THE CAMBRIDGE
HISTORY OF

THE
KURDS

EDITED BY
HAMIT BOZARSLAN,
CENGIZ GUNES
AND VELI YADIRGI

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The Cambridge History of the Kurds is an authoritative and comprehensive volume exploring the social, political and economic features, forces and evolution amongst the Kurds, and in the region known as Kurdistan, from the fifteenth to the twenty-first centuries. Written in a clear and accessible style by leading scholars in the field, the chapters survey key issues and themes vital to any understanding of the Kurds and Kurdistan including Kurdish language; Kurdish art, culture and literature; Kurdistan in the age of empires; political, social and religious movements in Kurdistan; and domestic political developments in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Other chapters on gender, diaspora, political economy, tribes, cinema and folklore offer fresh perspectives on the Kurds and Kurdistan as well as neatly meeting an exigent need in Middle Eastern studies. Situating contemporary developments taking place in Kurdish-majority regions within broader histories of the region, it forms a definitive survey of the history of the Kurds and Kurdistan.

HAMIT BOZARSLAN is Director of Studies at École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris. He is the author of a series of books on the Kurdish issue and Middle Eastern politics including *Histoire de la Turquie: De l'Empire à nos jours* (2013), *Le luxe et la violence: Domination et contestation chez Ibn Khaldûn* (2014) and *Révolutions et état de violence: Moyen-Orient, 2011–2015* (2015). He is currently researching anti-democracy in the twenty-first century.

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Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

AKP	Adalet Ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
AYM	Anayasa Mahkemesi (Constitutional Court)
BDP	Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (Peace and Democracy Party)
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)
CUP	İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Society for Union and Progress)
DBP	Demokratik Bölgeler Partisi (Democratic Regions Party)
DDKO	Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları (Revolutionary Cultural Hearths of the East)
DEHAP	Demokratik Halk Partisi (Democratic People's Party)
DEP	Demokrasi Partisi (Democracy Party)
DFNS	Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (Federaliya Demokratîk a Bakûrê Sûriyê)
Diyanet	Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (Directorate of Religious Affairs)
DP	Demokrat Parti (Democrat Party)
DTK	Demokratik Toplum Kongresi (Democratic Society Congress)
DTP	Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Democratic Society Party)
FSA	Free Syria Army
HADEP	Halkın Demokrasi Partisi (People's Democracy Party)
HDP	Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party)
HEP	Halkın Emek Partisi (People's Labour Party)
Hêvî	Kürd Talebe 'Hêvî' Cemiyeti (Kurdish Students' 'Hope' Society)

ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KADEK	Kongreya Azadî û Demokrasiya Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress)
KCK	Koma Civakan Kurdistan (Kurdistan Communities Union)
KDP (PDK)	Kurdistan Democratic Party (Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê)
KDPI (PDK-Iran)	Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan
KDPS	Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria
KNC	Kurdistan National Council (Encûmena Niştimanî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê)
KNK	Kongreya Netawa Kurdistan (Kurdistan National Congress)
KNMC	Kürd Neşr-i Maarif Cemiyeti (Kurdish Society for the Propagation of Education)
Komala	The Revolutionary Organization of the Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan
Komalay JK	Komalay Jiyanaway Kurdistan (Society for the Revival of Kurdistan)
Kongra Gel	Kongra Gelê Kurdistan (People's Congress of Kurdistan)
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
KSM	Kurdistan Socialist Movement
KSSE	Kurdish Students' Society in Europe
KTC	Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti (Society for the Betterment of Kurdistan)
KTTC	Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Kurdish Society for Mutual Aid and Progress)
KUK	Kürdistan Ulusal Kurtuluşcuları (National Liberators of Kurdistan)
MHP	Milliyetci Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party)
MİT	Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı (National Intelligence Organization)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NES	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PAJK	Partiya Azadiya Jin a Kurdistan (Freedom Party of Women of Kurdistan)
PAK	Partiya Azadiya Kurdistané (Kurdistan Freedom Party)

PJAK	Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê (Party of Free Life in Kurdistan)
PKK	Partîya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PSK	Partiya Sosyalîsta Kurdistan (Socialist Party of Kurdistan)
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (Yekîtiya Nîştimanî ya Kurdistanê)
PYD	Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (Democratic Union Party)
SDC	Syrian Democratic Council (Meclîsa Sûriya Demokratîk)
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces (Hêzên Sûriya Demokratîk)
SHP	Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti (Social Democratic Populist Party)
TCK	Türk Ceza Kanunu (Turkish Criminal Code)
TEV-DEM	Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk (Movement for a Democratic Society)
TİP	Türkiye İşci Partisi (Workers' Party of Turkey)
TKDP	Türkiye Kürdistan Demokrat Partisi (Kurdistan Democrat Party of Turkey)
TKSP	Türkiye Kürdistanı Sosyalist Partisi (Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan)
TMK	*Terörle Mücadele Kanunu* (Anti-terror Law)
UDG	Ulusal Demokratik Güçbirliği (Union of National Democratic Forces)
Xoybûn	Being Oneself
YPG	Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Defence Units)
YPJ	Yekîneyên Parastina Jin (Women's Defence Units)

Map of Kurdistan showing place names including:

Bernik, Markh, Berlıg, Kighi, Ashuka, Torut, Chan, Temran, Oghnat, Aghin, Baghin, Kizil Kilissa, Tepekoui, Boghlan, Dersim, Pertāg, Dushmald, Murad Su, Elazig, Termerd, Kauresh, Kab Usahghi, Kensin Khan, Dibme Su, Sarum, Kulp, Norshan, Barsum, Bitlis, Chunkush, Chermik, Haero, Koshikan, Kelamp, Bibot, Kaba Sakkai, Kuttain, Kumık, Kıakhta, Erkenek, DIARBEKR, Elmadin, Mudus, Oghra, Küfre, Tut, Serevek, Bladur, Redwan, Saïrt, Surfaz, Khaneki Ashaghi, River Tigris, Challek, Aghpunar, Tel Ab Fatus, Khaneki Yukari, Anshı, Kerburan, Fenduk, Narsaid, DEREK, MIDIAT, Cizre, Charmelik, Kirkhak, MARDIN, Urfa, BIRIJIK, Karmunj, Veranshehr, Tel Ermen, NISIBIN, Narinja, Kharbenas, Aznair

River Euphrates

K U R D I

0   50   100   150 km
0   25   50   75   100 miles

Map 0.1 Map of Kurdistan by Sherif Pasha (1919)
Redrawn based on Memorandum on the Kurd Question submitted to the Paris Peace
Conference 1919, Sherif Pasha

Map 0.1 (cont.)

Map 0.2   Map of Kurdish inhabited areas

Introduction

The Kurds and the Kurdish Question in the Middle East

HAMIT BOZARSLAN, CENGIZ GUNES AND VELI YADIRGI

In the past decade, the Kurdish question has re-established itself at the heart of the regional political debates at a time when the Middle East is once again engulfed in conflict and violence. On numerous occasions during the second half of the twentieth century, Kurdish nationalism has managed to generate and maintain strong appeal amongst Kurdish populations in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria, but these states have perceived Kurdish ambitions as a threat to their national security and regional stability. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Kurdish political activism has reached a new height with Kurdish movements in Iraq, Turkey and Syria establishing themselves as important political actors in the domestic politics of these states. The consolidation of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq in 2005 and the establishment of a Kurdish de facto autonomous region within Syria in 2012 have turned the Kurds into actors capable of influencing regional political developments, and consequently enabled them to forge stronger relations with the international forces involved in the region. The rise of the pro-Kurdish movement in Turkish politics in the past two decades, especially its strong electoral performance in a number of elections since 2015, has placed the Kurds at the heart of the political developments in Turkey, too.

This volume examines the Kurdish question as a deep-rooted and complex transnational issue. It brings together chapters that analyse the Kurds and Kurdistan from the medieval period to the present and takes a broad and multidisciplinary approach to events in the Kurdish regions in the Middle East. The multidisciplinary approach enables us to delineate and elaborate on the complexities of the social, political, economic and cultural forces and features pertaining to Kurds and Kurdistan and examine these forces and features from a number of innovative and critical perspectives. A brief

discussion of the evolution of the Kurdish question is needed to highlight the main issues and developments that the volume addresses.

The Kurds and Kurdistan in the Age of Empires

In the eleventh century, Mahmud al-Kashgari – a geographer from Kashgar in the Kara-Khanid Khanate – produced a stylized map of what he titled 'States of the East', which built-in, along with all the 'races' acknowledged in the East, the land of the Kurds. This perhaps is the first map to include Kurdistan (O'Shea, 2004). During the tenth and eleventh centuries, whilst part of the Arab caliphate (seventh to eleventh centuries), a number of Kurdish dynasties – the Shaddadids (951–1174, Transcaucasia), Hasanwaydhids (959–1095, Dinawar), Marwanids (990–1096, Diyarbakir) and Annazids (991–1117, Hulwan) – took control of their local matters, but were wiped out by the invasions of the Seljuk Turks in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Hassanpour, 1992). In the year 1150, the Seljuk sultan Sanjar created the province of Kurdistan, with the town of Bahar as its capital, and it comprised areas that are located in the Kurdish regions of contemporary Iraq and Iran (Kendal, 1996). Yet it was not until the sixteenth century that the geographical expression Kurdistan came into common usage to denote a system of Kurdish fiefs generally, and not merely the Seljuk-designated province.

After the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, except for Kelhor, Erdelan, Baban, Şehrizur and Mukri, which had either opted to stay independent of both the Safavid and the Ottoman empires or continued to recognise the former's suzerainty, the rest of the existing Kurdish principalities were incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. The newly conquered province of Diyarbekir (1515) hosted all of the acquired Kurdish chiefdoms in return for their acknowledgement of Ottoman sovereignty. Since then, a double dynamic pushing simultaneously towards fragmentation and unification began to determine the evolution of Kurdish space and the fate of Kurdish society. This dual process is certainly not new. As Boris James (2014) has suggested in his research, Kurds found themselves trapped by inter-imperial conflicts already during the medieval period, but their survival as a distinct group has also been guaranteed by their inter-imperial location. As one can feel it through Ehmed-ê Xani's epopee *Mem û Zin*, published in 1695, the division of Kurdistan between the Persian and Ottoman empires has certainly created frustration among some segments of the Kurdish elite; however, one should also recognize that it did not hinder fluid trans-border relations among the Kurds. The Kurdish prince (*mir*) Sharaf Khan (1543–1603), for instance, had

a problem with having a dual allegiance towards the power-holders in Istanbul and in Tehran in order to exert a cross-border influence on 'his' subjects.

The formalization of the Kurdish principalities occurred as a result of Sultan Selim I (1470–1520) consenting to the support of the predominantly Sunni Kurdish chiefs and integrating the Kurdish principalities in eastern Anatolia. The Battle of Chaldiran also determined the boundary between the Ottoman and Persian empires and it was officially recognized with the signing of the Treaty of Zuhab (1693) and – despite disputes and invasions – it formally persisted until 1914. Between the early sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the two Ottoman provinces that encompassed almost all of Kurdistan, Diyarbekir and Erzurum were economically burgeoning areas and constituted important sources of income for the Ottoman central treasury (Yadirgi, 2017).

The nineteenth century was a time of massive change in Kurdistan. In the first half of this century, the age-old Kurdish administrative structures established in the early sixteenth century were abolished as a result of the centralization and Westernization policies unleashed by the reforms of Sultan Mahmut II and continued by subsequent Ottoman reformers. The successor of Sultan Selim III (1761–1808), Mahmut II (r. 1789–1807), recognized that in order to rescue the ramshackle empire from further demise or collapse, he would have to reform its institutions. The centralist reforms implemented by Mahmut II and the succeeding Ottoman rulers entailed the suppression of the local notables all over the empire and occasioned the destruction of the Kurdish emirates. Local Kurdish hereditary rulers were removed, and the Kurdish territories were brought under direct Ottoman control. In other words, the toppling of the Kurdish polities and the suppression of the fiscal and landed power of the Kurdish notables went hand in hand. With the dissolution of Kurdish emirates, their constituent parts, tribal confederations and tribes (*aşiret*s) became the most important political and social components in Kurdistan.

During the centralization and Westernization period, the Ottoman Empire felt one of the greatest threats from its ambitious northern neighbour, Russia, which penetrated eastern Anatolia as far as Erzurum in 1829. Kars, Erzurum and Bayazid were all returned to the Ottomans under the terms of the Treaty of Edirne (1829), but the war had struck an entirely new note of danger as not only had the Ottoman Armenians assisted the Russian capture of Kars, but Muslim Kurdish tribes had also provided a regiment against the sultan. Such threats from Russia and the novel alliances between

the Kurds and the Russians had also been influential in informing the policies of the Hamidian period.

The politically integrated Kurdish rulers were neither autonomous nor did they request autonomy from the central state, because the nature and the maintenance of their power and wealth were grounded in the support provided by the Ottoman state. This helps explain why, in contrast to the Kurds in the Ottoman metropolis who were largely in support of the 1908 Revolution, the clientele Kurdish elite in Kurdistan were very hostile to it (McDowall, 2004: 95–6). Following the First World War, when the map of the Middle East was being redrawn, these schisms within the Kurdish society prevented the emergence of a leadership that could fill a role akin to that held by the Hashemite emirs in the Hejaz in the emergence of the Arab national movement and the development of Arab nationalism during and after the Great War.

The Fragmentation of Kurdistan and Kurdish Responses in the 1920s and 1930s

The political settlement in the Middle East after the First World War resulted in the division of Kurdistan between the states of Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. The Kurds did not accept the new status quo, and several Kurdish revolts took place during the 1920s but despite mobilizing a significant section of Kurdish society, they did not succeed in reversing the settlement that left Kurds as marginalized minorities in these states. In comparison with this inter-imperial past, the second division of Kurdistan after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire had much more disruptive effects. Moreover, the tearing apart of Kurdish regions between Turkey and newly created Syria and Iraq coincided with a period during which Reza Khan ascended to power in Iran (1921). Henceforth, the Kurds had to face not only exclusive nationalisms and repressive states but also militarized inter-state borders. While previously they were submitted to only two central authorities, now they depended on four distinct capitals, were obliged to learn one of the exclusive national languages and, more importantly, evolve in sharply contrasting political cultures, with different official ideologies, national narratives or regional and international alignments. The preservation of the Arabic scripts in Iran, Iraq and Syria, the so-called Linguistic Revolution of 1928 which Latinized the Turkish scripts and Stalin's decision to impose the Cyrillic alphabet to the national groups that did not have their own

historical alphabet, had also tremendously hindered intra-Kurdish communication in the subsequent decades.

Remarkably, however, this fragmentation has also radicalized Kurdish consciousness and motivated them to form one single entity, distinct from the Arabs, Persians and Turks. The trans-border affiliations have maintained themselves despite the heavy repression of states and many of the Kurdish uprisings gained a regional dimension. From the 1920s onwards, a common cartographic imaginary, which has been studied by the late Maria O'Shea (2004), symbolically unified the divided nation. A commonly accepted national flag was adopted by different Kurdish organizations and intellectuals, before the common national anthem, *Ey Reqib* ('You! Adversary!'), which became the official anthem of the Mahabad Republic (1946, Iran). Similarly, a largely shared historical narrative tracing the origins of the Kurds to the Median Empire, presenting the nineteenth-century Kurdish revolts as genuine expressions of Kurdish nationalist ambitions and describing the second division of Kurdistan as the darkest period of the nation to be overcome, has emerged and spread itself among the Kurdish intelligentsia. This self-awareness did of course not mean that the Kurdish elites held back from integrating into the Iranian, Turkish, Iraqi or Syrian political and administrative bodies or refused to take any opportunity of co-optation that could appear. But a cross-border national 'reservoir' of myths, symbols and plea was there, ready-made for the future mobilization process.

Pan-Kurdish political and cultural activities during the 1920s and 1930s were mainly carried out in Syria and Lebanon and organized by the Kurdish intellectuals exiled from Turkey. These Kurdish intellectuals were involved in the establishment of the Kurdish nationalist organization Xoybûn (Being Oneself) in 1927, which led the Ararat Rebellion (McDowall, 2004: 203–5). Important work on the grammatical development and standardization of the Kurmanji Kurdish was also produced during the 1930s and 1940s. In 1943 in Iraq, Mustafa Barzani organized a revolt that lasted until 1945 and was suppressed with the help of the British air force. In the mid-1940s, Iran became the centre of Kurdish political developments, which were led by the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (PDK-Iran), established on 16 August 1945 (Vali, 2011: 25). One of the main developments that the PDK-Iran initiated was the formation of a Kurdish republic in Mahabad on 22 January 1946. It came about as a result of the Soviet occupation of northern Iran during World War II and continued its existence for almost a year. On 15 December 1946, Iranian troops entered Mahabad and recaptured the city from the Kurdish forces.

Kurdistan after World War II

In Iraq during the 1950s, Kurdish nationalist activities continued underground but there was an instant revival soon after the overthrow of the monarchy by General Abd al-Karim Qasim in a coup d'état on 14 July 1958. Mustafa Barzani returned to Iraq and subsequently established himself as a key figure in Kurdish struggle and became the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (PDK). The early years of Qasim's rule witnessed growing Kurdish cultural and political activism but in 1961 he adopted repressive policies towards political activities of the Kurdish movement. On 9 September 1961, armed conflict broke out between the Iraqi army and the Kurdish forces. In February 1964 a ceasefire was agreed that lasted until 1965 when the second round of armed conflict began. After the Ba'athist coup in 1968, the conflict between the Kurdish forces and the Iraqi army continued until secret negotiations resulted in an autonomy agreement on 11 March 1970.

The implementation of the agreement was attempted but the Iraqi government opposed the key Kurdish demand of the inclusion of the Kirkuk governorate within the Kurdish autonomous region. A new autonomy agreement with reduced terms was proposed on 11 March 1974, which was refused by the Kurdish side, leading to the resumption of armed conflict soon after. The Kurdish forces were unable to prevent the advance of the Iraqi army and the Kurdish position was further weakened by Iran's sudden end of its military support following the signing of the Algiers Agreement between Iraq and Iran. On 18 March 1975, the PDK decided to end the insurgency and retreat its forces to Iran.

The defeat of the Kurdish rebellion spelt disaster for the Kurdish movement in Iraq, with its fragmentation resulting in intra-Kurdish conflict. The section of the PDK's leadership in favour of the continuation of resistance severed their ties with the party and established new political organizations, including the leftist Komala (Organization), led by Nawshirwan Mustafa, and the Kurdistan Socialist Movement (KSM), led by Ali Askari. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which was established on 1 June 1975 in Damascus under the leadership of Jalal Talabani, united these groups that broke away from the PDK. From May 1976 onwards, the PDK began to re-establish its presence in Iraqi Kurdistan under PDK-Provisional Leadership. The initial tense relations that existed between the PDK and the PUK soon led to the outbreak of violence in the summer of 1976.

The liberalization of Turkey's political system during the late 1940s and 1950s, the rise of the Kurdish national movement in Iraq and the emergence

of a new generation of politically active Kurdish activists influenced the politicization of the Kurds in Turkey during the 1960s. The second half of the 1960s is characterized by the evolution of Kurdish activism towards a more organized form. The reinvigoration of the Kurdish national movement in Iraq had a direct bearing on this development. This is evidenced by the establishment of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey (TKDP), which advocated a similar program as the PDK in Iraq and marked 'a new stage in the autonomisation of the Kurdish movement in terms of the worker and student movements' (Bozarslan, 1992: 98–9). In 1967 and 1968, during the 'meetings of the East' (*Doğu Mitingleri*), Kurdish political demands were publicly expressed, and these meetings culminated in the emergence of the Revolutionary Cultural Hearths of the East (DDKO) in 1969 (Gunes, 2012: 66–71). During the mid-1970s numerous Kurdish left-wing groups or political parties were established.

The new generation of Kurdish intelligentsia that began to dominate Kurdish politics after the Second World War had a very different sociological profile than the Kurdish intelligentsia of the 1920s. The 1920s Kurdish non-religious elite had basically the same education as the Arab or Turkish Ottoman intelligentsia, advocated a Western-oriented nationalism and presented the Kurdish struggle as the struggle of the Kurds for civilization. In contrast, the post-WWII intelligentsia was drawn from the broad masses and except for the few, had mainly plebian origins. It was not a surprise therefore that the new Kurdish militancy adopted left-wing discourses and symbols. It used Marxism–Leninism to explain the conditions in which Kurds found themselves and to conceptualize Kurdish self-determination in a way that did not deviate from internationalism and attempts at ending the class oppression that the rule of the oppressor Iranian, Turkish, Iraqi and Syrian nation-states also entailed.

An attempt to revive the Kurdish movement in Iran was made during the mid-1960s but without much success. However, as the protests in Iran intensified in 1978, Kurdish forces established control in the main towns of the region. Kurdish resistance continued, but in the summer of 1982, the Iranian army began a large-scale assault against the Kurdish-held territories and by the end of 1983 almost all of them had been captured. In total 10,000 Kurds died in the conflict during the late 1970s and early 1980s as a result of the fighting between the Kurdish forces and Iranian army and as a result of the latter's summary executions of Kurdish civilians and political activists.

The Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) offered Iraqi Kurdish parties more room for manoeuvre and provided the impetus in their attempts to re-establish

their presence in Iraqi Kurdistan. The PDK leadership was based in Iran and began to receive military aid and logistical support from the Iranian state. During the 1980s, the PUK managed to establish a strong support base in the Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk governorates. The PDK continued to receive military support and money from Iran during 1979 and the early 1980s. The PUK was initially allied with Syria, then signed a ceasefire agreement with the Iraqi government in October 1983. In October 1986, the PUK began to form an alliance with Iran and develop closer ties with the PDK.

However, during the mid-1980s, the Iraqi state intensified its campaign to bring Kurdish-held areas under its control and adopted an Arabization policy and initiated the Anfal campaign, which was implemented between February and September 1988 and involved chemical attacks targeting Kurdish civilians, destruction of the traditional rural economy and infrastructure, forced displacement of rural Kurdish communities and summary executions and forced disappearances. In total 4,000 villages were destroyed, and 182,000 people killed, according to Kurdish sources. According to the estimates of Human Rights Watch, as many as 100,000 people, many of them women and children, lost their lives, with the chemical attack on the town of Halabja on 16 March 1988 alone killing 5,000 Kurdish civilians (Human Rights Watch, 1993: xiv).

Hence, the 1980s seemed like the 'darkest period' in Kurdish history. In addition to the tens of thousands of victims, the suppression of the Kurdish movements in Iran and Turkey cost the lives of tens of thousands of other Kurdish fighters and civilians during this decade. At that moment in history, one could arguably doubt the very chances of the Kurds surviving as a national community. Remarkably, however, since this period of Kurdish history, there has been a marked improvement in the fortunes of the Kurdish communities.

The Revival of the Kurdish National Movements

The process of almost uninterrupted radicalization that began with the Barzani uprising in 1961 took a new dimension with the launching of a second rebellion in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1975, the formation of the Kurdish national movement in Turkey during the mid-1970s and the mass-mobilizations and guerrilla warfare in the Iranian Kurdistan in 1978–9. With these developments, Kurdistan entered a highly militarized process and integrated into a broader Middle Eastern environment marked by inter-

state or civil wars. The Syrian Kurds have also been engaged in this process since the mid-1970s through their mobilization for different Kurdish movements. This overall militarization allowed the Kurdish movements to access the resources of violence such as arms and shelter in one of the regional countries but also provoked internal conflicts which remained particularly traumatic throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Iraq's unexpected invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and the international condemnation and the Gulf War that followed it brought further instability to the region. After the US forces succeeded in expelling the Iraqi army from Kuwait in February 1991, Kurds in the north and Shias in the south were encouraged to rise against Saddam's rule. An uprising on 1 March 1991 in Iraq's south soon spread to central and northern Iraq. On 5 March 1991, a popular uprising (*raparin* in Sorani Kurdish) in the town of Ranya, Sulaymaniyah Governorate, took place and culminated in Kurdish pesh-merga ('those who face death') fighters taking control of the town. In the following day, this popular uprising spread to the main cities of the region, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. However, shortly afterwards, Iraqi military regrouped and began suppressing the uprising, which resulted in a massive exodus of Kurds in March/April 1991. Turkey refused to take in the Kurdish civilians and in order to prevent a humanitarian disaster on 5 April 1991, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 688 and a 'no-fly zone' in Iraq's north and south began to be enforced by the US and the UK. This action proved to be a significant development in the history of the Kurds of Iraq and enabled them to establish their de facto autonomy in 1991. The subsequent consolidation of Kurdish autonomy was not straightforward and the mid-1990s witnessed a violent conflict between PDK and PUK military forces, and two separate Kurdish administrations came into being, with the PDK controlling the Dohuk and Erbil governorates, and the PUK controlling the Sulaymaniyah governorate.

The 1980s and 1990s were a highly intense period of Kurdish political activities in Turkey. On 15 August 1984, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) embarked on its guerrilla war and during the late 1980s and early 1990s, it managed to gather popular support from the Kurds and increased its influence in Kurdish communities significantly. At the height of its power in the early 1990s, it had supporters and sympathizers numbering several million drawn from all parts of Kurdish-majority regions and among the Kurdish diaspora communities in Europe (Gunes, 2012: 101). Popular support for the PKK began to be demonstrated in the spring of 1991 and 1992 when large numbers of Kurds took part in popular uprisings, known as *serhildan*, across

Kurdish towns and cities in the south-east of Turkey. The PKK-led Kurdish rebellion is the longest in the history of the Kurds in Turkey. In addition to the PKK, Kurdish political demands have also been articulated through legal channels in Turkey by political parties that have a predominant Kurdish base and advocate a pro-Kurdish political line. This movement came into existence with the establishment of the People's Labour Party (HEP) in 1990 and while many of these parties were closed down by Turkey's constitutional court, the movement managed to grow throughout the 2000s and 2010s.

After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the occupation of Afghanistan by the Red Army in the same year, the transformation of the Iraqi and Syrian Ba'athist regimes into brutal dictatorships and the failure of Nasserism in Egypt, the regional political climate changed radically and Islamism imposed itself as the hegemonic ideology in many countries of the Middle East. Remarkably, however, Kurdish politics remained widely secular and left-wing oriented, at least within the framework of ideological division lines of the Middle East of the 2000s. While the PDK and broadly speaking the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) promote a liberal political discourse (and neo-liberal economic policies), the PKK and its allies in Iran, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), and in Syria, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), adhere to a broadly left-wing political agenda, and articulate various calls for equality within the Kurdish demands for self-government in Turkey, Iran and Syria.

One of the most important effects of this evolution can be seen in youth and women participation in politics. There is no doubt that as other societies of the Middle East, the Kurdish society, too, has come under the influence of social conservatism during the last decades. However, the continuing process of politicization since the beginning of the 1960s has also pushed forward a new political generation every decade or so, with each generation emerging on the historical scene with its own experiences and worldviews. This explains why the generation which has been already active in the 1960s and the one born at the beginning of 2000s coexist and interact. It also creates a complex and yet extremely original political landscape characterized by both intergenerational transmissions and conflicts. This process of constant renewal also allowed a much wider participation by women in Kurdish politics, namely, in Turkey and Syria. Gendered violence and discrimination certainly did not disappear from Kurdistan (indeed the Iraqi Kurdish authorities took a series of juridical measures to fight them), but women's engagement in the 'national struggle' has allowed them to enjoy a much higher legitimacy than that imposed by patrimonial structures. It is true that a rigid moral code is imposed upon the

fighters of PKK, PJAK and PYD, both male and female, but the 'co-chair' system that has been promoted in the legal/civic spheres enabled many women to access symbolic resources and local power.

Rising National Consciousness amidst Persistent Social and Political Fragmentation

The conflicts between the Kurdish political parties have not been extinguished in the 2000s and 2010s, but gradually gave birth to a non-institutionalized and yet trans-border Kurdish political space with its ad hoc mechanisms of communication and arbitration. This political space has two major reference actors: the PKK and the PDK. However, this bipolarity does not mean that the PDK-Iran or the Kurdish National Council (KNC) of Syria, which have close relations with the PDK, or the PJAK in Iran and the PYD in Syria, which follow the orientations of PKK, lack agency. The PYD and the PJAK are autonomous if not totally separate from the PKK: they are deeply rooted in local Kurdish contexts with their sociological peculiarities and cannot be reduced to the PKK; and yet, they are actors of a broader Kurdish sphere determined by the PKK and cannot be separated from it. The fact that the regional subsystem built in the 1920s collapsed in its weakest links, that is, Iraq in the 1990s and Syria in 2010s, which host smallest parts of the Kurdish population, has transformed these countries into terrains where competitive models of Kurdish autonomy could be experienced.

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century and during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, Kurdish national mobilizations and activism have fostered the development of national identity amongst the Kurds in all parts of Kurdistan. Social and political transformations engendered a high level of complexity in Kurdish society and the Kurdish intellectual microcosm. Rapid urbanization provoked important class differentiations but also changes in the manners of being, experiencing urbanity and mastering time and space under political constraints and violence. The cross-border mobility between the Kurdish communities has been tremendously augmented after the 1991 Gulf War and the emergence of an autonomous Kurdistan. It has created new economic dynamics easing, at least to some extent, the 'underdevelopment' (Jafar, 1976) of Greater Kurdistan, but also accelerated the process of intra-Kurdish integration. In the course of this process, new generations of Kurdish poets, novelists and for the first time filmmakers emerged and obtained quite high visibility both in Kurdistan and, as one can observe through frequent Kurdish film festivals, in Western countries. The setting up of thousands of websites and tens of TV

channels made possible thanks to new technologies of communication allowed a much broader, non-censored intra-Kurdish communication.

The rise of Kurdish national awareness has also reduced the influence and appeal of subnational identities, such as tribal ones. Although they are not the sole constitutive element of the Kurdish social fabric, the tribes have played a decisive role in Kurdish history, particularly after the brutal suppression of the Kurdish emirates in the nineteenth century. From the Hamidiye Cavalries (1891) or the militias formed under the Kemalist regime to the ill-famed Mustashars in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, many tribal leaders collaborated with the state. On the other hand, the tribes have also constituted one of the main human forces of armed resistance against the Iranian, Iraqi and Turkish states. In the highly urbanized context of the twenty-first century, Kurdish tribes do not have enough strength to impose themselves as main players of Kurdish politics, but they are still there and continue to play a double role: in Turkey, for instance, many of them are affiliated to Ankara's paramilitary Village Guards, while the others vote massively for the pro-Kurdish political parties. In Iraqi Kurdistan where tribes were involved in the 1994–1996 Civil War, they lost their weight in the wake of reinforcement of the Erbil government.

The religious sphere is yet another domain where one can observe a fragmenting dynamic. The religious environment of Kurdistan has radically changed after the nineteenth century, and particularly after the Armenian genocide of 1915, which also affected many Aramaic-speaking Christian communities of Kurdistan. Although no specific chapter in this volume is devoted to this genocide, which has been extensively analysed by authors such as Üngör (2009), Kieser (2000) and Kaiser (2014) in the Kurdish context, it has played a decisive role in the massive process of Islamization of Turkey, but also some parts of Iran and Syria. There is no doubt that many Kurdish actors, both tribal and urban, have participated in this genocide (Bozarslan, 1995). The subsequent expulsion of Jews and forced or voluntary departure of many Christians from Iraq have also impacted Kurdish society (one should, however, remember that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Christians took shelter in Kurdistan after 2003). The Kurdish-speaking Yezidi community has been also persecuted both in the late Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey, as well as in Iraq during the 1930s. The emergence of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014 went together with the quasi-genocidal violence deployed against this community.

The intra-Islamic divisions that one can observe in Turkey, Iran and Iraq are also present in Kurdistan and allow affiliations of some Kurdish actors with the non-Kurdish identities and solidarities. In Turkey, for instance,

Sunni belonging has played an important role in the formation of an alliance between many urban, tribal or religious dignitaries and Mustafa Kemal at the beginning of the 1920s. From the National Order Party (MNP) to the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Turkish Islamist political parties could find a constant (but fluctuant) electorate in Kurdish society. In the same country, many Kurdish Alevis have been affiliated with the radical-left movements or, later on, the Alevi associations' networks. It is also well known that the Islamic regime in Iran could get the support of at least some segments of the Kurdish Shia community. The Kurdish religious brotherhoods have also found themselves in close association not only with non-Kurdish *tariqat* networks but also with the states. Traditionally, in Assads' Syria, for instance, the position of the mufti of Damascus is held by a Kurd.

It is, however, remarkable to observe that in such a dynamic religious environment, Islamic politics have done rather poorly. The 1925 Sheikh Said rebellion is, in fact, the only rebellion that, while aiming at the establishment of a Kurdish state, also claimed to raise up the 'flag of Islam' abandoned 'by the Turks' who, according to the Sheikh, had 'betrayed' their promise of protecting the caliphate. To be sure, religious actors have also participated in the 1946 proclamation of the Mahabad Republic whose president, Qadi ('Judge') Muhammad, was a religious dignitary, as well as to the 1961–1975 Barzani rebellion, without, however, willing to transform them into religious contests. On the contrary, both contests had some left-wing orientations and adopted progressive policies. Today, in Iraqi Kurdistan the two main religious parties obtain hardly 15 per cent in elections. In Turkey, the Free Cause Party (Hüda-Par) – the legal political party representing the Islamist movement that has been built around the base of the extremely brutal Hezbollah, which occasionally also served as Ankara's local death squadron in the 1990s – is yet to mobilize a fraction of the Kurdish electorate that the pro-Kurdish parties do. One should also add that, notwithstanding the hierarchical positions that they occupy, the number of Kurds affiliated to al-Qaeda and ISIS has remained limited to a couple of hundreds.

Kurdish Cultural and Political Activities beyond Kurdistan

To a large extent, 'Kurdistan' is a space open or exposed to different cultures, languages, religious, social, political and economic tensions or dynamisms. Much like the Caucasian and Near Eastern Armenian, Greek, Jewish and Palestinian communities, the Kurdish community has also grown into

a multicultural, if not cosmopolitan, one, by the very condition of its historical formation. Little wonder, then, that many Kurdish figures such as Yilmaz Güney, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Bahman Ghobadi, Yaşar Kemal, Kamal Mazhar Ahmad or Khalid Bakdash have played the first-rank role in the cultural, scientific or political life of the four-concerned countries, or that a Kurdish politician such as Jalal Talabani has imposed himself in the 1960s and 1970s as a leading figure of Middle Eastern left-wing contests.

What one could call the 'Kurdish space' is, in fact, undetermined and constantly changing, with multiple extensions well beyond the cartographic imaginations of Kurdistan. One observes, for instance, that the small Kurdish community of the former Soviet Union (around 300,000 people) had played a decisive role in the shaping of Kurdish literature and modern Kurdology after the Bolshevik victory in the Caucasus in 1920. The deportation of some segments of this community to Kazakhstan after 1943 could not break down its cultural dynamism. One should also mention the very small Kurdish community in Jordan; it certainly did not play a major political role but has been nevertheless active and gave birth to some original works, including one of the first Arabic–Kurdish dictionaries (Gewranî, 1985; Al-Khatib and Al-Ali, 2010). Estimated to number some 150,000, the Kurdish community in Lebanon hosted many political refugees from Turkey. At the beginning of the 1980s, PKK has been literally refounded in Lebanon before starting to wage its guerrilla warfare in Turkey itself.

However, the most important Kurdish diaspora has to be found in Europe. The term diaspora was first used, in this context, at the beginning of the 1980s, when tens of thousands of Kurds fled from dictatorships in Iraq, Iran and Turkey, as well as the Iran–Iraq War, and sought asylum in different European countries. Thus, Kurdish political and diplomatic life has been literally transplanted in Europe, where the Kurdish Institute of Paris, founded thanks to Dr Kendal Nezan's personal relations with the French President François Mitterrand, has organized three important international conferences, respectively in Paris, Washington and Moscow. Europe has also hosted Iraqi Kurdish political parties, as well as PKK, which established its publishing house in Germany. Iranian Kurdish leaders Ghassemlou and Sharafkandi have been assassinated by the Iranian secret agents, respectively in Vienna and Berlin in 1989 and 1992. When an autonomous Kurdish government was founded in Iraqi Kurdistan after the 1991 Gulf War, many of its leading figures spoke, besides Kurdish, Arabic and English, fluent Swedish, French or Russian.

But the real formation of the Kurdish diaspora took place rather in the years 2000–10 when the Kurdish political class could act more freely in Iraq and Turkey, and when a second, and then a third, generation of Kurds born in Europe came to the age of adulthood with strong pro-Kurdish sentiments, but a European education, and in some cases new professional profiles or political socialization in their host countries. During the 2000s, it was not uncommon to see Kurdish figures among the ranks of German, Swedish or European members of parliament. As the massive mobilization for Rojava, rather a neologism to describe Syrian Kurdistan, shows, this diaspora is quite active, but it does not constitute the very heart of Kurdish politics as was the case in the 1980s.

A New Era for the Kurds?

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the US and British forces and the chain of developments it triggered had a major impact on the fortunes of the Kurds of Iraq. In 2005, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) was recognized as part of Iraq's new governmental structure and Kurds managed to secure some of the key political positions in the Iraqi state, including the presidency and foreign ministry. The KRI has complete control over and responsibility for its own internal security and the organization of its police and security forces, and its own military forces, the peshmerga, are outside the command of the Iraqi military forces. However, some of the Kurdish-majority populated areas, including the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, remained outside of the Kurdistan region and the final status of these 'disputed' territories was to be decided after a referendum, which for various reasons was not held.

During the 2000s, significant developments also took place in the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. This began with the departure of the PKK's leader Abdullah Öcalan from Syria in October 1998 and his capture by Turkey in Nairobi, Kenya, on 14 February 1999. He was subsequently sentenced to capital punishment, which, as a result of diplomatic pressure and fear that the conflict might descend into civil war, was reduced to life imprisonment. In August 1999, the PKK withdrew its guerrillas from Turkey to Iraqi Kurdistan and declared a permanent ceasefire, which lasted until June 2004 (Gunes and Zeydanlıoğlu, 2014). Subsequently, the PKK began to advocate the accommodation of Kurdish rights within the existing state boundaries through self-government for Kurdish communities. The transformation of the conflict brought about a normalization in Kurdish politics in Turkey and created

more room for the pro-Kurdish political parties to increase its presence in Turkey.

In the local elections of 2004, the pro-Kurdish political party won fifty-four councils, including the municipal councils of Batman, Diyarbakır, Mardin, Hakkari and Şırnak provinces. After the 22 July 2007 general election, the pro-Kurdish parliamentary opposition returned with the election of twenty-one MPs who stood as independent candidates in order to avoid the 10 per cent national election threshold. In the municipal elections held on 29 March 2009, the then pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) consolidated its position as a leading political force in the Kurdish majority regions. In total, the DTP won eight provincial councils and fifty district councils, including the council of Diyarbakir and Van. Being represented in the national assembly and having the experience of running many of the local authorities in the majority Kurdish regions had enabled the pro-Kurdish movement to establish a strong regional and national presence.

In the 2010s, the region entered a period of instability as a result of the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The Kurds established themselves as important actors in the domestic politics of Iraq, Syria and Turkey and the Kurdish question became one of the main issues in the international relations of the region. In Iraq, the emergence of ISIS and its attempted genocide of the Yezidi Kurds in August 2014 led to a huge exodus that threatened the security of the entire Kurdistan region. The mechanism to determine the final status of the 'disputed' territories has not functioned and following ISIS offensive in northern Iraq in August 2014, the disputed territories fell under the control of the Kurdish peshmerga forces. The inability to reach an agreement on the final status of the disputed territories led to the Kurdistan region holding a referendum on its independence on 25 September 2017, in which 93.73 per cent of the voters cast a vote in favour of independence. However, due to the opposition of the Iraqi federal government and regional and international powers, the KRG reversed its decision of pursuing independence. On 16 October 2017, the Iraqi army and the Shia militia attacked and took back control of the disputed territories that were held by the Kurds, including the oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

At the onset of the conflict in Syria in 2011, there were around twenty Kurdish political parties in Syria and many of these were brought together under the umbrella of the KNC in 2011. Since 2011, the PYD has been the dominant political force in the Kurdish-majority regions of Syria and it has been spearheading the political developments there. The PYD was established by former Syrian Kurdish members of the PKK in 2003. Intra-Kurdish

relations since 2011 in Syria have not always been cordial but the tensions have not resulted in an armed conflict. The PYD has been accused of suppressing the activities of the political parties linked to the KNC and generally being intolerant to dissent. Such political disagreements have continued despite the attempts at securing an agreement among the Syrian Kurdish political parties.

In Turkey, the dialogue between the PKK and the republic created hope that the decades-long conflict will finally end via a political process. Between 2008 and 2011 Turkish state representatives held direct meetings with the PKK, mediated by Norway. In August 2009, the government announced that it was preparing a 'democratic initiative' to accelerate the process of political reform and offer greater recognition to Kurdish cultural rights. The process was aborted in October 2010 and renewed violence broke out between the PKK guerrillas and the Turkish state security forces, which continued until the end of 2012 when a new round of dialogue was initiated. The ongoing dialogue resulted in the PKK declaring a ceasefire on 23 March 2013 and this was followed on 25 April 2013 with an announcement that it was pulling its guerrilla forces from Turkey to its bases in Iraqi Kurdistan. This announcement created a new sense of optimism and was widely seen as a new chance for a peace process to end the conflict.

In this period, the pro-Kurdish political parties began to establish themselves as an effective electoral bloc, with the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) winning 35 seats in the general election held on 12 June 2011. At the local elections held on 30 March 2014, the BDP won 100 municipal, district and town councils. From 2012 onwards, the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) established itself as the main representative of the pro-Kurdish movement and in the June 2015 general elections, it managed to win the backing of 6 million voters to secure 80 seats in the parliament. Despite the subsequent repression, the HDP maintained its electoral base in the subsequent elections in November 2015 and June 2018, where it obtained 10.8 and 11.7 per cent of the national vote and 59 and 67 seats in the parliament, respectively.

One could thus conclude that real Kurdish empowerment took place in the region during the 2000s and 2010s, but the price paid for this rise was heavy. While in 2012–13 many observers thought that Iraqi Kurdish de facto independence could be viable, the Syrian conflict would not affect the Kurds, that a long-standing deal would smooth relations between Iran and the Western countries and that Erdogan's Turkey would ultimately find a way out to envision a political solution for the country's century-long Kurdish conflict, the regional environment evolved in a totally dramatic way: the rise of ISIS,

the burden of militia order imposed on Iraq and Syria by the Islamic regime and last but not least, repressive and irredentist policies of Erdogan's regime created the conditions of a remilitarization of the Kurdish conflict. Kurdistan of 2012–13 imagined itself as the Athens of the Near East; soon, it realized that it was about to become its Sparta. After having successfully fought ISIS, the Kurdish movement had to face important setbacks such as losing the oil-rich city Kirkuk to Iraq's Shia militias called Hashd-i Shaabi, affiliated to the Iranian Pasdaran forces, and Afrin, a Kurdish city in Syria, which has been heavily targeted by the Turkish air force and handed over to Ankara's Syrian Islamist militia clients. Meanwhile, repression increased both in Iran, where a few Kurdish guerrilla groups fight frequently with the Pasdaran, and in Turkey, where the 'peace process' launched by Erdogan at the end of 2013 has left room for a new stage of massive terror leading to the destruction of a few mid-sized Kurdish cities and arrest of many Kurdish politicians.

Despite these setbacks, one can observe that at the end of the 2010s the intra-Kurdish dynamics remain quite strong and could contribute positively to the reshaping of Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria in the 2020s. That being said, one should also bear in mind that the Kurdish actors remain minor compared to the Iranian and Turkish states, as well as to what remains from central states in Baghdad and Damascus. As importantly, the Kurdish empowerment in Iraq and Syria had been strongly dependent on American military and political support. What will be the ultimate outcomes of the disintegration of the Iraqi and Syrian societies? How will the Iranian and Turkish regimes manage the crisis in which they have cast their own societies? What role will the United States and Russia be able or willing to play in Syria and in Iraq in the future? The fate of Kurdish society will depend on these yet unanswered questions.

Organization of the Book

The chapters are organized within seven parts. Part I discusses the developments in Kurdish politics and society from the medieval period to the early twentieth century. In Chapter 1, Boris James discusses the rise and fall of the Kurdish emirates between the fifteen and nineteenth centuries. In Chapter 2, Metin Atmaca delineates Kurdish emirates' struggle to exist under the suzerainty of the Ottoman and Persian empires. In Chapter 3, Sabri Ates sets out the Ottoman Empire's policy of repression of the Kurdish nobility and discusses the sociopolitical ramifications of the dissolution of the Kurdish emirates on its society. In Chapter 4, Djene Rhys Bajalan traces the

emergences of the Kurdish national movement in the late nineteenth century and its evolution until the early 1920s. In Chapter 5, Kamal Soleimani discusses the role Islam played in the early articulations of Kurdish nationalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Chapter 6, Veli Yadirgi presents a historical account of the economic changes in Kurdistan.

In Part II, the impacts of the regional, political developments on Kurdish society and politics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are evaluated. In Chapter 7, Metin Yüksel provides an account of the main developments in Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and the USSR in the interwar period. In Chapter 8, Béatrice Garapon and Adnan Çelik discuss the revival of Kurdish political activism in the pan-Kurdish space during the 1950s and 1960s. In Chapter 9, Cengiz Gunes highlights the main political developments taking place in Kurdish regions during the 1970s and sets out the organizational transformations and the fragmentation of Kurdish movements in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. In Chapter 10, Hamit Bozarslan situates the political developments taking place in Kurdish-majority regions during the 1980s and 1990s within the regional and international political fluxes and discusses the main events taking place in Kurdish regions of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. In Chapter 11, Mehmet Gurses and David Romano examine the main developments in Kurdish regions of the Middle East before assessing the Kurdish prospects in light of the major transformation experienced in the regional order.

Part III of the book presents analyses of the state-level developments during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and highlights the main changes that have taken in Kurdish politics in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. In Chapter 12, Mesut Yeğen unpacks the ideological and organizational evolution of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey during the twentieth century. In Chapter 13, Derya Bayır deconstructs the strong hostility the dominant political forces in Turkey feel towards the idea of Kurdish autonomy and self-government, emphasizing its entrenchment in the country's legal and political order. In Chapter 14, Gareth Stansfield provides an account of the consolidation of Kurdish self-rule in Iraq, highlighting the key political developments taking place and the main trends in the past five years. In Chapter 15, Nicole F. Watts provides an account of forms of Kurdish political activism through legitimate democratic channels in Iraqi Kurdistan and highlights the challenges and difficulties that such a form of Kurdish political participation faces. In Chapter 16, Massoud Sharifi Dryaz discusses the evolution of the Kurdish question in Iran after the 1979 revolution, examining

the domestic and regional factors that have influenced the evolution of Iran's Kurdish movement in political and military terms. In Chapter 17, Jordi Tejel provides an account of Kurdish politics in Syria. In Chapter 18, Estelle Amy de la Bretèque discusses the Yezidi presence and experience in the Soviet Union.

Part IV focuses on religion and society. In Chapter 19, Michiel Leezenberg provides an account of the role of religion in Kurdish society, the Kurdish religious networks and organizations and how these religious actors interact with the other political organizations, statutory bodies and the public. In Chapter 20, Mehmet Kurt discusses the rise of political Islam within Kurdish society in Turkey and outlines the movements, political parties and/or organization that constitute political Islam in the Kurdish-majority provinces. In Chapter 21, Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Khanna Omarkhali discuss the position of the religious minorities such as Yezidis, Yarasan and Alevis in Kurdistan whose religion is traced back to the pre-Islamic period in Kurdish history. In Chapter 22, Erdal Gezik discusses the Kurdish Alevis in Turkey and the evolution they have experienced in the twentieth century. In Chapter 23, Hamit Bozarslan and Cengiz Gunes discuss the changing role of tribes and tribal affiliations in Kurdish society during the twentieth century.

Part V turns the focus on the history and evolution of the main varieties of the Kurdish languages. In Chapter 24, Ergin Öpengin presents an account of the historical origins and evolution of Kurmanji Kurdish. In Chapter 25, Jaffer Sheyholislami discusses the emergence and evolution of Sorani Kurdish, also known as Central Kurdish. In Chapter 26, Mehemed Malmîsanij discusses Kırmanjki Kurdish, also known as Zazaki.

In Part VI, the developments in the fields of Kurdish art, culture and literature are examined. In Chapter 27, Hashem Ahmadzadeh outlines the evolution of Kurdish literature and critically evaluates the various literary movements and periods in Kurdistan. In Chapter 28, Farangis Ghaderi discusses the emergence and evolution of Kurdish poetry. In Chapter 29, Mari R. Rostami discusses the history of Kurdish theatre. In Chapter 30, Bahar Şimşek discusses the emergence and evolution of Kurdish cinema in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey, and in Chapter 31, Engin Sustam discusses the main artistic developments and cultural productions in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria in the past three decades.

Finally, Part VII discusses the transversal dynamics associated with Kurdish politics and society. In Chapter 32, Joost Jongerden and Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya discuss the ideological evolution of Kurdish movements in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran, unpack the new political project the Kurdish movements seek to construct and analyse the inter-Kurdish ideological

debate and contestation. In Chapter 33, Ipek Demir discusses the emergence of the indigeneity discourse and claims within the transnational Kurdish movement. In Chapter 34, Barzoo Eliassi provides an account of the formation of Kurdish diaspora in Europe and assesses the impact diaspora has on Kurdish politics. In Chapter 35, Choman Hardi presents an account of women's participation and influence in the KRI and discusses the progress they made and the challenges that remain. Finally, in Chapter 36, Isabel Käser presents an account of Kurdish women's mobilization in Turkey, the impact it has on politics and society and the main trends and developments women's increasing participation has engendered.

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PART I

★

HISTORICAL LEGACIES

The Rise and Fall of the Kurdish Emirates (Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries)

BORIS JAMES

The Ottoman Kurdistan period has often been described by historians and Kurdish intellectuals as some sort of golden age. It is perceived as the era in which a firm Kurdish high culture emerged *ex abrupto* within the framework of thriving Kurdish autonomous principalities. From this preconception surfaces the idea that the contemporary Kurdish question and Kurdish nationalism, with its traumatic ignition (WWI), arise directly from an ideal Ottoman past. However, let us not forget the ambiguous nature of the Ottoman Kurdistan conception, since it might also imply the subordination of the Kurds to the 'Turkish Empire' and Islam in the eyes of Kurdish nationalists. However, the previous periods are seldom taken into account in the process of establishing the conditions of intelligibility of a Kurdish transhistorical phenomenon.

This chapter contends that a long-term perspective linked with a sociopolitical analysis is necessary to understand the formation of autonomous principalities during the Ottoman era. I will try and render both the pre-Ottoman origins of the Kurdish emirates as well as the complexity of the Kurdish Ottoman principalities' status and relationship with the Ottoman centre from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. The constitution and the blossoming of consistent Kurdish principalities during the early modern Ottoman period is born of three main factors:

(1) Specific regional geopolitical conditions that created the situational opportunistic rallying of Kurdish polities to the Ottoman entity.
(2) The existence of a long-term local Kurdish economic, social and political, internal order emerging from the intermediate situation of the Kurdish lands.
(3) The reproduction of an ancient and well-learned political scheme of relations between the Kurdish potentates and the bigger regional powers.

Therefore, there are two sides of the Ottoman Kurdistan coin: a micro-political and inter-Kurdish side, as well as a macro-political one based on the peripheral politics of the Ottoman sultanate. The three aspects described above are crucial in defining the Kurdish situation in the long run. This equation seems to be determined by local anthropological preconditions and by a specific set of imperial policies paradoxically characterized by an inclusion–exclusion trend. Thus, Kurdistan and each of the Kurdish Ottoman principalities can be seen as a semi-periphery, integrated while marginalized, intimate but autonomous from the Ottoman centre.

From this multivariant viewpoint, the chapter will look into the medieval origins of the Kurdish Ottoman principalities. It will then study the political and cultural structuration of these emirates before exploring the conditions of their decay and their fall.

Defining Kurdish Pre-modern In-betweenness: Transhumance and Territorial Anchorage

Medieval Arabic and Persian sources state that the main Kurdish groups lived anywhere between the Fars region in the east, and the Syrian Jazira in the west, and from Georgia in the north to Khuzistan in the south. These same sources also noted that the Kurds inhabited a multitude of environments from warm steppe-like deserts to high snow-capped mountains. However, after an overall survey of the sources between the eighth and fourteenth centuries, the image that emerges is that of an agro-pastoral population essentially residing in mountainous zones (James, 2011).

As early as the tenth century, thanks to the writings of Ibn Hawqal (1939: 1/215, 240, 271), we learn of the transhumance of the Kurds. At the centre of the map of the Djibâl attached to his *Kitâb sûrat al-ard* (The Book of the Surface of the Earth) are located both the summer and winter pastures of the Kurds (*masâʾif al-akrâd wa mashâtiʾihim*). This map is reproduced two centuries later in the great atlas of Idrîs al-Idrîsî (1154). In the chapter on the Djezireh, Ibn Hawqal indicates that the region provided summer pastures for the Hadhbâniyya Kurds and winter pastures for Arabs of Banû Shaybân. Similarly, it is noted that the Kurds of Fârs searched for pastures in the mountains during the summer and returned to the plains during the winter. The geographer indicates that only a few tribes did not engage in such a lifestyle. Some contented themselves with 'moving within the various lands they owned' without these movements being seasonal.

During Ibn Hawqal's period, seasonal movements prevailed among the Kurds in the Fârs region and probably elsewhere (Ibn Hawqal, 1939: 240; al-Masʿûdî, 1966: 3/249; Qazvînî, 1915: 74). Musʿir Ibn Muhalhal indicates that 60,000 Kurdish households (*bayt*), who had their winter pastures in the Shahrazûr (Slemani region nowadays), also lived in this manner. Nevertheless, Yâqût, writing during the Ayyubid period (thirteenth century), after reproducing Ibn Muhalhal's words, states: 'Today the situation is quite different from what he [Ibn Muhalhal] mentioned' (Yâqût al-Hamawî, 1866–1973: 3/375–6). This indicates that in the region of Shahrazûr, which was then under the domination of the Turkmen Begtkikinid dynasty, the 'troublesome' Kurdish tribes were no longer herding (although, thanks to Mamluk sources, we know that they returned to this lifestyle in later periods).

For several centuries the Kurdish transhumant population had been grazing their livestock in Djezireh and Shahrazûr during the wintertime. During the summer the Kurds made way for Arab tribes, while themselves moving further northward and eastward into Zûzan, the region north of Mosul near Lake Van. It is most likely that the stability of this organization was broken by the arrival of the Turks in the region around the eleventh century, with some conflicts erupting between Kurds and Turkmen at that time and on (Ibn al-Athîr, 1998: 10/136).

However, three centuries later it seems that the transhumant economy of the Kurds continued even during the troubled times of Mongol domination of Upper Mesopotamia due to the latitudinal organization of Kurdish herding practices, that is, as the Kurds moved northwards so did the Mongols (Masson Smith, 1999: 45–7). The seasonal and latitudinal organization of the pastures likely prevented any overlapping between Kurds and Mongols. The Kurdish winter pastures were probably too uneven and too dry to maintain a compact army comprising tens of thousands of horsemen.

The image of Kurdish constant displacement is counterbalanced by the fact that during the Middle Ages, each of the Kurdish tribes was strongly anchored in a specific territory. During the Ayyubid period (twelfth to thirteenth centuries) they were easy to locate. According to thirteenth-century writers, Yâqût, Ibn al-Athîr and Ibn Khallikân, the Bashnawiyya were in Fink and its environs, the Hadhbâniyya were in the region of Marâgha, the Zarzâriyya in Sindjâr, the Hakkâriyya in the Djebel al-Hakkâriyya (the region of ʿImâdiyya) and the Humaydiyya in the region of ʿAqr (Akre) (James, 2006). During the Mamluk period (beginning of the fourteenth century), in his geographic encyclopaedia, the *Masâlik al-absâr fî mamâlik al-amsâr* (The Journey of the Eye across Realms and Countries), al-

ʿUmarî (1988: 3/124–35) completely confuses geographic designations and the anthroponymy of the tribes as tribal names appear as geographic landmarks. The author travelled over the region of Djibâl, from east to west, and enumerated the names of the Kurdish tribes to be found on his route. Passing from one tribe to another, that is to say, from one area to another and moving closer to the Djezireh, he writes: 'After these [tribe A] we find the [tribe B].' The vocabulary used is yet another indication of a lack of movement of these tribes, whose members lived (*yaskunûna*), owned (*ladayhim*, *biyadihim* . . .), governed (*yahkumûna*) or were residents (*muqîmûn*) of this or that region. Accordingly, it would be quite absurd to state that these tribes were only passing through the region as the stereotype of an overwhelmingly nomadic society would suggest. Moreover, al-ʿUmarî speaks of the territories of some tribes as their place of residence (*masâkinuhum*), their countries (*diyâruhum*) or their 'homelands' (*awtânuhum*). The levy of *khafâra* – protection tax granted by the empires to some emirs and Kurdish tribes – goes along the same argument of territoriality.

Despite the fact that semi-nomadism and transhumance seemed to be a very strong feature of the Kurdish lifestyle, it was not the only one, and tribal territories and settlements were quite easy to define. Moreover, very early on it was possible to delimitate, even vaguely, a Kurdish space if not a Kurdish territory (James, 2019). Therefore, the Kurds as an ethnic and territorial category seemed to be situated in an intermediary position in between two major nomadic populations: the Arab Bedouins, on one side, and the Turco-Mongol peoples, on the other.

To conclude on the question of movement, it should be highlighted that many Kurdish individuals and tribes migrated towards the major cities of the Middle East (Baghdad, Mosul, Aleppo, Damascus, Cairo, etc.) as early as the eleventh century. These migrations resulted in the establishment of the Kurds within peri-urban territories in which the itinerant or semi-itinerant lifestyle continued, or within the city, where they adopted an urban lifestyle. In addition to this, the Mongol invasions during the thirteenth century provoked massive movement of the Middle East's Kurdish populations to the west, Syria and Palestine. Yet, not all these migrations were permanent transfers as the nexus with the Kurdish regions in the east was maintained. These populations lived within a polycentric world in which an individual could be attached to the economy, society and politics of major urban centres such as Damascus and Baghdad, while at the same time maintaining a relationship with their tribe, transhumant economy and the 'Kurdish territory'.

Kurdish Law and Order: Between ʿ*Asabiyya* and Confederacy

The emerging element of an internal law in the Kurdish lands focuses mainly on feuds and the resolution of conflicts. First, we can state without going into details that the segmentation of the Kurdish tribes during the Middle Ages is mainly due to the state of ongoing war amongst them. During the long Muslim medieval period Kurdish tribes had fought each other and, indeed, conflict might almost be described as the central structural function of Kurdish society at that time. However, this scheme could not be perpetuated without a mechanism of conflict resolution that re-establishes the balance, namely, the law of war and peace. War cannot be total as its *raison d'être* lies only in its resolution. As al-ʿUmarî notes, when two tribes are at war such as the Zîbâriyya and the Mâzandjâniyya, they are bound to come to terms (al-ʿUmarî, 1988: 3/133). The one that is considered to have lost asks for mercy (*amân*), displaying its submission to the other without disappearing and without losing face. Alliances between Kurdish tribes were also possible, especially in the situation of a struggle against external enemies such as the Turkish Ghuzz during the eleventh century (Ibn al-Athîr, 1998: 8/177–8). Cordial neighbourly relations between tribes could also exist, such as between the Markawân, on the one side, and the Zarzâriyya and the Djûlmarkiyya, on the other side, during the Mamluk period (al-ʿUmarî, 1988: 3/132).

The cycle of tribal war can also be explained by the two core tribal values: solidarity within the tribe, and hospitality and generosity with the external world. The solidarity within the tribes, sometimes called ʿ*asabiyya*, implies the participation of all the members in *lex talionis* ethos. Moreover, any failure by a particular tribe to respect the unwritten code of hospitality and generosity would lead to the violent intervention of other tribes. These principles suggest a system of complicated social and political games. Yet, as much as the genealogic principle, these are symbolic frameworks governing the form of social organization amongst the Kurds and restricting the possible modification of its foundations. These unwritten rules were also a shield against outside intervention. They are the guarantor of the tribe's autonomy and beyond, they worked as ideal elements structuring the Kurdish lands and its boundaries.

In addition to the rules and customs that allowed the tribes to overcome the state of ongoing war and disorder, another tendency permitted local political stabilization and tribal unification. From the classical period on

(tenth century), petty sovereigns showed their ability in gathering Kurdish tribes and clans. It is unnecessary to present a detailed history of the period Vladimir Minorsky described as the 'Iranian intermezzo', namely, the rise of Daylami and Kurdish principalities during the tenth and eleventh centuries (Minorsky, 1953). Suffice to say, there existed a number of Kurdish dynastic entities: the Shaddadids of the Rawadiyya tribe from the Hadhbaniyya confederacy (from the tenth to the end of the twelfth century) in Azerbaijan and Armenia; the Rawadids, who were also related to the Hadhbaniyya (from the ninth to the eleventh centuries), in Azerbaijan; the Marwanids, who were of Humaydi origin (from the tenth to the eleventh centuries), in Diyar Bakr and around Lake Van; and the Hasanwayhids from the Barzikani tribe (tenth and eleventh centuries), who ruled over Hulwan, Dinawar, Nihawand as well as the regions of Hamadan and the Shahrazur. Emerging from a specific tribe these dynasties federated several other groups and played a role of referee in between them. Conversely, the tribes in question can be described as king-making tribes that exploited this situation to grow stronger through the power of said dynasties. The Marwanids, famous for the development of a refined court culture, is one successful example of a family that made a transition from a tribal confederacy to a strong principality and a quasi-kingdom (Ripper, 2000).

Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras: A Prehistory of Ottoman Kurdistan

Somehow and from a very Kurdish perspective, Saladin's epic and the Ayyubid phenomenon (first half of the thirteenth century) are the product of the Kurdish tribal schemes described above. However, this fact might not clearly surface at first. Indeed, the alliance of Kurdish groups recruited by the year 1130 in Mosul Hinterland and elsewhere – among them Saladin's family – was aimed at securing the power of Turkish rulers (the Zengids) and was used to carry out the conquest of Syria and Egypt for the sake of the Zengids as part of a larger non-Kurdish confederacy. It took almost forty years for the Kurdish Ayyubids – Saladin's dynasty – to take over power in Egypt and Syria, far away from the tribal territory.

Nevertheless, Saladin ascending to the throne in 1171 as well as the power structure during the reign of his successors are undeniably underlain by a transhistorical Kurdish tribal model. The Ayyubid dynasty definitely acts as a Kurdish dynasty working as a tribal catalyst. In a way, it resembles the confederacies that emerged long before during the tenth century and led to

the creation of minor Kurdish dynasties in Upper Mesopotamia. On one hand, this new amalgamation had to deal with the transformations which took place in the regional configuration (the Crusades, Turkish ethno-military domination). On the other hand, this historical phase resulted for the Kurds, as a whole, in crucial sociopolitical changes. The Ayyubid dynasty reinforced the nexus between the Kurds and the state while maintaining the Kurdish tribal ethos and solidarities as well as the link with the 'original' territory. The Ayyubid period represents the climax of the Kurdish integration in Egypt and Syria, to the extent that Saladin's dynasty came to appear retrospectively as *the Kurdish dynasty par excellence*. Kurds from various tribal and social backgrounds occupied very high political positions within the military and religious elites of these conquered lands for more than half a century. This situation contributed to consolidate the Kurdish internal solidarity, military and political prestige as well as their apprehension of state-like institutions.

Conversely, when the Mamluks came to power in Egypt after the Ayyubids (c. 1250), the Kurds ceased to be both a central military force in the Egyptian army and a major political faction within the state's institutions. However, Kurdish identity or – to put it in Khaldunian terms – the Kurdish ʿasabiyya (esprit de corps or firm solidarity) was then mobilized differently by the Mamluk state and Kurdish leaders. It became a tool to counter Ilkhani-Mongol influence coming from the east and reinstate Kurdish polities in Upper Mesopotamia (James, 2016). For instance, the Mamluk ruler al-Malik al-Zâhir Baybars (r. 1259–77) put administrators, soldiers and a royal court at the disposal of the chief of the Kurdish Jûlmarkiyya, Sayf al-Dîn Mankalân, in order to retake the latter's principality lost to the Ilkhanid Mongols by his grandfather Asad al-Dîn (Ibn ʿAbd al-Zâhir, 1976: 87). During the first half of the fourteenth century, fifty Kurdish emirs within the Kurdish zone were subject to an official correspondence with the Mamluk chancellery and received *manâshîr* (property notifications) (Ibn Nâzir al-Jaysh, 1987: 74–81; al-Qalqashandî, 1912–1913: 7/285–9). This state of affairs had both practical and symbolic implications. Certain Kurdish groups were aided by Mamluk military support; at the same time, the symbolism of being appointed by an imperial state institutionalized local leaders who began to look less and less 'tribal'. Kurds appeared as natural allies to the Mamluks.

However, on the other side, while crushing the Kurdish tribes and potentates, the Mongol authorities sought also to integrate some Kurdish leaders into their political system on an individual basis. This was done, most probably, in order to diminish the influence of the tribesmen and to avoid

the prospect of their alliance with the Mamluks. Some other tribal chiefs were instituted as Ilkhanid agents either when the Mongols were unable to impose their will or when they needed to have certain policies, such as tax collection, implemented. The rulers of both Kurdish Mâzanjâniyya-Humaydiyya and Jûlmarkiyya-Hakkâriyya principalities held a high official position in the Ilkhanid state apparatus. For instance, after the Mongols gave up their efforts to overthrow Mubâriz al-Dîn Kak, the Mâzanjânî-Humaydî paramount chief, the latter was handed a *pâ'iza* (an investiture document) which made him the chief of the region of Irbil and ʿAqr (Akre), where he was obliged to collect the taxes on behalf of the Ilkhanids during the second half of the thirteenth century (al-ʿUmarî, 1988: 3/128). Significantly, the Mongols also granted a *pâ'iza* to a minor chief, al-Asad b. Matkâkîn, who was responsible for collecting taxes in the main cities of the region. This seems to have been an attempt to dilute the authority of Mubâriz al-Dîn Kak. However, despite Mongol efforts to enact a policy of 'divide and rule', he and his descendants remained in charge of the region. As for the Jûlmarkiyya and its chief, Asad al-Dîn Mûsâ b. Mujallî b. Mûsâ b. Mankalân, whose stronghold was situated to the far north and west of the Mazânjâniyya region in the country of Jûlmark-Hakkârî south of Lake Van, he was also finally officially recognized by the Ilkhanids (al-Qalqashandî, 1912–1913: 7/283).

The strategy adopted here was to *co-opt* intractable local forces. By co-option, we mean providing financial and military assistance as well as a title to support individuals who were to represent the central Ilkhanid power. The advantages of this strategy for the Mongols was twofold. On the one hand, they avoided the destruction of taxable resources and major military expenditures. On the other, they ensured that they were able to harness local resources and asserted their claims of sovereignty over regions within the Kurdish zone. Such policies were, of course, not unproblematic, as they facilitated the autonomy of Kurdish tribes and principalities. The fact was that fear of violence and general mistrust undergirded the relationship between Kurdish tribes and the Ilkhanid imperium.

Although, at first glance, the policies of the Ilkhanids and the Mamluks seem quite similar – except in the area of tax collection – the co-option of individuals and tribes in each empire had different implications. Particularly significant was the Mamluks' co-option of Kurdish groups – not on an individual basis as in the case of Mongol policies – but as members of a people. These policies were more than the mere implementation of local powers; they reflected the Mamluks' desire to create a powerful coalition against the Mongols through reinforcing the notion of the Kurds as a distinct

category, while at the same time territorializing it. In this sense, Mamluk policies were somewhat paradoxical; they both promoted integration and differentiation. This paradox reminds us of the crucial role of the state in shaping a geographical space, simultaneously resisting or enforcing the local political configurations. More concretely, not only does the state endeavour to appoint local leaders in order to project its influence and sovereignty, but it also names the lands over which it seeks to rule. Indeed, this naming is, in itself, an overtly political act. The Mamluks tried to do so in external Kurdish lands.

We should not forget that the Kurdish territories were officially under Mongol sovereignty during that period. However, the Mamluk state intended to give it an administrative substance, that is to say, an official complexion. Al-ʿUmarî, a *dîwân al-inshâʾ* (chancellery) administrator and son of an administrator, refers to *jibâl* (the mountains) as a specifically Kurdish zone. In his geographic encyclopaedia, as well as in the chapter concerning the *mamâlik* (countries) in the *Subh al-aʿshâʾ* of al-Qalqashandî, Kurds appear in a separate section, namely, in the sections relating to *jibâl*. Similarly, Muhî al-Dîn Ibn ʿAbd al-Zâhir (d. 1293) reproduces an excerpt of the Mamluk Sultan al-Mansûr Qalâwûn's act of succession to his sons. Amongst the many dependencies over which the sultan exerted his sovereignty and which his sons inherited, there was the 'fortified and mountainous realm of the Kurds' (*al-Mamlaka al-Akrâdiyya al-hasîna al-jabaliyya*) associated with its 'potential conquests' (*futûhâtuhâ*) (Ibn ʿAbd al-Zâhir, 1961: 202). In reality, actual Mamluk influence over this region was extremely limited. Yet, what is significant is that the Mamluks put their hopes in the Kurds as a whole, that is, as an abstract category of people – a people who would settle and control a specific territory on behalf of the Mamluks.

The Mamluks led only a few fruitless raids on these regions. It is noteworthy that Mamluk texts seem eager to show that some Kurdish emirs mentioned in the chancellery's lists had high ranks (*makâna*) within the Mongol Empire. Thus, we might ask, on whose side were they? The answer is probably both and neither. However, a sovereign Kurdish entity was not feasible. Al-ʿUmarî explains the reasons for this in his *Taʿrîf*: '[The Kurds] are countless. If the sword of discord was not cutting their growing sprout and was not preventing their eruption, they would pour into the lands and would seize many goods. However, they are inclined towards disagreement and dissension. The sword stands drawn between them, blood stays shed, order remains scorned, eyes are wet and spattered with

blood' (al-ʿUmarî, 1992: 47; al-Qalqashandî, 1912–1913: 7/283). Thus, there is no reason for the Mamluks not to claim sovereignty over the Kurdish regions.

At the same time, we can sense in these few words, as well as in al-ʿUmarî's other writings, the nature of the Mamluk's 'Kurdish policy', namely, their desire to use a potentially strong but flawed esprit de corps (ʿasabiyya) as a weapon in order to extend the Mamluk realm against the Mongols. Thus, the Mamluk state, contrary to what earlier Middle East medieval polities had attempted and contrary to the unanimistic Mongol policies, offers to create and reinforce the Kurdish ʿasabiyya in order to assert its sovereignty over eastern lands. This paradox resembles an oxymoron: the autonomous dependence of the Kurdish territory. And it would not have been possible without the specific conditions of the Kurdish territory, namely, the situation of war between two big regional powers, the Mongols acting here as a monolithically constituted imperium according to old Iranian uses.

From a macro-historical point of view, it is not surprising that the situation of the Kurdish territory led to the establishment of quasi-independent Kurdish principalities, notably during the 'Iranian intermezzo' (tenth to twelfth centuries). The circumstances of in-betweenness and border culture that developed during the Mamluk–Mongol conflict are somehow different as they imply the obvious and proactive intervention of the Egyptian and Iranian states in the shaping of these borderlands. It resulted in a new sociopolitical formula (Kurdish in-betweenness and state ethnic engineering) that probably laid foundations for the autonomy granted to the Kurdish principalities by the Ottomans during their conflicts with the Safavids in the early sixteenth century. It also allows us to see circumstances in which the entire region gradually became known as 'Kurdistan'.

Although the Mamluk polity was the most favourable to a Kurdish entity or Kurdish buffer zone in Mongol territory, its influence was restrained outside Kurdish lands. From an Egyptian perspective, such a policy (backing the Kurds) functioned as a thorn in the side of the rival Iranian imperium but it did not imply the full embedding of the Kurdish entity in the Mamluk sultanate. Two centuries later the House of Othman finally made this leap and seized the opportunity to create a fully Ottoman Kurdistan. The circumstances under which autonomy was granted to Kurdish principalities that recognized the one and only Ottoman rule were multifaceted. Many factors were at stake. To take a few, the troubled political situation that preceded the incorporation of Kurdistan and the deal that the Ottoman bureaucrats, among which the infamous Idrîs Bidlîsî, crafted for the Kurdish mîrs as well as the religious siding of the Kurds, were crucial in prompting the outcome.

Pre-Ottoman Turmoil

After a short period of Timurid domination over 'Kurdish lands', that is to say, Upper Mesopotamia and parts of Zagrossian Iran, the fifteenth century was characterized by power fragmentation at a local level. None of the Turkmen local petty states were able to gather this domain and project their strength further. Among them, two main actors emerged and ruled the Kurdish lands until the end of the fifteenth century: the Qarâ Qoyunlu and the Aq Qoyunlu. The Qarâ Qoyunlu were located around Lake Urmia and ruled the major part of Azerbaijan and the eastern Kurdish lands until 1469. At the beginning of fifteenth century they became the delegates of the Timurid state in the west and started their lone expansion in Mesopotamia. However, they appear to have enforced most of the Kurdish rulers' rights over their principalities and even acted as mere allies to these Kurdish princes (*mîrs*). This was especially true in western Kurdistan, where Qarâ Qoyunlu influence was remote and unseen. For instance, Shams al-dîn of Bidlîs was a quasi-independent leader of his city. The Ayyubids, who had disappeared from Egypt and Syria, remained in the fortress of Hasankeyf in the heart of Kurdistan where they were seen as Kurdish *mîrs*. They no longer represented a large-scale catalyst. It looked as if their ʿasabiyya took them over once again (Ibn al-Munshî', n.d.). Their local power faded as the Qarâ Qoyunlu declined around 1462. On the other side, the Aq Qoyunlu flourished later than their rivals Qarâ Qoyunlu in the second half of the century. As their sphere of influence was based in western Kurdistan, they felt the necessity to crush Kurdish princes who situationally sided with the Qarâ Qoyunlu. The Aq Qoyunlu leader Uzun Hasan defeated the Qarâ Qoyunlu around 1470 and took over most of the Kurdish lands. Then he intended to exercise direct rule over it (van Bruinessen, 1999: 137; Ozoglu, 1996: 11; Minorsky, 1983: 457).

However, the Aq Qoyunlu were soon confronted with two new challenges from the west (the Ottomans) and from 'within' (the Safavids). We can only wonder whether the Aq Qoyunlu's intransigence vis-à-vis the Kurds was not led by their fear and incapability in addressing these new threats. It was also probably reinforced by their ambition in becoming a new avatar of the Iranian Empire with its unanimous standpoint, as they conquered most of the Iranian plateau. Nevertheless, their attempts in gaining hegemony over both Iran and Anatolia were unsuccessful. After Uzun Hasan's death, the dynasty decayed.

In this context, the Safavid shahs surfaced as the strongest force in Mesopotamia and the Iranian plateau. This political entity emerged from

a classical Muslim brotherhood, a *tarîqa*, very popular among the Turkmen tribes. The *tarîqa* that revered the family of an illustrious and charismatic shaykh, Safî al-Dîn (1252–1334), flourished at first in Azerbaijan and Upper Mesopotamia under the Aq Qoyunlu umbrella. As soon as it transpired that the brotherhood was an overtly political and military organization danger-ously able to compete, the relations between the shaykhs and the Turkmen dynasty started to go downhill. The conversion of the *tarîqa* to Shiite Islam was equally detrimental to the former alliance. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the brotherhood had the upper hand. Under the guidance of Shah Ismâʿîl, it finally gathered a huge territory stretching from the Hindu Kush to the Euphrates. Opportunistically the Kurdish families tried to emerge once again as local leaders. However, relying on Turkmen and Shiite troops, the Safavids' policies towards the Kurds were no different than those of the Aq Qoyunlu. They sought to exercise direct authority over their imperium and logically intended to undermine or suppress the paramount Kurdish families that ruled over the small Upper Mesopotamian principalities, replacing them with Shiite governors or isolated and weak Kurdish protagonists. One telling episode is the imprisonment of more than a dozen of Kurdish *mîr*s while they were visiting the shah in Khoy and at the verge of pledging allegiance to him in 1510. Ismâʿîl had them substituted by trustworthy officers.

Idrîs Bidlîsî and the Ottoman Integration of Kurdistan

On the other hand, in the mid-fifteenth century, the Ottoman sultanate was a western power, if not a European one, with a strong anchorage in the Balkans. That is when it started to expand eastward and succeeded in containing the Aq Qoyunlu's influence and even prompted their decay. However, the initial growth of the Ottomans in Anatolia did not undermine the Safavid ambitions as they perceived the Aq Qoyunlu as their main threat. The latter endured a turn of events that gathered against them Ottomans, Safavids and to a lesser extent the Mamluks of Egypt. Until the beginning of the sixteenth century, the two emerging big powers (Ottomans and Safavids) did not enter into massive confrontations for various reasons. Nevertheless, Ottoman incursions from Trabzond in Safavid territory were numerous, as well as Shiite revolts remotely backed by the shah could rise in Ottoman Anatolia. This restrained tension resulted in overt warfare that was instru-mental in reshaping the Kurdish lands. Conversely, the centrality of

Kurdistan in the confrontation of both empires had a strong impact in defining their ideological and political construction. Ottoman Sultan Selim I, who had just reached the throne in Istanbul (1512), launched a massive military operation against Safavid lands. He easily penetrated the Safavid borders and broke through in 1515. Soon the city of Amed (recent Diyabakir) fell under the authority of the Ottomans. The Ottoman armies assisted by some Kurdish forces pursued their advance and met the Safavid army northeast of Lake Van in Armenia at Chaldiran. The Ottoman victory was complete and Shah Ismâ'îl even fled from his capital, Tabriz, which was occupied by Selim I for some time.

This triumph was partly seen as the consequence of the rallying of Kurdish tribes and emirates or perhaps it was only secured by their backing afterwards. What is certain, in any case, is that once the Ottoman army retreated from the Safavid centres, Shah Ismâ'îl was quite unsuccessful in his counterstrike in Anatolia. Organized Kurdish forces resisted and blocked the redeployment of Shiite armies.

Some scholars have interpreted the Safavid intransigent policies towards the Kurds as a sign of their zealous religious Shiite bias against Sunni groups. Moreover, the god-like nature of Shah Ismâ'îl would not allow the establishment in his sphere of any autonomous or semi-independent rule as the Kurdish aristocracy was claiming. Some credit can be attributed to these interpretations. Nevertheless, if we reverse the usual macro-historical perspective and look backwards (from the Ottoman to Mamluk era), we might come up with another analysis. Therefore, the situation would rather suggest that it is not so much the religious nature of the Safavid power that explains their policies towards the Kurds but the pluri-secular political culture attached to the Iranian imperium. The Ottoman–Safavid conflict seemed to revive the binary scheme that governed the peripheral policies of the Mongol and Mamluk empires towards the Kurdish emirs two centuries before. The unanimous political trend was to be applied by the Safavids, and the ethnic engineering regarding the Kurds and leading to more liberal policies was to be implemented by the Ottomans. The former were resetting the Mongol modus operandi, and the latter, the Mamluk one.

Several subsequent Safavid offensives in Anatolia were repelled thanks to a military confederacy made up of regular Ottoman troops and local Kurdish armies. The incorporation of Kurdistan was achieved by 1515 and lasted according to the same unchanged rules for more than 300 years.

From the Kurdish and Ottoman perspective the whole issue of rallying and organizing the Kurdish principalities revolved around the figure of Idrîs

Bidlîsî, a Kurdish bureaucrat who had worked for the Aq Qoyunlu sovereigns. Born near their capital, Tabriz, where his father enjoyed a high position at the court, he most likely could have followed his path but decided to do otherwise. Around 1500 Bidlîsî left Tabriz. He considered making the trip to Egypt in order to join the service of the Mamluk sultan (Sönmez, 2012: 41). One can only wonder whether he had in mind the old Mamluk Kurdish policies that ensured the perpetuation of Kurdish principalities in the face of Mongol rule. As the events unfolded, later on, it appears clearly that Bidlîsî was seeking a patron not only for himself but for a wide group within the Kurdish aristocracy that suffered from Aq Qoyunlu and Safavid bullying. He finally joined Istanbul and approached the sultan's court where he became a simple bureaucrat but also a productive apologist of Bayazid II's power, writing essays, histories and poems glorifying him (Sönmez, 2012: 43). However, he showed some ambiguities in his allegiance to the Ottomans as he left for Mecca at the end of Bayazid II's reign, where he stayed for a while under Mamluk protection. Finally, he was summoned to Istanbul at the service of the new sultan-caliph, Selim I, in 1512. He was then highly appreciated for his foresight and profound knowledge of the eastern lands and the power structures in the Safavid realm and more specifically in its Kurdish areas. Therefore, Bidlîsî became the paramount negotiator in the Kurdish affairs and the main architect of the Ottoman eastern policies as well as a military advisor. Indeed, the Mesopotamian and Azerbaijan expansion of Selim I's empire was mainly achieved through political dealings and political engineering in which Bidlîsî's role was instrumental. In order to undermine the basis of Safavid power and its territorial spreading he was sent many times to the Kurdish lands. There he assured the princely Kurdish families of the sultan's goodwill towards them. He won their support for military campaigns and most importantly in order to secure the political base for a long-lasting Ottoman settlement in the region. This was done almost instantly and Bidlîsî crafted such a successful deal that by the time of Chaldiran battle, most of the paramount Kurdish families had pledged allegiance to the Ottomans. The others followed after the Ottoman occupation of Azerbaijan and during the failing Safavid counter-strike campaign. Some princes directly met with the sultan (van Bruinessen, 1999: 142–5). Aside from their immediate military interest, these negotiations and allegiances laid the ground for the structuration of a strong and complex Ottoman Kurdish edifice that lasted for decades. As this incorporation of Kurdish principalities opened a new page in their history, it was perceived in Istanbul as crucial for the whole Ottoman realm. Somehow, Kurdistan became consubstantial of the Ottoman

structure. This state of affairs also explains why the agreement was renewed by most of the Ottoman sultans afterwards.

Ottoman Kurdistan: Political Structures and Further Developments

Ottoman Kurdistan, established in eastern Anatolia, stretched from Malatya to Hakkari (Colamerg/former Jûlmark). It also integrated the north-eastern fringes of Irak. Although at first it had an essentially defensive function in order to counter any Iranian Safavid expansion towards the west, this did not prevent it from being thoroughly crafted and reconfigured for the sake of the Ottoman sultanate. Bidlîsî was once again the architect of its political internal and external structures. Ottoman Kurdistan did not completely work as federate entity and comprised many layers of administrative and political authority. However, the Ottoman central state intended to develop a unified policy towards these lands. The very advantageous conditions for the submission of Kurdish lords to the sultan-caliph before and after the Chaldiran battle were transcribed in the Kurdistan administrative structures. The Ottomans appointed a *beylerbeyi* (lord of the lords) over it. The latter was never considered the uncontested paramount leader of the Kurdish princes but acted as some kind of Kurdish interface that would help co-ordinate Ottoman borderlands politics. Each Kurdish prince did not benefit from the same privileges regarding the inheritance of their prebends. Nor did they have the same obligations in terms of participation in Ottoman military campaigns and fiscal reversion duty. Granted by official decrees (*berat*), some bore the title of *mîr* (prince). Others held the dignity of *beg* (governor) or *hakim* (ruler). Their principalities were divided into generic *sancak*s that had different administrative status from *yurtluk-ocaklik* (house) to *hükümet* or *beylik* (lordship). The latter awarded to more or less ten principalities referred to the highest level of independence in the fiscal, land property, judicial and political domains. One lone, unavoidable request was the undying loyalty towards the House of Othman. Within the province of Kurdistan, which was actually western Kurdistan, and included most of these autonomous emirates, numerous issues were treated internally between the Kurdish notability without the intervention of the Sublime Porte (Ateş, 2013: 37–42; van Bruinessen, 1999: 151–61; Ozoglu, 1996: 16–20). Most of the families consecrated by the new politico-administrative structures claimed a long-standing authority over their lands. Except for the legendary lineages and genealogies, some of

these claims can be asserted by the comparison of medieval and Ottoman sources where names of families and tribes can be traced.

The incorporation and organization of the Kurdish principalities within the Ottoman edifice had the consequence of stabilizing and strengthening the Kurdish lordships to the extent that some of the *hükümet* acted as very localized potentates. The princes' courts and administrations started to look more and more like miniatures of the central sultanate ones, as they were comforted by it and the security it offered. In Bidlîs, not far away from Lake Van, Idrîs Bidlîsî's city of origin, a strong principality flourished under the aegis of Sharaf Khan's family derived from the Rojakî clan, already mentioned during the Mamluk era. During the late years of his reign by the end of the sixteenth century, the same Sharaf Khan retired to write the *Sharafnama*, a history of the Kurds and their principalities since immemorial times, which aimed at glorifying the Kurdish lords, among them his family and the Ottoman Empire. Written in Persian, the book is the first opus relating Kurdish history through the lens of a Kurdish notable. It then enjoyed a formidable posterity (Bidlîsî, 2005). As an example, among others, of an emerging Kurdish vernacular literature (Leezenberg, 2014), it was well considered in the princely courts throughout Kurdistan. Kurdish *mîr*s purchased copies of it and ordered extended versions with some additions praising the local families or had the original text translated into their favourite language (e.g. Ottoman Turkish). Thus, for instance, several hundreds of miles from Bidlîs down south, the Baban dynasty, which settled at the beginning of the seventeenth century in the town of Qala Çolan, had the passage from the *Sharafnama* on their own family extended (Alsancakli, 2018; Bajalan, 2012). Playing on the rivalry between Safavid (and then Qajar) Iran and the Ottomans, this family managed to govern almost independently until the mid-nineteenth century over a territory that extended from around their capital, Suleymaniyyeh (Slemanî), which was founded at the end of the eighteenth century. A great number of Kurdish principalities knew more or less the same destiny. However, the evolution of the structure of power in both the central states in Iran and Anatolia as well as the transformation of their relations had a strong impact on the structuration of Ottoman and Iranian Kurdistan. During most of the sixteenth century, starting from the treaty of 1535, Kurdish principalities were enjoying peace and a flourishing economy as well as cultural dynamism. As the cycles of war started once again between the two empires at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Kurdistan autonomy appeared more precarious. Military campaigns could prove very detrimental to the Kurdish lordships' independence as it meant they were facing direct threats from outside, since they were located in the borderlands or internal

centralization, in order to secure the Ottoman or Iranian nature of their territory. Nevertheless, long periods of peace could also endanger the autonomous reign of Kurdish lords. The imperial states were taking the opportunity of these untroubled times in reasserting central authority over peripheral lands. That is exactly what caused the decay of both the several autonomous principalities and the Kurdistan local modus vivendi that was to govern common Kurdish affairs.

By the mid-seventeenth century, peace agreements started to multiply between Iranian kings and the Ottoman caliphate. The idea of instituting a firm frontier in between the two empires made its way into the central elites. Nevertheless, the total disarmament of autonomous Kurdish principalities was not achieved until the mid-nineteenth century. Until here we insisted on the role of the Ottoman Empire in 'promoting' Kurdish self-rule as a means to contain Iranian influence. On the Iranian side, the House of Ardalan, governing Sinne (Sanandadj), Saqqiz and Baneh, enjoyed, until the mid-nineteenth century, the same kind of independent rule despite the payment of a tribute to the Iranian crown (Ardalan, 2004). At this time the Kurdish principalities' room to manoeuvre seriously shrunk and faded away at the end of the century. Several factors caused this fall. First, the intra-Kurdish rivalries, often within the same family, strongly weakened their ability to rule independently. But foremost, firm and sometimes violent centralizing policies launched by the two empires were aimed at exercising direct control over the Kurdish lands. This implied the gradual replacement of local lordship by Ottoman officers formally appointed and sponsored by the central state. Having at their service considerable military forces, the governors of the Ottoman Kurdistan's neighbouring cities (Baghdad, Mosul, Diyarbakir, Trabzond) undertook the task of breaking the cycle of princely titles' transmission. Sometimes they used military campaigns arguing that some Kurdish mîrs were disloyal to the Sublime Porte, which might have been true somehow. The central state was increasingly interfering into the political and administrative processes of principalities, imposing the levy of new taxes, modifying the local land tenure system, establishing direct military drafting. It started taking the upper hand over princes' nominations. The central authorities provided them with non-hereditary bureaucratic titles like mutesellim, mutasarrif or müdür, which were more or less referring to tax collection activities (Ateş, 2013: 66–85). Underlying this centralizing process were the reforms aiming at modernizing the state and the society and regarding the economic, military and fiscal rationalization of the empire (Eppel, 2008). The centralization process that Kurdistan underwent by the 1830s resembled a second Ottoman conquest of the region.

Bringing the autonomous Kurdish provinces back into the Ottoman central state's fold was also aimed at securing the borders and countering the imperial threats, especially the Russian influence. It was equally intended as a way to deprive local communities (Kurds or Armenians) of the means to secede as some were tempted to follow the trend the Balkans underwent at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Russian threat materialized into a series of wars with the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran. These events resulted finally in the rapprochement of the two regional powers. The last Irano-Ottoman war took place in 1821–2. The rest of the century was characterized by a series of attempts to bring about a lasting peace. Both Istanbul and Tehran were consistent in their efforts to establish a permanent frontier between them. The Kurdish principalities which previously played one kingdom against the other suffered greatly from these newly established cordial relations. The neutralization of the borderlands rendered the federating and protecting role of the Kurdish principalities obsolete. Thus, at that period we can witness a retribalization process as well as the emergence of new charismatic Kurdish actors, namely, the Sufi brotherhood leaders (shaykhs) who terminated the *mîrs'* prestige, already undermined by Ottoman interventionism and internal strife. On the other hand, it is not surprising that some dispossessed princely families became vigorous figures in the domain of Kurdist or Kurdish nationalist activities at the beginning of the twentieth century, among them the Bedirxan *mîrs*, who once ruled over the principality of Cezire Botan (Cizre) (Jwaideh, 2006: 62–74). The Xoybûn, the association they created, acted as a Kurdish nationalist vanguard, publishing Kurdish newspapers and reviews under the French mandate's umbrella in Beirut as well as fomenting revolts against the Kemalists (Tejel, 2007).

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The Kurdish principalities that were renowned since the Middle Ages have soon developed an ambiguous relationship with central states that allowed them to survive as autonomous entities. They used both the social and political specificities of their lands and the binarity of imperial powers' situation in order to thrive. Furthermore, the Kurdish political scene could only be fragmented as it had to rely on a set of untold tribal rules that asserted the Kurdish difference. Nevertheless, some strong political catalysts (Kurdish Sufi brotherhoods and dynasties) emerged from within. Conversely, the premodern states, namely, Mamluk and Ottoman realms, saw the interest of integrating while keeping

a differentiated Kurdish space aside their core territory as a useful resource against Iranian attacks. However, the process of integration of Kurdish lands into the Ottoman imperium resumed at the end of the nineteenth century by crushing the weapons they once utilized against their neighbours. The emerging modern state could not allow anymore strong delegation of power and it had henceforth the technical means to counter the traditional Kurdish catalyst processes.

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Negotiating Political Power in the Early Modern Middle East

Kurdish Emirates between the Ottoman Empire and Iranian Dynasties (Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries)

METIN ATMACA

Introduction

After Shah Ismail I (1501–24), a charismatic and messianic Sufi leader who proclaimed himself as the reincarnation of the Hidden Imam of Shiite tradition, crushed the Aqquyunlu dynasty (1378–1501) in a battle in 1501 and entered their capital, Tabriz, he declared himself king of a new state named Safavid, whose members would rule Iran for over 220 years.[1] In 1507, he sought to expand the boundaries of his dynasty further west into eastern Anatolia where he came into direct contact with the Kurdish rulers. During Shah Ismail's conquest, the most influential *beg* (lord, ruler) among all the Kurdish lords was probably the *beg* of Bitlis, Emir Şeref.[2] When Shah Ismail seized Harput in 1507–8, Şeref welcomed him with a lavish banquet and pledged his allegiance to the shah in Ahlat, on the northern shore of Lake Van. Amused by the reception, the shah recognized the rights of Şeref Beg. However, this manoeuvre did not save his rule when he presented himself in the same year to the shah in Khoy. This time, he was arrested with fifteen other Kurdish rulers. After his detention, a Qizilbash commander was appointed to rule Bitlis. The power of Kurdish *beg*s in the region was significantly weakened even after most of them were later released by the

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[1] For the arrival of the Safavids and their encounter with the Ottomans, see Allouche (1983), Bacqué-Grammont (1975: 68–88) and McLachlan (2000: 401–3).

[2] I use *beg* (Turkish *bey*) and *emir* (Kurdish *mîr; umera* for plural Turkish *emir*) interchangeably here as historical sources use both titles to refer to Kurdish dynastical leaders. Whereas *agha* (Kurdish *axa*, Turkish *ağa*) in the Kurdish political context is mostly used to refer to a tribal chief. I prefer using *emir* instead of the Kurdish *mîr* as the former is widely used in English.

shah. The shah did not release Şeref Beg and Melik Halil of Hisnkeyfa due to their prominent position in Kurdistan.[3]

There was already a Kurdish–Turkmen rivalry during the period of the Aqquyunlus for the control of eastern Anatolia because of the trade routes and the abundance of pastures for grazing (Woods, 1999: 31–3). The appointment of the Qizilbash Turkmen commanders, including Khan Muhammad Ustajalu to Diyarbekir, further stiffened this rivalry.[4] Therefore, just before the Ottomans arrived in Kurdistan, the Kurdish lords of Bitlis, Mardin, Çemişgezek, Egil, Hazzo (Hizo) and other centres revolted against this Qizilbash domination (Woods, 1999: 166). After İdris-i Bidlisi, an experienced Kurdish bureaucrat who worked for the Aqquyunlus and Safavids, decided to collaborate with Sultan Selim I, the Ottomans better organized their march on Iran in order to stop the Anatolian expansion of Shah Ismail. Once the Ottomans defeated the Safavids in the war of Çaldıran on 23 August 1514, Selim I assigned İdris with the duty of 'earning the hearts of the kings and rulers of Kurdistan, encouraging the obedience to the sublime throne and standing up to the adversaries'.[5] İdris immediately started with his shuttle diplomacy among the Kurds, who were still under the influence of the Safavids.[6] He first met with the Kurdish emirs of Bradost, Soran, Baban and Sarım, and established an alliance among them.[7] Later he moved to Amediye and Cezire, and met with the leaders of Hisnkeyfa, Siirt, Hizan and Bitlis. His aim was 'to bring the order among the Kurds', earn their loyalty to the sultan and unite them against the Safavids.[8] Similarly, in February and March 1515, he secured the loyalty of Kurdish rulers of Urmiya, Amediye, Soran, Bohtan,

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[3] According to Şeref Xan Bidlisi's *Sharafnama*, at the beginning only three of the Kurdish lords were not arrested: Ali Beg of Sason, Emir Şah Muhammed of Şirvan (Şirvi) and Gazi Kıran (Yusuf Beg) of Bradost (Scheref, 1860: 191–3, 232, 297). In another part of his work, Şeref Xan states that only Ali Beg and Emir Şah Muhammed were not arrested (Scheref, 1860: 411).

[4] Despite the initial arrest of the Kurdish lords by Shah Ismail and his brutal punishment of some Kurdish leaders who supported the Ottomans, Yamaguchi states that there was no great difference between the Kurdish policy of the two empires as both recognized the hereditary rights of the Kurdish rulers (Yamaguchi, 2012: 110).

[5] TSMA (Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi), e.8333–1, in Genç (2019: 307).

[6] While he was moving around Kurdistan, he was stopped by some Kurdish bandits who were collaborating with the shah. He named them as those who 'wear the Qizilbash cap'. İdris must have been very upset about this looting since he did not lose the opportunity to write to the sultan about it and probably used it as part of propaganda while he was making his case against the Safavids (TSMA, e. 8333/2, in Genç, 2019: 309–10).

[7] İdris-i Bidlisi's travel and outreach among the Kurdish emirates and tribes was not easy as he was constantly followed by the shah's spies (İdris-i Bidlîsî, *Hakku'l-Mubîn fi şerhirisaleti'l-hakki'l-yakîn*, vr. 7b, in Genç, 2019: 309).

[8] TSMA, e.8333–1, in Genç (2019: 307).

Nemran, Rojikan and Eyyubi through agreements (İdris-i Bidlîsî, 2001: 253). Shah Ismail's oppressive policy further motivated Kurdish emirs to collaborate. With İdris's excellent skills of negation, an alliance was established among these Kurdish emirs against the Safavids. Shortly before the summer of 1515, this new alliance defeated the Kurdish regiments loyal to Shah Ismail at Erciş, north of Lake Van.

İdris deemed Diyarbekir as the final regional target for the Ottomans. He considered the subjugation of the city as 'completion of Istanbul's conquest and the prelude to the conquest of Arab and Iranian lands'.[9] Similar to his earlier efforts with other Kurdish emirs, İdris used the language of diplomacy with the notables in the city and backed efforts to force the Safavids out of Amid. Shah Ismail sent more military support and surrounded the city whereas the people inside of the fortress started to defend the city with the help of Kurdish forces sent through the initiative of İdris. Both parties attracted Kurdish groups on their side with promises and religious propaganda and they faced each other in Diyarbekir. In the war that took place in September 1515, the Ottomans came out victorious (Genç, 2019: 315–18).[10] Over the course of the following winter and spring, the Ottoman army marched on Mardin and decisively defeated the remaining Qizilbash forces in the battle of Koçhisar (Kızıltepe) in May 1516 (Markiewicz, 2019: 133).[11]

İdris, without a military or administrative position, became the sultan's special emissary in Kurdistan from September 1514 until May 1516. He implemented Selim I's eastern policy in the region. This policy included the forging of military alliances and the organization of military expeditions. The other part of Selim I's policy was to establish long-term relations between the Ottomans and the Kurdish emirs after the military victories. To this end, Selim I handed İdris blank titles of investiture (*berât*) and treaties (*istimâletnâme*) with his seal on (Markiewicz, 2019: 133). Besides distributing these titles among the rulers in Kurdistan, İdris and his men struck deals with Turks and Arabs settled between Amid, Mosul and Shahrizor. It seems that the defeat of the Safavids by the Ottomans had an initial effect on the alliance between the Kurdish emirs and the Ottomans and the majority of the work was through the carefully crafted diplomacy of İdris. During eighteen months

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[9] TSMA, e. 1019, in Genç (2019: 313).

[10] İdris-i Bidlîsî, *Salīmshāhnāma,* 133a, in Markiewicz (2019: 127). In Haydar Çelebi's *Ruznâme* the date for the conquest of Amid's fortress is recorded as 22 October 1515 (Ferîdûn Ahmed Bey, 1858: 1/470).

[11] Based on Haydar Çelebi's *Ruznâme* Nejat Göyünç estimates that Mardin was taken sometime in October 1515 (Göyünç, 1991: 19).

of his efforts, he drew the *beg*s of Hisnkeyfa, Sason, Bitlis, Bohtan, Amediye, Zirki, Merdisi, Egil, Hizan, Çemişgezek and some others to the Ottoman side. İdris struck a deal first among the Kurdish emirs themselves in order to unite them against the Safavids, and later prepared an agreement between each emir and the Ottomans.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Kurdish emirs had no interest in establishing an alliance with the Ottomans.[12] Instead, they were inclined more towards Shah Ismail after he destroyed the Aqquyunlus. Many Kurdish emirs had grievances towards the Aqquyunlu ruler as they were pushed out of their hereditary lands.[13] Shah Ismail initially handed back their lands to some of the Kurdish *beg*s. This period of confidence, however, remained short when Kurdish *beg*s were arrested and their lands were distributed among the Qizilbash leaders. Shah Ismail also deported some of the Kurdish *beg*s and tribes from the west of Kurdistan into central Iran, replaced some of the *beg*s with those loyal to him and established kinship with some through marriages (Scheref, 1860: 410). İdris's endeavours persuaded many of those *beg*s to side with Selim I. They considered Selim I as a new chance to reclaim their lost territories. Meanwhile, İdris tried to draw the sultan into a second war against the Safavids (Genç, 2019: 323–4). It seems that the bond he established among the Kurds was not sufficient. Shah Ismail still held influence over some of the Kurdish emirs. Furthermore, Sultan Selim I had not met his promises to the Kurdish emirs. Following their experience with Shah Ismail, these emirs were growing more suspicious of the Ottomans.

Once the Ottomans took Diyarbekir and divided it into twenty-three districts (*sancak*), the Ottoman commander in Diyarbekir, Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha, was appointed as the supreme commander (*beylerbeyi*).[14] Selim I sent

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[12] Regardless of this, there were many Kurdish notables and religious scholars who pursued their career in the Ottoman Empire. For instance, during the first decade of the sixteenth century, a certain Kurd Maksud, who was accompanied by his uncle, went to war in Hungary as an Ottoman mercenary. After his uncle's death he decided go to another military expedition with Ali Pasha and later asked for his *ulûfe* (lit. 'fodder money' or military wage) from the sultan. The story of Maksud is not traceable as the documents catalogued in his name at the Topkapı Palace Museum Archive are limited. This story nonetheless demonstrates that the Kurds saw the Ottoman Empire of the period as a land where they could pursue a career (TSMA, e. 753/42 (6062/1), 7 Safer 918 (26 Nisan 1512)).

[13] Uzun Hasan (1457–78), the most prominent Aqquyunlu leader, tended towards conciliation with the Bulduqani of Egil and Zirki of Tercil while he had taken a much aggressive stance towards the Ayyubids of Hisnkeyfa and Malkişi of Çemişgezek (Woods, 1999: 91–2).

[14] For further information on the first administrative structure established by the Ottomans in Diyarbekir, see Göyünç (1969).

new blank titles of investiture to İdris and instructed him to collaborate with Bıyıklı Mehmed and appoint suitable Kurdish *beg*s to these districts. The sultan also sent seven treaties to those Kurdish lords to confirm their pre-existing rights and ancestral lands (Markiewicz, 2019: 128–9). The Kurdish *beg*s who joined the 1515 Ottoman campaign in Diyarbekir received these seven treaties. İdris mediated the process. It was İdris, the sultan's special envoy who was delegated extensive authority, who determined which 'Kurdish leaders were worthy of formal recognition of status, what rights and privileges should be recognized, and where these rights and privileges should exist' (Markiewicz, 2019: 129). Utilizing the Ottoman facilities and documents he received, he divided the province into two types of administrative units. The central and western areas of Diyarbekir were put under the administration's direct control through the appointment of district commanders (*sancak beği*).[15] Despite central administration of the districts, the Ottomans deemed it necessary to confirm the rights and status of some of the pre-existing local elites. İdris and Bıyıklı Mehmed accepted the hereditary rights and the independence of the Kurdish lords located in the east of the province. There is no record as to which of the Kurdish *beg*s were accorded their ancestral lands. Most likely, because of their support for the Ottomans in the war with the Safavids, the beneficiaries of these treaties were the most powerful Kurdish lords in Bitlis, Amediye, Hisnkeyfa, Cezire, Hizan, Hakkari and Sason (Markiewicz, 2019: 130).

These initial efforts by İdris and the Ottomans would have long-lasting effects on Kurdistan in the successive three centuries. The experience of the Kurdish *beg*s of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was interpreted as evidence for specific political prerogatives on the part of the Kurdish *beg*s. That is, the Kurdish *beg*s would always try to maintain good relations with strong rulers and with such 'wise politics they kept Kurdistan safe from the constant attacks of the rulers of Aqquyunlus, Safavids and the Ottoman'.[16] The Kurdish lords, especially those close to the borders, would keep close relations both with the Ottomans and Safavids. They would establish an alliance with one side against the other if they deemed it necessary in a given

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[15] According to the cadastral survey completed in 924/1518, Amid, Mardin, Arabkir, Kiğı, Harput, Erhani, Siverek, Ruha (Şanlıurfa), Akçakale, Çermik, Sincar and Çemişgezek were classified as regular districts. Among these only Çemişgezek was accepted as the ancestral seat of a Kurdish *beg* as he assisted directly the Ottoman army in the campaign on Amid (TT.d.64, in Markiewicz, 2019: 130).

[16] Although Şeref Xan makes this statement for the rulers of Sason, this was a rule that most Kurdish *beg*s followed (Scheref, 1860: 192).

context. They would sometimes even ask for backing against a contestant from their own ruling family (Scheref, 1860: 425–30).

Shah Ismail, when compared with Selim I, appears to have been less successful in approaching the Kurdish tribes in the prelude and during the Çaldıran war. Sultan Selim I, on the other hand, appointed İdris with a special mission to persuade the Kurdish lords and ensure a constant flow of information before and in the aftermath of the Çaldıran war. This shows he carefully planned his Kurdish policy (Yamaguchi, 2012: 110–11).

The struggle between the Ottomans and the Safavids, especially during the first half of the sixteenth century, was pivotal in shaping the political landscape in Kurdistan. The policies of both empires had lasting effects in the region. İdris himself contributed tremendously by using the religious differences between the two empires. In his communications with the Ottoman sultan, İdris represented Kurdish rulers as staunch Sunnis despite the existence of a significant number of heterodox groups like Qizilbash, Shiite, Yezidi and Ahl-i Haqq among the Kurds. İdris focused on religious difference as a political tool because of Shah Ismail's emphasis on Shiism. The sectarian division between the Ottomans and the Safavids was the most important policy-forming element for both sides. The emphasis on the religiosity of the Kurds and their devotion to Sunnism persisted through the reign of the Ottomans and was remembered more often during political conflicts with Iranian dynasties.[17] İdris believed that recognizing the hereditary rights of Kurdish emirs would be a lesser motive in terms of securing their loyalty. He saw the religious bond as the basis for a long-term bond. In addition to religious propaganda, İdris addressed the grievances towards Shah Ismail and attracted the Kurdish *beg*s to the Ottoman side (Genç, 2019: 329–33). These Kurdish *beg*s agreed to offer their allegiance to Selim I and accepted the sultan's name to be proclaimed in the Friday sermon (*hutbe*) in their territories. However, the official Ottoman religious doctrine did not deem the Safavids as infidel threats like their European rivals and wars against their eastern neighbour were not *gaza* (holy war). Religion, therefore, was less significant for the Ottoman side in the following period of relations with the Safavids. This situation also affected Kurdish rulers in the aftermath of the conflict between the two empires. This was when the right of inheritance and leadership became an issue among the Kurdish leaders.

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[17] Şeref Xan Bidlisi stressed on the Sunni and Shafi'i credentials of the Kurds and for him being an Ottoman subject was closely identified with Sunni Islam, especially among the Kurdish rulers (Scheref, 1860: 14, 36; Sharaf al-Dîn Bitlîsî, 2005: 36).

Some emirs even decided to switch to Shiism due to arising conflicts of interest. Their commitment to their new faith, however, remained superficial (Yamaguchi, 2012: 120–1). Despite that, in the following three centuries the sectarian difference between both empires and religious propaganda would once in a while come back as a useful political tool to justify the war.

The Sixteenth Century: The Age That Defined the Permanent Division of Kurdistan

After the Ottomans established their authority among Kurdish *beg*s, they did not draw abstract lines between themselves and the Safavids. The sixteenth century was not a period of political conceptualization such that the Ottomans sought a boundary resembling today's specific lines between modern Turkey and Iran. Instead, they paid attention to the cities and their environs close to the frontiers. The majority of these areas between the two empires were controlled by Kurdish clans and notables. Kars, Pasin, Hınıs, Adilcevaz, Muş, Erzurum and Bitlis marked the northern frontier between two powers during the first half of the sixteenth century. Controlling such a wide range of distant territory from the capital, Istanbul, was difficult. The Ottomans, therefore, had to rely on the local rulers to settle their sphere of influence. Furthermore, settling precise boundaries meant the loss of large revenues for the client Kurdish tribes. Besides, the Iranians were reluctant to leave Iraq to the Sunni Ottomans where it sheltered some of the most important Shiite sanctuaries (Barthold, 1984: 206). Therefore, both empires left most of the boundaries undecided.

Following İdris's negotiations, Emir Şeref of Bitlis sided with the Ottomans against the Safavids. In the aftermath, however, the next ruler of Bitlis did not feel safe under the rule of the Ottomans because of some conflict. Therefore, he continued to seek protection from the Safavids (Scheref, 1860: 418). After the conflict between the Shii Pazuki and the Sunni Rozki (Rojiki, Rawzhaki, Ruzagi, Ruzbenis, Ruzgan) tribes, Emir Şemseddin, the then ruler of Bitlis, surrendered the city to the Ottoman authorities in the course of (Kanuni) Süleyman I's Irakeyn campaign (1534–36) and subsequently he left for the Safavid court to serve the shah. This resulted in the extension of the Ottoman border to the south of Kurdistan. However, tribes in the region never accepted direct Ottoman rule. It took more than forty years until the claim of the princely family of Bitlis was accepted by Istanbul when Şemseddin's son, Şeref Xan Bidlisi,

the author of *Sharafnama*, was allowed to return with the Rozki tribe in 1578/9.[18]

After Süleyman I's Irakeyn campaign, the division between 'Iranian Kurdistan' and 'Ottoman Kurdistan' was consolidated. However, for the successive centuries, some of the Kurdish lands kept changing hands after each war between the two empires. Sometimes Kurdish lords would switch their loyalty for another ruler or simultaneously pay tribute and tax to both empires.[19] The allegiance of emirs of Ardalan, Hakkari, Baban, Soran, Bitlis and the aghas of tribes on the frontier was therefore always in flux. Besides, as Posch suggests the 'partition of Kurdistan' was in no way resembling, for example, the 'partition of Poland' of the eighteenth century since the lands populated by the Kurds were never united under one political unit named 'Kurdistan' (Posch, 2003: 211).

Before Kurdistan was partitioned between the two empires, Süleyman I (1520–66) succeeded in uniting almost all of it under his rule. He pursued conquests in the east, especially in Kurdistan, Armenia and areas around Lake Van. This was mainly to prevent potential Qizilbash intrusion into Anatolia. He also wanted to make the Euphrates River a natural boundary between his domain and the Safavids (Allouche, 1983: 103). He partially accomplished this through the Irakeyn campaign. During the second campaign in 1548–9, he captured Kars and Van, two key military strongholds between the Ottomans and the Safavids. The sultan used the policy of *istimâlet* ('to lean' or 'incline in the direction of') among the Kurdish tribes during his war against the Safavids. İbrahim Pasha, sending communications from his winter base at Aleppo, pursued the Kurdish tribes with vigorous diplomacy with message content similar to İdris's earlier engagements. He persuaded a number of frontier tribes. Ottoman officials attracted Kurdish rulers and tribes to their side through establishing better terms of association with the empire when compared with conditions with the Safavids. Registers of Imperial Surveys (*Tapu ve Tahrir Defteri*) show that the Ottomans attached importance to be recognized as 'more just rulers than their Safavid predecessors'. Therefore,

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[18] BOA (Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı), Mühimme Defteri (MD) no. 32, decrees 168, 185, 514 and 543 (March–November 1578). Posch states that it took nearly seventy years for the family of Bitlis to reinitiate their rule (Posch, 2003: 205–6).

[19] Eskandar Beg, a Persian court scribe and chronicler during the reign of Shah Abbas I, emphasizes the tendency of Kurdish tribes to switch side in the conflict with the Ottomans (Eskandar Beg, 1978: 856; Mirza Shukrullah Sanandaji, 1366/1987: 96ff). Because of this tendency, many sources blame them of being fickle. Iranians during this period stereotyped the Kurds as 'evil-natured', 'stubborn', 'morose' and 'treacherous' (Kaempfer, 1977: 88).

they ended some of the abusive tax practices, so as to establish a long-lasting rule in Iraq (Murphey, 1993: 243–4).[20]

Süleyman I's third campaign in 1553–4 resulted in full control of Kurdistan following the capture of Shahrizor and Balqas. Subsequently, the peace treaty of Amasya was signed between both empires. The Safavids recognized the sovereignty of the Ottomans over Iraq, north of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. Following the treaty, Süleyman I pursued the 'policy of containment' vis-à-vis the Safavids. He wanted to keep two Muslim powers away from a mutually destructive war while the Portuguese were becoming more active in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. It was also pragmatic for the Safavids to sign such a treaty, considering the overwhelming military power of the Ottomans (Allouche, 1983: 144).

Selim I approached the Kurds more cautiously and handed hereditary rights to a limited number of Kurdish lords. Süleyman I differed from his father in his Kurdish policy by giving more autonomy to local rulers. In addition to Selim I's classification of Diyarbekir into *sancak*s (counties with tax and military obligations) and *hükûmet*s (local governments with a high degree of autonomy), Süleyman I added eight more *sancak*s. He classified the rest of Kurdish emirates into twenty-eight administrative units as *yurtluk* and *ocaklık* (family estate or hereditary fiefdoms), as stated in a *ferman* (imperial decree), and granted them to Kurdish rulers with extensive autonomy and inheritance privileges from father to son (Barkan, 1953–4: 306–7).[21] Despite their self-rule, most of the Kurdish territories were, in addition to Diyarbekir, put under newly created *eyalet*s (province) of Dulkadir, Erzurum, Mosul, Baghdad, Van and Shahrizor. Most Kurdish lords nonetheless enjoyed direct access to the sultan, especially during periods of conflict with the Safavids. Süleyman I made sure to keep the Kurdish emirs empowered since he saw Kurdistan 'as a strong barrier and an iron fortress against the sedition of the demon Gog of Persia' (Aziz Efendi, 1985: 14). The sultan sought to preserve a strong leadership through the granting of inheritance, securing these lords against the intrusion of other rivals. This was to assure the continuity of the Kurdish emirates. His policy would also make these lords more dependent on the sultan to maintain their position. Süleyman I differed from his predecessor when he replaced the focus on religious fervour

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[20] For a short account of the Ottoman Empire's legacy in Iraq in the early modern period, see Murphey (1987: 17–29).

[21] The decree, which would set the Ottoman governing strategy of Kurdistan for the next three centuries, also detailed the rules of inheritance from father to son and their administrative privileges (TSMA, e.11696). For an English translation of the *ferman*, see Özoğlu (2004: 53–4).

with different state creeds blending 'ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious ecumenism' (Murphey, 1993: 248).

Some of the Kurdish tribes were located near the frontier between both empires and their territories were sometimes divided. Those tribes were very influential. The Ottoman and the Safavid regional leaders had to take them into consideration. The Mahmudi near Khoy and Mahmudiye, the Dunbuli around Khoy and Sugmend (Sukmanabad) and the Şenbo (or Şanbavi) in Hakkari were among some of the prominent tribes. The Şenbos, for instance, were almost independent and their name was not put on tax registers at least until the mid-seventeenth century despite their allegiance to the Ottomans (Posch, 2003: 206). The Bradost tribe dominated the territory from the east of Hakkari to Lake Urmiya and Sawujbulagh (Sablax). Sultan Hüseyin of Bahdinan, respected both by other Kurdish tribes and Ottoman sultans, was another strong tribal leader who ruled from the west of Mukri's dominion on the other side of the Zagros mountains in Amediye (Posch, 2003: 206–7). Further south were the Babans and their tribal confederation located around Shahrizor. The Babans later extended their territories up to Lake Urmiya. Their leader, Hacı Şeyh Baban, so threatened the Safavids that in 1540 Shah Tahmasp was compelled to send a military force against him (Scheref, 1860: 286).[22]

Şeref Xan classifies some of the Kurdish tribes (Pazuki/Pazogi, Siyah Mansur, Çekeni/Çigani, Kelhor and Zengene) as the 'emirs of Iranian Kurds' (*omara-ye Akrad-e Iran*) (Scheref, 1860: 320–8).[23] These tribes were loyal to the Safavids as they were either Qizilbash or from a Sufi order close to them. Their leaders were promoted as *khan* or *qurchi*. Posch suggests that these tribes could be named as Qizilbash Kurds (*Akrad-e Qizilbash*) (Posch, 2003: 210). Many of these tribes were sent to Khurasan during the reign of Abbas I (1587–1629). In comparison, a second group was made of those who often switched loyalty between the Safavids and the Ottomans. The Sunni Rozki, Ardalan, Soran, Hakkari, Baban, Mukri, Mahmudi and Yezidi Dunbuli dominated the Ottoman–Safavid frontier. In each conflict between the two empires, they could and did shift alliances in order to keep their independence and hereditary rights.[24] Arising conflicts of leadership within a given tribe and members of

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[22] Hacı Şeyh Baban was also mentioned in the Persian and Ottoman chronicles of Ḥasan Rūmlū (1931: 382–3) and Lütfi Paşa (1341/1925: 383).
[23] Yamaguchi adds the tribes of Bana and Lur-i Kuchak to this list (Yamaguchi, 2012: 112).
[24] Besides these two categories, Yamaguchi suggests a third group of Kurdish lords who were made up of governors and emirs around Diyarbekir and gradually incorporated into the Ottoman administrative system after the creation of the province in 1515. Once their territories were seized from the Safavids and hereditary rights were recognized, these rulers pledged their near total obedience to the Ottomans (Yamaguchi, 2012: 111–13).

their ruling family would often result in an invitation to either the Ottomans or the Safavids to support them in their struggle.

While Kurdish tribes were important for both empires to keep the shared frontier steady, the towns and cities close to boundaries had further military, strategic importance. Places like Bitlis and Van were considered as a 'key and gate to Azerbaijan' by the Ottoman commanders.[25] Khoy and Urmiya on the Safavid side were the energetic towns for the Safavids to keep the Ottomans at the door. Therefore, Khoy often became the target of the Ottoman–Kurdish alliance. Together with their environs, these towns were strategically very important to check each other's power for the Ottomans and Safavids. Without the co-operation of the Kurdish tribes and lords around these towns, it was impossible to protect these settlements. Kurdish tribes on the frontier could unexpectedly change sides. In some cases, towns changed hands when the tribe in their alliance switched sides. Furthermore, the Ottomans and Safavids tried to avoid direct confrontation. They preferred proxy wars. The Kurdish emirs and their tribal confederates conquered the land of another Kurdish ruler under the rival empire. Sometimes they used such skirmishes among Kurdish tribes as a pretext for wars of a new conquest.[26]

The Safavids remained on the north-east shores of Lake Van until the wars in 1548 and 1550–3. After the Ottomans incorporated Van into the territories of the empire, a province under the rule of *beylerbeyi* was created (Sinclair, 2009: 216–17). Despite Ottoman rule in Van, the Mahmudi *beg*s remained loyal to the Safavids until 1554, several months before the treaty of Amasya was signed between the empires.[27] The treaty brought about some stability to the region by barring the Kurdish rulers from switching loyalty. This laid the foundation for long-term relations between the two empires. There were not many cases of shifting sides among the Kurdish ruling families during this period. The Safavids nonetheless got involved in the appointment of the Mahmudi *beg*s. Some family members of the Mahmudis were appointed to positions

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[25] BOA, A.DVN, I/52, in Posch (2003: 208).

[26] The Ardalanis, who expanded their territories over Sanandaj/Sinna and Shahrizor, are a good example of how the Ottomans and Safavids waged proxy wars on each other and tried to expand their frontier territories. Lands of the Ardalanis were ruled by two brothers (Biga Beg and Suhrab), one in Shahrizor and another in Sanandaj. Using the feud between these brothers in the second half of the sixteenth century, the Ottomans took over Shahrizor while the Safavids claimed Ardalan. The boundary between the two empires was defined as a result of the battles between family members in the coming years. More details on the history of the Ardalanis in the sixteenth century are available in Me'mun's memoirs, which were published both as transcription and facsimiles in Parmaksızoğlu (1973: 192–230 and 1a–45b).

[27] For the Ottoman view of the treaty, see Şahin (2013: 127–36).

in the Safavid army (Scheref, 1860: 302, 304–6). The Mahmudi case shows that the Ottoman authority was not the only option for the Kurdish lords, who saw the competition between the two empires as an opportunity to carve a political space for themselves. They did not passively accept the authority of their sovereign but maintained the power of negotiation.

When Shah Tahmasp (1524–76) succeeded his father, Shah Ismail, he recognized the hereditary rights of almost all the Kurdish rulers who sought refuge in his court. He rarely eliminated a Kurdish ruler unless they proved rebellious. He provided them with financial support whenever for some reason they lost territory. A distinctive feature of his Kurdish policy was that he received the young sons or brothers of emirs into his court, most of them as hostages, in order to assure the loyalty of their families and had them trained with his own princes (Yamaguchi, 2012: 114–21). Many of those would be raised with a sense of adoration and fidelity to the shah and would be later appointed as loyal rulers in their land. Devoted Kurdish rulers would be appointed with titles such as *qurchi*, a kind of royal bodyguard. The Safavids created the post of *amîr al-umarâ'* (commander-in-chief) of Kurdistan and gave it to loyal Kurdish emirs to command other Kurdish chieftains.[28] Marriage alliances between Kurdish rulers and the Safavid royal family as well as Qizilbash commanders contributed to the integration of Kurdish emirs into the Qizilbash confederation. Shah Tahmasp's Kurdish policy seems to achieve its objective for a while as few Kurdish emirs changed their loyalty to the Ottomans. On the other hand, despite their attachment to the shah, the Kurdish emirs were never appointed to high positions in Tahmasp's court as it was dominated by Qizilbash Turkmen tribes. One had to wait for Shah Abbas (1578–1629) to reform the system until some Kurdish elites were accepted into the core administration.[29]

After Shah Tahmasp's death, Iran was in a power vacuum and the Ottomans wanted to use this opportunity to expand their eastern territories after more than two decades of stability. Using Iranian Kurdish tribes' attack on Van and frontier raids as a pretext, in 1578 the Ottomans launched a new campaign on Iran and it took twelve years until the war ended (Kütükoğlu, 1993: 18–22).[30]

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[28] Among those who were appointed *amîr al-umarâ'* were Halil Beg Pazuki during Ismail I's reign, Emir Şeref during the rule of Tahmasp and Şeref Xan Bidlisi, the author of *Sharafnama*, after Shah Ismail II (1576–77) came to power (Yamaguchi, 2012: 118–19).

[29] 'Alî Khan Zanganah, who was a member of the prominent Kurdish Zangana tribe, reached to the position of grand vizier during the reign of Shah Sulayman (Matthee, 1994: 77–98).

[30] See also the same source (Kütükoğlu, 1993: 53–82) for a detailed account of the war. Giovanni Michiel, a resident of the Venetian consulate in Aleppo until 1587, bluntly states that the Ottomans waged war on Iran not for the usual issue of faith but simply for the sake of expanding their territory (Bibliotecada Ajuda, Lisbon, 46–10-X,

The Ottomans also sent an order to Kurdish emirs and aghas to move into Safavid territories, occupy their cities and kill all the 'heretics' (*mülhid*) in the area (Uzunçarşılı, 1995: 3/57–8). Hüsrev Pasha, the governor of Van, is said to have armed the Kurdish tribes and the emir of Hakkari with a promise of land and hereditary rights, with the condition that they seize the region of Salmas (Matthee, 2014: 15). A joint Ottoman-Kurdish force later attacked the Qizilbash forces in Toprakkale-Urmiya and occupied the area. Proxy wars between the two empires were carried out through Kurdish forces. The Ottomans kept denying responsibility and blamed the Kurds for disturbances in the frontier area. In 1585, the Ottomans eventually occupied Tabriz and large swathes of Iran's most productive territories in the empire's north-west regions. The Iranians mounted a counter-offensive after one and a half-decade later and regained these lands. The decades-long conflict in the vicinity of Kurdish territories drained resources and caused tremendous economic instability with a number of forced population deportations in Azerbaijan and Shirvan (Matthee, 2014: 2). Several factors underlie the Ottoman decision of war. One is its religious ideology vilifying the Safavids as 'heretics worthy of death' (Matthee, 2014: 19).[31] Considering the weakness of the Safavids and Ottoman military superiority it seems the latter calculated its military strategy very well. The Kurdish tribes played an undeniable and active role in the planning, outbreak and course of the war. The Kurdish lords and tribes who supported the Ottomans had an interest in it. In the words of Murphey, the Kurdish lords and tribes retained 'sufficient fluidity and dynamism to defend their own interests and in exceptional circumstances, especially during wartime, even to extend their sphere of independent action and influence within those states' instead of remaining as 'participants in and contributors to the fixed agendas set by their respective imperial "masters"' (Murphey, 2003: 151).

The Seventeenth Century: From Agents to Partners of the Empire

In 1603, Iranian lands once again became the battleground between the two empires and this resulted in the recapture of Tabriz by the Safavids. Shah Abbas I and his Ottoman counterpart Sultan Ahmed I (r. 1603–17) along with the sultan's successors re-established the loyalty of the tribes on the frontier.

'Relazione delle successi della Guerra fra il Turco e Persiano all anno 1577 al 1587', fols. 299v–300, in Matthee, 2014: 12).

[31] For a discussion on religious elements in the wars between the Ottomans and the Safavids, see Hess (2013: 199–204).

In contrast to the sixteenth century, the earlier Kurdish policy of the Ottoman Empire to 'unite and rule' forced to change into 'divide and rule' (*divide et impera*) because of the competition with the Safavids for the control of Azerbaijan. At the same time, the tribes saw this competition as an opportunity offered by 'the complex matrix of fluid borders, changing alliances and the heightened strategic importance that their own native and patrimonial homelands now possessed in the wartime context to renegotiate and redefine the terms of their clientship, loyalty and dependence in relation to their respective nominal overlords both sultan and shah' (Murphey, 2003: 152).

Despite the autonomous and hereditary status of Kurdish *hükûmet*s, their influence on the frontier remained local and they were not appreciated much by the Ottoman centre for their patrolling and defending the eastern frontier. Neither the Ottomans nor the Kurdish lords and their tribes sought a fuller integration between them. As the Ottoman documents of appointment and investiture during this period formulate, the Kurdish emirates were *mefrûz-ül-kalem ve maktû'-ül-kadem* (separated from the pen [of revenue assessors] and cut off from the feet [of the inspectors]). This formulation denoted their autonomous status with no tax obligation and free of inspection (Ayn-ı Ali Efendi, 1280/1863–1864: 30). Their co-operation with the Ottomans during wartime gave the Kurdish lords the prestige they sought and put them on equal terms with accompanying Ottoman provincial officials. They projected more power during military activities in their territories than in times of a lack of conflict. They served as scouts during the war. They were information collectors and intelligence agents, establishing links between the Ottomans and various anti-Safavid allies (Murphey, 2003: 154–5). In times of crises with Georgian princes, for example, the Ottomans would rely mostly on Kurdish emirs of the Azerbaijani-Caucasian frontier to supply them with reliable information. The Ottomans made explicit their unreserved confidence in the permanence and sustainability of good relations with Kurdish rulers because the empire needed stability and predictability in a frontier where the population easily shifted allegiances (Ferîdûn Ahmed Bey, 1858: 2/221).

The Ottomans relied on the Kurdish leaders to the extent of even employing them as peace negotiators with the Safavids. For example, in 1604, the Ottoman commander Cağaloğlu Sinan Pasha delegated Süleyman Beg, a Mahmudi and the ruler of Hoşab, to put forward his proposal for peace with the Safavids (Eskandar Beg, 1978: 857). The leaders of the Mahmudi tribal confederation were able to carry this and other roles owing to their cross-border relations with members of the same or affiliated tribes. Once the

shah became aware of anti-Safavid coalition among the Mahmudi Kurds, he took immediate steps to relocate them to other less militarily active parts of the frontier (Eskandar Beg, 1978: 878). The case of the Mahmudis demonstrates that both empires often targeted semi-subordinate tribal groups and attempted to make them clients. They also tried to divert the loyalty of subordinate groups under the allegiance of their enemy. To this end, Shah Abbas I equalized the status of the Kurdish and Turkmen Qizilbash groups, both of whom were indispensable in the defence of the frontier (Murphey, 2003: 158–9).

During the seventeenth century, the Safavids preferred to be heavy-handed on the non-co-operative elements among the Kurdish tribes in western Iran. Abbas I was faced with the dilemma of choosing between maintaining a workable balance between the Kurds and the Turkmens or suppressing semi-subordinate Kurdish groups. The shah opted for the second option in the case of Emir Khan, the leader of Bradost, who built the fortress of Dimdim near the western shores of Lake Urmiya and rebelled against him. Emir Khan surrendered his fortress after three months of siege by the Safavid forces between November 1609 and February 1610. In the end, those who voluntarily surrendered were indiscriminately massacred along with the rebels who did not lay down their arms as such (Eskandar Beg, 1978: 998–1002).[32] Fifteen years after the Dimdim massacre, Şir Beg of Mukri revolted in a similar fashion, marched on Maragheh and plundered the inhabitants. A punitive expedition was sent over his capital, Gavdal, by the shah. However, Şir Beg was able to save himself when he fled into the mountains (Eskandar Beg, 1978: 1253).

For the rest of the seventeenth century, the Safavids saw Kurdish lands as alien and treacherous. Contrary to the Safavids, the Ottomans pursued a longer-term strategy to win the support and loyalty of the tribes through investitures and concessions. The policy aimed at creating robust, steady and self-sufficient allies in the border regions who could react against sudden attacks when Ottoman forces were not on the ground. Mîr Şeref, the hereditary ruler of Cezire, was delegated with a special position and extensive cross-clan authority during the early seventeenth-century Ottoman–Safavid wars. The Ottomans would not have been able to overcome the Safavid

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[32] Kurdish literature is rich in the battle scenes of Dimdim. The Kurds treated the conflict as a struggle against the foreign domination and in their ballads portrayed the massacred people as martyrs (şehid) in a holy war (gaza) (Hassanpour, 1995: 404–5). For ballads with musical notation and short stories on the battle, see Dzhalilov (1967: 5–26, 37–9, 206).

threat without the collaboration of local rulers like Mîr Şeref. Kurdish rulers gained further power by exploiting their new positions to the point to co-opt the Ottomans into serving their purposes (Naʿîmâ Mustafa Efendi, 1281/1864–1865: 2/17).[33] For instance, the governor of Diyarbekir, Nasuh Pasha, who was also the son-in-law of Mîr Şeref Pasha, wanted to put an end to a rebellion in Baghdad in 1606. Mîr Şeref diverted Nasuh Pasha's attention at the close of campaigning season to a project to expand his own territory and persuaded him to attack the stronghold of Kurd Ali, a leader of the Aşti tribe. A prolonged siege of four months proved to be fruitless and the campaign on the Iraqi front was postponed to the following year.

The Kurdish tribal forces became indispensable for providing some of the basic services in the areas of army transportation and logistical support. The supply lines of the Ottoman army extended beyond the imperial *menzilhâne* (post stations) network confined to the core provinces of the empire thanks to these tribal forces. According to Aziz Efendi, Kurdish forces constituted a military force of 50,000 to 60,000 soldiers during this period.[34] After the Ottomans recaptured Baghdad in 1638, the tribes were encouraged to extend their sphere of influence and build cross-border bonds with their tribal brethren in Safavid territories (Murphey, 2003: 162–3).[35] Furthermore, in the absence of Ottoman commanders or pashas to lead their forces, tribal commanders assumed leadership positions in their own particular sectors of the wider frontier. When several fronts had been opened on the eastern frontier in 1627, the leadership for the battle in southern Kurdistan was assigned to the chief of the Mukri confederation, Mira Beg (Kâtib Çelebi, 1287/1870: 2/96–7).[36] In such cases, the usual order of superiority was temporarily reversed and the hierarchical distinction between the overlord and vassal was blurred. Besides, the Ottomans during this period could not rely on the central treasury as they did in the sixteenth century. Therefore, Kurdish tribes had to share the cost of wars despite their tax privileges. Such shared responsibility and burden redistribution during the war gave the opportunity to Kurdish lords to redefine their role and status. These emirs

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[33] Topçular Kâtibi, *Tevârîh-i Âl-i Osmân*, fol. 241b–242b, 265a, Vienna: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Ms, Mxt 130, in Murphey (2003: 162).

[34] Aziz Efendi notes that after the provincial governors corrupted and started to extort money from the Kurdish *begs*, their forces shrank substantially to a mere 600 or 700 men at the beginning of 1630 (Aziz Efendi, 1985: 14–15).

[35] Before Baghdad was permanently taken under control, the Ottomans used eastern Anatolia and the province of Mosul as the centres of military mobilization against the Safavids.

[36] Aziz Efendi, too, in his report tries to draw the sultan's attention to the campaigns that took place under the command of Kurdish *begs* (Aziz Efendi, 1985: 14).

obtained further immunity against the encroachment of state authority in their lands and 'extended regional authority and a re-confirmation and of long-standing autonomous control within their own patrimonial lands designated as *hukumets*' (Murphey, 2003: 167).

After the two sides agreed to sign the Treaty of Zuhab (better known in Turkish historiography as Kasr-ı Şirin, 1639), which reaffirmed the essential elements of the treaty of Amasya that was ratified more than eighty years before, the Ottoman authority in eastern Anatolia slowly eroded.[37] The Kurdish territories on the Iranian side were faced with a similar fate once the weakening Safavid dynasty could not stand strong in the region after the second half of the seventeenth century and ultimately lost control in the eighteenth century when Iran plunged into anarchy because of political weakness. The long-enduring Ottoman–Safavid conflict eventually created a suitable environment for the autonomous status of Kurdish emirs who became part of a buffer zone, which afterwards was left almost untouched.[38] Neither side was able to dominate in Kurdistan. As a result, the Kurdish lords were able to turn this stalemate to their own advantage.

Aziz Efendi suggested that the eastern frontier significantly declined due to the rapacious attitude and their continual intervention into the family affairs of the Kurdish emirates. He stated that the *beylerbeyi*'s interference into the autonomy of the Kurdish *beg*s caused the decline. The *beylerbeyi* collected huge sums of money from Kurdish *beg*s despite their exemption from financial obligations. The only solution to improve the military situation in the east, Aziz Efendi suggested, was to give their hereditary privileges of tenure and protect them against financial demands by provincial governments. 'Kurdish warriors' would once again be able to 'put to use the sharpest swords' and 'bring about many conspicuous victories on behalf of the imperial throne' (Aziz Efendi, 1985: 14–17).[39]

The control of the central government in Diyarbekir became weaker in the second half of the seventeenth century as only nine ordinary *sancak*s, out of the eighteen which were registered in the sixteenth century, remained.

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[37] For more details on the agreement, see Naʿîmâ Mustafa Efendi (1281/1864–1865: 3/406–10).

[38] Evliyâ Çelebi, who passed through the region in the mid-seventeenth century, refers to Kurdistan as a 'stronghold' (*sedd-i sedid*) (Evliyâ Çelebi, 2005: 4/219a).

[39] Aziz Efendi adds that the Ottomans were in 'debt' to the Kurdish *beg*s for the services they provided on the frontier. He therefore suggests, 'no one shall, in contradiction to that judicial decree, request a single akça or a single kernel [of grain] from the Kurdish commanders' (Aziz Efendi, 1985: 17). For the administrative organization of the province of Diyarbekir in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see van Bruinessen (1988: 13–28).

Nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes in the province remained marginal within the political structures of the Kurdish principalities. These tribes were not integrated into any administrative units and their classification as *sancak* was merely for fiscal purposes as the Ottoman tax agents wanted to collect taxes before they took the journey to their summer pastures.[40] By the mid-eighteenth century, the tribal population of Diyarbekir decreased further. Princely emirs like those in Bitlis, Hakkari, Amediye, Baban and Soran were based more on tribal lineages and they received their power from tribal confederates. Some of these confederates, like the Heyderan and Boz Ulus, broke up. The Ottomans bolstered these newly born tribes so as to recruit them into the military, by distributing fiefs and grazing grounds among them. Such redistributions caused further political conflict inside the Hakkari and Bitlis emirates. Kurdish rulers in these emirates had limited power on tribes and were sometimes challenged by their chieftains. This situation forced them to establish their legitimacy and claim to power with imperial support. Therefore, they needed the sultan to back their rule (Fuccaro, 2012: 243).

The emirates and tribes kept changing sides and sometimes expanded their borders. Eventually, the frontier became harder to control or navigate on the Ottoman and the Safavid side. This situation is clearly visible in the maps in Kâtib Çelebi's seventeenth-century geographical account *Cihannüma*, which details Anatolia but the Kurdistan region is left blank despite the author's knowledge of the region. In the text, he provides some details on the region. He gives a description of towns and cities like Van, Adilcevaz, Bitlis, Muş, Mosul, Hakkari, Siirt and Diyarbekir. He defines Cezire as the centre of Kurdistan and emphasizes the Sunniness of the Kurdish population (Kâtib Çelebi, 2007: 1/448–50).[41]

Evliyâ Çelebi, an Ottoman traveller who spent some time throughout Kurdistan in the second half of the seventeenth century, presents more details on the geography, politics, people and culture of the region. When he visited Kurdistan, he found some politically stable administrations. During his visit, almost all Kurdish principalities were based in towns like Bitlis, Amediye, Cezire, Hisnkeyfa and Colemerg.[42] He spent most of his time in Bitlis, and thus presents it as the most important emirate among all the others. He gives

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[40] A new study on the political economy of Kurdistan shows that the power of *beylerbeyi* increased and the autonomy of Kurdish rulers eroded in Diyarbekir during the seventeenth century (Yadirgi, 2017: 75–6).

[41] For more discussion on Kâtib Çelebi's perception of Kurdistan, see Atmaca (2018: 82–4). See also my forthcoming work (Atmaca, 2021).

[42] By the end of the seventeenth century, Naima imagined the 'domains of Kurdistan' (*memâlik-i Kürdistan*) as a region larger than that described by Evliyâ Çelebi, by

some details about southern Kurdistan, especially the province of Shahrizor, centred in Kirkuk. He finds the province with eighteen ordinary *sancak*s and two fully autonomous Kurdish districts, Gaziyan and Mehrevan. During the war with Iran, he claims, Shahrizor could put out an army of 30,000 men.[43] He adds the emirates of Harir, Ardalan and Soran to the autonomous Kurdish entities classified under the province of Shahrizor, but does not provide any detail about them. He calls Bahdinan with its capital, Amediye, as the most autonomous and powerful of all Kurdish emirates. The emirate was divided among several districts and appointments to rule these districts were made by Emir Seyyid Han, not by the governor of Baghdad. The emir would partake in the military campaigns against the Safavids with his own army of 40,000 men, standing beside the army of Shahrizor. Both armies would constitute the front guard.[44]

The Eighteenth and First Half of the Nineteenth Centuries: From Imperial to Regional Alliance

From the 1639 Treaty of Zuhab until the 1720s, no significant conflict took place between the Ottomans and the Safavids. During this period, the Ottomans mostly focused on wars in the Balkans and rebellions inside of the empire. Istanbul sought the help of the Kurdish forces usually during a revolt in the Caucasus, Azerbaijan or Iraq. For instance, the emir of Bahdinan sent his uncle Kubad Beg, with a military force of 16,000 men, to join an Ottoman campaign to suppress an uprising in Basra in 1700 (Saadi, 2017: 83).

The Safavids went through a period of relative decline during this period. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, before the Safavid shahs were replaced by Nader Shah (1736–47), the founder of the Afsharid dynasty, the Ottomans wanted to occupy western Iran. They sent Dürri Ahmed Efendi to Iran to assess the military condition of the Safavids. After he completed his journey at the end of 1721, he prepared a detailed report about the Safavid

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including Erzurum and Ruha (Urfa). He also recorded the Kurdish population in Sivas (Naʿîmâ Mustafa Efendi, 2007: 2/550, 899).

[43] It seems that Evliya Çelebi exaggerated the number of soldiers, which he substantiated without any evidence (Evliyâ Çelebi, 2005: 4/372b).

[44] ʿİmâdiyye diyâr-ı Kürdistân'da ulu hükûmetdir . . . eyâletinde asla timâr u zeʿâmet ve alâybeği ve çeribaşı ve serdâr u dizdâr ve kethudâyeri hâkimleri yokdur. Cümleten melik kendüsü hâkim-i dünyadır' (Amediye is an almighty rule in the realm of Kurdistan . . . in its province there is no fiefdom or vassalage and no officer, commander, castle warden or rulers of stewardship. The king all by himself is the ruler of the land.) (Evliyâ Çelebi, 2005: 4/377b). More details on the Bahdinan emirate are available in Saadi (2017), al-Damalûjî (1952), al-ʿAbbâsî (1969) and al-ʿAzzâwî (1949).

court, their military forces and the society (Dürri Ahmed Efendi, 1820). Once Sultan Ahmed III and his grand vizier, Damad İbrahim, read the report, they decided that conditions were ripe for declaring war on Iran. The wars were waged from three fronts: the Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Iraq. Led by the governor of Baghdad, Ahmed Pasha, the Ottoman army marched from the Iraqi front and occupied Kermanshah. In order to expand the eastern frontier further, the Ottomans relied on the Kurdish forces led by the leader of the Baban emirate, Han Ahmed Pasha (Zeki, 1939: 54–5). The Ottomans, therefore, succeeded in occupying Hamadan in July 1731. After Nader Shah took over Isfahan and replaced the shah with his eight-month-old son in August 1732, he reclaimed the territories lost to the Ottomans and declared war on Baghdad. The Ottomans came out of this second war victorious as well (Vak'anüvis Subhî Mehmed Efendi, 2007: 102–3, 188–92).

In 1736, Nader Shah had usurped the throne of the Safavids and intensified his irredentist policy towards the west as much as the east of Iran. From the beginning of his rule until his death in June 1747, he waged a series of wars against the Ottomans.[45] During these wars, some of the territories that belonged to the Kurdish emirs changed hands several times. Among those lands, the emirate of Ardalan was occupied by the Ottomans and the Afsharids more than any other. Besides these states, the Mukri, Baban and Shahrizor emirates also invaded territories of Ardalanis (Sawaqeb and Muzaffari, 1393/2015: 97–120).

The Ottomans must have been planning to remain in Iranian Kurdistan for a while as they prepared land registers for Ardalan together with Luristan, Kermanshah, Urmiya, Mahabad, Sawujbulagh, Khoy and Maku in the late 1720s (Özgüdenli, 2003: 87–93; Uzunçarşılı, 1995: 4/180–2, 193). The Ottomans organized Ardalan, Kermanshah and Hamadan as *eyalet*s. According to this new organization, Ardalan was planned as the largest province divided into seven districts (*liva* or *sancak*).[46] Despite planning and registration, the Ottomans decided to sign a peace agreement with Iran in February 1732 and retreated from most of Iranian Kurdistan, including Ardalan (Uzunçarşılı, 1995: 4/222). The Kurdistan region and Mosul suffered continuous blows as a result of Nader Shah's campaigns. Just before he died, a peace agreement confirmed the 1639 borders between the Ottomans and the Afsharids. The periods of

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[45] On wars and peace agreements between the Afsharids and the Ottomans, see Tucker (1996: 16–37) and Olson (2017).

[46] Sinne (Sanandaj), Mihreban (Meriwan), Evruman (Awraman), Cevanrud (Javanrud), Bane (Baneh), Sakız (Saqqez) and Afşar were organized as *liva* under the province of Ardalan (*Tahrir Defteri* (TD), no. 1066 (c. 1726–27), in Özgüdenli, 2003: 90–2).

peace, however, did not endure, on the whole, for a long time (Fattah and Caso, 2009: 126).

Karim Khan Zand came to the throne immediately after Nader Shah's assassination. He largely settled down Iran and started a military campaign targeting Ardalan territories before the winter of 1749. The Kurdish emir, Hasan Ali, was ill-prepared and tried to solve the crisis through diplomacy. He failed to convince Karim Khan. His capital, Sanandaj, was sacked and burned by the Iranian army (Perry, 2006: 25, 102–3). Kurdish rulers were never given high positions as governor-general in the administrative division of the Zand dynasty. The hereditary posts were subject to royal ratification and Karim Khan did not necessarily confirm as rulers those who were waiting in line to take the rule in their hereditary lands.

The rivalry between Ardalan under the rule of the Zandis and the Baban emirate (corresponding to present-day Sulaimaniya in Iraq and its sur-rounding), which was part of Ottoman Baghdad, provided the pretext for new interferences. Both emirates had 'traditional east-west ties of culture and kinship, which were bisected by the north-south frontier' between the realms formally under the rule of the Ottoman and Iranian dynasties, respectively (Perry, 2006: 103). The Ardalan–Baban rivalry would dominate the political scene of Kurdistan until the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Therefore, the Kurdish centre of power started to move down further to the south of Lake Van and the north of Iraq.[47] Similar to the late sixteenth century, the Ottomans and Iranians waged periodic proxy wars through these two emirates. At the beginning of the conflict, Hasan Ali Khan had to withdraw to Sanandaj against an assault by the ruler of Baban, Salim Pasha. Despite the collaboration of the emirates of Baban and Ardalan with the Qajar contender against Karim Khan, the latter's victories left them with no choice but to transfer their allegiance to the Zandis. The Babans had fallen increasingly under the influence of their rival Kurdish emirs, the Ardalanis, until 1774. The governor of Baghdad, Ömer Pasha, finally decided to reverse this situation and replaced the ruler of the emirate with another family member. A joint Zandi–Kurdish force was sent over Baghdad to reimpose Iran's rule in the Baban emirate but failed to accomplish the mission. During the following year, Karim Khan opened up a new offensive on two fronts, the Shatt al-Arab and Baban territories. Three-pronged attacks by the Zandi army resulted in the defeat

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[47] On the rivalry and the rise of the Babans in Kurdistan in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, see the first chapter in Atmaca (2013). On the oscillation of political power among the Kurdish emirates, see my forthcoming work (Atmaca, 2021).

of the Ottoman–Baban forces. The status quo in the Kurdish emirate was reinstated (Perry, 2006: 75, 78–9).

During this period, local notables in Ottoman Iraq became quasi-independent to such an extent that the governors, who were sent from Istanbul to Baghdad and Mosul, remained symbolic. From 1750 to 1831, the dynasty of the Mamluks ('owned' or 'slave'), who would come from Georgia as Christian slaves and be converted to Islam, ruled Baghdad, then Basra and later extended their sphere of influence in Mosul. The Mamluks forged a close alliance with the Babans. The Baban emirate provided a significant proportion of Baghdad's budget. During the first decade of the nineteenth century, the Baban emirate under the rule of Abdurrahman Pasha (r. 1789–1813) became more powerful than the Mamluks in Baghdad and other Kurdish emirs in Ottoman Kurdistan. Abdurrahman was called a 'kingmaker' because of his role in the appointment of Mamluk leaders to the head of Baghdad (Longrigg, 1925: 226, 231–2). He even asked the sultan to bestow upon him the province of Baghdad. In return, he would suppress the Wahhabi rebellions in Iraq and reinstate the Ottoman rule in Aleppo, Diyarbekir, Rakka and some other provinces that the rebels attacked. He also offered to pay annually 30,000 piasters as tax, an amount more than the Mamluks paid.[48] Abdurrahman attacked Baghdad, Kirkuk, Sanandaj and Koy Sanjaq, and expanded, at the expense of other Kurdish emirates, the boundaries of his emirate to the north and east (Atmaca, 2013: 53).

Abdurrahman used the rivalry between the Ottomans and the newly emerging Qajar dynasty (1794–1925) in Iran. In times of conflict with Mamluk governors, he would seek help from Fath Ali Shah (1797–1834), the second Qajar ruler. After losing a war against the governor of Baghdad, Ali Pasha, he sought refuge in Iran. Fath Ali received him well and later pressured Ali Pasha to reappoint Abdurrahman to the leadership of the Baban emirate.[49] Instead of occupying Ottoman lands, Fath Ali decided to maintain close relations with the emir in order to interfere in the internal affairs of Baghdad. On the other hand, the pasha utilized the political turmoil between the two states. Abdurrahman switched several times his loyalty between the two powers to ensure his political survival. The Ottomans considered the Baban territories (called 'Kürdistan' in the official correspondence) as

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[48] BOA, Hatt-ı Humayun (HAT), 20880-F (17 Rebiülâhir 1225/22 April 1810). For an English translation of Abdurrahman Pasha's letter to the grand vizier, Yusuf Pasha, see Atmaca (2013: 55).

[49] BOA, HAT, 20880-F.

a gateway to Iraq and larger lands of the empire.[50] Hence, the Porte considered Abdurrahman's position very critical to the safety of its eastern frontier. The Ottomans expressed concern about Abdurrahman due to his close relations with the shah and Iranian governor in Kermanshah.

Qajar shahs were frequently involved in the internal affairs of Ottoman Kurdistan until the mid-nineteenth century. Such interferences often resulted in conflict between the Ottoman Empire and Iran. Two conflicts, one in the early 1820s and the other in the early 1840s, resulted in two agreements signed in Erzurum. The first treaty was signed in 1823. As part of the treaty, Iran agreed not to interfere in the politics of Ottoman Kurdistan. The Ottomans did not want the Baban ruler to get involved in the peace negotiations since the Porte considered the Babans as a 'bond between two states and having no concern with the war'. Therefore, the report concluded, the issue of the Baban emirate should be 'left out of peace terms'.[51] The treaty did not stop Iran exercising influence through the emir. This led to further clashes and culminated in the second treaty of Erzurum in early 1847. One of the major topics of negotiation was the status of Sulaimaniya, the capital of the Baban emirate, and some of the Kurdish lands on the frontier. The Iranian delegate claimed some of the districts in Van, Bayezid and Sulaimaniya. When the Ottomans did not accept such demands, Iran offered to act together in the appointment of the Baban rulers and to receive dues from the tribes of the emirate for the usage of summer camps on the Iranian side. The Ottomans rejected these requests altogether and in contrast to the previous treaty, this time they made sure that the Baban territories would be recognized as part of the empire (Ateş, 2013: 92; Aykun, 1995: 39–41). Following the 1847 treaty, the Ottomans replaced the Baban ruler with a new administrator of its choice. This ended Iran's plan to claim the emirate.

Conclusion

Both states removed the Kurdish notables from their position and incorporated their lands into the central administration with the 1847 treaty. To this end, the Ottomans waged a decade-long war against the Kurdish nobility in

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[50] A report on Abdurrahman Pasha and Baban territories, prepared by the governor of Baghdad, Ali Pasha, states 'Kurdistan [means acquisition] of Iraq and Iraq means acquisition of all Anatolia (*Kürdistan Irak'ın ve Irak cümle Anadolu'nun ittihâzı olduğu*).' BOA, HAT, 6671-B (undated – probably May or June 1806).

[51] BOA, HAT, 37113-S (29 Zilhicce 1239/25 August 1824). For more details on both treaties, see Masters (1991: 3–15) and Aykun (1995).

the Bohtan, Soran, Baban, Bahdinan, Hakkari and Müküs emirates. The Ottomans eventually defeated them and appointed administrators from the centre. Two decades later, Iran followed suit. Iran removed the last members of the Ardalan dynasty from Sanandaj. Despite delimited borders and an altered political system in Kurdistan, the Kurdish tribes continued to have close relations with their brethren on the other side of the border.[52] The Sunni Kurds under Iranian authority continued to be influenced by the Ottomans' pan-Islamism propaganda in the second half of the nineteenth century, while Iran kept close relations with the aghas and members of their tribes, which were divided by new borders (Harris, 1896: 285–7).

After the second treaty of Erzurum was signed, the Ottomans and the Iranians avoided any major war. Iran no longer posed a military and ideological threat to the Ottoman Empire. However, low-intensity violence continued in the following decades. Kurdistan remained politically fragmented because of its geography, the sporadic feuds caused by Kurdish tribes and the ever-changing administrative and political rearrangements in Kurdish territories in both states. The boundaries were roughly established and the border disputes caused only minor modifications in the following period. Kurdish lands remained a 'buffer zone' between the two states until the mid-nineteenth century when finally a borderline was drawn with the help of an international commission. Despite the Ottomans' intention of turning the eastern frontier into a borderland, Kurdish territories remained as a 'fluid zone of passage, warfare and imperial administration, an area of economic and cultural exchange with a harsh natural environment' (Fuccaro, 2012: 237).

From the arrival of the Ottomans and the Safavids to Kurdistan until the removal of the Kurdish emirates in the mid-nineteenth century, the Kurdish nobility was actively involved in regional and trans-border politics. Tools of power politics varied from time to time but remained mainly the same in essence. The Kurdish lords sometimes used the least resources to achieve the most gains and at other times, they employed all their men and financial means if they saw clear victory in the conflict. Their 'advantageous' position turned into a 'disadvantageous' one during the two treaties of Erzurum. As a result of these treaties, the Ottomans, for the first time, recognized Iran as a separate nation from the rest of the Muslim world. This meant that the Ottomans considered Iran as their equals in terms of sovereignty. The shift in Ottoman politics reshaped diplomatic relations with Iran. This had some

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[52] For the centralization of Kurdish emirates and its consequences, see Atmaca (2019: 519–39).

permanent consequences on Kurdish political entities. In the end, both states decided to move together against the Kurdish rulers. Only then were they able to bring about the demise of the Kurdish emirates.

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The End of Kurdish Autonomy

The Destruction of the Kurdish Emirates in the Ottoman Empire

SABRI ATES

The long nineteenth century started with ominous signs for the Ottoman Empire and with it the Kurdish emirates. Alarmed by Napoleon Bonaparte's short foray into Egypt, its losses against the Russians, the outbreak of the Serbian and Greek uprisings and various local revolts led by provincial strongmen (*ayan*), Istanbul settled on a course of administrative reorganization and centralization that could not tolerate indirect forms of administration. One of the longest surviving forms of local, indirect administration that actually predated the Ottomans was the Kurdish emirates. In most parts of the empire, the Ottomans, like the European governments, for example, relied on a system of indirect rule whereby the local magnates recognized the ruler's suzerainty. Those magnates 'collaborated with the government without becoming officials in any strong sense of the term, had some access to government-backed force, and exercised wide discretion within their own territories' (Tilly, 1985: 170). The rise of the modern state and its institutions diminished the need for what might be called a symbiosis with the peripheral power holders. This practice of ending local autonomies, whereby central states abandoned their 'confederal organization' during widespread civil wars, allowed them to replace decentralized structures of politics with administratively and territorially cohesive regimes (Maier, 2006: 43).[1] In Ottoman Kurdistan, the process of centralization was made possible by a parallel development: the formation of the Ottoman–Iranian boundaries and the permanent division of Kurdistan that had been evolving for quite some time. The elimination of Kurdish dynasts, who hitherto held power at

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1 For socio-organizational changes of the Ottoman *ancien régime* in the premodern period with a particular attention to Iran, cartography and the borderlands, see Salzmann, 2004.

the borderland, facilitated the making of the boundary even though it facilitated their elimination.

The hereditary Kurdish dynasties made their first appearance in Ottoman history the moment the empire expanded into Kurdistan to take advantage of post-Akkoyunlu disintegration and prevent the expansion of the nascent Safavid state. The deal they struck with Sultan Selim I, with some changes, lasted until the early nineteenth century. It is to be noted that the Kurdish dynasts did not originate with the order of Selim I; they were already there and made a mutual pact with the sultan. The symbiotic and flexible relationship between Istanbul and the Kurdish aristocracy was mutually beneficial. The geographic distance from the imperial capital, the limits of transportation technology, the difficulty of penetrating the ragged topography of Kurdistan, the pre-existing administrative structures and military power of the Kurdish dynasties and the rise of the Safavid state and the Anatolian masses that were sympathetic to the Safavids provided an opportunity for the parties to enter into an alliance.

Indeed, as Suleiman the Magnificent himself came to note, the Kurdish principalities formed a crucial buffer zone between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran (Aziz Efendi, 1985: 14). It could be argued that it was mostly due to this buffer that the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire, and by extension modern Turkey, started at the Zagros Mountains and not somewhere in Central Anatolia where the Turkish masses were sympathetic to the Safavids. Despite their significant autonomy, except the Babans, the Ottoman Kurdish nobility did not control wholesale provinces that were under the authority of the Ottoman governor-generals. Due mostly to the zeal of the governors to extend their authority and extract more resources, and abetted by interfamily and inter-emirate rivalries, the Kurdish nobility increasingly lost to the governors. Still, despite the overall control of the Ottoman state, the stronger Kurdish emirates remained in almost complete control of their own internal affairs up to the early nineteenth century (Mehmed, 1997: 241).

In the early nineteenth century, the Ottoman state began a reform and centralization process that would thereafter evolve into what would be called the Tanzimat period. Istanbul's relentless drive for centralization effectively started with Mahmud II's (r. 1808–39) ascension to the throne. Set out to eliminate the indirect rule of the local elite throughout the empire with the direct rule of the centrally appointed bureaucrats, change landholding patterns, introduce new taxes and enforce conscription, the Ottoman state pressed hard to eliminate any local contenders in front of its drive to bring uniformity to its governmental structure. As Nilay Ö. Gündoğan noted, with

an eye to the confiscation and division of the lands of the Kurdish emirs and transferring their revenues directly to the treasury, and standardizing the land tenure system, Istanbul developed strategies from negotiation and incorporation of former beys as salaried administrators (*mudir* of nahiye or *kaimmakam* of a kaza), to outright violent suppression of the remnants of the Kurdish rule (Gündoğan, 2014: 160–75). However, the main goal of the Tanzimat state was to break the autonomy of the Kurdish aristocracy by confiscating the base of their power, land (Gündoğan, 2014: 164).

The fundamental change came to Kurdistan with the governor of Egypt Mehmed Ali Pasha's challenge to the Ottoman sultan. As it is well known, it was only with the help of the British and the Russians that Istanbul was able to overcome this most serious threat to the Ottoman throne. Appointing Mehmed Ali the hereditary governor of Egypt and hence officially recognizing what could possibly be considered the second Kurdish dynasty of Egypt (after the Ayyubids), Istanbul turned against the other hereditary Kurdish aristocrats.[2] In the meantime, as a result of their increasingly tense competition over the Baban principality and the migration of tribes like Zilan to the Ottoman side, the Ottomans and Iranians were on the brink of another war. As the tension increased, Britain and Russia intervened and persuaded the parties to withdraw their troops and agree to resolve their differences, especially the disputes over the frontier, through an international conference. Six months later, in mid-May 1843, Russian, British, Ottoman and Iranian diplomats started deliberating on and negotiating the limits of the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran. Great Powers' intervention in the Egyptian crisis, and their mediation in the Ottoman–Iranian frontier dispute, thus, facilitated Istanbul's efforts to increase its capacity where it was markedly low: Kurdistan.

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2 Mehmed Ali Pasha, known as Kavalalı, and Albanian, is most possibly of Kurdish origin. Based on an interview with Prince Abbas Hilmi, the eminent Egyptian historian Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot notes that 'While historians have described them as being of Albanian origin, a family tradition believes that they might have been of Kurdish stock, and came from a village, Ilic, in eastern Anatolia where they were horse traders' (al-Sayyid Marsot, 1984: 25). Similarly, premier Turkish republican historian Enver Ziya Karal, without mentioning Mehmed Ali's ethnic origin, maintains that he was born in Kavala, but historians mistakenly assume that he is Albanian. A long time ago, his ancestors moved from Arabkir (same region as Ilic), he notes (Karal, 1994: 125). It might be due to this knowledge, for example, that at a much later date, Sherif Pasha's (Baban) wife, Emine Hanım, from the Khedival family, was active in 'Kürd Kadınları Teali Cemiyeti'; and Kurdish tribes of Syria, like Kiki, and Kurdish notables of Damascus maintained close connections with the Khedival family of Egypt (Henning, 2018: 400, 452). One hopes this topic will be further researched by historians.

The First Phase of Kurdistan's Pacification

Elimination of the Kurdish *mir*s started with Muhammad Pasha of Rewanduz, or Miré Kor of Soran, who was aggressively expanding his rule in southern Kurdistan. Ascending to rule the Soran emirate in 1814, he forcefully subdued petty chiefs and the larger tribes of Khosnaw, Shirwan, Surchi, Bradost and Mamesh, and seized the old centre of the Soran emirate, the town of Harir, from the Babans. By 1831 he took over the Bahdinan emirate of Imadiye (Amedi), which had been ruled by the same family since the time of the Abbasids (Kinneir, 1813: 301). It was possibly around this time that the viceroy of Baghdad acquiesced to Miré Kor's relentless push for power and granted him the title of pasha (*miri miran*, or pasha of one tail), perhaps as a way of reining him in (Wood, 1966: 93). However, Miré Kor's sending of troops against Nisebin, Mardin and Cizre where Mir Sévdin accepted to come under his authority, and his possible contact with Mehmed Ali's son Ibrahim Pasha in Syria, caused serious alarm in Istanbul. He continued expanding his authority by occupying Akre and expelling its ruler while massacring a considerable number of Yezidis of the area in 1833.[3] The following year he extended his authority over Erbil, Zakho, Duhok, Ranya and Altun Kopru. In the meantime, according to some accounts, aside from minting coins in his name and gaining the support of the ulema, he set up 'plants for the manufacture of artillery, shells, rifles, swords and military equipment. In the city itself, he established a council, or *diwan*, which advised and assisted him' (Eppel, 2008: 251). Defeating an Ottoman force sent against him in 1834, he pushed into Iran. His efforts to win over the Kurdish tribes on the Iranian side, attack on Mergever and Urumieh in 1835, and getting Koi Sanjak from the hands of the Babans inflamed the tensions with Iran.[4] Despite his establishing his authority over most of southern Kurdistan, the harshness of his expansion, at a moment of utter Baban decline, while bringing order, security and prosperity to the area, caused various complaints (Fraser, 1840: 65–83). The notables of Amedi, the *beg*s of Bradost and Bervari, the chiefs of Zibari and Mızuri and the mufti and sheikhs of Zakho and Akre sent a letter to (Gürcü) Reşid Mehmed Pasha, the former grand vizier and governor of Sivas, and the region's supreme authority, complaining about Miré Kor's *zulm*, or oppression (Gencer, 2010: 16; Hakan, 2007: 68–74).

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3 Mentioning Miré Kor's harsh methods to establish order, Richard Wood notes that he carried out a 'War of extermination' against the Yezidi tribes (Wood, 1966: 94).

4 Wood to Ponsonby, 25 March 1837 (Wood, 1966: 118).

Combined with some of the Kurdish *mirs*' and beys' 'wait-and-see' approach during the Russo–Ottoman War of 1828–9, such petitions might have added fuel to Ottoman pashas' desire to eliminate the Kurdish dynasts (Aydın and Verheij, 2012: 31). By 1834, Istanbul had ordered the governors of Baghdad and Mosul to join Reşid Mehmed Pasha (now with supreme authority as the governor of Diyarbekir, Raqqa, Keban and Ergani as well), to help the punitive campaign against the Kurdish grandees and to reconquer Kurdistan. As Ottoman authority was by and large nominal in most of Kurdistan, Reşid set out on a grand plan, including census, settlement of itinerant populations, banning the production of gunpowder and erecting stone buildings outside settlements lest they will be used as fortifications (Gencer, 2010: 21–2). It appears that Emin Pasha of Mush and his brothers ruling over Bitlis, Hınıs and Tekman also joined Reşid (Brant and Glascott, 1840: 351). Co-operation of Emin Pasha and his brothers brought a considerable part of northern Kurdistan under Reşid's authority. Reşid's forces first carried out punitive expeditions against smaller local rulers of Hazro, Hani, Ilıcak and Silvan, who had been ruling their domains as privileged *hükümet*s for a considerable time. Burning their residences and exiling these beys, the pasha's forces then massacred the Yezidi Kurds of Shirvan in Diyarbekir province, and in 1835 succeeded in wresting Mardin from the Milli tribe (Aydın and Verheij, 2012: 31–2). Reşid soon turned his attention to the most powerful Kurdish grandee, Miré Kor, who through his co-operation with the Zirki chiefs of the Diyarbekir area had extended his control up to the Cizre and Mardin areas. Reşid's forces first occupied Zakho and Cizre because Mir Sévdin, the *mütesellim*, was now under the authority of Miré Kor. Sévdin took refuge in Baghdad. His cousin and rival Bedirxan withdrew to the mountains north of Bohtan, but soon surrendered and was appointed a *binbaşı* (major) in the Ottoman army and *mütesellim* of Cizre in 1836 (Hakan, 2007: 80; Kardam, 2011: 76, 84–7).

To completely subjugate the 'North of Kurdistan', as the British diplomat Richard Wood noted, Reşid Pasha and İnce Bayraktarzade Mehmed Pasha (the governor of Mosul) from the north and west, and Ali Pasha (the governor of Baghdad) from the south and the flank advanced towards Miré Kor, who in the summer of 1836 was still controlling the inaccessible castle of Rewanduz, and the castles of Amedi, Erbil, Altun Kopri and Akre (Wood, 1966: 93–4). In the meantime, Tehran mobilized a considerable number of troops at the border. Sending messengers to Miré Kor promising help, and swindling large amounts of money with such promises, it was simultaneously offering its help to Reşid (Wood, 1966: 104–5, 112). As Miré Kor was trying to

gauge the sincerity of the Iranian offers of help, Ottoman troops captured Erbil and Akre, approaching Rewanduz. Pressed by a combined force of over 25,000 better-equipped troops, and commanding only 8,000 troops, Miré Kor entered into negotiations with the Ottoman commanders, asking to 'remain in quiet possession of Rewanduz . . . be spared the humiliation of going to the Camp' (Wood, 1966: 107, 119). Aware that Miré Kor might cross into Iran, Reşid dispatched an officer and some Kurdish ulema to renew his assurances of protection with a 'Muhurly Qur'an', or a Qur'an bearing his seal, and promised that he would be reinstalled. It appears that Miré Kor became a victim of competition between the ambitious Ottoman pashas. Ali Pasha of Baghdad, who strongly disagreed with Reşid Pasha, was of the opinion that conditions accorded to Miré Kor were of a degrading nature to the Porte and as such inadmissible. Asking Reşid to quit with his troops, he refused to deal with Miré Kor. He issued his own orders, and thus nullified Reşid Pasha's promises. Ali Pasha appointed Miré Kor's uncle Baïz Pasha to the govern-ment of Rewanduz while marching to Koi Sanjak to enforce his 'hitherto nominal authority'. Reşid, on the other hand, in contravention to the promises he made with the Muhurly Qur'an, seized on Miré Kor's 'person and property' and sent them towards Constantinople, via Diyarbekir.[5]

James Baillie Fraser attributes Miré Kor's capitulation to his unpopularity in his conquered territories, the treachery of some of his officers and the unwill-ingness of the Kurds to fight against the caliph sultan's standard. Nonetheless, his brother Rasul Beg resisted the Ottoman forces for twenty days at Amedi castle, while Miré Kor was sent to Istanbul, where he spent several months. It seems that he visited the armoury, learned about the British influence at the court, was given a decoration or *nişan* and invited to *selamlık* – accompanying the sultan in solemn procession to the Friday prayers. He was hoping to return as the ruler of Kurdistan. British representatives, who might have accelerated his end, were suggesting to the Ottoman authorities that Miré Kor be installed as the governor of 'the line of the Country of the Taurus running from Erzroum southward to Sulaimaniyah', because he alone, they thought, could hold the region as a barrier against Persian and Russian encroachments; but also because disorder followed Miré Kor's dismissal.[6] Despite his cordial reception in Istanbul, on the return voyage, Miré Kor mysteriously disap-peared. It is highly possible that he was murdered by the Ottoman authorities. Nonetheless, his family, like several other Kurdish dynasties, much demoted,

5 Wood to Ponsonby, from Revandus Castle, 3 September 1836; from Mosul, 19 September 1836 (Wood, 1966: 105–9).
6 Wood to Ponsonby, 26 March 1837 (Wood, 1966: 117–18).

was incorporated into the Ottoman system and remained influential in the frontier region for some time. As Ahmet Kardam insightfully noted, because Miré Kor had already eliminated most of the Kurdish aristocracy of southern Kurdistan, his elimination left all but the weakened Babans as an obstacle to the Ottoman domination (Kardam, 2011: 87). Indeed, seeing the writing on the wall, the Baban pasha, Suleiman, provided the imperial army with 600 soldiers, while Istanbul appointed one of his sons as a major in the army and decorated the other (Hakan, 2007: 81). The British missionary George P. Badger claims that Reşid's operation caused 'Noorollah Beg, the Emeer of the independent Coords of Hekari, to sue for an appointment under the Pasha of Erzeroom' as well (Badger, 1852: xii).

In the middle of his campaign to subdue Kurdistan, Reshid died in late 1836, upon which the 'the treasures taken from Ravandus' together with the prisoners were sent to Kharput.[7] His replacement, the müşir or field marshal of Sivas, Çerkez (Circassian) Hâfiz Mehmed Pasha, the new governor-general of Diyarbekir and Sivas, whom the notables previously appealed to against Miré Kor's oppression, started a four-year campaign to bring Kurdistan into the Ottoman fold. Hâfiz Pasha's first target were the Yezidis of Sinjar and Turcoman of Tel Afar, who were resisting conscription and taxation. He brutally suppressed them, forcing them to pay taxes and submit to the government authority, and sent 3,000 Yezidi youth to military service (Hakan, 2007: 86–7). He then bloodily suppressed the Garzan Kurds who hitherto had never acceded to Ottoman authority (Gencer, 2010: 16).

Hâfiz Pasha's next target were the brothers Khan Mahmud and Abdal Khan of Moks, or Müküs (present-day Bahçesaray), who since the 1820s were expanding their control in the Van province and beyond. Ottoman disarray during and after the 1828–9 Russo–Ottoman War allowed Khan Mahmud to expand the limits of his small principality. During the war he took over the lands of the ancient Mahmudi dynasty, of the famed Khosab castle, ending their storied rule (Hakan, 2002: 50). Following a period of clashes for the dominance of the region, Khan Mahmud and Bedirxan of Cizre struck a deal and entered into an alliance that included other Kurdish grandees such as Nurullah of Hekarî. According to the British Consul Brant, gradually defying the sultan's authority, by the end of the 1830s they stopped paying taxes to the Ottomans, asserting their independence. The eldest of six brothers, Khan Mahmud appointed some of his brothers to govern the districts of Van.[8]

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7 Wood to Ponsonby, 2 December 1836 (Wood, 1966: 113).
8 PRO.FO 78/2707, Consul Brant's long and detailed 'General Report on Border Provinces'.

Around this time Istanbul had downgraded the status of Van from province to *kaimmakamlık*. With Ottoman defeat against the Egyptians in 1839, Khan Mahmud established his authority in the city of Van as well (Hakan, 2002: 66).

Despite fears that the Iranians and the *mir* of Hekarî, Nurullah Beg, might come to the aid of the brothers, Nurullah, and Bedirxan and Sevdin of Cizre, who harboured enmity towards the brothers, complied with Hâfiz Pasha's orders and attacked Khan Mahmud, forcing him to go to Erzurum to submit to the pasha on 4 November 1838. Khan Mahmud and two of his brothers who accompanied him were imprisoned. The other brothers fortified themselves in their castles but after negotiations submitted to the Ottoman army. Perhaps Helmut von Moltke has them in mind when he noted, 'the Ottoman artillery was far superior to anything which the Kurds could bring against it, and yet castles with garrisons of from forty to eighty men resisted all their attempts for thirty-two and even forty days' (von Moltke, 1893: 285). Khan Mahmud and two of his brothers were exiled to Istanbul, where they arrived in March 1839. They were later pardoned and returned to Müküs, where they regained their power (Hakan, 2007: 88–114; Kardam, 2011: 93–7).[9] The Ottoman treatment of the Müküs family shows that Istanbul's goal was not the physical elimination of Kurdish nobility, but the abolition of Kurdish rule and the hereditary status of the *mir*s and their incorporation into the new, centralized Ottoman administrative system as lesser actors.

One of those actors, Bedirxan of Cizre, accompanied Hâfiz's forces to subdue one of his former allies, Said Bey of Hacıbehram, a powerful Kurdish grandee and father-in-law of Mir Sevdin, who resided in the castle of Gurkêl. In return, Bedirxan's rank was raised to *miralay* (colonel) (Çadırcı, 1991: 194–6; Kardam, 2011: 84–93; van Bruinessen, 1992: 177–82). With the Babans in complete disarray,[10] the *mir*s of Rewanduz, Müküs, Hekarî and Cizre eliminated or incorporated into the Ottoman Empire, and most other *yurtluk-ocaklık* holders appointed as lesser administrators, it seemed that Kurdistan's pacification was almost complete.

Yet, soon afterwards the geopolitical situation changed significantly. The elusive peace between Cairo and Istanbul that had been holding since 1833 ended abruptly when Mehmed Ali Pasha announced his intention to break

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9 It appears they were soon allowed to return, because they commanded the important Khosab castle and kept a standing force to defend the frontier.

10 According to Fraser's account, in the mid-1830s Suleimani was under Iranian occupation. This was caused by Miré Kor's push to extend his domains and his war with the Azerbaijan provincial government. Additionally, a plague that carried off half of the town's population and dispersal of many others significantly weakened the Babans (Fraser, 1840: 148).

away from Istanbul. Jubilant by the victory of his modernized troops, who were supported by the Prussian advisers, against the Kurds, Hâfiz Pasha 'reportedly convinced the Sultan that he could crush the mighty rebel *vali*, and was placed in the command of the Ottoman army' (Aydın and Verheij, 2012: 34). However, the Ottoman forces, and their large numbers of recently forcefully enlisted Kurdish irregulars, were no match for the disciplined Egyptian army. News of the Egyptian army's besting that of the Ottomans at the battle of Nizip in 1839 reached the Porte right after the death of Sultan Mahmud II. However, the Egyptian advance towards Istanbul brought in the Great Powers as the saviours of the sultan and forced Mehmed Ali to accept the hereditary governorship of Egypt. Hâfiz Pasha's defeat and the consequent lack of authority allowed the Kurdish aristocracy to fill in the resulting power vacuum. Conversely, their incorporation into the Ottoman system facilitated that. For example, Bedirxan, who was now also a colonel in the Ottoman army, was asked to mobilize troops against the Egyptians. He did so and used that as an opportunity to extend his control beyond his ancestral domains. This was to be short-lived, though. Immediately after containing the Egyptian menace with British and Russian help, Istanbul turned its gaze to Kurdistan. The well-equipped, 50,000-strong army it had mobilized against the Egyptian Ibrahim Pasha was now ready to reconquer Kurdistan and bring it under complete Ottoman control for the first time (von Moltke, 1893: 278, 285). In the absence of a central command structure and each contained to their own provinces, the Kurdish nobility had no chance of withstanding the onslaught of such a strong army under pashas eager to advance their careers at the expense of everybody else.

End of Autonomy

The total elimination of the Kurdish nobility, yet again, started with the Babans. Following the tumultuous decades of crisis surrounding the Baban succession and Ottoman–Iranian rivalry over having their man in Suleimani, in the early 1840s Ahmed Pasha Baban established his authority in the region. He raised a disciplined 800-strong force and equipped them in the garb of the regular troops. Suspicious of this reform-minded Baban ruler, the governor-general of Iraq, Gürcü Necib Mehmed Pasha, substantially increased taxes Suleimani had to send Baghdad. Calculated to nip the Baban force from budding, this measure forced Ahmed Pasha to increase taxes on his already overburdened country people. That was half of Ahmed Pasha's challenge, though. He also needed to keep Iranians at bay and bribe the Baghdad

authorities to ignore his scheming brother Abdullah's bid to the governorship (Jones, 1998: 208–9).

The Ottoman–Iranian border conferences in Erzurum that started in 1843, and the British pressure on him not to disturb the status quo, temporarily halted Necib Pasha's uninhibited aggression. As Iranians were contesting Ottoman sovereignty over Suleimani, the British diplomats wanted the campaign against the 'almost independent government of Kurdish Pasha' to wait 'until the new treaty shall have been ratified, and the frontier-line practically defined' (Jones, 1998: 208–9). Temporarily postponing his campaign, in 1845 Necib Pasha gathered troops to march against the Soran, Baban and Bohtan emirates. Marching towards Soran, Necib secretly asked Ahmed Pasha Baban to join his forces. Fearing treachery and uneasy over commissioning 2,000 muskets from a British dealer without the cognizance of the government, Ahmed declined the offer.[11] Angered, Najib turned his forces away from Rawanduz and towards the Babans. Najib advanced towards the province of Köy/Koi Sancak with the declared goal of 'observing and adopting measures for agricultural improvement', but the real intention was to incite a crisis so as to assert Istanbul's power while curbing that of the Baban prince, as Henry C. Rawlinson noted.[12] The following developments provide insights into how the Kurds perceived the limits of their autonomy and that of the Ottoman power. Cognizant of Ahmed Pasha's precarious position and regarding Najib's 'inspection' as nothing but a hostile invasion, the Kurdish local authorities arrested Baghdad officers who entered the town to collect provisions. The Baban governor of the Koi Sanjak with a 'sufficiently respectful, but distinctly intimating' letter informed Najib Pasha that 'pending instructions from Ahmed Pasha the Ottoman troops could not be permitted to occupy the place'.[13]

Ahmed Pasha's attempts at rapprochement came to nought. Necib ordered him to 'withdraw his troops from Koie and admit a free occupation of the country by the troops within five days, and appear in camp and render personal homage to his superior that he would restore [Koie to] him'.[14] When Ahmed refused to do so, Necib deposed him and appointed his treacherous brother Abdullah in his stead. As it was already planned, Necib requested all troops from Mosul and Baghdad to immediately march on the Baban lands. His force of 12,000 was numerically inferior to the Baban forces, but was better trained and equipped. Abdullah Bey Baban, now made a pasha,

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11 PRO.FO 78/2713, Rawlinson to Canning, British Consulate, Baghdad, 13 May 1845.
12 Ibid.   13 Ibid.   14 Ibid.

accompanied Necib's force to win over malcontents from his brother's party and to aid by the influence of his name. Ahmed's efforts at reconciliation once again proved fruitless.[15] The Tanzimat steamroller was not going to let indirect rule survive in the empire.

In response, Ahmed Pasha, the *mir* of Rewanduz and the chief of the Khosnaw tribe of Koi Sanjak joined forces to resist. The families and property of the tribes were moved to secure places or sent across the frontier to Iran. The passes were secured and two separate Kurdish forces assembled at Koi and Bazian, the only places from which the Ottoman troops could penetrate the mountain chain. Rumours of Bedirxan Bey of Cizre's offers to help Ahmed Pasha proved baseless. If happened, such co-operation could have possibly tipped the balance in favour of the Kurds. It seems that at this juncture Ahmed Pasha made a crucial mistake. While, according to Rawlinson, his force could have overwhelmed Necib Pasha's, he concluded that he would act only defensively and did not attack, so as not to give the impression of rebelling against the sultan.[16]

Aptly observing the situation, Rawlinson was prescient about Necib Pasha's and Istanbul's policies, that is, the substitution of 'Turkish for Kurdish power',

> and the establishment of Turkish governors and Turkish garrisons in all the towns of Kurdistan. If the expedition against Sulaimanieh is attended with success . . . Kurt Mahomad Pasha will be left with a strong force of Turkish infantry and artillery in Southern Kurdistan, and Abdollah Pasha will be made use of as a mere puppet to soothe the irritation of the Kurds at their subjection to a foreign race. Similar measures will then be conducted in succession against Rawanduz, Khosnau, the Hakkiari Chief, and Bedir Khan Bey, the chief of Jazireh; and ultimately it is hoped, the spirit of independence which has long reigned among the Kurds will be thoroughly broken, and the tribes will become subjects, rather than the tributaries of the Turkish Empire.[17]

As Necib was getting ready to advance towards Koi Sanjak, Ahmed Pasha was preparing to surround Necib's camp. Realizing his precarious position, Necib dispatched messengers to Baghdad to ask for aid, but they were intercepted by the Kurds and killed. Necib then enlisted a highly regarded sheikh to Ahmed's camp to negotiate. During the negotiations, for reasons unknown, Ahmed Pasha killed the sheikh with a pistol. In response, many of his

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15 Ibid.   16 Ibid.
17 PRO.FO 78/2713, Rawlinson to Canning, Sulaimaniyah and Baghdad, 9 July 1845.

followers switched their allegiance to his brother Abdullah. Following clashes at the camp, Ahmed Pasha fled to the Jaf tribe, one of the Baban clients, and then to Senne, in eastern Kurdistan. His army dispersed, and his guns fell to the hands of Necib.[18] He tried to challenge his brother's authority, while the Russian, British and Ottoman representatives put pressure on Tehran to keep him away from the frontier. Nonetheless, the end of Ahmed Pasha was the effective end of the hereditary rule of the strongest Kurdish dynasty and its rule over the Suleimani, Kirkuk and Erbil regions. This end, as Rawlinson noted, symbolized the transition from tributary relations where the Kurds recognized the Ottoman sultan as their suzerain, to a new type of relationship where they become the subjects of the Ottoman sovereign. Ahmed Pasha later reconciled with Istanbul, where he returned as an exile. His brother Abdullah, who replaced him, like various other Kurdish grandees who betrayed their people and family and co-operated with the state authorities, was soon deposed from his puppet governorship and sent to Istanbul.[19] That did not mean that the Babans were not incorporated into the Ottoman system. Abdullah was later appointed as the governor of Divaniyyah in southern Iraq, while Ahmed Pasha became a prominent imperial administrator.

Eliminating the weakened Babans, the Ottoman pashas immediately turned their attention to the recently rebounded Bohtan, Hekarî and the Khan brothers of Van. It appears that after being released from Istanbul, the Khan brothers regained control of the Van province, wrested control of the Khosab castle from the Ottoman troops and carried out a campaign against Bitlis. According to the Ottoman pashas, Khan Mahmud was making alliances with Hekarî and Cizre, as well as Yahya Khan of Selmas, a member of the Hekarî family, on the Iranian side. In reality, he was receiving aid from his ally, the Shekak tribe, on the Iranian side, and the Duderi and Koçer tribes of the Cizre region, who spent their summers in Mahmudi pastures[20] (Hakan, 2007: 126–9). The people of Van resisted Istanbul's several efforts to send troops and install a governor (Doğan, 2011: 154).

Very much like the Baban Ahmed Pasha, the Khan brothers were not against the sultan or the Ottoman umbrella but were acutely aware of

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18 PRO.FO 78/2713, Rawlinson to Canning, Mosul, 12 July 1845.

19 PRO.FO 78/2714, Canning to Sheil, Constantinople, 12 February 1846; and BBA-A-DVN 97/39, 18.L.1270/14 July 1854.

20 The Ottoman pashas' fears might not be baseless. In the spring of 1846, when Bedirxan needed a doctor, he sent for the missionary Dr Wright of Urumieh, through Nurullah and Yahya Khan, the governor of Urumieh (Wright and Breath, 1846: 378).

Istanbul's intention of ending their autonomy and substituting Ottoman appointees in their stead. They were not alone. Various Ottoman reports of the period maintain the presence of a Kurdish league. When the regional governor-general, Es'ad Pasha of Erzurum, asked the inhabitants of the city of Van to explain why they are in open rebellion, the people of Van sent a deputation to let him know that, as the faithful subjects of the sultan who were ready to pay *just* dues to the government, they refused to furnish recruits, receive a garrison, accept Tanzimat or submit to quarantine.[21] Over a month after the deadline that Es'ad Pasha had given them for their unconditional surrender, in March 1845, forty-seven Muslims and sixteen Christians of Van sent him a sealed letter. They reiterated that they are resisting the government not because they are rebellious or refuse to pay their taxes (which they will collect and send to the government), but because Tanzimat means more taxes, government pressure and conscription. Defending their autonomy, they additionally informed the pasha that local troops were protecting the castle of Van (against Iran) and that there was definitely no need to deploy regular troops there.[22] Following the reports of the regional governors, the Ottoman council of ministers concluded that the Kurdish league under the leadership of Bedirxan, which was behind the resistance in Van, needed to be suppressed lest it spread to all of the Kurdish regions all the way to Sivas (Doğan, 2011: 153–4). The British consul of Erzurum, James Brant, who strongly advocated for the end of the Kurdish dynasts, was of the same opinion. Indeed, it appears that, after Bedirxan's helping suppress Kurdish grandees like Khan Mahmud and Said Bey of Hacıbehram, Hâfız Mehmed Pasha empowered him as a way of keeping him under control. According to M. van Bruinessen, made *mutesellim* in 1836 and subdued in 1838, Bedirxan had re-established himself following the battle of Nizib and extended his authority from east of Rawanduz in the south-east, to west of Urumiya in the east, and to the gates of Mosul in the south. Establishing security and the rule of law in the lands under his control, he promoted crop cultivation and rebuilt destroyed villages, which resulted in a general air of prosperity. Moreover, as the missionary Dr Wright noted, who spent four weeks with Bedirxan, he distributed cash to the poor, dispensed impartial justice and established 'the force of law', while being a magnet for 'every chief in northern Kurdistan' to visit, including his old

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21 PRO.FO 78/653, Brant to Earl of Aberdeen, 8 January 1846. Most of the information in the following pages is based on the letters of James Brant. Other detailed accounts are that of Kardam (2011: 219–54) and Doğan (2011: 153).

22 For a summary of the letter, see Kardam (2011: 234) and Hakan (2007: 183).

rivals Nurullah of Hekarî and Khan Mahmud of Müküs,[23] 'both still rulers of emirates with *hükûmet* status' (Wright and Breath, 1846: 381–3; Aydın and Verheij, 2012: 36). Going beyond the powers of the traditional *hükümet* system of the old days, it was reported that he had Friday prayers recited in his name, an unmistakable sign of a claim to independent rulership in the Islamic world. Very much like Ahmed Pasha Baban, he tried to modernize his troops, creating elite cross-tribal units under his own command (Aydın and Verheij, 2012: 36; Klein, 2011: 109–11; van Bruinessen, 1992: 179–80).

If not suffocated at its infancy, this new effort would most possibly have left the Kurdish political structure with a much different type of organization. The Kurdish grandees that this chapter concentrates on were definitely taking Kurdish politics beyond the limits of their locality and were establishing the foundations of supra-tribal organizations. It could be claimed that with their military contingent compiled from various tribes, they were detribalizing the social organization and a nascent alliance was taking shape among the Kurdish nobility.

This reassertion of Kurdish political authority posed a direct challenge to the centralizing Tanzimat state that was bent on eliminating autonomous or indirect rule in the empire and replacing local aristocracy with central appointees. In 1841, suspicious of the empowered Bedirxan and the alliances he was building, Istanbul tried to rein him in by incorporating parts of his territory into the Mosul vilayet ruled by the ambitious İnce Bayraktarzade Mehmed Pasha. The so-called Cizre meselesi, or the issue of attaching Cizre to Mosul, has been interpreted, by scholars who disregard the Kurdish demands of autonomy and interpret the Kurdish revolts solely as reactions to the Tanzimat, as the main event that triggered Bedirxan's revolt (Aydın and Verheij, 2012: 36). 'Cizre meselesi' dragged on for some time as the Ottoman cabinet and pashas debated the issue. In the end, the district was officially detached from Diyarbekir and attached to Mosul. Bedirxan's refusal to submit to Bayraktar provided the Ottoman pashas with the opportunity to declare him a rebel, destroy Kurdish autonomy and increase their own power. While the Ottoman pashas were plotting their end, an alliance between Bedirxan and Khan Mahmud was taking shape. Very much like

23 'Bedirxan's supreme status among the Kurdish grandness was attested by various Ottoman authorities who saw him as the leader of resistance from Van to Rewanduz. For an example the governor of Erzurum noted all the 'ümera' of Kurdistan waits for his word (Kürdistan ümerasının cümlesi Bedirhan Bey'in ağzına baktıklarından),' BOA I. MSM, 48/1229, p. 20, Halil Kamili Pasha to Dersaadet, 5 November 1843.

his ally, Khan Mahmud had recovered from the first phase of Kurdistan's pacification in the mid-1830s and took control of the strategic Khosab castle (1842), and tried, unsuccessfully, with the help of Bedirxan and Nurullah Bey, to take the lands of Bitlis under control. Some Ottoman pashas of the time interpreted this as part of Bedirxan's plan to gradually throw off Ottoman hegemony (Kardam, 2011: 115–19).

Ottoman pashas were not alone in wanting to quash the Kurdish spirit of independence. The British diplomats insistently pushed for an end to the Kurdish autonomy as part of their grand strategy of keeping the Ottomans as a bulwark against Russia's southern expansion. This push also had a lot to do with what happened several years earlier. Due to Bedirxan and Nurullah Bey's first campaign against Nestorians in the summer of 1843, they were well-known names in the West and there was pressure on the Ottoman Empire for their removal. Most possibly encouraged by the support they got from a variety of European and the newly arrived and assertive American missionaries, and the promises of the Tanzimat decree, the Nestorian Christians of Hekarî region, who until then were under the authority of the *mir* of Hekarî, Nurullah Bey, refused to pay him their annual tribute and as attested by contemporary missionary accounts carried out raids in Julamerg (Grant, 1843: 435). Nestorian leader Mar Shimun also sided with Nurullah's nephew Suleiman, who was competing with his uncle for leadership. Faced with this assertive independence, increasing Nestorian attacks on Muslim villages and mosques and the American missionary Dr Grant's building a fort-like house in Tiyari district, Nurullah asked Bedirxan for help and he sent a large force to quell the rebellion. In the ensuing confrontations, large numbers of Nestorians were slaughtered, and many were forced to leave the region. It would not be far off the mark to suggest that this event and the well-publicized 'atrocious massacres of Bedr Khan Bey', as one observer called them (Badger, 1852: ix),[24] started a chain of anti-Kurdish European sentiment and stereotyping that would be repeated by almost all travellers and diplomats to the region and would play a crucial role in the Kurds being left out of the post-WWI negotiations, and consequently without a state of their own.[25] Khan Mahmud-Bedirxan-Nurullah league's massacre of the Nestorians and the destruction they wrought in their

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24 Bedirxan's anti-Nestorian campaigns have been interpreted as anti-Christian. However, such accounts fail to explain the close relations between the Armenians and Khan Mahmud as well as Bedirxan, not to mention pre-massacre co-operation between Nestorians and various Kurdish tribes and *mirs*.

25 Alongside the British representatives, the French ambassador continuously put pressure on Bâb-ı Ali for Bedirxan's punishment. This legacy continued to inform French policies. According to the extract of a dispatch from Director of British Military

communities poisoned the relations between the Kurds and the Nestorians. Similarly, their and other Kurdish grandees like Miré Kor's anti-Yezidi and inhumane policies played a significant role in alienating the Yezidis from the other Kurds for the long term.[26]

The attack, seen as one more event in a long chain of anti-Christian violence, was well publicized in Europe. Occurring several years after the Ottoman Empire declared the equality of all subjects before the law, the attack was in contravention to the promises of Tanzimat. French and British governments pressured the Ottomans to punish the rebel chiefs (Hakan, 2007: 157–93; Klein, 2011: 108–15; van Bruinessen, 1992: 177–81). The Ottoman administrators were of a different opinion. Considering the fact that Nestorians had never submitted to the Ottoman Empire before, Bedirxan's suppressing them was not unwelcome. The governor of Erzurum, Kamili Pasha, for example, noted that British and American influence, along with Iranian interference, had led Nestorians astray, encouraging them to pillage villages and turn mosques into churches for which Bedirxan took the necessary measures of suppressing them.[27] Similarly, the support of the governor of Baghdad and Erzurum to Bedirxan and the fear of European interference might have led Istanbul not to push Bedirxan out. Perhaps emboldened with high-level support, he continued his harsh anti-Nestorian policies and the French and British consuls, kept informed by missionaries, continued to pressure Istanbul and their foreign services to put a stop to this persecution. After he carried out yet another bloody attack on the Nestorians of Thuma in the autumn of 1846, Istanbul, pressured by the French ambassador and aware that its legitimacy is at stake, concluded that the time had come to deal with him decisively. The *müşir* of the Anatolian army and the governors of Sivas, Diyarbekir and Mosul were ordered to co-ordinate a campaign against Bedirxan and Van, whose inhabitants continued to defy the government and were confident of 'their ability to maintain their independence'.[28]

Intelligence to the Acting Under-Secretary of State, on 27 January 1919, Mark Sykes informed François George Picot that 'he intends to suggest that an independent Kurdish Emirate, to include Mosul, shall be created, and this independent State shall be placed under British protection.' Picot refused to take this plan into consideration as he considered this to be against French interests and that 'it would sacrifice people who have been traditionally protected by the French, such as Chaldeans and Nestorians, etc.' (Burdett, 2015: 5/245). As such, one could claim that the idea of not leaving the local Christians at the mercy of the Kurds played a significant role in French decision-making, which has cost generations of Kurdish people dearly.

26 For a similar view, see Aydın and Verheij (2012: 38).
27 BOA I. MSM, 48/1229, p. 20, Halil Kamili Pasha to Dersaadet, 5 November 1843.
28 PRO.FO 78/654, Brant to Palmerston, 11 November 1846; and Hakan (2007: 192).

Bedirxan's pledging to leave Cizre, allow the return of those who had fled the region, pay what he owed, regularly collect the due taxation, cease interfering in Nestorian affairs, submit to the exclusive authority of the governor of Mosul and conscript troops from areas under his control were of no use (Kardam, 2011: 313–15). For Istanbul, his requirement that the Friday khutba be read in his name alone warranted his dismissal. Istanbul would tolerate the Kurdish lords no more. Following long preparations, in the summer of 1847, the Ottoman Anatolian and Arabistan armies under the command of Muşir Osman Pasha began preparing a simultaneous attack on Khan Mahmud and Bedirxan, the two leaders of the Kurdish alliance (Kardam, 2011: 105). The city of Van had been defying the Ottoman authority since early 1845. A letter Osman Pasha sent to the Ottoman general staff clearly indicates that the Khan Mahmud–Bedirxan alliance that included some other Kurdish grandees had a strong unity (*ittifak-ı kaviyye*), and had ideas incompatible with loyalty, and dreamt of establishing an independent state (*hükûmet-i müstakile*).[29] The Porte ordered its pashas to do their best to break the 'league of notables'. This was accomplished when Sherif Bey of Mush and Khan Mahmud's brother Abdal Bey, possibly angry because the castles he held were to be given to Bedirxan, defected in April 1847 (Hakan, 2007: 193–203; Kardam, 2011: 331–6). This was followed by Hesenan chief Rızvan Agha, Heyderan chief Ibrahim Agha and the notables of Ahlat and Adilcevaz giving up resistance and submitting to the Ottoman army. Some other defections followed. With a clear plan of eliminating these defectors after they took care of Bedirxan, the Ottoman pashas distributed robes of honour to many of them (Kardam, 2011: 328). To guarantee his services, Sherif Bey was made a *miralay* (colonel) and the town of Mush the centre of preparations. Reşid endorsed Sherif's brother Emin Pasha as the *mutasarrıf* of Mush sanjak and decorated the brothers with imperial honours (Gencer, 2010: 16). Because Abdal Khan controlled the castles of Satmanis and Khoshab on the border, his defection was a huge blow to the Khan Mahmud–Bedirxan league, which had planned to take refuge in Khosab in case of defeat.[30] Abdal Khan's defection thus forced Bedirxan to enter into inconclusive negotiations with Iran. In the meantime, the *kaimmakam* of Harir, Resul Pasha of Rewanduz, who had been appointed after his brother's 1836 submission, escaped to Ushnaviyah in Iran. Istanbul asked the Iranian and British consuls

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29 BOA I.MSM, 51/1293, lef. 9.
30 PRO.FO 78/702, Dispatches of Consul Brant, 10 April and 6 May 1847; and Hakan (2007: 208–11).

in Baghdad for his return. He voluntarily complied, and Tehran decided not to offer help or hope of refuge to Bedirxan (Hakan, 2007: 217–19).

Even though they faced a superior army of 25,000 and much better-equipped soldiers commanded by high-ranking generals, Bedirxan and Khan Mahmud decided to resist and they successfully did so. Yet, on top of other defections, the betrayal of Bedirxan's cousin, Ézdin Sher – the son of Mir Sevdin, whom Bedirxan had replaced – that allowed the Ottoman army's entry to Cizre in late May 1847, significantly weakened them, especially because he guided the troops to Bedirxan's stronghold at Dergul.[31] Following clashes between Khan Mahmud's forces and Ottoman troops in the Ahlat, Bitlis and Mush regions (Hakan, 2007: 212–13), on 14 June 1847, Bedirxan, accompanied by 4,000–5,000 men, carried out a night attack on the camp of the Ferik Ömer Pasha. Simultaneously, Khan Mahmud attempted a night ambush on the Serasker Osman Pasha's division. The latter, however, was discovered and 'his troops were prevented from passing the Bohtan River, which they were about to attempt on rafts, the bridge having been destroyed.'[32]

Despite the clashes taking over a large geographical area, seeing the writing on the wall, Bedirxan released his followers from the oath of loyalty they had taken. In late July, with about 500 followers he retreated to Erwex (Orak) castle, where his family was already secured. The surrender of two of his nephews soon followed. The crumbling of the league of Kurdish notables dispirited the resistance at Van. When the Erzurum troops arrived, two of Khan Mahmud's brothers, who had been left to defend the city, surrendered to Ferik Ömer Pasha.[33] Henry A. Layard noted that assisted by the forcefully conscripted Yezidi Kurds, the sultan's troops finally defeated Khan Mahmud at Tilleh, as he marched with the tribes of Van and Hekarî to aid Bedirxan. However, receiving the news of Bedirxan's surrender, Khan Mahmud also entered into negotiations for his and his allies' (including his Armenian allies Mıkırdiç and Marik Efendis) surrender; thus, bringing forty days of clashes between the Ottoman and Kurdish forces to an end. He surrendered on

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31 PRO.FO 78/702, Brant to Lord Covley, 26 June and 3 July 1847. As a reward for his co-operation, Ézdin Sher was appointed *mütesellim* of Cizre but in March 1848 Istanbul appointed a new *kaimmakam* and ended his 'rule'. He later carried out a revolt of his own to no avail (Kardam, 2011: 365).

32 PRO.FO 78/702, Brant to Lord Covley, 26 June 1847. In Ottoman documents the commander of Bedirxan's forces is Telli Bey. See Hakan (2007: 224).

33 PRO.FO 78/702, Brant to Lord Covley, 3 July 1847. The notable of Van, Timurzade Fazıl Bey, whom Khan Mahmud left as the ruler of Van, had been secretly co-operating with the Ottomans.

4 July 1847 in Tatvan and was later exiled to Rusçuk. In the following week, the government forces were able to take Van castle under control (Doğan, 2011: 156–7; Kardam, 2011: 343, 361–2).

According to Consul Brant, it was reported that had Bedirxan been successful, there would have been a general Kurdish uprising.[34] He was not, however, and after several days of resistance against the Ottoman troops at Erwex, he surrendered to the Ottoman pashas on 4 July 1847 (Kardam, 2011: 358). It appears that in the meantime (May 1847), Nurullah Beg of Hekarî, who had not participated in the revolt and was keeping his distance, had been persuaded to renounce his allegiance to Bedirxan.[35] After the capture of Bedirxan, 'only a few months had, however, elapsed since the Beys of Bitlis, who had longest resisted the Turkish arms, had been captured. With them, it was thought, the rebellion was extinguished for the time in Kurdistan' (Layard, 1852: 10). By August, nearly every important Kurdish chief had surrendered and was awaiting exile to western regions of the empire.[36] As it usually is the case, betrayal only brought temporary relief to the betrayers. The chiefs who co-operated with the Ottomans, like Sherif Bey of Mush and his brothers, were left in their positions for the time being but by early 1850 they also were exiled from the region. Despite his early defection Abdal Khan was made to join the caravan of exiles.

Similarly, not co-operating with Bedirxan–Khan Mahmud, and being provided with an imperial decoration, did not save Nurullah Beg of Hekarî. Istanbul came up with the excuse that he was trying to unite the districts of Hekarî with Iran. The Ottomans were suspicious of Nurullah because one of his wives was the sister of Yahya Khan of Selmas, whose other sister was a wife of the shah of Iran, Mohammad Shah. Asking Tehran not to accept Nurullah in case he crosses the border, Ottoman troops entered Julamerg (Colemerg) on 9 December 1848. Overwhelmed by the superior military might, Nurullah escaped to Berderesh castle, where the Iranian *hakim* of Berdesor, Ali Ashraf Khan, with 300 horsemen came to his rescue. This turned into a small-scale international crisis, with Istanbul asking for his return from Tehran, the local authorities and even the British and Russian consuls of Tabriz. The consuls, on their part, urged Iranians to hand him over to the Ottoman authorities, who, they promised, would guarantee his life, honour and property. Under such pressure, Nurullah returned to the Ottoman side but took refuge with Seyyid Tâhâ of Hekarî, the respected

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34 PRO.FO 78/702, Brant to Lord Covley, 3 July 1847.
35 PRO.FO 78/702, Brant to Palmerston, 8 July 1847; and Kardam (2011: 336).
36 PRO.FO 78/702, Brant to Palmerston, 9 August 1847.

Naqshi-Qadiri sheikh (Hakan, 2007: 266–71). Soon, however, he was sent to Istanbul and from there to exile. Nurullah's taking refuge in Seyyid Tâhâ was a symbolic moment in the history of Kurdistan. As the old nobility was waning, a new class of brokers between state and society, the already well-established leaders of the religious networks, were stepping into the scene to take the mantle of leadership.

Conclusion

Many accounts of Kurdish autonomy start with Idirisi Bidlisi bringing most of the Kurdish *mir*s to the Ottoman fold. However, as noted previously, Sultan Selim I did not create the Kurdish emirates. But through Bidlisi's intermediation, he initiated an alliance with the Kurdish nobility. The very fact of his negotiating and offering them special privileges is a testimony to the existence and power of pre-Ottoman structures that the Ottomans, as they did in other parts of the empire, shrewdly incorporated into the body politic of the empire. Local nobility in many parts of the empire retained their power for generations. In the case of Kurdistan, through a symbiotic anti-Safavid alliance, a considerable number of the Kurdish dynasts accepted the suzerainty of the Ottoman sultan, in exchange for preserving their autonomy. Not all of them were located in the borderland, though. Despite its ebbs and flows their privileged status or autonomy, with their areas of control and numbers dwindling, would continue until the mid-nineteenth century. No doubt, the sultan's recognition of their authority helped 'secure and consolidate their power' (Özoğlu, 1996: 24), and strengthened these 'princes' positions vis-à-vis rivals and subjects' (Houston, 2007: 409), while bringing large swaths of land under Istanbul's authority. It is, however, erroneous to read the history of the Kurdish emirates as one of reactions to Safavid and Ottoman policies, or their survival as a by-product of imperial rivalry or as part of borderland accommodation. Such reductionist and Turco-centric or Persian-centric reading of history where groups like Kurds, as some scholars noted in another setting, only 'react and adapt and do not create, machinate, initiate, or control', treats them as objects rather than subjects or as mere pawns in the imperial game. Such perspectives not only deny the agency of the Kurds in the making of their own history but by silencing this agency also marginalize their histories and 'their roles as rational, influential agents' (Wunder and Hämäläinen, 1999: 1232–3). The biggest testimony to this role is the survival of Kurdish dynasties, despite the relentless efforts of the Ottoman authorities to end their rule, over the centuries. Their resistance to the

Ottoman attempts to end their hereditary status, thus, was not just a reaction to the Tanzimat, as the conventional Ottoman historiography would have us believe, but a resistance to the Ottoman pashas wanting to end this role and the Kurdish autonomy. One of the most important consequences of the demise of Kurdish emirates, thus, is the disappearance of this role, that is, the agency of the Kurds in the making of their own history for a considerable time.

When their rule ended, the Kurdish aristocracy was integrated into the administrative structure of the empire in various ways. Many lesser aristocrats were left in Kurdistan and incorporated into the Ottoman administrative system. The *hâkim* of Palu Abdullah Bey, for example, was given the titles of *rikâb-ı hümâyûn kapıcıbaşısı* (officer of the imperial palace) and *asker-i redif binbaşısı* (major of the reserve troops). When the central government abolished his hereditary position, it appointed him as the *müdür* of the Palu district and later the *kaimmakam* of the Hüsnü Mansur district (Gündoğan, 2014: 165). Such appointments opened the way for what has been called the 'politics of notables' that would dominate post-Ottoman politics of successive states for the years to come. However, it also signalled out to the elite that the only way to hold on to some form of power was to co-operate with the state and be part of it.

Despite the incorporation of the lesser notables, the grandees of Kurdistan, like Baban, Bohtan, Hekarî and Soran family members, were exiled and permanently cut off from their lands. This set a precedent that would be repeated in the republican times as well. Their exile conclusively ended the hereditary Kurdish rule in the lands they ruled. However, that did not mean the end of their elite status. The well-known cases of the Babans and Bedirxanis provide valuable insight in that respect. Following Bedirxan Bey's return from exile, the Bedirxanis, for example, became highly adept at integrating themselves into the Ottoman elite, producing a number of high- and mid-level administrators. Similarly, the Babans became part of the Ottoman and later republican elite. Bedirxan Beg himself, together with his extended family, was sent to Candia, on the island of Crete. After a period of hardship, he was given a salary, and in 1848 due to his service in Crete, was invited to Istanbul and decorated with a Fourth Degree Mejidi Decoration and the rank of *mîrimîran*, which was a civilian rank corresponding to lieutenant-general (Süreyya, 1996: 2/360). Following a ten-year residency, where he was kept under surveillance in Istanbul, he moved to Damascus, where he died in 1867, leaving behind twenty-two sons and twenty-one daughters. The Ottoman administration made sure that Bedirxan's progeny

would have no connection to their ancestral lands and would not be able to emerge as a rallying point for the Kurds.[37] Except for a small number of Bedirxanis who later played significant roles in the Kurdish nationalist movement, most family members were either silenced, integrated into a variety of other aristocratic families throughout the Middle East or assimilated into the emerging republican or the Middle Eastern elite.[38]

Exiled to the same island and similarly barred from communicating with his native land, Nurullah Beg of Hekarî was given the rank of *dergah-ı âli kapıcıbaşılığı*, later pardoned and granted an increase of his meagre salary.[39] In most cases, the notable families were only allowed to get a fraction of revenues accrued from the lands they lost.[40] Notables who, unlike Nurullah and Bedirxan, co-operated with the state authorities did not save themselves from exile. For example, Sherif Beg of Mush, in spite of his defection, was exiled to Damascus but early on was allowed to retain revenue from his *yurtluk-ocaklık* lands, even though the legal status of the lands changed.[41] Similarly, Suleimani was turned into a regular *sancak* and a regular army was established in the district.[42] But that did not prevent Ottoman co-optation of the Baban family members as high administrators. Ahmed Pasha Baban, for example, after his short exile in Istanbul, where he was first given a meagre salary, was sent to Paris with the Ottoman envoy where he stayed for two and a half years (Atmaca, 2019: 11). He was later appointed as the *beylerbeyi* (governor) of Yemen (1855–64), *mutasarrif* (district governor) of Van (1865), raised to the rank of *vezir* in September 1865 and reappointed as the governor of Yemen. This two-year appointment was followed by governorships in Erzurum, Aleppo and Adana, where he died in 1875. Sicilli Osmani notes that his son Halid Pasha became an Ottoman ambassador to Tehran and his brother Mustafa Pasha became the governor of Basra (Süreyya, 1996: 1/204). Several other Baban family members rose to

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37 BOA I.MSM, 51/1293, lef. 9. Mushir Osman Pasha noted that, due to the loyalty of most Kurds to them, if Khan Mahmud and Bedirxan return twenty years later, they would rally behind them. Hence, they should be kept in exile and cut off from Kurdistan. Istanbul, therefore, made sure that was the case.

38 For a comprehensive account of the Bedirxani family in the post-1847 period, see Henning, 2018.

39 BOA.A.MKT.UM 343/82, 09.B.1275/1859.

40 For example, out of the 50,000 *ghurush* yearly revenue of the villages registered to them, the seven sons and daughters of Evliya Pasha of Mahmudi received a total of 2,400 *ghurush*. BOA.A.AMD 89/98, 1274/1858.

41 BOA.A.MKT 225/82, Kurdistan Valisi M. Esad Muhlis'in yazısı, 1265.11.13/ 25 January 1850.

42 BOA.A.DVN 61/39, 1266.9.15/27 November 1849; and BOA.A.MKT.UM 10/35, 1266.4.24/6 July 1850.

prominence in the Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey, while some others rose to prominence in Iraq.

Elimination of the Kurdish hereditary rule was made possible with the territorialization of sovereignty that required the delimitation and demarcation of boundaries. It is, therefore, no coincidence that Bedirxan and his allies' demise was almost concurrent with the signing of the Erzurum Treaty of 1847, which set the stage for the finalization of the Ottoman boundaries with Iran. The making of the boundaries facilitated the extension of the Tanzimat state to Kurdistan. By securely framing the Kurdish nobility within the Ottoman domains, the finalization of the boundaries did not leave them with much room for manoeuvre. This was followed by the introduction of new administrative units, taxes and forced conscription of the hitherto unconscripted Kurdish masses in the service of the empire.[43] Conscription was not introduced en masse. Considering how much the practice was dreaded, Istanbul introduced a lottery system (*kur'a*) in which lots were drawn in the presence of a 'Kur'a Meclisi' (Lottery Council) to determine conscripts (Çadırcı, 1985). As an Ottoman report put it, the Kurds, like those of Palu and Şiro *kazas* who had until then enjoyed the *yurtluk-ocaklık* status, resisted the 'beneficial system of conscription'.[44] Similarly, the *nahiya*s of Mardin resisted to the point where troops were sent to impose conscription policies.[45] Villages in Cizre were likewise forcefully made to surrender conscripts (and pay taxes).[46]

While the Kurdish aristocracy and its natural allies, the nomadic tribes, vehemently defended their precarious autonomies and their being subjected to the alien rule, it appears that the sharecropping population, *maraba*, which constituted a considerable part of the agricultural producers, might have benefitted from the demise of the *mir*s. The beys/*mir*s owned large tracts of land that the peasantry tilled as sharecroppers subject to paying a tithe and rent (Gündoğan, 2014: 165–6). The Tanzimat state's ending the privileged rule of the Kurdish aristocracy might have relieved the peasantry from various misdeeds of the beys like forcing the peasants into *corvée* labour and sharecropping, indebting the peasants

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43 Richard Wood in 1836 noted, 'The main object of the Turkish Government in subjugating these parts of the Empire which is to increase its revenue, it is stimulated also by a desire of recruiting its Forces from Kurdish Youths, Sixty Thousands of whom are to be enrolled in its Armies as soon as circumstances will permit' (Wood, 1966: 95).

44 (*kur'a-i şer'iyye usul-ü hasenesi*). See BOA.A.MKT.MHM 22/35, 1266.8.8/20 October 1850.

45 BOA.MVL [Catalog no. 1086, p. 8], From the Governor of Kurdistan and the 4th Army Commander to Istanbul, 12.L.1267/10 August 1851.

46 BOA.A.AMD 22/61, 1266/1849.

through various stratagems, over taxation or overtaxing a particular part of the society like the Christians, and other strong-arm tactics they sometimes resorted to against the locals. Nonetheless, the local society had direct access to their rulers. With the demise of the *mir*s, they now had to confront the non-familiar Ottoman administrators and tax collectors sent from various parts of the empire and imposing harsh new taxes. Moreover, these new officials started a tradition of petty government officers exacting exorbitant amounts 'not for the real exigencies of the state' but for their own 'rapacious pashas and their attendants'. A newly appointed *müsellim* of 'Khini' (Hani) formulated the new Ottoman method of ruling Kurdistan to Consul Brant thusly: getting rich, as in the example of Kurdish Begs, causes people to rebel and that 'people must be kept poor by oppression to make them obedient' (Brant and Glascott, 1840: 361–3). Indeed, the removal of the hereditary rulers who acted as the anchors of their communities, and brokered between the state and society, in the long run, made the region economically disadvantaged and poorer.

As Veli Yadırgı argues, confiscation of the large landholdings of the Kurdish dynasts had 'unfavourable consequences for agricultural productivity in Kurdistan, and resulted in this region being less affected by the world-market-induced commercialization of agriculture in the next four decades'. This was because most of those lands were mismanaged by the state appointees who left them mostly uncultivated, and secondly, because the poverty-ridden small peasants were not able to meet the demands of running small farms and an expanding world market. With the eradication of the Kurdish emirates irrigation works fell into disrepair and villages fell into destitution (Yadırgı, 2017: 112–13). Among those dynamics that were most conclusively affected by the destructive military campaigns of the Tanzimat pashas that ended the Kurdish hereditary rule was the loss of security and the consequent decrease in commerce and related activities, as could be deduced from declining custom revenues in Ottoman Kurdistan. Yadırgı convincingly shows that the large-scale military campaigns and the destruction they wrought in their wake caused a demographic demolition that permanently disadvantaged the region paving the way for its de-development (Yadırgı, 2017: 133).

Replacing the Kurdish aristocrats and their armed followers with the regular government troops allowed the governments to increase their surveillance and control capability, which facilitated bringing those areas under the governments' fiscal, administrative and legal structure. In Hekarî, for

example, Ottoman Albanian troops were brought in, and the governor, Ahmed Izzet Pasha, began residing in Nurullah Bey's stronghold, and his rule prompted one observer to declare, 'the whole of this country, for the first time, has been brought under the direct control of the Porte' (Layard, 1852: 383). By losing the beys/*mirs* the local society lost any form of protection against even the lowliest of the officials who, acting with the motto of 'ben devletim' (l'état, c'est moi), start a period of misuse of authority and oppression that the peoples of Kurdistan have since not seen any relief from. The ruthless campaigns of Mehmed Reshid and Hâfız Pasha temporarily brought order to the region. They partially improved the infrastructure and economy, building the Samsun–Diyarbekir road, new towns like Malatya and Mezre (later Elazığ) near Harput and government buildings (Aydın and Verheij, 2012: 33).

While constructing new government buildings as potent symbols of the governmental authority, the Ottoman authorities made sure that most of the castles, houses and mansions of the Kurdish grandees were destroyed[47] (Layard, 1852: 50–4), thus depriving Kurdistan of its historical monuments, memory and legacy. It was not the castles or residences of the Kurdish beys and *mir*s that will henceforth project and represent power but the *hükümet konağı* (the government house), where an appointed *kaimmakam*, speaking an alien language and representing a distant authority, resided. While destroying the castles, houses and mansions, the Ottoman pashas also confiscated the treasuries of the Kurdish emirs.[48] This was not aimless vandalism or collateral damage to the campaigns. These systematic acts of architectural dismemberment were calculated moves, aimed at severing an important link between historical memory and the people. As Robert Bevan notes, the destruction of cultural artefacts of an enemy people or nation is a way of dominating, terrorizing, dividing or eradicating it altogether (Bevan, 2016: 18). This process went hand in hand with the exile and banning of the Kurdish grandees from establishing any contact with Kurdistan.

No doubt the confiscation of the treasuries and property of the nobility had a devastating effect on the future of the Kurdish society. This transfer of capital from Kurdistan prevented capital accumulation and the consequent benefits accruing to its peoples. As Michael Eppel argued, the elimination of the Kurdish emirates and the following deterioration in the general security of the regions led to the decline of the cities that had and could have further

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47 For the burning of the residences of 'Hazro, I'lijeh [Ilicak] and Khini [Hani]' and their *beg*s being exiled to Edirne, see Brant and Glascott (1840: 360–1).

48 For Miré Kor's treasury, see Wood to Ponsonby, 2 December 1836 (Wood, 1966: 112).

flourished as centres of respective emirates and of trade and prosperity. The elimination of the *mir*s and decline of those cities prevented the emergence of a bourgeoisie that could have patronized the development of Kurdish literature, and 'high' language (Eppel, 2008: 256).

These steps conclusively weakened the agency of the Kurds in the making of decisions regarding their historical homeland and themselves as a people. Despite their limited authority and the limited land they controlled, the emirates constituted a symbolic rallying point for the Kurds and provided them with a sense of identity. For centuries, those emirates stood as the symbols of Kurdish rule, albeit increasingly diminished. Their destruction left very important symbolic voids. The idea of self-governance and the Kurdish sense of self-reliance was destroyed with the end of the Kurdish emirates, setting the stage for the still-ongoing Kurdish struggles trying to gain autonomous power. As Stephen Longrigg prospectively put it, even though the emerging Ottoman regime was precarious, nominal and barely operative in higher altitude areas, 'most of the rallying points of the Kurdish nation had been destroyed' (Longrigg, 1925: 286). This was also because, unlike the non-Muslim communities who have, over a long period of time, developed various institutions and were organized around 'national' churches (and synagogues), the emirates were the only political organizations that the Kurds could rally to. As Eppel argued,

> The elimination of the Kurdish emirates, with their feudal characteristics, wiped out any potential nuclei for the growth of a force with ambitions to dominate Kurdistan, which – in order to adapt itself to modern political conditions and discourse – would have adopted Kurdish nationalist discourse and arguments. The existence of such a force could have aroused the imaginings of the Kurdish nation and attracted the support of educated, westernized Kurds within and outside Kurdistan, and accordingly could have become a nucleus for Kurdish statehood and nationalism after the First World War (Eppel, 2008: 240).

As the examples of Baban and Bedirxani families show, in the following period, the progeny of the Kurdish emirs were successfully integrated into the military-bureaucratic elite of the Ottoman Empire. Yet, still, they were not allowed to reconnect with their ancestral lands and many through intermarriage or voluntarily assimilated into the post-Ottoman societies, especially the Turkish republican one, and some of them rose to prominent positions. However, 'the intellectual forebears of Kurdish nationalism did not enjoy social and political conditions under which the Kurdish national idea could have taken root and developed into a powerful national movement'

(Eppel, 2008: 256). It could, therefore, be argued that with the elimination of the Kurdish emirates in the mid-nineteenth century, the Kurds lost the decisive battles that would take place during and after the First World War. Lacking any figure(s) whom the Kurdistanis could rally behind, the majority of the Kurds pinned their hopes to would-be oppressors like the Kemalists, who would go on to subject them to a century-long programme of cultural erasure from which they have yet to get a respite.

The void that the demise of the Kurdish emirates left in Kurdish sociopolitical organization was not only symbolic. As several travellers noted, Bedirxan's rise brought order to the previously famously insecure areas he controlled (Wright and Breath, 1846: 380). Following the demise of the Kurdish emirates, insecurity and raids – including the cross-border ones – hampered trade and the future development of the region. In that sense, as S. Aydın, and J. Verheij put it, 'the removal of the *mir*s was a Pyrrhic victory' because Istanbul did not have enough human and other resources with which to fill the emerging power vacuum. Consequently, law and order deteriorated, and it became increasingly difficult for the government to collect taxes and conscripts. To deal with the volatile situation, and keep order and security, Istanbul appointed the chiefs of tribes as administrators of subdistricts. As in the example of the Midyat kaza being divided into Halilbegli and Isabegli kazas, after the chieftains of two tribes, the Heverki and Dekshuri (Aydın and Verheij, 2012: 40).

The demise of the Kurdish emirates also started a process that I elsewhere called the re-clanization of Kurdistan, which accompanied the well-known process of the rise of the sheikhs to the leadership of the Kurdish society. Eliminating the 'rallying points' of Kurdish society, and unable to completely fill the power vacuum, the Ottoman administration followed a two-pronged policy of empowering the religious figures and lesser tribal chiefs and making them dependent on the largess and backing of the government. For example, in places like Rewanduz (and others) the ulema were given salaries and numerous *Ekrad ve aşair beyleri* (the beys of tribes and the Kurds), who nonetheless were eager to fill the emergent power vacuum, and were sent robes of honour designating them as the new state-sanctioned local leaders. As in the example of some chiefs of Van, in some places, this co-optation was selective and provisional. Tribal chiefs were granted temporary salaries or what one could call hush-money 'until the border was finalized and the divisions of tribes [with Iran] was complete'.[49] In places further from the

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49 BOA.A.AMD 29/53, 28.3.1267/8 June 1851.

Iranian borders, however, numerous notables whom the government considered to have leadership skills were exiled to other parts of the empire. Such drastic measures had a number of unintended consequences. Firstly, the central state did not have the means to fill the jurisdictional, military and administrative capacity to fill the vacuum created by the removal of so many local leaders. No doubt, the dearth of recognized local authorities capable of brokering or liaising between state and society and among the latter's competing sections further fractured it. The long-term consequence of this process of increased societal conflict often resulted in the formation of subtribes and increased instability. The enduring effects of this direct result of the end of the emirates are brilliantly described by van Bruinessen: 'A rapid devolution from complex, state like to much simpler forms of social and political organization – as if [tribal organization had] taken a few steps back on the evolutionary ladder' (van Bruinessen, 1992: 181–2, 193–5). That is, breaking the power of the autochthonous political structures forced the Kurdish political organization to take a step backwards in the evolution of political formations. Kurdish political institutions' devolution from proto-state to chiefdom to tribe increased instability but further empowered the state in the long run (van Bruinessen, 1992: 193–5). It was the aggregation of these policies and the increasing lawlessness, insecurity and social conflict in Kurdistan that three decades later Sheikh Ubeydullah referred to when he met the British consul of Tabriz, Abbot. When Abbot asked the sheikh what his programme was, the sheikh apparently replied that 'he wished to reorganize Kurdistan . . . He felt that the moment had arrived when something ought to be done for Kurdistan' and for the shamefully treated, poor and uneducated people whom neither the Ottomans nor the Iranians understood.[50]

The rapid devolution of Kurdistani sociopolitical structures reached a new and defining low with the creation of the Hamidiyeh Light Cavalry Corps in the early 1890s. Gaining the debatable title of 'Bave Kurdan', or the 'Father of the Kurds', Sultan Abdülhamid II's regime cemented the tribalization of Kurdish society and the power of acquiescent chiefs. Empowering Kurdish chiefs as a bulwark against Russian designs on the region, and the rising Armenian nationalism, the Hamidian regime set the tone of future engagements between the Kurdish notables and the regimes that would follow: rewarding and co-opting the acquiescent, and demonization and war against the resilient elements of Kurdish society, as a way of controlling the region and the internal dynamics of the Kurdish society.

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50 PRO, FO 60/441, Abbot to Earl Granville, Tabriz, 1 October 1881.

Replacing the indirect rule of the Kurdish dynasts with that of central appointees was part of a process that included the central state's further penetration of its geographic peripheries, the standardization of state practices and identities and growth in the state's capacity of carrying out intended policies (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001: 78). The natural corollary to this process was a reorganization of the administrative divisions, the reform of landholding patterns, the forced settlement of itinerant populations, the introduction of new and excessive taxes and the forceful conscription of hitherto un-conscripted locals. Perhaps the most interesting development was the formation of the *eyalet* of Kurdistan, which was composed of Diyarbakır *eyalet*, Van, Mush and Heari *sancak*s and Cizre, Bohtan, and Mardin *kazas*. Created on 5 December 1847 it was abolished in 1867 (Hakan, 2007: 255–7; Kardam, 2011: 384–6). Considering Kurdistan a reconquered region, Istanbul carefully appointed new administrators while the high-ranking pashas who helped suppress revolts were given decorations 'peculiar to the conquests of Kurdistan'.[51] The creation of this new administrative unit was meant to send a clear signal: the old order of privileged Kurdish dynasties is no more, and their lands and inhabitants were now included into the orbit of the 'auspicious' Tanzimat.

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51 BOA.A.DVN.MHM 7/16 1265.C.3/27 April 1849.

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4

The Kurdish Movement and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1880–1923

DJENE RHYS BAJALAN

Introduction

Historians of the Kurdish question have often traced the origins of Kurdish nationalism to the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt of 1880 (Ateş, 2014: 735–98; Jwaideh, 2006: 75–101; Olson, 1989: 2–7; Soleimani, 2016a: 157–216). The classification of this rebellion as one motivated by nationalism is by no means universally accepted. Several scholars have argued that such a characterization is a product of a retrospective reimagining, choosing instead to emphasize the tribal and religious nature of the uprising (McDowall, 1997: 53; Özoğlu, 2004: 76–7; Pistor-Hatam, 2002: 19–30). Yet, Sheikh Ubeydullah did not simply seek to maintain or expand existing feudal privileges in face of a centralizing imperial government as a previous generation of rebellious emirs, such as Babanlı Ahmed Pasha of Suleimani and Bedirhan Bey of Cezire-Bohtan, had in the 1840s. He had a more expansive goal, namely, the overthrow of the existing political order in the region through the unification of both Ottoman and Iranian Kurdistan under his rule. More importantly, he legitimized his political aspirations with reference to the idiom of Kurdish nationhood. In a frequently cited letter to an American missionary, he proclaimed, 'The Kurdish nation, consisting of more than 500,000 families, is a people apart. Their religion is different, and their laws and customs distinct . . . We are a nation apart. We want our affairs to be in our hands . . . and have privileges like other nations' (see McDowall, 1997: 53; Özoğlu, 2004: 75).

Sheikh Ubeydullah was ultimately unsuccessful in carving out a Kurdish state on the Ottoman–Qajar frontier. Following a failed invasion of Iranian Kurdistan, culminating in a brief siege of the city of Urmia, Qajar reinforcements dispatched from Tabriz were able to put the Kurds to flight. Defeated, the sheikh returned across the frontier to his stronghold in the Ottoman district of Hakkari, where he eventually surrendered to the Ottoman authorities in the summer of 1881. After this, he was sent into exile, first to Istanbul,

and following an abortive attempt to return to his homeland a year later, Mecca, where he died in 1883. Yet, as W. G. Abbot, the British consul in Tabriz, observed in the aftermath of the sheikh's surrender, despite his defeat, it 'will probably be asked hereafter, what is to be done with Kurdistan?'[1] In retrospect, Abbot's assessment proved to be prophetic. While the rebellion did not immediately usher in an era of a sustained effort of nationalist resistance to either Ottoman or Qajar rule, it did herald a new period in the development of the history of the Kurdish community, one shaped by the gradual growth of Kurdish national consciousness and the emergence of the 'Kurdish question'.

This chapter examines the approximate half-century from the outbreak of the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt in the early 1880s to the collapse and partition in the early 1920s of the Ottoman Empire, home to the majority of the Middle East's Kurdish population. This period is of particular importance to the history of the 'Kurdish question' as it witnessed the emergence of an increasingly active Kurdish 'nationalist' movement, a movement that emerged primarily amongst the Kurds of the Ottoman Empire.

The emergence of nationalism in Europe and the Americas in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had a profound impact on the Ottoman Empire. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, nationalism amongst the predominantly Christian peoples of the Balkans facilitated the region's transformation into a patchwork of nation-states, Greece (1829), Serbia (1878), Montenegro (1878), Romania (1878), Bulgaria (1908) and Albania (1913). By 1914, rebellion and war had reduced the Ottoman Empire's once-vast European imperium to a small enclave surrounding the capital, Istanbul. The Ottoman's Asiatic empire fared better remaining largely intact until the empire's calamitous defeat in 1918, at the conclusion of the First World War. Yet, while nationalist politics first appeared amongst the Ottoman Empire's Christian populations, from the final quarter of the nineteenth century onwards, those claiming to speak in the name of the various Ottoman Muslim peoples – Turks, Arabs, Albanians and Kurds – increasingly gained ground.

Much of the older historiography pertaining to the late Ottoman Empire possesses within it an implicit nationalistic teleology, which regards the desire for national self-determination in the form of a nation-state as the inevitable outcome of growing national consciousness. However, it would be a mistake to assume the rise of national consciousness directly correlated with the growth of separatist nationalism. Indeed, recent scholarship has

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1 NA FO 60/441, Tabriz, 10 August 1881.

demonstrated the complexity and often-ambiguous nature of identities in the Ottoman Empire of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Bozarslan, 2016; Der Matossian, 2014; Provence, 2017; Reynolds, 2011a). While it is possible to identify the growth of Kurdish national consciousness over the course of this period in a *general sense*, amongst the early generations of Kurdish activists, there was a considerable divergence of opinion on how they might advance the interests of the Kurdish nation.

Like Sheikh Ubeydullah, some such as the social critic and poet Heci Kadirî Koyi and the recalcitrant Russophile aristocrat Abdürrezzak Bedirhan envisaged a future of national independence. Yet, many of their contemporaries, including pioneers of Kurdish activism, saw a different path. Rather than independence, figures such as Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan and Abdurrahman Bedirhan, who founded the first Kurdish newspaper in 1898, and Sheikh Ubeydullah's son, Sheikh Abdülkadir Efendi, who played a leading role in Kurdish activism following the 1908 Constitutional Revolution, sought to advance the Kurdish cause within the framework of a multinational Ottoman polity governed by constitutional principles. Even as the Ottoman Empire entered its final death throws, following the end of the First World War, the Kurdish movement remained divided between pro-Ottoman and nationalist-separatist factions, with Sheikh Abdülkadir Efendi seeking to maintain links with the Ottoman Empire, while others, most notably Emin Ali Bedirhan, agitated for complete independence. Thus, it is essential to reject a teleological narrative of the period that sees the rise of national consciousness as synonymous with a growing desire for a Kurdish nation-state. Instead, it is necessary to recognize both the inherent diversity of opinion within the early Kurdish movement and seek to understand how and why different elements of Kurdish society approached the 'Kurdish question' in different ways.

At the same time, it is important to avoid projecting back national rivalries that emerged in subsequent historical eras on earlier periods. In the post-imperial Middle East, Kurdish nationalism has often developed in response to the 'official nationalisms' of Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. Yet, while ethnonational polarization was certainly a factor in the late imperial era, the hostility and antagonisms that would characterize the relationship between Kurdish nationalists and their Turkish, Arab and Persian counterparts were far less apparent. Indeed, the political identities of Ottoman Kurds were often quite complex. For many Ottoman Muslims, including the Kurds, Islam and a shared sense of Ottoman patriotism provided a powerful alternative to 'ethnic' nationalism. For instance, writing in 1908, Babanzade İsmail Hakkı,

an Ottoman parliamentarian and prominent Kurdish activist, proclaimed that the Kurdish identity was 'before everything Islamic', then Ottoman, and only 'in the third degree Kurdish'.[2]

Indeed, it was often the Kurds' troubled relationship with the Ottoman Armenian community that played a critical role in shaping the trajectory of early Kurdish activism. However, this too was a complex process. Some activists such as Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan and Abdurrahman Bedirhan won praise from Armenian revolutionaries for their efforts to promote 'peaceful coexistence' (Sarkisian, 1994: 29–30). In contrast, Abdürrezzak Bedirhan sought to play on Kurdish fears of the ascendency of 'the rich but immoral Armenians' in order to rally the local tribes to the nationalist cause.[3]

Consequently, the Kurdish movement of the late imperial period ought not to be viewed simply as a 'prelude' to that of later historical eras, but a movement that was shaped by a set of conditions quite distinct from those that emerged following the end of the First World War.

'Father of the Kurds': Sultan Abdülhamid II and the Kurdish Question, 1880–1908

For Ottoman officials, Sheikh Ubeydullah's uprising brought into sharp relief the potentially destabilizing nature of the 'Kurdish question' to the existing order on the Ottoman–Qajar frontier. As one Ottoman official warned in the autumn of 1880, despite the fact that the sheikh's initial campaign was directed at the Iranians, his objective was a 'new government for the Kurds' and 'because of their ethnicity (*kavmiyet*) the participation of our people close to the frontier in his movement would be natural'.[4] Significantly, the rebellion possessed a strong sectarian character with the violence in Iran pitting the Sunni Kurds against the Shiite Iranians (Azeri Turks and Persians). However, the sheikh was also critical of his fellow Sunnis, Ottoman Turks. As early as the Russo–Ottoman War of 1877–8, Sheikh Ubeydullah composed his *Masnavi*, in which he praised the Kurds as being zealous warriors of Islam, while condemning 'Rumis' (Ottoman Turks) for their lack of martial spirit and religious vigour (Soleimani, 2016b). Indeed, on the eve of his invasion of Iran, he questioned the legitimacy of Ottoman claims to the caliphate, condemning it for having 'rejected Islamic law' and 'acknowledged the law of the infidel' (Averyanov, 2010: 188–9).

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2 Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, 'Kürtler ve Kürdistan', *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5 December 1908).
3 NA FO 195/2460, Erzurum, 31 October 1913.   4 BOA Y.PRK.ASK 3/72, 19 November 1880.

Such antagonisms reflected growing discontent towards the reforms of the Tanzimat era (1839–76). On one hand, many Kurds came to see the gradual legal emancipation of non-Muslim communities as a threat to traditional Muslim supremacy within the empire. On the other, centralization had resulted in conscription, increased taxation and arbitrary rule. For many Kurds, especially those in rural districts, their first experience of Ottoman 'citizenship' was one of growing responsibilities and obligation without a commensurate increase in services and rights (Aydın and Verhij, 2012: 34). The growing disparity in power between Istanbul and the European Great Powers laid bare by the empire's catastrophic defeat during the Russo–Ottoman War of 1877–8 only served to heighten these tensions.

Unrest amongst the Kurds was not the only challenge to Istanbul's authority over its eastern provinces. Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909), who had come to power on the eve of the war with Russia, also faced an increase in militancy amongst Armenians. In 1878, Armenian Patriarch Nerses Varjabedyan successfully lobbied for the inclusion of a clause in the Treaty of Berlin committing the Ottoman government to carrying out 'the improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and Kurds' (Hurewitz, 1979: 414). Ultimately, the sultan was able to confound efforts at reform. Nevertheless, Armenian discontent continued to fester resulting in the formation of several militant revolutionary organizations. This growing militancy served to intensify friction in the region, which exploded in a wave of pogroms directed against the Ottoman Armenian community in the mid-1890s. This violence attracted considerable international attention, a source of particular concern to the Ottoman authorities. As one British diplomat noted, 'Foreigners were talking of Armenia as they had once talked of Bulgaria. The Turks thought that there was a clear intention to break up what remained of the Ottoman Empire and found an Armenian kingdom' (Eliot, 1900: 401).

Consequently, the threat of Armenian nationalism shaped Sultan Abdülhamid II's attitude towards the Kurds. In practice, this policy imperative translated into favouring the Kurds, and more specifically powerful Kurdish tribal leaders, over the Armenians. For example, in 1889 a Kurdish religious notable in the district of Muş, Hacı Musa, abducted, raped and forcibly converted to Islam a young Armenian woman. International outcry and diplomatic pressure eventually forced the return of the girl to her family. However, following a trial in Istanbul, an Ottoman court acquitted Hacı

Musa of wrongdoing, much to the dismay of the Armenians and their supporters (Deringil, 2012: 224–6).

Perhaps the most well-known example of the pro-Kurdish *élan* of Hamidian policy was the formation of the Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments (Hamidiye Hafif Süvari Alayları) between 1890 and 1892. The Hamidiye regiments, which drew inspiration from Russia's Cossacks, were recruited primarily from amongst the Kurdish tribes. They were named in honour of the sultan and placed under the command of Field Marshal Zeki Pasha, the sultan's brother-in-law, who assumed overall command of the Fourth Army headquartered at Erzincan (Averyanov, 2010: 197–224; Klein, 2002: 32–56; Kodaman, 1983: 36–81). The organization gained international notoriety because of the involvement of many Hamidiye tribes in the persecution of Armenians. In the district of Erciş, the British traveller Henry Finnis Blosse Lynch noted that the enrolment of the Haydaranlı and Adamanlı Kurds in the Hamidiye had resulted in 'a general relaxation of the law' with crimes against the Armenians being committed under 'the eyes of the Kaimakam' (Lynch, 1901: 26). Hamidiye tribes were particularly heavily involved in the violence of the mid-1890s. Yet, the regime rarely punished Kurdish tribesmen responsible for violence against Armenians. Moreover, it did little to prevent Hamidiye tribes from illegally seizing the lands of Armenian cultivators, which facilitated the economic aggrandizement of tribal leaders (Astourian, 2011: 55–81; Klein, 2002: 256–304). Such policies led Armenian activists to see the Hamidiye as part of a 'fixed policy' designed to depopulate Armenian-inhabited districts to ensure that no region maintained an Armenian majority, a perspective shared by some later historians (Astourian, 2011: 63–5; Bedickian, 1912: 17–18; Kévorkian, 1995: 31–2).

Although the Armenian question was certainly an important factor in shaping Hamidian policy in the Ottoman Empire's Kurdish-inhabited provinces, it was not the sole consideration. In 1876, a camarilla of high-ranking bureaucrats and military officers had forced the sultan into granting the empire a constitution and a parliament. This first period of constitutional rule was short-lived and, in 1877, under the cover of war, the new sultan was able to dismiss parliament and suspend the constitution. In place of a constitutional regime, an autocracy was constructed. In order to strengthen this new political order and shore up support amongst Ottoman Muslims, Sultan Abdülhamid II moved away from the liberal-inspired Ottomanism of the Tanzimat era, towards a state-based patriotism that accentuated the empire's Islamic character (Deringil, 1998). The regime would achieve this not only through propaganda and education but also through appeals to the

material interests of provincial notables, such as Kurdish tribal leaders and religious dignitaries, whom the reforms of the Tanzimat had alienated.

Hence, it would be a mistake to view schemes such as the Hamidiye exclusively through the lens of intercommunal relations. One of the most powerful Hamidiye commanders of the period, Milli İbrahim Pasha, maintained warm relations with the local Christians, sheltering many Armenians in his capital at Viranşehir during the violence of the mid-1890s. In fact, İbrahim Pasha's primary rivals were the Arab tribes of the Syrian desert and Muslim notable classes of Diyarbakir (Jongerden, 2012: 55–84). Yet, as one exasperated Ottoman official recalled, complaints 'did little to harm his influence or the esteem in which he was held by Istanbul' (Tepeyran, 1998: 450). Moreover, it was not only Hamidiye commanders who benefited from the sultan's patronage and protection. In the Kurdish sub-districts of the vilayet of Mosul, where Hamidiye regiments were not established, the sultan forged close relationships with important religious dignitaries. This included Sheikh Said Berzenci, who through a campaign of violence and intimidation indulged by the sultan emerged as the de facto ruler of Suleimani, much to the dismay of Ottoman officials (Çetinsaya, 1999: 155–8; Soane, 1914: 187–91). In short, the Hamidiye formed part of a broader policy that sought to tie the interests of Kurdish tribal leaders directly to those of the autocracy, creating a parallel structure of control, independent of the regular bureaucracy and army, institutions that the sultan viewed as potential centres of constitutionalist opposition (van Bruinessen, 2002: 174).

The sultan's pro-Kurdish disposition earned him the moniker 'father of the Kurds' (van Bruinessen, 1992: 186). However, while no doubt a popular figure amongst powerful elements of Kurdish society, this popularity was by no means universal. For one thing, the regime's policies tended to favour rural elites, the sheikhs and aghas who dominated life amongst the Kurdish tribes, often at the expense of urban elites in the region's towns and cities. This gave rise to considerable discontent amongst Kurdistan's urban notables. For instance, in an 1899 letter published in the newspaper *Kürdistan* (*Kurdistan*), Diyarbakir's notables complained that officials dispatched to the region were 'oppressors and lacked a sense of justice'.[5] The expanding influence of the sultan's favourite, Milli İbrahim Pasha, was a particular source of discontent, provoking public protests in 1905 and then again in 1907 (Hanioğlu, 2001, 106–7; Jongerden, 2012: 76–7). Nevertheless, although noteworthy such protests were not framed in nationalistic terms.

5 Ş. M, 'Kaxidek e jî Kurdistanê Hatî', *Kürdistan* (1 April 1899).

Still, the quarter of a century between Sheikh Ubeydullah's death in 1883 and the 1908 Constitutional Revolution did witness evidence of an emergent Kurdish national consciousness. This included an increase in scholarly interest in Kurdish language, culture and history. The year 1894 saw the publication of the first Kurdish–Turkish dictionary, Sheikh Yusuf Ziyaeddin Pasha's *al-Hediyyet'ul Hamdiye fi'l-Lugat-il Kurdiye* (Ziyaeddin, 1894/1895), and in 1900 a group of religious scholars formed the Kürdistan Azm-ı Kavi Cemiyeti (The Kurdistan Strength of Purpose Society), an Egyptian-based organization that undertook the publication of works on Kurdish history and literature (Malmîsanij, 1986: 44–5, 2010: 15–21). It was the beginning of what one eminent Kurdish historian aptly called the 'Kurdish enlightenment' (Celîl, 2000).

The scholarship was not the only element of this movement. There were also more overtly political manifestations of a nascent sense of Kurdish national identity. Perhaps the most forthright expression of this is in the work of the quixotic poet Heci Kadirî Koyi. Although receiving a traditional religious education, Koyi became a keen admirer of modern science and European civilization. At the same time, he bemoaned the backwardness of his own community, especially the lack of written materials in Kurdish. 'If only books and records and histories and letters were written in the Kurdish language,' he lamented, 'Then our mollas and scholars, our princes and emperors, would remain famous, forever known and distinguished' (Koyî, 2004: 60). He was particularly scathing in his criticism of Kurdistan's sheikhs, whom he condemned for 'teaching laziness . . . collecting treasure and lands' and occupying themselves with 'symbolism, coyness and wishing', while 'the science of Europe' had 'reached the impossible' (Koyî, 2004: 104). Koyi also opined over the fall of Kurdistan's emirs, such as the Babans and Bedirhans, whom he viewed as the true leaders of the 'people and nation (*qewm û millet*)' (Koyî, 2004: 124), and mourned the passing of an age 'when the Kurds were free and independent' (Koyî, 2004: 11). Thus, he called on Kurds to emulate the Christian peoples of the Balkans, who had thrown off Ottoman rule and become 'states' as well as the 'possessors of armies and banners, generals and field staffs' (Koyî, 2004: 85).

Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan and Abdurrahman Bedirhan, the editors of the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kürdistan* (published in Kurdish and Ottoman Turkish), were admirers of Koyi[6] and shared his concerns pertaining to the backwardness of Kurdish society. Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, who founded the

6 Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, 'Untitled', *Kürdistan* (19 May 1898).

newspaper in British-controlled Egypt in 1898, stated that he had 'set up and published this Kurdish newspaper in order to encourage the Kurds towards scientific and artistic education'.[7] Abdurrahman Bedirhan, who took over the newspaper from its sixth issue onwards, mourned the fact Kurds knew 'nothing of the history of Kurdistan',[8] while another contributor complained that, although Kurds were an 'excellent specimen of humanity', they suffered from a deficit in 'scientific knowledge and technical knowhow'.[9] The newspaper lavished praise on those who had contributed to the advancement of Kurdish language and culture, including the lexicographer Sheikh Yusuf Ziyaeddin Pasha,[10] and even the German orientalist Martin Hartmann, whose interest in the Kurdish language, Abdurrahman hoped, would 'become something from which the Kurds themselves learn'.[11]

Kürdistan also addressed political questions, becoming progressively more critical of the Hamidian regime. Abdurrahman Bedirhan was particularly critical of the Hamidiye, asking in a piece discussing Kurdish–Armenian relations whether there was 'anyone else bringing oppression to Kurdistan other than the Hamidiye, who are armed by the sultan and carry his name?'[12] In another article, he asserted that 'as with all innovations of the sultan', the Hamidiye had been 'established with a corrupt purpose'.[13] However, the newspaper explicitly rejected Koyi's separatism. Abdurrahman Bedirhan proclaimed, 'Every person who is a Muslim desires the continuation of the Ottoman state . . . The health of the state is our health and the demise of the state is our demise.'[14]

Kürdistan's Ottomanist orientation was reflective of the fact that the Bedirhan brothers were not only scions of an influential family of Kurdish notables but also members of a nascent class of Ottoman-Kurdish intellectuals and professionals. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the expansion and modernization of the Ottoman Empire's bureaucratic apparatus necessitated an ever-growing army of bureaucrats, officers and officials. This was realized through the creation of a modern system of state education, which resulted in the formation of a governing elite familiar with European languages, sciences,

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7 Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, 'Şevketlu Azametlu Sultan Abdülhamid-i Sani Hazretlerine Arzıhal-i Abidanemdir', *Kürdistan* (2 June 1898).
8 Abdurrahman Bedirhan, 'Untitled', *Kürdistan* (30 November 1898).
9 Ş. M, 'Kaxidek e jî Kurdistanê Hatî', *Kürdistan* (1 April 1899).
10 Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, 'Untitled', *Kürdistan* (19 May 1898).
11 Abdurrahman Bedirhan, 'Întîbah', *Kürdistan* (1 April 1899).
12 Abdurrahman Bedirhan, 'Kürtler ve Ermeniler', *Kürdistan* (14 October 1900).
13 Abdurrahman Bedirhan, 'Hamidiye Süvari Alayları', *Kürdistan* (14 September 1901). See also Abdurrahman Bedirhan, 'Alayênê Siwarênê Hemîdî', *Kürdistan* (14 September 1901).
14 Abdurrahman Bedirhan, 'Întîzar', *Kürdistan* (6 August 1899).

technological innovations and intellectual currents. This new governing class was made up of Ottoman Muslims from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds. This included numerous Kurds. Indeed, Sultan Abdülhamid II greatly expanded upon a policy, begun during the Tanzimat era, of integrating aristocratic Kurdish families into the empire's governing classes. The sultan elevated members of the Baban dynasty to high office, including Kürt (Kurdish) Said Pasha, who served as foreign minister and later President of the Council of State. Members of the Bedirhan clan were similarly privileged. For instance, Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan and Abdurrahman Bedirhan benefited from the patronage of the Ottoman state, receiving educations in the elite Imperial High School in Istanbul and going on to enjoy careers in the Ottoman judiciary and ministry of education, respectively.[15] In fact, so notorious was the sultan's indulgence of the Bedirhans that when the family dramatically fell from grace and was exiled to Tripolitania in 1906, it warranted an extensive examination in the London-based *Times*.[16]

Hence, when Kurdish members of the Ottoman Empire's new governing classes came to oppose the regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II, they did so as part of the broader constitutionalist opposition, which Europeans often referred to as the 'Young Turks'. Despite the nomenclature, the 'Young Turk' movement included Ottoman subjects from a variety of different ethnic and religious backgrounds committed to the overthrow of the autocracy and the restoration of the Constitution of 1876. Moreover, while some opposition activists were attracted to Turkist ideas, overall the constitutionalists remained committed to a cosmopolitan Ottomanism, built on the principle of the unity of ethnic and religious elements (*ittihad-ı anasır*). In fact, Kurds played a significant role in the constitutional movement. In 1889, two Kurdish medical students, Dr Abdullah Cevdet and Dr İshak Sükuti (Hanioğlu, 1995, 71), were amongst the founders of the İttihad-i Osmânî Cemiyeti, a group which developed into the leading opposition faction İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Committee for Union and Progress, CUP). As the constitutionalist opposition gained momentum, other influential Kurdish public figures, such as Sheikh Ubeydullah's son, Sheikh Abdülkadir Efendi, and Kürt Said Pasha's son, Mehmed Şerif Pasha, joined the ranks of the 'Young Turks'. Even members of the Bedirhan clan turned against their patron, including *Kürdistan*'s editor, Abdurrahman Bedirhan.

15 Abdurrahman Bedirhan, 'Sultan Abdülhamid-i Sani Hazretlerine', *Kürdistan* (14 December 1900). See also Malmîsanij (2009: 11, 107–13).

16 'The Fall of the Bedr Khans', *The Times* (23 August 1906). See also Edib (1926: 223–4) and Alakom (1998: 48–54).

In fact, under Abdurrahman Bedirhan's leadership, *Kürdistan* received support from Dr Abdullah Cevdet, who ran an opposition printing press in Geneva (Malmîsanij, 1986: 15; Ünal, 2008: 70–3). Abdurrahman Bedirhan also attended the 1902 Congress of Ottoman Liberals, siding with Ahmed Rıza's 'centralist' faction following splits amongst the attendees.[17] Thus, in political terms, *Kürdistan* might be thought of as an organ of the constitutionalist opposition, albeit one catering to a Kurdish audience. The newspaper's editorial line rejected separatism and called for the restoration of constitutional rule. As *Kürdistan*'s editor proclaimed in a 1902 article, 'the remedy for all [issues] is the Ottoman Constitution. When this Constitution is fully implemented, then people will be aware of their rights and the curse of a despotic emperor and his civil servants will vanish.'[18]

For *Kürdistan*, the Kurdish question was one of education, development and maladministration, issues that could be resolved with the removal of sultanic despotism and the establishment of constitutional order. Ultimately, *Kürdistan*'s four-year run ended in 1902. Yet, *Kürdistan*'s ideological configuration, which might best be described as an Ottomanism with Kurdish colours, remained a potent political force amongst the Kurdish intellectual and professional elite, reaching its apogee in the aftermath of the 1908 Constitutional Revolution.

'Loyalists' and 'Nationalists': The Constitutional Revolution and the Rise of the Kurdish Movement, 1908–1914

In July 1908, a mutiny in the Balkans led by officers with links to the CUP succeeded in forcing the empire's ageing despot to restore the constitution and call elections for a new parliament. Sultan Abdülhamid II was able to remain on the throne until the abortive counter-revolution of April 1909, but the power of the imperial autocracy was broken. His successor, Sultan Mehmed V (r. 1909–18), was largely a ceremonial figure.

Yet, despite the hopes of the revolutionaries and their supporters, the restoration of constitutional rule after over three decades of absolutism did not usher in a new era of stability and harmony. The decade that followed the revolution was, instead, a period of growing conflict and disruption. At home, the CUP, at first hesitant to take hold of the reins of power, became

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17 Abdurrahman Bedirhan, 'Ahrar-ı Osmaniye Kongresi', *Kürdistan* (14 April 1902).
18 Abdurrahman Bedirhan, 'Kurdistanê de Esasa Nîfaqê', *Kürdistan* (14 March 1902).

increasingly intolerant of opposition, establishing de facto one-party rule following a coup in January 1913.

The new regime also faced an increasingly hostile international atmosphere. In 1911, Italy launched a successful invasion of the empire's last holding in North Africa, Tripolitania. A year later, the empire suffered an even greater humiliation, when an alliance of Balkan powers – Greece, Bulgaria, Romania Serbia and Montenegro – successfully drove the Ottomans from most of what remained of their European empire. Thus, on the eve of the First World War, not only had the Ottoman state suffered enormous social and political dislocation, but its continued viability was increasingly in question.

This period also was one critical to the development of the Kurdish question, with Kurdish leaders taking advantage of the relative openness that followed the revolution to organize, lobby and agitate for Kurdish rights. During the Hamidian era, manifestations of Kurdish national consciousness had been largely sporadic and lacked any coherent organizational base. In contrast, the years between the Constitutional Revolution in July 1908 and Ottoman entry into the First World War in October 1914 witnessed the birth of an increasingly organized and active Kurdish movement. However, Kurdish activists remained divided, between 'loyalists', who sought to advance Kurdish interests within the framework of a constitutional Ottoman Empire, and a growing band of 'nationalists', who strove to separate the Kurdish element from the ailing imperium.

Like many members of the Ottoman Empire's cosmopolitan governing class, leading Ottoman-Kurdish intellectuals and professionals welcomed the fall of the autocracy. The religious reformer Said-i Kürdi (Nursi) declared the new constitutionalist order to have been 'born like a miracle' (Nursî, 2007: 420), while Dr Abdullah Cevdet proclaimed the revolution a 'festival of freedom' and called on all citizens to 'embrace one another' (Bayrak, 1994: 14–18).[19] Such attitudes are perhaps unsurprising, given the role played by figures such as Dr Abdullah Cevdet in the opposition to the autocracy. Moreover, a number of high-profile Kurds, who had been associated with the opposition, were now closely associated with the new CUP-backed regime. Mehmed Şerif Pasha became CUP's Pangaltı branch president (Tunaya, 2007: 253), while Sheikh Abdülkadir received an appointment to the Ottoman parliament's upper house.[20] Indeed, Babanzade İsmail Hakkı – whose opposition to the autocracy

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19 Abdullah Cevdet, 'Bir Hutbe: Hemşehrilerime' (1909), reproduced in Bayrak (1994: 14–18).
20 'Meclis-i Ayan ve Seyyid Abdülkadir Efendi', *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (19 December 1908).

had resulted in his expulsion from the Civil Service College – became a regular contributor to the CUP daily *Tanin* (*Echo*) and was elected to parliament as the member for Baghdad on a CUP ticket.[21]

However, a commitment to the new constitutional order and participation in Ottoman politics did not preclude an interest in the Kurdish question. Indeed, Istanbul, home to an estimated 30,000 Kurds, served the focal point of a new wave of Kurdish activism. Within the first year of constitutional rule, a number of Kurdish-orientated newspapers were published (or sought permission to publish) in the imperial capital, including a revived version of *Kürdistan* (*Kurdistan*), *Şark ve Kürdistan* (*The East and Kurdistan*) and Said-i Kürdi's *Marifet ve İttihad-ı Akrad* (*The Skills and Unity of the Kurds*). However, the most significant development was the formation, in September 1908, of the Kurdish Society for Mutual Aid and Progress (Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti, KTTC). Although remaining active for less than a year, the association sponsored two publications, *Kürd* (*The Kurd*) and *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (*The Kurdish Mutual Aid and Progress Gazette*), in addition to gaining affiliates across Ottoman Kurdistan. Both Sheikh Abdülkadir and Babanzade İsmail Hakkı were heavily involved in the organization, with the former serving as its president and the latter contributing to its publications. Other leading Kurdish public figures were also involved, including Said-i Kürdi and lawyer and leading member of the Bedirhan clan Emin Ali Bedirhan.

In terms of its understanding of the issues facing the Kurdish community, the KTTC remained largely consistent with the views expressed in *Kürdistan* ten years earlier. Articles in the organization's publications focused on subjects such as education, with one article urging readers to 'open schools and endeavour to make your children learn about science'.[22] Said-i Kürdi emphasized the need to spread both 'the religious sciences' as well as those 'sciences necessary for civilization' amongst the Kurdish tribes.[23] Social and economic development was also a focus of the KTTC's bulletin, with one article calling for public works and the settlement of nomadic populations in order to liberate the tribes from 'squalor and disorganisation' and transform the economic fortunes of Mesopotamia.[24] One author neatly summarized the

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21 'Meclis-i Ayan ve Seyyid Abdülkadir Efendi', *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (19 December 1908). See also Mayak (2010: 421).
22 Halil Hayali, 'Weten û İttîfaqa Kurmanca', *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (23 January 1909).
23 Said-i Kürdi, 'Kürtler Neye Muhtaç', *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (12 December 1908).
24 Ahmed Cemil, 'Osmanlı Amerikası ve Saadet-i Müstakbele-i Aşâir', *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5 December 1908).

significance of social and economic development to the KTTC, noting that, while the Kurds were a 'decent, loyal and capable people (*qewm*)', this was of little use if they lacked 'education or art' and commerce was 'a rarity amongst them'.[25]

Also, in a similar manner to *Kürdistan*, the KTTC saw the solution to the Kurdish question in constitutionalism. In fact, the KTTC charter committed the organization to introduce the constitution to Kurds who were not aware of it, as well as defending constitutional government and the parliament, which it described as establishing the primary 'paths of religion and progress' (Tunaya, 2007: 435). Thus, the KTTC embraced the new regime, proclaiming that it supported all the elements 'within the political programme published by the CUP' which would 'assure the good health and progress of the [Ottoman] homeland'.[26] As one writer put it, 'thanks to the efforts of the CUP . . . all the woes of tyranny from which we had suffered disappeared.'[27]

However, not all Kurds were enthusiastic about the revolution. In Kurdish-inhabited provinces, the response of locals to the restoration of the constitutional rule was mixed. For some, such as Pirinçizade Arif, a Diyarbakir notable who had led anti-government protests, the revolution was an opportunity. He was elected to parliament, a position that passed to his son following his death in 1909. However, for others, in particular, those tribal leaders and religious dignitaries who had enjoyed a close relationship with the palace, the revolution was a cause for uncertainty. Within a year of the autocracy's fall, two of the Hamidian regime's most high-profile protégés, Milli İbrahim Pasha and Sheikh Said Berzinci, were dead. More broadly, the revolution brought to the fore questions concerning the privileges enjoyed by the Hamidiye tribes, as well as the issue of lands seized from Armenian cultivators by Kurdish tribesmen.

This apprehension was evident in the more ambiguous stance of the KTTC's provincial affiliates towards the new regime. In December 1908, a ceremony to mark the opening of a branch of the organization in Diyarbakir culminated in the participants 'entering the Mosque [where] they took [an] oath to be faithful to the "Sheriat-i-Mohammed" or Islamic law and to the Padishah'.[28] In Van, the British vice-consul described the KTTC's local affiliate as being made up of 'Kurdish Aghas of bad character',

25 Seyyah Ahmed Şevki, 'Gelî Walatîya', *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (12 December 1908).
26 Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti, 'Cemiyetin Beyannamesi', *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5 December 1908).
27 Halil Hayali, 'Weten û Îttîfaqa Kirmanca', *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (23 January 1909).
28 NA FO 195/3317, Beirut, 3 January 1909.

complemented by 'tithe farmers, selefji [religious scholars] and others, who fear for their illicit gains under the new regime'.[29] The anti-constitutionalist orientation of the Bitlis KTTC was even more pronounced. Indeed, its members openly welcomed the abortive April 1909 counter-revolution, which led to its suppression once the CUP returned to power.[30] While the leadership of the KTTC in Istanbul welcomed the new order, those fearful about the implications of the revolution for both ideological and material reasons dominated the KTTC membership in the provinces (Klein, 2007: 141). In short, the organization encompassed two distinct factions of the nascent Kurdish movement, a pro-constitutionalist faction in Istanbul and an anti-constitutionalist faction in the provinces.

For the Kurdish activists in the capital, the period between July 1908 and April 1909 marked the apogee of an optimistic Kurdish Ottomanism. Subsequently, the movement in the capital developed within the context of growing political discord, international crisis and creeping authoritarianism. For instance, following the suppression of the 1909 counter-revolution, the CUP-backed government placed new restrictions on 'national clubs', which were forbidden from engaging in political issues.

Nevertheless, Kurdish activism in the capital continued. In 1910, a group of leading Kurdish public figures including Emin Ali Bedirhan, Said-i Kürdi, Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, Abdurrahman Bedirhan and Dr Abdullah Cevdet, as well as a number of Kurdish parliamentarians, founded the Kurdish Society for the Propagation of Education (Kürd Neşr-i Maarif Cemiyeti, KNMC).[31] The organization's objectives were to promote learning amongst the Kurdish community 'who, out of all the sons of the [Ottoman] homeland, had been the most deprived of the blessings of education' (Tunaya, 2009: 224). To this end, it established a model school in Istanbul, Kürd Meşrutiyet Mektebi (The Kurdish Constitutional School), under the directorship of Abdurrahman Bedirhan.[32] The Ottomanist framing of the project even earned a government subsidy thanks to Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, who, in the spring of 1911, briefly served as Minister of Public Instruction (Malmîsanij, 2009: 86). Yet, according to one account, the organization ultimately fell victim to the CUP's growing paranoia concerning activism amongst non-Turkish minorities and was forced to close down.[33]

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29 NA FO 195/2284, Van, 3 November 1908.   30 NA FO 195/3317, Bitlis, 8 June 1909.
31 BOA DH.MUİ 60/2, 31 January 1910; and BOA DH.MUİ, 12 September 1910. See also Tunaya (2009: 224).
32 BOA İ.MF 15/1328/M-1, 24 January 1910.
33 *Kürdistan*, no. 5 (31 October 1917), reproduced in Malmîsanij (2009: 90–1).

Growing factionalism also stymied Kurdish activism. On one hand, family rivalries between the Bedirhans and the followers of Sheikh Abdülkadir undermined the KTTC (Silopi, 1991: 28). On the other, intensifying divisions between the CUP and the 'liberal' opposition also served to heighten splits amongst Ottoman-Kurdish elites. Some figures, including Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, Sheikh Abdülkadir Efendi and Said-i Kürdi, remained loyal to the CUP. However, others joined the opposition. In April 1912, for instance, a member of the Bedirhan clan, Hasan Bedirhan, was elected to parliament in Siirt on an opposition ticket, a result the CUP overturned at 'the point of a bayonet'.[34] Indeed, Mehmed Şerif Pasha took a leading role in the anti-CUP activity, fleeing the empire and joining the Paris-based opposition, where the CUP attempted to assassinate him in 1914.[35]

Despite such divisions, Kurdish activism in the capital continued, albeit with a new generation at its head. In August 1912, a small group of students, for the most part, enrolled at the Agricultural College in Istanbul, established a new Kurdish association, the Kurdish Students' 'Hope' Society (Kürd Talebe 'Hêvî' Cemiyeti, Hêvî). This new organization obtained official permission from the government to proceed and successfully recruited some 200 members (Ekrem, 1992: 20). It remained active until the autumn of 1914, after which the Ottoman government conscripted much of its membership into the military. Between August 1912 and September 1914, it published three journals, *Rojê Kurd* (*Kurdish Day*), *Hetawê Kurd* (*Kurdish Sun*) and *Yekbûn* (*Unity*). In addition, it distributed the Baghdad-based newspaper *Bangê Kurd* (*Kurdish Call*).[36] The organization also founded a legal advice centre for Istanbul's poor,[37] as well as an affiliate amongst Kurdish students studying in Lausanne.

In some ways, Hêvî was radical when compared to its precursors. It pushed discussions into new areas, including land reform,[38] women's rights[39] and alphabet reform.[40] Moreover, the association described the advancement of the Kurdish community as being 'the burden of the Kurdish youth'.[41] Yet, even for these young activists, the Kurdish question remained primarily a question

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34 NA FO 195/2405, Bitlis, 27 May 1912.

35 'Sherif Pasha Attacked in Paris', *The Times* (15 January 1914); and 'Turk Slain in Paris as He Tries Murder', *The New York Times* (15 January 1914).

36 'Bangê Kurd', *Hetawê Kurd* (23 May 1914).

37 'Osmanlı Teshil-i Mesalih İdarehanesi', *Hetawê Kurd* (23 May 1914).

38 Hüseyin Sükrü, 'Arazi Meselesi', *Rojê Kurd* (12 September 1913).

39 Ergani Madenli, 'Kürtlerde Kadın Meselesi', *Rojê Kurd* (12 September 1913).

40 Temin-i Maarif ve Islah-ı Huruf Cemiyeti, '(Temin-i Maarif ve Islah-ı Huruf) Cemiyet-i Muhteremiyesi tarafından varid olmuştur: Rojê Kurd Mecmuası Müdiriyet-i Aliyesine', *Rojê Kurd* (19 July 1913).

41 'Gaye, Meslek', *Rojê Kurd* (19 June 1913).

of social, economic and educational development.[42] At least in public, they remained committed to the continuation of the Ottoman polity. As one article posited, their 'pure and lofty intentions' were simply to prepare the Kurdish community for 'service and self-sacrifice to the supreme caliphate and the exalted sultanate'.[43]

However, in the provinces, Kurdish discontent continued to simmer. In 1910, the Hamidiye were reorganized as the 'Tribal Light Cavalry Regiments' (Aşiret Hafif Süvari Alayları), losing many of the privileges they had enjoyed under the *ancien regime* (Klein, 2002: 217–31). The fate of Armenian lands taken by Kurdish tribesmen also continued to be a source of uncertainty. As one tribal chief bitterly complained to Said-i Kürdi in 1910, 'the Armenians became lords and we remained wretched' (Nursî, 2007: 442). Despite such dramatic declarations, government promises to restore stolen lands came to nothing. In fact, following the 1913 coup d'état, Ottoman policy shifted from a strategy of delaying the issue to one in which it made no commitments at all (Polatel, 2015: 169–83). Yet, military defeat in the Balkans revived European interest in the Armenian question leading in February 1914 to Ottoman acquiescence to European administration of the so-called 'six provinces' (*vilayat-ı sitte*): Van, Erzurum, Mamuretülaziz, Bitlis, Diyarbakir and Sivas – along with the province of Trabzon (Heller, 1980: 3–26, Kaligian, 2009: 201–29). Once again, a mood of uncertainty prevailed.

Writing in 1914, the British vice-consul in Van noted that little had been done to 'improve the material conditions' in Kurdish-inhabited regions, while taxes were 'more rigorously collected than under the old regime'. At the same time, since the revolution, he suggested that there had been 'no continuity of policy', the result being that the Kurds viewed the CUP regime with 'mistrust and suspicion'.[44] Ottoman defeats in North Africa and the Balkans only served to heighten these antagonisms as many Kurdish tribesmen saw these losses as divine judgement on the 'godless' Young Turks (Safrastian, 1948: 72). This growing gulf between the government and the Kurdish tribes facilitated an upswing in nationalistic political agitation. Seyid Ali of Hizan circulated pamphlets declaring Siirt, Van and Bitlis Kurdish property (Reynolds, 2011a: 60), while Sheikh Abdüsselam Barzani and Nur Mehmed of Dohuk forwarded a petition calling for both cultural and administrative autonomy for five of the vilayet of Mosul's Kurdish-inhabited sub-districts (McDowall, 1997: 98).

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42 Kürd Talebe Hêvî Cemiyeti, 'Kürd Talebe Hêvî Cemiyeti'nin Beyannamesidir', *Hetawê Kurd* (23 May 1914).

43 'Hêvî ve Genclik', *Hetawê Kurd* (3 July 1914).   44 NA FO 195/2458, Van, 14 February 1914.

There were more organized and systematic efforts to unify the Kurds against the authorities. By April 1913, members of the Bedirhan clan, including Bedirhani Hüseyin Kenan Pasha, Yusuf Kamil Bedirhan and the deposed Siirt deputy, Hasan Bedirhan, had won significant tribal support in the districts surrounding their ancestral homeland of Cizre-Bohtan[45] and were calling upon the Kurds 'to rise in revolt to protect their national existence'.[46] Hüseyin Pasha's death in August 1913 put an end to plans for an insurrection; however, Hasan Bedirhan remained in the region, stockpiling weapons and calling for the Kurds to be granted greater administrative autonomy, including the right to use taxes locally and for officials in the region to be proficient in Kurdish.[47]

However, the objectives of another member of the Bedirhan clan, Abdürrezzak Bedirhan, were more radical. It had been his actions that caused his family's dramatic fall from grace in 1906. This was due to his implication in the murder of Istanbul's governor, Ridvan Pasha. As a result, while following the revolution, the rest of his family received pardons, he remained in prison until 1910 (Bedirhan, 2000: 18–19). Following his release, he returned to Istanbul, after which he made for Russian-controlled Tiflis, where he hoped to find support for his political ambitions (Bedirhan, 2000: 25).

These ambitions consisted of not merely winning autonomy from the Ottomans but separating Kurdistan from the empire entirely. In the years leading up to the First World War, Abdürrezzak Bedirhan worked continuously to build up a revolutionary movement. In May 1912, he established İrşad (Correct Guidance), which he hoped would provide an organizational framework through which to unite the Kurdish tribes and lay the foundations for a general revolt. The organization aimed to build a 70,000-strong militia and established secret committees in Van, Diyarbakır, Urfa and other Kurdish-inhabited districts. Abdürrezzak Bedirhan also recognized the need to secure foreign support and looked towards Russia (Akgül, 1995: 28–9). Hayreddin Berazi, İrşad's vice-president and a former gendarme captain, even proposed that Kurdistan might join the Russian Empire with a status similar to that of the various principalities of Germany (Reynolds, 2011a: 60). Eager to undermine Ottoman influence amongst the Kurds, Russian officials supported Abdürrezak Bedirhan, offering him protection and supplying him with weapons.[48] However, in September 1913, the Ottoman authorities killed

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45 NA FO 195/2449, Diyarbakır, 22 April 1913. 46 NA FO 195/2449, Van, 4 April 1913.
47 NA FO 195/2458, Diyarbakır, 14 May 1914.
48 NA FO 195/2405, Erzurum, 5 November 1912.

Hayreddin Berazi, leading to the collapse of the organization (Akgül, 1995: 28–9; Bedirhan, 2000: 35).

Despite this setback, Abdürrezzak Bedirhan continued his activities, albeit with a change of focus. The Russian authorities had allowed him to operate in the Iranian Kurdish town of Khoy, which they had occupied in the chaotic aftermath of the 1906 Persian Constitutional Revolution. There he established Gehandîn (Upbringing/Deliverance), an educational association that, in October 1913, opened a Kurdish school in the town (Celîl, 2008: 85–91). Although providing education in Kurdish, the school also taught Russian language, literature and law (Ahmad, 1994: 61; Celîl, 2000: 127–32, 2008: 81–5; Reynolds, 2011b: 435–7). Unlike the Kurdish enlightenment in Istanbul, which saw Kurdish educational improvement as linked to the broader quest for imperial salvation, Abdürrezzak Bedirhan desired Kurdish enlightenment under Russian auspices, which would serve to sever connections with the Ottoman order.

However, with Istanbul consenting to European control over the 'six provinces' in early 1914 and Kurdish apprehension over potential Armenian ascendancy heightened, he redoubled his efforts to raise Kurdistan in revolt. Unfortunately for Abdürrezzak Bedirhan, in March, Ottoman authorities captured one of his agents, Molla Selim, a founding member of İrşad, and follower Seyid Ali of Hizan.[49] This triggered a planned revolt early, with Molla Selim and his allies marching on Bitlis, before all the elements were in place. By early April, government forces had dispersed the rebels and Molla Selim was forced to take refuge in the Russian consulate. Abdürrezzak Bedirhan and his allies were in Russia and thus unable to do much to support the uprising (Reynolds, 2011a: 80).

Nevertheless, the harsh response of the Ottoman government, which executed fifteen of the rebellion's ringleaders including Seyid Ali, aroused 'surprise and consternation' amongst the Kurds due to the fact that the government had 'enforced the death sentence on men enjoying such veneration and respect as the sheikhs'.[50] Discontent continued throughout the summer of 1914, with Abdürrezzak Bedirhan and his supporters attempting to use the execution of Seyid Ali and his confederates to 'awaken feelings of revenge' amongst the local population (Aydoğan, 2005: 187). In summation, while Abdürrezzak Bedirhan's 'nationalists' were by no means in a dominant position in Kurdistan on the eve of the First World War, Ottoman power

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49 NA FO 195/2458, Van, 4 April 1914. See also Akgül (1995: 29).
50 NA FO 195/2458, Van, 16 May 1914.

over the region was looking increasingly tenuous, resting primarily on fear and violence.

War, Genocide and Imperial Collapse: The Battle for Kurdistan and the Road to Lausanne, 1914–1923

In the summer of 1914, the Kurdish movement consisted of two distinct factions. In Istanbul, the Ottoman-Kurdish elite remained largely committed to the continuation of the Ottoman polity, although attitudes towards the CUP were more complex than they had been six years earlier. In contrast, across Ottoman Kurdistan, growing discontent directed at the CUP was increasingly taking on a nationalistic quality, a fact that Abdürrezzak Bedirhan and his Russian backers endeavoured to exploit. However, the outbreak of the First World War and Ottoman entry into the war in October 1914 on the side of Germany and its allies had a profound impact on the trajectory of both the Kurdish movement and, more generally, Kurdish society.

The immediate impact was that Ottoman Kurdistan became a battlefield over which the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia struggled. In the winter of 1914/15, Ottoman Minister of War Enver Pasha launched an offensive into the Russian Caucasus, an offensive that ended in disaster at Sarikamiş. The Ottoman defeat allowed Russia to seize the initiative and over the course of the following year, Russian forces pushed deep into Ottoman Kurdistan. By early 1916, they had seized a vast swath of Ottoman territory including the cities of Van and Erzurum. In February 1916, the Russians also took the strategically important town of Bitlis, although a force led by Turkey's future president, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), was able to retake it, as well as the neighbouring town of Muş in the summer. Yet, overall, the military situation for the Ottomans remained dire (McMeekin, 2016: 277–83, 311; Reynolds, 2011a: 134–8).

Not only was the war fought over Kurdish-inhabited regions, but a considerable proportion of the Ottoman army on the empire's eastern front was also made up of Kurds, most notably in the Third and Fourth Armies as part of the Ottoman Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Army Corps. Kurdish tribal leaders also supplied irregular forces to fight both on the eastern front against the Russians and on the Mesopotamian front against the British (Ahmad, 1994: 90; Zeki, 2011: 239–40). The cost was great. Indeed, Muhammad Emin Zeki Bey, a former Ottoman officer and military historian, estimated some 300,000 Kurds lost their lives as a result of the conflict (Zeki, 2011: 240).

Despite the setbacks the Ottoman military faced, the war also provided the CUP with an opportunity to 'solve' the Armenian question permanently. More specifically, it provided cover for the annihilation of the Ottoman Armenians, whom CUP leaders had come to see as an existential threat to the continued existence of the Ottoman Empire. Beginning in the aftermath of the Ottoman defeat at Sarikamiş, leading members of the CUP, most notably Minister of the Interior Talat Pasha and a leading member of the Ottoman intelligence services, Dr Bahaddin Şakir, orchestrated an escalating campaign of genocide consisting of deportations, rape and mass murder (Akçam, 2012, 2018; Rogan, 2015: 159–84; Suny, Göcek and Naimark, 2011). The result was, as one of the leading scholars on the topic noted, the 'death and/or murder of more than one million individuals' (Akçam, 2018: 2).

Many Kurds participated in the campaign of violence. In June 1915, Erzincan's Kurds plundered the town's Armenian quarter (Üngör and Polatel, 2013: 70); the same month a mob in Diyarbakir, made up of local militiamen and Kurdish villagers, raped and massacred the local Armenians leaving the bodies in the open to rot (Üngör, 2015: 253–4). Kurdish violence was by no means universal with some Kurdish Muslims protecting their Christian Armenian neighbour from violence. Because of this, Bahaddin Şakir issued a directive stipulating that those who had protected Armenians were to be executed and their residences burned (Akçam, 2018: 16). Nevertheless, some Kurds ignored the government's demands. Indeed, following the end of the war, the British forces in Aleppo received a delegation of Kurdish sheikhs who requested that the Europeans take charge of the Armenian refugees they had been sheltering (Keeling, 1924: 209–10).

At the same time, in some cases the Kurds were the objects of violence: in 1916 Russian forces allied with Armenian volunteers seized the town of Rawanduz, engaging in massacre and pillage (Hay, 2008: 137–8). However, the Kurdish population was also subject to violence from the Ottoman government. From the Balkan Wars onwards, the CUP leadership increasingly shifted towards a policy of 'nationalization' and, more specifically, Turkification. While the primary targets of such policies were non-Muslims, these policies were also directed against non-Turkish Muslim populations such as the Kurds. In this context, the Armenian genocide constituted part of a broader policy of demographic engineering. These policies aimed to both strengthen the Turkish character of the empire's Anatolian core and expand the zone of Turkish settlement into regions such as Kurdistan (Ülker, 2005: 613–36).

In 1916, not long after the removal of the Armenians, the CUP administration issued an ordinance on settlement and refugees, which made an explicit distinction between Kurds and Turks. Kurdish tribes fleeing the fighting were to be disarmed, broken up into groups of no more than 300 and sent to settlement zones in central Anatolia. Tribal groups were to be dispersed into regions where they would not make up more than 5 per cent of the population and were separated from their sheikhs, mollas and tribal leaders. Furthermore, unlike Turkish communities, the government denied Kurds permission to return to their home districts (Akçam, 2018: 40–8; Bozkurt, 2014: 823–37; Dündar, 2008: 409–19). The objective was clear; dilute the Kurdish element in the empire's eastern provinces, while at the same time assimilating the Kurds by dispersing them in small groups in predominantly Turkish regions.

In addition to the enormous disruption visited upon Kurdish society, the war also signalled a rupture in Kurdish activism. Despite growing tensions in Ottoman politics and the increasingly authoritarian nature of the CUP, most of the leading lights of the Kurdish movement's Ottomanist wing remained loyal to the empire with many serving with distinction in the armed forces. However, for Abdürrezzak Bedirhan and the nationalists, the war was an opportunity. Hoping to bring the Kurds to their side, the Russians appointed him 'Sultan of the Tribes' (Sultan ul-aşair) and provided him with arms and money. Abdürrezzak Bedirhan also issued a manifesto calling on the Kurds to support Russia in order to drive the 'Rumis' (Turks) from Kurdistan. As the war progressed, tensions flared up between Abdürrezzak Bedirhan and elements of the Russian army. There was conflict also between pro-Russian Kurds and pro-Russian Armenians. Consequently, the Russian military moved to disband both its Kurdish and Armenian auxiliaries. Despite this, Abdurrezzak Bey maintained good relations with the Russians, who appointed him governor of Erzurum, following the fall of the city, while Kamil Bedirhan briefly received the governorship of Bitlis (Reynolds, 2011b: 446–8).

These appointments marked a high point for the nationalists. In March 1917, the Tsarist regime was overthrown, and, in November, the Bolsheviks came to power. The result was the collapse of the Russian army. With the assistance of Abdürrezzak Bedirhan, the new Bolshevik administration attempted to lay the foundations of a Kurdish Soviet Republic, but these efforts met with little success (Henning, 2018: 321). Ottoman forces were able to reoccupy much of the territory they had lost over the preceding years, eventually pushing into the Caucasus. It was there, in the summer of 1918, that they captured and executed

Abdurrezzak Bedirhan. However, the Ottomans' moment of triumph was short-lived and, following successful British offensives in Syria and Mesopotamia, the empire was forced to surrender at the end of October. The war was over.

The Ottoman capitulation and the collapse of the CUP government prompted a new wave of Kurdish political mobilization. Significantly, as was the case prior to the outbreak of the war, Istanbul served as the centre of Kurdish activism. In November 1918, leading Kurdish public figures in the capital established a new organization, the Society for the Betterment of Kurdistan (Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti, KTC), with Sheikh Abdülkadir serving as its president and Emin Ali Bedirhan its vice-president. However, unlike the optimistic atmosphere that followed the restoration of constitutional rule in which the KTTC had been established a decade earlier, the KTC was formed within the context of military defeat and imperial collapse. It was also a period in which the principle of national self-determination, in both its Leninist and Wilsonian iterations, was increasingly shaping the actions of the peacemakers who met in Paris. Moreover, American President Woodrow Wilson's famous Fourteen Points explicitly called for the 'nationalities which are now under Turkish rule' to be assured 'an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development' (Torr, 2002: 78). The implication was that the principle of nationality would fashion the post-Ottoman Middle East.

Still, even at this late stage, the KTC's attitude towards Kurdish self-rule was ambiguous. The organization's constitution committed it to defend the Kurds' 'general interests', which was later changed to 'the Kurdish nation's political, economic and social interests and historical and racial/ethnic rights' (Tunaya, 2009: 215, 222). In January 1919, the KTC's leadership approached British officials requesting self-government over a geographically defined region, calling on 'the British Government to kindly undertake the protection of their rights and interests, and to help them in their path to civilization and Progress'.[51]

For some elements within the KTC, this did not necessarily preclude a continued connection with the Ottoman state. Moreover, KTC President Sheikh Abdülkadir continued to play an active role in Ottoman politics, serving as the Head of the Council of State between March and May 1919. He continued publicly to insist that the Kurds remained loyal to the sultan-caliph and that they only sought a limited form of provincial autonomy.[52]

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51 NA FO 608/95, Constantinople, 2 January 1919.
52 Seyyid Abdülkadir, 'Kürdler ve Osmanlılık', İkdam (27 February 1920), reproduced in Göldaş (1991: 282–3). See also 'Leaders in the Turkish Senate Greatly Worried over Kurdish Independence', Leavenworth Times (6 March 1920).

However, for others, the objective was complete independence. Indeed, in a KTC general meeting, there were clashes between Sheikh Abdülkadir, who called for continued co-operation with the Turks, and younger members, who demanded that 'a decision be taken for the declaration of independence of Kurdistan' (Dersimi, 1996: 131). In early 1920, the continued ambiguity of the KTC leadership towards the question of independence and discontent amongst those advocating a more forthright nationalist policy culminated in the formation of a rival organization under the leadership of Emin Ali Bedirhan, the Kurdish Society of Social Organization (Kürd Teşkilat-i İçtimaiye Cemiyeti, KTİC).

Despite these divisions, Kurdish activists in Istanbul continued to lobby the Great Powers for recognition of Kurdish national rights. Kurdish activists were particularly keen to secure the support of Great Britain, which emerged as the Middle East's leading imperial power following the end of the war. This included not only petitioning British representatives in the Ottoman capital but also securing representation at the Paris Peace Talks. To this end, the KTC appointed Mehmed Şerif Pasha to represent Kurdish interests in Europe. As the KTC's chief diplomat, Mehmed Şerif Pasha put forward Kurdish territorial claims in a 1919 pamphlet entitled *Memorandum sur les revendications du peuple kurde* and sought to assure the British of the Kurds' amenability to their interests.[53] At the same time, he entered into negotiations with the Armenian delegation, which culminated in November 1919 with an agreement regarding the border between Kurdistan and Armenia.[54]

In the short term, the Kurds' lobbying efforts met with success. In August 1920, the Ottoman government signed the Treaty of Sèvres, which included provisions pertaining to the future of Ottoman Kurdistan. Article 62 of the treaty outlined a scheme for a commission, appointed by Britain, France and Italy, to draft 'a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia . . . and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia'. Article 64 further stipulated that

> if within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from

53 See NA FO 608/95, Paris, 14 February 1919; NA FO 371/4192, Constantinople, 29 June 1919; NA FO 371/5067, Constantinople, 3 February 1920; NA FO 371/5067, Turkey, 1 March 1920.
54 NA FO 371/4193, Paris, 20 November 1919.

Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them (Hurewitz, 1979: 82).

The form of self-rule outlined in Sèvres was certainly limited as it was contingent on the will of Britain, France and Italy. Moreover, the geographic extent of Kurdistan was far less than that which had been desired by Kurdish nationalists. The treaty envisaged the inclusion – either in whole or in part – of Kurdish-populated provinces such as Erzurum, Van and Bitlis – in a projected Armenian state (Hurewitz, 1979: 83), while Kurdish-inhabited regions west of the Euphrates, such as Dersim, were to remain in Turkish hands. Moreover, the fate of the Kurdish districts in the British-controlled Mosul vilayet remained unclear. Article 64 was somewhat ambiguous stating that were Turkey to renounce its rights over the territories outlined in Article 62, no objection would 'be raised by the Principal Allied Powers to the voluntary adhesion to such an independent Kurdish State of the Kurds inhabiting that part of Kurdistan which has hitherto been included in the Mosul vilayet' (Hurewitz, 1979: 82).

Thus, although the form of Kurdish self-rule outlined in Sèvres was limited, it constituted an explicit recognition that the Kurds were a national community with, at least, the potential for self-rule. Yet, despite this recognition, Kurdish activists were unable to secure even this truncated form of Kurdish statehood. A number of scholars have emphasized divisions within the Kurdish movement as accounting for the failure of Kurdish activists to secure Kurdish independence following the end of the First World War. Certainly, rivalries and factionalism served to undermine the strength of Kurdish nationalism (Kirişci and Winrow, 1997: 67–88; Özoğlu, 2004: 87–120; Strohmeier, 2003: 57–74). Indeed, European officials were often dismissive of those claiming to represent the interests of the Kurdish community. As one British official remarked in March 1920, not only was there a lack of a Kurdish opinion in 'the sense of coherent public opinion . . . The few educated Kurds outside Kurdistan holding separatist ideas are very apt to exaggerate their own influence and importance.'[55]

However, the emergence of resistance to efforts to partition Anatolia, which included Greek efforts to take control of İzmir and its hinterlands as well as plans for an Armenian state on Ottoman territory, also served to impede attempts to establish a Kurdish state. This resistance movement, which was led by elements of the military and former CUP operatives,

55 NA FO 371/5068, Constantinople, 29 March 1920.

coalesced under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) in 1919 and, ultimately, rejected the authority of the Istanbul-based government, which signed the Treaty of Sèvres. The Kemalists established a rival government based at Ankara in early 1920 and were soon able to establish their authority over those Kurdish-inhabited provinces that remained in Ottoman hands at the end of the war.

In a general sense, Kemalists were adept at mobilizing Ottomanist political discourse, presenting their movement as one seeking to protect the caliphate against non-Muslim interlopers (Soleimani, 2016a: 256–65). More specifically, in the east, they were able to appeal to Muslim opinion by strongly opposing Armenian territorial claims in eastern Anatolia, emphasizing that they would never allow the formation of an Armenian state on Muslim Kurdish lands.[56] Mehmed Şerif Pasha's agreement with the Armenian delegation over an Armenian–Kurdish boundary only served to reinforce Kemalist propaganda and, when news of the agreement reached Kurdistan, Kurdish tribal leaders across the region were swift to denounce it (McDowall, 1997: 133). In short, the Kemalists were able deftly to manipulate Kurdish fears of Armenian ascendancy, fears that Kurdish participation in the genocidal campaigns of the First World War only exacerbated. Indeed, reflecting on the early years of the Kemalist struggle, Mustafa Kemal's commander in the east, Kazim Karabekir, recalled that he was able to 'immunize' the Kurds from Kurdish nationalism by portraying those advocating Kurdish statehood as seeking to 'turn Kurdistan into Armenia' (Karabekir, 1990: 113).

Writing in late 1919, Major Edward Noel, a pro-Kurdish British officer who toured Kurdistan, confirmed this, observing that the Kemalist movement was making 'frantic efforts to win over the Kurds to the nationalist cause by pan Islamic and anti-Christian propaganda'. However, Major Noel also noted that 'no organization for counter propaganda exists. The Kurdish intelligentsia, the majority of whom have been banished from their country, are debarred from all communications with the compatriots.'[57] In other words, repression also played a significant role in frustrating the activities of Kurdish nationalists. For example, an October 1919 petition forwarded to the British complained that, in addition to Diyarbakir, the KTC branch in Siirt had been 'forcibly suppressed by the Turkish Authorities' and that 'at Urfa the Turkish authorities are determined not to permit the opening of a branch of the said Society there.'[58] The result was that, by the time Sèvres was signed in

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56 See 'Şarki Anadolu Türki ile Kürdi tefrik edilemez', *Al-Bayrak* (20 October 1919).
57 NA FO 371/4193, London, 18 December 1919.
58 NA FO 371/4193, Constantinople, 16 October 1919.

August 1920, Kurdish activists had already been effectively excluded from Kurdistan. There were subsequent attempts to mobilize against Kemalist forces, most notably in the Koçgiri region, where, in the spring of 1921, Kurdish nationalists attempted to exploit anti-Kemalist unrest. However, Kemalist forces were able to put down the rebellion with ease (Strohmeier, 2003: 71–2).

Broader geopolitical circumstances also served to undermine the position of Kurdish nationalists. Most obviously, Russia's defeat worked against the nationalist cause. The secret treaty between Britain and France of 1916, the so-called Sykes-Picot Agreement, had envisioned

> that the region of Kurdistan to the south of Van and of Bitlis between Mush, Sert, the course of the Tigris, Jezireh-ben-Omer, the crest-line of the mountains which dominate Amadia, and the region of Merga Var, shall be ceded to Russia; and that starting from the region of Merga Var (Hurewitz, 1979: 64).

Hence, the Russian withdrawal from the war in 1917 ensured Ottoman dominance across much of Kurdistan. More importantly, in years immediately following the end of the war, Russia's new Bolshevik government reversed the anti-Turkish policy that had defined Russian attitudes towards the Ottomans for decades (Reynolds, 2011a: 255–9). Indeed, the hostility of Great Britain towards both Ankara and Moscow only served to drive 'the Turkish nationalists and the Bolsheviks into each other's arms' (Gökay, 2007: 2). Consequently, Kurdish nationalists lost a powerful potential patron in the critical years between 1918 and 1923.

At the same time, Great Britain had little interest in the creation of a Kurdish state. Its Middle Eastern interests centred upon the Ottoman vilayets of Baghdad and Basra. British forces had occupied both these provinces during the war and, following the fall of Baghdad in 1917, they had advanced into the vilayet of Mosul. In fact, the British military offensive in Mesopotamia continued even after the Ottoman capitulation on 30 October 1918, culminating in the capture of Mosul on 10 November 1918. The result was the de facto partition of Ottoman Kurdistan with Mosul's Kurdish-inhabited sub-districts coming under British control. Initially, the British appointed Sheikh Said Berzenci's son, Sheikh Mahmud Berzenci, governor of the Kurdish-populated district of Suleimani, but his efforts to assert his independence resulted in conflict. In May 1919, British forces marched on the city and removed him from office (Eskander, 2000: 139–63).

Although under the terms of the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, Britain had agreed to French control of Mosul, its inclusion of the vilayet within the

British sphere became a priority. While France was quick to renounce its claim, the Kemalists continued to lay claim to the province, until a League of Nations Commission peacefully resolved the issue in 1926. Faced with Kemalist efforts to retake Mosul, the British again experimented with Kurdish self-rule, allowing Sheikh Mahmud to return to Suleimani as governor in 1922. However, again, his efforts to assert Kurdish independence and establish himself as the leader of a Kurdish 'kingdom' resulted in a second, unsuccessful, revolt (McDowall, 1997: 159–63; Olson, 1989: 60–3). Ultimately, it was Britain's desire to stabilize its control over Mesopotamia that came to drive policy in 'Southern Kurdistan'. Thus, Britain's activities in the region generally served to limit Kurdish self-rule, while pushing for the incorporation of Mosul and its Kurdish sub-districts into the newly formed Kingdom of Iraq (Eskander, 2001: 153–80).

Britain's Kurdish troubles meant that it had little incentive to intervene beyond the boundaries of the vilayet of Mosul in order to enforce the pathway to Kurdish self-rule outlined in Sèvres. Moreover, British officials were quick to recognize that the Constantinople-based government was powerless. Consequently, Britain increasingly looked towards the Ankara-based nationalists, who had defeated both Armenia (1920) and Greece (1920–2), to become the de facto government of Ottoman Anatolia. As Ankara gained both power and diplomatic recognition, including from Britain's ally France, Britain increasingly looked to appease the Kemalists as part of a broader strategy to isolate Bolshevik Russia (Ali, 1997: 521–34). This culminated in the Mudanya Armistice in October 1922, which opened the way for a new round of negotiations. The outcome of these negotiations was the conclusion of a new treaty, the Treaty of Lausanne, signed in July 1923.

This new agreement between the Kemalist government in Ankara and Great Britain superseded Sèvres. It proved to be disastrous for Kurdish nationalists. Not only did Lausanne contain no reference to Kurdish self-rule, but it also did not even reference the Kurds as a distinctive community. It did commit the government of Turkey 'to assure full and complete protection of life and liberty to all inhabitants of Turkey without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race or religion'. It also included a provision that stated:

> No restrictions shall be imposed on the free use by any Turkish national of any language in private intercourse, in commerce, religion, in the press, or in publications of any kind or at public meetings. Notwithstanding the existence of the official language, adequate facilities shall be given to Turkish

nationals of non-Turkish speech for the oral use of their own language before
the Courts (Hurewitz, 1979: 122).

However, the new Kemalist government soon reneged on these commit-
ments, launching a wave of anti-Kurdish policies (McDowall, 1997: 191–2).
The hostility of the new regime forced many Kurdish activists in Istanbul into
exile (Strohmeier, 2003: 74). Indeed, Tensions between Kurds and the new
'Republic of Turkey' were only exasperated following Mustafa Kemal's
abolition of the caliphate in 1924, which was not only the last vestige of the
Ottoman order but had also served as a symbolic bond between Kurds and
Turks. At the same time, Great Britain had little appetite to enforce these
provisions. Its priority was to resolve the disputed status of Mosul, which the
League of Nations Commission ultimately awarded to the British-backed
Kingdom of Iraq in 1926 (Hurewitz, 1979: 143–6). The partition of Ottoman
Kurdistan was complete and the Middle East's Kurdish population found
themselves in a radically different set of geopolitical circumstances.

Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter, some of the considerable differences in terms of
the context pertaining to Kurdish activism in the late and post-imperial period
were highlighted. However, while it is important to avoid teleological narra-
tives or anachronistic readings of history, some of the patterns that define
Kurdish activism in the late imperial period can also be discerned in later eras.

Firstly, one might note the differences between urban and professional
elites and 'traditional' notable classes, the sheikhs and aghas. While both
these elements of the Kurdish cause have often taken up the national cause,
they have often done so for different reasons. Indeed, in this regard, the
politics of nationality have often served as a framework for co-operation
between different elements of the Kurdish elite. This is most evident in the
case of Abdürrezzak Bedirhan's efforts to build a movement that brought
together disgruntled Kurdish intellectuals and professionals with restive
Kurdish tribal leaders. Indeed, although unsuccessful in shaking off
Ottoman rule, this political formula prefigured the structure of Kurdish
movements in the post-imperial period, ranging from the Sheikh Said
Revolt of 1925 in Turkey to Molla Mustafa Barzani's insurrection against
Baghdad in the 1960s and 1970s.

Secondly, the diversity of opinion within the Kurdish movement relating to
the ultimate objectives of Kurdish activism and how the Kurdish question might

best be resolved has also persisted as a feature of Kurdish politics. While over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Kurdish activists have at the time sought national independence, such as in the case of the Iraqi Kurdish Independence Referendum in 2017, this has not always been the case. Kurdish political and intellectual leaders have forwarded various potential formulas for the resolution of the Kurdish issue that have fallen short of the nationalist ideal of a Kurdish nation-state. This has ranged from cultural rights to forms of territorial autonomy, as well as encompassing 'post-national' approaches such as 'Democratic Confederalism' as proposed by the Kurdish movement in Syria.

Finally, we might note the importance of international conditions in shaping the Kurdish movement. Just as the interests and actions of the Great Powers, especially in the aftermath of the First World War, gravitated against the formation of a Kurdish state, so too have the attitudes of the governments in the post-imperial period. The Kurdish movements in both Iraq and Syria, despite significant gains, remain extremely vulnerable to international circumstances. Indeed, it is perhaps this factor, the geopolitical, that is the most significant in understanding why those seeking Kurdish statehood in both the late and post-imperial period have ultimately failed in their objectives.

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Religious Narrations of the Kurdish Nation during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

KAMAL SOLEIMANI

In this chapter, I shall shed some light on the fusion of Islam and nationalism in modern Kurdish history. To do so, I will selectively discuss the views and activities of some influential late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Kurdish religio-political figures. The discussions here will by no means be exhaustive. Here, my aim is to demonstrate that Kurdish religiosity, similarly to that of other Muslim communities, accommodated their nationalism. In other words, major Kurdish religious figures were open to, supported and often worked for some forms of Kurdish self-rule: they imagined Kurds as a distinct nation and therefore declared and defended the legitimacy of Kurdish political demands and rights. In a sense, the latter point defines nationalism since the right to self-rule is principally based on self-referentiality. I argue that the defining point of religious nationalism is that the modern religious agent creates / imagines the boundaries of her collective self within those of the national.

   In recent years, a body of scholarship has emerged that revisits the nexus between nationalism and Islam among Arabs, Kurds and Turks (Datla, 2013; Devji, 2013; Houston, 2003). This emerging literature questions the dominant orthodoxy that for so long has posited an essential connection between nationalism and secularism and by the same token has insisted on the latency of both Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms. Now, especially the idea that Muslim Arab revivalists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were also nationalists or were influenced by nationalism has gained greater credence. I for one have argued that the life and thought of religious agents operating within the paradigm of nationalism, combined with their inability to conceive any political system beyond the nation-state, turns them into agents of nationalism (Soleimani, 2016a, 2017a). The modern state is inherently a nationalist one. Thus, modern religious agents' perception of the nation-state as a self-evident entity should be seen as enough of a reason to

view modern religious agents as *homines nationales*: they are nationalists since they blithely and banally espouse either dominant or dominated forms of nationalism (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991: 93; Wodak et al., 1999). In the Kurdish case, Kurdish religious agents, too, either consciously or unconsciously, evinced nationalism or endorsed Kurdish nationalism or the nationalisms of their Others. This is the case even with those religious figures who believed in the unity of the *umma* and hope for the revival of an Islamic caliphate.

Seemingly universalist religious concepts such as *umma* and caliphate lack coherent historical significations. They have been understood and put into practice differently in different times and places. Yet in the modern era, with the rise of anti-colonialism both Muslim activists and the Ottoman state tried to refashion and reappropriate those concepts to serve their anti-colonial agendas, not to mention that such agendas were not per se free from the influence of modern nationalism. Through such reappropriations, however, modern Muslims have tried to redefine terms like *umma* as a unified political entity, in ways resembling the modern concept of nation vis-à-vis the Christian West.

In this chapter, I will mainly focus on the views and thoughts of Sheikh Ubeydullah of Nehri and the nineteenth-century Kurdish Istanbul intellectuals Said Nursi and Sheikh Said of Piran in passing. Rather than attending to the chronologies of events, I will mostly focus on the discursive aspects of the influence of these figures as well as the nature of their religious-nationalist utterances.

Kurdish Nationalism and Islam

Kurdish nationalism, being the nationalism of a dominated community, is an understudied one. Additionally, its initial sparks become visible in unexpected centres like Sufi lodges and traditional Kurdish *medrese* (pl. *medâris*, seminaries) and under unconventional leaders like sheikhs and mollas (clergymen), which makes it a manifestly distinctive form of nationalism. Therefore, the views regarding the initial stages of Kurdish nationalism could be highly incongruent. There is a somewhat extensive debate on when Kurdish nationalism began (Vali, 2003). However, some Europeans who visited Kurdistan in the latter part of the nineteenth century testify to the existence of Kurdish nationalism. One of these European travellers was Frederick Millingen, who visited and worked in Kurdistan in the late 1860s. Millingen contended that he could 'affirm, without fear of exaggerating, that

the sentiment of nationality and the love of independence are as deeply rooted in the heart of the Koords [*sic*] as in that of any other nation' (Millingen, 1870: 213).

This brief account shows that Millingen himself might not only have encountered debates dealing with more than the mere possibility of the existence of Kurdish nationalism; he also found it to be comparable with that of other nations. Millingen himself seems convinced of the intensity and prevalence of Kurdish nationalist sentiment to the degree that it did not appear different from that of other nations. He tries to substantiate his claim by making use of a kind of ethnographic account. Accordingly, he asserts that his conclusion was based on his 'personal experience, having been thrown into contact with many of the chiefs of the *Koordish national movements*' (Millingen, 1870: 213, emphasis added). Millingen neither specifies any 'Kurdish national movements' nor defines it. However, even if he was conflating some Kurdish political activities with a movement, the existence of such activities, far from signifying an absence of Kurdish nationalism, suggests that the early stages of Kurdish political history have been understudied.

Even if the paucity of evidence prevents us from offering a detailed discussion on the existence of Kurdish nationalism in the 1870s, we encounter a different situation in the 1880s. The late 1870s witnessed the rise of Sheikh Ubeydullah, whose nationalism is unquestionable (Soleimani, 2016a, 2016b). Yet Sheikh Ubeydullah's activities were not only some efforts by one charismatic Kurdish leader. Undoubtedly, his uprising – discussed below – reflected a certain degree of the prevalence of Kurdish nationalism. The greatest testimony to such a prevalence of nationalist sentiments is a series of articles that were written by some Kurdish intellectuals at the time and published in the newspaper *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* (*Interpreter of Truth*) (Soleimani, 2016c). In 1880, perhaps for the first time, some pro-Kurdish articles appeared in the Ottoman newspapers. This was taking place due to the perilous circumstances in which the ruling Ottomans found themselves. As they were alarmed by the prospect of an independent Armenia and further disintegration of the empire as a possible outcome of the Berlin Treaty, some Ottoman circles allowed for Kurdish voices, who were still called 'beasts' or 'tailed Kurds', to be heard.[1]

Kurdish intellectuals clearly expressed their agitation at the Ottoman elite's portrayal of Kurds as brigands and savages. Their articles began to

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1 Or 'caudate Kurds'.

appear in the Ottoman press as the implementation of Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty became more and more likely. As shown in the Kurdish elite's reaction to Armenian nationalism, these articles demonstrated their collective self-perception. Therefore, the articles are critical of the portrayal of Kurds in the Ottoman, Armenian and European presses (*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 589). In these articles, the use of the phrases 'patriotism' (*ḥamiyet-i milliye*) and 'ethnic zeal' (*ʿaṣabiyet-i ḳavmiye*) are not infrequent as the writers aim at rewriting their own nation's history while portraying their Others, such as the Armenians, in degrading ways. Hence one of the writers claims that, aside from those residing in Istanbul, the Armenians were many times more backwards than the Kurds (*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 589). One of the writers who is introduced as a Kurdish notable (*muʿteberan-ı Kürdʿden*) starts his article by emphasizing the Kurds' disadvantaged position and their lack of access to any newspapers, including Turkish ones. Without stating why they did not previously have access to Turkish newspapers, the writer asserts that 'now, we have become more aware of our plight due to lack of access to the press, even to the Turkish press' (*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 586).

In many ways these writings reflect a significant degree of ethnic self-consciousness and glorification to an extent that one article, signed by a certain 'A. T.', states that even the nomadic Kurds greatly value education and the arts, that they are extremely eloquent and poetic and that 'we can say that no other *nation* (*millet*) has arrived at such an honourable stage' (*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 586, emphasis added). Hence these writers made efforts to legitimize Kurdish political demands through their narration of a distinct Kurdish nation. A. T.'s writing exemplifies how the nationalist elite in the Kurdish community, too, portrayed their Others as nothing more than 'subhuman' (*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 586). As Wodak and colleagues correctly point out, in a more general context, these types of 'shared *emotional dispositions* relate to the attitudes members of a given ingroup have towards other members of that ingroup, as well as those towards members of an out-group' (Wodak et al., 1999: 4, emphasis added). The writings of A. T. and others also exhibit the racialist views of the time, which draw links between race, language and progress in a simplistic, connect-the-dots fashion. Therefore, these stubbornly depict Kurdish as one of the most developed languages and almost as the unique lingua franca of previous centuries' Islamic scholars of cosmopolitan regions like Arab Iraq and the Levant (*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 592).

These Kurdish intellectuals venerated traditional religious scholarship and conflated it with their ethnic self-glorification. Their writings celebrate

Kurdish contributions to the past Islamic scientific and scholarly achieve-ments. Moreover, they portray Kurdish religious scholars as superior to the likes of Voltaire, claiming that if he were resurrected from his grave and confronted with Kurdish scholars, he would have involuntarily bowed down to them (*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 592). This type of 'classicization' (Chatterjee, 1995) by late nineteenth-century Kurdish intellectuals is not limited to the role that Kurds might have had in Islamic civilization; they Kurdicize the Islamic influence on European civilization as well. In their attempts at classicization, a religious hero like Salah al-Din is reappropriated. This way, one of the most significant Christian–Muslim encounters of the High Middle Ages is repre-sented as Kurds' *ethnic* triumph in history. Also, the non-Kurdish share in this particular experience is potently obscured. As Wodak and colleagues state, in a slightly different context, such narrations of the past lend 'meaning and security to monotonous existence and ties everyday life to a "national des-tiny"' (Wodak et al., 1999: 24).

Furthermore, these writers present Kurdistan's geographical unity as eternal, as expected, while simultaneously eliding Kurdistan's contemporan-eous membership in the Ottoman Empire as entirely 'forgotten'.[2] For this reason, their claims should not be seen as simple reactions or as limited to Armenian–Kurdish communal contestations. Despite its paucity, this litera-ture reveals a situation that is more than merely the Muslims' reaction to Armenian nationalism. For instance, in a piece on Kurdistan's geography, in addition to telling the general story of the 'personified' nation's 'uniquely identifiable' historical presence, traceable back to 'mythical times', the Kurdish nation's geographical borders, too, are believed to have 'remained ever separated'.

In these writings, the Kurds are usually portrayed with a distinctly primor-dial nationality and are divorced from all other Muslims, including the Ottoman Turks. The classicization is not limited to ignoring Kurdish Muslims' experience, shared with and central to the Ottoman domains. Not only the Kurds are imagined as an ethnically distinct community, but Kurdistan also comes to be imagined as a geographically distinguishable, neatly separable place from its environs for millennia. In the light of such distinctiveness of both the nation and its land, these writers reinterpreted the Ottoman Empire's expansion into Kurdistan from the sixteenth century (*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 595). Accordingly, they regard this historical event as one in which 'Kurds voluntarily accepted the Ottoman rule' through

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2 For more on the importance of nationalist forgetting see Renan (1990).

which these intellectuals hope to retroject the birth of an imagined Kurdish state into the distant past. Their 'imagined community', here, rather than just being one among multiple imperial domains, has turned their assemblage thus imagined into a partner for unity in the past and imbued them with a singular historical agency with an existence independent of the empire.

The language used by these nineteenth-century Kurdish intellectuals for self-distinction or self-referentiality to a certain extent explains the socio-historical backdrop of the 1880 Sheikh Ubeydullah uprising. The writers are very explicit about their political agenda. One of them declares that 'we too will be declaring our plans for the future and we will prove that we have one' (*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 591). It is clear that their narration of the past aimed to legitimize their contemporary political claims and demands. They, therefore, welcome Sheikh Ubeydullah's political endeavours. The sheikh's endeavours, first and foremost, were a sign of the vibrancy of the Kurds. Therefore, his leadership offered them a great hope, and served as a warning to any who assumed that 'the land of Kurdistan lacks any vigour and excitement (*heyecandan ʿari*), and as you [all] know, the question of Sheikh Ubeydullah Efendi is still an enduring one' (*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 591). The last remark not only indicates that these intellectuals were hopeful about the sheikh's uprising but also supported his strategic planning for Kurdish self-rule.

Ubeydullah's Borderland Islam

Many scholars of Kurdish studies have claimed that 'the uprising of Sheikh Ubaidullah . . . cannot be explained as motivated by nationalist feelings' (Henning, 2018: 4). My contention is that various historical documents leave no room for the fact that Sheikh Ubeydullah was a religious nationalist. Elsewhere, I have shown that claims to the contrary are unpersuasive (Soleimani, 2016a). The most significant evidence can be found in the sheikh's own poetic oeuvre, which until recently was unavailable to scholars, an issue which I will further discuss below (Soleimani, 2016b).

Ubeydullah was a third-generation Kurdish Naqshbandi sheikh who resided in the village of Nehri on the Ottoman–Qajar border (Castor-Thompson, 2014; Gaborieau, Popovic and Zarcone, 1990; Legall, 2004; Mardin, 1989). He was a dynamic figure, and at the age of forty, Ubeydullah was already known for having immense regional religious influence with a wide range of followers. After an 1882 interview with the sheikh, the American missionary Henry Otis Dwight described him as 'a religious

chief [who] represents some two million devoted adherents in Kourdistan [sic], besides counting many of the Pashas of this city [i.e. Istanbul] as his disciples' (ABCFM). According to Robert Speer, the biographer of Dr Cochran, an American missionary, 'the sheikh was the third-most highly respected person in the Sunni world after the Ottoman caliph and the sharif of Mecca' (Speer, 1911: 74). British Parliamentary Papers give a glimpse of the sheikh's relation with the populace, reporting that he was 'entertaining daily at his gates from 500 to 1000 visitors of all classes. His character stands out in clear contrast with that seen in Persian officials as well as Turks' (Parliamentary Papers, 1881). About the sheikh's character, we are told that he was simple and he or his son would personally see 'all who come to them on business, no matter how trivial it may be . . . From early morning to late at night he [was] employed in the interest of . . . his people' (Parliamentary Papers, 1881).

Various historical records point to the sheikh's restiveness, especially in the last few years preceding his 1880 uprising. Official and missionary documents, his personal letters and his poetry reveal the sheikh's great interest in political matters and in the fate of Kurdish people. It was particularly the latter that occupied his mind during and after the Russo–Ottoman War (1877–8). Ateş rightly asserts that 'Sheikh Ubeidullah of Nehri represented the spirit of the age and his movement was a distillation of the cultural and political trends of this time period and should be studied as such' (Ateş, 2014: 740). His participation in the war gave the sheikh the opportunity to regard the Kurdo–Ottoman relations in a new light. It also led the sheikh to conclude that the role that Islam played in the life of these communities was not identical. During the war, the sheikh began to think of the Ottoman Empire's weakness in its fight against Russia as well as its treatment of the Kurds as signs of the Ottoman Turks' 'un-Islamic' tendencies. The sheikh was certain that the calamities that had befallen the Ottoman state were the result of their abandonment of Islamic laws and traditions and the spread of a great deal of moral laxity (bar kabāʾer moṡerr). To him, the Ottoman state was too corrupt to be reformed even by a powerful and well-meaning ruler (tabdil in hayʾat) (Nehri, 2000: 108).

To the sheikh, the Kurds were a pious Muslim nation that needed to separate their path from that of Persian and Ottoman Turks. Both in his interview with Dwight and in his poetry, the sheikh accuses these nations of the lack of a 'true and heartfelt religiosity' (ABCFM). In his Masnavi, the sheikh claims that, unlike the Kurds, the Ottoman Turks were only nominally religious and were bereft of any religious feeling (Nehri, 2000: 111). In his

discussion with Dwight, the sheikh emphasized the issue of Kurdish piety and insinuated that missionaries were uninformed about Kurdish religiosity: 'You think us [the Kurds as] bad men because you see the Mahometanism of the Turks. That is in no respect to Mahometanism. Among [pious] Kurds there [are] no licentious men, no dishonesty, no lying' (ABCFM). He tries to convince Dwight that Kurdish Islam was distinct from that of their Others. Kurds supposedly lived an 'authentic Islam', which manifested in their 'virtuous life' and 'moral superiority'. The sheikh compared 'the Islam of pious Kurds' with 'true Christianity' of which he thought the missionaries were the embodiments. He thus 'went on and his face lighted up with a smile, "We seek what you seek"' (ABCFM). Being under the influence of the renowned thirteenth-century Persian Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi, the sheikh did not much concern himself with the ritualist aspect of Islam as he believed that monotheistic religions were merely different manifestations of a single truth. Dwight's account evidences aspects of Ubeydullah's religious views and his utter indifference towards religious formalism and consequential theological differences. This seems to be consistent with the views found in the sheikh's poetic work (Nehri, 2000: 129). The sheikh was acutely interested in the practical outcome of the religious agent's devotion and the ways in which heartfelt beliefs are reflected in one's action rather than one's words (Soleimani, 2018). Therefore, he tells Dwight, that essentially, *'We seek what you seek.'*

The sheikh viewed the Ottoman army's mistreatment of Kurdish fighters during the Russo–Ottoman War as evidence of the irreligiosity of the Ottomans and the piety of the Kurds. He, therefore, concluded that the Kurds needed a state of their own, one under which the Kurds could advance their 'pious life' free from Ottoman Turkish and Persian oppression. The sheikh's assertions about the Kurdish war experience with the Ottomans demonstrates his great disappointment with the entire Ottoman state apparatus. Also, it helps to view the incompatibility of the appropriation of Islam by the centre and by the periphery, which in turn signified ethnic and communal differences as well. Particularly, in his *Masnavi*, Ubeydullah laments bitterly about Kurdish life under the Persians and Turks in a way that entirely corresponds to his interview with Dwight (ABCFM). The sheikh's lamentation is particularly important when he compares the contemporary Kurdish situation, in the late nineteenth century, with the golden age of Sayyed Taha's time.

Sayyed Taha, Ubeydullah's grandfather, was enormously influential in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century: 'In the 1840s, when Emir Bedirhan

ruled over the Emirate of Bohtan, Sheikh Taha of Nehri . . . yielded considerable influence over the emir' (Henning, 2018: 138). The sheikh believed that, due to destruction of the Kurdish principalities in the mid-nineteenth century, the Kurdistan of his day had lost its vibrancy. This situation, he claimed, had left the people 'to roam in the valleys of ignorance' (Nehri, 2000: 129). To the sheikh, in the previous decades, Kurdistan was the beacon of knowledge. Spiritually, all of this had been replaced with lawlessness and ignorance. He also argued that Turks and Persians used Kurdish ignorance and lawlessness to their advantage. The sheikh accused them of using the existing situation to perpetuate and legitimize their oppressive presence. That is why despite his defeat in 1880, Ubeydullah had not given up on another uprising against the states.

The sheikh was of the opinion that a Kurdish state was the one and only solution to the sorry state of the Kurds. Their community, unlike those of the Persians and the Ottoman Turks, retained 'true religious belief' (Nehri, 2000: 109, 129). To him, the Kurds were exceptional in their 'mastery in art and sophistication (*fażl u honar*): No one could be as talented as the Kurds if they were properly educated' (Nehri, 2000: 121). Yet, for their proper education, a state was necessary. Kurdish education was certainly the sheikh's highest priority in his pursuit of Kurdish independence. Dwight recounts that when asked what his people most needed, the sheikh pointed to the poor conditions of Kurdish education and the Ottoman government's unwillingness to support them. He insisted that something has to be 'done for the enlightenment of *his benighted people*' (ABCFM, emphasis added). The sheikh tells Dwight that education, books and schools were the primary needs of the Kurds. According to Dwight, Ubeydullah did not differentiate between religious and secular education in terms of their values. He introduced Kurds to Dwight as a nation that was composed of 'seekers of knowledge'.

The sheikh made his collective self-referentiality accord with his ethnicity. He concurrently tried to make the political congruent with the religio-national. Sheikh Ubeydullah was adamant about the 'purity' of Kurdish Islam, in which once again this religious purity was directly related to Kurdish ethnic character that could only be found on the initial bearer of the Islamic message, namely, Arabs. So, he claimed that

> Kurds are icons of generosity
> 'd' in Kurd stands for *dīn* (religiosity)
> 'k' stands for *kamāl* and perfection

'r' for *rushd*, spiritual maturation
Only in Kurds can you find
All these virtues combined (Nehri, 2000: 120–1).

This is one of the reasons why his imagined state, regardless of the degree of its adherence to Islamic laws, was a Kurdish state. This is how the sheikh tried to make the national and political congruent and in the process he turned his Islam into an exclusionary one: an Islam that was regional and had an exclusively ethnic character, which, revealingly, accommodated non-Muslim cohabitants of Kurdistan.

Instances of Kurdish Religious Nationalism in the Twentieth Century

The influence of Sheikh Ubeydullah on later generations of Kurdish political figures has not been studied. This is the case perhaps due to the extraordinary conditions of the region, widespread illiteracy among the earlier generations of Kurds and the prohibition of Kurdish historiography. However, there is important evidence signifying the widespread influence of the sheikh's 1880 uprising. For instance, the Ottoman state records clearly show that Sheikh Ubeydullah's uprising had a meaningful effect on the mutual perception of the state and the Kurds. Accordingly, almost a decade after the revolt, a major rift between the state and the Kurds continued to exist. Such a rift forced the Ottoman state to come up with a new strategy to bridge the existing gulf and therefore resorted to using non-Turkic languages to address Kurdish people.[3] The fact that Turkish was seen as a language inaccessible to the Kurds in and of itself is indicative of the distance between Turkish and Kurdish society. On the contrary, Arabic, along with Kurdish and Persian, was one of the most commonly taught languages in Kurdish *medâris*. Therefore, the state, following its treatment of Sheikh Ubeydullah, used Arabic in the hope of propagating new policies and establishing new ties with the Kurds. It was against this background that the Hamidian regime adopted a series of new political strategies aiming at greater Kurdish integration with the state. Abdülhamid II himself had declared that 'We can now tolerate within our borders those who share our religion and [therefore] are one of us. We need to *strengthen the Turkish element in Anatolia* and *give priority to making the Kurds part of us*'

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3 BOA: Dosya No: 1428; Gömlek No: 43; Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 09/L/1304 (Hicrî) [01.07.1887]; BOA: Dosya No: 1432; Gömlek No: 109; Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 25/L/1304 (Hicrî) [17.07.1887]. See also BOA: Dosya No: 1453; Gömlek No: 73; Fon Kodu: DH. MKT. Tarih: 20/M/1305 (Hicrî) [08.10.1887].

(Heper, 2007: 47, emphasis added). As part of 'strengthen[ing] the Turkish element in Anatolia' under the guise of religion, the state created ʿaşiret mektebleri (tribal schools), as well as the Hamidiye Cavalry, which aimed at assimilation in Kurdistan after the sheikh's uprising (Akpınar and Rogan, 1997; Klein, 2016).

Anti-central Sunni Kurdish politics, however, continued to be expressed in various forms. The Ottoman records reveal a great deal of state concern about some prominent Kurdish religious figures and families. This was particularly the case when it came to Barzani and Berzenji sheikhs, whose activities were usually referred to in the state records as ifsad (dissemination of vice) and şekavet (brigandry). The Ottoman records, for instance, indicates that the state officials accused Berzenji sheikhs of anti-state activities in the last decade of the nineteenth century.[4] In 1908, Sheikh Abdul Salam Barzani made certain political demands, which once more illustrated the persistence of religious nationalism among the Kurds. Barzani insisted on the need for a type of religio-political autonomy, emphasizing the particularity of Shafiʿism (the Islamic legal school to which the Sunni Kurds adhered) and the ethnic character of the majority of the inhabitants of Kurdistan. Barzani's prospective autonomy would have made Kurdish an official language, required that taxes levied in Kurdistan be spent for the Kurds and that Kurdish affairs be administered by the Kurds themselves in accordance with the Shafiʿi school of jurisprudence[5] (Barzani, 1997: 25–7; Olson, 1991: 16–17). The Barzani sheikh's discontent with Ottoman policy did not end until he was executed by the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress/ İttiḥad ve Teraḳḳi Cemʿiyeti) government in 1914 (Barzani, 1997: 1, 27).

Sheikh Ubeydullah's uprising was one of a series of acts of resistance which exerted a broad and lasting influence on Kurdish religious figures in the post-1880 period. Notably, some members of his family played an essential role in the later stages of Kurdish politics and were instrumental in the persistence of his vision. Ubeydullah's younger son, Sheikh Abdülkadir, who in the post-Hamidian era became the speaker of the Ottoman senate, emerged as an indispensable figure in Kurdish politics and remained active until he was executed at the hands of Kemalists in 1925.[6] The same Sheikh

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4 Cf. BOA: Dosya No: 426; Gömlek No: 65; Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 22/Ra/1313 (Hicrî) [12.09.1895].
5 The great majority of Sunni Kurds are followers of the Shafiʿi school of Islamic law, and the Turks follow the Hanafi school.
6 Abdülkadir was well known and respected in all regions of Kurdistan. The following poem by a poet from Saujbolaq (now Mahabad) illustrates this reality as the poet describes Sheikh Abdülkadir as someone 'from [Kurdish] notability and yet so

Abdülkadir,[7] after being exiled in 1882, led a group in disseminating anti-Hamidian caliphate propaganda from Mecca. This group of Kurds renewed their pledge to the struggle against the Ottoman Empire as a means of championing their desire for an independent Kurdistan.[8] Also, the grandson of Ubeydullah, Sayyed Taha, worked as the most influential advisor to Isma'il Agha Simko, who led a Kurdish movement from 1918 to 1928 in east Kurdistan (in Iran); Simko's movement clearly demonstrates Ubeydullah's Kurdish-Sunni politics.

Simko's regional rule drastically increased ethnic and religious divisions. Even though Simko was not a religious figure, his movement was instrumental in the conflation of Kurdish ethnicity with Sunniness, which has not received any significant attention in the writings on this subject. In the Lake Urmia region and in Simko's time, those who were called 'Ajam were generally understood to be non-Kurdish Shia. The overwhelming majority of Kurds in the region were Sunni. Sunniness and Kurdishness were nearly synonymous. The binary of Sunni Kurds vs Iranians and non-Kurdish Shia was the operative dichotomy employed by both Kurds and non-Kurds. Thus, occasionally, for both sides, Kurdishness connoted non-Iranianness, with the crucial difference being the Sunni–Shiite divide (Soleimani, 2017b).

To come back to Ubeydullah's family, Sheikh Abdülkadir, in the post-Hamidian era, continued to play an active role in politics and led a well-known Kurdish group. Notably, considering the precariousness of the Kurdish situation in a post-WWI environment, Abdülkadir formulated Kurdish political demands in the form of a request for autonomy rather than independence, usually in public. In secret, however, he and his nephew Sayyed Taha were known for their unyielding efforts to garner British support for the creation of an independent Kurdish state (Zelyut, 2010: 59). British records reveal that 'in Constantinople 'Abdul Qadir of Shamdinan was ready to assume ... the hypothetical post of the ruler of a united Kurdistan.'[9] Abdülkadir seemed to have been hopeful that if the Kurds were able to make their case, the League of Nations might recognize their right to an independent state (Teqi and Teqi, 1988:

concerned about the welfare of the helpless Kurds. He is the sea of *'irfan* (gnosis) and the very manifestation of altruism', *Jîn* (no. 7, 1918).

7 After WWI, Abdülkadir, Nursi and a few other like-minded figures co-founded a Kurdish political organization.

8 Cf. BOA: Dosya No: 14; Gömlek No: 50; Fon Kodu: Y.PRK.ASK. Tarih: 17/Za/1299 (Hicrî) [30.09.1882]; BOA: Dosya No: 1946; Gömlek No: 91; Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 13/L/1309 (Hicrî) [10.05.1892]. See also BOA: Dosya No: 1971; Gömlek No: 47; Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 18/Z/1309 (Hicrî) [13.07.1892].

9 Parliamentary Papers online ([Cmd. 1061] 1920), 70.

13–15). So, in his secret meetings with Western delegates, Abdülkadir, along with Bediüzzaman Said Nursi and others, seems to have been more comfortable expressing the real Kurdish desire (Cemil Paşa, 1991: 7).

The Two Saids' Religious Nationalism

Ubeydullah's family was respected and known by and connected to people throughout Kurdistan. Chief among them was Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (1876–1960) and Sheikh Said of Piran (d. 1926). Nursi, along with Sheikh Abdülkadir, was one of the founders of the Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan (Kürdistan Teʿali Cemʿiyeti) (Mardin, 1989: 90). Due to his influence on modern Islamic thought in Turkey, Nursi's works and thoughts have been the subject of various interpretations. To Turkish Islamists, any discussion of Nursi's nationalism is absurd.

Originally, Nursi was from the Kurdish city of Van, and he visited Istanbul for the first time in 1907. In that visit, he asked the sultan to allow education in the Kurdish language. The sultan responded to Nursi by sending him to a mental hospital. Turkish nationalist historiographical works[10] try to downplay Nursi's efforts for the inclusion of the Kurdish language in the educational system. They also strive to obscure his ethnically based demands. As such, M. Hakan Yavuz, a Turkish nationalist writer, tells us that 'In an effort to bring the natural sciences together with Islamic sciences, Nursi visited Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1907 to seek his support for a university in Van. However, the sultan *rejected his proposal to reconcile scientific reasoning with Islam*' (Yavuz, 2003: 152–3, emphasis added). Actually, Abdülhamid II was not against modern sciences or modern education; on the contrary, his regime was instrumental in expanding modern education in the empire (Fortna, 2002). Additionally, Kurdish education and instruction remained a lifelong cause for Said Nursi.

Nursi was very hopeful that the demise of the Hamidian regime would inaugurate an era in which new schools would change the fate of the Kurds, whom he called *benim cinsimdan*, of *my own kind* (Nursi, 2009). He believed that the 1908 Constitutional Revolution would result in great things and best of all would be Kurdish education. Thus, he declared that 'in a short time schools will be built in places where there ha[d] never been any, and the old

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10 It should be pointed out that some Kurdish writers have also tried to obscure the nationalist aspect of Nursi's thought. For instance, Malmîsanij's work on Nursi exemplifies such an attempt. Malmîsanij deems religion as inherently inimical to Kurdish nationalist tendencies (cf. Malmîsanij, 1991: 12–14).

schools will be replaced by modern ones in [every region of Kurdistan]' (Nursi, 2009: 30). Nursi believed that lack of literacy among Kurds had resulted in their exploitation by those who 'were once inferior'[11] to them.[12] Therefore, he greatly admired those who devoted their lives to the Kurdish language and its improvement.

Nursi claimed that devotion to the improvement of one's mother tongue mirrored '*the dissemination of national sentiment*' (Nursi, 2009: 191). To him, there was a direct connection between the prevalence of national sentiment and the veneration of the mother tongue. Therefore, he paid great attention to the idea of 'collective self' and the role of the mother tongue in the healthy formation of such a 'self'. In an effort to describe the value of the Kurdish language, Nursi went as far as equating one's degree of self-worth to *one's devotion to one's mother tongue*. In his pre-1925 works, Nursi reproached the Kurds for their negligence of 'the mother tongue' and warned that

> what is called the mother tongue (*lisan-ı maderzad denilen*) is the *mirror of dissemination* of national sentiment, the *water* for livelihood, and the *tree* cultivated from *literary toil*, the measurement of knowledge, and the criterion of [the collective level of] *self-worth* and *perfection* . . . . I make my lamentation known to you for letting [our] language, which is a sign of *civilization, become dry, deficient, and dysfunctional* (Nursi, 2009: 191, emphasis added).

Nursi also expressed his unease about writing in non-Kurdish languages. He seems to have felt that the languages of his writing, namely, Arabic and Turkish, were foreign to his imagination and were cruelly marring his articulation. So, he states 'I think in Kurdish, but I have to write in Arabic and Turkish through which the typewriter of my imagination is unable to communicate my thought' (Nursi, 2009: 439). Nursi, as a Kurd, sensed a type of alienation from his own thoughts when he expressed them in foreign tongues.

Nursi praised those who devoted their works to the Kurdish language. A case in point is his unbound admirations for Halil Hayalî, one of the most renowned northern Kurdish literati.[13] Nursi calls Hayalî an '*exemplary patriot*'. In one of his talks, Nursi tells his audience, 'permit me to acquaint you with a model of patriotism,[14] Motkili Halil Hayalî Efendi, who in his linguistic

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11 *Ekradın madündunda bulunanlar.*
12 *Şark ve Kürdistan Gazetesi* (no. 1; 2 Dec. 1908). See also Nursi (2009: 507).
13 Hayalî was close to the father of Turkish nationalism Ziya Gökalp, before the latter's conversion to Turkish nationalism. They together even wrote a Kurdish dictionary (Cemil Paşa, 1991: 30).
14 *hamiyet-i millînin bir misali.*

efforts, as in all other patriotic fields, has played a pioneering role' (Nursi, 2009: 191). Nursi's impact was not limited to his linguistic nationalism. As stated earlier, Turkish nationalists, religious or otherwise, have turned Nursi's Kurdish nationalism into a huge point of quarrel. Due to Nursi's tremendous influence on Turkish Islamism, Islamist Turks adamantly reject attributing such credit to him. Hence, they claim that Nursi 'always condemned nationalism in his publications and speeches' (Uzer, 2011: 112). His proponents, known as Turkish Nurcus, most of whom are followers of the renowned Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen, go even further and claim that 'throughout his life, [Nursi] stood against any kind of Kurdist (Kürtçülük) activities' (Çolak, 2009: 134). Of course, Turkish nationalists' claims fly in the face of Nursi's pre-exilic writings. In my analysis, I will strictly concentrate on Nursi's pre-1925 writings since, during his exile, he was utterly deprived of communication with Kurds. Therefore, it is my contention that Nursi's general writings on Islam do not negate his nationalistic sentiments and views.

There is no doubt that Nursi held fairly complex views about the modern state and nationalism. He was particularly frightened by the practices of the CUP, which he came to see as embodying modern statecraft par excellence. However, Nursi developed these views later, in the post-WWI era, because he could not decouple modern statecraft from Western civilization and the catastrophic results of WWI (cf. Nursi, 2009: 250–4). Such observations doubtlessly made him overly reluctant to directly partake in political action. Yet, Nursi's avoidance of political action, which he exhibited in 1926 in Sheikh Said of Piran's uprising, does not negate his interest in Kurds' political fate. Despite his misgivings, Nursi admitted that the modern state could play a vital role in providing public education, health and safety. Yet, he perceived the state to be an inherently violent institution. Hence, unlike today's Islamists, he did not believe that the religiosity of the rulers alone would deter the modern state from exerting destructive power.[15]

Nursi experienced a great dilemma: he advocated what he called positive nationalism (*muṣbet milliyetcilik*)[16] – a moderate form of nationalism that defended people's collective right to statehood while avoiding *tenakür* (denial) of other nations' existence and rights (Nursi, 2009: 243). And yet,

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15 "Bediüzzaman Kürdinin Fihristi – Makasidi Ve Efkarinin Progmidir/the Programme of Bediüzzam Kurdi," 2–3.

16 As noted earlier, Nursi's own writings attest that he endorsed what he considered to be positive nationalism; namely, the type of nationalism that does not deny others' rights or existence.

for Nursi, this meant believing in the legitimacy of dismantling the Ottoman caliphate, the last Muslim sanctuary against Europe. Such ambivalences and 'double loyalties' reflected his concerns about the fate of his fellow Kurds in the face of growing Turkish nationalism as well. Therefore, in 1921, Nursi proposed an alternative form of a caliphate, one that would play merely an advisory role within Turkey and symbolized the unity of the Muslim world at large. Accordingly, Nursi advocated a system in which 'our Padişah, as a King, oversees (nazaret) thirty million people [within Turkey], and as a Caliph symbolizes the sacred bond among three hundred million [Muslims worldwide]' (Nursi, 2009: 258). Nursi did not oppose the increasing rise of Muslim nationalisms and states. On the contrary, he regarded this as the 'attainment of their own rightful sovereignty' (Nursi, 2009: 179). He seems to have thought of the emergence of Muslim nation-states as fertile ground for the realization of individual rights. Therefore, he asserted that 'every individual Muslim will obtain his rightful share in the new governing system since the idea of national sovereignty (hakimiyet-ı milliye) is gaining currency in Asia' (Nursi, 2009: 179). Given the fact that Nursi understood nationalism as a right, he could hardly stand in opposition to Kurdish nationalism; only for it. The following passage should justify this claim:

> What is called nationality 'milliyet' is [rooted in] the *depth of the past,* across the *vast deserts of the present and future* ... [It is rooted in] the Kurdish prodigies' [voices] like those of the sons of Zal, Rustam, and of Salah al-Din Ayyubi, gathered as one family in a *tent on a mountain top* ... commanding you all to turn into a single soul who embodies the unity of the nation for the sake of its protection and happiness ... [It is] with an *outburst of nationalist zeal* that [one] excels in *moral virtues* and *refines one's character* (Nursi, 2009: 189, emphasis added).

His discussion of tyranny also reveals that Nursi was deeply concerned about the fate of his fellow Kurds. He believed that, in addition to political tyranny, there also exist scholastic and communal forms of tyranny to which a constitutionalist system (meşrutiyet) was the panacea (Nursi, 2009; 189). To Nursi, constitutionalism was not merely a political system. It was rather a form of the political culture in which ideas were treated based on their inherent values and merits. He contended that without burying their 'communal tyranny' and adopting the culture of constitutionalism, Kurds could not compete with their Others. Nursi held that was a systematic correlation between the prevalence of communal tyranny or 'tribal rivalry' and a dearth of *nationalist sentiment*. He claimed that 'every nation has a spiritual pool that

constitutes and protects its national audacity, honor, and power' which altogether lay the foundations of the *national consciousness* (Nursi, 2009: 123–4). These traits 'function like a string of [threaded] beads . . .. When the *idea of nationhood is shattered . . . the nation loses its reality*' (Nursi, 2009: 123–4, emphasis added). The Kurds had to learn, warned Nursi, that some Kurdish religious and community leaders were the embodiment of tyranny. In fact, their tyranny was extremely destructive and the supreme impediment to Kurdish nationhood (Nursi, 2009: 123–4). In his 1911 piece titled *Münaẓarat* (*Debates*), Nursi claimed that the Kurds, despite their 'extraordinary bravery, zeal, and exceptional personalities', were lagging behind their neighbouring nations whose populations and power were said to be no match to that of the Kurds (Nursi, 2009: 123). The reason for their contemporary sorry state, claimed Nursi, was 'communal tyranny', the *prima causa* for the fundamental flaws in Kurdish politics (Nursi, 2009: 123).

Whenever Nursi's Kurdish nationalism is discussed there arises a stinging question: 'why did Nursi not join the 1925 uprising of his fellow Kurdish Sunni Sufi Sheikh Said against the Kemalist state?' Turkish religious nationalists particularly claim that Nursi would have adamantly opposed a nationalist uprising like the one by Sheikh Said. Moreover, they tell us that Nursi had warned Kurds not to fight against the Turkish Muslim army (similar claims being repeated by Şükran and Abu-Rabiʿ (2005: 109)). Or that Nursi believed that there were 'perhaps a hundred thousand saints in the Ottoman army' (Şükran and Abu-Rabiʿ, 2005: 109). Turkish academics Cemalettin Canlı and Yusuf Kenan Beysülen have already shown that such accounts are incoherent, sloppy and factually erroneous (Canlı and Beysülen, 2010: 298–310). These Turkish historians have rigorously scrutinized those stories and have cast light on their glaring inconsistencies. All this said, however, when it comes to answering the above question, there are a number of issues that need to be taken into consideration. First, Sheikh Said of Piran's uprising, discussed elsewhere (Soleimani, 2016a), represented another upsurge of Kurdish nationalism, religiously and politically congruent with Nursi's views about both Islam and nationalism. Second, Nursi had a close relationship with the most influential leaders of the uprising and his own brother had a leadership role in it. Third, there are evidences that even a decade later, Nursi could not hide his sympathy for the highest-ranking leader of the uprising and even in one instance, he declared taking Sheikh Said's vengeance (Çevik, 1996: 8–15). Now, the question is: why did Nursi not take an active role in the 1925 Kurdish uprising? I argue that there could be two reasons for this: one psychological and the other religious.

My contention is that despite his Kurdish nationalism, Nursi would not go as far as to fight against another Muslim community. Hence, he seems to have preferred a non-violent form of defending Kurds, notwithstanding the fact that he believed that ethnic nationalism could advance Kurdish society and refine their national character. He even once suggested that Kurds should receive help and learn nationalism from Armenians (Nursi, 2009: 160). All the indications suggest that Nursi assumed that one Muslim community's violence amongst themselves would fall under the category of *negative nationalism*: posing a threat to another nation's existence. Additionally, given the precarity of the Kurdish situation, Nursi may have found the Kurdish uprising to be a strategic mistake. Many Kurds believed that in the event of a clash with the state, the Kurds would not fare any better than their Armenian cousins. Nursi's post-WWI writings show that he was horrified by the modern state's laxity and the ease with which it unleashed violence.

Nursi's psychological situation and his increasingly ascetic tendencies must have also exacerbated his desire to steer clear of taking part in any activity that involved Muslim bloodshed. Nursi, as a former POW in a Russian camp, had undergone a monumental ordeal of running away from the prison camp and returning home. His memories of the war were still fresh. Nursi was an eyewitness to the frontline atrocities. Additionally, he was disillusioned or devastated by the political violence wrought by the CUP, whom he once thought would only be a blessing to Muslim nations. For a resigned, disillusioned and war-fatigued former POW, joining an uprising that seemed likely to bring the Kurdish Muslim community to the brink of genocidal eradication by other Muslims was not a terribly appealing course of action. Nursi's return to Van and the resumption of his teaching, which continued until he was exiled in 1925, was itself a sign of his disillusionment with politics. Nonetheless, despite his ambivalence, Nursi always remained very attentive to the fate of Kurds as a distinct ethnicity.[17]

Concluding Remarks: Is Religious Nationalism Possible?

Having discussed the influence of ethnic differences on Sheikh Ubeydullah and Said Nursi's perception of the 'Other' and religious views, we shall now take up the declarative aspect of their political statements. To borrow Judith

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17 Shown above, there are examples in Nursi's writings through which he inspires the Kurds to become the embodiment of the unity of the Kurdish nation (see Nursi, 2009: 189).

Butler's phraseology, in what kind of politics of the performative were they involved? (Butler, 1997). What did, for instance, the sheikh declare with his statements? What did he do with the words he used? Can any sense be made of his words? Did the declarative aspect of his revolt exhibit any novelty compared to previous Kurdish uprisings? What if his statements sound anomalous to commonly held views about the socio-cultural context of his revolt? Can his statements be utilized to revisit the revolt, or can they be ignored?

By carefully analysing what the above figures had to say about Kurds, Turks and Persians, and in particular by looking at which characteristics they portrayed more positively and negatively to ascertain which aspects he wished to incorporate, change or discard in their revivalism, we can trace a distinct outline of how they saw Kurds vis-à-vis various Others. This analysis can lead to surprising discoveries about what they saw, how they interpreted it and what cultural and religio-political motivations may have been driving them to express their particular views at those particular times and in those particular contexts. We can thus obtain a picture of the possible reasons why they thought the way they did.

The best way to determine what those figures might have meant is to look at how they used the phrase 'Kurdish people' in a variety of different contexts. For instance, on 5 October 1880, in one of his letters to the American missionary Dr Cochran, Sheikh Ubeydullah wrote:

> The Kurdish nation, consisting of more than 500,000 families, is a people apart. Their religion is different (to that of others), and their traditions and customs are distinct. It is known among nations as mischievous and corrupt. This is how Kurdistan has been depicted . . . Kurdistan has got a bad reputation and has been disgraced . . ..The chiefs and Rulers of Kurdistan, whether Turkish or Persian Subjects and the inhabitants of Kurdistan, one and all are united and agreed that matters cannot be carried on in this way with the two Governments and that necessarily something must be done, so that European Governments, having understood that matter, shall inquire into our state.[18]

Since these above figures were neither those of a historian, sociologist nor an ethnographer, then the question may arise as to what his goal was in separating the Kurds from other nations. What were they attempting to accomplish by these utterances? What *we* are doing here is trying to tease apart (1) what their intentions were, and (2) what picture of their politics their

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18 Sheikh Ubeidullah to Dr Cochran. Correspondence. Turkey. No. 5/61. Incl. 3 (1881).

words illustrate. Thus, to make sense of a speech act is to decode 'the meaning of an action [which] seems equivalent, in the case of linguistic action, to understanding the nature of the illocutionary act performed by the speaker' (Skinner, 2002: 113). For instance, Sheikh Ubeydullah addressed his letters to an official audience, and the contents and the context of his letters are plainly political. Hence, the letters are political statements or arguments intended to achieve certain political goals. This political aspect of his letters, the nature of his argument and the way he describes or 'narrates' the Kurds become a matter of utmost importance to understanding his intentions. Moreover, we want to find an answer to the questions of why he made such political statements at that particular time and why he addressed those specific political figures. These questions arise since, as mentioned earlier, some scholars have raised doubts about the authenticity of Sheikh Ubeydullah's views and consider his language to be a counter-example or an anomaly in Kurdish tribalism / religiosity. Those who consider his views inauthentic believe that the sheikh could not have held nationalistic views since he was a religious person and lived in a tribal socio-cultural context that left no room for the emergence of nationalism.

As indicated above, for example, the sheikh wrote certain letters for a political purpose. Now the critical question is as follows: can we make sense of the sheikh's 'intentional act' through a close reading of these letters? To what degree can these writings shed light on their own historical context? In his letters, the sheikh tries to describe the Kurds. He attempts to convince his audience that the Kurds are a separate people or 'a people apart'. They are neither Persians nor Ottomans. He does so in an exaggerated language. The sheikh goes as far as to say the Kurds believed in a distinct religion. Why did Ubeydullah want to convince Britons and others that the Kurdish religion was different from that of their co-religionists? What was the underlying logic? Was this the only way to convince the Great Powers that the Kurds had no religious loyalty to the Ottomans?

The key issue here is that although prior to Sheikh Ubeydullah's uprising the Kurdish region was known for its anti-centralist uprisings, they most likely had not emphasized their distinct identity then.[19] It is Sheikh Ubeydullah who emphasized the distinct ethnicity, religion and language of the Kurds and turned these into a basis for the legitimacy of his political claims. There had been a pattern of Kurdish uprisings even before the late

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19 It was noted that in his book, which was published in 1870, Millingen maintains that he had personally witnessed strong nationalist sentiments and desire for independence among the Kurds (see Millingen, 1870: 210–15).

nineteenth century. Prior to Sheikh Ubeydullah's uprising, however, the state's discontents had not cited Kurdishness as the reason for their uprisings. Ethnic differences and possibly discriminatory policies must have played some role in the previous revolts, but they had not exhibited signs of Kurdish self-reflection nor had they made any demand based on the distinct ethnicity of the participants. What distinguishes Ubeydullah's uprising from the previous revolts in Kurdistan lies in the sheikh's tying the legitimacy of his political claims to his own description of the Kurdish community. This is exactly what is at the heart of modern nationalist claims in which the nation is presumed self-evident. This is best articulated by Billig when he notes that 'nationalism, *as a way of depicting community*' is a historically specific form of consciousness (Billig, 1995: 19, emphasis added).

What needs to be emphasized is that the figures discussed above saw a direct connection between their description of the Kurds and securing their rights. Believing that certain facts will produce certain rights, they, as political agents, described or presented their 'facts'. This is what Derrida, in his discussion of the American Declaration of Independence, calls 'the prescription, the fact, and the right' (Derrida, 2002: 51). This type of phrasing is unique to the era of nationalism. It is this era's convention to present a certain human collectivity's characteristics as 'facts' to use these 'self-evident facts' as the bases for demanding some 'inalienable' political and cultural rights. As we have seen, in these cases Kurdish leaders describe the Kurds and declare them to constitute a single political entity, separable from other Muslim communities. Such declaration of the 'facts' and the constitution of them takes place all at once. As Derrida (2002: 49) puts it, 'This obscurity, this undecidability between, let us say, a performative structure and a constative structure is required to produce the sought-after effect.' Unlike that of the Americans, Ubeydullah's declaration, for instance, did not succeed in producing a state. However, it did summon into being a novel idea of the Kurds as a singular entity.

With the benefit of Austin's insight, one could say that with the declaration of the distinctness of the Kurds, Ubeydullah did create the *nation* that he wished to create, notwithstanding his lack of success in creating the state (Austin, 1962). As Skinner (2002: 104) notes, 'stressed that, in speaking about the force of an utterance, he was mainly pointing to what an agent may have been doing *in* the act of saying what was said.' So it is after these utterances that Kurdishness (*Kurdayeti*), not Kurdish tribes taken separately, became an issue of the central states' concern. No matter on which side of the border this invocation of Kurdishness took place, the very invocation of Kurdishness

becomes equated with a claim to sovereignty. Ubeydullah, as later Kurdish history affirms, made it natural to talk about the rights of the Kurds on the other side of the border. He used their collective suffering as a justification for this declarative act. He attempted to erase 'the signature' of other states, to borrow Derrida's line, and aimed at '"dissolving the links" of their "paternity or maternity"' (Derrida, 2002: 50).

Without coming to terms with the possibility of a fusion of religion and nationalism, one cannot explain how an actor whose main role and function was to lead his community in its religious affairs[20] would use this language and become involved in a 'politics of the performative'. The expected theological stance,[21] to be drawn from a Muslim religious figure or a sheikh – any sheikh – is one of guarding the bonds of the *umma* as sacrosanct links. What is seen, however, is that these bonds are either dissolved or become secondary in the religious actor's political thoughts as he ventures on this nationalistic enterprise. This is the case since the actor is ready to go against his co-religionists to further his ethnic nationalist cause. He rethinks these bonds with his current ethnic Other in their entirety. He is, at least, undisturbed by creating a new boundary between himself and his co-religionists on ethnic lines. These changes in the religious actor's views take place along with the changes in his perception of 'us' and 'them'. These new political stances evidently are not the result of the actor's conversion or complete abandonment of his religion. On the contrary, these political stances are usually justified religiously. This illustrates the penetration of what is known as national consciousness, for with it 'each person mirrors (*maʿkas*) his own nation', says Said Nursi (Nursi, 2009: 189). Thus, in studying the connection between religion (or Islam in particular) and nationalism, one has to look into how the nation-state becomes a kind of Weberian ideal type for governance.

Whether it is an 'ideal type' or a 'paradigm', as Billig calls it, nationalism is a modern convention, namely, the universally accepted tradition of governance. Also, it is a framework which is conventionally assumed to bring a resolution to communal conflicts, notwithstanding its bloody history (Mann, 2005). As Anderson puts it, 'the "nation" proved an invention on

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20 As indicated earlier, Speer states that 'next to the Sultan and the Sheriff of Mecca the Sheikh was the holiest person among the Sunni Mohammedans. Thousands were ready to follow him as the vicar of God.'

21 The boundaries of the community of the faithful were a matter of theological disputation between the Muʿtazila and Ashʿari schools of Islamic theology (*kalam*) (see Rahman, 2002).

which it was impossible to secure a patent.[22] It became susceptible to being pirated by disparate and at times unexpected hands' (Anderson, 1991: 67). Thus, if Billig's insight of nationalism as a paradigm is accepted, then when one is within it, one thinks and acts nationalistically. Nationalism then provides a conventional procedure for the nationalist speech act to occur. To Billig, nationalism is a paradigm since it provides the framework for our thought, which then becomes invisible to us. We could all be nationalists without even being conscious of our nationalism, which is why it is 'taken for granted' or 'banal'. The 'invisible force' of nationalism remains invisible to us. It must be this invisibility and omnipresence that makes it both local and universal (Billig, 1995: 9–30). Therefore, instead of thinking of nationalism only in terms of its connection with technological progress and industrialism's advancement, à la Gellner, it seems more useful to think of nationalism as a paradigm (Billig, 1995: 9–30).

To come back to our figure's speech act, it can be only understood within the nationalist paradigm. It is within this paradigm that a distinct national group, based on self-referential claims about itself, can demand certain political rights. It is within this paradigm that claims to nationhood are seen as rights, and it becomes conventional to make such claims. In previous eras, such a convention did not exist (Billig, 1995). Despite the existence of nations in pre-nationalist eras, the claim to national sovereignty and self-rule based on distinct ethnic and collective characteristics was absent. Again, it is within this nationalistic paradigm that such claims have become conventional.

We can determine whether an utterance is nationalistic if nationalism is understood as a dominant modern convention. Hence, Austin's observation pointing out that 'there must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances' can be expanded and applied to nationalist utterances as well (Austin, 1962: 14). This approach can help us determine whether or not the above historical figures' speech acts took place within this paradigm or whether they were invoking this convention. Again, if Austin's conditions on speech acts are applicable to nationalist claims, their conventional efficacy becomes a reality when they are uttered:

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22 The emphasis here is on the fact that the attempts at 'making the political and the national congruent' are conventionality accepted, at least theoretically. Otherwise, as indicated earlier, some aspects of this approach that sees nationalism as a universal 'modular' has been critiqued by Chatterjee in his various works (see Chatterjee, 1993, 1995).

'by certain persons in certain circumstances' (Austin, 1962: 14). If 'persons' here is replaced with 'community', this community must 'imagine' and claim its distinctness. This perception of in-groups' distinctness is a unique form of 'imagination', which only within the current paradigm could produce legitimate claims. It constitutes the right circumstance that renders the pursuit of nationhood or declaration of it sensible. In all likelihood, if similar claims were even made in pre-nationalist eras, they did not have either any efficacy or any meaning. Also, if individuals or groups who do not speak on behalf of an 'imagined community' do not follow the right procedure, their declaration of a nation would not amount to more than what Austin calls reporting 'a phatic act' like stating that 'the cat is on the mat' (Austin, 1962: 95). Its efficacy would not go beyond a historian's writing on any given people's history.

Ubeydullah, for instance, backed up his declaration with a revolt. He foregrounded the legitimacy of his revolt in his own description of 'the nation' as a legitimizing procedure that is only known to people in the age of nationalism. He first described the nation, which was equivalent to the declaration of its existence, and then he used these 'sought-after facts' as the bases for declaring the Kurds' right to statehood. Thus, he wrote:

> We also are a nation apart. We want our affairs to be *in our own hands* so that in the punishment of our own offenders we may be strong and independent and have *privileges like other nations*, and respecting our offenders, we are ready to *take upon ourselves* that *no harm or damage shall occur to any nation*. This is our object, and the reasons of my son's going to Souj Boulak, so as to obtain inquiry into the state of Kurdistan.[23]

It is instrumental to pay attention to some of these figures' 'certain references' to see how these references signify the nationalist context of their writings (Austin, 1962: 94). These 'certain references' could not exist before their modern conceptual framework came into existence, and they could not have been available to people before the modern era – before their entry into the nationalist paradigm. Ubeydullah's argument could only take place within this paradigm. Although in previous eras there may have been instances in which Kurds invoked Kurdish ethnicity, they did not or could not ask for 'the national and the political' to become congruent.

To these figures, this self-referential and self-defined nationhood of the Kurds constituted the moral ground for them to claim their own state and to

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23 Sheikh Ubeydullah to Dr Cochran. Correspondence. Turkey. No. 5/61. Incl. 3 (1881) (emphasis added).

reject Ottoman and Qajar rule. As stated earlier, this argument for the necessity of the Kurdish state was in essence modern. It could not have taken place outside the modern nationalist approach to statehood. Their writings carry a certain illocutionary force and contain certain vocabulary that belongs exclusively to 'a certain construction', namely, to the nationalist paradigm. In short, these religious figures' use of specific language with certain references took place in a 'particular occasion' or era. Emphasizing the occasion with its connection to the use of certain language is vital in reading and understanding their political statements and writings. Expanding on Austin's work, Skinner remarks that Austin 'placed his main emphasis on the fact that we need in addition to grasp the particular *force* with which any given utterance (with a given meaning) may have been issued on a particular occasion' (Skinner, 2002: 104, emphasis added). The key terms here are 'the particular force' of the utterance along with 'the particular occasion' that provides the meaning and sheds light on the context of the utterance. In our case, instead of essentializing his religious adherence and the socio-cultural context of his operation, which would result in a dismissal of the sheikh's utterance, we need to see how his utterances shed light on his politics.

The scattered writings by the individuals in question, thus, should be read on several different levels. First, they describe or narrate a nation and with their very narration try to justify the Kurds' claim to statehood. Second, by setting the Kurds as a nation on par with others, they delegitimize or attempt to delegitimize non-Kurdish rule in Kurdistan. Third, their 'claiming a nation' signifies a particular occasion of the ascendency of nationalism that these leaders themselves influenced and by which they were influenced during its ascendancy, and therefore they deemed it natural and necessary to distinguish the Kurds as a nation to gain the right to a separate state. Finally, not only was their Islamic faith no barrier to their nationalism, it accommodated and served their nationalistic views and made it even easier to imagine the Kurds as a distinct community. To conclude in this regard, the impact of ethnic background and cultural context is visible in these leading figures' understanding of Islam. In many ways, the boundaries of their Islamic interpretations coincide with their ethnic and their 'imagined', as per Anderson, national boundaries. They redrew their religious boundaries in accordance with those of the Kurdish ethnonational community. These leaders were devout Kurdish religious figures. Yet their religious outlook was exclusionary. Unlike most anti-colonial Muslim revivalists, the Islamic *umma* had not occupied a prominent place in their political imagination. Their imagined state was

a religious one of sorts. Yet, it would have been created mostly to deal with the Kurdish predicaments.

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6

The Political Economy of Kurdistan
From Development to De-development

VELI YADIRGI

David McDowall in the introduction to his highly influential study on the Kurds, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, highlights the lack of coverage in the historical archives of the economy of Kurdistan, and the resultant void it has left in the study of Kurdistan, with the noteworthy observation that

> perhaps the most important [void was] the processes of economic and social change. I cannot help feeling that if these were better documented and understood, many of the events we do know about in Kurdistan would undergo re-evaluation (McDowall, 2000: xii).

This chapter will aim to provide an overview of the economic changes in Kurdistan with a view to addressing this lacuna, rightly highlighted by McDowall. In doing so, it surveys the political and economic events and changes in Kurdistan in the years 1514–1800: the period from the time when the Kurdish principalities were incorporated into the Ottoman Empire and the semi-autonomous Kurdish regimes were established, until the dawn of the suppression of these polities. Thereafter, it explores the political and economic occurrences and transformations in Kurdistan in the years 1800–1914: the era during which all semi-autonomous regimes in Ottoman Kurdistan had been overthrown, the penetration of world capitalism into the Ottoman Anatolia had deepened and the First World War began. Finally, it examines the years 1914–29 in Kurdistan: the epoch wherein the Ottoman Empire collapsed, Kurdistan was deformed, collective rights of the Kurds denied and the Kurdish question began to occupy the post-Ottoman political space.

The Formation of and General Trends in Kurdistan's Economy

After the Battle of Çaldıran, with the exclusion of a few Kurdish principalities, which had either opted to stay independent of both the Safavid and the Ottoman empires or continued to recognize the former's suzerainty, the rest of the existing Kurdish principalities incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. The newly conquered province of Diyarbekir (1515) hosted all of the acquired Kurdish chiefdoms in return for their acknowledgement of Ottoman sovereignty. The first official balance sheet of state revenues or treasury 'budget' in 1527–8 gives the total value of all revenues of the Ottoman Empire as 537.90 million *akçes*, which is equivalent to 9.7 million gold ducat.[1] The state revenues consisted of 477 million, which constituted 89 per cent of the total revenue of the empire (see Table 6.1).

The actual purpose of these 'budgets'[2] was to determine whether surplus had been realized, thus for an efficient 'budget', Ottoman statesmen had anticipated a surplus after expenditures so that those in receipt of a salary from the sultan's treasury would not have concerns about their income (İnalcık, 1994: 77). When the revenues and expenditures of the province of Diyarbekir are compared with other Ottoman Anatolian regions (see Table 6.2), which today roughly constitute modern-day

Table 6.1 Total revenue of the Ottoman Empire, 1527–1528

Sources of revenue	Value (in millions *akçes*)
Imperial *hass*	277
Other *hass* and *timar* distributed	200
Vakf and *mülk* properties	60
Total	**537**

Source: İnalcık (1994: 81)

1 In 1528, one gold ducat was equivalent to 55 *akçes* (İnalcık, 1994: 78).
2 The 'budgets' in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries differed from their twentieth-century counterparts. Ottoman 'budgets' pre-Tanzimat were used as balance sheets for the revenues and expenditures of the Ottoman state already undertaken, often encompassing a full solar or lunar year. On account of Ottoman 'budgets' from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries recording revenues already collected and expenditures undertaken, Ottoman historians conceive them as a reliable index for the general condition of the economy (Barkan, 2000: 607; İnalcık, 1994: 78).

Table 6.2 Balance of provincial revenues, 1527–1528
(in million *akçes*)

Province	Revenue	Expenditure	Balance
Anadolu, Karaman, Rum and Zülkadriye[a]	294.85	322.13	−27.28
Diyarbekir	21.46	20.10	+1.36

Source: İnalcık (1994: 83); Barkan (2000: 649–69)

a In the published version of the 'budget' of 1527–8, the balance
   sheets of the provinces of Anadolu, Karaman, Rum and
   Zülkadriye are calculated together (Barkan, 2000: 649–69).

Turkey, it becomes evident that the latter areas were operating under
a budget deficit whilst the former yielded surplus revenue. This is despite
Diyarbekir having the third lowest population density out of the four
compared provinces.

Such a development was not unique to the 'budget' of 1527–8, because
more deficits were sustained from these regions – particularly Rumeli and
Anadolu – in the later years of the sixteenth century, as evidenced by the
deficits incurred from the aforementioned provinces in the succeeding pub-
lished 'budget' of 1547–8. The expenditure of the central budget reached
171,997,449 *akçes* in 1546 and 111,997,449 *akçes* in 1547. The revenue the central
treasury received from the provinces of Anatolia and Rumeli in the same
years was 135,402,022 *akçes* in 1546 and 94,543,349 *akçes* in 1547. Consequently,
the deficits of 36,470,335 *akçes* and 17,454,694 *akçes* were incurred. The surplus
revenues deriving from the newly conquered provinces of Egypt, Syria,
Diyarbekir and Baghdad covered these deficits (Sahillioğlu, 1970: 239–40).
The surplus revenue transferred from Diyarbekir to the central treasury
had arisen from about 1.36 million *akçes* in the previous 'budget' to around
5 million *akçes* in the 'budget' of 1547–8 (Barkan, 2000: 891). In the only other
published 'budget' for the sixteenth century, the 'budget' of 1567–8, the
income revenues and expenditures for the province of Diyarbekir were not
recorded in the form that it had been done with the latterly stated 'budgets'
(Barkan, 2000: 962–73).

The periodic irregularities and altered content of the 'budgets' in the
seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (i.e. virtually none of the published
'budgets' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provides the geograph-
ical distribution of all the revenue sources) make it highly difficult to study
systematically the spatial sources of state revenues and expenditures during

this period. Nevertheless, as Ahmet Tabakoğlu posits in a trailblazing study of the Ottoman 'budgets' *icmal*[3] and *rüzname*[4] registers, provincial revenues in these two centuries – with the exclusion of Egypt – consisted of *mukataa*[5] or tax-farm revenues administered by the Baş Muhasebe branch of the imperial treasury (Tabakoğlu, 1985: 168–9). Therefore, in order to attain an understanding of the evolution of the provincial revenues during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this chapter will make use of the documented data on *mukataa* revenues of Ottoman provinces.

One of the existent official records from the seventeenth century is the *icmal* accounts in the tax-farm register for 1636–7, *Register Maliyeden Müdevver 7075*.[6] This documentation gives an insight into the amount and sources of *mukataa* revenues in the early seventeenth century from the following regions and provinces of the empire: 'Western, Central, South-Central Anatolia (Anadolu, Zülkadriye, Karaman, Rum, Kastamonu and Bursa (Bolu)'; 'Southeastern Anatolia (Diyarbakir)'; 'Eastern Anatolia (Erzurum)'; and 'Northern Syria and parts of South-Central Anatolia (Aleppo)' (Murphey, 1987: 220).

These tax-farm revenues suggest that the provincial sources of income in Kurdistan in the early seventeenth century, when contrasted with the *mukataa* revenues of other Anatolian provinces, had attained a greater importance. *Mukataa* revenues in Diyarbekir alone had been almost equivalent to the *mukataa* revenues of the five bordering Anatolian regions, excluding Zülkadriye. The *mukataa* revenues in Erzurum had been triple the amount of the revenues in the bordering Rum and Karaman provinces (see Table 6.3).

Based on the available data on trade, as well as the principal provincial revenues of Diyarbekir and Erzurum (Tables 6.4–6.5), we can posit reasonably that the revenue base of the provincial revenues of Diyarbekir and Erzurum in the seventeenth century consisted of mine and mineral manufacturing and

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3 The *icmal* fiscal registers contained periodic summaries of the revenues and expenditures of the central imperial treasury and of the various provincial treasuries. They were used for verifying internal accounting as well as simplifying and summarizing a mass of information for final reporting to the sultan in a synoptic form (Murphey, 1987: xvi).

4 *Rüzname* registers contained records of the day-by-day revenues and expenditures of the provincial treasuries and of various other government departments. For detailed information, see Shaw (1969: 1–12) and Tabakoğlu (1985: 40–3).

5 In Ottoman fiscal practice, a *mukataa* had meant a source of revenue projected and entered into the register of the finance department, which included a host of revenue sources. Collection of such revenues had been farmed out under a specific tax-farm system to independent agents called *mültezim* or *amils* or delegated to administrative officials such as the *emins* or *voyvodas*.

6 This register was prepared in 1636 as a result of Sultan Murat IV (1612–40) ordering the preparation of a detailed report on the state of financial revenues of Anatolia (Murphy, 1987: xiii).

Table 6.3 Provincial tax-farm revenues of Anatolia and the coastal and northern portions of Syria, early seventeenth century (in *akçes*[a])

Provinces	Amount
Aleppo	24,106,727
Zülkadriye	30,911,760
Karaman	2,390,000
Diyarbekir	25,019,750
Rum	3,063,000
Damascus	15,382,000
Erzurum	16,800,000
Kastamonu	2,656,113
Bursa (Bolu)	5,334,042
Anadolu	12,399,400

Source: Murphey (1987: 220)

a There had been a four-fold increase in the exchange equivalent for one gold piece in circulating silver *akçe* coins in the period between 1526 (1 *altun* = 60 *akçes*) and 1636 (1 *altun* = 240 *akçes*) (Murphey, 1987: xxi).

Table 6.4 Principal revenues for the provinces of Diyarbekir and Erzurum, early seventeenth century (in *akçes*)

Diyarbekir	
Customs	6,021,950
Sales tax on cloths and textile production	551,800
Sheep tax	555,000
Tax from pastoral peoples or tribal confederations	2,679,500
Erzurum	
Customs	8,000,000
Mines and minerals	3,182,650
Revenues from salt flats	84,252

Source: Murphey (1987: 226–32)

Table 6.5 English and French imports from the Levant, 1620–1789

English imports	1621–1634	1663–1669	1699–1701	1722–1724
(in thousands of pounds per year)				
Raw silk	73	172	219	274
Mohair yarn	9	45	32	40
Cotton and cotton yarn	25	28	25	12
Galls	5	58	13	7
French imports	**1700–1702**	**1750–1754**	**1785–1789**	
(in millions of livres per year)				
Textile materials				
Silk	2,416	2,095	1,683	
Cotton[a]	1,528	5,684	12,792	
Mohair yarn	639	1,835	1,437	
Camel hair	137	914	1,021	
Galls[b]	170	488	853	
Textile manufacture	385	1,715	2,430	

Source: Davis (1970: 202–4)

a Much cotton was locally processed into yarns and cloth in the following localities in Ottoman Kurdistan: Ergani, Mardin and Diyarbekir. The red cotton cloth of Diyarbekir was very famous and in much demand abroad during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. So much so that, according to Tavernier, half of the population in the mid-seventeenth century had engaged in its production and that of red Morocco leather. For more information, see van Bruinessen (1988: 36–40).
b All galls exported originated in Diyarbekir, Van and Mosul (Davis, 1970: 200–1; van Bruinessen, 1988: 40).

trade, sheep breeding and sheep trade, textile production and the custom revenues attained from long-distance trade passing from Kurdistan.

The sources of income in the provinces of Diyarbekir and Erzurum maintained their relative importance in the eighteenth century. As exhibited in the summarized *mukataa* revenues in the 'budget' of 1706–7 in Table 6.6, the tax-farm or *mukataa* revenues of the provinces of Erzurum and Diyarbakir had been nearly equivalent to the total revenues of the three major Ottoman Anatolian provinces: Anadolu, Karaman and Sivas.

Tabakoğlu (1985), by collating *mukataa* revenues found in various Ottoman fiscal documents, traces the progress of the revenues of the ten prominent *mukataa*s in the empire between the late seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries (Table 6.7). The findings of this study demonstrate that the provincial sources of revenue originating from Kurdistan were vital sources of income for

Table 6.6 *Mukataa* revenues, 1706–1707 (in million *akçes*)

Provinces			
Anadolu	4.6	Maraş	4.9
Karaman	2.3	Rakka	9.6
Sivas	8.0	Damascus	1.6
Erzurum	13.9	Sayda-Beirut	28.3
Trabzon	10.9	Tripoli	41.7
Çıldır	2.4	Diyarbekir	13.5
Aleppo	21.9	Mosul	3.2
Adana	13.8	Baghdad	4.4

Source: Tabakoğlu (1985: 170)

the Ottoman economy. *Mukataa*s from Erzurum and Diyarbekir were among the most protuberant sources of income for the Ottoman Empire.

When the scale and sources of revenue of the most prominent *mukataa* of the province of Diyarbekir (Diyarbekir *Voyvodalığı*[7]) in 1797–8 (Table 6.8) are studied in tandem with the principal revenues of this province in the early seventeenth century (Table 6.4) and the total *mukataa* revenues in the early and mid-eighteenth century (Tables 6.6–6.7), we can arrive at two interrelated results. The first is that in the late eighteenth century, Diyarbekir increased its *mukataa* revenues. The other is that this province preserved the manufacturing and trade revenues base of the province, as is evident with the revenues yielded from customs, dye houses and market dues. Thus, on the eve of the nineteenth century, the paradigmatic Kurdish province in the Ottoman Empire was as valuable, if not more, as a revenue source for the imperial treasury as it had been in the early sixteenth century, and its progression in the sphere of

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7 The term *voyvodalık* originates from a Slavic term: *voyvoda*. A *voyvoda* refers to a subcommander. During the sixteenth century, it was the title given to the civil governors of the Balkan states under the control of the Ottoman Empire. In the preceding centuries, the term had come to be used in northern Anatolia and Kurdistan for a class of officials who acted as intendants of tax farms. As a fiscal category *voyvodalık* denotes the stewardship of *hass* or the sultan's properties assigned to the administration of a *voyvoda* or, in other words, extensive lands administered as imperial estates under the supervision of state officials titled *voyvoda*. The *voyvodalık* as an *eklâm* (provincial bureau) was a provincial fiscal bureau that had the stewardship of a bulk of the state-designated wealth in a given province. Moreover, one of the primary duties of the Diyarbekir *voyvoda* was to administer the *mukataa* of the Diyarbekir *Voyvodalığı*. The *mukataa* of the Diyarbekir *Voyvodalığı* yielded the highest revenues in the province of Diyarbekir. In return for this service, the *voyvoda*s attained an annual salary (Salzmann, 2003: 128–31).

Table 6.7 Principal *mukataas*, 1698/1699–1748 (in million *akçes*)

Sources	Years							
	1698–1699	1700–1701	1701–1702	1706–1707	1710–1711	1716–1717	1734–1735	1748
Erzurum customs	11.4	11.5	11.6	13.9[a]	12.2	17.4	15.5	–
Aleppo revenues	20.1	20.2	20.1	21.9	19.2	23.5	23.4	22.5
Rakka *mukataas*	9.3	8.6	8.5	9.5	10.9	12.9	12.8	14.0
Sayda-Beirut	26.5	26.7	26.7	28.3	27.4	26.9	27.4	27.6
mukataas								
Tripoli *mukataas*	31.2	38.3	38.3	41.7	35.8	36.1	29.6	36.1
Diyarbekir	10.1	13.3	9.2	13.5[b]	9.5	9.3	10.3	10.5
Voyvodalığı								
Gümüşhane *hass*	10.0	10.1	–	–	9.5	9.6	–	–
Sakız and İzmir customs	10.1	–	12.8	–	–	–	18.2	–
Eflak *cizye*	17.0	–	17.0	–	–	–	22.2	–
Istanbul customs	39.8	–	39.8	–	–	–	57.3	–

Source: Tabakoğlu (1985: 173)
a This is the whole revenue of the *eyalet* of Erzurum.
b This is the whole revenue of the *eyalet* of Diyarbekir.

Table 6.8 Revenues of the Diyarbekir
Voyvodalığı, 1797–1798 (in *kuruş*[a])

Sources	Amount
Customs (*gümrük*)	97,490
Dye house dues (*boyahane*)	35,000
Sales tax (*damga*)	33,550
Ground rent (*arsa*)	34,000
Craftsmen's dues (*ihtisab*)	8,344
Total	**208,384**

Source: Başbakanlık Arşivi, Bab-ı Defteri Baş
Muhasebesi, no. 6538, in Yılmazçelik
(1995: 285)

a In the years 1690–1844, 1 *kuruş* equalled 120
   akçes or 40 *paras* (Pamuk, 1994: 967).

manufacturing and in international trade made it one of the most promising
hubs for production and commerce.

Underdevelopment in Kurdistan in the Age of Centralization, Westernization and Crisis

The nineteenth century was a time of astounding change in Ottoman
Kurdistan. In the first half of this century, the age-old Kurdish administra-
tive structures established in the early sixteenth century foundered. The
abolition of the Kurdish polities, which hitherto preserved their infrastruc-
ture despite intermittently being suppressed by the Ottoman state in the
preceding three centuries, was a derivative of the centralization and
Westernization policies unleashed by the reforms of Sultan Mahmut II
and continued by subsequent Ottoman reformers: the Tanzimat statesmen;
Sultan Abdülhamid II (1842–1918), the Ottoman sultan from 1876 to 1909;
and the Young Turks.

From its birth to its demise following the First World War, the Ottoman
Empire had been an agrarian empire. During the nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries, 'four-fifths' of the Ottoman population lived on the land and drew
some portion of their livelihoods from the soil (Eldem, 1970: 44). In an empire
where agriculture was the dominant form of economic activity, the control of
the land as an important means of production can naturally be conceived as one

of the most important factors affecting the relations of production, class structure and the mechanisms of the articulation of the local structures with the larger structures. This explains why the role and influence of the Kurdish notables over agricultural land and surplus in Kurdistan is commonly set as one of the central themes of enquiry by scholarships investigating socio-economic and political developments in this region.

Prior to analysing the data pertaining to the land regime, agricultural activities and trade in Kurdistan – as the findings of a range of scholarly studies (Eldem, 1970; Pamuk, [1987] 2010; Quataert, 1994; Yadirgi, 2017) that examined the existing Ottoman official statistics illustrate, and Ottoman trade, land and agricultural statistics for the nineteenth century illuminate – it is worth noting that the quantitative local (Ottoman) information regarding these spheres had been minimal and deficient. Relatedly, the ensuing assessment of agriculture in nineteenth-century Ottoman Kurdistan will largely be based on the data presented in the consular reports prepared by British diplomats who had regularly reported on events from different parts of Kurdistan from the 1850s onwards. The data recorded in the British consular report make it very valuable and at times the only source of information for understanding manifestations in the agricultural sphere of nineteenth-century Ottoman Kurdistan. This said, the information in these reports, rather than being treated as a definite reflection of the agricultural patterns or trends in this region, will be taken as a rough indicator of the actualities in this sphere.

The centralization policies of the Ottoman state during and after the early nineteenth century had not only occasioned the obliteration of the semi-autonomous Kurdish administrative bodies, but had also resulted in the expropriation of large holdings of land that up until that point had been de facto properties of Kurdish notables. The confiscation of large holdings of land from the Kurdish landed elites appears to have had unfavourable consequences for agricultural productivity in Kurdistan and resulted in this region being less affected by the world market-induced commercialization of agriculture in the next four decades, predominantly because of two inter-related factors. The first of these is that after the 1830s, many of these confiscated lands were uncultivated owing to their neglect by the central state. The second factor is related to the inadequacies of the poverty-ridden peasants; with the absence of state support, peasants were not able to meet the demands of running the small estates/farms that they attained as a result of the very partial distribution of land to small peasants after 1830.

The initial consular reports prepared by British Consul William Richard Holmes (1822–82) in Ottoman Kurdistan during the 1850s track the latterly mentioned changes in the ownership of land and highlight the negative ramifications of the centralist policies of the central state on the agriculture of this Ottoman domain. The dates of these reports, 1857–8, are particularly important, coming nearly two decades after the confiscation of large landholdings and on the eve of the Land Code of 1858. In 1857, in a consular report on the conditions of Kurdistan, Consul Holmes, who at the time was based in the province of Diyarbekir, notes the following informative changes:

> The condition of the peasantry in general is extremely poor, and they seem on this account quite unable to cultivate the lands themselves. They therefore seek advances of money from the wealthier individuals of towns and villages. . . . Land in this Pashalic [Kurdistan] can scarcely be said to have any value, as without artificial irrigation nothing can be produced, except wheat and barley, which are sown in the autumn or the very early spring. Formerly, the country was extensively irrigated, and covered with villages and cultivation, under the government of certain native Koordish families, who for years had ruled it. . . .
>
> Land in this Pashalic either belongs to the State . . . the Church, or to private individuals. That belonging to the State was acquired when the country was taken from Koordish Begs, by the confistication of their possessions. . . . Of these three categories of land freehold property is always the most flourishing . . . whereas the Crown and Church lands, particularly the latter, continually deteriorate.[8]

In addition, a survey on the land tenure in Kurdistan in 1858 on the eve of the Land Code of 1858 summarizes the alterations that have taken place in this region of the empire after the 1830s with the following words:

> I. What are the different kinds of tenure of land and in what proportion are they, respectively, in use in your district?
>
> About 20 years ago this part of Koordistan, which had previously been more nominally than really in the hands of the Turkish government, was wrested from the Koordish Beys, and the whole of the land, with the exception of some few parts the ownership of which was confirmed to its ancient proprietors, was confiscated to the Crown. Since then a portion has been sold and become private freehold property, a considerable portion is let as short leases of a year or two, a great deal has become Church property or 'Vakouf', but the greater part remains the property of the state and is waste and uncultivated . . .

8 A&P, 1857, 'Commercial Report for Kurdistan', 2285, XXXVIII, pp. 186–7.

III. What is the condition of vakouf and other public lands as compared with that of freehold property?

Every individual takes care of his own private property to the best of his ability but the vakouf and crown lands are entirely neglected. . . . Consequently freehold property is usually in a much better condition than any public lands. . . .

XI. Are large estates or small holdings predominant, and what are the causes which most affect the distribution of land?

Small holdings predominate.[9]

Consul Palgrave's assessment of the centralization policies implemented during the Tanzimat era for the agriculture of the Asiatic provinces of the empire is parallel to that of Consul Holmes delineated earlier. Palgrave contends that during this era as a result of four main factors – (i) subdivision of estates on land proprietorship; (ii) overweight of excessive taxation on land and its produce; (iii) official spoliation of land by the state for public works without any compensation for the landowners; and (iv) the 'forfeit of 10 per cent. *ad valorem* by the State from any proprietor' enacted by the Land Code of 1858[10] – the agriculture of this region had in general suffered gravely:

The agricultural or land conditions of Eastern Turkey before and after the 'Tanzeemat' [Tanzimat] of the Sultans Mahmood II. and Abd-el-Mejeed [are] as follow:

The tendency of the former period was to the security, permanence, and accumulation of land tenure; that of the latter to insecurity, change and disintegration. The tendency of the former period was to encourage agriculture, and to raise the value of land; that of the present, to discourage the former, and to depreciate the latter. The strength of the former period was in the permanence of large estates and numerous tenants; the weakness of the latter, in the multiplication of small estates and numerous landlords. . . . That in such a state of things no advance, economic, social, moral, or intellectual, can be expected from the agricultural population, whether landlords or tenants, and that, none, in fact, exists; on the contrary, that cultivators and land are alike deteriorating.[11]

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, there appears to be a significant rise in the concentration of the land controlled by certain sections of the Kurdish notables. More specifically, as the findings of the Ottoman Agricultural Census of 1909 suggest, south-eastern Anatolia – i.e. Diyarbekir, Bitlis and Van – had been second to the Adana region in terms of

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9 FO 78/1419, 'Land Tenure in Kurdistan', 1858, Reply by Consul Holmes to Questionnaire, in Issawi (1980: 220).

10 A&P, 1870, 'Report on Land Tenure in Eastern Turkey', C.75, LXVII, p. 283.

11 Ibid., p. 287.

Table 6.9 Distribution of farm sizes ca. 1900 in the core regions of the Ottoman Empire

Regions	Distribution of farm sizes (% of farms)			
	Under 10	10–50	Over 50 (in *dönüms*)	Average farm size
Northern Greece and Thrace	40	42	18	21
Western Anatolia/Marmara	31	46	23	35
Eastern Black Sea	43	42	15	18
Adana	17	36	47	77
Central Anatolia	23	52	25	35
Eastern Anatolia				
Central tier	41	41	18	21
Southern tier	23	37	40	58

Source: Pamuk ([1987] 2010: 96)

inequalities in the distribution of farm sizes within the following tabulated core regions[12] of the empire (Pamuk, [1987] 2010: 98) (Table 6.9).

This change in land distribution and ownership in the southern tier of eastern Anatolia coincides with the policies implemented during the Hamidian period (1876–1909). In the course of this period, the Kurdish tribal forces in Ottoman Kurdistan were absorbed into the Ottoman military and political structure with the dual purpose of securing the eastern frontier districts from the real and perceived threats from Russia and Iran and integrating Kurds into the Ottoman state system. Thus, within Ottoman Kurdistan the Hamidiya became a channel for the power relationships between the sultan and the Kurdish rulers, operating as a tool for tribes to gain influence, and for the sultan to extend imperial rule over this region of the empire. The data from the late nineteenth century indicate that, particularly after the creation of the Hamidiye Cavalry (1891), the Kurdish religious and landed elite, with the active support of the Ottoman administration, attained vast amounts of land in Kurdistan by the use of both economic and extra-economic means (Issawi, 1980; Yadirgi, 2017).

12 Definitions of core regions as defined by Pamuk ([1987] 2010: 96): **Northern Greece** (Salonica, Monastir), **Thrace** (Edirne), **Western Anatolia and Marmara** (Izmit, Biga, Hüdavendigar), **Aydın** (İzmir), **Eastern Black Sea Coast** (Trabzon), **Central Anatolia** (Kastamonu, Ankara, Konya, Sivas), **Eastern Anatolia, Central Tier** (Erzurum, Mamuretülaziz), **Eastern Anatolia, Southern Tier** (Diyarbakir, Bitlis, Van).

Table 6.10 Customs revenues collected by
the Diyarbekir *Voyvodalığı*, 1797–1834

Years	Value (*kuruş*)
1797–1798[a]	97,490
1804–1805[b]	86,505
1805–1806[c]	72,248.5
1822–1823[d]	86,388
1824–1825[e]	93,847
1833–1834[f]	36,199

a Başbakanlık Arşivi, Bab-ı Defteri Baş
   Muhasebesi, no. 6538, in Yılmazçelik
   (1995: 285).
b Başbakanlık Arşivi, Bab-ı Defter-i Baş
   Muhasebesi Diyarbakır Hazinesi, no. 16802
   (1804–5/1805–6), pp. 1–10, in Yılmazçelik
   (1995: 285–6).
c Ibid.
d Diyarbakir Müzesi, Diyarbakır Şer'iyye
   Sicilleri, no. 351, pp. 7–8 (1822–3), in
   Yılmazçelik (1995: 286).
e Başbakanlık Arşivi, Kamil Kepeci, no. 5132,
   pp. 1–150 (1824–5), in Yılmazçelik (1995: 286).
f Diyarbakir Müzesi, Diyarbakır Şer'iyye
   Sicilleri, no. 603, p. 15 (1833–4), in Yılmazçelik
   (1995: 286).

The available official data regarding custom duties remittances collected by
the Diyarbekir *gümrük*[13] (customs house) indicate that up until the early 1830s the
trade routes located in Ottoman Kurdistan were frequently used for the move-
ment of goods (Table 6.10). Information regarding customs revenues of
Diyarbekir has seen daylight as a result of the extensive archival work on the tax-
farm records of the provincial fiscal bureau, or Diyarbekir *Voyvodalığı*, by
Yılmazçelik (1995).

It is worth noting here that the jurisdictional range of the province of
Diyarbekir during 1780–1845 had been such that it encompassed the vast

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13 After 1760–1, the central authorities handed over the management of the *gümrük*
   (customs house) of Diyarbekir to the Diyarbekir *Voyvodalığı*. The revenues of the
   Diyarbekir *gümrük* during the 1820s accounted for 43.76 per cent of all the incomes of
   the Diyarbekir *Voyvodalığı*, and up until the 1830s, it was by far the richest source of
   income of the *Voyvodalık* of this province (Yılmazçelik, 1995: 285, 314–15).

majority of the Kurdish lands incorporated into the Ottoman Empire after 1514 (see Yılmazçelik, 1995: appendix 6). In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the province of Diyarbekir had in its jurisdictional boundaries vast areas of land, extending from Malatya to Mosul. During 1847–67, as mentioned earlier, Diyarbekir was renamed *Kürdistan Eyaleti* and it comprised parts of the provinces of Bitlis and Van. At the end of the nineteenth century, the province remained impressive in size, as it embodied the following provinces in present-day Turkey: Batman, Elazığ, Mardin, Siirt, Şanlıurfa and Şırnak. Thus, up until the twentieth century, the bulk of the aforementioned overland trade routes situated in Ottoman Kurdistan was located in Diyarbekir's provincial boundaries, which explains the importance of the customs revenue records kept by the *voyvoda*s of this province for attaining an understanding of the trade to and from Ottoman Kurdistan.

The British consul in Kurdistan described Diyarbekir as 'nearly equidistant west and east between the capital and Busreh, north and south between Erzeroom and Aleppo – [Diyarbekir] is admirably calculated for a great commercial central depôt.'[14] Throughout the nineteenth century, merchants from a wide range of other locations – Van, Manastır, Gümüşhane, Rakka – very frequently visited and stayed in the different *hans* of Diyarbekir (Yılmazçelik, 1995: 314–15). The Ottoman *hans*[15] provide a valuable source of information for transportation of goods and commerce – in particular for Anatolian cities that were linked by overland trade routes – because starting with the sixteenth century in the big *hans* of any of the urban business centres, merchants conducted negotiations that led to the formation of caravans (Faroqhi, 1984: 51–3). Because of being located on an important crossing point for international and domestic trade, Diyarbekir – alongside Aleppo, Bursa, Erzurum and Tokat – was one of the few provinces that had tax farms incorporating customs and other transportation-related duties. Customs duties, or *resm-i gümrük*, were levied on all goods transported to and from Diyarbekir in accordance with the varying tariffs laid in the *Customs Tariff Book* (*Gümrük Tarife Defterleri*) (Yılmazçelik, 1995: 288).

When the customs revenues in 1833–4 are studied in conjunction with those of the preceding three decades (see Table 6.11), it becomes apparent that there had been a remarkable fall in the early years of the 1830s. The extensive historical details provided regarding Ottoman Kurdistan in the report from the British Consular District of Kurdistan in 1863, which hitherto has been overlooked by the existing scholarships on Ottoman Kurdistan, indicate that

14 A&P, 1873, 'Commercial Report for Diyarbekir', C.824, LXVII, p. 682.
15 For a detailed analysis regarding *hans*, see Faroqhi (1984: 1–104), and for a detailed description of the *hans* in the province of Diyarbekir, see Yılmazçelik (1995: 23–74).

Table 6.11 Revenues of the Diyarbekir *Voyvodalığı*, 1797–1834 (in *kuruş*)

Years	Gümrük (customs)	Boyahane (dye house dues)	Arsa (ground rent)	İhtisab (craftsmen' dues)	Damga (sales tax)	Others	Total
1797–1798[a]	97,490	35,000	34,000	8,344	33,550	–	208,384
1804–1805[b]	86,505	19,726	23,153	10,742	30,078	23,121	193,325
1805–1806[c]	72,248.5	21,946	29,868	12,000	32,519.5	12,067.5	180,798
1822–1823[d]	86,388	31,515	37,697	4,090	8,671	30,000	198,361
1824–1825[e]	93,847	39,872	51,198	9,613	11,854	8,956	214,440
1833–1834[f]	36,199	8,483	–	–	10,297	74,063	129,042

a Başbakanlık Arşivi, Bab-ı Defteri Baş Muhasebesi, no. 6538, in Yılmazçelik (1995: 285).
b Başbakanlık Arşivi, Bab-ı Defter-i Baş Muhasebesi Diyarbakır Hazinesi, no. 16802 (1804–5/1805–6), pp. 1–10, in Yılmazçelik (1995: 285–6).
c Ibid.
d Diyarbakir Müzesi, Diyarbakır Şer'iyye Sicilleri, no. 351, pp. 7–8 (1822–3), in Yılmazçelik (1995: 286).
e Başbakanlık Arşivi, Kamil Kepeci no. 5132, pp. 1–150 (1824–5), in Yılmazçelik (1995: 286).
f Diyarbakir Müzesi, Diyarbakır Şer'iyye Sicilleri, no. 603, p. 15 (1833–4), in Yılmazçelik (1995: 286).

the sizeable reduction in the customs revenues in 1833–4 was a corollary of the military campaigns of Rashid Pasha against the Kurdish emirates:

> Though repeatedly taken and plundered; by Persians, Arabs, Saljooks [Seljuks], Tatars, Soofees [Sufis], and Turks it [Diyarbekir] always seems to have soon regained its riches and prosperity as history hardly records one of its many sieges and captures, without at the same time detailing the rich booty that fell a prey to the enemy. *In more modern times its commercial activity does not seem to have sensibly diminished; and I cannot trace its real decline any further back than thirty years ago, immediately subsequent to Rasheed Pasha's successful campaign against the Kurds in these regions. But from that time, as the merchants inform me, marked falling off took place and each succeeding year has been more unprofitable than the last.*[16]

Other foreign officials based in Ottoman Kurdistan during the nineteenth century have made similar observations in relation to the negative repercussions of the military activities of the Ottoman state in this region. In 1835,

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16 FO 195/799, *Trade and Agriculture of Kurdistan for 1863*, enclosed in Taylor at Diarbekir, 13 July 1864 (emphasis added).

a few years after Rasheed Pasha's campaign commenced, British Consul James Brant reports two destructive results of the military assaults in Diyarbekir. The first of these relate to the demographic demolition: the number of houses found in Diyarbekir had reduced from '40,000' to '8,000', and the second devastation pertains to the 'severe damage' to the trade of Diyarbekir (Brant, 1836: 209–10). Correspondingly, German Field Marshal Helmuth Carl Bernhard von Moltke (1800–91), who participated in the Ottoman army in Ottoman Kurdistan under Hafiz Pasha, makes parallel observations vis-à-vis the ramifications of the military campaigns to social and economic life in Hasankeyf and Cizre (von Moltke, 1968: 251). The information relayed earlier not only oppugns the validity of the postulate that Kurdistan was secluded from the local and foreign trade throughout the nineteenth century, but it also indicates that the military operations of the Ottoman state after the early 1830s in Kurdistan created long-term constraints for the commerce of this region.

While the currently existing quantitative evidence on the commerce of Kurdistan in no way enables a complete understanding or analysis of the nature and scale of the commercial activities in this domain, it nevertheless does equip us with valid grounds to doubt the prevailing static assessments regarding the trade of this region. The only currently available regularly recorded data of the commercial activities in Kurdistan for the first half of the nineteenth century is the tax-farm accounts of the provincial fiscal bureau, or *voyvodalık*, of Diyarbekir. As alluded to by Faroqhi, in the absence of regular and accurate data 'for figures concerning the volume of urban economic activities and particularly of trade, our best and usually only guide consists of tax-farming accounts' (Faroqhi, 1984: 16). However, after 1839, due to the centralist reforms in the Tanzimat era, the tax-farm system had been transformed. Therefore, the availability and utility of the tax-farms accounts after the third decade of the nineteenth century is moot, which is why this chapter will only make use of tax-farm records up until the mid-1830s.

As outlined in the preceding section, the year in which Rashid Pasha's military venture in Ottoman Kurdistan (1833–4) commenced was identified by the contemporaries as the point at which the decades-long decline – which contemporary observers believed lasted until the 1860s[17] – in the commercial activities in this region began. This observation is supported by the data attained from the records of the fiscal bureau of the paradigmatic Kurdish province of Diyarbekir summarized earlier. One of the first things we realize when we look at the figures in Table 6.11 is the vast decrease during the 1830s in the second-

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17 FO 195/799 *Trade and Agriculture of Kurdistan for 1863*, Taylor in Diarbekir, 13 July 1864.

most important source of revenue of the Diyarbekir dye house (*voyvodalık*: *boyahane*) dues remittances. This drop is redolent of the fact that production of and trade in textiles was sorely affected by the military operations in this province. The other glaring fact is that there is no record of the ground rent (*arsa*) levied from external goods kept in the warehouses of Diyarbekir. According to archival research by Yılmazçelik, this void was because after the early 1830s, this form of taxation was conjoined or 'noted under the *Gümrük* [customs revenues]' (Yılmazçelik, 1995: 288) by the *voyvoda* personnel. This change in the records reinforces the drastic fall in Diyarbekir's custom and trade revenues immediately after the military activities of the Ottoman state in Kurdistan in the early 1830s. Furthermore, sales taxes (*damga*) intakes, when compared with the figures during 1797–1806, witnessed a severe reduction. The concurrence of these negative fluctuations led the total revenue of the *voyvodalık* to decrease, when compared to the revenues of the selected years in the preceding three decades, by around half in 1833–4. After sixteen years of sporadic war in the different parts of Kurdistan, the Ottoman state had been successful in suppressing the Kurdish emirates and the rebellions in Kurdistan, but with tremendous negative repercussions for the economic activities in this region.

The data pertaining to the commercial activities in Kurdistan during the second half of the nineteenth century suggest that between the 1860s and the early 1870s, with the arrival of relative security to this domain, the commerce in this region witnessed a gradual revival. Based on the findings of Quataert in the seminal work *Ottoman Manufacturing in the Age of the Industrial Revolution*, we learn that the use of British yarn in the textile manufacturing industry at the Diyarbekir province had overall 'quadrupled or quintupled between the 1860s and late 1880s and, by [the] mid-1890s, had doubled again' (Quataert, 1993: 69). Contrary to the suggestions of the destruction of the manufacturing sector in the second half of the nineteenth century (Burkay, [1992] 2008; Jafar, 1976; Pamuk, [1987] 2010; Sönmez, [1990] 1992), Quataert establishes that 'aggregate textile production around Diyarbakir was stable, at c. 200,000 pieces, between the 1860s and 1903' (Quataert, 1993: 70). Accordingly, Quataert argues, 'despite the loss of Diyarbekir's international markets during the eighteenth century . . . the Diyarbekir region continued as one of the most important Ottoman textile production centers' in the nineteenth century (Quataert, 1993: 66).

The gradual revival and progression of commerce in Diyarbekir and Erzurum throughout the 1860s and early 1870s was followed by stagnation and regression in the second half of the 1870s. Alongside the fiscal crisis and government bankruptcy in 1875 and the famine in the 1880s, the Russo–Ottoman War (1877–8) and the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt (1880), both of

which took place in the borders of or in close proximity to Erzurum and Diyarbekir, severely hampered production and trade in these provinces between approximately 1875 and 1890.

In 1886, the acting consul of Kurdistan, George Pollard Devey, described the negative ramifications of the political instabilities in this region for manufacturing and commerce in Kurdistan:

> Some industries have altogether died out, as that of swords and dagger making. The manufactures of cotton, woollen, and silken stuff is much less than in former years. . . . There can be no doubt that the death blow to Erzeroum['s] trade and industry was the war of 1877–'78, followed by three years of famine, since this period trade has remained at the lowest point.[18]

The British consul at Diyarbekir, Thomas Boyajian, in the same report, transmits the following bleak manifestations:

> During the period from 1880–85, as compared with the preceding 15 years, export trade has, with the exception of opium, diminished. Imports have increased in volume but decreased 30 per cent. in value. . . . This town in former years could reckon 1,500 silk and cotton looms, and carried trade with the remotest parts of the empire. . . . The value of silk alone manufactured in 1865 was £35,000, that of 1884 £7,500. . . . In the absence of trade returns of former years, I am not in a position to state precisely the difference of exports of the period 1880–85 as compared with the 15 previous years, but the following table of one or two of the chief items of export will suffice to prove the statement:

	Value 1860	Value 1884
	£	£
Mohair	65,450	14,500
Wool	23,300	14,200
Galls	8,000	1,900
Total	**96,750**	**30,600**

Source: A&P 1886, C.4715,
XXI.231, p. 796[a]

a   The table is part of the text cited earlier and ends the quote.

Although the non-existence of trade records for Diyarbekir and Erzurum makes it impossible to estimate the exact nature of the decrease in the export trade, we nevertheless are able to attain an idea of the nature of the deterioration by juxtaposing the trade data from the early 1880s with that

18 A&P, 1886, C. 4715, XXI, p. 795.

Table 6.12 Imports and exports of Erzurum,
1871–1884 (in pounds sterling)

Year	Import	Export	Total
1871[a]	300,000	215,000[b]	515,000
1883[c]	356,160	83,560	439,720
1884[d]	268,570	99,070	367,640

Source: A&P 1872, 1884 and 1884–5
a A&P, 1872, C.637, LVIII, p. 1347.
b Export figures of only items exported to Europe and the
   interior regions, not including Persia and Russia.
c A&P, 1884, C.4106, LXXXI, p. 1411.
d A&P, 1884–5, C.4526, LXXIX, p. 1929.

Table 6.13 Imports and exports of Diyarbekir,
1863–1884 (in pounds sterling)

Year	Import	Export	Total
1863[a]	187,224	325,174	512,398
1883[b]	129,850	118,150	248,000
1884[c]	132,980	108,838	241,818

Source: FO 195/799, A&P 1884 and 1884–5
a FO 195/799, Taylor at Diarbekir, 13 July 1864, pp. 63, 77,
   74, 79.
b A&P, 1884, C.4106, LXXXI, p. 1411.
c A&P, 1884–5, C.4526, LXXIX, p. 1940.

of the previous two decades. The trade figures in Tables 6.12–6.13 are in
harmony with the dismal state of the eastern Anatolian economy relayed by
the British consuls cited earlier.

The relatively abundant quantitative data[19] after 1890 on Ottoman
Kurdistan's trade regularly transmitted in the commercial reports prepared
by the British consuls based in Diyarbekir and Erzurum – some of which have

19 Tables 6.14–6.15 express the trade balance in Kurdistan during 1891–1913 in nominal
    terms. This limitation is due to the existent and prevalent Consumer Price Index
    (CPI) – which used to calculate inflation and thus enumerate real (inflation-adjusted)
    growth – employed to understand and analyse price trends in the Ottoman Empire
    based on price indices in Istanbul (see Pamuk, 2004). Owing to the fact that throughout

Table 6.14 Imports and exports of Diyarbekir,
1890–1913 (in pounds sterling)

Year	Import	Export	Total
1891[a]	151,184	145,282	296,466
1893[b]	169,885	193,338	363,167
1895[c]	216,636	179,181	395,817
1897[d]	287,000	275,000	562,000
1908[e]	436,560	445,049	881,609
1909[f]	478,500	510,000	988,500
1912[g]	648,000	455,400	1,103,400
1913[h]	693,960	503,300	1,197,260

Source: A&P
a A&P, 1893–4, C.6855–129, XCII, p. 8.
b A&P, 1895, C.7581 C.7828, XCVI, p. 3927.
c A&P, 1897, C.8277, LXXXIX, pp. 4200–1.
d A&P, 1898, C.8648, XCIV, p. 3974.
e A&P, 1911, Cd.5465, XCVII, p. 1877.
f Ibid.
g A&P, 1914, Cd.7048–187, XCV, pp. 6–12.
h Ibid.

been tabulated here – specifies that commercial activities in these provinces
had recorded an impressive recovery during 1890–1914. In more concrete
terms, the paradigmatic Kurdish province of Diyarbekir and the province of
Erzurum in 1913, when compared with that of 1891, had witnessed a near-
fourfold increase in nominal terms (see Table 6.14).

Based on the details provided in the commerce reports cited earlier, it
becomes apparent that around 40 per cent of all the items exported from
Diyarbekir during 1890–1913 had consisted of wool, silk, mohair, valonia oak
and hides that had been sent to foreign countries. The remainder had consisted
of industrial products and agricultural produce, such as butter, rice, sheep and
camels, which had been exported to various regions of the empire. The trade

the lifetime of the empire prices, as well as wages, in the imperial capital differed
substantially with that of the other regions of the empire, the utility and the veracity of
using the CPI to work out the real growth in Ottoman Kurdistan are highly dubitable.
That said, when we bear in mind the following two actualities, it becomes apparent
that the trade expansion in Kurdistan posited by this chapter cannot be oppugned: (i)
exchange rate of the British pound sterling against the Ottoman lira remained constant
during the years 1850–1914 (i.e. 1 British pound sterling = 1.10 Ottoman lira), and (ii)
change in the CPI in Istanbul in the years 1891–1913 was not of a very substantial nature
(i.e. CPI in 1891 = 282.91 and CPI in 1913 = 317.10) (Pamuk, 2004).

Table 6.15 Imports and exports of Erzurum,
1890–1913 (in pounds sterling)

Year	Import	Export	Total
1891[a]	294,400	202,950	497,350
1892[b]	230,015	209,300	439,315
1893[c]	231,690	164,700	396,390
1895[d]	194,110	157,300	351,410
1897[e]	214,030	167,660	381,690
1912[f]	639,200	303,750	942,950
1913[g]	650,250	360,700	1,010,950

Source: A&P
a A&P, 1893–4, C.6855–129, XCII, pp. 3–4.
b Ibid.
c A&P, 1895, C.7581–C.7828, XCVI, p. 3918.
d A&P, 1897, C.8277, LXXXIX, p. 4199.
e A&P, 1898, C.8648, XCIV, pp. 3971.
f A&P 1914, Cd.7048–187, XCV, pp. 6–12.
g Ibid.

data for the province of Erzurum in the same period indicate that the bulk of all the trade had been with interior domains and had consisted of commodities and agricultural produce similar to that in Diyarbekir.

Although the level of interregional trade in native goods had varied in these provinces, it nonetheless had been a very important component of the trade of provinces in and around Ottoman Kurdistan during 1890–1913. Quataert deriving from the trade data attained for Diyarbekir, Harput and Mosul – all of which had been constituent parts of the central province of Diyarbekir in the early nineteenth century – during the 1890s arrives at the following revealing conclusion:

> In some cases, the value of a district's inter-regional trade in goods of Ottoman origins vastly exceeded the value of its exports to foreign countries. At Mosul, in some years, the ratios were nearly three and four to one. During a typical year in the 1890s, Diyarbekir, Harput and Mosul together interregionally sent goods worth more than one million pound sterling. . . . (Total Ottoman exports abroad during the 1890s averaged 18 million pound sterling) (Quataert, 1994: 837).

All of the data presented here are indicative of the vibrant atmosphere and positive fluctuations in the spheres of commerce and production in Ottoman Kurdistan and bordering regions after 1890. Moreover, contrary to the

prevalent static conceptions of the commerce in Kurdistan, the information, despite the lack of longitudinal data, draws a picture of constant flux in manufacturing and commerce in Kurdistan in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Deformation of and De-development in Kurdistan

The ideological shifts among the late Ottoman political elite to pan-Turkism or Turkish nationalism at around the same time as the outbreak of the First World War had entailed a dialectical process; involving not only destructive social engineering and economic policies targeting the non-Turkish citizens of the empire, but the nationalist reorganization of the Ottoman lands.[20] In other words, during and immediately after the war, the CUP's nationalist demographic policies aimed at homogenizing the multi-ethnic landscape of the empire, which mainly targeted the Armenians and the Kurds in the ethnically heterogeneous eastern provinces, concurred with the radical reforms that laid the groundwork for Turkish capitalism and the unitary Turkish nation-state that ascended from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire.

After 1913, more importantly, the CUP abandoned the English liberal model of economic development modelled on laissez-faire liberalism and began to embrace the economic model of 'national economy' centred on the ideas of the German economist Friedrich List. This shift in policy enabled the Unionists to combine the principle of state control over the economy with preferential treatment towards the Turkish/Muslim bourgeoisie.

List, in brief, contended that the liberal theories of the British economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo suited the national interest of England because of its industrialized economy and imperialist policies, but the model of development these economists advocated could not be universalized. According to List, if laissez-faire liberal ideas are adopted by countries that do not have the large-scale industries akin to those of England, they would end up reliant on England (List, 1856).

One of the prominent theoreticians of the CUP, Ziya Gökalp, paraphrased these concerns in the early 1920s. Gökalp maintained that the 'Manchester economics is not at all a cosmopolitan doctrine, it is nothing but the national economics of England which stands for big industry and, thus, derives only

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20 For detailed analyses of the nature and implications of the nationalist spatial policies in the late Ottoman era and the Republican era of the Turkish Republic in eastern Anatolia, see Jongerden (2007), Öktem (2004) and Ülker (2005).

benefit from the freedom of exchange abroad and suffers no loss from it' (Gökalp, 1959: 307). Deriving from this premise, Gökalp argued that if countries that do not have the industrial base and scale of England implement the ideas of the Manchester school, they would inevitably become 'economic slaves to industrialized nations like England' (Gökalp, 1968: 123).

Relatedly, the CUP with the purpose of nurturing the indigenous industry undertook fundamental economic measures (Toprak, 1982: 25–33). One of the core aims of these policies was the creation of the Turkish/Muslim bourgeoisie to supplant the existing non-Muslim/Turkish commercial class, which was content to play the role of commercial intermediary in an empire that served as a market for Europe's industry.

However, the repercussions of the First World War and the project of building a 'national economy', which concealed a Turkist agenda that was entirely a novel feature in Ottoman history, were double-edged. Ethnocide, forced migration and the demolition of moveable and immovable property had become the destructive components of the policies implemented in the Ottoman Empire during the war.

Based on an archival study of the deportation orders issued by the CUP government, Fuat Dündar discerns that the deportation of the Ottoman Armenians had commenced in February 1915. The 'fifth and final stage of the deportations' is said to have begun after the leader of the CUP, Talat Pasha, on 21 June 1915, ordered the deportation of 'all Armenians without exception' who lived in ten provinces of the eastern and south-eastern regions of the empire, including Diyarbekır, Sivas and Mamuretülaziz (Dündar, 2012: 281–3). Within a year or so after the initiation of forced deportation of the Armenians from their ancestral homelands, according to a report of a United Nations human rights sub-commission, 'at least one million' Armenians perished (Hovannisian, 1999: 15).

The removal and the subsequent destruction of the Ottoman Armenians had severe social and economic consequences.[21] Prior to 1916, the CUP's 'national economy' targeted mainly the Armenian and the Greek communities in the empire, and after 1916, it targeted the Kurds. The Ottoman Interior Ministry, in a circular on 2 November 1915, confessed to the occurrence of 'an economic vacuum arising from the transportation of Armenian craftsmen'.[22]

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21 For a detailed examination of the social and economic repercussions of the Armenian genocide of 1915, see Üngör and Polatel (2011).

22 Başbakanlık Odası Arşivi (BOA), Dahiliye Nezareti Şifre Kalemi (DH.ŞFR) 57/261, Interior Ministry to all provinces, 2 November 1915, in Üngör and Polatel (2011: 93).

After the forced expulsion and massacre of the Armenians, the CUP had designed and implemented a range of forced deportation policies targeting the Kurds. The settlement policies of the CUP entailed, on one hand, the deportation of Kurds from their homelands for resettlement in central and western Anatolia in accordance with the '5 per cent rule': ensuring that the Kurds constituted no more than 5 per cent of the total population in their new places of settlement. On the other hand, Muslim immigrants, or *muhacir*, from lost territories, such as Albanian Muslims, Bosnian Muslims and Bulgarian Turks, settled in eastern Anatolia, where they were not allowed to constitute more than 10 per cent of the local population (Akçam, 2012: 43–50; Jongerden, 2007: 178–9).

The statistical data prepared by the Ministry of the Economy indicate that there were 'well over a million' Kurdish refugees and deportees during this period (Üngör, 2011: 117). Figures pertaining to the actual number of Kurdish deportations are non-existent, however. The common consensus in the scholarly studies on this issue is that approximately 700,000 Kurds were forced to flee their homelands, around half of whom are reported to have perished before reaching their various destinations (Jwaideh, 1961: 369; Safrastian, 1948: 76).

Overall, by the end of the war, the Ottoman economy shrank by around 50 per cent and its GDP fell by 40 per cent. The destruction the war caused in the different sectors of the Ottoman economy are succinctly summarized by the following figures pertaining to the declines experienced during the war. Mineral production fell by 80 per cent, coal production by 75 per cent, cotton textiles by 50 per cent, wheat production by 40 per cent and sheep and goat raising by 40 per cent (Üngör and Polatel, 2011: 94). Life for the population in Ottoman Kurdistan who had survived the war had been reduced to abject misery and destitution as famine and bacterial diseases like typhus and typhoid took their toll. Due to the destruction of the eastern economy during the course of the First World War, the famine that began at the end of 1917 struck the eastern and south-eastern provinces more acutely than elsewhere in the empire (McDowall, 2000: 108–9).

With the proclamation of the Turkish Republic (29 October 1923), the short-lived Kemalist–Kurdish alliance collapsed. After the armistice in October 1923, Turkish nationalism had become Turkey's official and hegemonic ideology. Eastern South-eastern Anatolian (ESA) provinces in northern Kurdistan comprised the only domains in Turkey not to be Turkified at the inception of the Turkish Republic; therefore, in the eyes of the Kemalist rulers, these territories were areas wherein potential secessionist threats

could originate. The perceived risk of Kurdish self-rule by the Republican rulers informed the discriminatory Kurdish policies during the single-party period, which led to neglect and further peripheralization of these primarily Kurdish regions of the new Turkish nation-state, a theme explored later. This perhaps explains why the alteration in the Kemalist attitude towards the Kurds had overlapped with the Lausanne Conference, which was held in two sessions, from 20 November 1922 to 4 February 1923, and then from 23 April until 24 July 1923.

The major change of policy vis-à-vis the Kurds took place at the İzmir Economic Congress (17 February–4 March 1923). This congress convened during the interval in the deliberations of the Lausanne Conference, with the attendance of 1,135 delegates (İnan, 1972: 12) mostly from the dominant classes, namely, big landowners and the merchant bourgeoisie, as well as from the labouring classes (Boratav, 1982: 14–18). When Mustafa Kemal's speech[23] to this congress was published, all references to the Kurds had been excised (McDowall, 2000: 191), which implied a fundamental shift in the policies of Ankara towards the Kurds in Turkey.

Such an alteration was not adversative to the purpose and principles of the 1923 Congress of Economics, as this congress espoused to consolidate the foundations of the Turkish 'national economy' envisioned and set out by the CUP during the First World War as the basic strategy of the new Turkish nation-state. The principles adopted in the İzmir Economic Congress pertained to the preparation of a property regime, an institutional structure required for the operation of a modern market economy and special incentives designed for the enrichment and development of the indigenous bourgeoisie (Boratav, 1982; Toprak, 1982; Yalman, 2009).

After this congress, and throughout the Republican era, one of the central objectives of the Kemalists was, in the words of an official report of the ruling Republican People's Party's General Secretariat in 1939–40, to 'dismantle the territorial unity of Kurds' and to 'Turkify the Eastern population' (Bulut, 1998: 185–9). The Kemalists sought to procure the densification and power of the dominant ethnic group, the Turks, at the expense of the Kurds in ESA with the anticipation that the latter would gradually be extinguished or become a powerless ethnic entity. The cornerstones of this strategy were threefold: (a) the forced deportation of the Kurds from their native lands; (b) the

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23 For the speech by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to the İzmir Economic Congress, see İnan (1972: 57–69).

assimilation of the Kurds into the Turkish identity; and (c) the underdevelopment of the areas predominantly inhabited by the Kurds.

The Republican rulers' aim of 'turkifying' the heterogeneous eastern provinces and, in turn, extinguishing the Kurdish identity or rendering the Kurds a feeble entity had played a determinate role in the creation of a chaotic atmosphere in the predominantly Kurdish south-east of Turkey in the early years of the Turkish Republic. During the first two decades of the Republic, there were twenty-seven Kurdish revolts, and only one out of the eighteen Turkish military expeditions during the years 1924–38 transpired outside of Kurdistan. Three of these revolts, namely, the Şeyh Said Revolt (1925), the Ararat Revolt (1930) and the Dersim Revolt (1936–8), had a distinctive influence on the evolution of the CHP regime and its Kurdish policy.

Subsequent to the Şeyh Said Revolt, Atatürk, on 8 September 1925, authorized the creation of the Reform Council for the East (Şark İslahat Encümanı) in order to devise concrete policy prescriptions to deal once and for all with any potential separatist threat from Kurdish society. Pursuant to this, on 24 September 1925, a special report titled the *Report for Reform in the East* (*Şark İslahat Raporu*) was prepared and presented to the Turkish Assembly. This secret report, which saw daylight as a result of a series of official reports published by Mehmet Bayrak (1993, 1994) in the 1990s, made the following critical recommendations:

(i) Preventing the Kurdish political and social elite from reviving as a ruling class;
(ii) Clearing persons, families and their relatives whose residence 'in the east the government deems inappropriate';
(iii) Reuniting and governing all of the provinces located on the east bank of the Euphrates River via the military administrative unit of 'Inspectorates-General' by martial law for an unspecified period of time;
(iv) Emphatically prohibiting the use 'of all non-Turkish languages' and the 'employment of the Kurds in even secondary offices';
(v) Allocation of 7 million Turkish Lira (TL) in order to finance the settlement and the livelihoods of the Turkish refugees and transportation of the Kurds (Bayrak, 1993: 481–9).

Consequently, a series of deportation laws was implemented between 1925 and 1927 actuating the recommendations in this report. These laws were akin to the expulsion orders of 1915–16. In the words of British Ambassador Sir George Clerk, it empowered the government to 'transport from the Eastern

Vilayets an indefinite number of Kurds or other elements ... the Government has already begun to apply to the Kurdish elements ... the policy which so successfully disposed of the Armenian Minority in 1915.'[24] Despite the lack of factual data, according to the figures cited by contemporary Kurdish authors, from 1925 to 1928 more than 500,000 people were deported of whom some 200,000 were estimated to have perished in the aforementioned provinces (Bedirkhan, 1958: 52–3).

The 1925 revolt was a catalyst for more than the suppression of the Kurdish national movement as it led to the implementation on 4 March 1925 of an extraordinary law titled 'The Law on the Maintenance of Order' (Takrir-i Sükün Kanunu), which remained in force until March 1929. The Law on the Maintenance of Order marked the end of political pluralism and free press in Turkey.

The Law on the Maintenance of Order empowered the government to enact a wide range of legislations in order to attain a top-down transformation of society according to the Western model, which the Kemalists perceived as the universal model of civilization and progress as well as a precondition for economic progress. The direct and indirect effects of these new acts are commonly posited in the literature on the initial years of the Turkish Republic to have stimulated modernization and capitalist development in Turkey (Ahmad, 1993; Aydın, 1986; Herschlag, 1968; Issawi, 1980).

Between 1923 and 1929, the Turkish economy recovered, and by 1929, it appeared to have regained its pre-war level. For instance, per capita GDP in 1923 was 40 per cent below its 1914 level, but by the end of the 1920s, it had attained the levels prevailing prior to the First World War (Pamuk, 2008: 276–7). Besides, as illustrated by Table 6.16, when compared to the pre-war Ottoman levels, considerable developments had taken place in the sphere of education and in transport.

However, ESA[25] (Beyazıt, Bitlis, Diyarbekir, Elaziz (Elazığ), Erzincan, Hakkari, Kars, Malatya, Mardin, Siirt, Urfa and Van), which in 1927 were

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24 FO 371/12255, Clerk to Chamberlain, Istanbul, 22 June 1927.
25 Mustafa Abdülhalik Renda, one of the co-authors of the aforementioned *Report for the Reform of the East*, in September 1925 traversed the eastern provinces/districts of Gaziantep, Urfa, Siverek, Diyarbekir, Siirt, Bitlis, Van, Muş, Genç, Elaziz, Dersim, Ergani, Mardin, Malatya and Maraş in order to identify 'where the Kurds live and how many they are'. As a result of this field research, Renda discerned that out of the 1,360,000-registered population east of the Euphrates in 1925, 993,000 were Kurds, 251,000 were Turkish and 117,600 were Arabs. Moreover, Renda, subsequent to an elaborate socio-economic analysis of the eastern provinces, concluded that the Kurds had been in a 'dominant economic position' in this region of Turkey (Bayrak, 1993: 452–67).

Table 6.16 Indicators of development, 1913–1928

Year	1913	1923	1928
Population (millions)	17	13	13.8
Foreign trade (million dollars)	179	137	202
GDP per capita (1948 prices Turkish lira)	–	254	330
Agricultural production (millions of liras 1940 prices)	–	1,522	2,254
Industrial production (millions of liras 1948 prices)	–	421	662
Wheat (million tons)	3.4	1.0	1.9
Tobacco (thousand tons)	49	45	50
Cotton (thousand tons)	30	44	51
Coal (million tons)	0.8	0.6	1.3
Refined sugar (thousand tons)	–	–	4.3
Cement (thousand tons)	–	–	59
Electricity (million kWh)	20	40	90
Railways (thousand kilometres)	3.6	4.1	4.8
Students in schools (thousands)	–	359	517

Source: Issawi (1980: 368)

home to just under a fifth (14.6 per cent) of the general population of Turkey (13,660,275[26]), did not develop in parallel with the rest of the country. These regions had been the least affected quarters by the post-war recovery witnessed in the Turkish Republic between the years of 1923 and 1929. Despite the aforementioned transport infrastructure projects, by 1930 no railroads were constructed in these provinces.[27] In 1927, only 900 of the 14,000 schools in Turkey were located in these domains.[28] In the whole of ESA, furthermore, by 1930 there was only one bank, namely, the Elaziz İktisat Bankası, established in 1929, which had a nominal capital of 50,000 TL.[29] Thus, obtaining loans was virtually impossible.

According to the official data from 1927, when compared with the nine designated agricultural districts in Turkey, each of which was composed of five to nine provinces, the districts in ESA, namely, districts five and six, contained the least amount of agricultural tools and machinery. Only 119,665 out of 1,413,509 of the necessary agricultural tools and machinery were to be found in the provinces located in these regions.[30]

26 TCBIUM, *Annuaire Statistique*, 1928: 24–5.   27 Ibid., 1932: 359.   28 Ibid., 1928: 28–9.
29 Ibid., 1934: 305.   30 Ibid., 1933: 188–9.

Although there are no official regional trade statistics to cite, the following report from the British consul in Trabzon in June 1926 indicates that the trade in the mid-1920s in the Kurdish provinces was a shadow of what it had been during the First World War: 'Travellers report having seen great numbers of Kurds with their families and cattle being driven along [the] Erzurum–Erzinjan [Erzincan] road presumably bound for Angora [Ankara] and Western Anatolia. Whole villages are deserted, and trade is at a standstill over a large area.'[31]

The policy of deporting the Kurdish political and economic elites, more-over, adversely affected trade and wealth creation in this region of Turkey, as revealed by the following observation of a British traveller in the summer of 1929: 'One of the main weapons employed was the deportation of the rich and powerful Kurdish families . . . in the process they have lost all their belongings, and there is not, so I was told, a single wealthy or powerful Kurd in Turkish Kurdistan to-day.'[32]

Conclusion

Albeit on differing causal grounds, the development literature on Kurdistan converges on the postulate that a unilinear continuum of underdevelopment has characterized its economic history. The findings of this chapter challenge this prevailing interpretation. The analysis of the vicissitudes in Kurdistan within the past four centuries, outlined in the previous sections of this chapter, paints a non-stagnant picture of economic life in this domain.

In light of the information given, when the changes over the past four centuries are considered, a new periodization for economic history of these regions emerges. The periodization is no longer centred on a unilinear continuum of inadequate development. Rather, there are three distinct periods: the first of these begins from the early sixteenth century and ends with the arrival of the third decade of the nineteenth century, characterized by economic development. The second period commences around 1830 up until the first quarter of the twentieth century, and the major theme of this period is economic underdevelopment. The final period is an age of economic de-development, beginning from around the first quarter of the twentieth century.

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31 FO 371/11528, Knight to Lindsay, Trebizon, 16 June 1926.
32 FO 371/13828, Clerk (Istanbul) to Henderson (London), 15 July 1929.

Between the early sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries Kurdistan was an economically burgeoning area, and constituted important sources of income for the Ottoman central treasury. The sheep breeding and sheep trade, textile production and trade and mining and mineral manufacturing and trade, as well as the international and interregional trade passing through Kurdistan, played an important role in the economic expansion of these regions. Up until the early nineteenth century, the revenues attained from these sectors of the local economy constituted the bulk of the provincial revenues of Diyarbekir and Erzurum.

The domineering policies of the Ottoman state after the third decade of the nineteenth century instituted a major barrier to the expansion of commerce and export trade by inhibiting the development of export-oriented agricultural production in Ottoman Kurdistan. Put differently, economic underdevelopment in Ottoman Kurdistan after the 1830s was directly related to barriers to the penetration of market-induced commercialization of agriculture in this region, which was closely connected to the negative repercussions of the centralization policies of the Ottoman central authorities on regional agricultural production.

After the early 1830s, the central authorities seized almost all the lands previously owned and cultivated by the Kurdish notables, and, more importantly, large tracts of these repossessed lands remained uncultivated for a long period after their appropriation. Three decades after these lands were seized from the Kurdish notables, the greater part of the confiscated lands was either abandoned or was not resourcefully allocated to peasants by the Ottoman state. As corroborated by the quantitative data above, such ill use of land, as well as the three decades of sporadic violence in this region, had inauspicious consequences for agricultural output and trade and augmented the pauperization of agrarian labourers previously working in these lands. In sum, the destruction of autonomous Kurdish polities and the decline in economic development in this region went hand in glove.

The intrusive policies of the Ottoman state in Kurdistan after the 1830s triggered major social and political changes in this Ottoman borderland. A large section of the Kurdish notable families and merchant elites both voluntarily and involuntarily resettled in western Anatolia, particularly in Constantinople, far from Kurdistan, during the time of the Tanzimat and the initial years of the twentieth century where they became increasingly integrated into the Ottoman state, language and discourse. This process is exhibited with the participation of émigré

Kurds in the CUP and their support for the Young Turk Revolution of 1908.

Relatedly, the eradication of Kurdish administrative structures, by instigating a power vacuum in Kurdistan, created fertile conditions for the strengthening of tribal frameworks and deepened the feudalization of Kurdish society. It is not a coincidence that with the obliteration of the Kurdish emirates, tribal confederacies occupied the central stage in Kurdish society and politics thereafter. Consequently, there was a significant rise in the number of tribal rifts, resulting in less law and order, particularly in the Kurdish countryside. Thus, the centralist modernization policies implemented in Ottoman Kurdistan after the 1830s, on top of having damaging consequences for the means of production and relations of production in this region, paradoxically enhanced the feudalization and fragmentation of society. The concurrence of these factors engendered socio-economic underdevelopment in this region.

The impact of political transformations on economic and social life in nineteenth-century Ottoman Kurdistan summarized earlier does also suggest that underdevelopment in this region cannot be adequately explained by the 'isolation' of Kurdistan from the transformative economic changes caused by the increasing incorporation of capitalism into the Ottoman Empire throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Because of the absence of railroads and efficient transportation infrastructure in Kurdistan, it is commonly hypothesized that this region, more than any other part of the empire, was secluded from the changes invoked by the penetration of the capitalist system throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The seclusion of Ottoman Kurdistan from the Ottoman and the European markets is often posited as a prime example of this phenomenon.

As the findings of this chapter uncover, up until the early 1830s, commercial activity in Ottoman Kurdistan was as vibrant as it was in the late eighteenth century. In the years 1833–60, the commerce of this region witnessed a swift decline. From around 1860 up until the outbreak of the Russo–Ottoman War of 1877–8, even in the face of transportation barriers, with the arrival of relative stability to the region, commerce to and from Kurdistan did recover. Between 1890 and the outbreak of the First World War interregional and intraregional trade reached new and important heights.

These developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries coincided with the Hamidian period (1876–1908). During this era, the politically co-opted (predominantly Sunni) Kurdish tribal elite, like Milli Ibrahim Pasha

(chief of the Milan confederation), with economic and extra-economic means largely designated by the Ottoman state, accumulated immense landed wealth, reinvigorated the lord–peasant bonds and aimed to minimize the economic fortunes of the Christian community in Ottoman Kurdistan. Such factors did not only enable the aggrandizement of the politically receptive Kurdish elite, they also provided fertile conditions for commodity production and export orientation in the local economy by enabling the possession of private owner-ship of large estates and by accelerating the exploitation of the dependent peasantry. Yet the growth in the local economy was not a harbinger of structural change, nor was it long term. In other words, the expansion in trade was not accompanied by a transformation of the relations of production, since it was based on usury and extraction of rent payments from direct producers. The combination of the outbreak of the First World War in addition to the destructive population policies had a deleterious impact on all of the previously recorded economic expansion in this region.

The politically integrated Kurdish rulers were neither autonomous nor did they request autonomy from the central state, because the nature and the maintenance of their power and wealth were grounded in the support pro-vided by the Ottoman state. This helps explain why, in contrast to the Kurds in the Ottoman metropolis who were largely in support of the 1908 revolution, the clientele Kurdish elite in Kurdistan vehemently opposed the notions of 'nation' and 'society' adopted by the Ittihadist Ottoman reformers in place of the *umma*, and were very hostile to the 1908 revolution (McDowall, 2000: 96). Following the First World War, when the map of the Middle East was being redrawn, these schisms amidst Kurdish society played a pivotal role in the void of a leadership that could fill a role akin to that held by the Hashemite emirs in Hejaz in the emergence of the Arab national movement and the development of Arab nationalism during and after the Great War.

On the eve of the war, the Young Turk regime adopted ideological, political and economic programmes that were substantially different from those of previous Ottoman administrations. After the 1913 coup d'état, the late Ottoman rulers abandoned economic liberalism and, alternatively, embraced the economic model of *Milli İktisad* (National Economy), and concomitantly an ideological shift from pan-Islamism to pan-Turkism occurred among the political elite in the empire. The economic development and ideological paradigms the Young Turk rulers espoused were inherited by their Kemalist heirs and formed the basis of the policies implemented in the Turkish Republic throughout the Republican era.

In the years 1913–50, the two operational codes of the state programmes in the residues of the Ottoman Empire were the construction and the preservation of the Turkish national economy. This entailed the protection and elevation of the Muslim/Turkish bourgeoisie and the Turkification of the ethnically heterogeneous demographic landscape. These objectives of the Turkist rulers after 1913, at a time when the empire was largely reduced to its Anatolian heartlands, entailed policies of genocide, forced migration, confiscation of economic resources and the suppression of all forms of non-Turkish identities and cultures in the ethnically mixed ESA provinces in Northern Kurdistan. These novel features of state policy persistently implemented in these regions during the first quarter of the twentieth century unleashed a unique and new economic process of de-development, proactively created by state policies geared towards precluding the possibility of an economic base to support independent indigenous existence (Roy, 1995). This process came to fruition in Kurdistan by policies that not only hindered, but also deliberately and assiduously blocked internal economic development and the structural reforms on which it is based.

De-development in Kurdistan commenced as a result of the state policies implemented by the Young Turks and their ideological heirs, the Kemalists, centred on the objectives of nationalist demographic (i.e. Turkification) and economic (i.e. Turkish National Economy) reorganization. These state programmes differed greatly from those of the previous Ottoman regimes, which, albeit distorted, allowed for some form of indigenous economic development. Prior to the first decade of the twentieth century, at no point in history was ethnic nationalism a notion that struck a chord with the Ottoman political leaders. The Ottoman political establishment was above all occupied with preserving the territorial and political integrity of a multinational empire. The heterogeneous character of the Ottoman Empire recurrently informed the policies of the Ottoman political leaders, and there was no predisposition towards formulating a nationalist agenda, which would have been antithetical to the prevalent aim of holding the multicultural domains together.

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REGIONAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THE KURDS IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

7

Kurds and Kurdish Nationalism in the Interwar Period

METIN YÜKSEL

From the early modern era through the eighteenth century, Muslim empires and China were the chief political and economic powers in the world (Frank, 1998; Hodgson, 1970). Traced back to the fifteenth century, European rise to power to gradually replace them continued with the 'scramble for colonies, markets and raw materials' during the 'high noon of imperialism' and finally resulted in World War I (Hall, 2008: 282). From the Great War through the 1930s, approximately 90 per cent of the surface of the globe was under the control of a Western power (Loomba, 2005: 19; Young, 2001: 2), which makes modern Western colonialism and 'ecological imperialism' (Crosby, 2009) unprecedented in world history. The modern Western-dominated world has been reshaped by a world economy and a system of nation-states (Gelvin, 2011: 9), which have brought unmatched devastation to human beings, the flora and fauna.

In addition to politics and economy, Europe has also come to occupy the central place in historiography. Criticizing the domination of Eurocentrism in historiography, Dipesh Chakrabarty highlights 'the subalternity of non-Western, third-world histories', by framing it as 'inequality of ignorance' (Chakrabarty, 2000: 28). Non-Europeans were seen as peoples without history (Wolf, 2010), and their resistance is erased from the pages of history (Trouillot, 1995). The philosophical groundwork of Eurocentrism and European colonialism was prepared by such prominent philosophers as Georg W. F. Hegel. In his view, Africa is the 'land of children' (Buck-Morss, 2000: 859); the Amerindians are 'obviously unintelligent' and 'unenlightened children'; and 'India has no history' (Guha, 2002: 9, 10). For 'the quintessential Eurocentrist' Hegel, thus

'colonialism is not only justified but also necessary, as part of Europe's centuries-long process of realizing freedom' (Stone, 2017: 248, 255).

Non-European peoples, on the other hand, devised various strategies of resistance ranging from composing poetry to armed revolts against European colonizers and their local collaborators. The shining example of the latter is unquestionably the 1791 Haitian Revolution, the largest slave revolt ever in world history. Modern Western colonialism and its non-European reverberations have also received radical criticism by W. E. B. Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Edward Said, Eduardo Galeano, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, bell hooks and İsmail Beşikçi. An inspiring body of scholarship provides invaluable interventions on differing forms of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in the West and beyond. One can refer to the instances of Ottoman Orientalism (Makdisi, 2002), Ottoman colonialism (Deringil, 2003; Kühn, 2003; Minawi, 2016), Japanese pan-Asianism (Esenbel, 2004), Chinese Occidentalism (Chen, 1992), the Asian intellectual self-orientalization (Dirlik, 1996) and the 'colonized colonizer' (Powell, 2003).

Leaning on such a 'globological perspective' (Frank, 1998: xv) and post-colonial critique, this chapter offers an account of Kurds and Kurdish nationalism in the interwar period. Cited as an example of 'anti-colonial struggles . . . by indigenous peoples in border territories' (Young, 2001: 3–4; see also Dirlik, 2002: 439), the Kurdish case has been examined through such concepts as 'inter-state colony' (Beşikçi, 1990; Mohammadpour and Soleimani, 2019), 'internal colony' (Gunes and Zeydanlıoğlu, 2014; Kurt, 2019; Soleimani and Mohammadpour, 2019), 'maternal colonialism' (Turkyilmaz, 2016) and 'Turkishness contract' (Ünlü, 2018).[1] The underlying conviction of this chapter hence is that modern Kurdish history and Kurdish nationalism cannot be convincingly analysed without taking into account the making of the modern world by European colonialism and its various 'native' manifestations.

Before going into a survey of the main developments in the interwar period, several observations must be highlighted. First, World War I brought the dynastic orders to an end (Anderson, 1991: 113), and gave way to the dominant political principle of nationalism that holds the congruence between the political and the national (Gellner, 1983: 1). In this new political setting, the Kurds came to live under the jurisdiction of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and the former USSR. They were often regarded to be incongruent with the state,

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1 A recent study analyses the construction of both Turkishness and Kurdishness in Turkish cinema from the 1950s on through a perspective informed by a critique of Orientalism and colonialism (Şen, 2019).

and hence as troublemakers. As a British Mandate between 1920 and 1932, Iraq recognized the Kurds as an ethnic minority. However, the British choice of setting up an Arab government selected from among the Sunni officers and urban dignitaries (Sluglett, 2007: 5) resulted in the continued conflict between the Kurds and the state. The Kurdish nationalist movement in Syria was strictly controlled by the pro-Christian sectarian French Mandate. Having the lowest number of the Kurds, the USSR first defined the Kurds as a 'small nation', but later categorized them as an 'enemy nation'.

Among these five states, Turkey and Iran stand out for their similarities with respect to their Kurdish policies. They had the largest number of Kurds within their borders. It was in Iran and Turkey that Kurdish identity was denied and most harshly subjected to the policies of denial, assimilation and forced resettlement. Accepted generally as the earliest Kurdish revolt that had national demands (Olson, 1991; van Bruinessen, 1992: 330 [n. 2]),[2] the 1880 Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt broke out on the borders of Iran and the Ottoman Empire. Having paid his only visit abroad to Turkey,[3] Reza Shah viewed Atatürk as a model in his modernization programme (Keddie, 2003: 92). As Stephanie Cronin observes, like Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, 'Riza Shah was especially sensitive to the image of his country presented to the West and the archaic, exotic and picturesque appeal of the nomads for European visitors was especially galling' (Cronin, 2009: 364–5).

Second, the Middle East in the interwar era was taking shape not only politically but also economically. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Middle East was incorporated into the industrial capitalist Western European-centred world economy. The Middle East was gradually integrated into this world economy as a provider of raw materials and importer of Western industrial products (Issawi, 1982). Economic concessions granted to Western merchants contributed to the frustration of local artisans and merchants that in turn fostered nationalist movements alongside the violent solidification of ethno-confessional boundaries. The emergence of Middle Eastern nation-states made smuggling the main economic activity in the Kurdish context. Martin van Bruinessen calls this process the emergence of the profession of the smuggler, which he estimates to rank third after agriculture and animal husbandry in the Kurdish economy (van Bruinessen, 1992: 190).

2 For two approaches viewing the origins of Kurdish nationalism to lie in the post-World War I period, see Vali (2014) and Özoğlu (2004).
3 For a short video-recorded conversation between the two leaders during the visit, see Manoto TV (2014).

Third, neither the Kurds nor the newly founded states are homogenous and fixed entities. The Kurds are divided in terms of rural–urban, social class, gender, linguistic, religious, ideological and tribal lines. Their gradual assimilation into the newly founded nation-states added yet another layer of the split. Likewise, the interwar years were a period when the borders were still in fluctuation. While the Mosul question was settled in 1926, the Turkish–Iranian border took its current shape in 1932. The Syrian–Iraqi border would change when the Kurdish-inhabited territory of Sinjar was left to Iraq by the Syrian–Iraqi agreement in 1933 (Tejel, 2009: 11). The Iran–Iraq border question was settled in 1937 (Tripp, 2000: 90), while the Republic of Hatay became a part of Turkey as late as 1939.

Fourth, the interwar period is characterized by Kurdish armed revolts in Turkey, Iran and Iraq. These revolts were predominantly trans-border movements most often led and/or organized by sheikhs, tribal chieftains, mollas, as well as Western-educated officers and intelligentsia. Nonetheless one should not reduce Kurdish responses to armed uprisings against dominant powers. Some tribes and individuals also collaborated with the state (Hamelink and Baris, 2014: 48). For example, the head of the Jaf tribe and one of the loyal chieftains to the British, Adela Khanum, sided with the British against Sheikh Mahmud when he declared himself king of Kurdistan (van Bruinessen, 2001: 96–7).

Fifth, there are mainly four state and non-state actors shaping the social, political and economic context under consideration: Britain, France and the League of Nations; the newly founded states of Turkey, Iran and the USSR; Kurdish 'traditional' and modern elites and Kurdish commoners. Needless to say, this four-fold categorization by no means implies that they present a homogeneous monolithic bloc. To illustrate, one can see conflicting views between the officials in the capitals and those on the ground.

The sixth point is about the need for a nuanced grasp of Kurdish resistance, which most often gets associated with armed revolts. Such a focus seems inadequate as it fails to take into account the ways in which commoners reacted to the imposition of national borders, identities and languages. In the Mount Ararat Revolt, for instance, Kurdish women not only ululated from behind the firing lines (Yüksel, 2016: 666) but they also actively participated in armed clashes (Forbes, 1931: 264). In addition to boycotting parliamentary elections in September 1930 (Hassanpour, 1992: 109), the Kurds in Iraq sent a substantial number of telegrams of protest to the League of Nations in 1930–1 concerning their rights (Sluglett, 2007: 129–30).

Lastly, European powers, the states and Kurdish elites fought over the redefinition of Kurdishness. Through proverbs, for instance, Kurdish intellectuals voiced nationalist claims in the Kurdish-Ottoman journal of *Jîn* in late 1918 and early 1919 (Klein, 2000). Turkish, Iranian and Iraqi nationalists, on the other hand, 'competed to integrate and indigenize the Kurds into their respective nationalist ideologies' (Vejdani, 2015: 133). While in Turkey Kurds were called 'Mountain Turks' (Elphinston, 1946: 97), in Iran they were viewed as 'authentic Iranians and defenders of Iran against foreign invaders throughout history' (Vejdani, 2015: 133), if not one of the '"tribal elements" in Iran' (Wenner, 1963: 69). While the British and French viewed Kurds as tribal and primitive, the USSR officially listed them as one of the 'culturally backward nations'.

Turkey

The Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 divided up the former Ottoman territories among the Allies,[4] and it called for Kurdish and Armenian states. From 1919 on, Mustafa Kemal organized the War of Liberation against the Western occupation. Together with World War I, the Turkish War of Independence brought the existence of Greek and Armenian populations in Anatolia to an end (Gingeras, 2011). It is hence no surprise that the letters sent by Mustafa Kemal to Kurdish leaders in 1919 made references to the 'Armenian threat' and the cause of saving the sultanate and caliphate (Atatürk, 2000: 937–45). In a public interview he gave immediately before the proclamation of the Turkish Republic on 29 October 1923, Mustafa Kemal said:

> In accordance with our constitution, a kind of local autonomy is to be granted. Hence, provinces inhabited by the Kurds will rule themselves autonomously . . . The Grand National Assembly of Turkey is composed of the deputies of both Kurds and Turks and these two peoples have unified their interests and fates (Yadirgi, 2017: 163).

The abolition of the caliphate in 1924 was considered by Kurdish religious dignitaries to be 'the end of the only remaining common ground between Kurds and Turks' (Bozarslan, 2008: 338). Subsequently, a large number of Kurdish rebellions ensued from 1924 until 1938. Mete Tunçay notes that eastern regions were in a civil war-like situation between 1924 and 1938 (Tunçay, 1999: 134). The three most important moments were the 1925

4 For the map, see Cleveland and Bunton (2009: 165).

Sheikh Said Revolt, the 1927–30 Mount Ararat Revolt and the 'pacification' of the Dersim region in 1936–8. Founded in 1923 by 'the urban elite – the well-to-do aristocrats, intellectuals, and high functionaries of Istanbul, and some religious figures' as well as 'army officers', Civata Azadi Kurd (Society for Kurdish Freedom) helped to prepare the Sheikh Said Revolt (Hitchins, 2018: 25–6). It was crushed in two months and Sheikh Said and other leaders were hanged in Diyarbakır in June 1925. Around the time of their trials, prosecutor Ahmet Süreyya Örgeevren let Prime Minister İsmet İnönü know about his views regarding the Kurdish political elite: 'it is a most sacred objective for this spirit to die and be killed. Therefore all harmful persons that could become leaders in Kurdistan should absolutely not be pardoned' (Üngör, 2011: 130). While large waves of Kurds and remaining Armenians fled for the Syrian Jazira (Altuğ, 2011: 75), thousands were resettled in western parts of Turkey.

The Mount Ararat Revolt was organized by the Kurdish nationalist organization Khoybun based in Syria. Having taken place on the Turkish–Iranian border, the revolt was crushed by the joint military operations of both states. In his memoirs, the second Turkish president, İsmet İnönü, called the Mount Ararat Revolt a 'Kurdistan movement' (Yüksel, 2016: 660). The third major armed confrontation took place in Dersim. During military operations in Dersim in 1936–8, thousands of people were massacred, while thousands more were resettled in western parts of Turkey (Beşikçi, 1992). Atatürk's adopted daughter, Turkey's first woman military pilot and the world's first woman combat pilot, Sabiha Gökçen, also actively took part in these operations (Altinay, 2004: 33–58).

Alongside its military undertaking, the Turkish state also attempted to reshape both Kurdishness and Turkishness. The Şark Islahat Planı (Plan of the Reformation of the East) was prepared several months after the suppression of the Sheikh Said Revolt. This plan put forward an extensive range of educational, demographic and administrative measures to be implemented in Kurdish-inhabited areas (Bayrak, 2009). Due to its comprehensive Turkification goals, Mesut Yeğen aptly calls it 'the guiding text of the Republic in its Kurdish policy' (Yeğen, 2009: 14). The Turkish foreign minister Aras told the British representatives to the League of Nations in Geneva in November 1930 about the 'possibility of a future intense Turkish colonization in order to smother the Kurds in a considerable mass of Turkish population' (Yadirgi, 2017: 180). Furthermore, Kurdish was banned in public and Kurds were seen as a branch of the Turkish people (Aytürk, 2011: 312).

As to building Turkishness, the Kemalist Republic attempted to build a homogeneous Turkish nation. The Turkish Historical Society and the Turkish Language Society were founded. The Latin alphabet was accepted for the Turkish language. The fields of history, anthropology and archaeology were also deployed for the study of Turkish race, culture and history (Beşikçi, 1991; Houston, 2009; Maksudyan, 2016). 'Turkish History Thesis' and 'Sun-Language Theory' seem to have functioned to overcome 'the inferiority complex' (Fanon, 1967) vis-à-vis the West by proving that the Turkish race was the founder of civilizations. Afet İnan was one of the leading personalities in the development of the Turkish History Thesis. She was a history teacher who received her PhD at Geneva University in 1939 under the supervision of Eugene Pittard (Atakuman, 2008: 223, 225). In her presentation delivered at the First Turkish History Congress held on 2–11 July 1932, İnan noted the following: 'the real mother race of those civilized peoples' who spread about the world is the Turkish family' (Atakuman, 2008: 221).

During the times of revolts, Kurdishness was deemed to represent savagery and backwardness vis-à-vis the Turkish ethnicity that was seen to represent civilization and revolution (Bozarslan, 2002: 848). Therefore, 'the denial and oppression of the Kurdish ethnic identity' were seen 'as a national and civilisational necessity' (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008). An early Republican Turkish novel published by Halide Edib in 1928 and titled *Zeyno'nun Oğlu* (*Zeyno's Son*) is an outstanding literary work in this regard. Relating the events taking place in Diyarbakır before the Sheikh Said Revolt, this novel oftentimes likens Kurds to animals (Adıvar, 2010). While a piece in the daily *Cumhuriyet* on 13 July 1930 places Kurds alongside 'ordinary animals' and 'African barbarians' (Üngör, 2011: 184; see also Özbilge, 2020: 89–140), a series of articles by the nationalist journalist Yusuf Mazhar in the same newspaper in August 1930 have more to suggest about Kurds:

> Even though they may be more capable than the redskins in the United States, they are – history is my witness – endlessly bloodthirsty and cruel . . . They are completely bereft of positive feelings and civilized manners. For centuries, they have been a plague for our race . . . Under Russian rule they were prohibited to descend from the mountains, where they did not lead humane and civilized lives, therefore these creatures are really not inclined to profit from civilization . . . In my opinion, the dark spirit, crude mental state, and ruthless manners of this Kurdish rabble is impossible to break (Üngör, 2011: 184).

The principal of the Elazığ Girls' Institute, Sıdıka Avar, joined the literary, ideological and military Turkish women's fronts of Halide Edib, Afet İnan and Sabiha Gökçen. Opened soon after the military operations in Dersim, the Elazığ Girls' Institute aimed to civilize and Turkify the girls of the Dersim region. Bringing this particular project into conversation with the forced schooling of indigenous girls in Australia and the USA, Zeynep Turkyilmaz suggests that Sıdıka Avar was an archetype of a national heroine in the 'symbolically violent project of maternal colonialism' (Turkyilmaz, 2016: 162).

Iran

From the nineteenth century onwards, Russia and Britain had such strong political and economic interests in Iran that Iran's independence was 'often *purely* formal' (Keddie, 2003: 34, emphasis in original). Reza Shah's accession to power in the first half of the 1920s corresponded to a period when there was no centralized political authority.[5] For example, the Baluch leader Dust Muhammad Khan minted a coin in his name (Cronin, 2009: 364). That is why, it seems, Reza Shah was so strongly committed to centralization and Iranian nationalism (Pahlavi, 1386/2007).

The most important Kurdish movement in Iran was led by Ismail Agha Shikak – known as Simko – who was the head of the Shikak tribal confederation (Koohi-Kamali, 2003: 74–5). Simko aimed to take the revenge of his older brother Jafar Agha, whose 'body was cut into pieces and hung from the gates of the army garrisons' (Koohi-Kamali, 2003: 82). Simko was considered an important leader by the Kurds as well as the Soviet, Turkish and Iranian governments (Koohi-Kamali, 2003: 75). Having founded an autonomous Kurdish government in the areas west and south of Lake Urmiyeh from 1918 until 1922, Simko organized a strong army that several times defeated the government forces (Koohi-Kamali, 2003: 75). Alongside state authorities of Russia, the Ottoman Empire and Iran, he was in constant touch with influential Kurdish personalities such as Sheikh Taha, the grandson and successor of Sheikh Ubeydullah. He also met with the Assyrian leader Mar Shimun in 1918 to talk about future joint operations against Turkey and Iran but at the end of the meeting, he killed Mar Shimun and his 150 men (Koohi-Kamali, 2003: 76–7). He published a Kurdish-Persian weekly newspaper called

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5 A fascinating first-hand source on a view of nomadic lifestyle is the video-recording of the migration of a clan of the *Bakhtiyari*s in 1924 (Zukor and Lasky, 1925).

Kurd (Koohi-Kamali, 2003: 80–1). Simko's nationalist goals can be seen in his following remarks:

> See how the small nations of the world, who are not one quarter of the size of the Kurdish tribes, have received autonomy from great governments such as the Germans. If this great Kurdish nation does not get its rights from Persia, it will consider death far better than life and whether the Persian government grants it or not we will make Kurdistan autonomous (Koohi-Kamali, 2003: 85–6).

His subsequent attempts to regain power did not come to fruition. He was invited back in 1929 by the Iranian state and was killed by the state in an ambush (van Bruinessen, 2006: 91).

The second important armed confrontation was the Mount Ararat Revolt led mainly by Ihsan Nuri, a former Ottoman officer. The Kurdish nationalist organization Khoybun was founded by the 'traditional' and modern Kurdish elites in Beirut in 1927 (Tejel, 2009: 17). Alongside its diplomatic contacts with state and non-state actors, namely, Armenians and the Turkish opposition in Syria, the Khoybun League 'became an essential regional actor' during the Mount Ararat Revolt (Gorgas, 2014: 846; see also Alakom, 2011). In this revolt were also involved such legendary leaders as Ferzende, about whom oral poems were composed. The Mount Ararat Revolt is particularly crucial as the present-day Turkish–Iranian border was drawn through a land exchange between Turkey and Iran to be able to control the rebels. Moreover, Turkey and Iran collaborated to resettle the Kurds living on borders in inner regions so that further 'troubles' could be prevented (Dehnavi, 1386/2007: 225, 228–9, 233, 246, 247, 249). The Soviets also placed troops opposite Mount Ararat to make sure that the Kurds would not cross to the Russian territory (Yüksel, 2016: 661). Not only were the leaders of the revolt exiled and jailed but also their wives – including Bro Hasso's wife, Rubabe, and Ferzende's wife, Besra – and their children were kept under surveillance in Iran (Bayat, 1374/1995: 179–80).

There were also smaller-scale uprisings. In January 1929, around the south-west of Lake Urmiyeh, a religious leader by the name of Molla Khalil rose up in arms. Having ended in June 1929, Molla Khalil's revolt was also pan-Kurdish and nationalist (Cronin, 2007: 116). Having reached an estimated force of 15,000 men by the end of January (Cronin, 2007: 116), the uprising came to an end by June 1929, as there was a shortage of ammunition and lack of wider support (Cronin, 2007: 116).

There has been a growing body of critical scholarship on the modern history of Iran, which approaches the making of modern Iran from the

margins. These studies reveal different manifestations of Iranian nationalism as a racist, Aryanist and Orientalist project of subjugating non-Persian communities to Persian Shiite-centric Iranian nationalism (Asgharzadeh, 2007; Elling, 2013; Mohammadpour and Soleimani, 2019; Saleh, 2013; Soleimani and Mohammadpour, 2019; Vaziri, 1993). The Reza Shah period comes to the fore in the making of Iranian nationalism. It has been suggested that alongside modernization and centralization, nationalism was one of the three objectives that characterized the Reza Shah period (Matthee, 2003: 128). In this perspective: 'The modern Iranian state defined the Persian community as the core ethnocultural nation and in this process, it effectively marginalized other ethnic communities in Iran' (Cabi, 2017: 2). While the use of minority languages was banned, ethnic costumes were outlawed (Cleveland and Bunton, 2009: 189). The governor of Kermanshah in Kurdistan, for example, sent a directive to the districts in 1936 and warned them about the 'ugly habit' of veiling among urban women. The government officials were asked to make sure that '(the peasant women of Kermanshah) would "look like the civilized women of the world"' (Chehabi, 1993: 226).[6] Reza Shah's nationalism was also seen in the imposition of 'Persian as the uniform and exclusive language in the school system' and 'chauvinistic celebration of the country's ancient and glorious past' (Matthee, 2003: 137, 139).

As in the case of Hosain Kazemzadeh Iranshahr and his journal called *Iranshahr*, Iranian nationalist elites also participated in the Iranian nation-building project through their publications (Keddie, 2003: 83). Nationalist elites also targeted tribes, nomads and non-Persians in their civilizing and nation-building projects. They viewed nomads and tribes as 'the antithesis of modernity' as well as 'primitive and as symbolizing Iran's backwardness' (Cronin, 2009: 364). As Kamal Soleimani argues, the discourse of setting nomads, tribes and the Kurds as forces of pre-modernity against the state's modernity places the latter outside of the discourse of power and 'recapitulates the mechanisms used by supporters of colonialism when they drew on the discourses of the European Enlightenment to justify their *missions civilisatrices*' (Soleimani, 2017: 959).

Iraq

A British colonial creation in 1920, Iraq comprised the former Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra. Its population was composed of

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6 For similar Orientalist traits embedded in the Turkish nationalist discourse with a particular attention on women's veiling in early Republican Turkey, see Yeğenoğlu (1998: 131–6).

Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, Jews, Turkomans and Assyrians. British imperial interests in Iraq were oriented to secure 'its communications with India, the Empire air route, and the protection of the Persian and Iraqi oilfields' (Sluglett, 2007: 6). British colonization of Iraq faced fierce resistance. The 1920 revolt was crushed at the expense of enormous human and material costs (Cleveland and Bunton, 2009: 205). Mandatory Iraq (1920–32) was run by four high commissioners: Sir Percy Cox, Sir Henry Dobbs, Sir Gilbert Clayton and Sir Francis Humphrys. A key figure in the creation of Iraq was also a woman official, namely, Gertrude Bell, the oriental secretary to the high commissioner. Under the British was also a Sunni Arab minority. Having been ousted from Syria, Faysal was made the king of Iraq in 1921. The Iraqi mandatory government was almost entirely composed of members of Sunni Arabs, who were less than 25 per cent of the total population (Sluglett, 2007: 6).

The British had two contradictory positions regarding Kurdish rights: London's official line and British officials on the ground (Eskander, 2001: 178). While the secretary of state for colonies, Winston Churchill, favoured a Kurdish buffer state, the High Commissioner Percy Cox supported the incorporation of Kurdistan into the Iraqi state (Eskander, 2001: 153). Needless to say, both perspectives were concerned with sustaining British imperial interests. By 1923, the Cox perspective won with the support of gas bombs and air raids against the civilian targets by the Royal Air Forces (Eskander, 2001: 176).

In January 1923, Faysal and Cox recognized the rights of Kurds within the boundaries of Iraq (Fontana, 2010: 10). The Kurds were thus officially and legally recognized and Kurdish was made the language of the administration and education (Edmonds, 1968: 513). Prime Minister ʿAbd al-Muhsin al-Saʿdun's following remarks on 21 January 1926 demonstrate their aim to incorporate the Kurds as 'an Iraqi element':

> Gentlemen! This nation cannot live unless it gives all Iraqi elements their rights ... The fate of Turkey should be a lesson to us and we should not revert to the policy formerly pursued by the Ottoman Government. We should give the Kurds their rights. Their officials should be from among them: their tongue should be their official language and their children should learn their own tongue in the schools. It is incumbent upon us to treat all elements, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, with fairness and justice, and give them their rights (Sluglett, 2007: 124).

The diplomatic battle fought over Mosul in the ongoing Lausanne Peace Conference in 1922–3 pushed Turkey and Britain to manipulate the Kurds 'in

order to strengthen their bargaining position at the Conference' (Ali, 1997: 524). Once the dispute was finally resolved in 1926, the High Commissioner Dobbs asked Turkey to rest assured that 'there is and will be no question of Kurdish independence'. Dobbs added that the Kurds would have a bright future in Iraq ('The Future of Iraq', 1926: 278), which would prove wrong as the British and Iraqi authorities ignored the commitments they gave to the League of Nations (Dodge, 2006).

There has been strong Kurdish uneasiness about becoming a part of Iraq. In the 1921 referendum: 'the vast majority of Southern Kurds refused to vote in favour of Feisal as their King and Iraq as their state' (Eskander, 2001: 163). Moreover, Kurdish nationalist literature throughout the twentieth century mostly refers to Iraq as 'an Arab occupier' (Rafaat, 2016: 492–3). The governor of Sulaimani in the early 1930s, Tawfiq Wahby, is reported to have stated in 1931:

> that southern Kurdistan was the historical homeland of the Kurds, which had never been part of Arab land, and which had never been ruled by Arabs – even during the Caliphate period. He insisted that the annexation of Kurdistan to Iraq was illegitimate and unjustified. He protested against identifying the Kurds as Iraqis, explaining that it would be as wrong to identify them as Iraqis as it would be to identify an Irish person as 'English' (Rafaat, 2016: 492).

Kurdish resistance against the British and Iraq was also put to arms. The most important political movement was led by Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji, 'the most influential nationalist leader of southern Kurdistan' (van Bruinessen, 2006: 91). On 1 December 1918, the Acting Civil Commissioner Arnold Wilson met with Sheikh Mahmud and sixty Kurdish chiefs in Sulaymaniya. Wilson found out that they were almost unanimous 'that the Turks should not return and a general recognition of the need for British protection' (McDowall, 2004: 152). Sheikh Mahmud was appointed as the governor of Sulaymaniya division (McDowall, 2004: 156). As he tried to extend his control to Kirkuk and Kifri (Gorgas, 2018: 7), however, military confrontations followed and the British defeated the Kurdish forces. Sheikh Mahmud was removed by the British and exiled to Ceylon (Elphinston, 1946: 98). Later on, while his nationalist followers killed British officers, Kurdish notables submitted petitions to request his return (Eskander, 2001: 166). Upon continued unrest and demands, he was brought back and appointed as the governor of Kurdistan in 1922. He declared himself the king of Kurdistan:

> From today, I have taken in my hands the tiller of the state and assured responsibility for the protection of the independence of Kurdistan. It is my

hope that you will all work and strive for the perpetuation of this glorious day and for the welfare of the progress of the nation. Kurds! Now is your opportunity to labour unitedly as one family for the consolidation and protection of the national rights which we have won (Eskander, 2001: 174).

Sheikh Mahmud's nationalist revolt continued until 1932 when it was eventually crushed (Elphinston, 1946: 98).

In 1931–2, Sheikh Ahmad and his brother Molla Mustafa also rebelled but the RAF destroyed over half the houses in their district of Barzan and they were forced to the mountains (Meiselas, 2008: 152). Having reached the Turkish border, Sheikh Ahmad was taken prisoner by Turkish troops and several of his men were hanged. They eventually surrendered but were made to live in internal exile (Meiselas, 2008: 152). It is noteworthy that in crushing these revolts, Iraq received military assistance from Turkey and Iran (Hassanpour, 1992: 112).

Alongside the military front, the fight also took place on the discursive front. Meeting with Wilson in 1920, Sunni Iraqi nationalists told him that Shiites and Kurds 'were ignorant peasants who could easily be kept in their place' (Fontana, 2010: 5). Cox noted that 'unlike Arabs, the Kurds had neither a sense of nationality nor political reliability' (Eskander, 2001: 158). He also called the followers of Sheikh Mahmud 'ignorant and fanatical elements' (Eskander, 2001: 176). The following is taken from what Britain wrote to the League of Nations in 1930:

> Although they admittedly possess many sterling qualities, the Kurds of Iraq are entirely lacking in those characteristics of political cohesion which are essential to successful self-government. Their organization and outlook are essentially tribal. They are without traditions of self-government and self-governing institutions. Their mode of life is primitive and for the most part they are illiterate and untutored, resentful of authority and lacking in sense of discipline or responsibility (Hassanpour, 1992: 112).

From the late Ottoman period on, the Kurdish press had already left a legacy on both nationalism and modern education. The Kurds were aware of modern nationalist ideological symbols and ideas. In his first government, Sheikh Mahmud had a Kurdish national flag (Gorgas, 2018: 7). 'With the collaboration of Sulaimaniya's leading intellectuals and poets,' he started the publication of the newspaper *Rojî Kurdistan* (*Kurdistan Sun*), which spread nationalist ideas (Gorgas, 2018: 7–8).[7]

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7 Founded in Sulaymaniya in 2004, the Zheen Documentation and Research Center has been reprinting Kurdish journals and newspapers published in colonial Iraq, such as

The interwar period in Kurdistan also witnessed the flourishing of linguistic, literary and historical works of such prominent personalities as Pîremêrd, Abdulla Goran, Tawfiq Wahby and Amin Zaki. The Kurdish intelligentsia countered the marginalization of the Kurds by the British and Iraqi nationalists. To illustrate, one of the critiques Amin Zaki raises against the 1931 'Local Languages Law' is that the adjective 'local' must be omitted (Hassanpour, 1992: 117). The following lines from a 1931 poem titled 'To the League of Nations' and penned by the poet Salam Ahmad Azabani (1892–1959) reflect Kurdish frustration with the Western betrayal:

> Source of intrigue! League of dissimulation!
> Is this how you give the rights of minority peoples?
> Workshop of corruption! League of sufferings!
> 'A club in the hands Mr. Henderson!'   (Hassanpour, 1992: 113)

Syria

The secret Sykes-Picot Agreement allocated Syria and Lebanon to the French in 1916. Nonetheless, the French Mandate began after the British-backed Arab kingdom of Faysal was ended in 1920 (Khoury, 1987: 35–41). Deeming them illegitimate (Khoury, 1987: 4), many Syrians resisted the French by demonstrations attended by men and women (Khoury, 1987: 124), boycotts (Khoury, 1987: 132) and a series of armed uprisings. The Great Revolt of 1925–7 had the most devastating consequences (Cleveland and Bunton, 2009: 223). The French Mandate in the interwar period was executed by the following high commissioners: General Gouraud, General Weygand, General Sarrail, Henry de Jouvenel, Henri Ponsot, Damien de Martel and Gabriel Puaux (White, 2011: 10). Commanded by French officers, North Africans, Madagascans and the Senegalese provided the manpower for the Armée du Levant (Khoury, 1987: 79).

Syria had a diverse population comprising Sunni Muslims, Alawites, Druzes, Ismailis, various Christian denominations, Jews and Kurds. In addition to its political and economic interests, the French claim to Syria and Lebanon was based on its moral claim of *mission civilisatrice* (Khoury, 1987: 27–32), and of being the protectors of Christians (Altuğ, 2011: 77). While the French generally had a low view of Arab Muslims, Kurds and Druzes, they viewed Christians as 'more intelligent and open-minded' (Khoury, 1987: 71).

Têgeyiştiniy Rastî, *Jiyan* and *Gelawêj*. See Zheen Documentation and Research Center, https://zheen.org/blawkrawe/.

In realizing their civilizing mission, their ally would be the socially and culturally superior Christian minority against the 'fanatical, narrow-minded, and intellectually underdeveloped Muslims' (Khoury, 1987: 28). The French pro-Christian sectarianism is reflected in various Kurdish oral history accounts that label it a 'Christian state' (Altuğ, 2011: 204).

Following the military operations during and after the 1925 Sheikh Said Revolt – which is recalled as the 'second *ferman* [order]' in local memories – thousands of Kurds, Armenians and other Christians fled for the French Jazira (Altuğ, 2011: 75). In the early 1930s, Assyrians from Iraq also took refuge in Jazira. The refugee flow caused great resentment among Arab nationalists, who viewed it as 'violating the national sanctity of Syria' (Altuğ, 2011: 77). Regarding Kurdish nationalism in Syria, the Arab nationalist paper *al-Ayyam* stated in a 1932 article that

> we want them to build their independence in their homeland [*diyarihim*] 'Kurdistan', not in the Arab Jazira, the birthplace [*mawtin*] of Shammar, ʿAnaza, Tayy, al-Jabbur, and other great Arab tribes. The Jazira was the cradle of Arabness [*mahd al-ʿuruba*] before the Islamic conquest (White, 2010: 913–4).

The settlement of Armenians was likened to the Zionist settlement in Palestine. It was seen as a project by the French and League of Nations to create an Armenian homeland (Altuğ, 2011: 220). The paper *al-Chaʾb* even threatened the Armenians: 'We warn the Armenians that a future life in Syria, next to the "angry Arab," will be insecure' (Altuğ, 2011: 222). Due to the continuous warnings of the Turkish foreign ministry, 'it was the non-Armenian Christians and non-Kurds who were settled in the 50 km breadth of the frontier region' (Altuğ, 2011: 78).

Earlier it was pointed out that the Kurdish nationalist organization Khoybun was based in Syria and it organized the Mount Ararat Revolt. French mandatory Syria was also important in regards to the flourishing Kurdish cultural movement in the 1930s (Gorgas, 2007; Tejel, 2009: 21–3). Celadet Bedirkhan published a Kurdish-French journal called *Hawar* in 1932–5 and 1941–3. *Hawar*'s goal was 'to promote the unity of the Kurds . . . on the basis of a unified alphabet and common language' (Yüksel, 2011: 251). Celadet's wife, Rewşen Bedirkhan, also contributed to *Hawar* in 1941. In her two pieces, she underlined the role and importance of Kurdish women as mothers in the instruction of the Kurdish language to their children (Yüksel, 2011: 260–1). The other journals published by the brothers Celadet and Kamuran Bedirkhan in the first half of the 1940s were *Ronahî*, *Roja Nû*/*Le*

Jour Nouveau and *Stêr*. Turkish Republican archival documents provide an extensive list of bans on Kurdish books and records published and produced in Syria and Lebanon (Yüksel, 2011: 271–2). Alongside publications, Kurdish associations were also established (Tejel, 2009: 23). The nationalist poet and writer Osman Sebrî founded a Kurdish-language school in the Kurdish quarter of Damascus (White, 2011: 115).

Not all Kurds were involved in Kurdish nationalism, however. Kurdish leaders in Kurd Dagh were 'claiming a *Turkish* identity and requesting their region's incorporation into Turkey' (White, 2010: 913, emphasis in original). Another Kurd, Khalid Bakdash, was the leader of the Syrian Communist Party and he viewed Kurdish activities to serve French imperialist ends (White, 2011: 116). Bakdash was in a bitter conflict with Osman Sebrî whose anti-communist propaganda among young Kurds caused many of them to leave the party; therefore, Bakdash and his friends attacked him and called him a French spy (White, 2011: 116–17).

The Kurdish nationalist movement in Syria was under the surveillance of the French (Gorgas, 2014: 846). The French approached it according to their colonial interests. Financial support for the publication of *Hawar* was accompanied by the imposition of 'severe mechanisms of control' (Gorgas, 2014: 850). The nationalist poet and writer Osman Sebrî was exiled to Madagascar (Altuğ, 2011: 80). Like the British in Iraq, the French also used the 'Kurdish card' in their disputes with Turkey (Gorgas, 2014: 846). Furthermore, French authorities encouraged young officers Pierre Rondot and Roger Lescot to collaborate with Kurdish nationalist leaders 'to keep an eye on the Kurdish movement' (Gorgas, 2014: 851). In his private diary, Pierre Rondot states: 'I played their game, I held their secrets, I was their accomplice' (Gorgas, 2014: 852).

The USSR

Following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, Russia withdrew from the war and renounced the treaties of the former regime with the Allies (Cleveland and Bunton, 2009: 162). In the postwar period, the Bolshevik interest in the Middle East continued with the support for anti-imperialist struggles. Lenin's Arabic-language leaflets distributed in Aleppo in 1920 asked Aleppines to adopt communism in their fight against the French (Khoury, 1987: 107). 'Containing the Bolshevik threat' thus became one of the British strategies in the postwar Middle East (Ali, 1997: 521).

According to the 1926 Soviet census, there were around 70,000 Kurds in the USSR (Pohl, 2017: 35), and they lived in the republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan

and Georgia. Although they did not have a republic in their own name, there was an administrative district called Red Kurdistan between 1923 and 1929 (Yılmaz, 2014: 801–4). Kurdish experience in Soviet Caucasus in the 1920s was shaped by the Leninist policy of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization). As J. Otto Pohl states:

> The Soviet policy of *korenizatsiia* officially started in 1923 and sought to promote the Sovietization of non-Russian nationalities by supporting their national development within a socialist framework. This included support for educational and cultural institutions in their native languages as well as policies to increase their membership in Soviet state and party organs and among industrial workers (Pohl, 2017: 32 [n. 2]).

In 1929, Stalin also underlined the importance of universal primary school education in every nationality's native language (Martin, 2001: 163–4).

In the context of the early Bolshevik nationalities policy,[8] the Kurds were called a 'small nation' and encouraged 'to create a written version of their native language and to develop education in their mother tongue' (Leezenberg, 2015: 748). Consequently, one can see the publication of Kurdish primary school textbooks, folklore collections, children's literature, as well as the Kurdish-language paper of the Armenian Republic called *Riya Teze* (*New Way*). Primary school education was provided in the Kurdish language. A Kurdology conference was held in Yerevan in 1934 (Leezenberg, 2015: 758–9). The leading Kurdish Yezidi intelligentsia engaged in Kurdish publishing and teaching in the 1930s was Casimê Celîl, Qanatê Kurdo, Heciyê Cindî and Emînê Evdal (Yüksel, 2011: 309–18).[9]

The policy of indigenization was subsequently replaced by ethnic cleansing. As Leezenberg notes, 'the Kurds ceased to exist as a small nation' and were subjected to assimilation in Soviet Azerbaijan and Armenia (Leezenberg, 2015: 756). Pohl also suggests that the census data attest to the deprived status of the Kurds. Pointing to the decrease in the official number of the Kurds from 41,193 in Azerbaijan in the 1926 census to 6,005 in the 1939 census, Pohl states that

> this massive decrease in the official numbers occurred primarily due to the identification of people previously listed as Kurds in 1926 as Azeris in 1939. It appears that both of these facts were the result of a strongly national

8 Francine Hirsch provides a fascinating account of the relationship between ethnographic knowledge and the making of nationalities in the Soviet Union (Hirsch, 2005). I am grateful to Masha Cerovic for bringing this important work to my attention in the 'RusKurd Workshop' held on 12–13 December 2019 in Istanbul.

9 For a comprehensive work introducing prominent Kurdish personalities in the fields of Kurdish cultural and scholarly production in the former Soviet Union, see Boyîk (2019).

chauvinist local leadership in the Azerbaijan republic to monopolize the benefits of the Soviet nationalities policy for the Turkic Azeris to the exclusion of national and ethnic minorities in the republic such as Kurds (Pohl, 2017: 36).

The Kurds not only stopped being a 'small nation' but they were also categorized as an 'enemy nation' alongside the Poles, Germans, Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Koreans, Chinese and Iranians in 1937–8 (Martin, 2001: 311). Martin proposes that the three factors of 'Soviet xenophobia, the category of the border regions, and the politics surrounding immigration and emigration' must be considered in the transition from 'ethnic proliferation' to 'ethnic cleansing' (Martin, 2001: 313). While in late 1937, over 1,000 Kurdish families were deported (Martin, 2001: 335), a larger number of Kurds from Georgia were deported to Kazakhstan and Central Asia in 1944 (Pohl, 2017: 32). Comparing the policies towards the Turks and Kurds under the Bulgarian and Turkish nation-states from their foundation until the 1940s, a study suggests that while Turkey acted as a 'homeland state' for the Turks in Bulgaria, the Kurds lacked a 'protective homeland state' (Köksal, 2006: 505, 513). The Kurds in Soviet Caucasus not only lacked a homeland state, but they also experienced ethnic cleansing due to 'suspect cross-border ethnic ties' (Martin, 2001: 342).

The Kurds in the Soviet official ideological representation were often associated with feudalism, backwardness, illiteracy, religious fanaticism and oppression of women. Thus while the Soviet government was seen as the 'gravedigger of Kurdish feudalism', Sheikh Said was 'considered to be an agent of imperialism' (Yılmaz, 2014: 808, 810). The 'Kurds' and 'Kurd-ezid' were on the official list of a total of ninety-seven 'culturally backward nationalities' (Martin, 2001: 167). Some characteristics of these peoples were as follows: 'the oppression of women, religious fanaticism, nomadism, racial hostility, clan venge[a]nce and so forth' (Martin, 2001: 166).

In 1989, the Soviet government condemned the Stalin regime's deportations and recognized the Koreans, Germans, Karachays, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, Meskhetian Turks, Greeks and Kurds as 'Repressed Peoples' (Pohl, 1999: 7). Hence following the categories of 'small nation', 'culturally backward nationality' and 'enemy nation', the redefinition of the Kurds in the former USSR came to a close with the concept of 'repressed people'.

Conclusion

From the French invasion of Egypt in 1798 till the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, Western European modernity held also at gunpoint radically

reshaped the Middle East. Britain, France, Russia and later on Germany were in continuous conflict to increase their share in the Middle East. The elites and commoners were actively involved in appropriating the available means in their own favour. A balanced view on the period, however, should not remain within the binary of the colonized and the colonizer. Recent research on climate in the nineteenth-century Middle East is very enlightening (Mikhail, 2016; Pehlivan, 2020), as it calls attention to an approach away from nationalist and anthropocentric anachronisms.

Starting with the appearance of the paper *Kurdistan* in 1898 in Cairo, until the aftermath of World War I, the newly rising Western-educated Kurdish elites voiced Kurdish cultural and political claims, which did not lead to the emergence of a Kurdish nation-state in the wake of World War I. To the extent that the interwar period was a state- and nation-building process in Turkey, Iran and Iraq, for Kurds, at its essence, it was a process of 'nation-destroying',[10] manifested in centralization, modernization, assimilation, 'civilization' and colonization. In this process, Kurds were objects and subjects as well as foes and allies. Moreover, they were by no means united. A telling illustration of Kurdish fragmentation as it emerges from this account could be by bringing side by side the four Kurdish women named earlier, namely, Besra, Rubabe, Adela Khanum and Rewşen Bedirkhan. Despite destruction and fragmentation, however, the interwar period has been the primary point of political and historical reference in virtually any discussion on the Kurds. Lastly, Kurdish struggle of the interwar era has left a legacy which not only the Kurds but also the states they challenge draw on up to the present.

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10 I borrow this term from Terry Martin, who uses it in the context of the USSR of the 1930s (Martin, 2001: 312).

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From Tribal Chiefs to Marxist Activists
Kurdistan from 1946 to 1975

BÉATRICE GARAPON AND ADNAN ÇELIK

The fall of the Mahabad Republic in 1946 is usually said to usher in an era of 'silence' for the Kurdish movement. The dreadful suppression of the Kurdish region of Dersim in Turkey, in 1937–8, followed by an effort to integrate young generations into national societies by providing higher education to young Kurds and forging economic ties with the peripheral Kurdish areas, were influential in silencing the Kurdish demands. No major upheaval took place in the Kurdish space until 1961 when an insurgency was launched in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurdish national movement suffered a hard blow and was eventually defeated in 1975.

However, this silence certainly does not mean that nothing happened. To the contrary, major shifts date back to this period, and it is indeed crucial to understand how the Kurdish movement was structured later, in the 1980s and the 1990s. It can even help us understand some aspects of the Kurdish movement as it is now. Two major developments date back to this period: the emergence of a Kurdish youth and its projection in a universal quest for freedom (Bozarslan, 2017a). The Kurdish youth, which emerged in Turkey as an independent actor in the Kurdish movement from the end of the 1950s onwards, played a critical role in its transformation from a tribal quest for independence from the central states into a modern nationalist movement. The year 1958, in that sense, is a turning point. The military coup in Iraq, and, in its aftermath, the 'September Revolution' (11 September 1961), launched by Mustafa Barzani, attracted many young people across the whole of Kurdistan. That does not mean that tribal actors vanished from the Kurdish scene after this period, nor does it imply that previous uprisings lacked nationalist characteristics, but the soaring number of diverse actors – student youth and tribal chiefs, urban dwellers and peasants – made the picture much more complex.

This chapter will discuss the emergence of Kurdish student youth and its projection of a decolonization scheme, which was aided by the development

and diffusion of new means of communication enabling the different parts of Kurdistan to get more connected. In 1946, the declaration of the 'Republic of Kurdistan' – best known as the Mahabad Republic – is the very first attempt to create a Kurdish state. Set and led by urban dwellers and a new generation of intellectuals, it is one of the first Kurdish initiatives that was set outside of tribal dynamics. Although the resonance of the Mahabad Republic was limited in the Kurdish space as a whole, its failure was immediately interpreted by activists-to-be as a consequence of tribal organization and therefore as a case showing the need for its abolition.

Jordi Tejel has already emphasized the difficulty of writing a non-parochial Kurdish history (Tejel, 2017). The division of the Kurdish space into newly emerged territorial states after World War I created a new dimension of the Kurdish question: the cross-border exchanges and their effects on the Kurdish movement. Transnational dynamics paradoxically open a new window of opportunity for Kurds. While authoritarian regimes crackdown on public protests in different parts of Kurdistan, transnational exchanges carry the potential of infra-political resistance. This is why we chose to take a transnational approach to 'address the crossing of the boundaries' by 'includ[ing] the penetration or exchange of ideas, reform networks, images, technologies, markets, and goods as well as people' (Helgren and Vasconcellos, 2010: 2). Particular attention will be paid to the concrete circulation of ideas and know-how by new media, such as radio, or physical immigration, including the assemblies of Kurdish intellectuals in exile such as Damascus, Beirut and several European cities. New centres, like Europe and European universities, start to gain crucial importance in this period. The authors also turned their attention from the 'great men/heroes' to the social basis of the Kurdish movement and the ordinary men. This is why the Cold War context, which is, in many ways, a determining factor in the shaping of many episodes in our period, will not be dealt with specifically. We will take it as a global framework and the emphasis will be put on the bottom-up dynamics.

A Transnational History of the Mahabad Republic

In Kurdish history, with a retrospective approach, Mahabad is considered to be a milestone. It is the first time in the twentieth century that Kurds asked for their own state and actually had it for about a year. When he was living in Syria, Abdullah Öcalan had a falcon named Mahabad, after the first Kurdish republic (Marcus, 2009: 265). This in itself tells us the republic has become

a symbol for Kurdish resistance. It is, however, important to stress that, as far as we know, outside of Iran and some parts of Iraq, few actually heard of it by the time of its declaration.

The First Kurdish State?

We will not be focusing on the history of that short-lived republic, for it has already been well documented (Bozarslan, 2009; Eagleton, 1963; Gorgas, 2014; Koohi-Kamali, 2003; McDowall, 1994; Vali, 2014). During the Second World War, the weakening Iranian state held less and less control over its peripheral regions, especially in the west. This lack of control allowed the Kurdish nationalist movement to bloom. In 1941, the joint occupation of the region by the Red Army and the British troops gave a final blow to the authority of the Persian state in Iranian Kurdistan. A nationalist underground party, Komalay Jiyanaway Kurdistan (the Society for the Revival of Kurdistan, Komalay JK), was founded and soon transformed into a political party in 1945, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), with the support of the USSR. A Kurdish republic was heralded in January 1946, and Qazi Muhammed, an intellectual with an urban background, who had also been a religious leader, was chosen to be the president. A constitution was enforced, and the security of the Republic was to be endorsed by Mustafa Barzani, an already well-known leader of several Kurdish uprisings in Iraq.

But the shift in the international context, accompanied with strains among different tribes around Mahabad, soon sounded the death knell for the Kurdish republic. The USSR, which was actively supporting the Republic until then, left it to its destiny when it proved too risky an engagement. Stark repression ensued: the execution of Qazi Muhammed did impact Kurdish memories. It did not, however, curb PDK-I's popularity: in the 1950 legislative elections, the party took more than 80 per cent of the votes in Mahabad (Ghassemlou, 1991). In Iraq, too, the government had long been preoccupied with the rebellion of the Barzanis and took the occasion to exact revenge. On 24 May 1947, four Kurdish members of the Iraqi army who had joined Barzani in Mahabad were publicly executed in Baghdad: Izzet Abdulaziz, Mustafa Xoshnav, Muhammad Mahmoud and Hayrullah Abdulkerim (Eagleton, 1963). This greatly impacted Kurdish opinion. Barzani and hundreds of peshmerga subsequently decided to leave Iraq to seek exile in the USSR.

Three features matter to us in the short-lived period of the Mahabad Republic, as they mark a new era of the Kurdish movement. First, unlike many uprisings in earlier Kurdish history, it was led by the urban population. The tribes' ultimate defection can actually be seen as the very cause of the fall

of the Republic: the whole experiment was led by intellectuals and urban dwellers, while the Republic had to rely on feudal lords to ensure its security (Koohi-Kamali, 2003). The latter, however, had no intention to support progressive reforms that were directly clashing with their interests. Second, it had an explicit nationalist basis. The founders of the Republic were seeking to build a territorial state for the Kurds, which was quite absent a concern in the previous experiences, except maybe for the Kurdish Republic of Ararat. Third, Barzani's exile to the USSR marks the beginning of a long period of time in which the USSR is a tutelary power for the Kurdish movement.

Resonance in Kurdistan as a Whole

More than the experience itself, what matters to us is the resonance of the Mahabad Republic in the Kurdish space as a whole. Although the sources on the subject are rather inadequate, what we might assert from them is that the echoes of this experience were limited, even though the founders of the Mahabad Republic were seeking legitimacy in the entire Kurdistan region. Before the foundation of the Republic, in 1944 and 1945, many Kurdish leaders from Iraq, Syria and Turkey visited Mahabad to discuss mutual aid. 'Hamza Abdullah and Wurdi' came from Iraq, Qadri Beg, the grandson of Jamil Pasha (Cemil Paşa) of Diyarbakır came from Syria and 'Qazi Mulla Wahab' came from Turkey. In August 1944, a summit was held in the Dalanpar mountains, at the intersection of Iraqi, Iranian and Turkish borders. The aim was to symbolically proclaim a greater Kurdish unity. Again, 'Qazi Mulla Wahab' was representing Turkey (Eagleton, 1963: 36). Who is he? This is difficult to say. This name is not mentioned in any other source.

The arrival of Molla Mustafa Barzani with about 10,000 people from Iraqi Kurdistan is well known. What is less known, however, is the number of Kurds from Turkey who joined Barzani's army. In his canonical work, William Eagleton says that among Barzani's men, there were about 50 people coming from Turkey (Eagleton, 1963: 56). In another book, Hamit Bozarslan writes that 'numerous' Kurds from Turkey were fighting alongside Barzani (Bozarslan, 2009: 43). But there are very few traces of mobilization of Kurds from Turkey or Syria for the Mahabad Republic. For instance, Canip Yıldırım, a Kurdish activist who was a college student in Ankara in 1946 – born in 1925 in Lice – recounts in his memoirs: 'we heard of Mahabad only later on. When I went to France, after the 1950s. And even then, it was because I was curious and because I was in touch with the Kurdish students coming from Iran … They were telling us how Qazi Muhammed was sentenced to death and executed' (Miroğlu, 2005: 112). Canip Yıldırım then

gets to know Safii, who was Qazi Muhammed's personal secretary, but explains Safii did not want to talk to him about Mahabad, as he was under the trauma of Qazi Muhammed's execution.

In Ankara, Canip Yıldırım was socializing with other students coming from Diyarbakir but apparently did not hear of Mahabad. Things were different in Istanbul. Tarık Ziya Ekinci and Musa Anter, who were students in Istanbul at that time, and living together in the 'Dicle Student Residence' (Dicle Talebe Yurdu), did hear of the Mahabad Republic. Tarık Ziya Ekinci tells in his memoirs that one day Nejat Cemiloğlu approached him at the library where he was studying for his exams and offered him chocolate. When they came out of the library to have that chocolate, Nejat Cemiloğlu told him the reason: the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad had just been declared, and given the situation, their only way of celebrating it was to have chocolate together. When Nejat Cemiloğlu said that, Tarık Ziya Ekinci recalled reading a short paragraph in the newspaper mentioning the founding of a Kurdish republic in Iran with the backing of the USSR (Ekinci, 2010: 211). This episode shows that Kurdish students were aware of the existence of the Mahabad Republic. But the celebration was, at the same time, very modest and quite far away from a political meeting: two students in front of the library, eating chocolate.

A similar event is mentioned in an interview of Şahin Cizrelioğlu, who was from an important family from Diyarbakir that was sent to exile in the 1930s. When amnesty was declared in 1946, a few members of great families of Diyarbakir who returned from exile met in Istanbul. They decided to act on a co-ordinated basis when they were back in their villages. At that time, says Şahin Cizrelioğlu, 'the event of "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad" had taken place' (Diken, 2010: 219). During the meeting, they listened to Iraqi radio broadcasts in Kurdish. He does not say much on the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad; what they actually said about it is how they heard of it. But the simple fact he remembers that Mahabad was one of the subjects of conversation, decades later, shows that it must have been an important topic of discussion.

In March 1947, a more openly political meeting took place in Dicle (Tigris) student residence in Istanbul: Tarık Ziya Ekinci was invited to a small gathering by two Kurdish students, Aziz Gülbeden and Şevket Çelikkanat. The meeting of seven or eight people was chaired by Ali Karahan, a student who was older than most of them and would become a Kurdish activist in the 1950s. Ali Karahan gives a short overview of the situation in Iran: a republic had been founded but the shah had decided to crack it down, and Qazi

Muhammed had been sentenced to death. The 'duty' (to protect the Kurdish Republic), he said, was now to be endorsed by the 'Kurdish people' and the 'Kurdish youth'. He invited all students in the room to leave Istanbul and head to Iran to fight with their Kurdish brothers (Ekinci, 2010: 212). A debate follows among the students who were present: what was the best way to help their people? Should they first finish their studies and get a job, or should they leave for Iran and fight against the Persian army? The small assembly was divided. The debate ended with no answer to this question. But Ekinci concludes by saying that no one actually left Istanbul for Iran to fight for the Mahabad Republic.

What must be underlined in this conversation is the tone of Ali Karahan's lecture, and his emphasis on the role of the Kurdish 'people' and the 'youth'. This points out a new perception of the Kurdish space as a whole, and also indicates the emergence of the student youth, as a new actor in Kurdish politics. The conclusion of the debate and the fact that no one actually left to fight in Iran is the proof of limited solidarity between the different Kurdish movements at that time. If most students chose to finish their studies and get a job in Turkey, it is because they felt the need to get involved in Turkish politics – a large part of them did so in the 1950s.

In sum, it seems that only the Kurdish elites and, among them, their most politicized members had heard of the foundation of the Mahabad Republic. The Kurdish students in Istanbul were coming from big families of Turkish Kurdistan. Interestingly, the Mahabad Republic was declared at a time when a more politicized youth emerged in Turkey, due to several dynamics. Around 1948, five students of the Dicle Talebe Yurdu – Mustafa Remzi Bucak, Yusuf Azizoglu, Ziya Serefhanoglu, Faik Bucak and Musa Anter – decided to establish a society to defend the rights of Kurdish people, the 'Association for the Rescue of Kurds' (Kürtleri Kurtarma Cemiyeti) (Anter, 2011: 59). The 'organization' (örgüt) was meant to fight for the rights of the Kurdish citizens. Although it never had more than five members, its nature was clearly nationalist: the members had to swear on a Kurdish flag that one of them, Musa Anter, sewed with his own hands.

The most important thing to note is the way students in Istanbul interpreted the failure of the Mahabad Republic. In Tarık Ziya Ekinci's memoirs, a critique of feudalism is developed right after the mention of the Mahabad Republic period. Considering the fall of the Republic, Kurdish student youth in Istanbul drew the following conclusion: tribalism is the cause of the weakness of the Kurdish movement. All in all, the declaration and the fall of the Mahabad Republic, and the way it was interpreted in the larger Kurdish

geography, was a turning point in the history of the Kurdish nationalist movement. It was the starting point of the new dynamics: the shifting of the focal point from the countryside to urban centres, the demand for a territorial state and the rise of a student youth who saw tribalism as a weakness for the Kurdish nationalist movement. These new demands and actors were going to be at the forefront of the political developments in the 1960s.

Ethnopolitical Entrepreneurs of the Kurdish Issue in the Late 1950s in Turkey and Syria

Both in Turkey and in Syria, leaders of a new type emerged in the late 1950s. In Turkey, this decade was for the Kurds a time of integration into the broader Turkish society. The transition from a single-party regime to a multi-party system let certain Kurdish demands be expressed, especially by Kurdish Members of Parliament (Çelik and Garapon, 2017). At the end of the decade, Turkish repression marks a turning point. In Syria, Kurds mainly engaged in the Communist Party, but the hegemony of Arab nationalism led them to leave it at the end of the 1950s.

From Integration to Political Activism: 'The 49'ers (49'lar)' in Turkey

The formation of a new and graduate Kurdish elite in Turkey, in the late 1950s, coincides with the rebirth of the Kurdish movement. The first claims were centred on cultural activities and the concept of 'Kurdism' (Kürtçülük), in the form of reviews, writings, small groups and organizations which gathered around political ideas. Thus Kurdism was revived in the public sphere, albeit in a marginal manner (Çelik, 2018). These 'ethnopolitical entrepreneurs', in the words of Watts (2010), would make it possible to transform the Kurdish protest into a sustainable ethnic movement in the 1970s, unlike the rebellions of the republican period, even if their activism would only have limited appeal to the Kurdish masses until the military coup in 1980 (Aslan, 2015: 118).

'The 49'ers' incident was an important event that left its mark on a whole generation. Many people who experienced it mention it as a founding event that marked a turning point: the first rebirth of the Kurdish issue, as it was collectively and explicitly addressed for the first time since the repression of the 1930s. Two events in the late 1950s initially contributed to the mobilization of these 'ethnopolitical entrepreneurs', which ultimately led to the detention of forty-nine of them: the so-called Kımıl event and the

anti-Kurdish statements by a CHP deputy in the National Assembly following the 'Kirkuk events'. On 31 September 1959, the Kurdish poet and writer Musa Anter, an active defender of Kurdish identity, published a poem in Kurdish in his newspaper, *İleri Yurt*, with the title *Kımıl* ('Wheat bug'). This was one of the first attempts since the 1930s to almost openly criticize the exploitation of the Kurdish regions by the Turkish state. It immediately attracted considerable attention and criticism from the Turkish press. In September 1959, in a context where the possible repercussions in Turkey of the constitutional recognition of the national rights of the Kurdish population in Iraq worried the Turkish elites, Musa Anter, Canip Yıldırım and Abdurrahman Efhem Dolak, the editors and owners of the newspaper *İleri Yurt*, were arrested (see Anter, 2011; Miroğlu, 2005).

After the 1958 coup in Iraq, several Turkmens were persecuted, leading to a strong reaction in racist and extreme right-wing circles in Turkey. A CHP deputy, Asım Eren (nicknamed 'Rommel' by Kurdish students (Bozarslan, 2013)), complained in the parliament that Kurds were killing Turkmens in Iraq – he attributed these massacres to Barzani's forces – and advocated a policy of coercion against the Kurds in Turkey. 'The Kurds killed our brothers,' he said, 'so we must kill as many Kurds as they killed the Turkmens' (*Mukâbele-i bil misil*). This discourse stirred strong reactions in Kurdish circles (Anter, 2011; Ekinci, 2010: 375; Peşeng, 2015), particularly among students and intellectuals, fifty of whom were arrested. One of the prisoners awaiting trial died quickly during his detention and those who remained would be known as 'the 49'ers' ('Kırk Dokuzlar') from then on. They were accused of 'Kurdism and Communism' for sending a telegram to foreign embassies in Turkey and to the Turkish newspapers, in order to protest against the way in which the Turkish press reported the call for a massacre against the Kurds (Çamlıbel, 2015; Peşeng, 2015).

The 49'ers are a good sample of these 'ethnopolitical entrepreneurs' from the late 1950s on. First, the sample shows a generational change: not all of these activists are from the 'generation of fear', who were born during the repression of the uprisings of the 1930s and spent their childhood in exile. Some of them were younger (Bozarslan, 2013). Second, the university was becoming more and more important in the making of Kurdish political identity. Most of the men in prison held a university degree – nineteen of them were graduates of law school, eleven were medical graduates, seven had studied engineering and three economics. On the other hand – and this is the third conclusion we can draw – most of these university students came from modest families, as opposed to the 'large families' with strong social

roots that dominated the politics of the Kurdish regions (Çelik and Garapon, 2017). They came from all regions of Kurdistan. Finally, they were sensitive to global anti-colonial discourse. Some of them had studied abroad (Bozarslan, 2013). Naci Kutlay, for example, wrote a poem about the struggle of Djamila Bouhired, an FLN activist born in Algeria in 1935, when he was in prison for the '49'ers' case (cf. Temel, 2015).

Finally, the emergence of a politicized Kurdish youth is one of the prevailing developments of the Kurdish movement in Turkey in the 1960s. These students were increasingly attracted towards Marxist ideas. Marxism also attracted some of the Kurdish activists in Syria, although in a profoundly different manner.

Syrian Kurds between Arab Nationalism, Communism and Kurdish Nationalism

After the end of the French Mandate in Syria, in 1946, the Kurdish population engaged in political participation at the national level. In this engagement, however, Kurds did hesitate between 'Arab Nationalism, Communism and Kurdish Nationalism' (Tejel, 2008: 42). Many Kurds who were serving in the French mandatory troop units during the French Mandate continued to be active in the army in the post-mandate period and then took side with Syrian Arab nationalism, which was, at that time, very close to the left. In 1949, two of the three successive dictators (Husni Za'im, Adib al-Shiskakli and Sami al-Hinnawi) were of Kurdish descent (Tejel, 2008: 44).

This is somehow surprising when we recall that in the 1920s and 1930s, Syria became the centre of the Kurdish political and cultural activities, together with Lebanon. These activities, which significantly contributed to the development of the Kurdish nationalism in the region, were being conducted by Kurdish intellectuals exiled by the nationalist leaders of Turkey, like the descendants of Jamil Pasha – his grandson visited Mahabad in 1944 as a leading Kurdish leader (Gunes, 2019: 63; Tejel, 2008). After the French withdrawal in 1946, Kurdish intellectuals continued to make an effort to develop and revive the Kurdish national consciousness, culture and identity in Syria.

However, Kurdish nationalism was starkly challenged by the attraction of Communist ideology and the party. Within the four parts of Kurdistan, Syrian Kurdistan was where the earliest and most massive orientation to the Communist Party was experienced. According to Harriet Allsopp (2015), this is due to several factors. First, the Syrian Communist Party, founded in 1927, was ruled by Khalid Bakdash, who was also Kurdish, from

1936 until his death in 1995. Bakdash played a major role in retaining the support of a considerable Kurdish base throughout the party's history (cf. Cegerxwîn, 2003). Second, the beginning of intensive mechanized agriculture in the country brought about significant socio-economic changes in the Kurdish regions of Syria, which led different social groups – mainly landlords and their peasants – into a struggle for power. The Communist Party thus became popular in the Kurdish mountains. The Communist Party's approach to issues such as equality, peasant rights and the redistribution of prosperity was to be quickly endorsed by the Kurdish peasant class and among the intellectuals. The Syrian Communist Party also attracted the attention of the Kurdish poet Cegerxwîn and Kurdish intellectuals such as Muhammad Fakhri, Rashid Hamo and Shawkat Na'san. The Soviet Union's support to Molla Mustafa Barzani after his exile was a third important factor dragging the Kurds in Syria towards the Communist Party (Allsopp, 2015: 68–9).

For all these reasons, and most probably because the leftist orientation was echoing the preoccupations of landless peasants, as well as those of educated young people, who saw Marxist–Leninist ideologies as a means of providing liberation, equality and justice for the Kurdish people, the Syrian Communist Party became the centre of the Kurdish political activities from the late 1940s to 1957 (Allsopp, 2015: 69).

Things started to change in the 1950s when the rise of an increasingly aggressive Arab nationalism led Kurdish activists in Syria to establish a new party, explicitly designed to defend Kurdish rights, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria. The hegemonic Arab nationalist discourse in Syria was among the first reasons. In 1958, the unification of Syria with Nasserist Egypt in a short-lived 'United Arab Republic' is a telling example of the attraction of Arab nationalism for Syrian officials. But there is more: as party officials might have been scared by the significant number of Kurdish supporters and feared it might become a Kurdish party (Cegerxwîn, 2003: 307–9), the Communist Party's stance towards Kurdish demands shifted from indulgence to rejection at the end of the 1950s. The party tried to curb publications in the Kurdish language and even adopted an official position rejecting the recognition of Kurdish national rights in Syria. It is in this context the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria was founded in 1957. Its overall aim was the recognition of Kurdish cultural rights and democratic change in Syria. The organization was short-lived: its leaders were arrested in 1960 and its activities soon went underground.

Its influence, however, remained big among Kurdish students sent to Europe to study. These students and a few intellectuals played a critical

role in organizing the support for the Barzani upheaval in Iraq from abroad (like Ismet Cherif Vanly and Noureddine Zaza; see Wanlî, 2014; Zaza, 1993). Indeed, if the year 1958 in Syria marks the end of an era of limited pluralism due to the unification with authoritarian Egypt under Nasser's rule, it is in Iraq that the beginning of the rebirth of the Kurdish movement takes place.

New Cross-border Dynamics: Routes, Radio and Europe as a New Centre

The upheaval of 1958, Barzani's return to Iraq, the 'September Revolution' from 1961 on and their resonance in the wider Kurdish space put the Kurdish Iraq area at the centre of a new imagined Kurdistan. But this is also due to profound changes in communications and cross-border exchanges: new transnational dynamics were transforming the Kurdish area as a whole.

'Crossing the Boundaries' in the Kurdish Space: Old and New Transnational Dynamics

The borders between Iraq and Iran, Iran and Turkey, Iraq and Turkey, Turkey and Syria were always transitional. Traditionally, border traffic and seasonal migrations were important factors in the flow of information, know-how and ideas.

Semi-nomadic tribes, who crossed borders every summer, were, since the construction of new international borders, a transnational force. National governments had long tried to control them, with little success. In 1943, the extra-judiciary execution in Turkey of thirty-three Kurdish peasants who were regularly crossing the Iranian border can be linked with that attempt to control those tribes (see Beşikci, 1991; Özgen, 2003). In 1961, a diplomatic report by Pierre Lescot, the counsel of the French ambassador, indicated that the Iranian authorities had raised the tax barriers per livestock in a drastic way to dissuade tribes from crossing the border.[1] The traffic of all kind of goods, tobacco, alcohol and weapons, was, in certain regions, a means of subsistence for most of the population.

The smuggling is not only based on the exchange of goods prohibited by the state, but it should also rather be defined as a 'challenge' that goes well beyond its material dimension. In fact, smuggling, far from being limited to the transportation of banned goods, was *lêxistina sînor* (breaking the border). The *smuggler* would smuggle everything the state wanted to curb or prevent

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1 Diplomatic archives of Nantes, 36 PO/2/52.

the circulation of. The smuggler helped the *mahkum* (convict) and *firari* (fugitive) whom the Republic was searching for, the people trying to get to Beirut to work during the famine in the 1940s and also, until the 1950s, the students of madrasa (*feqi*) who wanted to go and study in the madrasas of Binxet (Kurdistan part of Syria). They could also host the people fleeing a tribal hostility like a blood feud or a case of abducting a woman. According to a French diplomatic report, weapons were circulated from USSR and different parts of Kurdistan, arming rebels in several uprisings.[2] These merchants and tribes did participate in the creation of a consistent Kurdish space. But new dynamics in the 1960s also gave a new impulse to this movement.

Increasingly from the 1960s on, they also carried banned cassettes, books and magazines through the borders; young people who wanted to join the movement led by Barzani in Iraq in the 1960s and 1970s, and people who were escaping the military coups of 1971 and then 1980 in Turkey, were illegally crossing the borders (Çelik, 2019: 175). Lescot's report written in 1961 mentions a new route that was being built to connect northern and southern Kurdistan in Iran.[3] That route, says the diplomat, might help the commercial relationships develop between these two regions, while until then commercial networks were connecting northern Kurdistan with Azerbaijan. This new route might play a role, he says, in the forming of a more consistent Kurdish identity. This was also true for other parts of Kurdistan, especially Turkish Kurdistan. The fast development of new roads shortened the distances and gave Kurds a greater feeling of belonging to the same culture.

Following the 1958 coup, several Kurds from Iraq also sought refuge in Turkey and in Iran. In a letter to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1959, the French ambassador to Turkey, Henri Spitzmüller, states that there were around 2,000 Iraqi refugees in Turkey at that time.[4] Some of them, thought to be opponents of Mustafa Barzani, also fled to Iran.[5] They were certainly circulating the news, through a clandestinely distributed Iraqi journal, *Kurdistan*. Lescot mentions rumours of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan were very frequent, and everyone was well aware of the last arrests in Iraq and Turkey.[6]

But the most important innovation of that time certainly was the radio, which connected Kurds across the Kurdish geography. Broadcasting in Kurdish began in 1939 and was one of the corporate outcomes of the Kurdish intelligentsia in exile. As speaking and publishing in Kurdish was banned and criminalized in Turkey from 1925 on, radio stations broadcasting

2 Ibid.   3 Ibid.   4 Ibid.   5 Ibid.   6 Ibid.

in Kurdish outside of Turkey had become very popular in the Kurdish regions (İnanç, 2017; Üngör, 2011). The first three radio stations broadcasting in Kurdish were Radio Bagdad (1939–46), Sharq al-Adna (1943–5) and Radio Levant (1941–6) (Hassanpour, 2005: 438). Radio Yerevan, which was the last of these radios, was also among the best known and most listened to among the Kurds of Turkey (Ağcakulu, 2012). It began broadcasting programmes on 1 January 1955. The staff who operated the radio station were mainly Kurdish Yezidis and Armenians. It was authorized and funded by the Soviet government, which of course kept an eye on the content and guided the choice of programmes (Cemîla Celîl, 2017).

Radio Yerevan was the first and foremost cultural media among the Kurds of Turkey as a modern tool. The Kurdish voice in the radio broadcasts was new to the Kurds. The practices of assimilation were intended to humiliate the Kurdish language and culture. But Radio Yerevan broadcast traditional Kurdish songs as well as *dengbêj* songs about their recent history and interpreted these songs by inviting Kurdish historians. Scientists sent their work about the Kurds to be broadcast by radio (Celîlê Celîl, 2017: 37). Radio thus acted as a 'satellite of resistance' (Çelik, 2018: 360).

In terms of broadcasting, the Kemalist regime considered Turkey's Kurdistan as an area where 'Turkishness' had to be spread. The aim of the generous distribution of radio stations in these regions was obviously to disseminate Turkish history and official culture. But Turkish journalist Nedim Gürsel, visiting the south-eastern region in 1962, discovered that people there, instead of listening to TRT (Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu, Turkey's public channel), were connected to Radio Tehran, or, worse, Radio Yerevan. The authorities decided in response to jam Radio Yerevan's signal and send more radios to the border regions (Üngör, 2011: 201).

In the 1960s, the radio started to play a big role in forging Kurdistan as a culturally unified space. The radio became widespread in the 1950s across the Middle East: in Turkey, for example, almost every cafe had a radio by the end of the 1950s (Beeley, 1970). In 1946, Kurds in Istanbul were listening to Iraqi radio broadcasts in Kurdish. In Iranian Kurdistan, as Lescot reports: 'Kurdish radio emissions from the USSR, from Iraq, and even from Cairo were already being followed with great attention.' In Mahabad, it was listened to publicly in every shop of the bazaar, and according to Lescot, 'everyone who had a radio post knew the wavelength and program hours perfectly.'[7]

7 Ibid.

As new means of communications were enhancing new transnational dynamics, places outside of Kurdistan started to gain crucial importance for the movement. The USSR, through radio broadcasting, was one of them. But most important is certainly Europe, where young students from different parts of Kurdistan were socializing among themselves and were exposed to Marxist and anti-colonial discourse – this is very clear, for example, in Ekinci's memoirs (Ekinci, 2010).

Europe as a New Centre for the Kurdish Nationalist Movement

All the cultural and diplomatic activities of Kurdish students in Europe and their relations with the anti-colonial and Communist movements, especially with the USSR, were closely linked to the emergence of a left-wing discourse in the Middle East, certainly among the Kurds. The progression of left-wing activism did not just spread through individuals; student associations also played a significant role.

During the Cold War, many Kurdish students and intellectuals in exile were staying in several large cities and capitals: Damascus, Beirut, but mainly in Europe: Lausanne, Prague, Paris, Strasbourg, Moscow. Until 1975, the majority of Kurdish students in Europe were from Iraq and Syria. The greater development in these two countries, especially the economy and the education system, increased the contact between these countries and European countries such as England in the case of Iraq, and France in the case of Syria, as ex-imperial powers. The increased number of Kurdish students benefiting from government scholarships in various Eastern and Western European countries may help explain this (Sheikhmous, 1989: 4–5).

The first Association of Kurdish students in Europe was founded in Switzerland in 1949. The association published a bilingual Kurdish–French magazine, *Dengê Kurdistan – La Voix du Kurdistan* (Zaza, 1993). But from the Second World War to 1975, nearly all Kurdish political and cultural activities abroad, especially in Europe, were gathered in the Kurdish Students' Society in Europe (KSSE), which was established in 1956 in Wiesbaden, West Germany, by 17 Kurdish students from all parts of Kurdistan, studying in different countries in Europe. KSSE grew from 17 members in 1956 to nearly 3,000 in 1975, with branches in most European countries. The society was publishing magazines in Kurdish and European languages, participating in international youth and student festivals, organizing cultural evenings, acting as diplomatic representatives for the Kurdish movements inside Kurdistan and helping newly arrived Kurdish students by providing them with guidance and services (Sheikhmous, 1989: 3).

KSSE took part in international student networks, national networks supporting the 'Third World' national liberation movements and transnational revolutionary networks (Tejel, 2018). As the association was considered 'Communist', authorities in several countries paid great attention to it (cf. Ammann, 2001). The activities of the KSSE and its subsidiary committees were also disturbing the Iraqi government enough for Radio Baghdad to target its members a few months after the fall of Abdul Karim Qassem's regime. In the same vein, the Iraqi government successfully demanded that the Austrian government prevent the KSSE from holding its twelfth congress in Vienna (Tejel, 2018). Other organizations, too, were active, such as Hevre – Komala Şoreşvanên Kurdên Tirkiye li Ewrûpa (Together – The Revolutionary Organization of the Kurds from Turkey in Europe). This organization published a bilingual (Kurdish and Turkish) journal entitled *Ronahî* between 1971 and 1974.[8] In relation to KSSE, in a *Ronahî* article titled 'Why?' ('Ji bo çi?'), Hevre considered itself an organization not only for Kurdish students but also for Kurdish workers (Ronahî, 1971: 1). It also published some of Ismet Sheriff Vanly's and Kemal Burkay's brochures (Gunes, 2012: 71).

These students and their organizations played a significant role in the attraction of Kurdish actors towards Marxism, beyond the Soviet Union's activism.

The 1960s and 1970s in Iraq, Syria and Turkey: How Young Kurdish People Endorsed Marxism in the Middle East

Kurdism and Marxism still form the basis of a common political culture – albeit not without tensions and contradictions – shared by several actors in the Kurdish area today. This is partly due to the USSR's activism. The multinational structure of the Soviet Union made it possible, depending on the place and time, to improvise and then mobilize minority networks in Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt in the 1920s and 1930s (Ter Minassian, 1997). We have already mentioned the role of the Soviet regime in the case of the Mahabad Republic. Barzani's exile in the USSR also plays a crucial role before 1958. But it is also, as Hamit Bozarslan puts it, the desire to connect with the 'Marxist universal' that led the Kurds to become, in the 1960s, at least within the cross-border Kurdish space, 'hawkers of Comintern' (Bozarslan, 2017b). From the 1960s on, all across the Middle East, Kurds

8 Ismet Chérif Vanly's Collection, IS 5546/01/01/04.

would leave national parties and organizations to found their own, focused on Kurdish identity. Kurdish demands also went more radical, shifting from cultural rights towards a 'right to self-determination'.

The 'September Revolution' in Iraq: Radicalization and Mass Violence

In 1958, a coup brought up by officers of the Iraqi army took the monarchy down. The leader of that revolution, Abdul Karim Qassem, was of mixed origin: his father was a Sunni Muslim of Kurdish descent, and his mother was a Shiite Muslim from Baghdad. The fall of the monarchy elevated great hopes and expectations in Iraqi Kurdistan. Some weeks after the coup, Mustafa Barzani came back from his decade-long exile in USSR, where he had sought asylum after the fall of the Mahabad Republic in 1946. His party, the PDK (Democratic Party of Kurdistan), came to legal existence and rapidly gained a great influence in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Barzani tried to get an autonomous status for Iraqi Kurdistan but failed to convince Abdul Karim Qassem. The stalling of negotiations sparked an uprising in September 1961, known as the 'September Revolution'. Recent history work suggests the revolt was launched not by Mustafa Barzani himself but by his left-wing, gathered around Ibrahim Ahmed, an engaged writer, and Jalal Talabani (Bozarslan, 2009: 50).

Therefore, the Kurdish movement, which had succeeded in establishing a fair internal unity since the late 1940s, divided into groups fighting each other. Molla Mustafa Barzani, who had turned conservative after his long stay in USSR, was a respected figure among tribes and urban notables. His forces, however, were mainly coming from the left wing of the party and saw tribal chiefs as well as notables as class enemies. By 1964, the rupture was effective and even led the left-wing figures Ahmed and Talabani to fight with the Iraqi forces against Barzani in 1966 (Bozarslan, 2009: 49–50).

All in all, the Iraqi upheaval lasted for almost fourteen years and caused heavy losses in the Iraqi army. An efficient organization for the guerrilla is certainly one reason for its resilience. But the Cold War context also played an instrumental role. The support of the Iranian shah, who decided to arm Kurdish peshmerga in order to weaken the Iraqi state, was equally crucial. However, in the spring of 1975, a regional thaw brought this support to an end. At the OPEC meeting held in Algeria in March 1975, the Iranian shah and Saddam Hussein signed a peace agreement that resulted in the withdrawal of Iran's support for the Kurds, and the rebellion was quashed in a very short time (Zaza, 1975: 49).

The Kurdish national struggle was facing a great defeat. This time, the Kurds of Turkey watching the Kurdish national struggle under the leadership of Barzani with great interest and admiration would take over the national struggle, although through different means.

Turkey: From Integration in the Turkish Nation to Left-Wing Activism and Violent Action

In Turkey, the revival of Kurdish nationalism took place after the military coup of 1960. The 1961 Constitution, although it was largely oriented against Kurdism and Communism, certainly contributed to this renewal partly by extending civil liberties. Other important factors include the return of Barzani to Iraq in 1958 and the influence of the 'September Revolution'. Some Kurds from Turkey left to join Barzani's forces, while news of the revolt that was broadcast in the Turkish press met a formidable response, especially among the young people who came to see Barzani as the 'father of their nation'. Programmes were also broadcast by the Kurdish insurgent radio. Another factor reinforced the dynamics of this renewal in the late 1960s: the development of a left-wing movement in Turkey that attracted many young Kurds and, later, large segments of the Kurdish population resulting from migration to large cities.

However, the Kurdish movement broke up with Turkish left-wing organizations from the end of the 1960s on. In the autumn of 1967, successively in different localities, thousands of people began to gather in the districts and provinces of eastern Turkey. These protest rallies, in the form of marches and protest demonstrations, were forms of non-violent collective action, known as 'rallies' or 'meetings' from the east. It was the first massive movement against state authority in the Kurdish regions since the Dersim Revolt in 1938 (Gündoğan, 2005).

The first step in the formation of a Kurdish left-wing movement in Turkey separated from Turkish left-wing organizations is the emergence of the DDKO (Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları, Revolutionary Cultural Hearths of the East). They were founded in Ankara and Istanbul in 1969 and five other branches were established in late 1970 and early 1971 (Alış, 2009: 138). The majority of the members of the associations were Kurdish students. This premise will lead to an increasingly complete divorce that will become irremediable from 1974 on (Yeleser, 2011). Although designed for cultural rights, these associations were a melting pot for the Kurdish activists in the making.

After the 1971 coup d'état, which was particularly repressive against even harmless demonstrations of 'Kurdism', the Kurdish movement turned to

violence in the second half of the 1970s. The amnesty of 1974 for prisoners arrested in 1971 released a generation that had been radicalized by repression and prison, which no longer had any confidence in the constitutional and legal framework, and which considered clandestine action to be the only way out. Many of them formed the nucleus of future struggle organizations in prison.

Once and for all, after the general amnesty of 1974, the movements were confronted with the sudden defeat of the Barzani rebellion in 1975, which forced the Kurds of Turkey to seek alternative models of organization and inspiration. This configuration led to the creation, in the Kurdistan of Turkey, of small groups dedicated to political action based on radical discourse. Between 1974 and 1977, a dozen Kurdish organizations were formed (Akkaya, 2013; Ercan, 2010; Gunes, 2012; Orhan, 2015). All factions shared Marxist revolutionary ideology with nuances (Marxist–Leninist, Maoist, pro-Soviet). Overall, from the second half of the 1970s on, colonialism and the struggle for decolonization was the main framework for understanding the Kurdish question (Bozarslan, 2007).

Conclusion

In sum, many developments of the further decade have their roots in the 1946–75 period. Before 1946, the Kurdish movement relies on tribal networks, and it is embedded in rural societies. In 1975, Kurdish demands in Iraq and Turkey are inspired by Marxism, even if tribal figures remain stark. The period between 1946 and 1975, therefore, is a transition period where new actors – urban dwellers, student youth – and new discourses – from the quest for a state to the quest for universal emancipation through cultural rights for the Kurds – emerged. The founding of the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, although its resonance was limited, is a milestone. It is the first attempt to give the Kurds a territorial state and build unity among different parts of Kurdistan. In Turkey, its ultimate failure is interpreted as a lack of solidarity among Kurds. Even if, in the 1950s, several dynamics are pushing Kurds in Syria and in Turkey towards national integration, the years 1957–8 mark a turning point. In Syria, a party specially designed to defend the Kurds' rights, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria, is founded. In Iraq, a coup d'etat by Abdul Karim Qassem and Barzani's return from exile are the starting point for further Kurdish demands. In Turkey, political repression fuelled a renewed activism by 'ethnopolitical entrepreneurs'. At the same time, new means of communications and the melting pot of European

universities for many young Kurds created a new imagined Kurdistan. From the 1960s on, the Kurdish struggle was increasingly interpreted through the colonization and decolonization scheme. In Turkey, the Kurdish movement and the Turkish left parted ways at the end of the 1960s, even if the Kurdish demands remain expressed through Marxist discourse. In the 1970s, further repression by states – the end of the Kurdish guerrilla in Iraq and the violent crackdown following the 1971 coup in Turkey – fostered in return violence by Kurdish activists. In sum, violence and fragmentation, which are constitutive of the next decade, were already in the making in the 1960s and in the 1970s.

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Kurdish Politics across the Middle East during the 1970s

CENGIZ GUNES

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the political developments in the Kurdish regions of the Middle East during the 1970s. During the 1970s, Iraqi Kurdistan was the centre of Kurdish political developments and in March 1970, an agreement on Kurdish autonomy was reached between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the government of Iraq, which brought an end to the violence in the conflict that began in 1961 and continued intermittently throughout the 1960s. However, the persistent disagreement about the parameters of Kurdish autonomy led to the resumption of hostilities in March 1974. This round of fighting continued until March 1975 and ended with the defeat of Kurdish forces and their retreat to Iran.

During the 1970s, Iraq's Kurdish conflict integrated into the regional rivalries and power contests and the support that Iran and Israel provided to the Iraqi Kurds was instrumental in their ability to sustain their struggle against the Iraqi army. Iran's decision to end the military and financial support it provided to the Kurdish forces in exchange of the territorial concessions it obtained from Iraq in the Persian Gulf was a major factor in the collapse of the Kurdish armed struggle against Iraq in 1975. The collapse of the armed struggle had major ramifications for Kurdish politics across the region in the years to come and resulted in the division of the KDP, which had been the main force in Kurdish politics in Iraq since the 1950s and the formation of left-wing Kurdish political parties. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which was established under the leadership of Jalal Talabani in Damascus, Syria, in June 1975, was the main challenger to the KDP and the conservative brand of Kurdish nationalism it represented. The division and subsequent fragmentation of the Kurdish movement were not amicable and a factional conflict between the remaining elements of the KDP and the PUK ensued that continued throughout the late 1970s.

In Turkey, after years of silence, Kurdish activists began organizing cultural and political activities and challenge Kurds' oppression and denial of their identity. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Kurds who took part in the activities of Turkish socialist groups and parties began advocating the establishment of Kurdish political parties and groups. The mid-1970s witnessed the emergence of several clandestine Kurdish socialist political parties in Turkey. The activists that were previously allied with the KDP's branches in Turkey began to use the socialist discourse, which shows the popularity of the left-wing Kurdish nationalism among the Kurds in Turkey. In this period, the notion of Greater Kurdistan was rearticulated in the discourse of the newly emerging Kurdish national movement in Turkey and the idea of armed struggle to liberate Kurdistan began to gain widespread support. However, the nascent Kurdish movement emerged within a harsh and violent political environment and many of the Kurdish political activists were arrested and remained in prison following the military coup of 12 September 1980.

In Iran, too, Kurdish movement was highly active and after the overthrow of the shah's regime, it mobilized a significant section of the Kurdish society around the demand of territorial autonomy. However, it was not long before the Kurdish forces came under attack by the forces of the Islamist regime that took power in Iran following the revolution and the Kurdish resistance against the Islamist takeover lasted until 1982. The first Kurdish political party in Syria was established in 1957 but it faced a series of divisions in the subsequent decades and remained fragmented. The consolidation of the authoritarian regime in Syria following Hafez al-Assad's ascendency to power further limited the opportunities for Syria's Kurdish movement and consequently, it was unable to appeal to the masses or generate mass political mobilization.

Armed Struggle in Iraqi Kurdistan

During the 1960s and 1970s, Iraqi Kurdistan was the main centre of Kurdish political activism in the Middle East. Kurdish revolt led by Mustafa Barzani and the KDP started in 1961 and continued intermittently for nearly a decade. The political instability Iraq experienced throughout the 1960s as a result of military coups by the rival factions of the Iraqi army created opportunities for Kurds to sustain their struggle. On 17 July 1968, Ba'athist officers organized the third coup of the decade to remove Abdul Rahman Aref and the Ba'ath leadership initially chose to co-operate with the KDP

with the aim of bringing about a negotiated end to the conflict that crippled Iraq throughout the 1960s.

Secret negotiations resulted in an autonomy agreement on 11 March 1970 (Vanly, 1993: 153). The autonomy agreement recognized the Kurdish language as an official language of Iraq and the right to provide education in it in the majority Kurdish regions. It also was committed to the Kurds' full participation in the country's politics and administration with the senior government posts in the Kurdish majority region being held by Kurds. It lifted the restrictions that blocked the development of Kurdish civil society organizations and promised state support for the development of Kurdish language and culture. State investment to promote the economic development of Kurdish regions was also promised and more importantly, Iraqi government accepted the future 'unification of Kurdish majority areas as a self-governing unit' (McDowall, 2004: 328; Stansfield, 2003: 75–7; Vanly, 1993: 153–5). The autonomy agreement satisfied many of the KDP's political demands. However, the inclusion of the Kirkuk city in the territory of the Kurdish autonomous region and a power-sharing framework at the state level, including the appointment of Kurdish representatives to the executive body of the Iraqi state, were also key demands the KDP raised, but these did not become part of the autonomy agreement (Burdett, 2015: 282).

Previously, the Bazzaz proposal in 1966 also promised Kurdish autonomy in Iraq to end the conflict, but it did not materialize (Burdett, 2015: 302). Hence, the idea of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq had a history and the autonomy agreement of 1970 did not diverge from the Iraqi policy, but what was surprising was its timing and the ability of Iraqi government and the KDP to overcome the many differences that they faced during the negotiations. According to British diplomatic sources, the cost of fighting the Kurds and the Iraqi army's inability to defeat the Kurdish armed struggle contributed to the drive to seek a peaceful resolution (Burdett, 2015: 302). Also, the pressure the Soviet Union applied to both sides to reach an agreement and accommodate Kurdish demands through autonomy also contributed to its success (Burdett, 2015: 298). However, doubts remained about the government's commitment to the implementation of the agreement.

In fact, the implementation phase of the agreement revealed its limitations and soon the government's unwillingness to address the key Kurdish demands became apparent. One area of disagreement concerned the exact borders of the autonomous Kurdish region and Iraqi government's refusal to include the Kirkuk governorate within it and follow the agreed procedure to decide the status of Kirkuk (Vanly, 1993: 156). Moreover, very little progress

was made in the first four years in terms of the implementation of the original autonomy agreement and on 11 March 1974, the Iraqi government offered an alternative autonomy proposal with significantly reduced terms and rejecting the Kurdish claims over the city of Kirkuk.

The KDP leader Mustafa Barzani refused the new autonomy offer and his actions led to the resumption of armed conflict in March 1974 (McDowall, 2004: 337). Initially Barzani attempted to obtain financial support from his backers to establish and manage a Kurdish administration in the areas the Kurdish forces controlled, but while both the shah of Iran and the US were keen to continue providing the Kurdish forces with financial and military support to push back the advance of Iraqi army, they were not prepared to support the unilateral declaration of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq (Gibson, 2013: 240–2). The Iraqi army's superior firepower, including intense air bombardment of Kurdish strongholds, began to pay dividends and, in the summer of 1974, it made headways in the mountainous terrain with the Kurdish forces unable to prevent their progress (Bengio, 2012: 129). The subsequent Kurdish counter-offensive in the winter of 1974 was unable to dislodge the Iraqi army from the areas it captured, which was an indication that without a significant increase in the military and financial aid, Kurdish forces could not withstand Iraqi army's advances.

Iran's military and financial support to the Kurdish forces during the early 1970s was a source of strain in the relations between Iran and Iraq and negotiations to find an amicable solution began to take place between the two sides at the end of 1974. The final agreement, the Algiers Accord, was reached on 6 March 1975 and in exchange of Iraqi concessions in the territorial dispute in the Gulf between the two states, Iran was required to end its military support for the Kurdish forces. Upon his return to Iran, the shah informed his advisers and the US official that the aid to the Kurds was to stop immediately and communicated his decision to Barzani in person at a meeting held on 11 March 1975 (Korn, 1994). The Algiers Accord significantly weakened the Kurdish position in the conflict as the support the Kurdish forces received from Iran was of crucial importance for the survival of the armed struggle. The Iraqi government offered a two-week ceasefire to Kurdish forces to end the armed struggle and leave Iraq. The KDP leadership decided to end the military campaign and retreat its forces, estimated to be between 35,000 and 40,000, to Iran on 18 March 1975 (Bengio, 2012: 144–6; Vanly, 1993: 172–3). In addition, around 210,000 Kurds found refuge in Iran following the withdrawal of the Kurdish forces (Ghareeb, 1981: 176). Initially, Barzani took the decision to continue with the armed struggle but soon on

18 March 1975 reversed his initial decision and informed his senior commanders that the armed struggle was to cease (Korn, 1994). The decision to end the armed struggle and relocate to Iran was a major source of division within the movement and generated much resentment against the KDP leadership. Barzani moved to the US in August 1975 to receive medical treatment for lung cancer at a Minnesota clinic and remained in the US until his return to Iran in October 1975. Barzani returned once more to the US to continue with the medical treatment and remained there until his death on 3 March 1979. His body was flown to Tehran and from there to Mahabad to be buried in the town of Oshnavieh in north-west Iran (Korn, 1994).

A significant section of the KDP's leadership was in favour of continuing the resistance against the Ba'athist regime and after the defeat of the insurgency, they began to break away from the KDP to establish new political organizations. The most significant of these groups was the PUK, which was established on 1 June 1975 in Damascus, Syria, under the leadership of Jalal Talabani and united two of the main groups that broke away from the KDP, the Marxist–Leninist Komala (Organization) group led by Nawshirwan Mustafa, and the Kurdistan Socialist Movement (KSM), led by Ali Askari (McDowall, 2004: 343). Although left-right divisions within the KDP existed since the mid-1960s and resulted in occasional tensions, they became more noticeable in the early 1970s and in March 1975, the shock of the sudden end of the armed struggle brought these divisions to the foreground.

Combining the power of Komala and KSM enabled the PUK to start its armed campaign within Iraqi Kurdistan in 1976 and establish itself as a strong political and military movement in Iraqi Kurdistan in the subsequent decades (McDowall, 2004: 343–52; Stansfield, 2003: 83–4). Some members of the KDP gathered around Mahmoud Othman and launched the KDP-Preparatory Committee in 1976, which joined forces in 1979 with a break-away section of the PUK led by Rasul Mamand to form the Kurdistan Socialist Party (McDowall, 2004: 344–5). Another section of the KDP led by Aziz Aqrawi, who was a senior military commander, and Hashim Aqrawi, who was a member of the politburo of the party, supported the autonomy offer made by the Iraqi government and remained in Baghdad where they attempted to revive the party there and took part in the autonomous structure created by the state (Ghareeb, 1981: 154).

The PUK formally advocated closer co-operation with the democratic forces of Iraq to overthrow the Ba'athist dictatorship and establish Kurdish autonomy within a democratic Iraq (Burdett, 2015: 517). Hence, despite the left-wing discourse, it did not differ significantly from the KDP in terms of

its key political demands. From May 1976 onwards, the KDP started its recovery and re-established its presence in Iraqi Kurdistan under the KDP-Provisional Leadership (Vanly, 1993: 187). The KDP-Provisional Leadership group was principally divided into two camps: the leftist elements within it congregated around Sami Abdul Rahman, with the traditionalists supporting Idris Barzani and Massoud Barzani, the sons of Mustafa Barzani (Stansfield, 2003: 87). Eventually, Idris Barzani and Massoud Barzani managed to gain control of the KDP with their rivals dissociating themselves from the party. During the late 1970s, the KDP also began to use a leftist discourse, which was visible in the documents produced following its ninth congress held on 4 November 1979. The congress passed a resolution condemning 'U.S. imperialism, international Zionism and reaction in the Middle East and the world' and committed itself to form a 'progressive national front in Iraq and Kurdistan to include all the progressive, democratic and national Kurdistan and Iraqi forces' against the Ba'athist regime (Burdett, 2015: 741).

The initially tense relations between the PUK and KDP led to the outbreak of violence in the summer of 1976, with the military forces – the peshmerga ('Those who face death') – loyal to the KDP ambushing and killing around 50 PUK peshmerga fighters. The KDP's deadliest attack against the PUK took place in June 1978 when a group of 800 PUK fighters led by Ali Askari were ambushed near the Turkey–Iraq border resulting in the death of many of the fighters. Both Ali Askari and his deputy, Khalid Said, were executed by the KDP peshmergas (McDowall, 2004: 344–5). Sporadic attacks against the Iraqi army by the KDP and PUK armed forces continued during 1978 and 1979 and both the parties convened their congress in 1979. The Iran–Iraq War, which began in September 1980, offered Kurdish parties more room for manoeuvre and impetus in their attempts to re-establish their presence in Iraqi Kurdistan. With the reduced presence of the Iraqi army in the Kurdish regions, both the PUK and KDP were able to increase their activities and exploit the war between Iran and Iraq to their advantage.

The 'Kurdish Card' in the International Relations of the Middle East

The regional and transnational dimensions of Kurdish politics began to manifest themselves more clearly during the 1970s. Despite the divisions imposed by state borders, the interactions between the Kurdish communities within the states of Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey continued. Hence, even if distinct social dynamics and ideologies have dominated different parts of

Kurdish political space in the Middle East, and local and national conditions played a significant role in the formation of each Kurdish conflict, Kurdish identity served as a source of connection across the state boundaries. Also, during the 1960s, Kurdish political activities began to take place in Western Europe, which was led by students, exiled political activists and representatives of the Kurdish political movements. This continued throughout the 1970s and the diaspora offered Kurdish activists new space to forge pan-Kurdish ties. In the early 1970s, a group known as 'the Hevra Organization of Revolutionary Kurds' was active and produced brochures and pamphlets written by Kurdish activists, such as Ismet Sherif Vanly and Kemal Burkay.

The geopolitical importance of the Middle East and the strong ties that the regional states cultivated with the international powers restricted the support the Kurdish armed movements could obtain from the international powers. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Kurdish conflict in Iraq integrated into the regional power dynamics and became a factor in the power struggle between the states in the region. It was instrumentalized by Iran and Israel in their efforts to preserve the balance of power in their favour by weakening Iraq. Throughout the 1960s Iran provided military and financial support to the KDP and also allowed Israel to use Iranian territory to deliver its military and financial support for the Iraqi Kurdish forces. Israel began supporting the Kurdish forces in the mid-1960s, but its support became more apparent in 1972 and consisted of financial support, arms and military training (Ghareeb, 1981: 142).

Iran and Israel shared a joint objective of weakening and pressurising Iraq and the 'Kurdish card' was frequently played to strengthen Iran's position as the dominant power in the Middle East and prevented Iraq posing a threat to Israel's security (Malek, 1989: 83). Iran was also keen to provide the Kurds of Iraq with military aid in order to extract concessions from Iraq in the Iran–Iraq territorial dispute in the Persian Gulf (Vanly, 1993: 169). Kurdish movements' engagement with the states in the region created opportunities to exploit. However, the support the Kurdish movement in Iraq received from Iran and Israel did not translate into support for autonomy and accommodation of Kurdish rights. Also, the support provided did not have the objective of empowering the Kurds as a policy goal and was linked to preserving the balance of power in favour of Iran and Israel and had the backing of the US as both Iran and Israel were the main US allies in the region.

In the post-World War Two US geopolitical imagination, the Kurds were seen as a force for destabilizing the region and a potential Soviet ally (Culcasi, 2006). This was mainly due to the Soviet support for the Kurdish Republic in

Mahabad, Iran, in 1946. However, in the early 1970s, the US began to increase its engagement with the KDP and the Iraqi Kurdish forces. This was partly done on the behest of its regional allies of Iran and Israel and partly as a reaction to the increasing military ties between Iraq and the Soviet Union, particularly after the signing of the Iraq–Soviet friendship treaty in 1972. The US support to the Kurdish forces in Iraq began at the end of 1972, consisted of military and financial support and was delivered secretly (Gibson, 2013: 215). Supporting the Kurdish insurgency created an opportunity to weaken the main Soviet client state in the Middle East and also keep the balance of power in favour of its main allies in the region: Iran and Israel, who were concerned by the threat that an empowered Iraq could pose to their security. The US–Iraq relations showed signs of improvement in 1973 after Iraq reached a deal to compensate the Western shareholders of the nationalized Iraq Petroleum Company, but tensions remained especially after the Iraqi army attacked a Kuwaiti border post in March 1973 (Gibson, 2013: 221). Consequently, the US continued with its support for the Kurdish forces to preoccupy the Iraqi army and this support was seen as necessary to prevent it from launching possible attacks on or threatening US allies.

When the conflict between the Iraqi army and the Kurdish forces resumed in March 1974, the US continued with its military and financial support until March 1975. While the US was unwilling to support Barzani's ambition to establish a Kurdish administration in the Kurdish-controlled areas, it was willing to support the Kurdish forces to prevent a total and easy victory for the Iraqi army. In autumn 1974, the US and Israel increased their military aid and included the advanced anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons in their transfers to the Kurdish forces, which resulted in a slowing of the advances of the Iraqi forces. Gradually, however, as the conflict began to play out, it became clear that unless the Kurdish forces were provided with a great deal more support, they would not be able to prevent the advances of the Iraqi army and air force. A crucial change in the established arrangements began to occur with the talks between Iran and Iraq to settle their differences and the territorial dispute in the Persian Gulf. From then on, the US and Israel were unable and/or unwilling to provide military and financial support sufficient enough to enable the Kurdish movement to sustain its armed campaign.

During the late 1970s, Syria also emerged as a potential Kurdish ally. Both Iraq and Syria were ruled by their respective Ba'ath parties, though relations between the two had been strained during the mid-1970s. Also, continuing disagreements due to the sharing of water resources exacerbated the tensions. The relations between the two countries improved after the

Israel–Egypt rapprochement in the late 1970s, Saddam Hussein's consolidation of his power in 1979 further increased the tensions and during the Iran–Iraq War, Syria sided with Iran against its Arab neighbour (Hinnebusch, 2001: 157). In order to weaken Iraq, Syria covertly facilitated political activities by Iraqi Kurdish groups and provided the PUK with the space to establish itself and build its party organization in its territory. Similar tensions with Turkey meant that from 1979 onwards, Syria tolerated the presence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in its territory and in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley. During the early 1980s, the PKK established its bases there and transformed itself into a guerrilla movement. The tolerance Syria showed the Kurdish movements from Iraq and Turkey was in stark contrast to the repression it used to control Syrian Kurdish political parties to prevent any Kurdish domestic challenge to state authority from developing.

Another international power involved in the region and Kurdish politics was the Soviet Union. On occasions, the Soviet Union lent its support to the Kurdish cause and it remained supportive of the idea of Kurds enjoying their national rights within a united Iraq. However, the degree to which it was vocal about its support for the Kurdish cause depended on its relations with Iraq's government (Burdett, 2015: 353). In the 1970s, the Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East centred on an alliance with Iraq and Syria and supporting communist parties in the Arab world. In April 1972, the Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation was signed between the Soviet Union and Iraq (Dawisha, 2009: 213). Therefore, throughout the 1970s the Soviet Union refrained from overtly supporting the Kurds on grounds that such a stance will antagonize Iraq and Syria – its main allies in the region – as well as the Arab world.

Turkey's Kurdish Movement during the 1970s

Turkey's transformation to democracy in 1950 created opportunities for the Kurdish religious and tribal elite to participate in politics and the institutions of the state. Party competition meant that these suitable conditions for Kurds to deepen their engagement in politics continued. These Kurdish political representatives acted as intermediaries between the government and the state and the Kurdish population and they dispensed patronage in exchange of votes, but by and large, they did very little to advocate Kurdish national rights. During the early 1960s, a new generation of Kurdish activist intellectuals emerged and began challenging the cultural and political oppression that the Kurds in Turkey routinely faced. This evolved towards a more

organized form during the second half of the 1960s. A clandestine political party, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey (TKDP), which advocated a similar autonomist programme as the KDP in Iraq, was established in 1965, which did not manage to gain much ground in Kurdish politics in Turkey (Bozarslan, 1992: 98–9).

Another source of Kurdish activism in the 1960s was provided by the Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP) and Turkey's growing socialist movement. The Kurdish activists in the TİP made a significant contribution to the debate on the Kurdish question. These debates gradually led to the Kurdish activists appropriating the Marxist discourse to develop a new conceptualization of the Kurdish question in terms of national oppression. The efforts of Kurdish activists began attracting mass support during the 'meetings of the East' in 1967, which took place in several Kurdish cities and became a platform for public expression of Kurdish political demands. These meetings culminated in the emergence of the Revolutionary Cultural Hearths of the East (DDKO) in 1969 (Gunes, 2012: 66–71). The military coup in 1971 intensified political oppression in Turkey and closed down the DDKO centres and prosecuted their leaders and members. Although almost all of the Kurdish activists were detained after the coup, some of them, such as Kemal Burkay, managed to escape to Europe, which gave them an opportunity to establish links with the Kurdish activists there.

The move towards separation and the establishment of specifically Kurdish organizations that started in the late 1960s continued throughout the 1970s and by the mid-1970s, numerous Kurdish revolutionary groups were in existence and active in Turkey. These included the Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan (TKSP) in 1974, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in 1978 (initially formed as a small political cell in 1973), Rizgarî (Liberation) in 1976, the National Liberators of Kurdistan (KUK) in 1978, Kawa in 1978, Denge Kawa in 1979, Ala Rizgarî (The Flag of Liberation) in 1979 and Tekoşin (Struggle) in 1979 (Gunes, 2012: 65–80; Jongerden and Akkaya, 2011). Their main activities revolved around publishing political magazines to disseminate their ideas and their discourse in the second half of the 1970s became more condensed focusing on Kurds' national oppression, analysing the nature of colonialism in Kurdistan and developing strategies to organize a Kurdish national liberation movement.

Most of the new Kurdish groups and parties traced their origins to the DDKO, the TKDP and TİP. They claimed to be mainly pro-Soviet Union and Marxist–Leninist. However, the Soviet Union's support for the Ba'athist regime in Iraq during the Kurdish uprising in the early 1970s caused

disappointment among some Kurdish socialists, who began to support the 'independent' line advocated by the Chinese Communist Party or the Albanian Labour Party. The fragmentation and division of the Kurdish movement were due to issues around strategy and tactics, as well as the groups' differing attitude towards the Soviet Union, or the Kurdish movement in Iraq contributed to their fragmentation.

In 1977 local elections, two pro-Kurdish candidates, Edip Solmaz and Mehdi Zana, successfully contested and won the 1977 provincial elections in Batman and Diyarbakir, respectively, which shows that the appeal of Kurdish political parties was quite strong (Dorronsoro and Watts, 2009). However, soon afterwards they, too, faced repression: Solmaz was killed in an extra-judicial murder in 1979, and Zana was arrested in 1980. Despite overall division and fragmentation that the Kurdish movement experienced during the late 1970s, there was an attempt by some Kurdish political parties and groups to form a united front when the Union of National Democratic Forces (UDG) was formed by the TKSP, the KUK and the KİP/DDKD in February 1980 (UDG, 1980).

The popularity of socialist ideas among the Kurdish activists in Turkey can be attributed to numerous factors: firstly, the participation of the high number of the Kurds in the Turkish socialist movement meant that the Kurdish activists were already familiar with Marxism and in a position to appropriate it for the Kurdish national question. Secondly, the defeat that the KDP suffered in 1975 against the Ba'athist regime in Iraq discredited, in the eyes of many Kurdish activists in Turkey, the 'conservative' brand of Kurdish nationalism and convinced many that reliance on the support of the 'imperialist' forces was bound to fail. Hence, it created a new space for a movement seeking to articulate Kurdish rights and demands within the Marxist discourse. Thirdly, the popularity of the socialist movements around the world, especially the successful anti-imperialist struggles in Africa and Asia, showed the validity and applicability of Marxism–Leninism as an ideology for the oppressed nations. The popularity of socialist ideas among the Kurdish activists is especially recognizable in the ideological evolution of the formerly conservative TKDP, whose members founded the left-wing orientated KUK, KİP/DDKD and the Kawa groups in the mid-1970s. Finally, the fact that the demands of the most populous section of the Kurdish society – the landless peasantry, whose living conditions deteriorated as a result of the capitalist development and mechanization of agriculture – could be reflected and articulated by a socialist discourse that enhanced the suitability of the national liberation discourse.

While the newly established Kurdish political parties and groups were committed to both socialism and Kurdish national liberation, there were important differences in terms of their political strategy and in terms of the issue of alliances and the method of revolution, and overall two predominant positions can be discerned. The strategy that the TKSP and the KİP/DDKD advocated emphasized the need to forge a strong alliance between the Kurdish revolutionary groups and the Turkish socialist movement to overthrow the domination by the Turkish bourgeoisie and the Kurdish feudal classes. In the revolutionary strategy advocated by the PKK, the Kawa and the Ala Rizgarî, the continuous revolution through protracted people's war emphasized the antagonistic nature of the relations between the Kurds and the Kemalist regime. Some of these groups sought to secure autonomy for a Kurdish region in Turkey but others, most notably the PKK, invoked the idea of Kurdistan as a distinct geographic entity and sought to unify it under an independent socialist Kurdish state (Gunes, 2019: 14).

The practice of national liberation often involved armed struggle, but a clear revolutionary strategy was not articulated from the onset. However, violence within the Kurdish movement in the late 1970s and the state's increasing repression from 1979 onwards, especially during the military coup in 1980, created a difficult environment to conduct any sort of legal politics and made violent resistance and armed struggle the dominant practice. Although the PKK is usually seen as the main advocator of violence as a political practice, the necessity of armed struggle was part of the general debate that took place within the Kurdish national movement. This is evident in the establishment of the Ala Rizgarî, which proposed the need for a political party organized according to the principle of democratic centralism and advocated armed struggle. The establishment of armed units in 1980 affiliated to the Kawa group is also indicative of the inclination towards political violence (Gündoğan, 2007: 40). These developments indicate the preference for the use of violence as a revolutionary strategy started to gain ground within the Kurdish movement.

The PKK's attempts to organize in the Kurdish regions created friction and conflict with other Kurdish groups. A leading member of the PKK, Haki Karer, was killed by Tekoşin on 18 May 1977 in Gaziantep and as a response, Tekoşin's leader, Alattin Kaplan, was killed by the PKK on 1 May 1978. In May 1978 in the town of Hilvan a leading group member, Halil Çavgun, was attacked and killed by the pro-state Süleymanlar tribe. As a response, the PKK cadres organized a popular resistance in which a significant proportion of the townspeople was mobilized to defeat the Süleymanlar tribe. The PKK

intensified its efforts to build its organizational capacity and increase its recruitment; it held its first congress on 27 November 1978 in Fis village near Lice, Diyarbakir, during which the decision to transform itself into a clandestine political party was taken. In order to publicize its establishment as a political party, the PKK attacked the pro-state Bucak tribe in Siverek on 30 July 1979, but overall this attack proved costly as two of its leading members, Cuma Tak and Salih Kandal, were killed (Gunes, 2012: 79).

The military coup of 12 September 1980 caught the Kurdish movement at a time of disarray and inflicted the most fatal damage that it intended. Although prior to the military coup, a considerable number of Kurdish political activists managed to escape Turkey, many more were captured by the state's security forces and incarcerated in various prisons in the eastern and south-eastern towns, mainly in the notorious Diyarbakir Military Prison, which was the site of horrific torture to subdue the inmates (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2009). A significant number of the PKK members, prior to the military coup in 1979 and 1980, relocated to Syria and Lebanon and established the organization's bases there. Its relocation to Lebanon presented it with an opportunity during the early 1980s to form close links with the Palestinian organizations and established its guerrilla training camps. Also, beginning in the early 1980s it started to build a strong presence in Europe, mainly Germany, through a network of community organizations.

Kurdish Political Activism in Syria and Iran

During the 1920s and 1930s, Syria was at the centre of Kurdish political and cultural activities and many of the Kurdish nationalist intellectuals moved there in order to escape the repression unleashed by the Turkish nationalists following the proclamation of the republic in Turkey. In the subsequent decades, the Kurds in Syria found it difficult to organize their struggle for obtaining their national rights. This is because the Kurds in Syria were long seen as a threat by Arab nationalists and the Syrian state kept Kurds on a tight leash. In 1962, Syrian citizenship of 120,000 Kurds was revoked on grounds that they were not natives of Syria (Tejel, 2009: 61). The developments in Iraqi Kurdistan were a concern to the Syrian state and the report drafted by Muhammed Talab al-Hilal in November 1963 listed several measures for managing the Kurdish question in Syria, including the proposal to create an 'Arab belt' in the north-west of the country along the Iraqi and Turkish borders. This proposal involved the displacement of Kurds from their areas to the interior provinces and their replacement by Arabs (Tejel, 2009: 60–2).

The Syrian state was keen to prevent any challenge to its authority from the Kurds and the government's aim was to create the 'Arab belt' along the Iraq–Syria and Turkey–Syria borders in the north-east corner of the country as a protection against future Kurdish unrest (Gunter, 2014: 23). It began implementing the policy from 1973 onwards when it settled ethnic Arabs displaced by the construction of the Tabqa Dam on lands that the Kurds owned (Tejel, 2009: 61). However, the policy was abandoned in 1976 but the Arabs settled in Kurdish land were not removed from the region (McDowall, 2004: 475).

The first Kurdish political party in Syria, the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria, was established in 1957 and it took its inspiration from the KDP in Iraq. The Kurdish political parties experienced several divisions during the 1960s and 1970s and a number of Kurdish parties existed in Syria during the 1970s. To a certain extent, the divisions Kurdish political parties in Syria experienced were a consequence of those that the Iraqi Kurdish parties experienced during the 1970s. The activities of Kurdish political parties were highly controlled by the Syrian state and Kurdish political activism was kept at bay throughout the 1970s. Kurdish political parties had to conduct their activities in an environment of authoritarian rule, which dissuaded many Kurds from engaging in politics or the parties from confronting the Syrian state. Consequently, due to the internal fragmentation and the state repression, Kurdish political parties in Syria could not develop a popular base or initiate the types of struggles we have seen develop in Iraq or Turkey. The unsuitability of geography was another factor behind the low levels of mass political mobilization in Syria (Allsopp, 2014: 72–92). The Kurdish political parties framed their demands around ending the discrimination the Kurds faced and 'securing political, cultural and social rights for Kurds and the democratic reform of the Syrian state' (Allsopp, 2014: 28).

Iran's Kurdish minority was under severe pressure from the state and for much of the 1970s, Iran's Kurdish movement organized in exile. The unsuccessful attempt by a dissident group within the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) to start an armed struggle against Iran in the late 1960s demonstrated the challenges the movement faced. In 1971, during the third conference of the KDPI, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou was elected as the party's new leader replacing Ahmed Tawfiq, who supported the conservative faction of the party and was a close associate of the KDP leader, Mustafa Barzani. The KDPI's third congress also adopted the slogan 'Democracy for Iran, Autonomy for Kurdistan' and committed itself to armed struggle (Vali, 2016: 310). For a long period, Ghassemlou continued his activities in exile, in

Prague and Paris and returned to Iran following the overthrow of the shah's regime. The absence of political channels in Iran that the Kurds could use to raise their demands meant that armed struggle was the only viable option left to them. The KDPI was not very successful in its armed struggle against Iran, but it managed to persevere in a harsh political environment and its struggle became a source of hope and admiration for the ordinary Kurds in Iran (McDowall, 2004: 254).

The Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan (Komala) was the other main Kurdish political party in Iran and is claimed to have been formed in 1969 in Tabriz by a group of students but its existence was declared publicly only in 1979 (McDowall, 2004: 265). It was not openly Kurdish nationalist and advocated a more social liberationist programme – administrative decentralization and working with other communities in Iran to defeat the central government were its main objectives. The Komala was particularly strong in the Sanandaj and Mariwan regions and its formulation of Kurdish autonomy demands was similar to that of the KDPI, with the greater emphasis on 'workers' rights and agrarian policies' in its political programme being the main difference (Koohi-Kamali, 2003: 181). The Komala's existence challenged the KDPI's claim to be the sole leader of the Kurdish people in Iran.

The combined effects of land reforms that were carried out in Iran between 1962 and 1971, improved communications, increasing levels of education among the Kurds and migration of Kurds to the urban centres of Iran in search of work politicized the Kurds and brought about an awareness of Kurdish identity among them (McDowall, 2004: 258). Hence, despite the repression of Kurdish political organizations during the shah's rule, underground Kurdish political activism continued, and the Kurdish movement was able to organize Kurds once the opportunity to do so presented itself.

The developments in the Kurdistan region of Iran during the late 1970s were mainly connected to the erosion of state power as a result of the turmoil and the challenges to the shah's authority. As the protests and upheaval in Iran intensified during the autumn of 1978, Kurds intensified their efforts to mobilize. Following the collapse of the central government in February 1979, Kurdish forces seized large quantities of weapons and took control of their regions. They were the main force on the ground in the Kurdish regions until August 1979.

In March 1979, a rally organized by the KDPI drew a crowd of 200,000 (Burdett, 2015: 711). In mid-March 1979, large-scale attacks took place in Sanandaj, with Kurdish forces targeting the military and gendarmerie building, and in return government forces attacked the Kurds, resulting in the

death of many Kurds. In April 1979, the KDPI established control in Kurdish areas and the main towns of the region, including Sanandaj, Marivan, Naqadeh and Saqiz. The government representatives visited the Kurdish region and met with Kurdish representatives and promised the Kurds local autonomy, but these promises were not kept (McDowall, 2004: 271). Hence, instead of the recognition of their de facto autonomy, the Kurdish forces came under attack by the government forces. The attacks intensified once the hardliners consolidated their rule following the resignation of the interim prime minister, Mehdi Bazargan, in November 1979 (Malek, 1989: 85). Kurds took part in the parliamentary elections held on 3 August 1979 and elected candidates from the Kurdish political parties, but the elected Kurdish representatives were never allowed to attend the parliament (Ahmadzadeh and Stansfield, 2010: 19).

The KDPI's demands for extensive autonomy and the creation of a Kurdish administrative region in Iran were not met by the newly established Islamist government. The armed conflict between the Kurdish forces and the Islamists continued throughout 1979 and while Kurdish forces were well organized and determined to hold on to the gains they made, the Iranian army's superior firepower made all the difference on the ground. The reason the Iranian army was able to regain control of towns and cities with relative ease was that the Kurdish forces did or could not defend them. This might have been tactical as clashes with the Iranian army in the urban centres would have resulted in a high number of casualties and destruction. The Kurdish forces had more experience in conducting guerrilla warfare and lacked the experience and resources to conduct conventional warfare against Iran. The geography of the region was a factor, too, as there were many hiding places for Kurdish fighters in the mountainous areas that could protect them against air strikes and enable them to continue their resistance for longer. British documents mention reports of Iraq providing food, ammunitions and light weapons to the Kurdish insurgents (Burdett, 2015: 739).

In addition to political parties, Kurdish dissent was organized by religious actors. One such political actor was Sheikh Ezzadine Husseini, who was the imam of Mahabad and advocated the Kurdish people's demands for self-rule in the areas of culture, politics, administration and economy (Burdett, 2015: 612). Following the Islamist consolidation of power in Iran after the revolution, Shia Islam became the official religion of Iran and Kurdish autonomy was not mentioned in the constitution drafted by the Islamists, which explains Husseini's opposition to Iran's Islamist regime. Another important figure was Ahmad Moftizadeh, also a Sunni religious leader from Sanandaj

and supportive of the Bazargan government and Khomeini (Burdett, 2015: 624). He was initially close to the government but was disappointed with the way Kurdish demands were rejected and then became critical. He was arrested and imprisoned in 1983. Hence, religion (Sunni Islam), as well as nationalism, played a role in the mobilizations against the newly created Islamic Republic of Iran. There were other Shia Kurdish clerics, such as Ayatollah Safdari, who were supporting the Islamic Republic and the efforts of the government forces to bring under control the Kurdish-populated regions.

In autumn 1979, the Iranian army began to regain control of the towns and cities in the Kurdish areas, but the rural areas remained under Kurdish control for much longer and Kurdish resistance there lasted until 1983. According to the British diplomatic sources, the KDPI was vying for military support from the Soviet Union but this did not materialize (Burdett, 2015: 697). The Kurdish forces were not able to create unity nor co-ordinate their activities and each group was left to confront the government forces alone. On occasion, tensions arose between different Kurdish forces and between Kurds and other groups in the region. In the summer of 1982, the Iranian army began a large-scale assault against the Kurdish-held territories and by the end of 1983, almost all of them were captured. In total, 10,000 Kurds died in the conflict during the late 1970s and early 1980s as a result of the fighting between the Kurdish forces and Iranian army and as a result of the summary executions of Kurdish civilians and political activists by the Iranian army (McDowall, 2004: 262).

Conclusion

In summary, the 1970s was a pivotal period for the Kurds in the Middle East in a number of respects. The defeat of Kurdish armed struggle there in March 1975 marked the beginning of the fragmentation of the Iraqi Kurdish movement and a left-wing brand of Kurdish nationalism beginning to take hold. The emergence of the PUK challenged the KDP's claim to be the sole representative of the Kurds of Iraq, but with the organizational fragmentation of Kurdish movement in Iraq came the intra-Kurdish conflict during the late 1970s. During the 1970s, Kurdish conflicts in the region became integrated into the regional power struggles and created the possibility of alliances and sources of support that proved crucial to their survival in dire times. However, as the experience of the Kurdish movement in Iraq demonstrated, the Kurds could not totally rely on these alliances as the empowerment of the

Kurds was not the objective. The support available to the Kurdish forces from the states in the region did not provide the Kurds with sufficient means to challenge the existing state system and borders.

One of the main political developments of the decade took place in Turkey with the emergence of several Kurdish political organizations. These organizations were established by Kurdish activists politicized within Turkey's socialist movement and made the liberation of Kurdistan and improving the socio-economic conditions that the Kurdish masses found themselves in Turkey the central focus of their discourse. The 1970s was a period in which the debate and discussion on the correct strategy for Kurdish struggle in Turkey proliferated and similar to the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan, this debate created friction among Kurdish political organizations and resulted in occasional armed conflicts that exacerbated the existing divisions and deepened the fragmentation. The violent political environment that they found themselves in and rampant state repression prevented many of these organizations from developing and growing. The PKK managed to survive the repression by moving its members to Syria and Lebanon from 1979 onwards, a move that enabled it to transform itself into a guerrilla movement from the early 1980s onwards. In the subsequent decades, it managed to establish itself as a major political actor in Kurdish politics in Turkey.

The commencement of Kurdish armed struggle in Iran in 1979, mainly as a result of the political space created by the turmoil the country was experiencing, intensified Kurdish efforts to obtain political rights. Kurdish armed forces of the KDPI and Komala took control of the Kurdish areas and established de facto autonomy, but the refusal of the Islamist government to meet Kurdish demands for self-rule led to the military assault by the forces of the newly created Islamic Republic in 1979, which the Kurdish forces were unable to resist.

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Dark Times

Kurdistan in the Turmoil of the Middle East, 1979–2003

HAMIT BOZARSLAN

Prelude: The Middle East in 1979

Choosing the year 1979 as the beginning of a new historical cycle in Kurdistan should not sound as arbitrary. Marked by exceptional events, such as the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Egypt, a quasi-messianic uprising in Mecca, the Iranian Revolution and occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, the year 1979 has indeed constituted a turning point in Middle Eastern history. Looking back into the region's past, one could even wonder if this year didn't last a whole decade and not a simple calendar year: the intensification of the Lebanese Civil War (1975–89), with the formation of Hezbollah; the Iran–Iraq War (1980–8), with the constitution of the exiled Shia militias from Iraq; and the war in Afghanistan (1979–89), with its Arab jihadists, such as Osama Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi prefiguring al-Qaeda, were direct consequences of dramatic events of 1979. As I have suggested elsewhere (Bozarslan, 2012), during this period the Middle East witnessed not only the empowerment and radicalization of Islamist contest, but also huge-scale military transhumance with armed groups travelling from one country to another, a transformation of the inter-state frontiers that sociologist Anthony Giddens defines as states' 'power containers' (Giddens, 1985: 120) into the zone of production of intra-state and inter-state violence, and a blurring of the distinction between the state and non-state actors, which is central in the very definition of the Westphalian state.

To be certain, the Middle Eastern conflicts of this decade had no direct link with the Kurdish issue as such. But they have radically reshaped the Kurdish issue as well as Kurdish society. As we will see, the Iran–Iraq War took place partly on the Kurdish territory and the chemical war of Saddam Hussein, which increased in intensity after the ceasefire between the two countries in

1988, devastated Iraqi Kurdistan. In Iran, the guerrilla warfare, which intensified after Ayatollah Khomeini's declaration of jihad against Kurdish autonomists, had been largely defeated and Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, the charismatic leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Iran (PDK-I), was assassinated in Vienna by Iranian secret agents in 1989. Although taking place far away from Kurdistan, the Lebanese Civil War allowed Kurdish militants from Turkey to find temporary shelter, gain training and military experience to launch one of the most impressive forms of guerrilla warfare at the turn of the twenty-first century. Even the Afghan jihad, which attracted some 40,000 so-called Arab-Afghans, had an impact on the Kurds: the Iraqi Kurdish Islamist activist Mullah Krekar ('Mullah Worker') studied with Abdullah Azzam, the famous theoretician of jihad, and in 1991 founded a small extremist Kurdish Islamist movement, Ansar al-Islam. This organization would change name, shape and leaders in time to give birth to its ultimate avatar, the well-known Islamic State (IS), in 2014.

The highly tense regional context of the 1980s has indeed reconfigured already-existing conflicts in the broader Middle East, among them the Kurdish conflict. While being able to access important resources made available by the conflict, the Kurdish movements from Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria, as well as Kurdish society more broadly, seized the opportunities that this conflictual environment presented, but also faced the constraints it engendered.

A New Guerrilla Warfare in Iraq

As explained by Gunes in Chapter 9, the end of the Barzani rebellion in March 1975, while it appeared to be in its zenith, created a real trauma among the Kurds in Iraq and elsewhere. The fourteen-year-long revolt, which entailed many sacrifices and promised so much, appeared to be a simple *ashbethal*, literally a mill turning empty. The ageing Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani, who was involved in the national struggle since his childhood, was henceforth qualified as a 'feudal' and 'backwards' leader, whose collaboration with 'imperialism' led the Kurdish nation to disaster. Barzani had already experienced exile between 1946 and 1958 after his 'Long March' from Iranian Kurdistan to the Soviet Union. But he continued to be a legend and a source of hope during this first exile. His return from the Soviet Union in the aftermath of General Abd al-Karim Qassim's military coup in 1958 was publicly celebrated and prepared the ground for the subsequent revolt in 1961 that would bear his name. In contrast, the new asylum he obtained with

some of his closest collaborators in the United States, a country accused of betraying the Iraqi Kurds, created a distance in space and time between him and Kurdish society: he was not anymore determining the fate of the Kurdish space and his generational time was over.

Within months after the end of the Barzani movement, a new revolt, also called the 'May Revolution' in echo of the 'September Revolution' of 1961, started and rapidly won momentum. The divisions that existed within the Barzani rebellion have been crystallized during this new stage, both militarily and politically. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (PDK) was restructured under Sami Abdurrahman's direction and adopted a much hardened, left-wing and 'anti-imperialist' discourse.[1] Barzani's two sons, Idris (1944–87) and Massoud (b. 1946), took over the PDK's leadership after a couple of years, but it was obvious that the old elites, among them many liberal professionals, urban notables and tribal chiefs who played an important role in the Kurdish movement, were henceforth marginalized and the urban intelligentsia, whose sociological profile is yet to be analysed, constituted the bulk of the new political-military contest within the Iraqi Kurdish movement. The soon to be founded Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) had many 'Maoist' militants, as well as a radical leader, Jalal Talabani, the son-in-law of Ibrahim Ahmad, the well-known left-wing author of *Jan-i Gel* (*Suffering of People*). A handful of the other organizations that were born from the ashes of the old rebellion were also identifying themselves as 'left wing'. The relations between these actors were rather conflictual and as the PDK–PUK fighting in spring 1978 showed, it could take a violent turn and cost the lives of prestigious Kurdish commanders, such as Ali Askari of the PUK in 1978 (Stansfield, 2003: 87).

Facing Saddam

It was under these circumstances that Saddam Hussein overthrew his uncle and mentor Hasan al-Bakr and became Iraq's new president on 16 July 1979. Everyone knew that Saddam was much more than a 'second knife' in Ba'athist Iraq, as it was stated in the official post-1968 nomenclature. His accession to the presidency, however, was not a pure formality, but an undeniable sign of the radicalization of the regime. The public denunciation

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1 In the 1980s, Sami Abdurrahman led his own party, the Popular Democratic Party of Kurdistan. After the dissolution of this formation in 1993, he rejoined the PDK. He was killed in February 2004, together with some 200 other leading Kurdish figures, by a jihadi attack.

and arrest of some leading figures of the Ba'ath regime, with the direct involvement of the surviving ones in their execution, showed that something had changed in the country and that the terror that could target high-ranking elite would not spare ordinary people. The repression continued with the elimination of the Communist Party. Most importantly, one year after he acceded to the presidency, Saddam decided to annul the Algiers Agreement that he had himself signed in 1975 with Iran to resolve the territorial dispute between the two countries and put an end to Tehran's military support to the Kurdish rebellion led by Barzani. But after the Islamic Revolution and massive disorganization of the Iranian state and military, Saddam was now confident that his military superiority and direct support received from the Soviet Union, Western countries and Gulf states would enable him to defeat Iran in a blitzkrieg, conquer Iran's Arab-speaking province of Khuzistan, establish Iraq's supremacy in the Gulf and thus impose himself as the uncontested leader of the Arab world. The war would, however, last eight years and not a couple of months as Saddam had envisioned, and end not with glory but by the simple re-establishment of the pre-war status quo between the two countries.

This war has allowed the Kurdish armed organizations in Iraq to obtain Iranian military aid and establish parallel diplomatic ties with Syria, Iran's only ally in the Arab world. For the Iraqi Kurdish leaders, Damascus constituted, in fact, the only gateway to the world. This military and logistic support, which allowed the Kurdish movement to resist Saddam's army, constituted as much an opportunity as a burden. The fact that the Islamic regime in Iran was conducting a very repressive policy against its own Kurds could but create a malaise among the Kurds. It was also obvious that dependence on a country which had betrayed the Iraqi Kurds only a couple of years ago (although, under a previous regime) was highly risky. More importantly, Saddam's regime, which was facing a courageous Iranian adversary at the border, had a free hand against its Kurdish civil population in Iraq itself. In 1983, 8,000 male members of the Barzani family, originally a tribe, aged between 12 and 80, were arrested and then disappeared. In March 1988, the city of Halabja, which had been overtaken by the Iranian forces with the military assistance of the PUK, became the site of a chemical attack, which claimed some 5,000 victims. This operation was not a simple military riposte, but rather constituted the first phase of an operation that would later take the name of Anfal, a Qur'anic term meaning 'the spoils'. Joost Hiltermann from the Middle East Watch has shown it in a series of studies that eight successive Anfal operations took place *after* the end of the war with Iran and therefore

could not be explained by any kind of military imperatives (Hiltermann, 2008). The plan was conducted under the direct leadership of Ali Hassan al-Majid (executed in 2010 for crimes of genocide against the Kurds), Saddam's cousin who would be nicknamed 'Chemical Ali'. The 'Al-Majid Tapes', seized after the 1991 Gulf War, show that Baghdad aimed at the total destruction of the Kurdish rural landscape where it wanted to make any form of life impossible. According to Hiltermann (2008), the operations cost the lives of between 50,000 and 100,000 victims and the survivors were either forced to flee to Turkey and Iran or have been parked in the *mujtamaʿa*s, the gigantic detention camps built around the main cities in northern Iraq. By the start of 1989, it was impossible to continue any armed resistance in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurdish movement could but conclude that it was facing its second *ashbetal* within less than two decades.

Iran: Resistance and Repression

Starting from 1978, the Kurdish towns in Iran, like many other parts of the country, became quite dynamic in the wake of the mass demonstrations that would oust Shah Muhammad Pahlavi in January 1979. That was the very first time that Kurdistan experienced such a massive mobilization since the premiership of Mohammad Mosaddegh, overthrown in 1953. With the departure of the shah, the Kurdish movement took the de facto control of many Kurdish cities, including Sanandaj, Saqez and Mahabad. Two movements appeared to be in the front line: PDK-Iran, the most important one, was led by Dr Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, a former Marxist economist who switched to social democracy after his decade-long experience in Czechoslovakia and the brutal interruption of the so-called Prague Spring in 1968. The more radical Komala, 'Revolutionary Organization of the Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan', founded in 1969 by Abdullah Mohtadi (distinct from the Komalay JK of 1946), shared many common features with the Iranian organization Fadaiyan-e Khalq (Self-sacrificers of the People) and represented younger generations with mainly, but non-exclusively, plebian origins. A sociological analysis of the social basis of these movements is yet to be done. But the generation and class differentiation, as well as tensions between democratic expectations and revolutionary urgencies that one could observe in many parts of the Middle East, particularly in Iran, appear to be some of the factors explaining the plural shape that Kurdish movement was taking in that country.

Although the two parties had many internal conflicts which occasionally turned violent, they opposed a common front against the project of

establishment of the Islamic Republic, which Ayatollah Khomeini and the country's high-ranking clergy wanted to impose on Iran. They were also keen to realize a Kurdish autonomous region, within democratic Iran, while the clergy was opposed to the demands of self-rule from any segments of what it defined as the Islamic *umma* (community of believers), and certainly to democracy, which it regarded as being in contradiction with the exclusive sovereignty that God exerted through *velayet-e fagih* (government of jurist-consult). Accusing the Kurdish resistance of betraying Islam and provoking a *fitnah* (discord among believers), the Islamic Republic besieged and bombed the Kurdish towns. On 29 August 1979, *The New York Times* published a picture of the collective execution of Kurdish militants, condemned to death by ill-famed Sadegh Khalkali's Mobile Revolutionary Tribunal. Mahmud Ahmadinejad, who would be elected Iran's president in 2005 and re-elected in a well-documented fraudulent way in 2009, had his first experiences in coercion in Kurdistan (Naji, 2008).

According to the Kurdish sources, the Islamic Republic's first full-scale war against the Kurdish autonomy, which intensified after Khomeini's fatwa (authorized opinion of religious authority) of jihad issued on 17 December 1979, cost the lives of probably some 45,000 people, among them only 5,000 fighters. To spare civilian life and avoid the destruction of the Kurdish cities, the Kurdish movements decided to abandon urban resistance in spring 1980 and instead switched to guerrilla warfare. The armed struggle seemed successful initially but weakened in the wake of the prolongation of the Iran–Iraq War. Like the Iraqi Kurdish guerrilla, it too created a malaise among the Kurds, in the sense that its headquarters were hosted in neighbouring Iraq, well-known for its repression of its own Kurds. After the Iran–Iraq War, Ghassemlou tried, on the one hand, to strengthen his relations with the Iraqi Kurds and prepare an international conference in Paris and, on the other hand, to negotiate with the Iranian government. He was murdered in Vienna in 1989 by Iranian agents during the secret talks he was having with them.

Turkey: Military Regime and Guerrilla Warfare

On 12 September 1980, after years of political and sectarian violence, General Kenan Evren, the chief of staff of the Turkish military, overthrew Süleyman Demirel's right-wing government and installed what would be remembered as the most repressive military regime of the country's history. While some 650,000 people were taken into custody, hundreds disappeared or were killed

either in the fight against the so-called anarchists, or under torture. The oral use of the Kurdish language was banned, and the Diyarbakir Military Prison, nick-named the 'Slaughter-House 5', became a centre of systematic torture. On 18 May 1982, four members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Ferhat Kutay, Esref Anyik, Necmi Önen and Mehmet Zengin, self-immolated to protest themselves against the conditions in the prison, but also to keep alive the fire of Newroz; they would become symbols of resistance in future years.

As Gunes details in Chapter 9, many left-wing organizations were active in Kurdistan before the military coup, but two of them had quite similar profiles, used violence, including against each other, and were rather success-ful in mobilizing the youth: the National Liberators of Kurdistan (KUK) and the PKK. Except for the PKK, the other Kurdish movements, including the KUK, did not survive the military repression. The PKK's success could be explained, at least in part, by the specific reading it proposed of Kurdish history and requirements that it imposed on the Kurdish youth. According to the PKK, Kurdish history was not a history of pride as the common Kurdish narrative taught it, but rather one of corruption and self-betrayal, and that the Kurds bore important responsibility for their enslavement. In this quite Fanonian perspective (Fanon, 2005), violence and sacrifice were not only a price that the Kurds had to pay for their national emancipation but also the very condition of their ontological transformation from an enslaved nation into a free one. This shift from historical to the ontological constituted an unprecedented radical rupture with the Kurdish discourse and self-image as they were elaborated throughout the twentieth century. The extremely severe critique of the past Kurdish resistances has repulsed other Kurdish organizations but mobilized the Kurdish youth that it charged with a sentiment of culpability and responsibility, as well as with the obligation of sacrificial action, and constituted one of the explicative keys of PKK's success throughout decades to come.

The second factor that might explain the PKK's survival was that in 1979, while the political situation of Turkey worsened and repression targeted many of his militants, the party's leader Abdullah Öcalan decided to leave Turkey and take refuge in Syria. This move could by then be described as a self-protecting tactical choice, but it ultimately appeared to be of vital strategic importance. It was in Syria that Öcalan successfully established contacts with Palestinian groups, and then with the Syrian government, before moving with their aid to Lebanon. To a large extent, the PKK was refounded in the Beqaa Valley, where it also established its military academy

with the consent and support of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad and Palestinian groups. It is also important to remember that the first war PKK waged, and its first military experience, was not against the Turkish army, but against the Israel Defense Forces which occupied Lebanon in 1982. The context of civil war in the country indeed allowed the organization to get important military skills and weapons.

When the PKK launched its guerrilla warfare on 15 August 1984 by attacking military garrisons in Eruh and Semdinli near the Turkey–Iraq border, no one in Turkey, and even less in the exiled Kurdish political class in Europe, imagined that such an 'adventurous' step, taken decades after the failure of the Kurdish armed struggle under the Kemalist rule, had any chance of success. But the 'bullets of 15 August' had another meaning in the eyes of Kurdish adolescence and youth: they signified the end of their underground socialization marked by fear, humiliation and shame, military incursions and tales of atrocities in the military prisons, a moment of vengeance restoring their pride. As Osman Öcalan, the PKK leader's brother recognized it, the repression of the Turkish army in the post-1984 period also served their cause by providing them with the support of large sections of the urban populations (Turkish Probe, 1993).

Abdullah Öcalan had a pivotal role in the success of the guerrilla: rapidly, he was able to impose himself as the leader that the Kurdish youth could sacralize and someone who could be compared to the Turkish figure of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. He was at once distant, because he was based in Lebanon and aureoled by a personality cult, but also accessible to the young militants taking the risk of joining the guerrilla. He used to pose for a picture with his fighters, published after their death as 'martyrs' in *Serxwebûn* or *Berxwedan*, the party's periodicals. To be sure, the execution of internal dissidents or the 1987 killings of dozens of members of Ankara's mercenary forces had created a malaise both within and outside the party, but gradually the PKK managed to form what anthropologist Martin van Bruinessen called in a conference 'a periphery', made up of many Kurdish intellectuals and politicians. The PKK's activities were not solely restricted to the military field: it was also able to propose another perception of time with its landmarks such as the celebrations of Newroz (21 March) and 15 August, public funerals of 'martyrs', and another cartographic imaginary dividing Kurdistan into *eyalet*s (provinces) distinct from Turkish geographical divisions. It was equally successful in mobilizing the civil population through a series of *serhildan* (uprisings) partly inspired by the First Palestinian Intifada (1987–91), which started on 15 March 1990 with the burial of a PKK guerrilla fighter in

the town of Nusaybin, Mardin. Stopping almost all attacks against civilians whose family members were collaborating with Ankara after 1987 and trying to get in touch with the Village Guards, PKK also promoted its illegal and yet quasi-public system of justice and taxation.

As one could expect, however, Ankara's response was brutal. In the beginning, Turkey's military and political authorities who were taken by surprise, described the PKK fighters as a 'bunch of bandits'; soon, however, they concluded that they were facing the 'Twenty-Ninth Kurdish Revolt' of the country's history, if not real 'low-intensity warfare'. In response to the guerrilla attacks, Prime Minister Turgut Özal proclaimed a state of emergency in large parts of Kurdistan, which was put under the authority of a 'super-*vali*', a governor with extensive powers, and enrolled some 100,000 Kurds, mainly, but not exclusively, of allied tribes, into what would become the pro-state Kurdish paramilitary Village Guards force (Köy Korucuları). These men received a salary as much as three times the amount of the minimum wage. Soon, however, many of them would become 'village guards' without any villages to protect: within one decade or so, the army and gendarmerie destroyed around 4,000 villages and hamlets, obliging millions to migrate to the cities in the Kurdish regions or the country's metropolis Istanbul and other major cities, such as Ankara, Izmir, Adana or Mersin (Jongerden, 2007).

Europe: Capital of Kurdish Politics

It was in the midst of massive repression of Kurds in Iran, Turkey and Iraq that the Kurdish Institute in Paris had organized an international conference on the Kurdish issue on 14–15 October 1989 (Institut kurde de Paris, 1991). The conference aimed, before everything else, at the mobilization of world opinion in support of the fate of the Iraqi Kurds, who were victims of wide-scale chemical attacks. The above-mentioned Anfal operations had certainly provoked some indignation in the world public opinion, but the United States, Soviet Union and key European countries refused to impose sanctions on Saddam Hussein's regime. The conference also had a pan-Kurdish ambition: bringing together different Kurdish leaders and opinion-makers. As said before, the Iranian Kurdish leader Ghassemlou also wanted to initiate dialogue and establish a platform with the Iraqi Kurdish political parties. Ghassemlou's assassination on 13 July 1989 created more urgency for holding the conference.

The conference, which was attended by some American congressman, indeed created greater awareness about what was going on in Kurdistan

in Iraq. Some internationally known experts analysed the symptoms that they observed among the Anfal survivors who escaped to Turkey. The Paris conference was followed by two other international conferences, organized respectively in Washington and Moscow, the first one having indirectly prepared the ground for the mobilization of American public opinion against Saddam's regime after the occupation of Kuwait in 1990.

The second outcome of the Paris conference was the participation of some Kurdish MP's of the Republican People's Party (CHP) from Turkey, who were immediately expelled from their party for their participation. A group of seventy politicians, both Kurdish and Turkish, including the expelled Kurdish MPs, founded thus a new left-wing party, the People's Labour Party (HEP), on 7 June 1990, which would become the first party in the history of the Republic to present itself openly as a defender of the rights of the Kurds when twenty-two of its candidates were elected to the parliament in October 1991. After the HEP was banned in July 1993, other parties were established including the Freedom and Democracy Party (ÖZDEP) in 1992, the Democracy Party (DEP) in 1993 and the People's Democracy Party (HADEP) in 1994, which took over the task of representing the Kurds in Turkey (Gunes, 2012: 162–4; Watts, 2010).

Interlude: Saddam's New War and the Middle East of the 1990s

After the end of the wars of the 1980s, the Middle East entered the new decade with some relief, if not optimism. While the American philosopher Francis Fukuyama was then promoting his idea of the 'end of history' which, according to him, would be marked by the triumph of liberal democracy, some observers thought that the worldwide process of democratization, which started in Latin America and continued in Eastern Europe in the 1980s, could spread to the Middle East. In sharp contrast with these expectations, however, the new decade was marked by the occupation of Kuwait by the Iraqi army on 2–4 August 1990, Operation Desert Storm between 17 January and 3 March 1991 and an almost decade-long Islamist armed contest in Egypt and Algeria, which indirectly paved the road to the 9/11 attacks. The dynamics unleashed by the dramatic events of 1979 continued to mortgage the Middle East also during this new decade.

Saddam's occupation and annexation of Kuwait had no connection to the Kurdish issue as such. It was a brutal response to the Gulf countries which financed his war efforts for eight years but now refused to continue to pay

a renewed ransom to rebuild his ruined country. Although many in the Arab world supported Saddam, who used a harsh anti-Israeli and anti-American discourse, the occupation of this small state created worldwide indignation. Saddam's putative protector, namely, the Soviet Union, which was passing through its last period of disintegration, appeared to be incapable of preventing the formation of a large military coalition led by the US against him. Ultimately, Saddam was obliged to withdraw from Kuwait but survived thanks to President George Bush's decision to keep him in power to avoid Iraq falling into the hands of its Iranian neighbour.

Encouraged by the American president's call to rise against the regime, the Shia community in the south and the Kurdish community in the north undertook impressive riots, but ultimately, they were abandoned by the American forces. Tens of thousands of Shiites were summarily executed in the south where no TV camera was available, and some two million Kurds, who feared a new chemical attack, fled to Iran and Turkey, but this time under the spotlight of many international TV channels. The reaction of the public opinion against this exodus paid off. Combined pressures exerted by the French President François Mitterrand and the Turkish President Turgut Özal, who after years of conflict with the PKK now hoped for a peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem in Turkey (cf. infra), convinced President Bush to act. By its Resolution 688, the United Nations Security Council declared north of the 36th parallel a 'Safe Haven' and launched Operation Provide Comfort on 5 April 1991. The operation's main objective was to allow the exiled Kurds to return and provide them with basic assistance. While keeping its control over Kirkuk, where he undertook new waves of the expulsion of Kurdish families, Saddam decided thus to retire his military, but also civil administration from most parts of Kurdistan. For the first time in the twentieth century, a territory with a surface of 40,000 square kilometres passed under the control of a Kurdish authority.

Kurdistan of Iraq in the 1990s

After the return of the refugees, Iraqi Kurdistan experienced first a climate of euphoria, and then a long period of instability, internal conflict and melancholia. In 1992, the first democratic elections since 1954 were organized, but the result was adjusted to allow a seat-sharing and power-sharing system between the two major political forces, Massoud Barzani's PDK, which obtained 45.27 per cent of the votes, and Jalal Talabani's PUK, which got 43.82 per cent of the casted ballots. Very soon, however, the autonomous

region had to face the consequences of the UN embargo imposed on Iraq as one single unitary entity, and a second embargo imposed by Baghdad on Kurdistan as a de facto separate entity. While accepting trans-border communications, the Turkish government also exerted economic and military pressure on the Kurdish government (the largest of its incursions would mobilize 50,000 men in 1997). To worsen the situation, the PKK's military presence in the region, which it considered as part of Greater Kurdistan and therefore belonging to its domain of sovereignty, did not only serve as a pretext of Turkish incursions but also provoked a full-scale military confrontation between its fighters and the PDK's and PUK's forces in 1992. The worst, and by far the most traumatic, episode, however, has been the civil war between the PDK and PUK between 1994 and 1996, which claimed thousands of lives from both sides, alienated Kurdish society from the two parties and seriously compromised their international credibility. Facing the threat of its adversary, the PDK's leader Barzani even accepted the return of the Iraqi army to Erbil for a couple of hours.

The conflict had its deep roots in the fragmentation of the Iraqi Kurdish movement in the 1960s and factional fighting of the 1970s. The Kurdish political class was also a military class and each party, the PDK and the PUK in particular, but also smaller parties without any electoral basis, had their militia forces. The Kurdish authorities faced the task of state-building and explained that they were keen to construct a pluralistic democratic society, but at the same time, they maintained the habitus inherited from decades of armed struggle. The political and military rivalry, however, was not the only explicative factor of the civil war: the conflict was also a consequence of the extreme scarcity of resources. As said before, Kurdistan was submitted to a double embargo; the destruction of the villages during the war and the Anfal operations which increased the proportion of urban population almost to 80 per cent of the total population, combined with the absence of any industry, had transformed the trans-border commerce and oil-smuggling with their informal system of taxation into the only means of generating funds. Turkey, whose army had imposed its taxation at the border, appeared as the main 'commercial partner' of the Kurdish autonomous region. The PUK was largely excluded from this system and was under indirect pressure of Iran, which played a fuelling role if not at the beginning of the conflict, at least in its continuation. Finally, regional and linguistic issues have also played a role: the PUK had its social basis in the Sorani-speaking Sulaimani region, while the PDK exerted overwhelming domination in the Kurmanji-speaking Bahdinan region. Kurdistan was united in a Safe Haven

and protected from Baghdad's threats, but its internal integration seemed far from sight.

The massive discontent expressed by the civil population which openly challenged militarized checkpoints that were dividing Kurdistan exerted an undeniable pressure on the two protagonists. But eventually, the conflict was overcome thanks to cycles of negotiations involving the French and American diplomats in the summer of 1996. The so-called Washington Agreement signed in 1998 allowed the formation of a new bi-partisan government with a progressive yet imperfect process of integration of the two administrations. The 'Oil-for-Food Program' which started in December 1996 and allowed Iraq to sell its oil to pay for food and medicines also helped to ease the conflict. The Kurdish region was thus able to access 13 per cent of Iraqi oil revenues. The two parties accepted the principles of pacific coexistence, political pluralism and a largely free press, but the militia dynamics and patrimonialism did not vanish from Iraqi Kurdish politics throughout the 1990s.

Iran: Politics of Murder and Reforms

The Iranian Kurdish movement suffered a second historical shock with the assassination of the new leader of the PDK-I, Sadiq Sharafkandi, in Berlin in 1992, only three years after Ghassemlou's murder, which further paralysed Iran's Kurdish movement. The German justice system established the responsibility of Iranian secret agents in this killing. In the 1990s, both major Kurdish political parties, the Komala and the PDK-I, entered a long process of internal fragmentation; they were also constrained because they had to act more in the diaspora as exile movements rather than in Iranian Kurdistan itself.

These political and military setbacks did, however, not mean the end of Kurdish dynamism in Iran. After the very repressive years of Rafsanjani's presidency (1989–97), Muhammad Khatami, a cleric with a solid background in the cultural field, was elected as Iran's new president. Although a former close aid of Khomeini and a high-level civil servant, Khatami represented the so-called reformist current within the Iranian establishment. He soon understood that his hands were tied by the 'conservative' camp, incarnated by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the Pasdaran. Still, his first term allowed multiple dynamics to grow in Iran in general and in Kurdistan in particular. To be certain, Khatami had no intention to abolish the Islamic regime, but his policies were softer as well as more liberal and democratic.

At the same time, he promoted many former radicals, such as Hamid Reza Jalalpour, who participated in the massive human rights violations in Kurdistan after the revolution, to the top administrative positions. On the other hand, however, Khatami also appointed the politically liberal Kurdish Shiite Abdullah Ramazanzadeh as the governor of Kurdistan, publicly saluted Kurds' role in the history of Iran and diminished the Pasdaran presence in the region. The Kurdish MPs were thus able to join their forces and demand cultural rights, and many Kurdish intellectuals were able to perform their art and contribute to the cultural life of Iran, mainly in the field of cinema and in some cases through the use of the Kurdish language in their films. This civil-cultural renewal was interrupted by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election and his government's suppression of mass riots which took place in different Kurdish cities in 2005.

Turkey: Legal Politics, Armed Struggle and Repression

In 1990s Turkey, the Kurdish movement evolved but developed into two complementary routes: the legal and armed modes of action, with some fluidity between them. As said previously, the Kurdish deputies who were expelled after the 1989 Paris conference formed a new political party, the HEP, which could present its candidates under the list of the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP). Thanks to this manoeuvre, they were able to subvert the 10 per cent electoral threshold and enter the National Assembly. After the 1991 elections, these MPs resigned from SHP and formed their twenty-two-member parliamentary group.[2] In the 2002 elections, which led to the victory of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AKP, HEP's successor party, HADEP entered in the electoral competition under its own list, but obtained only 6.5 per cent of votes and was thus not able to enter the National Assembly. In 2002, however, it was able to win thirty-seven municipalities, among them that of the Municipal Council of Diyarbakir, the main Kurdish city in Turkey.

With its heterogeneous social, political, class, gender and generational basis, this legal political movement constituted what one could call 'an actor of representation' of Kurdish society. In parallel, however, the PKK had imposed itself as the main Kurdish 'reference actor' of Turkey of the

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2 One of these MPs, Mehmet Sincar, was killed by a death squadron in Batman, where he was investigating the case of extra-judiciary killings, on 4 September 1993.

1990s, in the sense that it had the ultimate say in the very evolution of the Kurdish issue. It had also won great public visibility, including a wide press coverage. As it was attested by the murder of some hundred peaceful demonstrators during the Newroz celebrations in 1992, the de facto legitimacy it achieved in Turkey did not prevent state repression, but its ability to resist the Turkish army, security forces and the Village Guards for almost a decade of fighting created a Kurdish constituency and allowed the message of those who advocated a non-military solution to the Kurdish issue to resonate within it. The combined effects of changes taking place in the Middle East, the trauma of intra-Kurdish fighting in Iraq in 1992 among the Kurdish public opinion (cf. supra) and the end of the socialist block were pushing the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan to seek negotiations with Turkey. The Turkish context seemed also relatively promising: many retired military commanders began to openly recognize that a decisive military victory against the PKK guerrillas was out of reach. After his election campaign of 1991 based mainly on the issue of democratization, the new prime minister, Demirel, publicly recognized the 'Kurdish reality'. Most importantly, President Özal, who aimed at the transformation of the twenty-first century into a 'Turkish century', had concluded that the Kurdish issue had to be resolved politically. His project of the decentralization of Turkey, which he deemed urgent to unleash provincial dynamism repressed by a hyper-centralized state and empower the country, appeared to him also to be appropriate to resolve the Kurdish issue at a lower cost. Finally, Özal was keen to increase Turkish influence in the Middle East, if not to change its map, and advocated an alliance with the Iraqi Kurds as a *sine qua non* of such an evolution.

The PUK leader Jalal Talabani served as a mediator between Özal and Öcalan, and in a highly publicized press conference, the PKK leader declared a unilateral ceasefire at the beginning of 1993. The ceasefire, which created strong expectations in the country, was, however, short-lived: soon after, emdin Sakik, a local PKK commander whom Öcalan would, later on, accuse of gangsterism (and would indeed become a collaborator of Ankara after his capture in 1998), ordered the execution of thirty-three unarmed Turkish soldiers, an act that provoked a huge malaise. Öcalan's sharp condemnation of the killings could not re-establish trust. More importantly, the sudden death of Özal on 17 April 1993 left the PKK without an interlocutor, as the country's new president, Süleyman Demirel, and his prime minister, Tansu Çiller, already gave their full support to the military and the military solution.

The consequences of the failure of the ceasefire were tremendous: guerrilla warfare intensified and resulted in more than 30,000 victims in the 1990s, and Kurdish legal representatives came under heavy pressure. On March 1994, some HEP MPs, including Leyla Zana, a future Sakharov Prize winner, were arrested and spent some ten years in jail. The remaining MPs and other legal actors created a rather PKK-affiliated Kurdish Parliament in Exile in 1995. The death squadrons killed during this period some important Kurdish business and political figures who were accused by Prime Minister Tansu Çiller of supporting the PKK. A car accident that took place near the district of Susurluk of Balıkesir province in 1996 shed an unbearable light on these death squadrons: Abdullah Çatlı, the famous far-right leader involved in many political murders and the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II in 1982, and Hüseyin Kocadağ, a high-ranking police officer, were killed in the accident. Sedat Bucak, a leader of a famous Kurdish pro-Ankara Bucak tribe, who commanded his own private army, was the only survivor of the car crash in which the police discovered a huge number of weapons. Investigations conducted by the Office of Prime Minister and a commission of the National Assembly on this scandal limited themselves to the top of the iceberg. Still, they showed that for years the 'Susurluk Gang' had been involved in a war for sharing the revenues of drug-trafficking and kidnapping and were involved in torture and killed some high-ranking officials in Turkey. Among these high-ranking victims one can mention Abbas Hiram, a former National Intelligence Organization (MİT) officer, Cem Ersever, the founder of the gendarmerie's secret service, Tarik Umit, one of the main informers of the 'Special War' organization, and most probably also Eşref Bitlis, the gendarmerie's staff general. Another important conclusion of their reports was that the Susurluk Gang was only one of the semi-official gangs active in the country (Bozarslan, 1999).

As the memories of those who grew up in the 1990s reveal and broadly speaking the public debate in the country attest to, this decade will be remembered as one of the darkest periods of Turkey's history. It was also a period of what one could call over-radicalization of the PKK, which was doing well militarily, but was losing politically and evolved amid a very sombre subjectivity. During its fifth congress gathered in 1995, the party adopted a sacrificial vision of violence; Öcalan, who was already defined as Serok (the Leader), was presented as incarnating the legacy of the PKK's fallen 'martyrs'. More than a simple political and military leader, he was transformed into a source of imitation and his 'analysis' (Çözümlemeler) was considered as the guideline for the process of 'PKK-ization', meaning the

fabrication of a new Kurdish human being, a new Kurdishness and a new humanity. Öcalan explained on many occasions that this goal was not only sacred but also requiring constant efforts and that even he didn't yet fully reach it.

This decade ended abruptly in 1999, after an ultimatum that Ankara launched to Damascus through which it required Öcalan's extradition. Syrian President Hafez al-Assad asked Öcalan to leave Syria, and after a spectacular journey which brought him to Russia, Italy and Greece, Öcalan was kidnapped by the Turkish forces shortly after leaving the Greek embassy in Kenya en route to a third country prepared to offer him refuge and brought to Turkey. He has been jailed in Imrali Island and condemned to death, but his sentence was commuted to life-term imprisonment after the abolishment of the death penalty in the country. Öcalan's arrest provoked a major wave of violence, including self-immolations and attacks on Israeli representations in Europe for Israel's alleged complicity with Turkey in Öcalan's capture. From his jail in August 1999, Öcalan ordered the cessation of all forms of violence as well as a new period of ceasefire. It was also in jail where he came across Murray Bookchin's work, which paved the way for his future theory of democratic civilization or radical democracy, which will be analysed by Jongerden and Akkaya in Chapter 32.

In January 2000, the seventh congress of PKK elected a collective presidency composed of high-ranking commanders Cemil Bayik, Duran Kalkan, Mustafa Karasu, Murat Karayilan and Ali Haydar Kaytan. Despite some internal dissidence, the new leadership narrowed its political horizon, asking henceforth for autonomy in Kurdistan and democracy in Turkey. In 2002, it abandoned the name PKK to adopt that of the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK), and then the People's Congress of Kurdistan (Kongra-Gel). The Kongra-Gel remains active to date, but the PKK reappeared under a new political programme in 2005.

Syria: Rojava before Rojava

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Syria's Kurdish political landscape remained a complex one, composed of many parties with rather weak representation (Tejel, 2009). Officially, Hafez al-Assad's regime did not change the status of the Kurds in the country: those who have been declared 'non-nationals' and lost their Syrian identity following the adoption of the 'Arab Belt' programme in 1963 did not get back their legal rights and the Kurdish language had still no recognition in the Syrian *Arab* Republic. As the deadly repression of the

Newroz celebrations in 1990 showed, the Kurds could not publicly claim their specific identity, let alone any official status. The Kurdish political parties were officially banned. Still, President al-Assad, who imposed the domination of a clan originating from the Alawite minority, faced a strong Sunni Islamist opposition which reached its peak during the Hama rebellion of 1982 and needed allies among other minorities. Thus, the Kurdish politicians, including the leaders of the officially banned parties, could entertain many relations with the system and some of them were even co-opted as MPs. The Kurdish religious circles also occupied high positions, including that of the mufti of Damascus. More importantly, al-Assad openly supported Kurdish parties from Iraq and allowed them to have their offices in the Syrian capital. He was also the de facto protector of Öcalan and the PKK: the Syrian Kurds fighting in the ranks of PKK were exempted from military service and occasionally could also serve in ensuring social control on the Kurdish youth. These PKK sympathizers would create the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in 2003.

Hafez al-Assad passed away in June 2000. The enthronement of his British-educated son, Bashar, at the age of only thirty-four years, created many expectations and unleashed what was then labelled as the Spring of Damascus, with which the Kurdish parties, namely, Yekiti (the Kurdish Party of Unity in Syria), were closely associated. The occupation of Iraq, in 2003, would, however, create a new period of tensions, leading to heavy repression of the Kurdish contest in Qamishli in 2004, which resulted in the death of around fifty people and the arrest of many more.

Conclusion

The crisis which started in 1979 with the major events that we have mentioned in our introduction had long-lasting effects and prefigured to some extent the process of disintegration of states and societies that one could observe in some parts of the Middle East in the 2010s. As the occupation of Afghanistan attested, the intra-state, inter-state and cross-state violence of the 1980s was partly linked to a new episode of the Cold War, but also, partly to the incapacity of the world system and the two superpowers of the period, the Soviet Union and the United States, to arbitrate regional conflicts. The Iranian Revolution, the presidency of Saddam Hussein and the vertiginous stasis that was taking place in Lebanon were the outcomes of the large autonomy that regional powers acquired in the turn of the 1980s. The struggle for hegemony was also

becoming a struggle between local actors, and not exclusively between superpowers. But expressed almost exclusively through war, either civil or inter-state and internal coercion, this autonomy could not lead to any other scenario than the radicalization of all other conflicts and ultimately to a self-destructive process.

The Kurdish conflict was one of these radicalized conflicts. As the Kurdish revolts of the 1920s and 1940s, as well as the Barzani movement of 1961–75, showed, the Kurdish issue was certainly not a new one. The regional order between Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria was based during a very long period on the principle of an inter-state security regime aimed at containing the Kurdish movement. After the events of 1979 and wars of the 1980s, such an inter-state status quo stood no chance of surviving. The Kurdish actors could not remain outside the conflictual regional landscape that thus emerged. Although far weaker than the states, they tried to win a space for their survival and enlarge their autonomy of action.

During these decades, while the entirety of Kurdistan was affected by one form or another of war and violence, two structural dynamics of the Kurdish conflict, which had determined Kurdish history, have also been radicalized and militarized: the centrifugal one tearing apart the Kurdish space along the line of the state borders, linguistic and sectarian zones, partisan traditions and political cultures, and centripetal one unifying it across these many borders under the idea and ideal of 'Kurdishness' and by many forms of pacific or armed mobility. This tension was not an easy one to bear, but it has been managed, although at a high cost. The 1980s (and as far as Turkey concerned 1990s) have probably constituted the darkest period of the Kurdish history with a rough estimation of Kurdish victims, namely, civilians, reaching some 200,000 people. By the beginning of the 2000s, however, Kurds' survival as a part of Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Syria and thus, in trans-frontier Kurdistan, seemed to be out of any major threat.

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Kurds in a New Century
Prospects and Challenges

MEHMET GURSES AND DAVID ROMANO

Kurds in a New Century: Prospects and Challenges

The twentieth century saw the rise of modern Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, which inadvertently resulted in the division of Kurds, the fourth-largest ethnic group in the Middle East, into minorities in these newly created states. Central governments dominated by Turkish, Persian and Arab political elites deemed the Kurds an obstacle to forging mono-nationalist identities and resorted to harsh discriminatory and assimilationist measures to subdue real or potential challenges from the Kurds. While Kurds rejected and rebelled against these repressive policies aimed at obliterating Kurdish identity and engaged in dozens of armed insurrections against their governments throughout the twentieth century, their attempts at negotiating a better status with their dominant nations failed (Jwaideh, 2006; Lowe, 2010; McDowall, 2004; Olson, 1989a, 1989b; Romano, 2006; Vali, 2014). This bloody and failed history of the past century has given rise to a widely quoted expression that 'Kurds have no friends but the mountains' in reference to betrayals and broken promises.

As the Middle East is undergoing monumental changes, many have pointed to the demise of the Sykes-Picot Agreement that brought about modern Middle Eastern states with shaky foundations a century ago. Iraq and Syria are two such countries and home to sizable Kurdish minorities. These countries are fractured along ethnic and sectarian lines and are seriously challenged by sub-state actors. Importantly, 'in the midst of these sudden and dramatic changes, the once marginalized Kurds became geopolitically central and relevant as their interest aligned with Western powers' (Stansfield and Shareef, 2018: xviii). With these key changes, the turn of the twenty-first century has brought the Kurds to the forefront of regional and global politics and ushered in a growing sense of optimism, one that has been portrayed as 'a quantum leap' for the Kurds (Bengio, 2017: 84).

While dramatic changes taking place in the Middle East offer important opportunities to the Kurdish century-long struggle for recognition, serious obstacles seem to keep re-emerging every time Kurds anywhere make progress. The large Kurdish geography, extending from western Iran to near the eastern Mediterranean, and a century of repression and denial have engendered various kinds of Kurdish groups with competing and at times conflicting views and goals. In this chapter, we examine challenges and opportunities the twenty-first century has brought about and aim to shed light on domestic, regional and global dynamics in assessing the prospects of Kurdish aspiration for recognition in the new century.

The Kurds in Iraq were the first to reap the benefits of these changes. The Kurdish–US partnership during and after the First Gulf War in the 1990s helped create a de facto Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq protected by a 'no-fly zone'. With the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, this situation was solidified and gained official recognition in Iraq's 2005 constitution. As we discuss in greater detail below, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq faces some serious domestic and regional challenges but nonetheless has succeeded in emerging as a political entity with some international recognition.

The onset of the Syrian civil war in 2011 created similar circumstances for hitherto largely unknown Kurdish groups in Syria. The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat, PYD) and its armed wings, the People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, YPG) and the Women's Defence Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Jin, YPJ), emerged as United States' (US) most effective on-the-ground partner in the fight against the Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIS). This military partnership has evolved as the PYD-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) became an increasingly indispensable longer-term ally in putting an end to the ongoing Syrian civil war and holding Islamist groups and Iran in check. Notwithstanding challenges the Kurdish-led administration faces in a region marred by instability and war, it is increasingly becoming a part of the overall US strategy of countering Iran and defeating Islamist insurgency in the region. The other side of the border in Turkey is home to the largest Kurdish population in the world, but Kurds there have never managed to establish even brief periods of autonomy (such as the Republic of Kurdistan in Iran in the 1940s) much less more sustained de facto autonomy (such the as the Iraqi Kurds from 1991 to 2003 and the Syrian Kurds after 2012) or recognized autonomy (the Iraqi Kurds after 2003). In Turkey, the armed revolt of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, PKK) has flared and simmered since 1978.

The twenty-first century marked a new era for the Kurdish movement in Turkey. With the arrest of the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, in 1999, the militant group declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrew its guerrilla units to its bases in the Qandil Mountains in northern Iraq. The group also began to experience a genuine and wide-ranging transformation. Over the next decade, this strategic transformation proved to be 'a comprehensive democratic discourse' that changed 'the movement's long-term objectives and its political demands for the Kurds' (Gunes, 2012: 124). With an emphasis on such concepts as 'democratic autonomy', the movement abandoned its original goal of forming an independent socialist Kurdish state and began to seek a political solution within Turkey rather than separate from it.

As Gurses (2018) argues, the Kurdish insurgent group has shown to be resilient and adaptable. It has engendered several non-violent organizations, including the Democratic Society Congress (Demokratik Toplum Kongresi, DTK), the Democratic Regions Party (Demokratik Bölgeler Partisi, DBP) and the Peoples' Democratic Party (Haklarin Demokratik Partisi, HDP). The latter, the HDP, founded in 2012, and highlighting Turkey's diverse and rich past, has emerged as a formidable political bloc. In the 7 June 2015 general elections, the pro-Kurdish HDP with more than 13 per cent of the total votes not only managed to surpass the 10 per cent electoral threshold to enter the parliament for the first time but also dealt a blow to the governing Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi, AKP) by denying a parliamentary majority that the AKP enjoyed since 2002.

This time period also coincided with the AKP government's talks with the PKK's imprisoned leader, Öcalan, to put an end to the conflict. This process, dubbed as the 'Peace Process' (Barış Süreci), began in early 2013 and was characterized by a ceasefire that was largely observed by both the PKK and the state. The hopes to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, however, were dashed as the ceasefire came to an end in July 2015. This, as Hakyemez (2017: 1) summarizes, led to an 'unprecedented military offensive' against the PKK-affiliated militia in several major cities in the Kurdish east, resulting in one of the most brutal phases in the three-decade-long conflict.

Despite this unprecedented crackdown on the Kurdish movement, including the Turkish government's forcible removal of nearly all Kurdish mayors and the arrest of thousands of HDP members as well as its co-chairs (Gunes, 2019: 55), the HDP is still a key political player and appears to enjoy significant support from the Kurds. Despite an unfair, even repressive political environment, in the 31 March 2019 local elections, the HDP managed to regain nearly all of the municipalities that were overtaken by the

government. Moreover, the party opted not to field candidates in such major Turkish provinces as Istanbul, Ankara, Adana and Antalya, allowing its supporters to vote for the opposition bloc led by the Republican People's Party. This move proved to be detrimental to the governing AKP, contributing to the AKP losing in Ankara and Istanbul after twenty-five years of uninterrupted rule over these cities. The HDP has, in fact, emerged as a prominent source of opposition to the increasingly Islamist and authoritarian rule of the AKP.

Notwithstanding these significant gains for Kurds in Iraq, Syria and Turkey, in that order, the turn of the century has yet to bring any meaningful changes for the Kurds in Iran. This is 'ironic' in that it was the short-lived Kurdish Republic of Mahabad of 1946 in present-day Iran that 'gave Kurds their first modern political party, national symbols like a flag and an anthem' (Bengio, 2019). This is due in part to the fact that while the turn of the century saw dramatic changes in neighbouring Iraq, Syria and Turkey, for Iran it coincided with the consolidation of state power in the aftermath of a long and destructive war with Iraq.

One of the most significant developments in Iran in the twenty-first century has to do with the rise of a new actor, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (Partiya Jiyana Azada Kurdistan, PJAK), a party that embraced the PKK model in Turkey. Moreover, there are signs of old parties and groups (i.e. the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and the Organization of Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan (Komala)) trying to reclaim political as well as military leadership among the Kurds in Iran (Gunes, 2019). As we discuss in detail below, the Iranian Kurdish scene is still highly fragmented and the Kurds in Iran seem to be lagging behind their brethren in Iraq, Syria and Turkey in pressing for a redefined relationship with the state.

Reasons for Kurdish Optimism: The Internationalization of the Kurdish Question

Ethnonationalist secessionist movements have both internal and international dimensions. While 'for the most part the emergence of separatism can be explained in terms of domestic politics' (Horowitz, 1981: 167–8), their success or outcome is largely a function of external factors such as weakening or collapse of central government or foreign intervention on behalf of the secessionist group. While the international regime and the principle of non-involvement tend to constrain external involvement, foreign support to

secessionist groups occurs frequently and often is a determining factor in the success or failure of secession (Heraclides, 1990; Young, 1994).

Of the non-state actors that the fractured Middle East has generated, Kurds have emerged as the most effective and arguably only force with a secular ideology, resulting in an unprecedented partnership with the US. Subsequently, what has been a key obstacle to Kurdish desire for recognition – 'that their problem is too big to resolve, but not big enough to be of primary concern to an international community' (Stansfield and Shareef, 2018: xix) – has begun to change with the failing status quo or weakening state system in the Middle East.

At this juncture, US open-ended presence in Syria and Iraq and its heavy reliance on the Kurdish groups in these countries to achieve its strategic objectives has fundamentally changed the prospects for the Kurds. US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson announced in January 2018 that 'Syria remains a source of severe strategic threats' to justify the American plan for a long-term presence in Syria. This plan seems to have three dimensions. First, it is aimed at eradicating radical Islam, notably the IS and al-Qaeda, through its partnership with Kurdish and Arab allies (i.e. the Syrian Democratic Forces, SDF) to stabilize the parts of the country under SDF control. Second, through their allies on the ground, the US intends to push for a political solution to the war in Syria. Third, the 'continued strategic threats', Tillerson noted, were not limited to these relatively limited goals of fighting Islamic terrorism and stabilizing Syria. Citing the rise of the Iranian influence in Iraq and Syria, the US sees a close alliance with the Kurdish-led SDF as key to checking the Iranian influence in the Middle East (Crawford, 2018). In August 2018 a senior US diplomat reiterated the desire to stay in Syria to ensure 'the enduring defeat of ISIS' and 'the withdrawal of Iranian forces and their proxies' (The Jordan Times, 2018). The same logic probably holds true for the US relationship with Iraqi Kurdish groups, whom the Americans often rely upon to help stymie the Iranian influence in Iraq, to help fight the IS in Iraq and to help influence politics in Baghdad.

The IS is proving to be resilient, despite its territorial losses in the past years. Some reports show that the group still has 'as many fighters as it did at its peak' and is 'well-positioned' to make a comeback (Williams, 2018). The resilience of the IS and other jihadist groups and the spread of Iranian influence, both of which are deemed as sources of 'severe strategic threats', are likely to contribute to the growing need for developing a more comprehensive relationship with Kurdish groups in the Middle East.

One should add another powerful factor to these structural changes that could potentially pave the way for further recognition of the Kurds. That is the end of the anti-Kurdish narrative. The fighting prowess, readiness and eventual victory of the Kurds against the IS, coupled with their progressive ideals, have earned them considerable international media attention (Toivanen and Baser, 2016). As Stansfield (2018) notes, in addition to their success in administering their territories in the chaotic setting of the Syrian civil war, militarily, the Kurds seemed to have turned into 'the Middle East's equivalent of the Spartans. With limited equipment but an abundance of discipline and sheer belief, Kurdish forces fought a dogged and ultimately successful defence of Kobane, which history will view as the moment the tide turned against IS, which had, until then, seemed virtually unstoppable.' The aforementioned Kurdish women's units, the YPJ, have been likened to the armed Mujeres Libres (Free Women) during the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s (Graeber, 2014). These qualities have led one observer to describe Syrian Kurds as 'the Syrian force with the most democratic, pluralistic, and feminist vision' (Tax, 2016).

The negative portrayal of the Kurds as 'terrorists', a 'threat' or 'nuisance' to the stability of the region by governments in Ankara, Tehran, Baghdad and Damascus thus no longer falls on sympathetic ears in the West. The Manicheanism of the Cold War era, which resulted in nearly unquestioned support for the Turkish state in suppressing or pacifying Kurdish insurgencies there, has largely eroded. To the contrary, the positive public image Turkey once had under the pro-Western secular elites has been greatly tarnished.

While the European and American official response to the Turkish military offensive against the Kurdish YPG in the Kurdish enclave of Afrin in north-western Syria was measured and aimed mainly at urging Turkey to limit its operations and show restraint, the Western media, for the most part, lashed out at Turkey. The Wall Street Journal's editorial board, in its analysis of the Turkish military incursion into Afrin, described Turkey as an 'invading force' targeting the US and its allies, read as the Kurds, in Syria (WSJ Opinion, 2018). A retired United States Army lieutenant colonel went as far as to suggest that Turkey should be kicked out of NATO.[1] One human rights activist declared that Turkish military operations in Afrin threaten Syria's most pluralist and democratic force (Tax, 2018). Another analyst warned of Turkey's intention of 'ethnic cleansing' in Afrin, as opposed to its stated goal of fighting terrorism (Rubin, 2018). Still, another analyst described the fledgling Kurdish-led

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1 http://video.foxbusiness.com/v/5718959704001/?#sp=show-clips.

entity in northern Syria, officially the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, as 'the most progressive democracy' and urged the US to prevent it being 'strangled' by Turkey (Gupta, 2018).

Whatever 'soft power' Turkey possessed when it represented arguably the most secular and democratic Muslim country under Kemalist elites has been spent as the country has increasingly embraced Islamist and authoritarian policies. Soft power is the actor's ability to 'affect others by attraction and persuasion rather than through the hard power of coercion and payment' (Nye, 2018). The soft power of a country relies primarily on three resources: its culture, political values and foreign policy (Nye, 2004: 11).

As Turkey under Erdoğan is increasingly distancing itself from the Western bloc, moving away from democratic values and principles, emerging as the protector and supporter of Islamist groups (Yayla and Clarke, 2018), and having diverging interests with the West in Syria and beyond, it is unlikely that it will receive the same support that it once did during the Cold War era. As Nye (2018) notes, power not only depends on 'whose army wins, but it also depends on whose story wins'. Thus, Turkey's war against Kurdish demands for equality and recognition is increasingly becoming morally ambiguous. Put differently, Turkey is 'losing the story' against the Kurds.

French President Emmanuel Macron described his counterpart, President Erdoğan of Turkey, as 'anti-European' whose values and principles are incompatible with that of the European Union. The Turkey of Erdoğan, he continued, is 'not the Turkey of President Kemal', referring to the founding father of the secular republic (McGuinness, 2018). Whereas drawing attention to the Kurdish groups' effectiveness against radical Islamists, one observer went as far as declaring the PKK and its sister groups and parties as 'agents of stability now, and tomorrow, of peace in the Middle East' (Levy, 2014). In September 2017, a court in Brussels described the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurds as 'an internal armed conflict' and hence ruled that the insurgent group, the PKK, should be treated as a party in the civil war, not as a terrorist organization (FlandersNews, 2017). Given nearly undisputable diplomatic, military and intelligence support Turkey has long received from the West in its fight against the PKK, these developments are noteworthy.

Reasons for Pessimism: Kurdish Divisions and Enduring Geopolitical Realities

Although the twentieth century's 'anti-Kurdish' narrative portraying Kurds as terrorists, troublemakers and ruffians fell away during the last decade, the

stigma for an 'ethnic-nationalist' agenda has not. Kurds in Iraq face derision for wanting a Kurdish state of their own rather than working to improve 'an Iraq of all its people'. Even the Kurdish movements in Turkey and Syria, whose 'democratic autonomy' discourse strongly rejects nationalism and states per se, find themselves accused of 'separatism' and exclusionary nationalism. The critics of the Kurds seem to assume that the existing states – the Turkish Republic, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq – have been and are states of 'all their people'. In truth, these states, with the possible partial exception of contemporary Iraq, exclude the Kurds and other minority groups. They do so via names (such as the Syrian *Arab* Republic), symbols, bans on the Kurdish language, national narratives and the monopolization of political and economic power.

At the same time, naysayers seem to assume that a state of Kurdistan would be a state existing only for the benefit of Kurds – while Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran or the Syrian Arab Republic can exist for all its ethnic and religious groups. While supporters of the status quo see no difficulty with Kurds being minorities in such states, they argue that Arabs, Turkmen, Christians or others would face unacceptable problems as minorities within a Kurdish state. These objections remain no matter how many times KRG officials stress a *Kurdistani* rather than Kurdish identity. Critics claim that other minorities (no matter how small) within Kurdistan will likewise demand secession and their own state (al-Istrabadi, 2017) as if the Kurdish desire to secede had nothing to do with exclusion and failed governance in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran.

Such so-called objections on principle work in tandem with the attachment of the leading powers of the international system to the prevailing status quo. Particularly the US has long been averse to territorial border changes in the international system and the irredentist movements that struggle for such (Paquin, 2010). When such an attachment to the status quo is wedded to the principle of non-intervention in the sovereign affairs of states, however, the results can continue to prove very problematic for groups such as the Kurds. From the Iraqi Kurds' point of view, for instance, America's carte blanche 'one Iraq' policy combined with an American failure to support good governance, real decentralization and federalism within Iraq (provisions of a constitution the Americans helped midwife in 2005) led to both the emergence of the IS (Romano, 2014) and the Kurdistan referendum for independence in September 2017.

When the Kurds in Iraq held their referendum on independence in September 2017 they thus found themselves without any international support

apart from some rhetorical statements from Israel. Landlocked between Turkey, Syria, Iran and Baghdad's Iraq, they immediately fell under the threat of embargos and sanctions from their neighbours. When Baghdad moved the Iraqi army and pro-Iranian Shiite militias north to reclaim Kirkuk and other disputed territories, the Americans declared their neutrality and stood by even as US-supplied weapons and tanks were used against the peshmerga. US President Trump declared that 'we're not taking sides, but we don't like the fact that they're clashing' (RadioFreeEurope, 2017).

Enduring and serious intra-Kurdish divisions likewise continue to pose serious obstacles for the Kurds. In the aforementioned example of the Iraqi Kurdish referendum and loss of disputed territories, these divisions played a central role. Because the referendum campaign was called and led by Massoud Barzani and his Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq (KDP), many Kurdish parties initially opposed it and average Kurds in the anti-KDP stronghold of Silemani only gave it lukewarm support. Although the referendum passed with overwhelming support (over 93 per cent), the voter turnout rate was 72 per cent overall but as low as 50 per cent and 54 per cent in Silemani and Halabja provinces, with an 80 per cent proportion of 'yes' votes among half of the Silemani voters who voted (Watts, 2017). The supposedly fervent Iraqi Kurdish desire for independence thus still seems somewhat contingent on which political leaders lead an independent Kurdistan. Many Kurds outside of the KDP strongholds of Duhok and Erbil saw the 2017 referendum as a ploy by KDP leader Massoud Barzani to distract people and hold on to the region's presidency beyond the term limit mandated by law.

In a similar vein, the Iraqi recapture of Kirkuk and other disputed territories occurred with minimal fighting because of more enduring intra-Kurdish divisions. The KRG's failure to unify its peshmerga forces, despite innumerable promises to do so over the years, led to the unravelling of the defence of Kirkuk. While the KDP thought that its allies in the very fractured Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) – particularly PUK leader Khosrat Rasul – commanded the half of the region's peshmerga that were organized under the PUK, they soon discovered otherwise. In a deal brokered by Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and PUK leaders on less good terms with the KDP, Bafel and Lahur Talabani (a son and nephew, respectively, of late PUK leader Jalal Talabani) apparently ordered PUK forces defending most of Kirkuk to withdraw in the face of approaching Shiite militias and Iraqi troops (Chulov, 2017). With the Kurdish front broken and Iraqi forces now behind their lines, the KDP quickly issued a similar withdrawal of its forces – allowing the Iraqi

government to reclaim territories disputed between it and the KRG almost overnight.

Even had Baghdad not moved militarily against the Kurdistan region of Iraq and left Kirkuk's oil in Kurdistani hands, they would have had to overcome the Iraqi and Iranian embargos as well as the prospect of a Turkish embargo in order to get their oil to international markets. Without friendly neighbours or access to the sea, any Kurdish bid for independence (or even very high levels of autonomy) continues to face serious difficulties. When combined with the international community and especially US disinclination to support Kurdish independence, Kurdish aspirations in many ways appear as difficult to realize as they ever were during the twentieth century. The Kurdistan region of Iraq unquestionably represents the most enduring and closest thing to independence for any part of Kurdistan, yet such enduring divisions within the region and varying levels of dysfunctional governance and corruption have somewhat tarnished Kurdish aspirations in recent years. While oil and gas resources in the Kurdistan region of Iraq may offer a financial basis for independence, they may also encourage the 'resource curse' of rentierism and corruption. If Kurdish autonomy or independence is a means to an end (of greater freedom, prosperity and happiness) rather than an end in and of itself, then dysfunction in the KRG – whose parliament even closed due to internal divisions between 2014 and 2018 – represents problems that autonomy or independence will not necessarily resolve (Watts, 2014). Although an autonomous KRG has proven more liberal than the vast majority of regimes in the region, this does not set the bar very high. The KRG still falls short of a success story in consolidating its nascent democratic institutions or fostering good governance (Gunes, 2019: 33).

Meanwhile, Iranian Kurdish political groups seem to display even greater divisions than their brethren in Iraq, with multiple splinter incarnations of groups such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (with the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, not to be confused with the Kurdistan Democratic Party) and Komala (with the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, not to be confused with splinters such as the Komala Communist Party of Kurdistan and the Komala Communist Party in Iran). Additional groups include the PKK-linked PJAK, the Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK) and Sazmani Khabat (Ali, 2016). With Iran having yet to suffer the kind of political collapse and vacuums experienced in Iraq and Syria, the plethora of Iranian Kurdish parties have struggled to mount a united or effective opposition to the regime. The last major Iranian Kurdish uprising occurred following the revolution in 1979 and was forcefully put down by the new Revolutionary

Guards at the cost of tens of thousands of lives. Kurds in Iran, with education in their mother tongue, Kurdish publications and Kurdish organizations all banned, thus still await the arrival of the twenty-first century. While renewed American sanctions against Iran and an increase in country-wide protests of economic conditions in Iran may eventually destabilize the Islamic Republic and offer Kurds there an opportunity to press their claims, no one is sure when such an eventuality may manifest itself.

In Turkey, a great deal of hope accompanied ostensible efforts in 2013 by the Turkish government to make peace with the PKK. At the same time, the legal pro-Kurdish HDP enjoyed fast-rising popularity, a charismatic leader in the persona of the young human rights lawyer Selahattin Demirtas and a showing in the June 2015 Turkish elections that managed to breach the 10 per cent threshold to win seats in the national parliament (the highest such threshold in the world, probably designed specifically to keep pro-Kurdish minority parties out of parliament). The twenty-first century seemed to have arrived for Kurds in Turkey, and the ruling AKP broke many taboos regarding the Kurds in the first ten years after coming to power in 2002. The AKP initially began openly speaking about and trying to appeal to the Kurds as no other mainstream Turkish party had done before, and even moved to allow Kurdish-language broadcasting (including a segment on the government-owned TRT6 television channel) and private Kurdish-language education. In elections prior to 2015, the ruling AKP with its message of Islamic brotherhood (as opposed to secular Turkish mono-nationalism) managed to often attract more Kurdish votes than the pro-Kurdish HDP.

Progress for Kurdish group demands in Turkey came to a halt after the June 2015 election results, however. The Turkish state's apparent satisfaction as IS forces assaulted Syrian Kurds in Kobane in 2014, as well as President Erdoğan's authoritarian turn following the Gezi Park protests of May 2013, may have soured the AKP's appeal for Kurdish voters. The decline in Kurdish support for the AKP and the concomitant rise of the HDP's electoral fortunes in that election likely caused Erdoğan to change direction and adopt a much more anti-Kurdish, Turkish nationalist agenda (Basaran, 2015). Turkey thus resumed the war with the PKK, revoked most of its liberalizing reforms towards Kurdish language, culture and political groups and soon invaded Syria to stymie Kurdish ambitions there as well. Most of the HDP's leaders at the national level and in various municipalities were promptly imprisoned, including former presidential candidate Selahattin Demirtas.

Although the Kurdish movement in Turkey is not divided like in Iraq and Iran, but rather under the somewhat hegemonic auspices of the PKK and

pseudo-legal Kurdish parties sympathetic to the PKK, the full might of the Turkish state proved as difficult an obstacle as ever for them once the peace process broke down in this way. Despite Turkey's less favourable standing with Europe and the US, as well as European courts' recent questioning of the PKK's designation as a 'terrorist organization', Kurds in Turkey were left on their own when the war with the Turkish state resumed. Turkey remains too important a country for Western states to criticize too heavily when it comes to internal political developments. After 2015, pitched battles between state security forces and PKK militants in urban Kurdish milieus in south-eastern Turkey saw scores of city blocks in places like Diyarbakir, Mardin and Sirnak completely destroyed and hundreds killed. As long as President Erdoğan lives, it seems hard to imagine him relinquishing power and his near-dictatorial control over Turkey. In such circumstances, the Kurdish movement in Turkey will continue experiencing serious difficulties existing peacefully in Turkey. They have simply become, after 2015, too useful a bogeyman for rallying President Erdoğan's nationalist base.

In Syria, however, the Kurdish movement has indeed made great strides since 2012 as discussed above. The realization of Kurdish autonomy, even of a de facto nature and unrecognized abroad, would have been unimaginable before the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011. So dire was their situation under the successive Assad regimes that Syrian Kurds (even more than Iranian Kurds today) were often referred to as the 'forgotten Kurds of Kurdistan'.

All the Syrian Kurds' impressive gains appear contingent upon American protection, however. If left alone without tangible support, PYD and SDF fighters – no matter how brave and determined – risk bleak prospects in the face of Turkish, Syrian and Sunni jihadi designs in Syria. Like the other parts of Kurdistan, the Kurdish and non-Kurdish areas controlled by the PYD and its allies remain landlocked and surrounded by unfriendly forces. Even the neighbouring KRG, displeased by the progress of a very ideologically different Kurdish party, cannot be counted as an ally for the PYD. Iraqi Kurds led by the KDP even put in place their own limited embargo on the Syrian Kurdish cantons during the last several years (ISKU Informationsstelle Kurdistan e.V., 2017). While US interests in fighting the IS, containing Iran and remaining relevant to a resolution of the Syrian civil war currently keep American forces and their co-operation with the PYD/SDF in place (despite strident Turkish objections), one day the Americans will presumably leave Syria. Turkey, the Assad regime, Iraq and Iran, along with various home-grown jihadi groups, will remain in the area after this withdrawal. The Syrian Kurds' challenge is, therefore, to build up their strength sufficiently to

overcome their geopolitical isolation before the Americans leave. No land-locked Kurdish movement has ever been able to successfully stand alone for long in such circumstances.

The Kurds of Syria and elsewhere need not be able to defeat their enemies, however. They need only develop sufficient power, links to the outside world and other resources to dissuade their enemies. If expending the amount of effort necessary to suppress the Kurds, as occurred throughout the twentieth century, proves too costly, then room for enduring Kurdish political fortunes will come into existence.

Conclusion

The unquestionable character of the trans-border Kurdish question (Jwaideh, 2006), the isolation of the Kurdish geography and low levels of socio-economic development (Tejel, 2009: 5) have long served as obstacles in the formation of a unified Kurdish space or 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006). Kurdish homeland consists of 'impassable' (Jwaideh, 2006) mountains, which have historically served both as a shelter as well as an obstacle to the rise of a unified Kurdish movement.

Despite the challenges discussed above, changes in technology, the integration of the Kurdish geography into the global economy due mainly to its coveted oil and natural gas reserves and dramatic changes that decades-long conflict has produced are likely to offset previous negative effects of the geography. Furthermore, the transnational reality of the Kurdish issue might, in fact, serve as a facilitator, not an obstacle, for the Kurdish cause. The trans-border spread of ethnic groups is shown to be an important factor in initiating and sustaining the war (Cederman, Girardin and Gleditsch, 2009; Gurr, 1993). They can also help increase the cost of the war for the government and incentivize a peaceful resolution of the conflict in favour of the rebels (Gurses, 2015).

A popular aforementioned thesis that is advanced against the feasibility of a Kurdish state is divisions within the Kurdish people. To be sure, there are important differences among the Kurds. Not all speak the same dialect of Kurdish. While a clear majority adheres to Sunni Islam, segments of the Kurds are Shiite, Alevi, Yezidi or belong to other smaller faiths. This, however, is neither unique to the Kurdish case nor very surprising. In fact, it is expected, given a century-long subjugation of the Kurds by hostile regimes and peoples. As Tejel (2009: 85) notes, distinct political, economic and military jurisdictions, created by the Kurdish partition between four

different states, is the key to understanding the divisions and factions within the Kurdish groups. Furthermore, as Cunningham (2013: 665–6, see also 2014) argues, 'the assumption that [self-determination] movements are unitary is empirically wrong the vast majority of the time.' She finds that of the 1,188 self-determination factions (including social pressure organizations, political parties and armed militias) that make demands related to self-governance between 1960 and 2005, over 90 per cent of them are characterized by one or more internal divisions and over 85 per cent of them experienced changes in the number of internal factions over time.

Despite these differences and squabbling elites, the Kurds are no less prepared than neighbouring Arabs, who managed – due mainly to the alignment of major powers' interests with theirs in the post-WWI era – to form nearly two dozen Arab states in the Middle East. Large Kurdish geography and population allow for more than one Kurdish political entity, however it might be envisioned.

Moreover, although the outcome of the failed 2017 referendum has been 'traumatic' for the Kurds, as it quickly resulted in an 'abrupt change from a quasi-state status to that of an entity under threat of annihilation' (Bengio, 2018: 15), regional- and global-level factors, primarily the ungovernable and untenable nature of Iraq and the internalization of the Kurdish issue, are likely to offer yet another chance at independence.

Thus, the outcome of the Kurdish struggle for self-determination is likely to be shaped by external intervention or mediation. At this juncture, the US presence in Syria and Iraq will play a crucial role in determining the Kurdish fate. While the US has been hesitant to commit to the Kurdish cause, its presence in the region seems to be neither short term nor driven by altruistic reasons. It is rather in the US' interests to curb radical Islamism, prevent the rise of an Iranian power that could easily stretch from Tehran to Beirut and play a key role in the emerging geopolitical map of the Middle East. While these developments defy quick fixes and necessitate deepening US–Kurdish relations in Iraq and Syria, changes taking place in Turkey are no less significant. Turkey's rapid slide into Islamic authoritarianism is likely to turn the Kurdish movement in Turkey into an ally in the fight to preserve the secular and democratic aspect of the country. In a fractured and polarized post-Erdoğan Turkey, Kurds are likely to play a key role in the emerging regime.

The failure of the status quo in the Middle East has created conditions encouraging other regional powers to support the Kurds as well. Boms (2018), in his analysis of the risks and opportunities the Syrian civil war offers for

Israel, highlights the emerging reality of the region. The retreat and partial defeat of the IS has not reduced or eliminated Israeli concerns, as some of these areas have come under the control of Shiite or Sunni militias supported by Iran or Turkey and with which Israel has hostile or strained relations. While Boms does not explicitly tackle the possibility of supporting Syrian Kurds, he nonetheless criticizes Israel's current 'ambiguous' policy towards Syria and concludes with a recommendation for a policy that does not necessarily turn 'a cold shoulder to Syrian groups interested in discussing cooperation on the basis of common interests'. Another analyst, reacting to US President Donald Trump's surprise announcement of a complete withdrawal from Syria in December 2018 (which he later retracted in practice), underlines the key role the Kurds in Syria could play in 'undermining Iran's hegemony', something the author ties to Israel's 'national security interests' (Naghi, 2019). Saudi Arabia's growing interest in Kurdish groups both in Iraq and Syria is likewise also a result of changing dynamics of the region. Kurdish geography and groups appear to be too important to ignore in the fight for the emerging Middle East.

While Kurdish circles generally reacted to Trump's Syria withdrawal announcement with a sort of angry déjà vu discourse about 'another American betrayal', the fallout in Washington from Trump's announcement actually demonstrated the extent to which Kurdish and American interests now coincide. Two days after President Trump made the withdrawal announcement (19 December), Defense Secretary James Mattis quit his post, citing fundamental disagreements with President Trump especially regarding Syria and US alliances there. A day after that (on 22 December), Brett McGurk, Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, submitted his resignation as well. During the next few weeks, President Trump was subjected to a rare barrage of criticism on the issue from within his own Republican Party. Figures such as key Republican Senator Lindsey Graham called the abrupt withdrawal announcement a 'disaster' and 'a stain on the honor of the United States' (Sullivan, 2018). A plethora of officials including various American generals, National Security Advisor John Bolton, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and others argued that the move ran contrary to American interests and publicly opposed it. Within a few days, President Trump busily backtracked on his withdrawal announcement, claiming at a 2 January cabinet meeting that he didn't approve of a four-month deadline to withdraw US troops from northern Syria, insisting 'I never said fast or slow' and that 'we want to protect the Kurds' (Mason, 2019).

With the US still retaining troops in Syria at the time of this writing in the autumn of 2020, the whole episode exemplifies a striking change in the position of Kurds in both Syria and Iraq. Once easily cast aside after short-term interests of outside powers were satisfied, the Kurds and their interests now apparently coincide with key interests and strategic views of super-powers such as the US – so much so that a fairly capricious American president appears unable to abandon them. The American foreign policy establishment even appears willing to risk a complete rupture in relations with Turkey in order to maintain its alliance with Syrian Kurdish groups. While such a change has yet to substantively affect Kurds in Turkey and Iran, the shift seems nonetheless remarkable. The longer the existence of autonomous Kurdish political entities in Syria and Iraq endures, the greater the attractiveness and international acceptability of such an arrangement will appear for addressing Kurdish grievances in Turkey and Iran as well. Ankara and Tehran react to such prospects with alarm, demonstrating both the challenges and opportunities that Kurds face in this new twenty-first century.

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DOMESTIC POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THE KURDS IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey, 1898–2018

MESUT YEĞEN

Despite there being a prominent debate regarding when Kurdish nationalism emerged (Bajalan, 2016; Hassanpour, 2003; Klein, 2007; Özoğlu, 2004, 2011; Vali, 2003), the publication of *Kurdistan* in 1898 may be taken as a symbolic date for the birth of Kurdish nationalism. First published in Cairo, the fortnightly *Kurdistan* ([1898–1902] 2018), the first newspaper in Kurdish, was established and run by a few Kurdish literates some of whom were a part of the anti-absolutist opposition of the time, headed by İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Committee of Union and Progress, CUP).

Banned in Istanbul, *Kurdistan* hosted articles denouncing the injustices committed by the Ottoman state in Kurdistan mainly. Publishing articles on Kurdish language and history and the poems voicing nationalist feelings, *Kurdistan* is argued to have hosted 'the first systematic expression of the Ottoman-Kurdish intelligentsia's attitude to issues of state and nationality' (Bajalan, 2016: 147). While the Kurdish literates writing for *Kurdistan* did not have a separatist agenda, they often compared Kurds with the Armenians, indicating that they imagined Kurds as a distinct nation. Briefly, then, as *Kurdistan* disseminated the ideas of Kurdish nation and Kurdistan, its publication in 1898 may be considered as an event symbolizing the beginning of Kurdish nationalism.

Reinstating the constitutional regime, the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 not only ended absolutism but also rejuvenated the Ottomanism of the 1876 Constitution, according to which Ottomans with diverse religious and ethnic identities were equal citizens. Reinforcing the non-Muslim and non-Turkish communities' support for the 1908 Revolution, this prompted an ethnic revival in the public sphere and in the field of publication. So much so that almost all main ethnic and religious groups in the empire established their own associations and published newspapers or journals in their own language. Kurds also joined this wave of ethnic revival.

A group of Kurdish notables and literates living in Istanbul founded the Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Society for Kurdish Mutual Aid and Progress, KTTC), the first legal Kurdish organization, in September 1908. Among the founders were Seyyid Abülkadir, Emin Ali Bedirhan, Şerif Paşa and Damat Müşir Ahmed Zülkif Paşa, all of whom were Istanbul-based Kurdish notables, intellectuals and bureaucrats who later would play some key roles in the Kurdish nationalist movement of the coming years (Malmîsanij, 1999: 23–4). Headed by Seyyid Abdülkadir, KTTC was constitutionalist and Ottomanist mainly. Endorsing the supra-political identity of Ottomanness for all Ottomans, including Kurds, KTTC aimed at the dissemination of constitutionalism among Kurds (Tunaya, 1988: 409–13). However, the articles published in the KTTC's weekly, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi*, indicate that the KTTC, while Ottomanist and constitutionalist, imagined Kurds as a nation and that it had, albeit slim, a nationalist agenda too (Malmîsanij, 1999: 117–87). That the state of Kurds was discussed in relation to those of Turks, Albanians, Armenians and Nestorians shows that Kurdish literates writing in KTTC's newspaper imagined Kurdishness as a separate national identity while acknowledging Ottomanness as a supra-political identity. Likewise, the fact that the idea of education in Kurdish was debated in the KTTC's newspaper shows that the Kurdish literates of the time had, albeit weak, a nationalist agenda too.

However, the abortive anti-CUP revolt in March 1909 was followed by a CUP-launched 'Ottoman Thermidor', resulting with 'curbing civil liberties, including the activities of "nationalist" societies' (Bajalan, 2016: 152). Nonetheless, the CUP's march towards authoritarianism could not terminate the 'Kurdish renaissance' (Duman, 2010). A group of Kurdish university students in Istanbul founded the Kürt Talebe-Hêvî Cemiyeti (Kurdish Student Hope Society, Hêvî) in August 1912 (Bajalan, 2013; Malmîsanij, 2002). The objectives of Hêvî were remarkably similar to those of KTTC. Conceiving of Kurds as Ottoman citizens with a separate national identity, Hêvî put 'working for the prosperity and happiness of Kurds' as its main objective (Celil, 2001: 75). To this end, Hêvî suggested building schools in Kurdistan, making Kurds acquainted with science and art and improving Kurdish literature and language. Established by the siblings of the Istanbul-based Kurdish notables mainly (Bajalan, 2016: 145), Hêvî published the monthly *Rojî Kurd* (*Kurdish Sun*), which later changed its name to *Hetawî Kurd* (*Kurdish Sun*), in 1913. Articles published in *Rojî Kurd* and *Hetawî Kurd* indicate that the Hêvî circle consisted of Kurds with a reformist and nationalist agenda (Kürdoloji Çalışmaları Grubu, 2013). Likewise, like their

predecessors, Hêvî Kurds remained loyal Ottomans and did not have a separatist agenda. This is confirmed by the fact that almost all Hêvî Kurds fought in the Ottoman army during WWI. Hêvî did not survive after WWI commenced.

The ultimate collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 prompted a change in the mindset of Kurdish nationalists of the time. Those Kurds who had remained loyal Ottomans were now attracted to the idea of a Kurdistan ruled by Kurds themselves. Kurdish literates and notables in Istanbul had become nationalists working for an autonomous or independent Kurdistan (Özoğlu, 2004). This change in the mindset of Kurdish literates and notables in Istanbul was visible both in the pages of the Kurdish-Turkish fortnightly *Jîn* and in the activities of Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti (Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan, KTC). Established and run by the Istanbul-based Kurdish literates in 1918, *Jîn* (Bozarslan, 1985) became a site for the expression of ideas pointing to the weakening of Ottomanism among Kurdish literates. Kurds were now invited by authors like Abdullah Cevdet, who was one of the founders of the CUP and a firm Ottomanist, to think of Kurds' future in the light of Wilsonian principles.

The activities of KTC, established and run by the members of Istanbul-based Kurdish notables in December 1918 with the official aim of 'ensuring Kurds' general interests and development', also revealed that Kurdish notables' mindset had changed (Göldaş, 1991: 249). Endorsing autonomy for Kurds, the KTC officials negotiated the project of an autonomous Kurdistan with the Ottoman bureaucrats, the officials of Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası (Freedom and Accord Party, HİP), the ruling party of the time (Göldaş, 1991: 15), and the diplomats in Istanbul (Yegen, 2012: 85–8). Besides, while a group of KTC officials would endorse self-rule in Ottoman Kurdistan, another group in the ranks of the KTC endorsed the idea of an independent Kurdistan. While the KTC's chair, Seyyid Abdülkadir, and the group headed by him advocated autonomy for Kurds, they were opposed by Emin Âli Bedirhan, the vice-chair, and his followers, who would work for an independent Kurdistan (Özoğlu, 2004: 87–120). Another member of the Bedirhan family, Abdürrezzak Bedirhan, Emin Âli's cousin, had already started striving for a Russia-mandated independent Kurdistan during WWI (Reynolds, 2011). Şerif Pasha, former Ottoman ambassador to Stockholm, also advocated the establishment of an independent Kurdistan in the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 (Alakom, 1998a). That the KTC had its local branches in nineteen Kurdish towns indicates that the change in the mindset of the Kurdish elite in Istanbul was echoed in Kurdistan.

However, while Istanbul-based Kurdish literates and notables would strive for an autonomous or a British-mandated independent Kurdistan, many Kurdish notables settled in Kurdistan mainly supported the movement headed by Mustafa Kemal. Having probably been one of the many reasons for Kurds' failure to attain autonomy or independence, this discord among the Kurdish elite of the time was due to a few reasons. First, the Kurdistan-based Kurdish elite was mainly composed of those who gained wealth and power in Kurdistan thanks to the removal of Istanbul-based Kurdish notables' descendants from power. Second, the Kemalist movement succeeded to aggrandize the Kurdistan-based Kurdish elite's fear that the Allies would aim to build an Armenian state over the territories populated by Kurds.[1] Third, Kemalists promised that the Kurds would be granted autonomy once the former's struggle to maintain the unity of the Ottoman state was succeeded.[2]

While the collapse of the Ottoman Empire prompted a change in the course of Kurdish nationalism in the form of rendering Kurdish literates and notables striving for social and cultural demands some political nationalists looking for autonomy or independence, the foundation of the Turkish Republic as a nation-state granting no cultural and political rights to Kurds prompted a greater shift in the course of Kurdish nationalism. To begin with, Kurdish nationalists began using clandestine organizations and violence as the main means to fight for their ideals. Second, as Istanbul was no longer a safe space for any kind of opposition including Kurdish nationalism, the relatively unreached Kurdistan became the core space of Kurdish nationalism. Third, Kurdistan-based officials and notables joined the Istanbul-based Kurdish literates and notables, making those who would lead Kurdish nationalism more diversified. Briefly, the foundation of the Turkish Republic generated a change in the agents, means and the space of Kurdish nationalism.

All these changes in the course of Kurdish nationalism are visible in the rebellion in 1925. Executed by Sheikh Said of the Naqshbandi order and the Kurdish tribesmen he mobilized, the rebellion was soon crushed by the Turkish army (Olson, 1989). The fact that the rebellion was not supported by urban Kurds and that neither Britain nor the USSR was in favour of an

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1 It is understood from the diaries of Major Noel that Kurdish tribes were convinced by the Kemalists that the British were pro-Armenian (Yegen, 2012: 80).
2 Building a local government in the lands inhabited by Kurds had been defined by the Council of Ministers of the assembly in Ankara as a part of its 'Kurdistan policy' in 1920 (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, 1985: 550–1).

independent Kurdistan must have been the primary factors making the rebels unsuccessful.[3]

The 1925 rebellion was planned by the clandestine organization Azadî, which was headed and run by a group composed of the Kurdish officers in the Turkish army, Kurdish politicians, sheikhs and landlords settled in Kurdistan (Sever, 2018). However, while established and run by secular-minded Kurdish officers and literates mainly, Azadî sought and partially ensured the support of tribal and religious leaders in Kurdistan. A document in British archives shows that there were many tribal leaders and sheikhs among the members of the organization (Yegen, 2012: 163–7). Seeking the support of the Kurdish tribes in today's Iran and Iraq, Azadî seems to have been firm in its programme: building an independent Kurdistan on Ottoman and Iranian territories.

Notwithstanding that the 1925 rebellion was crushed and the leading figures of both *Azadî* and the rebellion were executed, Kurdish nationalism in the form of armed resistance headed by a clandestine organization working for the ideal of building an independent Kurdistan lasted for a while. Of those rebels who survived, some withdrew to the unreachable parts of Kurdistan and some others found shelter in French-mandated Syria. While those who withdrew to the mountains of Kurdistan occasionally fought the Turkish troops, some of those who took shelter in Syria established the clandestine organization Xoybun (Independence) in Beirut (Alakom, 1998b). After a while, these two groups joined the clashes that started in 1926 between the Turkish troops and rebels from the Kurdish tribes on the north of Lake Van. Headed by İhsan Nuri Paşa, a former Ottoman army officer and a member of Xoybun, the clashes around Mountain Ağrı turned into a rebellion, which was finally crushed in 1930 by a military operation assisted by the Iranian army and supported by the heavy use of Turkish aircrafts (Süphandağ, 2012; Ulugana, 2012). The defeat of the Kurdish rebellion in 1930 terminated the first phase of Kurdish nationalism.

As the preceding narrative shows, the objectives, instruments and spaces of Kurdish nationalism of this first period all shifted from 1898 to 1930. While the main objectives of those who published *Kurdistan* and those who ran the KTTC were the social, economic and cultural development of Kurds and

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3 Records indicate that both Britain and the USSR, the two great powers of the time, considered an independent Kurdistan conflicting with their interests in region. For the British documents to this effect, see Yegen (2012: 217), and for the position of the USSR, see Perinçek (1994: 15).

Kurdistan and having a constitutional political regime in the empire, the same Kurds started to work for the objective of having an autonomous or an independent Kurdistan after WWI. Likewise, while the Kurdish nationalists of this first period mainly used newspapers and legal associations to reach their goals throughout the two decades following the publication of *Kurdistan*, they started using the instruments of clandestine organizations and armed rebellions in the 1920s. Also, while Kurdish nationalism emerged and developed mainly in Istanbul and in Kurdish town centres, Kurdish countryside and abroad turned to become the privileged spaces of Kurdish nationalist movement after WWI ended.

However, while the objectives, instruments and spaces of Kurdish nationalism remarkably changed after WWI, the agents of Kurdish nationalism remained remarkably similar between 1898 and 1930, making it plausible to consider these three decades as one coherent period in the course of Kurdish nationalism. Of those who ran Azadî and Xoybun throughout the 1920s, many had contributed to the Kurdish newspapers and associations of the post-1908 years. In other words, the Kurdish nationalism of these three decades was pioneered by a few hundred Kurdish notables and literates, most of whom were a part of Ottoman bureaucracy and intelligentsia of the time.

1958–1980

Kurds' silence in the three decades following the eventual suppression of their rebellion in 1930 produced the impression that Kurdish nationalism had been buried into the past. By the 1960s, however, Kurdish nationalism had already resurfaced, albeit with a change in all its components. When Kurdish nationalism reappeared in the 1960s, its leading agents, the targets it pursued, the discourses it blended with, the instruments it employed and the spaces it appeared in had all changed.

A retrospective analysis reveals that it was a combination of a couple of structural factors and contingent events that made the return of Kurdish nationalism possible. The primary structural factor was that the Turkish state of the second quarter of the twentieth century lacked the capacity of making Kurds 'proper' Turkish-speaking citizens by means of assimilation. That the Kurds were many and concentrated in the eastern part of Turkey and that the means at the disposal of the Turkish state were insufficient to assimilate a non-Turkish community of this size resulted in the fact that the majority of Kurds in eastern Turkey continued to have a separate identity in spite of

the long-lasting bans on Kurdish language and identity. In other words, the fact that the Kurdish identity had survived in spite of the decades-long politics of Turkification and de-Kurdification created a fertile ground for the return of Kurdish nationalism, and hence became the primary structural factor making the return of Kurdish nationalism possible. The second factor was that the memory of what Kurdish nationalists had done before the 1930s was still alive. The Kurdish rebellions of 1925 and 1930 and the following state brutality were all conveyed to new generations in oral forms mainly, making a nationalist memory available. The third factor in the same vein was the commencement of a multi-party democratic regime and rapid urbanization in Turkey in the 1950s. The weakening of state brutality in the Kurdish towns and countryside in the 1950s and the flow of masses to cities created a more liberal, social and political environment for intra-Kurdish communication. It was the very same environment that enabled Kurdish youth to have more access to university education in urban centres where they socialized with their fellow Kurds and encountered such new ideas as democracy and socialism. To these structural factors must be added events like the 1958 Revolution in Iraq and the enactment of the 1961 Constitution in Turkey. Culminating with the recognition of the Kurds of Iraq as one of the two peoples of this country, the former rejuvenated nationalist aspirations among the Kurds of Turkey. The latter, however, generated a liberal political environment wherein left-wing ideas became popular, equipping Kurds with a new vocabulary to express their discontents and demands. It was mainly these factors and events, which, while making the return of Kurdish nationalism possible, generated a renewal in its agents, objectives, vocabulary, instruments and spaces.

A couple of memoirs (Anter, 1990; Ekinci, 2010; Kutlay, 1998; Miroğlu, 2005) indicate that the early roots of Kurdish nationalism's re-emergence in this second period may be found in the social and intellectual activities of a group of Kurdish university students in Istanbul and Ankara (Bozarslan, 2013). After a while, however, the pioneers of this new generation of Kurdish nationalism made themselves public with a political stance. On 14 April 1959, 102 Kurdish students in the universities in Istanbul protested, by a telegram, the Republican People's Party deputy Asım Eren, who, in his speech in the parliament on the Turcomans' massacre in Iraq, and asked that a retaliation be staged against the Kurds of Turkey (Çamlıbel, 2007: 16). In another event in the same year, Musa Anter published *Kımıl*, a poem in Kurdish, in *İleri Yurt*, a local paper published in Diyarbakır. Musa Anter and Abdurrahman Efem Dolak, the owner of *İleri Yurt*, were both imprisoned on 20 September 1959

over the 'scandal' aroused by the usage of Kurdish in press. This was followed by the imprisonment of 50 Kurds from different parts of Kurdistan in December 1959. The military coup in May 1960 embarked on a bigger wave of arrests to curb the return of Kurdish nationalism – 485 Kurds with quite diverse backgrounds were arrested in the first days of the coup and imprisoned in a military camp (Çiçek, 2010).

However, these subsequent imprisonments did not halt the return of Kurdish nationalism, which, at this particular stage, was embodied in the cultural and intellectual activities of a new generation of Kurdish elite that consisted mainly of university students and professionals. On the contrary, the elections held in 1961 proved that this new generation of Kurdish elite and their demands were embraced by the Kurdish masses. Joined by the individuals from the younger generation of Kurdish influentials, the Yeni Türkiye Partisi (New Turkey Party, YTP) received 38.1 per cent of the votes cast in the provinces in which the Kurdish population was concentrated (Yüksel, 2007). That the Kurds massively supported the YTP revealed that a form of nationalism with a sense of self-identity was growing among Kurds. However, as time ensued, signals pointing to the return of Kurdish nationalism varied. In 1965, a group of professionals settled in Kurdish towns founded the clandestine Türkiye Kürdistan Demokrat Partisi (Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey, TKDP). The TKDP maintained that the Kurds are a nation deserving of cultural and political rights in Turkey (Epözdemir, 2005).

The return of Kurdish nationalism in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the forms and events portrayed above would show that the agents, targets, vocabulary, instruments and spaces of Kurdish nationalism had all changed. The profile of those who were involved in the events mentioned above indicates that a new generation of Kurdish elite with a renewed social composition would lead the Kurdish nationalism of this new period.[4] Those who pioneered the initial years of the Kurdish nationalism of the second period were mainly middle-aged professionals with a traditional elite background and the Kurdish university students. On the other hand, Kurdish nationalists of this period were, except the members of the TDKP, quite modest, if not uncertain, in terms of their targets. While much of what the Kurdish nationalists of these years did was limited to activities underlining Kurdish identity, many of them did not have a specific agenda other than

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4 For the social profile of these people, see Bozarslan (2013), Çiçek (2010), Epözdemir (2005), Kutlay (1994) and Yüksel (2007).

demanding the implementation of equal citizenship for Kurds. As to the means used, Kurdish nationalism was embodied in non-violent instruments such as newspapers, associations and political parties. Lastly, Kurdish nationalism resurfaced in such main Kurdish or Turkish towns as Diyarbakır, Ankara and Istanbul.

However, the majority of Kurds with national demands soon became socialists mainly and Kurdish national demands began to be voiced through a leftist vocabulary. In fact, by the mid-1960s, the Kurdish nationalist movement had mainly been a part of the growing socialist movement in Turkey. The incorporation of Kurdish national movement into the socialist movement in Turkey generated a considerable shift not only in the language of Kurdish nationalism and in the political identity of Kurdish nationalists, but also in the social composition of those who took the lead of the struggle for Kurdish national demands. By the mid-1960s, Kurdish university students and the younger generation of Kurdish professionals such as lawyers and doctors were leading the struggle for Kurdish national demands and by the late 1950s and early 1960s, middle-aged professionals with a traditional elite background had become ineffective.

Yön, the influential left-wing journal of the time, was the first site where Kurdish socialists with national demands made their voices heard. Sait Kırmızıtoprak (1963), for instance, denounced in *Yön* the assimilationist policies and sustained the free usage of the Kurdish language. Meanwhile, Türkiye İşçi Partisi (The Workers' Party of Turkey, TİP), founded in 1961, placed the questions of ethnic discrimination and the underdevelopment of eastern Turkey into the forefront of its political agenda. This made more Kurds attracted to socialist ideology. So much so that, by the mid-1960s, quite a number of Kurds would voice their economic as well as cultural demands through a left-wing discourse and in the ranks of TİP. The penetration of Kurdish nationalism with socialism and the socialist movement in Turkey became particularly visible in the elections in 1965 and in the Eastern Meetings in 1967. The support given to TİP in the elections in 1965 in Kurdish-populated towns such as Diyarbakır, Tunceli and Ağrı was twice more than this party's overall share. The Kurds' growing interest in the socialist movement in Turkey was confirmed once more in the mass demonstrations held by TİP in six Kurdish towns in 1967. Attended by the Kurdish crowds chanting slogans denouncing cultural assimilation and economic backwardness, the Eastern Meetings proved that many Kurds were attracted to socialist rhetoric addressing Kurds' social and cultural demands (Beşikçi, 1992; Gündoğan, 2011).

The *Yön* and TİP cases pointed to a few important facts regarding the course of Kurdish nationalism in the 1960s. First, the Kurdish nationalist demands in this decade were as modest as the recognition of Kurdish identity and the improvement of the socio-economic conditions in the east. Second, these demands were expressed through a leftist vocabulary. Third, the Kurds with such modest nationalist demands en masse penetrated into the Turkish socialist movement. Fourth, Kurds voiced their nationalist demands through legal and non-violent means such as journals and newspapers, mass gatherings and political parties.

By the mid-1970s, however, except the second, none of these four characteristics of Kurdish nationalism had remained intact. While Kurdish nationalist demands were still being voiced with a leftist vocabulary, they were no longer confined to the recognition of Kurdish identity. Besides, Kurdish socialists with a national cause now tended to split from the Turkish socialist movement and had their own organizations. Lastly, while the Kurdish nationalism of the time had still used legal and non-violent instruments, illegality and violence became a part of its repertoire.

Drawn to Leninism, on the one hand, and to the rising worldwide anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, on the other, the main bulk of Turkish and Kurdish socialists abruptly became radicals pursuing a revolutionary change in Turkey. Soon, the younger generation of Turkish socialists left the ranks of the TİP and established their own journals and illegal organizations with the aim of implementing a national-democratic revolution in Turkey. Likewise, known as 'Easterners', the Kurdish socialists began building their own organizations, the Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları (Revolutionary Culture Hearths of the East, DDKO). Attracted to the idea that Kurdistan was a colony, the Kurdish socialists of the time were no longer content with the Kurds' demands being framed as one of no assimilation and no oppression and with the TİP's promise of equal citizenship for Kurds.

However, soon both Turkish and Kurdish socialists were bulldozed by the military intervention in 1971. Yet, Turkish and Kurdish socialists made a stronger return to Turkish politics in the mid-1970s, albeit in split organizations. The dispute over the question of whether Kurdistan was a colony of Turkey had resulted in an ultimate split between the Turkish and Kurdish socialist movements (Yegen, 2016a). Eventually, by the mid-1970s, Kurdish nationalism had assumed the form of fighting for an anti-colonial revolution and it was embodied in the Kurdish socialist organizations rooted in the Kurdish towns. Soon, the pro-USSR, pro-China and in-between legal and clandestine Kurdish socialist organizations had become the significant actors

of the public and political life in many Kurdish towns. Chief among these organizations were the Partiya Sosyalîsta Kurdistan (The Socialist Party of Kurdistan, PSK), Devrimci Doğu Kültür Dernekleri (Revolutionary Culture Associations of the East, DDKD), Rizgarî and Kawa, all of which, except the federalism-seeking PSK, were striving towards an independent Kurdistan. These organizations were mainly rooted among students, teachers and professionals like lawyers, engineers and doctors. However, soon these organizations started to have mass support mainly from the poor peasantry in the countryside and the petty bourgeoisie in the towns too.

While Kurdish organizations of the time would generally have both a legal and a clandestine section, and while they were not entirely unarmed, they were, in principle, in favour of unarmed struggle. Almost all these organizations used such instruments as mass demonstrations, gatherings, magazines, pamphlets, banners and so on to reach their goals (Gunes, 2012: 65–80). However, it was not long before the Kurdish nationalist movement found itself confronted with a brand new issue and a new actor: the question of armed struggle and the PKK (Özcan, 2006: 101–2). The PKK burst into Kurdish politics as an organization perceiving and using armed struggle as the main instrument of political struggle. Soon after, using relentless violence against the members of its rival socialist organizations and the landlords allying with the Turkish state, the PKK recruited many militants mainly from the landless peasantry and Kurdish students with a poor background and became a leading organization in many Kurdish towns (Yegen, 2016b).

However, the coup in 1980 bulldozed all the legal and illegal Kurdish socialist organizations, including the PKK without much effort. In the few years following the coup, thousands of Kurdish socialists and their supporters were imprisoned, thousands of others fled the country and a relentless politics of oppression was implemented throughout Kurdistan. The second period of Kurdish nationalism had ended.

The preceding lines on the course of Kurdish nationalism between 1958 and 1980 points to three facts concerning the main components of Kurdish nationalism. First, when Kurdish nationalism resurfaced in the late 1950s, its agents, objectives, vocabulary, instruments and space were all different from those of the first period of Kurdish nationalism. Second, the agents, objectives, vocabulary and the space of Kurdish nationalism underwent some significant changes throughout this second period. Third, the instruments of Kurdish nationalism remained, for the most part, the same in this period.

To begin with, it looks evident that when Kurdish nationalism resurfaced in the late 1950s, the notables and the literati of the first quarter of the

twentieth century were replaced by the middle-aged professionals with a traditional elite background and the Kurdish university students, the object-ive of building an autonomous or independent Kurdistan with the objective of maintaining Kurdish identity, the vocabulary of reformism with the vocabulary of democracy and equal citizenship, the instrument of rebellion with legal protests and the space of Kurdish countryside with a few town centres such as Istanbul, Ankara and Diyarbakır. However, the agents, objectives, vocabulary and spaces of Kurdish nationalism underwent some significant and multiple changes throughout the second period. To begin with, the middle-age professionals with a traditional elite background were soon replaced by university students and new professionals, who later were joined by the have-nots of the Kurds in Kurdish towns and the countryside.[5] Likewise, the objective of maintaining a Kurdish identity was soon replaced by the objective of establishing a democratic-socialist Kurdistan for Kurds. Accordingly, those of class struggle, anti-colonialism and nations' right to self-determination succeeded in the vocabulary of democracy and equal citizenship. Lastly, while Turkish metropolises such as Istanbul and Ankara continued to have been hosting Kurdish nationalists, Kurdish town centres became the privileged sites of Kurdish nationalism in the 1970s. On the other hand, in due course, Kurdish nationalism remained, for the most part, loyal to its inclination of using non-violent instruments to achieve its goals. Although the Kurdish nationalist movement of the time was not entirely disarmed, it did not use armed struggle as its main instrument. While Kurdish nationalists of the time were by no means pacifists, armed struggle, the main instrument of the third period of Kurdish nationalism, was only on the horizon of the second period of Kurdish nationalism when it was ended by the 1980 coup.

1984–1999

Of Kurdish socialist organizations of the second half of the 1970s, only the PKK managed to save some of its militants from the brutality of the 1980 coup. While the leading cadres and militants of the Kurdish socialist organ-izations other than the PKK either took a shelter in Europe or quit the

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5 Nicole F. Watts (2007: 53) defines this change in the agents as the replacement of traditional Kurdish leaders with 'a young generation of Kurdish counter elites' who 'defined Kurds in radical new ways, and engaged in new types of political activism'. This change in the agents of the Kurdish resistance, Bozarslan (2013, 2014) argues, was echoed in many parts of the world, including the Kurdistan of Iraq and Iran.

struggle, the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and a few dozen PKK militants had fled Turkey months before the coup, ensuring the PKK a safe haven in the Syrian-controlled Beqaa Valley to uphold its fight. Those PKK members who gathered in Syria and Lebanon held a party congress in 1982 at a Palestinian camp in Syria and took the decision to wage guerrilla warfare to build an independent Kurdistan.

The Turkish state's response to PKK's guerrilla warfare was to aggrandize the oppression on all sectors of Kurdish society, particularly on those in Kurdish countryside. However, let alone liquidating the PKK, this resulted in growing support for the PKK. By the end of the 1980s, the PKK was rooted in the mountains and had become a guerrilla organization with tens of thousands of militants. This rootedness of the PKK and its sudden growth would indicate that Kurdish nationalism was back once more, albeit with another renewal in many of its main components.

To begin with, Kurdish nationalism had now returned in the form of armed struggle. However, not only the instruments, but the space and the agents of Kurdish nationalism had changed too. Born in the mid-1970s in the Turkish capital, and rooted in the Kurdish towns in the second half of the 1970s, the PKK turned into a mountain-based military organization by the end of the 1980s. In other words, while Kurdish nationalism of the late 1970s was rooted in Kurdish towns mainly, by 1989, the mountains of Turkish and Iraqi Kurdistan had become the new spaces of Kurdish nationalism. Likewise, the agents of Kurdish nationalism had also changed. While the typical Kurdish socialists (with a national cause) of the late 1970s were the male Kurdish university students, by 1989 those who would fight in the ranks of the PKK were mainly the male and female Kurdish youth of the villages oppressed by the military regime. One last change in the course of Kurdish nationalism in these years was that the PKK had remained the only Kurdish organization in the field, pointing to a de facto termination of the fragmentation of Kurdish nationalist movement.[6] However, despite the instruments, the agents and the space of Kurdish nationalism having changed from the mid-1970s to late 1980s, its objective and vocabulary did not. Embodied mainly in the PKK now, the Kurdish nationalism of the third period would still fight for an

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6 As a matter of fact, as the PKK has been the only significant Kurdish organization in the field since 1984, the post-1984 course of Kurdish nationalism can mainly be examined on the basis of the course of PKK activities. As the PKK has been the main actor of Kurdish nationalism since 1984, my analysis of the post-1984 period of Kurdish nationalism will mainly rely on my work on PKK (Yegen, 2016b).

independent Kurdistan and it would still use a hybrid vocabulary borrowed from the discourses of socialism and anti-colonialism.

The Turkish state employed new instruments to cope with the expansion of the PKK's armed struggle in the early 1990s. Starting from 1989, the Turkish state began evacuating or burning down those villages which were believed to be providing logistics to the PKK and oppressed the Kurdish civilians in the towns who were deemed to be in line with the PKK. However, notwithstanding this oppression, the PKK managed to recruit more militants than those who were killed or captured in these years. Moreover, the PKK started to encroach into Kurdish towns. By the early 1990s, the PKK was able to mobilize Kurdish masses in the small towns of Kurdistan to launch urban uprisings, known as *serhildan*, indicating that the PKK was a sizeable actor not only in military but political terms, and not only in the countryside but in the urban spaces too.

The PKK started to include some new instruments to its repertoire to be able to lead the masses it appealed to at the beginning of the 1990s. First, the professional politicians and civilians attracted to the PKK seized control of the Halkın Emek Partisi (People's Labour Party, HEP), which was established in 1990 by a group of left-wing politicians and intellectuals. Second, civilian Kurds attracted to the PKK in Turkey and Europe established dozens of legal associations working for the dissemination of Kurdish national causes. Third, Kurds close to or affiliated with the PKK launched weekly and daily papers both in Turkey and in Europe and set up Med TV, a TV station broadcasting through European satellites. The adding of these new instruments into the PKK's repertoire rendered the PKK a huge political complex, comprising legal political parties, NGOs and mass media. Also, the PKK ideals and hence Kurdish nationalist aspirations became rooted among Kurds in Turkey, Kurdistan and Europe thanks to this renewal in the PKK's repertoire. Accordingly, by the early 1990s, the PKK had become a huge and semi-open 'party complex' (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2011), appealing to the Kurdish masses in Kurdistan, Turkey and Europe. To sum up, by the early 1990s, the instruments at the disposal of Kurdish nationalism had changed once more. Armed struggle was now accompanied by the use of such instruments as political parties, NGOs and mass media.

The sudden growth in the mass support for the PKK generated a change in the agents of the Kurdish nationalism of the 1990s too. While those Kurds who joined the PKK in the 1980s were mainly the poor-educated Kurdish youngsters from the Kurdish countryside, many Kurdish university students from Kurdish, Turkish and European towns joined the PKK ranks in the 1990s

(Westrheim, 2010: 59). Meanwhile, the legal associations, political parties and the mass media under the aegis of the PKK were all being run mainly by the urban Kurds with a middle-class background. Briefly, while the have-nots of Kurdistan and the displaced peasants of the 1990s in particular continued to be the most energetic *träger*s of Kurdish nationalism, they were now joined by new and better-off segments of Kurdish society.

The 1990s brought a change in the spaces of Kurdish nationalism too. By the mid-1990s, Kurdish nationalism was rooted in diverse spaces. While the mountains of Turkish and Iraqi Kurdistan continued to be the privileged sites of Kurdish nationalism, Kurdish towns, towns on the Turkish coasts and European cities had also become the sites of Kurdish nationalism.

On the other hand, as the PKK became a political complex with an increasing authority over Kurdish masses in Turkey, the Turkish state started to change the manner in which it engaged with the Kurdish nationalist aspirations. Following the seventy-year-long policies of assimilation and oppression, the Turkish state began in the early 1990s to consider employing the instruments of recognition. The PKK welcomed these signals of revision and declared a ceasefire in 1993. Since then, direct and indirect, overt and covert, negotiation with the state has been another instrument in the PKK's repertoire. In addition to the signals given by the Turkish state that it could implement a politics of recognition, the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of the now notorious 'New World Order' sparked a revision of the PKK's ideology and programme. Sharply denouncing real socialism, Abdullah Öcalan maintained that socialism had to merge with democratic, pluralist and ecological viewpoints (Öcalan, 1995: 53–76, 1998: 30). By the mid-1990s, the PKK had abandoned the objective of building an independent Kurdistan too. The PKK was now in pursuit of 'cohabitation', pointing out that the Kurdish nationalism of the mid-1990s was no longer separatist and was ready to engage in an unarmed struggle (Özcan, 2006: 1049).

Briefly, then, the PKK and hence Kurdish nationalism had undergone a major transformation from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s. All major components of Kurdish nationalism had changed once more in these ten years. While Kurdish nationalism resurfaced in the hands of a bunch of male guerrillas in the mid-1980s, the Kurdish nationalists of the mid-1990s were more diverse as to include male and female guerrillas with different social backgrounds, poor Kurdish peasants and the urban middle classes. Instruments and spaces of Kurdish nationalism also diversified in due course. While armed struggle was the main instrument of the first few years of the Kurdish nationalism of the second period, a myriad of legal and illegal,

violent and non-violent, instruments were at the disposal of the Kurdish nationalism of the mid-1990s. Similarly, as opposed to being rooted only in the space of the Kurdish countryside in the mid-1980s, Kurdish nationalism of the mid-1990s was visible in many spaces, stretching from mountains to Kurdish, Turkish and European towns. Lastly, the early 1980s' objective of building an independent Kurdistan was replaced with the objective of rendering Turks and Kurds living together, and the socialist and anti-colonial vocabulary with the vocabulary of pluralism and cohabitation.

The third phase in the course of Kurdish nationalism ended by the capture of the PKK's leader, Abdullah Öcalan, allegedly by a CIA operation in Kenya (Yetkin, 2004). After he was handed over to Turkey, where he was jailed, Öcalan suggested renewing the PKK's objectives and instruments. He was now of the view that the objective of building an independent Kurdistan had to be replaced with the objective of making Turkey a democratic republic, and the instrument of armed struggle with the instrument of political struggle. Soon after Öcalan's return, the PKK held a congress in January 2000 and adopted without dissent his new route. Having already withdrawn its militants inside Iraq, the PKK ceased the armed struggle. The third period of Kurdish nationalism was over.

1999–2015

Kurdish nationalism had resurfaced two decades after it was first defeated in 1930, and only a few years after its second defeat in 1980. The defeat in 1999, however, was not followed by another round of resurfacing, simply because the Kurdish nationalist movement survived this time. Although the head of the movement was imprisoned, the PKK, which was withdrawn into Iraq, survived and more importantly the HEP's successor, Demokratik Halk Partisi (Democratic People's Party, DEHAP), was voted for by almost half of the electorates in Kurdish towns in the 2002 elections, manifesting that the Kurdish national cause was as alive as it was in the 1990s.

However, while Kurdish nationalism survived after 1999, Öcalan's capture prompted a huge shift first in the objectives, and later in the vocabulary and the instruments of Kurdish nationalism, making 1999 a moment which ended the third and opened the fourth period of Kurdish nationalism. Öcalan, who for long had led a movement fighting for an independent state for Kurds, was now an opponent of the idea of the state altogether. He developed and substantiated this anti-statist position in his proposal of democratic confederalism, which was informed by a post-national and an anti-state programme

fusing together the notions of direct democracy, self-government, pluralism, feminism and ecology. Inspired mainly by Murray Bookchin's *The Ecology of Freedom,* Öcalan developed his new approach by virtue of introducing the terms democratic nation, democratic modernity, democratic autonomy and so on. As the discussion ensued, the term democratic autonomy began to be used to refer to the Turkey-wise, the term democratic confederalism to the region-wise and the term democratic modernity to the global-wise application of Öcalan's new programme.

As interesting as Öcalan's theoretical journey was the immediate adoption of his new proposals by the whole body of the Kurdish nationalist movement. The PKK, the DEHAP's successor, Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Democratic Society Party, DTP), and all the legal or clandestine associations and media institutions affiliated with the PKK welcomed the objectives of democratic confederalism and democratic autonomy. Adopting the idea of democratic confederalism as its main objective, the PKK proceeded to set up women's, youth and peasant communes and assemblies in the villages and the neighbourhoods of Kurdish towns with a view to constructing confederalism in Kurdistan. Meanwhile, the PKK returned to armed struggle in 2004, without, however, reviving the objective of building an independent Kurdistan. Instead, the PKK had now begun sustaining Öcalan's proposals of democratic confederalism and democratic autonomy.

All in all, another radical shift had taken place in the first years of the new millennium in the objective and the vocabulary of the PKK, and hence of Kurdish nationalism. The PKK, which had fought for an independent Kurdistan since its very inception, was now in pursuit of democratic confederalism and democratic autonomy for Kurds. While the PKK had already announced in 1993 its abandonment of the goal of an independent Kurdistan, in the 2000s it denounced this idea altogether and demonized not only the notion of the nation-state but the state itself. Likewise, having for long used the vocabulary of class struggle and anti-colonialism, the PKK started using the vocabulary of radical democracy in the mid-1990s.

The change in the objectives and the vocabulary of Kurdish nationalism was followed by changes in the other components of Kurdish nationalism. While the PKK resumed the armed struggle in 2004, the latter did not become the number one instrument of Kurdish nationalist movement in the new millennium. Instead, Öcalan and the Kurdish nationalist movement prioritized politics on the streets and in parliament and local administrations in this new period. Likewise, negotiation with the Turkish state and addressing the Turkish public became the new instruments of this period.

All these changes in the main components of Kurdish nationalism made the PKK and the Kurdish nationalist movement expanded and inclusive. The DTP and its successor, Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (Peace and Democracy Party, BDP), took several dozen seats in parliament in the two national elections held in 2007 and 2011, and the DTP won the local elections in eight cities and fifty-one towns in Kurdistan in 2009. More legitimate and more expanded now, the Kurdish nationalist movement took some huge steps to be more inclusive. Caught by a non-nationalist perspective, the Kurdish nationalist movement began addressing the Turkish and Kurdish public with a radical democratic terminology, glorifying self-government, pluralism, gender equality and so on. To substantiate this politics of inclusion, the BDP was replaced in 2014 with a brand new party, Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party, HDP), which was established mainly by the members of the Kurdish movement together with the leftists of Turkey as an umbrella organization with a well-emphasized radical-democratic programme. Together with the establishment of the HDP, the Kurdish nationalists and the Turkish leftists started, after almost four decades, to work together under the umbrella of radical democracy.

Making it more legitimate, expanded and inclusive, the shifts in the programme, ideology and the instruments of the Kurdish nationalist movement were echoed in its spaces and agents. By the end of the first decade of the new millennium, both the spaces and the agents of the Kurdish nationalist movement were more diversified than the 1990s. To begin with, Damascus and the Beqaa Valley were no longer the sites of the Kurdish nationalist movement after the capture of Öcalan in 1999, which was followed by the banning of the PKK and closing of the PKK headquarters in Syria by the regime in this country. Accordingly, the entire armed wing of the movement was deployed into the mountains in Iraq and Turkey, maintaining mountains being a privileged site for the Kurdish nationalist movement. Nonetheless, the mountains were no longer the core spaces of the Kurdish nationalist movement in this fourth period. The unprecedented successes of the DTP and BDP in local and general elections rendered the municipalities and parliament the two strategic sites of the nationalist movement. Accordingly, Kurdish nationalism was now able to address the public in Turkey from such strategic sites as the parliament and the local administrations. Besides, Kurdish nationalism had now a strong voice on the streets of both Turkish and Kurdish towns. The streets of the cities and the panels, conferences and other such activities organized by numerous NGOs had now been spaces where the voice of the Kurdish nationalist movement was

heard in this fourth period. Lastly, Syria resumed being one of the spaces of Kurdish nationalism in this last period, albeit in a new form. First, the civil war in Syria enabled the PKK-affiliated Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (Democratic Union Party, PYD) and Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Protection Units, YPG) to seize control of the regions populated by Kurds, making PKK a significant sub-state actor in Syria and in the eyes of the international public. Second, the months-long siege of Kurdish-populated town Kobani by the Islamic State (IS) and the return of many bodies of fallen PKK militants from Syria endowed the Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava) with a special meaning for Kurdish nationalism in Turkey.

In due course, new sections of Kurdish citizens in Turkey joined the Kurdish nationalist movement, which had undergone a significant transformation in terms of its objectives, vocabulary and instruments. While the PKK militants, the have-nots of Kurdistan, the party activists, the NGO volunteers, the professionals with a middle-class background and the European diaspora kept being the main agents of Kurdish nationalism of the fourth period, they were joined, between 2005 and 2015, by those Kurds who welcomed the new route of the Kurdish movement. The remarkable electoral support given by the voters in western Turkey to the HDP presidential candidate Selahattin Demirtaş in 2013 and to the HDP in the national elections in 2015 indicated that the new route at stake was supported by some sections of Turkish society too.

Having become more legitimate, inclusive and expanded, the Kurdish nationalist movement engaged in a process of negotiation with the Turkish state starting from 2009. Aiming at the disarmament of the PKK in return for a reform programme, the content of which was not settled, the negotiations proceeded on and off until February 2015. Soon after the collapse of the negotiations in the spring of 2015, the clashes between the PKK and the Turkish state resumed (Yegen, 2015). Later, the Turkish state engaged in a relentless campaign of violence targeting not only the PKK militants in the mountains but the young militia who waged a 'trench war' in Kurdish towns, and the civilians living in the places where the clashes took place. Lasting for months, this new round of clashes resulted in crushing those PKK militants and the militia in the towns and with a defeat of the PKK in mountains. Simultaneously, the Turkish state engaged in a harsh campaign of oppression targeting the civilian leg of the Kurdish nationalist movement. The two chairpersons of the HDP, deputies, mayors, activists, NGO people and thousands of others were arrested and imprisoned in due course. By 2016, the Kurdish nationalist movement had been defeated once more. However,

despite this defeat, the PKK- affiliated and the USA-mandated PYD and YPG seized control of one-third of Syrian territory and HDP achieved in taking more than 10 per cent of the votes in the elections held in June 2018, indicating that Kurdish nationalism and the Kurdish nationalist movement both survived.

This 'defeated but survived' status of the Kurdish nationalist movement makes it difficult to determine whether 2015 was a moment when the fourth period of Kurdish nationalism ended and whether the fifth stage has already commenced. My prediction, however, is that it will not take long to see another shift at least in the objectives of the Kurdish nationalist movement, suggesting that the fifth period of Kurdish nationalism has either commenced or is on its way.

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Why Autonomy Hasn't Been Possible for Kurds in Turkey

DERYA BAYIR

Since the 1990s, under the influence of globalization and regionalization, the idea of autonomy and local self-governance has been gaining support in international fora. It has been converted into political commitment and found legal support at the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) through the principles of subsidiarity, local democracy, democratic good governance, the right to participation in public life and internal self-determination (Bothe, Ronzitti and Rosas, 1997; Lewis-Anthony, 1998: 320; Venice Commission, 2000: 13). These developments are echoed in the European Union (EU) where, since 1997, autonomy is articulated as a 'distinctive feature of the integration process' (Bullain, 1998: 343).

As a possible solution for the accommodation of ethnocultural diversity, autonomy has intermittently featured in political discussions in Turkey. In the case of the Kurds, these discussions intensified in the 2000s. Kurdish demands mostly centred on Abdullah Öcalan's idea of 'democratic autonomy', which had territorial and non-territorial dimensions. The idea was espoused by some Kurdish political organizations and seems to have found some support among the Kurdish population (SAMER, 2012: Yeğen, Tol and Çalışkan, 2016).

Turkey's political commitments before the above-mentioned regional inter-state organizations played a role in orienting these discussions. For instance, Turkey has long been criticized by the congress, which is the executive organ of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, for its very centralized administration system and the congress has called for greater decentralization at provincial level and recognition of 'special cultural and linguistic rights' in the Kurdish provinces.[1] In the 2000s, the EU subtly tried to

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[1] Among others, see Recommendation no. 176 (2005) on Local and Regional Democracy in Turkey; Recommendation no. 355 (2014) on the Situation of Leyla Güven and Other Local Elected Representatives in Detention in Turkey.

navigate Turkey's reforms towards decentralization (Bayraktar and Massicard, 2012: 26).[2] The EU *acquis*, which sets out the conditions for accession, contained an entire chapter on the administrative reform of the regions in Turkey (Bayraktar and Massicard, 2012: 24). Autonomy for Kurds as part of the EU accession process was expressly advocated by some senior EU politicians. For instance, in 2012, the European Parliament president, Martin Schulz, stated:

> My advice is given in the framework of Turkey's pre-EU accession strategy: We must try to convince both sides that it is possible [to create something] between a sovereign state and [a region] with a high degree of autonomy while [maintaining] the . . . territorial integrity of the country. That is my humble advice (Hürriyet Daily News, 2012a).

Under the influence of these internal and external pressures and incentives some trivial but noteworthy legal steps were taken by the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) (Aktar, 2014; Bayraktar and Massicard, 2012).[3] The AKP's early years pro-democracy, pluralist and anti-status quo political discourse and the subsequent 'resolution process' boosted discussions around a Kurdish autonomy. Nevertheless, all these soon yielded to prevalent antagonism towards the idea of autonomy among the mainstream political circles and the AKP's lack of political commitment.

This chapter examines the antagonism of the Turkish political elite towards Kurdish autonomy claims in a broader historical and ideological context with a view to understanding how that antagonism has been codified into law and jurisprudence in Turkey. It explores answers to the question why autonomy has not been a viable political project for Kurds in today's Turkey and one that can be realized through democratic and legal means. The chapter also explains how the enduring trajectory has led the country into an unprecedented centralist system and authoritarian rule in recent years and the repression of Kurdish claims for autonomy. In so doing, the chapter concentrates on three main reasons behind the (im)possibility of Kurdish autonomy in the current political and legal status quo. First, a dominant

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2 EU Commission Progress Report of 2005, pp. 102–3. See also the Progress Reports of 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2011. Bayraktar and Massicard (2012: 26) refer to the EU as an indirect 'driver', which had vague demands in relation to Turkey's reforms towards decentralization.

3 See Law no. 5227, *Kamu Yönetimi Temel Kanunu*, 3 August 2004, which introduced the notion that central government was subsidiary to local governments. The law was vetoed by former president Nejdet as contradicting the Constitution (Bayraktar and Massicard, 2012: 30–1; Reyhan and Şenalp, 2005: 137).

anachronistic reading of the centralist state legacy overlooks the Ottoman legacy for organizational diversity and the Kurdish conventional self-rule. Second, a dexterously designed legal system has made unlawful autonomy as a political project, while presenting the unitary state model as the only one conceivable and fundamental to political and legal order. Third is the Turkish mainstream political elites' ideologically driven response to the Kurds' claim for autonomy and failure to comprehend or deal with Kurdish nationalist sentiments and aspirations attached to it. Against that can be set the glorification of Turkish nationalism in all aspects of life (Bayır, 2013, 2017). Belge (2003: 187) puts this quite eloquently:

> It is as though 'nationalism' is an ideology created only for the 'Turkish nation'. When the members of those nations living under Turkish dominance also act in accordance with their own national aspirations, they are perceived as though they are committing a serious betrayal of the values of humanity and are treated accordingly.

Indeed, as we will see below, perceiving the Kurdish autonomy claim as something resistant, agitation of foreign powers, criminality and terrorism other than legitimate, democratic claims has conditioned and confined the Turkish political elite's response to the 'politicide' of Kurdish political agency, demands and solutions (Bayır, 2014; Pelek and Benlisoy, 2011) and oppression, punishment, assimilation and centralization policies (Bayır, 2013, 2017). Yet, autonomy has never been considered as a viable option as has become particularly evident in the recent events surrounding the 'resolution process'.[4]

The Legacy of Autonomy and Centralization

The lack of political commitment and antagonism towards Kurdish autonomy is usually attributed to the deep-rooted legacy of a centralized state tradition in Turkey. More importantly, the claim that the Ottoman Empire was a centralist

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4 These policies are not lacking in precedent upon which they build. The Turkish elites were merely mimicking their predecessors' conceptualizations of and responses to minority nationalisms since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when federalism and autonomy became anathematic (Davison, 1977: 396; Karpat, 1982: 144). The Ottoman political elite too had confined their responses to a combination of centralization, repression by the excessive use of force and the promotion of the idea of Ottomanism (*Osmanlılık*), aimed at binding the subjects to the empire through equal citizenship, while superseding their differences (Davison, 1977: 396). Rather than serving to extinguish them, these responses propelled nationalist demands and movements, resulted in uprisings and hastened the dissolution of the empire (Bataković, 2006: 114; Özoğlu, 2004).

state has been used as an explanation for the dismissal of Kurdish autonomy in Turkey. Indeed, some refer to the Ottoman Empire as being the most centralized state of its time. In his famous work *The Prince*, Machiavelli (1998: 17) states: '[t]he whole monarchy of the Turk is governed by one lord; the others are his servants. Dividing his kingdom into sanjaks, he sends different administrators to them, and he changes and varies them, as he likes.' The supposition behind this conviction was that the feudal structures in the empire were weak and incapable of influencing the centre's power politics, in contrast to the European kingdoms, where the powerful local nobles managed to obtain federal concessions. This view is still shared as though it constitutes evidence for the centralist state legacy of the empire (Aktar, 2014: 10–11; Güler, 2000; Reyhan, 2006a, 2007). This reading is somewhat selective, however, and does not account for the importance of the empire's diverse organizational legacy, which contained autonomy and self-rule for various communities and regions.

A close examination of the empire's organizational structure demonstrates that it was far from being a centralized state in the modern sense. It did not have a direct, uniform, centralized organizational structure and administration applied in and over all territories and communities. Factors such as geographical proximity to the centre, negotiations at the time of incorporation or conquest and religious affiliation resulted in the creation of a flexible and diverse organizational structure that varied from region to region (Bayır, 2013: 28–32, 2017: 41–6; Reyhan, 2015: 51; Ortaylı, 2010: 251–60). Hence, while some territories were brought under the central state administration and law, others were either loosely tied to the empire as 'privileged provinces' (*imtiyazlı eyalet*) – e.g. Moldavia and Wallachia, principality of Transylvania, Dubrovnik, Crimea – where the local nobles' and chieftains' hereditary right of self-rule was recognized in return for their loyalty to the empire (Ortaylı, 2010: 152, 254–61). Kurdistan was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth century and also had various degrees of 'exemptions and privileges' within the flexible and organizationally diverse Ottoman administration (Atmaca, 2017; Kılıç, 1999, 2001; Yılmazçelik, 2010). The land over which the Kurdish notables had hereditary ownership and monopoly of ruling 'rights' was left with them as *yurtluk*, *ocaklık* (Ortaylı, 2010: 154). The famous millet organizations, in which the administration of their community affairs was delegated to religious authorities, further contributed to this organizational diversity. Hence, in reality, the empire's organizational diversity resulted in the accommodation and existence of the 'multiple systems of rule, multiple negotiated frontiers, laws and courts, forms of revenue management, and religious diversity' (Barkey, 2009: 70).

Centralization in a modern sense entered into the empire's political agenda especially in the aftermath of *Sened-i Ittifak* in 1808, an attempt to force Sultan Mahmud II to recognize the powers of the rebellious local nobles and intermediaries (*ayan*s) over their territories (Karpat, 1972: 253). This document, however, never came into force as it was soon destroyed, and stronger centralization policies began to be applied through the nineteenth century.

The Kurdish principalities were among those affected by these centralization policies, which provoked a series of uprisings that were defeated by 1847 (Atmaca, 2017; Özoğlu, 2004). As a result, some of the rebellion leaders and local chieftains were sent into exile, while others were either reappointed as governors or replaced by the state-appointed governors (Yılmazçelik, 2010). At least on paper, the region came under general state administration and the 'Kurdistan province' (Kürdistan eyaleti) was established in 1847, lasting until 1867 (Özoğlu, 2004: 83; Ülke, 2014). In reality, however, the establishment of a centralized state administration and the elimination of the conventional governance system in these regions could not be achieved until the 1930s.

Meanwhile, the chieftain families' traditional '*ocaklık-yurtluk*' land, which they had hereditary ownership and ruling rights over, was gradually confiscated by the state treasury in return for a salary (Gençer, 2011; Karataş and Karasu, 2017). These salaries were calculated on the basis of income generated from these regions. While a certain percentage of these incomes was given on a hereditary basis to the local chieftains as a salary, the rest was retained by the state to defray the cost of running the state administration in that region (Gençer, 2011: 86–90; Karataş and Karasu, 2017: 376). At the beginning only male heirs could inherit these salaries but, with the *Arazi Kanunnamesi*, female heirs were also granted this inheritance (Gençer, 2011: 92). Dividing their wealth into small shares was a strategic move in diminishing the power of the local Kurdish political leadership. While maintaining their loyalty (Zharmukhamed, 2006: 73), this scheme played an important role in the liquidation of the conventional self-rule structure in the Kurdish regions and consolidation of the central administration (Gençer, 2011: 93; Karataş and Karasu, 2017).

The empire's centralization and bureaucratization policy became official with the Tanzimat era (Atmaca, 2017: para. 14). The *Vilayet Nizamnameleri* (1864–71) was especially designed to reform the empire's conventional organizational diversity by the imposition of uniform administrative structures and common rules for the whole country (Kostopoulou, 2013: 301; Reyhan, 2015: 54) in the belief that a centralized authority would result in a better-functioning state administration and prevent territorial losses. The effect of

the centralization policies was felt by the non-Muslim millet communities through the *Millet Nizamnameleri* (1861–76), considered as an important milestone in their liquidation (Bayır, 2013, 2017; Karpat, 1982: 164; Reyhan, 2006b). Administrative centralization was eventually extended to centralization endeavours in legal, educational and other fields.

While centralization was a tendency in the Kurdish regions, decentralization continued to be 'a peculiar feature of Ottoman statecraft . . . a model of imperial flexibility – a model . . . appropriate for a large Empire ruling diverse people and places . . .' in the nineteenth century until the last quarter (Genell, 2016: 538).[5] Many territories including Serbia, Bulgaria, Egypt, Romania, Crete, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria and Lebanon gained further autonomy from the centre during this time. In so doing, they extended the conventional status of 'privileged provinces' (*emaret-i mümtaze*) over them and placed their management under the Emaret-i Mümtaze Committee (Ortaylı, 2010: 260). Kostopoulou (2013: 301) explains the decentralization tendencies of this period on the ground that the political elite made the political choice of creating an Ottoman 'commonwealth' to retain these territories under the empire, thereby preventing their secession. It may be that in referring to the 'privileged provinces' as an 'indivisible' part of the empire, Article 1 of the 1876 *Kanun-i Esasi* captures the mentioned tension between secession and decentralization.

Clearly, opposite tendencies were being pursued during the nineteenth century. On the one hand, the Ottoman political elite has applied a differentiated policy of decentralization in the Balkans and Arab lands. In the Kurdish regions, on the other hand, centralization was being pursued. This begs questions and requires further research. However, perhaps one thing can be said without much objection: the centralization policies in Kurdistan were not successfully applied for a long time, and the conventional Kurdish political structures, leadership and their claim for self-rule continued to exist in the region over the coming decades. Even today, centralization policies remain one of the main causes of conflicts in Turkey.

The Changing Perception of Autonomy among Turkey's Political Elite

This conception of autonomy has drastically changed towards the end of the empire when it eventually came to be viewed as 'evidence of diminished

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5 For developments in regard to autonomy and federalism around the same time in Europe, see Binkley (1935: 181–96, 227–61).

Ottoman sovereignty and state capacity' (Genell, 2016: 538). As we see below, this view became the prevailing one among the mainstream political, intellectual and legal circles and the ideas of decentralization, federalism and autonomy did not find much support among the political elites of Turkey in the ensuing decades (Davison, 1977: 405; Karpat, 1982: 144). An idea of the changed political orthodoxy can be obtained by the reaction to the position articulated by a member of the Ottoman dynasty, Prince Selahattin, who still saw decentralization as a solution to the nationalism crisis of the empire (Davison, 1977: 406). He put it forward during the Young Turks conference of 1902 in Paris, convened by political dissidents opposing Abdülhamid II's repressive regime. The prince's view elicited strong criticism from the attendees of the conference who considered that decentralization would encourage separatist nationalist movements, not put an end to them. They argued that minorities would abuse it by turning it into autonomy or independence, leading to the division of the country (Toros, 1978: 189–90). As we will see, this argument is widely adopted in the discourse of political, legal, social and intellectual circles, and is utilized to justify rejecting Kurdish claims for decentralization even today.

Criticism against the prince's idea of decentralization increased, following the Meşrutiyet II period. The Ittihat Terakki Cemiyeti, which came to power in 1908, strongly advocated centralization. Under pressure, the prince felt motivated to clarify his ideas. What he meant by decentralization was not 'political decentralization' (*siyasi âdem-i merkeziyet*), but 'administrative decentralization' (*idari âdem-i merkeziyet*). Moreover, he argued, this was no different from the concepts of '*tefriki vezaife*' and '*tevsii mezuniyet*' set out in Article 108 of the *Kanunu Esasi* of 1876 (Güler, 2000; Toros, 1978: 190), which in actuality were designed to reduce the shortcomings of a centralized state system rather than advancing decentralization or autonomy in the country (Yıldırım, 1993). Ultimately, it appears that the prince, too, yielded to views of the contemporaneous political establishment.

These principles, especially '*tevsii mezuniyet*', later named '*yetki genişliği*', have found a place in all republican constitutions as the foundation of the administrative system and continue to reinforce that system's centralized characteristics (Çetin, 2018; Güler, 2000; Özbudun, 2012; Yıldırım, 1993). The '*tevsi-i mezuniyet*' principle was coded into law as assurance for the central government's primary position in governance while preventing the local authorities' ability to influence the general politics and interests of the country. The '*tefrik-i vezâif*' principle, meanwhile, meant leaving some of the social, economic and fiscal matters to the local authorities, as long as they

did not contradict the unity of the country (Göreli, 1952: 63–4, cited in Reyhan, 2006a: 207).

The political elite's antagonism towards autonomy, federation or any other form of decentralization was bequeathed to the leaders of the nationalist movement. Whether Kurds should be a beneficiary of the idea was strongly rejected at the Lausanne conference by the head of Turkish delegation, İsmet Pasha. In his reply to 'the question of autonomy' proposed by Great Britain for Kurds living in Anatolia and Mosul province, he said:

> The Kurds have always enjoyed all the rights of citizens in Turkey . . . At this moment they have their deputies in the Grand National Assembly and take an effective part in the government and administration of the country . . . The alleged civic rights and privileges which have been granted to the people of the so-called *autonomous districts could never satisfy a dominant race like the Kurdish race*. These considerations, which apply just as much to Kurds of Mosul Vilayet as to those of the rest of Anatolia, explain why the fictitious autonomy which has been promised for four years to inhabitants of the eastern parts of this province does not in any way attract them and cannot induce them to consent to share the fate of a population which has been reduced to the state of a colonised people (Conference on Near Eastern Affairs, 1922–1923: 346, emphasis added).

Instead of accepting the possibility of Kurdish autonomy, İsmet Pasha offered the equal citizenship status for the Kurds. However, during the independence war, when the support of the Kurdish notables was most needed, the idea of autonomy for Kurds had been invoked on several occasions by the nationalist leadership without necessarily elaborating on its content (Bayır, 2013: 74–9, 2017: 104–10). Yet, the idea of the Kurds' right to self-determination separate from the Turks was always rejected at the Turkish parliament.[6]

Yet, as Yeğen (2006: 52, fn. 6) has recognized, autonomy reached its most concrete form in the 1921 Constitution. That constitution divided the country into three administrative units, which were to be governed by centre-appointed civil servants. Some of these units were granted the legal personality and 'autonomy' (*muhtariyet*) in arranging and managing 'charitable foundations, religious schools, education, health, economy, agriculture, social public work' within their boundaries. On the other hand, foreign and internal affairs, religious, judicial, military-related matters and international economic relations, as well as large projects involving more than one province, were left within the central government's competence. The parliament,

6 TBMMGZC, 03.07.1920, p. 73.

however, rejected a proposal suggesting the election of judicial staff and governors by locals.[7]

Nevertheless, the explanations proffered on the 1921 Constitution before the parliament by the government representative clearly stated that these provisions were aimed neither at realizing 'local decentralization' (*mahalli ademi-merkeziyet*) nor autonomous regional states such as those in America.[8] Moreover, the realization of the prospective administrative structure was dependent on the enactment of the further special laws and the future political will and direction of the government. The above provisions were meant merely as a 'guide', a first 'step'[9] and an 'assurance'[10] yet to be realized (Bayır, 2013: 74–6, 2017: 104–10).

The 1921 Constitution codified the probability of autonomy rather than an intention to institute it, much less its realization. In reality, the nationalist ruling cadre seems to have wanted to ease the pressure from the outside powers, who constantly speculated on self-determination or autonomous arrangements for Kurds, as well as the discontent among the local nobles and tribal leaders within the parliament who favoured decentralization and greater liberalism (Bayır, 2017: 107; Mardin, 1973: 181, cited in Bayraktar and Massicard, 2012: 15).

These autonomy provisions never bore fruit and soon after the end of the independence war (Özbudun, 2012: 70), the coalition with the diverse interest groups was terminated. The prospect of the 1921 Constitution's decentralized administrative structures was rescinded and, as we will see, a more centralized administration was established with the Constitution of 1924. After this date, the idea of autonomy for Kurds was hardly ever articulated as a possibility by the mainstream Turkish nationalist political elite. As the ideas of decentralization and autonomy were gradually erased from the political vision of the ruling elite from the nineteenth century, their antagonism towards autonomy was codified into law in the coming years of the Republican era.

Legal Impediments to Kurdish Autonomy

The Turkish political system strongly inclines to the idea of 'the state's well-being' (*devletin bekası*), which means giving primary importance to the protection of the state (Bora, 2015: 15, 26). Political, legal and social orders

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7 TBMMZC, 18.11.1920, İsmail Suphi, p. 411.   8 TBMMZC, 18.11.1920, p. 412.
9 TBMMZC, 14.12.1920, Musa Kazım Efendi, p. 368.
10 TBMMZC, 04.04.1338 (1923), Yusuf Kemal Bey, p. 175.

have been engineered in such a way as to eliminate threats to the state's well-being. In this setting, the unitary state model, designed to maximize the central state's control over the peripheries (Elazar, 1997: 243), has been considered as the most suitable structure to eliminate existential threats. The Turkish political elite has subscribed to the unitary state model as the only one conceivable and they are convinced that autonomous arrangements would encourage the dissolution of the state (Aktar, 2014: 11, 30). Demanding federal or autonomous state arrangements has been outlawed and criminalized. Here, we examine how the legal system has been utilized to protect 'the state's well-being' through the centralized, unitary state model. We ask how the concepts of 'unity' and the 'unitary state' have been used as a pretext to eliminate Kurds' conventional political structures and entities and to criminalize them to prevent demands for Kurdish autonomy.

Elimination of Conventional Kurdish Political Structures

While the Ottoman Empire made long-standing efforts to eliminate Kurdish conventional self-rule structures and leadership, their relevance and legacy continued in national and international contexts. Their legacy endured in various disputes, complaints and submissions by the chieftains' families and their heirs before the domestic legal or administrative venues, particularly in regards to their salaries and lands mentioned above (Henning, 2018; Karataş and Karasu, 2017). In international fora, the legacy of conventional self-rule was used as the legal and political justification for the establishment of a Kurdish state or autonomous arrangements for Kurds. Şerif Pasha's letter to Paris Peace Conference (Şerif Paşa, 1919) and Abdurrahman Bedirhan's letter to the League of Nations in 1920 on his family's behalf illustrate this legacy.[11]

Despite many legal endeavours throughout the nineteenth century to terminate these salaries in return for land, lump-sum cash and so on, they had to be continued to be paid even after the Republican era (Karataş and Karasu, 2017: 376–7). In order to prevent any possible legal or political justification for a claim to a Kurdish state or autonomy, the removal of the remnants, legacy and memory of the decentralized past of the Kurdish regions and their conventional self-ruling status was a crucial task for the Republican elite. Abolishing the above-mentioned *'yurtluk-ocaklık'* salaries were one of the steps taken to this end.

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11 League of Nations Political Section, Registry files (1919–1927), R587/11/11114/11114.

After two attempts in 1925 and 1932, the Republican elite finally terminated these salaries, which imposed an economic burden upon the state, by a law of 1935 (Karataş and Karasu, 2017: 379).[12] These laws are interesting to examine, as legal markers of the continuing legacy of the conventional status of the Kurdish regions and its leadership. They point not only to the legal obligation to pay these '*yurtluk-ocaklık*' salaries as inherited by the new Republic, but also the rationale behind them.

The Settlement Law of 1934 gives us important insights about the legality of the Kurdish region's conventional self-ruling status and its leadership in the eyes of the Republican elite.[13] The government justification for the law, which was meant to bring that status to an end, described it as 'the last social institution remaining from the medieval ages which will be eradicated by this law'.[14] It then explicated their status as 'special features and privileges [within the classic Ottoman administration], granted by the laws of Kanuni Sultan Süleyman to certain Muslim but not culturally Turkish tribes, groups and *aşiret*s (chiefdom)'. It further acknowledged the conventional political leadership's role in the administration of these regions. It stated that 'all old and new laws, *ferman*s and *fetva*s of the Ottoman administration recognised *aşiret*, *agha*, *beylik* (chiefdomship) as something like a commune governor or a mayor.' Despite the centralization campaigns during the nineteenth century, the status of Kurdish conventional leadership had evidently continued to exist, performed a role in the administration of their regions and was recognized as the right bearers.

As noted, the aim behind this law was the complete liquidation of the conventional status of these regions and to ensure that none of these conventional administrative structures, entities, the leaders or councils (*heyet*) continued to exist in the Republican era. The law's drafting committee referred to the obliteration of the Kurdish '*aşiret* structures . . . [which were] in essence political organizations' as being vital to achieve the desired unity, since it was 'not possible to create a complete unity in the country if they continue existing'.[15] That is, the law affirmed that these conventional Kurdish

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12 The Muvazene-i Umumiye Kanunu, 19.12.1925. See also Law no. 1943, Mazbut Emlâk, Yurdluk ve Ocaklık Aylık Mukabili Verilecek Emlâk ve Arazi Hakkındaki Kanun, 07.04.1932, RG: 2076/13.04.1932; Law no. 2808, Mazbut Emlâk, Yurdluk ve Ocaklık Aylık Mukabili Verilecek Emlâk ve Arazi Hakkındaki 1943 Sayılı Kanuna Ek Kanun, RG: 3036/24.06.1935.
13 See government justification for the Settlement Law, TBMMZC, 07.04.1934, pp. 3–5.
14 This pejorative language would be evident in many of the laws in the coming years. See TBMMZC, 25.12.1935, p. 175; and TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 17.10.1960.
15 Settlement Law Temporary Committee Report, 27.05.1934; see the attachment to TBMM, 07.06.1934, p. 10.

structures are political entities and codified the Kurdish regions' conventional status with a self-ruling legacy as a threat to 'the unity' of the state.

The Settlement Law thus abolished the legal personality of the different ruling structures and leaderships, stating that 'the law shall not recognise the legal corporate personality (*hükmi şahsiyet*) of an *aşiret*. In this regard, all previously recognised rights, on the basis of a [sultanic] *hokum*, [official] document and judgment, were rescinded' (Article 10 (A)). It further abrogated 'all entities and organs attached to these *aşirets*' and their leadership granted 'on the basis of a [sultanic] *hokum*, [official] document and judgment or a custom or tradition'. Furthermore, all the registered and unregistered lands under the name of these *aşiret*s or their leaders were transferred to the state (Article 10 (B)), and those who wanted to maintain their traditional status and roles were to be resettled together with their families (Article 10 (C)).

The liquidation of the traditional status, political structures, entities, bodies and leadership of the Kurds was legally completed during the Republican era. The political elite's preference for using legislation rather than a mere political decision to terminate the rights and status of the Kurdish conventional organizational leadership is interesting on two grounds. First, it testifies to the fact that it had survived into the Republican era and therefore outlived the empire. Second, it points to the Republican political elite's desire to pre-empt the possibility of legal claims or challenges against the abrogation of their past status and rights. Despite these efforts, the legal and political legacy of the Kurdish conventional self-rule structure and hereditary owner-ship over the Kurdish regions still lives in the memory of Kurds as a recent legal suit in Diyarbakir for return of the ownership rights over the land and salary has shown (Milliyet, 2014).

The Place of the Unitary State in Turkish Law

The 1924 Constitution of the new Republic opted for a centralized administrative system.[16] Even though it did not make specific reference to the unitary state system, decentralization and federalism as possible options were clearly ruled out during the parliamentary discussions as neither suitable nor good for the state.

> [f]ederation, it is not a system, which could assure the advancement of our state and nation. This is a state of one nation. Therefore, it cannot be governed by the federal system. We did not go with the system of the

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16 The Constitution did not make any reference to the state's undertakings under the Lausanne Treaty of 1923, which foresaw establishment of a special administrative structure in two islands where a majority of non-Muslims resided (see Akbulut, 2018).

federation. We did not go with the system of decentralization. The Turkish state has only one centre. They are governed by one centre.[17]

The argument that federation or autonomy was not beneficial for the state's and the nation's progress, and their unsuitability for the country, would continue to be used frequently in political and legal discourse in the coming years (Bayır, 2013: 209, 2017: 326). Yet, it was this new, more centralized administrative regime that is thought to be a cause for the outbreak of the Sheikh Said Rebellion of 1925.[18]

The 1961 and 1982 constitutions reinforced a centralized state structure without referring to the 'unitary state system' as such. However, the principle of 'the integrity of the state' (*devletin bütünlüğü*), which was formulated in Article 3 of both constitutions, as 'the state's indivisible unity with its nation and territory', has been considered as primarily protecting the unitary character of the state (Gözler, 2000: 115–19). Article 4 of both constitutions made the principle 'absolute', which meant it could not be changed or proposed for change (Bayır, 2013: 208–10, 2017: 324–9).

In contrast to the oblique reference in the 1961 and 1982 constitutions, 'the unitary state principle' (*devletin tekliği ilkesi*) is expressly protected in Turkey's laws on political parties. So, the political parties banned changing, or working towards changing, the country's unitary state system in Articles 87 and 80 of the Political Parties Laws of 1965 and 1983, respectively. As the explanatory note to the Political Parties Law of 1965 states, the rationale was to 'prevent the establishment of a state containing autonomous (*muhtar*) provinces or regions or federal states'.[19] In a similar fashion, the Political Parties Law of 1983 justified the reintroduction of the ban on the ground that 'federal, confederal states and autonomy [systems]' contradicted 'the state and nation's unity principle' and 'run absolutely counter to social utility'.[20] The lawmakers clearly considered the unitary state principle as a prophylactic against political parties even proposing decentralized forms of governments.

As the parliamentary records show, the unitary state system was also deemed to be a fundamental element of Turkish/Ataturk nationalism, which founded Turkey's constitutions and legal system (Bayır, 2013: 247–8, 2017: 325–6).[21] Both

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17 Cemal Nuri Bey, TBMM, 20.04.1340, p. 915.   18 FO 371/10867 (in Yeğen, 2011: 181).

19 See 'Siyasi Partiler Kanunu Tasarısının Millet Meclisince Kabul Edilen Metni ve Cumhuriyet Senatosu Geçici Komisyon Raporu', CSTD, 29.06.1965, p. 6.

20 'Danışma Meclisi Siyasi Partiler Kanunu Tasarısı', MGKTD, 21.04.1983. See also same reasoning in AYM DDP-1996.

21 See 'Siyasi Partiler Kanunu Tasarısının Millet Meclisince Kabul Edilen Metni ve Cumhuriyet Senatosu Geçici Komisyon Raporu', CSTD, 29.06.1965, p.6; and 'Danışma Meclisi Siyasi Partiler Kanunu Tasarısı', MGKTD, 21.04.1983.

principles are considered to be working towards the same objectives: to prevent the creation of minorities, to ban regionalism and racism and to realize the principle of equality.[22] Therefore, federal or autonomous systems, which foster regionalism, minority protection and rights that go beyond mere equal citizenship, are feared as being in conflict with the Turkish/Ataturk nationalism and an existential threat to the constitutional order.

The legal system appears especially concerned with preventing Kurdish political claims for regional arrangements. Political parties' laws since the 1960s refer to the 'ban on regionalism and racism' (*bölgecilik ve ırkçılık yasağı*), which seems motivated by this concern.[23] The use of the word 'and' in this phrase functions to make regionalism and racism analogous. Turkey's political and legal discourse already referred to Kurds as 'the people of the region'[24] and the Kurdish areas as 'the Eastern region'. The wording of the article suggests that the ban was specifically formulated to delegitimize regional claims of Kurds by strategically equating them to 'racism'. Concordantly, the Constitutional Court (Anayasa Mahkemesi, AYM) has closed down pro-Kurdish political parties that have made claims for federal or autonomous arrangements for the Kurdish areas, stating that such claims were tantamount to 'racism' (Bayır, 2013: 192, 2017: 304).[25] In its recent party closure indictment against the Partiya Azadiya Kurdistané (PAK), the Yargıtay Chief Public Prosecutor Office reaffirmed this position. The prosecutor argued that by the statement 'aims to embrace the widest social and cultural sections of the Kurds and *Kurdistani*s', the PAK covenant was tantamount to 'regionalism and racism'.[26]

The mainstream Turkish political elites also share this view as evident in President Erdoğan's remarks below against Selahattin Demirtas, co-leader of the Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP), for his support for the declaration of self-governance in the Kurdish regions:

> I believe that there will be no votes for this racist candidate from Diyarbakır. See, we are not racist, we are not politically Kurdist (*siyasi Kürtçü*), politically Turkist (Hürriyet, 2014).

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22 'Siyasi Partiler Kanunu Tasarısının Millet Meclisince Kabul Edilen Metni ve Cumhuriyet Senatosu Geçici Komisyon Raporu', CSTD, 29.06.1965, p. 6. See also Bayır (2013: 190, 2017: 301).

23 See Article 90 of the SPY of 1965 and later Article 82 of the SPY of 1983.

24 Y.8.CD, 1993/11775, 1994/5, 05.01.1994; YCGK, 1999/9–77, K.1999/70, 20.04.1999.

25 Only exception is HAK-PAR, which could be explained more with political conjecture of that time rather than a change in case law (see Bayır, 2013: 191, fn. 19, 2017: 303).

26 Yargıtay Cumhuriyet Başsavcılığı İddianamesi no. 36321649/2018/616, 20.12.2018, p. 3.

Federal or autonomous state systems may well be based on an acknowledgement of the existence of multiple nations and allowing multiple sovereignties to be recognized by a legal system. However, this possibility was prevented in the constitutions with the concept of sole sovereignty,[27] and it has been used to justify banning even the proposing of systems other than the unitary state. For instance, the AYM judgements repeatedly stated that in Turkey, sovereignty belongs to the single Turkish nation. Therefore, autonomous state models, which could mean the distribution of sovereignty among various nations, are not compatible with the concept of the unity of the Turkish nation, and it is not beneficial to society (Bayır, 2013: 209–10, 2017: 315–16). More importantly, it has used these notions as a legal justification for denying the existence of the Kurdish nation within Turkey, with its distinct ethnic, linguistic and cultural characteristics and one that exists outside of the boundaries of the Turkish nation.

The Criminalization of Autonomy Claims

Besides being considered to violate the constitutional and public law in Turkey, proposing a system other than a unitary state system has also been the subject of criminalization. The now-defunct Article 142(3) of the Turkish Criminal Code (Türk Ceza Kanunu, TCK) criminalized organizations 'agitating and weakening national feelings with racial considerations' and played a crucial role until the 1990s. This article was evidently designed with Kurds in mind, as it punished 'regionalist movements', as well as political ideas that referred to 'citizens living in the East as racially different' (Cihan, 1979: 47). After the repeal of Article 142(3) in 1990, the Anti-Terror Law (Terörle Mücadele Kanunu, TMK) and, in particular, TCK Article 216(1) played crucial roles in the criminalization of Kurdish claims for autonomy. The latter legal provision was used as a basis to reconceptualize Kurdish regionalist political claims as amounting to 'inciting people to hatred and animosity . . . on grounds of . . . regional differences (*bölge farklılıkları*)'.[28] The expression of views or claims in support of changing the unitary state system, seeking Kurdish autonomy or regional autonomy arrangements, were penalized under this article. Since 2015 the provision has been used against Kurdish politicians involved in the democratic autonomy declarations made in that year.

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27 See Articles 3, 4 and 6 of the 1924, 1961 and 1982 Constitutions of Turkey, respectively.
28 Y(9)CD, E.1995/6119, K.1995/5720, 09.11.1995. See also YCGK, E.1999/9–77, K.1999/70, 20.04.1999; Y(8)CD, E.1996/11624, K.1996/12797, 18.10.1996; Y(9)CD, E.2001/2976, K.2002/217, 04.02.2002.

Under TMK, Article 1, acts and ideas 'impairing the State's indivisible unity with its territory' is defined as 'terrorism'. As seen above, this notion was already being used to primarily protect the unitary state system, with charges of 'terrorism' brought to criminalize acts and ideas opposing the prevailing state model or asking for Kurdish autonomy.[29] Consequently, anything that captures the mode of demand for Kurdish autonomy has also been banned. In this regard the word 'Kurdistan' is given a particular importance as it was heavily penalized under the TMK. Therefore, using Kurdistan as a historical-geographical name,[30] or to refer to the Kurdish regions as Kurdistan,[31] to refer to Kurds as a separate nation, or describing the Kurdish regions as a colony of the Turkish state,[32] claiming that Kurds have the right to self-determination,[33] have all been criminalized and punished as 'terrorist/separatist propaganda' under TMK, Article 7.[34]

Usage of the word 'Kurdistan', which is a historical-geographical name for the Kurdish regions, was first outlawed in Turkey in 1925 by a Ministry of Education Circular (*Tamim*) on Movements aiming to destroy Turkish unity (Bayır, 2013: 105, fn. 67, 2017: 162). In the following years, the establishment of political, cultural and social organizations using the word in their name was prohibited and made subject to a penalty. This situation changed in 2014 when some political parties were allowed to use the word Kurdistan in their name (Milliyet, 2016). However, soon after some actually did so, the Yargıtay Public Prosecutor Office brought a party closure case against them, which was kept dormant until recently, but reactivated following the end of the 'resolution process'. These cases are currently pending before the AYM (Demokrat Haber, 2017).

Destroying the 'state's unity', that is, the unitary state system, by means of 'material or moral compulsion' was a punishable act under TCK, Article 302 (Hafızoğulları, 2015: 561; Yaşar, Gökcan and Artuç, 2010: 8381). It is also defined as a 'terror crime' under the TMK. There is an agreement in the literature that Article 302 should not be used in cases that fall within the

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29 Y(9)CD, E.1992/11752, K.1993/664, 11.02.1993. See also Y(9)CD, E.1995/143, K.1995/2939, 25.04.1995.

30 The former mayor of Siirt, Selim Sadak, was punished under Article 7 of the Anti-Terror Law due to his following remarks: 'there is no need to establish Kurdistan. Kurdistan has always been existed; Kurdistan is an ancient name of this region' (Mynet, 2010). For a similar case, see Y(9)CS, E.1990/ E.1990/2830, K.1990/3274, 16.10.1990.

31 Y(8)CD, E.1993/11775, K.1994/5, 05.01.1994.

32 Y(9)CD, E.1993/5290, K.1994/1395, 21.03.1994.

33 Y(9)CD, E.1998/1505, K.1998/1132, 01.03.1999, cited in Halkın Demokrasi Partisi (HADEP), E.1999/1, K.2003/1, 13.03.2003, R.G: 29 25173/19.07.2003.

34 Previously the defunct TMK, Article 8.

freedom of expression (Hafızoğulları, 2015: 565) or against those seeking to change the unitary state structure or facilitating an autonomous, federal state structure by 'democratic means' (Soyaslan, 2010: 737). Despite this, some Kurdish politicians involved in the 2015 'democratic autonomy' declarations in Kurdish regions were convicted under Article 302. However, Yargıtay overruled these convictions arguing that their actions did not reach the level of 'compulsion and violence' required by Article 302.[35] Nevertheless, this judgment has not prevented courts punishing these politicians under TCK, Article 314, for being members of a terrorist organization. The Democratic Society Congress (Demokratik Toplum Kongresi, DTK) co-chair, Aysel Tuğluk, was arrested in December 2016 and sentenced to a ten-year term of imprisonment inter alia for reading out the declaration and facilitating the realization of democratic autonomy.[36]

Despite the Yargıtay's case law, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has continued using Article 302 as legal justification, notably for banning usage of the word 'Kurdistan'. The ministry claims that the use of the word 'Kurdistan' is a crime under Article 302 and it contradicts the principle of 'state's invisible unity with its country and nation' as set out in Article 3 of the Constitution (Agos, 2013).

A recent amendment to Article 161 of the parliament's internal regulation banned 'making statements against the state's administrative structure set out in the Constitution on the basis of the Turkish Republic's indivisible unity, with its territory and the nation' within parliament.[37] It sanctioned those making such statements by temporary suspension from general parliamentary assembly meetings and imposed a fine. The amendment was criticized for leaving open the door to punishment for using the words 'Kurdistan', 'federation' and 'Kurdish cities' in parliament. This prediction came true soon enough when HDP MP Osman Baydemir was suspended from attending general assembly meetings and fined for using the word 'Kurdistan' in his speech in parliament. Yet, this amendment was soon annulled by the AYM due to its incompatibility with the Constitution.[38]

Evidently, this regulation aimed to prevent political discussions and speeches challenging the mainstream political views on constitutional and

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35 Y(16)CD, K.2016/6118, K.2017/361, 31.01.2017.

36 Ankara (17) Serious Crime Court, E.2017/180, K.2018/24, 16.03.2018.

37 See TBMM İçtüzüğünde Değişiklik Yapılmasına Dair Karar (no. 1160, 27.07.2017). The same article also punishes to 'insult or label the history and common past of Turkish nations and the Constitutional order which was defined in the first four articles of the Constitution'. The HDP deputy Garo Paylan already punished under this provision for using the word 'Armenian massacre' by the parliament. His appeal was refused on the basis of the court's lack of competence on this matter. See AYM, E.2017/13, K.2017/21, 09.02.2017.

38 AYM, E.2017/162, K.2018/100, 17.10.2018.

administrative order and the unitary structure of the state. Preventing democratic venues having meaningful political discussions or dialogue, it ultimately aimed to expel minority political representatives from participation in decision-making and consultation processes, and suffocate their political agency and views and proposals about the future of their society.

Above, we tried to explain the legal logic behind the banning, criminalizing and delegitimizing of the Kurds' demands and discussion for autonomy, and the role of the legal system in making the Kurds' autonomy impossible in Turkey. Now, we can go on to examine the current situation in Turkey.

Autonomy Discussions since the 2000s

As briefly explained at the outset, many political, legal, international and internal factors, developments and trends have kept the autonomy discussions thriving in Turkey throughout the 2000s. The experiences and confidence gained by the pro-Kurdish political parties in the governance of municipalities in the region since 1999 provided one of these factors.[39] These experiences at the municipality level re-demarcated a Kurdish cultural and physical hinterland in the region and also developed a new competing 'governmentality' through their 'alternative "Kurdified" ... bureaucratic activities and modernization projects' (Watts, 2010: 143, see also Coşkun, 2015: 10). Moreover, this experience consolidated the 'institutionalization' (Watts, 2010: 7) and the political agency of the Kurdish political opposition in the region. It has also played a crucial role in the legitimization of 'demands for more local or regional autonomy' in the minds of local people (Watts, 2010: 143) and in wider democratic circles. It was this confidence and experience in Kurdish self-governance that precipitated the anomalous state oppression and centralization in the region post-2015.

The discourse, policies and political programmes during the AKP's early years in power and the political climate during the 'resolution process' nourished the discussions on Kurdish autonomy. The AKP came into government in 2002 with pledges to empower the local governments and especially the municipalities by increasing their competence, powers and resources, and to make them the principal deliverers of local services. Their first government programmes provided an idea of the services to be provided at a local level: 'health, education, culture, welfare, tourism, environment,

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39 In 1977 the Kurdish politicians won the municipality election in Diyarbakır, Batman and Urfa, which became in the words of Diyarbakir mayor Mehdi Zana, '"castles" for Kurdish national advocacy' (Watts, 2010: 49).

service provided to villages, farming, livestock raising, construction and communications' (Bayraktar and Massicard, 2012: 28–9).

The furthest the AKP was actually prepared to go became obvious from its 2015 election manifesto in which it pledged to rearrange the central government relations with the local governments in line with the European Charter on Local Governments (TC Başbakanlık, 2015: 34, 127). It meant offering 'administrative decentralisation' by relaxing the central government's trusteeship over the elected local bodies and improving their powers in line with the charter (Sobacı, 2015: 27–8). Over time these pledges gradually lost weight and scope and were almost totally abandoned in the AKP election manifestos and government programmes of 2016, 2018 and 2019. These pledges did, however, create greater expectations for far-reaching change in the country's centralized administrative system than their limited scope actually allowed.

During the famous 'resolution process', when the AKP needed the support of Kurds to realize their vision for a presidential system, they conveniently kept the discussion on autonomy alive (Aktar, 2014: 17), especially through public remarks by the leadership. The association of the presidential state system with federal, autonomous arrangements elsewhere in the world helped their cause. For instance, in 2013, Erdoğan said, 'A strong Turkey should never be afraid of a federal state system. You can maintain a unitary structure in a federal state system too' (T24, 2013).[40]

The AKP even allowed meetings, initiatives and discussions on decentralization, yet strongly opposed unilateral democratic autonomy declarations. The DTK's 'democratic autonomy' workshops, the first of which took place in 2010, provided an important venue for these discussions. Many politicians from various political parties including the AKP, civil society representatives, academics and even the former Turkish intelligence service deputy undersecretary were among the participants. At the final resolution of this workshop in 2010, the 'democratic autonomy of Kurdish people' was declared. A future AKP party spokesman, Yasin Aktay, who attended the workshop, wrote the following in his column: 'Demanding and defending democratic autonomy as a claim is a democratic right, and there is nothing more natural than a political party or movement defending it as long as it remains within political and democratic boundaries . . . However, an attitude like a unilateral declaration of democratic autonomy is not at all democratic' (Yeni Şafak, 2010).

40 See also the AKP deputy chairman Hüseyin Çelik's remarks on the subject (Hürriyet Daily News, 2012b).

These remarks never turned into a political commitment let alone being reflected in any legal document. For instance, the report prepared by the AKP members of the Parliamentary Research Commission Established to Investigate Social Ways of Peace and Evaluation Process did not contain any reference to autonomous arrangements as a viable solution to the Kurdish issue.[41] Meanwhile, the alternative report prepared by the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) deputies of the same commission was mostly concentrated around autonomy for Kurds (Bianet, 2013). The AKP also ignored Akil İnsanlar's south-eastern committee report of 2013, which, after underlining the overwhelming demand for Kurdish autonomy, had proposed the establishment of an autonomous regional government system as a solution (Akil İnsanlar Heyeti Güneydoğu Raporu, 2013: 31).

In the coming years, and on several occasions, AKP high-ranking politicians highlighted the fact that autonomy or any other constitutional arrangements for Kurds had never been part of the resolution process talks.[42] This was later reaffirmed by the deputy prime minister, Bülent Arınç, who stated that autonomy had never been on the agenda of the government and Kurdish counterparts had been warned from the beginning that such claims 'cannot be accepted thus should not be [even] raised' (Aljazeera Turk, 2014). The AKP was only ready to empower the local authorities but needed time even for that.

The 'resolution process' reached a tipping point with the 'Dolmabahçe Agreement (*mutabakati*)' on 28 February 2015, which mapped out the formal negotiation terms between the parties. As the parties could not reach a consensus, both sides read out their own press release containing their proposals in regard to the negotiations. The Kurdish side's text contained ten headings, which included 'determining the national and local dimensions of the democratic solution' and kept Kurdish autonomy on the negotiation table (Aljazeera Turk, 2015). The government proposal was limited by further democracy, human rights and a new constitution. This agreement received a strong reaction from the leader of the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetci Hareket Partisi, MHP), Devlet Bahçeli, who called it a 'treasonous document, no different from the Sevres Treaty', saw it as being a project aiming at the establishment of 'autonomy' in line with the European Charter of Local Self-Government and undermining the unitary state structure (Cumhuriyet, 2015).

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41 See Toplumsal Barış Yollarının Araştırılması ve Çözüm Sürecinin Değerlendirilmesi Amacıyla Kurulan Meclis Araştırma Komisyonu Raporu (2013), TBMM: Ankara.
42 See the Internal Affair Commission Meeting on 'The Draft Law on Prevention of the Terrorism and Strengthening of Social Solidarity' on 03.07.2014, pp. 61–2.

Erdoğan, at first, publicly supported the Dolmabahçe Agreement, while also making clear that he expected political gain out of it: '[the] important thing is application ... will its application reflect on the ground before or during the elections? Unfortunately, it was not reflected in the March elections, it did not reflect in the Presidential elections, as you know, it continued the same way' (TCCB, 2015).

As the 7 June 2015 election showed, the Dolmabahçe Agreement turned into a political gain for the HDP but not for the AKP, and they lost their majority in parliament. After this date, the AKP began to bargain the resolution process away for its political gain and yielded to the outcry of the Turkish nationalist and military circles. Turkey has moved into a more centralized and authoritarian system, and a revenge campaign was started against the Kurdish political opposition (Bianet, 2015a).

The 'resolution process' finally ended following the June 2015 election.[43] Besides Erdoğan's miscalculation regarding his political gains, the AKP's lack of political commitment for autonomous arrangements for Kurds, despite its above-mentioned official documents and public remarks, also played a key role in the termination of the process (Bayramoğlu, 2015: 23). Ending the resolution process triggered some events with horrific consequences in the region. The self-governance (*özyönetim*) declarations began as civil disobedience measures in August 2015 and were read as a justification for re-establishing the state's political authority in the Kurdish regions. The declarations were presented as the Kurdish people's reaction to the AKP government's disapproval of the Dolmabahçe Agreement, continuing military operations and anti-democratic practices. Soon, they turned into the so-called 'trenches incidents', which began by the digging of trenches and the raising of barricades in various Kurdish cities (Time Turk, 2015).

As these incidents were going on, in December 2015, following an emergency meeting, the DTK published a 'Declaration of the political solution to self-governance' (*Özyönetimlerle ilgili Siyasi Çözüm Deklarasyonu*) (Bianet, 2015b). The DTK defended this declaration as being an articulation of the Kurdish people's desire for autonomy and democracy at a regional level and as a reaction to the state's rejection of their demands for legal and political status. The declaration received strong condemnation from the president, Erdoğan, who spoke of 'treason and provocation' (BBC, 2015). He pledged that the

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43 It officially ended following the killings of two policemen in Ceylanpınar, which was initially claimed by the PKK to have been carried out by one of its affiliated groups but was subsequently retracted. However, all of the accused were acquitted recently (Cumhuriyet, 2018).

government 'would collapse the world around' those who endeavour to establish a state within the state in the name of autonomy (BBC Türkçe, 2016).

A military campaign in these cities, between July 2015 and December 2016, resulted in the extensive destruction of thirty urban and rural locations, and many unprecedented violations of human rights were recorded (OHCHR, 2017: 5). Many Kurdish politicians involved in the 'resolution process' talks, including the HDP co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş, İdris Baluken and Sırrı Süreyya Önder, were imprisoned and put on criminal trial after their parliamentary immunity was lifted. They were not allowed the legal immunity provided by the Law on Prevention of the Terrorism and Strengthening of Social Solidarity to those individuals or organizations involved in the resolution process.[44] Many were also charged for their public support of the DTK's democratic autonomy declaration (Euronews, 2018).

President Erdoğan's open alliance with the ultra-nationalist MHP consolidated after the failed military takeover. The State of Emergency Declaration of July 2016 facilitated the destruction of the Kurdish political movement that had begun to become institutionalized through municipalities. The first attempt to this end came in August 2016, with a draft bill enabling the central government to appoint state bureaucrats in place of elected mayors, although at the last minute the bill was withdrawn. The media reported this change as a victory won because of strong reactions of the opposition parties. In reality, before withdrawing the draft bill from the parliament, the cabinet headed by Erdoğan had already signed the state of emergency Decree-Law (Kanun Hükmünde Kararname, KHK) no. 674, which included the provisions of the draft bill.[45]

In amending the Municipality Law, Articles 45 and 46, KHK no. 674 made it possible to remove from office the mayors, deputy mayors or municipal councillors suspended from their posts or arrested due to a crime related to 'terror' or 'for abetting a terrorist organization' and to replace them with state-appointed trustees. This authority was vested in the Ministry for Internal Affairs for the metropolitan municipalities and the provincial governor for other municipalities.

While the government's aim of carrying out the 'politicide' of the Kurdish leadership is evident from these amendments to the Municipality Law, their aim

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44 Law no. 6551, Terörün Sona Erdirilmesi ve Toplumsal Bütünleşmenin Güçlendirilmesine Dair Kanun, 10.07.2014, RG: 29062/16.07.2014. See also Law no. 6532, Devlet İstihbarat Hizmetlerive Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı Kanununda Değişiklik Yapılmasına Dair Kanun, 17.04.2014. RG: 26.04.2014.
45 See Articles 38–41 of the KHK no. 674, www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2016/09/201 60901M2-2.pdf.

of diminishing the Kurdish municipalities' institutional capacities becomes clearer with KHK no. 678 of 31 October 2016. The provincial governors were now vested with powers to confiscate municipalities' moveable properties, suspend their personnel and to transfer some municipality services either to central state institutions or to neighbouring municipalities.[46] Yet, the expenses for these services were to be projected to the municipality budget received from the central state 'without being subject to any monetary and budgetary limitations'.

The government began to appoint state trustees in place of the HDP mayors and councillors on 11 September 2016 (Bianet, 2016). Soon afterwards, state-appointed trustees replaced nearly all HDP mayors (Evrensel, 2017). The amendments made by the state of emergency KHKs later became permanent by law no. 6758, and continue to be applied to the HDP mayors and councillors elected after the municipal elections held in March 2019.

The retrospective application of the KHKs and the consequent removal of many Kurdish mayors and councillors arguably constitute a breach of the Turkish Constitution, as well as Turkey's existing obligations under the Charter of Local and Regional Authorities (GABB, 2016: 11–16). In a recommendation issued by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, these developments are considered as evidence of the central government's motivation to dismantle the elected municipal councils, prevent local democracy and local government functions from being carried out through freely elected local representatives, and deprive the citizens in these areas of political representation at local level. The recommendation warns of the serious risk and damage to pluralist democracy at the local level and the grave weakening of political parties and civil society in Turkey (Council of Europe, 2017).

The forced removal of Kurdish mayors and councillors in this unjustified manner falls well below international standards protecting the participation of national minorities in public life and their voice in the decision-making process. It also contravenes the prohibition of assimilation of national minorities as set out in Article 5 of the Framework Convention on National Minorities as the dissolution of municipalities in areas where national minorities traditionally reside is likely to interfere with their right to maintain and develop their culture and to preserve the essential elements of their identity.[47]

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46 See Municipality Law, Articles 57 and 75.
47 *Noack* and others v. *Germany*, ACFC/INF/OP/I (2002)008, 01.03.2002, para. 32.

Conclusion

The dominant accounts of the Ottoman Empire have tended to rest on the assumption that it had always been a quite centralized enterprise. This image reflects a failure to properly read Ottoman political history or reflects a presentist retrojection of convictions truer of modern Republican Turkey. A more careful reading amply supports the opposite impression: that the Ottomans held onto a conventional model of decentralization that came into question only towards the end of the long nineteenth century, even if attempts to tinker with that model, which were met with continued resistance, lasted throughout that century. In fact, although centralization appears to have proceeded with greater vigour for the Kurdish regions, other parts of the empire continued to witness moves towards regimes of greater autonomy implemented as a means of dealing with fissiparous nationalist claims. It is true that ultimately by the early twentieth century a general reflex against decentralization had become embedded which further eroded the conventional structures of Kurdish autonomy. The post-war settlement tended to reflect that antipathy for conceding ground to any demands, foreign or domestic, to Kurds. Republican legal reforms took a further toll, as their mission to eradicate the remains of the conventional Kurdish leadership structures got legislated. Eventually, the Turkish legal system had become so hardened that Kurdism, claims including to autonomy or decentralization by Kurds or their political representatives, became the subject of the repressive application of laws framed around the conception of a unitary Turkish state. Repressive measures have included not merely the closure of political parties seeking some autonomy for Kurds, but also criminalization, including under anti-terror legislation, for merely embarking on a discussion of such political claims. It is in the context of this hostile background that what were considered liberalizing intimations made by Erdoğan and his AKP were taken up by Kurds, only to be reneged upon and met with repression. The politicide of Kurds may not have as lengthy a legacy as the dominant accounts of centralization in the Ottoman Empire may directly or indirectly try to justify, but expressions of alternatives to the closely guarded conception of a unitary state in Turkey have certainly and progressively been eliminated by legalized forms of repression.

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The Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 1991–2018

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The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) emerged in highly anomalous circumstances in the first years of the 1990s following the retrenchment of the Iraqi state's authority from the Kurdish-dominated northern provinces of the country in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's ill-fated attempt to occupy Kuwait in 1990 (McDowall, 2004: 376–9). What emerged as the KRI seemed to be a sudden manifestation of Kurdish antagonism towards the concept of Iraq. However, it had deeper roots, traceable to the formative moments of Iraq itself, when the Kurds were divided by Western powers, along with the involvement of Turkey and Iran, into the countries in which they have since existed (Stansfield, 2017: 218–23). The experience of the Kurds in Iraq since 1991 has, then, been a product of two dynamics, or conditions, derived from these two historical events. The first, of a deeply held normative view among Kurds of their existence in Iraq being somehow enforced, with their popular desire to be themselves sovereign over territories they defined as being, in a primordial sense, Kurdistan; the second, of their control, even de facto sovereignty, that emerged in 1991 as being a dangerously anomalous development that witnessed the KRI erupt in the north of Iraq because of broader geopolitical forces that had simultaneously weakened the abilities of regional Middle East countries to prevent a Kurdish entity emerging, while also aligning the nascent entity with more powerful international actors in the West.

The two dynamics have not remained constant since 1991, and have interacted, with each other and other forces, into the present. At times, the ability of regional powers to exert a formative influence over the KRI itself, and particularly through the leading political parties of the Kurds, namely, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), has proved to be overwhelming. Yet the influence and impact of political developments across the rest of Iraq has been equally, if not more,

important as the Iraqi state reasserted its influence, if not direct control, over the KRI when the opportunity presented itself, or it was necessary to do so in order to preserve Iraq's territorial integrity, or both (Hama and Abdulla, 2019; Rasheed, 2019).

This chapter will focus on the period since the establishment of the KRI in 1991. Events and developments that occurred in the 1990s have proved to be foundational in how the KRI would then operate in the post-2003 period. Indeed, the pathologies of many of the characteristics and dynamics that occur in the present have their roots in the 1990s and, in many cases, in the decades before. The chapter will then consider what was simultaneously an existential threat to the KRI, while also presenting a range of opportunities for its further advancement, in the form of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). The rise of ISIS and its subsequent transformation into Islamic State (IS) very nearly destroyed everything the KRI had achieved up until 2014, and then saw the rapid alignment of the political parties of the KRI with Western interests, thus advancing the KRI's autonomy from the rest of Iraq even more starkly than before (Stansfield, 2014). Yet, in keeping with the pattern of Western engagement with the Kurds in general, and the Iraqi Kurds in particular (and, now the Kurds of Syria as well), the alignment from the perspective of Western powers was needs based – with the need being for the Kurds to be the soldiers in the war with IS. Once this need diminished, then so did Western powers' alignment with the Kurds begin to weaken. This, among several other factors, led to parts of the KRI leadership – and especially President Massoud Barzani and his principal lieutenants in the KDP – to hold a referendum on independence in September 2017 (Park et al., 2017). While being a hugely successful statement as an expression of self-determination, the initiative floundered and failed as regional and Western powers together refused to support any notion of an independent Kurdistan state being carved out in the territories of northern Iraq.

The Pathology of Kurdish Autonomy in Iraq

Much has happened in Iraq in recent years and it is relatively commonplace to read reports that suggest the KRI emerged in the aftermath of the overthrowing of Saddam Hussein's government in March 2003. In fact, the establishment of the KRI can be traced to Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the subsequent routing of Iraqi forces the year after by a US-led coalition that then gave an opportunity for the Kurds of Iraq to then rebel against the regime (McDowall, 2004: 376–9). Yet, if 1991 was the moment of

the chaotic emergence of the KRI caused by a highly anomalous geopolitical situation, the 'idea' of the KRI was of greater antiquity. The notion of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq could be traced to the early 1970s when Mulla Mustafa Barzani and key figures in the KDP hammered out the details of an agreement with what was then a new and vulnerable Ba'ath regime, for the Kurds to exist in an autonomous region within the territorial framework of the Iraqi state (Stansfield, 2003).

The March Agreement of 1970 came about following the successes of Barzani as he consolidated his hold over Kurdish-dominated parts of northern Iraq in the late 1960s (Gunter, 1996). From a position of weakness, the new vice-president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, travelled north to negotiate with the veteran Kurdish leader. His starting point, of handing over a blank sheet of paper, emphasized his weakness at that moment in time, but it also was in keeping with a pattern of Iraqi–Kurdish relations that have arguably persisted to the present day: when the Iraqi state is weak, then concessions are made to the Kurds; when the state is strong, status quo ante is reimposed. Yet the March Agreement was important as it established the parameters for the territorial extent of an autonomous Kurdish region and recognized that 'the Iraqi people is composed of two primary nations, the Arab and the Kurdish,' and with the agreement recognizing the equivalency of Kurdish as a language, and mandating for the organization of Kurdish specific organizations, a Kurdish military unit, and Kurdish-language newspapers under the control of the KDP (Bengio, 2012; Stansfield, 2003).

The Agreement, though, was ultimately impossible to implement because of a further perennial sticking point in negotiations between the Iraqi state and the Kurds – the status of Kirkuk.[1] With Barzani demanding its inclusion and Saddam refusing, the implementation of the deal was delayed and, ultimately, reneged upon as the Iraqi state reimposed its authority in the north of the country from 1974 onwards. However, the terms of the March Agreement would continue to serve as the framework for subsequent developments, and not least because key figures involved in its negotiation, and witnessed its failure, in the early 1970s, including Mulla Mustafa's son Massoud Barzani, his counterpart and then rival Jalal Talabani, and figures such as the late Sami Abdul Rahman, who became the Minister for Northern Affairs in the 1970–4 period, were all leading figures when the next opportunity to secure autonomy presented itself.

1 For analyses of the situation in Kirkuk, see Anderson and Stansfield (2009) and Bet-Shlimon (2019).

The Kurdistan Region Emerges: The Trauma of the 1990s

It is interesting to imagine what Iraq, and indeed the wider Middle East, would have looked like today if Saddam had not ordered his army into Kuwait in 1990 (Karsh and Rautsi, 1991). Such an exercise in alternative histories would require a very extensive series of books to tease out the massive ramifications of the Second Gulf War not taking place, but, focusing upon events in the north of Iraq, it would seem to be reasonable to suggest that a Kurdistan Region would not have emerged. Without any doubt, the key formative moment for the Kurdish political system in Iraq came in 1990, when Saddam invaded Kuwait, which then led to his subsequent defeat at the hands of the US 'Coalition of the Willing'. Following a statement made by US President George H. W. Bush two days after the liberation of Kuwait, that 'the Iraqi people should put Saddam aside', a spontaneous rebellion, known in Kurdish as the Rapareen, started on 4 March 1991 in Raniyah before spreading to Dohuk, Erbil, and Suleimaniyya (Gunter, 1999; Stansfield, 2003). However, their triumph was short-lived as the Iraqi government reorganized its forces quickly and moved to recapture the territories lost to the Kurdish rebels. The result saw mass movements of Kurds to the mountainous border with Turkey, at the height of winter, creating a humanitarian problem that forced the United Nations (UN) Security Council to enact Resolution 688 demanding an end to the repression of the Kurds. In mid-April, the Coalition announced the establishment of a no-fly zone along the 36th parallel. After several tense months, Saddam then withdrew the institutions and military of the Iraqi government from the territories previously identified in the March Agreement of 1970. Sensing a trap, the Kurdish leadership – which was by now led by Talabani and Barzani – did not simply declare independence as this would have brought into the fray not only Iraq but Turkey and Iran too. Rather, they organized and held legislative elections on 19 May 1992 that formed the Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA), which then allowed them to form the first government of the KRI – henceforth known as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

If the birth of the Kurdistan Region had been traumatic, then its early years were no better. Far from being unified in the years leading to 1991, Kurdish parties had fallen to open and violent factionalism following the demise of Mulla Mustafa Barzani's rebellion in 1975 and his death in 1979. The KDP had always been an uneasy amalgam of a powerful wing of unquestioning loyalty to Mulla Mustafa and his sons, Idris and Massoud,

and an increasingly strong leftist-orientated wing that enjoyed strong support in Kurdistan's urban environs and among students, and that had been organized into several parties of varying degrees of a leftist persuasion. By 1975, these parties had been brought together by Ibrahim Ahmed and Jalal Talabani under the broad umbrella of the PUK. Throughout the remainder of the 1970s and the 1980s, the KDP, which by now was under the sole leadership of Massoud Barzani, and the PUK would engage in internecine warfare, often with the support of neighbouring powers, and thus setting the scene for what remains the most significant faultline in KRI politics to the present, and which was extremely raw as the KDP and PUK moved to form a government in 1992. The elections had been conducted with great enthusiasm and had presented the Kurds in an exceptional light to the international community because of the manner in which they were organized and held. But they also created very deep problems going forward because they simply recognized that the KDP and PUK were not only militarily balanced but also balanced in terms of their popularity. With each party holding 50 per cent of the seats in the legislature, the parties identified what seemed to be an elegant method of sharing power, but one that was destined to be disastrous. A simple power-sharing system known as *penj-a-penj* (50–50) was put into place which saw ministers appointed from one party and deputies appointed from the other, but minister and deputy each had equal powers and each possessed a veto over the actions of the other. The model was replicated throughout the entire governmental system, thus producing a situation whereby the government was not only prone to the stalemate but had within it a built-in power struggle between KDP and PUK cadres. It would take very little in the tense atmosphere of Kurdistan in the mid-1990s to see this animosity erupt into violence. By 1994, the KRI had divided with the PUK and KDP falling into internecine civil war and with the PUK controlling Erbil and Suleimaniyya, and the KDP controlling Dohuk and areas north of Erbil. Saddam's regime remained in total control of Kirkuk.

Enduring Pathologies

The aftermath of the civil war of the 1990s continues to frame political life in the KRI. In August 1996, the penetration of the KDP and PUK by regional powers became readily apparent, as the KDP partnered with the Iraqi government to force the PUK out of Erbil (from the perspective of the KDP) and the Iraqi National Congress (INC) military forces and

personnel from their bases south of Erbil, and in Erbil itself, from the perspective of Saddam's regime. Moving swiftly, the Iranian government then regrouped the fleeing PUK forces, facilitating their counter-attack that saw their peshmerga retake territories to the east of Erbil. At the end of these encounters, the territorial pattern that is familiar to today's observers of Kurdish politics had emerged, of the KDP holding Erbil and Dohuk, and the PUK holding Suleimaniyya and Kurdish-held parts of Kirkuk governorate. The KDP and PUK each ran a KRG in their respective zones; each had a prime minister, and each claimed legitimacy in a setting where, arguably, legitimacy remained with the Iraqi state. During this time, a further pathology of modern Iraqi Kurdish political life was established, and that was the absolute dominance of the KRG(s) with the two main political parties. Power remained vested in the leaderships of the parties, and particularly at the level of the political bureaus and the leadership offices of Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani. Furthermore, these two regions of Erbil-Dohuk and Suleimaniyya-Garmian would further develop their own distinctive political cultures and identities and would become even more strongly associated with the KDP and the PUK, respectively. Indeed, this last point is now a critical fact to appreciate about the politics of the KRI – it is, for now, almost unthinkable that Suleimaniyya-Garmian (and Kirkuk, too, if it were included in the KRI) would present a majority vote for the KDP; similarly, it is equally almost unthinkable that Erbil-Dohuk would gift a majority vote for the PUK. Furthermore, the ability of a (now unified) KRG under a KDP prime minister to project power into Suleimaniyya-Garmian is impossible to do so, without that power first being mediated by, and agreed with, the PUK. Similarly, if there were to be a KRG prime minister from the PUK, then his (or her) ability to govern Dohuk and Erbil would need to be similarly mediated through the KDP. While the KRI today is officially unified, following the implementation of the Washington Agreement of 1999 and subsequent measures taken following regime change in 2003, in practice the KRI remains very much divided in every way that matters – politically, administratively, militarily (with each party maintaining their own peshmerga forces), security and intelligence (again with each party maintaining their own institutions), business and economy (with each party possessing the most wealthy conglomerates and holding companies in the KRI, and possibly in Iraq) with the result being that the KRI remains very much a tale of the interaction, competition, alliances and rivalries between the two constituent regions.

Regime Change and After

If the events of 1990–1 constituted a watershed moment in the history of the Kurds of Iraq, allowing them to take the first, tortuous, steps at establishing self-rule in the north of the country, then the events of March 2003, as US-led forces removed Saddam Hussein from power, were a combination of consolidatory and catalytic dynamics. The removal of Saddam's regime allowed the Kurdish leaders again to align themselves with Western powers. For the last decade of their autonomous existence, Kurdish leaders had been engaging closely with Western diplomats and military officials. They had become intrinsic members of the Iraqi opposition movements working against Saddam's regime, and they had allowed Western countries and neighbouring powers to use their territory to project their own national interests in Iraq. Furthermore, the Kurds were now the most experienced grouping within the Iraqi political spectrum. They were the only group in Iraq to have experience of governance and administering peoples and territories, an they were the only group to have a clear political platform, built around securing an autonomous region within a federal structure for the Iraqi state, that they were determined to pursue. These aspects of consolidatory dynamics had proved to be transformative – they would see the KRI strengthened in every regard – yet the catalytic dynamics following the regime change in Iraq proved to be even more so. These dynamics included the strengthening of Kurdish popular society and the emergence of new social and political voices in the KRI that was directly tied to the generational changes that had naturally occurred. Those born in the early 1990s have no memories of being governed by the Iraqi state. Furthermore, they had seen virtually no changes in the make-up of the political landscape of the Kurdistan Region. Indeed, many of the faces in power in 2003 were exactly the same as those who had gained power in 1991, and if some of the faces were different, then the likelihood was that the family and tribal names were the same as those they succeeded. Very quickly from 2003 onwards, Kurdish society became more aware and more critical of the leaders of the KDP and PUK and these parties could no longer take for granted the uncritical and unquestioning support of the masses.

The next decade would see the Kurds undertake a transition from being a de facto anomalous territorial entity displaying some attributes of autonomy but with no legal basis, to being the first federal region of the post-2003 Iraqi state, and with their negotiators being critical to the writing of the new

constitution of Iraq.[2] Yet the path to be taken was not clear or straightforward. Kurdish leaders remained concerned about the US plans to overthrow Saddam Hussein, remembering also clearly how the US and the Western powers had failed to support them or honour their promises to them in the past. They also remembered vividly the retribution wrought upon them by Saddam Hussein in the 1980s when he inflicted a genocidal policy of ethnic cleansing and widescale destruction of the rural environment of Kurdistan as part of the Anfal campaign. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggested that broader Kurdish public opinion was in fact against the US taking military action against the Ba'ath regime.[3] However, the KDP and PUK had been fully engaged with different constellations of Iraqi opposition groups in the 1990s, and this had intensified since September 11, 2001. It was readily apparent to the leadership of the parties that the US was serious in its plans to remove Saddam's regime and they realized that they needed to move quickly to protect what they had already established in the form of the KRI's institutions and autonomy, and to ensure that they were well placed in a post-regime change setting to further their interests in Baghdad, as well as in Erbil and Suleimaniyya.

Building Post-regime Change Iraq

The period leading up to the regime change operations intensified the focus of Western powers upon the KDP and PUK. Initially cautious, the two parties would soon embrace the US-led plans, and this relationship would intensify following the decision of the Turkish parliament to not allow American forces to open a northern front against Iraq from their territory. This decision pushed the Kurds together with the US into a very close military relationship that would endure to the present day. Because of the demands of these early missions to the Kurds, which required the engagement of Western special forces groups with their Kurdish counterparts, certain groups of the KDP and the PUK developed extremely close ties with influential military practitioners in Western countries. Together Kurdish forces and their Western counterparts moved against Iraqi forces

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2 For accounts of the Kurds' experience in Iraq in the 1990s, see Gunter (1999), Stansfield (2003) and Bengio (2012).

3 During this period, I spoke often with friends in the Kurdistan Region – including those affiliated with political parties, and those who were not – and there was a commonly held nervousness about the West planning to take military action against Saddam, with many viewing themselves as being on the front line in such a conflict, facing a very dangerous enemy and with uncertain international support.

into Kirkuk, Tikrit and ultimately Baghdad, with intelligence provided by Kurdish agencies being of critical importance to Western military operations. Because of this, along with the longer history developed in the 1990s, the Kurdish leadership believed that their interests would be protected in the days following a regime change. However, in what was a chaotic period following Saddam's removal from power, the Kurdish leaders quickly realized that their military friends could not necessarily provide the protection they would need from the administrators appointed to govern Iraq after March 2003. Indeed, when the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) under the leadership of US Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III presented the first draft on the general principles of federalism for Iraq, with specific mention made to the Kurds, it was clear that the powers and competences of the KRG would have been heavily depleted.[4] Security would have been provided by the Iraqi government, necessitating the disbanding of the peshmerga, and natural resources and the control of borders would again have fallen within the sovereign competences of the government of Iraq (Galbraith, 2006).

Ultimately, this could not be imposed on the Kurds. They were too strong and too valuable to the US and its allies to either upset or to marginalize, and the CPA had to find a way of structuring its operations across Iraq by accommodating the Kurdistan Region but without threatening Iraq's territorial integrity. The Kurds then focused their efforts upon the drafting of the constitution as they rightly realized that the region's continued existence and success would rely heavily upon the structure, nature and content of the new founding document of the state. Critical for the Kurdish negotiators was for Iraq to be recognized as a federal state, and for the Kurdistan Region to be recognized from the outset as a federal region of Iraq. This they did by inserting into the constitution articles by which other federal regions could form, thus making an asymmetrical federal arrangement within the constitution. The reason for this was logical but ultimately flawed. It seemed to the Kurdish negotiators that their security would be best guaranteed by the creation of more federal regions, thus further limiting the relative power of the central state. However, such a plan would require those articles to be implemented in partnership with the government of Iraq, and this never happened, resulting in the Kurdistan Region remaining the only federal region in Iraq. With hindsight a clearer way forward could have been to have engineered an asymmetrical federal arrangement for Iraq whereby the

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4 For accounts of the formation and subsequent record of the CPA, see Diamond (2005) and Allawi (2007). For L. Paul Bremer III's personal account, see Bremer (2006).

Kurdistan Region was clearly recognized as being a singular special federal region, with its rights and competences ordered by its own regional constitution and with its relationship with the government of Iraq clearly defined. The ramifications of this symmetrical federal model have continued to confuse the relationship between Baghdad and Erbil to the present day.

Other important aspects covered in the constitution of relevance to the Kurdistan Region included a process to resolve the status of Kirkuk and other 'disputed territories'. Article 140 pacified a three-stage process by which the question of the disputed territories – those territories to the south of the extant KRI claimed by the Kurds – would be resolved. The first stage of the process, which was largely completed, required the normalization of the population distribution in the territories. This required those persons, usually of Arab ethnicity, that had been settled in the territories by Saddam's government, to be returned to their places of origin. The second stage of the process required a census to be held across the disputed territories, and the third stage of the process required a referendum to take place but would ask respondents whether they wished to be governed from Erbil or from Baghdad. This article was time-limited and was required to be concluded by the end of 2007.[5] For the Kurds, the inclusion of Article 140 was deemed to be a major success, yet it soon turned into a source of problems and animosity between Baghdad and Erbil. As months and years past it became clear that the government of Iraq had no intention of partnering the KRG in implementing the three-stage process. With the end of 2007 passing, Article 140 was deemed to be null and void by the government of Iraq, leaving the Kurds aggrieved to the point whereby they would take matters in their own hands when the opportunity presented itself.[6]

Sectarianism, Ethnicism and the Rise of Islamic State

The period following the passing of the constitution saw several parliamentary and provincial elections occur across Iraq, but a basic pattern had been established that would prove to have devastating consequences. The government of Iraq was by now dominated by Shia political parties, with the KDP and PUK serving as minority partners. The Sunni political

5 For an analysis of Article 140 and the disputed territories, see Anderson and Stansfield (2009), Wolff (2010) and Bartu (2010).
6 For an insightful account of the impact of the constitutional negotiations on Iraq's societal integrity, see Karam (2016).

community, however, was largely absent in terms of meaningful representation from politicians but had the support of the constituency. By 2007, Iraq was in the throes of a full-scale civil war between Sunnis and Shiites. The conflict saw militias from different sides pitched against each other in a brutal confrontation that had at its focus issues of Iraqi identity and who had the right to rule. Leading the fight on the Sunni side were a range of different groups with the most infamous being the al-Qaeda Iraq (AQI) organization led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Remnants of this group, combined with other jihadist and nationalist forces, would later re-emerge under the banner of ISIS. The Shiite militias were drawn largely from extant political parties and movements. Indeed, some of them, including the Badr Organization of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), had their origins in the 1980s and had also been based during the 1990s in the Garmian region of the KRI, with Iran's encouragement provided to the PUK for allowing them to do so. Other notable Shiite groups included the Jaysh al-Mahdi, nominally under the control of Muqtada al Sadr. From these groups, others would later emerge as the threat from ISIS materialized, including the ʿAsaʾib Ahl al-Haq and the Kataʾib Hezbollah – units which the Kurdish peshmerga would later confront as they evacuated their positions in Kirkuk following the referendum of 2017.

Meanwhile, the relationship between Erbil and Baghdad had steadily deteriorated. The Kurdish leaders had expected Article 140 to have been implemented quickly. However, they found a partner in Baghdad willing to assist them in implementing the three phases of their agreement. Rather, they found opposition. Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jafari adopted a notably anti-Kurdish stance across a range of issues, partly driven by problems being caused by the Kurds pursuing their own independent oil export initiative. This initiative, which the KRG declared as being legal within the framework of the constitution, brought the Kurdistan Region into close alignment with Turkey.[7] The relationship between Ankara and Erbil had managed to overcome the enmity that had characterized Turkey's relationship with its own Kurds by being built on the distinctly transactional rationale of trade and oil exports (Mills, 2016: 8–9). Furthermore, Ankara found it useful to engage with a deal at this time because its relationship with Baghdad had become very strained – the Muslim Brotherhood-associated AKP government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had little in common with the

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7 For an extensive and detailed discussion of the various oil-related articles of the Constitution of Iraq, and the manner in which they have been interpreted, see Zedalis (2012).

Shiite-dominated government of Iraq. By 2007, Turkey has made a shift in its policy. Placing economic interests above security concerns, Ankara embraced a relationship with the KRG. It facilitated the export of KRG oil through the Kirkuk–Ceyhan pipeline to the storage facility at Ceyhan and built strong relations with KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani and his political, diplomatic and business associates.

The Deterioration in Erbil–Baghdad Relations and the Rise of Islamic State

By 2010, the sectarian civil war had largely been brought to a conclusion through the intervention of the US military. Recognizing the severity of the situation, US President George Bush ordered a surge of US forces into Iraq to end the threat posed particularly by Sunni jihadist militants, and also by Shia militia groups supported by Iran. However, the underlying political and security-related reasons that pushed Sunnis to oppose the Shiite-dominated government remained, and it was in this period that the building blocks of ISIS were finally assembled. The new prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, firstly consolidated his own power base by attacking the military forces of the Shia populist leader Muqtada al-Sadr in 2008. With Muqtada then defeated in Basra, Maliki turned his forces to the north. With the Sunni-supported Iraqiyya block performing well in the elections of 2010, to the extent that Maliki maintained his premiership through the support of Western powers, Maliki turned his attention on what was becoming increasingly popular, and legitimate, Sunni Arab politicians. The vice-president, Tariq al-Hashemi, was ordered to be arrested on terrorism charges, as was the extremely popular Anbari politician Rafi al-Issawi. The result saw demonstrations take place across Sunni-dominated Iraq, with them being put down with increasingly violent force by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) that were now largely loyal to Maliki. In this setting, Sunni Arabs, and Turkmens, found the allure of the newly reorganized and energized Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) to be powerful, and it was a logical move to associate with them to oppose the state.

Concomitantly, Maliki was also turning his attention to the KRI. Maliki, increasingly exasperated by the Kurds' exporting of oil to Turkey, effectively placed the KRI under an economic embargo by withholding the agreed transfer of revenue from Baghdad to Erbil that was used to fund the public sector, and the peshmerga forces, of the KRI (Voller, 2013). Massoud Barzani, however, became even more determined to generate sources of revenue that were independent of Baghdad. The result was predictable as Barzani and

Malaki attacked each other ever more vociferously and also moved military forces against each other at key parts bordering the disputed territories. If it were not for the rise of ISIS in 2014, it is highly plausible that Barzani and Malaki would have deployed their respective military forces against each other for control of the disputed territories.

Meanwhile, the strength of what had now become the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) was continuing to grow in the rural areas of Nineveh, Anbar and Diyala provinces. To the west of Baghdad, the town of Fallujah was taken by ISIS insurgents at the beginning of 2013. Their presence continued to grow in Sunni-dominated provinces to the north and, on 9 June 2014, ISIS insurgents entered the northern city of Mosul. With alarming speed, ISIS captured Tikrit on 11 June and Anbar province was under their control by the end of the month. With these astonishing successes the leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared the establishment of the caliphate and the transformation of ISIS into the Islamic State (IS). Now known as Caliph Ibrahim by his followers, Abu Bakr surprised his northern neighbours by unleashing a wave of attacks on the Kurdistan Region from the beginning of August. Targeting Christians and Yezidis in Nineveh province, IS fighters then assaulted the town of Gwer to the south of Erbil governorate on 5 August and then captured Makhmour. The peshmerga forces had largely evacuated from the front and, with few forces available to stop Erbil from being invaded, President Barzani rallied his KDP peshmerga and appealed for assistance to PUK forces, to the YPG and PKK, and also to his arch-rival in Baghdad, Nouri al-Maliki. To their credit, they all came to the defence of Erbil, with Maliki facilitating Iranian air strikes at very short notice, and PUK, YPG and PKK fighters all deploying against IS. Most importantly, Western air power was also brought to bear on the marauding IS fighters on 7 August, allowing the KRI to once again survive a near-death experience (Stansfield, 2014).

It seemed, yet again, that the leadership of the KRI had been given a fortuitous lifeline – albeit one that had been the result of its near defeat at the hands of IS. Now, with Western powers fully mobilized against IS, the Kurdish parties in Iraq found themselves to be the preferred – and only – partners of choice in the immediate fight against IS in Iraq. With the ISF brutally mauled, it would take several years for Western trainers to bring their forces back to the levels needed to defeat IS and, in the meantime, it would be the KRI peshmerga forces that would undertake the arduous and dangerous work of combating IS on the ground, in the disputed territories, with Western air support. This security imperative allowed the KRI

leadership to continue to export oil – including, now, from Kirkuk following the ordering of the peshmerga forces into the city to prevent its capitulation to IS – and allowed, for a few more years, the KRI leaderships to ignore the public clamour concerning corruption, inefficient governance and elite-level bargains.

However, by 2016, these dynamics were again beginning to change and a perfect storm was starting to form around the president of the Kurdistan Region, Massoud Barzani. At the level of the political leadership, there were ferocious arguments over his continuation as president of the region, which remained unresolved as the KDP, PUK and Gorran engaged in a heated war of words (Morris, 2015). At the same time, the economy had been devastated and the KRG found itself in several billion dollars' worth of debt, unable to pay public sector salaries for months on end (Coles, 2016; Stansfield, 2014; DeWeaver, 2016). This appalling economic situation had then been further deepened by the influx of refugees from Syria and Iraq, caused by the expansion of the Islamic State. The numbers of refugees and internally displaced peoples (IDPs) that took refuge in the KRI were astonishingly high. By early 2015, some 1.5 million had fled IS and sought sanctuary in the KRI, which constituted a 28 per cent increase in the KRI's population, and with more arriving throughout the year and into the next (Kulaksiz, 2015).

Referendum and After

I was in Erbil during the referendum and had the good fortune to discuss its rationale with leading figures in the KDP, including Nechirvan Barzani and Hoshyar Zebari, and, after the referendum, with Massoud Barzani. Much has been said about why Massoud Barzani decided to hold a referendum in the autumn of 2017 – with many of his detractors arguing that it was the easiest way for him to nullify the effects of the perfect storm that was beginning to rage around him and his party. This may be true, but it also seems to be clear that there were other compelling reasons, not least because he recognized that the importance of the Kurds to Western powers was already beginning to lessen due to what was, by then, the rapid collapse of IS. Quickly, it seems, the Kurdish leadership realized that the 2014–17 period was again something of an anomaly – an interregnum in which the interests of the Kurds of Iraq were, for perhaps the first time in their history, totally aligned with the interests of Western powers. This alignment allowed them to develop initiatives in ways that would have been impossible before ISIS's appearance. The Kurds took control of vast areas of northern Iraq they had claimed as being

historically Kurdish, but that did not lie within Erbil's authority. These 'disputed territories', which included the multi-ethnic city of Kirkuk and its important oil field cluster, the strategically sensitive Sinjar district of Nineveh and areas to the north and east of Mosul, were simply taken by Kurdish peshmerga forces as a form of fait accompli, negating the need, from the Kurdish leaders' perspective, to continue to push for the implementation of Article 140 of the constitution – the article that would have formally resolved the question of authority in these territories, if it had ever been implemented by the government of Iraq. The Kurds would also export oil not only from their 'own' fields, as defined by the Constitution of Iraq in 2005, but also from the oil cluster of Kirkuk, including the massive Bei Hassan field and the Avana and Baba Gurgur domes – all of which were established producing fields before 2003, and so would, again according to the constitution, remain under the jurisdiction of the government of Iraq. As the Kurds needed revenue to support not only their heightened war effort but also to provide for a vastly swollen community of Internally Displaced People (IDP) that had fled in the face of the ISIS advance, the government of Iraq not only stopped attempting to block KRG oil exports but even came to agreement with them, particularly over the sharing of revenue from the Kirkuk oil field cluster (Elass, 2016).

But with the defeat of IS in Mosul, from the Kurdish perspective, the concern began to emerge that their utility, as conveniently placed proxies, would diminish. No longer would Western powers be willing to ignore the fact that Erbil now operated as the capital of an independent state in all but name. The pressure would also mount on the KRG to not only relinquish control of key disputed territories back to the government of Iraq but to also return Kirkuk to Iraqi sovereignty, along with Kirkuk's oil wealth. At the same time, the Kurdish leaders would be strongly encouraged to re-engage with their Iraqi counterparts – Shiites and Sunnis – in a political game that they increasingly saw no benefit in playing. The view from Erbil was that the institutions of the government of Iraq were now totally dominated by Shiite parties, with hard-line Shiite militias heightening their influence among them, and that the Kurds would struggle in vain to achieve success in such an environment. Economically, too, while the KRI economy was encumbered with massive amounts of public debt, and with public sector salaries being paid only partially if at all, there was little to suggest that the Iraqi economy was performing to a level by which the KRI's problems would be resolved. For Massoud, then, the situation was clear – it was the moment for the Kurds to express their desires and to attempt to secure their independence from Iraq.

When Massoud Barzani declared the holding of a referendum to express the Kurds' desire to secede from Iraq, he exposed not only the yearning of the Kurds across the Middle East to establish a state in which they would be the dominant nation, but also the ability of the state system to preserve the status quo.[8] He mobilized with great effect the passionate and emotive force of one of the two most significant non-state situations in the Middle East – those being the rights to statehood of the Kurds and of the Palestinians – and the counterpoint to this force, that being the inherent ability of extant states to protect their territorial integrity and nationalist projects. Barzani's initiative also illustrated the inability, or perhaps unwillingness, of Western countries and their powerful regional partners to support independence initiatives, either because of self-interest, or a lack of capability to support a new state-building project or a belief that such an initiative was simply being undertaken at an unsuitable moment in time. In the case of the Kurds of Iraq, arguably, all three came together, certainly in the eyes of Western powers.

The Referendum and Aftermath

The referendum was held as planned on 25 September 2017 and saw 93 per cent of a 72 per cent turnout say 'yes' to the question 'Do you want the Kurdistan Region and the Kurdistani areas outside the administration of the region to become an independent state?' (McKernan, 2017). But the referendum had gone ahead against the express wishes, demands even, of several governments including the US, UK, Turkey, Iran and Iraq. Of these countries, the US and UK had engaged in extensive diplomatic efforts to persuade Barzani and his lieutenants to at least postpone the referendum, in the interests of Iraq unity, with the US promising to support a referendum within two years if US- and UK-supported negotiations with Baghdad failed (Morris, 2017). Turkey's response was blunt, with President Erdoğan calling Barzani's plans 'illegitimate' (Karadeniz and Korsunskaya, 2017). However, while Erdoğan's rhetoric was strong, his actions were more restrained. Perhaps recognizing the extensive transactional relationship that had developed between Ankara and Erbil in the hydrocarbons and construction sectors, and recognizing Barzani's own animosity towards the Kurdistan Workers' Party – the PKK – that remained the Turkish state's primary

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8 For recent work on the relationship between non-states, unrecognized states, and de facto states and the international system of states, see Bahceli, Bartman and Srebrnik (2004), Caspersen and Stansfield (2011) and Ker-Lindsay and Berg (2018).

security concern, there was no visible change in the posture of Turkey towards the KRI. The border remained open, commerce and trade still happened and oil continued to flow from KRG-controlled fields to Turkish refineries and ports.

Iran's response was, however, quite different and, from the perspective of the Kurdish leadership, surprisingly so. After initially closing border crossings with the KRI at the request of the government of Iraq, Iran mobilized military forces along the border with the KRI, moving forces from Kurdish-dominant areas of Iran in a clear message to Iran's own restive Kurds, as well as those of Iraq (Nadimi, 2017). But Iran's real threat was to use its close relationship – even control – of Iraqi Shia militia forces of the Hashed al-Shaʿbi. With several military units already within striking distance of Kurdish peshmerga-controlled territories in Diyala, Kirkuk and Nineveh provinces – areas taken by the peshmerga in 2014 that lay to the south of the extant KRI – Iran then brought direct pressure to bear on the Kurdish political parties of Iraq, and particularly the traditional counterbalance to Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party, the Talabani family-led Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Following the direct intervention of the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Al-Quds Brigade, Lieutenant General Qassem Sulaimani, with the rising leadership figure in the PUK, Bafel Talabani – the eldest son of the late Jalal Talabani – parts of the PUK peshmerga force in Kirkuk were stood down as Iranian-commanded Hashed military units moved north on 15 October, retaking the city of Kirkuk before moving against KDP peshmerga lines to the west, in southern Erbil province and into Nineveh. While the KDP peshmerga with parts of the PUK peshmerga commanded by Kosrat Rasoul mounted a successful defence to the south of Erbil and Dohuk, it was clear that the situation was untenable.

By November, all the territory held by the Kurds since 2014, in the disputed territories, had been ceded to Iraqi forces, and the Kurdish leadership, especially Barzani, was accused of making dangerously misguided decisions. Massoud Barzani himself did not seek to renew his presidency and in effect ended his term at the end of November. After several rounds of negotiations between the KRG prime minister, Nechirvan Barzani, and the Iraqi prime minister, Haidar al-Abadi, the situation slowly began to normalize. However, it seemed that the initiative of Massoud Barzani had ultimately failed, and nearly catastrophically, as the Iraqi government and Shia militia forces had been poised to enter the Kurdistan Region itself. Even though this did not happen, the once confident Kurds had now to recognize that they had to rebuild their relationship not only with Baghdad, Tehran and Ankara but also

with Western allies that remained distinctly unimpressed with what was viewed as Kurdish intransigence and stubbornness that had very nearly caused an ethnic civil war in Iraq.

It has proved to be easy for commentators to criticize Massoud Barzani for his decision to go ahead with the referendum. A case can be made that he needed a significant nationalist event to take place to shore up his popular support at a time when his government, and his family, were being accused of financial mismanagement and corruption. He had also been in power for over twenty-five years and public opinion had begun to be more critical of his own standing. Yet these analyses undervalue the structural challenges that were emerging towards the continuation of the KRI even as an autonomous, non-state entity in Iraq. With the post-Saddam period being in its second decade, the Kurds were beginning to fear a resumption of 'business as usual' within Iraq, of their autonomy being diminished and with their rights being ignored. Compounding this was the clear end of the threat posed by Islamic State. Oddly, the Kurds, in Iraq and in Syria, developed an almost symbiotic dynamic with the Islamic State. In effect, as long as Islamic State remained a threat, then Western powers would choose to engage directly and bilaterally with the Kurds of Iraq and Syria. But as soon as this threat ended, then so too would the need to engage with the Kurds. From my own conversations with Barzani, it seems to be clear that this changing security setting weighed heavily upon the calculations as to whether to hold a referendum or not.

Conclusion: The Obliged Iraqis

Now, the Iraqi Kurds are firmly locked into the state of Iraq, as a singular federal unit, with significant amounts of autonomy, but with there being little likelihood that more federal units will develop in the near future. Kurdish leaders have again rebuilt their ties with Baghdad and have been proactive, and pragmatic, in re-establishing links with Tehran and Ankara, and are working closely with Western powers to reform the peshmerga forces, albeit within a framework of integrating them more fully with Iraqi Security Forces. And the KRG has also moved ahead with developing deeper relations with Russia, with a particular focus on the oil and gas sector.

In effect, the Kurds of Iraq are now obliged to be Iraqi – to exist within the state of Iraq, with a dream of being independent that, for now, unless events happen in the rest of Iraq that may collapse the state (such as a new sectarian civil war) have little hope of being realized. But their non-state existence gives them flexibility in their international relations, and opportunities to external

powers, that will likely see the Kurds of Iraq further consolidate their state-like institutions and to again resurrect their determination to pursue independence, whether in the next five years or beyond. And so it is in this peculiar setting of being a people without a state, yet with state-like institutions, and engaged in the mechanics and operation of a state (Iraq), that the Kurds in Iraq will continue to exist, for the time being – obliged to be Iraqi, but conditioned to pursue their dream.

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Street Protest and Opposition in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

NICOLE F. WATTS

Kurds in Iraq have a long history of taking to the streets to challenge government policies. Crowds in Sulaimani protested in 1930 when British leaders abandoned support for Kurdish independence aspirations, and rallied there and elsewhere against imperialism, economic nationalization and class inequities under the Iraqi monarchy and early republic. Despite sometimes ferocious reprisals, it was relatively common for ordinary people to demonstrate against state policies in the 1980s under Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, and mass demonstrations across Kurdistan played a key role in the 1991 uprising that briefly wrested the Kurdish north from central Iraqi control. Kurdish self-governance did not end public demonstrations and 'contentious performances' (Tilly, 2008): on the contrary, especially after the overthrow of the Ba'ath regime in 2003, extra-institutional protest became a fixture of Kurdish political life.

Though little attended by scholars, street politics have been important – sometimes the primary – means for ordinary Kurds to articulate collective preferences and to try and effect changes in policies and the distribution of resources. Under the pre-1991 Iraqi regimes, the authoritarian nature of the system blocked ordinary people's access to government institutions, leaving few public options for claims-making other than extra-institutional opposition. After 1991 and 2003, when Iraqi Kurdistan saw the establishment of more representative institutions under the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), the highly centralized and personalized nature of KRG authority – both in government and political parties – again discouraged political action through formal procedures or via established institutional arenas. In a sociopolitical structure long characterized by clientelism (see e.g. Bali, 2018), informal networking was and continues to be an important means of petitioning authorities, but the street has been the primary stage upon which people have aired grievances and mounted collective public challenges.

This chapter examines protest in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,[1] with an emphasis on post-2003 protests under the Kurdistan Regional Government. Rather than quieting dissent, Kurdish self-rule after 1991 and especially after 2003 prompted a new cycle of contention involving a wide array of actors. Though protests occurred in response to a variety of issues, the vast majority targeted the KRG and its ruling parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). I suggest that the prevalence of street protest has shaped Iraqi Kurdish politics in several distinctive ways: validating collective action as a legitimate form of political expression, normalizing street protest as a familiar repertoire of political action that people might readily engage in and helping produce alternative narratives to those perpetuated by ruling party elites, both under and after the Ba'ath regime. Cumulatively, street protest has expanded and diversified the Iraqi Kurdish political field, physically and symbolically, even while political parties have monopolized most areas of economic and political life.

The chapter is organized as follows. The first part considers the concept of street protest and then offers a rough historical overview of such protest in the Kurdish areas of Iraq in the twentieth century. The second part analyses protest targeting the Kurdistan Regional Government in the 1990s and after 2003.[2]

Kurdish Protest as Collective Claim-Making: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives

Street protests occur when people gather in public places in response to a perceived grievance, and/or to issue collective demands. Tilly (2006: 213) considers them 'established claim-making performances' that, over time, developed various forms: marches through public thoroughfares; silent vigils; blockades of city streets, bridges and highways; occupation of streets and squares; and mass, public gatherings, usually involving speakers and other sorts of performative acts.

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1 I do not include Kirkuk and other disputed areas in this analysis, but for a helpful study, see van Wilgenburg (2011).
2 A great deal of research remains to be done on Kurdish urban protest prior to 2003, and my assessment of these earlier decades should be read as preliminary observations based on limited sources. My analysis of post-2003 protest draws on ethnographic field research conducted in Iraqi Kurdistan between 2009 and 2019. I am grateful to Peshawa Ahmad for his extraordinary research assistance and translations from Sorani Kurdish, and to the many people who have given generously of their time to speak with me and help me in countless other ways.

As elsewhere, Kurdish protests have served both internal community-building functions as well as vehicles for publicizing grievances and making claims. Though most protests do not result in clear-cut policy victories or produce the collective benefits demonstrators seek, they nonetheless may have a range of important social, cultural and political impacts (see e.g. Giugni, McAdam and Tilly 1999; Meyer, 2003). Research on social movements shows that interpersonal networks and social ties are largely responsible for convincing individuals to participate in protests (Meyer, 2015), but the converse is also true: participating in protests can build internal solidarity, reinforce and expand sociopolitical networks and help forge new collective identities that can become the basis for further opposition. Street protests and rallies may shift public attitudes and pressure authorities by drawing attention and giving a name to grievances, articulating alternative narratives and discourses and offering a public demonstration of support for demands. When accompanied by strikes or mass non-compliance they can create an atmosphere of ungovernability and/or prod regimes into crisis, which in turn may create divisions among ruling elites over how to respond; rouse new allies; and mobilize new sectors of the population, any of which may create new opportunities for further mobilization (see e.g. Sharp, 2010; Tarrow, 2011).

Iraqi Kurdish Street Protest in Historical Context: Earlier Cycles of Contention

Though historically constituting a small part of a broader repertoire of contentious politics dominated by armed struggle, urban street protests in Iraqi Kurdistan nonetheless played important roles in perpetuating local claims and broadcasting popular perspectives in a series of regimes that gave ordinary people few avenues for exercising influence. Some of the earliest instances of Kurdish urban mobilization occurred in Sulaimani in 1930, when thousands of people took part in protests against British policies in Iraq that made no provisions for the Kurds (Gorgas, 2008), and, later that year, against the Iraqi elections, which protesters decried as unfair (New York Times, 1930). Other notable protests occurred between 1947 and 1949 in Sulaimani, Kirkuk and Erbil, organized in part by the Iraqi Communist Party, which for two decades played a key role in mobilizing popular opposition (see e.g. Batatu, 1978; Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, 2003). Some demonstrations took place as part of broad Iraqi responses to external developments, but others were class-based protests directed internally at Kurdish landed elites. David McDowall (1997: 298) writes, for instance, of

1947 solidarity demonstrations in Sulaimani after a sheikh flogged village men who challenged his authority.

While Kurds participated in the many labour strikes and anti-monarchy protests that took place in Baghdad and other parts of Iraq in the late 1940s and 1950s (see e.g. Gorgas, 2017; McDowall, 1997: 288), organized urban protests in Kurdistan itself were relatively uncommon until the later decades of the twentieth century. This can be in part attributed to demographics – as of 1957 about 70 per cent of the Kurdistan region's population still lived in rural areas (Ismael and Saleem, 2015) – as well as the lack of organizational infrastructure for mobilization. There were no universities in the Kurdish north until 1968; unions and syndicates were weak and heavily regulated; and active members of Kurdish associations tended to be urban notables and / or small groups of intellectual elites. In general, class divisions within Kurdish society obstructed the organization of urban protest. In these earlier decades, the most important forms of Kurdish mass mobilization took part in rural areas, largely underpinned by clan structures, as exemplified by the KDP and Mulla Mustafa Barzani's reliance on tribal militias.

Iraq's shift to a republic perpetuated some grievances and, especially under the Ba'ath regime, brought developments that laid the groundwork for new levels of urban protest. After the collapse of the Kurdish rebellion in 1975, the regime's village-razing and resettlement campaigns in Kurdistan accelerated existing trends towards urbanization. Both Kurdish movement activities and the central state's Arabization of Kurdish areas contributed to the popularization of a Kurdish national identity that crossed class and geographic divides (see e.g. Natali, 2005: 26–62). As occurred in Turkey after 1980, state repression contributed to the ethnicization and politicization of broad sectors of the Kurdish population that had not necessarily identified previously with Kurdish national aspirations. Though most street demonstrations did not occur in the name of Kurdish nationalism per se, the new collective sense of 'Kurdayetî' (Natali, 2005) helped build new solidarities and served as a resonant master frame (Benford and Snow, 2000) for a host of specific grievances and demands.

Even a fragmentary assessment of protests in this era highlights the fact that the Kurdish struggle under the Ba'ath was waged not only by peshmerga in the mountains but by civilians in towns and cities. Their collective public manifestations of discontent continually pushed the limits of Iraqi authority and became a resource for Kurdish leaders seeking to undercut the Iraqi regime on multiple fronts. Indeed, especially in the 1980s, both parties repeatedly called for a popular Kurdish uprising against the Iraqi state

(Hardi, 2019; see also Stansfield, 2003: 92), something that affirmed the value and role of protest as an important part of the Kurdish struggle.

Though few of these demonstrations received much attention outside Kurdistan, they were relatively common throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In the early 1980s, for instance, regime pressure on students to join the popular army led to widespread university protests in multiple cities (Hardi, 2019). Sometimes demonstrations would spread from one city to another, creating spirals of protest and reprisals. On April 24 1982, nine people in Qalladze (north of Sulaimani) were shot when security forces opened fire on several thousand people marching to commemorate the 1974 Iraqi air attack there that had killed at least a hundred people. Demonstrations condemning the shootings then erupted in multiple cities including Sulaimani, where demonstrations took place around the city almost every night, and Erbil, where two demonstrators were publicly executed (see e.g. Le Monde, 1982: 6). The death toll ultimately included at least half a dozen other young people.

One of the largest and most significant protests of this period took place in the spring of 1987 in Halabja, where protests had become relatively common (Sadiq, 2016). In May 1987 students affiliated with the PUK and the Communist Party organized a demonstration in response to government plans to relocate villagers from a dozen nearby villages. But when an estimated 1,000 to 2,000 people converged in the marketplace on the morning of 13 May and marched to the municipality, military vehicles began shooting, killing a young man. Protesters carried his body through the city chanting anti-government slogans, resulting in further clashes (Robinson, 2013; Sadiq, 2016). By noon, the level of violence had driven protesters into their homes, mosques and other buildings. Iraqi security forces brought tanks and helicopters and heavily bombed several neighbourhoods, razing at least one to the ground. Security forces later executed the wounded who had been taken to hospital, and around 1,500–2,000 people fled the city. Ultimately, around 50 people were killed, more than 100 seriously wounded and dozens detained (Sadiq, 2016; see also Hiltermann, 1994).

The last major act of collective defiance in Halabja before the Iraqi air force bombed the city with chemical gasses in March of 1988, the demonstration helped build a local historical memory that would fuel a sense of collective struggle and sacrifice even before the chemical bombing. Similarly, though the course of events was very different, mass participation in the March 1991 uprising – Raparin – at the end of the First Gulf War would become a powerful symbol of Kurdish initiative and courage, feeding both local and official narratives of resistance through the streets. Beginning in Raniya and

Chawar Qurna on 5 March 1991 and quickly spreading to Sulaimani, Erbil, Duhok and other towns and cities, thousands of people participated in mass demonstrations calling for democracy in Iraq and autonomy for Kurdistan. In Sulaimani, the fighting killed hundreds on both sides, but by the evening of 7 March, the city was in Kurdish hands. Two days later in Erbil, public demonstrations occurred in co-ordination with PUK peshmerga and Communist Party militias, with the city falling to Kurdish control after several hours (Abd al-Jabbar, 1992; McDowall, 1997: 371).

Protests under and against the Kurdistan Regional Government

In the 1990s Kurds living in urban areas began mounting collective public challenges to Kurdish authorities. Compared to later phases of contention these demonstrations were small and sporadic, but they indicate the degree to which ordinary people treated the street as a vehicle for political expression even after the partial withdrawal of Ba'athist forces, and they served as an indicator of popular criticism of the dominant Kurdish parties in the early years of self-rule.

Structurally, the creation of the no-fly zone in Iraq north of the 36th parallel, withdrawal of Iraqi troops in October 1991 and the first election for the Kurdistan National Assembly in mid-1992 reconstituted the political arena, creating a new framework for collective action. On the one hand, the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from most parts of Iraqi Kurdistan meant the Iraqi government could no longer enforce its authority there and halted the systematic use of mass violence against Kurdish civilians in the north. The 19 May 1992 election for the new 105-person Kurdistan National Assembly constituted a watershed moment in many people's lives, the culmination of nearly a century of struggle, and raised expectations for a better life and a more representative government. The early 1990s saw a blossoming of associational life in Iraqi Kurdistan, with the establishment of many new groups and parties, and in 1993 the parliament passed important new laws that offered some protection for their right to hold gatherings, demonstrations and strikes (Amnesty International, 1995: 16).

On the other hand, the economic embargos against the Kurdish region and the Kurdish civil war of the mid-1990s, coming on the heels of so many devastating years of violence, created profound instability (see e.g. Natali, 2010; Ofteringer and Bäcker, 1994). Though international aid slowly helped rebuild the economy and reopen public institutions, the region suffered acute

shortages of fuel and basic goods, widespread unemployment and poor infrastructure. Although the new Kurdistan Regional Government looked relatively democratic on paper, in practice its ministries and parliament had little actual authority, which remained with traditional Kurdish party and socio-economic elites (see e.g. Stansfield, 2003: 145–76). Especially in the mid-1990s when fighting broke out between the KDP and the PUK, the human rights situation deteriorated substantially, and some prominent civic and party leaders were assassinated (Amnesty International, 1995).

Organizational efforts helped name such strains and muster support for collective action. Workers' groups and unions, newly formed human rights groups, women's associations, religious groups and parties, and a host of left-wing groups all became active in organizing demonstrations, as did university students and youth associations at Salaheddin University in Erbil and at Sulaimani University, which opened in 1992. With little training in crowd control, Kurdish authorities sometimes responded harshly, and many small protests that began as non-violent rallies ended with detentions, property damage and clashes between civilian demonstrators and security forces. In August 1992, for instance, 13 activists were detained in Erbil during a protest involving about 200 people who gathered to condemn the Turkish bombardment of Şırnak. Another demonstration organized on 1 September 1994 by the Kurdistan Workers' Federation in Sulaimani, an umbrella organization representing unemployed people and workers, resulted in PUK security firing into a crowd of several hundred people, hitting and then killing at least one organizer. Demonstrators had gathered to protest a decision by the Sulaimani governor to destroy illegal shelters said to house Kurds from Kirkuk (Amnesty International, 1995).

Though some protests of the mid-1990s concerned regional issues, most targeted the ruling parties, especially as relations between the KDP and the PUK worsened, dragging many smaller parties into their conflict. In late May 1994 more than 200 women, organized via professional committees and through personal networks, marched from Sulaimani to Erbil calling for an end to the intra-Kurdish fighting (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2011: 342), and civilians demonstrated in both cities against the inter-party conflict. Many ordinary people, as Amnesty International (1995: 5) noted at the time, felt a 'deep sense of betrayal'.

These 1990s protest events were small – mostly involving demonstrators numbering in the hundreds – tended to be brief (an afternoon, or a day) and episodic. In the chaotic rentier environment of the 1990s, and lacking autonomous media, there were few institutional mechanisms for converting such

gatherings into large-scale mobilization. Physical and material insecurity, the factionalized nature of power and weak government capacity posed considerable obstacles to collective action and limited its potential tactical efficacy. But the presence of protesters on the street complicated Kurdish leaders' efforts to promote the region as 'the foundation of a democratic experiment right in the center of the Middle East', as KDP leader Massoud Barzani characterized Iraqi Kurdistan in a 1994 interview (Darnton, 1994), highlighted popular frustration with the political establishment and put party leaders on notice that they were not immune to Kurdish street protest simply by virtue of being Kurdish. In this sense, the 1990s protests served as a dress rehearsal for much larger demonstrations to come.

Protests after 2003: An Overview

The overthrow of the Ba'ath regime in 2003 and the 2005 Iraqi Constitution granting the Kurdistan region status as an autonomous region in a federal Iraqi state rewrote the rules of the political game. The legal, political and financial integration of the Kurdistan Region within Iraq and the unification of the two Kurdish governments after 2006 brought new stability and security, shifting attention away from existential survival and towards the unfolding project of Kurdish state-building and self-governance. Iraqi Kurdistan's self- and US-proclaimed status as a democratic example for Iraq offered potent master frames for mobilization and potential leverage for negotiation. Beginning soon after the overthrow of the old regime, street demonstrations became a regular fixture of political life, with daily news reports sometimes featuring multiple, uncoordinated protests and rallies occurring within the space of a single day, and, later, waves of linked demonstrations around Kurdistan.

Classified by target issue, street protests in the post-2003 era can be divided into four main categories. First, some demonstrations occurred in response to international or regional Middle Eastern events. They tended to be organized by parties and affiliate groups and often took place in conjunction with broader global protests. In 2006, for instance, Iraqi Kurds rallied against Israeli attacks on Lebanon and protested with Muslim communities across the world against Danish cartoons that appeared to depict the Prophet Muhammad as a terrorist (see e.g. Al-Musawi and Khalil, 2006).

A second category involved demonstrations concerning regional Kurdish issues. Turkish military attacks against Kurds both within and outside Turkey regularly provoked small demonstrations, often orchestrated by parties (see e.g. Brayati, 2003). In December 2011, for instance, protests took place in Erbil,

Sulaimani and Raniya condemning a Turkish air force attack in Şırnak that killed thirty-four people (Gali Kurdistan, 2011; Roj TV, 2011). In another instance, in the autumn of 2014 hundreds of protesters gathered in front of the UN building in Erbil to condemn Turkey and call for aid for Kurdish fighters defending the Syrian Kurdish town of Kobane against Islamic State (Hassan, 2014), and other rallies and campaigns on behalf of Kobane took place throughout Iraqi Kurdistan. Another Islamic State-related demonstration took place in front of the US consulate, organized by women's groups, members of parliament and civil society activists calling on American and UN officials to aid Yezidi girls kidnapped by ISIS (NRT, 2014).

While many protests in this category were spearheaded by parties or party affiliates, others were more grassroots affairs, highlighting the way networks forged through social media and new communication technologies could facilitate pan-Kurdism and produce collective action that transcended traditional party divisions within Kurdish politics. One notable example took place in March 2017 when demonstrators gathered in Erbil, Sulaimani and elsewhere to call for an end to Kurd-on-Kurd violence in the Sinjar district (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Rudaw, 2017a).

A third category involved protests against the Iraqi government in Baghdad. Their infrequency speaks to the degree to which ordinary Kurds had, by the start of the twenty-first century, come to view the KRG as the empowered governing authority for the Kurdistan Region and did not see collective action against Baghdad as a fruitful form of political action. But Baghdad-directed demonstrations did occur occasionally in response to the passage of Iraqi central laws – i.e. in late 2017 and early 2018 the Civil Development Organization in Sulaimani protested a new Iraqi law allowing child marriages (Othman, 2017) – or in moments of heightened tension between the KRG and Baghdad. In these instances, demonstrators often crafted their message to appeal simultaneously to international, Iraqi and KRG officials. In late 2017 and early 2018, for instance, protests took place after the September 2017 Kurdistan independence referendum, with demonstrators rallying in front of the UN building in Erbil to protest Iraqi flight bans and other restrictions on the flow of money, services and goods to Kurdistan (Rudaw, 2018).

A fourth – and by far the largest – category of post-2003 demonstrations concerned 'internal' developments in Iraqi Kurdistan. Though organized in response to a range of issues – religious concerns, women's welfare and the rights of minorities, for instance (see e.g. Hawlati, 2006a) – the vast majority of these targeted the Kurdistan Regional Government, around two main

issues: service provision and salaries, and governance concerns, especially corruption, rule of law and civil liberties. Though they might appear distinct, both reference government performance. In addition, many protests that primarily articulated service- and infrastructure-related claims included some explicit governance issues: corruption was blamed for the slow pace of work in completing public projects, for instance.

These KRG-directed demonstrations do evince some important continuities. Most were non-violent, and protesters' demands remained relatively consistent. Significantly, demonstrators did not question the validity of the project of Kurdish self-determination itself, but, rather, the manner of its implementation. At least until 2018, most took place in Sulaimani province and outlier towns such as Halabja, producing a clearly demarcated political geography of protest that encompassed areas dominated since the late 1970s by the PUK.

Nonetheless, an examination of post-2003 extra-institutional protest politics shows they have also altered in important ways. I here divide such protest into three main phases: 2005–9; 2009–14 and 2014–present, with each phase primarily differentiated by shifts in state–society relations, the resources of the system and by mobilization capacity. Systemic resources include material resources – the perceived amount of capital circulating within the formal and informal economy – and institutional capacity: government and party ability to formulate and enforce policy decisions. Mobilization capacity refers to the resources available to facilitate and sustain contentious politics (see e.g. Edwards and McCarthy, 2004): in Iraqi Kurdistan, the existence of powerful opposition parties and independent (or opposition) media outlets played key roles in expanding – or contracting – this capacity. Symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1994), such as perceptions of martyrdom (in the case of Halabja, and for peshmerga), and the democratic rights frame of the Arab Spring also provided activists additional resources for pressuring authorities and extracting concessions.

Phase 1 (2005–2009): Street Protest in a Resource-Mixed Environment

A new cycle of contentious street politics began in 2005 with a wave of demonstrations and strikes targeting the ruling Kurdish parties and the KRG. Characterized by small-scale, local and uncoordinated demonstrations that mostly revolved around service-related demands, this first phase occurred in a 'resource-mixed' environment in which Kurdish parties and institutions of governance had access to new levels of material wealth, but the capacity for

mounting broad-based opposition, though greater than in the prior decade, remained relatively weak.

The proliferation of KRG-directed protest in these years stemmed from a number of factors. As Denise Natali (2005) has detailed, after the overthrow of the Ba'ath regime in 2003 the Kurdistan Region received a huge influx of economic capital as a result of US aid, new budget allocations from Baghdad (17 per cent of the Iraqi budget) and foreign trade and investment. At the same time, KRG efforts to build a neo-liberal market economy altered the terms of engagement between rulers and ruled. While standards of living increased and some people become millionaires, many families struggled to survive on meagre state salaries in the face of sharp cost-of-living increases. Cities and towns across Kurdistan, and especially in Sulaimani province, suffered from severe service shortages – chiefly, electricity and clean water – as well as infrastructure deficiencies such as unpaved roads, inadequate health services and poor-quality education. The growing and highly visible income gap between ordinary people and a new elite class fuelled deep levels of frustration, creating strong rationales for collective action.

Demographic and organizational changes facilitated mobilization. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, four out of five Iraqi Kurds lived in urban areas, and almost half its population was under the age of twenty (Ismael and Saleem, 2015; Natali, 2005). The expansion of universities across Kurdistan – around ten new public and private universities were founded between 2000 and 2010, along with the four or so established in the 1990s – created new spaces for student-led activism, as well as extensive new socio-political networks. In the post-2003 environment, more associations joined the ranks of those formed in the 1990s, including new independent media (see especially Hussein, 2018): *Hawlati* newspaper in 2000, *Lvin* magazine in 2002 and *Awane* newspaper in 2006. These challenged official narratives, publicized demonstrations, undertook investigative reports and surveys and covered post-protest developments, including the detention of activists and official responses to popular demands. In so doing, they refracted and sustained campaigns, in some cases long beyond the original protest. Even party-supported newspapers and television stations often covered street demonstrations, with analysis from multiple perspectives.

Within this context, the October 2005 referendum on the new Iraqi constitution and the January 2006 national elections offered more proximate political opportunities for a critical public assessment of KRG performance 'thus far', and throughout the summer and autumn of 2005, the region experienced a spate of highly publicized protests, especially around

universities. Lecturers at Salahaddin University called for better wages (Hawlati, 2005a); students demanded more timely allocation of their student stipends and better living conditions in dormitories (see e.g. Howard, 2005). Other demonstrations took place in cities such as Raniya, where shopkeepers went on strike to protest fraud and long delays in completing projects (KurdSat TV, 2005); Akra, where angry protesters set fire to two petrol stations (Hawlati, 2005b); and Kalar, where demonstrators gathered outside the governor's building to protest electricity shortages, poor water distribution and lack of public services (Hawlati, 2005c; Kurdistani Nwe, 2005). In August 2006, the region experienced a wave of demonstrations from residents protesting corruption and demanding fuel, electricity and other services (see especially Hawlati, 2006b; see also Ridolfo, 2006).

These early-wave protests evince some distinctive characteristics. First, activists tended to issue pragmatic requests for improvements that in many cases officials had already promised. In this sense, many were comparatively strategic: organizers believed government authorities had the ability to respond to their demands and that protests might genuinely serve to coerce or convince them to actually deliver. In contrast to earlier eras, when the 'causal chain' between problems and solutions seemed long and complicated (i.e. ending the Kurdish civil war), the link between problem and solutions (i.e. paving roads) now seemed short and relatively uncomplicated.

Second, these early protests were local events that often took place without substantial organizational support. Many were led by students with little or no backing from civil society organizations or political parties. In so far as these early demonstrations might constitute the nascent efforts of an Iraqi Kurdish good government reform movement, the movement structure at this time could be said to be 'thin' and horizontal. Nonetheless, the protests of these years played an important role in politicizing wider sections of the population, 'emboldening more groups to confront the state in new spaces and employ a new language to describe their situation' (Abdelrahman, 2013: 579).

Third, the framing of activists' demands suggests that ordinary people accorded the regime a kind of conditional legitimacy. The KRG as an institution and the KDP–PUK leadership still enjoyed considerable support, but their right to govern became attached to performance-related conditions. However, even at this early stage, the tenor of popular protest shows pushback against Kurdish leaders' efforts to claim authority based on their historic role in the Kurdish national struggle. In this sense, the old symbolic capital of national resistance was wearing thin.

Finally, protester–official relations in this period still evince a kind of patron–client-based relationship, with dialogue and negotiations often taking place between high-ranking politicians and protest organizers. The KRG's prominent place in the international spotlight in these years and the linkage of foreign aid to democracy development meant Kurdish authorities were sensitive to the negative publicity potential of streets awash with protest, and many demonstrations were preceded and followed by activist meetings with officials.

These characteristics were very much in evidence on the 16 March 2006 protest at the Halabja Monument of Martyrs, which stands out among others of this period because of its size, symbolic import and impacts.[3] Organized by a small group of Halabjan students attending universities in Sulaimani, the protest was intended to showcase the poor quality of life in Halabja and to prevent Kurdish authorities from holding their high-profile commemoration ceremony at the monument (Watts, 2012, 2017). Prior to the demonstration, student organizers met with ministry officials and even the prime minister, who tried – unsuccessfully – to convince them to call it off. The protest began peacefully enough, but clashes between demonstrators and security forces outside the monument resulted in the death of a teenage demonstrator at the hands of security forces, and protesters setting the monument on fire, destroying much of it.

The Halabja Monument protest made headlines around the world, in part because of the symbolic significance of 'martyred' Halabja protesting its own Kurdistan Regional Government, and destroying a monument built to honour their own dead, and also because it was to date the highest profile challenge to Kurdish authorities and their claims to be a governing model for Iraq. The Halabja protest itself also served as a kind of incubator for the emergence of new civil society networks, as activists from non-governmental organizations co-ordinated their efforts to obtain the release of students detained after the demonstration, and to continue to pressure authorities to meet Halabjan demands (Watts, 2012). In 2007 and 2008 organizational involvement in demonstrations increased, with a concurrent shift towards more principled political demands such as the right to hold a demonstration and concerns for press freedoms and safety.

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3 This description of the Halabja Monument protest draws on field research carried out between 2009 and 2018, and is based on numerous interviews with the protest organizers, participants and KRG officials, as well as local news accounts, NGO reports and other materials. See Watts (2012), in particular.

Phase 2 (2009–2014): From Protests to Reform Movement –
Street Politics in a Resource-Rich Environment

The second phase of Iraqi Kurdish protest spanned from 2009 to early 2014, a period of activism that saw the longest and largest urban protest movement in the region's history, an expansion from local demands to a nationally ambitious frame of democratic systemic reform, and experimentation with new organizational models for collective action. Street activism in these years became a vital element of what could arguably now be termed a Kurdistani reform movement, with extra-institutional politics empowering – and drawing support from – more conventional forms of electoral and civil opposition politics.

Macro-level conditions in these years supported perceptions that public protests could produce results: that 'the system' – i.e. Kurdish authorities – had ample material and institutional resources to fix things if enough pressure were applied. Economically, the Kurdistan Region experienced what one World Bank (2016) report termed 'buoyant growth' between 2011 and 2013, especially in the oil and construction sectors. The region appeared awash in money, both from foreign investment and the billions of dollars flowing annually to the KRG from the central government in Baghdad. At the same time, the very visible indicators of new wealth – expensive cars, single-family homes, gated communities, private universities– fanned long-time class divisions, with many ordinary people struggling to survive on government salaries and pensions, and deeply frustrated by inefficient services and corruption (Dagher, 2009; Loschky, 2012).

A meso-level 'thickening' of organizational life further increased mobilization capacity. The establishment of new opposition-supported and independent media outlets (most importantly, KNN and Speda TV news, and, in early 2011, Nalia Radio and TV, or NRT) brought unprecedented public scrutiny of government and party activities (see e.g. Reporters Without Borders, 2010). Such media reported on human rights violations in the Kurdistan Region (especially detentions and torture), as did organizations such as Amnesty International (see e.g. Amnesty International, 2009). The rapid expansion in social media use, especially Facebook, as well as mobile phone and information technologies, also publicized human rights concerns and facilitated mobilization.

Among the most important organizational developments of this phase was the formation of Gorran (Movement for Change) in 2009 and the party's success in the Kurdish parliamentary elections later that year, when

it won 25 of 111 seats in the Kurdistan National Assembly. Drawing support mostly from traditionally PUK strongholds in Sulaimani province, Gorran's reform-centred platform formalized and affirmed many long-time popular demands: de-politicization of government and educational institutions, accountability and transparency and an end to corruption and nepotism, among others. Gorran, the Kurdistan Islamic Union and the Kurdistan Islamic Group together constituted an opposition bloc in the parliament and provided significant resources for Kurdish street politics. Activists now had influential allies who could use their status in the parliament to pressure KDP and PUK leaders, and support for such opposition parties at the ballot box underscored the validity of protesters' demands. At the same time, the politics of the street provided public legitimation for Gorran and other opposition parties, and indeed in this period Gorran sometimes behaved more like a social movement organization – boycotting parliament and calling for and/or organizing popular protest – than a conventional party (M. Abdulla, 2011; Watts, 2014).

Players within this crowded field of opposition increasingly articulated their demands within a political, rights-oriented frame. While activists had issued political demands before, they tended to be advanced on behalf of geographically specific communities: the Halabja Follow-Up Group, or the Group for Helping Raniya. Local and localized demonstrations continued through this period (angry protests by residents of the town of Said Sadiq in early 2014 succeeded in keeping it out of the new Halabja Province, for instance) (see Rudaw, 2014), but a growing number of street demonstrations began to advance Iraqi Kurdistan-wide demands. These either took the form of demands for KRG systemic reform or were articulated on behalf of occupational or situational groups – e.g. journalists, hospital patients – that transcended any one locale. In May 2010, hundreds of people demonstrated in Sulaimani and Erbil against the murder of a young reporter and in support of press freedoms (Dagher, 2010); other attacks on journalists would prompt further demonstrations. In late 2010 and January 2011 thousands of activists protested a new demonstration law that required official approval to hold a demonstration (see e.g. N. Abdulla, 2011). In December 2012, veterans demonstrated in Sulaimani and Erbil on behalf of the disabled, calling for better benefits and higher pensions (Watts, 2012). KNN news broadcasts showed images of men in wheelchairs and on crutches carted away by Kurdish security forces. Such frames were inherently national in scope: for instance, demonstrators sought help for all disabled citizens of Kurdistan, no matter where they lived.

By far the most significant protests of this era were those that took place in early 2011 in the context of the Arab Uprisings. These began on 17 February when demonstrators gathered in Sulaimani's Sara Square to express solidarity with Egyptian and Tunisian activists and to call for reform of the KRG (Watts, 2017).[4] Though the initial rally was peaceful, some demonstrators later left the square and marched to the Kurdistan Democratic Party headquarters, where they pelted stones at the building. Security forces shot out over the crowd, killing a fourteen-year-old boy and injuring another youth who died a few days later (see e.g. Amnesty International, 2011; Salih, 2011a, 2011b).

These events became the catalyst for two months of daily mass protests modelled on the Tahrir Square protests in Egypt. Crowds ranged from an estimated several thousand to 10,000. Most demonstrators were young men, but women and men of all ages participated after the first week when the protests became more peaceful and better organized. The size and duration of the Sulaimani protests were facilitated by organizers' emphasis on non-violence and on building an inclusive, horizontal movement that incorporated many different groups and individuals. Activists formed a loose association – the Ad Hoc Committee of Maidani Azadi (Freedom Square, as they renamed Sara Square) – to co-ordinate the protests, which issued a 'road map for social and political change'. This included a new KRG constitution, an end to party influence over state institutions, the abolition of party militias, fiscal transparency and economic reforms to end nepotism and more equitably distribute resources (Ad Hoc Committee of Maidani Azadi, 2011). Sustained protests also took place across the province in cities such as Raniya and Halabja, though activists' efforts to mobilize in Erbil were stymied both by internal differences among opposition groups and by the KDP's pre-emptive measures to suppress them.

KRG authorities responded to the protests with a mixture of repression and offer of concessions (see e.g. Human Rights Watch, 2011; Kurdistan Regional Government Cabinet, 2011). Clashes took their toll, and ten people were killed in the two months of demonstrations, including two police officers and several minors (Amnesty International, 2011). On 18 April, security forces arrived to break up the gathering in Sara Square by force, and the next day, the Security Committee for Sulaimani Province banned all unlicensed demonstrations. After some confusion, the protests ended.

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4 This section draws on field research on the 2011 protests in Iraqi Kurdistan. For more, see Watts (2016).

Though the demonstrations ended without obvious policy-oriented victories, they constituted the most direct and widespread challenge to the dominant parties in KRG history, brought together many different sectors of opposition that had not previously worked together, profoundly shaped public discourse and offered new 'radical democracy' consensus-style organizational models. Perhaps most significantly, protesters promoted a kind of 'second-wave' Kurdish national identity that pushed for new legitimations of governance beyond the old ethnonational model.

Phase 3 (2014–2019): The Street versus the Regime

The third phase of protest began in 2014, the onset of a period of the economic and political crisis in which many of the hopes and achievements of the prior decade seemed to dissolve almost overnight. This phase saw waves of large demonstrations and strikes, especially by public servants; a broader repertoire that included more incidents of attacks on property; and a turn towards citizen-led 'anti-politics' (Fawcett et al., 2017) that, especially after the political crisis following the 2017 independence referendum, involved a wholesale rejection of KRG legitimacy.

As with earlier phases, structural changes altered the terms of engagement between authorities and ordinary people, affecting the nature of the protest. In 2014–15 the Kurdistan Region suffered multiple economic and political shocks. A sharp drop in global oil prices and a dramatic fall in revenue transfers from the central government in Baghdad – from about $12 billion in 2013 to the complete suspension of transfers in mid-2015 (World Bank, 2016) – had catastrophic impacts on the KRG's economy (see e.g. Joseph and Sumer, 2019). The war with Islamic State (ISIS), which required the mobilization of 200,000 peshmerga forces along a 630-mile front line and brought ISIS forces within 13 miles of Erbil, put another huge strain on government resources, as did the influx of refugees. Wages to government-paid employees – by most accounts, around half of the workforce – dropped drastically, went into arrears or stopped altogether. In early 2014, teachers and many other public sector employees began on-and-off strikes that would continue for the next four years, and to hold ongoing demonstrations to protest the 'misuse of public funds' and lack of wages.

Compounding – and in part precipitated by– these severe problems came a succession of political crises that further undermined public trust in government. In the autumn 2013 Kurdistan parliamentary elections, Gorran won the second-most votes in the region, upsetting the delicate balance of power that had existed between the KDP and the PUK since 2006. After long

negotiations, the KDP and Gorran formed a coalition government, but relations between them deteriorated in August 2015 when KRG President Massoud Barzani remained in office after his two-year extension term expired (see Salih, 2015). This precipitated a 'presidency crisis' that moved to the streets in early October when protesters attacked KDP party buildings in Sulaimani province. The KDP accused Gorran of inciting the protests and blocked the Gorran speaker of parliament from entering Erbil (see e.g. Bozarslan, 2015). President Barzani then closed the parliament for two years. The politically catastrophic events following the 25 September 2017 Kurdistan independence referendum, which saw Iraqi forces re-establish control of Kirkuk and other disputed areas with virtually no Kurdish resistance, was another severe blow to ruling party credibility.

This third phase of post-2003 street demonstrations, then, occurred in a context of drastically reduced fiscal and political capacity. Gorran's removal from the KRG and the shutdown of parliament closed channels that had linked extra-institutional and formal politics. In 2016–17, Iraqi Kurdistan also lost its most important independent media: financial problems gutted *Hawlati* and *Awane* newspapers, and the formerly independent NRT news station became linked after September 2017 to a new opposition party. Deeply frustrated Kurds turned to the street with a ferocity not seen since 1991. Societal sectors involved in protests expanded considerably: whereas past phases had been dominated by students and small cohorts of civic activists, this phase of contention involved an array of public service workers including teachers, electricity and water workers, doctors and nurses, police and even peshmerga soldiers, all demanding economic relief and political action. The mobilization of so many people occurred in part through concerted efforts by syndicates, unions and professional organizations but also reflected a citizen-led politics evidenced around the world as people took to the streets to express dissatisfaction with the formal political system (Hay and Stoker, 2009). This grassroots protest sometimes produced a bifurcation between civil society organizations (who called for peaceful demonstrations) and angry people on the streets who attacked buildings and engaged in physical confrontations with Kurdish officials and security forces (see e.g. Golpy, 2015). Mobilization by occupational groups also began to bridge the KDP–PUK division that had previously defined the parameters of street protest, and significant protests occurred in traditional KDP strongholds such as Duhok and Erbil.

Particularly striking in this phase is the shift from the kind of conditional legitimacy accorded the KRG in past years to a new rejection of Kurdish

authorities' right to rule. Throughout this phase, protesters repeatedly called for politicians to resign and, in some instances, for the dissolution and reconstitution of the KRG. As party-association links eroded, so too did more patronage networks that had maintained communication between challengers and authorities. Polarization between Kurdish authorities and protesters increased, and demonstrators encountered significant new levels of repression and violence (see e.g. Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Two episodes of protest – December 2017 and March 2018 – illustrate many of these dynamics. In the second week of December, KRG authorities announced plans to make further cuts to state salaries. On 18 December protests began in Piramagrun, north-west of Sulaimani, where demonstrators attacked party buildings of the five largest Kurdish parties – notably including Gorran and the Kurdistan Islamic Union – and set them on fire. Protests then swept the region. Some demonstrations remained peaceful, but in others clashes between security forces and demonstrators led to deaths and extensive property damage. By the end of the next week, three people had been killed and several hundred injured; the government suspended NRT news; dozens of people had been arrested; and at least twenty party offices and government buildings set on fire (see e.g. Rudaw, 2017b). Protesters repeatedly called on government ministers to quit. On 20 December, Gorran, acceding to protesters' demands for mass resignation, announced it would withdraw its ministers from the regional government, though said it would remain part of local government in Sulaimani and Halabja provinces (Rudaw, 2017c).

Protests quieted in the new year, but in March 2018, a new round of demonstrations took place to protest salary reductions and delays in payments. This time, professional organizations mobilized tens of thousands of men and women in mass demonstrations in Erbil, Sulaimani, Duhok and elsewhere. The expansion of street protest on a significant scale to KDP strongholds and the capital city of Erbil was indicative of the broad reach of popular dissatisfaction and of the erosion of support for the KDP even on its own home turf. In late March, Sulaimani's streets filled with civil and public servants, and many workers went (again) on strike (see e.g. Rudaw, 2018). Though property damage did not occur on the scale seen in December, peaceful marchers were met with harsh crackdowns. KRG security forces detained at least eighty-four protesters and four journalists (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Conclusion

Both before and after the advent of Kurdish self-rule in northern Iraq, Kurds used the street as an avenue for political claims-making. In shifting contexts that were unconducive to the establishment of durable autonomous associations and offered few legal platforms for particularistic claims or systemic reform, the protest has served as an important means for communicating popular discontent, enunciating views on government positions and trying to coerce, shame and otherwise pressure authorities into acceding to demands. Especially prior to the establishment of more independent news sources and the widespread use of social media, even small public protests could play key roles in building a sense of social solidarity, laying the sociopolitical groundwork for larger episodes of contentious action. Harsh regime responses to public protest, particularly under the Ba'ath, served to politicize ordinary people, widening the divide between Arab and Kurdish Iraq and, ultimately, contributing to the construction of a broad sense of Kurdish national identity that crossed class, regional and tribal lines. Popular demonstrations against the regime, culminating in events such as the March 1991 Kurdish uprising, helped incorporate mass protest into the symbolic pantheon of the national (and ostensibly democratic) struggle.

Kurdish party leaders and, ultimately, beneficiaries of the long campaign for Kurdish self-determination discovered quickly after 1991 that Kurdish political dominion would not quiet the street. Throughout the 1990s small groups of Kurdish demonstrators gathered to express their frustration with Kurdish political elites and the party factionalism that precipitated further economic and political crises. After 2003, when the Kurdistan Region gained legal recognition within the new federal Iraq, street protests targeting the KRG became endemic. Initially focused primarily (though not exclusively) on improving service provision and infrastructure in specific locales, by the second decade of the twenty-first century both the geographic and political scope of demonstrations had broadened to include substantial systemic reforms calling for the redistribution of resources and the rule of law. A significantly expanded meso-level mobilization capacity combined with newly potent master frames and forms of movement mobilization helped build and sustain a significant level of popular challenge to Kurdish authorities, undermining their control of physical, political and symbolic space. Earlier 'conditional legitimacies' accorded the KRG and party officials eroded under the pressure of economic and political crises after 2014, with a new

phase of Kurdistan-wide mass demonstrations – including in KDP strong-holds such as the capital of Erbil – that evinced a new degree of hostility for the political establishment and a marked deterioration of state–society relations.

Attending to such public manifestations of popular claims-making can serve as an important corrective for what can be an over-emphasis on named, formal organizations as vehicles of challenge. It also calls our attention to the agency of people who are not necessarily active in parties and political associations. While Kurdish parties and tribes constituted the primary motors of Kurdish resistance to Baghdad in the pre-1991 era, ordinary civilians also engaged in numerous and mostly unheralded struggles against the central state. In the post-2003 period, the politics of the street has generally served as the loudest challenge to the KDP–PUK duopoly and its efforts to monopolize the project of Kurdish state-building. While parties such as Gorran built new conduits after 2009 for the interplay of institutional and extra-institutional politics and provided a new degree of institutional support for opposition and reform, the collapse of these channels after 2014 and the marked reduction in government capacity again shifted political action to the street. Overall, demonstrations since 2003 highlight the degree to which ordinary people have sought to hold Kurdish leaders accountable and to gain some say over the distribution of resources and power.

No matter how energetic, loud or large, street protests and demonstrations are always difficult to translate into the leverage and procedural mechanisms for concrete institutional and policy change. While the centralized, unofficial and clientelistic nature of Iraqi Kurdish politics has obstructed the development of viable and autonomous government organizations, it has also meant that street protest has played significant roles in the political process. Especially between 2005 and 2014 when Kurdish authorities had access to the capital to meet at least some pragmatic demands, protests could make a difference: officials did pave more roads and open a university in Halabja (among protesters' demands in 2006) and designate it a province, for instance. More generally, recurring cycles of public contention diversified Iraqi Kurdish political narratives almost from the start of Kurdish self-rule. This ensured that though the KDP and the PUK might retain tight control over economic capital and institutions of coercion, they would face an army of contenders for their control over the narratives and symbols needed to comfortably perpetuate their authority.

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Minority, State and Nation
Kurdish Society in Iran in the Aftermath of the Revolution

MASSOUD SHARIFI DRYAZ

On the night of the Iraqi Kurdistan's independence referendum, thousands of people in Iranian Kurdistan took to the streets to sing, dance and shout chants in favour of self-determination. In a meeting in October 2017 with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan just over a week after this event, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei described the Kurdish referendum as 'a foreign sectarian plot', and a sign of 'the emergence of a "new Israel" in the region' (Homa, 2017). He called for 'cooperation and consultation' between Iran and Turkey to combat independence for Iraqi Kurdistan. During the same week, Iranian military forces had conducted joint military manoeuvres with the Iraqi army facing border posts held by the Kurdish peshmergas. In fact, the Kurdish question, four decades after the Iranian Revolution, continues to be considered one of the most serious threats to Iran's territorial integrity by the clerical regime. In turn, Iranian Kurds often feel marginalized, discriminated and dissatisfied with the treatment they receive from Shiite Persians who dominate the multinational country of Iran.

The Kurdish conflict in Iran has roots in a long history with tensions. During and after the First World War the autonomous tendencies of Kurds vis-à-vis the central government took an unprecedented magnitude. Between the end of the First World War and the early 1920s, a series of uprisings and revolts broke out in Iranian Kurdistan. Undoubtedly the most significant was the revolt of Ismail Agha Shikak (1918–22) that represented a serious internal threat to the authority of the central government (Jwaideh, 2006: 140–3). Almost two decades later, in January 1946, the Kurds, supported by the Soviets, proclaimed the autonomous Kurdish Republic in north-western Iran, which lasted only eleven months. In December 1946, the Iranian regime deployed the army to crush the Kurdish self-government and established state authority over Kurdistan (Eagleton, 1991). The Kurdish books were

immediately burned, the Kurdish language was forbidden to be printed and published and the Kurdish leaders were executed (McDowall, 2004: 245). Despite its short existence, the Republic of Kurdistan left a lasting impression in the Kurdish collective memory and the story of trial and execution of Qazi Muhammad, who served as the president of the Kurdish government, has been passed on for generations. After the fall of Mahabad, although a clandestine Kurdish movement continued to exist, it had little chance of developing as the Iranian regime increased the scope of its oppression and violence against political dissidents. A new insurrection broke out in 1967, when a splinter group within the PDKI, known as the Revolutionary Committee, tried to move into Iran and carry the armed struggle. After a year and a half of fighting, the guerrilla movement was defeated by government forces and its principal leaders were killed. During the later stages of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the competing Kurdish political groups sought to mobilize popular support in an attempt to establish the autonomy for which they had struggled for several decades. The advent of the Islamic Republic ushered in an era of renewed Kurdish–Iranian tension.

In a quest to better understand the conflictive relationship between Kurds and the Iranian regime, this chapter intends to examine the social and political dynamics of Iranian Kurdistan by analysing the interaction between social forces, Kurdish organizations and the central state. For this purpose, it aims to examine three major aspects that have shaped Kurdish society since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The first section presents an overview of the demography, social and class structure of the Kurdish people. By focusing on state–minority interaction, the second section analyses the Kurdish question in Iranian discourse and various state policies vis-à-vis the Kurds. The third section addresses the Kurdish movement's responses to state policies. It distinguishes between organizations present in Kurdistan and the Kurdish movement which incorporates a wide array of aims, interests and actors. The chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of new spaces and prospects for action.

Social Structure in Kurdistan

In Iran, the Kurds account for approximately 10 per cent of the total population and are located mainly in the western and north-western areas of the country, in the regions neighbouring Iraq and Turkey. There is, however, an important Kurdish-speaking population in the north-east of the country, inhabiting the North Khorasan province near the Turkmenistan border,

where they are a majority.[1] Increasing numbers of Kurds reside in Tehran and in the most well-favoured regions of Iran, where educational, economic and employment opportunities are more plentiful. Little scholarly attention has been directed at describing the class structure and demography of the population in Iranian Kurdistan, and traditional analysis and historical overviews of the Kurdish movement have tended to underestimate the significance of new socio-demographic issues.

Demographical Changes in Kurdistan

Due to Iran's lack of an ethnic population census, it is impossible to give precise figures on the number of Kurdish people who live in Iran.[2] The lack of comprehensive and fully reliable statistical data renders it difficult to refer to concrete figures of the current scope of the Kurdish socio-demographic structure and analyse its dynamics. Therefore, to draw a portrait as close as possible to the reality of the Kurds in Iran, it is important to emphasize the need to diversify data sources. According to certain sources, in 1850, the population of Iranian Kurdistan was 800,000 and, until the latter half of the twentieth century, it was characterized by a long period of slow growth. A century later, in the mid-1950s, it numbered around 2,000,000 (Abrahamian, 1982: 12). Using the criterion of linguistic background, it is reasonable to estimate today's Kurdish population in Iran at eight million at least, mainly concentrated in five provinces: West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Ilam and North Khorasan.[3] Some, mainly Kurdish sources, estimate that the figure may be as high as twelve million (Institut kurde, 2017).

The second half of the twentieth century brought profound changes to the socio-demographic structure of Kurdish life. The Kurdish regions, like the rest of the country, underwent a relatively high rate of population growth in

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1 By the beginning of the sixteenth century, after the Battle of Chaldiran, the Safavid authorities initiated forced relocation policies with the aim of reducing the density of the Kurdish population in north-eastern areas and to secure its north-eastern borders. Evacuation took place on a large scale. 'In the period from 1598 to 1601 . . . [Shah ʿAbbas] forced 45,000 Kurdish families . . . to move to Khorasan' (Madih, 2007: 14).

2 The first nationwide census in Iran was held in 1956 by the General Department of Public Statistics. Seven more censuses were carried out in 1966, 1976, 1986, 1996, 2006, 2011 and 2016. Statistics presented in this section are extracted from these publications.

3 The total of eight million is a rough estimate based on the author's calculations from the 2016 National Population and Housing Census and the survey carried out by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in 2010. It is estimated that today at least 1,501,230 Kurds live in Kurdistan province; 1,828,725 in Kermanshah; 4,999,660 in Ilam; 1,994,114 in West Azerbaijan; 418,140 in North Khorasan; 184,885 in Hamadan; 873,751 in Tehran; 191,956 in Alborz; 266,826 in Razavi Khorasan; 43,750 in Qazvin; and 175,309 in other Iranian provinces.

the period 1966–86. Indeed, from 1976–86, the annual growth rate was quite high (3.26 per cent in Kurdistan province), even though this period was affected by exceptional political and social events: the Islamic Revolution, the Kurdistan War, the Iran–Iraq War, rapid and unplanned urbanization, rural–urban migration and the emigration of the Kurdish population to the rest of the country. The 1990s marked the beginning of the slowdown in the growth of the Kurdish population, characterized by a very rapid drop in fertility and a very sharp decline in the rural population. In Kurdistan province, the population growth rate decreased from 2.2 per cent to 0.67 per cent between 1996 and 2006. From 2006 to 2011, the average annual population growth rate in all predominantly Kurdish provinces, except for West Azerbaijan, was lower than the national average of 1.2 per cent. The fertility rate in three Kurdish provinces is now around 1.7 children per woman, thus well below what is required to replace the population.

The population of Iranian Kurdistan is largely urban today, the symbolic threshold of 50 per cent having been crossed in 1996. In 1956, 11.2 per cent of the population of Kurdistan province was living in cities.[4] After six decades, the share of the urban population in this province has increased to 70.7 per cent.[5] Since the policy of forced sedentarization in the 1930s, the nomadic population has declined sharply. The nomadic population in Kurdish provinces had shrunk to less than 0.09 per cent (7,059 people in five provinces), and the urban sector has quadrupled over these sixty years. The age structure in Kermanshah, Kurdistan and Ilam shows a relatively young population with 23.5 per cent under fifteen years of age, 70.1 per cent between fifteen and sixty-four years of age and 6.4 per cent sixty-five years of age and over. The generation born between 1975 and 1990 represents a large proportion of the Kurdish population (30.6 per cent).

At the national level, the adult literacy rate increased throughout the post-revolutionary period: from 47.5 per cent in 1976 to 61.8 per cent in 1986, while in Kurdistan province the increase was more moderate (29.7 per cent to 39.2 per cent). During the past three decades, the literacy rate in Kurdistan has doubled (81.5 per cent in Kurdistan, 84.9 per cent in Ilam and 84.5 per cent in Kermanshah). Recent progress towards mass literacy is especially marked among young people. However, illiteracy remains prevalent among women (21.7 per cent in Kermanshah, Ilam and Kurdistan provinces), the elderly, in

4 This percentage was higher (26.3 per cent) for Kermanshah province. In the same year, 12.5 per cent of Mahabad people were living in cities.
5 In Kermanshah province 75.3 per cent of the population live in urban areas and in Ilam 68.1 per cent.

rural communities and among members of poor households. Regarding educational dynamics, the most significant change is the transformation in the number of students in higher education, which was 3,529 in 1986 in three major Kurdish provinces. After three decades, the longer-term trend has shown a substantial increase in the number of students in these provinces (171,270 students in 2016). In 1986, the proportion of female students in higher education was 28 per cent (990) of all students in Ilam, Kurdistan and Kermanshah. Females represent less than half of all Kurdish students in various stages of higher education (accounting for 43.6 per cent in 2016). Surprisingly, inequalities between men and women are less pronounced at the doctorate level as 50.5 per cent of doctoral candidates in 2016 were women.

Class, Power and Workforce in Kurdistan

The post-revolutionary period has also influenced the class structure and occupational pattern of the workforce in Kurdistan. Until the early 1970s, landowning families, tribal chieftains and the mercantile bourgeoisie constituted the most powerful social stratum in Kurdistan, controlling almost all the instruments of economic and social power. In 1956, 'about 64% of Kurdish cultivable land was in the hands of 0.3% of the population' (McDowall, 2004: 256). Most of the Kurdish people in Iran were peasants, more than three-quarters of the total population in the 1960s. Together with the lower-middle class, they were in a complex and antagonistic relationship, into which co-operation, complementarity and hostility all entered (Keddie, 1968). Despite land reform in Iran (1962–71), the number of landless Kurdish peasants and workers was reduced only from 80 per cent to just 50 per cent in the 1970s (McDowall, 2004: 257). The percentage of the middle-class population was relatively low, concentrated in the major urban centres and composed of people engaged in trade, small business, the traditional intelligentsia (clerics) and public sector employees. Most wage-earning middle-class members were employed by the state providing social services, mainly education, healthcare and the military. Given the weakness of the modern capitalist mode of production, the proportion of professional or technical workers for the private sector was rather small. By 1977, the ratio of industrial workers to agricultural labourers in Kurdistan was 1:20, but in Tehran, the ratio was 1:0.7 (Abrahamian, 1982: 449).

The class structure in Kurdistan underwent major changes since 1979. By comparing the three major economic sectors of agriculture, industry and services, it is clear that, over the past four decades, Kurdistan witnessed

a general decline in workforce participation in the agriculture sector in favour of higher participation in the service sector, which became relatively larger in these years. Between 1976 and 2016, employment in this sector increased from 17.8 per cent to 50.5 per cent in Kurdistan province and from 33.5 per cent to 50.2 per cent in Kermanshah province. The petty bourgeoisie, shopkeepers, small merchants and state employees constitute the major part of employment in this sector. The trend has been towards a dramatic expansion of self-employed petty bourgeoisie, mainly engaged in small-scale agriculture and animal husbandry activities, distribution trades and local craft industries. Also, current trends clearly indicate that the proportion of petty bourgeoisie in agriculture is declining steadily. The impacts of increasing socio-economic changes have become visible in the growth of new shopping centres and city streets, where one can find shops of every kind, which coexist with bazaars, the traditional petty bourgeoisie and mercantile bourgeoisie's foyers.

Four decades after the revolution, state administration bodies, including military and paramilitary forces, continue to grow, and the total number of people currently employed by state bodies is estimated at about 2,341,000, of which 5.6 per cent are situated in Kurdistan. A significant number of those employed by the state work in areas such as education, healthcare, engineering and technology, social services and in the state foundations or the military (Revolutionary Guards) and paramilitary forces (such as Basij or Muslim Peshmergas). A large percentage of government bureaucracy employees, especially those in the executive and judiciary branches, and the top brass of the military are not recruited from the local population. In many cases, the government hinders Kurds from accessing managerial and leadership positions even in Kurdish regions. Employee commitment and loyalty to the principals of the Islamic Revolution are compulsory prerequisites for access to public posts. Regarding civilian posts, opportunities for employment are often offered first to veterans and families of martyrs from the revolution and the war, then to those who are considered 'defenders of the revolution'.

During the post-revolution period, employment in the agricultural sector declined from 78.8 per cent in 1976 to 24.4 per cent in 2016 in Kurdistan province. Despite this substantial decrease, the agricultural sector still employs more than a quarter of the Kurdish workforce.[6] While the agricultural sector's share of employment descended drastically, manufacturing's share of employment increased in Kurdistan (3.97 per cent to 25.1 per cent)

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6 27.5 per cent of the workforce in Kermanshah, 24.5 per cent in Ilam, 32.8 per cent in West Azerbaijan and 40 per cent in North Khorasan had been employed in agriculture.

and Kermanshah (9.3 per cent to 22.3 per cent) in a more modest way.[7] The construction and services sectors represented the true beneficiaries of the excess labour from agriculture by generating mainly low-skill and low-security employment.

The industrial sector is small and underdeveloped, essentially due to a lack of willingness by the government, but also because of security concerns on the part of investors. Soon after the Islamic Revolution, the new government nationalized large manufacturing and financial enterprises, confiscated the property of those who were deemed 'enemies of the regime', and state and para-state foundations took up the task of planning and co-ordinating socio-economic projects across the Kurdish provinces. Since the revolution and the Kurdistan War, the transition to the further militarization of the area has turned away both local and national investors, thus compounding poverty and unemployment in the region. There is the traditional bourgeoisie, involved in sales and services, agriculture or, to a lesser extent, production activities, with low productivity and accumulation capability, struggling alongside the state-owned enterprises monopolized and controlled by military forces, and an emergent Kurdish business class involved in an informal part of the economy and the cross-border smuggling of consumer goods. The industrial sector includes small and medium-sized manufacturing and mining companies. By 2016, Kurdish regions held 13 per cent of mines operating in Iran.[8] Most private firms in Kurdistan are still dominated by small-scale and inefficient modes of production and are managed by their owners who use their own capital to run them. This explains why workers employed in the industrial sector continue to represent a small percentage of the overall workforce in the region. According to official statistics, only 1.4 per cent of manufacturing establishments engaging 100 or more workers are in three Kurdish provinces. In 2015, the number of workers in manufacturing establishments with 10 or more workers was 20,051, representing 1.5 per cent of the total number of workers in the country.

In fact, the overall numbers of industrial workers are four times less than Kolbars, the cross-border porters who carry goods on their backs across Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan borders through dangerous routes to avoid border patrols. Every year, several dozens of them are killed by landmines and Iranian border guards. Their number is estimated to be as high as 75,000 by government officials. In addition to that, there are seasonal workers and day

7 Nationally, the industrial sector employs 31.9 per cent of the workforce.
8 In total, 675 mines are in operation in Kurdistan in 2016.

labourers among the least privileged, along with the unemployed. In general, they are not covered by health insurance, unemployment insurance, retirement pension systems or accident insurance. Underdevelopment and unemployment are endemic in Kurdish areas. In fact, the notion of activity or employment is itself questionable and imprecise, because of the development of the informal sector after the Islamic Revolution. The average level of unemployment declared by the authorities has very little to do with reality, which is often three times more than official figures. According to data released by the Statistical Centre of Iran, the unemployment rate in 2016 was 11 per cent for West Azerbaijan, 11.2 per cent for North Khorasan, 11.6 per cent for Ilam, 15.2 per cent for Kurdistan and 22 per cent for Kermanshah. Contrary to what official figures maintain, Member of Parliament for Sanandaj, Seyed Ahsan Alevi, estimates the current unemployment rate in Kurdistan province at around 45 per cent.

The Dilemma of Kurds in the Islamic Republic

Although formal institutions and national media in Iran generally tend to neglect or make invisible the existence of Kurds as a national minority, whenever the Kurdish question is raised, in official discourse they are often represented as the brave and courageous border guards of Iran, one of Iran's oldest ethnic groups, the most genuine Iranian people, Aryans and valiant people. However, it is evident that this integrative strategic vision generated by Iran's intelligentsia and political class coexists with another representation of Kurds that considers them separatists, violent, backwards, uncivilized, pro-Zionist, anti-revolutionary, infidels and even decapitators. The coexistence of these two paradoxical representations highlights the analytical challenges of the Kurdish question in Iran. For most scholars, the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–6 may be regarded as the start of the invention of the modern notion of Iranian national identity (Amanat, 2017: 384; Ashraf, 1993: 159; Vali, 2011: 2–3). In the years following, especially since the beginning of the Pahlavi era, the ideology of Iranian nationalism was nurtured by linguistic and cultural elements of Persianness, reflecting pride in the 'several millennia of Persian history' (Ashraf, 1993: 160) and the superiority of hegemonic Persian culture proved by poets such as Abolghaseme Ferdowsi, Saadi Shirazi, Hafez Shirazi and Nezami Ganjavi. Further evidence for this supposed primordial ethnic supremacy was argued to be the continuity of 'Iranian culture', perceived as being synonymous with Persian, over time. According to the official discourse, the

major invasions by Greeks (fourth century BC), Arabs (seventh century), Turks (eleventh century) and Mongols (thirteenth century) were only viewed as episodes of violence that did not interrupt the 'nation's putative historical continuity' (Hechter, 2000: p.95).

With the rise of Pahlavi rule, attempts to forge a new national identity for the country's inhabitants were pursued by a centralized state. Iranian nationalism under Pahlavi rule operated on two levels. On the political, cultural, economic and military planes, the country experienced a high degree of despotic centralization. In the sphere of identity construction, efforts were made by nationalist elites and intellectuals, an amalgam of journalists, political poets, essayists, historians and bureaucrats, to popularize the pre-Islamic glories of the Persian Empire and disseminate the idea that religion was a barrier to political, social and technological progress (Katouzian, 1981: 82–3). Under Pahlavi rule, the Shiite element of Iranian identity, which had been the official religion of the central government since the Safavid Empire, was ignored or even rejected. Preoccupied with ideas of modern and centralized state-building, the Pahlavi regime chose to place emphasis on racial and cultural nationalism and dissociate the Iranian nation from Islam, which was presented as an Arab-imposed religion. The result of such pseudo-modern nationalism was the persecution and harassment of not only religious parts of society but also ethnic and national minorities in Iran. The central government began in earnest to implement policies of cultural assimilation in non-Persian regions.

Nevertheless, by the outbreak of the 1979 Revolution, Shiism had been drastically transformed into a fundamental element of Iranian identity. However, the traditional Shiism of the Safavid dynasty was replaced this time by a highly politicized and radical version of Islam. To establish the government of Islam, Khomeini, or 'Imam of the Muslim *umma*' as he is identified in Iran, injected radical meanings into Iranian Shiism. Imposing pro-Islamic doctrine as the state and mandatory religion brought profound changes to the meaning of Iranianness, at least in the earlier stages of the revolution. The peculiar concept of the *umma*, or the world community of Muslim believers, highlighted the importance of the 'unity of Islam' above and beyond ethnic and national interests. In this sense, the construction of Iranian identity based on nationalism was rejected. Shortly after the Iran–Iraq War, the Islamic Republic's policies and discourse showed, however, that Iranian identity was still deeply marked by patriotism. In this mixture of religion and nationalism, the Persian aspect of Iranian identity has been replaced by a Persian-speaking Shiite element.

The Islamic Government's Minority Policy

What has been the overall policy of the theocratic Islamic state towards the Kurdish minority? There has historically been a complex and difficult relationship between Kurds and central states in Iran. Although the new regime did not have a definite policy towards the Kurds in the period immediately following the Islamic Revolution, with the beginning of the Kurdistan War, Iranian authorities' attempts to prevent Kurdish forces from becoming an increasingly potent political threat have developed a variety of strategies. Their general policy has always been based on common methods employed by nationalist-centralist governments regarding ethnic minorities, which generally vary between resorting to force or coercion, cultural assimilation, selective economic integration by creating and reinforcing patronage networks and promoting and arming local tribal militias. It is not surprising that, after presenting Kurdistan as an insecure region, the typical government response to Kurdish demands for autonomy was repressive. Tehran launched a large-scale attack using all sorts of heavy weaponry, tanks, artillery and aerial attacks, which left parts of Kurdish cities in ruin. In addition, the Iranian government imposed an economic blockade on Kurdish regions, depriving their inhabitants of the basic needs for life, including foodstuffs, medicines and fuel (Brigouleix, 1983). More than 384 Iranian Kurdish villages were destroyed between 1980 and 1993 (HRW, 1997).

The new state apparatus, like its predecessor and despite its claims of the *umma*'s universalism, continued a longer-term trend towards state centralization in Iran by emphasizing Persian as the national language and Twelver Shiism (Ithna ʿAshari) as the state religion. While it is true that, Article 19 of the new constitution stipulates that 'the people of Iran, regardless of ethnic and tribal origin, enjoy equal rights. Colour, race, language, and the like will not be cause for privilege' (Ramazani, 1980: 191), and Article 15 allows for 'the use of local and national languages in the press and mass media' and also permits 'teaching their literature in their schools, along with Persian language instruction', Persian continued to be the language of administration and education. Bans on education in the Kurdish language have persisted and the Kurds were eliminated from the country's political life and deprived of access to positions of political power.

Though it is true that the Iranian regime's policy regarding the Kurds was based basically on compulsory measures and linguistic and cultural assimilation, it is far from static, unchanging or unchangeable. Yet the changes which did occur were by no means necessarily structural, progressive and constant.

At the risk of oversimplifying, Iran's Kurdish policy can be divided into four different time periods. First, Kurdistan was militarized in the aftermath of the revolution, which continued until the reformist era in the 1990s. During these years, the Kurdish question was regarded merely as a security issue and the main internal danger threatening Iranian territorial integrity. With the government's consent, military units, including the Basij, the Revolutionary Guards and local tribal militias (formally known as the Kurdish Muslim Peshmerga Forces and called Jash by Kurdish people) have been deployed in Kurdistan to counter armed groups and to intimidate the civilian population through systematic but also random and widespread violence. The Iranian government managed to make use of the Iran–Iraq War to install more military bases in Kurdish zones. The end of the Iran–Iraq War (1988) and Khomeini's death (1989) did not reduce repressive policies, nor lead to the normalization of life in Kurdistan, which remained a potent challenge to Tehran's legitimacy and sovereignty. Even during the post-war period of reconstruction, the Rafsanjani government's policy towards the Kurdish question, with its security-orientated approach, remained the same. By the 1990s, 'more than 200,000 troops', representing 25 per cent of all conventional Iranian forces, were permanently deployed throughout Kurdish areas (HRW, 1997). Military barracks were firmly established in Kurdistan, where the armed forces had taken root and dominated legislative, administrative and financial responsibilities in Kurdistan.

The second period began with Muhammad Khatami's election and continued until 2005, the end of the reformist era. In 1997, with the widespread support from minorities, a reformist government came to power promising a new era of governance and civil society, the rule of law, tolerance and an 'Iran for all Iranians' advocating greater recognition of minority rights. This period is marked by Khatami's attempts to find a new minority policy approach that would balance the pursuit of established continuity and the advancement of Kurdish political integration into the Islamic regime system. In this period, the state maintained tight political control, while permitting the Kurds some degree of cultural expression. For the first time, Kurds and some officials expressed public criticism of Tehran's position towards the Kurdish question and its security approach. Kurdish deputies formed their own dedicated parliamentary group in the 6th Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran (2000) to pursue the recognition of Kurdish cultural and civil rights and for the first time since the revolution, a few Sunni Kurds were appointed to the middle-management layer in the administration. In the end, the

reformist government failed to implement its reform policies and fulfil the majority of the promises it had made to various ethnic groups during its term.

The third period brought the return of hardliners with the electoral victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005. The new president's populist rhetoric was accompanied by an essentially security-orientated treatment of minorities, which became, once again, the national standard for controlling ethnolinguistic minorities in Iran. Khatami's reconciliatory stance regarding demands from ethnic minorities for equal citizenship rights was replaced by a militarized political system that signalled an end to concerns over stability and national security in the country. A slight increase in the number of Kurds assigned to local administrative posts in the reformist era was reversed by centrally appointed bureaucrats and military authorities during the Ahmadinejad presidency. Unlike his predecessor, the new president and his allies did not directly address the minority issue. It appears they simply chose to deal with this issue as a part of the debate about social justice for the masses. Once again, central authorities deemed pro-Kurdish activities treason to the nation, foreign instigation or provocation by foreign powers. Ahmadinejad's government intensified political repression, media censorship, harassment, intimidation or arbitrary arrests of human rights defenders, targeted arrests and politically motivated persecutions against civil society activists. Most Kurdish publications were banned for non-compliance with state regulations or simply for political reasons (HRW, 2009).

During the 2013 election campaign, one of the promises made by presidential candidate Hassan Rouhani was to consider the demands of religious and ethnic minorities. In a ten-point statement, he called for full implementation of constitutional provisions guaranteeing minority rights, including Article 15, which safeguards the right to education in one's mother tongue. He also called for 'eliminating unjust discrimination in all its forms and dimensions', and 'changing security approaches toward ethnic groups' (Rouhani, 2013). Rouhani spoke directly about minorities and subsequently won most of their votes. Once in office, surprisingly, he appointed Ali Yunesi, a security figure and Khatami's former minister of intelligence and security, as his adviser on ethnic groups and religious minority affairs. Apart from a few minor changes, like the establishment of a Kurdish language and literature course at Iran's Kurdistan University (enrolling forty students per year), the creation of an inoperative 'citizen charter of rights' and some minority member appointments to middle levels of the administration, the 'government of prudence and hope' has failed to keep any promises made concerning minority rights.

As stated by a special adviser to the president, the most important barrier to implementing Rouhani's promises regarding minorities is 'religious hardliners and nationalists' (DW, 2013). The conservative establishment and nationalists are unwilling to change minority status. Shiite clerics and hardliners are against the presence of religious minorities at the political, judicial or administrative levels and the nationalist and secular parts of Iranian society strongly oppose what they call 'ethnic divisions', considered by them as obstacles on the path of 'national unity'. There was not a single Sunni Kurdish minister, deputy minister, ambassador, governor or member of command headquarters of the armed forces in Iran. For the first time in its history, in 2015, the Islamic Republic allowed a Sunni Kurd, Saleh Adibi, to be appointed Iranian ambassador, serving in Vietnam and Cambodia. Another telling example is the objections by Iranian scholars, professors and historians to the formation of ethnic parliamentary groups. In a letter to the Iranian parliament speaker, 170 historians warned of the threat of ethnic and linguistic groups in parliament, which they said, 'paves the way for divergence from the great and unified Iranian national body' (Farsnews, 2016).

Social and Political Mobilization in Iranian Kurdistan

After many years of difficult relationships, a climate of mutual mistrust seems to dominate the relationship between Kurds and the Islamic Republic, a reality which has contributed to heightened tensions on several occasions over the past four decades and which continues to play an essential role in Kurdish mobilizations in Iran. It is not surprising that the Kurds complain of systematic discrimination in all political, economic, social and cultural fields. A study carried out in 2004, on 500 residents in the Kurdish city of Mariwan, found that 83 per cent of respondents think that infrastructure and facilities in Kurdistan are worse than in Persian provinces; 83.6 per cent believe that the state is a significant cause of deprivation and underdevelopment in Kurdistan; and 88 per cent of respondents pointed out that injustice and discrimination against Kurds persist (Kohnepoushi, 2004). Another recent study, reaching a thousand residents of Kurdish regions in Iran, has shown that the feeling of being discriminated against seems to be very widespread among the Kurds. The study further states that the politicization of ethnic identity is higher amongst Sunnis Kurds in comparison to Shiite Kurds who instead insist on cultural rights (Ghaderzadeh and Mohammadzadeh, 2018: 35).

It seems that the desire to preserve common Kurdish identity and the wish to end discrimination provides psychological incentives for mobilization. However, Kurdish perceptions and their motivation for acting are determined not only by the domination–resistance dialectic but also by a series of events that brought significant changes to the lives of Kurds in Iran. In the past four decades, Iranian Kurdistan has experienced one revolution, two wars (the Kurdistan War and the Iran–Iraq War), massive immigration, rapid and unplanned urbanization, changes to the entire educational and economic structure, several attempts to participate in the implementation of democratic reforms in Iran, a de facto Kurdish state in the neighbouring country, the arrival of new information technologies, hardline conservative governments and several periods of popular mobilization and protests. All these events may have impacts on Kurdish perceptions about their own mobilization potential, their strategies and their image of the central state. Today, the Kurds are probably the most stigmatized yet the most mobilized minority in Iran, engaging, albeit with breaks and irregularities, in large-scale resistance to the central state.

The Kurdish capacity for mobilization has manifested itself in a variety of forms and the Kurdish movement, far from homogeneous, is constituted by diverse actors. The Kurds possess several structured organizations which differ, sometimes to a great degree, in their political programmes, strategies, structure, leadership and influence. Aside from the public expression of Kurdishness (Kurdayetî) and open protest, they use other forms of insubordination, called 'infrapolitics' by James C. Scott (1990: 189), which includes 'disguised, low-profile, and undeclared resistance'. Consequently, the forms of action adopted by the movement include guerrilla warfare, cultural resistance, sporadic riots and episodes of armed violence, as well as non-violent tactics such as protests, boycotts, strikes, civil disobedience, passive resistance and even conventional political and electoral participation.

To show how the Kurdish movement has re-emerged on the political scene after the Iranian Revolution, developed organizational structures, framed demands, rapidly mobilized people, evolved over time and continues to redefine its identity, I have divided the history of identity mobilization from the revolution to the present into four periods. The first corresponds to 'protests cycles' (Tarrow, 2011) in the early days of the revolution and the outbreak of the Kurdistan War, during which collective action was diffused rapidly from 'more mobilized to less mobilized sectors', and how the conflict further deteriorated after a number of sequences of intensified interactions between Kurds and the new authority, resulting in a situation of generalized

violence. The second period corresponds to Kurdish organizations' withdrawal from Kurdistan during which time guerrilla warfare began to spread while the repressive system of the state was strengthened. The third period begins with the election of the reformist president in 1997, after which there were unprecedented Kurdish civil society mobilizations and the development of more institutionalized political actors. The fourth period began in 2005 after the presidential elections in Iran which instigated a new wave of escalating political repression in Iran, the revival of a guerrilla insurgency and an epistemic shift in the Kurdish identity movement facilitated by new technologies and communication mediums (the Internet, satellite systems, etc.) and social networking.

Protest Cycles in the Early Days of the Revolution and the Outbreak of War

Following the immediate post-revolutionary period, various groups in Kurdistan mobilized mainly in defence of Kurdish rights. The Kurds had effectively participated in the overthrow of the monarchy and after the revolution, they quickly achieved de facto control of Kurdish regions. Kurdish organizations, having emerged from the underground, grew rapidly after the Islamic Revolution and began to control the streets, mobilize people, organize collective life, administer justice, develop education in Kurdish and negotiate with new power-holders. On 19 February 1979, they presented their first set of eight demands revendicating 'an abolishment of national oppression and their right to self-determination within a federated Iran' (Etelaat, 1979). However, failures and growing tensions increased internal divisions among Kurds. Consequently, the period after 1979 saw the emergence of separate groupings, each with its own goals and ideology, its own interpretation of autonomy.

One of the main Kurdish organizations was the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI), which provided much of the leadership in Kurdistan, and after thirty-two years of clandestine activities, established its headquarters in March 1979. This was a social-democratic and secular party (Ghassemlou, 1978). The party's slogan was 'Democracy for Iran, Autonomy for Kurdistan'. They demanded complete regional autonomy in Kurdish areas and to take charge of their own local administration, economy, education, culture and social affairs. The party enjoyed a solid grassroots base. In the first election for the Assembly of Experts which took place in August 1979, the party's leader was elected with 80 per cent of the vote in Urmia. Prior to

the revolution, the party's members numbered a few hundred, whereas one year later, it counted several tens of thousands. Days after Khomeini's declaration of war, the party's general secretary, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, claimed that '100,000 armed Kurdish men' were ready to fight (NYT, 1979). In February 1980, 310 party representatives, with an average age of 35 years old, participated in its fourth congress.

Another political organization engaged in the Kurdish cause on the eve of the revolution was the Revolutionary Organization of the Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan (Komala). This organization was founded clandestinely in 1969 and after the revolution established itself as the dominant party in the areas situated between Sanandaj and Mariwan (Alizadeh, 2000). Its members viewed themselves as Marxists and wanted a sociopolitical revolution that would demolish the old order and advance the class struggle to ensure rights for peasants, workers and national minorities. More inchoate and decentralized in comparison to the KDPI, Komala was headed by urban, leftist-educated people with notable family backgrounds. The method it adopted was to mobilize peasants, workers and women by promising social justice, pledging to eliminate the feudal system and provoking a popular uprising against local and traditional authorities. Its initiative led to the formation of a new wave of unions, committees and associations in various cities throughout Kurdistan (Komala, 2012). In its third congress, it emphasized that Komala sought 'extended and democratic autonomy for Kurdistan' (Komala, 1982).

The Maktabi Qhuran, a Qur'anic school of thought, was another group present on Kurdistan's political scene. It was founded in 1978 in Sanandaj by Ahmad Moftizadeh, the group's main ideologue. He advocated for cultural and linguistic rights within an Islamic government. According to him, 'cultural and linguistic liberties are the cornerstone of autonomy' (Keyhan, 1979). While the KDPI and Komala called for a boycott of the Islamic Republic referendum, Moftizadeh encouraged participation in the referendum. 'Unlike the other parties in the region, Moftizadeh was more optimistic about working with the new regime than other parties in Kurdistan.' This group, unlike other Kurdish movement organizations, viewed Islam as an integral component of the new country and was hostile to communism and leftist guerrillas. Not surprisingly, it was perceived as an Islamist ally of the clerical regime more than a pro-Kurdish organization.

Furthermore, several other religious leaders, such as Shaykh Ezzadin Husayni, organizations, armed groups and militias were present in Kurdistan. Some of them, including PDK-Provisional Leadership (Ghiyade Mwaqhet) and the Iranian communist Tudeh Party, had a close relationship

with Khomeini in public opposition to Kurdish autonomy, and others, many of them Marxist groups, such as the Organization of People's Fedai Guerrillas and Peykar, defended national minorities and the right to self-determination.[9]

The strategy adopted by the Kurdish movement, however, had not been unchanging during the post-revolutionary period. Negotiation, conventional forms of political action and the military option all prevailed at times. The Kurds boycotted the referendum on creating the Islamic Republic and on the new constitution. The turnout was under 15 per cent in Kurdistan when Kurdish organizations called for a boycott of the national referendum on approving the Constitution of December 1979. Faced with an explosive situation, the Kurds maintained communication channels with the government to negotiate Kurdistan's status under the new regime. In fact, they were divided on the negation issue. The struggle between the provisional government and the Revolutionary Council, two power structures of the Islamic Republic, further complicated an already-complex process. Consequently, the Kurdish demand for autonomy, after several negotiations, was rejected by the Islamic Republic's leaders. Khomeini prevented Kurdish representatives from attending the assembly and outlawed secular Kurdish groups. Even Moftizadeh, who had been identified by Khomeini as 'the legitimate representative of the Kurdish people' (Ezzatyar, 2016: 129), was arrested in 1982. A major assault was launched in March 1980 against Kurdish forces by Tehran to regain control of Kurdistan. However, the government did not control Kurdistan until four years later. Kurdish organizations, driven out of Kurdish towns in July 1984, moved their headquarters to Iraq and commenced guerrilla warfare. Five years after the revolution, 18,000 Kurds, including 1,600 KDPI fighters, were killed during battles and more than '1,200 Kurds were executed for instigating rebellion' hundreds of them after summary trials. Over 2,000 Komala casualties were added to these figures as well (Ward, 2009: 231; Komala, 2012; Péroncel-Hugoz, 1983).

Guerrilla Warfare Period

The failure of the Kurdish attempt to establish an autonomous Kurdistan in Iran was followed by the establishment of Kurdish parties in borderlands between Iran and Iraq. The Iraqi invasion in September contributed to further militarization of Kurdistan. In 1978, one KDPI politburo member talked about the presence of 200,000 troops (army, guards and pro-state

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9 This organization was created in August 1976 by Idris and Massoud Barzani after the defeat of 1975.

Kurdish militia), 3,000 small barracks, and 25 large bases and garrisons in Kurdistan (Pejwak, 1987). However, Iranian state borders remained permeable for Kurdish guerrillas which had the support of their members and sympathizers in the interior of the country. The anti-regime war was especially intense from 1983 to 1988, the year in which Iran accepted a ceasefire agreement with Iraq. According to the KDPI, between 1979 and 1989, 20,200 Iranian soldiers were killed in fighting with the KDPI and 2,089 others were captured (Gadani, 2008a: 404). An estimated 50,000 Kurds, 'of whom 45,000 were believed to be civilians' (Yildiz and Tayşi, 2007: 42), lost their lives in the same period. In the years that followed, the intensity of the fighting lessened. As claimed by the KDPI, between 1988 and 1994, 624 Iranian soldiers were killed and 20 captured (Gadani, 2008b: 241). Although it is difficult to verify these numbers, they do show a drop in the magnitude of the attacks and the intensity of the fighting.

The revolutionary situation did not simply produce Kurdish solidarity, but also a new internal crisis. At the same time that Komala and KDPI were gaining a near-monopoly in the Iranian Kurdish movement, a clash between the two groups seemed inevitable. They had been opposed to each other since the first months of the revolution, having almost gone to war in 1984. On the other hand, these organizations experienced internal discord and multiple splits (the KDPI in 1980 and 1988, and Komala/the Communist Party of Iran in 1991). Perhaps the single, largest blow to Kurdish organizations was the assassination of their political leaders and military commanders by the people believed to be affiliated with Iranian security forces. Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, the general secretary of the KDPI, and his successor Sadegh Sharafkandi were both assassinated in Europe during negotiations with Iranian government representatives in 1989 and 1992. According to Kurdish sources, more than 150 members of the KDPI were also murdered in Iraqi Kurdistan. The first effect of these changes was a weakening of the Kurdish movement's organizations. If the decline in military activities could be interpreted as a sign of state consolidation and expansion in Kurdistan, especially in the 1990s, the disengagement of militants can be cited as an indicator of an unavoidable crisis for Kurdish organizations. One month before the KDPI and Komala, under pressure from Kurdish parties in Iraq, publicly announced their intention to stop cross-border attacks from Iraq into Iran, Iranian troops, after obtaining agreement from the Iraqi Kurdish leaders, entered Iraqi territories to attack Iranian Kurds. Iranian Kurdish organizations had practically abandoned their armed protest and many of their militants took refuge and settled in the newly autonomous region of Kurdistan.

Although the early years of the Kurdistan War produced an increase in mass support for Kurdish organizations, the later war years, with the

economic and human damages that Kurdistan suffered during this period, raised doubts about the Kurdish capacity to realize their interests through war. On the one hand, Kurdish regions suffered from economic and political underdevelopment. In Kurdistan province, until 1991, 'there was no university or factory with more than 50 employees' (Atlas d'Iran, 1998). Even during the period of reconstruction under President Rafsanjani, Kurdish zones remained deprived of economic development. On the other hand, Kurdistan was heavily militarized and, since the end of the Iraqi war, it was the only area affected by armed conflict. The clerical regime attempted to demobilize Kurdistan and prevent the formation of a Kurdish civil society through various bodies and institutions working for the security forces. For this purpose, in addition to military institutions (army, Pasdaran, Basij and Komitehs), para-state organizations or foundations, including the Mostazafan Foundation, the Martyrs' Foundation, Jahade Sazandegi (Reconstruction Crusade) and Workplace Islamic Associations, were deployed in Kurdistan. These foundations, in addition to social services, acted as 'ideological state apparatuses' and provided 'technical and logistical support' to the security forces (Buchta, 2000: 65).

The Iranian regime defeated the Kurds militarily. This, however, did not mean that it solved the Kurdish question. On the contrary, the Kurdish population continued to suffer from the militarization of their territories, continuing economic crisis, political exclusion and restrictions on the exercise of cultural rights. One important consequence of this situation was the politicization and popularization of the romantic notion of national Kurdish identity which increasingly captured Kurdish hearts and minds, especially among the growing urban middle class. They demonstrated that they were strongly disposed to supporting new forms of collective action or somehow taking part in the country's political life. Prior to the reform era, one of the few occasions during which the Kurds had the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction was in the presidential election of 1993. Unlike the rest of Iran, they voted massively (55 per cent) in favour of the opposition candidate, Ahmad Tavakoli, rather than Rafsanjani, who was implicated in the deaths of Kurdish leaders (NYT, 1997).

Kurdish Activism and the Reformist Era

The third period of Kurdish mobilization was the reformist era, during which time the Kurds had great scope to express their social and cultural rights. This period, despite its limitations, can be regarded as a turning point in Kurdish movement politics. Khatami's discourse on political development, popular rule, civil rights and sociopolitical reforms was well appreciated by the Kurds.

The reformists obtained a clear majority of votes in Kurdish regions. After Khatami's election, the debate about minority rights expanded greatly. The reformists' policies and attitudes paved the way for traditional and even unconventional forms of political participation, such as entering parliamentary politics, discussing Kurdish rights in the public sphere, negotiating with political parties and their candidates, organizing political meetings, writing open letters complaining about the Kurds' condition, signing petitions, lawful or unlawful demonstrations and so forth. These activities were organized by students, independent intellectuals, human rights activists, scholars, artists and a new group of Kurdish politicians. Four major elements characterized the period from 1997 to 2005: high mobilization in universities, the expansion of protests to more diverse groups, the growth of various cultural activities and Kurdish participation in legal political life.

During Khatami's administration, the Kurds saw some improvements in their political life. Under tight controls by the Council of Guardians, Kurdish politicians were elected to the sixth parliament and entered the Kurdish parliamentary group of twenty deputies, which was politically close to the reformist movement. Though they lacked a party structure, a specific strategy and long-term political objectives, the Kurdish representatives used their public voice to criticize discrimination of Kurds and their inequitable access to power and resources not only in Iran but also in other countries.

After several years of restrictions on cultural life, there had been an increase in various types of social and cultural activities including Kurdish cinema production, literary associations, traditional music concerts and Kurdish literature conferences. Following Khatami's election, Kurdish media, literature and research flourished and about a dozen of local Kurdish and bilingual publications (including weeklies, periodicals and magazines) were given licence to operate. By 2000, the number of Kurdish-Persian periodicals reached 7, with a total circulation of 14,000 copies (Tavakoli, 2004). Articles analysing the Kurdish situation and describing Kurdish history, literature, music and politics appeared constantly in these publications.

In the climate of the late 1990s, Kurdish student movements were very active, aiming to mobilize other sectors and playing an important role in identity awareness in Kurdish society. The forms of action used by the students in their mobilizations were quite traditional: from demonstrations to campaigning for human rights and collecting petition signatures. The student movement was polarized between those who were sympathizers of various Kurdish political organizations and those who were simply looking to get involved in cultural activities. In 2005, they inaugurated the Kurdish

Students' Democratic Union. The students edited some 20 journals, weeklies and monthlies, of which only a few hundred copies of each issue were assumed to be published and distributed at universities. In reality, more than 3,000 copies of student publications (for example, *Rave* and *Rojame*) were distributed throughout the main cities of Kurdistan.

Although the Kurds participated massively in favour of reformist candidates in the 1997 presidential election and the sixth parliamentary election (2000), a sense of disillusionment and frustration with Khatami's policies was becoming increasingly apparent among the Kurdish people. During the massive Kurdish demonstrations in some twenty large cities in Iran, in February 1999, after the arrest of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, at least 40 people were killed, 140 injured and 1,800 arrested (Institut kurde, 1999: 7). The general sentiment felt by the Kurdish population was that the reformists remained silent and were indifferent towards this brutal oppression of the Kurds by the security forces. No less than one year later, the Guardian Council invalidated the parliamentary election results in the Kurdish cities of Saqqiz and Bane with no explanation. Some Kurdish appointees to official positions were removed and replaced by non-Kurdish officials. In addition, during the parliamentary elections of February 2004, several Kurdish candidates were disqualified by the Guardian Council. It was not surprising that voter participation decreased in Kurdish provinces in the 2001 presidential election, as shown in Figure 16.1.
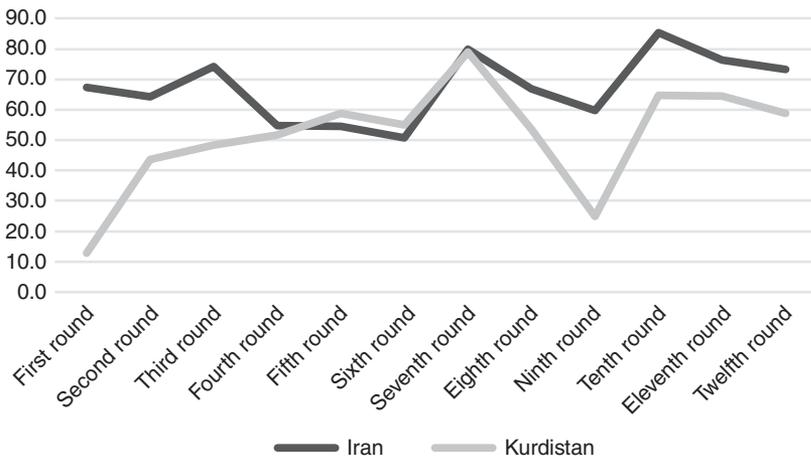
Figure 16.1 Voter participation in presidential elections (1979–2017)
Source: Author's calculation, Iran's National Population and Housing Census, various years
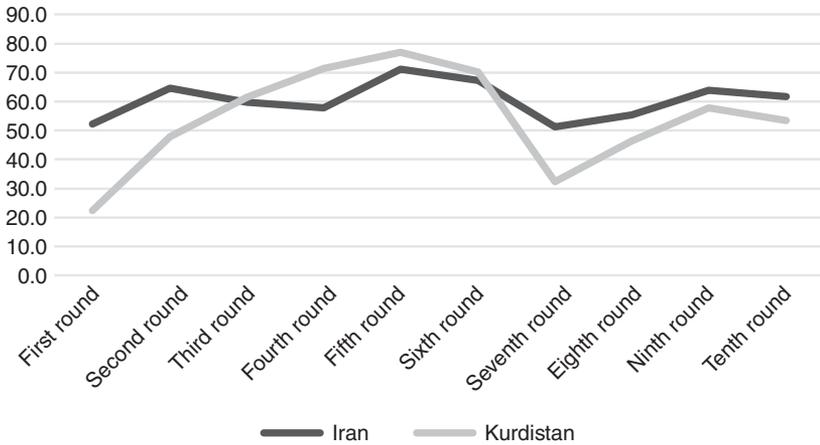
Figure 16.2 Voter participation in Iran's Islamic Consultative Assembly (1979–2016)
Source: Author's calculation, Iran's National Population and Housing Census, various years

However, most Kurdish votes (for example, 87 per cent in Kurdistan province) went to Khatami again. Figure 16.2 shows that the rate of voter participation in Kurdistan declined sharply in the 2004 parliamentary election. According to official records, only 32 per cent of the inhabitants of Kurdistan province participated in the seventh parliamentary election.

From 2005 Onwards

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election as president in 2005 marked the beginning of a new wave of repressive political measures in Kurdistan which undermined the little progress that had been made by previous governments regarding political openness to Kurds. Under Ahmadinejad's government, Kurdish cultural and political activities declined. The new administration closed down certain Kurdish periodicals such as *Rojhelat*, *Peyame Mardom*, *Rojame*, *Aso*, *Ashtî*, *Away Waqht*, *Kejîwe*, *Hawar*, *Sîrwan* and *Kereftû* and their journalists were persecuted and imprisoned with charges of 'acting against national security' and 'diffusion of ethnic issues with the aim of separatism' (AI, 2007, 2008). Several dozen publications were forced to abandon their activities due to Article 16 of Iran's Press Law and a lack of equipment, support and funds (Radio Farda, 2015). Human rights defenders, NGO workers and activists were arrested in various parts of Kurdistan. Student activities also declined because of detentions without charges, political arrests, kidnappings and cases of torture.

As a consequence of this change in the political environment, legal-political involvement by organizations such as the 'Co-ordinating Council of Kurdish Reformists' and the 'Kurdish United Front' (Jebhe-ye Mottahed-e Kord), two political formations that advocate Kurdish rights within the framework of the Islamic regime, also declined. The influence of Kurdish reformists decreased, and they suffered internal divisions. Although all political factions, especially reformist candidates Mir Hossein Musavi and Mehdi Karoubi, integrated the minority issue into their political platform, in the presidential election of June 2009, only 25 per cent of electors in Kurdistan province and 37.1 per cent in West Azerbaijan province (17.3 per cent in Mahabad, 19.9 per cent in Bukan, 19.9 per cent in Piranshar) voted. Most Kurdish cities remained silent during the Iranian Green Movement of 2009 and post-election unrest. This fissure between the Kurds and the forces of the opposition to the government of Ahmadinejad was partly due to a lack of clarity regarding reformist intentions for minority issues, but also because of some recent major changes in Kurdish social and political organization at the local and regional levels. Even though Kurdish regions voted overwhelmingly for Rouhani in both presidential elections of 2013 and 2017, the Kurdish participation rate, except for Ilam province, was lower than the national rate. In the parliamentary elections held in 2016, the majority of Kurdish MPs elected ran as independent candidates, without any political party affiliation.

After President Bush's inclusion of Iran in the 'Axis of Evil', and the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, hope increased among Kurdish armed organizations for the isolation of the Iranian regime in the region and even military action against Iran. Some took a wait-and-see attitude which caused a period of inactivity ending with internal discord and division. Komala and the KDPI have split into several parties and most of their activities have been centred on recruitment, fundraising, lobbying and propaganda. After two decades without armed conflict, in July 2016 the KDPI relaunched a campaign to take up the armed struggle again (KDPI, 2016). Following this change of strategy, clashes between security forces and Kurdish peshmergas have increased slightly. However, prior to that, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), a sister organization to the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), was engaged in a low-intensity armed conflict with the Iranian government for more than a decade. Violent confrontations took place between PJAK guerrillas and government forces between 2006 and 2012.

About ten armed organizations currently claim to represent and defend Kurdish people in Iran. Despite their differences in approach, ideology, size, organizational structure and political weight, the main Kurdish parties

demand the democratization of the country, the decentralization of power and the creation of a federal system. More recently, in their discourse they all stress, on various levels, the importance of youth, women, workers and minority religious groups. The influence of these organizations and their potential to mobilize varies according to the region and social groups. Engaged in open competition with each other and emphasizing their ideological differences, they often find it difficult to manage diversity and co-ordinate joint action around a shared agenda. Each organization tries to stand out from the others by highlighting its history of struggle and its martyrdoms, unable to offer achievable and credible programmes and political projects in the immediate future.

The result of these developments is that the Kurdish movement in Iran faces a growing gap between exiled parties and actors on the ground. This situation has prompted political malaise between Kurds, which is reflected in the decline of the Kurdish movement's mobilizing capacity, a more general rise in political disillusionment and a decrease in the popularity of Kurdish organizations. This palpable discomfort, on the one hand, contributes – especially among younger generations – to a weakening of interest in organizational forms of activism and, on the other, as contradictory, as it may seem, to a strong disposition to protest (Sharifi Dryaz, 2017). Therefore, the Kurdish movement in Iran currently has a segmented, plural and multifaceted structure with an alternation of phases of 'activism and latency' (Melucci, 1996: 115). It should also be noted that, during the dormant period, the Kurdish movement has frequently been able to demonstrate a radical and quick transformation in its capacity to mobilize. These specific moments of demonstrations, mass mobilizations and strikes often occur during significant events, such as the execution of Kurdish activists, security forces abuse, cultural and political celebrations and border closures between Iran and Iraq.

New Spaces and New Prospects for Action

New structural changes are providing a basis for the development of new social patterns, new spaces for action, new identities and new ways of organizing the Kurdish conflict. Currently, two factors, among others, are certainly very important to our understanding of societal dynamics in Iranian Kurdistan. The first is the establishment of a Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in 1991, but also, and above all, the reunification of the divided administration of Kurdistan in 2005. At a time when Iranian Kurds were barred from heading ministries, provincial governorships and even

municipalities, in 2005, Iraq's parliament confirmed Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani as the country's president, the Iraqi constitution recognized the Kurdish Region (KR) as a federal entity and Massoud Barzani was elected president of the regional government. On each of these occasions, Iranian Kurds took to the streets to celebrate and express their joy. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that the celebration of the independence referendum in September 2017 was more animated in Iranian Kurdistan than in the KR. The cultural, political and even economic lives of Iranian Kurds are likely to be heavily influenced by these recent developments in the KR. Many Iranian Kurds now live, work, study or frequently travel to the KR. The economic life of a large part of the Kurdish population in Iran depends directly on its economic and commercial exchanges with the KR. Advancements in cultural life enable many writers to publish their works, filmmakers to produce films and artists to perform and exhibit in 'free Kurdistan'. The programmes available through KRG television channels seem to be the most popular among Iranian Kurds. Kurdish identity and aspirations in Iran are currently built through interactions and comparisons with Kurds from elsewhere, but particularly with Iraqi Kurdistan.

The second factor is modern communication and information technologies. The spread of satellite TV and the Internet has facilitated new kinds of communication beyond the limits of Iran's borders. The end of the Khatami era coincided with the boom in Kurdish satellite television channels broadcast from Iraqi Kurdistan and Europe, which increasingly became an alternative to state-controlled national television and radio broadcasts. In just a few years, the number of satellite channels has rapidly increased. There are around forty Kurdish channels that are accessible by both satellite and the Internet (Sharifi Dryaz, 2015: 444). Almost a third of these channels are broadcast from Europe. Regarding the other satellite channels, most are based in Iraqi Kurdistan. Kurdish organizations and political parties in different countries each have one or more television channel. Iranian Kurdish political organizations created their own TV channels in 2006–7. In addition to this wave of satellite channel appearances, we must also add a dozen Web-TV broadcasts and dozens of local radio stations in Kurdistan and Europe. In the early 2000s, satellite TV quickly found its way into many Kurdish households. Many Kurds watch international TV networks via illegal, though previously largely tolerated, satellite dishes. According to a survey of Iranian Kurds, about 72 per cent reported that they normally use 'ethnic media' and 27.7 per cent declared they do not consume such media often (Ghaderzadeh and Mohammadzadeh, 2018: 35).

Furthermore, the increase in internet access played a decisive role in connecting Iranian Kurds to the outside world. In the early 2000s, the Internet was still not accessible everywhere in Kurdistan. In 2001, the three provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah and Ilam had 1.2 per cent (26,703 subscriptions) of mobile subscribers in Iran. In 2007, only 6.4 per cent of Kurdish households had landline telephones. A decade later, the number of mobile subscribers is greater than the Kurdish population (4,267,879 subscriptions) in Kermanshah, Ilam and Kurdistan provinces. In 2016, 97.8 per cent of Kurdish households had landline telephones, 51.2 per cent had computers and 47.6 per cent had access to the Internet at their home. In the same year, more than one-third (37.2 per cent) of the Kurdish population aged six and over was using the Internet, 33.7 per cent of whom were 3G subscribers. By mid-2007, Kurdish websites numbered more than 2,500, a significant increase over the mere handful in existence in 2002 (Sheykholislami, 2011: 140). Despite Iranian authorities' attempts to block access to social networks, they are now used on a massive scale in Kurdistan. Instant messenger apps, especially Telegram, and social media networks like Instagram and Facebook, offer young Kurds many opportunities to reach a large audience with criticisms of political figures and institutions.

The impact of technological changes on the Kurdish movement is still unexplored to a certain extent. However, one thing is already certain: amidst Iran's draconian press censorship, the rapid development of information and communication technology has facilitated the development of autonomous media. Kurds use the Internet to organize and communicate information and instructions, denounce injustice and discrimination, exploit it for online mobilization, raise funds on occasion and as a means of promoting Kurdish culture and rights. In addition, this new autonomous space has undoubtedly helped to further strengthen the voice of activists willing to mobilize Kurdish society around new issues and identities such as women's rights and ecology. The development of new technologies and the widespread use of the Internet will continue to have a profound effect on the Kurdish movement and its priorities. What sort of effect remains to be seen.

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The Kurdish Question in Syria, 1946–2019

JORDI TEJEL

Immediately after the partial withdrawal of the Syrian army from several towns in the north and north-east of the country in July 2012, Kurds seemed to emerge 'out of nowhere' (Gunter, 2014). More significantly, after more than forty years of dictatorship and political marginalization, Syrian Kurds appeared to become masters of their own destiny. For one, both the Democratic Union Party (PYD) – a Syrian offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which has been fighting the Turkish state since the 1980s – and its military force, the People's Defence Units (YPG), have been exercising state-like power in the Kurdish regions of Syria. In addition, the Kurds have become key actors in the Syrian conflict. In 2017, as part of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the YPG actively took part in military operations alongside the US against the Islamic State (IS) around Raqqa, the 'capital' of the IS's self-proclaimed caliphate.

However, in parallel, reports from the region have revealed a murkier picture: Syrian Kurdish parties appeared highly divided on the strategy to adopt regarding the Syrian regime, and the PYD ascent brought about significant consequences in the Kurdish enclaves. Whilst local co-ordination committees and local youth groups attracted many young people at the beginning of the revolt in 2011, the PYD played a significant role in repressing both the Kurdish youth activists and the marches organized by members of the Kurdish National Council (KNC),[1] which was established by fifteen political parties in October 2011.[2] Consequently, opposition political

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1 The Kurdish populations of Syria occupy three enclaves along the Turkish border that are isolated from one another: Upper Jazira, Kobane and Kurd Dagh, going from east to west. While Upper Jazira remained a stronghold of the KNC, in particular the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDPS, associated with the KDP led by Massoud Barzani in Iraqi Kurdistan), before 2012, the PYD was the hegemonic party in Kobane and Kurd Dagh.
2 See, for instance, Kurdwatch (2013a, 2013b). See also the reports elaborated by two international human rights organizations: Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2014) and International Crisis Group (ICG, 2014).

activities, as well as independent civic initiatives, were suppressed and/or deemed suspicious (Savelsberg and Tejel, 2017: 17–43).

More generally, the Sunni Arab opposition failed to meet Kurdish demands for official recognition of Kurdish national identity. The popular revolt of March 2011 became a civil war between the regime and an array of rebel groups, including hardline jihadist militias. Critically, between 2014 and 2015, the YPG forces faced a first dramatic blow: the IS siege of Kobane. Although the YPG militias alongside American planes and Iraqi Kurdish fighters liberated the city, the 'Battle for Kobane' provided worrying indications about subsequent events.

On the one hand, Turkey's unwillingness to aid Kobane's inhabitants to counter IS attacks announced a further straining of relations between Ankara and both the PYD and the PKK. A few months later, the war between the Turkish state and the PKK resumed, making the PYD-controlled regions a threat to Turkish national security in the eyes of Ankara's government. From that moment on, Turkey has conducted an aggressive policy against de facto Kurdish autonomy in northern Syria. The military campaigns in Afrin between January and March 2018 as well as the Turkish–US agreement to expel the Kurdish forces from Manbij exposed the dramatic shift in power relations along the Syrian–Turkish border. More importantly, and despite the Turkish–US agreement to establish a joint operation centre to manage tensions between the SDF and Turkish forces in northern Syria, Ankara launched Operation Peace Spring in October 2019 against the SDF. According to the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the operation was intended to expel the SDF from the border region as well as to create a 30 km-deep 'safe zone' in northern Syria where thousands of Syrian refugees currently hosted in Turkey would settle (TDN, 2019).

On the other hand, neither Damascus nor its main allies (Moscow and Tehran) helped the Kurdish fighters to free Kobane, thereby pushing the PYD into the arms of the US with unforeseen consequences. Critically, Russia allowed Turkish allies to occupy Afrin and replace the local authorities with anti-PYD cadres. Although communication channels between the PYD and the Syrian regime and Russia have not been completely severed, the PYD appeared more isolated and weaker than before. Once again, the green light provided by the US to Operation Peace Spring, after the partial withdrawal of the American forces from the border area, came to confirm that the Kurds in Syria were losing their allies, thereby pushing them to negotiate with the Syrian regime the return of the Syrian forces to Kurdish strongholds such as Kobane and Serê Kaniyê (Ras al-Ayn) (Rûdaw, 2019).

How do we account for this dramatic turn of events in the enclaves with the Kurdish majority in northern Syria? In this chapter we shall argue that both the continuity between 1946 and 2019 (e.g. division of the Kurdish political field, its openness to external influences and ambiguities with regard to the Syrian regime) and changes (e.g. Syrian war context, adoption of armed struggle strategies by Kurdish political parties and ideological transformations) may help us to better grasp current dynamics in northern Syria.

Between Syrianization and Pan-Kurdism

In the early stages of the French Mandate (1920–46), the strategies and attitudes of the Kurdish populations in Syria with regard to both the French colonial power and the Arab national movement varied. While some Kurdish tribes from Jarablus and Upper Jazira fought the French, most of the Kurdish leaders co-operated to secure French control in Syria. The Damascene Kurds proved their loyalty to the French after the fall of Faysal's cabinet in July 1920 (Fuccaro, 2003: 206–24). Furthermore, according to Philip S. Khoury, 'the role that Kurdish auxiliary troops had played in suppressing The Great Revolt [in 1925] strained relations between [Arab] nationalists and the Kurds of Damascus for the duration of the mandate' (Khoury, 1984: 526).

In addition, after the crushing of the Sheikh Said insurrection in Turkish Kurdistan in 1925, some members of Istanbul's Kurdish clubs sought refuge in the Levant. Subsequently, the Khoybun League (literally 'Be yourself'), the first Kurdish nationalist committee in Syria, was established in 1927 and was the basis for the conceptualization of modern Kurdish nationalism in Kurmanji dialect in Turkey and Syria (Tejel, 2007). The Khoybun League followed two different albeit not exclusive trajectories. While Turkey remained the target of its political and military activities since it was the country of origin for the majority of its members, Khoybun also favoured the participation of Kurdish representatives in Syrian political life.

Yet Khoybun's diplomatic failures during World War II led to a crisis in the Kurdish nationalist movement in Syria. The old members of the committee slowly withdrew from the Kurdish political scene, while Kurdish deputies to the Syrian parliament abandoned all autonomist demands for their respective regions to maintain the status quo. Consequently, by the late 1940s, the Kurdish movement lacked both a leader and a plan to bring together the diverse political factions.

Faced with this void, some of the more militant Kurds sympathized with the Syrian Communist Party (SCP). Young, politically active Kurds perceived the old Kurdish nationalist elite to be the enemy of the people and a vestige of a bygone era. Significantly, in some cases, the leaders of the movement were the sons of the old nationalist leadership. According to British sources, in the early 1950s, the main centre of communist activity in northern Syria was at Qamishli, while there were less important branches in towns such as Ras al-Ayn, Derbessiya, Amude and Derik.[3]

In addition to the party itself, there were also branches of two communist-controlled organizations, the Democratic Youth Organization and the World Peace Movement. The involvement of Kurds in the SCP took on such proportions that it was known in the north of Syria as the 'Kurdish Party'. Furthermore, from 1933 Khalid Bakdash, a Kurd from Hayy al-Akrad, or the Kurdish quarter, who used his ethnic background to spread the party's propaganda among Kurds in Damascus, led the SCP and won a deputy seat in 1954, in large part thanks to the mobilization of this electoral stronghold (Tejel, 2009: 42–5).

Like in Iraq, Kurdish leftist militants, while willing to defend Kurdish rights, were more prone to co-operate with 'Arab progressive forces'. In the same vein, despite French complicity with both Khoybun and autonomist leaders in Upper Jazira during the Mandate, young Kurdish activists reinterpreted recent Syrian history by hailing 'Kurdish resistance' against France and restating their commitment in the struggle against imperialism and its 'puppets' in the Middle East (Dengê Kurdistan, 1949). Ultimately, however, all different political Kurdish trends converged into a single organization, namely, the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria (KDPS) in 1957.

Following the elections of 1954, the Syrian parliament reflected the struggles between political parties, and between the political community and the army. Alliances and counter-alliances with Iraq and Egypt increased from 1954 to 1957. As a result of this impasse, the Ba'ath Party used the army and led Syria to integrate the United Arab Republic (UAR) under Gamal Nasser in February 1958.

To Ba'ath's surprise, Nasser imposed draconian conditions in order to unite the two countries, abolishing all political parties in Syria and putting the Syrian army under Egyptian command. For a short period of time, however, Nasser seemed to be eager to integrate the Kurds in his struggle against

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3 National Archives in London (thereafter NA), FO 195/2650. Political report no. 7885 'Kurdish Affairs'. Damascus, 25 September 1950.

imperialism. Thus, in June 1958, Cairo launched a Kurdish radio broadcast. More significantly, during one of Nasser's visits to Damascus, the Egyptian leader met with the KDPS leaders, inviting them to join the 'revolutionary' forces. The latter, in turn, asked Nasser for the right to education in the Kurdish language as well as the opening of a Kurdish radio station in Damascus.[4]

Not only were the Kurdish demands not met but also the end of this wary opening can be seen as a turning point in relations between the Kurdish movement and the Arab nationalists: publication and mere possession of books written in Kurdish became offences punishable by imprisonment; recordings of Kurdish music were smashed when played in cafes; and Egyptian teachers were sent into Kurdish regions (Nemir, 1992: 151).

Yet, like Arab nationalists during the French Mandate, Kurdish circles were also influenced by regional events. Spurred on by the events in Iraq, particularly by the agreement between Abd al-Karim Qassim and Mustafa Barzani to integrate the Kurdish nation into the definition of the Iraqi state, the KDPS succeeded in mobilizing a large number of Kurds between 1958 and 1961. Subsequently, the KDPS served as a propaganda platform for the KDP, which later acted as a link between the KDPS and the 'Iraqi' Party.

As in the past, however, tensions between a rather pan-Kurdist programme and a much more 'Syrian-oriented agenda' plagued the Kurdish movement. According to Osman Sabri, he founded the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria in 1956 together with Abdul Hamid Hajj Darwish, who was studying law at the time, Rashid Hamo (a teacher) and Sheikh Muhammad Isa Mahmud. A year later, the founding members chose Nuredin Zaza, who had returned from Europe in 1956, as president. At the insistence of the Iraqi KDP, the name of the party was changed to the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria at the beginning of 1960 (Jemo, 1990: 33–4). This name change was significant, for it implied that the Kurdish enclaves of northern Syria were also part of Kurdistan. Accordingly, Kurdish aspirations could include the potential annexation of these Syrian territories by an autonomous or independent Kurdistan. As a result, on 5 August 1960, the leaders of the executive committee were arrested and tortured.

Political connections between the Syrian Kurds and the Iraqi KDP were not, however, the only perceived threat to 'national security' in those years. During the French Mandate, tens of thousands of Christians and Kurds had settled in the province of Hasaka and began to cultivate new crops and build

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4 NA, FO 371/132747. Note on Kurds. From Foreign Office, 9 October 1958.

new towns. After World War II, Upper Jazira became the richest cotton-growing region of Syria. In addition to its agricultural wealth, the province had oil in a commercially exploitable form. Economic growth was paralleled by an increase in population: the official Syrian figures showed that between 1954 and 1961 the population of the province had increased from 240,000 to 305,000.

According to a British report, the rapid increase of population was partly due to Jazira's 'magnetic attraction' for the 'poor and unemployed' who lived in the surrounding areas, that is, Kurds from Turkey and Iraq.[5] As a reaction, Syrian media outlets, as well as politicians, began to denounce a supposedly massive 'infiltration' of Kurds from neighbouring countries and to make proposals to strengthen the 'Arabism' of the province in order to avoid the establishment of 'another Israel'.[6] Consequently, during the first week of October 1962, a special census was conducted in the province of Hasaka to find out who 'the real inhabitants' were and who were the 'foreigners'. After the special census, more than 100,000 Kurds, mostly peasants, were arbitrarily declared 'non-Syrians' and lost all the rights attached to citizenship (McGee, 2014: 171–81).

Finally, concerns about Kurdish trans-border relations were also raised in Turkey with regard to the survival of contraband cross-border networks. Since the French Mandate period, Turkey's porous border with Syria witnessed the proliferation of smuggled goods either circulating through or produced in Syria in large-scale operations. Sometimes employing a very aggressive tone, Turkish authorities, as well as newspapers, denounced French permissiveness regarding smuggling activities along the border on a regular basis during the 1930s (Tan, 1937; Yenilik, 1936).

Likewise, in the mid-1950s, tensions rose across the Turkish–Syrian border, including some clashes not only between smugglers and border authorities but also between Syrian and Turkish border guards.[7] In July 1956, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a communiqué about thirty-eight smugglers captured during an armed encounter with Turkish frontier guards and involving local villagers near Nusaybin.[8] In 1957, Turkey and Syria dispatched troops to its border and the same year Ankara proceeded unilaterally to plant mines along the boundary line.[9] Ultimately, Turco–Syrian

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5 NA, 371/164413. Report on the census taken in the province of Hassake. Damascus, 8 November 1962.

6 Ibid.   7 NA, FO 371/121868. Turco–Syrian relations. Damascus, 25 June 1956.

8 NA, FO 371/121868. Turco-Syrian Frontier Incident. Damascus, 13 July 1956.

9 While the number of smugglers found dead at the border was 28 by 1955, two years later 96 smugglers had died trying to cross the international boundary (Çelik, 2018: 61). The

frontier incidents were used by Syrian elites to reassert the need to protect national sovereignty over Upper Jazira, an 'Arab land'.

Towards the Strengthening of External Influences

On 8 March 1963, a coalition of Ba'athist officers seized power in the name of pan-Arabism and socialism, just a month after the twin Iraqi Ba'athist's coup in Baghdad. However, conflicts between factions were so intense that they systematically paralysed decision-making in Syria. Tensions in the ranks of the Ba'athists culminated in a new coup led by General Hafez al-Assad on 13 November 1970 and the establishment of the Corrective Movement one year later.[10]

Despite the regime's contradictions, the Kurdish movement was unable to defend Kurdish interests. In addition to state coercion, the fragility of the KDPS was also due to both internal and external dynamics. Since its inception, the KDPS was subject to various divisions stemming from generational and ideological differences, which mirrored the split between the partisans of the 'progressive' approach of the KDP in Iraq centred on Jalal Talabani, and the 'conservative' approach led by Mustafa Barzani. Divisions within the Iraqi KDP also had repercussions on the KDPS. Subsequently, the latter was divided into three blocs: one pro-Barzani, and two contesting parties split between the left (Osman Sabri and Muhammad Nayo), and the right (Abdul Hamid Hajj Darwish). However, Abdul Hamid Hajj Darwish eventually joined the Marxist camp of Jalal Talabani in 1965 (Allsopp, 2014).

In 1970, Mustafa Barzani attempted to reunify the KDPS by inviting all factions to Iraqi Kurdistan. Despite the effort, he was unsuccessful in reuniting the opposing factions under his party's banner so a new party was created by Daham Miro. Though this new formation succeeded in uniting conservative party members, the 'progressive youngsters' were not reintegrated in the KDPS, known henceforth as 'The Party'. Eventually, the left wing came to be led by Salah Badr al-Din of the Kurdish Leftist Democratic Party.

In 1975, the year the Kurdish movement was defeated in Iraq and Mustafa Barzani's KDP broke up, Jalal Talabani made an attempt to unite the Syrian Kurds at a congress, but those loyal to Barzani refused to participate. Furthermore, the Kurdish Leftist Democratic Party split in two, though it kept the same name until 1980. As a result, and in the face of pointless

mining of the border area in 1957 is certainly a key factor behind the increase of fatal incidents along the Syrian–Turkish border.

10 The new leader of the Ba'athists aimed at shifting and broadening the regime's foundation by means of an open economic policy as well as a pragmatic foreign policy.

ideological disputes, the parties in Syria were condemned to live in a state of lethargy (More, 1984: 205), thereby paving the way for the increasing influence of external factors.

As the Ba'athist regime departed from its original ideology, Hafez al-Assad sought to co-opt different elements of the Syrian society to secure its durability. Consequently, in 1976, as the Sunni Arab opposition against the regime became more pronounced, Hafez al-Assad reintegrated certain Kurdish individuals and groups into the communal system and gave them (e.g. Sheikh Ahmad Kaftaru) religious and military positions (Alawite Kurds from the north-west of Aleppo). Likewise, the Ba'athist regime established fluent, albeit uneven, connections with some Syrian Kurdish parties.

Abroad, this policy of co-optation served two goals: namely, to challenge Syrian neighbours (Turkey and Iraq), and to disperse the Kurdish 'danger' from Syria. In that sense, Hafez al-Assad's regime succeeded in displacing 'his' Kurdish problem towards Iraq and Turkey between 1970 and 1990, thus encouraging the polarization of the Syrian Kurds between partisans of the Kurdish movements in Iraq and those in Turkey (Tejel, 2006: 117–33).

From 1968 on, tensions between Syria and Iraq were obvious primarily in the struggle for Ba'athist ideological legitimacy. Within this context of competition, Kurdish political upheavals in Iraq provided Damascus with new opportunities. Following the Alger Agreement of 1975, which provoked the collapse of the KDP armed struggle in Iraq, former dissidents, such as Jalal Talabani and other leftist parties, created the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in the same year. In parallel, relations between Syria and Iraq worsened significantly during the 1980s, when Damascus sided with Iran during the Iran–Iraq War (1980–8), condemning the invasion of Iran by Iraq because it weakened the struggle of the Arab states against Israel. In exchange for this support, Iran allied with Syria at the time of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. As the Iran–Iraq conflict dragged on, Damascus sought to weaken Baghdad by working on the reconciliation between the PUK and the KDP, which was accomplished in 1987 through the creation of a United Front.

On the other hand, in the early 1980s, Hafez al-Assad began to support the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey. The conflict between Turkey and Syria was rooted in the transfer of sovereignty from the Sanjak of Alexandretta (Hatay) in 1939 during the French Mandate, which benefited Turkey. Besides this territorial dispute, Turkish dams on the Euphrates River threatened Syria's water supply. Against this backdrop, Hafez al-Assad allowed the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, to establish bases in Syria.

Later on, the PKK was moved from the north of Damascus to the Masum Korkmaz training base in the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon, which was under the control of the Syrian army. In August 1984, the PKK officially launched its armed struggle against the Turkish state (White, 2000). Thanks to the co-operation of the al-Assad regime, northern Syria became a breeding ground for PKK militants during the 1980s and the 1990s; certain sources estimate that between 7,000 and 10,000 Syrian Kurds died or 'disappeared' during clashes with the Turkish army (Montgomery, 2005: 134).

However, threatened by the 1996 Turkish–Israeli alliance and dependent on water from the Euphrates, Syria finally succumbed to Turkish pressure to withdraw all support for the PKK. Crucially, on 9 October 1998, Damascus expelled Abdullah Öcalan, who was subsequently arrested and transferred to Turkey. Ultimately, imprisoned Abdullah Öcalan called for a unilateral ceasefire.

Damascus Faces Its Own Kurds

The end of Hafez al-Assad's game was not without cost, though. Firstly, Damascus had to accept the strengthening of cross-border relations between the Syrian Kurds and the Kurds in neighbouring countries. Secondly, Syria relinquished part of its sovereignty, particularly in its relations with the PKK. Physically, PKK's militants took de facto control over a few small portions of Syrian territory, notably in Kurd Dagh. Symbolically, Öcalan and Barzani came to replace Hafez al-Assad in the minds of many Kurds. Overall, increasing awareness of the Kurdish identity in Syria and the strengthening of the pan-Kurdist ideal by 'proxy' were two significant consequences of Hafez al-Assad's game. The most obvious political outcome of this dynamics was the adoption by some Kurdish parties of the expression 'Syrian Kurdistan' or 'Rojava', referring to northern Syria, as opposed to the moderate, 'Kurdish regions of Syria'.

In addition, the collapse of the PKK–Damascus axis was deeply felt in the early 2000s: various high-ranking PKK officials were handed over to Ankara. In parallel, PKK militants created a new party in 2003, the Democratic Union Party (PYD). Crucially, by delivering Öcalan to the Turkish authorities, Syria lost an important asset for exploiting the Kurdish card at a regional level. Finally, Syria's relations with the Kurdish parties in Iraq also suffered a major blow after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Critically, the acceptance of federalism in the constitution as the new Iraqi state's system of organization in 2005 only served to strengthen the importance of the Iraqi Kurds, both in Iraq and in the Kurdish arena in the Middle East (Bozarslan, 2005: 25–36).

Be that as it may, while during the 'Damascus Spring' (2000–1) Arab individuals and groups played a major role in articulating political opposition to the regime, the centre of gravity was subsequently displaced towards the clandestine Kurdish parties. A previously marginal party, the Yekîtî (Kurd), decided to take various public actions in the Syrian capital denouncing injustice towards the Kurds. The Yekîtî Party presented some singularities when compared to the other Kurdish parties. Firstly, students, intellectuals and liberal professionals (doctors, lawyers) dominated their ranks. Secondly, the party was strong mainly in urban centres. Thirdly, Yekîtî expanded the boundaries of the 'Kurdish problem' beyond the narrow limits of an 'identity movement' to encompass the broader role of a 'civil society' movement. Finally, it sought to give more visibility to its demands and to put forward a 'Syrian' programme around the slogan 'the Kurdish problem is being settled in Damascus'.

For a while, the PYD seemed to follow Yekîtî's 'Syrian' strategy. As such, the Qamishli uprising of March 2004 and its aftermath provided the PYD with an opportunity to resume its activism in northern Syria, together with Yekîtî and other small Kurdish parties. On 12 March 2004, during a football match between the local team and Dayr al-Zor in the town of Qamishli, insults between the fans of the two sides escalated into a riot that spilt out into the streets. The governor of Hasaka gave the order to the security forces to open fire, killing six Kurds, three of whom were children.

Rumours of a real massacre quickly circulated, and thousands of people demonstrated, while the youngest sections of protestors attacked several symbols of the regime, such as the statutes of Hafez al-Assad and public buildings (Tejel, 2009: 108–32). During the following days, the riots spilt over all Kurdish enclaves as well as in the Kurdish neighbourhoods of Damascus and Aleppo. Significantly, it was the first time that the Kurdish parties and all Kurdish areas in Syria seemed to reach a high degree of unity in the face of the Syrian regime. This unity, however, did not last.

On 16 October 2005, the parties associated with the Iraqi KDP presented the Declaration of Damascus, a document that established a unified platform for democratic change and a solution to the Kurdish issue in Syria. Four parties, including Yekîtî and PYD, did not endorse the text. While the former asked for equal rights for Kurds as a 'minority', the latter pointed out that the Kurds were not 'guests living in an Arab country'; on the contrary, they lived on their own 'land'. In addition, good diplomatic relations between Damascus and Ankara had significant consequences for the PYD: on the one hand, dozens of its activists were delivered to Turkey, and on the other,

according to a PYD activist, the party went through a period of crisis marked by 'decline and betrayal' (Knapp, 2018: 388).

New Opportunities, New and Old Constraints, 2011–2018

The Syrian uprising of March 2011 thus seemed to provide unprecedented political opportunities for the Kurdish parties. Yet, the Syrian uprising had a profound divisive effect in northern Syria. While young activists demonstrated against the regime from the very beginning, Kurdish parties at first adopted a wait-and-see strategy. Thus, in June 2011, after demonstrations had already put significant pressure on the Syrian government, the leaders of the Kurdish political parties were invited to Damascus for the first time since Bashar al-Assad came to power. The invitation, which was ultimately declined, was part of a host of 'pro-Kurdish' measures that the Syrian government had implemented since the beginning of the revolution. These measures included the naturalization of registered stateless people (*ajanib* or foreigners) on 7 April 2011, and the effective repeal of Decree 49 on 26 March 2011, measures that satisfied two of the main programmatic demands of Kurdish parties and the Kurdish street activists.[11]

Following the establishment of the Syrian National Council (SNC) in August 2011, the new body was joined by only one Kurdish party, the Kurdish Future Movement. Yet its leader, Mashaal Tammo, was assassinated two months later. Subsequently, Arab leadership in the SNC increasingly alienated the Kurdish population with its refusal to incorporate Kurdish demands, including the removal of the word 'Arab' in the official state name (Allsopp, 2014: 200). For its part, the PYD declared that the 'Syrian revolution' was not 'its own' revolution and thus they would adopt a 'third-way' position between the Syrian opposition and the Syrian government in order to avoid the escalation of the conflict, which would ultimately pave the way for increasing interventionism from neighbouring countries (Savelsberg and Tejel, 2013: 189–217).

At the end of March 2012, however, the three blocs – youth committees, traditional Kurdish parties organized under the umbrella of the KNC, and the PYD – split into two camps after youth activist groups were co-opted by

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11 UNHCR reported in 2016 that by mid-2013, over 100,000 stateless Syrian Kurds had obtained Syrian nationality; however, many Kurds remain stateless due to the instability of the conflict and because they were not registered in the 1962 census. Due to lack of reliable data, the number is estimated to be about 160,000 (UNHCR, 2016: 7–8, 11).

either the KNC or the PYD. In parallel, increasing numbers of regional actors (state- and non-state-armed groups) became involved in the Syrian crisis. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared his former 'friend' Bashar al-Assad an illegitimate leader. Subsequently, Erdoğan opened Turkey's doors to Islamist rebels at the Turkish–Syrian border. Iran and Russia, in turn, expressed their will to support Bashar al-Assad's regime at any cost. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and Qatar financed diverse jihadist groups in Syria. It is within this context that the Syrian regime decided to partially withdraw its security forces from the Kurdish enclaves in July 2012,[12] thereby allowing the PYD – by far the most organized political group among Syrian Kurdish parties – to take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity and thus take control of the main Kurdish enclaves (Savelsberg, 2014: 98).

Subsequently, between 2012 and 2013, hundreds of PKK cadres and militants moved from Mount Qandil (Iraqi Kurdistan) into northern Syria in order to put in place a political framework of a de facto autonomous area and prepare the Syrian Kurds militarily. The YPG assumed control of main roads, border crossings and some administrative functions in Afrin, Derik and other small towns and villages. In parallel, the PYD agreed to co-operate with the KNC in other important urban centres such as Kobane and Amuda.

Yet from the very beginning there was an unbalanced power relationship between the two camps. Thanks to its financial resources, traditional popular support, pre-existing networks and an early establishment of armed militias, the PYD recovered its centrality within the Kurdish arena in Syria. Although this evolution has frequently been mentioned by observers and scholars, its novelty and subsequent effects have not been thoroughly addressed. Until 2011, the Kurdish parties of Syria constituted an 'exception', for Syrian Kurdish parties had never taken up arms against the government of Damascus; inversely, the armed struggle had been central to the Kurdish movement elsewhere. As a result, Syrian Kurdish parties had been unable to impose themselves as legitimate actors and open negotiations with the central government, a step which normally only took place in Iraq, Iran and Turkey after a period of armed conflict.

Admittedly, the establishment of armed militias and security forces in northern Syria not only allowed the PYD to become both the hegemonic Kurdish actor in the region and an important player in the eyes of the regime, but it also had a profound impact on the very foundations of Rojava's autonomous entity.

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12 Exceptions were Qamishli and Hasake, where the Syrian army and its security services were still present.

The Ambiguities of 'Democratic Autonomy' in Rojava

In 2013, the PYD established the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM), a coalition of civil associations and political factions (led by the former), to govern the territories under its control. While the KNC was negotiating with the SNC a political agreement based on the acceptance by the latter of the principle of 'administrative decentralization', if not federalism, the PYD alone promoted the declaration of a local administration followed by the appointment of three governments in the 'cantons' of Jazira, Kobane and Afrin on 21, 27 and 29 January 2014, respectively (Aranews, 2013). Rojava's administration also established people's tribunals, which lacked trained prosecutors and judges, as almost no Kurds had been accepted for these job positions in the Ba'athist system (HRW, 2014: 14).

In March 2014, the 'Social Contract of Rojava' was issued and intended to act as a provisional constitution charter for the region. The Social Contract Charter devoted Articles 8 to 53 to basic principles of rights, representation and personal freedoms that matched the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In addition, the PYD promoted a progressive gender equality standard in its governance structures, including equal gender representation in all administrations (Sary, 2016: 11–12). Moreover, on 17 March 2016, the PYD established a federal administrative system throughout the areas under PYD control, in which its principles – 'democratic autonomy' and 'democratic confederalism' – were to prevail.

In the proposed system of 'democratic autonomy' and 'democratic confederalism', the former refers to a regrounding of the political status of people on the basis of self-government, rather than on people's relations with the state. 'Democratic confederalism' aims at strengthening local administrative capacities organized in the form of councils at a very local level, of streets and then neighbourhoods, through districts/villages and towns/cities, to regions. 'Democratic confederalism' may thus be regarded as a form of autonomous self-administration. More importantly, following Abdullah Öcalan's prison writings, the PYD claimed that a decisive break from centralized and representative systems was needed; the Kurds, as well as all peoples in the Middle East, should abandon the nation-state system, to embrace a kind of communal self-organization (Jongerden and Akkaya, 2013: 163–85).

In theory, 'democratic confederalism' should bring to the fore local concerns and lead to a much more locally rooted Kurdish agenda. The reality, however, is different. Criticism of the PYD-led project among Kurdish individuals and

opposition political parties has been raised along with two main arguments. On the one hand, supporters of the revolution viewed their foremost goal as regime change. The party's co-operation with the regime was thus seen as a betrayal. On the other hand, many Kurds, as well as human rights groups, criticized the authoritarian tactics of the PYD and other associated organizations. Thus, competing parties were not allowed to participate in the political process. In addition, the number of unlawful arrests or kidnappings in order to intimidate representatives of other political parties has significantly risen since the PYD gained control (ICG, 2014). For the KNC, this was only a new form of authoritarianism, rather than democratic confederalism in action.

As the YPG agreed to fight ISIS with American logistical support, the military option had further consequences for the nascent political project. On the one hand, by expanding the involvement of the YPG beyond traditionally majority Kurdish areas, the Kurdish militia was brought to create a new military umbrella in October 2015; that is, the SDF, which despite being numerically dominated by the YPG cadres and fighters it also included Arab and Christian units. On the other hand, the new military strategy also led to a more significant name change. In December 2016, the federal system switched its name to the 'Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria' in order to integrate Arab populations into this political scheme. In July 2017, the PYD-led administration unit announced the organization of elections in three provinces named Jazira, Furat and Afrin. The first province included Hasakah (Hasakah, Darbasiya, Ray al-Ayn, Tel Tamir, Shadi, Arisha and Hula) and Qamishli (Qamishli, Derik, Amuda, Tirbesiye, Tel Hamis and Tel Barak) cantons. The second province included Kobane canton and its towns (Kobane and Sirrin), and Tal Abyad canton and its towns (Ayn Issa and Suluk). The third one included Afrin canton and its towns (Afrin, Jandairis and Raqqa), and Sheba canton and its towns (Tal Rifaat, Ehraz, Fafeyn and Kafr Naya). In September 2018, its name was changed once again to the 'Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria'. The removal of the word 'Rojava', however, sparked a wave of anger among various Kurdish groups within the country and in the diaspora.

Rojava and the Regional Dimension of the Kurdish Issue

The PYD's relations with the Syrian regime have remained ambiguous since the beginning of the Syrian uprising. As Syrian–Turkish relations collapsed, Bashar al-Assad allowed PYD leader Salih Muslim, a leader of

the PYD who had been exiled, to return to Syria and encouraged the PKK to reinforce its presence in the northern part of the country. Thirteen years after Öcalan was arrested and imprisoned by the Turkish government, the Syrian regime and the PKK and PYD again found themselves in an alliance of necessity.

Yet this relationship is both dynamic and contentious; it evolves in relation to internal and external shifts. Thus, while the Syrian government kept security forces in Qamishli and Hasakah, and services were still provided by the Syrian state, fatal clashes between the Syrian army and the YPG militias occurred occasionally (Barfi, 2016: 5). As both the regime and the PYD became increasingly threatened by Jabhat al-Nusra and IS, their mutual co-operation increased; this continues in some areas, such as the Kurdish neighbourhood of Sheikh Maqsoud in Aleppo against Jabhat al-Nusra and other groups. By late 2016, diverse statements confirmed by PYD spokes-persons reported that the extent of the co-operation between the YPG and the Syrian army in the Afrin canton had reached a level where they had a joint military command centre, supervised by the Syrian regime (Basnews, 2016a). However, it seems that there have been two main views in Damascus of the Kurdish project. The first one is that Syria will return to being a centralized state and Rojava will disappear. The second one views decentralization more broadly as a possible model for holding the state together (Lowe, 2016: 7). The latter has been backed by other international actors such as Staffan de Mistura, the UN special envoy for Syria, and Russia (Basnews, 2016b).

Moscow's relations with the PYD have also changed over time. At first, Russia saw the PYD's de facto non-belligerency pact with the regime as beneficial. It viewed the PYD as a potential ally against Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra, which came to control Idlib province. Ties between the two improved in 2015 after the Turkish downing of a Russian jet violating its airspace. Significantly, in February 2016 the PYD opened an office in Moscow. A year later, media outlets filtered a Russian draft of the Syrian constitution in which, while failing to accept federalism as a system of governance, it hinted at larger cultural and administrative freedoms within a decentralized Syria, in tune with Mistura's proposal (Rûdaw, 2017a). Notwithstanding this, Russia did not impose on Turkey the PYD's participation at the peace talks despite making multiple statements showing support for the inclusion of the Kurdish factions' involvement in any talks regarding the future of Syria.

The PYD's ties with Russia and the latter's military involvement in the Syrian conflict on Damascus's side led Rojava's leaders to think that should Turkey attempt to intervene in Syria, then Moscow would also clash with

Turkish forces (Al-Monitor, 2015). As first rumours on a Turkish intervention in Afrin canton circulated in January 2018, PYD leaders received an ultimatum: the Russian government would stop the Turkish offensive if the PYD handed over Afrin canton to the Syrian regime. However, Kurdish authorities refused the offer saying that YPG forces would defend the city (Basnews, 2018). Consequently, Russia allowed Turkey to penetrate into Afrin canton, thereby provoking the most serious blow for the PYD-YPG camp since the start of the Syrian crisis.

To understand the dramatic shift in Moscow–PYD relations, we need to return to 2014 and the rise of IS power in Syria and Iraq. As IS established the so-called Islamic caliphate over an area stretching between Raqqa and Mosul, and in the face of Ankara's complicity with diverse Islamic groups, the US Pentagon saw in the PYD and its militias the only forces capable of stopping IS advance in the region. Washington's pro-PYD shift coincided with the group's successes against IS in Kobane. The US forces carried out air strikes against IS positions and allowed Iraqi Kurdish fighters to aid the YPG in Kobane. Later on, the US State Department acknowledged intelligence sharing with the group.[13] Thanks to US support, the YPG-led SDF reversed the territorial gains of IS in Syria.

Critically, in May 2017, to the dismay of the Turks, US President Donald Trump issued an order to directly arm the YPG against IS, thereby paving the way for the subsequent military victories in Manbij and Raqqa (Al-Monitor, 2017). Yet following Trump's statements on the upcoming withdrawal of US forces from Syria, rumours spread on possible Turkish intervention in Manbij. Eventually, however, Washington and Ankara reached an agreement in June 2018 by which SDF forces would withdraw from Manbij, while Turkish and US patrols would share the control of the area. As a result of this agreement, northern Syria is de facto divided into two spheres of influence: west of the Euphrates River is under Russian/Turkish oversight; east of the Euphrates remains under US/YPG influence. More importantly, the PYD appears to be increasingly isolated.

The PYD and the Kurdish Sphere

Since 2011, the PYD's hegemony in Rojava is not without its challenges. Kurds have expressed their disappointment in the authoritarian behaviour of the PYD. Furthermore, the intervention by Iraq's Kurdistan Regional

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13 US Department of State, press briefing, 17 October 2014, www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/d pb/2014/10/233114.htm.

Government – in particular, its president, Massoud Barzani, as the 'protector' of Syria's Kurds (the KDP in Syria and the KNC) – has awakened regional intra-Kurdish rivalries. Tensions between the two Kurdish parties go back to the 1980s, and despite several agreements, relations between the PYD and the PKK, on the one hand, and the KDP, on the other, have worsened in the last few years since both political movements aspire to become central references for their respective core areas (Turkish Kurdistan for the former and Iraqi Kurdistan for the latter) as well as for the Kurdish sphere at large.

In that sense, the KDP has tried to mediate between the KNC and the PYD in Syria. As a result, the PYD agreed on three different occasions to share political and military power in Rojava.[14] However, none of these agreements has produced any concrete effect. Consequently, the KDP has made the management of the shared border crossing of Semalka (Faysh Khabur) a tool to press on the PYD-led region since 2013 on a regular basis. Crucially, the PYD monopolizes the revenues of the border crossing, contrary to what had been agreed in Duhok in 2014, between the PYD and the KRG (Kurdistan24, 2016).

As tensions around this border crossing would arise on a regular basis, the PYD sought an alliance with the Iraqi government to open a cross-border corridor southwards to break the 'embargo' imposed by Iraqi Kurdistan and thus end their international isolation in northern Syria.[15] The new corridor, though, asked for the green light from the Shia-dominated Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) that were clearing the Iraq–Syrian border of IS fighters. The YPG–PMU corridor, however, did not materialize as planned in order to avoid Turkish intervention in the area of Sinjar.[16] After the Turkish operation in Afrin, efforts were underway for the two rival parties of Rojava, the KNC and the ruling TEV-DEM, to reconcile in a bid for Kurds to be more united in Syria (Rûdaw, 2018). Such efforts, however, may be hindered by the last and more decisive regional player with regard to the Kurdish sphere: Turkey.

14 The first agreement was made on 11 June 2012 in Erbil and was called the Erbil I Agreement, the second was made on 24 December 2013, called the Erbil II Agreement, and the third was made in Duhok on 22 October 2014, called the Duhok Agreement.
15 Before IS took Mosul in June 2014, the PYD was using the border crossing in Rabia in co-operation with Baghdad to smuggle in supplies and fighters to avoid the KRG-controlled border of Samalka (Middle East Eye, 2017).
16 In spite of this cautious decision, Turkey struck several times between 2017 and 2018 in Shingal. Significantly, on 15 August 2018, Zaki Shingali (whose real name is Ismail Özden), a senior figure in the PKK, was killed in a Turkish air strike, near the town of Kocho in the Yezidi-dominated Sinjar area of Iraq (Al-Monitor, 2018a).

As Robert Lowe points out, for Turkey, Rojava is a multilayered and multidimensional issue (Lowe, 2016: 9). In that sense, Turkey's policies towards the Kurds on Syria are wholly inseparable from domestic Turkish Kurdish policies, as are the two Kurdish populations since the French Mandate period. However, the rising of PKK military strength from the 1980s onwards poses a threat to the security and territorial unity of the Turkish Republic. Although there are some similarities to its concern over the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in the 1990s, Rojava is different because of the involvement of the PKK.

Notwithstanding this, the relationship between Turkey and the PYD and beyond with Syrian Kurdish parties is a complex one. On the one hand, the Turkish government invited PYD leader Salih Muslim to Ankara for discussions in July 2013. Despite the assurances given by Salih Muslim to Turkish authorities that his party's call for a local administration did not mean a territorial division of Syria, relations between both sides worsened very rapidly and were not helped by the collapse of the peace process in Turkey between the PKK and Ankara in 2014–15. On the other hand, Turkey has sought to divide the Kurdish movement in Syria by favouring some parties over others. For instance, Turkey invited three Kurdish leaders to the Astana peace talks between the Syrian government and opposition parties, to be mediated by Russia, Iran and Turkey.[17] In the meantime, as it had previously done, Turkey rejected any PYD involvement in the peace talks. More importantly, after repeated threats to launch a military operation in northern Syria to stop YPG advances west of Manbij, in January 2018, Turkish planes and tanks attacked Afrin canton. Without significant resistance from YPG fighters, Turkey-backed militias took control of Afrin only some weeks later. Clearly, Turkish military moves in Afrin took place with the acquiescence of Russia. Likewise, the lack of clashes in Afrin city is probably due to an agreement between Russia and YPG in order to avoid further tension in an area close to the de-escalation zone, which is under Russian influence. In turn, YPG forces were able to redeploy east of the Euphrates River.

The fall of Afrin and taking control of Tell Rifaat by the Turkish army without any clashes boosted Turkey's determination. Within this context, the US–Turkey agreement on Manbij appeared as the only solution to halt Turkish ambitions east of the Euphrates which would provoke a serious

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17 The three Syrian Kurds invited by Turkey were Ibrahim Biro (head of the KNC), Abdulkarim Bashar (deputy president of the Syrian National Council) and Darwish Mirkan, as a consultant (Rûdaw, 2017b).

blow to Washington's most important ally in Syria: the YPG. Ultimately, the US and Turkey agreed to a plan on 4 June to jointly manage security and stability in three phases in Manbij, which is under the control of the US-backed SDF (Al-Monitor, 2018b). Yet, Operation Peace Spring launched by Ankara in October 2019 together with the partial withdrawal of US forces has undoubtedly reinforced Turkish military presence in northern Syria.

Furthermore, Turkish plans in the region seem to suggest that Turkey intends to keep a political, military and cultural influence over the area in the post-war period. Thus, for example, Turkey has opened four universities in the north-eastern Syrian territory it controls. Classes will be taught in either Arabic, English or Turkish. In addition, Turkish police in 2016 and 2017 trained 5,000 Syrians for a parallel police organization, and Turkey's postal service opened branches in Jarablus, al-Bab and Cobanbey (Al-Monitor, 2018c). Critically, almost a quarter of Syria's population is under Turkish control indirectly or directly, including 3.6 million refugees in Turkey. Plans to resettle thousands of Syrian refugees in northern Syria are since October 2019 more plausible than before. Be that as it may, the Turkish position in northern Syria has been strengthened between 2017 and 2019, and unless a dramatic shift occurs, no solution in Syria is possible without Turkish co-operation (AP News, 2018).

Conclusion

Although the uprising of 2011 has paved the way for unprecedented dynamics and opportunities, the tight connectedness of the Kurdish issue in Syria with external influences, including parties from other Kurdish areas and regional powers, continues to impose political and, since 2012, military constraints on the evolution of the Kurdish struggle in Syria. As a matter of fact, while YPG's military co-operation with the US against IS secured a central position for the PYD within the Kurdish and Syrian arena, once the IS threat has become less pressing for the Western powers, the PYD/YPG has faced increasing pressure from Turkey and Syria. Internally, while consolidation of Kurdish autonomy in Syria seemed unstoppable between 2012 and 2018, the 'Rojava laboratory', to use Leezenberg's expression (Leezenberg, 2016: 671–90), has been impeded by social variations that predated the Syrian revolt of 2011; namely, the extremely fragmented Kurdish political arena in Syria and the ambiguous relationship between the Syrian regime and the Kurdish political parties.

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The Yezidis in the Soviet Union

ESTELLE AMY DE LA BRETÈQUE

The Yezidis are a Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish)-speaking religious minority that is spread across northern Iraq, Syria, the Caucasus (Armenia and Georgia) and Western Europe.[1] Today, the largest group of Yezidis live in northern Iraq, which is also home to most of the holy sites. The Yezidis who settled in the Caucasus had left Anatolia during the nineteenth century as well as during the First World War. Since the collapse of USSR, unemployment and ethnic tensions have pushed many Yezidis from the Caucasus towards Russia, Ukraine or Western Europe. This chapter will set out (i) the Yezidi presence in the USSR with (ii) a focus on their role in the development of Kurdish studies and cultural institutions, as well as (iii) drawing a picture of how the Yezidi presence has evolved after the end of the Soviet Union, especially centring on new identity debates and the relations between the Yezidis and Kurdish movements in the diaspora.

The Kurds and Yezidis in USSR

Settlement and Censuses

The Yezidis of USSR moved to the Caucasus from what is now the Republic of Turkey as a result of two main waves of migration: the first wave took place during the Russo–Ottoman wars in the nineteenth century (1828–9 and 1879–82), and the second wave had occurred during the First World War, particularly during and after the Armenian genocide of 1915–16 that targeted the Armenians and Yezidis. They migrated from the regions of Van, Kars and Dogubayazit. Before they left, the Yezidis formed an integral part of the Kurdish tribal interactions in the Ottoman Empire. Fleeing persecutions in

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1 In Western literature, the spelling Yezidi or Yazidi can be found. In Kurdish, Yezidis use the word 'Êzdî'.

the Ottoman Empire,[2] the Yezidis found refuge in the Russian Empire. These Yezidis from the former wave settled mainly in the mountainous regions of Aragatz (Aparan and Talin provinces). The Yezidis who arrived in the early twentieth century settled mainly in villages of the plain (Ashtarak, Echmiadzin and Armavir provinces). Later on, in the 1930s, some Yezidis from the Aparan province were resettled in Tbilisi to work in factories.

Muslim Kurds already lived in Transcaucasia when the Yezidis arrived. They had moved to the Caucasus in the eighteenth century when these lands were part of the Ottoman Empire. They had become citizens of the tsar during his conquest of Transcaucasia during the nineteenth century[3] (Caratini, 1990: 121). In the Soviet Union communities were marked by 'nationality' rather than a religious creed.[4] Yezidis were considered 'Kurds' alongside the Muslim Kurds. After 1926, this classification was reflected in Soviet census figures, which no longer designated them as a distinct ideational category. In the Soviet Union, religion was hindered in various ways and nationality (natsionalnost) was the primary criteria to define peoples' group belongings. Thus, Muslim Kurds and Yezidis were all considered Kurds in the censuses. The Soviet census of 1926 registered 54,661 Kurds, the census of 1939 registered 45,866 Kurds, and in 1959, they were enumerated at 59,000 (with 26,000 in Armenia and 16,000 in Georgia) (Aristova 1966: 19; Chatoev, 1965: 9). Following the census of 1959, Bennigsen (1960) wrote that in the USSR, Kurds lived in Armenia (26,000), in Georgia (16,000), in Azerbaijan (an important – but unknown – number living in the region of Ganca and in the autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan[5]) and in Turkmenistan (a few thousand resided close to the Iranian border). However, the majority of Soviet Kurdologists consider these enumerations as underestimating the actual populace of Kurds in the USSR. Throughout the 1950s, authors gave higher estimates: 150,000 Kurds were posited by

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2 In the nineteenth century, Yezidis were often held to be 'devil worshippers' by Muslims and resultantly were subject to persecutions. Western Orientalists widely reflected this moniker in their writings: see, for example, Ainsworth (1855) and Mingana (1916).

3 The Kurds from Central Asia were integrated into the Russian Empire during the seventeenth century when the tsarist army defeated Persia in Central Asia.

4 However, the issue of religion was not disregarded, at least in the early years of the USSR. Confessional group and mother tongue were, then, seen as important elements of nationality (both nationalnost' and narodnost'). On the criteria used to define the terms of the 1926 Soviet census, see Hirsch (2005: 108–23).

5 In Azerbaijan, Kurds were mainly Muslims and were often counted as 'Tatars' or 'Azeris' in the censuses. For more information on Azeri Kurds, see Müller (2000). The first edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia (Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya) vol. I, gives for 1926 the following number: 34,098 Kurds in Azerbaijan (Great Soviet Encyclopaedia (Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopedia), 1926: 641).

Aristova (1954), according to Kurdoev (1957: 10) it was 120,000 and according to Mahmudov (1959) it was 160,000.

In the 1990s, even after the collapse of the USSR, varying populace estimates and enumerations persisted. Written sources (books and newspapers) usually estimated that around 60,000 Kurds resided in Armenia, and between 40,000 and 50,000 lived in Georgia (mainly in Tbilisi) (Caratini, 1990: 120–1). But in his book *Caucasus Chronicles* Leonidas T. Chrysanthopoulos reports that 'in 1993 there were between 60,000 and 120,000 Kurds living in Armenia. The latter was provided to me by the Ministry of Interior, the former, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although religion has never been an issue that has troubled them deeply about 10,000 of them were Sunni Moslems while the rest were Yezidis' (Chrysanthopoulos, 2002: 145).

Religion

The Yezidis are the followers of Yezidism. Yezidism is a religion which probably hails from an ancient Iranian faith akin to Zoroastrianism, and it has many elements that are interwoven with other belief systems, such as Islam, Christianity and Gnosticism.[6] The two main pillars of Yezidism are:

(i) the belief in the reincarnation of seven Holy Beings, which are said to serve God. The most important of them is: Melekê Tawus, the Peacock Angel;

(ii) the importance of purity, which is expressed in many taboos concerning food, dress and personal habits as well as in the social order of endogamous groups. The community is constituted in three endogamous groups: two groups of religious leaders (*pîr* and *şêx*) and a group of laymen (*mirîd*).

Another particularity of Yezidism, at least in its regional context, is the absence of holy books. Until recently, owing to Yezidi religious norms, writing was even prohibited. As a consequence, all sacred and secular knowledge was part of an oral tradition, and there are many differences between the practices of the Mesopotamian Yezidis and the Transcaucasian Yezidis.

After World War I, Yezidi communities were divided by new international frontiers, which became increasingly difficult to cross throughout the twentieth century. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the *mîr* (religious leader of the Yezidis) used to send the *qewels* (singers of sacred texts) from Sheikhan in Iraq to dispense religious knowledge and to collect

6 On the origins and intricacies of the Yezidi religion, see Kreyenbroek (1995), Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005) and Omarkhali (2005, 2017). For an overview of Yezidism in a worldwide perspective, see Allison (2017).

money.[7] With the establishment of these frontiers at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Yezidis living outside of Iraq were left out of this practice. In the USSR, the Caucasian Yezidis had to rely exclusively on their own religious figures, who were few in number and who could be punished if they were caught practising religious rites (Allison, 2017: 4).

Although the Soviet ideology promoted atheism and claimed that religions should be erased, this did not happen in practice.[8] Religion was absent in the public sphere of life, but it was kept alive in the private sphere. Families from the clergy (*şêx* and *pîr*) continued to transmit their knowledge in private to their children (Omarkhali, 2017: 139). The sacred hymns (*qewl*s and *beyt*s) are still known by the clergy from the Caucasus and were uttered in family gatherings and rituals when needed.

Among the Yezidis of Transcaucasia, religious life concentrated mainly around the *stêr*, domestic altar made of a pile of woollen mattresses.[9] Such shrines probably existed since the nineteenth century in Anatolia, but they are totally absent in Iraq and Syria.[10] In Transcaucasia, many families have a *stêr* in their house. The *stêr*s who are in the houses of clergy families are said to be invested with magical powers. They are sites of the power of the *ocax* – a household or holy lineage – at which blessings, protection or treatment of ailments by members of the lineages, *pîr* or *şêx*, might be given. Linked to a *hurî* (an invisible creature) or to one of the seven main angels, these *stêr*s are all dedicated to a specific cause: some protect livestock, some treat stomach-ache, some chase fear of darkness and some help procreation. They are usually set in the main room of the house on its eastern side. The *stêr* is a very respected object for the Yezidis, who say that many rules must be observed in relation to it. For example, it is forbidden to move the *stêr* without a ritual in which an animal is sacrificed (*qurban*).[11] Other sacred

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7 On the role of the *qewel*s (or *qewwal*s) in the transmission of religious knowledge, see Omarkhali (2017: 138) and Spät (2005: 33).

8 The persistent importance of religion was reflected in the matrimonial alliances of Kurds in the Soviet Union, for instance. Marriages between Muslim Kurds and Muslim Azeris were quite frequent, while extremely rare between Muslim Kurds and Yezidis (Davreshian, 1985). Also Muslim Kurds mainly settled in villages with Muslim inhabitants (Azeris, Turkmens and others), while Yezidis settled amongst Christians (Armenians or Molokans) (Omarkhali, 2013: 137).

9 The vast majority of Yezidis from the Caucasus are livestock farmers (Davreshian, 1986). In this pastoral society woollen mattresses are valuable goods. They are an important part of a bride's dowry, for instance.

10 In contrast, the Iraqi Yezidis, worship at Lalesh and at a lot of smaller shrines of similar architecture.

11 For a detailed analysis of the *stêr* and people's interactions with it, see Amy de la Bretèque (2013: 159–62).

sites exist, which the Yezidis call *ziyaret*s. They are often Armenian worship places, such as churches. Other sacred sites that exist are linked to topographic features, such as springs or caves. As with the Armenians, graveyards in their villages are also important places of gatherings. On the graves of their family members, families gather at least once a year for *roja mazala* (the graveyard day)[12] to commemorate the lost members of the household. On this day, the Yezidis eat and drink to the memory of their dead ones, clergymen utter prayers and close relatives utter laments.[13]

Kurdology and Kurdish Culture in the USSR

In the early 1920s, the Kurds became a distinct nationality (*narodnost'*) for the Soviet authorities. This status did not entitle them to have an autonomous region (*oblast' ou okrug*), but it did give them the right to study in their native tongue and allowed for the flourishment of Kurdish literary activities. Since both Yezidis and Kurds were members of the Kurdish 'nationality', distinctions were not in general made between their cultural productions. Folkloric songs and stories broadcast on Radio Yerevan were labelled simply 'Kurdish'. As with many of the nationalities in the Soviet Union, Kurdish cultural production in Armenia underwent an eclipse in the late 1930s but started again in the early 1950s.

Language and Schools

In 1922, in Yerevan, a Kurdish alphabet based on the Armenian script was created. Kurdish also started to be written in Latin script (1927)[14] and later in Cyrillic script (1945).[15] Since the fall of the USSR most publications use the Latin script.[16] In the 1920s schooling became mandatory and resultantly by the 1930s the overwhelming majority of the Yezidis (illiterate by religious prescription) became literate (Blau, 2012: 19). There were more than forty Kurdish schools in the Soviet Union at the end of the 1920s, mainly in

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12 All villages commemorate their dead at least once, in June. Some villages commemorate their dead twice: in June and September. On the calendar feast of the Yezidis in Transcaucasia, see Amy de la Bretèque (2011).
13 On the role of laments among the Yezidis of Transcaucasia, see Amy de la Bretèque (2013).
14 Elaborated by Isahak Marogûlov (1868–1933) and Erebê Shemo – Arab Shamilov – (1897–1978).
15 Elaborated by Heciyê Cindî (1908–90). This alphabet included thirty-nine signs (nine vowels and thirty consonants) (Bennigsen, 1960: 516).
16 For a detailed comparison of alphabets used for Kurdish in the USSR and beyond, see Hassanpour (1992: 374–76).

Armenia (Omarkhali, 2013: 136). A special school was established in 1931 in Yerevan to train teachers to deliver the Soviet literacy in Kurdish (Allison, 2013a: 194). School books in Kurdish were published for primary and secondary schools in Yerevan by authors such as Heciyê Cindî (1908–90), Emînê Avdal (1906–64) and Kanatê Kurdoev (1909–85). Most of them were translations of textbooks from Armenian or Russian. Furthermore, a huge amount of translations of literary work (mainly from Russian) and of official documents (such as the Constitution of the USSR) into Kurdish was accomplished by Soviet Kurds (Amy de la Bretèque, 2012: 105). Kurdish dictionaries were also published, starting with *Xebernamê ji zimanê fileĵî-kûrmancî* (Armenian–Kurdish dictionary), which was published in 1933 by the Academy of Sciences of the SSR of Armenia.

Literature and Newspapers

From 1929 onwards, the number of printed books in Kurdish increased in Armenia. In 1932, a branch for Kurdish authors was founded within the Armenian Authors' Union (van Bruinessen, 1997: 220). Most of them were self-educated. They were strongly influenced by Armenian and Russian literature and their works were engaged. Emînê Avdal, Heciyê Cindî and Casimê Celîl (1908–98) published their works in the bi-weekly newspaper *Riya Taze* (*The New Way*), which began its publication life in Yerevan in 1930, and in other literary brochures. The first theatre piece *Qitiya du dermana* (*The Medicine Box*, 1932) was written by Heciyê Cindî, who devoted a long period of his life to collecting and publishing Kurdish folklore-related material. In 1935, Wezirê Nadir (1911–47) wrote a second theatre piece, namely, *Reva Jin* (*The Abduction*), and a few years later, a long poem, *Nado û Gulizer*, narrating the heroic story of a young Kurd and his fiancée during the war. The most prolific Kurdish novelist of this period, Erebê Şemo (1897–1979), published in 1935 *Şivanê kurmanca û Kurdên Elegezê* (*The Kurdish Shepherd and the Kurds of Alagyaz*) in Yerevan. This autobiographical novel was immediately translated into Russian (*Kurdskij Pastux*), and was republished with a revised and augmented version under the title *Berbang* (*Dawn*) in 1958. The author describes his childhood as a shepherd and how he became a Communist and participated in the Soviet Revolution of 1917.

The years 1932–8 were the golden period for the development of Kurdish culture in Soviet Armenia. In 1934, a conference was held in Yerevan for Kurdish authors about writing in Kurdish. Topics like the creation of Kurdish neologisms for new technical devices and concepts were discussed. On the eve of World War II, and in the period of Stalin's Great Purge (1936–8), the

Soviet care for Kurdish culture and language suddenly dissolved; the newspaper *Riya Taze* was shut down in 1938, and the printing of Kurdish books was stopped.

After the Second World War, the Armenian Soviet Republic fostered a Kurdish cultural revival. The Kurdish newspaper *Riya Taze* reappeared in 1955, and books in Kurdish were published in Yerevan. Among others, in 1959, Semendê Siyabandov (1909–98) published *Siyabend û Xecê*, an epic romance, and *Bîranînêd Min* (*My Memories*) was penned by the novelist Ehmedê Mirazî (1899–1961) – it was published posthumously in 1966. The novel *Hewarî* (*The Call*) by Heciyê Cindî was published in 1967. Women also participated in this literary life: Sima Semend (b. 1933) published *Xezal* (*Gazelle*) in 1961 and *Do Şayî* (*Two Good News*) in 1967. Between 1980 and 1990, in Yerevan, not only was there the publication of the annual literary magazine entitled *Bahara Taze* (*The New Spring*) but there were also novels, poems and other forms of writings published by the second generation of Soviet Kurds, such as Emerîkê Serdar (1935–2018) and Wezîrê Eşo (1934–2015).

In the 1970s and through the 1980s, Tbilisi became another centre for Kurdish cultural life. The Georgian capital had a Kurdish theatre, Kurdish musical groups and Kurdish weekly radio broadcasting. Kurdish books were also published, and a Kurdish section was created in the Writers' Association of Georgia. Kurdish literature and culture in the former Soviet Union played a significant role in the development of Kurdish literature in general.[17] Listened to well beyond the frontiers of the USSR, broadcasts in Kurdish from Radio Yerevan played an important role in it.

Cinema, Theatre and Radio

The first Kurdish film was produced in Soviet Armenia by Arme-Kino in 1927. It was a silent seventy-two-minute black-and-white movie directed by Beg Nazarov (1891–1965) titled *Zare*. This film narrates the love story of the young and beautiful Zare with the shepherd Saydo in 1915 (a few years before the revolution of the Soviets). In line with the ideology of the 1920s, the film shows how the administration of the tsar uses dimness and ignorance of the oppressed Kurds to exploit them with the help of Kurdish spiritual and feudal leaders. In 1933, a silent fifty-two-minute black-and-white documentary titled *Krder-ezidner* (*Kurds-Yezidis*) was directed by Amasi Martirosyan (1897–1971). It exhibited the establishment of a Kolkhoz (collective farm) in a Kurdish village

17 For further detail on Kurdish Soviet literature, see Allison (2013a), Blau (2012), Japharova-Brutti (2001) and Mirzoev (1996).

in Soviet Armenia. After that, several other films were produced in Kurdish or in Russian about the Kurds.

In 1937, the Kurdish Folk Theatre of Alagyaz was founded. Situated in a village in the foothills of Aparan mountain, this theatre had a team of Kurdish actors and played several pieces every year. Most of them were also recorded for the radio. The building was destroyed in the earthquake of 1988 and did not open thereafter (Japharova-Brutti, 2001: 98). Radio Yerevan started to broadcast programmes in Kurdish in the 1930s but stopped in 1937 as a result of Stalin's Great Purge. In 1955, under Khrushchev, Kurdish programmes were timidly broadcast again. Casimê Celil directed three fifteen-minute slots per week in Kurdish. The topics covered by the programmes were monitored directly from Moscow. It was prohibited to talk about nationalism, politics or Kurdish unity. Instead, the programmes focused on songs and radio plays. In 1961, the broadcasts in Kurdish became daily at Radio Yerevan with 1.5 hours at a time. At that time, the broadcasts also crossed Armenia's borders reaching into Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, as well as several countries within the Soviet Union. The number of listeners grew accordingly, and the staff of the radio was in constant relation with Kurds in the Soviet Union and the Middle East, receiving letters and phone calls.

In the early 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly independent state of Armenia faced important social and economic challenges. Radio Yerevan was not financed anymore and almost the entire staff of the Kurdish department lost their jobs. As unemployment was extremely high most of them left the country. Only Keremê Seyyad (b. 1938) stayed and worked for the radio. The collapse of the Soviet Union also lifted ideological restrictions on the content of the programmes. In the late 1990s, Keremê Seyyad planned a new series of broadcasts that included news, political commentary, Kurdish history, language and culture. There was also a programme, where Keremê Seyyad put in contact Kurdish families from Turkey and Armenia who had been separated in the 1920s and 1930s.

Radio Yerevan marked the memories of many Kurds across the Middle East, Europe and the former Soviet republics. Throughout the years when the Kurdish language and culture were banned in Turkey, people got an opportunity to hear Kurdish language on the radio as well as to explore Kurdish culture, especially music. As Martin van Bruinessen writes: 'The impact of this first Kurdish radio transmission on the self-awareness of the Kurdish population of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq can hardly be overestimated' (van Bruinessen, 1997: 214). Today the archives of the Public Radio of

Yerevan include, among others, thousands of Kurdish folk songs and theatrical plays.

<div align="center">

*Kurdology in the USSR (Leningrad, Moscow
and Yerevan)*

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Soviet Kurdology inherited from Kurdish studies in tsarist Russia.[18] In Leningrad, a Kurdish department already existed at the Institute of Oriental Languages in 1930. A seminar of Kurdish linguistics opened at the Faculty of Languages of Leningrad's University in 1931, and the study of Kurdish became mandatory in Iranian studies at the Faculty of Philology. From 1930 on, Kurdologists worked at the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and at the Institute of Orientalism in Moscow. In Yerevan, a Center for Kurdology (focusing mainly on linguistics and folklore) opened just after the October Revolution at the Academy of Sciences of the newly constituted Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1933, a pan-Soviet conference of Kurdology was held in Yerevan.[19] Along with Kurdish history, linguistics and classical literature, the study of Kurdish folklore quickly developed with the publication of tales, epic narratives and songs.[20] Expeditions of folklorists and linguists were regularly organized in the villages of Transcaucasia until the collapse of the USSR.

A few years later, in 1959, the Group for Kurdish Studies was founded at the Leningrad branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies under the leadership of Joseph Abgarovich Orbeli (1887–1961), who is often considered as the founder of modern Kurdology. It was the first centre for Kurdish studies in the world. This group of Kurdologists worked actively on the Kurdish language and its dialects; they collected extensive documentation through fieldwork and published a significant number of monographs. Amongst the Soviet Kurdologists, Margarita Rudenko (1928–77) wrote extensively on oral poetry, and in more recent years, Ordikhanê Celil (1932–2007) and Celilê Celil (b. 1936) collected and published large amounts of ethnographic material, in particular among Yezidis living in Soviet Armenia.

The destiny of Kurdish studies in post-Soviet Russia and Armenia is unclear. With no financial support, institutions are closing, and the educated youth is leaving (Leezenberg, 2011: 10–11; Omarkhali, 2013: 136–7).

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18 For further details on this, see Leezenberg (2011).

19 For an extensive description of the development of Kurdology until 1960, see Kurdoev (1960) and Bennigsen (1960).

20 See, for example, Heciyê Cindî's (1957) *Folklore Kûrmanca*, in Kurdish and Armenian.

After the Fall of the USSR: A Quest for Identity

From Confessional to Ethno-confessional?

Since the fall of the USSR, nationalism and ethnic tensions increased in Transcaucasia. They led to the Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988–94),[21] which affected many Kurds of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Baku took advantage of the religious factor so as to court the Muslim Kurds. Yerevan used the same tactics to enlist the support of the local Yezidi Kurds. As a result, Muslims and Yezidis found themselves on opposite sides of the conflict.[22] This gave rise to the so-called 'Yezidi question' in Armenia: some of the nationalist groups tried to present the Yezidis as a separate ethnic group which had nothing to do with the Kurds. The majority of Muslim Kurds living in Armenia fled the country to Azerbaijan during the war.[23] Among the Yezidis, a schism grew up between those who saw themselves as ethnically Kurdish and Yezidi by religion and those who considered Yezidism as a separate ethnicity.

During the Karabakh War, many Yezidi soldiers fought alongside the Armenian soldiers (*fedayi*) against the Azeris. This Armenian–Yezidi friendship had also existed in the past. Yezidi epic songs still commemorate the active participation of Yezidi generals in the Battle of Sardarapat and Bash-Aparan in 1918. The Armenian General Andranik and the Yezidi General Jahangir Agha, who fought together against the Ottoman army, are both national heroes. The Yezidis also share with the Armenians the memory of the genocide in which Muslim Kurds participated actively (Bozarslan, Kévorkian and Duclert, 2015; Kévorkian 2006), and the memory of exile towards the Caucasus during the First World War to gain Soviet protection. In 1989, the Yezidi National Union was founded in Armenia by Aziz Tamoyan (president) and Khdr Hajoyan (vice-president). It claimed a separate Yezidi ethnicity, and a language which was no longer Kurmanji but Ezdîkî. For the first Armenian population census since the fall of the USSR (2001) 'Kurd' and 'Yezidi' were presented as distinct ethnicities, and only one answer could be

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21 In 1988, with the purpose of separation of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan and its joining to Armenia, a strong movement began in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, which led to an armed conflict between the two republics.

22 In the newly independent Armenia, the word 'Kurd' was synonymously used with that of 'Muslim', and suspicion was casted over Kurdish Muslims due to their alleged links with the Azeri Muslims. Weddings between Azeris and Muslim Kurds were common throughout the Soviet period.

23 Only about 1,500 Muslim Kurds still remained in the Abovian district after the Nagorno-Karabakh War (Serdar, 1998).

chosen.[24] In 2005, the Armenian parliament recognized Ezdîkî as a separate language. Ever since, the national TV channel which dedicates one hour for each 'national minority' broadcasts one hour in Kurmanji and one hour in Ezdîkî.[25] This debate over identity divides the community into two groups: Yezidi-Kurds and Yezidis. In the long run, they could become two nations speaking two different languages. The Yezidis who live in the plains are more prone to consider themselves Yezidis who speak Ezdîkî, while those who live in the mountainous Aparan region mainly consider themselves as Yezidi-Kurds speaking Kurmanji. This geographical division can be explained by the fact that the plain Yezidi villages are mostly mixed with Armenians or Molokans and also comprised until the war Muslim Kurds and Azeris. In the Aparan district, however, many villages are almost exclusively Yezidi. Moreover, an important part of the Soviet intelligentsia (more prone to consider themselves as Yezidi-Kurds) came from villages of the Aparan district.

Each of the two groups accuses the other of a political scheme. According to the pro-Kurdish movement, the Ezdîkî movement is promoted by Armenian nationalists. It would be aimed at avoiding separatist revindications of Kurds in Transcaucasia. On the other side, the Ezdîkî movement accuses the pro-Kurdish one to support the PKK. Local politics are indeed complex: the Armenian state encouraged the recognition of Yezidis as a distinct minority, while at the same time tolerating the presence of PKK fighters from Turkey on its territory. These fighters are said to be 'retired' and live in Armenia without any visa. They organize cultural events and demonstrations. Two offices of retired 'friends' (*hevalen*) of the PKK opened in Yerevan and Alagyaz.

According to the 'Ezdîkî' camp, long-felt and legitimate Yezidi claims to a separate identity had been repressed by the Soviet system. The 'Kurdish' Yezidis, by contrast, asserted that the problem was new and a product of the political climate of the Karabakh War (Flint, 1998: 77–83). The schism was bitter. In the early 1990s, the most notorious violent incidents occurred.[26] It

24 The population censuses carried out in Georgia (in 2002) and in the Russian Federation (in 2002) also registered Kurds and Yezidis as two different ethnic groups.

25 In effect, the separation between Kurmanji and Ezdîkî doubles the time in which the same linguistic system is used. For the moment the language is exactly the same during the Ezdîkî hour and the Kurmanji hour, but the ideological content is radically different and most of my informants watched only one of the two hours (for more detail, see Amy de la Bretèque (2013: 35–43)).

26 There are two notorious events: the murder of Seid Iboyan, a Yezidi 'pro-Kurd' paediatrician – see Lennox (2001: 418–23) – and the Yezidi participation to the

still exists today, but the situation is now much calmer; both sides interact and attend each other's celebrations. Occasional tensions persist, especially on matters such as schooling.[27] Radio and TV programmes remain separated between broadcasts in Ezdîkî and Kurdish (Kurmanji). The Yezidis of Georgia, linked by family ties to those of Armenia (and centred mainly around Tbilisi), also experience similar identity issues, even if the general climate is a bit less divisive.

Religious Changes

In Iraq, Yezidi religious life is punctuated by visits to temples and shrines. The great autumn festival of Lalesh is probably the biggest religious gathering throughout the year (Spät, 2005: 50–9). Until the end of the Soviet Union, the Caucasian Yezidis did not build temples but kept domestic altars (*stêr*) in the homes of men of religion (and sometimes in laymen, too). The absence of temples was not even questioned during the Soviet period as religion was not part of the political agenda of the Soviets. But even earlier, during the nineteenth century, before (or upon) their arrival in the Caucasus, the Yezidis from Eastern Anatolia did not build temples. According to Allison (2013b: 161), it is unclear what role Lalesh played in the religious life of the Caucasian Yezidis before their migration from the Ottoman Empire. During the Soviet period, Lalesh was entirely absent from both discourses and iconography. Representations of the distinctive buildings of Lalesh began to circulate only in the 1990s. They have become nowadays unavoidable ornaments on the walls of Yezidi houses.

In the late 1990s, the main issue within the Georgian Yezidi community was the building of a Yezidi temple and cultural centre on the outskirts of Tbilisi (Szakonyi, 2007: 16). This idea was completely new for the Yezidis who had no temple in Transcaucasia. The construction of the temple of Tbilisi took longer than expected due to a variety of disputes and difficulties.[28] The temple was finally opened in 2013 on the outskirts of Tbilisi. Since 2016, a building adjacent to this temple is ready to host the first 'Yezidi Academy of

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celebration of the capture of the (still disputed) Lachin corridor, after the ethnic cleansing of its partly Kurdish population.

27 The schoolbooks in Ezdîkî have been rejected by the schools of Aparan district, who continued to teach using Soviet books.

28 Szakonyi (2007) points to three main reasons for the delay: (1) lack of resources after the economic crises of the 1990s and the massive emigration; (2) internal conflicts about the legitimacy of constructing a temple outside historically religious places like Lalesh or Sinjar; and (3) close partnership between the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Georgian state who opposed the construction of buildings for other faiths.

Theology'. It will be headed by Pir Dima, President of the Spiritual Council of the Yezidis of Georgia. The opening of a religious curriculum is something extremely new for Yezidism in which the transmission of religious knowledge was kept secret in the lineages of clergy people. This new formalized teaching of the faith is bound to offer classes to any Yezidi who requests it. The programme will be taught in Kurdish and Russian, as well as including Arabic courses. In these programmes, the vocabulary of the religious *qewl* and *beyt* chants (which is partly borrowed from Arabic) will be explained. Students will be trained for new 'tasks', such as guardians of the temple[29] or clerics for religious wedding ceremonies. 'Temple' weddings are also totally new in the Caucasus. Finally, the Academy of Theology proposes a new ritual of 'reconversion' to Yezidism. Authorized in 2012 by the highest authorities of Yezidism (the Mîr Tahsîn Beg and the Baba Sheikh) during their visit to Tbilisi, this ritual allows a Yezidi converted to Christianity (and therefore excommunicated) to come back to Yezidism if he or she has not been married in the meantime.[30] These changes seem to indicate an attempt to bring back 'lost Yezidis' in the community and to offer an opportunity for all Yezidis (even if they are not from a clergy family) to study their religion.

In Armenia, a small temple similar to those in Iraq was also built and inaugurated in 2012 in Aknalich by Mirza Sloyan (a Yezidi businessman living in Russia). A second temple, the largest Yezidi temple in the world, was inaugurated close to it in September 2019. Next to the temple, a conference hall, a museum and religious seminary are under construction. Weddings will also be held in the complex. The name of the temple, Quba Mere Diwane, can be translated as 'All Will Come Together'. The construction of this huge temple was financed by Mirza Sloyan as well and was encouraged by the Armenian government in a wish 'to commemorate those killed at Sinjar and to honour Armenian Yezidis' (Kelly, 2017). In August 2014, the Yezidis of the Caucasus learned indeed through the media about the massacres carried out by Daesh in Sinjar. Shocked by what happened to the people of Sinjar, some understood these events as a repetition of those experienced by their ancestors, particularly during the 1915–16 genocide (Six-Hohenbalken, 2018). A sense of shared tragic destiny grew among the Yezidis in the Caucasus. Within a few months after the events of Sinjar, they managed to raise funds and bring in refugees from Sinjar. About fifty Yezidi

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29 In Iraq, temple guardians belong to the same lineage and do not follow a formal training.
30 About fifty people underwent this ritual in a little less than five years (Guardiola, 2017: 129).

families from northern Iraq settled in Armenia. Five years later, however, nearly all the Sinjarîs have left the country. Some moved on towards Europe, while others returned to Iraq. Their decision was apparently motivated in part by the difficulties which they faced in integrating into Armenian society. Religious and daily life are quite different in the Caucasus and Iraq. Christoph Bierwirth, representative for the United Nations Refugee Agency in Armenia, explained that 'they were welcomed in a small village with, on one hand, an open approach from the local population and, on the other, with some misunderstandings about whether their prayers are Muslim or of another form . . . The lifestyle is very different for those in the Sinjar mountains and the Yazidi communities here' (Kelly, 2017).

Conclusion

Although Soviet Kurds constituted a minuscule section of the Kurdish population, they held an important role for Kurds at large. Newspapers and radio broadcasts in Kurdish were the pride of the Soviet Kurdish intelligentsia, at a time when Turkish Kurds were hardly allowed to speak Kurdish on the streets. Today the situation of the Yezidis in the Caucasus and in post-Soviet countries is uncertain. Since the collapse of the USSR, the identity issue has been dividing the community and thus it is about to create two nations, speaking two different languages. Due to poor economic conditions, many Yezidis from the Caucasus have also fled to former Soviet states or to Europe. Many Yezidi families are now scattered over wide distances.[31] With the young members of the community so widely scattered, elders fear for the survival of the community. On the other hand, the construction of temples in the Caucasus was largely supported economically by the diaspora. This seems to indicate that the attachment to both their faith and the geographical region is still very much relevant in the communities of expatriated Yezidis.

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31 For a map showing Yezidi settlements across the former Soviet Union, see Omarkhali (2017: 34–36).

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Religion in Kurdistan

MICHIEL LEEZENBERG

Introduction

Among secular Kurdish nationalists, and in foreign media, one may find a persistent (self) image that the Islamic faith is less widespread and less deeply rooted among the Kurds than among their Arab, Turkish and Persian neighbours. To some extent, this image is confirmed by widely reported events like the secular Kurdish resistance against Khomeini's Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979; the opposition of the pro-Kurdish, secularist and pluralist HDP against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's authoritarian Islamism during the 2010s; and female guerrillas (not to mention a 'queer brigade') of the Syrian Kurdish YPG against the bearded warriors of the so-called Islamic State during the 2014 siege of Kobanî and after.

On closer inspection, things appear to be rather more complicated: religion has always played, and continues to play, a rather greater role in Kurdish public and private life than admitted by secular nationalists. In fact, one might even argue that religious factors have to a large extent made the Kurds into what they are today; but to such sweeping claims, one should immediately add the caveat that the factor or category of religion has itself undergone qualitative changes over the centuries as well. This chapter presents a brief overview of the most important of these developments. My focus is not primarily on what has been called 'political Islam', or on the political use of religion as an instrument or vocabulary of mobilization, as in the uprisings headed by religious leaders like Sheikh Ubeydullah and Sheikh Said (cf. Chapters 3 and 20); rather, I will trace the changing character of religion as a societal force, its interaction with developing Kurdish national identity and the changing relations between groups of different denominations in the region; finally, I will discuss the question of how and why newly politicized forms of religion emerged in the first place.

Before engaging in this discussion, however, a number of methodological caveats are called for. When discussing the historical development of religion, not only in Kurdistan but also more generally, one should beware of reproducing a number of widely held but debatable assumptions. The first of these is what one may call 'methodological nationalism': next to openly nationalist or politically partisan perspectives, there is also a more tacit and seemingly less problematic presumption of the nation, the nation-state or the state's hegemonic culture, as a self-evident framework of analysis. Apart from its problematic normative implications, this assumption tends to hide from view wider and interconnected world-historical processes (of which the worldwide rise of the nation-state form is, in fact, a prime example).

A second assumption is the still widespread secularist or modernist belief that religion is a thing from the past, which will – and should – wither away in ongoing and irreversible processes of modernization and democratization; that is, the belief that secularization is both a descriptive factuality and a normative desideratum. Given such secularist assumptions, which appear in both liberal and Marxist guises, any reassertion of religion in the modern world is almost by definition atavistic or reactionary. The belief in a linear process of secularization, however, is no longer tenable even in Europe, where it was first formulated. Moreover, in many respects, the post-1989 rise of political Islam (and of other forms of politicized religion elsewhere in the world) was not a return to the past, but a qualitatively novel phenomenon. One should, therefore, explore exactly *what* is novel in these developments.

Finally, one should avoid the pitfall of what may be called a 'minorities paradigm'. Not only have the Kurds often been depicted as a minority within existing nation-states; research on religion in Kurdistan also displays a marked bias towards religious minorities, like Christians of different denominations, Jews, and heterodox groups like the Yezidis, the Alevis and the Kaka'îs. Rather fewer, both proportionally and absolutely, are studies of the varieties of more orthodox Sunni Islam, with the partial exception of the Sufi orders active in the region. It has become fashionable to dismiss such biases as 'Orientalist'; but in the absence of any positive alternative account, such criticisms do little more than label the problem. A minorities paradigm leads both to empirical distortions and to conceptual and normative problems: On the one hand, it wrongly implies that there is nothing specifically Kurdish about the Sunni denomination of the vast majority of Kurds;

below, I will argue that there are in fact specifically Kurdish forms and formations of Islam. On the other, a concept of 'minority' defined in primarily numerical terms risks masking the relations of power involved in the 'minorization' of particular groups. Calling a group a 'minority' carries the risk of reproducing and tacitly legitimating the hegemonic discourse of locally dominant actors, and of legitimizing practices of assimilation and/or exclusion. The same point, incidentally, can be made about the distinction between 'orthodox' and 'heterodox' forms of religion.[1]

In order to counter such assumptions, the present chapter will, first, employ a perspective of 'global history' (cf. Bayly, 2004), or what Sanjay Subrahmanyam (1997) has called 'connected history'; that is, an approach to writing history that neither simply enlarges one's scale nor merges pre-given national histories, but systematically questions the very parcelling of history into national entities.[2] Such an approach need not result in a sceptical denial or dissolution of individual national (or, for that matter, religious) identities; but it traces their development as part of wider and interconnected world-historical processes.

Second, my approach will also be genealogical, in that it systematically looks for ruptures and qualitative changes affecting such seemingly neutral and unchanging analytical categories as 'religion', 'orthodox' and 'heterodox', and for the forms of power involved in these changes.[3] More specifically, I will not assume any linear process of 'progress' or 'modernization', which tends to be represented as the progressive branching off of distinct and autonomous fields or spheres of social action, like religion and politics; rather, I will trace how the sphere of religion was reorganized, redefined and renegotiated over the centuries, in particular in relation to the – equally contested – development of state power.

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1 To mention but one example: both KRG and PKK discourses pay lip service to societal and religious pluralism; but they do so in very different terms, and in part in clear opposition to each other. Moreover, in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, a discourse of pluralism masks what appears to be an increasingly restrictive conception of Kurdishness, developing from the early notion of *kurdayetî* to a more inclusive concept of *kurdistanî* during the 1980s, only to be further restricted after 2003 to *kurdî* as an idea, ideal or identity, which is not only self-consciously anti-Arab and non-Islamic, but also less accommodating towards minority groups seen as less than fully and unambiguously Kurdish.

2 Despite this emphasis on global or connected historiography, the present chapter will have relatively little to say about the religious effect of migration to Europe and elsewhere, and about the religious dimensions of Kurdish diaspora life, for the simple reason that relatively little research into these matters has been conducted.

3 Cf. Leezenberg (2019) for a more detailed theoretical discussion of the modalities of power involved in the orthodox–heterodox distinction.

The Premodern and Early Modern Ottoman Empire

Kurdistan has long been known to have harboured several centres of Sunni religious learning of the Shafiʿite *madhhab* or school of law; at the same time, the region was known for its heterodox sects. Kurds lived in the ill-defined and contested borderlands between the Ottoman and Safavid (later Qajar) empires. In the northernmost regions of these marches, the majority of the population may have been Christian; a substantial number of these Armenians had undergone a language shift to Kurdish. Among rural Muslim Kurds, Sufi orders or *tarîqa*s were widespread, the most important among these being the Qadirî and the Naqshbandî orders. But already in the sixteenth century, one finds references to substantial numbers of Kurds practising an 'exaggerated' (*ghuluww*) worship of Imam ʿAli or adhering to the Yezidi faith.[4] For long periods of time, however, the Ottoman authorities had little if any incentive to brand any of these population groups heretics or infidels, let alone to act on such judgements.

In various post-Ottoman circles, there is a long-standing tendency to view Ottoman policies through the prism of religious and ethnic repression. This tendency may be found not only among nationalist historians but also among smaller religious groups. Thus, Yezidi historians conventionally characterize their history as marked by seventy-three *ferman* ('catastrophes' or even 'genocides'); from this perspective, the genocidal 2014 IS offensive against the Yezidis in Sinjar area in Iraq was only the most recent event in a continuous history of persecutions. Alevi activists, too, tend to depict Ottoman rule as an uninterrupted and centuries-long sequence of oppression. Prior to the 1514 Battle of Çaldiran, however, and after the deaths of Yavuz Sultan Selim and Shah Ismaʿil, religious concerns with heresy, heterodoxy or sectarian antagonisms between Sunnis and Shiites appear not to have been high on the governmental agenda. Instead, as will appear below, these concerns – and the concepts informing them – underwent a qualitative change in the course of the nineteenth century.

On the other hand, during the early modern period, a number of distinct ethnic or sectarian groups appear either to have developed more pronouncedly heterodox doctrines and practices or to have started defining themselves in more emphatically if not defiantly un-Islamic or anti-Islamic terms; or to come to have been perceived in more antagonistic terms by Ottoman

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4 Cf. van Bruinessen (2000: 42).

officials. There is evidence that both the Yezidis and the Ahl-e Haqq have become more 'heterodox' and less recognizably Islamic in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[5]

The history of the Yezidis cannot be traced further back than the late eleventh century; attempts to link the faith to pre-Islamic Iranian sources have to extrapolate from oral traditions and to resort to the methods of comparative religion.[6] Moreover, the Yezidi faith emerged in a clearly Islamic environment. Its founder, Sheikh ʿAdî bin Musâfir (d. 1162 CE), was a Sunni Sufi from Lebanon, who, after his studies in Baghdad, settled in the valley of Lalesh. Several of his writings have been preserved; all of them are of an orthodox Sunni character. His earliest followers were mostly Kurds of the local Hekarî tribe.

Among the earliest sources on, and critiques of, Yezidism is the *Risâla al-ʿadawiyya* by the famous fourteenth-century theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 CE).[7] Remarkably, Ibn Taymiyya nowhere accuses the Yezidis, or as he calls them, ʿadawiyya, of unbelief; rather, he praises Sheikh ʿAdî as a pious Muslim, but criticizes his followers (whom he characterizes as 'ignorant Kurds') for allowing their veneration for their founding saint to lapse into idolatry and polytheism. Thus, Ibn Taymiyya clearly sees the Yezidis' main sin as *ghuluww*, or 'exaggeration', rather than unbelief (*kufr*), dualism or materialism.[8] Whatever their factual correctness, Ibn Taymiyya's comments have embarrassed later scholars, Kurdish nationalists and Yezidi activists alike. They are also difficult to square, it should be added, with the genocidal persecution of Yezidis by IS, who often appealed to Ibn Taymiyya's writings in their violent reinterpretation of the Islamic faith, radically distorting the latter's words and intentions in the process.

The premodern and early modern history of the Alevis, too, is less uniformly marked by repression and persecution than is often thought.

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5 Cf. Leezenberg (2019: 52–4); van Bruinessen (2000: 40–1).

6 For a comprehensive historical review, see Guest (1987); for a study employing the methods of comparative religion, see Kreyenbroek (1995).

7 Reprinted as Ibn Taymiyya (1906).

8 Lescot (1938: 37–43); Kreyenbroek (1995: 25n) summarily rejects the potential value of Ibn Taymiyya as a historical source. In fact, the history of Yezidi studies reflects an entire politics of research: until today, many Kurds and Yezidis think that discussions of the Yezidis' mystical-Islamic background are dictated by an Arab-nationalist agenda; an emphasis on their pre-Islamic origins, first propagated in missionary circles, continues to inform Kurdish nationalists and Western European scholars alike; and in post-Soviet Armenia, the political programme of strictly distinguishing between Yezidis and Kurds is reflected in scholarly efforts to credit the former with an entirely non-Kurdish history and language, Êzîdîtî. Considerations of space preclude a fuller discussion of these matters.

The background of the changing Ottoman attitudes towards Alevis was, of course, the confrontation between the Ottoman and Safavid empires. The political rivalries between the two were articulated in partly sectarian terms, with Shah Isma'il claiming to be a reincarnation of Imam 'Ali. Initially, he thus appealed to *ghulât* sympathies among the rural population in Anatolia and on the Iranian plateau; soon after consolidating his rule, however, he started propagating Twelver (*ithna'asharî*) Shiism as defined by urban Shiite ulema, and turning this clergy into a kind of state religious hierarchy. To the extent that one can speak of religious 'orthodoxy' during this period, however, this was defined by the ruler's imperial power as much as by urban, literate religious elites.

In the wake of the Battle of Çaldiran (1514 CE), in which Shah Isma'il's troops were decisively defeated, the Ottoman Sultan Yavuz Selim initiated persecutions of heterodox Shiites, or Qizilbash as they were called. This religious persecution appears not to have been a long-standing Ottoman policy, however: after the suppression of the Qizilbash revolts in the course of the sixteenth century, and prior to the early nineteenth-century Tanzimat reforms, the Ottoman authorities generally turned a blind eye to the Qizilbash and their possibly heterodox practices, and tended to treat them as belonging to the Bektashî *tarîqa*, which was considered politically loyal.

Conversely, the Safavids appear to have engaged in persecutions of Sunnis and to have presented Sunni ulema with the alternative of conversion to Twelver Shiism, exile or execution. These forcible conversions, however, appear to have targeted local ulema rather than the population at large: the bulk of the rural population in Kurdistan, as in other remote regions like Baluchistan, appears to have remained Sunni. Khaled El-Rouayheb (2015: ch. 1) has argued that as a result, substantial numbers of Sunni Kurdish ulema fled the Safavid Empire and resettled in Ottoman lands, giving a strong impulse to the local development of the rational sciences (including logic and philosophy) in a process already noted by Kâtip Çelebî.[9] These Kurdish religious figures fleeing the Safavid Empire also appear to have included Sufis like the famous Sheikh Mahmûd, who hailed from Urmiya and was executed in Diyarbakir on the orders of Sultan Murad IV in 1639.[10]

The hereditary Kurdish rulers of the marches maintained a careful balancing act between their Ottoman and Safavid overlords; some of them repeatedly switched allegiance. These changing and unstable loyalties could

9 Quoted in El-Rouayheb (2015: 57).
10 On Sheikh Mahmûd, see Evilya Çelebi, *Seyâhatnâme* IV, fol. 208b–209b; cf. van Bruinessen (2000: 79–82, 90–9); van Bruinessen and Boeschoten (1988).

also be expressed in sectarian terms, with Kurdish *mir*s loyal to the Ottomans claiming a strictly Sunni faith (cf. van Bruinessen, 1992: 136–45). Thus, sectarian labels virtually came to define political loyalty: in *Hesht Bihisht*, Idrîs Bidlîsî simply appears to call Qizilbash anyone who resists the Ottoman army or refuses to fight against the Safavids.[11] It appears as difficult to reduce religious affiliations to political loyalties, however, as to explain political developments from religious factors alone.

Chronicles like Idrîs Bidlîsî's *Hesht Bihisht* and Sherefeddîn Bidlîsî's *Sherefnâme* focus on local courtly elites; for the social history of seventeenth-century Kurdistan, Evliya Çelebi's *Seyâhatnâme* is by far our most important source (Dankoff, 2011). Ehmedê Xanî's writings provide another valuable perspective on seventeenth-century religious life among the Kurds. For different reasons, however, both sources should be treated with caution. Evliya's account abounds with anecdotes that are as obscene as they are fanciful, while Xanî's writings are primarily didactic, prescriptive and/or fictional, rather than descriptive.

Evliya, despite a certain urban bias (witness his focus on cities like Diyarbakir) and despite a certain elite bias (whether towards Ottoman officials or towards Kurdish khans), includes much useful information on local popular beliefs and practices. He lists six Sufi lodges in Kurdistan, of which three are associated with the Naqshbandî order.[12] He also describes various religious practices among Kurds at, or near, the court of Bidlîs that can barely be considered Islamic, let alone orthodox; but he seems more interested in telling entertaining stories than in expressing shock at deviant forms of religion. Thus, he describes the antics of one Molla Muhammad, a local Sufi, and possibly a Qalandar. During a celebration at the Khan's palace, Evliya tells us, this molla danced around all naked, but revealed no genitals or buttocks; next, he started flying around in the air, revealing his penis and showering the spectators with urine (231a16–b13).[13]

Evliya's observations on the Yezidis are equally informative. Especially important is book 4 of the *Seyâhatname*, which contains a lengthy account of an Ottoman expedition against the Yezidis in Sinjar area; from this and other passages, the Yezidis appear not as a persecuted religious minority but as an armed tribal forced to be reckoned with. Evliya calls the Yezidis, or as he

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11 Sönmez (2012: 81); on Idrîs-i Bidlîsî's intermediary position between the Ottomans and the Safavids, see also Genç (2019).

12 Cf. van Bruinessen (2000: 87–110, esp. 90).

13 For an English translation of Evliya's description of his sojourn in Bitlis, cf. Dankoff (1990).

labels them, 'Yezidi Kurds', as 'godless' (*bî-dîn*); but it is not clear whether he does so because of their religious beliefs, about which he says little, or because of their banditry.[14] More generally, Evliya calls groups like the Yezidis and the Qizilbash 'without religion' (*bî-dîn*) and 'without denomination' (*bî-mezheb*) (e.g. 4.53); but on the whole, he appears less concerned with religious orthodoxy than with political loyalty and social order and security. Hence, it is very well possible that his use of theological terms of religious heterodoxy figuratively stands for social rebelliousness and banditry.

Another significant phenomenon of the early modern era, which has yet to find a satisfactory explanation, is the rise of Kurdish vernacular learning, most famously but not exclusively to be found in Ehmedê Xanî's writings. In this process, one may argue, not only did a specifically Kurdish form of Sunni Islamic religiosity emerge, but also a more unified form of the (northern) Kurdish language used in learning and writing. In the mid-seventeenth century, Evliya still wrote that in the madrasas in Kurdistan, Arabic and Persian were the main languages of instruction; a few decades later, however, a significant shift towards the written use of Kurdish in rural madrasas occurred.[15] First, Ehmedê Xanî composed several rhymed didactic works for the earliest stages of religious education: the *Nûbihara piçûkan*, a short Arabic–Kurdish vocabulary, and the *Eqîdeya Îmanê*, a brief and simple profession of the faith. Second, a number of prose works for the next stage of madrasa education were written in the course of the eighteenth century. The most significant of these is perhaps Elî Teremaxî's *Tesrîfa Kurmancî*, a short work on *sarf*, or morphology; another is Molla Yûnus Khalqatînî's *Terqîb û Zurûf*, dated 1200AH (1785CE). For several centuries, the madrasas in northern Kurdistan appear to have had a remarkably uniform and partly vernacularized curriculum, or *rêz*, which started with elementary Kurdish-language textbooks, and proceeded, first, to the basic and widely shared introductory texts on Arabic grammar and the Islamic faith, and subsequently to specifically Shafiʿite works.[16]

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14 Evliya 4/65–8, 70; 3/267–78; 4/61–71; 5/6–9; cf. Guest (1987: 46–9).

15 During the seventeenth century, there was no such thing as an Ottoman madrasa curriculum. Apart from a small number of basic texts on Arabic grammar and on the Islamic faith, the central authorities did not make any attempt to impose either the Hanafi *madhhab* or a unified corpus of texts to be studied. On the other hand, regardless of sectarian differences, much of the basics of the madrasa curriculum was shared by Sunnis and Shiites alike in the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires (cf. Robinson, 1997).

16 On madrasa life in northern Kurdistan, see Zinar (1993); al-Bouti (1998); cf. Leezenberg (2014).

Like Xanî, Teremaxî is very conscious of doing something novel; in the introduction to his work, he states that 'for the community of the Kurds, it is necessary to know of the science of *sarf* in the Kurdish language.'[17] It turns out that Kurdish-language authors like Xanî and Teremaxî reflect a much wider process of *vernacularization*, which appears to have occurred throughout the Ottoman Empire, and even beyond (cf. Leezenberg, 2016). In this process, Arabic and Persian were not so much replaced by vernacular languages; rather, their use became more strictly confined to specific learned and religious purposes. In this context, it should be noted that, despite the Ottoman–Safavid confrontations, Persian as a language of *adab* and mystical literature was hardly if at all associated with either ʿ*ajamî* political dynasties or religious sectarianism.

In short, the early modern period not only saw gradual changes in attitudes towards, and possibly self-definition of, heterodox groups, but also the emergence of specifically Kurdish forms of orthodox Sunni Islamic learning. These processes, it should be noted, occurred largely if not entirely independently from Western European cultural, economic or other influences: they reflect a broader dynamic that can also be discerned elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, and in other parts of the Islamic world.

The Modernizing Ottoman Empire

The Tanzimat reforms of the nineteenth century have long been seen as a series of largely unsuccessful attempts at centralization of the Ottoman Empire, in a desperate attempt to ward off the steadily increasing influence of European imperialist powers, paired with the increasing, and increasingly visible, presence of Western (and in particular Protestant) missionaries on Ottoman territory. There were challenges to Ottoman authority from within the empire as well. On the one hand, there were the Greek and Serbian revolts in the empire's European provinces, which culminated in the creation of a de facto independent hereditary monarchy in Serbia in 1817, and in the establishment of an independent Greek state in 1830. On the other hand, the Wahhâbî movement attacked and conquered Mecca and Medina in 1803, directly challenging the Ottoman rulers' self-legitimation as protectors of the two holiest cities in Islam.

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17 'Jo boy tayîfa Ekradan ra jî lazim e ku bi zimanê Kurmancî ew ji ʿilmê serfê bizanin,' in Newayî (2018: 59).

Seen on a larger scale, however, these radical challenges do not simply reflect the death throes of a long-declining empire. Most importantly for our purposes, the nineteenth century led to a reorganization and transformation, rather than a decline, of religion, not only in the Ottoman Empire but worldwide. In Europe, this century has – with some justification – been seen as an era of secularization, due in part to a relative drop in church attendance and to the emergence of new scientific theories that were implicitly or openly at odds with church dogma, like Darwinism and Marxism. Worldwide, however, this century also witnessed the expansion, consolidation and indeed redefinition of religion.[18] Thus, British historian Christopher Bayly characterizes the nineteenth century as marked by a convergence in both bodily and textual religious practices, which led to a reconceptualization of such practices in terms of different but commensurable 'world religions', like Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism (Bayly, 2004: 332).

In the Ottoman Empire, and more specifically in Kurdistan, one may likewise observe rearticulations of religious doctrine, authority and agency. Both Western missionaries and Ottoman authorities employed a discourse of ignorance (*cahl*) and civilization (*medeniyet*), and of backwardness and modernity. This renewed focus on (religious and other) education led to a gradual redefinition of laypeople as religious and/or national, and increasingly also as political, actors. The process of vernacularization that had started in the preceding century made it possible, indeed desirable, for religious knowledge to become accessible to laypeople, in particular through simplified statements of the creed, like Mawlana Khalîd's *Aqîdetnamey kurdî*. Later in the nineteenth century, the spread of such accessible religious texts was further facilitated by the use of printing. Thus, among the first texts to be printed in (Kurmanji) Kurdish were several gospel texts printed in the Armenian script by Protestant missionaries.[19]

Famously, the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed the remarkably rapid growth of, in particular, the Khalidiyya Naqshbandî *tarîqa*, led by Mawlana Khalîd (1779–1827 CE), emerging from Kurdish soil but quickly also gaining a foothold in Baghdad, Damascus and Istanbul. The growth of the Naqshbandî order in Kurdistan has been explained from primarily local or regional factors, such as the Ottoman abolition of the Kurdish principalities and the ensuing increase in tribal conflicts, the presence of (evangelical) missionaries among local Christians, and the local penetration of

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18 Cf. Bayly (2004: ch. 9).   19 Cf. Malmîsanij (2007: 33–43).

capitalism.[20] But trans-regional factors may also have been at work. Just as the drive to convert southern Iraqi tribes to convert to Twelver Shiism from the late eighteenth century on can be interpreted as a reaction to Wahhâbî pressures, the rapid rise and spread of Khalidî Naqshbandî Sufism may also be seen as at least in part triggered by the challenge of Wahhâbism.[21] There are various indications of early Wahhabî activity in or near the regions inhabited by Kurds. Thus, Jaubert (1821: 15) already mentions the presence of a number of Wahhâbîs in Erzurum in the year 1805, suggesting that from early on, the Wahhâbî movement was quite active in different parts of the Ottoman Empire.

Shortly after the rise and subsequent ousting of the Wahhabîs, the Khalidiyya Naqshbandî order emerged – a religious reform movement of a very different character. Religiously, Wahhâbism and Khalidiyya Naqshbandism are diametrically opposed; thus, in his *Kitâb al-tawhîd*, Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhâb rejects *taqlîd*, or the slavish imitation of the existing schools of law (*madhâhib*), arguing that to place the authority of religious scholars next to that of scripture amounts to polytheism (*shirk*). In his *Aqîdetnamey kurdî*, by contrast, Mawlana Khalîd argues that not only the pious Companions, but also the founders of the *madhâhib*, and even Sufi sheikhs are *awliyâ*, or 'friends of God', and hence deserve the believers' respect and loyalty.[22] Accordingly, later nineteenth- and twentieth-century Naqshbandî writings consistently refer to Wahhâbism and Salafism in a polemical way as *lâ-madhhabiyya*, that is, as rejecting the *madhâhib* in an effort to destroy Islam from within.

Somewhat surprisingly, no clear traces of either Wahhâbî activity or the rise of the Khalidî-Naqshbandî *tarîqa* appear in the writings of Molla Mahmûdê Bayazîdî, otherwise one of the most remarkable – and least used – sources of information on rural conditions in the Tanzimat Kurdistan. Of particular relevance in the present context is Bayazîdî's ethnographic work on Kurdish customs, the *Adet û rusumâtnamaeê ekradiyye*, and his collection of prose texts, the *Cami'eya Rîsaleyan û Hikayetan* (Dost, 2010; Jaba, 1860; cf. Leezenberg, 2020). Bayazîdî focuses on popular religion, or folk beliefs and superstitions of the rural Kurds of his time, generally describing their religious customs as 'ignorant' (*cahil*). Unlike Western missionaries or

20 Van Bruinessen (1992: 224–34, 2000: 88).

21 On conversions to Shiism in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Nakash (1994: 25–43); on Khalidiyya Naqshbandism as a reaction to Wahhâbism, cf. Leezenberg (2017).

22 For the text of the *Aqîdetname*, see Karîm (1981).

Ottoman authorities, however, his is not a discourse of linear progress, modernization or civilization (*medeniyet*) – nor, in fact, one of 'culture' or 'folklore'. Rather, he observes a clear decline of religious learning in the Kurdistan of his age and interprets this decline as a sign that the end of times is near (Jaba, 1860: 14). Bayazîdi also contains valuable observations on the relations between Sunni Kurds and others. Thus, he generically classifies the local Christians (mostly Armenians) as *reʾaya* (flock); these, he writes, share the same language with the Kurds, and may even act as circumcision godfather (*kirîv*) for them (Dost, 2010: 226, 236). He also makes some brief comments on what he calls 'the Yezidi group of the Kurds, who are not Muslims but Yezidis', adding that 'this group worships Iblîs and calls the Satan 'Melek Tawûs.''[23] That is, he implicitly, but more unambiguously than either Ibn Taymiyya or Evliya Celebi, qualifies them as infidels (*kâfir*).

Bayazîdî wrote most of his works for Auguste Jaba, the then Russian consul in Erzurum. Thus, to a limited extent, his writings reflect the increasing presence of imperialist powers in the eastern Ottoman Empire, and their increasing interference on behalf of local Christians. Another source of such interference was foreign missionary activity, especially by English-speaking evangelical or Protestant missionaries. Evangelical missionaries in the Ottoman Empire further encouraged education both in local vernaculars and in modern European languages. It appears to have been this missionary activity, in particular, which triggered Ottoman policies of proselytization, and of actively encouraging, or even enforcing, conversion to Hanafi Islam.[24] Thus, the late nineteenth century also witnessed (largely unsuccessful) Ottoman attempts at forced conversion of Yezidis and both Twelver and heterodox Shiites. In the early 1890s, the Ottoman General Ömer Vehbi Pasha undertook a military campaign against the Yezidis of Sinjar, during which he forced the leaders of both Yezidis and Shabak to publicly convert to Sunni Islam.[25] This expedition should probably be seen less as an expression of an individual officer's religious zeal, let alone a timeless Sunni fanaticism on the part of the Ottoman power elites, than as reflecting an effort to further centralize and homogenize the Ottoman state.[26]

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23 'Li Kurdistanê jî ekradan taʾîfeya êzîdiyan jî heyîn ku musulman nînin, êzîdî ne . . . Ew taʾîfa bi perestiya Iblîs dikin û ji şeytan re dibêjin Melek ê Tawûs' (Dost, 2010: 134).
24 Cf. Deringil (1999: ch. 3). 25 See in particular Deringil (1999: 69–75).
26 In 1905, another Ottoman official, Mustafa Nûrî Pasha, then *vâlî* of Mosul vilayet, wrote a treatise on the Yezidis, which not only describes them as one of Islam's 'heretic sects' (*firaq-i zalle*), but also as 'devil worshipers' (*ʿabede-i Iblîs*), and as infidels among whom sodomy and adultery go unpunished. To the best of my knowledge, this treatise only exists in a German translation (Nûrî Pasha, 1911).

Simultaneously with this new emphasis on Sunni Islam, one may also see increasing efforts to create and spread a specifically Turkish identity. As historian Selim Deringil puts it, 'Ottoman identity assumed an increasingly Turkish character . . . packaged in universalist Islamic terms' (Deringil, 1999: 11). In particular, the Ottoman authorities reinterpreted Sunni Islam of the Hanafî school as the empire's 'official faith' (*mezhep-i resmiyye*) and redefined the Ottoman sultan as the *khalîfa*, that is, the legitimate leader of the entire *umma*, including those Muslims who were not under Ottoman political control. These innovations also informed the pan-Islamic ideas that started gaining popularity in the Ottoman Empire and elsewhere from the 1870s on. Although the Ottomans never consistently used pan-Islamism as a foreign policy tool, they tacitly encouraged its spread throughout the Muslim world, in part through the great centres of transnational pilgrimage, Mecca and Medina.

The effects of pan-Islamism in Kurdistan are as yet poorly understood. One event that may at least in part be seen as a reaction to pan-Islam and to other religious policies of both the Ottoman and Qajar empires is Sheikh Ubeydullah's 1880 revolt (cf. Ateş, 2014). This uprising has widely been interpreted as one of the first expressions of Kurdish national aspirations, but it also had clearly and indeed irreducibly religious backgrounds and dimensions. One cause of increasing tensions between Kurds and Armenians had been the Russo–Turkish War (1877–8); but also as a result of the Ottoman policies of Sunni proselytizing and of increasing Qajar attempts to promote Shiite Islam, sectarian tensions mounted, not only between Muslims and Christians but also between Sunnis and Shiites. One foreign contemporary foreign source claimed that Sheikh Ubeydullah's high position in the Naqshbandî *tarîqa* made it impossible for the Ottoman authorities to arrest him.[27] In his turn, the sheikh always continued to profess his loyalty to the Ottoman sultan, even if in practice there was a clear mistrust between them. Likewise, the attitudes of the famous Naqshbandî reformer Said Nursi towards pan-Islam and towards developing Turkish and Kurdish nationalism would deserve further study.[28]

In short, newly emerging national identities, including a Kurdish identity, both shaped and were shaped by religious solidarities which themselves were involved in an equally radical process of transformation (cf. Bayly, 2004:

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27 Quoted in Ateş (2014: 776).
28 Mardin (1989: 124–126) suggests that Nursi may have been sympathetic to a number of pan-Islamist ideas and policies of Sultan Abdülhamid II, but does not elaborate on this point.

362–3). This interaction between changing concepts of religion and nationality was only to accelerate in the twentieth century.

The Modern Nation-States

The modern nation-states and new multinational empires that emerged from World War I not only created new national identities, by violent means if necessary; they also brought along a radical reorganization of religion, a redefinition of orthodoxy and heterodoxy and of majority and minority and – last but not least – a rearticulation of individual and collective identities of gender and sexuality.[29] The importance of these new states in shaping and reshaping the religious experience of Kurds and others can hardly be overestimated; thus, members of the same, or religiously very similar, groups undergoing broadly similar processes of social change (urbanization, upward social mobility, increased access to education and increasing integration into the state) have had very different experiences in different states. Religiously, the Alevis in Turkey and the Shabak and Kâkâ'îs in Iraq may have much in common, but their twentieth-century social and political trajectories have diverged widely (cf. Leezenberg, 1997). Likewise, Yezidis living in Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia, Turkey and Iraq, let alone in Western European diaspora, show qualitatively different developments.

Perhaps the deepest and most radical transformation occurred in the Southern Caucasus. The early Soviet Union, with its policy of *korenizatsiia* (nativization), was as encouraging towards smaller nations as it was repressive towards religion. During the 1920s and 1930s, atheism (*bezbozhnik*) was official state policy; accordingly, early Bolshevik policies were geared towards the creation of modern nationalities as defined by spoken language and by an oral folkloric culture rather than a written literary heritage or traditional religious learning. This process of 'folklorization' of Kurdish national identity not only downplayed or repressed any religiosity among the Kurds, whether Islamic or other, and whether in Kurdish or in other languages; it also downplayed ethnic and sectarian differences between Kurds and Yezidis, treating them as a single nationality in view of their largely shared spoken language. In post-Soviet Armenia, by contrast, the religious and other differences between Yezidis and Kurds of Muslim backgrounds have been

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29 Considerations of space preclude a fuller discussion of questions of gender and sexuality in relation to changing religious practices and developing national identities among the Kurds; see Najmabadi (2005) for a classical statement of these questions in the context of Iran.

systematically emphasized, with some Armenian scholars even arguing that Yezidis do not speak a variety of Kurmanji Kurdish but a distinct language, 'Êzîdîtî'.

The secularist and Turkish-nationalist policies of early republican Turkey constituted a hardly less radical attempt at social engineering and nation-building than the avowedly atheist redefinition and construction of nations as folkloric in the early Soviet Union. As is well known, early Kemalist policies were particularly destructive towards the Kurds; they also led to radical changes in religious life among them. The 1924 law no. 430 on the unification of education (*tevhid-i tedrisat*) abolished all madrasas, where literacy in Kurdish had long been cultivated; a 1925 decree ordered the closing down of all Sufi orders, including the Naqshbandî *tarîqa*; and a whole series of legal and constitutional measures banned both the public and the private spoken (let alone written) use of the Kurdish language.

Driven by French-inspired positivist zeal, the early Kemalists may well have wished to eradicate popular religiosity altogether; but religious Kurds had different strategies to cope with these dramatically changed circumstances. In the Kurdish-majority provinces, many smaller rural madrasas continued to operate clandestinely, and Kurdish-language texts continued to circulate in handwritten form.[30] Others, most importantly the Nurcu movement, reappeared as informal study groups rather than *tarîqa*s. Yavuz (2003: ch. 7) has argued that as a result, the present-day Nurcu movement is text-based rather than centred around a charismatic personality; he also sees it as print-based and geared towards modern education rather than based on madrasa learning. Although charismatic leadership has by no means disappeared from twentieth-century Naqshbandî-origin networks (witness the Gülen movement, and witness the veneration among Nurcu members for Said Nursi), it is clear that these networks no longer relied on, and in fact, implicitly contested, the traditional authority of the ulema.

The secularist and Turkish-nationalist policies of the new Kemalist power elites also affected, and in a sense even created, religious minorities. In the new Republic of Turkey, religious or sectarian groups like the Alevis and the Yezidis were no more officially recognized than were linguistically defined ethnic groups like the Kurds. Instead, as Dressler (2015) writes, the Alevis were reconceptualized in a secularist framework as 'heterodox Muslims', or

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30 Interviews, Kurdish madrasa alumni, Mardin, summer 2009; Hakkari, spring 2011; and Diyarbakir, September 2012. I have also come across a photostat reprint of a madrasa-used manuscript supposedly entitled *Mîzan ul-edeb*, which on closer inspection turned out to reproduce a recent handwritten copy in Arabic script of Xanî's *Mem û Zîn*.

as adherents of a 'syncretistic', but originally purely Turkish, shamanistic religion.[31] However, Dressler emphasizes, this redefinition of Alevism as a heterodox religion was primarily the work of Kemalist state actors; it belonged to a broader authoritarian-nationalist hegemonic discourse and was shaped by efforts to build a secular Turkish nation-state. From such modern state-based origins, it also found its way into everyday language use – including later Alevi self-definitions. This policy of 'othering' of Alevis, Dressler continues, reflects the ambivalence of Turkish state policies, which wavered between the recognition of Alevis as a distinct religious minority and the assimilationist attempt to integrate them into a new, national Turkish identity defined as modern and secular. Turkish state discourse on the Alevis, he concludes, was secular and modernist, but could simultaneously appeal to normative concepts of Sunni Islamic orthodoxy.

This ambivalence in state policies and state discourse was reflected in Turkish society. Some Alevi authors expressed misgivings that formal recognition of the Alevis as a minority could lead to doubts about their political loyalty to the Turkish state, or to easier targeting by radical Sunni groups. In 1989, a group of Alevis living in Germany published an 'Alevi manifesto', a passionate plea for the recognition of, and more cultural rights for, the Alevis as a distinct religious group in both Germany and Turkey. The subsequent publication of a Turkish-language version of the manifesto in the Turkish newspaper *Cumhuriyet* led to a fierce debate in Turkey as well. Some opponents protested against creating any rifts in Turkish society, which, they argued, carried the risk of creating sectarian conflicts like in Northern Ireland or Bosnia. Kurdish-speaking Alevis were as ambivalent about the secular Turkish state (which, some felt, repressed them as Kurds but protected them as Alevis) as about the Kurdish movement emerging in the 1970s and 1980s; they were particularly sensitive to any tacit or explicit attempts to identify Kurdishness with Sunni Islam.[32]

The twentieth-century 'politicization of religion' was a gradual process that did not become clearly visible until the 1980s and after, and accelerated after the end of the Cold War. Politicized, and more specifically

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31 Dressler also observes that characterizing Alevism as a 'syncretistic' blending of Islamic and pre-Islamic religious traditions tacitly presupposes that such traditions are rather more clearly defined and bounded than they have in fact been for most of their history. This caveat would seem to apply with equal force to other religious minorities in Kurdistan.

32 For a more detailed discussion, see Massicard (2013).

revolutionary, forms of Islam had started appearing only after World War II, against the background of decolonization, the arrival of Jewish settlers in Palestine and the subsequent creation of the state of Israel, and the Cold War struggle between the liberal (or, some would say, imperialist) West headed by the US and a Communist bloc led by the Soviet Union – a struggle that also shaped much of secular Middle Eastern politics between the 1940s and 1989. These political redefinitions of Islam should not be mistaken for a return to a pre-secular past: they embody novel ideologies and new forms of organization. Thus, both the Muslim Brotherhood (*ikhwân al-muslimîn*) and Salafism (let alone Salafi-jihadism) are qualitatively novel phenomena, shaped by contemporary challenges, by modern education and by new transnational networks, rather than traditional madrasa culture or premodern Sufi orders.

The rise of political Islam in Kurdistan, too, reflects wider world-historical forces and processes; but conversely, these forces took very different shapes and had very different effects in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. The catalyst of this process, of course, was the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran; but for Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan, it turns out that the Sunni Afghan jihad against the Soviet occupation of the 1980s was of almost equal importance. Rejecting both liberal-capitalist and Marxist–Leninist models, the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran electrified Islamic movements in the wider region. Although in many respects of a specifically Shiite and Iranian character, the revolution exported the idea that Islam was neither a relic from the past nor – in Marxist terms – the opium of the people, but a potentially revolutionary political force. The revolution also triggered a new political rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The first arena for this Saudi–Iranian confrontation, as for the American–Soviet Cold War confrontation, was, of course, Afghanistan. Olivier Roy (1986) has argued that the Afghan mujahedin, rather than being organized along traditional or tribal lines, were affiliated to networks of the Muslim Brothers and the Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islami. During the war, another form of jihad also emerged, in particular through Abdallah Azzam's *maktab al-khidâmât* (bureau of services) in Peshawar. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of this current is the fact that it interprets jihad as armed struggle and considers this struggle an individual obligation (*fard ʿayn*) for each Muslim, whether male or female, rather than the collective duty of the *umma* as a whole.[33] A number of Iraqi Kurdish jihadists, most notably Mullah Krekar (pseudonym of Najmaddîn Farah), appear to have a connection of some sort to Azzam's Salafi-jihadism.[34]

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33 On the rise of Salafi-jihadism, see e.g. Kepel (2000).
34 Leezenberg (2007: 222). For Krekar's own account, see Krekar (2004).

The most remarkable feature about political Islam in Turkey, and by extension among Kurds in Turkey, is that it appears to have developed largely in isolation, not only from the networks of Muslim Brothers and Salafi-jihadism but also from Iranian revolutionary Islam. This may be due in part to a state tradition specific to Turkey, and perhaps to state repression; but perhaps the dominance of Khalidiyya Naqshbandism, which, as Hakan Yavuz (2003: ch. 6) argues, forms the 'matrix' of virtually all forms of political Islam in Turkey, is another broad factor. Ideologically, as noted, this branch of Naqshbandism is clearly opposed to Salafism; but it is also critical of Shiite Islam. More generally, Naqshbandîs have generally been politically quietist, seeking state protection or withdrawing from public life rather than seeking the confrontation. Turkish Islamist networks like the Nurcu and Gülen movements have generally rejected not only violent action against the state but any openly political activity. Likewise, the Gülen movement emphasized the need for education and the societal duty of 'service' (*hizmet*) rather than any form of political organization. Despite this studied self-distancing from all political power, it encouraged the infiltration of its followers in the judiciary and the police force, not to mention its setting up of a boarding school network both in Turkey and abroad. These activities were severely curtailed by the 2013 clampdown on the Gülen movement, and rendered illegal in the wake of the failed 2016 coup against Erdoğan. Since this crackdown, Turkish officials have consistently referred to the Gülen movement as 'FETÖ' (Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü, or Gülenist Terror Organization), in a sweeping attempt to delegitimize the movement and its members. Turkish persecution of Gülenists has also affected centres of the movement abroad; thus, in the wake of the post-2016 measures, a number of Gülenist schools in Iraqi Kurdistan closed down or changed owners.

The Naqshbandî dislike of both Shiism and Salafism may also serve as a tacit ethnic marker distinguishing Turks and Kurds from Arabs (among whom Salafism commands rather more respect) and (generally Shiite) Iranians; that is, religious identities may overlap with, or discreetly express, ethnic and national differences. There are no detailed studies of the activities of the Nurcu and Gülen movements in the Kurdish south-east; but their appeal has been considerable, despite the fact that, in Kurdish circles, Gülen was widely seen as having a Turkish-nationalist agenda. Thus, the publishing house Nûbihar (founded in the 1990s, and one of the most important religiously inspired Kurdish cultural organizations) has its roots in the Nurcu movement. It has been active in printing new editions of the classics of Kurdish literature and emphasizes that religion (and more specifically an affiliation with the

Shafiʿite *madhhab* and with Naqshbandism) is an integral component of Kurdish national identity. As one of the speakers memorably stated during a 2012 Nûbihar conference on language, religion and national identity, 'Kurdistan is Naqshbandistan' (*Kurdistan Neqshbendîstan e*).[35]

Apart from these groups, more overtly politicized and more violent forms of Sunni Islam also appeared among the Kurds in Turkey. The most important of these is undoubtedly the so-called Kurdish Hezbollah (KH), which emerged in the Batman area during the 1980s.[36] Although its members appear to have been inspired by translations of works by revolutionary Islamists like Sayyid Qutb and Ali Shariati, they had few if any organizational links with either the Muslim Brothers in the Arab world or any revolutionary organization originating in, or associated with, Iran (cf. Leezenberg, 2017: 41). In the early 1990s, KH's violent confrontation with the PKK gave it the reputation of colluding with the state's counterinsurgency; but whatever the truth of such allegations, by the end of the decade, it had largely ceased its activities. In 2000, its leader, Hüseyin Velioğlu, was killed in a police raid, and thousands of its members were reportedly arrested; but from 2003 on, KH re-emerged in a new shape and in a new national political landscape. Although KH remained outlawed as a 'terrorist organization', its sympathizers regrouped, first under the guise of the Mustazaf-Der association, and after the latter's 2010 closure by a Turkish court, as the Hüda-Par political party (Hür Dava Partisi, or Free Cause Party). Although this group could mobilize large numbers of sympathizers in street demonstrations, Hüda-Par performed poorly in both local and national elections.

Developments among Kurds in Syria and Iraq were very different: for one thing, the Naqshbandî *tarîqa* had not been outlawed here but had continued to exist as such. Moreover, in these self-proclaimed Arab states, Kurds were rather more exposed to Arab-originating networks like the Muslim Brotherhood than in Turkey. In Syria, the Muslim Brothers' armed revolt against the al-Assad regime, which started in 1979, left an imprint almost as deep as the Islamic Revolution in Iran. In the violent confrontation between the Muslim Brothers and the regime, which culminated in the 1982 Hama massacre, Syrian Kurds were – whether or not correctly – widely seen as having sided with the regime by both secular Sunni Arabs and MB sympathizers.[37] There are no indications

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35 Personal observation, Diyarbakir, September 2012.
36 The most detailed account in English is Kurt (2017). See also Kurt's Chapter 20 in this volume.
37 Thus, in Sunni Arab circles, the story went that Hafez al-Assad's brother Rifaat had relied in part on ethnically Kurdish elite troops in crushing the Hama revolt.

that the Syrian Muslim Brothers received support from Saddam Hussein, al-Assad's arch-rival; in Iraq, the Brotherhood continued to face close scrutiny if not outright persecution during this period. Only during the 1990s does the Iraqi regime appear to have given the Muslim Brotherhood more leeway; but there is little reliable information on this period.[38]

One figure who was indicative of Kurdish attitudes towards Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood was the famous religious scholar Muhammad Said Ramadan al-Bouti (1929–2013), who, as his name indicates, hailed from Jezira Botan. After his father had fled the persecutions of both Kurds and clerics in the new Republic of Turkey, al-Bouti was born on the Syrian side of the border in the Jazira region. Educated in Damascus and in the Azhar University in Cairo, al-Bouti remained on the frontier between Kurdish and Arab identity, and between Naqshbandî and Salafî forms of Islam. Politically, he always remained close to the al-Assad regime, perhaps based on a conviction that religious leaders should be loyal to whichever secular forces are in power. In his sermons, in his regular TV appearances and in his writings, he was invariably critical of the Muslim Brothers and of Salafism, let alone Salafi-jihadism, up to his assassination in 2013, in the midst of the Syrian civil war. Significantly, and like earlier Naqshbandîs, he refers to Salafism as *lâ-madhhabiyya*, and as 'the biggest threat to the sharia'.[39]

Rather less attention has been paid to al-Bouti's Kurdish background and activities. He himself has given an account of this background in his 1998 account of his father's life, *Hâdhâ wâlidî* [This is my father]. This work clearly shows al-Bouti's Naqshbandî origins, even though he has been vocal in his criticisms of what he called the backwardness of early twentieth-century Sufi orders. Thus, in the 1950s, al-Bouti also published an Arabic prose rendering of Xanî's *Mem û Zîn*, which toned down not only references to Kurdish national aspirations but also to mysticism (al-Bouti, 1982).

Another high Syrian cleric of Kurdish origins was Ahmad Kaftaro (1915–2004), who for many years was Grand Mufti of Syria. Kaftaro, too, was a member of the Naqshbandî *tarîqa*. Although the Kurdish background of religious leaders like al-Bouti and Kaftaro was neither widely publicized nor systematically papered over, it may be indicative of a wider tendency among Kurds and Arabs to sympathize with, respectively, Naqshbandî and Salafi-

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38 On the relations between the Iraqi Ba'ath regime and the Muslim Brothers, see al-'Azami (2002) and Helfont (2018). Discussion of MB mobilization of among Iraq's Kurds, however, is absent from both analyses.

39 Al-Bouti (2009). For more discussion, see Christmann (1998).

inspired forms of Islam. Although one should not overstate such tendencies, they do seem significant, both in Syria and in Iraqi Kurdistan.

In Iraq, unlike in Syria, neither the Muslim Brothers nor the Salafis or Salafi-jihadists had gained a significant following, whether among Kurds or among Arabs. Although in its earliest phase, the Iraqi branch of the Muslim Brotherhood had claimed to be open to both Arabs and Kurds, and both Sunnis and Shiites, the leading body of the Islamic Party that was formed from among its ranks overwhelmingly hailed from the Sunni Arab triangle, in particular the city of Ramadi.[40] It was only after the 1991 uprising that MB presence became more visible both in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the parts of Iraq that remained under Saddam's control. In the Kurdish-controlled north, the most dramatic development was the rise of the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan or IMIK (Bizûtnewey Îslamî le Kurdistanî ʿIrâq), founded in 1979 and headed by Mullah Othman from Halabja. In 1987, Mullah Othman had called for a jihad against the Iraqi regime; but after the March 1988 chemical attack on Halabja, Mullah Othman and his followers had fled to Iran.

Although IMIK spokesmen claimed that Mullah Othman had developed his own form of Salafi-jihadism, both its ideology and organizational form appear to have originated in MB networks. IMIK writings abound in references to Azzam and Saʿid Hawa, one of the leaders of the Syrian branch of the MB.[41] Mullah Othman himself appears to have made contact with the MB during his studies at the Azhar University in Cairo. His precise links with the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Afghan mujahedin are unclear; late in the 1980s, however, he appears to have turned away from the Muslim Brotherhood after the latter failed to condemn the Halabja attack. More generally, Iraq's 1990 occupation of Kuwait and the ensuing 1991 Gulf War appears to have led to a split in the ranks of the Muslim Brothers. The aftermath of that war presented not only Iraq's secular Kurdish parties but also local Salafi-jihadists with unprecedented political opportunities. In the 1992 regional elections, IMIK received 5 per cent of the vote, just short of the 7 per cent threshold; but it was the single biggest party after the KDP and PUK, and also commanded a sizeable militia. In the violent climate of party infighting during the 1990s, there were several rounds of deadly clashes between IMIK and PUK forces, primarily in the Halabja area.

Initially less dramatically present, and certainly less violent, but in the long run more enduringly active, were the local Kurdish offshoots of the Muslim

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40 Al-ʿAzami (2002: esp. 167). On the Muslim Brothers in Iraqi Kurdistan, see also Leezenberg (2007: 213–23).
41 On Azzam, see Kepel (2000: ch. 6, esp. 145–47); on Hawa, see Weismann (1993).

Brotherhood. The most important among these were the Rabitay Islamî Kurd, a charity organization founded in 1992, and the Kurdistan Islamic Union (Yekgirtuy Islamî), founded in 1994 by Salaheddîn Bahaeddîn. Unlike IMIK, Rabita and Yekgirtû rejected violent tactics, and had no militia of their own; rather, they mobilized in civil society, and participated in the regional and local electoral process, initially with considerable success.

Given their location straddling the Iranian border, IMIK and its offshoots primarily received financial and other support from Iran, unlike the Yekgirtû and Rabita, which during the 1990s reportedly received funding from wealthy sponsors in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. In the late 1990s, several Salafi-jihadi groups broke away from IMIK. The most important of these was headed by, respectively, Mullah Krekar and ʿAli Bapîr. In the wake of the 11 September 2001 assaults in New York and Washington, DC, and in the run-up to the 2003 war against Iraq, PUK propaganda successfully portrayed these groups as the missing link between Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq and the al-Qaeda network. The remaining Salafi-jihadi groups in the border areas were targeted by American air bombings, and many of their remaining personnel were killed in combat or captured. Mullah Krekar fled abroad; ʿAli Bapîr spent a number of years in prison, and subsequently entered the civilian political process in the region. From this, one might have cautiously concluded that ten years after the ousting of Saddam Hussein, Sunni political Islam and Salafi-jihadism were largely a spent force in the region. The dramatic developments of 2014, however, put the lie to such conclusions.

Religion in Post-IS Kurdistan

For a long time, foreign observers depicted Iraqi Kurdistan as a beacon of stability, prosperity and democratic liberties in a region otherwise marked by sectarian conflicts and dictatorial regimes. Such pictures were always overly optimistic, in that they overlooked both the authoritarianism of the leading Kurdish parties and unresolved political questions, like the status of Kirkuk, Ninewa plain and Sinjar. They also largely overlooked the warning signals of rising jihadist violence, which escalated into the rise of the self-proclaimed Islamic State or DAESH (acronym of al-Dawla al-Islâmiyya fi-l-ʿIrâq wa-l-Shâm) in northern Iraq and Syria from 2013 on.[42] The genocidal violence perpetrated by IS warriors against Shiites, Christians and especially Yezidis has rightly drawn a lot of – mostly journalistic – attention. It should be noted,

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42 For an overview of the pre-2014 situation, see the various contributions in Omarkhali (2014).

however, that jihadist violence against Christians, Yezidis and different Shiite or Shiite-leaning groups in northern Iraq had already been on the rise since the emergence of a Sunni Arab insurgency against the American military presence after 2005. This insurgency had only partly been crushed or contained by the 2007 'Surge' led by the American army. In June 2014, IS forces overran Mosul; then, in August of the same year, they attacked and occupied Sinjar and Ninewa plain, which had been under de facto Kurdish control despite being *de jure* part of Sunni Arab-ruled Ninewa governorate.

The 2014 IS offensive was not only a human tragedy and a military disaster; it also marked – and, paradoxically, masked – a crisis of legitimacy of the Iraqi Kurdish leadership. By early 2014, popular disaffection with the dominant parties' corruption and inability to compromise had become widespread. In the ongoing conflict between Baghdad and Erbil about control over oil sales, the al-Maliki administration had discontinued the monthly payments to the Kurdistan Region in January 2014, causing an abrupt and acute financial crisis: overnight, the KRG lost the ability to pay the salaries of the estimated 65 per cent of the labour force in direct state employment. Simultaneously, an ongoing political conflict between, in particular, the KDP and Goran, largely paralysed the regional parliament. Yet, there were surprisingly few sustained protests against KRG policies or against the corruption of officials. In this sense, the acute and violent threat posed by IS may have been a blessing in disguise for local elites.

The August 2014 IS offensive appears to have directly and deliberately challenged the KRG's resolve to protect the less than unambiguously Kurdish minority groups in areas de facto and/or *de jure* under its control. It was probably no coincidence that the August offensive primarily targeted Sinjar and Ninawa plain, home to Yezidis, Christians, Shabak and other minorities, rather than areas primarily inhabited by Sunni Kurds. If indeed it was such a test, the KRG failed dismally: in particular among Yezidis, one encounters a lot of resentment about the peshmergas' failure to provide adequate protection for the Sinjar population during the August 2014 IS onslaught.[43]

Subsequently, however, the regional government did take a number of legal measures in order to better protect religious minorities. For years, it had promoted the public expression of Sunnî Islamic piety, for example by granting tax advantages to affluent individuals who funded the construction

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43 For a detailed account of the August 2014 events, and of the political pressures surrounding attempts to protect the Yezidi population, see Schmidinger (2019).

of mosques; but in 2015, the regional parliament passed a 'Law for the protection of the rights of religious minorities in Iraqi Kurdistan' (qanûn himâyat huqûq al-mukawinât fî Kurdistân al-ʿIrâq). The law includes both 'national groups' (al-majmûʿât al-qawmiyya), listing Turcomans, Chaldaeans, Syriacs, Assyrians and Armenians; and 'religious and sectarian groups' (al-majmûʿât al-dîniyya wa-l-tâʾifiyya), including 'Christians, Yezidis, "Mandaean Sabaeans", Kâkâʾîs, Shabak, Faylîs, Zoroastrians and others'; it lists a number of measures to protect members of these groups, with the aim of 'promoting a spirit of respect, tolerance and coexistence among the citizens of Iraqi Kurdistan'.[44] Some have argued that such measures were too little, too late; some critics even rejected them as mere window dressing, given the dominance and authoritarian character of the ethnic Kurdish parties currently in power in the region.[45]

At the societal level, the IS onslaught appears to have had far-reaching consequences; but to the extent that these can be clearly perceived, they have not yet been studied in detail.[46] The most dramatic immediate effect has undoubtedly been the emergence – or, as its adherents claim, re-emergence – of Zoroastrianism in the region. Earlier Kurdish secular nationalists had claimed Zoroastrianism as the original religion of the Kurds, and the Yezidi faith as the survival of this original Kurdish religiosity; but as a living religion, Zoroastrianism had long been absent from Mesopotamia. After 2014, however, increasing numbers of Iraqi Kurds not only started openly identifying as Zoroastrians, but also claiming that their religious tradition had never really disappeared, and had continued to be practised clandestinely.[47] A fire temple was opened in Sulaimaniya, and editions of Zoroastrian sacred texts and studies on Zarathustra – mostly translated from Persian – could be found in bookstores all over the region.[48] Spokespersons of local Zoroastrianism openly acknowledge the protection and financial support they receive from the regional authorities, and proudly declare that 'Zoroastrianism is the mother of all religions and the father of all philosophies,' alluding, respectively, to the near-contemporary Vedic tradition in Sanskrit and to Nietzsche's

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44 For the Arabic-language text of the law, see http://perleman.org/files/articles/21011 8092548.pdf.

45 Interviews, anonymous local informants, Sulaimaniya, Duhok, October 2019.

46 For a preliminary stocktaking, see the papers collected in Sevdeen and Schmidinger (2019).

47 The new Zoroastrianism is among the best documented of the post-IS religious developments; see Szanto (2018). In fairness, it should be noted that local Zoroastrians fiercely contest these analyses by foreign scholars.

48 See, for example, Abdulhemîd (2016), a translation from a Persian rendering of selections from the Gathas, the oldest Zoroastrian texts, originally written in Avestan.

writings, in particular, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.[49] This Zoroastrian tradition, however, is clearly invented: it has no links with Zoroastrian communities in Iran and India or with the existing Zoroastrian leadership, and it has no affinity with Nietzsche's radical critique of religion. Rather, its appearance may reflect a wish among a number of Iraqi Kurds to distance themselves from Islam, which has increasingly come to be perceived as a specifically Arab religion, without falling into a complete and publicly professed atheism. The number of actual adherents of Zoroastrianism in the region is unknown.

A second consequence is the further societal weakening of political Islam, and of Salafism in particular. Even more strongly than before, Islamist activities were constrained and held under close scrutiny. In the 2018 regional elections, the Kurdistan Islamic Union lost six of their eleven seats in parliament; ʿAli Bapîr's Komal, due in part to its solid backing in Halabja region, gained one seat, reaching a total of seven. Clearly, political Islam seems past its heyday in the region; but it is unlikely to disappear completely. It remains to be seen whether new forms of depoliticized Islam will develop as a reaction to the extreme, and violent, politicization of the faith by groups like IS.

A third post-IS development is an increasingly openly proclaimed atheism. Especially among younger generations, the confrontation with IS atrocities has not only led to questions about the morality of the religion in the name of which these were committed but even about the very existence of God. Finally, a fourth reaction appears to be the strengthening of (evangelical) Christianity. Nowadays, evangelical missionaries can openly proselytize, especially in the Ain Kawa suburb of Erbil; and local evangelicals feel increasingly encouraged to voice theological criticisms of Islam.

At present, however, it is impossible to state on what scale these reactions have occurred, or to predict how enduring they will be. All of these tendencies, it should be noted, already existed in the years prior to the IS assault; but in the last few years, they appear to have become more openly allowed, if not actively encouraged, by local authorities.

Finally, the confrontation with IS has brought to the fore questions of gender and sexuality. During the battle for Kobanî and in Rojava more generally, the stark opposition between female YPG guerrillas and male bearded IS warriors was lost on few onlookers; but it remains to be seen to what extent the gender equality agenda of PKK and PYD will enduringly change gender relations in local Kurdish society, especially in interaction with

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49 Interview, Zoroastrian spokesperson, Duhok, October 2018.

religious values. In Iraqi Kurdistan, the figure of the peshmerga as an ideal of patriotism and masculinity has clearly been losing appeal. Since 1991, an entire generation of Kurdish youths has grown up in the absence of national mobilization and guerrilla warfare against a non-Kurdish enemy. Hence, neither the 2014 confrontation with IS nor the 2017 run-up to the referendum for independence has led to significant military mobilization among the region's youths, despite the militant and military rhetoric that surrounded both events. If anything, male–female relations appear to have become more conservative, and more often enforced by violent means, than in the decades preceding de facto independence; but one should beware of reducing such changing patterns of gender-based violence to a timeless patriarchate, to tribal conceptions of gendered honour or to religiously sanctioned norms of male and female behaviour.

Perhaps the clearest indication of these changes is the work of 2018 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nadia Murad. In the 2014 IS assault, Murad was captured and sold into sexual slavery after most of her male relatives had been murdered by IS forces. After escaping from captivity and resettling in Germany, she became one of the most vocal activists on behalf of the Yezidis, calling for help for enslaved women and for the prosecution of the perpetrators (Murad, 2017). In publicly speaking out about her experiences, however, she also challenged taboos in her own community concerning female sexuality. It briefly looked like her and others' efforts would be successful: in April 2019, the Yezidi Supreme Spiritual Council issued a statement that declared, or was widely read as saying, that all victims of the IS genocide would be welcomed back into the Yezidi community, including rape victims and their offspring. A mere few days later, however, a retraction (or rectification) followed, stating that the declaration should not be read as allowing children born out of rape by IS members as members of the Yezidi community.

Such developments suggest that underlying questions concerning religion, especially in interaction with ethnic identity and gender, remain contested. It seems unlikely that, with the fall of IS, radical political Islam will have been neutralized and domesticated once and for all; but in this volatile region, it is risky to make such predictions with any degree of confidence.

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Religion and Politics in Turkey's Kurdistan from the Beginning of the Republic

MEHMET KURT

Introduction

The history of the Kurdish people in modern Turkey is characterized by various forms of repressive governmentality and resistance. While much has been written about the roots and developments of the Kurdish question, the role of religion in this process has not been analysed sufficiently. Most works either focus on the contemporary actors in Kurdish politics, without considering the role of Islam and Islamic mobilization in the Kurdish public sphere, or briefly mention religious elites as allies of the state and state Islamism.

Among the few studies more directly addressing the role of Islam in the Kurdish context, several have concentrated on the Sheikh Said Rebellion and discussed the respective weight of Kurdish nationalist aspirations and Sufi Islam in the uprising (Olson, 1989; Soleimani, 2016). More broadly, the role of sheikhs, imams and Sufi orders in the preservation of Kurdish language and culture (Yıldırım, 2018) and their influence on the development of Kurdish nationalism and identity awareness have been discussed (van Bruinessen, 1992, 2000, 2016). In addition, the return of the landowners (aghas) and the sheikhs into the political field beginning from the 1950s has been touched upon by several scholars who have set up the overall historiographic narrative of the Kurdish question (McDowall, 1996; van Bruinessen, 1992).

Unlike these pioneering studies, the works published in Turkish about the role of traditional Islamic institutions, such as Kurdish madrasas, and the intellectual productions of Kurdish Sufis and scholars do not contextualize these developments within broader political and historical dynamics (Çiçek, 2009). On the one hand, this orientation can be partly explained by repressive state practices against critical scholarship. İsmail Beşikçi is an emblematic case of the criminalization of scholarship on the Kurdish issue. On the other hand, among critical scholars the development and transformation of

religious practices, institutions and elites in the Kurdish political sphere have drawn much less interest than leftist political groups and nationalist organizations.

As for studies focusing on religion and politics in Turkey, they either pay limited attention to the development of the issue in the Kurdish context or overgeneralize the nationwide situation to the Kurdish case. Although many of these studies mention the role of the Sheikh Said Rebellion (Ahmad, 1988; Sakallıoğlu, 1996), they also fail to assess the role of religion in the formation of Kurdish nationalism. Moreover, these studies adopt a simplistic approach to the Kurdish case, assuming static situations, identities and politics. Considering religion and vernacular politics in the Kurdish case would lead to a re-evaluation of the dominant paradigms and arguments developed on the issues of religion and politics in Turkey, such an approach is essential to analyse the specific dynamics of the Kurdish case and evaluate intersectional relations between religion, nationalism, colonialism, nation-building practices and class struggles. For instance, in his well-known centre/periphery theory seeking to explain the power struggle from the late Ottoman period to the modern Turkish republic, Şerif Mardin acknowledges that other forms of cleavages and differentiation exist within the periphery and he briefly mentions the Kurds as one of the divergent cases (Mardin, 1973: 187), yet he does not elaborate on the specificity of this 'Kurdish periphery'. Moreover, most works on Islamic politics (Tuğal, 2009; Yavuz, 2003) and mobilization in Turkey (White, 2002) focus on Turkish-majority western Turkey and pay limited attention to the roles of different Kurdish ethnopolitical, religious and economic groups in nationwide power struggles.

The most relevant studies of religion and politics in the Kurdish context concentrate on the past decades, particularly the 1990s. Houston's work on Islam, the Kurds and the nation-state is a striking example in which he identifies three distinctive approaches to the Kurdish question in the 1990s: state Islamism, Islamism and Kurdish Islamism. State Islamism tends to label anything Kurdish as nationalist, in contradiction to the pan-Islamist discourse of the Turkish Islamists (Houston, 2001). He later explains how this group has engulfed the Islamists who have been critical to the role and power of the state in the 1990s (Houston, 2019). In the 2000s, growing scholarship has focused on the role of religion in Kurdish politics in connection to the return of Islamism to the nationwide political debates under the AKP rule. Gülay Türkmen explains how Islam has failed to act as a conflict resolution medium between the Turks and the Kurds, despite the discursive appraisal of the religion as a unifying factor (Türkmen, 2018). Cuma Çiçek offers a conducive

frame to contextualize the Kurdish issue along with national, religious and economic identities in order to understand major changes in the electoral politics and competition over the representation of the Kurds (Çiçek, 2013, 2017). White also traces the formation of Muslim nationalism and its multiple manifestations in the public and political realm among the Turkish Muslim nationalists. Although the book is not solely analysing the Kurdish case, it provides illuminating insights about how the Kurdish question is a constitutive element in the reconfiguration of this Muslim nationalism (White, 2013).

This chapter aims to contribute to scholarship on the role of religion in the development of the Kurdish question by providing a brief historical overview to understand the reconfigurations in Kurdish politics and discussing the changing influence of religion, from a platform of resistance to a medium of compliance.

The chapter evaluates these transformations in five distinctive periods, spanning from the 1925 Sheikh Said Rebellion to today, and studies both the implementation of state religious policy in the Kurdish region and the counter-strategies adopted by Kurdish actors to challenge the state's repressive practices. It should be noted that there are many overlaps between these five periods. Hence, the chronological approach is combined with a socio-spatial analysis aiming to highlight continuities and changes in patterns of compliance and resistance since the early republican era.

Islam between Resistance and Compliance during the Early Republican Period (1925–1938)

During the nineteenth century, numerous Kurdish uprisings were led by Kurdish religious figures, the sheikhs, against the Ottoman Empire's centralization efforts. The first uprising after the declaration of the Republic of Turkey was led by a Sufi Naqshbandi sheikh, Sheikh Said,[1] and the uprising spread over a vast area of the Kurdish south-east within weeks in 1925 (Olson, 1989; Soleimani, 2016). While a significant number of Kurdish political and religious elites supported the uprising and mobilized their armed force, many

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1 Although Sheikh Said was the leader of the uprising and his followers composed the backbone of the rebellion, a secular nationalist organization called Azadi was also a major component of the uprising. Azadi struggled for an independent Kurdistan. Yet, this intellectual group did not have the power to mobilize masses for their nationalist ambitions.

other Kurdish tribes allied with the central government in Ankara, which precipitated the failure of the uprising.[2]

Sheikh Said was the head of a powerful Sufi Naqshbandi order in the area, and was well connected to community leaders, imams[3] and *seydas*,[4] who studied in the family's madrasa and adhered to the Sufi order. However, the new republic's modernist and nationalist agenda threatened this inherited power and prestige. The main reason for the uprising was the Turkification and centralization project of the new state: the tribal chiefs and sheikhs feared that these reforms would eradicate their traditional privileges and authority. Increasing taxation and the negation of Kurdish cultural and political heritage also fuelled the uprising (Olson, 1989). Van Bruinessen highlights the bilateral nature of the uprising as both religiously and nationally motivated and argues that the motivation behind the uprising, agreed by all actors, was the establishment of an independent Kurdistan (van Bruinessen, 1992: 298). Bayrak also argues that the rebellion was a movement of Kurdish national resistance and the leadership of the sheikh was a strategic choice of the nationalist Azadi movement to mobilize the Kurds (Bayrak, 1999: 334).

In the days following the execution of Sheikh Said and his friends in June 1925, the central government in Ankara implemented several policies to suppress the Kurdish rebellions: thousands of people were killed, many tribes, landlords and sheikhs were exiled and had to live under a constant state of surveillance (van Bruinessen, 1992: 253). Not only those who participated in the revolt but also many Kurdish sheikhs and landlords (aghas) who remained neutral or in support of the state were brought before the infamous Independence Tribunal in Diyarbakır, where most of them were sentenced to death or exile. The court records of the Independent Tribunal demonstrate the extent of the persecutions and displays the religious landscape of Kurdistan between 1925 and 1927. The six-volume court verdicts and minutes, published by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, is important evidence underlining the mass involvement of the Kurds and Kurdish religious figures in the uprising and the state's brutal punishments of those who were even slightly involved in the rebellion (Kumbuzoğlu, 2016). In addition to multiple accounts from statesmen, the first prime minister of Turkey, İsmet İnönü's memoirs on the Sheikh Said Rebellion and the harsh measures taken following the uprising indicate how the Kurds were perceived as a national threat

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2 See Kamal Soleimani's Chapter 5 in this volume for more information.
3 Imam in the Kurdish context indicates a madrasa graduate who works in a mosque.
4 *Seyda* is a higher position than imam, has the authority to teach in the madrasa and is usually more involved in the social matters.

challenging the newly founded republic's nationalist construct (Yadırgı, 2017: 165–73). The Sheikh Said Rebellion is one of the events that has shaped Kurdish political imaginations up to the present, as a symbol of Kurdish aspirations, resistance and resilience, on the one hand, and increasing state repression and assimilationist policies, on the other. It did not only give a reason to the central government of Ankara to repress the Kurdish aspirations heavy-handedly but also provided a ground for the republic to introduce several policies to eliminate the power of Kurdish dissent in Kurdistan and the religious dissent nationwide.

In the years between 1925 and 1938, a few other rebellions broke out across Kurdistan, most of which were heavily suppressed, and the state consolidated its power in the Kurdish central cities. Yet, the financial costs of suppressing the Kurdish dissidence consumed one-third of the annual budget only in 1925 (Yadırgı, 2017: 168). The three-year-long Agri/Ararat Rebellion between 1927 and 1930 was suppressed via heavy air strikes and served as a ground for the empowerment of the Turkish air forces in the following years (Olson, 2000: 67). In 1928, the central government created three regional governorships under the name of General Inspectorates[5] and granted them limitless authority over administrative, judicial and military intervention for the remaking of Kurdish society (Aslan, 2011: 80). In 1934, the central government introduced the Settlement Law, which aimed to change the demographic structure of Kurdistan by relocating the Kurds in the Turkish areas and the Muslim migrants from Balkans and Central Asia to the Kurdish territories (Yeğen, 1999: 562). According to the Settlement Law, Turkey was divided into three zones. In the Kurdish-majority zone one, the density of the Turkish population was to be increased. Zone two was spared for the relocation of the Kurdish people exiled from their original land to assimilate into Turkishness. In zone three, resettlement was prohibited, and massive evacuations were planned (Yadırgı, 2017: 182). In sum, Kurdish uprisings in this period became one constitutive element of the Turkish republic and provided reasons for authoritarian governmentality, whose main pillars were Turkification, Westernization and modernization.

Parallel to these efforts, the central government in Ankara maintained strong propaganda to overshadow the true nature of the Kurdish uprisings. As Yeğen demonstrates, the Turkish state consistently avoided acknowledging the Kurdish aspect of the Kurdish national question. Instead, the

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5 Although its name varied from General Inspectorate, OHAL or Special Security Area, Kurdistan remained under martial law and has been ruled by a permanent state of exception since the foundation of the Turkish republic.

authorities did not hesitate to frame Kurdish dissidence as the result of regional or religious backwardness, political reaction to the progressive revolutions, as well as feudal or tribal resistance to the central government's efforts to create a nation-state. The true nature of the Kurdish question as an ethnopolitical issue was never mentioned or admitted in the state discourse between the 1920s and the 1980s. Yeğen argues that the aim of this strategy was not to misrepresent the Kurdish question but to reconstitute the true nature of it within the Turkish state discourse (Yeğen, 1999: 555–60). Despite the state's effort to maintain a public discourse based on the rejection of the ethnopolitical nature of the Kurdish question, Mehmet Bayrak's work demonstrates that the state, indeed, had a clear understanding of the Kurdish national issue and developed several agendas to suppress dissidence among the Kurds and manipulate the facts related to the national aspect of the uprisings (Bayrak, 2014).

The role of religion in this process has not been analysed in detail, as the prevailing assumption was that the modernization project of the founding elites of the republic aimed to undermine the role of religion. However, recent scholarship has convincingly argued that state policy rather attempted to control religion and create a political theology to support the new nation-state (Azak, 2010). The establishment of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (hereafter Diyanet) in March 1924, a few months after the foundation of the republic, sought to replace the position of the caliphate and develop a central administration for religious affairs. The abolition of lodges, hermitages and madrasas in the following years also aimed to position Diyanet as the only authority to manage religious establishments and the mosques. In sum, these regulations do not indicate a divorce between the state and religion, but strict control of the former over the latter (Ahmad, 1988: 753).

Traditional religious leaders were the most effective agents of mobilization of Kurdish dissidents in this early republican period. During the cycles of repression and resistance between 1925 and 1938, Kurdish insurgencies were led by religious figures such as Sheikh Said and Seyid Rıza. The role of the Azadi movement in 1925 and the secular Xoybûn Society in 1930 was significant, but the mobilizing forces in Kurdish society were the religious elites, not only because of their functions in traditional and religious life but also as a result of their powerful mediating role among the competing tribes. As Senem Aslan argues, the state-intensive mechanisms of control established across the Kurdish provinces hardly achieved an 'integrated domination' over Kurdish society in the first three decades of the republic (Aslan, 2011: 76–7).

Although the process of assimilation gained momentum after the Sheikh Said Rebellion (1925), the lack of resources and incomplete centralization of the government prevented them from fully implementing this policy across Kurdistan (Barkey and Fuller, 1997: 63). However, the closure of madrasas and lodges, in combination with the violent repression of the Kurdish insurgencies, had a particularly strong impact on Kurdish traditional figures and the sheikhs. The centralization efforts of the Ankara government, the establishment of Diyanet and the unification of education under the control of the Ministry of National Education were among the several novelties that gradually started to undermine the influence of traditional power-holders. The sheikhs, imams, *seydas*, Sufi orders, and madrasa students in the Kurdish cities were also among those who were more targeted by repression and sometimes exiled to central Anatolia.

However, the influence of this state policy was more limited in the Kurdish countryside (Aslan, 2011: 80) and among the ordinary Kurds, where traditional social and political structures were still effective. The Diyanet and nationalized education had a limited impact, due to the lack of resources and the grassroots resistance of the Kurds, who had no interest in welcoming the newly appointed state officers. They, instead, preferred to go to their traditional religious authorities to obtain fatwa or resolve a societal or personal matter. In addition, the border zones were still porous and trans-border relations between the Kurds were important. Crossing the borders was a common practice for tribesmen, dissident aghas, sheikhs and their followers, to participate in an insurgency or escape from the ire of the central state. Despite the heavy suppression and mechanisms of control, the Kurdish religious figures, the imam-training madrasas and the Sufi lodges maintained their various activities for a long time. To give an example, Sheikh Abdurrahim, Sheikh Said's younger brother, crossed the border into Syrian land but came back in 1927 to initiate a new rebellion. He and two of his cousins, Sheikh Fewzî and Sheikh Fahri, started a new uprising and took over the area from Lice to Çapakçur (Bingöl) and expanded their territory until Erzurum and Palu in October 1927. This incident shows that the period between 1925 and 1938 witnessed small or big uprisings led by sheikhs and were supported by many components of Kurdish society (Olson, 2000: 79). This continuous dissidence was an obstacle to the government's complete control over the new nation-state.

The resistance did not only come from the Sunni Kurds and elites, but Alevi Kurds and their leaders were among those who revolted against the central government. The 1921 Koçgiri Rebellion, supported almost

exclusively by Alevis, is widely considered as the first Kurdish nationalist rebellion in the emerging Turkish republic (Bayrak, 2010; Massicard, 2009). In the 1920s and 1930s, unrest continued among the Alevi Kurds particularly in the region of Dersim and culminated with the Dersim Rebellion in 1937–8. Protesting against the Tunceli Law passed in 1935 and the state's attempts to 'pacify' the region through military action and development of infrastructures, Seyid Rıza, one of the most important tribal chiefs and religious leader of Dersim, worked to unite the tribes and resisted against the state's security forces. This triggered harsh state repression targeting not only the rebels, but also the local civil population as a whole, resulting in mass casualties, forced displacement and assimilation policy towards the survivors with the aim to eliminate the influence of Alevi or traditional networks (Kieser, 2011).

Silence and Religion as a Tool of Political Integration (1938–1961)

Following the massive operations and massacres that took place in Dersim area in 1937 and 1938 (Goner, 2017), the central government in Ankara relocated many families alongside the railroad to mid- and western Anatolia. This constituted the beginning of a silent period (Bozarslan, 2008: 344–6), in which Kurdish dissidence was weakened by the state's repression, centralization and assimilation efforts. The silence period here implies the lack of organized and effective resistance as a result of the repressive disempowerment of Kurdish dissidence. However, the Kurdish nationalist aspirations kept growing in cross-border areas and among the smaller circles elsewhere. Syria under the French Mandate, as well as Iran, Lebanon and, to a certain extent, Egypt, became the new centres of Kurdish nationalist aspirations. Mîr Celadet Ali Bedirxan is one of the best examples of this period, who left Turkey in 1923, lived in Lebanon and Iran until 1931 and spent the rest of his life in Syria until his death in 1951. Bedirxan became the first president of the nationalist Xoybûn Society and mobilized the Ararat Rebellion via trans-border networks (Özoğlu, 2001: 401–2). His letter to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is a declaration of Kurdish demands for independence and rights to self-determination (Bedirxan, 2010). Dr Nureddin Zaza or the chief commander of Ararat Rebellion Ihsan Nuri Pasha are other two examples of Kurdish leaders who remained active in the following decades. However, their reach was limited, and their activities were under the control of the countries they lived in. Hence, these figures turned towards publishing activities to write their memoirs of struggle (Zaza, 2000), history and politics

of Kurdistan, semi-fictional stories where the national cause remained the central theme (Bedirxan, 2014), linguistics studies on Kurdish (Bedirxan and Lescot, 2009), as well as journals and magazines (*Hawar*).

While many Sufi sheikhs and aghas also settled in Syria and maintained their political activities through trans-border mobilizations, Kurdish madrasas in Turkey enjoyed less support from the local people or the Kurdish aghas and either had to shut down or move to the remote areas to maintain their teaching activities. The number of their students (*feqa*) dropped dramatically, although few figures about them are available due to the non-official character of this traditional education system. While no comprehensive study addresses the transformations of the religious sphere during this period of silence, some of its aspects survive in Kurdish collective memory. Moreover, the memoirs of Kurdish nationalist leaders, such as Dr Nureddin Zaza (2000), Musa Anter (2011) and Celadet Bedirxan (Reş, 1997), provide perspectives into the period.

The centralization of education across the country and the establishment of new schools, village institutes (*köy enstitüleri*), in the 1940s and 1950s (Yalman, 1990) had a negative impact on the traditional Kurdish madrasas. Not only stigma and illegality affected attendance at these schools, but also the changing social and political environment had already made the curricula of these madrasas outdated. They tended to teach a dozen Arabic language-focused books, elementary texts on faith and Sufism and Islamic law books focusing on the daily problems of Muslims. Science, astronomy, mathematics and geometry had already disappeared from the curriculum of the Kurdish madrasas in the twentieth century. Since the graduates of these madrasas were a significant mobilizing force in the 1925 and following uprisings, and that they served as the local representatives of a certain tradition or a Sufi order, the slow disappearance of the Kurdish religious schools undermined the possibility or effectiveness of religiously led mass mobilization. Hence, the dissident nature of Kurdish religiosity almost disappeared from the urban public space and survived only underground or in the remote countryside.

The adoption of the multi-party system in 1946 constituted a turning point. The 1950 general elections became a battleground between the founding Republican People's Party (RPP) and the Democratic Party (DP), who departed from the RPP under the leadership of Adnan Menderes and Celal Bayar. Although the leaders of the DP were not essentially different in their secularist and modernizing worldviews from the founding elites of the republic, electoral politics led them to reconsider their party's alliance with religious masses. The DP administration introduced a few improvements

welcomed by the religious majority when they came into power: re-establishing the call to prayer, adhan, in Arabic and opening fifteen İmam-Hatip high schools in several provinces (Azak, 2010; Reed, 1954) were among the few changes that took place in the 1950s. However, none of these changes aimed to dismantle the state structure and its Kemalist modernization project. In reverse, the DP government introduced many laws in the spirit of the Kemalist project (Sakallioğlu, 1996: 237) and targeted some of the Sufi orders who challenged the Kemalist state project. The Sufi Tijani order was specifically targeted by the DP administration after several Tijanis had destroyed a statue of Atatürk. The state's ire was more intense when it came to the Kurds. Seventeen Naqshbandi sheikhs were arrested in the city of Mardin in February 1954 during a religious Sufi ceremony, with the allegation of it being an unauthorized and illegal gathering (Reed, 1954: 275).

Although the DP did not directly address the Kurdish question and identity issues (Barkey and Fuller, 1997: 65), its electoral strategy still marked the beginning of a new era in which the state developed softer forms of power to influence the Kurdish public and political space via local allies. Islam became the central discursive tool to bring together the Turks and the Kurds, even if in this state version of Islam Turkishness was omnipresent and superior, whereas the Kurdish identity remained either invisible or inferior. The DP also promised to ease some of the restrictions in the Kurdish region and to reduce the oppressive practices of the gendarmerie in the rural areas. After coming to power, the DP amended the Settlement Law to allow the exiled Kurdish families to come back to their homeland and return the land to their owners, which in return created considerable support for the DP in the following elections (Uçar, 2016: 179).

The DP's electoral strategy led to the co-optation of some Kurdish notables to increase its public support in the Kurdish region. Indeed, Kurdish provinces voted in the majority for the DP and several Kurdish notables won seats in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in Ankara. Together with Said-i Nursi,[6] the Kurdish Naqshbandi and Qadiri orders voted in the majority for the DP. As David McDowall indicates, thirty-four of the forty seats were gained by the DP in the Kurdish region in the 1954

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6 Said-i Nursi has become one of the most influential religious thinkers after his death in 1960. Although he supported the DP government, he remained under state control most of his life, but his well-known *Risale-i Nur* (*Treatise of Light*) was first published in 1956 in the Latin alphabet. His followers later split into many groups and Said-i Nursi's statements on Kurds and Kurdistan were distorted by his followers for the sake of a friendly relation with the state. See Atacan (2001) for further details.

general elections. Among the Kurdish MPs, there were several Kurdish notables, children of aghas and sheikhs, such as Yusuf Azizoğlu (later a minister), Mustafa Ekinci, Mehmet Tevfik Bucak, Nejat Cemiloğlu, Kamuran İnan (who later served as a minister and ran for the presidency), Kinyas Kartal and Sheikh Kasım Kufrevi (McDowall, 1996: 396–407). The most debated figure, however, was the grandson of Sheikh Said, Abdulmelik Fırat, who was brought back from exile and was offered an MP position in the parliament by the DP. Fırat later founded his own pro-Kurdish political party, HAK-PAR, and remained active in the defence of Kurdish rights.

The elected Kurdish MPs had various motivations to ally with powerful state actors and were well aware of their constraints within the system. Altan Tan mentions the memoirs of Mustafa Remzi Bucak, a member of an agha family from Siverek who served as an MP in the DP between 1950 and 1954. According to Bucak, 'if the DP was sure that they could get the majority without our support, they would never include us in their list.' He also recalls that the president, Celal Bayar, told him during an official dinner: 'Mr. Remzi, we all know who you are and what you are after. Do not forget that the Kurdish question is way more important than the Armenian question to us. If you do not want to face the same fate, this tolerance and treatment is enough for you' (Tan, 2011: 317–18). Often those Kurdish figures made strategic choices, based on their limited power, and aimed to empower their de facto Kurdish political agency in the competing environment of Turkish politics. Many of them had a strong sense of Kurdishness, which sometimes surfaced in the public sphere and in their discourse.

In sum, the DP period, 1950–1960, was significant as it marked the birth of a new alliance between the conservative Kurds and Turkish right-wing politics. The 1950s provided an aperture to break the silence over the Kurdish question. Moreover, the DP's religious stance and its attempts to integrate some Kurdish leaders/tribes to broaden its electoral base inaugurated a new strategy of governmentality of the Kurdish region. The repressive state policies stayed in place, but the state strategically used religion to align Kurdish representatives. This strategy was followed by other political parties both from left and right wings in the next decades. Even if many Kurdish notables, aware of the strict Turkification policies, chose to align themselves with the state, from the 1950s onwards Kurdish political agency became a determinant factor in Turkish politics.

Towards Polarization: Political Islam and Formation of the Turkish–Islamic Synthesis (1961–1980)

The protection of the secular republican regime was one of the main justifications of the 1960 military coup, which overthrew the DP government and marked the beginning of the active intervention of the military in Turkish politics. At the same time, the relatively liberal constitution adopted in 1961 facilitated the development of new political tendencies and parties. The 1960s was also a time of deep social and political transformations across Turkey. The rapid increase of industrialization and urbanization, the higher rate of literacy and the workers' migrations towards Germany were the main developments in this decade (Karpat, 1972: 366). Mass movements from the countryside towards the urban centres provided a platform for change and transformation in the society during this time (Ahmad, 1988: 757–8). Rural and agricultural society transitioned into an industrial age where the outskirts of the urban centres were dominated by conservative people who migrated from the countryside.

The rise of left-wing ideologies among the urban youth, the students and workers, however, gradually canalized the state's counter-strategies towards favouring Islam and right-wing conservatism. Turkey's position during the Cold War also led to a rapid increase in religious politics (Bayrak, 1999: 96). The formation of Turkish–Islamic synthesis, a nationalist version of Islamic revivalism, took place in such an environment. The anti-communist associations recruited hundreds of conservative citizens from the outskirts of the cities in the name of religion and nationality. The translation of the Muslim Brotherhood thinker, Sayyid Qutb's book *Social Justice in Islam* was commissioned by the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) director Fuat Doğu as a counter-strategy against the influence of the rising left and its effective discourse on justice and equality. The book was translated by the vice president of the Diyanet, who was Kurdish and allegedly had links to the MİT, and the publisher was a well-known nationalist-Islamist press of the time, Cağaloğlu Publisher (Türkmen, 2013).

This evolution also affected the Kurdish population. Kurds participated in migrations to the urban centres in western Turkey and the interactions between the Turks and the Kurds increased. The perception of these Kurds by the urban population was often negative, as they were perceived as illiterate, backwards and conservative. However, left- and right-wing ideologies penetrated the everyday lives of ordinary Kurds. While the previous

generation of Kurdish students were mainly children of powerful families and had more in common with urban, educated Turks, from the 1960s onwards Kurds from a less privileged background migrated to the cities. There, the Kurdish working class got in contact with trade unions, socialist or Islamist organizations. Many Kurdish intellectuals, politicians and activists had their political formation in this environment.

In this period, however, the separation between the Turkish and Kurdish Islamists or leftists was still incomplete. Although these ideologies brought together the ethnic Kurds and Turks under the umbrella of the same ideology, Turkishness was more present and superior in the relationship. This imbalance stemming from the colonial attitudes of the Turkish Muslim 'brothers' or socialist 'comrades' started creating a division in ethnopolitical rights, which led to autonomous Kurdish socialist or Islamist organizations in the process. However, the influence of Turkish Islamism and leftist ideologies in the transformation of Kurdish political imaginations continued. The Kemalist undertone in the leftist discourses, for example, dominated the discourse of the PKK for a long time and shaped its perception of religion throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The nationalist undertone among the Islamist circles also formed the way in which the Kurdish Islamists understood and reacted to the ethnopolitical problems among the Kurds and beyond.[7]

The first wave of Islamist ideas penetrated the Kurdish political imagination in this period. The notion of Islamic *umma*, however, was infused with Turkish nationalism and was not as universal as it was claimed. The anti-communist associations, the nationalist-Islamist groups such as Raiders (Akıncılar) or the National Turkish Student Union (MTTB) became effective political actors and established networks across Kurdish cities via recruiting of Kurdish students in western Turkey. In the 1960s and 1970s, there were not yet any autonomous Kurdish Islamist organizations, as most of the early Kurdish Islamist figures maintained their activities together with the Turkish Islamists. The National Vision (Milli Görüş) movement and its affiliated organizations (MTTB) were particularly influential among the Kurdish religious students in the late 1970s. The founder of the Kurdish Hizbullah

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7 Dr Şivan was one of the few figures to attempt to go beyond these ideological divisions in the late 1960s. A medical doctor by training, Dr Şivan was a socialist Alevi and a well-known physician in the area. When he started organizing a resistance movement around Hakkari region, he did not hesitate to collaborate with the Kurdish imams and *seyda*s. He welcomed them to his public meetings in villages and let them speak on religious matters before he took over and talked on colonialism, the situation of Kurdistan and the solutions he proposed. Within a short period, and likely due to his inclusive strategies, Dr Şivan recruited around 5,000 men in the Hakkari area.

Hüseyin Velioğlu, the Turkish presidents Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül, and the leader of the Gülenist organization, Fethullah Gülen, all came from these Turkish nationalist/Islamist organizations (Çiçek, 2017: 58). Sharing the same ideological formation and space, their solidarity remained effective in the following decades. Moreover, the urban conflict between left- and right-wing ideologies prefigured the division between the leftist and Islamist Kurds. Across the Kurdish towns and provinces, Islamist networks spread mostly through tea houses, *sohbet* circles (religious conversation) and house meetings. Although there were a few Turkish Islamist associations operating in the area, such as the MTTB, informal networks and activities were more common.

Besides these networks, a rapid increase in the number of religious İmam-Hatip schools in the Kurdish cities aimed to raise pious but ethnically indifferent generations (Bayrak, 1999: 96). The Directorate of Religious Affairs started expanding its base among the Kurds and recruited the Kurdish madrasa-graduated imams who were previously paid and supported by local Kurdish communities or aghas in a patronage system. These imams were paid in alms (zakat) by the villagers, with a yearly amount of grains, raisins, dried fruit or sheep, and their accommodation was provided by the hosting village or town. The dependent relationship between the imams and the villagers, or the patronage of the aghas in some cases, lasted for a long time and worked both for the local communities and imams. In many cases, these imams were affiliated with a Sufi order, usually Naqshbandi, and, in addition to their role as an imam, they were managing the Sufi ceremonies, *khatma* and *zikr*, and accepting Kurdish villagers into the Sufi order via repentance (*tewbe*) rituals. This double role of imams gave them the power to become a part of the wider geography and network of people. They could also be appointed to another village, travel for *irshad* (guidance) activities,[8] and organize and mobilize their followers in line with the teaching or command of their sheikhs. The urban migration of the 1960s and 1970s, however, altered this tradition, even more than the repressive governmental practices that aimed to destroy these community bonds. Because of the collapse of traditional patronage, becoming civil servants of Diyanet remained the main option for imams. The expansion of Diyanet activities was also in line with the state strategy against the increasing influence of

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8   In some cases, these imams and their Sufi followers crossed the Turkish–Syrian border, which was heavily guarded by Turkish soldiers, wired and land mined throughout. For a detailed account of these trans-border activities and relations between the Kurdish smugglers and Sufis, see Aras (2018).

leftist ideologies and Kurdish nationalism among the young and educated Kurds. However, this policy did not result in the complete suppression of dissident voices among the Kurdish religious establishment, as illustrated by the case of Mehmed Emin Bozarslan, once a mufti who suffered state repression for his critical views and publications on Kurdish religious, linguistic, social and political structures (Yüksel, 2009).

Conflict and Political Violence: The Emergence of Hizbullah and the Kurdish Islamists (1980–2000)

The 1970s were characterized by increasing political radicalization and violence in the Turkish urban centres and the rural areas. While the aftermath of the 1980 military coup brought harsh repression against political opponents, the new regime also deeply reshaped constitutional balances and state ideology. Particularly, the influence of Islam on politics and society dramatically increased (Ahmad, 1988: 763) and religion became a constitutive element of governmentality and Turkish nationalism. Islam was considered as an antidote to communism and leftist organizations and incorporated into the 1982 Constitution via several amendments (Salt, 1995: 16).

The 1980 military coup also reshaped the religious and political space in Kurdistan. The new regime introduced compulsory religion classes in education, increased the number of religious İmam-Hatip high schools, appointed more imams and established mosques across the country, including the Alevi villages and towns (Bayrak, 1999). They gave specific importance to the establishment of mosques and religious schools in Kurdistan, where the Kurdish children and youth were left no choice but to attend these schools. The purpose was to create a state-friendly religiosity to counter the increasing effect of leftist ideologies among the youth and fight against the increasing influence of the anti-colonial Kurdish nationalism. The political theology of the Turkish state became one of the most effective tools to deal with the Kurdish question.

After the 1980 military coup, the first split between the Turkish and Kurdish Islamists took place and a few Kurdish Islamist groups emerged, such as Partiya Islamiya Kurdistan (Kurdistan Islamic Party, PIK), the Nurcu Zehra and Med-Zehra organizations, Hizbi İslamî (Islamic Sect), Hareketa Islamî (Islamic Movement), Fedaiyên Islamê (The Bodyguards of Islam), Batman Fecir Group, Tevhid, Selam, Menzil, Vahdet and İlim/Cemaata Ulemayên Islamî (later became Hizbullah). Although these organizations had some common theoretical references, their goals, methods and politics

substantially differed (Kurt, 2017: 16). The PIK, for example, was founded in 1979 (allegedly via Saudi support) and remained critical of the Turkish state's policies. Their party magazine, *Judî*, was photocopied and distributed across Kurdish cities in the 1980s but had limited reach. The PIK's founding manifesto calls for a pro-Kurdish Islamic state in Kurdistan (M. N. Yekta, 2011). The PIK later became a part of the National Platform of North Kurdistan, together with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and several other leftist Kurdish parties, in 1999 in Belgium (Global Security, 1999). However, their grounds of support remained limited (van Bruinessen, 2000) and their leaders lived in exile in Europe and the US. Apart from Zehra, Med-Zehra and Hizbullah, the remaining Islamist Kurdish groups did not obtain wide public support in Kurdish cities and disappeared in the violent environment of the 1990s.

The pro-Kurdish Nurcu Med-Zehra community and the pan-Islamist Hizbullah were the first two influential groups to split from their Turkish counterparts. A group of Said-i Nursi adherents, under the leadership of Sıddık Şeyhanzade, left the Turkish Nurcu Yeni Asya movement, accusing the Turkish followers of having altered the original text of Nursi and removed the terms 'Kurds' and 'Kurdistan', using instead 'easterners', 'peasants' or 'tribe'. Kurdish followers of Nursi formed their own organization, Zehra, and started publishing a Turkish magazine (*Dava*) (Atacan, 2001: 116–23). Although its influence remained limited, Med-Zehra was a pioneering group that questioned state Islamism and its problematic views on the Kurdish nation and its rights. The majority of the Said-i Nursi followers continued to support the state. Med-Zehra later split into two groups (Med-Zehra and Zehra) due to some disagreements over the administration of the group. The leader of the Zehra Foundation, İzzettin Yıldırım, was killed by Hizbullah in 2000.

In the conflictual environment of the 1980s, the political theology of the Turkish Islamists shifted from an anti-secularist, anti-Kemalist and statist position to a pragmatic alliance with the state. Two rival groups, the PKK and Hizbullah, started their activities in these years. Their respective Marxist–Leninist and Islamist ideologies were conflictual, but both groups claimed to be the righteous solution for the Kurds. In the post-1980 military coup environment, both groups expanded their base via different tactics and strategies. Hizbullah remained underground and silent for several years and benefitted from the positive post-coup climate towards Islam to recruit more supporters in the Kurdish south-east. For the militarist administration, it was more important to repress Kurdish separatism than Kurdish Islamists, who

carefully avoided any association with their ethnic identity those years. Although Hizbullah's aim was to overthrow the secular regime and establish a sharia-based state at the beginning of the 1980s, they were instrumentalized by the state in the war against Kurdish dissent in the 1990s. While many people believe that Hizbullah was founded by the state itself, my work suggests that this is not the case, but that a pragmatic alliance between the two helped the state to eradicate the influence of the PKK in some of the Kurdish urban centres (Kurt, 2017).

Hizbullah was founded in 1979 in the Kurdish city of Batman. The founder of the group, Hüseyin Velioğlu, was a graduate of Ankara University's Faculty of Political Science. Velioğlu got involved in Turkish Islamist organizations in his high school years in Batman and Mardin and he had close ties with the Milli Görüş movement (National Vision) and MTTB during his undergraduate years in Ankara. After his graduation, he worked in a factory belonging to a Milli Görüş leader, Şevket Kazan, who served as Minister of Justice during the Welfare Party coalition in the mid-1990s. He returned to his hometown, Batman, in the early 1980s. Velioğlu established Hizbullah with five other Islamist figures, among whom were two madrasa graduate *seyda*s and two engineers. Velioğlu benefitted from the post-coup environment in the early 1980s when he visited almost all the madrasas in south-east Turkey to invite young madrasa students, *feqa*s, and imams to his group. Velioğlu was not welcomed by the Sufi madrasas and *seyda*s, who accused him of corrupting the message of Islam and Sufism. However, many young imams, under the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Iran Revolution, supported Velioğlu and joined the group.

Velioğlu also received significant political and financial support from Iran in the early 1980s, where he and some of his followers received military and ideological training as well. Returning from Iran, Velioğlu decided to move the centre to Diyarbakır, the heart of Kurdish ethnopolitics, where the PKK and Hizbullah had first violent encounters in and around religious high schools, the İmam-Hatips. In Diyarbakır, Hizbullah organized its activities around a bookstore, called İlim Kitabevi, which was also the name of the group in the early years. Hizbullah also developed close ties with other Kurdish and Turkish Islamist groups, most of whom turned their back to the group later during the conflict.

Hizbullah maintained aggressive recruitment activities and soon fell into conflict with its former allies, which eventually resulted in the division of Hizbullah into three groups: İlim, Menzil and Vahdet. Hizbullah not only eliminated its rivals but also murdered its former partners and consolidated

its power in the region among İmam-Hatip students, conservative Kurdish provincial men and opponents of the PKK in the area. After losing Iran's support in the late 1980s, Hizbullah looked for other allies when the conflict with the PKK almost became inevitable in 1990. The first bloodshed took place in 1991 when the PKK killed the parents of a Hizbullah member in Idil district of Şırnak. Hizbullah responded harshly and within a month, the number of casualties exceeded 20. The state also got involved in this internal conflict and supported Hizbullah against the PKK. My previous research suggests that Hizbullah was aware of this utilization, but it chose to benefit from the state's support to increase its influence and eliminate its rivals (Kurt, 2017). As a result of the internal conflict, more than 700 Kurdish citizens lost their lives, among whom 500 were from the PKK supporting base. Once an unspoken ceasefire ended the conflict in 1996, Hizbullah turned to internal revenge and executed more than a hundred of its members, accused of involvement in the Turkish state and intelligence organizations. A book providing first-hand testimony of those years, likely written by a Hizbullah leader, Isa Altsoy, confirms that Hizbullah executed many of its men for their alleged involvement in intelligence services (Bagasi, n.d.). In addition to many observations and the impunity that protected the Hizbullah murderers in the 1990s, this account indirectly confirms the state's involvement in the fratricide.

The arrest of the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, in 1999 put an end to the collaboration between the state and Hizbullah. On 17 January 2000, the security forces raided a house compound in Istanbul's Beykoz district, where the Hizbullah leader, Velioğlu, and some of his high-ranking managers were hiding. Velioğlu and his friends responded with firearms and eventually he was killed while trying to destroy the Hizbullah archive. His friends were arrested and the archive, consisting of a million pages of information, member profiles, interrogation and torture videos, helped the security forces to target the functioning body of the organization. Eventually, a few thousand members were arrested and put in prison for several years (Yılmaz, Tutar and Varol, 2011), while a few hundred were sentenced to life in prison for their murders of civilians. The amount and extent of the torture and violence perpetrated by Hizbullah reverberated across the media. Many Islamist groups, who initially supported Hizbullah, refrained to acknowledge that they had any tie with it.

Both Hizbullah and the PKK's approaches to religion and ethnic identity were problematic in the early years of their formation. Hizbullah remained completely silent about the Kurdish question and Kurdish ethnopolitical

identity in public, whereas the PKK maintained a rigid anti-religious position and argued that, together with the landlords and aghas, the Kurdish religious elites were responsible for the colonization of Kurdistan. However, both groups' approaches gradually changed in the following decades. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Kurdish National Movement was indifferent and hostile to Islam and Islamic elites as a result of its strict socialist worldview and the influence of Kemalism inherited from the Turkish left. However, with the mass movement of the 1990s, the PKK entered into a 'sometimes-ambivalent, but generally friendly approach', whereas the 2000s witnessed the 'accommodative attitude and the rise of Kurdish-Islamic synthesis' (Sarıgil, 2018: 65–92). The early anti-religious position of the PKK, however, was constantly used by the state in its propaganda. As for Hizbullah, it maintained a blurred boundary with Kurdish ethnopolitical and identity issues in the 1980s and the 1990s. Starting from the legal phase of the group in the early 2000s, it started embracing the cultural and religious aspects of Kurdish history and presented religion as the main constitutive element of Kurdish identity. With the opening of the political party Hüda-Par, in 2012, Hizbullah entered the stage where it incorporated the Kurdish issue as a part of its party politics, in the form of a rudimentary religious nationalism.

Religion in the Public and Political Spheres since the 2000s

The turn of the millennium witnessed the return of religion into the political sphere. The broader change in the political sphere came about in 2002, when the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) ascended to power. The AKP received massive support from the Kurdish east and maintained a relatively liberal discourse in the first few years of its rule. Some improvement and openings were introduced for the Kurds, the Alevis and other minorities. Most of these openings, however, remained ineffective or failed in the process. Almost two decades of the Islamist AKP's rule over the Kurdish 'subjects' have demonstrated that Islamist governmentality was not much different in terms of repressive state practices. Although the Islamists used to argue that the Kurdish question stemmed from the Turkish state's secularist, nationalist and oppressive practices and the Islamic fraternity could solve this problem (Houston, 2001), they failed to demonstrate that the Islamist understanding and administration of the Kurdish question could offer a real solution. Religion did not act as a unifying factor between the Turks and the

Kurds for several reasons, such as the omnipresence of Turkish national identity, its alleged superiority to other ethnic identities and the emphasis on the role of Turks as the leaders of the Muslim *umma* (Türkmen, 2018).

On the other hand, Islam was used as a tool for mobilization in the Kurdish region by the AKP administration (Kurt, 2019a). The AKP gradually increased its support to the religious organizations across the country, with a particular emphasis on the Kurdish region. The number of Islamic civil society organizations operating in every sector of society and politics increased dramatically. The main roles in civil societization were played by the Gülenists and Hizbullah. In 2004, the latter appeared in public in the form of the Association for the Oppressed (Mustazaflar Derneği) and soon expanded to hundreds of different associations operating in every aspect of humanitarian aid, education, housing, youth and human rights. However, the political clash between the Gülenists and the AKP in 2013 eliminated the powerful Gülenist influence in the region. The AKP replaced them with other Islamist organizations from western Turkey and among the Islamist Kurds, resulting in the increasing influence of smaller scale Islamist groups, both Kurdish and Turkish, in the Kurdish region. Governmental support via EU funds[9] has been an important element in the development and recruitment of these organizations. Almost all tendencies in the Islamist political scene spurred civil society organizations to get legal recognition and governmental support. Most of these organizations preferred to establish numerous associations unrelated to each other both to receive funds for each of them and to escape prosecution in Turkey's fragile political environment.

The Kurdish madrasas in this period went through a substantial transformation when the government offered incorporation and provided a legal status under the umbrella of Qur'anic courses (Kuran Kursları). Most of these madrasas, suffering from a lack of support and recognition, were struggling to survive. The AKP's offer to provide them with legal status and appointing the *seyda*s as Qur'anic teachers and instructors was an appealing offer to consider. Only a few madrasas across Kurdistan, which had secured support from Kurdish businessmen, landlords, Sufi sects or the Gulf countries, remained independent from the state whereas the vast majority gained legal status and came under the control of the government and the Directorate of Religious Affairs.

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9 4.5 billion Euros were transferred to Turkey after the Turkey–EU negotiation process started in 2004. They were mostly allocated to the Islamist organizations and used for electoral mobilization. See Kurt (2019).

Kurdish imams and *seyda*s were offered the same 'opportunity' to work as state-appointed imams. Those who did not accept the offer were not allowed to serve in mosques even in small remote villages and towns. The importance of controlling mosques, religious institutions and imams turned out to be of great importance during the failed military coup in 2016. Most of these imams and Islamist civil society organizations went to the streets and remained on the main squares of every city for a month following the coup until the AKP consolidated its power and prepared for the next waves of purge and elimination of its opponents. The khutbas read as Friday sermons were written by a central committee in Ankara and imams were obliged to read only these texts. Those who did not want to read nationalist khutbas were prosecuted and dismissed from their positions during the conflict with the Kurdish insurgencies in 2016 and 2017. My personal observations in Mardin show that since the failure of the peace process in 2015, the AKP government forced the imams to read governmental khutbas praising the military and praying for those who lost their lives fighting against the Kurdish insurgents. This created huge controversies among the pious Kurds, and I met many people who stopped attending the mosques due to nationalist khutbas. I was also told that more than fifty imams were dismissed in the city of Mardin between 2015 and 2018, due to their total or partial refusal to apply this policy. In one case, a Kurdish imam was dismissed from his position because the khutba included the terms 'our heroic soldiers' and he read 'our soldiers'. Although he claimed that he skipped the word 'heroic' by mistake, he could not save his position.

During the urban conflict in 2015 and 2016, the Kurds observed the same brutal practices conducted by the security forces allegedly pious and loyal to the Islamist notion promoted by the AKP. For instance, the police fired at the Kurdish insurgents while reading a verse from the Qur'an, which was referring to a war between the Muslims and their enemies during the Prophet Muhammad's time (Yeni Şafak, 2016). In this process, Kurdish Islamists became a legitimizing force to the state's policy. Right after the failure of the peace process in 2015, the Hizbullah-related associations organized a two-day conference titled 'An Islamic Solution to the Kurdish Question', with the attendance of 600 Islamist associations from the region. The same conference and themes were repeated in another event organized by the controversial Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), with the attendance of more than 800 Islamist associations and hundreds of community leaders (*kanaat önderi*), mainly imams, *seyda*s and leaders of Sufi orders. The purpose of both events was the same: creating a counter-narrative and providing a legitimating

ground for the violence perpetrated by the AKP to consolidate nationalist votes and remain in power.

Many of these organizations formed umbrella units both at provincial and national levels: the Islamic Civil Society Platforms at the city level, and the National Will Platform at the national level provided the space for Erdoğan to deal with his opponents in various ways. In the Kurdish context, these organizations were used to mobilize voters during elections, and provide and support counter-narratives, in line with the government's interest. A middle-aged man standing on the balcony of his civil society organization in the Sur district of Diyarbakır during the intense urban conflict in 2016 and saying that he is grateful to the state for saving the population from the PKK's violence illustrates this manipulation. The Conquest of Diyarbakır event, invented by the Islamist organizations right after the conflict in 2016, is another example of this combination of actual and symbolic violence. Just as the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday is attended by tens of thousands of people, the newly invented Conquest of Diyarbakır celebration aims to create a counter-space against the Kurdish national movement and its public visibility.

Hizbullah, which started to reorganize itself in 2004, played a major role in the organization of these celebrations. A protest against the Prophet's cartoons in 2006 gathered around a million people in Diyarbakır and encouraged Hizbullah to invest in the legal space. In the following years, Hizbullah-related organizations expanded their activities to student housing and dormitories, humanitarian aid, publishing and broadcasting, education and human rights. Although not welcomed by the government during the peace negotiations, they have been very active since the peace process failed. The AKP government welcomed the Hüda-Par leaders, released some of the Hizbullah prisoners and provided institutional support and recognition (Kurt, 2019b). As respected allies of the government, Hüda-Par supporters claimed the credit for governmental success in the 2016 elections and following referendums where Erdoğan won by a small percentage. It is believed that Hüda-Par can mobilize around a half-million to a million Kurds for religious public events, although their electoral success has never exceeded a hundred thousand votes. This still makes them the third political party, after the AKP and HDP, in many Kurdish provinces, whereas they receive around 30,000 votes only in Diyarbakır and 15 per cent of all votes in the city of Batman.

This political reconfiguration has also resulted in a growing presence of religious themes in the Kurdish national movement. The political representatives of the movement have incorporated religious elements into their

programmes, launched religious events and commemorations of Sheikh Said and his friends and nominated religious scholars and activists for the parliament. There was also a growing number of pro-Kurdish Islamic CSOs (Civil Society Organizations) before the conflict in 2015. Around a thousand pro-Kurdish imams working in the official Diyanet mosques, for instance, formed a trade union, Diyanet ve Vakıf Emekçileri Sendikası (DIVES), under the leftist Confederation of Public Workers' Union (KESK). Later, the number of pro-Kurdish Islamic associations increased, and they got involved in peaceful civil disobedience protests. The most effective civil disobedience protest came in 2011 when a pro-Kurdish Islamic Association of Imams (Diay-Der) demanded to have religious services and preaching in Kurdish in the localities where the community predominantly consists of Kurds. The Diyanet responded negatively and the association started launching civil Friday prayers in the central squares of the Kurdish cities. Prayers started in Diyarbakır and spread over the Kurdish cities and towns in a short time. They lasted for two years and approximately three million people attended these gatherings. The AKP government finally agreed to allow Kurdish prayers in mosques where most people were Kurdish. However, the regulation was not passed, and the idea was abandoned once the conflict started in 2015. Finally, in 2014, Abdullah Öcalan proposed to establish a congress to discuss the civil, pluralist and democratic aspects of Islam. The Democratic Islam Congress (DIK) was launched with the attendance of hundreds of scholars from all beliefs, who gathered twice, in Diyarbakır in 2014 and Istanbul in 2016. The final declarations of these gatherings highlight the diversity of Islam and propose to gather around the Medina Constitution, which created a platform of peaceful solidarity among the Muslims, Jews and Arab tribes when the Prophet Muhammad migrated to Yathrib/Medina. Although the provision of these meetings aimed to last longer, the conflict in the region prevented a meaningful discussion and a new gathering.

Conclusion

The historical overview provided by this chapter has sought to give an insight into the complex, and sometimes contradictory, role of religion in the Kurdish region of Turkey during the republican period. It underlined how, throughout the period, the religious policy was a significant dimension of state attempts to break community networks organized around religious and tribal leaders. On the other hand, focusing on the influence of religious affiliations and solidarities in the Kurdish region, it brought attention to the

changing role of Kurdish Islamic structures and identities in the political sphere, from a platform of resistance in the early republican period to a medium of compliance after the transition to the multi-party system and a tool for mobilization in the last decades. While the main emphasis of this chapter has been on Sunni Islam, convergent and divergent patterns of the state's repression and social mobilization among Alevi Kurds would deserve a more comprehensive study.

Since the early 2000s, the rise of Islamist civil society in Turkey in general, and the Kurdish region in particular, has brought religious beliefs, commemorations and discourses at the core of the public sphere. Yet, particularly after the collapse of the peace process in 2015, these civil society initiatives have failed to develop an understanding of religion and a civil society capable to reduce political polarization and enmities inherited from the previous decades. On the contrary, they have turned into one of the most powerful tools used by the state authorities in their attempts to establish total control over the region and its population. Meanwhile, the last decade has witnessed a transformation of the leftist, secular stance of the Kurdish national movement, towards the integration of religious symbols and practices as part of the definition of Kurdish identity. Given the continuing instability, political tensions and state repression in Turkey and the Kurdish region, it is difficult to foresee the role that religion will play in the state's policy, social mobilization and political opposition in the near future.

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'Kurdish' Religious Minorities in the Modern World

PHILIP G. KREYENBROEK AND KHANNA OMARKHALI

Introduction

This chapter discusses a group of communities with roots among Kurds, whose religions are thought by some to go back partly to an earlier 'Kurdish' culture. The chapter will focus on the Yezidis (Ēzidis) and Yāresān (Ahl-e Ḥaqq, Kāka'i).[1] Some reference is made to Kurdish- and Zazaki-speaking communities of Alevis from the area of Dersim (Tunceli). We also refer briefly to the Shabak, a group that speaks an 'Iranian' language and is widely thought of as a religious community, and to a recent phenomenon, the development of a 'Kurdish-Zoroastrian' community in the Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRI). Other Kurdish minorities, such as the Feylis, who speak their own form of Southern Kurdish but whose religion is Twelver Shiism, and the Kurdish Sufi brotherhoods fall outside the remit of this chapter.

A majority of Yezidis live in northern Iraq, both in and outside the borders of the autonomous region: notably in the Sheikhān district of Duhok governorate, where their most important sanctuary is located at Lalish, in Nineveh (Nīnawā) governorate; and on and around Mt Sinjar (Shingāl), much of whose Yezidi population became victims of genocide and enslavement by IS ('Islamic State') in 2014 (UN News, 2016). There is no reliable information as to the numbers of Yezidis worldwide, and estimates vary. Maisel (2016: 17) gives a number of 450,000; Omarkhali (2017: 24) of 600,000. In Syria there are Yezidi communities in and around Afrin (Maisel, 2016: 18) and the Jazira (Maisel, 2016: 18–30); their number does not exceed 15,000 (Maisel, 2016: 17). A majority of Yezidis from Turkey was forced to flee the country in the 1980s and 1990s; in 2009 only 2,700 Yezidis are said to have remained, mostly in the Tur Abdin region. A significant number of Yezidis live in Armenia (*ca.* 35,000)

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[1] In Persian written sources one often finds the form *Kākā'i*; however, the Kurdish spelling *Kāka'i* corresponds to the pronunciation one hears from members of the group.

and Georgia (now *ca.* 12,000), where groups of Yezidis migrated from Turkey in the early twentieth century. There is a large Yezidi diaspora community in Europe, with some 60,000 Yezidis in Germany alone. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, many Yezidis from the Caucasus have migrated to Russia (Joshua Project, 2019).

The Yāresān community is known by several other names. They are also called Ahl-e Ḥaqq and in Iraq Kāka'i. Some Yāresān refer to themselves as Tāyefe ('the Clan'). The term ʿAli Ellāhi ('One who says that ʿAli is God') is felt to be inappropriate, as it does not reflect most Yāresān's beliefs about ʿAli. There are no exact data concerning the community's size, estimates varying from one to five million. In Iran, groups of Yāresān now live in western Azerbaijan, Lorestan, Tehran, Hamadan, Kelardasht (in Māzanderān), and in some towns in central Iran such as Karaj and Sāwe. The greatest concentrations of Yāresān in Iran are to be found in two regions: one community lives in the Gurān region to the west of Kermānshāh city, another in and around the town of Sahne, between Kermānshāh and Hamadan. In Iraq, groups of Kāka'i live in or near Erbil, Mosul, Kirkuk, Khāneqin and Halabja. From a religious point of view, the Sārli community of Eski Kalak (between Mosul and Erbil) appears to be a Kāka'i community with its own dialect and some specific customs.[2] In recent decades a considerable number of Yāresān have had cause to move to the West; there are sizeable communities in Norway and Sweden.

Most Alevi communities live in the eastern and central parts of Turkey. Estimates of their numbers vary between eight and twenty million. This chapter is only concerned with the Kurdish- and Zazaki-speaking communities, who form a majority in the Turkish province of Tunceli (formerly Dersim). Many 'Dersimi Alevis' differ from other Alevis in that they do not consider themselves to be Muslims, but as heirs to an ancient religion. Some claim to be Zoroastrians (Benanave, 2015).

The Shabak form a separate community and have their own dialect, a form of Gurāni (see below). They live in about 35 villages east of Mosul in Nineveh governorate. Estimates of their numbers range from 100,000 to 500,000 (Institute for International Law and Human Rights, 2013: 134). Many scholars assume that the group started as a religious community. However this may be, the group now comprises many members who identify as Shiite or Sunni, as well, it seems, as a number of followers of a distinct 'Shabak' religion,

2 Based on Kreyenbroek's unpublished field notes (Eski Kalak, November 2009). Leezenberg (1994) notes that there may have been close contact and intermarriage between the Sārli and the Shabak.

which appears to be closely linked to heterodox Turkoman cults and has a sacred book, named *Buyruk* or *Kitāb al-Manāqib*, in a Turkic language.[3] The Shabak tend to be reticent about their religion. Many Shabak define their group identity as being based on 'region' (*manṭiqa*). Leezenberg (2014) states that the community increasingly identifies with Twelver Shiism and that some demand a state of their own ('Shabakistān').

Language plays a prominent role in defining the identity of some of these groups. A majority of Yezidis speak Kurmanji Kurdish as a first language (a small minority from Baʿshiqa and Behzāne speak Arabic as a first language, but can also be fluent in Kurdish); the 'Kurdish' Alevis speak Zaza(ki) and/or Kurmanji; the Shabak and various groups of Kāka'is in Iraq speak forms of Gurani (there called 'Macho'), a north-west Iranian language cognate to (but quite different from) Zazaki. In Iran, the few remaining native speakers of Gurani variants are fast dying out, but a 'literary' form of the language (Kreyenbroek and Chaman-Ara, 2013) is used in the religious poetry of the group. Important communities of the Yāresān in Azerbaijan and Hamadan speak a Turkic language, while many other communities in Iran now speak Persian and/or Kermānshāhi Kurdish.

Typical aspects of some of these minority religions include non-adherence to the five fundamental duties (*arkān*) of Islam (see below); they are traditionally inward-looking, have their own sacred texts, priestly hierarchies and rituals and observances. Traditionally these groups tended towards endogamy; in most communities, this rule is now contested. Conversions were typically either impossible or exceptional; people belonged to the group by birth and showed their allegiance mostly by 'orthopraxy' (emphasizing the importance of religious acts and behaviour), rather than 'orthodoxy' (which stresses the importance of belief). The transmission of religious knowledge was largely oral, and variants can be seen in sacred texts and priestly teaching. The question of whether or not these communities are heterodox forms of Islam or wholly separate from that religion is often an issue in community discourse. While almost all Yezidis reject any connection with Islam, the Yāresān and Alevi communities are divided on this issue. Yāresān, Yezidis and Dersimi Alevis tend to believe that their religion has roots in a common pre-Islamic Kurdish culture.

The linguistic history of the languages concerned shows that speakers of precursors of Kurdish and of Zazaki/Gurani belonged to the Iranian tribes who entered what is now Iran perhaps around 900 BCE (MacKenzie, 1961). It

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3 For a more detailed discussion of the question, see Leezenberg (1994).

is therefore plausible to assume that their ways of worshipping the gods resembled those of other early western Iranians. There is evidence to show that later, perhaps under the Achaemenians (558–330 BCE) a new religion, Zoroastrianism (see below), gradually became dominant in the Iranian heartlands. The traditions of Yezidism and Yarsanism suggest, however, that this 'Zoroastrification' did not, or not fully, occur on the north-western periphery of the Achaemenid heartlands, in what is now Kurdistan (Kreyenbroek, 1995: 59–61).[4] If this is true, it may be assumed that most of the 'non-Islamic' traits that are common to Yezidism, Yarsanism, Dersimi Alevism and to some extent Shabakism go back to a common pre-Islamic cultural-religious heritage. However this may be, all the minority religions concerned now show clear signs of contacts with Islamic movements such as Sufism and Shiism. The Yezidi tradition as we know it now was founded by a Sunni mystic, Sheikh ʿAdī ibn Musāfir; the religions of the Yāresān and Alevis show a clear influence of Shiite ideas, and are classified by some as *ghulāt* or 'extremist Shiites'. While this term could justifiably be applied as a typological qualification, the relatively late emergence of these groups, however, has to be taken into account to explain their historical development, which differs fundamentally from that of the early *ghulāt* movements. The latter arose in the seventh and eighth centuries as a direct result of a community's support of a certain figure's right to the Imamate (Halm, 2001; Tucker, 2008).

'Kurdish' Religious Minorities

Yezidism

Yezidism is a largely oral non-proselytizing minority religion. Its self-appellation is Ēzdiyātī or Ēzdītī. The main traditional centre of the religion, Lālish, is located in the KRI, in the Sheikhān area. During their history, Yezidis have been persecuted many times for their religion. For instance, there were the massacres of Yezidis in the 1830s, by the Kurdish rulers of semi-independent princedoms, Bedir Khan Beg of Botān and Mir Muhammad of Rowanduz. Thousands of Yezidis from the Ottoman Empire found refuge in what is now Armenia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More recently there were the terrorist suicide bomb attacks on

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4 The similarities and differences between the Zoroastrian cosmogony and that of the Yāresān and Yezidis suggest that the latter continue an original Indo-Iranian tradition, which has been modified in Zoroastrianism.

14 August 2007, in two Yezidi villages (Til Ezer and Siba Sheikh Khidir). From 3 August 2014, the Yezidis of Shingāl (Sinjar) became victims of IS genocide and were subjected to severe persecution. In this period, thousands of Yezidi men were publicly executed for refusing to convert to Islam; about 6,000 women and girls (some as young as 8 years old) were kidnapped and sold as slaves. Practically all 300,000 Yezidis from Shingāl have fled the area. While some Yezidis claim Kurdish identity, many others (in the Caucasus, but now also in Shingāl and elsewhere in Iraq) consider themselves to belong to an independent Yezidi *ethnie*.[5] In Iraq, this trend became much stronger after the IS attacks (see section 'Identity Issues after ISIS').

Sheikh ʿAdī ibn Musāfir Hakkārī (*ca.* 1073–1162), who was born in the village of Beit Far in the Beqaa Valley and studied in Baghdad with ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, played an important role in the shaping of Yezidism in the twelfth century. His followers were commonly known as ʿAdawīs. From the time of Ḥasan b. ʿAdī (b. 1195), the ʿAdawiyya order at Lālish appears to have acquired some characteristics which distinguished it from ʿAdawīs outside Kurdistan (Kreyenbroek, 1995: 27–36). Some Yezidi tribes are cited in historical chronicles as rulers of their own princedoms with the sphere of influence stretched into what is now Syria and Turkey (Guest, 1993).

Religious History

Yezidis believe not only that they are the people chosen by God, who will be rescued at the end of time, but also that they were created differently from all other peoples, namely from Adam only, whereas the other seventy-two peoples are descended from Adam and Eve.

Yezidi accounts of their religious history usually begin with myths about the creation of the universe. The Yezidi 'orthodox' or 'official' version of the cosmogony, as represented in the religious hymns, provides information about the mythological history of the community; the information of the sacred texts is supplemented by oral prose stories.[6] Prior to the time of creation of the world, God created a White Pearl[7] in spiritual form and dwelt in it alone. He then created the world from the Pearl. Before the creation of the world, God had created seven divine beings (Yez: Heft Sur; cf.

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5 On the question of Yezidi identity in the diaspora, see Ackermann (2004: 156–69) and Kreyenbroek (2009).

6 On the Yezidi cosmogony in detail, see Kreyenbroek (1995), Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005) and Omarkhali (2017).

7 Cf. in Zoroastrianism: a 'big light space' was the place of Ahura Mazdā (Bnd. Fr. 1: 2).

Yar: Haft Tan; Zor: (Haft) Ameshāsfand),[8] whose leader in Yezidism was Tawūsī Melek, who is responsible for this world. The main elements of this story are also attested in the Yāresān tradition.

Beliefs

As Yezidism is traditionally based primarily on orthopraxy and oral tradition, one can hardly speak of a single codified system of beliefs, though there are core elements that are acknowledged by all Yezidis. Yezidis believe in one God (Xwedē, Ēzdan, less commonly Heq). God created seven divine beings (*surr*, 'mystery', sometimes called 'angels'), whose leader is Tawūsī Melek (the Peacock Angel), the Lord of This World. The notion that Yezidis worship the principle of evil is mistaken, the result of a misinterpretation of the role of Tawūsī Melek, the 'Lord of This World' who is responsible for all that happens on earth, both good and bad (as humans would see it) (Kreyenbroek and Omarkhali, 2016: 123). As in Yarsanism (see below), there is a belief that some of the events of the time of creation repeat themselves in cycles of history. This idea is connected with the Yezidis' belief in reincarnation (*kirās gorīn*, lit. 'changing one's shirt'). In Yezidism, different concepts of time coexist: a pre-eternal time sphere (*anzal*); a cyclic course of time (*badīl* or *dawr*); a linear course, which runs from the start of the creation by God to the end of time; and three 'storms' (*tofān*) which divide the history of Yezidism into four stages (Omarkhali and Rezania, 2009: 346). Fire, water, air and earth are sacred elements which may not be polluted. During prayer, Yezidis face towards the sun.

Social Structure and Priesthood Hierarchy

Yezidi society has three hereditary groups, often called 'castes' in academic literature. Membership of the Yezidi community as such, and of one of the 'castes', is conferred by birth. Two 'castes', comprising about 6–7 per cent of the population, belong to 'religious leaders', the *pīrs* and sheikhs; the third caste are laymen (*mirīd*). According to the complex Yezidis marriage rules, the community is endogamous, and marriages between members of different 'castes' are forbidden. This became a big problem in the different diaspora communities, and questions were raised as to a possible reformation of this rule (cf. Kreyenbroek, 2009).

8 The following abbreviations will be used here: Al for Alevism; Yar for Yarsanism; Yez for Yezidism; Zor for Zoroastrianism.

According to the traditional rules, all Yezidis must have their own *pīr*, *sheikh*, *hosta*, *merebī* and *bir(ay)ē/xushka axiretē* (brother/sister of the hereafter), who are responsible for their spiritual life and development (similar structures exist among Dersimi Alevis and Yāresān, see below). Nowadays, both in the homelands and in the diaspora, the *hostā* and *merebī* no longer play a significant role. The priestly hierarchy in Lālish also includes a number of community leaders, such as the *bābā sheikh*, the *pēshīmām*, the *bābā chāwūsh*, the *mijēwir* and the *faqrā* (nuns). The nominal secular and religious head of all Yezidis is the *mīr* (prince). His position is hereditary; the office now belongs to the clan of the sheikhs of Sheikhūbekir. The current *mīr*, since July 2019, is Mir Hazim Mir Tahsin Beg.

Texts

Though many Yezidis claim that they once had a written scripture, at this moment at least the Yezidi religious tradition does not have a holy writ. The Yezidis, therefore, are not regarded in Islam as 'People of the Book' (Ahl al-Kitāb) and do not enjoy the civil rights accorded to these. IS considered the Yezidis as 'infidels', and 'devil worshippers', and offered them the option of converting to Islam or death.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, two texts described as 'Sacred Books of the Yezidis' came to be known in the West, the *Jilve* and *Meshefā Resh* (Bittner, 1913; Frayha, 1946: 18–43; Joseph, 1919; Mingana, 1916), which first raised much scholarly interest. Though some parts of these texts correspond to authentic traditions, a majority of scholars eventually came to the conclusion that these 'books' were not genuine. There are a few authentic Yezidi religious written manuscripts of different types, which are usually preserved in the families of *pīr*s or sheikhs; on the various types of such manuscripts, see Omarkhali (2017: 55–78).

The Yezidi religious tradition comprises a large corpus of sacred poetry and prose texts that were handed down orally. Sacred poetry is memorized by knowledgeable representatives of the Yezidi priesthood, by a special group of 'reciters' (*qawāl*) and sometimes by others.[9] Among the various categories of these texts, the most respected is the religious 'hymns' (*qewls*), which are considered as divine.[10] They are mainly performed as liturgical texts during

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9 On ways of transmission, see further Omarkhali (2017: esp. 137–75).
10 On these texts, see further Celīl and Celīl (1978a, 1978b), Kreyenbroek (1995), Kreyenbroek and Rashow (2005), Hecī (2002), Silēman and Cindī (1979), Reşo (2004).

religious festivals and other religious events and are collectively known as ʿUlmē Khwedē (Knowledge of God).

The Yezidi religious tradition, both sacred texts and priestly learning, were transmitted orally until recently. Though there were sporadic publications of some of the religious poetic texts before, at the end of the 1970s, three collections of the Yezidi religious sacred texts were published by Yezidi intellectuals: in Yerevan and Moscow (Celīl and Celīl, 1978a, 1978b) and in Baghdad (Silēman and Cindī, 1979). These publications marked the beginning of the scripturalization process of the religious textual tradition.

Almost all Yezidi oral religious texts are composed in Kurmanji. The language of the religious texts differs from modern spoken Kurmanji and is widely felt to be archaic. Apart from this, the texts of the *qewl*s are highly allusive and impossible to understand without knowledge of the traditional prose stories (*çīrok*) and religious traditions generally. These texts were traditionally explained to the people by religious 'experts', whose authority was unquestioned until recently.

Some Observances

As the Yezidi religious tradition is still mostly transmitted orally and the authority of local authorities plays a considerable role, there are some variations in traditional religious practice in the various communities. One of the main universal festivals for all Yezidi communities is the Feast of Ēzīd (ʿEyda Ēzīd), which is preceded by a three-day fast and falls on the first Friday of Eastern December; this feast has counterparts in Yarsanism and Alevism (see below).

Some major festivals are only celebrated by the community of Iraq, these include New Year (*Serē Salē*) on the first Wednesday of Eastern April; and the Feast of the Assembly (*Cejna Cimayē*) from 23 September till 1 October (Eastern). Furthermore, there are local festivals (Sheikhān: *Tiwaf*; Shingāl: *Cema*), often dedicated to saints or holy figures. In the Caucasus, a New Year ceremony exists which is known as *Klocha (Kloça) Serē Salē;* it falls on the first Wednesday of (Eastern) March.

Yāresān

Yāresān history is twofold. There are 'objective', 'etic' accounts, based on external sources combined with internal evidence, and 'emic' (Yāresān) religious accounts that could be called 'religious history'. Although there is evidence to suggest that similar groups already existed in western Iran, the

community as we know it today was apparently founded by Soltān Sahāk in the fifteenth/sixteenth century, who united different groups under his authority. The founding of the Safavid Empire in the early sixteenth century may have played a role in this process.

The earliest phase of this community took place in Hawramān, where the shrine of Soltān Sahāk is still much venerated, but where hardly any Yāresān now live. There is internal and external evidence of a move away from Hawramān to Zarde in the Gurān region, probably around 1500 CE, where much of the later features of the group's tradition may have taken shape (Kreyenbroek, 2017; cf. Mokri, 1963). During the early 'Zarde' period, it seems that there was a conflict between two community leaders, Bābā Yādegār and Shāh Ebrāhim. Groups of early Yāresān then spread towards what is now Iraq (Kreyenbroek, 2017). The religion also spread among Turkic-speaking communities in Azerbaijan and Hamadan. In Lorestān similar groups may have existed before Soltān Sahāk, who became integrated into the new cult.

Some important figures have emerged in recent centuries. In the nineteenth century, Sayyed Heydar (d. 1863), better known as Sayyed Brake, became a leading figure in the Gurān region and was regarded by the Gurani community as a manifestation of the Divine. Sayyed Brake was surrounded by a group of disciples known as the 'Thirty-Six Poets', who composed new religious poems in Gurani. The spiritual leadership of the Gurani Yāresān continues in Sayyed Brake's family.

Another claim to leadership had more profound consequences for the community as a whole. Hājj Neʿmatollāh Jeyhunābādi (1871–1920, see Membrado, 2008) was evidently a charismatic figure but did not belong to a family of Sayyeds (see below). Nevertheless, he aspired to the spiritual leadership of the community of the Sahne area, where he was born. He soon had a large following of pious Yāresān in Sahne, who accepted his claim to be the *Sāheb al-zamān* (Lord of the Age). This led to tensions with the established religious leadership in the region, who banished Jeyhunābādi. Later he returned, giving up all claims to active leadership. However, he continued to follow his spiritual calling, claiming to be a *didedār* ('one who has the Sight', see below) and devoting his life to the comparative study of the traditions of the various priestly lineages (see below). In his teachings, he aimed to reconcile the traditional Yāresān faith with Twelver Shiism. His teachings had a great impact on the Yāresān community as a whole: they led to the emergence of a new 'modernist' branch of the religion and caused a profound schism in the community (Mir-Hosseini, 1996: 111–34).

Religious History

In Yāresān religious history, two spheres of reality are to be distinguished: 'outer' (*zāher*) reality, which is the reality we all experience; and 'inner' (*bāten*) reality, a kind of essential or ideal, absolute reality which partly informs outer reality in ways that can only be understood by a spiritual elite. God dwells in the *bāten* reality and caused the *zāher* world to emerge. He created the world first in the form of a Pearl that contained all elements of terrestrial life; a sacrifice then took place, and the Pearl exploded; from this our world was formed. This primeval sacrifice was attended by the Seven Beings (Haft Tan), to whom God delegated the control of this world. In the Yāresān and Yezidi view of history, time essentially repeats itself, and the history of the world consists of a number of repetitive cycles (Yar: *dowre*, Yez: *dewr*, *bedīl*). Apart from those holy figures, a special veneration for ʿAli also plays a role in many, though not all, Yārsāni traditions. In Yarsanism the Seven Beings who were present at the primordial sacrifice are believed to become incarnate in this world during each cycle of its history (cf. Kreyenbroek, 2008). In our world, the Haft Tan and some other great Beings are represented by a lineage (*khāndān*) of Sayyeds (hereditary religious leaders). At the moment, most Yāresān accept eleven *khāndān*s. Some smaller groups recognize a twelfth *khāndān,* insofar as they accept a later figure (Gurān: Sayyed Brake; elsewhere: Hājj Neʿmatollāh Jeyhunābādi) as the founder of a new *khāndān*.

Beliefs

The belief in repetition also affects ideas about the fate of the soul after death: the soul is thought to move through a series of 1,000 reincarnations. This implies that different historical figures may be incarnations of the same 'essence'. Furthermore, Divine Beings may appear of the earth in human form or may become the 'guest' (*mehmān*) of an individual for some time, or throughout that person's life.

Understanding the deeper meaning of the appearances of this life is one of the main concerns of Yārsān religious wisdom. All that occurs in this world is thought to be ordained by the Seven Beings (Haft Tan) whose leader is the Lord of This World, God's vicegerent on earth, who is inherently good. Thus the deeper meaning of all that occurs in the world requires the special understanding offered by religious knowledge. One way towards such knowledge is the intensive study of the Yāresān

'hymns' (*kalām*),[11] which is mostly the province of Sayyeds, though others may also undertake it. Furthermore, some people with special gifts (*didedār*) may have access to this knowledge without study.

All Yāresān must have a 'spiritual director' (*pīr*), who is a Sayyed, and therefore a member of one of the *khāndān*s. In theory, at least, the *pīr* is responsible for the spiritual well-being of his followers (*murīd*), and at the time of writing many *pīr*s are still capable of transmitting the values and traditions of the community, in the light of their understanding of the contents of the *kalām*s, or 'hymns'. However, in many locations, the ties between *pīr* and *murīd* are becoming looser, and as the holy texts are now easily available in written form (see below) many Yāresān, particularly in the diaspora, are now seeking to gain a new understanding of the teachings of their faith through independent study of the texts.

<p style="text-align:center">Texts</p>

In traditional Yāresāni culture, the *kalām*s were mainly transmitted orally within the various *khāndān*s, which caused variants to occur in the texts. The texts were grouped according to the *dowre* (cycle) to which they were attributed so that most *kalām*s are said to belong to a certain *dowre*. It is widely believed that a written holy book comprising these texts had once existed but was lost. The name *Saranjām* may have been associated with this hypothetical work. In reality, until recently, a believer might order a written copy of a specific text or group of texts from members of a specific family of authorized copyists, which was then handed down as a precious object in the family. The transmission of the sacred texts, however, mainly took place orally. The collection and publication of comprehensive or representative collections of sacred texts for the use of the community or for the more general public appear to have begun in the latter decades of the twentieth century. We now have a number of such publications, usually entitled *Saranjām* or *Diwān-e Gewre* (*Great Collection*).

As to content, most *kalām*s are allusive in character and cannot be understood unless the recipient is familiar with the mythology and religious history of the group. As was said earlier, the main body of the *kalām*s is in a more or less artificial, 'literary' variant of Gurani (Kreyenbroek and Chaman-Ara, 2013), which in the past could easily be understood by speakers of several languages and dialects of the eastern Kurdish regions. At the moment

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11 The term *kalām* is used for these compositions by some Yāresān and most outsiders. Yāresāni usage varies, however, and some members of the group use different terms.

relatively few Yāresān in Iran still understand this language well; in Iraq, where forms of Gurani are still spoken, comprehension is better. Considerable numbers of *kalām*s in a Turkic language exist (Geranpayeh, 2007), and a few such texts are in Mokriāni Kurdish or Persian.

Some Observances

Jam. The main Yāresān ritual, the *jam* or *zekr*, in a sense re-enacts the events of creation. The rite combines strong ecstatic elements with the ritual consumption of food and drink. At least seven male members of the community must take part in this ritual; these sit in a circle, which they may not leave during the ceremony. Others, men, women and children, may stand around the circle.

Music plays a key role in the *jam* and some other rituals. Religious songs, which are not identical with the *kalām*s but in some cases derive from them, are accompanied by the music of the sacred instrument, the *tanbūr*.

Fasts in Winter. The Fast of Marnow is a three-day fast in winter, held to commemorate the rescue of Soltān after he had spent three days hiding from his enemies in a cave. The fast is followed by the great Feast of *Khāwandegār*. Many Yāresān regard this fast as obligatory. The Fast of Qawaltās is another three-day fast in winter, which some regard as the more important fast, while others regard it as a voluntary observance.

Dersimi Alevism

The term Alevi ('follower of ʿAli') can refer to members of a large and diverse section of the population of Turkey, whose religious cults and traditions have certain resemblances but also show a great deal of variety. In the Zazaki- and Kurdish-speaking region of Tunceli (referred to by many Alevis by its previous name, Dersim) a number of traditions can be found that have parallels among the Yāresān and Yezidis but are not common among other Alevis. These parallel beliefs and observances are generally referred to in older sources and communications by older people, and may no longer represent modern realities (Bumke, 1979: 515). While most Alevis regard themselves as Shiite Muslims, perhaps with an admixture of ancient Turkish beliefs, many Dersimis regard their religion as being originally Iranian and in some cases as a form of Zoroastrianism.[12] Most of these common elements suggest non-Islamic roots, as is shown below. The fact that only one regional tradition

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12 On this and on the links between Dersimi Alevis and Yāresān, see van Bruinessen (2017); on the latter question, see also van Bruinessen (1997).

among the many Alevi communities shows such elements reinforces the theory of an earlier Iranian substrate in this area.

Common Elements between Yezidis, Yāresān and Dersimi Alevis

(1) None of these groups traditionally observes the five 'pillars' (*arkān*) of Islam: the recitation of the Confession of Faith (*shahāda*); the fast during Ramadan; payment of the religious taxes (zakat); and the pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj).

(2) In all three communities, spiritual authority is invested in members of two hereditary groups (Yez: *ocax*; Al: *ocak*; Yar: *khāndān*) of spiritual leaders (Yez: sheikh and *pīr*; Yar: *pīr* and Dalil;[13] Al: *pīr* and Rehber). Each member of the groups must accept the authority of these figures. The connection between 'preceptor' and 'disciple' represents a hereditary bond between families (for Alevism, see Bumke, 1979: 534–5; van Bruinessen, 1997: 6; for Yarsanism, see Kreyenbroek, 2014: 9).

(3) All groups recognize a formal, close and life-long connection between two or three community members. The Alevis call this bond *müsahıplık* (Bumke, 1979: 534); the Yezidis speak of (*yar*) *bir(ay)ē/xuşka axiretē* (brother/sister of the hereafter);[14] the Yāresān, among whom the custom only survives among some groups in Iraqi Kurdistan, use the term *brāy/wālley Yārī* (brother/sister in Yarsanism). A belief in reincarnation is clearly attested in all traditions.

(4) The belief that the Divine can become manifest in humans (*hulūl/holul*) is shared by Yāresān and Alevis, and to some extent by the Yezidis.

(5) The core ritual practice of Yāresān and Alevis is called *jam/cem*. These rituals have several features in common, notably the singing of sacred music and playing of sacred instruments (Al: *saz* or *bağlama*; Yar: *tanbūr*; the instruments are virtually identical), and the fact that participants form a circle. The Yezidis also have two 'sacred instruments', the *def* (tambourine) and *shibāb* (flute).

(6) The existence in all three communities of a corpus of sacred texts (Yez: *qewl*, *beyt*; Al: *nefes*; Yar: *kalām*), which have a status similar to that which most Islamic communities accord to the Qur'an.

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13 The role of the hereditary Dalil (*Khādem*, *Kāki*) in Yarsanism is still a reality in some Kāka'i communities and in Gahwāre in Iran. Moreover, the Dalil is mentioned in many older sources. In most modern communities in Iran, however, pious laymen can take on the ritual role of the Dalil.

14 In Armenia the form *yar birê axiretê* is also found.

(7) The figure of Melek Tawūs (Tawūsī Melek), which is mistakenly associated by many outsiders with the Devil, appears in the mythology of all three religions (Al: van Bruinessen, 1997: 9; Yez: Kreyenbroek, 1995; Yar: van Bruinessen, 2014).

(8) Traditionally, group members were forbidden from marrying outside their own community.

(9) Men did not shave off their moustaches.

(10) Yezidism and Yarsanism share the observance of a fast around mid-winter, which is followed by a celebration of the birth of the founder of the faith (Yar: *Khāwandegār*; Yez: ʿ*Eyda Ēzīd*).[15] This is reminiscent of the Alevi three-day fast in honour of Khidr in mid-February (*Hızır Orucu*).

(11) The Yezidi and Yāresān traditions clearly reflect a belief in a cyclical form of history, which implies that the events of the time of creation are essentially repeated during a succession of 'periods'. Traces of a similar belief are found in the Alevi tradition (Selmanpakoğlu, 2006: 90).

(12) Yezidism, Yarsanism and Zoroastrianism recognize that the world is ruled by seven 'archangels' (Zor: Haft Amshāsfand; Yez: Heft Surr; Yar: Haft Tan).

The Shabak

As Leezenberg (1994) rightly remarks, not enough is known about a distinct 'Shabak' religion (whose existence is widely admitted by the community) to enable us to do more than draw attention to its existence. It seems that they recognize the *pīr–murīd* relationship that is also found among Yezidis, Yāresān and Alevis; they visit Yezidi shrines in the region and have a sacred book in Turkoman named either *Buyruk* or *Kitāb al-Manāqib*. In spite of their apparently Turkic affiliations, their language is a form of Gurani/Macho, which originated in the Kurdish parts of the Iraq–Iran border area. Although it seems far from certain to what extent Shabak identity is based on a connection with the 'Shabak religion', their community is often seen as a heterodox, religious one, and as such, they were exposed to the enmity of many outsiders.

Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism is a religion that originated with the appearance of Zarathustra (Greek: Zoroastēr) in the north-eastern Iranian lands around

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15 On the feast of *Khāwandegār*, see Kreyenbroek (2014: 10). On the Yezidi fast, see Kreyenbroek (1995: 155–6).

1000 BCE or earlier. A comprehensive description of its beliefs and practices would fall beyond the scope of this chapter. In contrast to the 'Kurdish' religions described above, Zoroastrianism sees the world in pronouncedly 'dualist' terms: as an arena in which the forces of good (represented on earth by the Seven Beings to whom Ahura Mazdā/ Ohrmazd left the control of the world, the Haft Ameshasfand) do battle with the powers of evil, led by the evil Angra Mainyu/Ahreman. All God's creations except man can only be good; all Ahreman's creations are essentially evil. Mankind, on the other hand, has been given the choice between good and evil; humans are intended to play a key role in ridding the world from evil through their intention and actions. The souls of humans who chose goodwill go to paradise; those who chose evil will spend time in hell. When evil will have been completely defeated in this world, the world we know will come to an end, time will cease to exist, the dead will rise from their graves and the world will enter a timeless, ideal stage. Many beliefs originating in Zoroastrianism, such as those in heaven and hell, the resurrection and the end of time, appear to have found their way into Christianity and Islam.

Neo-Zoroastrianism

Such factors, together with the idea that Islam is a 'Semitic' or 'Abrahamic' religion while Zoroastrianism springs from the early Iranian culture shared by the forefathers of the Kurds, and not least by a sense of aversion to the Islam portrayed by extremists such as IS, caused a number of Kurds to convert to a form of Zoroastrianism. In the 1930s and 1940s, in the magazine *Hawar*, the brothers Celadet and Kamuran Bedir Khan promoted the idea that the original religion of the Kurds was Yezidism, which they understood as a form of Zoroastrianism (Allison, 2009). In the 1970s, Abdullah Öcalan, the founder of the Partiya Karkerēn Kurdistan (PKK), claimed that Zoroastrianism was the original religion of the Kurds (see e.g. Szanto, 2018). In Sweden, Kurds founded a 'Kurdish Zoroastrian' temple in or around 2011, which aimed to reconvert Kurds to what was felt to be their original religion, and they worked towards acceptance of Zoroastrianism as an official religion in the autonomous region (Rudaw, 2016). This came to pass in 2015; there are now two Zoroastrian centres in Suleymani (Szanto, 2018). The 'Kurdish Zoroastrian' religion does not seek to imitate the somewhat orthopractic approach of the Iranian and Indian Zoroastrians. Many members, it seems, feel that their choice is based on a sense of Kurdish identity rather than

religious belief. Some believe that Zarathustra was a Kurd and that Gurani is closely related to Avestan.

Recent History

Yezidis

Details of the recent history of the Yezidis in different countries would need to be investigated separately, as they are frequently divergent, which would lie beyond the scope of this chapter. Still, there are some debates and changes affecting all Yezidi communities and some notable developments in individual countries.

Identity Issues after IS

The tendency to identify as a separate ethnic group rather than as Kurds intensified strongly after the IS genocide of Yezidis in Shingāl in 2014. The Yezidis of Shingāl and many others see the flight of the (mainly Muslim) peshmerga forces, who were to protect people in the area at the time of the IS attack, as a betrayal showing a lack of solidarity with Yezidis. Moreover, according to some Yezidi eyewitness reports, some of their Muslim neighbours, including Kurds, co-operated with the Islamist aggressors (van Bruinessen, 2016: 119). This evoked memories of earlier persecutions of, and attacks on, the Yezidis, most of which were also led by local Kurdish rulers. These events are deeply rooted in their cultural memory, being kept alive by means of oral history-telling and heroic songs. Thus, the barrier between Muslim Kurds and Yezidis became stronger, and fragile trust was replaced by increased fears in the area. This led many Yezidis to leave Iraq, and the question of an autonomous Yezidi region in the Ninawā governorate was raised in the community. The new mistrust between Yezidis and Muslims also led to a number of conflicts in the diaspora, notably in Germany.

Transformation and Reappraisal of Values

As a result of changes in Yezidi society, particularly in the diaspora, there had been discussions about the possibility of changing some of the traditional religious/cultural rules, such as the marriage rules (i.e. caste endogamy), the question of the bride price (qelen), the concept of honour, the role of women and the status of the traditional 'priestly' authorities (Kreyenbroek, 2009). These debates, however, remained at the grassroots level and were not acknowledged either by the religious authorities or by the leadership of

local communities. The IS attack, on the other hand, precipitated an official reappraisal of certain traditional values in Yezidi society.[16] When some of the Yezidi women who had been enslaved by IS returned to their communities, the traditional penalty for the 'sin' of having sexual relations with non-Yezidis, namely, excommunication, was changed. All women and girls who escaped IS were accepted back as Yezidis in good standing; a new ritual for their 'purification' was instituted and conducted by the spiritual leader of Yezidis, the *bābā sheikh* (Omarkhali, 2017: 557). Traditionally, moreover, a person who converted to another religion could not return to Yezidism. Now, all Yezidis, men or women, who were forced to accept Islam by the IS militants and escaped captivity, were officially accepted back as Yezidis.

Iraq

In 1988, during the Anfal campaign, many Yezidi villages (and also the villages of the Shabaks and Kāka'is) were destroyed and the inhabitants were resettled in the newly created collective villages (*mujammaʿāt*). After the 1991 uprising against Saddam Hussein at the end of the Persian Gulf War, concerns for Kurdish refugees led the United Nations Security Council to establish a 'safe haven' in most of the Kurdish areas of Iraq. This development eventually gave rise to the institution of the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraqi Kurdistan. Possibly because this newly created entity needed a stronger sense of cultural identity, one of the Kurdish parties, Barzani's 'Kurdistan Democratic Party' (KDP), stressed the Yezidis' status as representatives of an ancient Kurdish culture. During the many changes and upheavals that followed the initial institution of the safe haven, the Yezidi community can be said to have undergone a process of emancipation. Yezidis no longer seek to hide their identity; they are represented in the parliament and they now have a voice in society. Centres have been established for the preservation of Yezidi culture, notably the religious organization Bingehē Lālish, which was established in Duhok in 1993 with support from the Kurdish Regional Government. As of 2012, it had about thirty affiliates and offices all over the Kurdistan region, as well as in Shingāl (Omarkhali, 2017: 276). However, it must be added that most ordinary Yezidis do not co-operate with the people who work for these organizations. After the IS attacks the Yezidis formed their own military regiments (as did the Kāka'is and Shabak). It is worth noting also that Yezidi women now often represent their community in the international political arena.

16 Cf. the interview with Ilhan Kizilhan in Omarkhali (2016).

Syria

The complex political developments affecting the two main Yezidi communities of Syria (i.e. those of Afrin and of the Jazira) have been discussed in detail by Maisel (2016). As Afrin is currently occupied by Turkish forces and the entire region is in turmoil, the future of the Syrian communities cannot be foreseen.

Armenia and Georgia

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought considerable changes in the traditional way of life of the Caucasian Yezidis. There were migrations to, and non-compact settlements in, the Russian Federation and Ukraine: these were new environments with fewer opportunities for gatherings, and they were subject to the influence of the more individualistic Russian culture (Omarkhali, 2014: 74).

In Georgia, a Yezidi 'temple' (Quba Siltan Ēzīd) and a cultural centre ('House of Yezidis of Georgia') were opened on 16 June 2015. Both the building and many of the rituals connected with the new 'temple' are modelled upon those of Lālish in Iraq. Another 'temple' was built in Armenia, besides the recently opened *ziyaret* (place of pilgrimage) in the village of Shamiram. The Yezidi priesthood from Lālish blessed the buildings in both Georgia and Armenia.

European Diaspora Communities

Although there is no absolute unity, the Yezidi community in Germany is probably the most well-established and organized of the European diaspora communities. Various cultural organizations have been founded there, and there are many attempts to preserve Yezidi religion and culture through seminars, gatherings and other activities. The majority of the Yezidis in Germany originate from Turkey, but there is also a large number of Yezidis from Iraq, and now a growing group from Syria; there are also some Yezidis from the former Soviet republics.

Yāresān

Iran

Owing to the schism in the community caused by the teaching of Sheikh Neʿmatollāh Jeyhunābādi and by other local differences, one can now

distinguish between three groups of Yāresān: (1) one based in the Gurān region, which tends to insist on its non-Islamic identity; (2) a non-Jeyhunabadist group in the Sahne region, which does not reject a fundamentally Shiite identity and has a great veneration for ʿAli ibn Abī Tālib; in spite of this, the group is not recognized by the Islamic authorities and has no rights under the law, being regarded as a 'misguided sect' (*ferqe-ye dāle*); (3) the Jeyhunabadists, who have a strong presence in Sahne and other parts of Iran as well as in the European diaspora. The latter group is fiercely rejected by the two others but appears to be more or less accepted as a *maktab*, or acceptable religious 'school', by the Iranian authorities. Some Twelve Shiite sources, however, denounce the group as un-Islamic because of its belief in reincarnation (*tanāsokh*) and incarnation of divine beings (*holul*).

After the revolution of 1979, the Islamic Republic apparently feared to have non-orthodox groups on its border with Iraq and brought severe pressure on the communities of Gurān to proclaim their adherence to Shiism. At first, they completely refused to so do, but later they occasionally found ways of taking part in Shiite observances without compromising their own faith. However, they continue to reject the definition of Yarsanism as a form of Islam.

The non-Jeyhunabadist groups have faced considerable persecution since the foundation of the Islamic Republic, though such measures appear to be more or less random in character. In 2001, Sayyed Khalil Ālinezhād (a great master of the *tanbūr*, a very popular religious leader in the Sahne area, and a staunch enemy of the Jeyhunabadists), who had fled to Sweden, was killed in Gothenburg, apparently by Iranian government agents. This caused great alarm among all non-Jeyhunabadist Yāresān. The years that followed saw a series of grave clashes between Yāresāni individuals or groups with the authorities. There have been reports of the destruction of a shrine in the village of Khobyārān Jalālvand in Kermānshāh province in June 2011.

At least from 2015 onwards, applications have been made by the Yāresān 'Community Civil Activists Society', which is said to represent some two million followers in Iran, to amend the constitution so that their religion may receive official recognition as a religious minority, but so far without success (CHRI, 2016). Among other things, this means that the Yāresān are neither allowed to study at university nor to be employed by state institutions. Employment elsewhere may end as soon as a person's Yāresāni identity is discovered. During compulsory military service, Yāresān men are forced to shave or trim their moustaches, which they regard as an affront to their religion and their integrity as believers. In many places in Iran, in order to

function in society Yāresān have no option but to pretend to be Twelver Shiites.

Iraq

From the mid-1970s till the late 1980s, particularly during the Anfal campaign in 1988, many Kāka'is were dispossessed as a result of Saddam Hussein's efforts to Arabize the Kurdish regions, and pressures were brought to bear on them to identify as Arabs (Leezenberg, 1994: 11–13). In 1997, the Kāka'is of Kirkuk and others were threatened with deportation unless they changed their ethnic identity to Arab (Hosseini, 2015: 6). The Kāka'is have always kept a low profile in Iraqi and Kurdish society, and are underrepresented on public bodies. The invasion of IS in 2014 gave rise to intense fears in the community, as among Yezidis and Shabak. In Nineveh province, several thousand Kāka'is and Shabak were forced to flee their areas, some of which were recaptured by KRG forces in 2016 (Salih, 2016). Fear of IS apparently inspired some Kāka'is to declare at a press conference that they were Muslims (Clarion Project, 2016; Hosseini, 2015: 1, 7). In 2015, the Kāka'is formed three military regiments under the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs. The religion received official recognition from the Kurdish Regional Government in 2015.

Dersimi Alevis

In 1934, the process of 'Turkification' of religious and ethnic minorities in Turkey began with the passing of the 'Law on Resettlement'. Its measures included the forced relocation of people within the country. In 1935, the region of Dersim, whose inhabitants were mostly Kurdish- and Zazaki-speaking Alevis, was renamed Tunceli. The region had a reputation for being insubordinate and inclined to rebellion. In 1937–8, after a major uprising in the Dersim area led by the Alevi chieftain Seyyid Riza, the Turkish government launched a savage military campaign against this region, as a result of which thousands of Zazaki- and Kurdish-speaking Alevis died and many others were displaced. This resulted in further alienation of the local Alevi population. In 1994–5, there were military operations again in Tunceli and western Bingöl. According to van Bruinessen (1997: 2), the community is now divided in its loyalties to the Turkish state, the PKK and smaller groups advocating Zazaki or Alevi nationalism. In 2011, the Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan offered a public apology for the atrocities of 1937–8, a sentiment repeated in 2014 by Foreign Minister Davutoğlu (Farooq, 2014).

The Alevis appear to have responded to these steps with reserve. In the summer of 2018, widespread forest fires in the Tunceli region were thought by many to have been the result of the establishment's ill-will against the Alevi population of the region (Bianet, 2018).

Shabak

In the past half-century, the Shabak have faced pressures from Arabs, Kurds and Turkomen to identify with those groups, and were made to suffer when they did not. In 1988, during the Anfal campaign, many of their villages were destroyed and the inhabitants settled in *mujammaʿāt*, or collective settlements (Leezenberg, 1994). Some Shabaks now advocate a 'Shabakistān' of their own. The Shabak community, it seems, did not seek to enter Iraqi/Kurdish politics until 2003, when the Shabak Democratic Assembly (Tajammuʿ al-Šabak al-Dimuqrāṭī) was founded. After the IS incursion, the Shabak formed a militia of their own. The representative of the Shabak community in the Iraqi parliament Salim Juma received verbal approval from the parliament to form this militia (Iraqi News, 2014). Leezenberg (2014) notes a tendency among the non-Sunni Shabak to identify increasingly with Twelver Shiism.

General Tendencies

Traditionally, these minority groups (except the Neo-Zoroastrians) stressed the importance of observance of the community rules (such as preserving one's honour) and adherence to tradition, rather than a detailed understanding of religious teachings. The latter was felt to be the province of the community's religious leadership, which commanded enormous respect and had great authority in religious matters. The knowledge and interpretation of the sacred texts were largely restricted to the 'religious classes'. In the case of the Yezidis and Yāresān, these texts were mostly transmitted orally and were not easily accessible to the laity.

As these groups came into closer contact with the outside world, particularly in the diaspora, they were confronted with an implicit definition of religion as a system of beliefs rather than practices, which increasingly led them to seek answers about the teachings and meaning of their religion. Another contributory factor here is the separation of the diaspora communities from the sacred places and traditional customs of their homelands – in short, the loss of important parts of traditional life – which strengthens the need to understand the religion as a system of teachings. Alternatively, we

also see tendencies among diaspora groups to define their traditions first and foremost as 'cultural', rather than 'religious' (see further below).

There are generally intensive contacts between diaspora communities and the homelands, and the experiences of the former often affect the community as a whole. Generally speaking, diaspora communities are quicker to seek new solutions, but in the case of the Yezidis, for instance, the horrors of the IS attack of 2014 caused the Iraqi community to take the lead in instituting profound changes.

In both the Yezidi and the Yāresāni communities, sacred texts have recently become available in published form, and can now be studied by all who are capable of such intellectual pursuits. All this appears to be leading towards a paradigm change whereby the texts are scrutinized for meaning by intellectuals, rather than used as a source of traditional authority by traditional 'priestly' figures. The fact that many individuals are now separated from their traditional sacred places and cannot perform their age-old rituals there also leads to a new quest for the meaning of their religious tradition. The new search for meaning – on the basis of ancient oral tradition and a body of texts that are not easy to understand, by communities who no longer accept the absolute authority of the 'priestly' class – is an arduous and often frustrating undertaking. One implication of this search for the 'true' teachings of the religion is that, whilst slightly different traditions once existed side by side, we now see a tendency towards unification. This process is enhanced by the fact that, both in the homelands and the diaspora, the meeting of representatives of different communities leads to a broadening of their horizon beyond their own local tradition.

Whilst several minority groups thus have to face internal challenges and demands for a redefinition of their religion on the basis of teachings and 'meaning', many also face pressures from the outside world. These often take the form of threats to, or demands from, the community as a social, rather than a religious, entity. Such outside pressures can thus increase a tendency in the group to (re-)define itself as an ethnic or cultural (rather than a religious) community (see further below). On the other hand, outside influences may lead to internal religious changes. In the case of Yezidism, for instance, the IS attack on the Yezidis of Sinjār led to the abduction of thousands of Yezidi women as slaves. Through no fault of their own, these women were hardly able to preserve their chastity, which according to traditional Yezidi religious rules meant they could not be accepted back into the community. Interestingly and importantly these rules, which until then had appeared to

be unchangeable, were adapted to this situation. The women were readmitted as full and honourable members of the Yezidi community. To the satisfaction of most Yezidis, but not of the very conservative wing, it was thus demonstrated that age-old rules could be reinterpreted. For younger Yezidis, this, in turn, posed the question as to what other antiquated rules could be dispensed with.

Another result of the catastrophe of 2014 was that a large section of the Iraqi Yezidi community felt betrayed by the Muslim Kurdish peshmerga forces, who had failed to protect the Yezidis of Sinjār. Many Iraqi and diaspora Yezidis, therefore, repudiated their Kurdish identity, claiming a separate ethnicity and, in some cases, a Yezidi homeland in Sinjār. The question of ethnic identity haunts many of the minority groups discussed here. The Shabak (Leezenberg, 2014), and Alevis (van Bruinessen, 1997: 11–22) have been confronted by the need to (re-) define their identities vis-à-vis such larger groups as Arabs, Turks and Kurds. As was said earlier, out of fear for IS a group of Kāka'is publicly declared they were Muslim; this statement was, however, contradicted almost at once by other Kāka'is (Ekurd Daily, 2016).

Thus, outside threats to, or demands of, religious minorities in the Kurdish regions implicitly require these to define themselves as communities rather than religious entities. Sökefeld (2004) suggests that the Alevi community in the diaspora is increasingly inclined to see itself as a 'cultural' rather than a 'religious' group. The Shabak, it seems, hardly feel that their identity is based on religion. The modern Yezidi community, on the other hand, is in the process of redefining itself internally both as an ethnic and a religious entity. In the case of the Kāka'is in Iraq, the lack of a coherent organization seems to prevent the group from achieving widely accepted, intentional changes, although the fact that they organized a military resistance to IS (Salih and van Wilgenburg, 2015) suggests a degree of organization in the face of great danger. Many Iranian Yāresān are too preoccupied with their personal security at the moment to be much concerned with questions of social identity.

The appearance of a new 'Kurdish Zoroastrian' identity among Kurds who can no longer identify with the religion of IS suggests that some Muslim Kurds, like many members of minority groups, are no longer content to adhere blindly to the religious tradition they were born into, but are seeking a form of religion that is consistent with their general worldview. On the other hand, many followers of minority religions, particularly in the diaspora, can no longer see their tradition as 'religious' and tend to define it as a 'cultural' or 'ethnic' heritage.

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The Kurdish Alevis

The Followers of the Path of Truth (Raa Haq/Riya Heqi)

ERDAL GEZIK

> *Sodir ke / Kam ke ewladê xo ra haskeno / Duskinê îtîqatê Heqî / Rocî ke selam da / Mîrçikî wanenê / Î mîrçikî qey wanenê / Î Heqî rê minnete kenê / Wertê a dua mîrcikan de / Minneta xo bivînê / Hurdî hurdî qey wanenê / Rocî rê, tîcî rê minnete kenê / Wurcê ra / Dest û riyê xo bişuyê / Su vere roc / Î mîrçikan de minnete bikerê / Minneta wertê sodirî / Mîrçikî meqbulê Heqî yê.*

> When it is morning / Those who love their children / Who are devoted to God / When the sun is greeting / The birds are chirping / Why are they chirping? / They are showing their gratitude to God / Through the prayers of the birds / Find your own gratitude / Why are they chirping so gently? / They are showing their gratitude to the sun, to the light / Wake up / Wash your hands and face / Go and stand before the sun / Pray with the birds / In the course of the morning prayer / The birds are God's accepted ones.

It was in 1996 in the Netherlands when I recorded this prayer in Kirmancki,[1] recited by an old lady who for the past two decades had been living far from her birthplace Dersim (Tunceli). Turning her face to the rising sun and saying this prayer each morning, she was one of the few people I had met in Western Europe who was still observing the traditional rituals of the religion. Despite feeling satisfied spiritually, there was a loneliness within her religiosity; because the rituals she preserved over the years were not experienced by her family members anymore. Even though she had taught her children her own language, they would, for example, not follow her lead in the morning hours. During the interview, her husband's attitude was also worthy of notice. He frequently interrupted our conversation by implying that his wife was telling superstitious stories, and if he was interviewed, he would have told the real history of how Alevis migrated once from Iran.

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1 Kirmancki is the designation native speakers use for what is generally known as Zazaki or Dimilki.

The fact of the matter was that the conditions under which this elderly woman continued to practise her faith could be seen as a reflection of the contemporary state of the Alevi religion and its adherents. The isolation she experienced did not only reflect the existing gap between the older and younger generations of Alevis, but also the marginalization of the traditional Alevism by the modernist Alevi intellectuals who were keen to use the knowledge they gained through books to defeat those whose knowledge was based on oral legacy. All of this can be seen as an outcome of the oppressed and unprivileged situation the religion had to endure in Turkey where Alevi existence had been one of concealment since Ottoman times. Despite its validity, this instant explanation could prevent us from analysing the structural problems, in particular, Kurdish Alevis had to face.

The Alevi revival in the last thirty years witnessed two parallel developments that often did not coexist in harmony. For the first time in their history, numerous initiatives, foundations, religious centres, journals and so forth were established in the cities of Turkey and Western Europe to bring ordinary Alevis from all regions together and provide them with an opportunity to become acquainted. For the members of the community that so far preserved and transmitted the tradition orally in isolated rural areas, it became apparent that there were differences existing between groups and the regions who all called themselves Alevi. It is hard to ignore that this caused somewhat of a displeasure for the Alevis taking a leading role in the revival of Alevism, whose approach was to create a unity to overcome the political weakness of the group by standardizing the rituals. However, the developments of the past decades revealed also that the existing differences point to more than a sociological truth.

Kurdish Alevis

If attributing ʿAlī ibn Abī Tālib and his descendants (Imams) exceptional virtues and having the *cem* gatherings are considered as the two basic distinct characteristics of Alevism, the term Alevi may include the following Kurdish- and Turkish-speaking subgroups in Turkey and the Middle East: Kizilbash, Bektashi, Ahl-e Haqq, Kakai, Shabek and Tahtaci. Although Arabic-speaking Nusayris are also counted as Alevi, they differ from the other groups by not having the *cem* ceremony. Recently, another name was added to this popular list: Raa Haq or Riya Heqi (the Path of Truth/God), the former in Zazaki, and the latter in

Kurmanci.[2] This is a designation that had been used in the past by the Kurdish Alevis for their religious beliefs, and only captured the attention of the public after it came to light as a result of research in the field. Who are the disciples of the Path of Truth, and are they a coherent community to be listed as a separate, distinct subgroup?[3]

The Kurdish Alevis are settled in the eastern region of Anatolia in provinces of Maraş, Adıyaman, Malatya, Sivas, Elazığ, Dersim (Tunceli), Erzincan, Erzurum, Bingöl, Kars and Varto (Muş). Some enclaves are also located in central Anatolian districts of Çorum, Amasya, Kayseri (Sarız) and Gümüşhane (Kelkit). Kurdish Alevis speak Kurmanci or Zazaki. In Dersim, Erzincan, Varto and Bingöl the language of the majority is Zazaki; in all others Kurmanci is predominant. Except for estimations and general statements, nothing can be said on their prevalence within the general Kurdish and Alevi community or within the Kurmanci- and Zazaki-speaking populations, due to the fact that the official census in Turkey still does not include ethnic and religious background. The majority of the Kurds in Turkey belong to Shafiʿi and Hanafi school of Sunni Islam; for that matter, the Alevi Kurds constitute a minority of Kurdish population (cf. Andrews and Benninghaus, 1989: 110–25; Yeğen, 2016: 25–37). On the other hand, within the Alevi population the percentage of the Kurds in comparison to the Turks is definitely not in the minority as some scholars have argued (Kehl-Bodrogi, 1988: 7; Shankland, 2003: 20). According to a well-known field researcher on Alevis, Hamza Aksüt, the majority of Alevis in Turkey are of Kurdish background (Aksüt, 2015). Also, the statement that the majority of the Zazaki-speaking population does belong to Alevi faith is ungrounded, as there is a huge number of Zazaki-speaking Sunnis in eastern Anatolia. The Alevi–Zaza connection is probably based on the dominant role Dersim tribes played in Alevi and Kurdish history.

Until the second half of the twentieth century, the social structures of Kurdish Alevis remained mainly tribal and the religious life was directed by tribally organized holy families. These holy families (referred to as *ocak* or hearth) believed themselves to be the descendants of Imam Husayn and claimed to have the right to carry the title of *seyit* (sayyid). From these sayyids, whose authority and the number of *talips* (disciples, seekers) varied,

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2 Other designations like 'Ewladê Haq' (Children of God/the Truth) or 'Ewladê Raye' (Children of the Path) were also in use.
3 This chapter will focus only on the organizational dimension; for the rituals, theology and other features of what could be categorized as Kurdish Alevism, see Çem (2011) and Gezik (2015, 2016).

the best known were Ağuçan, Baba Mansur, Kureşan, Derviş Cemal, Sinemilli, Şeyh Delil Berxecan, Imam Reza, Şeyh Hasan, Cemal Abdal, Şeyh Ahmed, Şeyh Çoban and Seyit Savun.

The organization of the religion was based on inherited *maqam*s (positions) and *iqrar* (allegiance, confession). This led to an interlinked organization functioning on three levels: (1) between tribes and sayyids; (2) between different sayyid lineages; and (3) between the subfamilies belonging to the same sayyid lineage. The *maqam*s themselves were also divided into three degrees. Each disciple, whether belonging to a tribe or holy lineage, was linked to a *rayber* or *reber* (guide), *pir* (elder one, master) and *murshid* or *pirê piran* (master of masters). The centre of this organization was situated around the *pir–talip* allegiance. At least once a year, the *pir* would visit him, evaluate his deeds according to religious moral codes and then bless his household with prayers. The *pir* presides over the *cem/civat* ceremony and only he has the right, with the approval of the community, to punish or in the worst case, to excommunicate if a member is found guilty. The *pir* is assisted by *rayber*, his local representative. The *rayber* is responsible for the religious education of the *talip*, supports him with everyday problems and prepares him for the visit of the *pir*. The *murshid*, on the other hand, is actually not directly related to the *talip*; as the *pir* of a disciple's *pir*, he may visit the *talip* once every seven years and has the right to intervene between a disciple and his *pir*.

The position of the *murshid* brings us to the second pillar of this organization; that of the religious relations between different sayyid lineages. The tripod of allegiances between the tribes and holy lineages exists also between different sayyid families. Each *pir* or *rayber* himself is also linked to another *rayber*, a *pir* and a *murshid*, belonging to the same or a different sayyid lineage. If they belong to the same sayyid lineage, the religious allegiances are created between the subfamilies of the same sayyid lineage, which makes the overall organization a stratified entity of many small units (Bumke, 1979; Gezik, 2013).

On all three levels the allegiances were predetermined by paternal ancestors and could not be changed on personal preferences. Although exceptions were observed, this structure was preserved on a large scale until the second half of the twentieth century and had led to the creation of a complex socio-religious organization. Despite lacking a strong hierarchy, it did play a fundamental role in the continuation and cohesion of the community. First of all, the hereditary allegiances prevented disintegration, which could have been caused by migrations or resettlements of tribes. The *pir* continued to visit his *talip*s and most of the time moved, after a while, to the new location. Secondly, it averted separation, which could be generated by the

competition between different segments of a lineage or between different sayyid families. Thirdly, for the service the sayyids were offering, their own disciples were 'obliged' to give them a material compensation (çıralık), and this economic support granted (and motivated) the sayyids to continue their religious activities. And lastly, it protected them against the expanding Bektashi order, which successfully integrated many other Kizilbash and dervish groups into its organization.

As a result, all the Kurdish Alevi tribes and sayyids living in the listed districts were grasped within a network of religious contracts to each other. To give an example: a large number of the tribes in eastern Dersim (Nazmiye, Pülümür and Tercan) are disciples of the Kureşan sayyids. The Kureşans themselves are mainly disciples of the Seyit Ibrahim branch of Baba Mansur in Pülümür. The *pir*s of Seyit Ibrahim are linked to the Seyit Kasimis of Baba Mansur, residing in Mazgirt. Some of the leading families of Baba Mansur, on the other hand, have allegiance to Seyit Savun and Şeyh Ahmed sayyids, who live in Elazığ and Mazgirt. The latest ones are further linked to Ağuçan, residing in Hozat and Malatya. The tribes directly linked to Baba Mansur are settled in Mazgirt, Bingöl, Varto and the northern areas from Sivas to Erzurum; most of the tribes affiliated to Ağuçan sayyids live in Erzincan, Maraş, Malatya and Adıyaman provinces. The protractedness of this system is also shown by the Kurdish Alevi tribes living in central Anatolian districts like Çorum and Amasya, most likely deported to these areas since the seventeenth century, and still keeping up their allegiance to the same sayyid family (Imam Reza, Şeyh Çoban and Ağuçan).

The ritual language of Kurdish Alevis used to be Kurmanci or Zazaki (Çakmak, 2013; Muxundi, 2012). The claim that the ritual language of Kurdish Alevis used to be Turkish has no basis. Also, this could not be acceptable in a society where the majority of the population, including the sayyids themselves, could not speak Turkish. Introduction of Turkish in the rituals has been a practice of the twentieth century. Depending on the *talip* composition, the *pir*s could offer religious service in one or both languages. The bilingual status created also an interesting mix within the sayyid families. For example, Zazaki is the mother language of most of the Kureşan families, and the language of their *pir*s belonging to Baba Mansur sayyids in Pülümür, while the main segments of Baba Mansur, including the *pir*s of Seyit Ibrahim, speak Kurmanji. The majority of Seyit Savun speak Kurmanci, but Şeyh Ahmed, on the other hand, has also Kurmanci- and Zazaki-speaking families. Though the Ağucans mainly speak Kurmanci, they also have segments who are bilingual or who only speak Zazaki. As a matter of fact, this resulted in a situation

whereby many of them could speak both. Although conscious of the dissimi-larities, there is no evidence that this caused ethnic division or had a disorderly effect on the unity of the Kurmanci- and Zazaki-speaking Alevi tribes. For the ordinary man or woman, both belonged to the same 'millet'. The ordinary Alevi Kurds called themselves 'Milletê ma/me' (Our Community) and this included Kurmanci- and Zazaki-speaking co-religionists. Many of them became familiar with the existence of Turkish-speaking Alevis only after migration to the cities in western Turkey. The term 'millet' was used by the Ottomans for religious communities in the empire. It was not only the religious organization alone which preserved the unity between many tribes and saints. Persistency of this complex system was also determined by some historical developments.

A Historical Overview

At least three important debates should be reviewed here to explain the historical background. It should be noted that on all three debates, academic discussions are still ongoing and a consensus is yet to be established. The first concerns the historical origins of Alevism in Anatolia. Academic (as well popular) studies have mainly focused on the figure of Haci Bektash-i Veli, the thirteenth-century saint and the eponymous founder of the Bektashi Sufi order, and the Safaviyya Sufi order (Order of Ardabil). The latter was active in Anatolia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Academic studies produced in the last decades point out the importance of the Kurdish saint Abu'l-Wafâʾ Tâj al-ʿArifîn (d. 1107), and Sufis and dervishes belonging to the Wafâʾiyya order as the early representatives of it in Asia Minor (Karamustafa, 2005). This is especially apparent in the genealogies (*shejere*s) of active Kurdish and some Turcoman holy families in the earliest period in eastern Anatolia (Karakaya-Stump, 2008). The Ağuçan family, for example, which has a central position within the Kurdish sayyids, legitimizes itself directly by referring to Abu'l-Wafâʾ. Although in the course of time, the Bektashis and the Safavids did have a significant impact, apparently, the sayyid families belonging to the lineage of Wafâʾiyya applied a historical authority that could still compete with them.

The second critical chapter begins with the conflict between Sunni Ottomans and Kizilbash-Shia Safavids, which also determined the isolation and oppression of Alevis within Ottoman borders. Nevertheless, this fact should not lead to overlooking regional developments. At least for Dersim, this has to be taken into account. Though, because of political and religious

preferences of Çemişgezek notables (under which Dersim belonged) the relationship with the Ottomans became problematic, as the agreement Idris-i Bitlisi reached with the Ottomans to grant Kurdish principalities autonomy did also include Çemişgezek (Şerefhan, 1975: 207–22). Due to this, the tribes in Dersim could preserve their power and could even expand their influence far beyond. This relative self-rule in the area made it possible for Dersim to become a geographical centre for most of the Kurdish sayyid families, which from then on could expand their activities under the protection of the Dersim tribes.

Developments in the nineteenth century and afterwards would contribute to the third critical turning point, resulting firstly in the dissolution of Bektashis, and much later as well as the sayyid organization. During the nineteenth century the self-rule, which Dersim preserved, became unsustainable. After the elimination of Kurdish principalities, due to the Ottoman reforms to centralize its administrative and state structure, the region evolved into a period of social and political turmoil. The upcoming nationalist movements did not only cause wars and demographical changes but also affected those who stood on the edge of the empire. For instance, while the urbanized Bektashis sympathized with the Committee of Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terraki Cemiyeti, İTC) and later on with the republic, the Kurdish Alevis regularly came into conflict with both of them. The uprising of 1916 in Dersim against the policies of İTC and the Koçgiri rebellion in 1920–1 against the founders of the republic illustrate this at its best. Again, although the unfavourable policies of the Kemalists against religious orders in 1925 were not objected by Bektashis, in Dersim, these policies were seen as an attack on their identity (Gezik, 2000: 141–76; Küçük, 2002: 241).

Since the end of the nineteenth century, many officials had reported on Dersim and its opposition to the state authority. These activities were resumed in the 1920s and 1930s and resulted in the governing of the region under a special law, the 'Law on Administration of the Tunceli Province' (*Tunceli Vilayetinin İdaresi Hakkında Kanun*), that was passed by the parliament in 1935. By changing the province's name from Dersim to Tunceli, the law aimed literally to erase the 'Dersim problem' once and for all within a couple of years by transforming the ethno-religious character of the district through well-prepared military, ethnic, social and economic measures (Beşikçi, 1992). The resistance of some tribes, with Seyit Reza as the leading figure among them, could only be broken by heavy military operations and massacres in 1937 and 1938, whereby members of the sayyid families were also targeted and victimized (Kieser, 2011; Watts, 2000). According to the officials, the area was

hostile to the state and Turkishness because of the despotic aghas (tribal lords) and exploitative sayyids, and once it was liberated from them, 'the most obedient and hard-working people would be won' (Çalışlar, 2011: 252).

From Tribal Loyalty to Citizenship

In fact, the timeline between 1921 and 1938, starting with the Koçgiri uprising and ending with the Dersim massacre, can be seen as the beginning of the dissolution of the traditional Kurdish Alevi sayyid organization, based on tribal and hereditary religious affiliations. The period was not only characterized in terms of human causalities, but also by the implementation of a set of state policies against which this community was not able to resist. The pragmatic tribes, which were used to exploit the balance of power to their own advantage during the Ottoman reign, were now powerless against the forced measures of Ankara to centralize and secularize the state and society. Ban on activities of religious sects, measures to assimilate non-Turkish cultures and eliminate them from the public sphere, deportations and special tribunals all would affect the Kurdish Alevi society deeply and resulted not only in the loss of Dersim's position within Alevism, but also to the loss of the sayyids' influence on Kurdish Alevi tribes in and around the area. The new status quo gave them no other possibility than to assimilate and to integrate into the new order.

In the aftermath of Dersim, three developments would contribute to the further weakening of the religious structure of sayyids during the twentieth century. Firstly, from the 1960s onwards and due to economic reasons, many were forced to migrate to the cities and to Western European countries. A community that used to maintain its religion by face-to-face contact of its members and religious leaders would gradually lose its traditional habitation in favour of cities. Secondly, educational opportunities that were provided by the state were increasingly used for improving social-economic mobility by the young generations.[4] The beneficial results were seen in the 1970s as an increasing number of graduates could find jobs as civil servants on low and middle segments of bureaucracy. As a result of this, they became familiar with the state apparatus to which they had been no more than, to put it mildly, aliens in the previous centuries. Consequently, the values of the republic gained more ground, and this led to further secularization and Kurdish Alevis distancing themselves from their ethnic background, which

4 For a critical evaluation of the education policies, see Türkyılmaz (2016).

had dire consequences for the Kurdish language. Many parents prevented their children from learning the Kurdish language in the hope that this would benefit their position in society (Rotkopf, 1978: 129–35). And thirdly, the process of left-wing political activism would not liberate them from the burdens of class oppression, as many had hoped, but would turn them into critics of their own 'feudal' culture and traditions. Despite this distrustful attitude, it is remarkable to notice that the new political leaders of this process could have continued their influence on the community.

Turkey made the transition to multi-party parliamentarian democracy after World War II. The Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP), governing the country since 1923, lost the general election held in 1950. The Democrat Party (Demokrat Parti, DP), a coalition of liberal and traditional segments of the society, won two of the subsequent elections and ruled Turkey until 1960, when they were removed by a military coup. In the beginning, like the majority of the population of Turkey, many Kurdish Alevis also voted for the DP. However, as the DP inclined towards Islamic and oppressive policies, to compensate for their failure, they began to distance themselves from it and turned their face towards the only alternative, the CHP, and its secular doctrine. As long as they did not raise their religious or ethnical issues, Kurdish Alevis were welcomed by the CHP (Schüler, 1999: 157–90). The DP tradition was continued in the following decades by different right-wing parties, which all applied Islamic discourse from time to time and therefore had uneasy relations with Alevis. When the 2002 general election was won by the Islamist Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP), the majority of Alevis were certain that difficult times ahead awaited them.

On the other hand, Alevis' engagement with the CHP would be further facilitated when the party added a social-democratic discourse to its programme from the end of the 1960s. Probably this shift had partly to do with the upcoming socialist movement, at that time represented by the Workers' Party of Turkey (Türkiye İşçi Partisi, TİP), which won fourteen seats in the 1965 elections. The Kurdish Alevis were one of the main supporters of the TİP, as it was the first party in the parliament that became the voice of the oppressed Kurdish and Alevi sentiments (Güler, 2008: 126–39). The TİP was banned after the military coup of 1971, and its tradition was continued by many movements and parties. The engagement of Alevi youth with radical movements was accelerated by increased street violence between the right- and left-wing groups during the 1970s and the inability of the CHP to offer protection to Alevi Kurds in critical moments, such as in Maraş in the end of

1978, where hundreds of them were massacred within a few days by right-wing paramilitary groups (Tunç, 2011).

A remarkable development within the CHP took place in 2010 when Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu became the leader of the party. Kılıçdaroğlu was from Dersim and belonged to the Kureşan family. For some, the election of an Alevi from Dersim as the leader of the CHP, the party that was founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was a gain for Turkish democracy. For others, however, choosing someone from Dersim was no more than a desperate act, as the party did not even tolerate the slightest criticism of the Atatürk period. Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership has not had any doctrinal impact on the CHP so far. He has been successful in consolidating the Alevi vote, which was, prior to his election, gradually leaving the party. As a member of a sayyid family, Kılıçdaroğlu mostly had an impact on elderly Alevis. Although Kılıçdaroğlu himself has had a reluctant attitude towards his ethnic and religious background, his position has been used by the AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to discredit the CHP by bringing the Dersim massacres of 1938 for a while to the top of the latter's political agenda (Ayata and Hakyemez, 2013).

Almost all of the left-wing parties that were founded in the radicalized political environment of 1970s Turkey could rely, in variable amounts, on the sympathy of Kurdish Alevi youth. Nevertheless, those influenced by the Maoist doctrine could attract more sympathy. In their attempt to change the society 'from village to cities', one of the main groups they criticized were the religious leaders, who desperately opposed them. Despite this, the fast spreading of leftist doctrines among the Alevis is described by referring to egalitarian and anti-state features of the religion. However, it should be underlined that this process was introduced after a period when traditional structures were weakened, and their representatives were already made powerless by the state in earlier decades.

While the embrace of the new worldview by the Alevi youth went parallel with distancing themselves from their religious rituals, paradoxically, this process was interrupted by the coup d'état of 1980. In the name of restoring the order, the military took hard measures, and one of their main victims were, once again, the Kurdish Alevi population, many of whom were imprisoned and tortured. Of those who could escape, a section joined the guerrilla warfare, and another went to seek asylum in Western Europe, where many of their relatives were already settled as migrant workers. Towards the end of the 1980s, the majority of the leftist movements were dismantled, and their members were in an ideological crisis. It was during this

period that their place would be taken over gradually by religious and ethnic-inspired activities.

Kurdish Alevis versus Kurdish Sunnis

The increased attention to religious and ethnic matters could be analysed independently, but in the case of Kurdish Alevis, this would be more of an obstacle to outline the problematic situation they were situated in. It is interesting to note that in the provinces where they used to live with Sunni populations such as Maraş, Malatya, Sivas and Erzincan, being a Kurd or Alevi was synonymous. Now, after almost a half-century following the Dersim massacre, these identities became politicized on different arguments, and to answer the question 'Who are we?', which many began to ask themselves, became dependent on which layer of society a person was nestled under. This evolved not only into internal conflicts, based on ethnic, religious and political preferences, but it also created a highly fragmented view of their own history.

The rediscovery of Alevis by the administration began during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II. For the Islamic-oriented Hamidian officials, they were a community 'living in ignorance and deviance' who should be won back to the right path of the sharia (Gündoğdu and Genç, 2013). By the end of World War I, when Turkish nationalism became the ideology of the state, this also affected its approach to Alevis and Alevism, which were now seen as pure successors of Central Asiatic Turkic shamans that could resist Arab cultural expansionism (Dressler, 2015). The existence of Kurdish-speaking Alevis was simply interpreted as assimilated offshoots of Turkoman tribes, which, to survive the Ottoman oppression since Sultan Selim I, had to escape to the mountainous areas and therefore lost their language. It should be pointed out that this approach had no other meaning than isolating the Alevi religion to a cultural and historical context, and did not have any intention of improving its legal status. Nevertheless, this view was not only repeated by semi-official researchers, but was also enthusiastically embraced by some Alevi writers, and later on by many Turkish as well as Kurdish Alevis (Ağuiçenoğlu, 2013).

One of the early local representatives of the Turkish history view was Mehmet Şerif Fırat, belonging to the Kurdish Alevi tribe of Hormek in the Varto district of Muş province. His work *Doğu İlleri ve Varto Tarihi* (*Eastern Provinces and the History of Varto*) was published in 1948 and aimed to recon-firm the Turkishness of the Alevi religion, as well as the Turkishness of Kurmanci- and Zaza-speaking peoples, and to prove why the Alevi tribes in Varto and other eastern districts chose the side of the republic during the

Kurdish rebellion of 1925, led by Sheikh Said. According to Fırat, it was self-evident that the Alevis did not agree with the sharia-minded Sunni tribes because they identified themselves, from the beginning on, with the libertarian measures of Kemal Atatürk's republic and therefore did not hold back from helping to defend it (Fırat, 1983: 197). Although not in the same extent as previously, this interpretation is still accepted by many.

The reality was of course more nuanced than the representation that Fırat was offering. For example, it is known that the Alevi Abdalan tribe supported the rebels in Varto; and that the tribes of western Dersim attentively followed the developments in Elazığ to determine the time of their involvement. After the insurgency was suppressed, Hasan Hayri, an ex-deputy of Dersim in the Turkish parliament, was trailed and hanged for having contact with the rebels. But, more noteworthy than these, is the silence that Mehmet Şerif Fırat shows to the case of the Koçgiri uprising and the Dersim massacres; not a single word is said about these, including the execution of fifty-three members of his tribe in the village of Civarik in Dersim in 1938 (Gezik, 2000: 105–13). The indifference in the case of the Koçgiri and Dersim events was continued by many other Alevi writers, who aimed to reconcile with the state. In the aforementioned case, low-rank officials and tribal leaders were the first to be blamed for the massacres.

It is a well-described fact that internal Kurdish relations were characterized by tensions on tribal, religious, political and regional levels. Even then it should not be forgotten that the borders of divisions were not always that strict. The Alevi–Sunni relations were no exception. There were, for example, tribal confederations which consisted of Sunni and Alevi subgroups. In this regard, the case of Ibrahim Pasha, the leader of the Milan confederation, is much illuminating. At the end of the nineteenth century, he was one of the publicly known chiefs in Urfa province, not only because of the influence of his tribe but also as being the pasha of one of the Hamidian corps active in the area. These corps, also known as Aşiret Alayları (Tribal Regiments), were organized by Sultan Abdülhamid II in order to use the tribes for his political goals in east Anatolia provinces. The well-armed corps committed many brutal assaults and crimes against the non-Hamidian communities (Klein, 2011). Despite this, Ibrahim Pasha had good relations with the Alevis and was highly regarded by the tribes of Dersim (Sykes, 1915: 368, 574–5). Even Mehmet Şerif Fırat, who intensively describes the crimes the Hamidian Cibran corps committed in Varto districts, tells the story of one of his confidants who could find shelter with Ibrahim Pasha for two years when he was tracked down by the state (Fırat, 1983: 140).

Probably these transcendental feelings were also the reason why the first Kurdish cultural and political organizations at the beginning of the twentieth century could bring Sunni and Alevi Kurds together. At the end of World War I, the most important of these was the Society for the Rise of Kurdistan (Kurdistan Teali Cemiyeti, KTC), which also had members of Alevi background like Alişer Efendi and Haydar Bey, who would become the leading figures of the Koçgiri rebellion (Dersimi, 1992: 32–4; Göldaş, 1991: 39–45). After a long interval, Kurdish political activity in Turkey began to take place in the late 1950s onwards. When a group of them was detained in 1959, known as the '49'ers' (49'lar), Sait Kırmızıtoprak (alias Dr Şivan) from Dersim was among them. Kırmızıtoprak belonged to the same tribe as the aforementioned Mehmet Şerif Fırat and was only two years old when with his mother he survived the massacre of Civarik village. In 1970, he would become one of the founders of the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Turkey (Türkiye Kürdistanı Demokrat Partisi, TKDP) and a key figure in the Kurdish left-wing movement. Also, within other Kurdish leftist parties that were founded in the 1970s, we come across many other young men (and women) with Alevi background.

Nevertheless, also the religious contradictions and prejudice between the two groups cannot be ignored (Dersimi, 1988: 26). For the Shafiʿi-oriented Kurd an Alevi could not be considered anyone other than an unbeliever, who better should be avoided; for some Alevis, on the other hand, one can never trust the Shafiʿi Kurd, because his religious obstinacy makes him easy prey to be used by others.[5] Despite these attitudes, closer co-operation of both can also be witnessed since the 1990s. Probably this is related to the overall political and social transformation of the Kurdish society, disillusionment in the democratization of Turkey and the developments in the Middle East (recently ISIS), which endangered Kurds as well the existence of Alevis. The most recent expression of this co-operation has been the Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP), which became a political force in Turkey's parliament.

Europe: Back to the Roots

The politicization of Alevi youth before 1980 did not pay any attention to the Alevis' religious needs. When the hope for socialist salvation was shattered

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5 It is interesting to note that Shafiʿi Kurds are denounced as 'Kurr' and not as 'Kurmanc' or 'Kirmanc' by Kurdish Alevis. 'Kurr' has definitely a pejorative tone (cf. Kehl-Bodrogi, 1999).

by the military, the criticisms could no longer be ignored. Probably the most tragically heard of these was that the Alevi youth sacrificed their lives for the revolution, but there was no one left to give them a funeral service according to their own burial traditions. When the Sunni *hoca*s (imams), who were asked to perform the funeral ceremonies, refused, the sentiments became more intense.

Therefore, towards the end of the 1980s when the Alevi movement did get a public face, two basic facts determined its preposition: first, the search for a path to be able to organize the basic religious rituals of the community, and second, to realize this by not opposing but co-operating with the legal institutions. Due to the regular restrictions and inexperience with organizing themselves in cities, they started with establishing cultural foundations or associations. By doing this, the door was also opened for ex-leftist Alevis who were more experienced in organizing people and founding associations. Their partition aroused – as it still does – suspicion by the traditionalists, who accused them of being non-believers in reality and feared that they would politicize the issue. This transformation took place at the same time in Turkey as well as in Europe. The events in 1993 in Sivas, whereby thirty-three Alevi artists and intellectuals were killed in the hotel they were staying in, and the deadly skirmishes in 1995 in the Gazi district of Istanbul, would accelerate this process. Soon Alevi activities spread all over Turkey and Europe, and the first confederal foundations were crystallized. Although all have been endeavouring for equal rights for the Alevis, three general differences in emphasis have been developed. The first one aims chiefly to create the conditions to revive the Alevi rituals; the second underlines Alevism as a social and political movement; and the third prefers to stress the Islamic context of the faith (cf. Ertan, 2017; Massicard, 2013).

There were two other developments that should be emphasized in relation to migration to Europe. The first is concerning the discussion between Alevism and Sunnism in particular, or Alevism and Islam in general. In European countries, Alevis did get for the first time the chance to debate and organize themselves without the legal restrictions that were imposed in Turkey, or without considering the position of a Sunni majority (cf. Akdemir, 2016; Sökefeld, 2008). The multicultural context also stimulated discussions about whether the Alevis are a religious community or an ethnic group on its own. It was also in Europe, and not in Turkey, that they could found associations using the name Alevi. Although this process was complicated partly by internal disputes and partly by the Turkish state's attempts to influence these developments, the Alevi associations in Europe were able

to develop a more independent position, which fostered political and economic solidarity with Alevi communities back in Turkey.

In Germany, where the Alevis have been recognized as a separate religious group, with having, for example, the permission of organizing religious education at schools, this had definitely been stimulated by the German state tradition of dealing with the religious communities. However, the Federation of Alevi Associations in Germany (Almanya Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu, AABF), the main representative of Alevis in this issue, has been put under pressure by Turkey and the Turkish press. One of the accusations frequently made towards AABF is that the association would strive to separate Alevism from Islam and is directed by powers hostile to Turkey (Sökefeld, 2008: 236–49).

The last issue that should be mentioned in the context of Europe is the manifestation of Kurdish Alevism. It is an interesting fact that within all associations founded in Turkey or Europe, Alevis with a Kurdish background were active in all organizations – it might even be possible that the majority of their members have a Kurdish origin – without making an appeal to their ethnicity.[6] Partly, this was a result of the influence of the Turkish thesis, but there are also two pragmatic reasons for that attitude. The first is the idea that ethnic differentiation would weaken the Alevi movement, and secondly, the fear of being 'Alevi and additionally Kurdish' would be too heavy a risk in Turkey.[7] Whether openly pronounced or not, this issue is still one of the main topics the Alevi community is dealing with in the background, due to the fact that an important number of them were affected by the escalation of the Kurdish struggle in Turkey. The devastation and forced displacement of villagers, more than 200 alone in Dersim in 1994, seems a critical moment in the position of some Kurdish Alevis in distancing themselves from the Alevi movement and criticizing them of a passive attitude in relation to the repression of the Kurds. In the first issue of *Zülfikar* – the journal of the Union of Alevis of Kurdistan (Kürdistan Aleviler Birliği, KAB) founded in Germany – the editorial criticizes not only the Turkish state but also the 'so-called' Alevis who co-operate with the state, and proclaimed its position as

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6 This issue is still a problematic topic within the Alevi movement, even for the most progressive or independent AABF. For example, the first time the AABF journal *Alevilerin Sesi* (*The Voice of Alevis*) made the Dersim massacres the key topic was in 2012, on its 159th issue. It happened only after AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was involved in Dersim discussions.

7 It is a well-known saying that belonging to the '3-Ks', Kürt-Kızılbaş-Komünist (Kurd-Kizilbash-Communist), was the worst thing that could befall one when someone was detained in the 1970s and 1980s of Turkey.

follows: 'Separating Alevism and Kurdishness is impossible. The Kurdish Alevi is from Kurdistan and should not be left behind to struggle for his fatherland, for the self-determination right of his land and coming up to the power of his nation' (KAB, 1994: 3). More striking was the choice of images in this first issue: Seyit Reza, Alişer Efendi, Nuri Dersimi, all personalities of Koçgiri-Dersim events, and until then not symbolized by other Alevi movements. As an association KAB was not successful; however, it did bring the critics on the single-ethnic Alevi thesis loudly to the foreground (cf. Leezenberg, 2003).

It was not only the KAB that made Kurdish Alevism more visible. Since the 1990s diverse activities like forums, festivals and meetings have been set up around the religio-cultural heritage of some important Kurdish Alevi districts like Koçgiri, Maraş, Dersim, Pazarcık and Varto (Gedik, 2011). The community shows also a growing embrace towards its own rituals, history and mother language. European diaspora has been especially important for the Zazaki-speaking Alevis' important turning point in revaluating their language, which suffered badly as a result of the legal restrictions in Turkey. There was even a rise of an independent Zaza political movement, but this was not able to surpass the religious division within the Zazaki-speaking population and mostly turned into Dersim-oriented associations (cf. Akçınar, 2010: 67–83; Dinç, 2016: 77–86). Another important development has been the founding of satellite TV stations broadcasting from Europe. Of these, TV10, a Germany-based television channel, grew in a short time into a popular Alevi medium. In contrast to the existing Alevi TV channels such as Yol TV and Cem TV, TV10 broadcast also in Kurmanci and Zazaki. Alongside these, the sayyid families have begun to organize themselves. Since 2013 a yearly event is organized under the name of *Avrupa Ocakzadeler Buluşması* (The Meeting of *Ocak* Members in Europe), and also independent associations have been founded under the name of sayyid families like Baba Mansur, Kureşan and Derviş Cemal, with the aim to save Alevi heritage and to bring scattered families together.

Researching Alevism

It is inevitable that these developments would not have had an impact on the Alevi studies that have been monopolized for a long time by simple dichotomies and ideological views (Bozarslan, 2003), which especially had an adverse effect on the study of Kurdish Alevis. Although one of the two largest Alevi groups in Turkey, ignoring them was made easier by the political situation in Turkey where everything related to Kurdishness was banned and oppressed

for a long time. Until recently, the Alevi revival did not challenge, but instead complied with, this policy. However, due to the input of fieldwork carried out by activists and researchers in the last decade, knowledge of them increased rapidly. Currently, the public is not only better informed about their authentic beliefs, myths, religious organizations, ceremonies performed in Kurmanci and Zazaki, but also have a better understanding of the terminology used by them.

This has been an important addition to free the Alevi history constricted within the 'Alevi-Bektashi' dichotomy, a basic acceptance of Alevi studies since the early twentieth century. The Bektashi order, for an extensive period of time, was relatively tolerated by the Ottomans and could integrate many Shia, 'Alid or heterodox groups, active between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, into their own organization. The literature produced by the Sufis or dervishes associated with the order is accepted as Alevi-Bektashi heritage. These sources, which had a substantial influence on Alevi studies, had, in fact, disregarded the traditional heritage of rural Alevi communities that mostly was transmitted orally. This disregard caused ignorance of the role holy lineages played in the creation process of Alevi identity. Understanding the contribution of these families to carry on the tradition could not be realized under the shadow of the Bektashi order, or by designating them as village Bektashis (Mélikoff, 1994: 25). This is due to the simple reason that the dynamics in which both entities were settled differed. For that matter, studies on Alevi history have also become more Middle Eastern oriented and more attention is paid to the groups like the Ahl-e Haqq, Yezidi, Nusayri, Druze and others (van Bruinessen, 2017).

Seen by the Ottoman state as heretics, the Alevis inhabited mainly rural areas, far from administration centres. Despite this, it should not be forgotten that they were politically, economically and religiously subjected to an empire. Being labelled as heretic or Shia did not mean that they were in a permanent disadvantaged position. Par excellence, the sayyid families themselves were part of a religious activity that shared common interests, doctrines and locations in Anatolia and beyond. For instance, till the beginning of the twentieth century, a sayyid from Dersim could travel among his disciples in different parts of Anatolia and regularly visit the holy places in Syria and Iraq. The Bektashi order, including the shrines connected to it, was only one of the stations in the holy lineage network. That these were not indispensable was shown when the order was closed by the Ottomans in 1826. This would not have any effect on the activities of the sayyids. On the contrary, during the nineteenth century, the sayyid families would expand

their territorial influence once more. Even this example shows that the history of Alevis cannot be understood solely from the perspective of being victims.

For the ordinary rural Alevis, the religion was mainly passed through to the new generations orally. However, underscoring this aspect does not mean that written sources had no impact on the establishment and protection of the Alevi religion. Regardless of the oppression that existed, the Alevi families had in their possession an important corpus of written sources and the capability of interpreting them. Even in the case of *Buyruk*, the notable book that is accepted by most Alevis, the content was not followed simply. The fact that the twentieth century was an era of contradictions and poor intellectual activity for Alevism should not lead to general presumptions. For example, an impressive part of written Alevi sources emerged in the sixteenth century. Also, the emphasis some have put on the relationship between literacy, heterodoxy and inconsistency of rituals and doctrines should be re-evaluated. The existing inconsistency between Alevi communities may also be a natural outcome of different cultural and historical backgrounds, as in the case of Kurdish Alevis, rather than illiteracy or deviations due to lack of communication between scattered groups.

Lastly, the history of holy lineages cannot be written solely on the basis of religious matters. Social and tribal structures are now becoming a part of their historiography. In fact, this dependency did influence, more than it is presumed, religious organization, identities and religious heritage. In addition to this, the mobility, conflicts and deportations the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes experienced did not only strengthen the Alevi community but added an additional dimension to its organization. At the same time tribalism also played a role in the relationship between the Alevis and the state. Not to forget that the conflicts between the tribes and the state of oppression of tribal activities did not always have a religious ground.

Final Remarks

Although the Bektashi lodge was banned in 1925, the name of the order continued its impact afterwards. Often, this is served to legitimize a nationalistic view of Alevi history. There are also Alevis who have been opposing this tendency. The rediscovery of Raa Haq/Riya Heqi cannot be seen separately from this. The religious organization with Dersim as a historical centre is a fact, but the destruction it went through during the last century should also not be bypassed. The faith is not practised collectively

as it was before. The younger generations never experienced the original rituals of their creed and most of them do not even know their mother language.

 Despite these issues, the interest it has attracted cannot be overlooked. However, it seems until now to be more politically, academically or symbolically motivated than a genuine interest in practising the religion. Whether this is sufficient for the revitalization of authentic rituals, like praying to the rising sun each morning, remains to be seen. Being a member of two larger entities, Kurdish Alevis are overwhelmed by the developments concerning both Kurdish and Alevi issues, and distancing themselves from them to engage with their own problems is for the majority of Kurdish Alevis more than a matter of making choices.

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Tribes and Their Changing Role
in Kurdish Politics and Society

HAMIT BOZARSLAN AND CENGIZ GUNES

It is generally accepted that a significant percentage of Kurds belong to a tribe and that tribal bonds continue to play an important role in Kurds' lives. Martin van Bruinessen (1992: 51) defines the Kurdish tribe as 'a socio-political and generally also territorial (and therefore economic) unit based on descent and kinship, real or putative, with a characteristic internal structure'.[1] Tribes contain within themselves smaller units of clans and lineages and the belief that all its members share a common descent is generally held by all tribes but often disputed by scholars. Tribes came into existence because of alliances formed among several clans and lineages in a certain region, or in some cases, by two distinct tribes uniting. This was a process shaped by many local factors, such as the need to share access to land and pastures, and the threat caused by rival groups and other tribes. The membership of tribes was subject to fluctuation and change depending on factors such as tribes' ability to provide security and prosperity for their members (van Bruinessen, 1992: 58). Also, it was common for tribes to be part of larger tribal confederations for political or security reasons, but the membership of a tribal confederation did not mean that tribes had to cease their distinct status or privileges associated with it.

Before the nineteenth century, numerous tribes and tribal confederacies were brought together under the rule of Kurdish emirates, which were the centres of Kurdish power and culture. These included the Bitlis emirate in present-day eastern Turkey, the Botan emirate in present-day south-east Turkey, the Ardalan emirate in present-day north-west Iran and the Baban and Soran emirates in the present-day Kurdistan Region of Iraq. At the height of their power, Kurdish emirates became economically prosperous and maintained a significant degree of autonomy. The Bitlis emirate was

1 For a more detailed list of Kurdish tribes, see Izady (1992: 74–85).

abolished by the Ottoman Empire in the mid-seventeenth century and the remaining Kurdish emirates were abolished by the Ottoman authorities in the mid-nineteenth century as part of the empire's administrative centralization reforms, known as the Tanzimat. The abolishment of emirates meant that in the subsequent period, tribes gained an opportunity to create themselves as the dominant form of social and political organization within the Kurdish society (Bozarslan, 2006: 133; van Bruinessen, 1992: 133).

Tribes have a strong association with a specific region and territory and every tribe claims a territory to be its own; it is often the case that regions are named after the tribes inhabiting it (van Bruinessen, 1992: 53–4; Yalçın-Heckmann, 1991: 102). The territorial concentration and the claims over land have been a source of rivalry and conflict between different tribes throughout history. However, it must be emphasized that some of the tribes remained nomadic until as late as the early 1980s, migrating between several locations throughout the year. Many others were based in a particular area permanently but maintained a semi-nomadic lifestyle and migrated to different pastures to graze their livestock from early spring to late autumn every year.

Tribes' influence did not merely exist in the social and economic realm; there was a strong political dimension to their power, too. From 1950 onwards and following the transformation to electoral democracy in Turkey, the tribal elite constituted themselves the dominant Kurdish political actors and acted as intermediaries between the state and the Kurdish population. The centre-right political parties were keen to draw the tribal elite to their ranks to win the Kurdish vote. However, the transformation Kurdish society in Turkey experienced in the subsequent decades as a result of the spread of education and socio-economic modernization began to weaken tribes' political and social influence in Kurdish society. The rural-to-urban migration of Kurds from the 1950s onwards contributed to the weakening of tribes' power to further undermine their influence and traditional way of life. Hence, at present, tribes' influence and the strength of tribal bonds show a significant degree of variation across Kurdistan.

Furthermore, the patron–client relationship that came into being in Turkey after 1950 began to be challenged by the Kurdish national movement from the mid-1970s onwards. Many of the newly established Kurdish political organizations felt it was necessary to dislodge the power and influence of the tribal elite to advance the Kurdish national cause. Tribes were often depicted as socially backwards, oppressive and exploitative groups and the influence of the tribal elite was seen as a major barrier to the Kurds' national liberation

and unification. Tribal elite's involvement in Turkey's political system was interpreted by the Kurdish political groups as evidence of their complacency and involvement in the exploitation and oppression of the Kurds in Turkey.

The rising power of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey from the 1980s onwards led to a further reduction in the power and influence of the tribal elite. From 1985 onwards, some tribes began to take part in the village guard system that was assembled by the state as a pro-state paramilitary force and used in the state's counter-insurgency efforts against the PKK guerrillas. Tribes saw the PKK's rise as a threat to their existence, but it was not only their fear of the PKK that determined their decision to take arms; many tribes were involved in bloody feuds against their local rivals and participated in the village guard system to increase the power parity at the local level to their advantage. The emergence of the pro-Kurdish democratic political movement in Turkey in 1990 and its rise during the past three decades has further transformed the role tribes and tribal elite play in Kurdish politics and society. This is reflected in the decline of the number of tribal chiefs being elected as MPs or mayors of towns and cities in recent years. Despite these challenges, the tribal elite continue their efforts to retain their relevance and preserve their dominant position in Kurdish society.

Broadly speaking, the tribal actors in Iraqi Kurdistan have lost the central position they had enjoyed during the latter part of the twentieth century. This has come about as a result of the emergence of a strong political authority in the form of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The KRG and the main political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), have managed to monopolize instruments of coercion, which considerably narrowed tribal autonomy. One can see a similar development taking place in Syrian Kurdistan where the emergence of an autonomous administration under the control of the Party of Democratic Unity (PYD), which monopolizes the instruments of coercion in north-east Syria, has subdued the power of the Kurdish tribes there.

Tribes have been an aspect of the political life of other countries in the region and the ongoing violent conflicts in the region have transformed the role and functions they play.[2] As Hachemaoui (2013) argues, in Algeria, tribes have been rehabilitated by post-civil war power-holders and continue to play a decisive political role at the local level. In countries that continue to experience massive violence, such as Libya and Yemen, tribes have become major agents of territorial, social and political fragmentation. In Iraq and

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2 For a more detailed discussion on this, see Bozarslan (2015).

Syria, the Sunni tribes enjoyed an expanded field of autonomous action only in the first stage of the disintegration of the state, respectively between 2004 and 2007, and 2011 and 2012. During the second phase of the conflict, they had to accept a subordinated position vis-à-vis sectarian actors, who had, and still have, a higher capacity of using violence, controlling time and space and imposing their military order.

This chapter discusses the changing role of tribes in Kurdish politics and society. It focuses mainly on Turkey but also considers 'Kurdish situations' in Iraq, Syria and Iran. It provides a historical overview of the developments and suggests that the tribal factor has been one of the major determinants of Kurdish politics throughout the twentieth century. It is thus no wonder that French and British Mandate officers, as well as Turkish, Iranian, Syrian and Iraqi authorities, have paid specific attention to tribes and tribalism in Kurdistan. The sociopolitical developments in the second half of the twentieth century that have significantly transformed their role in Kurdish politics and society are highlighted before an assessment of their role in the current period is provided.

Imperial Past and the Tribal Factor

Tribes and tribal relations have been an area that has been getting considerable academic interest. The pioneering early sociological and anthropological studies conducted by İsmail Beşikçi (1992), Martin van Bruinessen (1992) and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann (1991) have provided detailed descriptions of tribes and the tribal system in Kurdish society. However, in spite of some excellent historical studies on the Kurds, our knowledge of Kurdish tribes under the first Muslim empires, and later on under the Ottoman and Persian empires, still remains quite elementary (Abdulla, 2013). As Boris James (2014) convincingly shows in his study on the Kurds during the medieval period, the area that would be known as Kurdistan hosted many tribes that were aware of their 'Kurdishness'. But the impression that one gets from the available literature is that, in spite of their durability in space and in time, these tribes were subordinated to either the imperial authorities or Kurdish emirates that were the main centres of power (Ripper, 2000). This seems to be even more obvious after the Ottoman–Persian wars of the early sixteenth century that marked, on the one hand, the division of the Kurdish geographical space between these empires, and on the other, the consolidation of the emirates, which were also referred to as *hukumet*s, or governments (Göyünç and Hütteroth, 1997). This situation did not constitute an exception to

a well-established rule that one could observe in many parts of the Muslim world: to the contrary of widespread opinion, the 'rural sphere' in this world has always been dominated by the urban centres; power can be exerted by former tribal elements disposing a strong *'asabiyya*, but as Ibn Khaldûn (1332–1406) understood, these tribes were doomed to fully urbanize themselves in a generation's time.

Just like their Muslim predecessors, however, both the Persian and Ottoman empires, and the Kurdish emirates that were subordinated to them, shared a common will to preserve, or even reinforce existing tribal structures in the Kurdish space. Although tribes were in no way fixed entities and evolved both in size, localization and strength, they enabled power-holders to subordinate their society: the presence of the Kurdish aghas allowed them to dispose a category of the 'most-favoured lords', who helped them maintain order and security at the local level and in some cases collect taxes as well. The existing literature seems to suggest that Ottoman power tried its best, from the reign of Sultan Mehmed II (1432–81), to destroy any kind of tribal solidarity among the Turks in Asia Minor and the Balkans and recruited high-ranking civil and military bureaucrats from converted Christians. Yet, it preserved tribal structures in Kurdistan and the Arab provinces. Weaker than its Ottoman neighbour, Persia was obliged to preserve the tribes not only in its peripheries but also at the 'heart' of its empire.

The tribal factor won considerable autonomy after the policy of centralization that these two empires developed from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards. The framework of this chapter will not allow us to analyse all the outcomes of this policy; suffice it to say that it was successful in destroying the Kurdish emirates and in implementing the state's administration in main Kurdish cities, often at the cost of much violence and brutality. However, it was unsuccessful in realizing its will to transform these empires into a fabric of citizenry (*fabrique des citoyens*). In fact, the state remained external to Kurdish society, and its military and fiscal presence have been apprehended by Kurds as a predatory form of intervention in the local Kurdish environment.

The destruction of the Kurdish emirates created a real power vacuum, which gave rise to massive security concerns and thus led to a wide-scale retribalization of Kurdistan. Notwithstanding their discourses on 'common ancestors' and their genealogies attached to the Prophet, here as elsewhere, tribes re-emerged or consolidated themselves as narrowly defined solidarity structures (Jabar, 1999). The first and 'spontaneous' reaction from the

Ottoman Empire against this tribal 'renaissance' was an 'ethnographic' and coercive one: the Westernized Ottoman bureaucrats, who orchestrated the reforms known as Tanzimat ('Reorganization'), had rather poor knowledge of their society. Thus, they tried in vain to understand the tribal social fabric, which had an obvious trans-border dimension and to reduce tribal 'unrest' through state coercion but without any tangible results (cf. Mehmed Hurşid Paşa, 1997).

It is only under Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909), who developed a project of 'restoration' under which he imagined and described the old Ottoman *nizam* ('order') and successfully recentralized power in his hands, that Ottoman rule understood that it could have another approach to the Kurdish tribal domain: the formation of the Hamidiye Light Cavalries, which regrouped some 65 tribes (and their sub-branches, or clans) with some 37,500 men, in 1891, allowed the Ottoman sultan to have a loyal Kurdish tribal force under his command. This force, which could be considered as the sultan's Cossack army, not only divided the Kurdish tribes but also prevented potential tribal violence from acquiring an anti-state narrative and was used against Armenian revolutionary activities. The formation of the cavalries also allowed the state to dispose of a generally efficient barrier against the Russian Empire, whose presence in the Kurdish space was perceived as a threat to Istanbul (Klein, 2011).

The cavalries also attested to the profound sophistication of Abdülhamid II's political engineering and corresponded to the construction of an Ottoman kind of *makhzen*, sharing many features with the one observed in past (or present) North African societies.[3] The enrolled tribes were all located in the northern tiers of Kurdistan, which partly overlapped with historical Armenia. In the southern parts of Kurdistan, where centrifugal dynamics were quite strong, the sultan could limit his *rapprochement* with the Kurds to classical paternalistic policies. As the case of Ibrahim Pasha of Milli shows (Jongerden, 2012; Verheij, 2012), some of these tribes have indeed been loyal to the sultan and have acted as his security agents but did not take part in the persecution of the Armenians and other Christian communities; some others, however, have participated in the wide-scale massacres of Armenians between 1894 and 1896, as well as in the genocide of 1915–16. The genocide of the Armenians as well as of the Aramaic-speaking communities (Syriacs and Chaldeans), which took place only six years after the fall of Abdülhamid II, largely contributed to

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3 In North Africa, notably Morocco, the domains of the kingdom were divided into two segments: the *seeba*, i.e. unruly, and the *makhzan*, the controlled. *Makhzan*, literally 'store', signifies the power of the ruling dynasty.

the religious and ethnic homogenization of northern Kurdistan (Bozarslan, 1999).

From the 1920s to 1950

As Hakan Özoğlu (2011) suggests, the complex relationship between some Kurdish tribes and the Hamidian regime resulted in two contradictory outcomes: on the one hand, they undeniably reinforced the state and, in spite of a series of Kurdish uprisings that took place between 1909 and 1914, constituted one of the preparatory conditions of the so-called war of independence led by General Mustafa Kemal in the wake of the military debacle of the Ottoman Empire in WWI. On the other hand, it also contributed to the formation of a political 'micro-climate' in Kurdistan, and, more broadly speaking, reinforced the Kurds' awareness of being 'Kurds' in spite of, or thanks to, being privileged allies of the state. After the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurdish tribal world was divided into four countries: Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey and was at one and the same time fragmented and radicalized. Since then, it has expressed simultaneously many forms of collaboration with or resistance against the new authorities. In Turkey, some tribes collaborated with the Kemalist power even during the repressive military campaigns against the Kurdish movement: in spite of this fact, some tribes, such as the Heverkans, could not avoid being the new victims of the state (Dillemann, 1979: 51); other tribes, whose chieftains were appointed deputies in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, were more fortunate (Beşikçi, 1991: 228).

Many other tribes, on the other hand, opted for armed dissidence vis-à-vis Ankara and constituted the main militant forces of the Kurdish rebellions of 1925 and 1927–30. During the same period, in Iraq too, some Kurdish tribes chose to collaborate with the authorities of the British Mandate, while others allied themselves with the resisting Barzandji, and thereafter Barzani, forces. That was also the case of Iran where Shah Reza Pahlavi's policy of destruction of the tribal world appeared to be widely inefficient; indeed, many Kurdish tribes joined, for various time frames, the Simko rebellion which was constituted by forces belonging to the Shikak tribal confederation (van Bruinessen, 2000a: 139). During the early period of the French Mandate, Kurdish tribes in Syria did not evolve in a violent environment and had rather good relations with the mandate authorities. However, some of these tribes, which were divided by the inter-state frontiers established in 1921, participated in the Kurdish rebellions in Turkey. The strong opposition to the heavily militarized

borders would become one of the key factors of the long-lasting armed struggle in Turkey, Iraq and Iran, where the struggle continued until 1946 (Yüksel, 2011).

It is true that during these two and a half decades, many tribes took ambivalent positions, acted under heavy constraints and opted either for co-optation with the states or for resistance against them. Here, as elsewhere, the rebellious tribes could not legitimize their actions by any discourse other than particularistic-tribal concerns. As Eli Amarilyo (2014) suggests, tribes needed a broader ideology and a more inclusive framework. Islam could meet this ideological 'call' only during the Sheikh Said Rebellion of 1925 in Kurdistan of Turkey. But even in this peculiar case, the religious discourse was combined with Kurdish nationalism. This is due to the nature of leadership. Sheikh Said, the head of the movement, was a well-known figure of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi Order, but most of the leaders of the movement, including the atheist Fehmiye Bilal, Said's secretary, and Hesen Heşyar Serdi, belonged to the Westernized Kurdish elite (Serdi, 1994). All the other subsequent Kurdish revolts that took place both in Turkey and elsewhere had a strong Kurdish tonality (Tejel, 2007).

The reason for the inefficiency of Islam as an ideology of resistance could be sought in the fact that the official Islam of the state was largely absent in Kurdistan or had a very weak local base; and although the Sufi orders, namely, the Naqshibandiyya and Qadiriyya, were strong, they nevertheless were fragmented and did not have the 'cultural' and 'ideological' capital necessary to lead an armed struggle. Kurdism, on the other hand, was the doctrine of the intelligentsia, a rather thin social stratum, for which many of the Kurdish tribal chiefs felt a strong disdain and perceived as *mutegallibe* or opportunists. The intelligentsia not only had the capacity to formulate a structured political discourse but also had a supra-social position that could place it in the privileged position of an arbiter. Although it was alien to the segments of the tribal world by its Westernized profile, it was able to offer them a set of meanings. On the other hand, the intelligentsia was heavily dependent on the rural dynamics: the submission of the cities, where the state was strongest, had left it without any force other than the tribal one to mobilize.

Tribes and Kurdish Contest during the Second Half of the Twentieth Century

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed significant developments in Kurdish politics across the Middle East, including the emergence of

Kurdish oppositional movements and their challenges of the state authority in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. Throughout these decades, tribes have been involved in Kurdish politics and in shaping Kurdish–state relations in a variety of ways: they have constituted the main fighting force of the Mahabad Republic (1946) in Iran and the Barzani rebellion in Iraq (1961–75), which had a formal tribal commission led by Mustafa Barzani himself. Barzani also had special relations with some Kurdish tribes in Turkey, where many began to be politically active after the adoption of the multi-party system in 1946.

As is well known, during the 1960s in Iraq, tribal fragmentation or the ability of the state to pressure some of the tribes to co-operate with it had considerably weakened the Kurdish nationalist resistance. Some tribes, who were profoundly opposed to Mustafa Barzani's leadership of the Kurdish rebellion, allied themselves with Baghdad. In the 1980s, some of these tribes, which were organized under the label of Fursan Salah al-Din militia, whose numbers ranged between 150,000 and 250,000 men, and led by their so-called *mustachar*s ('advisers'), had even participated in the infamous Anfal campaign against fellow Kurds in 1988. Finally, the tribes also played an important role in intra-Kurdish conflicts that would appear later on, during the Kurdish civil war of 1994–96.

Commenting on the role that tribes played in the Kurdish movement during these decades, Michael Hudson (1977) coined the concept of 'tribal nationalism'. While certainly explaining some features of the Kurdish contest, this concept seems to be problematic. It is true that the conflicts between the pro-state and pro-rebellion tribes have, at least partly, determined the fate of Kurdish contest. Naturally, the Kurdish political organizations had to consider the 'tribal temporalities', that is, the vicissitudes of tribal circumstances and interests, which were quite distinct from their national agenda. Whatever the strategies the tribes adopted, and whatever their short-term or long-lasting alliances with states or Kurdish movements might have been, it is obvious that they were subordinate actors throughout these decades. They had very limited room to manoeuvre and certainly a much lower ceiling for autonomous action vis-à-vis the Kurdish intelligentsia.

In Turkey, Kurdish tribes began to play a much bigger role in national politics after the country held its first competitive election in 1950. The Democrat Party (DP) was keen to consolidate its support base in the Kurdish-populated provinces. During the 1930s, many Kurdish tribal chiefs and religious leaders were exiled by Kemalists to southern and western Turkey as a form of collective punishment for their support of Kurdish rebellions and to prevent future ones. The DP government allowed their return from exile and

these tribal leaders have subsequently played an instrumental role in mobilizing Kurdish votes for the DP during the 1950s. With this move, the tribal elite became co-opted into centre-right Turkish political circles and a new patron–client relationship came into being, which in some form continues into the present day.

A common practice employed by the DP – and other centre-right political parties that were established after the DP was closed down in 1961 – to win the Kurdish vote was to choose locally influential tribal leaders from populous Kurdish tribes as their parliamentary candidates. This practice enabled tribal leaders to be elected as MPs and was the dominant trend throughout the second half of the twentieth century. In her case study of tribes in the Hakkari province, Lale Yalçın-Heckmann (1991: 70) argues: 'The leading families of Hakkari, with their tribal followers, still dominate party politics in Hakkari.' She also discusses in detail the role tribal ties and relations played in local politics, especially in the selection and election of candidates for national parliament or the municipal council. Tribes often co-operated to get a common candidate elected but, on many occasions, co-operation was not possible. For example, in the 1983 national election, the candidate supported by the Pinyanişi tribe in Hakkari did not win despite serving as the MP for the province previously because the rival Ertuşi tribe mobilized behind its own candidate (Yalçın-Heckmann, 1991: 125).

Consequently, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, many Kurdish tribal leaders and other members of the leading tribal families got elected and served as MPs and mayors of towns and districts. An influential Kurdish political actor active in centre-right politics was Kinyas Kartal (1900–91), who was an MP from the Justice Party (AP) for the Van province between 1965 and 1980 and a leading figure in the Bruki tribal hierarchy. His son, Nadir Kartal, was an MP for the Van province from the centre-right True Path Party (DYP) between 1991 and 1995. His nephew, Remzi Kartal, was also elected an MP in 1991 for the Van province as part of the pro-Kurdish list under the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP). The Zeydan family in Hakkari, which is a leading family in the Pinyanişi tribe, has played a central role in the politics of the Hakkari province in the past fifty years: Ahmet Zeydan was an MP for the province during the 1960s and 1970s and his brother Mustafa Zeydan was the mayor of Yüksekova district from 1969 to 1989 and an MP for the DYP during the 1990s.

The leader of the Şeyhanlı tribe, Ömer Cevheri, was elected as a DP MP for Urfa province in 1950. In the subsequent years, other members of the Cevheri family have also been influential in the politics of the province and

served as MPs. These include Necmettin Cevheri, who served as an MP for the AP from 1963 to 1980 and subsequently for the DYP from 1991 to 2002. Similarly, a leading figure in the Kirvar tribe, Abdulrahman Odabaşı, served as an MP for the DP in the Urfa province between 1957 and 1960. Another leading figure of the tribe, Ahmet Karavar was elected an MP from the Islamist Welfare Party (RP) in 1995 and again from the Virtue Party (FP) in 1999. Mehmet Celal Bucak and Sedat Edip Bucak, who are leading figures in the Bucak tribe in the Siverek district of Urfa province, were active in the national politics: the former was an MP for the AP during the 1970s, and the latter was an MP during the 1990s for the DYP.

Nurettin Yilmaz, who had an openly outspoken Kurdish identity, and Ahmet Türk, who would become one of the leaders of the pro-Kurdish movement in the 1990s, were among the tribal figures that had accepted to co-operate with the right-wing Justice Party (AP) of Süleyman Demirel, before switching to the 'centre-left' Republican People's Party (CHP) of Bülent Ecevit. Ahmet Türk was active within the SHP between 1987 and 1991 and since then within the People's Labour Party (HEP) and other pro-Kurdish political parties serving as an MP between 1991 and 1994.

In addition to their political influence at the national level, it is common that the leading families from the tribal hierarchy maintain significant commercial and political influence in their region and provincial city. Many of the local-level party representatives at the district and provincial levels, mayors or other local representatives were also selected from the leading tribal families. This has been one of the main reasons why tribes have continued their existence and in some cases been able to recreate their role to strengthen their power and influence over their members. Through political engagement, the tribal leaders have been able to centralize power and distribute political offices accordingly.

The state–tribe relations took on a new dimension with the establishment of the village guard system in 1985 as a paramilitary group to fight against the PKK guerrillas. The state began to work with the leading tribal families and offered them concessions and money to persuade them and the members of their tribe to join the village guard system. The concessions included forgiving the crimes committed by tribal leaders and their entourage and a good example would be that of the leader of the Jirkî tribe in Hakkari. The chief of the tribe, Tahir Adıyaman, and several of his associates were pardoned for several crimes they were charged with or investigated for, including the killing of security forces, in exchange for his collaboration with the state

and persuading the members of his tribe to join the village guard system (Özar, Uçarlar and Aytar, 2013: 146).

Formally the participation in the village guard system was voluntary but those who refused became victims of intimidation and widespread oppression. These ranged from barring the villagers from the use of grazing lands to food embargoes and to coercing people to leave their villages. Initially, tribal leaders signed up to become village guards and through the tribal leader people from lower levels of tribal hierarchy were recruited into the scheme. The village guard system was spread across the Kurdish-populated provinces, but the biggest concentration has been in the provinces of Batman, Bingöl, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Mardin, Siirt, Şırnak and Van (Özar, Uçarlar and Aytar, 2013: 56). Over the years many tribes took part in the village guard system and some of the well-known tribes that were recruited as village guards include the Bucak, İzol and Karakeçili tribes in Urfa, Ertuşi tribe in Van, Tayan tribe in Şırnak and Jirkî tribe in Hakkari.

The number of village guards has risen steadily since the system came into existence and in 1995 it stood at 62,186 (Özar, Uçarlar and Aytar, 2013: 56). During the late 1980s, the PKK carried out numerous attacks against village guards, including against their family members. While the armed clashes between the village guards and the PKK guerrillas have been occurring regularly throughout the conflict, on occasions the PKK declared amnesties for the village guards to dissuade them from fighting for the state. At times, the PKK took actions not to antagonize village guards and there were informal deals agreed with certain tribes to reduce the tensions.

Many tribes that worked closely with the state and became village guards experienced internal schisms and some members chose to support the Kurdish struggle and some chose to join the PKK as guerrillas. In fact, divisions caused by political affiliation predate the introduction of the village guard system. One such tribe that faced division due to political affiliation is the Bucak tribe and while Faik Bucak, the founder of the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Turkey (PDK-Turkey) and later on his children, have been involved in 'Kurdish' politics, other members have organized around Celal Bucak, the tribe's official head, adopted a strongly pro-state position and acted as its paramilitary force (Bozarslan, 2006).

The village guards were modelled on the Hamidiye Cavalries and the idea of such a force was floated by Colonel Nazmi Sevgin long before the start of the PKK's armed struggle. Colonel Sevgin was an admirer of Sultan Abdülhamid II and recommended the construction of such a force since the 1960s (Sevgin, 1982). The salaries of these village guards were three times

higher than the minimum wage, but they were not paid individually but to the tribal chiefs, who occasionally could be received by the president of the republic himself. Some of the village guards, who were, in fact, residing in urban quarters, belonged to the tribes that had collaborated with the state in the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s. As their involvement in the drug-trafficking and inter-tribal violence showed, these paramilitary forces enjoyed a high level of local autonomy.

Participating in the village guard system has been an important source of tribes' income and has been used to enhance their political power and influence in the region. For tribes, the village guard system provided an additional source of income and enhanced their power at the local level to enable them to maintain their influence in the region and amongst their members. Many of the heads of the village guards have also served as district mayors or local heads of various mainstream Turkish political parties. For example, Kamil Atak, who was the leader of the Tayan tribe and head of the village guards in the Cizre district of Şırnak province, was elected as the mayor of Cizre town in the 1994 and 1999 local elections.

The Tribal Factor in Kurdish Politics in the Twenty-First Century

In spite of the abundance of data sets on Kurdistan since 1990, our knowledge of the evolution of the tribal conditions, structures and culture in Iraqi Kurdistan since the Gulf War of 1991 remains rather poor. One reason explaining this fact is the very evolution of the Kurdish society, mutating into a much more heterogeneous state than ever before. In both Iraq and Turkey, for instance, the proportion of the urban and rural populations changed dramatically, with urban constituting 75 per cent of the total population, as against 25 per cent only just a few decades earlier. Kurdish cities have also been internally differentiated: the former urban notables have disappeared, replaced by modern middle classes, with new values, lifestyles, political leanings, modes of organization and action and expectations. The rural exodus of the 1980s, triggered as it was by economic factors and the state's coercive policies, created new generations of activists that are quite different both from the former intelligentsia and from the plebeian strata that dominated the Kurdish contest in the 1960s–1980s.

More importantly, the Kurdish political syntax and axiological forms have also changed: as the commencement of guerrilla warfare by the Party of Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK) in Iran, the second stage of the PKK's armed struggle

in Turkey (2005–13) and the PYD's – rather self-defensive – current military resistance in Syria show, violence has not disappeared from the Kurdish political idiom or agenda, but it has ceased to be the main axiological standard of the Kurdish movement. In Iraq and Syria, there is a quasi-state-building process, with institutional durability, coupled with their well-known short-comings and deformation: half patriarchal/half democratic or half hege-monic/half representative. It is true that during the inter-Kurdish civil war in Iraq (1994–96), the tribal world was corrected, as in some anti-Barzani tribes such as the Surchis supporting the Talabani-led PUK, known to be more 'modern' and 'urban' than the Barzani-led KDP. But the war itself was not a tribal one, and the militarized tribes could not determine its outcome nor build an autonomous power base, such as a militia force.

Only in Iran, where civil resistance has been spreading, the Kurds do not have any form of self-rule, however limited. While Kurdish society broadly speaking has experienced a real empowerment throughout the last quarter of a century, the trans-border Kurdish political space has been reconfigured by two political-military actors: (1) the hegemonic bloc built around the PKK, which also includes the PYD and PJAK, and (2): the KRG, around the KDP of Massoud Barzani, which includes other Kurdish political forces in Iraq and exerts some influence in Iran, Syria and Turkey.

These developments have inevitably affected the tribal world and the relations between the Kurdish political movements and tribes. First of all, in Kurdistan as elsewhere in the Middle East, tribes have been widely urbanized, though they have never been exclusively rural in the past. This gave them access to new political and economic resources, but at the cost of losing their capacity to master time and space and regenerate their internal solidarity and control over their fellow tribesmen. Secondly, compared to the past few decades, they have lost much of their already-limited autonomy. In the past, they could negotiate for some margins of action through long-term or limited and elusive co-operation with the states, or with the Kurdish nationalist movements. Such a political game is less likely today: in Iraq, the tribes that had traditionally been allies of Saddam Hussein's regime had to accept the Kurdish nationalist authority and try to negotiate their survival at the local level through a complex game. The Zebaris, Bradost, Doski, Mizuri, Surchi, Barzanji, Herki have certainly not vanished out and could become active elements in the political arena if the situation would deteriorate, but they are obliged for the time being to accept holding a subordinate position. In Syria, where the PYD has marginalized the KNC (Kurdish National Congress, which mainly represents urban notables), through its access to

resources of violence, Kurdish tribes have very limited opportunities to undertake autonomous action. The PYD's influence is strong enough to allow it to build patron–client networks with the Arab tribes.

Kurdistan of Turkey also became the theatre of local power restructuring, with the majority of the Kurdish cities being dominated by new Kurdish actors who descend from a new, mainly young and largely feminized urban elite. In Urfa, the dominance of tribes is higher and more tribal families are represented at national and local politics. This is because the tribes in Urfa are more organized and have maintained their central internal structure. In other provinces, such as Diyarbakır and Van, dominance is less visible but still present. However, even in Urfa, the influence of tribes is waning. In the 2011 general election, several tribal leaders, such as Ahmet Ersin Bucak and Zülfikar İzol, stood as independent parliamentary candidates but neither was elected. It is also increasingly the case that there are divisions in the tribal hierarchy about which party to support and often different parties select candidates from the different leading families of populous tribes to win the electoral backing of tribes. Hence, in addition to the tribal elite losing their ability to influence their members, divisions within tribes or their leading tribal families cause fragmentation in the tribal vote.

This does not mean tribal leaders have disappeared altogether in Kurdish politics in Turkey as many continue to be elected to political offices during the 2000s and 2010s. Mustafa Zeydan, a leading figure in the Pinyanişi tribal hierarchy, served as an MP for Hakkari province for the AKP between 2002 and 2007. His son Rüstem Zeydan was elected an MP for the AKP for Hakkari province and served between 2007 and 2011 (Yüksekova Haber, 2010). In the 2015 general election, the tribe seems to have changed its allegiance to the HDP with a leading figure in the tribal hierarchy, Abdullah Zeydan, elected as the MP for the province from the HDP list. However, subsequently at the 2019 local elections, Teoman Zeydan, the older brother of Abdullah Zeydan, was a candidate for the mayoral election in Yüksekova district for the AKP but he could not win. Sabahattin Cevheri, who was an independent MP for Şanlıurfa province between 2002 and 2007 and an MP for the AKP between 2007 and 2011, is a leading figure in the Şeyhanlı tribe. Another leading figure of the Şeyhanlı tribe active in politics is Seyit Eyyüpoğlu, who was active in the ANAP and represented Şanlıurfa province between 1991 and 1999. He was re-elected as an independent MP in 2007 but later joined the AKP and in 2011 was re-elected from the AKP.

Mahmut Duyan was elected as an MP from the CHP at the general elections held on 3 November 2002 (Uluç, 2010: 211). The leader of the

Delmamikan tribe, Süleyman Çelebi, was an MP for the AKP from Mardin province between 2007 and 2011 (Ateş-Durç, 2009: 43). The Ensarioğlu family in Diyarbakır has been active in the centre-right parties during the past three decades. Salim Ensarioğlu was an MP for the DYP and served as a state minister in the mid-1990s. His nephew Galip Ensarioğlu has been active in the various employers' associations in Diyarbakır, including as the president of the Diyarbakır Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and he was an MP for the AKP representing Diyarbakır province between 2011 and 2018 (Radikal, 2015). Ahmet Türk was re-elected an MP for Mardin province again between 2007 and 2014. From 2014 until his removal in 2017, he was the co-mayor of Mardin province.

It is also quite common to find tribes changing their party affiliation frequently because of the changing local and national political dynamics. For example, the Metinan tribe was supporting the CHP in the early 2000s but subsequently changed its affiliation to the AKP with its leader, Hatip Durmaz, becoming a member of the AKP in 2007 (Ateş-Durç, 2009: 89). On 9 May 2015, some 300 members of the Alpahan tribe of Batman, who, until then, supported the ruling AKP, changed their political affiliation and adhered collectively to the HDP, which openly defends the Kurdish cause (T24, 2015a). The day after, the Alikans and the Ramans (20,000 electors) followed the Alpahans' example (T24, 2015b). During this pre-electoral period, leaders or members of some other tribes in Siirt, Urfa and Adiyaman also declared that they were henceforth supporting the HDP (Taştekin, 2015).

The HDP's success in incorporating tribes into its structure and organization, especially during the campaign for the 2015 general election, was significantly aided by the transformation in Turkey's Kurdish conflict in the past decade. The most significant aspect of this transformation was the dialogue process involving the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, the state officials and a delegation comprising HDP MPs, and it achieved certain milestones, such as the unilateral ceasefire the PKK declared on 21 March 2013 and the PKK's subsequent promise to pull its guerrilla forces out of Turkey. Also, the reduction in violence during the past fifteen years has made a positive contribution to the reinvigoration of civil life in Kurdish-majority areas of Turkey. During the mid-2010s, there was an increasing attempt to incorporate the tribes into the ranks of the pro-Kurdish parties and consequently, they have nominated several candidates from tribes for the local or the general election. As mentioned above, Abdullah Zeydan of the Pinyanişi tribe was selected as the candidate and subsequently elected as an

MP for Hakkari province. The HDP has successfully canvassed many other tribes in the region that have been supporting the AKP in the past decade (Taştekin, 2015).

In Kurdistan in Turkey, while the influence tribes enjoy in politics has diminished significantly, they nevertheless continue to maintain ʿasabiyya, or solidarity, even in an urban context. In the past decade, we have also witnessed the establishment of numerous associations by tribes that function as support networks for their members and offer several other services. These associations offer financial aid to members who need it and a range of other services, such as scholarships for university students, advice and mentoring and social activities to strengthen community relations. Through such associations, tribes continue to maintain a connection with their members who have settled in urban areas in Turkey. Most tribes have their own association and the number of such associations has been increasing in the past decade. With the spread of education and the increase of urbanization, the strong connection between tribal leaders and political representatives started to weaken. In rural areas, it may be easier to convince tribe members to vote for a particular party due to the denser tribal relations, but this ability is likely to be lower in urban centres. There is also a generational difference between the younger people, who can navigate their way through modern life and have less reliance on the tribal networks, and the older generation, who need the support of the tribal network to solve their legal or bureaucratic problems and rely more on the tribal network in their day-to-day lives (Karadeniz, 2012: 226). But in spite of the fact that around 50,000 village guards are still active, tribes have had to accept the hegemony of the PKK. While being officially incorporated into the state's security forces, the guards develop locally also a 'Kurdish' discourse and many of them try to have open channels of communication with the PKK. Thus, tribes do not only lose their capacity to access the resources of violence but most importantly, lose their capacity of producing a political meaning.

Conclusion

As Martin van Bruinessen (2000b) argued years ago, the existence of a conflictual environment is a *sine qua non* for the survival of the tribes. But this is not necessarily the case with all conflict environments: tribes can manage low-level conflicts in which they may establish asymmetric relations of power both with state and among themselves. Yalçin-Heckmann (1991) suggests that many tribes can also be affiliated to different political parties and forces and

establish clientele relations with a complex political system. But they have been unable to manage high-level violent conflicts as is the case in Iraq and Syria, nor hegemonic military and political constructions as one may observe in the Kurdish regions of these two countries or in Turkey. Many of the leading families that were politically active in Turkish political parties began to lose their prominence as the Kurdish national movement gained more power.

Increasing levels of urbanization and the spread of education weakened the tribal ties and loyalties and reduced the tribal leaders' ability to mobilize the members of their tribes. Tribes have countered the consequences of these socio-economic transformations by developing new forms of organization to maintain and strengthen tribal ties and connections in urban contexts, such as through establishing community associations and creating support networks to retain their relevance to an increasingly urbanized and dispersed membership. The AKP and other centre-right political parties also maintain strong support among tribes and many tribal leaders continue to serve as MPs in the AKP. The village guard system also plays an important role in the tribes' ability to continue as significant political actors in the region as it gives them more resources and access to state dignitaries and government representatives. In recent years the pro-Kurdish parties have increased their efforts to develop ties with tribes and include more tribal representatives in their ranks.

Overall, however, tribes occupy a far weaker position than they did a few decades ago. As elsewhere in the history of the wider Middle East, when power structures which acquire some degree of supra-social autonomy are strong, tribes are rendered weak. Similarly, when strong political meanings emerge, 'tribal ideologies' lose their impact. It is obvious that in contrast with the Libyan or Yemeni cases, where tribes can develop a 'predatory solidarity' (Lapidus, 1990: 34), tribes in Kurdistan have to accept, at least for the time being, to subordinate themselves to the major political actors in order to sustain their continuity; the 'patriotic' or nationalist discourse that they adopt allows them to bargain for some 'prestige' not only to legitimize themselves vis-à-vis the Kurdish society at large but also their own young members. In contrast with the Libyan and Yemeni case, Kurdish tribes find themselves in dire need of investing 'urbanity' not through the formation of militias, but by embracing new manners, affiliations, as well as solidarities that urban life offers.

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PART V

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KURDISH LANGUAGE

The History of Kurdish and the Development of Literary Kurmanji

ERGIN ÖPENGIN

Introduction

Kurdish is one of the major languages of the Islamic West Asia, along with Arabic, Persian and Turkish. It is spoken by more than thirty million speakers in linguistically and culturally diverse communities across Kurdistan and in scattered enclaves of Kurdish speakers in central Anatolia, the Caucasus, north-eastern Iran (Khorasan province) and Central Asia, with a large European diaspora population. Given that there is only limited and unreliable census data provided by the sovereign states governing Kurdistan, the number of speakers can only be cautiously gathered by combining data from various sources (Ethnologue, 2018; Sirkeci, 2005; Zeyneloğlu, Sirkeci and Civelek, 2016), as seen in Table 24.1 (from Öpengin, 2020).

Despite its geographical and demographic importance, our knowledge of the historical sources and the internal classification of Kurdish, as well as the rise and development of written Kurdish codes, are far from being complete. The major problems have to do with the coverage of 'Kurdish' and the broad dialect categories. The neat dialect zones conveniently mapped also fail to do justice to the presence of 'displaced' dialects across Kurdistan and the wider region. Further controversies, more relating to technical linguistic circles, are around the historical affiliation of Kurdish with languages from earlier stages of Iranian languages, the degree to which the 'Kurdish' varieties form a 'language' in the sense of deriving from a common source language and whether or not one can talk about a linguistic continuum between certain

Table 24.1 The speaker population
of Kurdish[a]

Country	Population size (ca.)
Turkey	15,000,000
Iraq	6,000,000
Iran	8,000,000
Syria	2,000,000

[a] These are, more exactly, population figures, and they
should not be taken as equivalent to 'number of
speakers', since especially in Turkey an important
portion of the Kurdish population grows with no or
very limited knowledge of Kurdish (cf. Öpengin, 2012;
Zeyneloğlu, Sirkeci and Civelek, 2016).

Kurdish varieties. Most striking, however, is the remarkable discrepancy on
these matters between the specialists' position and that of the members of the
Kurdish communities. One aim of this chapter will, then, be to try to bridge
that gap by providing an accessible account of the position defended by
Iranian philology and general linguistics on these questions.

Given the limitations of space, however, these questions will be discussed
only selectively and in a combined manner. I will start with outlining the
most recent understanding of the major dialect divisions within Kurdish and
the interrelationships of the varieties spoken by the Kurds. I will then present
an overview of the historical sources and affiliations of Kurdish in deep
history. The research in this area, although dating the second half of the
nineteenth century, is mostly inaccessible to the wider Kurdish studies circles.
Finally, I will proceed to document the emergence of written Kurdish in late
medieval times, concentrating on the development of literary Kurmanji
starting from the sixteenth century onwards. Previous scholarship (Adak,
2013; Blau, 2010; Kreyenrbroek, 2005) provides comprehensive lists of works
written in Kurdish throughout the past several centuries, but a more the-
matic discussion on the development of the Kurdish literary code within its
historical context has only partly been done (Hassanpour, 1992; Leezenberg,
2014, 2019). Finally, I will provide an overview of modern Kurmanji as a pluri-
centric standard developing in entirely new material conditions in the coun-
tries it is spoken.

Scope of 'Kurdish' and the Internal Classification of Kurdish Varieties

The three major varieties of Kurdish are (i) Southern Kurdish, spoken under various names near the city of Kermanshah in Iran and across the border in Iraq; (ii) Central Kurdish (also known as Sorani), one of the official languages of the autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq, also spoken by a large population in west Iran along the Iraqi border; and (iii) Northern Kurdish (more widely known as Kurmanji), spoken by the Kurds of Turkey, Syria and the north-western perimeter of Iraq, to the east and north of Lake Urmiye in north-western Iran and in pockets in the west of Armenia. Of these three, the largest group in terms of geographical distribution and speaker numbers is Northern Kurdish. There are also Zazaki and Gorani varieties, the speakers of which commonly identify themselves as Kurds. Although linguistically these latter two do not descend from the same source language as the aforementioned three 'Kurdish' varieties, they can nevertheless be considered to be part of 'Kurdish' in a more socio-historical sense (see below). Zazaki is spoken in the north of Diyarbakir and in Dersim and Bingol provinces in eastern Turkey while Gorani is spoken in small pockets in Kurdistan-Kermanshah provinces of Iranian Kurdistan, and Suleimani, Kirkuk and Mosul provinces in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Although the borders and conceptions of the four varieties of Northern Kurdish, Central Kurdish, Zazaki, Gorani are more or less clear (for a map of Kurdish see Haig and Öpengin 2014:III), the linguistic composition of the southern-most periphery of the larger Kurdistan remains unclear even among specialists. Based on several recent important studies on this area (Anonby, 2004/5; Belelli, 2019, forthcoming; Fattah, 2000), it can be stated that there is an internally coherent Southern Kurdish variety that includes the major Kurdish dialects of Kirmanshah (Kalhori) and Ilam (Fayli) in Iran and the Khaneqin region across the border in Iraq. Laki, spoken to the south-east of Kirmanshah province and north-east of Lorestan province in Iran, is considered to be part of Kurdish but separate from the Southern Kurdish variety (both due to the presence of "ergativity" similar to Central Kurdish and several other important phonological and grammatical characteristics), thus a variety on its own. However, Fattah considers the Laki spoken in Kirmanshah province to be part of Southern Kurdish variety (Fattah, 2000: 61). On the other hand, Lori, spoken in a vast area in Lorestan and Hamadan provinces as well as in the south of Ilam province, is not considered to be part of Kurdish as it shows major South-western Iranian features on a par with

Persian. However, the dialect of some ethnic Lori people in Ilam province (in the 'Poshte Kuh' region) is considered to be part of Southern Kurdish for its major distinguishing features shared with the latter variety (Fattah, 2000: 40–55). The sheer complexity of the dialect distribution and linguistic composition in this southern-most region is visible even in this general (and necessarily sketchy) account.[1]

It was stated above that Zazaki (or Kirmanjki) and Gorani (or Hawrami) are not part of 'Kurdish', at least not in a purely linguistic sense. This is indeed the standard treatment in linguistic studies in Iranian philology. This position is summarized neatly in Ludwig Paul's (2008) seminal article on the linguistic history of Kurdish:

> Of those languages that have been claimed to be Kurdish, Zazaki . . . and Gurani . . . clearly do not form part of the Kurdish language. Many phonetic, phraseological, and syntactic similarities notwithstanding, the linguistic boundaries between Zazaki and Kurdish on the one hand, and between Gurani and Kurdish on the other, are very clear. *The analysis of historical phonology leaves no serious doubt*, either, *that Zazaki and Gurani are two West Iranian languages that had been quite distinct from Kurdish originally, but have influenced the latter, or have been influenced by it, over a long time* (emphasis added).

The issue is nevertheless complicated by a mismatch between this purely linguistic perspective and the identity perceptions of the speakers of Zazaki and Gorani, who predominantly consider themselves Kurds and their language as varieties or dialects of Kurdish. This has led to heated debates, particularly in the case of Zazaki, on whether they should be considered Kurdish or separate languages (cf. Hassanpour, 1998). Acknowledging that the dialect versus language distinction is ultimately a social construct rather than a purely linguistic one, Haig and Öpengin (2014) see this confusion arising from a failure to distinguish purely linguistic evidence from the results of socially contracted and negotiated perceptions of identity, which are rooted in shared living conditions, belief systems and perceptions of a common history. The results of the linguistic history of the languages (i.e. whether they descend from the same or different proto-languages) cannot form the basis for the social identity of speakers, and accordingly, as the authors state, it is perfectly possible to accept both the conclusions of the historical linguists (i.e. Zazaki and Gorani do not descend from the same source language as the 'Kurdish' varieties such as Kurmanji, Sorani and Southern Kurdish), and the conclusions of many native speakers (i.e.

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1 For a map of these linguistic divisions, see Fattah (2000: vi) and Belelli (2019: 80).

Zazaki and Gorani speakers are Kurds, and their language belongs to a larger-order entity 'Kurdish'). In this view (actually defended already in Fattah, 2000: 65), Kurdish would be seen more as a socio-culturally determined super-order or umbrella entity encompassing both the varieties forming 'Kurdish' in a narrow linguistic sense (Sorani, Kurmanji, Southern Kurdish dialects) and the linguistically related varieties (Zazaki and Gorani) that despite not forming a linguistic unit with 'Kurdish' belong to it nevertheless by virtue of being part of the socio-cultural identity formation of the Kurdish people.[2] Thus Zazaki and Gorani would be considered as part of Kurdish in the sense of a 'sociolinguistic' unit rather than in the purely linguistic sense.

Having thus outlined the major internal divisions in Kurdish, we will trace the deep history of Kurdish in the next section.

Historical Origins of Kurdish

The Iranian languages are traditionally classified into West and East Iranian, and historically also into Old Iranian (up to the fourth century BC), Middle Iranian (fourth century BC to eighth century AD), and Modern Iranian languages (after the eighth century). Kurdish belongs to the West Iranian languages, along with Persian, Balochi, Mazandarani and a number of other languages. West Iranian languages are traditionally further divided into North-western and South-western languages.[3] A largely controversial Median language (cf. Rossi, 2010) and the Parthian (i.e. the language of the Parthian or Arsacid Empire, 247 BC–224 AD) are traditionally considered to be representative of the North-western languages in the Old and Middle Iranian periods, while Old and Middle Persian represent the South-western Iranian group in those historical stages.

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2 Fattah (2000: 62–70) considers Zazaki and Gorani as the 'Kurdo-Caspian' subgroup of Kurdish. Despite the implication in Fattah's conceptualization, it should not be taken for granted that these two varieties form one single historical unit (i.e. descend from a shared proto-language) since this has not been demonstrated in a systematic and convincing manner (cf. Haig and Öpengin, 2014: 107). Moreover, it should be noted that identity perceptions are not fixed but rather constantly negotiated and subject to evolve. It is thus totally normal for the speakers of Zazaki and / or Gorani to foreground the linguistic distance their varieties have with Kurmanji / Sorani / Southern Kurdish to claim distinct sociopolitical identity for their communities and thereby separate language status for their language. This is indeed a process that has been developing for Zazaki since at least the 1980s (see Haig and Öpengin, 2014).

3 The traditional divisions into West and East Iranian, and especially the division of West into North-west and South-west, appear much less plausible in the light of recent scholarship; see Korn (2016) for critique and alternative suggestions. We maintain it here for ease of exposition.

Kurdish is classified as belonging to the North-western Iranian languages, along with Zazaki, Gorani, Balochi and a number of others, whereas languages such as Persian and Lori are classified under South-western Iranian languages. Accordingly, Kurdish is considered to be closest to the Parthian in the Middle Iranian stage. However, this does not amount to posit a direct link between the two. In fact, Kurdish, along with Balochi, diverges from Parthian and other typical North-western Iranian languages in many important respects (see Korn, 2003: 50–1). The widely held consensus in Iranian philology is that no predecessors of Kurdish in premodern stages are attested (Paul, 2008).

Establishing a connection with Old Iranian languages thus becomes even more difficult. Although some Kurdish authors have claimed descendants for Kurdish from Avestan and Median, a direct link of Kurdish with Avestan was ruled out in Iranian philology even back in its initial stages (cf. Rödiger and Pott, 1842, cited in Lecoq, 1997: 31), while Avestan, although its classification is also unresolved, is traditionally considered to be closer to Eastern Iranian languages (cf. Korn, 2016: 403). Furthermore, the purported relationship of Kurdish to the Median language, although defended by Minorsky based mostly on conjectural historical evidence (Minorsky, 1940: 143–6), is not supported by linguistic evidence, since information about the Median language is extremely limited and indirect, being mostly restricted to the loanwords found in the Old Persian inscriptions (Lecoq, 1987: 674).[4] As Lecoq (1997: 31) states in relation to the Kurdish–Median connection, everything is possible but nothing is demonstrable. But even the limited data at hand provide evidence against Kurdish–Median genetic affinity (Asatrian, 2009: 21; MacKenzie, 1999: 675–6; Rossi, 2010: 308). Refuting thus the Median origin of Kurdish, MacKenzie (1961) outlined a picture of the evolution of North-western Iranian languages where Kurdish and Persian evolved in parallel and therefore Kurdish 'represented an early splitting from the linguistic subgroup of Median' (cf. Rossi, 2010: 307–8). Likewise, in his survey of major isoglosses in the historical phonology of West Iranian languages,

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4 Indeed, even the existence of a 'Median' language is doubted and it is normally used to refer to a more general construct than a discrete language per se, as visible in Windfuhr's (1972: 371–2) statement: 'There is virtually no possibility to correlate that vaguely reconstructed "Median" with any later dialect. "Median" simply is a conglomerate list of isoglosses which can be found in a number of dialects of today ... What has been identified as "Median" from the ancient sources is that common Iranian in various facets. If one therefore uses the term "Median" it should only be with the understanding that it is in fact a very general concept equivalent to the traditional term Northwest Iranian ... Any other understanding can only contribute to the confusion' (see Rossi, 2010: 320).

Windfuhr (1975: 458) concluded on the basis of these facts (and with regard to the subsequent migration of the Kurds into the Median territory – explained below) that Kurdish can probably not be considered a 'Median' dialect neither linguistically nor geographically, stating further that the modern Iranian languages of Azerbaijan (originally 'Aturpatakan') and Central Iran (e.g. Sivandi) are Median dialects (Windfuhr, 2009: 15).

Despite the fact that there is no attested Middle or Old Iranian language predecessor of Kurdish, some scholars have suggested hypotheses regarding the origins and development of Kurdish based on various reconstructed linguistic and historical facts. It has been observed that despite being a North-western Iranian language, Kurdish (like Balochi) shares many essential features with Persian, while Zazaki and Gorani are much more systematically of a North-western character (Asatrian, 2009: 32–3; Korn, 2003; MacKenzie, 1961). This has led several researchers to consider that Kurdish, at its formative stage, was in close contact with Persian (Lecoq, 1989: 259–61; MacKenzie, 1961; Tedesco, 1921; Windfuhr, 1975). These authors thus project that Kurdish was originally spoken around the area to the north of Fars province or Isfahan (Asatrian, 2009: 34; Windfuhr, 1975: 458), with Persian in the south-west, Balochi in central west Iran, Zazaki in the Caspian region and Gorani to the north of Balochi.[5] From that area (the predecessors of) the Kurds must have migrated north-west to Azerbaijan/Armenia, expelling the Zaza westwards to Anatolia, and more recently a part of them must have migrated southwards to the erstwhile Gorani-speaking south of present-day Iranian Kurdistan, absorbing the local population subsequently and thus resulting in the reduction of the Gorani zone to 'a few speech islands in a sea of Kurdish' (MacKenzie, 1961: 73).[6] This scenario, as developed in MacKenzie (1961: 85), relies also on the fact that Central and Southern Kurdish, spoken in the erstwhile Gorani-dominant regions of southern and central Zagros, share a number of important features with Gorani to the exclusion of Northern Kurdish (e.g. the definiteness suffix -eke, the open compounds instead of ezafe

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5 Similarly, Lecoq (1997: 35) points to several phonological, morphological and lexical particularities that are shared between Kurdish and the languages and dialects around Kerman province in Iran. Based on these similarities, and the stability of the speech communities of those dialects, Lecoq considers the 'initial cradle of the Kurds' to be located in the east of the Kashan–Isfahan–Yazd axis, which is considered the territory of the old Media.

6 Windfuhr (1975: 467) points to the presence of the Kurds in Khorasan as further potential proof of the mentioned migration, for this creates a continuum between the original location and the destination of the migration in the South Caspian area. He claims that although the presence of the Kurds in Khorasan is often explained by their exile to there in Safavid times, people and tribes called Kurds are reported in that area much earlier.

noun phrases, the secondary passive conjugation, the post-verbal morpheme -ewe). Furthermore, the preservation in Central and Southern Kurdish of the suffix pronouns (also known as 'pronominal clitics'), which were shared all across Kurdish but lost in Northern Kurdish (as in Zazaki), is attributed to Gorani influence. MacKenzie suggests thus that there is a Gorani substratum in Southern and Central Kurdish that informs these major morphosyntactic differences between Northern and Central Kurdish.

This scenario of a Gorani substratum in Central/Southern Kurdish, although largely based on assumptions, has not been challenged, except by Jügel (2014: 129), who casts doubt on it on two grounds. Firstly, MacKenzie's argument that Northern Kurdish has preserved its 'purity' while Central and Southern Kurdish have lost theirs under the influence of Gorani is based on the assumption that all Kurdish varieties have descended from one language. But this is not a conclusion that has empirically been demonstrated (cf. also Haig and Öpengin, 2014: 108); these Kurdish varieties may have descended from separate source languages, in which case there is no reason to assume a divergence of Central/Southern Kurdish from Northern Kurdish under the influence of Gorani or any other language. Secondly, the loss of grammatical case in Central Kurdish is not expected since both the 'original' Kurdish and Gorani still have this category.

As for the timing of such a north-westwards migration, both Windfuhr (1975: 467) and Lecoq (1997) suggest the beginning of the Parthian era (i.e. third and second centuries BC) as its starting point. A relatively early 'Caucasian linguistic domain' predating the arrival of Islam is assumed to have been in place in the region (Lecoq, 1997: 34). Support for this claim comes from a phonological feature of aspiration distinction in plosives and affricate sounds found in Kurmanji Kurdish, Armenian and Ossetic (an Iranian language spoken in the Caucasus), but not in Sorani and Southern Kurdish. It is clearly an innovation within Kurmanji (i.e. not inherited from the predecessor language of Kurdish varieties) – since it does not exist in other Western Iranian languages but exists in Zazaki likewise under Caucasian/Armenian influence – that was developed due to the contact influence from the languages of this Caucasian domain that intrudes into eastern Anatolia. Stating that this consonantal system may not have developed recently, Lecoq (1997: 34) concludes that the presence of the Kurds in this Caucasian domain must be at least as old as but probably anterior to the Islamic period. From there, the theory suggests, they must have migrated to the west, pushing the Zazaki speakers to eastern Anatolia, while some of them must have migrated southwards to the Gorani-speaking area, evolving into the Kurmanji and

Sorani varieties, respectively. Asatrian (2009) claims that the Kurds' west-wards migration (i.e. their arrival in historical Armenia) must have taken place in the tenth to fourteenth centuries, but especially after the sixteenth century. This claim is not corroborated either by the sound changes of 'Caucasian linguistic domain' described above or by the historical facts, such as the medieval Kurdish dynasties in Diyarbekir-Akhlat regions (Ripper, 2012; and see section 'The Rise of Written and Literary Kurmanji'), while the colophons of the Armenian manuscripts from the fourteenth century abundantly attest to the presence of Kurdish principalities in the north of Van and Bitlis (Sanjian, 1969: ix) and the presence of Kurdish communities as north as Erzindjan (Sanjian, 1969: 80). The establishment of the Kurds in their present region should thus be seen as the result of a process that has taken about two millennia.

The deep history of Kurdish turns out to be largely unknown territory. The existing accounts are hypotheses relying on the reconstructions from linguistic and historical evidence but they are far from being certain and definitive. A picture does emerge, however, where we see that in terms of its historical classification, Kurdish (i) does not descend from any of the known Middle and Old Iranian languages, (ii) it is a North-west Iranian language with many shared features with South-west Iranian languages as Persian, which makes it actually a 'transition' variety (Windfuhr, 2009: 19) and (iii) its historical development is closely linked to the migrations from east to north-west and later further to the west (Kurmanji) and south (Sorani, Southern Kurdish).

The Rise of Written and Literary Kurmanji

In the absence of any attestation of Kurdish in the pre-Islamic Middle Iranian stage, the survey of the history of Kurdish above was entirely based on the indirect evidence of linguistic reconstruction. Although Kurds are mentioned in the pre-Islamic period (Bois, Minorsky and MacKenzie, 1986: §III; Limbert, 1968; MacKenzie, 1961), there is no information on their language up to the Islamic period.[7] The oldest reference to written Kurdish is by a medieval

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7 Some Kurdish authors have claimed the existence of texts in Kurdish from the fourth and first centuries BC. It is not even worth dwelling on these claims, since, for instance, the texts from the first century BC are the so-called Avroman Documents (see MacKenzie, 1987) that are in Greek and Parthian (see Öpengin, 2014, for a comprehensive rebuttal of this line of nationalistic Kurdish cultural historiography). There is also the so-called Suleimaniye Parchment from the seventh century, purport-edly relating the Kurdish plight under the Arab invasion. Although it found currency in

Chaldean author called Ibn Waḥshiyya (d. 318/930–1) in his treatise on alphabets titled *al-Shawq al-mustahām fī maʿrifat rumūz al-aqlām*. This work, allegedly from the ninth century AD, was first edited in 1806 by the Austrian Orientalist Joseph Hammer, based on a manuscript copied in 1788. Apart from various references to the Kurds, also in other works attributed to him (cf. Hämeen-Anttila, 2006: 126), there is mention of the Kurds in connection with their activities in science and art and their purported use of an alphabet in the writing of their language (Hammer, 1806: 52–3). The author mentions also that he translated two books of botany and agriculture from 'the Curdic language' to Arabic. However interesting such an early attestation of Kurdish sounds, the works attributed to Ibn Waḥshiyya are generally considered to be controversial and not entirely reliable (cf. Hämeen-Anttila, 2006: ix–x), while the particular work in question is considered to be 'a later pseudepigraph which used the names made famous by Ibn Waḥshiyya' (Hämeen-Anttila, 2006: 21). This is thus a largely hypothetical attestation that is not supported by any other source and it is certainly not related to the Kurdish literary tradition and the written language that would develop only in late medieval times.

The period which had more realistic potential of seeing the use of Kurdish as a written or literary language is between the tenth and twelfth centuries, when a number of important quasi-independent Kurdish dynasties were formed (cf. James, 2006, 2007: 110–13; Ripper, 2012: 21), such as the Ḥasanwayhids, Rawadids (cf. Minorsky, 1953), Ayyubids and Marwanids.[8] Among these, the Marwanid dynasty (983–1085) especially enjoyed considerable economic and cultural prosperity (Ripper, 2012: 21). However, Kurdish, the mother tongue of the rulers of the dynasty, does not seem to have enjoyed any visibility in administration nor in the cultural life at the court. Thus, although the *qasida* poetry was thriving in the Marwanid court and produced by poets of Kurdish and other origins, the language of its composition and performance is reported to be exclusively Arabic (cf. James, 2007: 112; Ripper, 2012: 507–28), while the number of coins from their reign is also in Arabic (cf. Heidemann, 1997–1998).[9] A second important dynasty known to be ruled mainly by Kurdish leaders is that of the Ayyubids (twelfth to

Kurdology circles in the mid-twentieth century, it was demonstrated by MacKenzie (1963) that it is a forged document whose language is entirely made up.

8 Abundant references to the Kurds in medieval Islamic Arabic and Persian sources are documented in Dehqan (2008).

9 Interestingly, the eleventh-century Iranian traveller Nasir Khusraw, who passed through the lands governed by the Marwanids in the mid-eleventh century, while describing the city of Akhlat (Kurdish: Xelat; Turkish: Ahlat) in his *Safarnama*, tells

thirteenth centuries). Alsancakli, Dehqan and Baluken (forthcoming) note that Kurdish gained a privileged status under the Ayyubids, but admit that the direct evidence for this is rather thin. There is no Kurdish written language specimen from the Ayyubid period either.

Considering the wider socio-cultural context, the absence of Kurdish in the written domain in those centuries is hardly surprising, since among the major languages of the region only Arabic was being used as the administrative and literary language up to the tenth to eleventh centuries when Persian also started to gain currency as a literary language (cf. Lazard, 1963; Perry, 2012).

The first written attestation of Kurdish known to us consists of a number of words – mostly Kurdish-origin toponyms – and a tongue-twister found in the Arabic scholar Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī's (twelfth to thirteenth centuries) geographical work *Muʿjam al-buldān*. These are such words as *dozeh* 'hell', *der* 'door', *bêrişo* 'place where sheep are washed', and such toponyms as *Serbar, Deşt, Kurdban, Siser, Devser* (cited in Çetin, 2014: 226) – though even some of these could actually be Persian citations. The tongue-twister consists of two separate segments inserted within longer stretches of verses by a poet called Shayṭān al-ʿIrāq (cf. James, 2006: 76–8).[10] Although some individual words are recognizable, overall it is a cryptic and largely indecipherable text.[11]

The first proper 'text' in Kurdish is a short four-line Christian missionary prayer, written in Armenian characters and found inside a larger manuscript in Armenian from the fifteenth century (held at the Collection of Matanadaran in Yerevan, no. 7117, fol. 144b – see Asatrian, 2009: 15). The manuscript was copied between 1430 and 1446 but its origin is considered to have been older (cf. MacKenzie, 1959; Minorsky, 1950). Following is the text adapted from MacKenzie's (1959: 355) reconstruction, and its rather literal translation:

that the city is the border town between the Muslims and Armenians and that in the city of Akhlat they speak three languages: Arabic, Persian and Armenian (Thackston, 2010: 8). Now, there is no evidence and reason for assuming the presence of the Persians in this region. It is almost certain that by 'Persian' Khusraw refers to Kurdish here, given the close linguistic affinity between these two languages.

10 I am indebted to Mustafa Dehqan for bringing this attestation to my attention.

11 Following are the relevant couplets in transliteration (al-Ḥamawī, 1866: 188): [ʿamā al-ʿirāqiyūn al-fāẓihum] çibˤ lî çifanî çeffe çal elçelâ çemmalik ey çeˤçeˋ çibė tiçî teçibˤ çemalė qebl en terçela [wa-l-kurd lātasmaˋ ˋalā] ciya ew neciya ew netˤwey zengelâ kella wbûbû ˋelluk̇ù xuṣtirî xiylû w miylû mûseka mengelâ memmû û meqqù memˤkiy śim anqalwa bû yerˤkiy teciy qulˤtula The text is available online in the following archive: https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.70330/page/n5.

pakij xodê, pakij zehm, pakij vêmarg, koy hat' î xaç'ê, ij kir me, řeh'metê me

Pure God, pure strong, pure immortal, who came to crux [i.e. who was crucified], for our sake. Have mercy on us.

Again, around this period, the Italian Dominican Giovanni visiting 'Nakhicevan in Armenia' (Nakhchivan) noted in his *Libellus de notitia orbis* (1404) in Latin that

Ad meridien Persie est Curdistan, quasi pars Medi sive Parthie, magna patria. Propriam linguam habent et quasi persicam communiter, quando loquuntur linguam armenicam (cited in Galletti, 2006: 291).

In the south of Persia, there is Kurdistan, a region, so to speak, of Media or Parthia, a great country. They have their own language and (it is) quasi-Persian, (although) they commonly speak also the Armenian language.

The Sociopolitical Context of the Emergence of Literary Kurmanji

A second, important political stage in Kurdish history is that of Kurdish principalities from the fourteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries (Bois, Minorsky and MacKenzie, 1986). The relative political stability and economic progress that some of the principalities attained in the sixteenth century seem to have set the material ground for nurturing an interest and motivation for using Kurdish in literature, a function hitherto reserved mostly to Arabic and Persian. Thus there appeared at least three important historians and poets in the Bitlis principality of the sixteenth century: Idris-i Bidlisi (d. 1520), the author of the history *Hasht Behesht* in Persian; Shukri Bidlisi (d. 1523?), the author of the *Selimname* in Turkish; and Sharaf Khan Bidlisi, the author of *Sharafnama*, a compilation of the history of Kurdish rulers in Persian completed in 1596–7. In *Sharafnama*, the single most important late medieval work on the history of the Kurdish rulers, which includes a number of lexical items in Kurdish (such as *çavsor* 'red-eyed', *sohr* 'red', *behl* 'valley', *çem* 'river', *şîlan* '(rosehip) tree', *rişk* 'black', in Scheref, 1860–1862: 107, 154, 211, 272, 301, 348; see also Alsancakli, Dehqan and Baluken, forthcoming), and in the travelogue *Seyahatname* by Evliya Çelebi, who travelled in Kurdistan around 1645–56, there are lengthy descriptions of the educational and theological activities of scholars especially in such principalities as Bitlis, Bohtan/Azizan and ʿImadiya (or ʿAmadiya) (cf. Scheref, 1860–1862: I:15; van Bruinessen, 2000). Yet there are only scarce direct references to writing in Kurdish in these works. Sharaf Khan, while describing the rule and personality of a certain

Emir Yeʿqûb Beg Zirkî (d. 1580), ruler of a castle called 'Derzin' (around Bitlis), states that he was a poet, who had composed mystical poetry and theological commentaries, and that the bulk of his poetry was in the Kurdish language (i.e. Kurmanji) (Chèref-ou'ddîne, 1868: 89). Evliya Çelebi, on the other hand, extensively praises the prosperity of the educational institutions in ʿImadiya (the Bahdinan principality in the present-day Amedi-Akre regions in Iraqi Kurdistan) and cites a poem from a certain Molla Ramazan-i Kurdigî as an example of numerous couplets and *qasida*s written by the Kurdish poets in that city (Çelebi, 2000: 306–10; see also van Bruinessen, 2000). Although no further trace is left from the poet ruler Yeʿqûb Beg Zirkî and only one from Molla Ramazan-i Kurdigî,[12] there are at least three other poets who lived at the end of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century whose works in Kurdish have reached to our day. These are ʿEliyê Herîrî (ʿAli Ḥarîrî, d. turn of the sixteenth century, cf. Yûsiv, 1988), Mela Ehmed Cizîrî (Molla Ahmed Jaziri, 1567–1640, cf. MacKenzie, 1969) and Feqiyê Teyran (Feqī Ṭayrān, 1563–1632, cf. Adak, 2013; Kreyenbroek, 2005; MacKenzie, 1969; Yûsiv, 1988: 20).

Against this brief background, it can be claimed that a literary tradition in Kurmanji Kurdish started towards the end of the sixteenth century. Poetry or more generally verse was the first area in which Kurdish was used. Following the work of Leezenberg (2014, 2019), I will also use the concept of 'vernacularization' for this process by which the language erstwhile restricted to spoken communication starts to be committed to writing, expanding thus its usage to literature and learning domains. More technically, however, 'vernacularization' in the sense of Pollock (2006: 23) stands for 'the historical process of choosing to create written literature, along with its complement, a political discourse, in local languages according to models supplied by a superordinate, usually cosmopolitan, literary culture'.[13] Noting from the outset its limited nature, this process of the 'vernacularization' of Kurdish, that is, its employment in new usage domains (e.g. poetry writing), can be situated within two wider sociopolitical frames.

First, the political stability attained under the major Kurdish principalities from the sixteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries (cf. Hassanpour, 1992, 2001; Özoğlu, 2004) and the accompanying increase in the number and quality of

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12 The manuscript of this text, in Evliya Çelebi's own copy from the second half of the seventeenth century, is coincidentally the oldest manuscript of a Kurdish literary piece. The oldest manuscripts of other major Kurdish works are from the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards; cf. Fuad (1970).

13 See Pollock (2006: 19–36) for a theoretical discussion.

madrasas (cf. Alsancakli, 2018: 186–91).[14] These developments must have created the necessary material and intellectual conditions for the Kurdish authors to start composing and writing poetry in their own language – albeit remaining within the realms of the existing 'literary culture' of the Islamic West Asia of the time. For instance, a number of scholars have pointed to close ties of Melayê Cizîrî to the Azizan ruling dynasty of the Jazira town, while he is also known to have served as the master teacher at the most important school of the town (cf. Ergün, 2017).

The second set of factors to consider in relation to the rise of literary Kurmanji is one which parallels the general trend in the Western world in late medieval times towards the employment of the Romance and Germanic vernaculars instead of the highly perceived trans-regional/superordinate and cosmopolitan Latin (cf. Pollock, 2000: 606). In subsequent centuries, the other 'smaller' communities of Europe, such as Romanian or Polish, started to employ their language in the written activity. A similar process of vernacularization was observed in India for such languages as Kannada, Telugu and at a later stage (in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries) for Maranti and Khmer, respectively (Pollock, 2006). These processes probably did not have any direct impact on the vernacularization of Kurdish. But the sociopolitical setting that might have led to attributing new functions to the community or more local-level languages are at least in principle parallel (cf. Leezenberg, 2014: 721). The phenomenon of vernacularization is indeed not restricted to Kurdish in Kurdistan at that period. Similar to Kurdish, the Neo-Aramaic varieties of the Christian and Jewish communities of Iraqi Kurdistan also started respective written literary traditions in the same period (ca. 1600). The first written records in Jewish Neo-Aramaic are dated to the seventeenth century, while the first text in a Christian Neo-Aramaic dialect is from the turn of the sixteenth century (Mengozzi, 2002: 16; Pennachietti, 1991: 169–70). One other variety ascending to writing at that period is Gorani (Gūrānī), a koine incorporating Hawrami, Central and Southern Kurdish and Persian elements, during the Kurdish Ardalan principality of the seventeenth century in west Iran (cf. Kreyenbroek and Chamanara, 2013). The global vernacularization thus seems to have its parallels also in Kurdistan, with the rise of written literary traditions in Kurmanji Kurdish, Christian Neo-Aramaic, Jewish Neo-Aramaic and Gorani.

14 Cf. Adak (2013: 198–9) for the famous madrasas of the time; cf. Leezenberg (2014) for some notes on the status of Kurdish madrasas during the seventeenth century.

Ehmedê Xanî and the Consolidation of Literary Kurmanji

This formative period was followed by works of larger impact for the consolidation of Kurdish as a written language at the turn of the seventeenth century – the era of Kurdish cultural and literary renaissance (Hassanpour, 1992: 83).[15] Most important of these were the three works by Ehmedê Xanî (1650–1707) in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, such as *Mem û Zîn* (1695), a lengthy romance in narrative poetry (*"masnavi"* or rhyming couplets), *Nûbara Biçûkan*, an Arabic–Kurdish dictionary in verse, and *Eqîda Îmanê*, a creed in verse. Most importantly, Ehmedê Xanî differs from his predecessors and contemporaries in his conscious effort for establishing a written tradition for Kurdish, thus its vernacularization in a more technical and political sense (see above for discussion). In the introduction to *Mem û Zîn*, Xanî states his aim in composing it as saving the Kurds from the embarrassment of not having a book culture, when he states:

> Da xelq nebêjitin ku Ekrad
> Bême'rîfet in bê'esl û bunyad
> Enwa'ê milel di xudankitêb in
> Kurmanc tinê di bêhesêb in

So that the [other] people would not say that the Kurds
   are uncivilized,
With no roots and foundations;
That various peoples possess books,
Only the Kurds are devoid of it   *(Xanî, 2010: 22, my translation).*

Interestingly, Xanî mentions the three Kurdish poets Melayê Cizîrî, 'Eliyê Herîrî and Feqiyê Teyran as his predecessors, which is further support for considering the beginning of the Kurdish literary tradition with these three names at the turn of the sixteenth century. Despite acknowledging his predecessors, however, he qualifies his own endeavour in writing *Mem û Zîn* as of building a literary / written language from scratch, leaving aside the more advantageous practice of using the dominant and established language(s), when he says:

> Safî şemirand vexwarî durdî
> Manendê Derî lîsanê Kurdî
> Înaye nîzam û întîzamê
> Kêşaye cefa ji boyê amê

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15 Attesting to this fact, Alsancakli (2018: 186) reports an interesting observation on the language constellation in the region by the translator of *Sharafnama* at the court of Palu principality who, in 1681, considered Kurdish to be the highest language after Arabic and Persian, having been chosen by great scholars and noble literati.

> He [Xanî] cleared from its dregs
> The Kurdish language, [and put it] on par with Persian;
> He has established order and regularity [in the language]
> And has suffered for the masses' sake   *(cf. Hassanpour, 1992: 86).*

And this endeavour is undertaken despite being entirely conscious of the low status of the Kurdish language on the literary scene and among the public. Since he likens the Kurmanji language to the less valuable of the coins and copper, as opposed to valuable coins, gold and silver. Most importantly, however, he stresses the intrinsic and pure value of Kurmanji (and by extension his local culture) as *undeceitful*, *pure*, *priceless*, *absolute*, *doubtless* and *clear* (*bayt*s 265 to 268 – see Leezenberg, 2019). As in other contexts of vernacularization, the emphasis is on the values of the local culture and community, rather than that of the dominant culture and society. Lastly, he also comments on the sources of his literary language by stating that the language of his work incorporates elements of Arabic and Persian based on the Kurmanji dialects of 'Bohtî, Mehmûdî and Silîvî' (Xanî, 2010: 201), which most probably refer to the three dialects of Bohtan (Cizîr/Jizre), Hakkari and Bahdinan (Zakho-Amedi region), respectively.[16]

In the same vein, Xanî's major aim in writing *Nûbara Biçûkan* is to facilitate the schooling of Kurdish children in Arabic-centred religious education. This purpose is stated explicitly when he says that he composed the dictionary for the Kurmanj (or unprivileged) children so that when they are done with learning to read the Qur'an, they are also acquainted with literacy, that through the use of his dictionary what they read no more remains difficult to understand (Hassanpour, 1992: 88–9). However, *Nûbara Biçûkan* goes beyond this stated purpose as a conscious introverted effort in codifying the Kurdish language, since there are various thematic, specific and technical terms that would not be immediately available to many speakers of Kurdish. Xanî's *Eqîda Îmanê* also falls in the same line since here, too, a previously unavailable domain of language use has been opened to the use of Kurdish. It can thus be seen as a building block in Xanî's effort in diversifying the language use domains of Kurdish, from short poetry to ambitious lengthy romance that may claim to be commensurate with similar high-impact

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16 The Italian missionary author of the Kurdish grammar and dictionary Maurizio Garzoni (1787: 4) also refers to major dialect divisions in the Kurdish of the region as (the dialects of) Soran, Badinan, Bohtan, Bitlisi. It is interesting that he considers Sorani – which according to him was spoken in the principality of Karaçolan (around Koye and Suleimani) – and the other three Kurmanji dialects on a par with each other, not assuming a higher distance between the three Kurmanji dialects, on one hand, and this Sorani dialect, on the other.

literary works in surrounding Persian-Arabic-Turkish cultures, to religious learning/thinking and to a pedagogy of children and lexicography.

Perhaps an equally important development in the vernacularization process of Kurdish was to follow in the grammar of Arabic in Kurdish called *Tesrîf* (also known as *Serfa Kurmancî*) written by Elî Teremaxî probably at the turn of the seventeenth century, to be followed by two complementary grammatical treatises, *Zurûf* and *Terkîb, by* Mela Yûnis Helqetenî on aspects of Arabic grammar written probably in the first half of the eighteenth century (the exact date of their writing is not known, but their oldest extant manuscripts are from 1767 – cf. Fuad, 1970: 119). These linguistic works are important in marking the beginning of prose writing in the emerging Kurdish literary culture but also as attempts at expanding the usage domains of written Kurdish in the context of religious education, otherwise reserved to Arabic and more restrictedly also to Persian (cf. Leezenberg, 2014). There are two final works to consider in this connection. First, the *Mewlûd (Mawlid)* written during the first half of the eighteenth century by Melayê Bateyî (Molla Ḥusain Bāta-i, ca. 1670–1750). *Mewlûds*, relating the events around the birth of *the* Prophet Muhammad, are sung texts as part of communal gatherings with the same name. Such texts abounded in Arabic, Persian and Turkish already in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries. The composition of the Kurdish version of the *Mewlûd,* thus, amounts to claim for a new usage domain for Kurdish, namely, that of religious recitation and communal entertainment. The second work is a medical treatise *(Kitâb al-ṭubb bâ lisân al-kurdî – The Book of Medicine in the Kurdish Language)* written at around the end of the eighteenth century by Molla Muhammad Arvasi (Doski, 2004: 15–22). It is presented as the translation of a work by Galen (Aelius Galenus – second century AD) though the relationship to such a source text is not evident. This work is important both for being a rare prose specimen and for documenting lexical items relating to an area (plants, medicaments) that would not appear in other major genres in classical Kurdish writing. One last prose work from the period is a compendium of Islamic doctrine by Sheikh Abdullah-i Nehri written in the Şemdînan dialect of Kurmanji (MacKenzie, 1962).

It is thus safe to state that after the emergence of literary Kurdish from the end of the sixteenth century within the political context of Kurdish principalities and widespread religious learning in Kurdistan, it is mainly with the works of Ehmedê Xanî and several other authors at the turn of the seventeenth century that use of written Kurmanji was expanded for new themes and genres. These efforts, however, remained largely marginal and short-lived, while they were also mostly conceived within the boundaries of the

existing language constellations where Kurdish was almost uniquely reserved for colloquial, rather than written, production and correspondence.[17] It is only in Ehmedê Xanî's aspiration in *Mem û Zîn* to establish a literary Kurdish equivalent of neighbouring major languages that there is a clear ambition of producing a Kurdish literary/written culture that would be an alternative to the two major Arabic and Persian literary cultures. In this sense, it marks a 'profound break' in cultural communication and self-perception, one which is also understood as such by the author (cf. Pollock, 2006: 21, for theoretical discussion), and it clearly follows from Xanî's own statements that his endeavour in creating a Kurdish vernacular (domestic) literature is 'in response to other literatures superposed to them in a relation of unequal cultural power' (Pollock, 2006: 26). In that sense, Xanî's attempt can also be considered as the peak at which the literary culture in Kurdish was formalized as the creation of an alternative literary activity with a clear political complement, thus 'vernacularization' of Kurdish in a more technical sense.

The Decline of Literary Kurmanji

The literary production continued in its relatively slow pace in the eighteenth century only to seriously fall in the nineteenth century, being restricted to several sporadic poetic works (see Adak, 2013; Blau, 2010; Doski, 2004). One important development, more for the record of the linguistic history of Kurdish than for the linear development of literary Kurdish of the time, concerns the works that Molla Mahmud Bayazidi compiled and composed for the Russian consul at Erzurum, Alexander Jaba, during the 1850s (cf. Hassanpour, 1992: 81). Witnessing the decline of literacy among the Kurds, Bayazidi, in his brief introduction to his copy (1857–8) of the *Serfa Kurmancî* of Elî Teremaxî (discussed above), after describing the curriculum of madrasa education, complains that 'but now madrasas, scholars and studying/literacy have become rather limited, and are hardly found' (Teremaxî, 1997: 11). The last important work in the premodern Kurmanji era is the grammar and dictionary of the Kurmanji of Muks region (in Van province) compiled by

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17 There is no doubt, however, on the principal role of Kurdish as the lingua franca among various linguistic communities throughout Kurdistan in those centuries. In addition to numerous observations by Evliya Çelebi in the seventeenth century (cf. van Bruinessen, 2000) and Maurizio Garzoni in the eighteenth century, Lentin (2012) reports a situation where in eighteenth-century Siirt (in eastern Anatolia) Kurdish is seen as indispensable for proper functioning in society. Bela Edwards' (1851: 16) summary of various missionary and Orientalist works of the time further attest that 'the Kurdish language prevails over the entire country from Armenia on the North to the region of Baghdad on the South, and from the Tigris on the West to Azerbijan on the East.'

Yusuf Ziyaeddin Pasha, the Palestinian governor of the town. The volume published in 1892 contained several works by Ehmedê Xanî as well as several other poems. Here, too, the author complains in his introduction that there were no relevant works nor interest among the members of the Kurdish community for him to rely on (see text cited in Arslan, 2014: 75–6). It should be noted that this obvious decline in Kurmanji literary activity – admittedly never really intensive – corresponds to the period when the semi-independent Kurdish principalities were first weakened at the turn of the nineteenth century and abolished towards the mid-nineteenth century. There was thus a rather weak scene of literary Kurdish in the period leading to the emergence of modern Kurdish at the turn of the twentieth century, to which we get in the next section.

Modern Kurmanji as a Polycentric Language

It is probably justified to date the beginning of modern written Kurmanji to the turn of the twentieth century, and this more due to the diversification of the forms and venues it was used in than the actual formal aspects of the language. Starting with the newspaper *Kurdistan* in last years of the nineteenth century and several journals in the first two decades of the twentieth century, such as *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (1908–9), *Rojî Kurd* (1913), *Hetawî Kurd* (1914), *Jîn* (1918–19), *Kurdistan* (1919), *Serbestî* (1919) and several others, published mostly in Istanbul but also in some other centres such as Cairo and Baghdad, Kurdish started to be used in prose for journalistic and more secular subjects. In these publications mostly Kurmanji but also Sorani pieces appear and there is even some discussion on language standardization (cf. Scalbert-Yücel, 2005: 176–8) and the necessity of adopting the Latin alphabet for the writing of Kurdish (e.g. *Rojî Kurd*, 1913). Although 'classical Kurmanji', especially in poetry, had developed grammatical and stylistic norms, the language used in these journalistic pieces often reflects wide regional differences. For instance, Evdirehman Rehmiyê Hekarî (1890–1958) relies almost entirely on his dialect of Hakkari, and the tables he charted for the verb conjugations in Kurmanji reflect specifically the grammar of his own Hakkari dialect (cf. Geverî, 2017: 150). In addition to these more organized efforts, one important body of Kurdish texts was composed in 1916–18 by Molla Said Shamdinani, who was Basil Nikitin's collaborator and teacher of Kurdish in Urmiya between 1915 and 1918 and composed a body of prose texts for him on various historical and cultural matters. Written in the dialect of

Şemdînan, the texts freely employ the rhetoric sources of the Persian language as a means of stylistic elaboration of Kurmanji (cf. Öpengin, 2019).

With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Kurmanji speakers were divided into five sovereign states of Turkey, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Armenia. This led to two forms of disruption. The linguistic development achieved until the early 1920s was discontinued, and the Kurmanji speakers in these different countries developed the written use of the language relatively independently of each other, leading to three different written codes of Kurmanji: (i) the Latin-based Bohtan (or Hawar) standard in Syria and Turkey, (ii) the Cyrillic-based Yerevan (or Caucasus) standard and (iii) the Arabic-based Bahdini standard. (In addition to these, the traditional Arabic-based Kurmanji alphabet that was in use throughout the previous centuries in the religious education and literature has survived thanks to its use in a number of madrasas in Turkey and Iran.)

The 'Hawar' Standard in Syria and Turkey

Following World War I, but especially after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, many Kurdish intellectuals from Turkey were exiled to Syria and Beirut. Benefitting from the relatively liberal attitudes of the French Mandate in Syria, Celadet Alî Bedirxan (d. 1961) started a journal called *Hawar* (1932–43), mainly in Kurmanji but also in French and Sorani, in which he proposed an adapted Latin alphabet for the writing of Kurdish (no. 1, May 1932) following the model of the Turkish alphabet adopted in 1928.[18] This standard was based mainly on the Botan dialect (the region with Cizre as its chief historical city), which shared numerous norms of the Kurmanji used in the works from previous centuries (the so-called classical literature). C. A. Bedirxan devised the rules of the orthography and the grammar of this new written form in subsequent issues of the journal and they were implemented more or less systematically, creating a normative reference for a small group of writers, most notably Kamuran Bedirxan, Cegerxwîn, Osman Sebrî, Qedrîcan, Nûredîn Zaza and many other ad hoc contributors. Celebrating the achievement of the Hawar circle in developing a modern written code, Bedirxan (1933: 1) was noting a year after the starting of the

18 The consonance with the Turkish alphabet is undeniable and indeed acknowledged by the author (*Hawar* no. 1: 10). Moreover, in 1934, in the twenty-fourth issue of the journal (p. 629), a change was introduced such that the letters 'q' and 'k' were swapped for their sound values, making the use of 'k' parallel to its counterpart in the Turkish alphabet. It is of course a very common practice for minority languages to create their writing systems following the model of dominant languages in order to facilitate the acquisition of literacy.

Hawar journal, in its twentieth issue, that Kurmanji was no longer only an oral language but that it had become a written language. Conscious of the existence of many predecessors having written in Kurdish, mentioning especially Ehmedê Xanî for granting the language its 'soul', he argues, nevertheless, that 'those writings would not create a language for us, since they were different from each other [for their language use], full of foreign words, far from the language of the people – the pure language – and were Kurmanji only with some of their words.' The major achievement of Hawar, according to him, relies thus on devising a practical writing system capable of representing the sounds of the language and the terminological and thematic modernization of the language (Bedirxan, 1933: 1) His essays on the grammar and orthography also laid the ground for the authoritative reference grammar of Kurmanji, *Grammaire Kurde* (Bedir Khan and Lescot, 1970). *Hawar* was continued with several other journals such as *Ronahî* (1941–4), *Roja Nû* (1943–6) and *Stêr* (1943–5), while the publishing house he established in Damascus published several books. It is through these publications and in general through the cultural activities of the 'Hawar school' that written standard Kurmanji was born and its initial stage lexical modernization and stylistic expansion largely achieved. The Hawar standard subsequently made its way into Kurdish intellectual circles emerging from the second half of the 1950s in Turkey, though the implementation of the alphabet and grammar rules were less systematic. It was only through intensive cultural activism of exiled Kurdish intellectuals in Sweden, France and Germany that the Hawar standard found relatively widespread currency (cf. Scalbert-Yücel, 2005: 210–11, 2006). Practically all the print and audiovisual media led by the Kurds of Turkey and Syria since then have relied on this written code, but meanwhile, its dialect basis has largely shifted to Diyarbekir-Mardin region. It is today the major written norm used for Kurmanji, enriched exponentially due to ever-widening usage domains such as TV, private courses and public schools, and undergraduate and postgraduate study programmes in several universities in Turkish Kurdistan.

The Kurmanji Norm of Armenia-Caucasus

Following the Russian revolution, the Kurds in Soviet republics, but especially in Armenia, acquired unprecedented opportunities for linguistic and cultural development.[19] After using Armenian and Latin-based alphabets during the 1920s–1930s, they adopted a Cyrillic-based alphabet around 1940

19 See Pohl (2017) for a historical background on the Kurds in Soviet republics.

(Leezenberg, n.d.: 3). With its base in Armenia, Yerevan, the cultural renaissance of the Kurds in the USSR was enabled primarily by Kurdish teaching at schools, the biweekly newspaper *Riya Teze* (published since the 1930s) and the Kurdish section of Radion Yerevan, started in early 1930s, disrupted in 1937, to be restarted with the leadership of Kurdish folklorist and author Casimê Celîl in 1955. Throughout the following three decades, until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the daily Kurdish programmes of this radio were the single-most important venue for the modern use of Kurmanji.

However, the development of the so-called Caucusus Kurmanji standard followed an almost entirely independent course of planning from that of the Hawar standard. Indeed, any interaction and co-operation of the Kurdish intellectuals in Soviet republics with the leaders of the Hawar circle was strongly discouraged and even sanctioned (Leezenberg, n.d.: 15–17). The written standard Kurmanji there was based on the northern-most Kurmanji dialect of the Kurds in Armenia. It was also heavily influenced by both Armenian and Russian, and the fact that its lexical and terminological modernization followed the models of those languages made its written form substantially different from the Hawar standard. Given also the political conditions, the interaction between the writers and speakers remained at a minimum. Any role in mutual literary and linguistic enrichment between the two standards through book publications and literary output, thus, remained extremely limited, until the end of the 1980s when the Kurdish intellectuals from ex-Soviet republics started to collaborate with the Kurds in the diaspora to publish their works. More recently, however, a good number of Kurdish authors from ex-Soviet republics have adopted the Latin Kurdish alphabet for their writings.[20] Both the republication of the classical works by ex-Soviet Kurdish authors in Latin Kurdish orthography and their ongoing activities within the domain of Kurmanji literary scene brings their written code closer to the Hawar standard of Kurmanji while also influences it especially when it comes to lexical cultivation. Given the highly marginalized status of Kurdish in Armenia and Caucasus, in general, it is unlikely that the Caucasus written standard will persist its independent existence for long; more likely is that the Hawar standard will turn into a more general reference point for those Kurdish communities, too, especially in the diaspora.

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20 The online cultural and political platform Riya Teze (https://krd.riataza.com/), run by veteran ex-Soviet Kurdish intellectuals, thus is output entirely in the Latin Kurdish alphabet, with its authors and readership consisting at least equally also of Kurds from Turkey.

The Bahdini Substandard of Kurmanji in Iraqi Kurdistan

Bahdini, or Badini, is the dialect of Kurmanji spoken in the Duhok and Erbil provinces of Iraqi Kurdistan, as well as in the Hakkari region in Turkish Kurdistan and southern half of the Urmiya region in Iranian Kurdistan. The name derives from the Bahdinan principality (see Hassanpour, 1988) with Akre and Amêdî towns of Iraqi Kurdistan being its historical centres. Bahdini is probably the most archaic Kurmanji (and, by extension, Kurdish) dialect. It is also the dialect that reflects most of the grammatical and stylistic norms of the so-called classical Kurmanji of the texts from the premodern era (cf. Öpengin, 2018). The dialect zone corresponds to the south-eastern section of Kurmanji speech area, and today, it is the dialect that, in lexico-statistical terms, stands out as the most different among all Kurmanji dialects (see Haig and Öpengin, 2018; Öpengin and Haig, 2014).

With the formation of the Iraqi state under the British Mandate after World War I, the Bahdini dialect became the main denominator of Kurmanji in Iraqi Kurdistan. However, compared to Sorani, its area was smaller and its population much more rural (cf. Hassanpour, 2012: 57). Thus although the successive Iraqi governments recognized some linguistic rights of the Kurds (cf. Öpengin, 2015; Hassanpour, 1992) – and at time also separately provided for the use of the Bahdini dialect in Bahdini-speaking towns (Hassanpour, 2012: 59) – it was mostly Sorani that was used in education and local administration, and thus benefitting from widespread linguistic cultivation. Nevertheless in 1958, with the wider recognition of Kurdish cultural and political rights after the fall of the monarchy, Bahdini was started to be used in the Kurdish section of the state radio as well as in several journals (Hassanpour, 2012: 61, 64). In comparison to Sorani, though, its written usage remained rather marginal, with only 12 per cent of the periodicals in Iraqi Kurdistan between 1918 and 1985 being in Bahdini/Kurmanji, while 80 per cent were in Sorani (Hassanpour, 1992: 273). After the establishment of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in 1992, the Kurmanji-speaking towns started using their dialect in various public domains, most notably in outdoor signs and publications. The process has attained momentum since further consolidation of the KRG in 2003, as, in addition to serving the working language of the local administrations in Duhok province, Bahdini has also gradually replaced Arabic and Sorani dialect in education, currently serving as the main medium of education at schools and to some extent at universities in the province. Thanks also to institutionally supported broadcast and print media, and a burgeoning literature, Bahdini seems to

have come a long way in the linguistics cultivation, modernization and normativization on its Duhok dialect and Kurdish Arabic alphabet, considered thus as a substandard of Kurmanji.

However, in addition to the state borders preventing cross-dialectal interaction, the Bahdini substandard developed mostly independently of the Hawar standard both because the two norms were based on different alphabets (Latin vs Arabic) and their linguistic cultivation and modernization took place following the models of different dominant languages, namely, Turkish in the case of Hawar standard, and Arabic and Sorani in the case of Bahdini. The standardization process of Bahdini has thus widened the distance between the two codes. However, there have been signs over the past decade among the users of Bahdini to use the Latin Kurdish alphabet and to incorporate a much greater number of Hawar standard norms in their written code. This new approximated Bahdini norm is particularly visible in the language use of the major media outlets in the province and various other print publication institutions. Furthermore, more recently the standardization efforts of Kurmanji are being managed by commissions including Bahdini-speaking linguist and researchers (cf. *Komîsyona Kurmancî*, cited in Akin, 2011; Rêbera Rastnivîsînê, 2019).[21] With such 're-linking' (Hassanpour, 2012: 70) and language planning efforts it is likely that the Kurmanji substandards can develop in harmony, ultimately resulting in much more transient linguistic and cultural borders.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to clarify several controversial areas around Kurdish or the language varieties spoken by the Kurds. It first provided a general internal classification of Kurdish varieties, clarifying the major problems of naming and classification in the southern-most periphery of the Kurdish speech zone in Iranian Kurdistan. This section also touched upon the highly controversial language–dialect and language–identity matters around Zazaki and Gorani varieties and called for the necessity of acknowledging the existence of separate dimensions of language history and collective identity, with distinct methodologies of study and potentially diverging outcomes. At the face of substantial linguistic diversity within the communities identifying as Kurdish, it was suggested that the concept of 'Kurdish' should be considered more as

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21 An orthography guidebook aiming at reforming the Hawar standard and introducing more detailed orthography rules into the language. See Rêbera Rastnivîsînê (2019).

a sociolinguistic unit than a purely linguistic entity. The chapter then took up the examination of the historical sources of Kurdish in ancient Iran and provided a summary discussion of the position of Iranian philology on the history of Kurdish whereby it was shown that Kurdish is not in a direct descendant relationship with any of the known languages of the Old and Middle Iranian periods, including the widely held candidate of the Median language, and that it shows a transitory character between North-western and South-western Iranian languages due to its close contact with Persian in its initial stage of formation. These observations were translated into a historical scenario where Kurdish was considered to be initially located in the central-eastern regions of Iran from where its speaker communities migrated westwards to the South Caspian, and from there further westwards to Upper Mesopotamia and southwards to Zagros area.

The chapter then traced the history of written and literary Kurdish. It surveyed the status of the language in the medieval period, enumerating several of its essentially insignificant attestations at this stage. The rise of literary or written code in Kurdish was shown to have taken place in the late sixteenth century, in its Kurmanji form, within the wider sociopolitical context of, on one hand, the emergence of powerful Kurdish principalities and widespread madrasa education, and, on the other, a general trend in the vernacularization of local community languages in Kurdistan. The major figure of Ehmedê Xanî as a pioneer in raising the status of Kurdish and cultivating its written code was discussed along with other significant poetry and prose works in the period up to the end of the eighteenth century. The decline of literary Kurmanji was shown to coincide with the weakening of the Kurdish principalities in the nineteenth century. The use of a literary Kurmanji in print and journalistic periodicals starting at the end of the nineteenth century marks the beginning of modern Kurmanji. The division of the Kurds following World War I was shown to have led to the development of three written norms or standards of Kurmanji, in Yerevan, Syria/Turkey and Iraq, each in a different alphabet and following the linguistic modernization principles of the dominant languages of those countries. This pluri-centric situation of Kurmanji was observed to be tending towards an ever more approximation of the norms around the Hawar standard of the Kurds in Turkey and Syria, which could result in a more comprehensive pluri-normative Kurmanji standard that accommodates a wider range of dialect forms enabling a more diverse and dynamic literary code.

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The History and Development of Literary Central Kurdish

JAFFER SHEYHOLISLAMI

Central Kurdish (CK) is spoken by about 8 million people: in Iran by about 3,000,000 people, in Iraq by about 4,750,000 and in diasporic communities outside these two countries by about 250,000 (see section 'CK Population'). In Iran, it is the main spoken language throughout the province of Kurdistan, and it is widely spoken in the provinces of West Azerbaijan and to a lesser extent in Kermanshah in addition to major urban centres such as Tehran. In Iraq, it is the majority language in four provinces: Halabja, Sulaimani, Kirkuk and Hewler/Erbil (see Map 25.1). CK is arguably the most standardized Kurdish variety for reasons discussed in this chapter. Whereas CK lacks any official status in Iran, it is the official language of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and an official language at the federal level in Iraq. This chapter provides an overview of this Kurdish variety's history and development to date. First, a discussion on terminology is in order, followed by a brief discussion on the number of speakers.

CK or Sorani?

Various labels have been used to refer to this variety of Kurdish, such as CK (MacKenzie, 1961), Middle Kurdish/Middle Dialect (Zabihi, 1977), Kirmanji Xuwaru or Southern Kurmanji (Abdullah, 1980) and Sorani (Hassanpour, 1992; Ghassemlou, 1965; Vanley, 1959). Calling it Sorani, however, has been controversial from the perspective of the vast majority of Iraqi CK literati who instead prefer either CK or Zimanî Edebîyî Yekgirtûy Kurdî (The Unified Literary Kurdish Language) (Sabir, 2008). Yet, to date, there has not been any critical investigation of how the term Sorani started to be used as a label for CK. This is an important task since the written CK originated from the Sulaimani region in the 1700s and in the same region, the foundations of
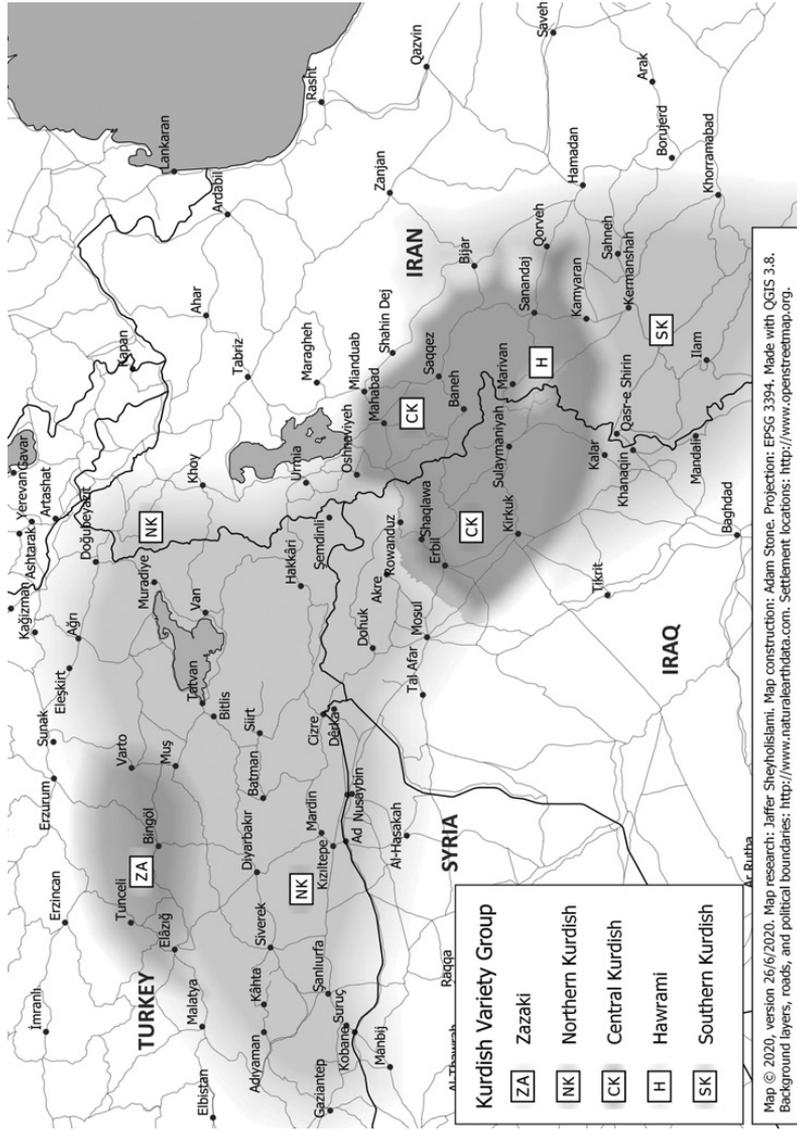
Map 25.1 Central Kurdish identified among other major Kurdish varieties

Map © 2020, version 26/6/2020. Map research: Jaffer Sheyholislami. Map construction: Adam Stone. Projection: EPSG 3394. Made with QGIS 3.8.
Background layers, roads, and political boundaries: http://www.naturalearthdata.com. Settlement locations: http://www.openstreetmap.org.

Kurdish Variety Group

ZA   Zazaki

NK   Northern Kurdish

CK   Central Kurdish

H   Hawrami

SK   Southern Kurdish

its standard variety were established. In fact, there is a CK-NK teaching booklet published in Istanbul, in 1921, that refers to CK as Babanî following the name of the last Kurdish principality, Baban, in that region (Hînkerê Zimanê Kurdî, 1921).

In one of the oldest scribal records in this variety (e.g. Nali's poetry, 1800–56), CK is simply called Kurdî (excerpts of poems below). Although Leezenberg (2020: 58) suggests that the term Sorani to mean CK possibly existed before the 1900s, this author has not been able to locate any usage of the term to mean CK or even the speech variety of the Soran region, before 1932 (see further below). Nikitine (1926: 121) seems to be the first source referring to the 'Suran' group of Kurds along with three other groups, 'Lur', 'Kalhur' and 'Guran'. He does not, however, use the term Surani, Sorani or Soorani. It is only in the 1930s when Kurdish language diversity becomes politicized during debates over what 'dialect' of Kurdish should be used as the written medium of education and public administration in different districts of the Kurdish region in Iraq.[1] From that point on various terms start to be used for CK, most of which carry their own political connotations.

When the Iraqi parliament approved a Local Language Law (LLL) bill in 1931, Kurdish was still referred to as Kurdi. However, in a British memo dated 1932, the term 'Soorani language' was used for the first time (cited in Hassanpour, 1992: 158). This appears to be the earliest documented use of the term 'Soorani' or 'Sorani' in Iraq to reference the Kurdish variety that is called Sorani or CK today. A different usage of 'Sorani' to mean 'Central Kurdish' appears in the resolution of the Second Congress of Kurdish Teachers (1960, in Shaqlawa) in which the 'Sorani dialect' was proposed to be the Kurdish literary language in Iraq (Khoshnaw, 2013: 390–2). CK authors (e.g. Ezzeddin Mustafa Rasoul) also used the term 'Sorani' as early as 1960 (Rasoul, 2008) when in the introduction to the novel *Peshmerga* he refers to Rahim Ghazi's Mukri variety as a dialect of Sorani possibly in its narrow sense, that is, the speech variety spoken from Hawler to Mahabad but excluding the CK varieties spoken in Kirkuk, Sulaimani, Halabja and most of the Kurdistan province in Iran.

It is my suggestion that the use of 'Sorani' to mean CK is a label first used by Badini speakers to refer to adjacent non-Badini Kurdish speakers (i.e. Hawler, Shaqlawa, Rawanduz) who lived in a region called Soran long before the establishment of the new Iraq (e.g. Leach, 1940; Sabir, 2008). Accordingly, their CK dialect was called 'Sorani'. The semantic field of the term was expanded

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1 Classic writers such as Ahmad Khani use Kurmanji/Kirmanji and Kurdî interchange-ably. I am not aware of any document that used Kurdî and Sorani as synonyms prior to 1932.

gradually by Badini speakers to mean all CK dialects. Since the 1980s, the term Sorani has been used interchangeably with 'CK' by some Kurdish scholars, and most Western scholars and community services in diasporic communities. However, many CK scholars in Iraqi Kurdistan disapprove of the term 'Sorani' with this broad meaning and believe that the term should be reserved solely for the subvariety of CK used by the speech community of the Soran region (Asaf and Abdulrahman, 2015). There are also prominent CK authors (e.g. Rafiq Sabir) who believe that referring to CK as 'Sorani' is an 'insult and degradation' of CK speakers (Sabir, 2008: 76–7). This chapter respects these reservations and uses the term 'CK' instead of 'Sorani'.

CK Population

Exact numbers of Kurdish speakers do not exist in Iran or in Iraq. The figures here on the number of CK speakers are based on the following estimates. Iraq: Halabja governorate, 250,000 (there is a considerable number of Hawrami speakers in the province); Sulaimani governorate, 2,000,000; Kirkuk, 700,000 (about 40 per cent of the population speak Turkoman, Arabic and Syriac languages, and a number of Kurdish groups speak varieties other than CK); Erbil/Hawler governorate, 1,800,000 (sizable populations of the province speak Turkoman, Syriac, Northern Kurdish (NK) and also Arabic). Iran, based on the 2011 census: Kermanshah province, 300,000, primarily from Jafi Kurdish people (the majority of the population in this province speak Southern Kurdish, e.g. Kalhuri, in addition to Gurani, Hawrami, Persian and Turkish in Sonqor); Kordestan/Kurdistan province, 1,400,000 (the province is also home to speakers of Hawrami in Hawraman, Pawe/Paveh and Nowsud, Southern Kurdish in Bijar and Azari Turkish in Qurwe/Qorveh and Bijar); West Azerbaijan, 1,000,000 (there are also speakers of NK, SK and Azari Turkish in the province); and, other major urban centres in Iran such as Tabriz, Karaj and Tehran among others, 300,000. As for diasporic communities outside Iran and Iraq estimated here at 250,000, CK speakers primarily live in Scandinavian countries in addition to the Netherlands, Germany, France, UK, Australia, Canada and the US among others. Given this, it is safe to estimate the population of CK speakers at about 8 million people.

History of CK

We are not sure when the first spoken language emerged despite various hypotheses; however, we do know that written language emerged about

5,000–6,000 years ago. The older the written record of a language, the older its known history and the better known its development. Without written records, then, any speculation about the origin of a language, including CK, likely amounts to mythology or – at best – an intelligent guess.

Many Kurdish sources have written about the history of Kurdish as a descendant of the language of the Medes. Due to the lack of written evidence, however, we know very little about the Kurdish language and its scripts prior to the Islamic conquest of the Iranian plateau in the seventh century (Kreyenbroek, 2005). The Arab conquest brought not only Islam but also Arabic and Arabic literacy to Kurdish-speaking regions. Written Arabic was first taught to the clergy, who translated the Qur'an for local Kurds and taught Arabic and Persian poetry to children. Later, the clergy would comprise most of the Kurdish poets on record today. As Hassanpour (1992: 52) observes, 'Kurdish literature was born in the mosque schools of cities and villages.' For centuries, like the literati of other linguistic minorities in the Middle East, those of Kurdish origin wrote in Persian, Arabic and sometimes in Turkish except for periods when they enjoyed various degrees of political autonomy and several of them wrote in Kurdish. For CK-speaking regions, this did not happen until the 1700s.

The 1700s–1917

The oldest written sources in CK are the eighteenth-century collections of poetry.[2] This is surprising, given that written records in Gurani/Hawrami and Kurmanji date back to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. We do not know why CK lagged behind its counterpart, Kurmanji, despite similar conditions between the two traditions of writing. Both were characterized by features such as 'an essentially poetic literature, restricted audience, a clerical and aristocratic base and limited functions' (Hassanpour, 1992: 90). One reason for this lag could be that CK emerged only after the decline of Gurani/Hawrami, the weakening of the Ardalan court and the rise of the Baban dynasty in the Sulaimani region. During the rule of the Babans, CK developed into an important literary language and the medium of some of the most influential classic poetry to this day. This language was based on varieties spoken in or near Sulaimani, and this era witnessed the rise of the Nali school of poetry (1800–56). Although Nali was proficient in Persian and Arabic, he chose

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2 The oldest written text in CK is reported to be Mulla Muhammad Ibn ul-Haj's *Mahdîname* (*The Book of Mahdi*), completed in 1762 (Gharadaghi, 1975).

to write in his mother tongue, Kurdish, and he views this ability as a source of power. This is evident in at least a few of his poems. For example:

Fars u Kurd u ʿEreb, her sêm be defter girtuwe

فارس و کورد و عەرەب، هەر سێم بە دەفتەم گرتووه

Nalî emřo hakimî sê muḻke, dîwanî heye

نالی ئەمڕۆ حاکمی سێ مولّکه، دیوانی هەیە

I have captured Persians, Kurds and Arabs with my monograph,
Nalî rules over three territories today, [for] he has a *dîwan* [collection of poems]   *(Nalî, 1976: 577, my translation, cited in Sheyholislami, 2011: 80).*

In another poem, Nali stated that he chose to write in Kurdish although aware that his writing and message might not gain as much currency as it might have had he written them in the more common, prestigious languages of the time – Persian and Arabic:

Teb'î shekkerbarî min Kurdî eger înşa deka

تەبعی شەککەربّاری من کوردی ئەگەر ئینشا دەکا

îmtîhanî xoye meqsudî, le ʿemda wa deka

ئیمتحانی خۆیه مەقسوودی، له عەمدا وا دەکا

If my poetic talent writes in Kurdish
It's on purpose, it wants to test itself

Kes be elfazim neḻê xo Kurdî ye, xokirdîye

کەس بە ئەلفازم نەلّێ، خۆ کوردی یە، خۆکردییه

Her kesê nadan nebê xoy talîbî me'na deka

هەرکەسێ نادان نەبّێ خۆی تالیبی مەعنا دەکا

No one should dismiss my utterances simply because they are in Kurdish
The wise person should be in search of meaning (Nalî, 1976: 106–7, my translation).

Nali's contemporaries, such as Salem (Abdulrahman Begi Sahebqiran) and Mistefa Begi Kurdi, also wrote mainly in CK. Their poems became the building blocks for CK's standard variety.

With the overthrow of the Baban dynasty in 1850, the first golden era of written CK ended and poets like Nali left the region. Nonetheless, CK continued to be the language of poets in a vast area in today's Iraqi Kurdistan as well as Iranian Kurdistan. The tradition of writing poetry in CK was continued by Heci Kadirî Koyi (1817–97), who was disappointed to discover that the Kurdish literati did not write in their language (Abdullah, 1980: 10–12). Haji criticized the clergy for not promoting Kurdish and called

anyone who did not know 'his' mother tongue a 'bastard'. He clearly connected mother tongue and ethnonational identity (Hassanpour, 1992: 57–62). Other important figures of the late nineteenth century, such as Sheikh Reza Talebani (1813–1910), enhanced CK's literary language, and a group of poets from Iranian Kurdistan further enriched it.

Despite this rich poetic tradition, we know of only three non-poetic CK works prior to the twentieth century: a glossary of Arabic–Kurdish vocabulary (Ehmedi, 1795, cited in Hassanpour, 1992), *Mawludname*, by Sheikh Husen Qazi (1793–1871), and the translation of the introduction to *Gulistaan*, a treasure of Persian literature written by Saʿdi. The language of these texts, however, relied heavily on Arabic and Persian and as such, CK enjoyed little to no progress at that point. This remained true up until WWI when, according to Hassanpour (1992: 95), the state of literary Kurdish could be summed up as follows: '1. proliferation of dialect literature, 2. absence of a reading public, 3. restricted social base of literary producers, 4. limited functional differentiation, 5. limited formal and stylistic differentiation, 6. restricted geographical spread, and 7. insignificant patronage.' Coupled with the lack of Kurdish political sovereignty, these limitations left all Kurdish varieties non-standardized and underdeveloped. This was particularly true of CK which, compared to Hawrami and Kurmanji, was a newcomer to the arena of literacy.

Although CK remained primarily a poetic language until 1918, linguistic work on the language was not completely absent. Chodzko (1857) published a sketch of the Sulaimani variety (McCarus, 1958). De Morgan, in 1904, published *Etudea linguistiques: Dialectee kurdea* in which he compared eleven dialects of Kurdish to each other, as well as to Persian and Sanskrit. Mann (1906) published *Die Mundart der Mukri Kurden*, which contained a grammatical sketch of Mukri Kurdish. E. B. Soane published a learner textbook along with a vocabulary list of the Sulaimani variety in 1903 called *Elementary Kurmanji grammar* to help British personnel in the region learn the language. Finally, Fossum (1919) published a practical Kurdish grammar in 1919 mainly based on the CK variety spoken in and around today's Mahabad in Iran. All these works were done on either Sulaimani or Mukri dialects. This may partially explain why the standard CK for a long time was based primarily on Sulaimani and Mukri varieties. This, however, is not the entire story.

1918–1930

In 1918, the British replaced the Ottomans as occupiers of what is known today as Iraq, and the foundation for CK as a standard language was gradually

established (see also Leezenberg, 2020). This foundation included the emergence of prose literature, especially in media and journalism, the creation of a distinct alphabet and the coinage of Kurdishized vocabulary that, by the 1950s, was drastically different from the lexicon of dominant languages, especially Arabic.

Following their occupation of Iraq, British authorities started publishing periodicals in regional languages, specifically CK. They did this for several reasons. CK was spoken by the vast majority of Iraqi Kurds who, compared to Kurds of other regions, were 'more urbanized, more lettered and more nationalist than the Kurmanji of Iraq, who were tribally organized and lacked any sizeable urban center' (Hassanpour, 1992: 156). Britain's main objective was to eliminate the Ottomans' control of the oil-rich regions of Mosul and Kirkuk. To reach this objective they promoted both Arab and Kurdish nationalism; for example, by assisting Kurds to embark on language planning in terms of corpus, status and acquisition planning (Leezenberg, 2020: 60). The authorities' commitment to the development of CK was further materialized in the establishment of the first government press in Sulaimani in 1920, which played a major role in further developing CK as a language of media, education and administration. By 1923, it had published 6 books, 118 issues of the weekly *Pêşkewtin* (*Progress*), 14 issues of *Bangî Kurdistan* (*The Call of Kurdistan*) and 16 issues of *Rojî Kurdistan* (*The Day of Kurdistan*) (Hassanpour, 1992: 171).

In addition to British support, ethnolinguistic mobilization was also crucial in the development of CK in Iraq. By 1929, under continuous pressure from Kurdish deputies and influential literary personalities, seventeen titles were published for use in schools including Sidqi (1928), which was the first textbook of CK grammar. From early on, Kurdish had the opportunity to be used in a variety of domains and this helped the language to expand its vocabulary and functional abilities. For example, in 1926, court cases in Sulaimani and Koy Sinjaq were heard in Kurdish, and Kurdish was the medium of instruction in about fifteen schools. In 1926, Huzni Mukriyani brought a printing press from Syria on the back of a mule to Rawanduz. Mukriyani's printing house, Matba'ay Zarî Kirmanjî (Kurdish Tongue Press), published twenty-three books within four years, for a total of ninety-five Kurdish books published in Iraq to that time. The Kurdish poet and essayist Piramerd, from Sulaimani, whose Nawroz poem is today still chanted by Kurds to celebrate the New Year, established Jiyan Press (Life Publishing) in 1937 and started publishing the weekly *Jîn* (*Life*).

The 1920s also witnessed slow but highly influential corpus planning efforts. In 1923, Tawfiq Wahby, who played a prominent role in the standardization of CK, was appointed by the Iraqi government to produce a Kurdish grammar for primary schools. He advocated a radical reform of the Kurdish orthography, but his proposal was rejected by the Iraqi Ministry of Education at the time because from the authorities' perspective his intended reform interfered with the letters of the Holy Qur'an's script and thus they deemed it *kufir* (blasphemy) (Hassanpour, 1992: 378). It took about another twenty years by the time his proposed modified Kurdish orthography was implemented in school textbooks. Nonetheless, his book *Desturî Zimanî Kurdî* (*Kurdish Language Grammar*, 1929) included the following reforms to the Arabic alphabet to suit Kurdish phonology. The Kurdish alphabet now differed from Arabic in that it would do without six letters that existed in Arabic but not in Kurdish: ظ ,ط ,ض ,ص ,ذ ,ث. While purging these Arabic letters, five other letters that did not exist in standard Arabic were added to the Kurdish alphabet: /p, پ/ as in Peter, /zh, ژ/ as in pleasure, /ch, چ/ as in church, /g, گ/ as in garden and /v, ڤ/ as in Vienna, in addition to adding diacritics and accents to consonants /l/ and /r/ to represent two phonemes (/ł, ڵ/, /ŕ/ ڕ) that did not exist in Arabic, Persian or Turkish, or if they did, they did not amount to more than allophonic variations of /l/ and /r/. In Kurdish, Wahby argued, they were distinct phonemes as they contrast in the minimal pairs of *ker* (donkey) and *keŕ* (deaf) as well as *gul* (person with leprosy) and *guł* (flower). Wahby also proposed the addition of accents over or under letters of /e, ێ/ as in English bed, /u, وو/ as in tour in contrast to /u, و/ in Kurd and /o, ۆ/ in shore. Despite these suggested changes to the Perso-Arabic alphabet and orthography, Wahby was a firm believer that the Latin alphabet was better suited to represent the Kurdish sound system. In fact, in 1933, he introduced a Latin-based alphabet for CK, mainly for teachers and non-Kurds; however, this alphabet was not accepted even by the Iraqi Kurdish literary society, let alone state authorities (see McCarus, 1958: 5). One can further observe Wahby's attempt to popularize the Latin-based alphabet for CK in the first major CK–English dictionary he compiled with C. J. Edmonds (Wahby and Edmonds, 1966). Wahby also attempted to 'purify' Kurdish by purging Arabic vocabulary from written CK. These initial efforts to reform the Kurdish alphabet and orthography in addition to the lexicon had a profound impact on Iraqi Kurdish writers for decades to come (Abdullah, 1980).

Although CK development in Iraq was slow and faced many challenges, the situation was by far more hopeful than the fortunes of CK in Iran. In Iran,

the earliest formal use of CK was during the rebellion movement led by Ismail Agha Simko. Simko was from the Urmiya (Wirme) region and a native speaker of NK, but both NK and CK were official in the territory he controlled (Hassanpour, 1992: 337) and were used in his official organ, *Kurd*, first published in 1919.[3] With the first defeat of the Simko rebellion in 1922, the formal usage of Kurdish came to a halt until 1946 (see further below). The first Pahlavi regime (1925–41) was extremely centralist, believing in the congruency of state, culture and language. Vali (2011: 18) writes:

> The dominance of Persian . . . was now to be reinforced by the suppression of all other languages spoken in Iran. A decree issued in 1935 thus marked the end of Kurdish as a written language, and the most significant element of Kurdish ethnic identity was suppressed.

Aside from a dozen handwritten poetry manuscripts, Iranian Kurds did not have the opportunity to contribute to the development of written CK effectively.

The 1930s

Whereas the 1920s was the decade when the first steps in *corpus planning* were taken and the foundations for standard CK were established, the 1930s witnessed the first instance of *status planning* (Cooper, 1989) in the history of CK when the variety was legally recognized in modern times. In the early 1930s, the League of Nations again rejected the Kurdish demand for a state of their own, but this time decided to direct the government of Iraq to draft a language law guaranteeing the use of the Kurdish language in order to redress Kurdish grievances (Hassanpour, 1992). Although the Iraqi state was reluctant to go along with this direction, the British knew that once they left

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3 Two prominent scholars both of Kurdish origin, and from the Mahabad region, have been mistaken about a few things with respect to the periodical *Kurd*. Both Hassanpour (1992) and Vali (2011) call the periodical *Roji Kurd* instead of *Kurd*. Secondly, Vali (2011: 146) states that the periodical was in the 'Sorani dialect' exclusively. Recently three issues of *Kurd* have become available to readers and they confirm Hassanpour's (1992: 155) observation that the paper was 'bidialectical', that is, it was in both CK and NK. Persian was another language of the journal. Hassanpour is also more accurate in stating the date of the publication as 1921 as opposed to Vali (i.e. 1919–26) (Vali, 2011: 13, 146). Vali also seems to be mistaken to report that in the early 1970s, in Tabriz, he had spoken to the editor of that newspaper 'Mullah Ahmad Ghizilji (Turjanizadeh)' as he recalls. The fact is that the editor's name was Muhammad, who was the older brother of Mullah Ahmad (Hassan Ghazi, personal communication, 12 July 2019). It is worth noting that the editor of the paper is recorded as Muhammad Turjani instead of Turjanizadeh in the actual publication. He is also known as Mela / Mullah Muhammad Qiziljî.

Iraq the legislation would not be implemented. Thus, they literally imposed it and it was enacted in May 1931.

The LLL, approved by the Senate and Chamber of Deputies of Iraq, indicated that the language of the courts should be Kurdish in the *qadha*s (districts) of Sulaimani and surrounding areas. In other *qadha*s and *liwa*s, such as Kirkuk, Dohuk, Hawler, the language of the courts could be Kurdish, Arabic or Turkish. Article 5 stipulated that for most bureaucratic tasks, Kurdish would be the official language in regions that made up today's Kurdistan Regional Government. In Kirkuk, the official languages were declared Kurdish and Turkish. Article 6 provided the right to have language instruction in the home language of most elementary students. Article 7 stated that citizens must receive correspondence from authorities in the language they wrote their initial letter in. Article 8 designated CK as the language of today's provinces of Sulaimani, Halabja, Hawler and Kirkuk. In the districts of Mosul residents could choose from CK or other varieties and languages (e.g. Kurmanji or Arabic). Specifically, about Kurdish, Article 9 reads:

> 1. Iraq undertakes that, in the liwas of Mosul, Arbil, Kirkuk and Sulaimaniya, the official language, side by side with Arabic, shall be Kurdish in the qadhas in which the population is predominantly of Kurdish race.
>
> In the qadhas of Kifri and Kirkuk, however, in the liwa of Kirkuk, where a considerable part of the population is of Turkman race, the official language, side by side with Arabic, shall be either Kurdish or Turkish
>
> (cited in Hassanpour, 1992: 111).

Although this treatment of Kurdish in Iraq was not comparable to the harsh treatment of the language in Iran, Syria and Turkey, Kurdish elites (e.g. Amin Zaki) expressed their dissatisfaction with the LLL because mother tongue education was limited to the elementary level, was confined to personal correspondence and Kurdish was declared official in only about half of the Kurdish territories where CK was spoken. As soon as Iraq entered the League of Nations, it felt free to completely Arabize education and administration throughout the provinces of Kirkuk and Mosul (Hassanpour, 1992). In subsequent years, the promises made to the Kurds with respect to positive language rights were either ignored or implemented reluctantly and slowly.

In Iran, except for a few clandestine poets (e.g. Hassan Saifulquzzat, Said Kamil Imami, Khalamin Barzanji), linguistic activities in CK – beyond daily speech – were non-existent. Suppression of all languages except for Persian in the three major domains of education, media and public administration was successfully implemented until the fall of Reza Shah in 1941.

The 1940s

In the 1940s, developments at different fronts, in both Iraq and Iran, contributed to the further standardization of CK. Among these developments was a continuation of corpus planning efforts, the proliferation of publishing, the introduction of CK in radio broadcasting and a surge of Kurdish nationalism marked by the establishment of the Mahabad republic.

In Iraq, during the monarchy, intermittent suppression of the language continued. Despite this, as Hassanpour (1992: 159) observes, '[CK] made considerable progress in standardization by the end of the period . . . a reformed alphabet, a modernized and purified vocabulary, a growing prose literature, and uninterrupted use in broadcasting and journalism.' It was clear that as early as the 1940s, Sulaimani Kurdish as the foundation for standard CK was beginning to be accepted even by some Kurds in Iran.

While publishing was making significant strides in codifying CK,[4] the 1940s witnessed the use of central Kurdish in radio broadcasting. This not only elevated its prestige, but also contributed to expanding the functional ability of CK to adapt itself to current events. The first CK radio broadcasting was by Radio Baghdad in 1939 for fifteen minutes a day, closely followed by Hifa Kurdish Radio in 1942,[5] and Radio Mahabad in 1946.

Important formal use of written CK in Iran took place during and after WWII. In 1941, British and Soviet forces occupied Iran, ousted Reza Shah and appointed his son Mohammad Reza Shah as the king of Iran. In the Mukriyan region, Kurdish nationalist sentiments gained strength and the pan-Kurdistani organization Komeley Jiyanewey Kurd (KJK)[6] was established. CK was the official language of the KJK's publications, including its most significant periodical *Nîshtiman* (*Homeland*, 1943–4).

The status of CK in Mukriyan was once again elevated when the Republic of Kurdistan was established in Mahabad, in 1945. CK was gradually introduced in schools and administrative domains in addition to media. Kurds

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4 During 1939–1945, Zhiyan Press, or what was then called Zhin/Jîn Press, continued publishing Kurdish books – fourteen during this period – bringing the total number of books published in Iraq to twenty-seven. Furthermore, instead of focusing on poetry alone, as was the case with the scribal era, the published books were more diverse in genre albeit literature was still dominant. Among others, *Ademîzad le sayey derebegî* (*Man in Feudal Society*) (1945) by Husen Huzni Mokriyani (1893–1947) and a two-volume history of Kurdish literature by Rafiq Hilmi in 1941 had a great impact on the codification and standardization of CK and gradually establishing the variety as the Kurdish literary language in that part of the world.

5 The Near East Broadcasting Station (Kurdish programme), Abdullah Goran and Rafiq Chalak. This was also in CK.

6 For more on KJK, see Vali (2011: 25–48).

from Iraq, who were experienced in the use of standard CK, helped with the development of a modified Kurdish orthography and coining new Kurdishized terminology. The official publication of the republic, *Kurdistan*, which was published every other day, carried a section devoted to newly coined terms. For example, the word Peshmarga/Pêşmerge (soldier), which is in use to this day, is a product of this corpus planning effort (for more, see Hassanpour, 1992: 339). In addition to a number of other periodicals such as *Hawarî Nîshtiman* (*The Cry of the Homeland*), *Hawarî Kurd* (*The Cry of the Kurds*), *Girûgalî Mindałan* (*Babbling of Children*), *Govarî Kurdistan* (*Kurdistan Magazine*) and *Govarî Hełałe* (*Halala Magazine*) three books in CK were published during the eleven months rule of the republic. Kurdish textbooks were imported from Iraqi Kurdistan, and Kurdish-medium schools were established not only in larger urban centres (e.g. Mahabad) but also in villages (e.g. Paswe). For the first time in the Grand Mosque of Mahabad, the imam conducted his sermon in Kurdish. Corpus planning efforts, however, were still rudimentary; serious efforts in crucial areas of planning such as lexicography, grammar, orthography and textbooks were almost non-existent.

The collapse of the republic put an end to the formal use of CK in Iranian Kurdistan for decades to come, but interestingly, the second Pahlavi regime (1941–79) proved to be somewhat more tolerant than the previous government in Tehran. As Hassanpour observes,

> In spite of the obvious de-ethnicization policy, the last Pahlavi monarch applied his 'safety valve' approach to the Kurds whenever the government was weak or threatened by Kurdish nationalist movement. Thus, during the 1941–53 period, when the central government was vulnerable, pressure on the opposition including the Kurds was occasionally relaxed
>
> (Hassanpour, 1992: 130).

Some linguistic developments that took place as a result of this policy included the publication of a few periodicals (e.g. *Koohestan*, *Baghistan*), state-sponsored radio broadcasting and even two university courses teaching Kurdish at the University of Tehran. The use of Kurdish in public administration or public schools, however, was not on the agenda.

The 1950s

Although compared to Iran the situation in Iraq was much better in the 1950s, the development of Kurdish did not enjoy the progress that concerned parties were hoping for. The publications of a few titles were important in those

years; for example, *Mêjuy Edebî Kurdî* (*The History of Kurdish Literature*) by Alaadin Sejjadi in 1952, and three titles by Giw Mukriyani: *Nawî Kurdî* (*Kurdish Names*), *Ferhengî Raber* (*Guide Dictionary*) in Arabic–Kurdish and *Kolkezêrîne* (*Rainbow*), a Kurdish–Arabic–Persian–French–English dictionary. Mukriyani was committed to purging non-Kurdish vocabulary while enriching CK with the lexical items of other Kurdish varieties such as NK, SK and Hawrami. A major contribution to the description of CK grammar following Wahby's (1929) publication was made by Nuri Ali Amin's *Qewa'idî zimanî Kurdî* (*The Rules of Kurdish*), in two volumes, the first published in 1956 and the second in 1958. By the end of monarchy rule in 1958, about thirty primary school textbooks were in use. The books covered such areas as Kurdish language, mathematics and religion. This further promoted CK, as textbooks are expected to not only incorporate the norms of the standard language but also contribute to its strength and legitimacy (see also Hassanpour, 1992: 328–9).

In Iran, the Shah regime started to practise a policy of restricted and controlled tolerance towards Kurdish and other minority languages in the 1950s and until its fall in 1979 (see Sheyholislami, 2012a). The state did not commit itself to any kind of positive rights for Kurdish (e.g. development and corpus planning of the language, or use of Kurdish to teach) and closely monitored any written use of the language. Despite this, the development of CK in Iran during those years is undeniable, especially in the area of journalism and broadcasting. Apparently, in reaction to Kurdish broadcasting airing from both Baghdad and Soviet Armenia, the Iranian government started limited radio broadcasting in Kurdish (predominantly CK) in Sanandaj, Mahabad and Kermanshah (Hassanpour, 1992: 284–5).[7] This had an important influence on the legitimization, elaboration and popularization of CK, and thus its further standardization.

Again, driven by political interests (Hassanpour, 1992), the weekly magazine *Kurdistan* (1959–63) began to be published in Tehran but only circulated outside Iran for the most part. *Kurdistan*'s aim was to neutralize Kurdish publications supported by the Iraqi regime (from Tehran's perspective). Mardukh Kurdistani was permitted to publish *Ferhengî Merdûx* (*Mardukh's Dictionary*), in 1953. The Faculty of Letters of Tabriz University started publishing Kurdish folklore in its journal in the mid-1950s (Hassanpour,

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7 A Kurdish programme from Radio Cairo mainly aimed at propaganda against the Iraqi government in 1957 pushed the Iraqi state to expand its broadcasting in CK. Iran started airing programmes mostly in CK in several locations apparently to divert the attention of its Kurds to the Iraqi Kurdish broadcasting.

1992; 210). A Kurdish bookstore in Mahabad was even allowed to distribute Kurdish books, most of which were smuggled into Iran from Iraqi Kurdistan. Meanwhile, Kurdish publishing and possession of Kurdish books continued to be closely monitored by the shah's secret service, and only a handful of trusted people could print or possess Kurdish books. Despite this, Jamal Nabaz – while visiting Sanandaj in 1951 – reported that he could not find any Kurdish books in any bookstore in that town, the largest CK-speaking community in Iran (Nabaz, 2008). Kurdish continued to be absent in Iranian education, public administration and public signs.

In Iraq, immediately after the fall of the monarchy in 1958, journalism, education and publishing made considerable strides in a very short period of time. The number of CK journals increased exponentially, and in 1959, the Kurdish department at the University of Baghdad was established. As demands for mother tongue education at all levels were intensified the Iraqi Ministry of Education established a Directorate General of Kurdish Studies in 1959. In its third congress, the General Union Students in the Republic of Iraq made several resolutions in favour of Kurdish; for example, it was proposed that Kurdish become official in all schools of Kurdish regions. The first Congress of Kurdish Teachers (CKT) on 10 September 1959 held in Shaqlawa declared, among other things, that all Kurdish dialects especially Northern, Central and Southern should be used in all Kurdish textbooks. The second Congress of Kurdish Teachers held in August 1960, however, recommended that the 'Sorani' variety be the basis for standard Kurdish in Iraq with other dialects used to enrich the standard variety (Khoshnaw, 2013: 388–93; Sabir, 1984).

The expansion of mother tongue education and an increase in Kurdish teaching materials gave rise to the need for monolingual dictionaries for the first time. Although an NK–Arabic dictionary had been compiled in the sixteenth century by Ahmede Xani, the first monolingual Kurdish dictionary (in CK, by Mihemed-I Xal) did not get published until 1960. Although most Kurdish dictionaries at the time did not meet modern lexicography principles (Hasanpoor, 1999), the works 'contributed to the enhancement of the status of the [standard] language among the Sorani speakers' (Hassanpour, 1992: 423).

The 1960s

The war between the Iraqi state and the Kurds broke out in 1961, and although mother tongue education continued to be one of the main demands of the autonomous movement, the Iraqi regime did not reverse its

commitment to Kurdish education. Instead, the 'Ministry of Education added two Kurdish lessons to the primary school curriculum and made Kurdish a compulsory subject of study at teachers colleges' (Hassanpour, 1992: 318). Thus, CK now had more opportunities to develop further. In addition to state-sponsored broadcasting, started in the 1950s, clandestine news and commentary programmes began airing on a station owned by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of Iraq beginning in 1961. Printing presses, pamphlets, circulars, leaflets and news sheets during the autonomous movement played important roles in expanding the use of Kurdish in print. These also contributed to the standardization of CK, for it was the primary language used in KDP's media even though Barzani himself was a Kurmanji/Badini speaker. Kurds from the Mukriyan region, such as Abdulrahman Sharafkandi (Hejar) and Khalid Hisami (Hedi), were among the main personnel in KDP's media and as such played a major role in the contribution of the Mukriyani variety to CK's standard code.

Other important developments that strengthened CK include the establishment of a Kurdish Scientific Academy in Baghdad and a university in Sulaymaniyah (Sulaimani) in 1968. The Academy devoted a great deal of its resources to developing neologisms, grammar books, writing style guidelines, a modified orthography and research in various linguistic domains. A very active press was stationed in Sulaimani, which played a decisive role in establishing CK as a standardized medium of education, media and public administration.

The 1970s

In 1970, CK entered a new era. The Iraqi central government and the Kurds reached a peace accord in March 1970. Article 1 of the Accord stated:

> The Kurdish language shall, side by side with the Arabic language, be an official language in the areas populated by a majority of Kurds. The Kurdish language shall be the language of instruction in these areas. The Arabic language shall be taught in all schools where teaching is conducted in Kurdish. The Kurdish language shall be taught elsewhere in Iraq as second language within the limits prescribed by the law
>
> (cited in Hassanpour, 1992: 122).

The Interim Constitution of Iraq, 1970, reiterated the positive language rights for the Kurds in addition to the recognition of the Kurdish nation. Another positive development was the establishment of the Kurdish Science Academy

later that year. The Academy's language committee embarked on various CK projects and played a decisive role in the further codification of CK. Also in the 1970s, CK began to be used at the secondary school level throughout Kurdistan, and Kurdish language and literature departments were established at Baghdad and Sulaimaniyah universities.

Although the relationship between Baghdad and the Kurds started to deteriorate in 1974, and subsequently the autonomous movement collapsed in 1975, efforts sponsored by the state to implement Kurdish as the medium of instruction in secondary schools continued. By the late 1970s, secondary school textbooks for various subjects and at all levels were prepared. New terminology for more advanced topics in science, arts and social science was coined to translate content from Arabic to CK and to produce texts that were devoted to the description of local contents and contexts. In addition, Kurdish continued to have a relatively strong presence in broadcasting. In 1977, Radio Baghdad had news every hour, ten times a day, with listeners from all CK-speaking regions (including Iran where Kurdish was either banned or absent from all formal and most public domains). By then, broadcasting had taken up the language purification cause started in the 1930s in print media. Arabic words, in particular, were purged and replaced by neologisms (Hassanpour, 1992).

By 1978, when the Kurdish autonomous movement was experiencing an unprecedented setback, the Iraqi regime embarked on an Arabization campaign, which aimed to uproot Kurdish nationalism, and it affected nearly every aspect of Kurdish life. According to Hassanpour (1992):

> Language-related aspects of Arabization include, among other things, the Arabization of Kurdish schools in the Autonomous region; the dissolution of the Kurdish Academy in 1978 and the formation of a 'Kurdish corporation' within the Iraqi Scientific Academy (the policy was to replace 'Kurdish' by 'Iraqi' in the name of organizations, institutions and unions); the removal of Sulaymamya University from Sulaymaniya, main center of Kurdish nationalism, to Arbil and partial Arabization of its faculty and curriculum; and the Arabization of Kurdish geographical names   (Hassanpour, 1992: 123).

CK, however, continued to be the medium of instruction at both elementary and secondary levels in many Kurdish-speaking communities.

At the same time, in Iran, schooling in Kurdish or even Kurdish taught as a subject in schools – public or private – was unthinkable. However, in a surprise move, in 1972, Tehran University started offering two courses on the Kurdish language: Kordiyeh Aghazi (Introductory Kurdish) and Kordiyeh Pishrafteh (Advanced Kurdish) (Hassanpour, 2015: 74–5). Interestingly, at the

same university's Department of Linguistics, one had to either refrain from discussing Kurdish and other minoritized languages or refer to them as 'dialects' (Hassanpour, 2015: 74). Meanwhile, state-sponsored radio broadcasting in Kurdish, CK mainly, continued. Hassanpour (1992: 130) interprets the Pahlavi state's approach to Kurdish as a 'safety valve' policy in which whenever the state felt threatened or challenged by Kurdish nationalism it provided some sort of cultural or linguistic incentive to Kurdish communities, hoping that political demands would either be forgotten or left in the hands of the oppositional groups only without any support from the Kurdish masses. This policy continues to be played out to this day, even after the 1979 revolution.

In December 1979, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran was adopted by referendum. Article 15 specifically addressed linguistic diversity in Iran and allowed rather ambiguous negative rights for minoritized languages like Kurdish:

> The *official language* and script of Iran, the lingua franca[8] of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as text-books, must be in this language and script. However, the use of *regional and tribal languages* in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian
>
> (cited in Sheyholislami, 2012a: 31, emphasis added).

The article did not bestow any obligation on the state to promote or support minority languages; it also did not stipulate any positive language rights. Even where it 'allowed' the use of minority languages in teaching, it was not clear whether it could be used to deliver written content or to facilitate teacher–student communication. It was also unclear in what context such permission is given; for example, whether this negative right was given in private or public schools. There is evidence that authorities have discouraged the use of CK in both public and private schools (Sheyholislami, 2012a). Another interpretation of this article is that the use of non-Persian languages (i.e. Kurdish) was declared illegal in all formal domains since Article 15 clearly stipulates that such communication 'must' occur in Persian (Hassanpour, 1992: 131). The use of Kurdish remained confined to limited media and a few periodicals and books in the first years following the revolution.

In the aftermath of the 1979 revolution, Kurdish-speaking regions of the two provinces of Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan (as well as parts of the

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8 There seems to be a misunderstanding of the term 'lingua franca' in this translation. The Persian text says 'zabane moshtarak', which can be best translated as 'shared language'.

Kermanshah) came under the control of Kurdish organizations. Appointed Kurdish committees started planning for mother tongue education and further standardization of Kurdish (CK) (Hassanpour, 1992: 332). Kurdish publications were smuggled from Iraq, new publications from the region emerged and various cultural activities contributed to the development of Kurdish. Political parties like Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and Komala gradually increased their publications in Kurdish, primarily CK, and radio and TV broadcasting also increased. However, before city councils in those areas had a chance to conduct education and public administration in Kurdish, the Iranian army regained control over the cities. The use of Kurdish in the rural areas under the control of the peshmerga, especially in the Mukriyan region (e.g. Bokan, Mahabad), resumed, and 'revolution schools', where Kurdish was taught, were established. The two Kurdish political parties at the time, KDPI, in 1982, and Komala, in 1983, started publishing their grade one reader textbooks and teaching them in the rural areas. Thousands of students were enrolled in those schools, and that helped Kurdish in that region to be taught for the first time since the fall of the Kurdistan Republic of 1946 (Sheyholislami, 2012a; Hassanpour, 1992). Furthermore, oppositional groups continued using CK as the main language of their movement. Two clandestine radio stations belonging to the two main Iranian Kurdish parties, Dengî Kurdistanî Ěran (The Voice of Iranian Kurdistan) belonging to KDPI and Dengî Şorishî Ěran (The Voice of Iranian Revolution) belonging to Komala, played a significant role in spreading standard CK in Iran. Although the main base support for Komala was in the Sanandaj area whereas KDPI's was in Mahabad, both parties, for the most part, used standard CK rather than the regional dialect of their base support (Sheyholislami, 2012a).

The 1980s

CK continued establishing itself as a literary and academic language throughout the 1980s in both Iraq and Iran. In Iraq, elementary and secondary education thrived, especially in the Sulaimani region. State-sponsored textbooks provided a tremendous amount of prose in 'purified' CK and in a variety of genres and subjects that further contributed to the codification of the variety. While the Iraqi regime was at war with Kurdish oppositional groups in the 1980s, government-sponsored print and broadcasting in CK were increasing.[9]

9 Hassanpour in 1989 wrote about the reason behind the Iraqi state's granting positive language rights to Kurdish yet refusing to compromise politically with the autonomous movement of the Kurds: 'Evaluating the Ba'th regime's policy in the short-term or on

Radio and television broadcasting continued not only in Baghdad and Sulaimani but also in Kirkuk. CK was also used in other domains, such as fiction and theatre, more frequently than in the past. The Iraqi Science Academy was actively involved in researching Kurdish grammar, orthography and standardization, with the main focus on CK (Muhammad, 2011; Sabir, 1984). Meanwhile, Kurdish oppositional groups continued to enrich the CK standard variety through their clandestine publications, radio broadcasting and other language and cultural activities. In the 1980s, television programming was aired in Kirkuk and by a few stations in Iran, although the programmes with Kurdish content were limited.

Throughout the 1980s, the state language policies in Iran continued to marginalize Kurdish and other non-Persian languages. The teaching and learning of Kurdish were entirely absent in Iranian schools. However, the policy of a 'safety valve' (Hassanpour, 1992) continued. The state publisher Soroosh continued publishing on 'safe' topics, while a publisher in Mahabad could publish approved monographs. Major contributions, however, began to be made in 1983 by Salahaddin Eyubi Publications, a state-sponsored publishing house. In addition to monographs, the house started publishing an influential literary magazine, *Sirwe* (*Breeze*), with Hemin (Said Muhammad Amin Sheikholeslami), a well-respected national poet and literary figure, and later, Ahmad Ghazi, another well-known writer and poet from Mahabad, as editor. Gradually, an enthusiastic and energetic group of Kurdish youth who looked up to Hemin joined his mission of 'serving the Kurdish language'. Although *Sirwe* contained a few pages in NK, it was mostly written in CK. Even oppositional groups and individual critics – usually suspicious of the occasional concessions the state makes to the Kurds and their language – have not denied that *Sirwe* played a decisive role in revitalizing the language in Iran and popularizing the standard norm. Notable corpus planning efforts carried out by Salahaddin Eyubi included the publication of a monograph in Persian devoted to Kurdish grammar and a first-grade Kurdish reader.

the surface, one may arrive at the conclusion that the Kurds and their language have every chance of survival and even advancement as long as they remain loyal to the Iraqi state and its ruling Ba'th Party. However, a careful synthesis of the facts on both linguistic ... and non-linguistic (not dealt with in this study) aspects of Arabization/Ba'thization supports the interpretation of the opposition groups, who believe the goal of the policy is de-ethnicization of the Kurds' (Hassanpour, 1992: 125).

The 1990s

In 1992, Iraqi Kurdistan's parliament passed a provisional constitution for the Kurdistan Region (Kurdistan: Constitution of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, n.d.). Article 7 outlined the following language rights:

(i) *Kurdish shall be the official language of the Kurdistan Region.*[10]
(ii) Official correspondence with the federal and regional authorities shall be in both Arabic and Kurdish.
(iii) The teaching of Arabic in the Kurdistan Region shall be compulsory.
(iv) The Turkmen language shall be considered the language of education and culture for the Turkmen in addition to the Kurdish language. Syriac shall be the language of education and culture for those who speak it in addition to the Kurdish language.

'Kurdish' in this context and at the time primarily meant CK. In fact, it was standard CK that became the working language of the KRG and the medium of instruction throughout the region including Hawrami- and Badini-speaking communities until they started demanding mother tongue education in their own varieties in the mid-2000s (see Sheyholislami, 2017). Another important step in the development of CK was the establishment of the Kurdistan Science Academy in December 1997, in Erbil. While the Academy was committed to supporting research on all Kurdish varieties, it worked towards building consensus on a unitary working (official) language for the Kurdistan Region.[11]

In Iran, especially as reformers came to power in 1997, more leniency was shown towards Kurdish (predominantly CK) (see Sheyholislami, 2012a). About a dozen periodicals, mostly bilingual (i.e. CK and Persian), were published at the time. Several courses teaching Kurdish were offered in a few universities mostly located outside the Kurdish region. In addition, literary clubs and societies in the CK-speaking provinces continued their intermittent activities. Salahaddin Eyubi Publications in Urmiya continued publishing its main periodical, *Sirwe*, and added several titles to its list of published monographs. Throughout the 1990s, CK continued to be used in state-owned media but its use in public administration and education, two essential domains for the maintenance and development of a language, was not allowed (see Sheyholislami, 2019). The debate over language rights,

10 Emphasis added.   11 N. Abdullah, personal communication, 5 August 2019.

especially mother tongue education, entered the Iranian public sphere about ten years later.

The 2000s

In the 2000s, several developments had significant impacts on the revitalization, legitimation and further standardization of CK. The World Wide Web made it possible for tens of thousands of CK speakers to read and write on the Web almost freely. Readers now had access to thousands of books and periodicals posted online, listeners and viewers found it easier to listen to or watch Kurdish radio and television (primarily broadcasting from Iraqi Kurdistan and predominantly in CK) and those interested in writing or in learning to write found blogs extremely convenient (see Sheyholislami, 2012b). Overall, the Internet seemed to foster CK use in Iran and the diaspora. In Iraq, on 13 November 2000, the Kurdish Academy of Science started its work. All the Academy's active members were either linguists (e.g. Marif Khaznadar, Kurdistan Mukriyani) or literary figures (e.g. Shukur Mistefa, Hedi – Khaled Muhammad Abdullah/Hisami). The post-Saddam Hussein constitution declared Kurdish an official language of the country in addition to Arabic. The first section of Article 4 of the 2005 constitution reads:

> The Arabic language and the Kurdish language are the two official languages of Iraq. The right of Iraqis to educate their children in their mother-tongue, such as Turkmen, Assyrian, and Armenian shall be guaranteed in government educational institutions in accordance with educational guidelines, or in any other language in private educational institutions
>
> (Iraq's Constitution, 2005: 4).

Sections two to five of Article 4 provided further details on language rights and obligations. It has become evident that in this article Kurdish has meant CK because it is the only Kurdish variety that is used on the Iraqi currency, passport and the signs of several important federal agencies such as the Iraqi national assembly.

In 2007, the Academy changed its name to the 'Kurdish Academy'. KRG's unified government brought about more stability, an improved economic situation, and thus was more able to engage in such activities as publishing, hosting conferences and holding seminars on language matters. To this day, the Academy with its main headquarters in Hawler has published several dictionaries mainly focusing on CK, twenty-six issues of its seasonal journal,

Govarî Ekadimî (*The Academy Journal*), two style guides mainly focusing on orthography and scientific glossaries.

While many CK literati from the region, who constituted the majority of the Academy's active members, were hoping to declare CK as the KRG's official and working language, in 2006 the Duhok province began to resist CK as its official language and instead started to use its own Kurdish variety, Badini (or Western Kurmanji).[12] In 2008, fearful of CK losing its hegemony, fifty-three Kurdish academics, writers and poets (mostly from the Sulaimani region and other CK-speaking communities) submitted a petition to the KRG and asked the Kurdistan parliament to declare CK as the region's official language. Their demand was met with fierce opposition from not only Badini literati but also a group of linguists and educators, among them CK native speakers from Iranian Kurdistan, who were in favour of multilingual officialization and education. They advocated for the officialization of both Kurdish standard varieties, CK *and* NK. In 2009, the Kurdish Academy in Hawler held a congress in the hope that it would be able to declare CK the official language of KRG. The attempt failed, again. Today, Badini is the language used in the Duhok province in most domains, including government, education and media.

However, the truth is that CK is the de facto official language of KRG, not only because of its hegemonic presence in Sulaimani (the industrial and cultural centre of KRG) and in Hawler (the administrative and political centre of the region) but also because of being used, albeit in limited ways, by the central government in Baghdad (Khoshnaw, 2013). CK is also the variety that is used by most KRG authorities including those whose native tongue might be something other than CK. It is the primary medium of instruction from kindergarten to PhD level. It is the subject of research in several departments of Kurdish literature and linguistics throughout Iraq. It is now the main language of several dailies, over two dozen periodicals, more than 200 radio and television stations and thousands of websites and social media platforms.

Despite this, CK is not without its challenges. In recent years, many complaints have been levelled against the poor use of CK in school textbooks, media texts, administration documents and public signage (Hassanpour, 2015; Shakely, 2011). According to the daily *Hawler* (Basî ziman le, 2011), two professors of journalism from Salahaddin University held a seminar at the

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12 By the 2014–15 academic year, Badini or NK became the language of media, administration and education from kindergarten to university level in the entire province of Duhok (for more, see Sheyholislami, 2017).

Kurdish Academy to say that the use of CK by some journalists has reached a 'dangerous' state to the extent that it may affect the use of the language by the ordinary people in a negative way. Janbaz (2019), a lawyer who has written quite extensively on language policy in Kurdistan, expressed his dismay at the state of the language used to render laws. In his view, the Kurdistan parliament should be able to write its bills and laws in Kurdish, rather than writing them in Arabic first and then translating them back into Kurdish. The same complaint has been levelled against CK on public signs (see Hassanpour, 2015). One of the most publicized examples of this is the phrase Firokexaney Hawleri Nêwdewletî (Erbil International Airport) which, after much debate, was revised to Firokexaney Nêwdewletî Hawler, following CK's noun phrase structure (i.e. head noun + qualitative modifier + possessive modifier). Finally, there have been many complaints about the use of CK in media, written by various people from Abdullah Pashew, one of the most famous contemporary CK poets from Iraqi Kurdistan, to students of journalism and media.

In addition, a continuing challenge facing CK is orthography, although this challenge is not unique to CK. The earliest attempts to develop a CK alphabet and orthography distinct from Arabic and Persian date back to 1918, as discussed above. Among these was an attempt by Wahby and others to introduce the Latin-based alphabet to CK in Iraq. Giw Mukriyani also came up with his own version of the CK alphabet in Latin. Jamal Nabaz, Tawfiq Wahby, J. A. Bedir Khan, Abdulrahman Haji Marif and many more scholars from the first half of the twentieth century appreciated dialectical diversity in Kurdish but were also concerned about finding a way to facilitate easier communication between CK and other varieties (e.g. NK, SK, Hawrami and Zazaki). With this objective in mind Roshani (2010) designed a 'standard Kurdish Unified Alphabet' based on 'International ISO-8859–1 Standards code'. These attempts have not been welcomed by the Iraqi and Iranian states, and by a group of Kurdish scholars (mostly of CK origin and from Iraq) who believe that adapting a Latin-based alphabet by CK communities could mean, among other things, the loss of over one hundred years of literary tradition (see Hassanpour, 2015; Shakely, 2011).

Judging by the way Microsoft, Apple and Google have introduced CK to their systems, the established orthography in Iraqi Kurdistan has become the norm for writing CK. However, this is also a work in progress. In recent years, the Kurdish Academy has published two style handbooks providing rules on spelling and orthography. To a large extent, this has helped to

normalize orthography in Iraqi Kurdistan and in diasporic communities where CK might be taught as a foreign or second language. Kurdish orthography in Iran, however, is influenced more by Persian orthography. Whereas Kurdish orthography in Iraq has moved towards combining more and more morphemes to make longer words, in some circles in Iran the trend is in the opposite direction: towards an orthography based on single morphemes. For example, in Iraq, one may write *pêdaçûnewe* (to review) but in Iran, the same word could be written *pê da çûnewe*. A final challenge to CK in Iraq is English. In recent years, the Ministry of Education in KRG decided to teach maths and science in English, beginning in kindergarten. Some CK advocates are concerned, for they see this as weakening and marginalizing CK in the educational domain.

Overall, today a standard CK is in use in education, public administration and media in KRG, and in Iran in the media. Despite obvious differences in the spoken and (sometimes) written modes in the four major CK varieties of Ardalani, Hawleri, Mukri and Sulaimani, a competent reader from any CK region can read texts from any of those communities without much difficulty. Whereas spoken CK (especially of older generations) still draws heavily on Arabic in Iraq and on Persian in Iran, written CK has become relatively unified across national and regional borders. Arabic vocabulary in Iraq (and to some extent in Iran) and Persian words in Iran (and to some extent in Iraq) continue to be purged from written CK and replaced with neologisms, most of which are quite creative, systematic and acceptable by Iraqi Kurdish society. CK, however, also readily borrows from European languages especially English.

In Iran, with the reformists rising to power in Tehran in the mid-2000s, more flexibility was shown towards Kurdish – likely to win votes in the Kurdish-speaking regions. CK activists seized the opportunity and started to publish over a dozen periodicals, set up private language-learning courses (e.g. Soma Centre and Vejîn Centre), and advocated for the implementation of Article 15 of the Iranian constitution.[13] A private publishing house such as Mang has not only augmented Kurdish book publishing in Iran but it has also played an active role in revitalizing, standardizing and promoting the language; for example, by publishing three volumes of primary CK readers *Kurdî Bixwênîn* (*Let's Study Kurdish*) in addition to children's storybooks and nursery

13 In August 2019, a group of members of the Iranian national assembly (Mejlese Shuraye Eslami ye Iran) submitted a signed petition to the Iranian President Hasan Rouhani and asked for the implementation of Article 15 so that Kurdish teaching as a subject can be allowed in public schools.

rhymes. Since autumn 2015, a BA in Kurdish language and literature has been offered at the University of Kurdistan in Sanandaj. However, the government has been reluctant to allow Kurdish in the public school system even as a subject, let alone a medium of instruction (something Iraqi Kurds have enjoyed for several decades). Both conservatives and core Iranian nationalists have expressed concerns over expanding linguistic rights for the minorities, worried it could damage the unity of the nation-state and it may lead the country to disintegration.

Finally, the diaspora has played a major role in the maintenance and development of CK. These efforts peaked in the 1980s and 1990s when numerous literary figures and speakers of CK from Iraq and Iran moved to the West as a result of the Iran–Iraq War, the Iraqi Anfal campaign and the retreat of the Iranian Kurdish movement. At least a dozen CK magazines were published (e.g. *Mamostay Kurd*, *Xermane*, *Wan*, *Gzing*, *Koçer*, *Berbang*, *Serdemî Niwê*, *Nuserî Kurd*), notable CK politicians in diaspora (e.g. Karim Hisami) published their memoirs, Kurdish courses either started or those in existence continued to be offered in several European and North American universities and CK started to be taught as a heritage language in various European nations especially in Scandinavian countries. These activities have contributed significantly to elaborating CK by introducing European neologisms. After the establishment of the KRG in 1992, a great number of language activists returned to Iraqi Kurdistan. One can trace their way of language use in today's standard CK in the media. The most obvious feature is the presence of numerous European neologisms in standard CK. While several centres at European universities offer courses in CK (e.g. Inalco, Uppsala University, University of Exeter), because of general interest in KRG in particular, be it for political or economic reasons, there have been a few notable English publications in recent years that have focused either on the teaching and learning of CK (e.g. Awde, 2009; Merchant, 2013), or linguistic description of the language (e.g. Öpengin, 2016; Sheyholislami, 2018; Thackston, n.d.). Two bilingual dictionaries (CK–English and English–CK, respectively) are significant: Qazzaz (2000) and Karadaghi (2006).

Conclusion

The history and development of any language are intertwined with that speech community's history, linguistic culture, socio-economic and political contexts. Central Kurdish is no exception. Earliest CK scribal records were poetic writings of the late eighteenth century during the Baban principality in

the Sharazoor region. CK continued flourishing after the fall of Kurdish principalities not only in Sulaimani but also Kirkuk, Koy Sinjaq, Ardalan and Mukriyan regions. In addition to this scribal tradition, the political climate that was born out of WWI, and materialized partly in the collapse of the empires in the region, paved the way for the development of CK standardization in Iraq and Iran. Standard CK foundations (i.e. dialect selection, orthography reform, new vocabulary building, etc.) were built starting in 1918 and mainly in Sulaimani.

In 1931, the variety, although referred to as 'Kurdish', gained official recognition in the Kurdish region of Iraq. Despite all obstacles, by the 1970s, corpus planning efforts towards standardization – mostly championed by individuals – helped CK to establish itself as a medium of instruction in schools, the language of media and the working language of public administration mainly in Iraqi Kurdistan but also in Iran during the Kurdish Republic in Mahabad in 1945–6. In addition to being the official and working language of KRG since 1992, CK also has been an official language at the national level in Iraq, although recognition has been mainly symbolic. Despite facing challenges (e.g. the lack of a standard orthography, lack of functionality in some domains such as law and medicine, losing ground to English, complaints about the literati's negligence in their use of the variety), CK is a young but full-fledged and standard working language in Iraq. A proactive language policy is needed so that appropriate institutions can face the challenges mentioned above, especially in the domains of education and media.

In Iran, however, the situation is very different. Neither CK nor any other Kurdish variety has official status. Except for a few recent instances, they are not the media of instruction or even subjects in public and state-run schools. Unlike Iraq, CK is prohibited in Iran to produce formal documents. As a by-product of the carrot-and-stick policy towards Kurds in Iran, CK language activists, educators and academics have welcomed opportunities to develop their language by using it in media and private language-teaching courses. In July 2019, the first cohort of the BA programme in Kurdish language and literature graduated from the University of Sanandaj. It remains to be seen whether there will be Kurdish classes in Iranian state-run schools for these new graduates to teach. Although CK continues to be the most widely used and recognized Kurdish variety in Iran, signs are indicating that CK is losing ground to Persian, even in the family environment. Language shift seems to be inevitable in a country like Iran as long as monolingualism remains the official language policy of the

state. This trend will likely continue unless CK achieves some kind of official recognition and positive language rights and is promoted as a medium of instruction in the country's education system.

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The Kırmanjki (Zazaki) Dialect
of Kurdish Language and the Issues
It Faces

MEHEMED MALMÎSANIJ

Kırmanjki (Kırmancki) is also known as Zazaki or Zaza especially in European literature. The objective of this chapter is to discuss the various problems of Kırmanjki, including the issue of the different designations under which it is known. At present, with the exception of those who have migrated to Western Turkey, those who were forced to migrate or those who were subjected to forced resettlement, Kırmanjki (Zazaki) speakers live within the borders of the following provinces: Çewlîg (Bingöl), Dêrsim (Tunceli), Dîyarbekir (Diyarbakır), Xarpêt (Elazığ), Erzingan (Erzincan), Ruha (Urfa), Mûş (Muş), Semsûr (Adıyaman), Bidlîs (Bitlis), Sêwas (Sivas), Erzirom (Erzurum) and Sêrt (Siirt). Kırmanjki is spoken by the great majority of the population in Dêrsim and Çewlig and by a substantial portion of the population in Diyarbekır, Xarpêt and Erzingan. In some provinces, it may be said that Kırmanjki is spoken within the boundaries of only one district or town each. Towns such as Ruha's Sêwregi (Siverek), Gimgim (Varto) of Mûş, Semsûr's Alduş (Gerger), Modan/Motkan (Mutki) of Bidlîs may be given as examples. In Sêwas, Erzirom and Sêrt, there are small Kırmanjki-speaking populations. According to the results of the 1950 General Population Census of the Republic of Turkey, besides the towns mentioned above, Meletî (Malatya), Qers (Kars), Gümüşhane and Seyhan (Adana) provinces also had small Kırmanjki-speaking populations (TİGM, 1961). In addition to the above, during the 1980s and 1990s, many Kırmanjki-speaking groups were compelled to migrate to cities in western and southern Turkey, such as Istanbul, İzmir and Mersin, due to the armed conflict in the region. As there are no official linguistic surveys done in Turkey, the exact number of Kırmanjki speakers is not known. Although some sources claim this to be three million, the figure is only an estimate (Ensonhaber, 2013).

Designations Used for Kırmanjki Speakers

Kırmanjki speakers have been described by a number of designations such as Kırd, Kırmanj (Kırmanc), Dımıli / Dımli / Dımbıli (Dimili / Dimli / Dimbili) and Zaza, varying by region. Accordingly, the dialect they speak is called Kırmanjki, Kırdki (Kirdki), Dımılki / Dımıli / Dımli (Dimilki / Dimili / Dimli) or Zazaki. Kırmanj mostly call themselves Kırmanj or Kırd, and their dialect Kırmanjki or Kırdki. The Vate Study Group, which brings together Kırmanjki linguists, writers and language activists and has been researching Kırmanjki and working on its standardization, has opted to use Kırmanjki. In this chapter, we use the endonym Kırmanjki. However, to better understand the issue of the different designations used for the language, let us briefly look at how Kırmanjki speakers define themselves.

Kırmanj

The Kırmanjki-speaking Kırmanj of Dêrsim refer to themselves as 'Kırmanj' and their dialect as 'Kırmanjki'. They distinguish themselves from Kurds, generally known as Kurmanj (Kurmanc), and call them 'Kırdas', and their dialect 'Kırdaski' / 'Kırdaşki' or 'Kırdasi' / 'Kırdaşi'. A researcher from Dêrsim, Mustafa Dûzgûn, writes on the subject as follows:

> People of Dêrsim, in regard to ancestry, call themselves 'Kırmanj'. They don't use any other names. Say a stranger or someone who is not from Dêrsim calls a person from Dêrsim, 'Zaza' with a slip of the tongue, the Dêrsim native will be cross, 'No, I'm not Zaza, I'm Kırmanj'. The fact of the matter is that the Kırmanj from Dêrsim never calls themselves 'Zaza'
>
> (Dûzgûn, 1988: 37).

In 1932, Karl Hadank, mentioning Dımlîs, points out that they are called Zâzâ by their 'neighbours and foreigners' (Mann and Hadank, 1932: 1). We also observe that in many folk songs sung in the Kırmanjki dialect, people of Dêrsim call themselves 'Kırmanj'. The below example will suffice here, but many more similar examples can be found in Sermîyan (2018). A lament mourning the murder of Bava, the son of Seyid Rıza, one of the leaders of Dêrsim who led the rebellion of 1937, is as follows: 'Let me say, let me say, let me speak on my Bava; My Bava has gone to Hozat; To take the kingdom of Kırmanj' (Fırat, 1986: 106).[1]

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1 ' Vacî, vacî, Bavayê ho ser o vacî; Bavayê mi şîyo Xozat; Cêno padîşayena kirmancî '(author's own translation).

Kırd

At present, Kurds who speak the Kırmanjki dialect in certain regions call themselves 'Kırd', and their dialects 'Kırdki' or 'Kırdi'. As seen below, these words have been used in the two texts written in the Kırmanjki dialect in the nineteenth century. The text compiled from a Kırmanj and written by Peter Lerch in the 1850s is one of the two oldest written texts in Kırmanjki. In this text Xelef Axa, the agha of Nêrıb, a village in Diyarbakır's Hani district, addresses his supporters in his village: 'Look aghas, we are going to fight, do not be frightened, Daqma Bey has many soldiers but they are all Turks, they can not measure swords with us, we are all brave **Kırds** . . . ' (Lerch, 1979: 78).[2] At the end of the *Mawlid*,[3] written in 1898, which is the earliest Kırmanjki literary text that exists, its author, Ehmedê Xasî, states the following:

> With the help of the Creator and our Prophet's – Peace be upon him and his family – enlightenment and blessing, the composition of **Mewlidê Kirdî** was completed by the hand of Ehmedê Xasî of Hezan, in the Arabic year of one thousand three hundred and sixteen　　　　　　　　　　　(Xasî, 1899).[4]

In 1921, Ziya Gökalp, a sociologist and one of the leading ideologues of Turkish nationalism, points out that in some regions, Kırmanjs who call themselves 'Kırd' call the Kurmanj 'Kırdas', and the Kurmanji dialect 'Kırdasi' or 'Kırdaski':

> These Kurdish peoples give themselves and each other different names . . . As for Zazas: They call themselves – pronouncing the Arabic kef with kasrah (a sign indicating a short i or ı) – '**Kırd**', and call Kurmanjs '**Kırdas**'. The Turks use the name 'Kurd' for Kurmanjs. When they ask, 'Is that man a Kurd, or a Zaza?' what they mean by Kurd is 'Kurmanj'
>
> 　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Gökalp, 1992: 27).

Kemal Badıllı, who was a writer specializing in Kurdish languages, touches upon the same topic: 'Considering themselves real Kurds, Zazas in Turkey call themselves Kırd and call all the other Kurds, that is the Kurmanjs – with an expression of slight contempt – **Kırdasi** (like a Kurd, little Kurd)' (Badıllı, 1965: 6). British statesman George Nathaniel Curzon pointed to the use of the

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2　'Bawnî axaler, ma şuenî qawxe, metersî, eskerî Daqma Begî zav û, hema pyêrû Tirk î, nişênî ma de qawxe bikî, ma pyêrû canmîrdî **Kird**an î.'

3　The text that narrates the story of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

4　'Temam bi viraştişê **Mewlidê Kirdî** bi yardimê Xaliqî û feyz û bereketê peyxamberê ma -sellellahu 'eleyhî we 'ela alîhî we sellem-bi destê Ehmedê Xasî Hezanicî di hinzar û hîr sey û şîyyes serrî de, bi tarîxê 'erebî.'

term 'Kirdasi' as early as 1892: 'The language spoken by the majority of the Kurds is Kurmanju (sometimes called **Kirdasi**)' (Curzon, 1966: 551).

Many different interpretations have been made in explaining the origin of the word 'Kurd' to this day, but the interpreters often have not dwelled on the word 'Kırd', the self-designation the Kırmanj (Zazas) use in certain regions. However, Strabo, the ancient Greek author (64 BC–21 AD), uses the term **Κύρτι**οι (**Kurti**oi) for Kurds, which is **Kyrt**ii in Latin; the similarity of these Greek and Latin terms with the word '**Kırd**' and its plural forms '**Kırd**i' / '**Kird**i' is remarkable (Strabon cited in Islâm Ansiklopedisi, 1977: 1090; Lecoq, 2006: 232). Likewise, in the Armenian language, the plural form '**Krd**er', '**Krd**akan' is used for the Kurds.

Dımıli

Mostly used by the Kurmanj, Dımıli is used in the form of Dımıli/Dımli, Dımbılı or Dünbülî among Kurds (Gökalp, 1992: 27). Kemal Badıllı writes that Kurmanj call 'Zazas rarely Zaza, they generally call them Dımıl' (Badıllı, 1965: 6). In written sources, the word 'Dımıli' appears in many different spellings, such as Dunbuli (Şerefxan, 1981: 569), Dunbeli, Dünbeli (Gülensoy, 1983: 11), Dunbali (Orhonlu, 1987: 110),[5] Donboli, Dınbıli (Şeref Han, 1971: 345), Dümbüli (Kütükoğlu, 1962: 65; Yûsuf, 1991: 50), Dümbeli (Fırat, 1983: 6; Rışvanoğlu, 1978: 93–4), Dumbili (van Bruinessen, 1991: 180–1), Dumbüli (Beşikçi, 1992: 112), Dumbuli (San, 1982: 46, 56), Dımbeli (Dumbeli) (Lerch, 1979: xxi, xxvii), Dımbıl(i) (Ûnis, 1985: 519), Dümbüllü, Dımılli, Dumuli, Dumılı, Dumli. So much so that we come across the varied forms of the word on different pages of a book or in different translations and editions of the same book (Yûsuf, 1991: 50–1). Quoted from Şerefname as 'Dumbuli' in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, the word becomes 'Dınbıli' in the Turkish translation of Şerefname and 'Dunbuli' in the Kurdish translation.[6] It seems that these different forms stem from the variations and inaccuracies in reading the Arabic script. As the word Dunbuli or Donboli is written as DNBLY in the Arabic alphabet, those who have not seen the word previously have often misread it.

Dimili also appears in Ottoman sources. Even as early as 1518, written sources call **Dimili** and **Disimlü** (Dêsımli/Dêrsımli) populations in Çemişgezek Sanjak of Dêrsim region 'Ekrâd', which means 'Kurds':

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5 The Dunbali tribe was settled in the vicinity of Diyarbekir at the beginning of the eighteenth century.
6 *Şerefname* is the history of Kurdish notable families written by Şeref Han, the prince of Bitlis emirate, in 1597.

'Ekrâd-ı Dimili', 'Ekrâd-ı Disimlü', that is, Dımıli Kurds, Disimlü Kurds (Ünal, 1999: 85, 215). Varying comments on the meaning and origin of this word have appeared in different sources. For example, Süleyman Sabri Paşa in his book *Van Tarihi ve Kürtler* (*History of Van and the Kurds*) uses 'Dümbeli' instead of Dimili: 'Surrounding communities of Diyarbakır, Genç, Kulp, Çapakçur, Siverek and the people of Dêrsim are wholly Zazas. Zazas are called Dümbeli' (cited in Rışvanoğlu, 1978: 94). Arthur Christensen (1921), on the basis of F. C. Andreas's findings, stated the following about the Kırmanj (Dımılis) in 1921: 'The people known as Zaza call themselves Dimle (the word formed by the metathesis of Dêlem) or Dimlī; they are probably the descendants of a military colony of Dêlemis.' Christensen states that 'probably' this idea was later taken by numerous researchers to be true and led to the allegation that Dımılis are not Kurds but are descendants of Deylemis and have come from the south-west of the Caspian Sea. The word 'Deylemi' becomes 'Dımli' as a result of metathesis (Christensen, 1921: 8). However, no satisfactory evidence has been provided to support this claim. In the words of linguist Pierre Lecoq (2006: 223): 'This is an attractive but still speculative hypothesis.' Those who claim that the word 'Dımıli' originates from 'Deylemi' cannot explain what the words 'Dunbuli' or 'Dumbeli', used as other designations for 'Zazas', are or how they are derived.

From our standpoint, the word 'Dımıli' is the modified version of the word 'Dunbuli' or 'Dunbeli'. We claim this because first of all, even today, in certain regions such as Hewêl (Baykan), Motkan and Sason, Kırmanjs are called **Dımbıl** (pl. Dımbılan). Secondly, Peter Lerch writes that in the 1850s, the **Dumbeli** tribe in the north of Palu spoke Zazaki (Lerch, 1979: xxi–xxvii). Thirdly, some sources state that Dummels (Zazas) originate from Dunbul: 'Dunbul is the name of a mountain in Diyarbekir region. The chiefs of the Azerbaijani **Dunbuli**s originate from this region and are famous in Kurdistan as Dummel/Zaza' (Dêhxuda cited in Rojbeyanî, 1985: 18). Fourthly, some sources claim that **Dinbilli** came to Dêrsim during the reign of Shah Ismail (1487–1524):

> Shah İsmail, to procure the security in the regions he had conquered, started punishing his own subjects, the **Dinbilli** clan, all the apprehensive Iraqi Kurds in the vicinity began fleeing westward and were dispersed in the mountainous areas such as Van, Bitlis, Diyarbekir, Harput and many of these people specifically chose the steep mountain terrain and wild oak forests of the remote Dêrsim region as their home and settled there' (Sunguroğlu, 1958: 134–5).

And finally, M. Şerif Fırat writes that Zazas are given the names **Dümbeli** and Yezidi (Fırat, 1983: 6).

It is not correct to say that the names Dımbıl, Dumbeli, Dunbuli, Dinbilli, Dümbeli in the five examples above are the metathesis of 'Deylem' since they have 'MB' or 'NB' sounds. One may surmise that 'NB' sounds in the word Dunbuli over time changed to 'MB' and finally to 'M' and yielded Dımbıli, Dımıli. In Kırmanjki there are many cases of the 'NB' sound change to 'MB' and then to the 'M' sound. A few will suffice as examples:

sınbore>sımbore/sembure>sımore (squirrel)
şenbe>sembe>şeme (Saturday)
tenbel>tembel>temel (lazy)
tenbîh> tembê>temê (admonition)

Zaza

Having lived among both the Kırmanj and the Kurmanj, Ziya Gökalp at the turn of the twentieth century wrote: 'The word Zaza is neither used by the Zazas themselves nor by the Kurmanj' (Gökalp, 1992: 27). The name 'Zaza', which is commonly used for the Kırmanj today, was originally the name of a tribe. We infer this from written sources: in Dêrsim's famous 'Kureş Genealogical Tree' dated 1330, we come across an inscription in Arabic 'Talıb Molla Nebi min **qebileti Zaza**', which means 'Talıb Molla Nebi of the '**Zaza tribe**' (Kekil, 2002: 216, 242). In the same lineage document, İzol, Badil, Heyder, Has, Mili is also described as 'qebile' (tribe) and it is understood that the term 'qebileti Zaza', that is, the 'Zaza tribe', is not used to mean a separate people or folk, but as the name of the Zaza tribe. In 1655, discussing 'Zazas', Ottoman travelogue Evliyâ Çelebi mentioned the following names when writing about Kurdish tribes: 'Zaza, Lulu, Zibari, Pisani, Kârkârî Kurds' (Çelebi, 2010: 207).

In short, originally the name of a tribe, the use of the term 'Zaza' over time has extended to include other Kırmanjs/Kırds, and thus 'Zazaki' has been used for 'Kırmanjki'/'Kırdki'. The same applies to the name 'Dımıli'. Originally the name of a tribe, it has extended to other Kırmanjs/Kırd. 'Zaza' and 'Zazaki' are mostly used by those who do not speak this dialect, namely, by Turks, that is, an exonym. European linguists and researchers use this name they have learned from Turks and through Turkish. The endonyms 'Kırmanj, Kırmanjki' and 'Kırd, Kırdki' are not used in Western literature. In recent years some Turks and Kırmanjs have intentionally been avoiding the names 'Kırmanj, Kırmanjki' and 'Kırd, Kırdki' commonly used among people, because of their similarity to 'Kurd, Kurdi' and 'Kurmanj, Kurmanji' signifying a connection.

Rather than being an objective designation based on ethnic or scientific grounds, it is a subjective preference based on political reasons. This may be clearly seen in the words of Zılfi Selcan, one of the proponents of this stance:

> Dêrsim and Erzincan folk call themselves Kırmanj. Kurds also call themselves Kırmanj (Kurmanj) . . . Our language and our people are referred to as Zaza. The world knows us by that name, we should go along with it. That is, in science and politics let us call our language Zazaki and our people the Zaza nation (Zaza people) (Munzur Haber, 2004: 8).

However, other peoples do not use the terms coined by foreigners to identify themselves (exonym) but use their own names (endonym). For example, the English word *German* is not used by the Germans themselves, who call themselves *Deutsch*. Likewise, the English word *Finnish* is used for the language of the Finns, but *Finns* use the name *Suomi* for their language. Similarly, the majority of Kırmanjki writers use the designations 'Kırmanj, Kırmanjki' or 'Kırd, Kırdki' when they refer to themselves today.

The Dialect–Language Dichotomy

In linguistics, the dialect and language dichotomy has been a much-discussed topic, but clear criteria have not been put forward to date. While some linguists consider Kırmanjki a Kurdish dialect (Aygen, 2010; Smirnova and Eyubî, 1998), others consider it an independent language (Paul, 1998a; Todd, 2002). Some linguists who claim that Kırmanjki and Kurmanji are distinct languages base this mostly on studies of historical phonetics alongside other factors. For instance, on the historical change of M to V sounds in some words, they point out that the 'M' sound in Kırmanjki becomes 'V' in Kurmanji, and 'W' in Central Kurdish (Sorani). D. N. MacKenzie (1961: 70–1) emphasizes these examples of sound change for the distinguishing sounds in Kurdish (Table 26.1):

Table 26.1 Distinguishing sounds in Kurdish

Sounds	Persian	Kurmanji and Central Kurdish (Sorani)	English
M–M–V/W	na**m**	na**v**, na**w**	name
Ş**M**–M–V/W	çe**ş**m	ça**v**, ça**w**	eye
X**M**–X**M**–V/W	tu**xm**	to**v**, to**w**	seed
X-K	**x**er	**k**er	donkey
Ş-Ç	**ş**ûden/**ş**oden	**ç**ûyin/**ç**ûn	to go

In Kırmanjki 'name', 'çim', 'toxim' are equivalents, respectively, for the first three words above. Using these and some other sound changes as criterion measures, some linguists have tried determining the position of Kırmanjki and Kurmanji in Iranian languages, and on the basis of these differences, regarded them as separate languages.

This criterion is flawed in at least two aspects. Firstly, it is not always possible to raise the sound changes observed in a few shared words in the two languages to the level of a general rule which determines the relationship between those languages or dialects. Considering the examples above, the opposite claim may be made if counter-examples are taken as the basis. That is, there are words which have the 'V'/'W' sounds in Kırmanjki and 'M' sound in Kurmanji, as seen in Table 26.2:

Table 26.2 'V'/'W' sounds in Kırmanjki and 'M' sound in Kurmanji

Kırmanjki (Zazaki)	Kurmanji and Central Kurdish (Sorani)	English
V/W	**M**	
e**w**-	e**v**, e**m**	this
e**w**ro	e**v**ro/e**w**ro/îro/îrû, e**m**ro/î**m**ro/e**w**ro	today
Na**w**itene	ni**m**andin	to show
şe**w**şe**w**oke/şe**w**şe**w**ike/ se**w**se**w**uke/se**w**se**w**ike	şe**v**şe**v**ok/şe**v**şe**v**ik/ şe**w**şe**w**îk/çe**m**çe**m**ok/ şe**m**şe**m**ok/ şe**m**şe**m**ekwêre	bat
vêşî/**v**îşî	**m**işe/**m**îşe	lots, quite, many, much
Zi**w**an	zi**m**an/hez**m**an/ez**m**an	language

If the 'M–V'/'W' change is to be taken as the decisive criterion in distinguishing Kırmanjki and Kurmanji, the issue of why MacKenzie's examples above are chosen over our last examples is unclear. If the sound change examples we have given here were taken as a criterion, Kurmanji would be assigned the position Kırmanjki is at, when MacKenzie's examples for the 'M–V'/'W' changes are taken as the basis. Moreover, as mentioned above, the Kırmanjki equivalents of Persian words 'na**m**', 'çe**ş**m', 'tux**m**' are, respectively, 'na**m**e', 'çi**m**', 'to**x**im'. That is, the 'M' sound occurs both in these Persian and Kırmanjki words. Hence, based on this feature, one cannot conclude that Persian and Kırmanjki belong to the same group. As a matter of fact, even the linguists who do not consider Kırmanjki as Kurdish

acknowledge that Persian belongs to the South-west Iranian languages and that Kırmanjki belongs to the North-west Iranian language group.

Secondly, these sound changes occur within both Kırmanjki and Kurmanji. To illustrate:

Table 26.3 Sound changes in Kırmanjki and Kurmanji

Kırmanjki (Zazaki)	Kırmanjki (Zazaki)	English
M	**V**	
ber**m**ayîş	ber**v**ayîs	to cry
mil	**v**ile / **v**îye	neck
ke**m**an / ki**m**an	ki**v**an	bow
si**m**zi	sê**v**ze	common hawthorn
xa**m**	xa**v** / xa**v**îg / xa**w**iz	raw, crude, unripe

Table 26.4 Sound changes in Kırmanjki and Kurmanji

Kurmanji	Kurmanji	English
M	**V**	
go**m**	go**v**	mountain shack
he**m**ber	he**v**ber	1. opponent, 2. rival, 3. equal
ke**m**n	ke**v**n / ke**v**in / ke**v**n	old
ke**m**nik	ke**v**nik	1. handkerchief, 2. rag
ni**m**êj	ni**v**êj	namaz prayer
ni**z**m / ni**m**z / nizi**m**	ni**v**iz / ni**v**z	low
si**m**nik	si**v**nik	broom
si**m**ore / si**m**orîk / si**m**olek	si**v**ore / si**v**orik / si**v**orîk	squirrel
to**x**m / tu**x**m / toxi**m** / tuxi**m** / tixu**m**	to**v**	seed
xa**m**	xa**v**	raw, crude, unripe

As may be observed in Tables 26.3 and 26.4, the sound changes between 'M' and 'V' occur within both Kırmanjki and Kurmanji. There is no plausible criterion for taking the examples in one column as a basis and disregarding the rest. There are other examples of sound changes given in various sources for the same purpose. A number of these sound changes are listed in Table 26.5, followed by examples for each sound change in the list (Tables 26.6–9).

Table 26.5 Further sounds changes in
Kırmanjki and Kurmanji

Kırmanjki (Zazaki)	Kurmanji	English
V	**B**	
Va	**b**a	wind
C	**J**	
cinî / **c**enî / **c**ênîye	**j**in	woman
W	**H**	
Ce**w**	ce**h**	barley

The evidence of the sound changes previously illustrated by those claiming that Kırmanjki and Kurmanji are not dialects of the same language seems inadequate. Due to this inadequacy, some linguists who have determined the position of Kırmanjki within Iranian languages in accordance with historical phonetics and sound changes have made different assertions. For instance, Jost Gippert of Frankfurt University links Kurdish (Kurmanji) to Central and Ancient Persian, but Kırmanjki (Zazaki) to Parthian and Medean (Keskin, 2012a: vi, 2012b: 236). He maintains that Kurmanji Kurdish belongs to the South-west Iranian languages, and Kırmanjki (Zazaki) to the North-west Iranian languages. According to Bo Utas of Uppsala University and many other linguists, both Kurmanji and Kırmanjki (Zazaki) are Northwest Iranian languages (Utas, 1995; Paul, 1998b; Windfuhr, 2009: 12). That is, each has observed one aspect of Kurdish and drawn a conclusion accordingly.

Selected isoglosses vary according to the researcher. Let us continue with examples of 'B'–'V' / 'V'–'B' changes within both Kırmanjki and Kurmanji.

Table 26.6 'B'–'V' / 'V'–'B' sound change examples in Kırmanjki

Kırmanjki (Zazaki)	Kırmanjki (Zazaki)	English
B	**V**	
ba**b**î	ba**v**î	father
ber**b**ayîş	ber**v**ayîş	to cry
biruşk / **b**irûsik / **b**ilusk	**v**irûsk / **v**irûsik / **v**irso	lightning
baha	**v**aya / **v**ayî	price, worth
burr	**v**îyer / **v**êr	alleyway
gul**b**ang	gul**v**ang	Alevi invocation
ke**b**anî / ke**b**anîye	ke**v**anî / ke**v**onî / kê**v**anîye	housewife
kê**b**er / key**b**er / çê**b**er	kê**v**er / çê**v**er	door

Table 26.6 (cont.)

Kırmanjki (Zazaki)	Kırmanjki (Zazaki)	English
pîr**bab**	pîr**bab** / pîrba**v** / pîr**vav**	grandfather, ancestor
şor**ba**	sor**va**	soup
te**b**er	te**v**er	1. outside, outward, 2. except
yew**b**înî	zu**v**in	each other

It is clear that a classification based on only one group of words is not adequate. In Kırmanjki, if the first column of examples 'B' is taken as the basis, what about the 'V' variants of the same words in the second column? They are Kırmanjki words, too. This point is also valid for the other examples we have given.

Table 26.7 'B'–'V'/'V'–'B' sound change examples in Kurmanji

Kurmanji	Kurmanji	English
B	**V**	
ba**b**	ba**v**	father
bi**b**êje	bi**v**êje	say
ke**b**anî	ke**v**anî / ke**w**anî	the woman responsible for housework
ri**b**ês / rubes	rê**v**as / rî**v**as / rê**v**az / rî**v**az	rhubarb

Table 26.8 'C'–'J' sound change examples in Kırmanjki

Kırmanjki (Zazaki)	Kırmanjki (Zazaki)	English
C	**J**	
ba**c**ar	ba**j**ar	city
di**c**e	di**j**e / ji**j**e / jû**j**e / jû**j**û	porcupine
gi**c**ik	gi**j**ik	hair
he**c**îre / în**c**îre / în**c**ili / în**c**il	hê**j**îre / he**j**îre	fig
lo**c**ine / lu**c**ini / lo**c**ini	lo**j**ine / lu**j**ini	hearth
mi**c**	mi**j**	fog
nima**c**	nima**j**	prayer
ro**c**	ro**j**	sun
ro**c**e	ro**j**	day
ro**c**e	ro**j**e	fast
va**c**e	va**j**e	say, tell

Table 26.9 'W'–'H' sound change examples in Kırmanjki

Kırmanjki (Zazaki)	Kırmanjki (Zazaki)	English
W	**H**	
wenik	**h**onik/**h**ûnik	cool
weriştiş/**w**uriştiş	**h**uriştiş	to stand up
wir/**w**ur	**h**er/**h**ur	each
wişk/**w**uşk	**h**uşk/**h**usk	1. dry, 2. solid
wîye	**h**uye	shovel
wîyeyîş	**h**uwayîş/**h**iwayîş	to laugh
wurdi/**w**irdi	**h**urdî	small, tiny, crumb

From the point of view of historical phonetics, another issue about taking sound changes as criteria in determining the distinguishing features of languages or dialects is this: if only certain sound changes are used as criteria, this may lead to the wrong conclusion that some Kırmanjki local languages belong to the same group as Kurmanji, not Kırmanjki. The second column of examples given above to show C–J change in Kırmanjki may be cited to illustrate this point. The same applies to the examples in the second column above. Taking a few sound changes as criteria is not sufficient to determine the position of a dialect and a language among other dialects and languages. A comparative assessment should be made of the shared or distinguishing features of the language/dialect in question with the other language and dialects in regard to various points of grammar, and the aforementioned determination made accordingly.

Kirmanjki and Kurmanji Word Similitude and Difference

The words used in Kırmanjki and Kurmanji may be grouped into three sets in terms of similarities and differences. The first group consists of words that are identical. The second group consists of words that have the same origin but have undergone one or more sound changes. The third group is composed of words that are completely different. First and second groups, that is, words that are identical or have undergone one or more sound changes (cognates), form a large majority in Kırmanjki and Kurmanji. For example, when we examine the words in the first written literature of Kırmanjki we have, the *Mawlid* by Ehmedê Xasî, we observe the following:

Total word count in the book is 1,101, 92 of which are proper nouns. The total number of words less the proper nouns leaves 1,009 words and according to this list, the distribution of the remaining words is as follows:

- 750 (75 per cent) are identical in Kırmanjki and Kurmanji.
- 150 (15 per cent) words are of the same origin but have undergone one or more sound changes.
- 109 (10.9 per cent) words are completely different.

As can be observed above, the percentage of the words that are completely different in this work is 10.9 per cent.

Although the percentage of cognates and different words in *Mewlidê Kirdî* to Kurmanji words with regards to similarity and difference is not applicable for all Kırmanjki works, it still gives an idea on the topic. Ludwig Paul, who regards Kırmanjki and Kurdish as different languages, writes: '[h]owever, Zazaki speakers have been in close contact with Kurdish dialect-speaking Kurds for centuries. Consequently, Zazaki today shares common features with the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish not only in terms of vocabulary and phraseology but also syntax' (Paul, 1998a: xii). On the other hand, Terr Lynn Todd, who has written his PhD thesis on Dimili (Kırmanjki) grammar, considers Kırmanjki as an independent language and asserts that:

> Dimili speakers today consider themselves to be Kurds and resent scholarly conclusions which indicate that their language is not Kurdish. Speakers of Dimili are Kurds psychologically, socially, culturally, economically, and politically (Todd, 2002: vi).

It is true that there are some important differences between Kırmanjki and Kurmanji Kurdish. Yet a detailed comparison of the two in terms of phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicology has shown that they have, to a great extent, many shared features (Malmîsanij, 2015). Therefore, we consider them as dialects of the same language.

Kırmanjki Writing and Its Present Status

Kırmanjki oral folk literature is very rich. Works of every description, namely, fairy tales, love stories, folk songs, anecdotes, proverbs and riddles, have survived to this day. In the last thirty years, numerous pieces of oral folk literature have been compiled from Bongilan, Çewlîg, Dêrsim, Gêl, Gimgim, Licê, Pali, Pîran, Qerejdax, Sêwregi, Tekman, Xinis regions and published in book form (Can, 2018: 26–39). The writing of Kırmanjki is quite recent. As

mentioned above, the first written literary work is Ehmedê Xasî's (1867–1951) *Mewlîdu'n-Nebîyyî'l-Qureyşîyyî* (Xasî, 1899). Although Mustafa Dehqan mentions a Kırmanjki manuscript written in 1798, no other researcher has seen it and my personal efforts to reach the manuscript have not borne fruit (Dehqan, 2010). After Xasî's work, the second Kırmanjki work we know of is the *Mawlûd* written in 1903 by Osman Esad Efendiyo Babıj (1852–1929) (Babij, 1933).

As writing and publishing in Kurdish was prohibited during much of the republican period in Turkey, after the two books mentioned above, no Kırmanjki works were published until 1963, when two short texts, one of which was a folk song, appeared in the *Roja Newe* newspaper. The first issue of the paper was banned and confiscated. Following this, no Kırmanjki texts were produced until 1976, when a few texts were printed in some periodicals. Modern Kırmanjki literary works appeared for the first time in the *Tîrêj* (*Beam of light*) journal, which began publication in 1979. Published in Kırmanjki and Kurmanji, almost half of the journal was dedicated to Kırmanjki. In the aftermath of the 12 September 1980 coup d'état, this journal was banned too, and there were no publications in Kırmanjki in Turkey for a long time. In the 1980s and 1990s in Europe – in France, Germany and particularly in Sweden – some periodicals continued producing Kırmanjki texts, even if just a few. When the ban on the public use of Kurdish was lifted in Turkey in 1991, certain journals and newspapers began publishing Kırmanjki texts, their numbers increasing over time.

After Xasî and Babıj's works mentioned above, no Kırmanjki books were published until 1977, when a book was published. In the past forty years, the number of Kırmanjki books published have been increasing. A Kırmanjki book was published in 1981 and one in 1986. Two books were published in each year in 1987 and 1988 and one in 1990. Since 1991, following the lift of the ban on Kurdish in the public domain, there has been a relative increase in Kırmanjki book publishing which still continues to date. Two books were published in 1991, 4 in 1992, 3 in 1993, 4 in 1994, 5 in 1995, 5 in 1996, 9 in 1997, 5 in 1998 and 6 in 2000 (Can, 2018: 459–60). We know that at least 332 Kırmanjki books have been published in Europe and Turkey during the period up to 2018 (Can, 2018: 460).

The Standardization of Kırmanjki

Kırmanjki was not established as a written language until quite recently, hence a standard language and a standardized orthography were out of the question. Each writer wrote with the local language of their region or, in some cases, their village. There was a deep difference of opinion among the authors on the topic of the alphabet and the letters. Gathering in Stockholm in 1996, the Vate Study

Group began working on the problems faced by Kırmanjki and to standardize it. The group, made up of a number of Kırmanj linguists and writers, first established a common alphabet and orthography rules and published them. Still working on Kırmanjki to date, the group have prepared and published the *Kırmanckî–Tirkî* (*Kırmanj–Turkish*) and *Tirkî–Kırmanckî* (*Turkish–Kırmanj*) standard dictionary in addition to the orthography book. The former had its fifth printing in 2016.

In 1997, the same group started publishing the *Vate* (*Word*) journal, which contains articles on Kırmanjki language and literature. Fifty-eight issues of this periodical have been published to 2019. Likewise, the Vate Publishing House, founded in Istanbul in 2003, has published seventy Kırmanjki books up to present. Both *Vate* and the books published by the Vate Publishing House comply with the rules of orthography and the standard language suggested by the Vate Study Group. Roşna Publishing House has published books adhering to these rules. At present, a large number of Kırmanjki writers apply these rules, yet there are those who do not. Among those who write using different alphabets, there is no consensus on an alphabet and orthography rules.

Kırmanjki Education in Turkey

Kurdish scholar Amir Hassanpour argues the 'Turkish policy towards Kurdish was a typical example of linguicide (linguistic genocide)' (Hassanpour, 1989: 124). This policy was implemented from the 1920s to 1990 through bans and criminalization. A great portion of children and youths, whose parents were also raised under these conditions, today either do not speak Kırmanjki or Kurmanji or have a rudimentary grasp of their native language. There has been a gradual decrease in the number of Kırmanjki speakers. This situation is more prevalent for millions of Kırmanj and Kurmanj who live in the western and southern provinces of Turkey including Istanbul, İzmir, Mersin. Overwhelmed by the Turkish-speaking population, the Kırmanj cannot maintain their language and consequently, cannot transmit it to their children. The Turkish language rapidly takes the place of their mother tongue.

The most pronounced problem on this topic is the language status issue. Since Kırmanjki and Kurmanji have no legal status, therefore no prestige in Turkey, the Kırmanj who do not speak Turkish face many difficulties. The older generation, so that their children do not encounter problems, and in practice, for them to make use of their fluent Turkish, either did not teach them Kırmanjki or did not acknowledge its importance. Despite fluency in Kırmanjki, not speaking Turkish is a deterrent in finding employment, particularly in the civil service.

Secondary Education

Since 2012, Kırmanjki has been available in Turkey as a two-hour per week optional course offered in secondary schools for grades five to eight inclusive, but there is little interest in it. According to the Minister of National Education Nabi Avcı, on 1 November 2013, the number of students who had chosen Kurmanji as an elective course was 18,000 and for Kırmanjki 1,800 (T24, 2013). The most important reason for this lack of interest is the absence of status and prestige discussed above. Furthermore, as the native Turkish student is taught in their mother tongue all week, many Kırmanj parents who feel that two hours per week for Kırmanjki is insufficient do not consider the course valuable. Additionally, we have observed a lack of awareness by many Kırmanj parents of the right to choose Kırmanjki for their children at school.

At some schools where parents do choose Kırmanjki for their children, school administrators, either on the grounds that there are no teachers or other excuses, direct them to other electives such as 'Kur'anı Kerim' (Qur'an) and 'Our Prophet's Life' where the above-mentioned courses are among the few other electives offered as alternatives. If pious Kırmanj parents choose their mother tongue for their children, they face the dilemma of not being able to opt for 'Kur'anı Kerim', for example. In that case, many religious parents prefer 'Kur'anı Kerim' or 'Our Prophet's Life', at the expense of the mother tongue elective. Discrimination is the main issue here as the student whose mother tongue is Turkish does not have to choose between their mother tongue and other electives. Turkish is the medium of instruction; besides, since Turkish is compulsory, the parent of the native Turkish-speaking student, if so wished, could choose 'Kur'anı Kerim' or 'Our Prophet's Life' without giving up the mother tongue.

Apart from the regions where Kurds are concentrated, the Kırmanj living in the western and southern provinces of Turkey, in effect, have no real chance of selecting Kırmanjki for their children even for two hours a week at school, evidenced by the absence of Kırmanjki teachers in these regions. Additionally, for fifth, sixth and seventh grades, there is only one reading book available for use in teaching Kırmanjki and no books for eighth grade. As there are scarcely any Kırmanjki supplementary textbooks and children's books, the student electing Kırmanjki is at a disadvantage in this regard, too. The state does not offer any support for addressing these needs.

During the first four years of schooling, the child whose mother tongue is Kırmanjki is taught only in Turkish instead of their native language, and hence, is completely cut off from their mother tongue at school. Due to their

age, a child's language aptitude is stronger during the first four years of schooling. The Kırmanj student is at a serious disadvantage since he or she does not receive mother tongue-based education during that vital period. Immersed only in Turkish for the first four years of his or her schooling and receiving no mother tongue education after grade eight results in the weakening of his or her native tongue. All the problems discussed above culminate in the assimilation of the child whose mother tongue is Kırmanjki. It has been frequently observed that the child who does not learn to use Kırmanjki well enough has difficulty in communicating with older relatives.

Higher Education

Since 2009 various departments such as Kurdish Language and Culture, Kurdish Language and Literature, Zaza Language and Literature have been established at Çewlîg (Bingöl), Dîyarbekir, Mêrdîn (Mardin), Mûş, Wan, Dêrsim (Tunceli) universities in Turkey. Kurmanji or Kırmanjki is taught in these departments, but interest today has decreased considerably. We shall point out the most important of many reasons. It ought to be mentioned that until the inauguration of these departments, Kurdish education was banned in Turkey, hence the instructors appointed to these faculties were not qualified for teaching subjects such as Kurdish language, literature and culture. Indeed, the instructors were predominantly recruited from unrelated departments, namely, the Faculty of Theology and Turkish Language and Literature. Initially, it was thought that the Kırmanjki and Kurmanji graduates of Kurdish departments at universities would be appointed as teachers of Kurdish, so the interest in these sections was high. When it was realized that graduates of these programmes did not have any job prospects, interest decreased significantly.

Moreover, using Kurdish has become more difficult in the wake of the attempted coup d'état of 15 July 2016. Numerous Kurdish academics and lecturers have been dismissed or expelled from universities and other schools. Some TV channels broadcasting in Kırmanjki have been closed down. Following these events, fear has spread among students and their parents that studying Kırmanjki would get them into trouble. The dread of unemployment upon graduation from these departments and other causes have decreased students' interest in studying Kurdish in general and enrolling in the above programmes in particular. For example, in 2018–19, the number of applicants to the Kırmanjki master's degree (without thesis) at the Mardin Artuklu University dropped to fifteen, and for Kurmanji to sixty-three. The numbers were much higher during the 2012–15 period.

MEHEMED MALMÎSANIJ

Vulnerable Kırmanjki Facing the Threat of Extinction

Multilingual or multidialectal people and communities live within the borders of many states. These people or communities use at least two languages. In many countries, one of the languages or dialects in use has a higher status than the others and hence has more prestige. The status of the language or dialect depends on the speakers' social and geographical position. Due to social factors, a person may become bilingual against his or her own will, in other words, as a result of state-run compulsory education, economic or religious needs. In our day, media such as TV and the Internet play a prominent role in language shifting. The second language, which some linguists call the foreign language, is the language learned through education after the acquisition of one's native tongue in one's natural environment. This is the situation in Turkey for the Kırmanj; Turkish is a foreign language for Kirmanjki speakers.

Community bilingualism is generally temporary. Due to external causes, that is, factors outside the language, one of the languages gradually becomes dominant and reduces the scope of the second. As a matter of fact, the second language is assimilated into the dominant language. For this reason, bilingualism of the community may be considered as the beginning of the death of the second language. Today a great majority of the native Kırmanjki speakers are bilinguals. They use Turkish alongside Kırmanjki.

Language, with its various features, is a dynamic system; after taking shape and flourishing according to circumstances, it may weaken or die. The weakening or strengthening of a language depends on the living conditions of its community. A language is considered a dead language if there is no one speaking it. Languages have changed throughout history, but today, this change is being realized much more rapidly due to globalization and technological advancements. At present, many living languages are under threat of dying. In the near future, several languages will become dead languages. That is why some linguists speak of 'language ecological crisis' (Dahl, 2000: 161).

There are various factors that cause the death of a language. In history, we know that some communities and their languages have been eradicated through massacres and genocides. Natural disasters in the form of earthquakes, floods, droughts, plague and cholera epidemics have caused the death of great multitudes of people and with them their languages. In our day, many researchers draw attention to the following factors, among others, which cause the rapid change of languages and facilitate their death:

urbanization, education in the official and standard language, the encounter of different languages, globalization, technological advancements and Internet and TV media. These factors affect languages in various ways in daily life. For example, in multilingual communities, the minority languages are under the direct or indirect suppression of the dominant language. Minority members are compelled to converse with majority members in the dominant language. The status of the minority language is often low, and the majority group members do not need to learn this language, but the reverse is true for minority members who need the dominant language for participation in mainstream domains (Dahl, 2000: 158). Consequently, many minority members abandon their mother tongue, using the dominant language instead. The official language is used in education, administration and mass media. As a matter of fact, at times the oppression on unofficial languages can culminate in a legal ban, as in the case of Kurdish in Turkey.

Not only are the children at school, youth during military service, citizens in public enterprises obliged to speak the official language, but the labourers at a workplace where the foreign language is spoken are also compelled to speak it (Dahl, 2000: 157). Even if there is no direct oppression, the advantages of speaking the dominant language impel many parents to speak to their children in the foreign language rather than their mother tongue. The suppressed language faces a twofold issue: the number of its speakers decreases, and it changes under the influence of the dominant language; its structure degenerates. The lack of mother tongue-based education, the fact that the younger generation is not literate in its own language, and the presence of other adverse conditions will culminate in the loss of the language albeit contrary to the wishes of its speakers.

In sum, all the adverse circumstances mentioned above are valid for Kırmanjki. In fact, Kırmanjki was classified as a vulnerable language by UNESCO in 2009. Both Kırmanjki and Kurmanji have been under oppression in Turkey and have no status or prestige. During the last thirty years, due to armed conflict in the region, Kırmanjki- and Kurmanji-speaking millions were forced to flee to big cities. Thousands of their villages were destroyed, and the inhabitants forced to relocate. Migrants' children who have grown up in Turkish-speaking cities, especially in the west, today speak Turkish instead of Kurdish. The language of official education, and mass media, such as the press and TV, is in Turkish. There is no opportunity for mother tongue education except for the two-hour per week elective courses at secondary school. Turkish, the official language, is used in the public domain: in the state administration, in education, in the military and official institutions. For

all these reasons, millions of Kırmanj are obliged to use Turkish instead of their mother tongue. Ever-increasing cases of mother tongue degeneration under the influence of Turkish have been observed among the younger generation speakers of Kırmanjki. For example, many young people misuse sentences with ergative properties.

On the other hand, it is well known that if a positive and equitable policy on language is implemented, the developing media of technology such as the Internet and TV may be used for the empowerment of suppressed languages. The efforts for the protection and promotion of the mother tongue in some democratic states may be cited as an example. In these countries, the minority / mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction, and mother tongue teacher training programmes are implemented. Devising plans and schemes for mother tongue-based education, the state supports the preparation of books and materials to be used in education and promotes the development of mother tongue literature. UNESCO also fosters projects for the protection of endangered languages. It is important for the development of the minority language at risk that the prestige and wealth of its speakers, and consequently the prestige of the language within the dominant community, are improved (Crystal, 2010: 155–68).

Finally, in order for Kırmanjki to live on and flourish, the positive measures briefly mentioned here need to be taken; first and foremost, it is essential that Kırmanjki gains status and prestige, and Kırmanjki-medium education is offered at every level. Unless the existing adverse circumstances are reversed, and positive steps are taken in this regard, Kırmanjki will continue to face the risk of extinction.

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PART VI

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ART, CULTURE AND
LITERATURE

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From the Wandering Poets to the Stateless Novelists

A Short Introduction to Kurdish Literary History

HASHEM AHMADZADEH

Introduction

In the famous cemetery of Mahabad, the main city in Iranian Kurdistan and the capital of the first short-lived Kurdish Republic in 1946, there is a special corner for the Kurdish poets and literary figures. Not far from this corner there is the tomb of Qazi Muhammad, the founder of the Kurdish Republic in Mahabad. The visitors of the cemetery rarely forget to pay respect to his tomb and the corner of the poets and writers. Among the resting poets in the corner, there are two highly influential poets, Hemin and Hazhar, whose literary styles stand at the final stages of the classical Kurdish poetry.[1] They actively participated in modern Kurdish political life and struggle, hence they suffered from continuous migration to different cities in Iraq and Iran. Hemin, Hazhar and Hedi left Iranian Kurdistan to spend a large part of their life in Iraqi Kurdistan.[2] While Hazhar and Hemin returned to Iranian Kurdistan and died there, Hedi did not return and died in 2016 and is buried in Hawler, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Hemin, Hedi and Hazhar's published memoirs are important literary works and are much appreciated by the Kurdish literary circles. Their life represents a long-standing tradition of those Kurdish poets who can be referred to as wandering poets.

Historically, especially during the nineteenth century, many Kurdish poets used to travel to territories outside their own birthplace. Among these poets one can name Nali (1797–1857/73), Heci Kadirî Koyi (1817–97), Rahim Wafayi (1844–1902), Qani (1898–1965), Hazhar (1921–91), Hemin (1921–88), Hedi (1927–2016), Usman Sabri (1905–93), Qadri Jan (1911–72) and Cegerxwîn

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[1] Hemin was the pen name of Muhammad Amin Sheikholeslami (1921–86) and Hazhar was the pen name of Abdurrahman Sharafkandi (1921–91).

[2] Hedi was the pen name of Khalid Hisami (1927–2016).

(1903–84). These poets spent a major part of their lives outside their original hometown. Nali left Sulaymaniya and lived in different cities, such as Damascus, Mecca and Istanbul, where he supposedly died. Haji Qadir left Koya and stayed in Istanbul where he acted as the teacher of the famous Badirkhanis, who played a determined role in the Kurdish literature and political life. Wafayi left Mahabad to live in Shamzinan to work as Sheikh Ubeydullah's clerk. Usman Sabri, Qadri Jan and Cegerxwîn, who were born in northern Kurdistan, following the collapse of Sheikh Said's uprising in 1925, all moved to western Kurdistan. Cegerxwîn moved to Baghdad after the 1958 events and stayed there until 1970 when he returned to western Kurdistan and finally fled to Sweden the same year where he died in 1984.[3]

During the early decades of the twentieth century, parallel to the formation of the new nation-states in the Middle East, the literary history of the main languages of these nation-states was also booming. The main direction of the mostly romanticized and glorified literary histories and themes in these countries legitimized the hegemony of the dominant languages, that is, Persian, Arabic and Turkish. This policy was at the cost of the other ethnic groups who spoke in languages other than the official languages. Thus, the Kurds and other minorities in these countries became subject to the policy of marginalization and assimilation. In the official political and literary historiography of these nation-states, the Kurds and their history and literature are either ignored or have only been mentioned in passing as a part of the motherland, that is, the official nation-state. As late as 1945 the famous Kurdish poet Hazhar states that there are many Iranians who do not even think that there have been authors who have written in Kurdish (Salih and Salih, 2010: 145).

This chapter aims to shed light on the Kurdish literary history in both its classical and modern context. The chapter argues that Kurdish poetry in its various dialects was the dominant literary genre until very recently. The prosaic literature, short story and the novel rose in the early decades of the twentieth century and it is still in the early stages of its development.[4] Reviewing the life of some of the most influential Kurdish poets shows that they usually crossed the borders between the different parts of Kurdistan and served the Kurdish ethnic and national awareness and literary heritage. In the

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[3] The details of all these poets' lives are beyond the scope of this chapter. A short account of each poet's life can be found in Kurdish in Marif Khaznadar's comprehensive history of Kurdish literature (Khaznadar, 2010).

[4] For the rise and development of the Kurdish theatre, see Rostami (2018). See also Chapter 29 by Mari R. Rostami in this volume.

modern Kurdish narrative discourse the Kurdish novelists, not having their own nation-states, encounter a dilemma as far as the national setting of their narratives is considered. Contrary to the earlier poets, who could wander to different parts of Kurdistan, the novelists provide their imaginary characters with such an opportunity. These characters, suffering from the lack of a defined national identity and a state of their own, challenge the borders between various parts of Kurdistan by crossing them.[5]

Kurdish Literature

Kurdish as an Indo-European language belongs to the North-western branch of the Indo-Iranian languages. Different scholars have labelled its subdivided dialects differently. Generally, the Kurdish dialects are divided into four groups: Northern Kurmanji, Central Kurmanji, Southern Kurmanji and Hawrami and Zazaki. The ways of categorizing the Kurdish dialects have been 'strongly influenced by certain cultural, political, and other factors and viewpoints'.[6] In fact, the paralinguistic factors play a crucial role in discussing the Kurdish language. Among the most important subjective reasons that result in considering the Kurdish dialects as 'one language', that is, Kurdish, one can mention the widespread national feelings and the 'ethnic unity of Kurds' (Paul, 2008).

Due to the existence of the geographical borders among the various parts of Kurdistan and the deprivation of the Kurds of public education and administrative bureaucracy, the Kurdish main dialects have developed in isolation without any organic relations with each other. This has resulted in making Kurdish a bi-standard language, that is, Northern and Central Kurmanji, usually known and referred to as Kurmanji and Sorani. The speakers of these dialects, as Hassanpour rightly states, despite all obstacles, 'do communicate, with difficulty, in normal conversational situations' (Hassanpour, 1992: 24).

Far from being produced in a standard and unified language and orthography Kurdish literature cannot be a proper label for denoting specific and well-defined literature not only linguistically but also socio-politically. On the contrary, Kurdish literature has been developing in about five different

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[5] In another article I have discussed the traces of statelessness in the Kurdish narrative discourse. See Ahmadzadeh (2005).

[6] Some Western scholars, based on historical and linguistic perspectives, reject the common origin of Kurdish dialects and refer to some of the dialects, e.g. Zaza and Hawrami, as non-Kurdish ones. Among these scholars, one can refer to MacKenzie (1961).

contexts and the only common feature between various produced types of this literature is the language, which is not by any means a standard one.

There are, generally speaking, two methods of covering the history of Kurdish literature. One can either prefer to take into consideration the geographical spaces or the linguistic and dialectal groupings of the Kurdish language. In both cases, one needs to distinguish between classical and modern Kurdish literatures. In this chapter, the latter method, that is, the main common linguistic features of the main Kurdish dialects, is applied. Kurdish oral literature and the question of any periodization of Kurdish literature according to the literary styles and themes, though very important and needed, are beyond the scope of such a short review. Another limitation that has been imposed on this chapter is the exclusion of the modern literature produced in Hawrami and Zazaki. One of the rich Kurdish dialects that was used in the Ardalan principality was the Goran/Hawrami dialect. There were many influential Kurdish poets who wrote in Gorani dialect and left a rich literary heritage behind them. Among these poets, one can name Besarani (1641–1702), Khanay Ghubadi (1700–59) and Mawlawi Tawagwezi (1806–82). During the recent years, there have been some publications in both Hawrami, in eastern (Iran) and southern (Iraq) Kurdistan, and Zazaki in northern (Turkey) Kurdistan.

The existing materials on Kurdish literary history, mainly in Kurdish, date back to the early decades of the twentieth century. Since then, many similar works have been published. Most of the authors have meant to prove that there is a 'nation' with its own literature. One can see this position as a reaction to the rising history books about the other literature, such as Turkish, Arabic and Persian, in the region. Among the most known historians of Kurdish literature, one can refer to Amin Faizi Bag, Rafiq Hilmi, Aladdin Sajjadi, Sadiq Borakayi, Qanat-e Kurdo and Marif Khaznadar. The common feature of most of these histories of Kurdish literature is a kind of biographical narration of the Kurdish poets. An exception to the rule is Khaznadar's comprehensive seven-volume history of Kurdish literature, which covers besides the biography of the authors an exemplified review of their works.

The formation of the new nation-states resulted in the rise of a modern Kurdish middle class that was totally educated in the official languages of these nation-states. Some pioneering authors in these countries wrote in the official languages.[7] The works produced by the Kurdish authors in a language rather than Kurdish have raised the question of their affiliation and whether

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[7] Among the very well-known and successful Kurdish authors who published their literary work in the imposed 'national languages', one can name Salim Barakat (1951), Yashar Kemal (1923–2015), Mohammad Ghazi (1913–98), Ibrahim Yunesi (1926–2012), Ali

they can be regarded as Kurdish literature.[8] To polarize the works of those Kurdish authors who write in languages other than Kurdish one should either emphasize the language or the content of their works. While the former option excludes these works from Kurdish literature, the latter considers them as Kurdish literature in other languages.

The beginning of Kurdish literature has been a hot question among Kurdish scholars. Khayat, trying to trace the early Kurdish poems, reviews the related research and finds quite diverse dates, stretching from a few decades before the Common Era to the early decades following the Islamic conquest in the Kurdish regions in the seventh century (Khayat, 2018). In many Kurdish sources, the history of Kurdish literature goes back to Baba Taher Oryan (937–1010) (Ahmadi, 2016). The linguistic affiliation of Baba Taher Oryan's poems has been a matter of disputation among scholars. Ahmadi, referring to various ideas, such as Minorsky, Safa, Bertles, about these poems, argues that these poems, having been changing throughout time, are not written in Persian, but in Lori, as a sub-dialect to Kurdish (Ahmadi, 2016: 55). The close relationship between these poems and the Yarsan religious beliefs strengthen their Kurdish affiliation. In fact, these poems are frequently recited by the Yarsans and many of them appear in their holy book, that is, the *Saranjam*.

Northern Kurmanji

Classical Poetry

Following the Chaldiran battle between the Ottomans and Safavids in 1514, the Kurds and their territories acted as a buffer between the two competing empires. The principality of Botan was one of the strong Kurdish principalities and it became the cradle of many well-known Kurdish poets. The Kurdish emirs and princes of Botan by their generous patronizing encouraged the talented poets of the principality to write down their poems. Malay Jiziri (1570–1640), who lived in Jizira (Cizre), the capital of the principality,

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Ashraf Darvishiyan (1941), Ali Mohammad Afghani (1925), Muhaydin Zangana (1940–2010), etc.

[8] Earlier, during the time of the empires that ruled the Kurds, there were not any official languages. There were, in fact, some languages that had a higher position among the inhabitants of the empires. While Arabic for centuries was vastly used for scientific purposes, the two other influential languages, Persian and Ottoman Turkish, were used in the military, communicative and administrative discourses. It is within this logic of empires and the question of language that we find many works by Iranian authors in Arabic, e.g. Ibn Sina, al-Biruni and al-Ghazali.

became the icon for Kurdish classical poetry. Although his poems represent the common features of Sufism, that is, Islamic mysticism, very common in Arabic and Persian poetry (Mala, 2001: 17), one finds a strong representation of his native environment and cultural affiliations. The word 'Kurdistan' is explicitly mentioned in one of his poems:

> Gulî baxî Îremî Botanim
> Şeb çiraxî şebî Kurdistanim

> I am the flower of the paradise of Botan
> I am the lantern of the night of Kurdistan
> *(Hazhar, 2014: 639, my translation).*

It only took a few decades until another legendary Kurdish poet, Ahmad-i Khani (1651–1707), from the same region to found the milestone of Kurdish epic poetry. In his everlasting epic of *Mam u Zin*, Khani mentions with a strong admiration Jiziri, Faqe Tayran and Ali Hariri as his own predecessors. Since the early stages of the Kurdish awakening in the early twentieth century and the continuous struggle for constructing a modern identity Khani's *Mam u Zin* has been frequently referred to. The book has been frequently reappeared in new editions and in other Kurdish dialects.[9] Hajar's version of *Mam u Zin* in Central Kurmanji refers to the crucial role of Khani's message for the liberation of the Kurds.[10] The book has been widely read and interpreted by scholars of Kurdish studies. Khani and his *Mam u Zin* are still present in modern Kurdish literature and there are different authors and artists who base their works on the main theme of this work and its author.[11]

Modern Poetry

Abdul Rahim Rahmi Hakari (1890–1958) was one of the early Kurdish poets who, being influenced by modern Turkish poetry, marked the modernizing

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[9] The characteristic features of Khani's epic work and its various interpretations can be found in Vali (2003).

[10] Hazhar, being deeply influenced by Khani, adapts the poet's name for his son, Khani, who has been actively contributing to spreading his father's mission regarding Kurdish identity and sovereignty. In the highly literary introduction that Hazhar has written to his translation of Khani's *Mam u Zin*, he emphasizes the importance of this work for the survival of the Kurds and their national identity (see Hazhar, 2008: 5–24).

[11] The Kurdish novelist from Syrian Kurdistan in his popular novel *Mirname* (*The Book of the Mir*) reconstructs the historical condition of Khani's life and times. The traces of Khani's life and epic work can be also seen in Helim Yousif's short story *Mame be Zin* (*Mam without Zin*), which is an adaption of Khani's life and his *Mam u Zin* in the modern Kurdish context. During the early 2010s, Khani's life and mission became the main theme of a famous theatre play by Dr Bamarni in Kurdistan and it was frequently shown in different Kurdish cities in Iraqi Kurdistan.

of Kurdish poetry. He published his early modern poems in *Zhin* magazine in Istanbul before the Kurdish language was banned in Turkey following the establishment of the Turkish Republic. As a consequence, Kurdish literature and its various genres did not have any opportunity to develop until the early 1990s. During the last three decades, there have been several poetry collections published in Turkey. The published poems show a shift from the classical ones both in content and form. The published Kurdish journals and magazines always contain some pages devoted to modern Kurdish poetry. Among many modern Kurdish poets in northern Kurdistan, one can name Rojan Barnas, Arjen Ari, Berken Bereh, Renas Jiyan, Irfan Amida and Selim Temo.[12] Besides the works of Kurdish poets from northern Kurdistan, there have been many poetry collections of Kurdish poets from southern Kurdistan translated into Kurmanji. In Duhok province there are many published poetry collections in Northern Kurmanji. Khalil Duhoki, Mahfuz Mayi, Najib Balayi and Moayyad Tayyeb are among the famous modern Kurdish poets in this part of Kurdistan. The published works of poets such as Cegerxwîn, Jan Dost, Ahmad Hosseini, Axin Welat and others show the rich tradition of Kurdish modern poetry in western Kurdistan. The most outstanding theme of these published collections is resisting against being subject to the eliminating policy of the Syrian regimes.

Modern Narrative

Northern Kurmanji celebrated its unprecedented achievement in the modern era in the former Soviet Union in the early 1930s. This unexpected achievement can be referred to as the Soviet mutation of Kurdish literature. This literary achievement was, in the first place, the result of the political facilities that were offered to Kurdish citizens of the Soviet Union. Thousands of Yezidi Kurds had earlier, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, migrated to the territories of Russia to escape the suppressive politics of the Ottomans. Influenced by the Marxist ideology some of these Kurds actively participated in the October Revolution of 1917. Consequently, they succeeded in publishing their works in Kurdish. Some of these Kurdish writers became the pioneers of modern Kurdish literature, especially the novel. Arabe Shamo (1897–1978) has been considered the 'father of the Kurdish novel'.[13] His first

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[12] For a most representative collection of Kurdish poetry in northern Kurdistan, see Ari (2011).

[13] Arabe Shamo was born into a Kurdish family, which had immigrated earlier to Russia from Ottoman Kurdistan. He spoke Armenian, Turkish, Russian and Kurdish. As a child, he worked as a shepherd. During the First World War, when he worked as

novel, *Shivane Kurmanja* (*The Kurdish Shepherd*), was published in Yerevan in 1935.[14] With the exception of *Dimdim*, which is a historical novel and narrates the events of the war between the Kurds and the Safavid king Shah Abbas II in the seventeenth century, his six other novels deal mainly with the contemporary sociopolitical conditions of the Kurds of the former Soviet Union in accordance with the conventions of socialist realism.

Shivane Kurmanja narrates the hard life of the Kurdish people in Russia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The author/narrator provides the reader with a close account of his childhood, his family, his village and the conditions of the Kurdish tribes and the establishment of the Soviet system and its consequences among the Kurdish tribes. His participation in the First World War as a translator for the Russian army, his participation in the civil war as a Bolshevik and his work as a high-ranking member of the Bolshevik Party among the Kurdish tribes in eliminating tribal and feudalistic traditions and structures are narrated in detail. The conditions of women and their hard lives are thoroughly described. It is through his failed love for his cousin, Kare, that we understand how girls used to be nothing more than objects to be sold. The narration is delivered from a first-person perspective with detailed descriptions of the various social and cultural traditions of the Kurds.

Memoirs from his childhood form the main part of the novel. He tells us how he once stole some potatoes and tried to cook them under fire, and wolves attacked the sheep. He fights against the wolves and when the fight is over the potatoes are completely burned and the young shepherd has to put up with his hunger. He also narrates the story of his first encounter with knives and forks in his teacher's home. When he is served lunch, he notices

a translator for the Russian army, he came across socialist ideas. After the revolution he joined the Bolsheviks. He was one of the main organizers of the Soviets among the Kurdish tribes in Russia. In 1937, he was sent to exile in Siberia and had to stay there until 1954. He came back to Yerevan and died there in 1978. For more information on Arabe Shamo's political and literary life, and the general situation of the Kurdish language and the Kurds in the former Soviet Union, see Vanly (1992).

[14] The Russian and Armenian translations of *Shivane Kurmanja* (*Kurdish Shepherd*) were also published in 1935. In 1946, Basil Nikitin translated the Russian version into French. In 1947, Nuraddin Zaza published the Kurdish translation of the French version in Beirut. In 1989, the Kurdish Institute in Paris published both the Kurdish and French versions in one volume. In 2006, the Kurdish version in the modified Arabic alphabet was published by Aras Publishing House in Hawler. Muhsin Ahmad Omar has written an introduction and lexicon for this version and has transliterated it into Sorani. In 2009, Lis Publishing House in Istanbul republished the original version of the book in the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets in one volume. Mustafa Aydogan wrote a long introduction to this volume. For a detailed history of the publication of this novel and its translations into other languages, see Aydogan (2009: 5–47).

that there is a knife and fork and a spoon next to his plate. He eats his food with the spoon and puts the knife and fork in his pocket as if they were gifts to him. Later on, he is accused of stealing them. However, he defends himself and says that he thought that they were only gifts for him. This event results in serious feelings of shame and these memories give a very satirical aspect to the novel and at the same time a sad feeling to the reader about how deprived the character was. The character is asked to work as the porter at a school for three roubles a month. He accepts the job while studying at the school at the same time. He also tells us about his first love for Marosya, the daughter of his teacher. Getting a book from her for the first time is described with great passion. The novel ends with the emphasis on the importance of the October Revolution, the election of the Soviets, the end of the Kurdish feudal lords and sheikhs (Shamo, 2009: 127). The novel has all the characteristics of a socialist-realist work.

The content and language of *Shivane Kurmanja* is an important issue regarding the formation of a new era in Kurdish literature. There are some considerable similarities between this novel and a novel written in Persian by the Kurdish author Ahmad Khodadadeh, who published *Ruz-e Siyahe Kargar* (*The Dark Day of the Worker*) in two volumes in 1926 and 1927 in Kirmansha, the biggest city in Iranian Kurdistan. A newly edited version of the book was republished in 2016 in Paris (Khodadadeh, 2016). The editors of this version of the book have referred to it as the first Iranian novel of proletarian literature.[15] The content of this novel has certain similarities to Shamo's novel. In both of them, one can trace the authors' own lives. Both of them describe the hard situation of the peasants and the cruel structure of feudalism. Both novels are narrated from the first-person point of view with many autobiographical allusions.[16] Both Khodadadeh and Shamo were Kurds, but their different political and geographical situations resulted in choosing different languages for the writing of their novels.[17]

Following *Shivane Kurmanja*, Shamo published six more novels in Kurdish. Among his famous influential novels, one can refer to *Qelay Dimdim* (*The*

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[15] For a detailed introduction to the book and its author's life and times, see the Asad Seif and Naser Mohajer's introduction in Khodadadeh (2016).

[16] The editors of the new edition of the book state that it was translated into Russian and published in 1930 in Russia. Bearing in mind that Shamo's book was published five years after the translated version of the book in Russian, one can assume that Shamo had the chance to read it.

[17] In 1995, Abdulla Mardukh translated the novel into Kurdish and published it in Paris. He gave a modified Kurdish title to the Kurdish version of the novel, *Charereshiy Warzer* (*The Farmer's Unfortunate Life*).

Castle of Dimdim), which was published in 1966. It is a historical novel about the surrounding of a castle that belongs to a Kurdish prince, Khani Lapzerin, by the Safavid king Shah Abbas during the early seventeenth century. The novel narrates the heroic resistance of the inhabitants of the castle against the enemy and their tragic death at the hands of Shah Abbas's soldiers. The translated version of this novel, as well as others into Central Kurdish during the last decades of the twentieth century, contributed to further development of the Kurdish novel.

There were some other Kurdish authors, such as Eliye Evdirrehman, Heciye Cindi, Seide Ibo, Egide Xodo, Khalil Muradov, Tosine Rashid and others, who enriched this tradition through publishing more works in Kurdish. The main themes of these novels are love, Kurdish traditions, the powerful feudal and religious leaders, historical social movements, the exploitation of the people and the spread of socialist and egalitarian ideas among the Kurds. In these novels, by comparing the conditions of life before and after the establishment of socialism, it is intended to highlight the superiority of socialism over capitalism. Seide Ibo in his *Kurden Revi* (*The Migrating Kurds*) tells the story of those suffering Kurds who, during the second decade of the twentieth century, migrated to the former Soviet Union where the socialist revolution was to put an end to all their sufferings. During the early years of the twenty-first century, Aras Publishing House in Hawler republished a considerable number of these novels in the modified Arabic alphabet and made them available for a greater Kurdish public readership.

In northern parts of Iraqi Kurdistan, that is, Duhok province, a sub-dialect of Northern Kurmanji, which is known as Badini, is the dominant dialect. During the last two decades, many Kurdish novels have been published in this dialect with the modified Arabic orthography. Active publishing houses like Sipirez and Nalband have published many books in this dialect. Novelists such as Anwar Tahir, Hasan Slevani, Sidqi Hirori have published their novels.[18]

The political changes in Turkey, in favour of the Kurdish question since the 1990s, paved the way for publication in Kurdish. A dozen new publishing houses such as Avesta, Doz, Peywend and Lis recorded high levels of publishing in Kurdish. Among the Kurdish novelists who have actively published in northern Kurdistan, one can refer to Ramazan Alan, Shener Ozman, Hasane Mate, Firat Ceweri, Yaqub Tilermen and Mehmed Uzun.

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[18] For a detailed study of published Kurdish novels in the Badini dialect, see Ameen (2016).

While the novels are written by those Kurdish authors who live in exile and mainly deal with the question of Kurdish identity and liberation, the authors who live in northern Kurdistan and Turkey mainly focus on more general sociopolitical questions. Some of them, such as Ramazan Alan and Shener Ozman, deal with ontological questions. Likewise, the novels published by Kurdish novelists from Syrian Kurdistan, such as Halim Yusif and Jan Dost, though living in exile, show how the Kurdish novel has become an established Kurdish genre all over Kurdistan. Jan Dost with his mainly historical novels focuses on the fictive recreation of the legendary Kurdish political figures such as Sheikh Said and the formation and decline of the Kurdistan Republic in Mahabad in 1946. In his *Mirname* (*The Book of the Mir*) he has recreated Ahmadi Khani's life and his epic masterpiece, *Mam u Zin* (*Mam and Zin*). In his latest novel, *Kobani*, published in 2017, he depicts the war in Kobani and the legendary resistance of its inhabitants against ISIS in 2015.

The main Kurdish diaspora novelists, such as Mehmet Uzun and Hasane Mate, provide their readers with a wide social, political and historical context of the Kurdish society in northern Kurdistan.[19] In his main historical novels, Uzun contributes to the reconstruction of modern Kurdish history through depicting the life and fortune of some of the main Kurdish personalities, such as Mamduh Salim and Jaladat Badirkhan.

Central Kurmanji

Classical Poetry

One of the main Kurdish principalities within the Ottoman Empire was Baban principality. The rich poetic heritage of this principality has acted as the base of the Central Kurdish dialects, which now functions as one of the two main standard Kurdish dialects, that is, Northern and Central Kurmanji, better known as Kurmanji and Sorani. Three influential and prominent poets of this principality, Nali (1797–1857/73), Salim (1800–66) and Kurdi (1812–50), have been referred to as the three angels of the Baban school of Kurdish poetry. Their *divan*s (collections of poems) are frequently republished and broadly received by Kurdish readers. One of the episodes of Nali's life has extensively drawn the attention of Kurdish readers. Any observant of Kurdish culture and literature realizes how Nali's lamentations about his imposed exile have become popular references for Kurdish readers. The Ottoman

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[19] For detailed statistics of Kurdish publications in the diaspora up to the early twenty-first century, see Ahmadzadeh (2003: 161–7).

conditions of Kurdish society in Iranian Kurdistan following the formation of the Iranian nation-state at Reza Shah's hands.

> Agar dapirsn waz'i zamana
> Millat pareshan, aman amana
> Har kas la khoyda sardari nabe
> Hali har waya, axri wa dabe

> If you ask about the condition of time
> The people are sad and in need of help
> Whoever does not have his own sovereign/leader
> His condition will be so forever (Qazi, 2008: 130, my translation).

Modern Poetry

While the neighbouring forms of literature alongside the formation of the nation-states were modernizing themselves, Kurdish poetry was deprived of the main mediums of modernization such as education, standardization of the language, public reading and functioning journalism. Despite these obstacles, some Kurdish poets being influenced mainly by the modern poets of the official languages, such as Arabic, Persian and Turkish, initiated modern poetry. The early signs of the reflection of modernization had first appeared in Heci Kadirî Koyi's poetry. The new rising middle class in Iraqi Kurdistan had a better position as far as linguistic rights were considered.

Nuri Sheikh Salih (1905–58) and Abdulla Goran (1904–62) are the main pioneers of modern Kurdish poetry in Central Kurdish. Goran's poetry with a purified Kurdish and a modernized form founded the strong bases of modern poetry in Central Kurmanji. Among the influencing factors of the modernization, one can name the influence of Turkish modern poetry (Ahmad, 2012). Besides a changed vocabulary and content, modern Kurdish poetry gradually left prosody, the formal obligations of classical poetry. Goran as the main founder of this trend was himself an active member of the Iraqi Communist Party. His worldview and ideological thoughts were strongly reflected in his poetry. The Kurdish popular melodic traditions and folk poetry, that is, 'finger metric', alongside a romanticized Kurdish milieu were among the characteristic features of Goran's modern poetry. Modern Kurdish poetry continued to flourish in the works of poets such as Ibrahim Ahmad, Yunes Dildar, Salih Dilan, Kamuran Mukri, Jamal Sharbazheri, Ahmad Hardi and others.

Following the political events of March 1970 in Iraqi Kurdistan, a literary movement celebrated its birth by a declaration, which was referred to as

rwange (viewpoint), in April 1970. The main literary figures of this movement were Sherko Bekas, Jamal Sharbajeri, Hisen Arif and Kaka Mam Botani. Earlier, Latif Halmat and Farhad Shakely had initiated another less-known literary movement of modernization of Kurdish poetry in Kifri. *Rwange* as an influential literary movement played a significant role in developing Kurdish poetry and prose during the 1970s and later on. Among the most-known contemporary Kurdish poets in Iraqi Kurdistan, one can name Sehrko Bekas (1940–2013), Latif Halmat, Qubad Jalizadeh, Farhad Shakely, Rafiq Sabir, Zana Khalil, Pishko Najmadin, Shirin Kaf, Kazhal Ibrahim Khidir, Karim Dashti, Anwar Jaf, Kazhal Ahmad, Mahabad Qaradaghi, Choman Hardi, Nazand Bagikhani, Hnadren and Jalal Barzinji. The works of some of these poets have been translated into Turkish, Persian and European languages. Some of them, Bekas, Hardi and Bagikhani, have been awarded international literary prizes.

Central Kurdish obtained one of its main fields of progress in Iranian Kurdistan where Sware Ilkhanizadeh (1937–75), influenced by Goran and Persian modern poetry, pioneered modern Kurdish poetry. His new form of poetry became a successful and celebrated model for some more Kurdish poets, such as Fateh Sheikh, Ali Hasaniani and Solayman Chireh (Herish), in Iranian Kurdistan. Omar Sultani (Wafa) (1939–2005) through his poems in both Persian and Kurdish shows how he was influenced by Persian modern poetry and its main founder, Nimayushij.[20]

Due to the severe political conditions in Iranian Kurdistan, there are clear signs of a kind of escapism in current Kurdish poetry. The earlier known forms have given their place to much more abstract forms. In the 1990s, a group of Kurdish poets, such as Azad Rostami and Behzad Kordestani, referring to themselves as DAKAR poets, published their poems, which had a critical tone against the current literary forms. Some scholars have tried to polarize the high number of Kurdish poets in Iranian Kurdistan based on various criteria such as age, generation and form. Among these groups, one can name 'the fourth generation, the modern and even the "more modern" poets'.[21] Among the several known modern Kurdish poets in Iranian Kurdistan, one can mention Zhila Hosseini, Bahar Hosseini, Shoaib Mirzayi, Omid Warzandeh, Raza Alipour, Kambiz Karimi, Jalal Malaksha, Yunes Razayi, Sulaiman Sofi Sultani and Saleh Suzani.

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[20] For more information on Wafa's style and life, see *Malband*, no. 96 (London, 2006).

[21] Masud Binandeh in a comprehensive interview in Kurdish sheds light on the different groupings and generations of Kurdish poetry in Iranian Kurdistan. See www .amazhe.com/1087–2/.

Modern Narrative

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Iraq was one of the newly formed countries that included the southern part of Kurdistan. The destiny of southern Kurdistan as a part of this country became subject to various political scenarios between the British administration in the region and Turkey, who did not want to accept the British plans to annex Mosul Vilayat into the newly formed Iraq.[22] The relatively strong position of Kurdish nationalism led the British authorities to offer some cultural rights to the Kurds. Some of the British officers in the Kurdish areas, such as Major Soane and J. C. Edmonds, encouraged the Kurdish educated elites to write in Kurdish. They promoted the Kurds to write in Kurdish and arranged competitions of writing the best short stories in pure Kurdish. They pioneered the early Kurdish journals and newspapers such as *Peshkawtin* (*Progress*) and *Dangi Geyti Taze* (*The Voice of the New World*), which contributed tremendously to the promotion of the Kurdish language. The influence of the British Mandate in Iraq resulted in offering education in Kurdish in the main Kurdish cities of Iraqi Kurdistan. With the return of some of the distinguished and prominent Kurdish officers who had served in the Ottoman army in Istanbul to Silemani, Kurdish journalism enjoyed much more development. Haji Tofiq (1867–1950), mainly known as Piramerd, who had earlier founded an influential Kurdish journal, *Zhin* (*Life*) in Istanbul, continued his journalism in Silemani. Besides *Zhin* he founded another Kurdish journal *Zhiyan* (*Life*). By publishing the early Kurdish short stories and literary texts these journals contributed to the development of Kurdish literature. Another prominent Kurdish officer who had a remarkable rank within the Ottoman army and returned to Silemani following World War I was Amin Zaki Bag (1880–1948). His seminal book about the history of Kurdistan acted as one of the early texts that promoted the formation of a modern Kurdish identity.[23]

The Kurdish narrative discourse in Iraqi Kurdistan celebrated its early start during the first few decades of the twentieth century with some short stories that were published in various Kurdish literary journals. Among the most successful literary journals, one can name *Galawej*, which was published

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[22] A good analysis of the conditions that resulted in the formation of Iraq to which southern Kurdistan was annexed, can, among many other sources, be found in Natali (2005). Hassanpour (1992) explains the process of the standardization of Central Kurdish in southern Kurdistan in detail.

[23] In the introduction to this book, Zaki Bag mentions how the formation of the Turkish and Arab nationalisms motivated him to look for his own roots. By considering the Turks and Arabs as the others of the Kurds, he aimed to find out the historical roots of the Kurds. See Zaki Bag (1931).

monthly from 1929 to 1939. The political achievements of the Kurdish movement in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1970 resulted in the significant flourishing of Kurdish literature in general and the Kurdish narrative discourse in particular. Among the important Kurdish novels that reflect the hard situation of the 1960s in Iraqi Kurdistan, one can refer to *Jani Gal* (*People's Suffering*) by Ibrahim Ahmad (1914–2000), an educated literary man and a political activist who was one of the founders of the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party in 1946. The novel was published in 1972. The novel is a story about the pains and agonies of the Kurdish people. In the words of Nariman, one of the characters in the story, the revolution is the pain which the people, in order to be free, need to suffer from, similar to the pain a mother suffers from when she gives birth to her child. The names of the characters have mostly a revolutionary and national connotation: Jwamer (brave), Hiwa (hope), Bebak (brave), Aso (horizon), Shaho (a mountain in Kurdistan), Saman (prosperity). There are clear references to the issue of identity with a focus on the 'Patriotic Liberation Army' that fights against the enemy for the sake of the Kurds and their liberation. This novel, contrary to the previous Kurdish novels that had been published in the former Soviet Union, has the typical features of a realist novel, which is, as Watt argues, characterized by particularity, temporality, individualism, spatiality, immediacy and closeness of the text (Watt, 1995: 34).

The third golden period for the flourishing of the Kurdish narrative discourse in Iraqi Kurdistan happened in the early 1990s following the uprising of the Iraqi Kurds and the liberation of most of the Kurdish territories. Since then publication in Kurdish has increased unprecedentedly. It is during this period that many publishing houses such as Aras, Mukiryani, Sardam, Andesha, Ghazalnus, Wafayi and others start mass publication in Kurdish. The flourishing economic situation during the early 2010s and the numerous newspapers and journals paved the way of increased publishing. By paying the authors for their writings many journals encouraged more publications in Kurdish. While up to the early 1990s the dominant narrative discourse was the Kurdish short story, it was the novel that became the most flourishing genre after the Kurdish uprising. While up to the early 1990s only a few authors such as Hissen Arif, Ibrahim Ahmad and Mihammad Mukri represented the known names for the Kurdish novel, during the first two decades of the twenty-first century there were tens of novelists who exemplified the Kurdish novel. It is during this period that novelists such as Bakhtyar Ali, Jabar Jamal Gharib, Sherzad Hassan, Karwan Kakesur, Farhad Pirbal, Karim Kake, Hama Fariq Hassan, Hiwa Qadir, Aram Shexwasani, Sabir Rashid,

Gashbir Ahmad and others published their novels continuously. During this period many Kurdish novels were translated into Persian and European languages. A Kurdish novelist, Bakhtyar Ali, was awarded the prestigious Nelly Sachs literary prize in Germany in 2017.

During the recent years, the Kurdish novelists in Iraqi Kurdistan have criticized the shortages of Kurdish reign and have pointed out corruption and nepotism as two infamous phenomena in Kurdistan. This is, in fact, a radical change in the thematic features of the Kurdish narrative discourse, which mainly used to target the oppressive politics of the central governments against the Kurds. Among the known authors who have been pioneering this trend in Kurdistan, one can refer to Bakhtiar Ali, Jabar Jamal Gharib, Rewas Ahmad, Runak Shwani, Gashbir Ahmad and others.

The first published Kurdish novel in Central Kurdish, *Peshmerga* (*Partisan*), was written by Rahim Ghazi.[24] The novel is a socialist-realist account of the cultural, political and social conditions of Kurdish society in Iranian Kurdistan during the early years of the 1940s. The main theme of the novel is the formation of the first modern Kurdish nationalist organization, Komalay Jiyanewey Kurd (the Society for the Revival of the Kurds), known as JK, which was established in 1942 by a group of educated young men in Mahabad. The struggle of the Kurds for their national rights and the co-operation of the feudal lords with the Iranian government against the Kurdish nationalist movement are the other main themes of the novel.

Despite the political suppression in Iran, the Kurdish narrative discourse gained a lot of success during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. During the last two decades of the twentieth century a Kurdish journal, *Sirwa*, which literally means breeze, provided the Kurdish language with an influential medium. In this journal, tens of Kurdish authors started publishing their short stories and literary critical articles. The Iranian authorities, seeing the Kurdish strongholds in their neighbourhood, showed a kind of flexibility in their politics regarding the Kurdish print in Iran. Kurdistan University in the main Kurdish city of Sine started its BA programme for Kurdish language and literature in 2016. The rising Kurdish publishing houses, such as Gutar,

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[24] *Peshmerga* was written by Rahim Qazi, who, at the time of the Democratic Republic of Kurdistan, left Mahabad and went to the Soviet Union. Following the collapse of the republic he stayed in the Soviet Union. The novel was first published in Yerevan in 1960. In 1961, it was published in Baghdad. This version had a subtitle: 'A story of the struggle of the Kurds against the feudalism and the occupiers at the time of the Kurdistan national republic.' In 1980, it was reprinted again in Iran. In 1997, its Kurmanji version, translated by Ziya Avci, was published in Stockholm. In 2008, a new edition of the book was published by Aras Publishing Centre in Iraqi Kurdistan, Hawler (Erbil).

Zanko, Mang and others, in Kurdish cities, made Kurdish publication much more developed. Nowadays short story writers and novelists such as Naser Vahidi, Mihammad Ramazani, Ata Nahayee, Qader Hedayati, Shahram Ghawami, Kawan Nahayee and Kamran Hamidi are known authors in Kurdistan and their novels have been republished frequently. These novelists reflect the current and historical situation of the Kurds in their work.

While the earlier Kurdish novelists were dominantly men, since the late 1990s women novelists have increasingly published their novels. Novelists such as Rewas Ahmad, Mahabad Qaradaghi, Pari Kariminia, Bayan Salman, Nasrin Jafari, Zeinab Yusefi, Runak Shwani and Galawej have drawn the attention of readers of the Kurdish novel. These women novelists have added a new perspective to the earlier man-dominated Kurdish novel. Some Kurdish women in the diaspora, such as Awa Homa, Widad Akreyi and Tara Omar, have published their novels and short stories in English and Scandinavian languages.

Southern Kurmanji

Compared to the main Kurmanji dialects, writings in Southern Kurmanji, which consist of some sub-dialects, such as Laki, Fayli, Kalhuri, Kirmashani, Khanaqini and others, have not developed considerably. The early poems in this dialect were produced about two centuries ago without any noteworthy continuity. During the recent decades, there have been some significant efforts to publish in this dialect in Kirmashan, Ilam and Lorestan. Among the known poets of this dialect, one can mention Shami Kirmashani, Partaw Kirmashani and Lak Amir.[25]

Conclusion

Kurdish literature until the early twentieth century mainly consisted of poetry in different Kurdish dialects. Parallel to the social and political changes in Kurdistan, Kurdish classical poetry also experienced radical formal and thematic changes. Modern Kurdish poetry celebrated its rise during the early decades of the twentieth century. Likewise, a new genre emerged in the field of prosaic and narrative discourse as another result of the sociopolitical changes from the early decades of the twentieth century. The Kurdish

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[25] A concise and informative piece on writing traditions in Southern Kurmanji can be found in Sajjadi and Ibrahimi (2018: 270–85).

narrative discourse, due to various social and political reasons, rose much later than the official languages, such as Arabic, Turkish and Persian, in the region. Among the determining causes, one can refer to weak journalism, the fragmented development of the Kurdish language and literature in different parts of Kurdistan, the political hinders and the lack of a public readership. The lack of a standardized language and the existence of three orthographies strengthened the obstacles for the formation of a strong unified Kurdish narrative discourse. Despite all these hinders, Kurdish literature celebrated its strong emergence in both poetry and prose during the early decades of the twentieth century. The dynamic Kurdish diaspora, the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the political and cultural achievements of the Kurds in Turkey and Syria and the flourishing of Kurdish literature in Iranian Kurdistan, although under strict regulations, have been among the major factors for the development of the different genres of Kurdish literature in its fragmented and politicized form. The classical Kurdish poets usually wandered through different parts of Kurdistan and followed the general patterns of classical poetry in the region. The Kurdish narrative discourse has been a developing literary genre in constructing the modern problematic identity of the Kurds within the frame of the modern nation-states that govern them.

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A History of Kurdish Poetry

FARANGIS GHADERI

'For us poetry was everything. For us, poetry was history, geography and journalism . . . to understand the history of the Kurds we need to look at poetry. Through poetry we can understand the past,' said Şêrko Bêkes (1940–2013), renowned Kurdish nationalist poet, in a conversation with Kurdish journalist Şêrzad Heynî (2008: 26). There is much truth in this seemingly exaggerated account of Kurdish poetry when the significance of poetry in Middle Eastern societies is taken into account. Poetry for Kurds, like their neighbouring peoples, has been 'a way of existing, a way of relating to and conceiving the world, political action and an act of power' (Almarcegui, 2016: 125).[1] Poetry has been a tool of communication, transmitting knowledge, and an act of remembrance. Being the main Kurdish literary genre up until the mid-twentieth century, poetry for Kurds has an extra layer of significance. Kurdish prose did not come into existence until the nineteenth century and was not a noticeable genre up until the second half of the twentieth century. As such, Kurdish poetry provides an invaluable source of understanding to the dynamism of Kurdish society from the perspective of the Kurds themselves. Thus, Bêkes was right in stating that we understand the arrival of Sufism in Kurdistan through the poems of Melayê Cizîrî and the advent of modernity through Heci Kadirî Koyi's poetry (Heynî, 2008: 26). The advent of modernity in Kurdish society in the late nineteenth century did not diminish the status and power of poetry but rather reinforced it as a means of enlightenment and resistance. Throughout the twentieth century, Kurdish poetry was an integral part of the political uprisings and revolutions and an effective tool for mobilizing forces. The study of Kurdish poetry has largely been confined to literary studies and has not yet attracted the attention of scholars of history and the social sciences. Offering a brief account of the

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1 See also Alshaer (2016).

history of Kurdish poetry, I aim to shed light on its depth and wealth, its significance in Kurdish culture and potential for scholars of fields beyond literary studies.

The Challenges of Studying the History of Kurdish Poetry

Writing about the history of Kurdish poetry, as I have previously noted (Ghaderi, 2015), is a challenging task mainly due to the loss of a significant part of the Kurdish literary heritage. Furthermore, a significant portion of Kurdish written literature has remained as unpublished manuscripts in private collections and libraries across the Middle East and beyond. Consequently, we have a disjointed and episodic picture of classical Kurdish poetry (Ghaderi, 2015: 6). From the late nineteenth century, there was an increasing sense of awareness of the scale of the loss of the Kurdish heritage and its precarious fate and poets lamented the loss and disparaged the Kurds for disregarding their language and literature. Concerned and anxious about the fate of the Kurdish literary heritage, Koyi (1817–97) in a self-fulfilling prophecy in the late nineteenth century said:

> Ey refiqanî weten zor x̌ezełm mawe lewê
> Le kelênekewe teqdîre wekû hełbikewê
> Wek sefine bigerêy, bîdeye ber meddî nezer
> Ḧeyfe wek min le x̌erîbî bimrêt û netewê
>
> *(cited in Muḧemed, 2010: 100).*

> O homeland's friends! many of my *ghazals* are left there [Istanbul].
> They may come to light from a corner by chance,
> If you look with care, like a search ship.
> What a pity if they get buried in exile, like myself.[2]

In the twentieth century, the Kurdish literary heritage faced unprecedented attack from the newly founded nation-states and as rightly noted by Hassanpour, '[M]ost manuscripts, especially those in private possession, were destroyed under repressive conditions in Turkey, Iran, and Syria' (Hassanpour, 1990: 66). Kurdish memoirs and autobiographies are replete with examples of how, out of fear, Kurdish people were forced to destroy their Kurdish collections. Omer Sheikhmous, a renowned Kurdish politician, recalls that they had to hide and bury their Kurdish books in Syria in 1949, at

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2 All translations in this chapter are author's own.

the time of the Husni al-Zaʿim coup, and also as late as 1963. He recalled that they managed to save those they buried in 1949, but not the later ones (ʿElî, 2010: 23). Likewise, Hejar Mukriyanî (1920–91), renowned Kurdish-Iranian poet, recalled in his memoir, *Çêştî Micêwir* (*The Verger's Hotchpotch*, 1997), the difficulty of retaining Kurdish books in Reza Shah Pahlavi's time in the 1920s and 1930s and that people were forced to set fire to their Kurdish books or to bury them for fear of being arrested (Ghaderi, 2015: 6). The publication of a manuscript on Kurdish cuisine by Peywend in 2015 provides another poignant example revealing the tragic fate of Kurdish culture in the twentieth century.[3] The collection of poems entitled *Fī Beyānī al-taʿām wa-Mazāqīha* (*About Food and Its Taste*) was written by Şêx Muhyedînê Hênî (1849?–97), who was a prolific scholar. The son of renowned Kurdish scholar Şêx Ehmedê Karrazî, he produced collections of poems among other works, adopting the pen name of 'Saʿî' and 'Heqî' (Hênî, 2015). He joined the Sheikh Said revolt in 1925 and following the repression of the revolt, was forced into exile. Tragically his family destroyed his works out of fear of persecution. Mela Birhanê Tarînî, who prepared the manuscript for publication, quoted Şêx Muhyedîn's great-grandson, Mela Ehmed, that they 'had many manuscripts, among them my grandfather's works, but out of fear we buried, destroyed, and lost them' (Tarînî, 2015: 18–19). Hênî's poem on Kurdish cuisine together with four *ghazal*s and a *mukhammas* (quintain or pentastich) are all which have survived.[4]

In recent years there have been serious attempts to revive the lost Kurdish literary heritage and as a result, a significant number of manuscripts have been discovered and published. Kurdish publishers and publishing houses have made the editing and the publication of the Kurdish cultural heritage their prime agenda, which has changed the Kurdish publication landscape, and, in turn, has transformed Kurdish literary studies. Kurdish literary scholars have also adopted a more comprehensive approach in their attempts to identify new resources in public and private archives and in Turkish, Persian, Arabic sources. For instance, in his latest publication, Mustafa Dehqan has identified unpublished texts in Gorani and Sorani in Persian codices, entitled *Jung*, in the Iran National Library in Tehran, which had been purchased from Kurdish individuals (Dehqan, 2019: 91–104). Among the codices is *Jung-i shʿār-i Gūnāgūn (Bayāḍ-i Majmūʿa)* (*Anthology of Miscellaneous Poems*) dated 1832 by a copyist from Saqiz in Iranian Kurdistan, which, although mostly in Persian, contains Gorani and Sorani sections. The

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3 I am grateful to my colleague Dr Serdar Şengül for bringing this work to my attention.
4 Tarînî found the poems as an appendix to a *divan* of Şêx Evdirrehmanê Aqtepî. For more on Hênî, see Adak (2015).

Sorani folios consist of *qasida*s by known and lesser-known poets such as Mela Meḧmûd Xakî, Fikrî, Beḧrî, Amîn, Murteza, Xeste and Oyûnî (Dehqan, 2019: 93–5). Further research in national and private archives and collections could reveal similar sources. As well as manuscripts, examining newspapers and journals in the twentieth century and in particular those published in the early decades of that century could bring unsung poets and texts to light. An example of such texts is the three Kurdish poems by Lahuti Kermanshahi (1887–1957), the Iranian Kurdish intellectual and poet in *Jîn* (1918–19), which are his only surviving poems in Kurdish.[5] Lahuti is recognized for his significant role in Iranian modernity and modern Persian poetry (Karimi-Hakkak, 2012), as well as his contributions to Tajik literature (he is the author of the anthem of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic); however, his contribution to modern Kurdish literature has remained unexplored.

Classical Kurdish Poetry

Kurdish has five dialect groups: Northern Kurdish or Kurmanji, Central Kurdish or Sorani, Southern Kurdish, Gorani/Hawrami and Zazaki or Kurmanjki (also known as Dimili) (Haig and Öpengin, 2014). Three of these dialect groups, Kurmanji, Gorani and Sorani, have strong centuries-old written literary traditions. The Zazaki dialect is the only one that does not have a long-established written literary tradition. The earliest classical texts in Zazaki are two *Mawlid*s, which were published in 1899 and 1933, and its cultivation as a literary dialect began in the diaspora in the 1970s thanks to the efforts of Zazaki intellectuals like Malmîsanij (Ghaderi, 2015: 32–3).

The Kurdish dialects of Kurmanji, Gorani and Sorani were cultivated under the auspices of different Kurdish principalities in the Ottoman and the Persian empires and constitute classical Kurdish poetry. The oldest literary tradition is believed to be that of Gorani poetry, which developed from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries under the patronage of the Ardalans in the Persian Empire (Xeznedar, 2001: 12). Gorani developed into a 'literary koine' in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries (Blau, 1996: 21; Hassanpour, 1990: 68; Minorsky, 1943: 76) and was used as a medium of poetic expression by non-Gorani speakers, not only in the Ardalan principality but also in neighbouring areas (Hassanpour, 1990: 68). However, following the fall of the Ardalans in the mid-nineteenth century, as a result of the centralization policy adopted by the Persian kings, Gorani literature dramatically

5 For more, see Soltani (2006).

declined and was never restored. Today, Gorani is spoken in a small area of Hawraman (in western Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan) and its use as a written language is limited to a few sporadic attempts (Ghaderi, 2017: 33). In fact, in 2008 it was recognized as an endangered language by UNESCO.[6] That Gorani literature dramatically declined following the fall of the Ardalans testifies to the significance of the princely patronage for its cultivation; however, correspondences between the Ardalan emirs and the Gorani poets are further evidence for the princely patronage (Ghaderi, 2015: 35). Another less-acknowledged and explored factor in the development of Gorani poetry was the patronage of the Jaff princes, themselves Gorani speakers. Pîremêrd (1867–1950), a modernist Kurdish poet and publisher, who published the *divan*s of poets such as Mewlewî (1806–82), the iconic Gorani poet, argued that Mewlewî's fame was due to the Jaff princes' support and maintained: 'It can't be denied that Mewlewî is known because of the Jaff princes ... Mewlewî received a stipend from the Jaff princes' (Muḧemed, 2004: 151–4).[7]

Kurmanji literature developed in the Kurdish principalities of the Ottoman Empire such as Jezir and Botan from the fifteenth century and flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Xeznedar, 2002: 143–4), a progress which continued to the nineteenth century. Sorani literature was the last to emerge in the late eighteenth century (Ahmed, 2020) and developed in the nineteenth century under the patronage of the Baban principality (Xeznedar, 2003: 15–17).[8] As well as the patronage of the Babans, Edmonds suggested that the foundation of a secular military school, 'Mekteb-i Rüştiye', in Sulaimaniya in 1893 by the Ottomans, which helped to create a literary class who had the chance to go on to the academy and staff college in Istanbul, motivated the development of Sorani as a medium of literary expression beyond the borders of the Babans (Atmaca, 2013: 92). Despite its late development, Sorani enjoyed an uninterrupted continuity in the twentieth century and from the late nineteenth century replaced Gorani. Kurmanji

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6 UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger is accessible at www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php.

7 This statement is part of an open letter to Ḧuseyn Ḧuznî Mukriyanî (1890?–1948), a Kurdish historian and journalist, published in *Jiyan* on 25 April 1936 and in response to a piece published by Mukriyanî on Mewlewî in *Runakî* stating that Mewlewî left Halabja due to the hostility of Muḧemmed Pasha of Jaff.

8 Ahmed has challenged the dominant view of the emergence of the Sorani literature with Nalî by bringing to light *Mahdīnāmah* (*The Book of the Mahdi*), a long apocalyptic poem completed in 1762 by Mulla Muhammad Ibn al-Haj. See Ahmed (2020).

and Sorani continued to develop in the twentieth century, though mainly in the diaspora in the case of Kurmanji.

Classical Kurdish poetry in Kurmanji, Sorani and Gorani shared a set of criteria but had also unique characteristics which set them apart. This is particularly true of classical Gorani poetry, which had unique features in terms of form and content. Whether the classical literary traditions in different Kurdish dialects had any relation to or were aware of each other's literary endeavours has not yet been the subject of a scholarly study. As such, any suggestion in the context of a lack of comprehensive research is premature. It is safe to argue, however, that their shared characteristics stem from their shared source of inspiration, which was classical Persian poetry. Kurdish literati studied Persian classical poetry and wrote in Persian and Arabic, as well as Kurdish.

Classical Kurdish poetry could be broadly classified as epic and lyric. Celebrated examples of an epic are Ehmedê Xanî's *Mem û Zîn* (*Mem and Zin*) and Feqiyê Teyran's *Şêx Senʿan* (*The Story of Sheikh Sanʿan*) in Kurmanji and Xanay Qubadî's *Xosrow û Sîrîn* (*Khosrow and Shirin*) in Gorani. Notable examples of lyric are written by Melayê Cizîrî (1567–1640) and Pertew Beg Hekarî (1777?–1841) in Kurmanji, Mewlewî (1806–82) and Bêsaranî (1643–1701) in Gorani, and in Sorani by Nalî (1797–1856), Kurdî (1812–50) and Salim (1805–69).

A significant part of classical poetry is written in *aruzi* metre; however, the syllabic metre was also used, particularly in Gorani poetry. The earliest example of the application of *aruz* in Kurdish poetry is seen in the Kurmanji poetry of the sixteenth century in the work of Melayê Cizîrî, whom Xeznedar, renowned Kurdish literary critic, considers as the founder of Kurdish *aruzi ghazal* (Xeznedar, 2002: 246). However, the Kurdish poets did not employ all the recognized metres in Arabic poetry, but as rightly noted by Herdî (2009: 43), they followed Persian poets' practice of employing *aruz*. The common metres in Persian poetry are *rajaz*, *ramal* and *hazaj*, while metres such as *basīṭ*, *madād*, *ṭawīl*, *muḍāriʿ*, *khafīf*, *mujtathth*, *sarīʿ*, *kāmil* and *munsariħ* are rarely found (Elwell-Sutton, 1986: 670–9). Likewise, Kurdish poets found the application of *rajaz*, *ramal* and *hazaj* easier than the rest of the Arabic metres and as Herdî (2009) and Gerdî (1999) illustrate in their studies of the application of *aruz* in Kurdish poetry, *rajaz*, *ramal* and *hazaj* are the most common metres in Kurdish poetry.

As for form, Persianate poetic forms such as *ghazal*, *qaside*, *du bayti*, *tarjiʿ-band* and *tarkib-band* were adopted and used extensively. Kurmanji and Sorani *ghazal* closely followed the conventions of the Persian *ghazal*. Like Persian,

Kurmanji/Sorani *ghazal* is a short monorhymed lyric of seven to fourteen lines and the entire poem strictly follows one *aruzi* metre. Each line in Kurmanji and Sorani *ghazal* is an independent semantic unit and may or may not be related to its previous or following line thematically. In other words, the lines are connected mainly by rhyme. Gorani *ghazal*, however, is distinctively different from Persianate *ghazal* in form. It is varied in length and can be between five and twelve or more lines in syllabic metre, with decasyllabic lines and a caesura in the middle as the most common form (Ghaderi, 2017: 46–7).

Mysticism and love, the ethereal or the earthly, are the most common themes of *ghazal*s. *Qasida* is very similar to *ghazal* in metre, rhyme and style, but it is longer (Xeznedar, 2001: 166). In *qasida*, the number of lines is more than eighteen and because each poem is longer, the form itself is used for descriptive and panegyric purposes (Xeznedar, 2001: 166). The best-known panegyric poems in Kurmanji are Melayê Cizîrî's *Xanî Xanan* (*The Prince of Princes*) and *Pesnê Mîrê Botan* (*Eulogy of the Prince of Botan*). In Sorani, the most famous are written by Nalî, Salim, Kurdî and Şêx Reza Tałebanî (1835–1910). Panegyric poems constitute a significant part of classical Sorani poetry as patriotism was a major theme. In a *qasida* which narrates the account of the battle of Aziz Bag of Baban and the Turks, Salim wrote:

> Le deryay meʿrekey tîẍî nehengî ger nemayan bê
> Le naw ordûyî Turkana debê şîn û seda peyda
> Xudaye mułkî Baban bê rewac w qelbe sa lutfê
> Be êksîrî wicûdî ew bike wek mis beha peyda
>
> *(cited in Xeznedar, 2003: 207).*

> In the sea of battle, when his whale-like sword appears,
> Wailing and cries arise among the army of the Turks.
> O Lord! the land of Baban lacks gaiety and vigour, pray
> That the elixir of his being [Aziz Bag] brings back prominence.

Ghazal and *qasida* both end with a reference to the nom de plume of the poet which is called *takhalos*. Other commonly used poetic forms are *tarjiʿ-band*, *tarkib-band*, *mustazad* and *mulamaʿ*. *Tarjiʿ-band* and *tarkib-band* are 'strophic forms' in which certain strophes were commonly employed as variations on a given *ghazal* (Rypka, 1968: 96). *Tarjiʿ-band* consists of a number of short *ghazal*s connected together with a refrain (Xeznedar, 2001: 167) and *tarkib-band* is different from *tarjiʿ-band* only in the connecting line between the *ghazal*s. While in *tarjiʿ-band* one line connects all the *ghazal*s, in *tarkib-band* the connecting lines change in every stanza (Xeznedar, 2001: 168). *Mustazad*,

or 'tail-rhymed', is a form of poetry in which at the end of every hemistich a fragment related to the meaning of that line is added (Tamīmdārī, 2002: 200).

Classical Kurdish poetry became recognizable by a repertoire of conventions, themes, motifs and images reflecting the noticeable influence of classical Persian poetry. Examples of recurrent images are Saqi (*saqî*), nightingale (*bulbul*), rose (*guł*), cypress (*çinar*), narcissus (*nergîz*) and musical instruments such as the *def* (frame drum), *çeng* (harp), and *nêy* (flute). Language in classical Kurdish poetry is highly embellished and complex. Embellishment is an important element of both form and content. On the formal level, the frequency of devices such as alliteration, homophony, internal rhyme, rhyme and refrain accentuate the musicality of the lines. Embellishment also occurs at the semantic level; devices used include amphibology (*iham*), antithesis (*tazad*), congruence (*moraat-e nazir*) and the arrangement of words in a pleasing or impressive pattern, such as *laff o nashr* (involution and revolution). Meaning in classical poetry is hidden beneath layers of ornament, and at times understanding a poem is close to solving a riddle. Nalî and Meḥwî (1830–1906) are among the best-known poets for their highly figurative language and riddle-like metaphors which constantly surprise readers.

While Persianate images are an integral part of classical Kurdish poetry, Kurdish poets, in particular, Gorani poets, also drew on Kurdish nature, folklore and mythology in creating the unique Kurdish poetic tradition. Nonetheless, the frequency of Persian and Arabic diction in classical poetry is one of the distinctive features of classical poetry. In employing non-Kurdish diction, classical poets demonstrated ingenuity and innovation. Playing with Kurdish and non-Kurdish words and giving them a new turn is among the techniques used by Kurdish poets. An example of creative use of Arabic and Persian diction are the following lines by Nalî:

> Saqî were rengîn ke be pence lebî qedaḧ
> bem raḧe le ser raḧe, dełên raḧetî erwaḧ   *(Nalî, 2001: 164).*

> O Saqi, your fingernails make the rim of the cup colourful.
> This cup, on this palm, is what they call the comfort of hearts.

In this line, the poet uses the word *raḧe* (*rāḥa*) meaning palm in Arabic, *raḧet* in Kurdish and Persian meaning comfort, and *erwaḧ* (pl. of *roḧ*) meaning soul in Kurdish, Persian and Arabic. The skilful and playful repetition of the word *raḧe* creates alliteration and makes the verse aurally and visually compelling.

Another example is found in the following lines, again by Nalî:

> Dem dem ke deka zarî pir azarî be ẍunçe
> bo de ʿwetî maçî lebe goya demî nada *(Nalî, 2001: 84)*.

> At times, showing her mouth like a rosebud,
> A supposed invitation to kiss, yet playfully denied.

Here the poet plays with the word *dem*, which means 'mouth' in Kurdish and 'time' in Persian (*dem dem* means 'at times'). The skilful use of languages is also exemplified in *molammaʿāt* (macaronic poems), a poetic form in which Arabic, Persian and Turkish verses alternate.[9]

The presence of Arabic, Persian and Turkish words was an established tradition and the reflection of the poet's erudition and multilingual proficiency; however, as illustrated in the above example, the non-Kurdish words are not used mechanically, but rather resourcefully and creatively. Multilingualism was common among the Kurdish literati and this was naturally reflected in their creative writings. Employing Arabic and Persian words was also a necessity when adopting the *aruzi* metre because *aruzi* scansion is very different from the natural rhythm of the Kurdish language (Gerdî, 1999). It should also be noted that classical poets' attitude towards Arabic, Persian and Turkish, the empires' languages, was significantly different from that of the modernist poets and writers. Classical poets did not perceive Persian and Arabic as the languages of the oppressor, as the modern poets did. For them, classical Persian poetry, for instance, was the source of inspiration and wisdom. The inventive use of non-Kurdish languages in classical poetry was not appreciated by the nationalist intellectuals in the early decades of the twentieth century and some writers did not shy away from expressing disparaging views towards classical poetry, even denying its worth outright. This is best epitomized in writer and literary critic Gîw Mukriyanî's comments on Nalî, who is known as one of the three pillars of the Sorani classical poetry:[10]

> Around 1,050 years ago, Ferdowsi revived the Persian history and language and *Shahnameh* [the Persian national epic] does not contain more than two Arabic words. What has Nalî done for Kurd and Kurdistan? Alas, nothing!
> (cited in ʿEbdulkerîm, 2001: 59).

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9 Cizîrî's famous *ghazal* 'ela ya eyohel saqî' is an example of a macaronic poem (in Kurdish and Persian).
10 The term *'sê kochkey Baban'* (three pillars of the Babans) is used to refer to Nalî, Salim and Kurdî for their foundational role in developing classical Sorani poetry under the Babans.

The tradition of following Persianate poetic conventions in classical poetry has remained unappreciated in traditional Kurdish literary criticism, marred by a narrow nationalistic approach. To avoid mentioning the word 'Persianate' in discussing the classical poetic tradition, Xeznedar, the author of the most comprehensive Kurdish literary history, coined the term 'Îslamewî' (Islamicate):

> The Kurdish language contributed to what I call Islamic literature [*edebî Islamî*] and the content of this literature is not just religion but it includes all aspects of life; therefore, to distinguish it from Islamic [religious] poetry, I suggest using the term 'Îslamewî' (Xeznedar, 2002: 247).

Such a viewpoint has resonated with nationalist literary critics in the twentieth century and at times was echoed in extreme reactions such as disregarding the entire tradition of classical poetry as 'non-Kurdish', 'inauthentic' and 'mere imitation [of Persian poetry]'. The critique of Kurdish classical poetry as an 'imitation' (*teqlîd*) of classical poetry is a reductive approach, which overlooks the intricate and masterful appropriation of classical Persian poetry by classical Kurdish poets and their novelties.[11] It is also important to take into account that classical poetry was the product of a specific context and tradition. To write a *ghazal* meant following certain conventions which extended from the formal to the semantic level. While poets could introduce a level of creativity in the image, metaphor and the use of other literary devices, the innovations had to be within the boundaries of a recognizable system for the poem to be recognized as a *ghazal*.

Modern Kurdish Poetry

The strict poetic system of classical poetry gradually began to change from the late nineteenth century when a succession of small but noticeable changes in form and content transformed the poetic system leading to the emergence of modern poetry. The traditional Kurdish literary criticism argued that classical poetry continued to exist until the 1940s when ʿEbdula Goran (1904–62), 'the father' of modern Kurdish poetry, transformed poetry. Modern poetry in traditional literary criticism is defined by its distinctive formal features, namely, abandoning *aruz* and replacing it with syllabic metre (*hica*) and the adoption of free rhyme schemes. However, as I have previously argued, the construction of modern poetry is a complex process which

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11 An interesting read on the question of the imitation of Persian poetry is Inan's article on classical Turkish poetry; see Inan (2017).

unfolded in the oeuvre of generations of poets.[12] The process, I argue, started in the late nineteenth century in the context of significant social and political changes in the Ottoman Empire. Modern Kurdish poetry emerged in response to the advent of modernity and nationalism, as its political manifestation, in Kurdish society. Modernity and nationalism as the main discourses of poetry resulted in the introduction of new perspectives and rhetoric, and as a result, we see a gradual but successive change in theme, motives, literary devices and modes of expression.

In the late nineteenth century, Kurdish poets were inspired and excited by the technological advancement of Europe. In the absence of Kurdish newspapers (the first Kurdish paper, *Kurdistan*, was published in 1898), it was poetry which updated Kurdish people about the latest scientific discoveries and technological advancements of Europe. This was a new function for poetry which resulted in the introduction of non-literary words to poetry. Words such as *telegraf* (telegraph), *elektrîk* (electricity) and *şemendefer* (train) were first introduced into the Kurdish language through poetry. As well as introducing new terms to the Kurdish language, nationalism as the new ideological system designated new ideological overtones to some existing words in the language. Words such as *mîlet*, *dewlet* and *veten*, for instance, were stripped of their classical meanings and were assigned new significations reflecting the emergence of nationalistic discourse. As such, the rearticulation of the fundamental concepts of *mîlet* (nation), *dewlet* (state), *veten* (homeland) and *ʿilm* (knowledge), which discursively shaped Kurdish modernity, happened in the poetic discourse.

With the rise of nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, advocating Kurdish national rights, romanticizing the Kurdish people and glorifying the Kurdish history and language became the main subjects of poetry. This thematic transformation in the late nineteenth century is best reflected in Koyi's (1817–97) poetry. To infuse a sense of pride in Kurdishness, he praised Kurds for their gallantry, valour and generosity:

> Xo dezanin sulaley Ekrad
> lêrewe bigre ta degate Qubad
> Hemû ʿalim, hemû şêx û mîrin
> zîrek û jîr û ehlî tedbîrin
> . . .
> Be şecaʿet hemû wekû Rostem
> be sexawet hemû wekû Ḧatem   *(Koyî, 2007: 180).*

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12 This section is informed by my doctoral thesis, 'The Emergence and Development of Modern Kurdish Poetry' (Ghaderi, 2016).

> You know that the Kurds' descendants, from now till Qobad,
> All were educated, learned, sheikh, emir, clever, and wise.
> In bravery all like Rostam, in generosity all Hatam.

To highlight the noble and ancient origin of the Kurds, here Koyi claims that their origin goes back to Kay Kobād (Qobād), the ancient Iranian king (Skjærvø, 2014). Creating a glorious Kurdish history by referring to famous kings, notables and heroes as part of Kurdish history became an established practice in poetry.

The late nineteenth century's poetry also marks a significant shift in attitude towards the Kurdish language. Although Kurdish had been used as a medium of poetic expression since the fifteenth century, it was deemed less significant than Arabic, Persian and Turkish. Kurdish poets and writers, like writers in most parts of the Islamic and the Persianate world, wrote primarily in Arabic and Persian and when they were writing in Kurdish, they often felt the need to explain why they did so. Contrary to the apologetic tone of classical poetry, the tone from the late nineteenth is confrontational. The hegemony of Arabic, Persian and Turkish was challenged, and Kurds were scorned for disregarding their language. Lamenting Kurdish intellectuals' disregard for their language, Koyi wrote:

> Yekser ʿûlema diruşt û wirdî
> naxwêninewe du ḧerfî Kurdî
> Ostadî xetin le em siyane
> wek dî le zubanî xoy nezane
> . . .
> Kake ême moʾmênîn ne rûsîn
> boç kofre zubanman binusîn   *(Koyî, 2007: 219)*.

> All our educated people, young and old, cannot read Kurdish;
> All are masters of these three languages, when it comes to
>   Kurdish, they are illiterate.
> Brother! we are Muslims, not infidels, why is it a sacrilege to write in our
>   language?

Devoting entire poems to the glorification of the Kurdish people, history and language were new subjects and themes in Kurdish poetry, which began to transform it from a private to a public phenomenon. It is important to note that although drawing on almost entirely new subjects and themes, Koyi used the traditional and familiar poetic forms such as *ghazal* and *qasida* but adopted couplet rhyme instead of commonly used monorhyme.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, a new definition of poetry was in place and poets were assigned the new responsibility of awakening the people, which is best epitomized in the opening lines of a *qasida* by Qazîzade Letîf (?–1921):

> Şa ʿêrî Kurdan meken beħsî ʿozar û
>   zułfî yar
> Beħsî beħsêkî biken bo Kurd lemew paş bête kar
>
> *(Letîf, 1918).*

> Kurdish poets, do not write about the
>   hair and the mole of the beloved.
> Write about subjects of use to Kurds.

As such, good poetry was that which served the nation. Among the 'useful subjects' were those encouraging education and propagating nationalism. Kurdish society in the poetry of the early decades of the twentieth century was continuously portrayed as a 'sleeping nation' while all other nations were 'awake' and thriving. Similar terminology was repeatedly used in the early Kurdish papers where the Kurdish people were depicted as if they were 'slumbering' and had 'lost consciousness' (*bêhoş*) and had to be 'awakened', 'brought to their senses' and 'roused'.[13] Ignorance was considered the source of all the miseries of the Kurds and education the cure for all ills. Rehîm Rehmê Hekarî (1890–1958) wrote in 1918:

> Ey cehl û nezanîn tuyî dijmin, tuyî xaîn
> zulma teye hêlan hemî bê sen ʿet û bê dîn
> Qehra teye wêran kirîye, ah, wetenê min
> kîna teye bê lane kirî cism û tenê min.
> Servet te ji min standîye bê mal û diravin
> em maîne belengaz û feqîr, xane belavin.
> Derdê teye meʿlûm kirî, em xwe nezanîn   *(Hekarî, 1919: 16).*

> O ignorance, ignorance, you are the enemy, you are the
>   traitor. It is your tyranny that has left us bereft of skill and
>   faith.
> It is your cruelty which has ruined my homeland. It is your
>   hatred that has deprived me of a refuge.

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13 The image of awaking from sleep was prevalent in the literature of the other nations of the Ottoman and Persian empires at this period of history. A famous example in Persian poetry is Iqbal Lahurī's poem Az Khab-e Geran Khīz (Wake Up from the Deep Sleep), in which he implores the Muslims to wake up to the tyranny of the West. Read the poem here: https://ganjoor.net/iqbal/zaboor-ajam/sh80/.

> You have taken our wealth; [you] have left us homeless and
> penniless.
> We are left poor and destitute and scattered because of you;
> You have left us handicapped, without us realizing it.

In a similar vein, Eḧmed Muxtar Caf (1898–1935) wrote:

> X̌eyrî mekteb bo tedawî ême hîç derman nîye
> hîç sîlaḧ çatir le ʿêlm w ʿêrfan nîye   *(Caf, 1935)*.

> There is no cure for our illness other than school.
> There is no better weapon than education and industry.

In advocating education and nationalism, Islamic rhetoric was employed and hadiths and Qur'anic verses were appropriated. This practice was widely adopted by Kurdish intellectuals, poets and writers. Drawing on Islamic rhetoric was also an effective tool in making nationalism intelligible and appealing to ordinary people. Rehîm Rehmê Hekarî was one of the most significant voices in constructing a religious interpretation of Islam which not only did not conflict with Islam but was rather a religious duty. The religious rhetoric of the 1920s in advocating education and nationalism in poetry, however, was replaced with a more secular approach from the 1930s.

A significant consequence of employing poetry as a medium of enlightenment was the adoption of a simpler language, in comparison with classical poetry where the language is highly embellished and complex. The language, unlike that of classical poetry, is direct and unambiguous and the meaning is easily accessible. There was also a growing interest in translating Turkish and European poetry which inspired experimentation with rhyme and metre; nonetheless, *aruz* was still the dominant metre in use. Kurdish poets had successfully appropriated the classical poetic forms such as *ghazal* and *qasida* for new ideological purposes. In fact, the transformations happened within the classical poetic system. However, from the 1930s the classical poetic system and its relevance to the modern world was questioned and in particular, the hyperbolic language of classical poetry was ridiculed and was branded as 'unnatural' and 'embarrassing'. In his short autobiographical piece, Pîremêrd (1867–1950), a prominent modernist poet, wrote: 'I am ashamed of some of my older poems replete with exaggeration and bombast. There were popular metaphors in the past which make one ashamed now' (Pîremêrd, 2009: 18). He elaborates on this by citing an example of such metaphors:

> The beloved is turned into a monster you want to run away from ... They [classical poets] have compared the delicate hair of the beloved to black snakes, her eyelashes to spears and her figure to a cedar tree. What effects will visualizing the beauty of the beloved with dangerous animals leave on one's soul?
>
> (Pîremêrd, 2009: 18)

Such feelings of shame and embarrassment concerning the hyperbolic language of classical poetry was a new phenomenon and marked a turning point in Kurdish poetic modernization. Dismissing the traditional poetic system, a new aesthetic model was proposed for emulation, which was 'European poetry'. Europe was considered an advanced culture and 'European literature' was seen as having played a decisive part in that advancement (Karimi-Hakkak, 2012: 33). Thus, Europe became not only a source of inspiration for technology and science but also for what was imagined to be advanced culture and literature. Studying the references to European literature, however, reveals that Kurdish poets' knowledge of 'European literature' was to a large extent indirect, superficial and somewhat 'imaginary'.

Discussing European poetry, Pîremêrd stated that 'European poets refrain from using exaggeration and hyperbole. They write factually and materially' (Pîremêrd, 2009: 18). The obsession with 'facts' had a profound impact on the poetic language; the precision of imagery and clear and concise language was favoured and vague generalization was discouraged leading to what is called 'realism' in Kurdish poetry. In an article on poetic modernization, ʿEbdula Goran (2002: 29) described modern poetry as 'realist' while classical poetry was 'idealist' poetry, which represented the 'feudal system'.

The Kurdish poets were also inspired by modern Turkish poetry, especially the Five Syllabist (Beş Hececiler) poets and their take on folk tradition, as drawing inspiration from the folk tradition was at the heart of the Five Syllabist poets (Mignon, 2010: 83–5). In the 1930s and the 1940s, there was a growing interest in collecting and publishing Kurdish folk literature and the early Kurdish journals had dedicated sections for publishing and discussing Kurdish folk tradition. The subject, the language and the form of Kurdish folk poetry provided the modernist Kurdish poets with a new source of inspiration and had a lasting impact on modern Kurdish poetry. Throughout the twentieth century and now during the twenty-first, Kurdish poets and writers have turned to Kurdish folk tradition for inspiration and have found innovative ways to incorporate it in their writings.[14] What was also significantly

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14 Pîremêrd, for instance, wrote some of his plays based on folk stories; e.g. see Pîremêrd (2017).

inspirational in the transformation of Kurdish poetry in the twentieth century was the revival of interest in the classical Gorani poetry in the 1940s. The *divan*s of prominent Gorani poets such as Mewlewî were published for the first time in the 1940s (Pîremêrd published Mewlewî's *divan* in two volumes in 1935 and 1940) (Xeznedar, 2003: 437). Classical Gorani poetry with features distinctively different from classical Sorani and Kurmanji poetry and great resemblance to the Kurdish folklore in form and language offered the modernist Kurdish poets a rich source of inspiration.

The discovery of unique poetic forms such as the Gorani *ghazal*, which, as noted earlier, unlike the classical Persian *ghazal*, is in syllabic metre and has no strict rhyme pattern (Ghaderi, 2017: 46), was a revelation for modernist poets who were in search of a new form different from that of classical poetry, which, in their nationalistic view, was too close to Persian poetry. Going back to a particular form of classical poetic tradition at a time when following European poetry was recommended by the modernist poets seems contradictory, nevertheless interestingly some Kurdish scholars went as far as claiming similarities between the two traditions.[15] The syllabic metre of folk poetry and the classical Gorani poetry was, in particular, inspiring for modernist poets who were experimenting with the metre. *Aruzi* metre was soon branded as 'inauthentic' and 'foreign' (Îlxanîzade, 1973: 252), while a syllabic metre (*kêşî hîcayî*) was acclaimed as the 'national' (*neteweyî*) metre (Goran, 2002: 28). Abandoning *aruz* by modernist poets was viewed as liberation from the 'fetters' of *aruzi* metre by Kurdish literary critics. Sware Ilxanîzade (1937–76), a Kurdish-Iranian poet, writer and critic, went as far as renouncing the *aruzi* poetry as 'non-poetic':

> The *aruzi* poetry has reached us through other nations and cannot be considered as a native form. That is why in my view an *aruzi* poet is not a poet at all because they not only imitate another poet's style but also the poets they imitate are not Kurdish. By that I mean the poet they followed was not aware of the Kurdish way of life, history and wishes
>
> (Îlxanîzade, 1973: 252).

Classical poetic forms and *aruz*, however, continued to exist alongside modern poetic forms and syllabic metre till the end of the twentieth century. It is also important to note the vital role of early Kurdish journals and periodicals in the development of Kurdish poetry in the twentieth century,

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15 See, for instance, Feyzî's notes on Mewlewî in Feyzî (1920: 8).

which, in the absence of adequate print facilities, were often the only avenue for the publication of poetry and critical discussions of new poetic attempts.[16]

Modern poetry was instrumental in the development and the dissemination of Kurdish nationalism. Modern poetry, I argue, was the literary form which accompanied the emergence of Kurdish nationalism (Ghaderi, 2016). Throughout the twentieth century, modern poetry continued to be a platform for Kurdish nationalist resistance movements and was employed as an effective tool in mobilizing forces. One of the most influential voices in adopting poetry as a means of awakening and mobilizing was Cigerxwîn (1903–84). Like his contemporaries, Cigerxwîn found Marxist ideology inspiring and was significant in popularizing leftist political ideas through his poetry and fashioning leftist political and social terminology such as 'Markisî' (Marxist), 'prolêtar' (proletariat), 'sermayedar' (capitalist) and 'borjiwaz' (bourgeoisie) (Yüksel, 2014: 537–44). His poetry has been further popularized through the musical performances of the prominent Kurdish singer Şivan Perwer (Yüksel, 2014: 543). One of his best-known poems, *Kî me ez?* (*Who Am I?*), has been turned into a popular song:

> Kî me ez?
> Kurdê Kurdistan
> Tev şoreş û volqan
> Tev dînamêtim
> Agir û pêtim
> Sorim wek etûn
> Agir giha qepsûn
> Gava biteqim
> Dinya dihejî
> Ev pêt û agir
> Dijmin dikujî
> Kîme ez?   (*Cigerxwîn, 1973: 9*)

> Who am I?
> A Kurd of Kurdistan,
> All revolution and volcano,
> I am all dynamite,
> Fire and flame,
> [We are] red like an oven stone;
> The moment I explode
> The world will tremble.

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16 For a thorough study on discussions on modern and classical poetry in Kurdish periodicals and journals, see Sabîr (2006).

> This flame and fire
> Will kill the enemy
> Who am I?

Poetry was one of the most influential tools in reviving and fashioning Kurdish history, remembering historical events and figures and celebrating national days, most importantly Newroz, as part of a newly invented Kurdish calendar. It was through the efforts of poets such as Pîremêrd in the 1940s that Newroz began to be celebrated as the Kurdish New Year. One of his best-known poems for Newroz, *Em rojî salî tazeye, Newroze*, has been adopted as an official song of Newroz by Kurds:

> Em rojî salî tazeye, Newroze hatewe
> Cejnêkî konî Kurde, be xoşî û behatewe
> Çend sał, gulî hîway ême pest bû takû par
> Her xwênî lawekan bû gulî alî newbehar
> Ew renge sure bû le asoy blindî Kurd
> Mijdey beyanî bo gelî dûr û nizîk ebird
> Newroz bû agrêkê wehay xiste cergewe
> Lawan be eşq eçûn be berewpîrî mergewe
> Ewa roj hełat le bendenî berzî wiłatewe
> Xwênî şehîde be regnî şefeq şewq edatewe
> Ta êste rûy nedawe le teʿrîxî mîleta
> Qełẍanî gulle singî kiçan bê le hełmeta
> Pêy nawê bo şehîdî weten şîwen û girîn
> Namirin ewane wa le diłî mîleta ejîn   *(Pîremêrd, 2009: 152)*.

It is New Year's Day, Newroz has come.
    An ancient Kurdish celebration of joy
    and bliss.
For many years, the flower of our hope
    was withered, until the blood of our
    youth brought poppies to the spring.
It was that red colour, which from the
    horizon of the Kurds' fortune brought
    glad tidings for the people from near
    and afar.
Newroz brought such a fire to the hearts
    that the youth welcomed death with
    love.
The sun has risen, from the high
    mountains of the homeland. The
    redness of the dawn is the blood of
    the martyrs.

> It has never happened in the history of our
>   nation, girls' breasts to be the battle shield.
>   Moaning and tears are not needed for the martyrs. They live in
>   the hearts of the nation; they don't die.

The gendered representation of the homeland, imagining it as a female body, as a mother, often ill and in need of care or a young woman whose 'honour' was endangered, which was a significant theme of modern poetry, also played an important role in developing Kurdish nationalism and provided the Kurdish nationalists with a powerful tool to urge Kurdish people to fight for their homeland.

With the rise of armed struggle in the 1970s and 1980s, a new genre of poetry developed known as 'poetry of revolution' (*şî'rî şoriş*), whose main aim was to inspire resistance, to assert particular discourses of revolution and to establish the legitimacy of new political movements. This poetic genre is overtly political and the aestheticization and romanticization of armed resistance are one its significant features as illustrated by the following lines by Qanê' (1898–1965):

> Axrin małî jiyanim kuncî bendîxaneye
> Em kelebçe merhemî zamî diłî dêwaneye
> . . .
> Gerçî dujmin wa dezanê min dîłî lał ebim
> Baş bizanê kuncî zîndanim qûtabîxaneye
> Girtin û lêdan û kuştin 'amîlî azadîye
> Top û şeştîr û kelpeçe lam wekû efsaneye
>
> *(Qanê', 2005: 14–15).*

> The corner of prison is my final abode;
>   this handcuff is the cure to wounds of
>   my infatuated heart.
> The enemy thinks I will be silenced in
>   prison; let him know that the corner of
>   prison is my school.
> Arresting, beating and killing are just means of freedom. The
>   bomb, gun and handcuffs are fairy tales for me.

Kurdish poetry has played a significant role in Kurdish political and cultural struggles and continues to be the site of resistance and remembrance in the twenty-first century. With the emergence of the Kurdish semi-autonomous government and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Kurdish poetry has also been a significant means of propagating social justice and critique of Kurdish political parties, which is best exemplified in the works of 'Ebdula Peşêw.

Poetry continues to play a formative role in expressing Kurdish identity and it is a vivid element of everyday popular and political culture, which is evident in public poetry readings that drive audiences in their hundreds.

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A History of Kurdish Theatre

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In Kurdistan, as elsewhere in the Middle East, a wide variety of perform-
ance activity existed long before the introduction of European-style the-
atre. Most notable of folk performance traditions which are specific to
Kurdistan are the ones that were performed during Newroz, the celebra-
tion of spring equinox which marks the beginning of the year for the
Kurds. An important example of these performances, which were part of
the Kurdish springtime festival, is *mîrmîran* or *mîrmîrên* (king of kings, or,
playing king), a festival similar to the medieval Feast of Fools in which
a mock king was chosen to rule temporarily. In addition to Newroz
festivals, Kurds have long held seasonal festivals such as the shepherd's
festival of *kose-geldî* or *kose-kose*, or rain rituals such as those of *garwanekî*
(cattle-raid) and *bûke-barane* (rain bride) (Rostami, 2019: 26–38). But closest
to the Western-style theatre in form is perhaps dramatic storytelling,
a common tradition among most nations in the Middle East. Storytelling
has been a popular form of entertainment among Kurds and an important
repository of their oral literature. Kurdish romantic tales and historical
narratives have long been performed by the Kurdish *beytbêj* in public places
such as tea-houses.

Despite a wealth of traditional performance traditions, modern drama in the
Kurdish language appeared only in the early twentieth century. The first
mention of a Kurdish drama appears in the World's Columbian Exposition,
a world's fair held in Chicago in 1893. The Ottomans participated in the fair with
a Turkish Village compound that included, among other things, a theatre that
was meant to showcase the diversity of the Ottoman culture. Among the plays
shown on this stage was a play entitled *The Kurdish Drama*, which was performed
in Arabic by the cast of mostly Christian Arabs and Orthodox Greeks (Sarıkaya,
2012). By using common tropes such as the abducted woman and the skilled
Kurdish warrior, the 'Kurdish' drama, which was also directed by a Christian

Arab, depicted aspects of Kurdish life as seen through the eyes of non-Kurdish non-Muslim Ottomans.

The first-ever Kurdish-language drama appears in Istanbul in 1919 when Ebdurehîm Rehmî Hekarî (1890–1958) published his two-act play *Memê Alan* in the journal *Jîn* (*Life*). This play does not have much in common with *Mem û Zîn* (*Mam and Zin*), the well-known Kurdish romance. The story of *Memê Alan* seems to take place during the Third Crusade when the Europeans attempted to recapture Jerusalem from Saladin. Mem in Hekarî's play leaves his mother and his wife, in order to join the forces of the prince of Hakkari, who has called for jihad in support of Saladin. After a long absence, Mem returns from war to his lovesick wife who faints upon recognizing her much-changed husband. Unaware of her son's return, Mem's mother comes home to find her daughter-in-law in bed with a man and, not recognizing her son, stabs him in the chest. Hekarî seems to have drawn upon Kurdish oral tradition, particularly the *Memê Ebasî* narrative, as material for this play. In his short description of the play, Hekarî writes '*Tiyatroya Kurdan Fezîleta Kurdan Noşî Didit*', which translates to 'Kurdish Play Shows the Kurds' Virtues'. These virtues, as portrayed in the play by Mem, his mother and his wife, are honour and love of country, religion and family. The pro-Kurdish and pro-Islamic sentiments that characterize *Memê Alan* reflect the Kurds' hope for national recognition following the First World War. This is particularly evident in the play's glorification of Saladin, the Kurdish Muslim leader, who was celebrated by early Kurdish nationalists as a national hero.

Kurdish dreams of independence were soon crushed as the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire led to the further fragmentation of the Kurds into minority groups within the newly formed Middle Eastern states. This was followed by decades of linguicide, ethnocide and genocide that hindered the growth of their culture. While centralization policies in Iran, Syria and Turkey aggressively aimed at assimilating the Kurdish populations by suppressing all Kurdish expression, Kurds in Iraq and the Soviet Union enjoyed greater freedom to embark on creating an original Kurdish theatre. Modern Kurdish theatre, therefore, emerged and developed differently in countries in which the Kurds live. The following traces these divergent histories in Soviet Armenia and Georgia, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria and within the diaspora.

In Armenia and Georgia

While Turkey's Kurdish elite were forced into exile soon after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, Kurds in Soviet Armenia set out to create the

first and only state-supported Kurdish theatre in the world. They were only able to achieve this with the support of Armenian cultural figures such as Hakob Ghazaryan or Lazo (1864–1926), who helped erase the illiteracy of Soviet Kurds by composing and publishing the first Kurdish ABC book in 1921 (Boyîk, 2004: 12). Along with Ahmedê Mîrazî (1899–1961) and others, Lazo founded the first Kurdish boarding school in Tbilisi and also staged Kurdish plays in a club named Lukashin (Boyîk, 2004: 104). The plays performed there included Mîrazî's *Zemanê Çûyî* (*The Time Passed*) and Lazo's *Gustîl* (*Ring*) and *Qelen* (*Dowry*) (Boyîk, 2004: 104–5). This unofficial Kurdish theatre group performed in Tbilisi and Armenian villages with Kurdish populations during the late 1920s.

In Armenia, Kurdish plays first appeared in print in the 1930s. These plays, which mainly focused on sociopolitical themes, were *Qutiya Dû-Dermanan* (*Medicine Box*, 1934) by Hecîyê Cindî (1909–90), *Zemanê Çûyî* (1935) by Ahmedê Mîrazî and *Reva Jinê* (*The Abduction of a Woman*, 1935) by Wezîrê Nadirî (1911–47). In 1937, the first state-supported Kurdish theatre was founded in Alagyaz, an Armenian village populated mainly by Yezidi Kurds. The theatre group was made up of the Kurdish youth of the Alagyaz district and was managed by two directors, the Armenian Tsolak Nikoghosyan and the Kurdish Celatê Koto. In November 1937, the state's Kurdish Theatre in Alagyaz launched its first production, Samson Kajoyan's *Xuliqandina Rojê* (*The Sun Rises*), a play dedicated to the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution. The Kurdish Theatre enjoyed the support of Armenian artists including actor Mkrtich Djanan, director Amo Kharazyan and playwrights Suren Ginosyan and Vardges Shogheryan, among others. These theatre artists trained the young Kurdish actors who, within a few years, acquired a great reputation by participating in the national theatre festival and performing in Tbilisi (Boyîk, 2004: 103–12).

During the ten years of its life, the Kurdish Theatre of Alagyaz staged around thirty plays, four of which were written by Kurdish writers: *Miraz* by Heciyê Cindî, *Xuşka Doxtiryê* and *Bira* by Cerdoyê Genco (1904–45) and *Lur-De-Lur* by Celatê Koto. Other Kurdish cultural figures who supported the Kurdish Theatre included Emînê Evdal (1906–64), Casimê Celîl (1908–98), Usivê Beko (1909–69), Semend Siyabendov (1909–98) and Mîroyê Esed (1919–2008), writer and editor-in-chief of the Kurdish newspaper *Riya Teze* (*The New Way*).

During World War II, Armenia's Kurdish Theatre produced pro-Soviet plays that demonstrated Soviet Kurds' solidarity with their country. Among these were patriotic plays by Armenian playwrights such as Ashot Shaybon,

Nairi Zaryan and Suren Ginosyan. Ginosyan's *Heso*, for example, depicted the fate of a young Kurdish couple, Hasso and Leyla, who embodied the patriotism of the Soviet youth (Jafarova, 2000: 48). The Kurdish Theatre also staged several well-known social-realist plays by Armenian, Georgian and Azerbaijani playwrights such as Gabriel Sundukyan's *Pepo*, Alexander Shirvanzade's *The Evil Spirit*, Vrtanes Papazyan's *Rock* and Jafar Jabbarly's *Sevil*, among others (Boyîk, 2004: 109).

Armenian playwrights also drew on Kurdish life and folklore for their plays. This is best exemplified by Ginosyan's *Keça Mîrakê* (*The Girl from Mirak*), *Ker û Kulik* (*Kar and Kulik*; based on an old Kurdish epic), *Xecêzerê û Siyabend* (*Khaj and Siyaband*), *Ewledê Çiyayê Reş* (*The Son of Black Mountain*) and *Mêrxasê Bajarê Cizîrê* (*The Hero of the City of Jazira*). According to Eskerê Boyîk, some of the most memorable performances by the Kurdish Theatre of Alagyaz were *Xecêzerê û Siyabend*, *Ker û Kulik* and a play based on Soghomon Taronts's *Mem û Zîn* (Boyîk, 2004: 108–9).

In 1947, financial difficulties and the dissolution of the Union of Regional Theatres put an end to the Kurdish Theatre of Alagyaz and many other theatres. Kurdish theatre, however, did not completely disappear during the decades that followed. In 1955, the Kurdish department of Public Radio of Yerevan broadcast its first programmes, focusing mainly on songs and radio plays. The first dramatic experience on the Kurdish radio was Emînê Evdal's *Gulîzer* produced in 1957. With radio substituting the stage, several Kurdish writers, such as Eskerê Boyîk (b. 1941) and Ezizê Gerdenzerî (b. 1945), wrote their first plays for the radio. By broadcasting these plays and songs in Kurdish, Radio Yerevan played an important role in the cultural life of the Kurds both inside and outside the USSR's borders, especially in Turkey where the Kurdish language was banned.

In 1980, the Kurdish Theatre of Tbilisi was founded by Mirazê Uzo Ceferov (1947–2008), becoming Georgia's first Kurdish theatre company. This had been made possible after the Georgian Communist Party's adoption of a more tolerant policy towards minorities. Staged in April 1980, Eskerê Boyîk's comedy *Sinco Qîza Xwe Dide Mêr* (*The Wedding of Sinjo's Daughter*) marked the beginning of Kurdish theatre in Georgia. This play was soon followed by *Cîran* (*Neighbour*), based on a play by Georgy Khugayev and *Xecêzerê û Siyabendo* by Haik Beylerian, translated into Kurdish by Tosinê Reşîd (b. 1941). Reşîd's *Siyabend û Xecê* was published by Roja Nû publishing house in Stockholm in 1988.

It was *Xesû* (*Mother-in-law*), an adaptation of the Azerbaijani playwright Mehdi Shamkhalov's play, that became the company's most popular

production. Directed by Mirazê Uzo, this play won awards in two Soviet festivals and toured several countries including Armenia in 1983, Kazakhstan in 1987, Russia in 1988 and 1990, France in 1991 and Syria in 1992 (Jafarova, 2000: 50). It was after this success, Jafarova states, that the theatre was given the official title of 'Popular Theatre' (Jafarova, 2000: 50–1).

The Tbilisi Kurdish Theatre's repertoire includes several foreign plays including *Until the Ox-Cart Turns Over* by Otia Ioseliani, *From Three to Six* by Alexander Chkhaidze, *Twenty Minutes with an Angel* by Alexander Vampilov, *My House Is Not Your House* by Zhirayr Ananyan, *The Tree Branch* by Yuri Vizbor and *Foreign Groom* by Ashot Papayan (Jafarova, 2000: 52).

In 1990, Ezizê Gerdenzerî's *Zarîna Çiya* (*Wailing Mountains*), a historical drama about the exodus of Yezidi Kurds of the Ottoman Empire to the Caucasus during the First World War, was staged by the Kurdish Theatre of Tbilisi under the direction of Mirazê Uzo. This performance along with performances of *Cîran*, *Siyabend û Xecê*, *Mala Min Mala Te Ye* (*My House Is Your House*), *Sinco Qîza Xwe Dide Mêr*, and *Xesû* were recorded by the Kurdish Institute of Paris (headed by Kendal Nezan). The Kurdish Theatre of Tbilisi was closed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The Kurdish Theatre of Tbilisi managed to resume its activities in 1998 with a grant provided by the Georgian government. Meanwhile, in Moscow, Şalîko Bêkes (b. 1956), a veteran of the Tbilisi theatre, attempted to launch a theatre movement. He wrote and staged several plays between 1994 and 1996 but it was only in 2007 that he officially established his group, Mediya Theatre. Bêkes's theatre group has participated in festivals in Moscow and Diyarbakir with great success. In recent years, some of his plays including his two-act comedy *Kurd û Tûtû* (*Kurds and Aliens*, 2012), which depicts the arrival of aliens in the USSR and their fascination with the stateless Kurdish people, have been performed by Kurdish theatre groups in Turkey.

In Turkey

Unlike in the Soviet Union, bans and restrictions imposed on the Kurdish language, printing and publishing completely thwarted the growth of Kurdish culture in Turkey for decades.[1] The first Kurdish play that was published in Turkey since the creation of the Republic was *Birîna Reş* (*Black Wound*). *Birîna Reş*, which was published in both Kurdish and Turkish in 1965,

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[1] For information on Kurdish theatre groups in Turkey between 1991 and 2013, I have benefited from Mirza Metin's *Jêrzemîn* (Metin, 2014).

was written by Musa Anter (1920–92), a leading figure of the Kurdish move-ment in Turkey who wrote his play during his imprisonment in Harbiye Military Prison.[2]

During the 1960s in Silvan, which was the main centre of Kurdish activism in Turkey, Kurdish activists within the Workers' Party of Turkey (Türkiye İşçi Partisi, TİP) including Mehdi Zana, the chairman of TİP's Silvan branch, organized a series of meetings to protest the backwardness of the east and south-east Anatolia regions. It was during this period that Zana met Mamoste Cemîl, the veteran of Kurdish theatre in Turkey. After witnessing his pro-duction of *Buzlar Çözülmeden* (*Before Ice Thaws*), Zana recognized the potential of theatre as an important propaganda tool (Çelik, 2017: 148–50). For this purpose, he set up a 'theatre club' to reach out to the village youth, teach them about socialism and strengthen their class and national consciousness (Çelik, 2017: 149). Zana was also among the Kurdish activists who organized the first (clandestine) celebration of Newroz in Turkey in the mid-1960s. Newroz was of particular symbolic value to the nationalist struggle due to its association with the legend of Kawa, the blacksmith who rebelled against the tyrant King Dehak and liberated the ancestors of the modern Kurds.

The 1970s–1980s saw a proliferation of clandestine leftist Kurdish parties that used the legend of Kawa as a symbol of the Kurdish people's struggle. In 1978, Kemal Burkay's *Dawiya Dehaq* (*The Fall of Dehak*) was published in the socialist magazine *Özgürlük Yolu* (*Freedom Path*) in both Turkish and Kurdish. The play depicted the Kurdish aristocracy's complicity with the tyrant king who is ultimately slayed by the blacksmith Kawa, the symbol of the exploited proletariat. *Dawiya Dehaq* was staged on Kurdish New Year of 1978 in Dilan Cinema in Diyarbakır by a youth organization associated with the Kurdistan's Socialist Party (PSK or TKSP). The play was also staged in Adana, Ceyhan and Istanbul before the 1980 coup. *Dawiya Dehaq* was resur-rected in 1991 by the amateur theatre group Şanoya Roja Azadî (Freedom Day Theatre), who staged the play at the Istanbul meeting room of HEP (People's Labour Party) (Zêdo, 2015: 269).

The glorification of Kawa reached its peak after the violent death of PKK leader Mazlum Dogan in the notorious Diyarbakir Prison on the Newroz of 1982. Dogan's death inspired his fellow inmate Selim Çürükkaya to write a short Turkish-language play entitled *Demirci Kawa ve Çağdaş Kawa Destanı* (*The Blacksmith Kawa and the Tale of the Contemporary Kawa*). Çürükkaya's play which immortalized Dogan as the modern-day Kurdish hero was performed

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[2] Musa Anter was assassinated by the Turkish secret service in 1992 in Diyarbakir.

at Newroz parties in the diaspora. Both *Demirci Kawa ve Çağdaş Kawa Destanı* and *Dawiya Dehaq* were only published after the repealing of the language ban in 1991.

With the 1980 military coup, public speaking or printing in Kurdish was officially banned. Theatre in Kurdish was, therefore, a clandestine affair that would result in government persecution. Despite the ban, Mamoste Cemîl set out to stage Kurdish-language plays with the help of amateur actors. Their plays, which included *Axa Sor* (*Red Soil*), *Dîlana Şer* (*War Dance*) and *Hacî Amer* (*Haji Amar*), addressed the Kurds' current issues such as the 'village guard' system and were all performed in private homes (Çelik, 2017: 153–6).

It was only after the repeal of the ban on the use of Kurdish in recording and print (Law 2932) in 1991 that serious attempts to institutionalize a national Kurdish theatre began to be made. Opened in Istanbul in September 1991, the Mesopotamia Cultural Center (Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya, NÇM, in Kurdish; Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi, MKM, in Turkish) became the centre of Kurdish theatre production in Turkey. Aimed at reviving Kurdish culture against the decades-long assimilation policies and the denial of Kurdish identity, MKM served both as a school that trained a new generation in the fields of arts and culture, and as a national institution that produced artistic and cultural work.

Initially, Mamoste Cemîl headed MKM's art department which had, among other things, a theatre subdivision. MKM's basement served as rehearsal and performance venue for the fledgeling theatre group who had no prior theatre training. In addition to the lack of a proper stage, the group was faced with other issues including the lack of Kurdish texts and the difficulty of hiring professional artists and qualified instructors. Working at MKM involved a great deal of risk and the group, whose activities were deemed suspicious by Turkish authorities, had to rely solely on themselves for their training.

Despite the numerous obstacles they faced, MKM's self-taught actors performed their first play, *Mişko* (*Mouse*), in Ortaköy Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi in 1991. This play, which was a fable, was directed by Mamoste Cemîl and printed in MKM's literary journal, *Rewşen* (1992, no. 2–4). Mamoste Cemîl soon left the MKM and his position was filled by Hüseyin Kaytan. Kaytan and his group performed their first play in a park in Adana in June 1992 when they adopted the name Teatra Jiyana Nû (TJN – New Life Theatre). TJN went on to stage plays written by Kaytan including *Mirin û Jiyan* (*Death and Life*), *Daweya Cenaralê Teneke* (*Tin General's Case*, 1993) and *Ta/Sê Ewrên Dûr* (*Ta/Three Distant Clouds*, 1993). Mamoste Cemîl returned to

MKM with *Rojbaş* (*Good Morning*, 1995), a folk play that introduced a different approach to theatre than Kaytan's literary, poetic and philosophical style. This play, which was collectively written and directed, is a predecessor to TJN's textless approach that started in 1997.

While mainly based in Istanbul, MKM soon opened branches in other cities including Adana (1993), İzmir (1994) and Mersin (1996), where theatre groups Teatra Med, Hêvî and Arzeba were, respectively, formed. To overcome the problem of lack of Kurdish-language plays, MKM's theatre groups in Istanbul and elsewhere relied on traditional Kurdish performances and foreign plays. Teatra Hêvî in İzmir made use of village performance traditions and drew on epic theatre to create original plays such as *Sîmurg û Ronahî* (*Simurg and Light*), *Gurî* (*Guri*) and *Kosegelî* (*Kosa Bride*). In 2001, the group also staged its first foreign plays, Harold Pinter's *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language* in Istanbul, Diyarbakir, Bochum, Brussels, Köln and Wuppertal. TJN staged its first foreign play, Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, in 2003. Kemal Orgun's translations of Athol Fugard's *Island* (*Girav*, 2004) and Dario Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (*Mirina Anarşîstekî*, 2005) were next in line.

Despite the lifting of the ban on the Kurdish language, the Anti-Terror Law of 1991 allowed for the targeting of anyone involved in the promotion of Kurdish language or culture on the basis of engaging in 'verbal and written propaganda'. This law was continuously invoked throughout the 1990s to justify raids on MKM buildings and their theatre groups. The Urfa branch, which was opened on 25 October 1997, was completely closed on 28 November. At the opening of the MKM Urfa branch, TJN staged a play entitled *Guşto*, which resulted in the arrest of the actors who remained in custody for a week. On 31 July 1998, police raided the Istanbul branch of MKM and sealed its performance venue. In 1999, due to the closure of the MKM-Adana's theatre venue, its theatre group Teatra Yekbûn resorted to street performances. During the 1990s Kurdish theatre continued to appear in MKM basements, private homes, union halls, party meetings and a few cultural centres (Çelik, 2017: 159–60).

After a decade, the first generation of actors trained in MKM began to leave and form their own theatre groups. Seyr-î Mesel, the first private Kurdish theatre company, was established in 2003 and staged several plays inspired by Kurdish folktales, performance traditions and village life. Directed by Erdal Ceviz, *Qal û Qir* (*Hubbub*, 2004) became a sensation with several performances across Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan. Seyr-i Mesel's *Sayê Moru* (*Shahmaran*, 2006), the Dersim version of a Kurdish fairy tale in the Zazaki dialect, and

Sêva Periyan (*Fairy Apple*, 2006), the Elbistan version of the Simurgh tale in Marash dialect, were among other plays staged by this group.

Another prominent Kurdish theatre company founded in 2003 was Avesta. This group was founded by Aydın Orak and Cihan Şan, previously members of TJN, who started out in 2005 with *Rojnivîska Dînekî*, Orak's translation of Gogol's *Diary of a Madman* with which they toured Turkey and Sweden (Stockholm) for four years. Avesta's other projects included Aziz Nesin's *Sen Gara Değilsin* (*You Are Not Gara*, 2007), Cîhan Şan's *Araf/Di Navbera Du Welatan De* (*Araf/Between Two Countries*, 2008) about the life of Musa Anter, Harold Pinter's *Mountain Language* (2009) and Orak's *Daf* (*Trap*, 2012). *Araf* toured Europe and Turkey and won an award in the Ankara International Theatre Festival.

Another Istanbul-based Kurdish theatre group is Berfin Zenderlioğlu and Mirza Metin's Destar Theatre. Established in October 2008, Destar changed its name to Şermola Performans in 2010, when the group opened a stage under the same name. Şermola Performans has staged several original plays by Zenderlioğlu and Metin including *Reşê Şevê* (*Nightmare*, 2009), *Cerb* (*Experiment*, 2010), *Disko 5 No'lu* (*Disco No. 5*, 2011) and *Antigone* (2012). Şermola Performans's much-acclaimed *Disco No. 5*, a play about the brutality of torture in Diyarbakir Prison, has toured nationally and internationally and has won the group several awards.

In Kurdish provinces, which were under the military state of emergency since 1987, theatre in Kurdish began to really appear only after 2002, when the state of emergency was lifted. Diyarbakir Municipality's City Theatre (Diyarbakır Belediyesi Şehir Tiyatrosu – DBŞT), which was founded in 1990 and closed by the Refah Party in 1995, reopened in 1999 when the Kurdish Democratic People's Party (DEHAP) won the local election. City Theatre's first Kurdish-language play, a Kurdish translation of Murathan Mungan's *Taziye*, debuted in 2003. For thirteen years, the Diyarbakir City Theatre brought vibrancy to social life in the city, with an annual high school theatre festival, Kurdish scriptwriting contest, international theatre festival and several workshops.

In 2012–13, Diyarbakir City Theatre's partnership with Theatre Rast in Holland resulted in a ground-breaking production of *Hamlet*. Translated into Kurdish by Kawa Nemir, the play toured for months in Turkey and Europe, and also participated at Ankara's 16th International Theatre Festival, where several politicians including Turkey's minister of culture and the mayor of Diyarbakir attended the performance. Kawa Nemir's adaptation of the classic Kurdish romance, *Mem û Zîn*, was another important project by Diyarbakir

City Theatre. This play was first staged in the open-air courtyard of the Cemilpaşa Mansion in Diyarbakir in 2014.

Not long after these exciting developments, the blooming days of Kurdish theatre in Turkey came to an abrupt halt. After the failed coup attempt in July 2016, the AKP government ordered state-appointed trustees to take over the municipalities of several Kurdish cities. The pro-Kurdish mayors who had been supportive of Kurdish artistic production are now facing various charges of aiding and abetting terrorists and separatist propaganda. The Diyarbakir City Theatre, lauded by the AKP government just a few years earlier for its production of *Hamlet*, was disbanded, along with the city theatres of Batman and Hakkari. Theatre groups affiliated with Kurdish arts and culture associations across the country, including Seyr-î Mesel and several MKM branches, were shut down. The termination of dozens of theatre groups was also accompanied by the sealing off of performance and rehearsal spaces and the confiscation of archives, props and other equipment.

Resilient in the face of the new wave of repression, Kurdish theatre artists continue their efforts to keep their language and culture alive in Turkey. In February 2017, former members of the DBŞT, who had been fired by the municipality, established their new theatre group, Şanoya Bajêr a Amedê (Amed City Theater), and staged several plays, toured within Turkey and Europe, hosted exhibitions and organized workshops and theatre festivals. After the victory of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) in Diyarbakir and other cities in the local elections of March 2019, there was hope that Kurdish theatre would once again flourish with the support of local municipalities. However, it did not take long before the Turkish government removed the mayors, including in the three major cities of Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van, over alleged ties to PKK militants, therefore demonstrating once again Turkey's continued intolerance of Kurdish political power.

In Iraq

With Iraqi Kurdistan enjoying recognition as a Kurdish region and the return of the Kurdish intellectuals and notables from Istanbul to their hometowns in the 1920s (following the ban on Kurdish language and culture in Turkey), theatre in the Sorani dialect of Kurdish found a suitable environment in which to develop. According to Ahmad Khaja, Komeley Lawanî Kurd (The Kurdish Youths' Society), which had been established in Erbil in 1921, staged *Selahedînî Eyûbî* (*Saladin*) during the same year (Pirbal, 2001: 70). This play, which was an adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's *The Talisman* (1825), was

written by the Lebanese Najib al-Haddad and was directed by Danial Qasab (1913–2000), the renowned Jewish painter from Erbil who contributed to several theatrical productions in that city with his paintings and scene design (Pirbal, 2006: 96–7). In Kurdistan, like elsewhere in the Middle East, non-Muslim minorities seem to have played a significant role in the early stages of theatre. One example of their contribution is cross-gender acting, which was made inevitable due to the social stigma surrounding female acting. An early example of non-Muslim actors taking on female roles is a 1930 production of *Saladin* in Erbil (Pirbal, 2001: 73).[3]

It was in Sulaymaniyah that the theatre movement gained momentum, particularly as a result of the efforts made by schoolteachers. This group of young men mostly encountered drama for the first time when they enrolled at the educational institutes in Baghdad or Mosul where they were introduced to theatre and became involved in acting. During the 1920s, these teachers/directors staged plays in schools and acted in them along with their students, primarily as a way to raise funds for their schools and students from low-income families. Their plays, which included *Îlm û Cehl* (*Knowledge and Ignorance*, 1926) and *Nîron* (*Nero*, 1927) were mostly adaptations of Arabic plays.

Dildarî w Peyman Perwerî (*Love and Faithfulness*, 1933), written by the poet A. B. Hawri (1915–79), marks one of the first attempts at dramatic writing by a Kurdish writer in Iraq. In 1934, Piremerd (1867–1950), the most prominent literary figure in Iraqi Kurdistan at the time, wrote its oldest printed Kurdish play, *Mem û Zîn*. This play, which was staged in 1935 by the students of the Kurds' Literary Society (Komeley Zanistî Kurdan), marked the beginning of a distinct Kurdish theatre in Sulaymaniyah. Piremerd continued to draw on folktales and the history of the region as material for his next plays, *Mehmûd Aqay Şêwekel* (*Mahmud Agha Shewakal*, 1936) and *Şerîf Hemewend* (*Sharif Hamawand*, 1936).

By the late 1940s, communism and nationalism appeared as predominant ideological influences in Kurdish theatre. Members of political parties saw theatre as an important means to spread their party doctrines and therefore encouraged theatrical performances and even directed or participated in them. More often than not, the plays that were staged by these activists had political and revolutionary messages. *Kawey Asinger* (*Kawa the Blacksmith*) was a particular favourite of activists. This story was enacted regularly during

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[3] Cross-gender casting in Kurdish theatre and TV productions continued for decades. Omar Chawshin (b. 1942) is widely known for his cross-gender roles in the 1960s and 1970s, with memorable performances both on-stage and on TV.

Newroz celebrations of Koya in the 1940s (see Hamadbag, 2007). In 1941, the play was co-authored by poets Osman Awni (1914–92) and Rostam Hawezi (1913–99), who were members of Tîpî Şanoy Mîllî Koye (Koya's National Theatre Group). Formed officially in 1952, this group rehearsed and staged their plays in a casino and therefore were known in Kurdistan as The Youths of Saeidi Mala Ahmad's Casino (Tîpî Şanoy Lawanî Gazînoy Seîdî Mela Ehmed) (Hamadbag, 2007).

The 1948 Newroz celebrations were the most elaborate as the communists (Hizb al-Taharrur al-Watani) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) both planned several events including theatrical performances of *Kawey Asinger*, which was staged by both parties (Pirbal, 2001: 88–9). A large number of guests from across Iraqi Kurdistan attended these Newroz events in Koya including the poet Abdullah Goran, whose operetta *Gulî Xwênawî* (*Blood Red Rose*) was staged by Koya students. One of those students, Jalal Talabani (1933–2017), who later became a leader of the Kurdish uprising and the president of Iraq, played the role of Kawa's son in KDP's production of *Kawey Asinger* (Hamadbag, 2007: 34).

The government swiftly clamped down on theatre after recognizing the potential for this art form to propagate subversive ideas and sentiments. May 1948 saw the first instance of the interruption of Kurdish theatre performance and the arrest of its participants by government forces. The play called *Têkoşanî Rencberan* (*The Toilers' Struggle*) told the tale of a group of working-class men who rebelled against the monarchy (Barzanji, 2007: 61). The government clampdown failed to stop theatre's engagement with politics and the theme of social injustice became a thread running through numerous plays of the 1950s, such as *Kilolan* (*Les Misérables*, 1952), *Brûske w Şîrîn* (*Bruska and Shirin*, 1954) and *Elî Efenî* (*Ali Efendi*, 1958). In Koya, Tîpî Şanoy Mîllî Koye (Koya's National Theatre Group) caused a riot against the Iraqi parliamentary election on 17 January 1953 (Hamadbag, 2007: 37).

In the 1950s, an increasing number of European plays which had been translated into Arabic started to make their impression on the Kurdish stage. These plays, which were mainly social satires, included Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector* (*Cenabî Mufetiş*, 1954), Shakespeare's *Othello* (*Oteyl*, 1956) and *The Merchant of Venice* (*Bazerganî Vînîsiya*, 1956) and Molière's *L'Avare* (*Pîskey Terpîr*, 1956). Income from these and other plays, was, as per standard practice, distributed among students from low-income families.

In 1957, a group of theatre enthusiasts, which included actors, painters and musicians, founded the first Kurdish Society for Fine Arts (1957–63) in Iraqi Kurdistan. Among the members were the musicians of Tîpî Mosîqay Mewlewî

(Mawlawi Music Group), painters Anwar Tovi (1925–94), Azad Shawqi (1930–2002) and Khalid Saeid (1927–96), and actors Rafiq Chalak (1923–73) and Taha Khalil (1940–2010) (Ahmadmirza, 2011: 22). In 1958, the Society successfully staged the classic tale of *Mem û Zîn* and notably, for the first time in Iraqi Kurdistan, a Kurdish actress assumed the role of the heroine.

The overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy and the creation of the Republic of Iraq in 1958 resulted in a brief period of positive development for Kurdish theatre. *Holî Gel* (*People's Hall*), Kurdistan's first proper theatre, was built in Erbil. In Kirkuk, theatre groups such as Tîpî Hunerî Xebat (Khabat Art Group) and Tîpî Lawanî Kerkûk (Kirkuk Youths' Group) were formed. The latter celebrated the overthrow of the monarchy in a play entitled *Şewî Kotayî* (*The Deciding Night*) on the anniversary of the 14 July Revolution (Barzanji, 2007: 98). Unfortunately, the post-revolution optimism did not last long and the Kurdish cultural life was brought to a halt when, in September 1961, the war between the Kurds and the Iraqi regime broke out. Theatrical activities in Kurdistan almost completely disappeared for the duration of the war (1961–70).

The establishment of autonomy in Kurdistan in 1970 was simultaneous with the return of the first generation of Kurdish theatre graduates from Baghdad including Sabah Abdulrahman, Qazi Bamarni, Farhad Sharif, Talat Saman, Ahmad Salar and Badea Dartash, among others. Their return in the late 1960s and early 1970s reinvigorated the region's theatrical landscape and led to the establishment of several theatre groups such as Komeley Huner û Wêjey Kurdî (The Society for Kurdish Art and Literature), Tîpî Hunerî Hewlêr (Erbil Art Group), Tîpî Nwandinî Silêmanî (Sulaymaniyah Acting Group) and Hawrêyanî Gezîze (Gaziza's Friends). These groups thrived within an environment that enabled them to openly engage political topics by drawing on national folktales, myths and legends. *Kawey Asinger* (*Kawa the Blacksmith*), directed by Ahmad Salar, and *Kotayî Zordar* (*The Fall of the Tyrant*), directed by Qazi Bamarni, are examples of plays that were produced in the aftermath of autonomy.

The autonomous era only lasted five years. Baghdad launched an offensive against the Kurdish region in April 1974 and won the war immediately after signing the Algiers Agreement with Iran in March 1975. The Kurdish movement was crushed and the freedom that had flourished during the autonomous phase came to an end. With the Ba'ath regime seizing power, theatre artists came under strict scrutiny. Plays were censored and performances were watched for their potential subversive messages. As a result of strict censorship, Kurdish playwrights had to veil their true targets and hide their

political messages behind symbols and allegories, relying on pro-Arab, particularly pro-Palestinian, plays as a substitute for anti-regime and revolutionary expression on stage (Rostami, 2019: 123–5). The Israeli oppression of the Palestinians was a ripe topic for comparison with Baghdad's repression of its Kurdish population. These parallels were highlighted in plays such as *Ey Gelî Felestînî Rapere* (*Rise Up, Palestinian Nation*), directed by Badea Dartash (Rostami, 2019: 115).

Despite government repression and the chaos of the Iran–Iraq War, the second half of the 1970s and the duration of the 1980s is viewed by some as the 'Golden Age' of Kurdish theatre in Iraq. While it had been banned in Kirkuk, Kurdish theatre had become a popular medium in the cities of Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. The 1980 opening of the Sulaymaniyah Academy of Fine Arts (Peymangay Hunere Cwanekan) was an important development which established the basis for future theatrical endeavours. Another important development was the establishment of several theatre groups over the course of the 1980s, including the Progressive Kurdish Theatre Group (Tîpî Pêşrewî Şanoy Kurdî), Salar Theatre (Şanoy Salar), the Kurds' Fine Art Society (Komeley Hunere Cwanekanî Kurd) and the Experimental Theatre (Şanoy Ezmungerî).

During this period, efforts were made to create a distinctly Kurdish theatre. While Kurdish artists staged several Arabic and Western plays, they also found inspiration in their oral literature to produce plays such as *Mem û Zîn* (1976) and *Qelay Dimdim* (*Dimdim Fortress*, 1982) written and directed by Talat Saman, and *Xec û Siyamend* (*Khaj and Siyamand*, 1978) written by Fuad Majid Misri and directed by Ahmad Salar. In the late 1980s, Ahmad Salar, perhaps Kurdistan's most prolific playwright, aimed at creating a quintessentially Kurdish theatre by relying solely on Kurdish culture and literature in plays such as *Nalî w Xewnêkî Erxewanî* (*Nali and a Violet Dream*, 1987) and *Katê Helo Berz Efrê* (*When the Eagle Flies High*, 1988).

Although the Iraqi Kurds achieved autonomy in 1991, Baghdad's economic blockade against the Kurds followed by a bloody civil war (1994–98) resulted in the drastic decline of theatre in the 1990s. It was only after the war that theatre started to regain some of its lost lustre. Under the auspices of the Kurdistan Regional Government's Ministry of Culture, theatre administrations were established in several cities. The establishment of the Academy of Fine Arts, first in Erbil and then in Duhok, was also an important step towards theatre education. Budgets were allocated to fund stage and TV productions that were produced for the growing number of Kurdish TV stations.

However, while during the Ba'ath repression theatre used to draw large enthusiastic crowds, in the autonomous era, when all performances are free, it suffers from the lack of a theatre-going public. Theatre in Iraqi Kurdistan is also suffering from poor infrastructure, mismanagement of funds, poor quality of education and a dire shortage of library resources. All this notwithstanding, the Kurdistan Region, as the only de facto Kurdish state entity, has played an important role in safeguarding Kurdish culture against assimilation. The publishing of anthologies, dramatic works and theatre histories have particularly contributed to our knowledge of the history of Kurdish theatre.

In Iran

Under Reza Shah (1926–41), the Kurdish population in Iran was subject to assimilationist policies that banned their cultural expression. The British and Soviet invasion of 1941 toppled over the Iranian power structure and this led to a brief period of Kurdish autonomy in the town of Mahabad. In the absence of Iranian authority, Kurdish cultural activities resurfaced. A photograph from 1944 (see Kurdistan Photolibrary, n.d.) shows that the Kurdish performance tradition of *mîrmîren* was revived in Mahabad, seemingly by members of the Society for Kurdish Resurrection (Komeley Jiyanewey Kurd, 1942–45), a political organization whose activities eventually led to the creation of the Republic of Mahabad in 1946. This group, however, is best known for performing the play *Daykî Nîştiman* (*Motherland*) in April 1945. This play, which has been described as an 'opera', depicted the chained Motherland's ultimate liberation by her sons (Roosevelt, 1993: 125–6). As the first instance of serious drama in Iranian Kurdistan, *Motherland* enjoyed immediate and resounding success, not only in Mahabad but also in other Kurdish towns.

The Mahabad Republic was short-lived (January–December 1946). The Iranian Kurds' further attempts at autonomy were violently crushed and they experienced periods of extreme military suppression and repression of the expressions of their identity. Since the 1980s Kurdish language teaching and publishing have been allowed to some extent but the general marginalization of languages other than Persian, neglect of secular cultural endeavours by the state, lack of state sponsorship and state censorship in Iran have weakened the progress of Kurdish theatre in the country.

Despite all restrictions, the annual International Kurdish Theatre Festival in Saqez and the International Street Theatre Festival in Mariwan have been held regularly for over a decade now. Theatre groups from Diyarbakir, Iraqi Kurdistan and the Iranian provinces of Ilam, Kermanshah, Kurdistan, western

Azerbaijan, northern Khorasan and Tehran have participated in the Saqez Theatre Festival. The Mariwan Festival has also succeeded in attracting international theatre groups from around the world.

More recently, the Kurdology Centre of the Islamic Azad University in Sanandaj has published a collection of plays by Kurdish writers from the Kurdistan province including works by Ghotbeddin Sadeghi, Simin Chaichi, Saber Delbina and Trifa Karimian, among others (Varzandeh, 2018). The University of Kurdistan's Centre for Kurdish Studies also announced its decision to publish a collection of Kurdish plays during its centennial celebration of Ebdurrehîm Rehmî Hekarî's *Memê Alan*. Despite these positive developments, Kurdish theatre artists in Iran still grapple with serious problems such as poor infrastructure, lack of venues, lack of original Kurdish texts and underfunding.

A distinguished figure in Iranian-Kurdish theatre is the Sanandaj-born, Sorbonne-educated Ghotbeddin Sadeghi (b. 1952), who has been a mentor to Kurdish and non-Kurdish artists in Iran. With decades of experience in Iranian cinema, television and stage, Sadeghi has played a prominent role in Kurdish festivals in Saqez, Erbil and Diyarbakir. He has also addressed the plight of neighbouring Kurds in a number of plays including *Serdemî Bêtawanî* (*Age of Innocence*), about Saddam Hussein's chemical bombing of Halabja and its aftermath, *Surûdî Sed Hezar Ofêliyay Evîndar* (*The Song of a Hundred Thousand Lovesick Ophelias*) about the Anfal genocide and *Ezîzî Şengal* (*Aziz from Shangal*) about the tragedy of Shangal. The enslavement of Yezidi women of Shangal by the Islamic State terrorists has also been the subject of a play entitled *Îşa* (*Isha*) written by Trifa Karimian. These plays exemplify the Iranian Kurdish theatre artists' solidarity with their neighbouring Kurds; a bond that has been strengthened by the artists' participation in the international theatre festivals of Diyarbakir, Erbil and Saqez.

In Syria

The first published Kurdish play in Syria dates back to the 1930s when Turkey's exiled Kurdish prince, Celadet Bedir Khan (1893–1951), launched a cultural movement by publishing a literary journal named *Hawar* (*The Calling*). Celadet Bedir Khan, who aimed to strengthen the Kurds' sense of national identity by publishing literary works in their language, wrote a patriotic play entitled *Hevind* which he published in the twentieth issue of his journal in 1933. After World War II, when Syria became independent, the Kurds lost their freedom and became subjected to extreme assimilationist policies. The teaching of Kurdish was prohibited and children found speaking

Kurdish in public schools were physically punished (Tejel, 2009: 63). Speaking Kurdish in the workplace, ceremonies and festivities was also banned and stores selling audio and video material in Kurdish were forcefully closed (Tejel, 2009: 63).

After the 1980s, improved relations between Kurdish parties and the Syrian government created an environment in which cultural activities, including theatre, started to emerge. These activities were organized by students and folk groups particularly for the occasion of Newroz, which had gained the status of a national holiday. Among the folk groups that presented theatrical performances were Newroz, Xelat, Narîn, Mîdiya and Xanê in Qamishli, Armanc in Afrin and Kawe in Damascus (Çeto, 2019). The first of the public open-air theatre performances presented by these groups was *Çeto*, a play that was performed by Xelat folk group during the Newroz festivities of 1982 in Qamishli (Çeto, 2019). Another play that was staged in Qamishli was *Kawe*, the story of the mythical Kurdish hero, that was dramatized during the Newroz festival of 1983. The playwright Mohammad Khalil (1958–2012) is considered a pioneer of these student-led performances. He performed with the folk groups Xelat in Qamishli and Kawe in Damascus. Other than *Çeto* and *Kawe*, he staged the play *Gurî* in 1984 and presented several others clandestinely (Çeto, 2019). Narîn folk group also presented several nationalistic plays including *Qazî Mihemed* (*Qazi Muhammad*), *Leyla Qasim*, *Agirê Sînema Amûdê* (*Fire at Amouda Cinema*) and *Helebçe* (*Halabja*) (Çeto, 2019).

The creation of the autonomous Kurdish cantons (now Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, consisting of three self-governing regions of Afrin, Jazira and Euphrates) in 2014 sparked a revival of Kurdish theatre in Syria's Kurdish territories, best known as Rojava. Shortly after the declaration of autonomy, and amidst the violence of the Syrian civil war and wars of self-defence against Turkey and the Islamic State, the Kurds of Syria held a series of theatre events including annual Kurdish theatre festivals. Rojava's first annual theatre festival, which was named Mîtan, opened in Afrin in November 2014 and continued to be held regularly until November 2017. In Qamishli, the annual Şehîd Yekta Herekol theatre festival opened on 27 March 2015, on World Theatre Day, which is also the day the Kurdish actor Erdogan Kahraman (*nom de guerre* Yekta Herekol) set himself on fire in Aleppo in 2004 in protest to the Syrian regime.

Understandably, the majority of plays performed at Rojava's theatre festivals have engaged themes of revolution and resistance. This is exemplified by the first Mîtan festival's motto 'For Kobani' and plays such as Koma Şano's *Gelê Kobanê* (*People of Kobani*), which glorified the city of Kobani's resistance against the

Islamic State. Celebrating the heroes of the revolution has been a common theme among theatre groups in Rojava who are often named after theatre actors in the guerrilla movement such as Koma Şehîd Dagistan (Martyr Dagistan Group), Koma Şanoyê ya Şehîd Yekta Herekol (Martyr Yakta Harakol's Theatre Group) and Koma Sarya Baran (Sarya Baran Theatre Group).

In November 2017, a few months prior to its occupation by Turkey, the city of Afrin hosted the third theatre festival of Mîtan under the motto 'We cultivate life'. The participants of the festival were Afrin's youths who had drawn on Kurdish folklore as material for their plays. Despite the uncertainty of their situation and further threats of violence against them, the Kurds of Syria were adamant in their cultural pursuits, including theatre. This is evident in the establishment of Komîngeha Şano (Theatre Commune) in October 2018 in Qamishli, in a ceremony whose motto summarized the inspiring perseverance of all Kurdish theatre artists and their spirit of optimism: 'Days can be happy or sad, but life still goes on.' Qamishli's Koma Şano, a theatre group established with the aim of addressing the mental health needs of conflict-affected children, held several workshops for children and young people. These young actors staged plays in Qamishli and toured the al-Hasakah governorate performing Molière's *The Imaginary Invalid* in 2018.

Turkey's invasion of northern Syria, which began on 9 October 2019, threatened to put an end to all these efforts as tens of thousands fled their homes facing an uncertain and perilous future. However, this has not been the case so far as proven by the people of Afrin. Forcefully displaced to the IDP camps in the northern countryside of Aleppo after the Turkish military invasion, the founders of Afrin's Mîtan festival built a new stage inside the camp to hold the fourth Mîtan festival in January and February of 2020, after a two-year suspension. Among the participating artists at the festival, other than the displaced artists from Afrin, were the all-female Teatra Sarya Baran from Qamishli. Established in 2018 under Kevana Zêrîn, the women's arts and culture organization, Sarya Baran has toured north and east Syria with *A Woman Alone* and *I'm Ulrike Screaming*, plays by Dario Fo and Franca Rame. One of their performances in Aleppo in February 2020 was followed by chants of 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadi' (Women, Life, Freedom), the revolutionary slogan that sums up the essence of the Rojava revolution; a revolution that has women's liberation at its heart.

In Diaspora

For decades, Kurdish artists in exile, mainly in Europe and North America, have actively held festivals, exhibitions, concerts and film screenings. Theatre

has also held a place in the cultural lives of the Kurds abroad. Kurdish theatre artists have managed to produce numerous works in various Western countries including Canada, England, France, Holland, Denmark and Germany.

During the 1980s, Mozaffar Shafeie, a former director of the Kurdish Cultural Centre (KCC) in London, directed the first theatrical activities of Kurds in England. These plays were *Kawe le Sedey Bîstimda* (*Kawa in the Twentieth Century*, 1986) and *Serxwebûn* (*Independence*, 1989). While at the KCC, Shafeie, who was the first and only Kurdish member of the British National Theatre, trained theatre enthusiasts. In 1994, he played the role of Pamir, a Kurdish refugee trying to get asylum in Britain in Clare Bayley's play, *Northern Light*. The play explored the relationship between Pamir and Laura, the solicitor's clerk trying to help him.

In the late 1980s in Sweden, the Kurdish theatre group Ararat staged Slawomir Mrozek's one-act dramas including *On the High Seas* (1960) and *Striptease* (1961) (Kurdisches Theater in Europa, 1993: 43). The plays were directed by Fazil Jaff (b. 1951), who later received his doctorate in theatre arts from Saint Petersburg Theatre Arts Academy. In addition to acting in and directing several plays in Iraqi Kurdistan and abroad, Jaff has written and translated several plays and published academic works such as *Ezmûnî Şanoy Meyerhold* (*Meyerhold's Theatre Experiments*, 2003). Dana Rauf (Marouf) is another Kurdish director and actor from Iraqi Kurdistan who now resides in Sweden. In their production of *Strindberg on the Track – To Damascus* in 1997, the Swedish actress Berit Kornhill and Rauf portrayed a Swedish woman and an immigrant who met in the underground and connected through Strindberg (Szalczer, 2011: 88–9). Rauf has also authored several Kurdish-language books on world dramatists such as Anton Chekhov, Harold Pinter, August Strindberg and Lars Norén.

In France, the Sulaymaniyah-born Shwan Jaffar received his postgraduate diploma (DEA) in theatre studies from the University of Sorbonne Nouvelle. In 1994, Jaffar, as the director of the Compagnie Chano, staged the Kurdish love story *Mem û Zîn*, which he had translated into French. In 1996, he translated and directed *Kardo*, first at the National Theatre Albi, and later in Paris. In 2000, he translated and directed *Azady . . . L'être Kurde* (*Azady . . . To be a Kurd*) at the National Theatre of Cherbourg and in Paris. Jaffar has written several articles on Kurdish theatre in French. His recent biography of Badea Dartash, published in *Dictionnaire Universel des Créatrices* (Jaffar, 2013), is particularly important in documenting the life and works of Iraqi Kurdistan's first female theatre graduate and professor.

Between 1989 and 1993, Ibrahim Farshi, a graduate of the University of Köln, and his theatre group, Koçer, staged several plays in Köln, Germany. These included *The Poisoned Bread* (1990), *Flowers Bleed over Halabja* (1991, 1993), *The Exodus* (1991) about the Kurdish exodus of 1991, *The Prison* (1991, 1993) and *Not Alone: Different but Together* (1992) (Kurdisches Theater in Europa, 1993: 44). Apart from *The Prison*, all the other plays mentioned had no dialogue; instead, they made extensive use of music, dance and body movement, which played an important role in Koçer's works. Another Kurdish theatre group in Köln was Botan, which was founded in 1990 by a group of Kurdish students and workers. In July 1991, the group staged Eskerê Boyîk's five-act play, *Mem û Zîn*, in Köln. In May 1993, they staged Harold Pinter's *Mountain Language* in both Kurdish and German (Kurdisches Theater in Europa, 1993: 44).

Another Kurdish theatre director in Germany is the Kirkuk-born Hawre Zangana, who sought refuge in that country in the 1980s and obtained his MA in theatre studies at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. His thesis, entitled 'Theater als Form des Widerstands in Kurdistan' (Theatre as a form of resistance in Kurdistan), was published in 2002, becoming the first book in a European language to deal exclusively with modern Kurdish theatre (Zangana, 2002). Having worked for the city of Munich, at Refugio München and afterwards, at the Youth Migration Centre at AWO München, he has organized and directed theatre projects with young people and adolescents, many of them in the areas of intercultural integration. Some of these projects include *Als der Frühling auf die Erd nicht kam* (*When Spring Did Not Come to Earth*, 1996), *Der Mondwanderer* (*The Moonwalker*, 1997), *Sprache der Tiere* (*Language of Animals*, 1998) and *Traum einer Schülerin* (*A Student's Dream*, 2004). Zangana has written and directed *Geschichte einer Ramentromel* (*History of a Drum*, 2002), which toured Munich, Stuttgart, Nuremberg and Berlin, and *Lieder der anderen Mütter* (*Songs of Other Mothers*, 2009), which went on-stage at the Gasteig in Munich and in Dachau where it was followed by a panel discussion with survivors from Dachau, Hiroshima and Halabja. He has also co-organized Kurdish theatre conferences in Munich and Nuremberg in 2006, 2007 and 2013. In 2020, Zangana published his second book on Kurdish theatre entitled *Theater als therapeutische Erinnerungsarbeit* (Zangana, 2020).

In Germany, co-founder of Şermola Performans, Mirza Metin has received scholarships from ifa (Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations) and the Martin Roth Initiative as an artist-in-residence with the Bonne fringe ensemble. In 2018, with the financial support of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, fringe ensemble's founder, Frank Heuel, and Metin

founded NEXUS, a Kurdish-German theatre network intended to promote alliances between Kurdish and German actors, directors, playwrights, musicians, designers and other Kurdish theatre artists living in Germany. This initiative has resulted in a series of workshops and the translation and production of Metin's plays *Anziehungskräfte* (*Gravity*, 2018) and *Zwischenhalt* (*Stopover*, 2017), both directed by Frank Heuel.

In October 2011, Fethi Karakecili directed *Mem û Zîn*, the first Kurdish musical to go on-stage in Canada. At Toronto's Isabel Bader Theatre, twenty dancers from eleven distinct backgrounds and dance styles participated in this unique performance that used a blend of Kurdish and non-Kurdish dance styles (folk, contemporary and ballet). Sena Dersimi, a Kurdish singer from Germany, performed vocals and acted in the performance (Karakecili, 2011). Karakecili, a graduate of York University, has been working in the field of Turkish, Kurdish and Middle Eastern dance and music for over thirty years and has written about Kurdish rituals, dance and music.

Starting in March 2014, Hevgirtina Rewşenbîrên Rojavayê Kurdistanê (Union of Intellectuals from Western Kurdistan – HRRK) has held annual culture and arts festivals in Europe, with participants from different parts of Kurdistan. In May 2017, HRRK held its fourth Rojava Culture and Art Festival (Festîvala Çand û Hunerê ya Rojava) simultaneously in the German city of Wuppertal and in Qamishli. Participants from different parts of Kurdistan engaged in activities ranging from theatrical performances to poetry recitations and storytelling. The fifth festival, which was held in April 2018 in Wuppertal and Kobani, was held under the motto '*Em hemû Efrînî ne*' (We are all from Afrin) in solidarity with the Kurds of Afrin who had come under Turkish military attack earlier that year. The poems, stories, plays and musical performances all addressed the issue of Afrin. One year later, during the sixth Rojava Culture and Art Festival held in Wuppertal, young Kurdish artists performed *Rawestgah* (*Station*), a play written by the Syrian-Kurdish Helim Yusiv that drew on themes of loss and exile by depicting the Kurds' futile wait for a train home that never arrives.

Conclusion

The history of Kurdish theatre is the story of a nation's struggle to survive against attempts at eradicating its language, culture and identity. This history has been characterized by bans, persecution and violence. Moreover, the Kurds' lack of national institutions to safeguard their culture and national

heritage means that many theatre events have gone unrecorded and therefore much of the Kurdish theatre history has been lost and is unrecoverable or remains hidden. In Turkey, archives have been lost to police confiscations and raids of performance venues. While wars, displacement and the persecution, repression and erasures of Kurdish cultural and artistic production continue to date, grassroots efforts to build the foundations of a modern Kurdish theatre are illustrative of the Kurdish artists' resilience and the importance of theatre in maintaining cultural identity.

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A Cinematography of Kurdishness
Identity, Industry and Resistance

BAHAR ŞIMŞEK

Introduction

The first time I heard a Kurdish language in a cinema was in 2001, in Bursa. As a Kurdish teenager, it was a transformative experience then to see *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* (*Hejar*, Handan İpekçi, 2001) sometime between its release and its immediate ban, in one of Turkey's main cities. As the story of a five-year-old Kurdish girl named Hejar (meaning miserable in Kurdish), who survived a clash between Turkish police and Kurdish militants in mid-1990s Istanbul, it is one of the most concrete narratives on the Kemalist reading of the Kurdish issue, which tends to frame it as one of underdevelopment and the supposed financial and cultural backwardness of the Kurds. The film was honoured at one of the most prestigious international film festivals in Turkey, the International Antalya Film Festival. Interestingly, *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* – a movie with a nationwide public distribution in Turkey, addressing a Turkish audience with a Kurdish protagonist speaking in her mother language – has never been considered a Kurdish movie. This early personal memory of the multilayered presence of a cinematic account of the Kurdish issue shows a very basic characteristic of non-territorial and fragmented Kurdish cinema and its literature: it is de facto occupied by at least one colonial gaze.

Under attack from at least four nation-state projects, Kurdish culture has flourished not only on historically Kurdish lands but also in diaspora, and until recently has been deprived of cinematic means to express its presence and desire for recognition. With the rise of internet technologies and the questionable democracies empowered by the World Wide Web's existence, arguably, Kurdish languages have become more audible, and Kurdish culture more visible. Yet talking about the film industry, whose history spans nearly a century and coincides with both the emergence of modern nation-states and the rise of capitalist modes of production, it is a given that the category of

Kurdish cinema is a matter of late arrival, for both the state and the industry, while the Kurdish issue of cinema is the history of the colonial occupation of Kurdish geography and culture under national (whether Turkish or Iranian) film industries.

In light of these concerns, this chapter unpacks the claim that both the formal and contextual patterns of Kurdish cinematic works are a challenge to any holistic imposition of the national subject of cinema and to the particularly Kurdish ways of embracing post-cinema. Kurdish cinema thus asks, if its claim to autonomy is to be understood, to be discussed through the lenses of identity, industry and resistance. I borrow here the term cinematic from J. Hoberman, who uses 'cinema to mean a form of a recorded and hence repeatable moving image, and for the most part, synchronized recorded sound. Television kinescopes and TV and since video-tape are *cinematic*. So is YouTube' (Hoberman, 2013: 3). Identity, industry and resistance together attach Kurdish cinematic subjects to the social body in a precise way that divorces Kurdish cinematography from the colonial gaze and victimhood discourses in the name of the agency. I approach Kurdish cinematography (which embraces several artistic conventions yet tends nevertheless to converge on realism) here as a case to think through Kurdishness and its engagement with post-national visual repertoires.

To explore the extent that a colonial gaze is at work for Kurdish film-makers and to depict the Kurdish past of cinema, I begin with Yılmaz Güney's shifting performative identity as a Turkish movie star at the beginning of his career, then an acceptable Kurdish filmmaker relying on Kemalist understandings of the Kurdish issue, and finally as a Kurdish leftist ideologue and director. Güney, as the pioneer of Kurdish cinema for many (Çiçek, 2016; Şengül, 2013; Şimşek, 2018), stands at the heart of my analysis, since his trajectory describes at several levels how Kurdishness resists the categories of the imagined national subject of cinema and that any account of Kurdish cinematography must attend to the tactics it employs to realize its claims. Exploring Güney's performative identities is, here, a crucial step in critically engaging with the historical structure of the Kurdish cinematic environment's colonial components, including beyond Kurdish lands per se.

Discussing Güney also involves, here, an examination of national film histories in terms of industry, due to the overwhelming basis of film industries in national economies, even with the presence of independent cinema funded by transnational budgets. Building on this, I aim to problematize the

common academic curiosity today in Kurdish cinema by insisting that we pay attention to the structuring role of the film industry. Within this discussion, too, I attend to how the limited audibility of Kurdish languages both exposes the limits of national film industries' space for Kurdish cinemas and colours the very characteristics of Kurdish national cinematic discourse. Since the audibility of Kurdish languages in movie theatres in historically Kurdish lands is today still up to the agenda of ruling governments regarding Kurds and Kurdishness, the spaces for the distribution of films in Kurdish languages in these national film industries is rather narrow. Approaching the national character of Kurdish films in linguistic terms, I claim that the diegetic use of Kurdish languages in films calls for secondary identification – identification with the characters of the film (Metz, 1984: 95) – and social recognition in the service of an imagined Kurdishness, alongside attempts at theorizing Kurdish national cinema. Accordingly, I claim that the common narratives of victim-hood and trauma in long-feature films in Kurdish languages under the rule of at least four national projects, together with diasporic experience, target an imagined Kurdish nation.

Tracing Kurdish cinematography's presence through a number of titles, I conclude this analysis with the wide-ranging cinematic repertoire of Kurdishness in and on the state of conflict to contemplate on the future of Kurdish cinema. Following the lead of questions posited by Hito Steyerl in *November* (2004), I claim that conflict emerges as *the* condition determining the future content and form of the Kurdish cinematic environment. Steyerl's engagement with the Kurdish issue of Turkey through a decentralized narra-tive on the ambiguities of the real and the conditions of struggle opens a space for a cinematic account of the Kurdish insurgent movement and for resist-ance as the central theme, within hybrid film forms, of becoming Kurdish. Here, the so-called mountain cinema of Halil Dağ (*nom de guerre* of Halil Uysal) and more recent Western interest in Kurdish resistance in the Syrian civil war are key to discussing such cinematic reflections of Kurdishness and its future. While Kurdish popular films tied to national industries and film festivals posit themselves as agents for the public recognition of claims, a more comprehensive account of the Kurdish cinematic repertoire should recognize forms beyond the national determinacy of technically developed perfect cinemas, attending to the imperfectness of broadcasted news videos and film communes' anti-capitalist modes of cinema. Becoming Kurdish, hence, becomes possible through a series of fragments and collages of real, asking for agency amidst the ongoing suppression of Kurdish identity.

The Wretched of Turkish Cinema: Yılmaz Güney

Today it is a well-established fact that cinema in Turkey has never been nationally homogenous, but has rather been haunted by the ethnic and religious identities Otherized by hegemonic national discourse since the late Ottoman era. In continuity with the nationalist constructions of Kemalist Turkey, the hegemonic reading of Turkish film history is based on a dismissal of its Ottoman roots, so that for nearly a century the pioneers of this specific film culture have not been recognized. This situation gained publicity during discussions on reconsidering what is said to be the first film produced in Turkey in the early 2010s: Fuat Uzkinay's (Faruk Kenç) *Ayestefanos'taki Rus Abidesinin Yıkılışı* (*The Destruction of the Russian Monument of Ayestefanos*, 1914). Yet, on the basis of citizenship, the founders of Turkish film culture cannot be properly called Turkish, at least by a Kemalist imposition of Turkishness formulated as a 'Muslim, Hanafiyyah sect, Turkish speaking person' (Yıldız, 2004: 301). Reflecting the Ottoman Empire's cosmopolitan presence, the Manaki Brothers, Yanaki Manaki (1878–1954) and Milton Manaki (1882–1964), are seen by some as the pioneers of Turkish cinema in the Ottoman era (Evren, 2013). The glorious Yeşilçam era of Turkey is founded on an ideological ground never announced as such: the Turkish film industry's ethnically and religiously non-homogeneous structure. The popular name of low-budget Yeşilçam movies, Yılmaz Güney, aka Çirkin Kral (Ugly King) of Turkish cinema, was born into this history of denial and oppression.

I claim that Güney is central to any historical account of Kurdish cinema for at least three reasons. Being born in the era of the Kemalist Republic and being a part of the system of Turkish stars in the 1960s, first of all, he was then the example of an acceptable (assimilated) Kurdish citizen for the (Kemalist) nation-state. Since his early emergence on the silver screen, Güney's name has also been credited in the scenario, direction, and production in many of the films he took part in as the protagonist. Being identified with the role of a bandit (*eşkiya*) (Özcan, 2019: 48–51) in the films of 1960s, it was he who asked for an interview with the journalist Tarık Dursun Kakınç from *Milliyet* on his then latest movie *Krallar Kralı* (*King of the Kings*, Bilge Olgaç, 1965). During this interview, Güney's tone, echoing from his 'kingdom', bothered Kakınç, such that the latter felt the need to remind Güney that 'the only King of Turkish cinema is Ayhan Işık' (Özgüç, 1988: 48), a hidden Armenian citizen of Turkey at that time (Kara, 2014). It was Güney himself who picked the name Ugly King in response to Kakınç's reaction (Özgüç, 1988). This anecdote both

solidifies the limits of Güney's acceptance by Turkishness and exposes Güney's refusal of the normative power of Turkishness, in playful terms, to claim recognition. Secondly, Güney's cinematic productions during the 1970s mirror the mechanisms that show how internalized colonialism is at work in certain films by Kurdish directors translating Kurdish identity and culture in the hegemonic (Turkish) culture. Namely, alongside *Umut* (*Hope*, Yılmaz Güney, 1970), *Arkadaş* (*Friend*, Yılmaz Güney, 1974) and *Sürü* (*The Herd*, Zeki Ökten, 1978), Güney embraces a Turkish socialist understanding of the Kurdish issue in terms of underdevelopment and backwardness, through a socialist-realist depiction (even if he does not name it as such) of poor Kurdish villages and feudal Kurdish society. Tim Kennedy discusses these cinematic productions of Güney as an extension of understanding 'the root of the Kurdish problem in class conflict' along with Turkish directors Lütfü Akad and Metin Erksan (Kennedy, 2007: 115), while Müslüm Yücel calls Güney *'le regard mutilé'* (the mutilated look), echoing Dariush Shayegan (Yücel, 2008: 127–78). This phase of Güney embraces the fixation of Turkish socialist ideologies of Kurdish identity and geography as a matter of underdevelopment and backwardness in financial and religious terms, which Güney himself exposes through his didactic narratives, in the colonial gaze he has internalized. In both of these Güney eras, the very signifier of Güney's cinematography emerges as masculinized resistance either under the name of bandit (*Seyyit Han*, *Bride of the Earth*, 1968) or else a mobster (*Krallar Kralı*) or a petit-bourgeois (*Arkadaş*) struggling against the powerful. The Kurdish tone of this resistance signals its very presence through narratives employing Kurdish culture and geography in the Turkish language, such that utterance in Kurdish languages can only be audible in the names of characters such as Remo, Keje, Koçero and Seyyit Han. These two initial eras are foundational to a visual regime enjoying the possibility of a settled national (Turkish or Iranian) cinema for telling stories related of the oppressed Kurdish identity; the internalization of colonialism, to a certain degree, emerges as the inevitable transition phase in a strategic move to claim a presence for Kurdish identity.

The third and final pivot that makes Güney essential to current Kurdish cinema discourse is the cinematic opening that comes by the Palmé d'Or winner *Yol* (*The Way*, Şerif Gören and Yılmaz Güney, 1981). The critique and reception of *Yol* by Turkish intellectuals tell us about the multilayered work of Turkish ideology in the film industry as well as its determinacy on production and distribution. *Yol*, banned in Turkey until 1999, colours the indecisive Turkishness of its Kurdish producer as a case to expose indecisive

Kurdishness to the eye of Turkish audience accordingly. In other words, the unnamed tension between Güney as the globally recognized Turkish director and as the most possible founder of Kurdish cinema names the discursive struggle that determines the possibility of any Kurdish cinema. Turkish film scholar Asuman Suner's (1998) approach to *Yol* and Güney exemplifies this well. Trying to make a feminist sense of *Yol*, she calls the concepts of Otherness and political cinema into the discussion for the Turkish case of national cinema. Positing Güney as a Turkish director, Suner suggests that Western interest in *Yol* is based on an Orientalist understanding of Turkey under the rule of feudal traditions and the image of subaltern Anatolian women. Taking the Turkishness of the director and the society under his lens for granted, Suner's gender-focused analysis turns out to be itself a colonial reading, as it rejects to recognize the sociology of Kurdish society and Kurdish women's life under the shadow of feudal structures as a colonized entity under the rule of the Turkish state, as depicted in *Yol*. In other words, positing Güney's cinema as the Other of Turkish cinema, Suner develops an approach embracing a conditional recognition of the Kurdish issue that silences a Güney Other than the Ugly King of (Turkish) Yeşilçam, and takes pride in Palmé d'Or coming with Turkish Güney while addressing Kurdish Güney as responsible for a misrepresentation of modern Turkish society in terms of backwardness. This reading of *Yol* and Güney crystallizes the colonial gaze that Kurdish works of cinema have been read through in theory.

Liberating himself from a Kemalist socialist understanding of the Kurdish issue, Güney embraces realistic aesthetics to let Kurdish geography speak for itself through its native languages in *Yol*. Kennedy names the manifestation of the Kurdish issue in *Yol* not as a matter of class conflict in the 1980s but as the source of Güney's reinvention of his Kurdishness and the imagined Kurdistan (Kennedy, 2007: 115). As also discussed by Bozarslan, it is only in *Yol* that the director posits the Kurdish issue as a national problem in his film universe (Bozarslan, 1990: 36). As a result of continuous marginalization in both financial and political terms in Turkey, Bozarslan addresses the category of marginal as the very characteristics of Güney's films to mirror the mutations and crises of Turkish society in social, national and sexual terms (Bozarslan, 1990: 35). As such, Güney's analysis of the Kurdish issue evolves from 'people of the East' to the 'Kurdish nation' with the growing weight of the Kurd's marginalization in urban masses as unemployed, proletariat or mafia figures, as a result of being pushed from their homeland (Bozarslan, 1990: 36).

Moreover, edited in the diaspora, *Yol* announces the conditions of any Kurdish filmmaker under the rule of hegemonic oppression against stateless Kurdish identity: diasporic being. Following *Yol*, Güney's last project, *Duvar* (*The Wall*, 1983) – echoing his several imprisonment experiences in Turkey for political and non-political reasons – becomes an allegory of colonial violence from several perspectives and of the multitude in resistance that opens a space for female agency in addition to Kurdish socialist awakening. Working on a number of non-visible political themes – torture, rape and execution – of 12 September films (the plenitude of films on and about the 12 September coup d'état led to a categorization of these films under the name of post-coup d'état films) of Turkey (Dönmez-Colin, 2014) – Güney addresses the sites of political agency in then Turkey through the experience of non-political prisoners subordinated by the elitisms of Turkish leftist movements, by breaking the innocent child myth into pieces. For instance, extracting the child lacking any agency – the weeping boy picture (Gürbilek, 2004: 39) of post-coup d'état Turkey – from the family, Güney evades being caught by modernist constructions foundational to Turkish leftist ideologies. Addressing the child as the protagonist of a narrative on violence and attributing agency to the category of child, Güney exaggerates the alienating effect on a liberated spectator from the imagined modern family and its nation.

With this specific narrative, Güney opens up to social change with a shock effect – namely, 'the shock of the real' (Jaguaribe, 2005). Here I propose to borrow Jaguaribe's conceptualization of shock of the real, which she develops through realist works of cinema and literature positioned in comparison to the interpretative pedagogical effort to reveal the reality (Jaguaribe, 2005: 6). Following Jaguaribe's analysis on the centrality of the shock of the real to produce meanings that are 'not readily decoded as being the usual spectacularized product of the televised media' (Jaguaribe, 2005: 6), we see that Güney's realist approach converges to a minimalist aesthetics founded on close-ups that disturb the body's unity for the sake of fragmented truth, unlike the wide-angle spatial shots in *Yol*'s imagining of Kurdistan. The delinquents of *Duvar* neither have family nor the sympathy of society to prevent inhumane violence, but have self-consciousness and a will to transform the situation. The state is manifested in its patriarchal codes by means of the bio-politics of the prison regime; the separation between the (punishing) Father-state and the (caring) Mother-state dissolves in violence. Torture, humiliation and rape are essential to this corresponding bio-politics. Wardens are present in the narration as the mediators of the state's rage against its disobedient

children. But unlike common narration on the 12 September coup, *Duvar* does not call for identification with political prisoners' victimhood to ask for sympathy but instead calls for participation through positing audience as the witness of the indiscriminate violence of the state against the people.

Accordingly, being outside of rights, in the circumstances of bare life (Agamben, 1998), it becomes experience itself that will shape the future instead of norms of hierarchic and homogenous communal norms. The 'fourth ward', as the second address of the orphan children, transcends the shock of the real via experience; resistance and the will to survive are as real as oppression and violence. Specifically, taking sexual assault into account with direct signifiers, *Duvar* posits the body as the primary source of resistance and oppression, echoing Mbembe's claim that the 'body in itself has neither power nor value duplicates itself and, in death, literally and metaphorically escapes the state of siege and occupation' (Mbembe, 2003: 37). *Duvar* sees the potential of the people as it sees the state's intervention through violence; an orphan child's dead body lying in front of a giant portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Turkish flag does not prevent one to see the will against oppression. Moreover, wary of the moralist and sterile sexuality of hegemonic leftist discourse, the narrative includes sexual perversion to expose the libidinal investment of power relations. Pederasty becomes the base of the corresponding power relations. Blunt questions are aired: 'Are you fucked by Cafer (the warder)?' Moreover, defining women's subjectivity through close-ups of the faces and wide-angle shots of naked women's bodies, *Duvar* allows neither a non-sexual presence of women's bodies nor their objectification as the *objet petit a* for the male gaze and differentiates from Güney's essentially male films of Yeşilçam. Nor, still, does it tend to a separation between the political and other women prisoners in terms of their desires or literacy. Through the presence of women's anatomy in one of the film's most spectacular scenes, *Duvar* confronts the spectator with the very moment of the vagina during birth. That scene is where the film radicalizes its means to consolidate a shock effect meant to effect transformation, where the director addresses the agent of the transformation as gendered. However, as we shall see, the gender revolution needed to wait two decades to be explored in Kurdish cinematic terms.

Borderless Industry, National Claim

Cinema, born in the age of modern nation-states, has been in the service of collective imaginations in ways similar to what Benedict Anderson (2006)

described for printing, publishing and broadcast. Film theory's service to modernist constructions of art and culture comes about through an embracing of a hegemonic national concept of cinema. The main characteristics of national cinema discussions, as Christie (2013) argues, are elitism and works of art cinema funded by national industries and domestic consumption against the hegemony of Hollywood. Under the shadow of a grand battle between national cinemas and Hollywood, regional and ethnic cinemas that suffer cultural homogenization and political sanctions have been posited as the agents of specific discourses or culturally specific aesthetics (Crofts, 2006) rather than being recognized as autonomous works of art. In other words, any understanding that cannot be assimilated into national cinema discourses has been abolished into regionalism such as it empowered capitalist hierarchies. The name for Catalan cinema chosen by Marvin D'Lugo, 'something like national cinema', is cited by Stephen Crofts (2006) as the signifier of a naming crisis in ethnic and linguistic minority cinema and its place in film studies. There has been no critical account of the borrowed conventions of these cinemas from the narrations of national cinemas – and nor of their challenge to the icons of national cinema undermining such hierarchies. Two main determinants of the nationality of a cinematic account, therefore, become the hegemony of Hollywood and 'taste-brokering functions of international film festivals and film criticism' (Crofts, 2006: 54). Moreover, these particular regional and ethnic cinemas are assumed to engage the 'national audiences' (Higson, 1989) defined by states and related cinematographic subjects, which ends in the legitimization of assimilation of the related ethnicity into the hegemonic identity in cinematic terms.

In the Kurdish case, besides the general interest in Kurdish directors at international film festivals, whereby films become labelled 'Kurdish', reference to this cinema is rarely observed. This is not only because of a lack of territorial recognition among the league of modern nation-states but also because of the overdetermining political conditions that lack space for Kurdish identity's very presence. The term 'Kurdish cinema' has developed, problematically, following the international reputation of the award-winning Kurdish directors Yılmaz Güney, Bahman Ghobadi and Hiner Saleem by Kurdish film critics (Aktaş, 2009; Şengül, 2013). Either as a transnational cinema funded by international collaborations or as an exilic cinema mostly developed by diasporas, the concept of 'Kurdish cinema' is explored by the territorial determinacy of modern national cultures (Çiçek, 2016; Çiftçi, 2015; Koçer, 2014). Yet, for Kurdophone subjects of cinema, including film scholars suffering from the internal cultural colonialism of nation-states (Turkey, Iran,

Syria and Iraq), the privileged target of reception has been the audibility of Kurdish languages in movie theatres (Kılıç, 2009). However, debates on Kurdish cinema have subordinated the audio-visual promise of the diegetic use of Kurdish languages to transnational or diasporic conditions of Kurdish films' production and distribution. In other words, it has only been considered appropriate to discuss Kurdish film under the titles of transnationalism and diaspora, affirming the condition of state and national industry for its presence.

The borders and the rules of the four modern states have deprived Kurds of their most effective means for articulating and sharing discursive identity constructs during the twentieth century (Sheyholislami, 2010: 292). Kurdish culture has not only been deprived of government support but has been jeopardized by governments as a 'stateless sub-culture' because of the alleged lack of a Kurdish nation in the era of modern nation-states (Hassanpour, 2003; Kreyenbroek and Allison, 1996; Vali, 2003).Yet, as Hassanpour (1996) has already noted, alongside the oppression of the four states, cultural production in Kurdish languages has involved a multilayered development from oral tradition to media culture. Kurdish media, in which Kurdish popular culture is rooted, has developed over the last two decades in four ways: through Turkey's EU membership process since 1999; through the Kurdish diaspora, which is both deterritorialized and denationalized; through the 2003 establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraqi Kurdistan; and finally through the rise of social media (Ayata, 2011; Bozarslan, 2006; Çiçek, 2015; Sheyholislami, 2010; Smets, 2018). Deprived of the vital elements of a state-funded film industry, these four conditions have made it possible to talk about a Kurdish cinema characterized by hybridity and fluidity through production and distribution – in other words, through the diasporic position of directors of Kurdish movies and their worldwide distribution via international film festivals (Şengül, 2013: 10). The discursive power of a national Kurdish cinema relies on its importance as a political tool for claiming the Kurdish nation and against the denial of Kurdish identity. The poly-dialectical Kurdish languages gain importance for Kurdish cinematography since 'subjectivity and identity mark the compositions of persons in language and culture' (Barker and Galasinski, 2001: 28). Linguistic action and the interaction of particularly located speaking subjects, according to Barker and Galasinski, become the main agent of identification; they provide a relative conceptualization of self-identification and social recognition, as differentiated from and opposed to imaginative identifications with the nation-state icons and discourses. Strictly speaking, it turns out to be the language used (spoken, sung)

that determines the subject positions from which to declare the means of becoming, say Polish or American (Barker and Galasinski, 2001: 28) – or Kurdish. Accordingly, what primarily determines the characteristics of Kurdish cinema of national claims turns out to be the employment of the diegetic use of Kurdish languages such as it transcends the overdetermination of the political economy of the film industry for the sake of being Kurdish by addressing its own people and popular culture in their mother language for secondary identification.

Moreover, recalling Hall's emphasis on the writer's enunciation and the implication of the new subject of cinema – the place where s/he speaks and the practices of representation to the positions of enunciation (Hall, 1990: 222) – the Kurdishness of the director emerges as central to the national characteristics of Kurdish films, in ways similar to the diegetic use of Kurdish languages to assert its people and popular narratives. Here it is important to recognize the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)'s unique position for Kurdish national cinema discussions. Being the only officially recognized Kurdish administrative unit, the KRG's investment in the Kurdish film industry follows the national patterns for any film industry by promoting the production of films in Kurdish languages by Kurdish directors, the public demonstration of those films and having its international Kurdish film festival at the capital, Duhok International Film Festival, since 2012. Twenty-one long feature films in Kurdish languages were produced by the KRG's financial support between 2009 and 2018. The low number of feature-length films in Kurdish languages by Kurdish directors in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and in exile since 1982 (Yılmaz Güney's *Yol*), fifty-eight in total, shows the numeric impact of having an official account of the film industry for Kurdish cinema. Moreover, the KRG's emergence forces a narrative shift from the outsiders' violence towards a problematization of Kurdish society that becomes evident in the narratives of *My Sweet Pepperland* (Hiner Saleem, 2013) and *Bîranînên li ser Kevirî* (*Memories on Stone,* Shawkat Amin Korki, 2014). Following Saleem's previous works embracing the multilingual and multicultural reality of Kurdish society in the migrated European capitals to survive afterwards the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the 12 September coup d'état in Turkey and massacres against Kurds in Iraq (Akın, 2012), *My Sweet Pepperland* voices over its protagonists from each of four Kurdish languages. Such as the intra-Kurdish conflicts accompanied by the feudal patriarchal structure of Kurdish tribes become audio-visually exposed by the lack of communication through an unconventional love story between Soranî and Kirmanckî (Şimşek, 2016). The Kurdish woman who stands against the feudal foundation of Kurdish

society is the common point of Saleem's and Amin Korki's films, which are, respectively, addressing the intra-Kurdish conflicts by embracing linguistic plurality and being a film on Kurdish filmmaking practices, that is, the future of Kurdish cinema. Korki, whose family fled from Saddam's regime to Iranian Kurdistan, opens his film on filming the Anfal genocide by Güney's *Yol*, which was banned in Iraq, too, for decades. The narrative in *Bîranînên li ser Kevirî* affirms the necessity of a settled industry to claim for a Kurdish cinema having its national audience while leaving its inner film on the Anfal genocide without any audience in the liberated Kurdish land.

This phenomenon aside, though, the claims of Kurdish directors under the shadow of hegemonic national film cultures remain valid. While the KRG's film industry targets its national audience through widespread public screenings as much as film festivals, the films in Kurdish languages produced in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and the diaspora have limited space for public screenings – basically in film festivals – due to both the lack of a legal basis and a commercial value for the use of Kurdish languages. Kurdish languages, which until recently were largely treated as dialects of the (ruling nation-state's) official language (Hassanpour, 1996), tend to sound the explosion of truth, as 'the roughness of the film surface' (Bonitzer, 2007) against the official language in (Turkish, Arab, Persian) national discourse. As claimed by Natali, 'Kurds are Kurds because they are not Arabs, Persians or Turks' (Natali, 2005: xvii), such that Kurdish dialogues enunciate the autonomy of Kurdish identity against the normative linguistic power of hegemonic identities through not speaking in Turkish, Arabic or Persian in Kurdish films and by embracing plurality comes by Kurdish languages. The linguistic turn in Bahman Ghobadi's last feature-length film, *Fasle Kargadan* (*Rhino Season*, 2012), who defines his stance as 'My whole being is Iranian, but my heart is Kurdish' (Hamid and Ghobadi, 2005: 45), demonstrates this in process. Gaining international reputation by the narratives on Kurdish lives determined by death and poverty alongside the borders between Iran and Iraq (Hadaegh and Zandi, 2015) in Kurdish languages and letting the states' languages speak only by and with the officials in his previous films, Ghobadi's embracement of Persian, Turkish and English languages in his last narrative affirms the lack of commercial value of Kurdish languages for the future of Kurdish popular cinema. The fetishism of political discourses and realist aesthetics, along with the epistemological effects of the construction of a Kurdish national cinematographic subject, are uttered through fragments of Kurdistan and the audibility of Kurdish languages by Kurdish directors in these trauma narratives (Şimşek, 2018). The limited space for narrations in Kurdish languages imposes its popular themes to be collective trauma and collective

memory to cover such issues as statelessness, borders and violence for its audience. Accordingly, the title of the first edited volume on Kurdish cinema comes out to be *Kürt Sineması: Yurtsuzluk, Sınır ve Ölüm* (Kurdish Cinema: Statelenessness, Border and Death) (Arslan, 2009).

   With the most developed national film industry and the largest Kurdish population, Turkey hosts most feature-length movies in Kurdish languages, particularly due to the peace process between 2009 and 2016 in addition to the promotion of Kurdish elements in Turkish films such as *Güneşi Gördüm* (*I Saw the Sun,* Mahsun Kırmızıgül, 2009), *Press* (Sedat Yılmaz, 2010), *Gelecek Uzun Sürer* (*Future Lasts Forever*, Özcan Alper, 2011) and *Jîn* (Reha Erdem, 2013). Exploring the developing Kurdish film culture of Turkey in terms of how it benefited from the revival of the film industry in Turkey during the 2010s, Çiftçi (2015) explores Kurdish cinema as a question of Turkish cinema, such that Kurdish narratives emerge as a part of new Turkey's film culture. Çiftçi's approach aims to reconceptualize the definition of Turkishness in line with the hegemonic political discourse in Turkey. Yet it, too, is not able to escape from a colonial reading, in not recognizing the autonomy of Kurdish films. Özgür Çiçek also problematizes how cinema is discovered and embraced by Kurdish directors to mirror the circumstances surrounding Kurdish people, contextualized in the politics of Kurdish resistance (Çiçek, 2016: 5). Being popular in the sense of their embracing of hegemonic language on the Kurdish issue and imagining its own people through narratives of trauma and victimhood, Kurdish feature-length movies of Turkey follow the early works of Güney, which are in line with Turkish politics' and the film industry's space for Kurdishness. Yet Güney is the figure who caused a rupture in the history of Turkish cinema by his late works (Ergül, 2018: 42). As such, Güney's aesthetic opening not only speaks to but helps to shape the agents of resistance. However, the narratives embraced by the Kurdish directors of Turkey during the 'Kurdish opening' of the AKP government by the first half of the 2010s strategically engage with the popular political claims that had then gained partial recognition. So that the pedagogy of the real finds its expression as 'the claim of truth-telling' (Çiftçi, 2015) in the Kurdish cinema of Turkey. Kurdish national cinema, then, can be claimed to be in the service of already decoded meanings by the parties of the conflict. Yet, a Kurdish film environment not reliant on capitalist modes of production and distribution pushes the limits of Kurdish national cinema discussion from the bottom, through audio-visual works embracing the ambiguity between the real and the fictive to transcend the pedagogy of the real in the name of the shock of the real, and the liberation of Kurdishness from victimhood.

Endless October

With the sounds of military helicopters in the background, *November* (Hito Steyerl, 2004) opens with a voice-over description by Steyerl herself on the screen: 'My best friend when I was seventeen was a girl called Andrea Wolf. In 1998, she was shot as a Kurdish terrorist.' The twenty-five-minute video *November* consists of twelve titles, including footnotes and credits. The first title, *A Reconstructed Witness Account by a Female Guerrilla Fighter*, depicts Steyerl's friend Andrea, the protagonist of her first movie on a group of women fighting for justice with their bare hands against armed men. The next title, *Postures and Gestures*, opens with a poster of Andrea Wolf (whose *nom de guerre* is Ronahî) in Kurdish announcing Wolf's martyrdom in a movie theatre showing porn films. 'Her body never came back . . . What came back instead was this poster', says Steyerl's voice-over. Giving a brief frame for Kurdish broadcasting through Andrea's talk on Ronahî TV, which was then a pro-Kurdish satellite channel, Steyerl paves the way to explore her conceptualization of the 'poor image' in the Kurdish case. Steyerl, the contemporary artist and film scholar, defines the poor image as such: 'The poor image is a copy in motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution' (Steyerl, 2009: 32). And she concludes that 'the poor images are the contemporary Wretched of the Screen' (Steyerl, 2009). In line with this, showing images of Andrea Wolf's poster in the hands of Kurdish kids in a protest in Germany shortly after 1999, when the leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan, was captured by Turkish authorities, she discusses how Andrea herself became an icon, copied and reproduced by printing processes, video recorders and the Internet, under the title of *Travelling Images*. The only voice-overs other than Steyerl in *November* belong to a former militant of the West German Urban Guerilla and a former Kurdish militant of the PKK. The former militant of the West German Urban Guerilla explains the impossibility of any realist account of realist aesthetics, referring to *The State of Siege* (Costa Gavras, 1972). The Kurdish militant who lives in Berlin, pointing to north Kurdistan as a white spot on the map and lacking a face, announces Germany's specific place in the Kurdish issue of Turkey after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Two titles on the white screen without any poor images successively flow on the screen to reach *Mixed Territories*: 'Germany is in Kurdistan. Kurdistan is in Germany.'

Steyerl's artistic investment in liminal experience between the real and the fictive comes to terms in Andrea's case through the circulation of Andrea's image as a 'glamorous star in a fiction' in Steyerl's first movie, then as a documentary image on Kurdish Ronahî TV, and as a fictive unit of the video art *November*. This very precise circular history of the poor image claims to reconceptualize the truth and liberate it from a linear understanding of histories and society in the service of capitalist modernity. Here it becomes not the vertical film industry but the horizontal distributions zones of images that construct meaning and produce the surplus value of the work of art. As such, the fetishism of high resolution identified with technologically equipped movie theatres dissolves into ways of seeing in the service of alternative truth regimes. Moreover, as Paul Lafuente claims, 'the sound-track, dissociated from the images, adopts a different meaning, as do the images dissociated from their original soundtrack – perhaps because the old one is substituted by a new one, or perhaps, like the scenes from Steyerl's early B-movie that were included in *November*, because no sound was ever recorded? That is, the images never actually made any sound' (Lafuente, 2008: 68). Inviting the subordination of sound in film reception under the question, Steyerl's embrace of several poor images from documentaries, television and popular culture enjoys the linguistic diversity both to pose several identification positions and the alienation effect through a decentralized narration. In her own writings, Steyerl claims the economy of poor images to be understood in relation with the imperfect cinema (Steyerl, 2009: 39) of Juan García Espinosa, which is a reaction to the 'technically and artistically masterful' of perfect cinema (Espinosa, 1979). In the age of technical superiority and advanced images, national claims on cinema have a certain investment in perfect cinema, affirming its superiority through the fetishization of high resolutions and the hegemonic language of national arts. Imperfect cinema imposes itself as a film without the condition of perfection and instead investigates the most accessible forms to assert its political claim against the capitalist distribution of images.

Referring to the manifestos accredited to the Third Cinema Movement, another name, Kevin Smets, focuses on cinemas of conflict in the Kurdish case. Instead of relying on hegemonies of national film industries and national cinema discussions, Smets's fourfold categorization opens a space also for films made by Kurdish militants who only have internet databases, DVDs and Kurdish televisions in their distribution repertoire (Smets, 2015). Accordingly, he claims we have the culture of death (battle cinema), the culture of violence (victim cinema), the culture of negotiations (human rights cinema) and the

culture of indifference in the Kurdish case of cinema (Smets, 2015: 2440–8). Positing the ongoing state of conflict in and on Kurdish identity and politics, Smets's search for a Kurdish cinematic environment communicates with theories against the hegemony of the myth of Total Cinema. In later work with Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya, he focuses on the guerrilla-director Halil Dağ. Previously working as a journalist and editor for the first pro-Kurdish daily newspaper, *Özgür Gündem* (*Free Agenda*), and for the first Kurdish satellite TV, and MED TV, Akkaya had the chance to meet with Dağ in 1995 (Smets and Akkaya, 2016: 82). The homeland of Andrea, Germany, emerges as the diasporic home of Halil Dağ where he discovers his Kurdishness and becomes involved in Kurdish politics. Dağ was killed in a clash with the Turkish army ten years after Andrea's death, in 2008. Smets and Akkaya identify six projects of his, namely, the documentaries *Kilamek jî bo Zagrosê* (*One Ballad for Zagros*) and *Di Jiyana Gerîla Xweza û Ajal* (*Nature and the Animal in the Life of a Guerrilla*), and the docu-fictions *Tîrej* (*Ray of Light*, 2002), *Eyna Bejnê* (*Big Mirror*, 2002), *Firmeskên Ava Zê* (*The Tears of Zap*, 2005) and his only feature-length film, *Berîtan* (*Beritan*, 2006) (Smets and Akkaya, 2016: 84–5). Chalking up his inspiration to Sergei Eisenstein's two main works, *The Film Sense* and *The Film Form* (Smets and Akkaya, 2016: 84), it is Dağ's films which brought to the fore the genre of 'mountain cinema' referring 'not only to the iconography of mountain landscapes in his films, but also to their embeddedness in the guerrilla activities in the Kurdish mountains' (Smets and Akkaya, 2016: 86). Lacking the necessary conditions of any perfect cinema because of the state of conflict these films were born into, Smets and Akkaya (2016) address Dağ's cinema as the vernacular cinema of conflict. Here I claim that the particularism attributed to Dağ's films endures Steyerl's critique of the death of universalism after the fall of the Berlin Wall through the poor images of mountains and guerrilla lives surrounded by nature in the name of continuous resistance. Noticing Steyerl's lament on October by calling November as the time when 'particular, localist and almost impossible to communicate with' emerges in history, the very presence of Dağ's films assert that the relation between the particular and the universal is far from being one way.

The third and last focus of my approach becomes evident at the intersection of Andrea Wolf's and Halil Dağ's cause of presence in the Kurdish cinematographic environment. While Kurdish cinema is being shaped as a discursive tool in the hands of film scholars and popular victimhood narratives by Kurdish directors, the Kurdish insurgent movement's impact on the history of Kurdish cinematic products is present not only through its own media tools but also by its very presence in conflict zones that have

gained international attention in Syria, in the fight against Islamic State (IS). Following the 2015 January victory in Kobane against IS, Kurdish women guerrillas of the Women's Protection Unit (Yekîneyên Parastine Jin, YPJ) turned out to be the main public image of the coalition with the Kurdish movement there for Western Europe and the United States. As such, the image of Kurdish women earned a kind of recognition of Kurdish identity in mainstream media channels, though on the condition of silencing its political body and background (Şimşek and Jongerden, 2018; Toivanen and Başer, 2016). Moreover, the latest release of the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* (Taylor Kurosaki, 2019) with its brand-new high resolution has a Middle Eastern woman fighter named Farah Karim inspired from YPJ, as one of the main characters in the video game to expose a 'side of warfare that they (game player) may not be aware of', in the words of Kurosaki (Martens, 2019). Such popularity gained by the defeat of IS has also made the region the main attention centre for journalistic accounts and documentaries, leading to a series of videos on YouTube and social media channels on Kurdish militants' daily lives and culture. To name some, Vice News' *Female Fighters of Kurdistan* (2013), BBC News' *Islamic State Are Afraid to See Women with Guns* (2014), Russia Today's *Her War: Women vs. ISIS* (2015) and Günter Steinmeter's several documentaries are among the most popular. Focusing on Kurdish women's faces and such feminized activities as combing hair, spending time in front of mirrors and cooking to underline the gendered nature of war, the borrowed conventions of these videos impose a Western gaze on the image of Middle Eastern women through depicting Kurdishness and Kurdistan surrounded by weapons while objectifying Kurdish women in the eye of a white male seer. A consumable feminine Kurdishness under armour becomes the most popular visual material of such a history.

We recall, though, that the history of cinema in Syrian Kurdistan goes back to 1960 when 298 children were burnt to death in then the only movie theatre in the main capital of the Kurdish population of Syria, the city of Amûde. The Rojava Film Commune (Komîna Filma Rojava), founded in 2015 in northern Syria, announced its first film festival on 13 November to support its claim about reimagining society through cinema (Neon Exhibition, 2019). Besides the international interest in the visual economy of war images in the Syrian civil war, the Rojava Film Commune animates a particular film culture by implementing a cinematographic habitus mediating daily struggles and cultural sovereignty (e-flux, 2020). In other words, Kurdish cinematic products insist on their own ways of presence by claiming an agency on the production and distribution of film pieces beyond mainstream interests in Kurdishness

and Kurdistan and its conditional recognition. Regarding the high resolution of documentary pieces by BBC News, Vice News and Russia Today, the poor images of this Kurdish film collective stand for an imperfect cinema of Kurdish identity that doesn't rely on industrialism but on a multitude in cinematic communities. While the feature-length films in Kurdish languages claim for a national cinema, in theory, it is the short films and documentaries in Kurdish languages that make it possible for the Kurdish audience to imagine and realize itself through cinematic tools. Can Candan takes the Kurdish word for the documentary, *belgefilm*, as a signifier of the attributed meanings to film tools by Kurdish agents (Candan, 2016: 25). Following the first Kurdish film festival organized in London in 2001, the Collective of Kurdish Filmmakers (Le Collectif des Cinéastes et des Artistes Kurdes/CCAK) organized a second Kurdish film festival in Paris in 2007; the third in the diaspora was organized in New York in 2009 (Candan, 2016: 8–16). Today we see that several capital cities hosting Kurdish population such as Berlin, Hamburg, Montreal and Melbourne have their own Kurdish film festivals circulating short movies and documentaries in Kurdish languages and on the Kurdish issue among several Kurdish communities. However, Istanbul, the de facto capital of the Kurdish population, could only have its own Kurdish film festival, Istanbul Kurdish Film Festival (Festîvala Fîlmên Kurdan a Stenbolê), by 2019. The organizer of the first Kurdish film festival of Istanbul, Mesopotamia Culture Centre (Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi, MKM), has been in the service of Kurdish cultural practices since the early 1990s. As discussed by Can Candan in detail, being founded by several Kurdish and Turkish intellectuals including Musa Anter and İsmail Beşikçi, MKM owns the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective (Kolektîfa Sînema ya Mezopotamya) from which Kurdish documentary cinema was derived (Candan, 2016: 6). As one of the first cinema workshops in the Kurdish districts of Turkey, it is the Diyarbakır Cinema Workshop (Candan, 2016: 10) that built an alternative film environment for Kurdish filmmakers not necessarily targeting the settled film industries, but in the service of building their own horizontal networks by addressing Kurdish identity as a category of resistance to denial, oppression and perfection.

Conclusion

On 4 October 2015, the twenty-four-year-old Kurdish actor and activist Hacı Lokman Birlik was killed by police special forces after they opened random fire at civilians in Şırnak under the rule of the state of emergency. The police special forces dragged his body behind an armoured police vehicle through

the city of Şırnak and posted video footage of this atrocity on the Internet, with the cursing and swearing of the officers audible. The devastatingly poor images went viral on social media. The short film *Bark* (Home, 2015), in which Birlik is the protagonist Xacî, is available on YouTube with its dominant greyscale and the scenes of isolated mountains accompanied by the sounds of conflict, affirming the conventional use of realism in Kurdish cinematography to call attention to the surrounding political circumstances. Yet, unlike popular trauma narrations' cynic realism, instead of pointing to the victims of the conflict as the address of identification, it focuses on the impossibility of right to life under such conditions of conflicts to claim agency. Xaci indecisively stands at a fork between paths leading to the mountains (rural rebellion) and a paved road to the city (urban obedience) colonized by the radio broadcast of TRT announcing the war policies against the Kurdish insurgent movement. *Bark*, as a short film on the state of war surrounding Kurdish settlements of Turkey, becomes a document of the death of its protagonist in continuation of that war. Its technical imperfection is due to limited financial support available from the Şırnak Municipality Cudi Culture and Art Centre and Şırnak Youth Working Group Association, and it solidifies how Kurdish cinematography asks to be examined in the field of conflicts, as much as in the theory of settled national cinemas, and how the state of conflict determines the paths of film communities to reach their audience.

To return now to Güney, I have discussed how his performative identity as a Kurdish citizen, director, writer and actor of Turkey, as the original account of Kurdish cinematography, demands for a horizontal understanding that attempts to close the gap between Kurdish cinema discourse and its practices in the name of recognition claim. Güney's several performances throughout his career as an activist demonstrate how dependence on settled national film industries determines the position of Kurdish directors from different Kurdish lands including the diaspora. As such, Kurdish directors of Turkey's peace process prefer to identify their productions as 'political films by a Kurdish director' (Doğan, 2013) or their own situation as a 'Kurdish director with Turkish citizenship' (Mintaş, 2013), whereas Kurdish cinema is 'trying to progress on the way of the sun and spring', in the words of exilic Kurdish director Hineer Saleem from Iraq (Saleem, 2009). Although Güney's cinematography announces the film medium as the carrier of truth for Kurdish people through its international reputation, it is Güney's persona that challenges the realist aesthetics to go beyond already-there meanings attributed to Kurdishness by hegemonic ideologies through the shock of the real.

Accordingly, Güney's cinematography consists of moving pieces that investigate several Kurdishnesses oscillating between voluntary assimilation and continuous resistance in the service of an acentric and achronological Kurdishification in audio-visual terms, which finds its expression in today's poor images' circulation through the Internet. Güney's popularity, which abandons victimhood discourses, contrasts with the new popular address of feature-length movies in Kurdish languages that offer the catharsis to its possible Kurdish audience through secondary identification rather than assuming the audience as the agent of history so that the ultimate question demands consideration of Kurdish cinema in light of industry, identity and resistance.

The industrial mode of cinema's desire for national totalities is valid in the Kurdish case through a pedagogy of the real to place traumatized Kurdishness in a victimhood discourse in the name of the recognition of Kurdish languages, and to claim its own popular narrations within limits defined by hegemonic powers – that is, the officially recognized space for Kurdish languages in movie theatres. The limits of this very popular audience are also flagged by international film festivals' taste and room for them. Within such a historical and political context, which sets Kurdish cinematography as a discursive tool within capitalist film modes, a claim for truth-telling emerges as the domestication of non-linear and non-smooth conflict zones in favour of a consumable form of Kurdish culture. Here it should be well noted that, as discussed by Koçer in detail, Kurdish directors' engagement with international film festivals is also a field of struggle, such that space, in European festivals, for Kurdish documentaries, helps Kurdish directors to gain recognition back in their host country (Koçer, 2013). Hence, affirming the hierarchies of nationalist theories by addressing its audience either as a homogenous totality or festival-goers, the perfection of feature-length movies and documentaries in Kurdish languages and Kurdish national film culture is also tied to the concept of resistance. Tim Kennedy in his comparative research on Armenian, Kurdish and Palestinian national identities in cinema concludes that cinematic Kurdishness ends up with a 'virtual nation' of imagined Kurdistan, following a series of geopolitical events in the 1980s (Kennedy, 2007: 175–8). In the second half of the 2010s, a new series of geopolitical events in Rojava, in northern Syria, challenged both Kurdish national consciousness and audio-visual reflections on Kurdish identity. The emergence of Kurdish insurgent movements' female faces on several visual materials through the Internet, TV broadcasts and video games exposed the Kurdish insurgent movement as a part of Kurdish cinematic environment.

Although the Kurdistan Regional Government's administrative autonomy remains the main agent for the traditional construction of Kurdish national cinema, the impact of cinematic works of and on Kurdish identity asks to be examined through the most accessible distribution networks for its non-homogenous, acentric and highly political particular public.

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Kurdish Art and Cultural Production
Rhetoric of the New Kurdish Subject

ENGIN SUSTAM

Introduction

This chapter analyses Kurdish cultural and artistic work. In the past three decades, significant artistic activities took place and cultural works have been produced in cities such as Diyarbakir, Mardin, Istanbul, Duhok, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Qamislo, Kermanshah, Mahabad, Tehran, as well as in the Kurdish diaspora in Europe. For much of the twentieth century, Kurdish cultural and artistic productions were repressed by the assimilationist policies the states of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria adopted with respect of their Kurdish population. In Iran, Kurdish people suffered various forms of political oppression during the rule of the shah of Iran and these policies continued after the revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Although the Iranian state recognizes the language and culture of the Kurds, this recognition does not extend to autonomy and self-government and the provision of public education in the Kurdish language is prohibited.

In Turkey, from 1991 onwards, the situation began to change as a result of the easing of restriction on Kurdish language and culture initiated by the reforms of the government of Turgut Özal. During the 2000s, more restrictions on Kurdish culture and art were removed and means to disseminate it, such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations, were established. Cultural festivals organized by the municipal councils in the Kurdish regions of Turkey became commonplace in this period. However, in recent years and as a result of the acceleration of Turkey's authoritarian turn, many of the institutions that played a leading role in the production and dissemination of Kurdish culture in Turkey have been closed down by the state. In Iraq, Kurds have been enjoying extensive autonomy since 1991 and cultural production has flourished since then. A de facto Kurdish autonomous entity has also emerged in Syria in July 2012 onwards, and all of the restrictions

imposed on Kurdish culture and identity by the Ba'athists have now been removed.

This chapter postulates that the cultural endeavours in these regions and the artistic work produced there has an overtly anti-colonial character, adapting an oppositional political stance to war, oppression and mechanisms of political repression that the Kurds have been subjected to, as well as addressing their multifarious social consequences. Cultural and artistic production in the Kurdish space in Turkey during the 1990s is especially marked by an acute political awareness, going hand in hand with the rise of an artistic dynamic leaning on a destructive and ironic language. In that respect, it can aptly be stated that all artistic and cultural works of art that fall within the Kurdish space are political due to the clear stance they take.

One of the most intriguing contributions of this chapter is its emphasis on artistic and cultural production within the actual political arena, interrogating how it contributes to the transformation of the new Kurdish subjectivity that situates itself across borders. Artistic production for Kurds signifies the memory of a stateless people trying to survive amidst the hegemony of the dominant national cultures and the traumas of the repression of Kurdish culture. Hence, analysing the participation of contemporary artists and producers in the Kurdish artistic and cultural space in the midst of conflict and violence enables us to highlight the emancipatory capacity of their work (see the analysis of the work of Cengiz Tekin in Sustam, 2015).

Territorialization, Reterritorialization and Deterritorialization: Understanding Kurdish Cultural Space

The analysis presented in this chapter draws from the theoretical discussion advanced in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and in particular the concepts of 'territorialization, reterritorialization and deterritorialization'. Before I proceed to the discussion, these concepts need to be briefly outlined and their value as a method of analysis highlighted. This research investigates how, through literary and artistic efforts, a cognitive territory of an oppressed people is created or rather recreated. The concepts of 'territorialization', 'reterritorialization' and 'deterritorialization' traverse the foundation of our decolonial approach and join a particular structure which is the movement of the relative and molecular process that Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize in their theoretical reflection on space, in which these notions are presented to render an account of this transdisciplinary aspect that

prefigures the real space. For Deleuze and Guattari, questions of space concern the 'matter that will occupy space at this or that degree' and this movement of imminence reacts with the notion of territoriality and how territory is created, marked, appropriated and described by means of signs (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 46, 55, 177, 181, 214).

This Deleuzian approach is useful for questioning artistic thought. The term 'territoriality' is, then, used around the concept of 'deterritorialization and reterritorialization' movements to analyse the mobility of artistic creation, cultural production and thought around these three stages. Art sometimes transcends culture, but also culture has in itself the potential for reterritorialization as an authentic reflex that constitutes thought, actors networks and movement. As Deleuze and Guattari put it: 'Territory is, in fact, an act that affects environments and rhythms, which "territorialises" them' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 386). For Deleuze, to deterritorialize 'is to leave a habit, a sedentary lifestyle. More clearly, it is to escape from alienation to processes of precise subjectivation' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972: 162). However, one should avoid believing that deterritorialization is an end in itself, a deterritorialization without return. For Deleuze and Guattari, this concept is not conceivable without its counterpart 'reterritorialization': 'Consciousness finds its territory, but in new ways until a next deterritorialization' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972: 306–7).

As Deleuze and Guattari add in their book *What Is Philosophy*: 'Deterritorialization and reterritorialization intersect in the double becoming. We can hardly distinguish the native from abroad because the foreigner becomes an aboriginal person in the other who is not, at the same time that the native becomes a foreigner, to himself, to his own class, to one's own nation, to one's own language' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991: 105). On the basis of this analysis, I would like to show to what extent these two wandering movements are endowed with a critical potential and, more precisely, the utopic critical potential for the artistic production of an oppressed people.

The potential for the Kurdish minority lies in their ability to question the ways of relating to space (Kurdish territory and space) and is only conceivable to the extent that the link between space and Kurdish identity is made visible. The fact that Kurdish subalternity of artistic perceptions unblock these from the colonial political situation that victimized and oppressed Kurdish identity enables for a reappropriation of some form of freedom and allows them to create a new decolonial relationship to space, both critical and singular. Through reterritorialization and deterritorialization movements, we seek to explain the production of the Kurdish space and explore the decolonial

character of this creation and how it relates to the concepts of territory and national identity.

The Changing Geography of Kurdish Cultural Production

Kurdish cultural production since the 1960s has been taking place in a number of locations and influenced by several distinct processes. As mentioned above, the repression of Kurdish culture and language in the states that have a Kurdish population has created a restrictive environment, which adversely affected its development. However, the situation began to change in the second half of the twentieth century through the political struggle by Kurdish movements and efforts by Kurdish individuals and institutions. Cultural activities in the diaspora started to take place from the 1960s onwards and from the 1980s, the efforts by Kurdish activists and intellectuals began to take a more organized form leading to the establishment of various institutions, such as the Paris Kurdish Institute and the Kurdish Library in Stockholm. The Kurdish language has been taught at Paris INALCO's Department of Kurdology since 1983.

Kurdish migration to Europe accelerated and as a result during the 1980s, the number of Kurds in European countries grew significantly. Many of the Kurdish activists settled in the Scandinavian countries and Sweden became a centre of Kurdish cultural activities in the late 1970s and 1980s. In contrast with the chaotic and repressive political period vis-à-vis the Kurdish language in the Middle East and Turkey, the exiled Kurds and political refugees began to produce literary works in the Kurdish language and contributed to the development of modern Kurdish literature. This came about as a result of the efforts of Kurdish activists leaving behind their commitment to political militancy and devoting their time to producing literary works. Authors such as Mehmet Emin Bozarslan, Rojen Barnas, Mehmed Uzun, Mahmut Baksi, Rohat Alakom, Firat Cewheri, Cigerxwîn, among others, continuously produced work in the Kurdish language. This new generation of Kurdish writers organized themselves in cultural and political associations, such as Yekitiya Nivîskaren Kurd (Federation of Kurdish Authors in Stockholm), Komela Nivîskaren Kurd Swêdî (Association of Kurdish Authors in Sweden) and the Kurdish Institute of Paris (Alakom, 1991: 16–20). Other Kurdish artists who escaped the persecution they faced in Turkey and settled in Europe included film director Yılmaz Güney, who following his escape from prison moved to Paris in 1981 and produced his two influential films, *Yol*

(*The Road*, 1982) and *Duvar* (*The Wall*, 1983) in France. He won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1982 for *Yol* and remained in Paris until his death on 9 September 1984.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a number of cultural journals and political magazines were established in Europe by Kurdish activists to promote the development of Kurdish language and its use in literary and artistic works, including *Pale* (1978, journal), *Armanc* (1979, journal), *Hevi* (1981, children's magazine), *Berbang* (1982, journal), *Pêseng* (1983, journal). Several publishing houses were also established in this period, including Wesanxana Roja Nû (1979) and Wesanxana Deng (1980), which published works of Kurdish classical literature and children's books. These publishing houses published important new work by Kurdish authors, including works by poets Şêrko Bêkes, Cigerxwîn and Rojen Barnas, and novels by Mehmet Uzun, Mahmut Baksi, Mehmet Emin Bozarslan and Firat Ceweri, which in the subsequent years contributed to Kurdish cultural reawakening. In addition, artistic performances (cinema, music and Kurdish literature) have become commonplace in many West European countries and contributed to the development of the feeling of belonging to the Kurdish nation among the diaspora Kurdish community.

From the early 1980s, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) also began establishing a presence in many of the West European countries and organized among the Kurdish communities there. An important aspect of the PKK's activism revolved around culture and at the start its 'cultural activities were comprised of the music group Koma Berxwedan (The Resistance Group), which was formed in 1981 in Germany' and in 1983 a cultural organization, Hunerkom (Association of Artists), was established in Germany, which organized activities to promote Kurdish cultural development and revival (Gunes, 2012: 113). Kurdish diaspora in Europe remained influential in the production and consumption of Kurdish culture. The London Kurdish Film Festival has regularly been held since 2001 (Gündoğdu, 2010: 9–36). In the past two decades, Kurdish film festivals started to be held in Berlin, Geneva, Paris and Vienna. A Kurdish cultural festival attended by many Kurds from European countries has been held annually in Germany since 1992 (Koçer, 2014: 476).

Another significant development that took place in the diaspora was the development of Kurdish media. A milestone was achieved when Kurdish-language television broadcasts started in 1995. This began when MED TV, the first Kurdish-language television channel, was established, with a licence from the UK's Independent Television Commission and began broadcasting

from its studios in Denderleuw, Belgium. However, MED TV's licence was revoked in March 1999, but a new channel, Medya TV, broadcast between 1999 and 2004, and following its closure, Roj TV between 2004 and 2012. Kurdish-language broadcasting has continued by Nûçe TV (2012) and Stêrk TV (2012) and Med Nûçe (2013). Television channels in Iraqi Kurdistan also began broadcasting in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Currently, there are several channels in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, including Kurdistan TV, Kurdsat, NRT, Newroz, Rudaw, among others (Hassanpour, 1996; Keles, 2015). Another channel, Kurdı, dedicated to broadcasting mainly cultural and artistic content, was established by the Paris Kurdish Institute and broadcast from France between 27 April 2009 and 31 December 2012. More recently, a Diyarbakir-based children's channel, Zarok TV, has been broadcasting in the Kurdish language since 21 March 2015.

In Turkey, a similar process of institutional development in the area of culture took place with the establishment of the Mesopotamian Cultural Centre (NÇM) in Beyoglu, Istanbul, in 1991. It had the objective of promoting Kurdish culture and arts and became an important centre of Kurdish cultural development. It organized music, theatre, cinema and folk dancing classes, as well as many cultural events and performances. The music groups Koma Rojhîlat, Koma Çiya, Koma Gulen Xerzan, Koma Amed, Koma Agire Jiyan were established as part of the NÇM and they played a leading role in the popularization of Kurdish language music. Another cultural centre, MEDKOM, also based in Beyoğlu, made a significant contribution to the cultural life of Kurds in Istanbul, forming a rich archive of works in theatre, cinema and especially music. Currently, Tev-Çand (Mesopotamian Democratic Movement for Culture and Arts, 2010) is active in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, as well as in the diaspora and one of the most significant institutions that contributes to the development of Kurdish culture.

Hence, from the mid-1990s onwards, Kurdish cultural and artistic activities began to take place more in the Kurdish regions in Turkey. This was facilitated by the establishment of several cultural centres during the 1990s, as well as newspapers and journals in Kurdish. Several high-profile Kurdish writers and musicians, such as Mehmed Uzun, Aram Tigran, Ciwan Haco, Sivan Perwer, Berken Bereh, who worked and produced in Europe were allowed to visit Turkey and perform and participate in festivals, coinciding with the Kurdish cultural awakening in Turkey. After the Kurdish parties began to take control of municipalities in the south-eastern and eastern provinces in Turkey in 1999, the ground for the revival of Kurdish culture was strengthened.

While the Kurdish space witnessed a cultural and social revolution since the beginning of the 2000s, some cities in Turkey including Diyarbakir, Mardin, Batman, Van and Dersim became a collective space of cultural expressions, despite all state pressure and obstructions. Mardin Biennale has been regularly organized since 2014 with the participation of international artists and it managed to become a significant attraction centre for the entire Kurdish region in Turkey. The Diyarbakir Book Fair has been regularly held since 2012 and the Amed Book Fair has been organized by Diyarbakir Municipality Council since 2015. The Yılmaz Güney Kurdish Film Festival has been organized in Batman since 2011. Diyarbakir became the most important place of Kurdish cultural production and distribution, with art galleries active not only in the cultural sphere but also in contemporary arts. We can then say that in these years, Kurdish music, linguistic studies, literature, cinema, contemporary arts, theatre, popular culture and gastronomy has managed to produce cultural and symbolic capital and contributed to the formation of a new Kurdish cultural memory (Sustam, 2016a: 152–9).

Also, in recent years, many new Kurdish-language journals and magazines have been published, including *Qijika Reş* (post-colonial anarchist journal), *Kovara Derûnnasiyê: Psychology Kurdî* (the first Kurdish psychology journal), *Wêje û Rexne* (academic journal of criticism), *Zarema* (journal of criticism), *Democratic Modernity* (journal of political theory), *PopKurd* (journal of popular culture), *Kund* (literary criticism), *Golîk* (comic), *Ziryab* (journal of music), *Derwaze* (Kurdish journal of social sciences and humanities), among others. New theatre groups have been established, including Sermola Performans, Şa Performans, Teatra Jiyana Nû, Tov Şano. Stand-up comedians, such as Murat Batgî and Mehmet Erbey, regularly perform in Kurdish regions as well as in western Turkish cities.

Cultural and artistic activities in Iraqi Kurdistan flourished with the establishment of de facto Kurdish autonomous rule in Iraq in 1991, which provided the fertile ground for Kurds to return from exile and produce in their own country. In Iraqi Kurdistan, after 1991, universities and schools of art were founded, all corresponding to factors that contributed to the flow of works of art, especially in literature, cinema and music, towards the region. In the past two decades, film festivals and other cultural events have become commonplace also in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Film festivals in Sulaymaniyah and Duhok are now well established and take place annually, with the participation of Kurdish films as well as films from many other countries. The International Erbil Book Fair is organized annually and attracts many

publishing houses. In addition, many music, theatre and cultural festivals are held, and the cultural life of the region has flourished.

Works of art in other Kurdish spaces as Iran and Syria did not show much difference when compared to the ones in Turkey, while those in Iraq and diaspora were products of a more independent atmosphere. Despite this, cultural activities have been taking place. For example, the Meriwan International Theatre Festival that has been held for the last thirteen years. Iranian Kurdish filmmakers, such as Bahman Ghobadi, Hassan Sonboli, Keywan Karimi and Rahim Zabihi, remain active and produce films that narrate the stories of Kurdish people, despite the censorship of the regime (Moradi, 2002). Since the emergence of a de facto Kurdish autonomous region in Syria, there has been a reinvigoration in the Kurdish artistic and cultural activities. The autonomous administration organizes many cultural activities despite the conditions of warfare. For instance, Rojava Film Commune organized the International Kobanê Film Festival (Festîvala Fîlman a Navneteweyî ya Kobanê) in Kobanê in November 2018, on the fifty-eighth anniversary of the Amudê Cinema fire, which resulted in the death of more than 200 Kurdish children and is a significant traumatic event in the history of Syrian Kurds (HawarNews, 2018). Similarly, the Rojava Culture and Arts Festival is also regularly organized since 2014. Cultural activities are organized by Tev-Çand (Art and Culture Movement) since 2012. Tev-Çand has established an autonomous structure in all cantons of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

Kurdish Cultural Production: From Victimization and Trauma to Subalternity and Rebellion

The militant cultural environment of the 1970s gave way to a cultural resistance that leaned on the collective memory. The distinct periods in the development of Kurdish culture highlighted above also depict cultural rituals through which a new Kurdish subjectivity was born. Advances and amendments in the cultural sphere somehow both described and problematized changing periods of the Kurdish space, transforming it into the memory and narrative of a people. Music is at the core of the Kurdish political subject that flourished in the diaspora. The new Kurdish music stems from the *dengbêj* (bard) tradition and a new generation of singers, including Aram Tigran, Şivan Perwer, Nizamettin Ariç, Ciwan Haco, Leyla İşxan, Brader, followed this tradition in their songs, which mainly narrated 'longing, pain, elegy,

rebellion and mourning' of the spirit of statelessness (*bê welat*) (Nezan et al., 1996; Scalbert-Yücel, 2009; Sustam, 2012).

Rebellious and militant music incorporated around the culture of '*kom*' (group) that appeared in the 1980s was, on the other hand, accepted as part of the ideological culturalism of the time. The period of *kom*s, including, among others, Koma Berxwedan, Koma Amed, Koma Gulên Xerzan, Koma Dengê Azadî and Agirê Jiyan, united the militant-protest Kurdish music with the traditional folk-dancing culture (*govend*) and emphasized the idea of rebellion for the national cause.[1] *Kom*s dominated the Kurdish musical production during the 1980s and 1990s but began to decline during the 2000s as more individual artists began to take centre stage in musical productions. This development increased the diversity in the Kurdish musical scene as new artists, such as Rojda, Çar Newa, Metin-Kemal Kahraman, Ferec, Siya Şevê, Bajar, Ahmet Aslan, Mikail Aslan, Hivron, Burhan Berken, Bê Sinur, Mem Ararat, Koma Zelal, among others, launched their albums.

During the 2000s, Kurdish arabesque gained more visibility with the formation of a Kurdish popular culture (Sustam, 2016a). The genre had already existed before and Emin Arbani, Bismilli Zeko, Şehrîbana Kurdî, Beşir Kaya, Şahê Bedo, Awazê Bazîdê, Murad û Fate, Zinar Sozdar among others, had already performed Kurdish arabesque in Kurdish regions (Diyarbakir, Van, Mardin, Dersim) during the 1990s and 2000s. Besides, arabesque singers making Kurdish music in cities like Diyarbakir bear all the traces of migration, victimization, social pathology and conflict and conveyed the language of the new generation fed by the culture of mourning. The origin of the emergence of a counter-cultural movement and Kurdish popular culture in Turkey can be traced to the presence of Kurds in all social spheres of big cities. Popular music such as 'Kurdish arabesque' carries the images of the subcultural resistance of Kurdish subjectivity and places minority decolonial codes on popular culture. When we speak of Kurdish arabesque music, it seems important for us at first to explain that this music trend is a counter-culture of a musical branch from the Kurdish slums in Diyarbakir, or Istanbul, and is excluded by forced political migration and the repressive state into public space during the 1980s and 1990s.

This genre is a production of the popular culture of the following Kurdish arabesque pop music under the influence of the cultural industry of Turkish arabesque music of the 1970s and 1980s. Even if the arabesque music uses the form of a heartbroken victim to express its resonance to expel and expatriate,

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1 For a discussion on traditional Kurdish music, see Merwanî (2010).

it still lends a voice to the cultural revolt from below and against the hierarchy of the elite culture in Turkey. The culture of arabesque music is stigmatized at a given moment by the state institutionalization, which wanted to reject this as 'shantytown culture' (Özbek, 1991). Kurdish arabesque music is also connected to the lives of people from the shanty towns and popular stereotypes and metaphorically represents political positions and experiences of Kurdish migrants in the dominant and urban society while making anti-colonial practice and subculture visible (see Hebdige, 1979). This tradition evolved and new musicians who speak from within the resistance, figures like Serhado, Sherif Ömeri, Dillin Hoox, Ado û Zara, Shakur 93, Mohsen Farhang, Tolhildan, MM47, Rap Er and Dj Mert, make Kurdish political arabesque rap in Europe or at the outskirts of Istanbul. This new situation uniting the *dengbêj* tradition with the Western sounds of the modern times can well be called the spring of Kurdish music ranging from popular culture to sociopolitical resistance.

It must be stated that traumatic events have always been the centre of Kurdish artistic production and the post-1990 period is not an exception. This situation that mostly shows itself in Kurdish contemporary arts and music drives forward artistic productions as political criticism intertwined with a political aesthetics and an anti-war language (Imago Mundi, 2017; Sustam, 2016a). Trauma, at the hands of the artist and the singer, ceases to be a social pathology and gets into the form of the counter-memory of a language of resistance. While the political arts of the 1990s mostly dealt with victimization, an artistic perspective that became political in the 2000s leans on the experience of trauma and turns victimization into the language of resistance. This is also related to the carnivalesque curative effect of art, healing the social memory afflicted by war and destruction.

In other words, while melancholy and depression were re-established as part of an artistic attitude, we witness the restitution of trauma and the social eclipse of reason with a sarcastic language. In line with Şener Özmen's important book *Travma ve Islahat* (*Trauma and Reform*, 2007), and especially his work 'Schizo-Notebook', the irony that lies in the question 'why can an artist in Diyarbakir not make HD quality works of art?' both reveals the situation of an artist who produces in the midst of war and problematizes the subaltern position of a low-resolution attitude beneath the paving stones (for a concept 'subalternity', see Spivak, 1997a). Undoubtedly highlighting impossibilities created by the conditions of war, this attitude makes a clear reference to the political signs art has created in an atmosphere of trauma: 'Diyarbakir had a trauma. We cannot expect people to be in their right

minds afterwards. What appears now is a schizophrenic character, meaning that the language is also schizophrenic' (Özmen, 2011: 28).

Here the discourse of trauma, as a testimony, becomes a politicized memory and shapes the attitude of the artist. Trauma becomes a narrative that might as well be the spine of artistic production, especially cinema. The visual power of the trauma narrative does not appear to create further victimization, rather it is an emphasis on the subaltern position of the Kurdish subject in the eyes of the artists. Within the same perspective, it can be said that the artisanal or subversive artistic translations of the artistic experience that deal with trauma not only have a literary and philosophical origin but also politicize artistic forms of trauma within the context of social relationality, while arts in general question the social accordingly (Benjamin, 2011). Artists focusing on cultural and artistic production, in response to the crisis in the sovereign cultural sphere created by music and cinema, added a unique quality to the ontological dimension to resistance in the Kurdish space. Arts and artists witnessing their time, amounting to a 'testifying' of an era, both multiplied the political memory of the reproduced works of art and added pure symbolic power to resistance.

It would be enough to look at the short film by Fırat Yavuz *Toros Canavrı* (*Toros Monster*, 2011), which focuses on the forced disappearances of the 1990s, to illustrate this reality. Many Kurdish political activists were arrested by shadowy organizations linked to the Turkish state security services, such as JİTEM (Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-terrorism), and taken away in a white Renault Toros to unknown locations.[2] The bodies of some activists were recovered in remote places but many of them have been officially classified as disappeared and the whereabouts of their remains have never been established until this day. Although the contribution of trauma studies and psychoanalysis in cinema to consciously or unconsciously decipher the unknown might well be considered as the memory of a certain period, it also

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2 The Kurds use the phrase of 'dirty war' to describe the violence unleashed on them by the 'deep' state and various of its agents of violence. Since the military coup of the 1980s, state violence has infiltrated into the daily lives of Kurds in Turkey's Kurdish regions. The consequences of this 'dirty war' in the Kurdish regions were manifold and included the disappearances of people, burning of villages, murders by unknown assailants. The mothers and relatives of the victims of violence have organized since May 1995 and are known as the 'Saturday Mothers'. They have been campaigning to discover the fates of their loved ones and have been organizing a weekly sit-in in front of Istanbul's Galatasaray School in Beyoğlu. The 'deep state' refers to the coercive power resulting from the use of a system that relies on state apparatuses and semi-state apparatuses such as Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MİT), the army, paramilitary groups such as JİTEM and other special combat units. Many of these organizations went far beyond the legally allowed use of force and acted with impunity.

reveals the political perspective of artistic and cultural productions, which mutually nurture the spirit that enhances the formation of an archive of testimonies.

We can see that this is also happening in Ali Bozan's contemporary art production titled 'Bu Bir Toros Değildir' (This Is Not a Toros), which includes intertwining narratives in close reading (Sustam, 2016b). The narrative of pain and trauma that is at the core of the perspective of these works both examines today and reminds us of other cultural memories from the era of *dengbêj*s, turning them into a great source of inspiration for artists' imagination. It can then be said that traumas and *serhildan*s (insurrections) constitute the visual memory of artists and cultural actors, being the milestone of their works wrapped up in the spirit of their times. Despite the destruction and wounds in Kurdish consciousness created by the social pathology caused by violence and repression targeting Kurdish people in Turkey, it is noteworthy that works of such artists, being the actors of a stateless people, were shown in important galleries, archived in museums and participated and received awards in international festivals. The work of individual artists who have lived and produced in Diyarbakir and Istanbul have been exhibited in Tate Modern in London (Erkan Özgen, Wonderland), Georges Pompidou in Paris (Halil Altındere, Dengbejs).

From 1995 onwards, we witness the emergence of a new generation of artists making an entrance in the artistic scene, and a new artistic situation occurring in the Kurdish regions of Turkey and around internationally recognized institutions. These include artists and filmmakers associated with the NÇM's Mezopotamya Gösteri Sanatları (Mesopotamia Performing Arts): Kazım Öz (director), Şener Özmen (author, artist), Kawa Nemir (poet, translator), Nazmi Kırık (actor), Şermola Performans (theatre group) and Aynur Doğan (musician), whose work has greatly contributed to the development of Kurdish art and culture.

A quick look at the works of art created by Kurdish artists of the war generation of the 1990s reveals that their works revolve around inquiries of identity and traumas of war. While the generation of the 1990s made use of collective memory through resentment, an anti-colonial reading and the language of artistic counter-violence emerges in the works of the subsequent generations who, despite adopting a singular and distinct language, were not so far away from the influence of the previous eras. Although all generations manifest relationality, continuity and ruptures, works of the generation of the 1990s were not so distinct from the arts, literature, theatre of the post-1960

exile generation as they, too, assumed a new claim over their local spaces and struggles.

Bê Welat: Artistic and Cultural Productions as Spaces of Memory, Statelessness and Deterritorialization

The language of war and violence shaped by the 'disappearances under custody and murders by unknown assailants' constituted the 'dirty' memory of the 1990s. Not only did it reveal the trauma that afflicted the Kurds' sense of community but also rendered visible forms of epistemic counter-violence that reflect on any artistic, cinematographic and literary work created by the Kurdish artists. The most important features of works created by Kurdish artists revolve around counter-violence and the theme of a stateless society.

Various artists in Diyarbakir and Mardin have continued making contemporary art, cinema and literary performances relating to the 'White Toros' that symbolizes the forced disappearances and murders by unknown assailants. This symbolization technique depicts the identity of the 'unknown' assailant as the car itself and thus reflects on cinema and contemporary art by means of relational aesthetics. The image of the 'White Toros' car is interesting in the sense that it evokes a ghost of warmongering governments' bellicist memory. While the entire panoptic system of the 1990s is based on the state of emergency practised in the Kurdish populated regions, White Toros is an element of violence evoking a parallel reading of the phenomenon of loss, the unrestricted use of sovereign violence, disappearance, oppression and threat. White Toros becomes the symbol of a ghost that is in contact with the wounded body of the Kurdish subject, as well as an object of fear used by the hierarchy of violence and the symbol of the colonial state in the memory of the disappeared people. It is also important to emphasize here that this object of fear is also a war tool. The car thus reminds us of the despotic violence of the state and the disappeared children of the Saturday Mothers. Yet, this is not art's first move against the rough mechanisms of the regime and its practice of violence. The work 'Untitled' (1996), co-produced by Şener Özmen and Halil Altındere, acts as a report on the burnt-down Kurdish villages and comprised two folders. The first folder included the Turkish IDs of the artists, while the other had the names and photos of the Kurdish villages burnt down and evicted in the 1990s by the Turkish army and paramilitary groups.

Symbols of the despotic war machine of the time were morphed into artistic works constituting a collective topos, while White Toros symbolized the forced disappearances of political activists not only as the symbol of a special war apparatus but also the core of the culture of fear generated by state violence that shaped the collective memory of Kurdish people. This decolonial artistic line of resistance peculiar to Kurdish artists infiltrating in the modern applications of identity politics in Turkey paved the way for an epistemological rupture and contributed to the emergence of the political language of the Kurdish subalterns that can be called political deviance. The concepts of deviation and cross-bordering might provide us with significant tools to expand the discussion. With reference to the readings on Howard S. Becker's (1963) *Outsiders*, speaking on the 'silent' memory of the Other, as well as situating the experience of being an outsider of the dominant norms, enhances the destruction of the restrictive normality judgement and points towards the position of Kurdish artistic works. The language of the Kurdish space is now a part of a new grammatic memory, unlike that of the 1990s and the diaspora. Today, Kurdish cultural works in Turkey cannot be restricted to a counter-cultural reflex. From within this memory, they create their own micro-identity resistance and economic and intellectual capital centred on the popular resistance associated with the Newroz festival, *serhildan*s of the 1990s and the social economy they created.

It must also be stated that Kurds now have their own market and institutions, especially in the area of television and culture, which influence artistic productions. For example, supported by the Diyarbakir Municipal Council as part of the International Kurdistan Art Meeting, 'The Kurdistan Exhibition' (organized by Barış Seyitvan) was held between 2 and 10 February 2015 with the participation of 230 artists. It must be emphasized that, despite the repression, a movement towards the accumulation of new cultural capital has started in the Kurdish regions, and this might turn into a market encompassing Kurds from other parts of Kurdistan and independent from the Turkish artistic market.

It is indeed true that the body of cinematographic and musical works by Kurdish artists in Turkey acts as an important laboratory, despite all political pressures. The language of the Kurdish cinema focusing on victimization until the end of the 1990s started to change in the new period and a new political cinematographic language orienting towards images and symbolizations that shift the attention from victimization to an active decolonial subject appeared after the 2000s. The documentary film *Bakûr* (*North*, 2015), by Çayan Demirel and Ertuğrul Mavioğlu about the lives of the PKK

guerrillas, was delisted and banned from the Istanbul Film Festival in 2015. Though censored in Turkey, the film was shown in international festivals and shared on online platforms and in alternative cinema halls. Let us add that the documentary genre is used more than the genre of fictional film in Kurdish cinema (Koçer and Candan, 2016). This is because the documentary films use shots from memorial archives, refer to the real events and in doing so restore them on the screen as well as interpreting them with current political events in the Kurdish area.

The language used in *Bakûr* and *Nû Jîn* (*A New Life*, 2015), a documentary directed by Veysi Altay that narrated the Kurds' resistance in Kobanê against ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), does not depict the victimization of a people, but the visuality of a political cause nestled in the ontology of resistance. Especially the sequences featuring women's bodies and political stance examine the positioning of women's micropolitical resistance against masculine violence in Kurdish society. Rather than making political cinema *Nû Jîn* politicizes the cinematographic language and symbolizes the space when it speaks on behalf of a dual micro space (Kurdish and women) under the guidance of the slogan 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadî' (Woman, Life, Freedom) closely associated with the Kurdish resistance in Kobanê. This is where the respective artistic reflexes of the 1990s and the post-2000s draw apart. Despite the ongoing resistance, the language of the 1990s seems to be wrapped up in the feeling of victimization, just as the memory of being exiled. Documentaries narrating the stories of Kurdish regions of Turkey and Rojava (Kurdish regions in Syria) treat symbols of women's emancipation as the expression of social awakening. Women's voices and presence are rendered visible in the grammatic rage of the slogan used by the speaking women addressing male oppression.

The cinematic and artistic productions of the post-2000 period rely more on singular installations and the collective narration. The language used in cinema, literature and art in this period features the epistemic definitions of the author himself/herself, the positive energy of the resistance culture, the mundane life of the neglected ordinary Kurds, rather than the idealized Kurdish subject. The main protagonist of the new generation of Kurdish directors is an ordinary Kurd on the street – who can be also seen as an anti-hero – and his traumatic social memory. In other words, the language, life and body of the marginalized segment of the society (women, the village idiot and homeless children) come to the fore, enabling the power of art to critique the male-dominated social world to emerge. It can aptly be said that this analysis is valid for literature, music and contemporary arts. For example,

Kawa Nemir's poetry collection *Selpakfiroş* (*Selpak Tissue Seller*, 2003) narrates the misfortunes of Kurdish children, a phenomenon of the 1990s in the central Taksim district of Istanbul and portrays the traces of the social pathologies of forced migration. The book makes an analogy between the 'Selpak tissue sellers' of modern times and *zembilfiroş* (basket seller) of the ancient times that features in classical Kurdish poetry and in doing so elucidates the continuity of migrant experiences.

His poetry, through navigating the street life of Kurdish immigrants in Istanbul, describes how the trauma of the lower classes becomes differentiated. The same theme is also explored in contemporary art installations, such as in *Bridge* (2006), which was a photographic exhibition by Ahmet Öğüt and Pilvi Takala. The video of Fikret Atay, *Rebels of the Dance* (2002), which looks at the lives of Kurdish children living near ATMs, also deals with the social pathologies of migration. While the sovereign historical interpretations alter when the subaltern starts to speak, just as Spivak (1997a, 1997b) says, this political deviance also activates other tools on the side of the subaltern. Here, art fills the rhetorical gaps and endeavours to narrate micro historiography against the macro history. The Kurdish subaltern speaks, leaves stains and destructs certain parts of the central public story (Özmen, 2007). The Kurdish subaltern who speaks responds to the central meta-narrative with a ruinous voice (Sustam, 2012).

Therefore, social themes tackled by artistic and cultural works are archived in the language of their own temporality within the micro and macro historiography. What is at stake is not just a social revolution in the Kurdish social and political space, but an overall molecular revolution including the cultural and artistic sphere, as well as life itself. This reality is wrapped around the phantom of institutional life, while the insurrection peculiar to the molecular revolution settles in daily life, acting as the visual aspect of a political domain that actively builds a position to pave the way for alternative emancipatory spaces (women's liberation, LGBTIQ, ecology, childhood trauma, alterity etc.). The short film *Kurneqiz* (*Neither a Boy nor a Girl*, 2016), directed by Gökhan Yalçınkaya under the production of Rosida Koyuncu, is the first film in Kurdish cinema to explore social gender codes and the exclusion of LGBTIQ individuals from the masculine living spaces. The film tells the story of a Kurdish transsexual boy and was shown around the world in international queer film festivals.

Art exhibitions were not the main focus of many of the art centres established in Diyarbakir in the past decade. Rather, their efforts have focused on providing artistic education by organizing pedagogical programmes for

the public and creating a space to nurture local artists. Journals, cinema, art and theatre, especially in the Kurdish space, went beyond the recurrent themes of the nation-state, diaspora, colonialism and the nostalgic paradigm and oriented towards more daily issues as the women's movement, ecology, feminism, queer studies, daily life, academic problems, migration, children, psychology and so on. This clearly shows that the discussion peculiar to the 1990s leaning on the need to prove oneself and the Kurdish subjectivity transformed itself, and the language of the 2000s Kurdish space ceased to be a language about the victim; instead, it became a subject on its own account through subsequent speech acts and turned into the memory of creation and resistance formed as part of a micro-narrative.

Kurdish Cinema: Cultural Counter-power and Political Aesthetics

In this section, without presenting a detailed analysis of films, I will discuss the memory, changing narrative techniques and aesthetic relationality of Kurdish cinema. Rather than engaging with the questions of whether 'a Kurdish cinema exists or not' or 'when it was initiated', I will discuss the language and image axis used in Kurdish cinema to highlight the influences of certain sociopolitical events and the signs that constitute its ontological universe. The cultural and political baggage of the Kurdish cinema and its long-term relations with the diaspora also determine its cinematographic language around the narrative of 'deterritorialization' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980). Kurdish cinema both leans on a general sense of 'statelessness' (*bê welat* – without a homeland) and a collective assemblage around the exile narrative, dealing with the metaphysical narrative of the Kurdish immigrant caught between the city and country, and borders (Arslan, 2009).[3] Kurdish cinema has an ironic language at the cultural edges of Kurdish subalternity and a melancholic universe of images. Poetic artistry reflected on linguistic realities, pathological mental frontiers, the political sensitivity of a cross-border situation all contribute to the formation of a hybrid language in Kurdish cinema with an anti-colonial circulation.

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3 *Bê welat* literally means 'being without a homeland', but here we use it to refer to the sense employed by the Kurds to define the colonial practice and statelessness of Kurdish territoriality. *Bê welat* is a practice and theory of Kurdish 'minor cultures in resistance' and includes semiotics of the refusal of identity against all forms of domination and destruction. Through works of art *bê welat* proposes to unfold reflexivity and to make visible minor cultures and languages and developing counter-powers based on memory of decolonial subculture.

Looking at the brief history of the Kurdish cinema, we witness a political production technique influenced by a militant sense of responsibility (Smets, 2015). Deleuze (1985: 39) argues that film proceeds as a relational text that harbours and structures production, movement and syntax. With respect to the political cinema of Kurdish director Yılmaz Güney, Deleuze states what differentiates him from the revolutionary cinema of Rocha is his micropolitical stance and political image that erases borders and goes beyond the urban–rural dichotomy. We can attribute these relational aesthetics to all Kurdish films. In Güney's films, the personal cause is immediately linked to the sociopolitical sphere and the national consciousness (Deleuze, 1985: 223–84).

The dialogues in many of the Kurdish films produced in the late 1970s and early 1980s, such as Güney's *Sürü* (*The Herd*, 1979), *Yol* (*The Road*, 1982) and *Duvar* (*The Wall*, 1983), were in Turkish. Of course, this was not due to the director's political stance, but rather because, despite being a Kurd himself, Güney did not know the Kurdish language and could not shoot films in it as its public use was prohibited in Turkey. When he was asked about the reasons why he made his films in Turkish in an interview by Chris Kutschera – among others – Güney states that Kurdish was prohibited, and he was 'assimilated'. Not being able to shoot a movie in a banned language and speak one's own mother tongue are both conditions that reveal the very history of Kurdish cinema (Kutschera, 1983). He further elaborates on this discussion when he adds that he might nevertheless be considered a 'Kurdish director' (Othman, 1983). Güney, himself, spoke of the impossibility of dubbing Kurdish at the time in his films shot in Europe during his interview with Kutschera (1983):

> *The Herd*, in fact, is the story of the Kurdish people, but I could not even use the Kurdish language in this film. If we had used Kurdish, all those who collaborated on this film would have been put in prison. In the case of *Yol*, the main thing was to focus on Diyarbekir, Urfa and Siirt. Although the film was released in Europe, I did not manage to do all dubbing in Kurdish. I tried to create this atmosphere by dubbing, by music.

His films mostly leaned on two stances: the political frame of the Kurdish individual endeavouring to survive in harsh geography and political environment, and the narrative of victimization soaked in the cinematographic frames marking the entrance of the oppressed colonized Kurd in the world scene. Nizamettin Ariç, who settled in Europe after the military coup in

Turkey in 1980, uses the Kurdish language in the dialogues in his film *Klamek Jî bo Beko* (*An Ode to Beko*, 1992). Amir Hassanpour (2006) also situates the emergence of Kurdish cinema within the post-1980 period, pointing to the common temporality of Güney's *Yol* and Ariç's *Klamek Jî bo Beko*.

Starting from the mid-2000s, the language of Kurdish cinema began to change. A critical engagement with the new subjective conditions and a more personal language of the aesthetic regime became visible in cinema. Kurdish cinema of the 1990s, with its limited archive fed by the minimalist victimization narrative of the times, screened the melancholic world of images of the displaced Kurds longing for their lost home. The new generation of directors first intervened in this discourse in the 2000s and then dealt with the lives of lower-class Kurds (street vendors, construction workers, poor Kurds, etc.) popularly referred to as *Kurdên perawêz* (Kurds at the bottom). The new generation of directors and artists do not deal with the retrospective narrative of a national cause but link the micro memory of Kurdish subjects to the political scene. In that sense, in the 2000s, we mostly witness a realist or hyper-realist artistic stance and films orienting towards relational aesthetics. Early Kurdish cinema presents a wide variety of representations that depict an atmosphere laden with a melancholic feeling of victimization with respect to the national cause. Individual narratives depicting the social existential world or a critical approach towards political struggle also emerge in films such as *Bahoz* (*The Storm*, 2008, director Kazım Öz), *Zer* (director Kazım Öz), *Min Dît* (*Before Your Eyes*, 2009, director Miraz Bazer) *Press* (2010, director Sedat Yılmaz), *Dengê Bavê Min* (*Voice of My Father*, 2012, directors Orhan Eskiköy and Zeynel Doğan), *Meş* (*Walking*, 2011, director Şiyar Abdi) and *Kurneqiz* (2016, director Gökhan Yaçınkaya).

In these films, the political matter regarding the conflict is personalized and framed within a subjective perspective, while the personalized memory folds over and is framed within the political cause. *Bahoz*, for example, narrates the story of the *serhildan* (resurrection) generation of the 1990s, their emergence in universities in western Turkey, the reasons behind their choice to join the PKK guerrillas, as well as life in Istanbul slums in the 1990s. In *Azad*, the subject of the pathological memory of a child raised under war conditions and his alienated body in the midst of the city walls of the city he migrated to is explored. *Meş* narrates the post-coup years in Turkey (the 1980s) through the eyes of the village idiot and children and discusses the issue of normality and abnormality in the post-coup period. This illustration of the political scene also visualizes the eclipse of reason created by the growing hegemony of the image.

In other words, what comes to the fore is not an emphasis on the national sentiment, but the narrative of the political cause or the transformation periods of post-conflict Kurdish subjectivity. For instance, *Dengê Bavê Min* deals with the massacre of Kurdish Alevis in Maraş in 1978 from a simple and personal memorial enquiry and the personal history of a father. The film revolves around a decolonial reading based on the narration of personal history through mother-and-son characters, and finally reaches its culmination point in the last scene. In this film, we witness the prevalence of a hybrid language that does not polarize the representative characters or lean on victimization, while the very framing reinforced by artistic narrative forms is politicized. Kurdish cinema tackling traditional social memory, politics, nostalgia, communality and the crisis of the modern narrative caught between the dichotomy of urban and rural does not neglect the subjectivity of ordinary Kurds but situates it within a colonial narrative that preserves an oppositional stance.

The film also has certain oedipal bearings in the way it narrates because, for the first time in Kurdish cinema, it depicts the story of a frustrated protagonist who delves into the genealogy of his family. The resolution of a mystery (the memory of the hidden Maraş massacre) between the mother and the son with the voice recordings of the deceased father is over-personalized in a way that renders visible its almost immediate political articulations. While trauma is treated in the film in the political-geographic space, the existence of a lost language, that is, the Maraş variant of the Kurdish language, is also unravelled through the memory of the parents. We see that the new generation of Kurdish filmmakers does not use a political frame, but rather the frame that is being politicized. The militant position shall not be read as loyalty to a political cause, however, as it is the attitude of the actor who delves into political reflexes of art.

As for the Kurdish cinema in Iranian Kurdistan, Bahman Ghobadi can be a significant reference point. In *Dema Hespên Serxweş* (*Time of the Drunken Horses*, 2001) the poor living conditions of children in the rural countryside are depicted. He deals with the themes of disabled children, poverty and smuggling with images of border control and colonialism that influence the daily lives of Kurds and constitute their political fate. Similarly, the guerrilla director Halil Uysal (Halil Dağ) is also an important figure in Kurdish cinema as the pioneer of guerrilla cinema (or 'the mountain cinema'). His films *Eyne Bejne* (*Tall Mirror*, 2002), shot in the Qandil mountains (in southern Kurdistan), and *Beritan* (2006) (the pseudonym of the Kurdish guerrilla Gülnaz Karataş) portray the mountain as a geography and a code

symbolizing national struggle and as a space of social revival (Smets and Akkaya, 2016). Acts of survival of a generation in the history of cinema starting from the 1990s until today shall be named a political situation and regarded as the attempt of a dissident people to form themselves through their own history of film. Made Omer's *Rawe Jinoke* (*Exorcism*, 1993), Hiner Saleem's *Long Live the Bride and the Liberation of Kurdistan* (1997) made in France and *My Sweet Pepper Land* (2013), Jaleel Zangana's *Khola Piza* (1998), Ali Kemal Çınar's *Veşartî* (*Secret*, 2015), among others, give us an idea of the ways Kurdish cinema makes use of the political frame in a symbolic aesthetic relationality (Sonboli, 2017).

In Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava) new cinematographic endeavours have been witnessed. The Rojava Film Commune, in particular, makes productions influenced by the French New Wave and the political cinema of Latin America with a focus on resistance and revolution. The camera in Rojava cinema turns towards the public life of the subject that situates itself within the political resistance – rather than fiction – and uses the documentary language to narrate the rage, resentment and joys of the Kurdish subject in the conflict zone. As such, the camera loses its fictional character and becomes a part of the truth-telling reflected on a political reading of the war front lines. In that sense, resistance cinema has become a part of the dynamics of the social movement since its foundation and delves into the codes of rebellion and emancipation with cinematographic narratives and a political-aesthetic approach.

Contemporary Art: The Don Quixotes of Kurdish Art

In this section, I will focus on the Kurdish contemporary art scene in the Kurdish space and its relations with the sub-culture's memory, firstly with a brief account on the Iraqi Kurdistan and then a longer comment on the artistic practices in Turkey. In the Iraqi Kurdish space, Sulaymaniyah and Erbil come to the fore as centres of artistic and cultural production. Exhibitions of local and international artists met art-lovers in 2018 in the Sulaymaniyah Contemporary Art's Museum and Erbil Media Hall, with the call by the Kurdistan Contemporary Art Platform. Helgurd Ahmed organized an exhibition in Sulaymaniyah on 31 October 2018 with waste petroleum products to raise awareness of the issues connected to the oil industry in Iraq and Kurdistan. There have indeed been many institutional endeavours especially with the support of the government of the Kurdistan region after 1991,

as well as the emergence of a new generation of artists. Azar Othman Mahmoud (Sulaymaniyah), Muhammad Saleh Rosramzada (Erbil), Jamal Penjweny (Sulaymaniyah), Sawar Mohamad Amin (Sulaymaniyah), Roshna Rasool (Sulaymaniyah), Hemn Hamed Şerif (Erbil), Barham Taib Hama (Sulaymaniyah), Zana Rasool Mohammed (Erbil), Julie Adnan (Kirkuk), Pshtewan Kamal Babakir (works with Shene Mohammed on kashkul projects in the American University of Sulaymaniyah) are among these video, photography, illustration and performance artists.

In Turkey, the new generation of artists includes Mahmut Celayir, Şener Özmen, Mehtap Baydu, Halil Altındere, Erkan Özgen, Cengiz Tekin, Berat Işık, Ahmet Öğüt, Fikret Atay, Fatoş Irwen, İhsan Oturmak, Ali Bozan, Mehmet Ali Boran, Deniz Aktaş, Nevin Aladag, Mehmet Çeper, Savas Boyraz and Zehra Doğan. Contemporary art practices in the Kurdish space are particularly striking as 'tools' to tinker with certain mnemonic narratives 'under the paving stones'. The artistic reading in conflict zones makes references to the fragmented memory of geography built on blood and destruction, adapting a grotesque and ironic language against the dystopia created by a paranoid regime. Works produced in this space have a political stance against the allegoric and idealized colonial art both in Kurdish cinema and the sovereign artistic domain. We can then say that the artistic works in the Kurdish space both have the anti-war spirit of intervention and deal with the conflict-related post-traumatic social perceptions and relations with the unique, non-involved micropolitical stance of the artist.

From *Şizo-Defter* (*Schizo-Notebook*, 1999) of Şener Özmen, written in the form of correspondences from Diyarbakir to Istanbul and embodying the periphery's critical approach to the centre, to *The Meeting or Bonjour Monsieur Courbet*, the Kurdish video co-produced by Şener Özmen and Cengiz Tekin, many artistic productions explore the aggressive relational network around the themes of wandering and errance. The latter, for instance, in its illustration of the figure of an aggressive revolutionary fool afflicted with political trauma and rebelling against the bourgeoisie – rather than the kind wanderer of Gustave Courbet – in rural Diyarbakir plays with and ridicules the concepts of terrorism and reality. The art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, drawing on the Nietzschean concept of resentment, states that it is the 'rage of a bad aesthetics' against the tendency in today's art towards the production of perfect arts (Didi-Huberman 1994: 67–8).

Contemporary arts, including productions with a decolonial language, need to make use of networks in transversal transitions, visual tools and the daily 'poor' materials to escape from the trap of institutionalization. In *Art*

Worlds Howard S. Becker (2006) calls this 'interaction'. Averring that artistic production is a process of (inter)actions among the artist, society, technical production and distribution apparatus, public, political environment, funders and so on, Becker states that this interaction is formed and sustained as part of a network system. Kurdish artists who are almost completely bereft of support – institutional or otherwise – are included in the itinerary of the contemporary arts through different tactics, agendas and networks in Istanbul and Europe. Mediation for the Kurdish contemporary artists is thus a double-edged sword (Imago Mundi, 2017). On one hand, they must confront certain identity politics in the phase of production due to being Kurdish, while on the other hand, they need to deal with the colonial language prevailing in the Turkish public sphere. Unidentifiability and ineffectiveness of arts in the Kurdish sphere, its exclusion from international biennials, the erasure of artistic practices under the weight of identity all contribute to its transformation into a mere ideological war apparatus.

We cannot yet talk about Kurdish 'resistance art', but we can very well indicate an artistic dynamic born out of resistance. *Dancer in the Dark* (2003) and *Stop! You Are Surrounded* (2004) by Berat Işık illustrate this point well. In a constant play with cult film images, *Dancer in the Dark* video installation uses a grotesque language questioning the eclipse of reason and darkness peculiar to the lynch culture and certain canonic forms with progressive sequences.[4] The video is nothing but a whining and speaking sound in the dark. This voice, with its desire to be seen and recognized, is the privacy and disruptive visibility of Kurdish. At one point, it turns into a scream: *Ho! Qey tu min nabînî!?* (Hey, do you not see me?) . . . *Ez li vir im!* (I'm here! 3,000 years later) *Ez li vir im!!!* (a mechanic voice).[5] This obtrusive scream in the Kurdish language on the dark background (*Ez li vir im*: I am here!) is the outcry of a people struggling to survive.

Tinica (2004), the video documentation by Fikret Atay, also works on this endeavour. *Tinica* is a story of post-migration Batman afflicted with poverty, suicides by women and the pressure of the paramilitary groups such as Hizbullah. The video is about a boy who enjoys himself in playing his make-shift tin battery on the 'rubbish mountains' of the city; a child body hit by both poverty and migration who has fun despite

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4 *Dancer in the Dark* video also refers to the last scene of the film directed by Lars von Trier featuring Björk.

5 'Hey, don't you see me? I am standing right before you! Hey, don't you see me? Hey, I am talking to you! I am here, right before you! Don't you see me? I am here. Right before you, I am here . . . 3,000 years later (with a mechanic voice), I am he-re . . .'

the ongoing conflict. The collective work of Şener Özmen and Erkan Özgen exhibited in Istanbul Modern in 2003, *Road to Tate Modern*, delves into the image of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza looking for Tate Modern lost in Kurdish mountains. It is no surprise that Özmen (2005: 132) calls them 'Kurdish chevaliers of the contemporary art'. The silent subject against the despotic machine of the sovereign points to the hysteric memory of the periphery and artists targeting the centre thus make a political point with the help of an absurd irony via Don Quixote and Sancho. The work merely presents the pathological states of the protagonist idly wandering around, while the desired journey of Sancho Panza, the companion of Don Quixote who witnesses the pain of the latter, from the 'wild' Kurdish mountains to the 'civilized' London streets, narrates the irreparable fate of the Other. In *Apriori gezi rehberi: İstanbul Guide*, which was exhibited in 2005 Istanbul Biennale, Şener Özmen defines himself and artists from Diyarbakir as 'Kurdish chevaliers of contemporary arts' with an ironic humour, which shall be read not as a determination, but the political text of a Don Quixote-like 'fool' or 'chevalier' who defies and searches for alternatives of the central artistic authority (Özmen, 2005: 132).

The contemporary art practice is not about telling the 'truth' or the 'right', but questioning the truth itself. Nicolas Bourriaud (1998) refers to the aesthetics of a new relational regime. Similarly, Kurdish artist Fatoş Irwen questions women and social gender identities in her work, defying the hegemonic 'social phallus' and masculine identity policies. In the collective exhibition, *Nehêle ez te Bieşînim* (2015, Don't Let Me Hurt You, curated by E. Sustam, M. Koyuncu, Stüdyo Açık, Istanbul), Irwen refers to women's rituals in her work called 'the pathological memory', an installation made out of her own hair that she kept for some time, depicting the obsessive hysterical moods of women. The work is a response to masculinity that oppresses women's bodies. *Blood Is Sweeter Than Honey* (2004), *fotonovelas* of Şener Özmen and Ahmet Öğüt including cartoons and fanzine stories, ironically illustrates the position of a 'cursed artist' from the Diyarbakir streets (inconsistent rage of the periphery) against the central art market, with icons not so far away from the pop-cultural readings of his time. The symbol of blood, as a ritual, in this co-produced work, is masochistically associated with the sweetness of honey, indicating the trauma of the Kurdish geography. It seems that the symbol of blood refers to reading on the oppression that Kurds are no stranger to, with all its pathologies. Indeed, a historical reading on the concept of blood reveals the long-term memory around the term in

the Kurdish geography (see, for instance, *Mexzena Xwînê* (*Blood Pot* by Renas Jiyan)).

Lastly, Ahmet Öğüt's *Stones to Throw* (2011), which was an art installation that used painted stones, plinths, photographs and FedEx bills and exhibited at Kunsthalle Lissabon, in Lisbon, reflects on Kurdish children's stoning of the police officers and invites us to ponder over violence and game in a timeless and gameless setting. The symbolism of the work refers to the political memory of Kurdish children clashing with the police on the streets of Diyarbakir during the 1990s and 2000s. The artist creates a defence strategy by drawing Hollywood cartoon characters on stones, transforming violence and police into a game for the Kurdish boys stoning police officers. He places an emphasis on a cynical and resentful reflex through an act of game-making that turns the paper fanzine into the fanzine of the stone. The intense political irony of the works of art produced by Kurdish artists coincides with the political fate of the geography in its absurdity. Given the fact that sociopolitical narratives correspond to artistic installations, what we witness in contemporary art are indeed bifurcated individual linguistic axioms leaning on the collective memory, rather than an 'individual' attitude.

Conclusion

The concept of *reterritorialization* of cultural memory (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980) is useful in understanding the path of Kurdish cultural production. Three intertwined yet distinct periods might be mapped: (1) the exile period beginning from the 1960s; (2) the culture of rebellion in the 1990s; and (3) singular narratives of the 2000s. In these periods, the history of the silenced and disappeared Kurdish subjectivity meets with art and cultural memory, yet it would be an incomplete reading to depict this meeting only with respect to a confrontation with the colonialist cultural identity imposed on the Kurds. It is also a process in which the new Kurdish subject (decolonial subjectivity), formed out of artistic experiences and cultural productions and Kurdish subalternity, became visible and its artistic resistance capacity was restituted in active *violation* of the dominant sovereign narratives in all spheres of life.

The activities that were once localized in the diaspora from the 1960s onwards gravitated towards the Kurdistan Region in Iraq after 1991 and Turkey during the 2000s. During the 1990s and 2000s, theatre, music, cinema festivals began to be held in European countries also extended to the four parts of the Kurdish territories, leading to the propagation of both intergenerational and trans-border artistic and cultural activities.

The political *serhildan*s in early 1990s Turkey began to evolve towards a cultural *serhildan* during the 2000s. The generation of the 1990s, while having a militant cause as was the case with the previous generation, found a singular language and distinct artistic aesthetic form. Art fairs and cultural festivals in Kurdish space have become places of interaction for Kurdish artists, bringing them together around a variety of productions. It is not a coincidence that symbolic, politicized cities of Diyarbakir, Erbil, Duhok, Sulaymaniyah became centres of cultural production. The memory of the resistance tradition laid the ground for this expansion in the 1990s. This *reterritorialization* of Kurdish cultural memory may not be a renaissance of Kurdish cultural production but instead should be considered a cultural *serhildan*. Artistic and literary productions found their way back to the Kurdish space through contact with violence and politics. Due to this contact, trauma and post-trauma narrative, as well as the scarred social memory, came to the fore in cinema, literature and contemporary arts. A new artistic narrative was born in the Kurdish space in the midst of war and resistance and around the memory of trauma, rather than being wrapped in feelings of nostalgia and longing, peculiar to the cultural and artistic productions by the artists in exile.

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TRANSVERSAL DYNAMICS

A People beyond the State

Kurdish Movements and Self-determination in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

JOOST JONGERDEN AND AHMET HAMDI AKKAYA

Introduction

Self-determination operated as an organizing principle for national liberation movements around the world in the twentieth century. This was no different for Kurdish political movements assuming the principle that a nation is entitled to a state which exercises exclusive territorial control. National self-determination became the grounding of the right they claimed to establish the independent state of Kurdistan. Since the constitutive power of the state relied for its justification on the existence of a self-determining nation (Keitner, 2007: 2, 5), Kurdish political parties emerging after the Second World War framed their struggle in terms of state formation. However, in the course of the twenty-first century, the emphasis on the Kurds as a people *without* a state became one of the Kurds as a people *beyond* the state. On the one hand, this has been expressed in the regression of the proto-state in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq (Başur, or southern Kurdistan) to family- and tribal-based politics, while on the other hand, it has involved attempts to establish an alternative to the state in the Kurdistan region in Syria (Rojava, or western Kurdistan).

In this chapter, we discuss these contemporary political developments within a historical context. We look at the relation of Kurds and Kurdish politics with the state as an object and objective of political struggle. In so doing, we will distinguish between two strong currents in Kurdish politics over the last decades. One developed from the tradition initiated by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP, Partiya Demokrata Kurdistanê),[1] with

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[1] This KDP tradition includes the KDP in Iraqi Kurdistan, but also the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK, Yekêtiy Niştîmaniy Kurdistan) and its sister parties in the Kurdistan

Molla Mustafa Barzani as its icon, the other born from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK, Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan) and inspired by the ideas of its leader, jailed since 1999, Abdullah Öcalan.[2] The first tradition continued to understand the realization of self-determination in terms of state construction, as expressed in the independence referendum bid organized in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq in 2017, yet further regressed into family-based politics. The second initiated a movement that started to perceive the state not as a goal but as a hindrance on the road to self-determination. Thus it was that a fragile (proto-)state-structured Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) turned into the governmental expression of family networks in Iraqi Kurdistan, while the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS, including Rojava) was founded on the basis of a non-statist societal organization referred to by the twin terms 'democratic autonomy' and 'democratic confederalism'.

The chapter comprises five main sections. The first section provides a brief introduction into the idea of self-determination, nation and state, and how this was expressed in Kurdish politics. The second section looks at Kurds and state formation from a historical perspective, describing the relation of Kurds to the state in terms of a 'reversed' state formation in Kurdistan, the integration of Kurds in centralized administrations of surrounding countries and the history of rebellions related to this process. The third section discusses the two main currents in Kurdish movements, one is represented by the PKK, and the other one by the KDP, focusing on their approach to this critical issue in Kurdish politics of statehood. The fourth section discusses the experience of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Rojava administration in relation to statehood. The fifth and final section of the chapter is devoted to

regions in Iran (e.g. the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI, Hîzbî Dêmukratî Kurdistanî Êran) and Komala fractions), Syria (e.g. Democratic Party of Syrian Kurdistan (KDPS, Hîzbî Dêmukratî Kurdistanî Sûrye), Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party in Syria (KDPP, Partiya Dîmoqratî Pêşverû)) and Turkey (e.g. KDP, Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK, Parti Azadi Kurdistan)).

2 The PKK tradition incorporates a range of political parties, following a process of decentralization initiated in 2002. In that year, the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (PÇDK, Partî Çareserî Dîmukratî Kurdistan) was established, focusing on the struggle in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, followed by the Democratic Union Party (PYD, Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat) in 2003, focusing on the struggle in Syria, and the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK, Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê) in 2004, oriented to the struggle in Iran. A women's party was established as early as 1999, renamed in 2004 as the Kurdistan Women's Liberation Party (PAJK, Partiya Azadiya Jin a Kurdistan). The PÇDK was abolished in 2014, with the political party being replaced by a societal organization, the Kurdistan Free Society Movement (Tevgeri Azadî Komelgey Kurdistanê), founded in October 2014.

the prospects and conclusions, which include the challenges and contingencies to these two models.

Self-determination and the Nation-State

The relationship of the nation with state emerged against the background of the transformation in Europe by which empires became nation-states, with the concomitant concern in the governance of these new entities with the characteristics of their subjects. A population politics emerged modelled on the idea of nationalism, a political concept holding that the borders of political units (state) and cultural units (nation) should coincide and teach that the power of a state depends on the degree to which its subjects respond to the ideal of the particular cultural identity that is thought to characterize the nation (Koehl, 1953). So in the course of the nineteenth century, nationalism had become a vibrant and multi-faced political imaginary, in which 'the nation' emerged as a platform for political and territorial claims. Every self-identified nation was supposed to have control over a state that exercised exclusive territorial control (Keitner, 2007: 2–3), and any arrangement that fell short of the equation of the borders of the state with those of the nation was considered suboptimal (Keitner, 2007: 3), a sign of inferiority (Clastres, 1989) or regarded as an injustice (Challiand, 1993).

It was in this context that the Kurdish national liberation movements emerging after the Second World War declared the establishment of an independent state as their ultimate political goal. At the time, the quest for independence was based on a Marxist–Leninist approach to the issue of self-determination, as specifically argued by Lenin, who had written that the 'self-determination of nations meant the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies and the formation of an independent national state' (Lenin, 1972). The treatment of this issue of national self-determination by the leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI, Hîzbî Dêmukratî Kurdistanî Êran), Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, in his book *Kurdistan and the Kurds*, published by the Czechoslovakian Academy of Sciences, is typical of the way Kurdish political parties inspired by Marxism–Leninism looked at the status of Kurdistan and the ultimate aim of liberation struggles from the 1960s onwards:

> Marxism–Leninism avows the right of self-determination to every nation, and this right for them has a concrete content. Lenin in his polemic with reformists and deviationists from Marxism showed clearly that the self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national

> bodies and the formation of an independent national state. ... Self-determination of nations in the programme of the Marxists cannot have any other meaning than political self-determination, political independence, and the formation of a national state. ... [Lenin] censured anyone who denied the right, or regarded it otherwise than a right to separation. 'A socialist who is a member of a dominant nation,' Lenin writes, 'and thus not furthering the right of oppressed nations to separation during peace nor during war, is neither a socialist, nor an internationalist, but a chauvinist'
>
> (Ghassemlou, 1965: 246).

The right to self-determination was looked upon as both an issue of separation and unification; a separation of Kurdistan from the post-imperial (Safavid and Ottoman), post-WWI colonizing states (Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria) and unification of these parts into one, namely, Kurdistan (Ghassemlou, 1965: 247). Moreover, a unification with other peoples in the Middle East was also considered as dependent on separation, since 'brotherhood' could not occur in the context of a colonial relationship. Self-determination in the form of state formation was seen as part of a worldwide struggle for the liberation of oppressed nations, as expressed in the 1978 PKK manifesto:

> Given today's conditions, an independent state, the only true and correct way and therefore the only revolutionary thesis; other theses and roadmaps are reformist because they do not touch state-borders, and because they are reformist they are reactionary. Aiming to create a politically, economically, and in other ways independent country, the Kurdistan Liberation Movement, first in relation with the neighbouring peoples, then peoples in the region and the world, will work in the interest of a world proletarian revolution
>
> (PKK, 1978: 128).

This double legitimation of the struggle, in terms of a right to national self-determination and through Marxism–Leninism, provided a framework in which Kurdish liberation movements and political parties linked their particular case to universalistic principles (Bozarslan, 2012: 11). The struggle for independence connected the case of a Kurdish nation-state to the universal principle of self-determination (wherein the denial of the right to establish a state would be the denial of a universal principle of international politics), while Marxism–Leninism placed the Kurdish case in the broader context of a dialectics between oppressor and oppressed (wherein the ending of this oppressive relationship would free both, thus allowing them to establish new relations based on equality).

Reversed State Formation and Evolving National Awareness

Claims to a nation-state are a modern phenomenon (Gellner, 1997: 236). For centuries, empires had dominated Europe and the Middle East. The Ottoman Empire, covering parts of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, had been an assemblage of direct and indirect rule. The only areas effectively centralized were parts of the Balkans and Egypt along with key transportation routes, the remaining territories being mostly self-governed. This was also the case with the Kurdistan region within the Ottoman Empire, which was composed of emirates governed by Kurdish *mirs*. However, in an attempt to modernize and strengthen the empire, the Kurdish emirates were eliminated in the first half of the nineteenth century (Eppel, 2008; van Bruinessen, 1978).

Looking at Kurdistan from the fifteenth till the twentieth centuries, van Bruinessen (1978: 194–5) characterized the political developments as a reversed state formation process, as Kurdish society passed through the 'stages' of (proto-)state to chiefdom and tribe. The disintegration of larger political institutions in Kurdistan and the aggressiveness of nascent Turkish, Persian and Arab nationalism were threatening Kurdish national identity with extinction. In response to this process, Kurdish elite groups, organized around sheikhs and aghas, waged various short and protracted struggles aiming to claim and maintain some form of autonomy from the central administrations they were being incorporated into and thus in defence of a Kurdish identity, which simultaneously came to express this as a political dynamic, parallel to the other nationalisms. These rebellions, however, were geographically confined and in general politically limited to the followers of particular religious and tribal leaders.

The most important rebellions were those led by Sheikh Ubeydullah in Colemerg in 1880 (south-east Turkey), Sheikh Mahmud in Silêmanî in 1919–22 (north-east Iraq), the tribal leader Simko in 1919–22 in the eastern Urmia region (north-west Iran); then, the Sheik Said 1925 uprising in Diyarbakir (south-east Turkey), the Agri Rebellion[3] in 1929 (east Turkey) and Seyid Riza's 1935–38 revolt in Dersim (east Turkey), along with the 1932 rebellion in the Barzan region (north Iraq) led by Sheikh Ahmad. Though the revolts were elite responses informed by a national consciousness against threats to established ways of life (Olson, 1989; Tejel, 2009), the majority of the leaders were fighting

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3 The Agri Rebellion was not led by aghas or sheikhs, but 'conducted and commanded by a modern and secular organization, Hoybun', organizing tribal discontent (Bajalan, 2009; Yeğen, 2017).

for local or regional interest, a particularism which militated against the creation of a more comprehensive political programme (Jwaideh, 2006: 292–3).

Although the process of reverse state formation involved tribes and their subdivisions becoming the most important social and political units in Kurdistan in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there were also many Kurds who did not have a tribal affiliation and there were regions in which tribalism did not play a significant role and where tribal dominance was recreated as a result of colonial intervention. The administrative system promoted by the British at the turn of the twentieth century in Silêmanî, for example, precluded the revival of a system based on personal and tribal loyalties, which has consequently been depicted as a retrograde movement (Jwaideh, 2006: 163–73). The central administrations of the four states, based in Ankara, Tehran, Baghdad and Damascus, also forged tribal loyalties as a means for an indirect rule.

Although a process of reversed state formation has been identified, the same cannot be said for the development of national identity. An increasingly stronger sense of national belonging emerged among the Kurds in the course of the twentieth century – albeit a rather late and relatively weak form by comparison to that among the neighbouring (Turks, Arab and Persian) nationalisms. In contrast to the Turkish nationalist movement, the Kurds were not well organized, either politically or military, at the time of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, which made them a weak actor in the negotiations designed to redraw the map of the Middle East. The Treaty of Sèvres in 1920, and then the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which superseded it, established new borders – essentially those of Turkey and of the British- and French-mandated territories from which the modern states of Iraq and Syria emerged – leaving the Kurds divided. Notably, the fact that a growing national consciousness does not automatically foster state consciousness is illustrated by the stance of the Kurdish delegation at the Lausanne conference. Although quite aware of their Kurdish identity, the Kurdish delegates defended incorporation within the new Republic of Turkey, even making a claim for Mosul to become part of Turkey (Jwaideh, 2006).

The Emergence of Two Traditions in Kurdish Politics

At the risk of oversimplification, we can distinguish the emergence of two main traditions in Kurdish politics in the post-WWII period grounded in

different zones in Kurdistan, one growing from the east part of Iran and north Iraq (southern and eastern Kurdistan) and born from the KDP, and the other in south-east Turkey (northern and western Kurdistan), born from the PKK.

Southern and Eastern Kurdistan

The first tradition has its roots in the Mahabad republic, where notables established the KDPI and, with support from the Soviet Union, announced the establishment on 22 January 1946 of the Republic of Mahabad. Though short-lived – Iranian forces entered the city in December that year and the president of the republic, Qazi Mohammed, his brother Sadr and his cousin Sayf Qazi were hanged on 31 March 1947 – the Mahabad republic became an inspirational symbol for many Kurds, and one of its generals, the tribal leader Molla Mustafa Barzani, would emerge as a leader of a Kurdish national movement in Iraq and symbol for Kurdish aspirations for self-determination.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the now Barzani-led KDP not only dominated politics in southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq) but was also the main player in Kurdish politics elsewhere. Although dreams of independence continued to be nurtured, in Iraq the KDP entered into negotiations with subsequent governments about autonomy and in Iran, the KDPI organized itself around the slogan 'Democracy for Iran, Autonomy for the Kurds' (Entessar, 1984). Eventually, in 1970, this decades-long, military and political struggle resulted in the recognition of Kurdish territorial autonomy in Iraq. Nevertheless, hostilities continued and finally erupted with a fully-fledged war between the KDP and the Iraqi regime that only ended when Iran, which had backed the Kurds, made a deal with Iraq in which it ended logistical support in return for the favourable (to Iran) settling of a border dispute (Bengio, 2006). The dissolution of the territorial autonomy of the Kurdistan region was followed by a lengthy programme of Arabization, organized from Baghdad under Saddam Hussein, insurgency and then the horrors of chemical attacks and mass deportations in 1987 and 1988, which resulted in an effective defeat of the Kurdish guerrillas in Iraq (HRW, 1993; van Bruinessen, 1994).

Opportunities for the Kurds in Iraq changed after the 1991 US-led First Gulf War, with Operation Desert Storm launched against Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. After the de facto defeat of the Iraqi army on 28 February 1991 and encouraged by the Bush administration to topple Saddam Hussein, popular revolts broke out in Iraq's (Shia) south and (Kurdish) north. In the north, the uprising started in Raniya, in Silêmanî governorate, on 4 March 1991, and spread rapidly over the rest of the region. In less than ten days, most of Iraqi Kurdistan was rebel controlled (McDowall, 2000: 371). When the Bush

administration quickly back-pedalled (Romano, 2006), the Iraqi army regained control of much of the territory, resulting in a mass flight of Kurds to Turkey and Iran. On 6 April 1991, military forces from the international coalition implemented Operation Provide Comfort to give the refugees humanitarian assistance and installed a no-fly zone (NFZ) north of the 36th parallel to protect them (Chorev, 2007; Romano, 2006). It was this NFZ that effectively brought the Kurdistan autonomous region into being (Gunter, 2008; McDowall, 2000; Romano, 2006; Yoshioka, 2015). When the US occupied Iraq in 2003 (the Second Gulf War), the boundaries of the Kurdistan region were pushed southwards (Yoshioka, 2015: 22–3), and in 2014, when the Iraqi army collapsed in Mosul under attack from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) – now just Islamic State (IS) – the Kurdish forces (peshmerga) moved further south, establishing control over the long-disputed city and oil-rich area of Kirkuk.

In retrospect, a new territorial entity was born in 1991, comprising the governorates of Silêmanî (Sulaymaniyah), Hewler (Arbil) and Dihok (Dohuk).[4] This region came to be referred to as the 'Kurdistan Region in Iraq' or the 'Kurdistan autonomous region'. Together with the organization of parliamentary elections in 1992 and the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), a process of state formation was initiated. However, the process was interrupted by infighting between the two main political parties, the KDP and PUK, between 1994 and 1998, which resulted in a separation of the Kurdistan region, with a western part under the control of the KDP and an eastern part controlled by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK, Yekêtiy Niştîmaniy Kurdistan).

Northern and Western Kurdistan

The second current in the Kurdish movement emerged in the 1970s through the PKK and became hegemonic in the Kurdish-dominated region of Turkey from the 1990s onwards (Akkaya, 2013) and then in Syria from the 2010s onwards. Against a background of concerted efforts to destroy Kurdish identity and the absence of legal avenues to address this, the PKK voiced as its primary goals the right to self-determination, understood at the time as the establishment of an independent and united Kurdistan, alongside a socialist transformation of society (Bozarslan, 2004; Gunes, 2012). The PKK believed that only a prolonged people's war against colonization by Turkey, Iran, Iraq

4 Parts of Nineva above the NFZ were administratively absorbed by Dihok, while the northern edge of Diyala was absorbed by Silêmanî.

and Syria could bring about the desired societal change, and they relocated to the countryside and outside Turkey's borders to escape the army's crackdown following the military coup there in 1980.

The history of the PKK can be categorized into several phases. The years from 1973 to 1977 can be described as a period of ideological group formation, and those from 1977 to 1979 as the stage of party construction; during the period 1979–84, guerrilla warfare was prepared and organized for the establishment of an independent Kurdistan and putting an end to exploitative feudalistic, land ownership-based relationships within Kurdish society, while the period 1984–99 was one of active fighting. During 1999–2004, there was a crisis and repositioning, prompted by the ejection of the party's leader Abdullah Öcalan from Syria in 1998 and then his capture and abduction from Kenya in 1999. Following crisis and turmoil within the party (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2012), the PKK re-established itself in 2004 on basis of a reconceptualization of self-determination in terms of a project not of state-building but of council democracy, inspired by the work of libertarian thinker Murray Bookchin. Whereas the PKK had originally aimed at the establishment of a united socialist state of Kurdistan (PKK, 1978), the ultimate aim of self-determination today is embodied in the development of a project of radical democracy (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2012). The party became committed to a peace process and reorganized its guerrilla as self-defence forces.

Some twenty years after the Kurdish political parties in Iraq had gained control over the main part of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, the violent disarray into which Syria fell created opportunities for the Kurdish movement there. Although the Kurdish political parties in the region had been under the tutelage of the KDP and PUK for several decades, a crisis within the Kurdish political party system had been smouldering since the 1990s leading to a loss of popularity of the two main parties. This was partly due to the factionalism but also because of the domination of personality issues and the inability of the parties to gain concessions from the state (Allsopp, 2014: 176–7). The sense of a crisis was exacerbated since, while support for the parties had diminished, the levels of Kurdish national consciousness and youth activism increased. It was from out of this contradiction – a crisis in traditional party politics set against a raised political awareness – that a new political party, the Democratic Union Party (PYD, Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat), emerged. Oriented towards the ideology of Abdullah Öcalan, the PYD was able to develop a political alternative, a vision for a bottom-up system of self-administration, which connected well to the grassroots activism of the youth.

In January 2011, following the sequence of protests that swept through North Africa and the Middle East from Tunisia and Egypt eastwards, the 'Arab Spring', mass protests erupted along with violent actions and reactions in Syria, too. Within three months, the Syrian protests had developed into an uprising. The regime in Damascus thought it could mitigate and suppress the protests by a combination of gesture politics and brutal force, as it had done in the past, but this time the international context had changed considerably. An active insurgency dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood and then itself riven by the emergence of al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS) ripped through the country. With Western (the United States, Russia, France, Britain, the Netherlands, among others) and regional state (Turkey, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, among others) and non-state (Hezbollah among others) actors intervening, the result became an increasingly violent cluster of interlinked conflicts in different locations with alignments of armies and militias made up of variously independent and proxy forces in which no single power could prevail. With most factions aiming at a military solution that they could not achieve, the Hobbesian war of all against all dragged on (van Dam, 2017: 183).

The Kurdistan region in Syria had its own history of resistance against oppressive Syrian state policies under Hafez al-Assad and then his son Bashar, including Arabization and denial of citizenship. Protests in Syrian (western) Kurdistan broke out in 2012, and, with the regime facing an existential threat in the capital, its local authority in this peripheral, though agriculturally important, area imploded. People's Protection Units (YPG, Yekîneyên Parastina Gel) allied to the PYD took the city of Kobanê on 19 July, followed by Amude and Afrin on 20 July, and Derik and Qamislo in the days after. Within two weeks, regime forces had pulled back to the south of Rojava, though maintaining strongholds in Hasakeh and Qamislo (Knapp, Flach and Ayboga, 2016; Knapp and Jongerden, 2016). In the years that followed, the YPG forces – and later, too, the 2013-established Women's Protection Units (YPJ, Yekîneyên Parastina Jin) and the Syrian Defence Forces (SDF), a coalition of forces established around the YPG and developed into a broader, progressive, multi-ethnic and multi-religious alliance – were able to establish a monopoly of violence in the regions under their control and build relatively stable and working administrations.

Unlike other parties in the conflict, the PYD and its political umbrella organization, the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), did not aim at (Syrian) regime change, at conquering and constructing a state (in the case of IS, by eradicating the Syria–Iraq border). For the PYD, the principal issue was not a replacement of (Bashar) al-Assad, but a change of the political system

through which dictatorships and dynasties emerge. The PYD advocated a radical change to the political formation underlying the repression in Syria and the Middle East as a whole, one that involved the construction of more genuinely democratic institutions for societal empowerment.[5] Contrary to the statist political outlook of the Kurdish parties in Iraqi Kurdistan, therefore, that of the PYD was centred on a strengthening of society (vis-á-vis the state) through a form of active citizenship and self-government – a non-state, or better, non-statist democracy – which stood square to al-Assad's objective of restoring centralized state rule (Allsopp, 2014; Knapp, Flach and Ayboga, 2016; Lowe, 2014; Maur and Staal, 2015; Schmidinger, 2014).

This PYD–SDC orientation towards systemic change informed its distrust of the Syrian National Council (SNC), a Muslim Brotherhood-dominated entity sponsored by Turkey that called for regime change but was considerably less vocal on systemic change. Similarly, the PYD–SDC politics was rejected by the Kurdish National Council (KNC), an umbrella organization established in 2011 under the political guidance of KRG President (Massoud) Barzani, which was collaborating with the Syrian opposition to al-Assad. The tensions between the KNC–SNC, on the one hand, and the PYD–SDC, on the other, expressed a fundamental division between what had by now become the two traditions of Kurdish politics. Indeed, it encapsulated and brought to the head, occasionally in open conflict, two very different approaches to the state.

Proto-state Development in Iraqi Kurdistan

On 25 September 2017, voters of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq were given the opportunity to respond to the question 'Do you want the Kurdistan Region and the Kurdistani areas outside the administration of the Region to become an independent state?' At a rally organized in Hawler three days before the referendum, Barzani had stated, 'From World War One until now, we have not been a part of Iraq,' before going on to declare, 'We refuse to be subordinates' (Chulov and Johnson, 2017).

Despite their long fostering of a dream of independent statehood and the gain of an almost de facto independence from the central government since 1991, the dominant political parties, the KDP and PUK, had adhered to

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5 E.g. Salih Muslim (2011): 'We want a fundamental change to the oppressive system. There are some who hold up the slogan: the fall of the regime. Our problems are not of powers. The ruling powers in Damascus come and go' (Allsopp, 2014: 209).

a federal approach to the question of self-administration. The two parties had been constituent members of the Iraqi National Congress, a coalition of opposition groups in favour of a post-Saddam federal Iraq (Yildiz, 2004: 116) and had decided to remain in a federal Iraq in 2005 – even though most Kurds were suspicious of the reincorporation and had voted already for independence in an informal referendum organized in parallel to parliamentary elections that year (Ahmed, 2013: 112, 131).

As the US pressured the Kurds to remain in Iraq and act as a stabilizing force, KDP and PUK co-drafted the new Iraqi constitution in collaboration with the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI).[6] Articles 117 and 141 of the new constitution formally instituted the Kurdistan region and effectively recognized the Kurdistan parliament and legislation enacted there (Ahmed, 2013; Danilovich, 2014; Kane, Hiltermann and Alkadiri, 2012; Katzman, 2010; Stansfield, 2006, 2017; Stansfield and Anderson 2009; Yoshioka, 2015). The constitution was approved by the referendum held on 15 October 2005. While the population in the majority Shia and Kurdish regions welcomed it, the new constitution was met with fierce opposition from Sunnis, whose leaders had not actively participated in the drafting. Yet, at the time, it was clear that an undercurrent in the Shia political leadership favoured simple majoritarian rule in a centralized unitary state (Gunter, 2008: 20), and in the years that followed, anti-federalism among the Shia leadership increased and many of the articles in the constitution were violated or not implemented.[7] A matter of grave concern for the Kurds was the refusal of the Iraqi central government to implement Article 140, which required it to 'perform a census and conclude through referenda in Kirkuk and other disputed territories the will of their citizens'. The referendum to determine this should have been concluded before 31 December 2007. While the Kurds saw the failure to implement the referendum as a violation of the constitution, Iraqi leaders considered the paragraph expired (Park et al., 2017: 201). Though a driving force of a federal system is a politics of recognition of difference and diversity (Burgess, 2017), politics in Iraq became increasingly sectarian and exclusive. Similarly, if a federal system is 'meant to provide institutional solutions that allow the different segments of diverse societies to realise their aspirations for self-determination while simultaneously preserving the overall social and territorial integrity of existing states' (Wolff, 2009:

6 Renamed the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) in 2007.
7 Some fifty-five articles in the constitution were violated by Baghdad according to Kurdistan officials.

28), not implementing Article 140 can be considered a breach of the right to self-determination.

Although the KDP and PUK had acted in concert at the time of the drafting of the 2005 constitution, they were hopelessly divided by the time of the referendum. The PUK had become increasingly prone to divisions and splits, aggravated by the absence and illness of its leader, Jalal Talabani, who died in October 2017. This had already resulted in the establishment of the PUK break-away party Goran (Change) in 2009, disrupting a fifteen-year-old power-sharing agreement between the KDP and PUK that had dominated Kurdish politics. Goran campaigned for a strengthening of the governmental institutions, the integration of party and personal militia into the peshmerga (accountable to the Ministry of Defence) and against corruption. It was precisely this failure to create political coherence through government institutions that was exposed in the preparation for the referendum and its aftermath.

The failure to create coherent self-government went back to a power-sharing arrangement agreed upon by the two dominant parties following the first general election organized in the Kurdistan Region in 1992. After the KDP and PUK had gained 50 per cent and 48 per cent of the popular vote, respectively, they agreed upon a power-sharing arrangement, dividing governmental functions between them (Anderson and Stansfield, 2005; McDowall, 2000). However, parallel to the establishment of state institutions, strongmen in the parties had constructed power connections through clientelistic networks supported by militias loyal to them. These dominant families also constituted the key element in establishing personal links between government and the private sector (Aziz, 2017: 110). Overshadowing the state institutions, therefore, power became located in family networks. In the KDP, such networks were not only constructed around Massoud Barzani, who had inherited the leadership from his father, but also around his son Masrour Barzani and nephew Necirvan Barzani, who were themselves engaged in a dormant succession struggle; within the PUK, such networks developed around Hero Talabani, the wife of the legendary PUK leader Jalal Talabani, Kosrat Rasul, Mala Bakhtiar and Sheikh Jafaar, among others.[8]

The construction and maintenance of these clientelistic networks have been highly dependent on the availability of resources (van Wilgenburg and Fumerton, 2015: 5), and the asymmetric access to resources needed to sustain

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8 The main difference between the two main parties is that while the KDP is a centralized organization or dynasty, the PUK is more like an umbrella organization or network of officials (Aziz, 2017: 117–18).

these networks heightened the competition between the two main parties. The KDP controlled the Ibrahim Khalil border post with Turkey, which produced much higher revenues than those gained by the PUK controlling the border with Iran (Chorev, 2007: 4). There has been an ongoing competition between KDP and PUK over who controls the oil-rich territories in the region. The international community allegedly strengthened this reality of competing party networks by dealing with politicians from the region as party leaders and not with them as KRG government officials (Yoshioka, 2015: 33). Then, with the rise of IS in 2014, investments and revenues slumped, while oil prices dropped, causing serious money-flow problems for the maintenance of the power structures that had evolved. Thus, the clientelistic networks had undermined a democratic institutionalized system of government, and then their reduced power caused it to further weaken.

The already weak government institutions were further undermined by the decision of the president of the Kurdistan autonomous region in 2015 to deny the speaker from parliament access to Hawler, where the parliament is located, causing it to fail to convene for two years. The speaker's party, Goran, had accused the president of acting illegally since his term had already expired two years previously. This conflict about the legitimacy of the presidency was reflected in his unilateral decision to organize an independence referendum. Goran, the Talabani faction within the PUK,[9] the Kurdistan Islamic Group and the 'Not for Now' movement headed by the businessman and former media tycoon Shaswar Abdulwahid Qadir[10] were questioning or opposing the referendum.[11] This was not informed by a rejection of the right for independent statehood, however, but because they were convinced that the referendum was being used to gain support for a president plagued with legitimacy problems (Anczewski, 2017). Shaswar Abdulwahid Qadir expressed the opposition thus:

> [T]he purpose of this referendum is not to create an independent state. We think it's just an excuse by our leader to cover up the internal issues. It's a smokescreen to hide problems inside the country . . . In the absence of the referendum, the political agenda would be determined by the call for a much needed anti-corruption campaign, [investigation into] the paralysing of

9 Networks around the prominent PUK politicians Kosrat Rasul and Najmaldin Karim, among others, were supportive of the referendum.

10 Shaswar Abdulwahid Qadir was a property developer and the founder of Nalia Media and Radio in 2010, parent company to the independent media organization NRT.

11 The parliament of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region approved the referendum only ten days before it was held, though only 68 of 111 lawmakers attended the meeting due to a boycott by Goran, the main opposition party.

parliament, the [lack of] separation between the judiciary and the executive authorities, the absence of a united army [and] lack of respect for people's rights and freedom of speech.[12]

Reviewing the period 1991–2017, therefore, we witness a double process of failed state construction in the Kurdistan autonomous region. As part of Iraq, the state formation failed due to centralizing and sectarian tendencies in Baghdad, while in the federal entity, patronage and clientelism came to characterize the polity. This was the effect of a power-sharing arrangement made between the two political parties, which were again dominated by a few families only, whose main concern became the appropriation of resources for the maintenance of clientelistic networks. The failure of state construction became painfully manifest in the referendum fall-out (International Crisis Group, 2019). The KRG proved to be defunct, and what remained were the clientelistic party–person militia networks unable to act in concert.

Non-statist Administration in Rojava

While state formation and federal autonomy were on the top of the agenda in Iraqi Kurdistan, the political thought of the PYD, inspired by the post-1999 work of Abdullah Öcalan, problematized the concept of the state. Öcalan (2013, 2015) had argued that social inequalities and cultural injustices are directly related to the process of state formation, which has its historical backgrounds in the idea of the 'strong man' and the emergence of gender hierarchy. In *Liberating Life*, Öcalan (2013: 55) argued that the struggle for justice 'entails creating political formations aiming to achieve a society that is democratic, gender-equal, eco-friendly and where the state is not the pivotal element'. Referred to by Nietzsche as 'the coldest of cold monsters' (Merrifield, 2006: 157), the state is critiqued by Öcalan (2010: 193) as an institution that stands not for democracy, freedom and human rights but rather for their denial.

Briefly, Öcalan's critique of the modern state has two analytical threads. The first is a state critique that problematizes the administrative state, the creation of bureaucracy as a dominant class, in which the main contradiction becomes that between the people and this dominant class. The alternative of a system of local self-administration is suggested to address this. The second

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12 Shaswar Abdulwahid Qadir, 24 September 2017, personal communication, at his mansion in 'the German Village' in Silêmanî.

is a state critique that problematizes the nation-state form as having the ultimate objective of homogenizing the population through assimilation into a dominant identity and thus erasing diversity and difference. As such, Öcalan followed Franz Fanon and Ho Chi Minh, who, like himself, as formerly colonized subjects, distrusted state power (Kohn and McBride, 2011: 56). His idea of autonomy was the right of cultural, ethnic, gender and religious groups to organize themselves and give expression to their interests and identity aims in order to address this problem; this was self-determination based on people themselves taking up the imperative of independence (Kohn and McBride, 2011: 57).

Thus, rejecting the administrative state and the nation-state, Öcalan (2014: 32) proposed a new model:

> The people are to be directly involved in the decision finding process of the society. This project relies on the self-government of local communities and is organized in the form of open councils, town councils, local parliaments and larger congresses. Citizens are the agents of this kind of self-government instead of state-based institutions. The principle of federative self-government has no limitations. It can even be continued across borders in order to create multinational democratic structures. Democratic confederalism prefers flat hierarchies where decision finding and decision making processes take place within local communities . . . It provides a framework within which minorities, religious communities, cultural groups, gender-specific groups and other societal groups can organize themselves autonomously.

Following Bookchin (1991), Öcalan employed the term *democratic autonomy* to refer to the decision-making capacities and responsibilities of people themselves, a politics fundamentally based on an engaged involvement, a primarily participatory rather than representative democracy (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2013). Then, the principle of *democratic confederalism* referred to the inter-connective context in which self-government should take place, comprising a multilayered network of local assemblies as a principle of a social organization aimed at 'democratizing the interdependence without surrendering the principle of local control' (Bookchin, 1991). Thus, a bottom-up process of extension starting with the establishment of 'direct-democratic popular assemblies at the municipal, town, and neighbourhood levels' becomes, through the emergent confederated form, an alternative to the state; this was 'a politics that seeks to recreate a vital local political or civic sphere' (Bookchin, 1991: 13). Over larger regions, these assemblies would confederate and, as they gained strength, challenge the centralized nation-

state. Parallel to this, Bookchin argued for a municipalization (rather than a Marxian nationalization) of the economy, as a way of opposing the present corporate capitalist system of ownership and management (Simkin, 2014).

It was through his imbibition of these ideas that Öcalan came to question whether independence really ought to be conceptualized and practised in the form of state construction. Thus, following a critique and self-critique on the character of national liberation struggles and 'real existing socialism' during the 1990s, Öcalan developed a new political philosophy for the Middle East (Jongerden, 2016). Thereafter, the Kurdish movement organizations inspired by his thought began to develop an ideological architecture of political society organized on the basis of a non-statist self-governance after 2005. So, in the Kurdistan region in Turkey the Democratic Society Congress (DTK, Kongra Civaken Demokratik) was established co-ordinating the development of a council system in the Kurdistan region in Turkey, the East Kurdistan Democratic and Free Society (KODAR, Komalgeya Demokratîk û Azad a Rojhilatê Kurdistanê) was established with the same purpose for the Kurdistan region in Iran, while Tevgera Azadi Komelgey Kurdistan (Free Kurdistan Society Movement) and the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM, Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk) were established for the development of a council system in the Kurdistan region in Iraq and Syria.

A start was made on introducing this approach in Turkey where community-based councils worked alongside (together and in parallel with) the local authorities controlled by the pro-Kurdish party. Destruction of these self-governing structures has been the main reason behind the replacement of more than 100 elected mayors in the Kurdistan region by state administrators in 2016 and the escalation of violence following the barricades built in various Kurdish cities after the state pulled back from a process of talks and negotiations with the PKK.

The situation was very different in the relative vacuum of Syrian Kurdistan, where the state forces were ousted and had mostly withdrawn. Thus, after large parts of Rojava had come under the control of the YPG in 2012, local (neighbourhood) assemblies were developed to provide a form of government. The assemblies organized the delivery of services, starting with the distribution of food and fuel, and the provisioning of education and self-defence. In other words, the councils took over state functions, at least in respect to local security and service provision.

The establishment of councils was not solely a Rojava affair. In the context of the civic protest, administrative disorder and governmental collapse as al-Assad's state was rejected and its representatives ejected in areas across Syria,

hundreds of councils sprang up all around the country during 2011 and 2012. In the portrayal of the Syrian civil war as a violent descent into chaos, this constructive face of the uprising is rarely given attention.

Interlinked in a variety of ways – e.g. such as through WhatsApp groups with like-minded councils and organizations – again, these councils were everywhere from the creative product of local needs, an immediate response to the absence of local government in the wartime context, to the governance vacuum resulting from the sudden absence of state administrators either through forced departure and/or local rejection of their office. The local councils in the ethnically diverse city of Manbij, for example, was described as a 'compelling example of successful grassroots governance during the two-year period between the Syrian regime's withdrawal from the city in 2012 and the Islamic State's takeover in 2014' (Munif, 2017).[13]

The councils that had emerged in Syria at large in the springtime of the protests were different from those that emerged specifically in the Kurdistan region, however. The distinction was primarily in terms of political strength, expressed through ideological orientation and political determination and the ability to organize a coherent self-defence. Together with the establishment of the first councils in the Kurdistan region, the PYD initiated the establishment of the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM, Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk), a platform of political parties, professional and societal organizations and council representatives for deliberation and co-ordination (Knapp, Flach and Ayboga, 2016). On an ideological level, TEV-DEM firmly framed itself as promoting 'formative pluralism', based on the 'rights of all ethnic and religious groups to manage themselves according to their own free will' (Kurdish Question, 2015). It argued that such pluralism was not possible within Syria in its formation as a centralized state.

Councils for decision-making and administration in Rojava have been established at the level of streets and villages, neighbourhoods, districts, cities, cantons and regions, and also, now, at the level of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS), all with a 40 per cent gender quota. The smallest unit in this confederation is the commune, which consists of at least a few and up to 400 households, covering a residential street or streets or a village. Each commune has an executive, composed of the co-chairs (one man and one woman) and additional members. It meets weekly and ideally has committees for peace, self-defence, economics, politics, civil society, free

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13 IS was expelled by the SDF in 2016; the regime policy was generally to continue paying the salaries of local officials, signalling its non-acceptance of the new arrangements and intention to reassert (control of) the state at some point in the future.

society and ideology. Not all committees have been established everywhere, but the peace and self-defence committees are common (RIC, 2019: 22). A neighbourhood council is composed of several villages or a city-quarter, and its members are the executives of the communes. The neighbourhood councils have an executive and further committees (Knapp, Flach and Ayboga, 2016: 87). This is repeated at the level of the city council, cantons and regions (Cezîre, Euphrates and Afrin) and the DFNS.

A social contract, drafted and accepted in Rojava in January 2014, begins with a rejection of the national state: 'We, the people of the Autonomous Regions, unite in the spirit of reconciliation, pluralism and democratic participation so that all may express themselves freely in public life. In building a society free from authoritarianism, militarism, centralism and the intervention of religious authority in public affairs' (Charter of the Social Contract, 2014). Expanded with non-Kurdish territories under the umbrella of the DFNS, the overall aim was announced in 2016 as the establishment of 'a new democratic structure in lieu of the dissolved state of Syria' (Sherko, 2016). This was the idea of democratic confederalism, constructed through the structure of the DFNS. Thus, on 22 September 2017, three days before the independence referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan, elections were organized for the DFNS commune co-chairs. We see, therefore, that attempts were made in the very same month in 2017 to establish an independent state in one part of Kurdistan and to strengthen self-administration in the other. The former proved unsuccessful – and worse than that, in fact, as not only national and international reaction caused the vote to be disregarded, but internal splits surfaced and various differing and competing interests in combination with a harsh response from Baghdad caused territories to be retaken by Baghdad. In Rojava, meanwhile, the local elections of co-chairs did not attract international attention; however, they were an important step in a gradual building of an alternative and interconnected form of government from below.

Conclusion

Our main concern has been the relation of Kurdish political parties and broader movements to the state, not just the relations with the states into which they were integrated and against which they were struggling in order to defend their identity and advance their rights, but also and beyond this, how they relate to the idea of state constitution. We have argued that in the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, the Kurdistan region was subject to

a process of reverse state formation and that although Kurdish elites were autonomous, a state consciousness was not well developed; in most cases, rebelling elites defended local interests and did not have a wider political programme. Since then, parallel to a non-identification with the state (specifically, the four states across which the Kurdistan territory is spread), a Kurdish national consciousness had been on the rise.

In the post-WWII period, Kurdish liberation movements increasingly framed their struggle in terms of self-determination. According to this, since nations are entitled to have a state, exercising exclusive control over a territory, the Kurdish nation also must have the right to establish a state. The particular plight of the Kurds derived its legitimization from a universal right, while its struggle became framed by a Marxist–Leninist approach, which explained the subordinate status of the Kurds in a wider analysis of imperialism and colonialism. Then, the 1990s and 2000s saw a transformation in which the control of the states weakened in relation to the claims and growing strength of the Kurds (with the arguable exception of Iran, where Tehran has generally maintained its grip on the Kurdish area).

In the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, a proto-state was in the making. This formation is occurring at the frontstage, at a formal level, while in the backstage of day-to-day politics we witness the continuing evolution of a power system based on family networks and clientelism. This has resulted in an effective division of the KRG in two separate entities, which has led to the development of de facto defunct institutions. While family loyalty and patronage characterize the situation in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, another, 'beyond-the-state' politics has developed elsewhere. In the Kurdistan region of (south-east) Turkey, a nascent system of neighbourhood assemblies working in parallel with local authorities led by the main Kurdish party has been obliterated by state power and the resumption of the state–PKK armed conflict, with its functions taken over by centrally appointed governors prior to the 2019 local elections, when the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP, Halkların Demokratik Partisi) regained power. In the Kurdistan region in Syria, however, a power vacuum caused by the civil war afforded the space for the development of the project of democratic autonomy and confederalism and the potential beginning of a new way of doing politics.

In Rojava, the 'beyond the state' is not a movement towards family particularism (as in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq), but the development of a new political imaginary, one in which the Kurdish case for self-administration is placed within a commune / communal tradition of citizen-based or direct forms of democracy. This is a form of *self*-administration,

intrinsically autonomous. It does not start from individualized and vertical relations between subjects and a state agent but foregrounds the question of how people are to relate to one another. Such a replacement of vertical state–subject relations by a form of network governance implies a rethinking of government not only as beyond the state but further, as a thorough transformation of the very essence of the body politic (Knapp and Jongerden, 2016), emphasizing the capacities of citizens as a true form of self-determination rather than the structure of institutions (Kohn and McBride, 2011). Although this does not take the state as its mainframe and it is not about redrawing borders, the development of a network of councils might affect these borders by rendering them insignificant (Karasu, 2009). Ultimately, the promise of this new political formation is that of a people moving beyond the state.

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Kurdish Transnational Indigeneity

IPEK DEMIR

This chapter argues that Kurds are an interesting example of how indigenous groups can gain influence via *transnational* routes. Over the last thirty years, the Kurdish issue has developed into a fully-fledged transnational one. In line with this transformation, the explanations and perspectives we, as analysts, provide should take into consideration the further transnationalization of the Kurdish issue in the last two decades. In other words, it demands we shift and reorder our analyst categories and thinking in many spheres and areas, rather than simply acknowledge the impact and activities of the Kurdish diaspora. Epistemological shifts should follow the shift on the ground. In this chapter, I not only attempt to highlight the transnationalization of the Kurdish issue but do so through this conceptualization being an indigenous one. I will argue that the Kurdish issue should no longer be understood as 'minority rights within a state (or regional) system' but one which centres on the issue of Kurdish transnational indigeneity. As such, I will show that Kurdish *roots* are being articulated through transnational *routes*.

Transnational indigeneity is, at first sight, an oxymoron. Transnationalism is associated with uprootedness, crossing boundaries, flows, routes and hybridity. It describes the steady ties of 'migrants' across countries. It refers 'not only [to] communities, but all sorts of social formations, such as transnationally active networks, groups and organisations' (Faist, 2010: 9). Indigeneity, on the other hand, is typically associated with rootedness, authenticity and connection with a particular land, strong identity, cultural and linguistic bonds. This polarized juxtaposition has been challenged to some extent by the notion of rooted cosmopolitanism (Appiah, 1997), and by Samson and Gigoux (2015), Malreddy (2015), Clifford (2013) and Forte (2010). This juxtaposition also begins to unravel when we recognize that transnationalism can lead to or support stronger identities (e.g. diasporic groups pursuing identity battles at a distance), and indigeneity discourse and claims

have in fact been influenced by indigenous groups learning from each other across different parts of the world, and also their rights being protected by international institutions and law. For example, indigenous rights were codified by the United Nations General Assembly through the collective campaigning of the Indigenous Peoples' Movement (IPM). The assembly adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007.[1] Indigenous rights come under those which have been referred to as 'third-generation' rights (first being 'individual rights' and the second being 'social and economic rights', both of which are also protected by UN Declarations). Third-generation rights are based on the idea that vulnerable cultures and groups need protection against the dominant culture by virtue of their minoritized position (Kymlicka, 1989). Indigenous rights and UNDRIP are seen as correctives to the international order and law which, it is argued, has distributed sovereignty unjustly (Macklem, 2015). Even though it is not a document with legal force or sanctions, the 'UNDRIP has elevated Indigenous peoples' understanding of their local rights and their global connectedness. That Indigenous peoples around the world have come to share knowledge about their common experience; the shared reality that they have suffered comparable dislocations, injustices, and hardships is proving to be remarkably empowering' (Coates and Mitchell, 2013). In fact, through the deployment of the concept of transnational indigeneity, we can escape some of the possible limited understandings of both by going beyond an essentialist understanding of indigeneity and rejecting the naive uprooted and boundary-free construction of transnationalism.

This transnational indigenous perspective can also contribute to a better conceptualization of the Kurdish issue. Many indigenous groups of the Middle East have found themselves as victims of various regional and national conflicts throughout the twentieth century. As Bozarslan (2014) has highlighted, Kurds, amongst others such as Assyrians and Armenians, were one of the major victims of regional conflicts and state violence. 'More than 200,000 Kurds were killed between 1979 and 1991 as a consequence of state coercion in Iran, Iraq and Turkey; thousands of [Kurdish] villages have also been destroyed in these two latter countries' (Bozarslan, 2014: 7). Consequently, much of the understanding of the Kurdish issue in the

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1 In 2007, only four countries voted against the UNDRIP. These countries were settler colonies with indigenous populations: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. These four have now all endorsed the declaration (Rudd, Trudeau, Key and Obama overturned their respective predecessors' decisions). Interestingly, none of the countries where there is a substantial Kurdish population voted against the UNDRIP.

literature has revolved around a discussion of the regional and state politics in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. For example, ethnic cleansing of the Kurds in Iraq, the Arabization of Kirkuk, the politics of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the guerrilla war of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the fate of the pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey, as well as the state suppression and violence against the Kurdish movement and leaders in Iran, were understood as regional conflicts, at times using the language of think tanks, policy-advisors and policy-makers. The focus has typically been issues of security. This focus developed also because Kurdish studies as a field developed 'in those countries that have had an imperial interest in Kurdistan: Russia, Great Britain and France' (van Bruinessen, 2016: 1). In other words, if the trans-border aspect of the Kurdish issue was acknowledged and discussed, it was still examined from a traditional inter-national relations[2] perspective rather than thinking about it transnationally. There are of course plenty of studies which examine the Kurdish issue from sociological, historical, linguistic, transnational and diasporic perspectives (e.g. Allison, 2016; Ayata, 2011; Başer, 2015; Demir, 2015; Gunes, 2012; Hamelink, 2016; Ozok-Gundogan, 2014; Yadirgi, 2017; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008, 2012). However, this does not do away with the fact that a state-based, security-dominated inter-national relations perspective rather than a transnational one had come to dominate the field of Kurdish studies until recently.

If one needs to understand why indigeneity was approached with caution, one must also examine the role of the Kurdish movement, including the PKK, the pro-Kurdish political parties, as well as Kurdish intellectuals, artists and writers who have contributed to the creation of Kurdish identity and struggle. For most of the twentieth century, Europeanization and Westernization were the driving forces not only in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey but also of the Kurdish movement. Kurdish activism was itself formed and shaped by discourses of modernity and by a Eurocentric worldview. Whilst one should not create a homogenous vision of Kurdish activists and of movements, it goes without question that indigeneity and indigenous practices such as folklore, tradition and oral literature were typically seen as being too close to the backwards, tribal, primitive construction of Kurds. This is the image which the Kurdish movement wanted to shed. As such, the modern aspirations of the Kurdish movement and their resultant ambivalent relationship

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2 I use inter-national relations (with a hyphen) to refer to perspectives which see states as primary actors and which focus analysis on an examination of the relationship between states. This distinguishes it from international (without a hyphen) relations, a discipline which incorporates inter-national as well as transnational perspectives.

with indigenous traditions and practices have been identified. For example, many indigenous practices and traditions such as the *dengbêj* were seen as backwards, relegated to the past by Kurdish political activists. The *dengbêj* are part of a Kurdish oral tradition of singer-poets. They perform publicly, at weddings and other social gatherings. They are a perfect example of Kurdish indigenous culture, but on the road to national unity and future liberation, they were consigned to the past. Scalbert-Yücel's work, for example, identified that 'people interested in folkloric and oral literature were considered "reactionary" [*gerici*]' (Scalbert-Yücel, 2009: 23), and also that the PKK 'had a share in marginalizing dengbêj' (Scalbert-Yücel, 2009: 8).

Hamelink and Baris (2014: 41) reinforce this point:

> Thus, it is not surprising that the PKK did not only challenge Turkey's political system in general, but it also took a critical stance against Kurdish landlords, political figures, religious leaders and petit sovereigns, and all cultural elements and social values that were considered to be part of that world.

This modernization discourse no doubt helped question the upper hand that Kurdish religious landlords and traditional elites held. However, it is also important to notice that the tension between indigenous traditions and the Kurdish movement did not last long. In fact, Kurdish traditions and practices began to take centre stage, and regain importance from the mid- to late-1990s onwards. Kurdish political parties and associations, some of whom were associated with the PKK, sanctioned and monitored Kurdish culture and heritage (Allison, 2016). Traditions such as Newroz, as I will highlight below, became a central vehicle for mobilizing Kurds and reinforcing a Kurdish ethnopolitical identity. A *dengbêj* house was opened in 2007 in Diyarbakır, supported by the local government and the European Union's grant scheme. *Kom*s (Kurdish music groups) contributed to the construction and shaping of Kurdish identity in the 1990s (Sarıtaş, 2010). Watts (2010) also notes that Kurdish parties and local government put aside plenty of money for Kurdish cultural activities – so much so that they even got criticized by the local population for doing so given the poverty of their constituencies. Nevertheless, Kurds were able to open up new cultural and political spaces through their control of the municipality (Gambetti, 2009). In summary, after the initial disdain shown to indigeneity and cultural practices, especially as they were seen as being in opposition to modernist ideas of progress and civilization, the Kurdish movement claimed Kurdish indigeneity and culture through ascertaining and cherishing certain Kurdish customs, traditions,

language and practices. Kurdish folkloric dancing (*govend*), Newroz, oral literature and *dengbêj* art, as well as claims to Kurdish language and land, have now found their place as part and parcel of Kurds' indigeneity claims. Consequently, Kurdish studies has to shift from a discussion of Kurds as 'ethnic minorities within a state-centric worldview' to a 'transnational indigenous' one. Such a perspective would allow us to examine the Kurdish issue in a new light and develop perspectives which are more adequate for understanding the nature of the Kurdish issue in today's world. Below I will elaborate further on how, and why, we could conceive Kurdish transnational indigeneity.

Transnationality via Diaspora

Firstly, there is the well-known fact that Kurds are divided across four countries, namely, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. The Middle East was carved up and divided into spheres of control at the beginning of the twentieth century by Western powers. Today's borders in the Middle East are an outcome of such colonial interventions. At the beginning of twentieth century, what we today call Iraq, Jordan and Palestine went under British rule, and Syria and Lebanon went under French control, paying little attention to ethnic and other traits in the region. The Ottoman Empire (later Turkey) and Iran held on to and continued to dominate the lands populated by Kurds. In other words, Kurds remained 'divided' within multiple spheres of control and nation-states. However, wars and unrest in these regions in the twentieth century, including similar social, ethnic and economic exclusions Kurds faced in their respective countries, fostered ethnic awareness and allowed Kurds to remain interconnected. As such, the transnational origin of Kurdish politics is not new. However, it is the movement of Kurds to the metropoles of Europe which has inevitably turbocharged the transnationalization of the Kurdish issue.

Kurds arrived in Europe, Canada, the US and Australia as refugees, ex-guerrilla fighters, working-class Kurds, agricultural workers from rural areas, as well as artists, singers and authors. They first found themselves in poor subaltern neighbourhoods, whether in Berlin, Paris, Brussels, Toronto, London or Sydney. As most first-generation immigrants do, Kurds initially formed their own community organizations, spoke to their own peoples and tried to re-establish their lives, looking for economic security and stability. Despite the daily struggles of existence in the subaltern neighbourhoods of Europe, many Kurds remained politicized and many others, in fact, became

political over time in the diaspora (Leggewie, 1996; Demir, 2017a). As Kurds learnt to speak the languages of their new host countries, they began to be involved in local, national or European politics, organizing rallies, dynamic campaigns and institutions. They also brought up a highly politicized Kurdish 'second and third generation' who were capable of not just translating Kurdish grievances to Western publics but also making these translations better understood and more palatable to the Western populations than their first-generation parents had been able to do.

In the UK, for example, Kurds mobilized and elected many local councillors of Kurdish descent in London. One of them (Ali Gul Ozbek) was elected mayor of Haringey Council in London. Kurds in London also established the Centre for Kurdish Progress, which lobbies and holds high-level Newroz events at the British Parliament. Currently, in Sweden, there are six MPs of Kurdish descent, whilst in the UK there is one (Nadhim Zahawi). Zahawi, a Conservative MP, also holds a junior cabinet position, Under Secretary of State at the Department of Education, and has supported the Kurdish independence referendum in September 2017 (Zahawi, 2017). There are also other British MPs, including Jeremy Corbyn, former leader of the Labour Party in the UK, who are seen as Kurdish allies. In fact, Corbyn's support for Kurdish claims and demands is not a recent phenomenon. He has been a regular attender and speaker at Kurdish events, such as during Newroz celebrations in London, long before his rise to power in the Labour Party. There are Kurdish MPs in other European countries besides Sweden and the UK. Gökay Akbulut and Zuhal Demir are well-known MPs (of Kurdish origin) in German and Belgian parliaments, respectively. Demir was also appointed as minister in February 2017. In addition, Europe has been, and continues to be, home to Kurdish artists in Germany (e.g. Şivan Perwer, Rapper Azad), France (e.g. Yilmaz Guney, Ahmet Kaya), Sweden (e.g. Özz Nûjen; Darin Zanyar) and the UK (e.g. Tara Jaff, Kae Kurd).

As Anantram, Chase-Dunn and Reese (2009: 612) highlight, '[c]oordination beyond the nation does not make a movement transnational; only regular, frequent, long-term interaction across nations, coupled with similar framing issues, and mass mobilizations, make movements transnational.' Through these political positions and involvements, artistic interventions but also through ordinary Kurds' translation of the Kurdish issue to Europeans which differs from the presentation of the Kurdish issue provided by their country of origins, the Kurdish issue has increasingly become a transnational one. Moreover, it has been consolidated through translations. As a result of diaspora activism, the Western public's approach to the Kurdish issue has

shifted significantly in the last decades. The strategic positions and policies of European states on the Kurdish issue are also called into question more often – though have not yet reversed significantly. Hence it is not only the arrival of many more Kurds from Iraq, Turkey and Syria to Europe in the last few decades, but also the interconnections they have built and fostered through their activism in the diaspora which has brought about this shift (e.g. Ayata, 2011; Başer, 2015; Demir, 2015; Eccarius-Kelly, 2002; Eliassi, 2013; Keles, 2015; Lyon and Uçarer, 2001; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2001; Wahlbeck, 1999). Kurds over time have become transnational actors, and the Kurdish issue a transnational one.

Kurdish Indigeneity Revisited

According to Samson (2008: 4), the former Special Rapporteur Jose Martinez Cobo's definition of indigenous peoples in his 'Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations' is widely accepted:

> Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system.[3]

The Kurds are increasingly framing their demands in the language of indigeneity; for example, by referring to their colonization and to their demands for autonomy and linguistic and cultural rights, akin to indigeneity claims pursued by other indigenous groups, such as in Latin America (Demir, 2017b; Gambetti, 2009; Gellman, 2017, Withers, 2016).

Conceptualizations of Kurds as an indigenous group are, of course, not new. The Council of Foreign Relations (2015) report identified that 'The Kurds are one of the indigenous peoples of the Middle East and the region's fourth-largest ethnic group.' The fact that Kurds make indigeneity claims has also been noted by the mass media, such as by the BBC (2019): 'The Kurds are one of the indigenous peoples of the Mesopotamian plains and the highlands in what is now south-eastern Turkey, north-eastern Syria, northern Iraq,

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3 Vol. 5. UN doc. E/CN.4/Sub. 2/1986–7/Add. 4 1987.

north-western Iran and south-western Armenia.' Kurds, amongst others (e.g. the Turcoman), are conceived as indigenous populations of the region in the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG)'s cabinet document Article V dating from 2007. In fact, indigeneity claims of Kurds can be identified even earlier. In Turkey, for example, Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya (NÇM), an organization which was opened in 1991 in Istanbul, promotes Kurdish culture and has often deployed themes of indigeneity in its mission statements and themes. It 'aims to "protect the culture, art, history and language of the colonized peoples of Mesopotamia" meaning, the Kurdish people' (cited in Scalbert-Yücel, 2009: para. 20).

The indigenous nature of Kurdish demands and movement has also been identified in academic publications (e.g. Bingol and Benjamin, 2014; Houston, 2009; Gambetti, 2009; Gellman, 2017; Yadirgi, 2017). Bingol and Benjamin (2014), for example, present the Kurdish political movement in Turkey as a revival of Mesopotamia's indigeneity whilst Gellman provides a comparative analysis of indigenous groups in Mexico, Turkey and El Salvador. That Kurds position 'themselves as the indigenous peoples of the region and Turks as colonial invaders' has been identified (Withers, 2016: 6). Kurdish diaspora's positioning as a voice of the Global South, in the Global North, making claims on the Global North has been discussed whereby Kurds in Europe have been conceptualized as forming a transnational indigenous movement (Demir, 2017b). In other words, there is increasing self-presentation and reception of Kurdish rights along indigenous lines rather than purely in terms of minority rights within a state or region. The former focuses on the territory, history, autonomy, language and cultural rights and also on colonization. It is a collective claim, challenging the sovereignty of the nation-state. More importantly, my argument is that such claims are part and parcel of Kurdish diasporic claims.

Newroz and *govend* are two important expressions of Kurdish indigeneity and culture in the diaspora. The Newroz festival is celebrated on 21 March in the Middle East and by the Kurdish diaspora. For the Kurdish movement, the Newroz myth has been instrumental in creating an awareness that Kurds constitute one people. Discussed in Firdausi's *Shahnama*, the myth of Newroz originates from the seventh century BC when a blacksmith called Kawa is said to have liberated the Medes by leading an uprising against Dahhak, a ruler who was deemed to be an Assyrian tyrant. Newroz extends the origins of the Kurds temporally and also connects them spatially. Temporally, it links them to an ancient civilization, the Medes. But the myth of Newroz provides Kurds not just with a history, but one which is linked to liberation, resistance

and thus hope. Spatially it links Kurds as it crosses national borders and is celebrated by Kurds in many countries. It has helped to strengthen the spatial and temporal dimensions of Kurdish indigeneity.

Whilst other groups in the Middle East also celebrate this 'spring' festival', for the Kurds the Kawa legend and uprising are central to Kurds' understanding of Newroz and for their Kurdishness. It is no surprise that Newroz was 'used as an ideological tool to create a counter-hegemonic order' (Aydin, 2014: 77) and was deployed by the PKK (Gunes, 2012). It has become a pivotal Kurdish celebration and event also in diaspora. Whilst Newroz was banned and under state surveillance in Turkey, in the European capitals it became a day of Kurdish political resistance, activism and recognition as some of my interviewees[4] claimed:

> Best Newroz is in Diyarbakir, and then it is in Berlin. (Male, 58)
>
> It pains me that I never celebrated Newroz in Kurdistan. But Iraqi Kurds and us [Kurds of Turkey] get together and celebrate Newroz together in London. (Female, 24)
>
> On Newroz [day], I love seeing Kurdish women put on traditional dresses, yes. But most of all I love their dignity when wearing those Kurdish dresses. (Female, 35)

The European left has usually supported and attended Newroz celebrations of the Kurdish diaspora. In the last decade, the transnational aspects of Newroz were enhanced through the UN. The proclamation of 21 March as the International Nowruz Day by the UN General Assembly resolution in 2010 presents this festival as an ancient custom of various civilizations and invites UN member states, agencies and organizations to celebrate it. It was nominated to UNESCO in 2009 by the member countries of Afghanistan, Albania, Azerbaijan, Macedonia, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Turkmenistan. The resolution does not associate Newroz with any ethnicity. In fact, on the UN website regarding this proclamation, there is no mention of Kurds (or of any other ethnic groups who celebrate it), but only a list of certain member states, echoing the state-centric understanding of heritage in UNESCO.[5] Moreover, it is interesting to

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4 Data for this research is drawn from my broader research project on Kurdish diaspora supported by the AHRC and subsequent work. The data for this chapter was specifically drawn from interviews with sixty-seven diasporic Kurds living in Europe. Sampling for the interviews sought to maximize variation in gender, age, social and economic background, political affiliation and country of origin. I also examined news pieces from diasporic media, documents and Kurdish community association publications as part of 'grey literature'. For a detailed discussion of the methods of this project see Demir (2017b).

5 www.un.org/en/events/nowruzday/index.shtml.

note that the UN logo includes a variety of spellings of this day, but the one used by Kurds is never present. It is conspicuously missing. Having examined the application form submitted to UNESCO, Aykan (2014: para. 32, 33) notes that the form does not mention the fact that the festival was celebrated by Kurds. That the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of Iraq recognizes it as a national holiday was also missing. The conspicuous absence of Kurds should not come as a surprise. According to Aykan (2014: para. 23), Turkey was unable to curb Newroz celebrations by Kurds in Turkey. As such it began to promote the idea that Nevruz (spelt in Turkish) was 'a Turkish spring holiday in order to dissociate the festival from the Kurdish identity and national movement'. Turkey, it is claimed, did this domestically but also internationally via UNESCO in order to offset Kurdish nationalism's adoption of Newroz as a mobilizing force.

Nevertheless, this recognition of the Newroz festival by the UN has opened up its take-up around the world. The UNESCO proclamation has legitimized Newroz celebrations in European spaces such as the UK Parliament, Hôtel de Ville, Paris, and by European leaders such as the German president.[6] In other words, even though the UNESCO resolution avoided and erased Kurds, Kurds in the diaspora have inadvertently benefited from the international recognition of Newroz by UNESCO.

Similarly, *govend*, Kurdish dancing, is part and parcel of Kurdish mobilization not just in the Kurdish regions but also in the diaspora. No Kurdish protest or Newroz celebration in Europe takes place without *govend*. Many second- or third-generation Kurds whose English, German and French are better than their Kurdish (or Turkish or Arabic or Farsi) are able to connect and express common heritage through the language of *govend*. In fact, *govend* is a central expression of Kurdishness and of belonging in diaspora for newer generations. Most start learning it at the age of five or six at weddings or political gatherings. It glues identity across different generations and spaces. In the diaspora, it connects Kurds of Europe who are from different generations together. It also brings Kurds from disparate parts of the Kurdish regions together, and bonds Kurds from across their new homes in Europe. *Govend* is an expression and celebration of Kurdish indigeneity, tradition and culture:

> My cousins [who live in Brussels] and I speak in broken Kurdish and Turkish. They don't speak English well; I don't speak French. But we excel at Kurdish dancing [*halayda döktürürüz*] [comment followed by laughter]. (Female, 32)

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6 For example, in March 2018 the German President Joachim Gauck formally visited a Newroz celebration in Berlin. In his talk he acknowledged its Kurdish roots.

I feel most Kurdish when I dance [*halaydayken*]. (Male, 35)

Yes, Kurds of Turkey dance differently to us. But so do Kurds in Dohuk and Kirkuk. Different ones [mean] we end up learning. It is our richness. (Female, 41)

Govend, as can be seen, is a common language for Kurds living in disparate parts of Europe; it is also part and parcel of continued struggle, of empowerment, resistance and solidarity (see also Bilgen, 2018). In addition to the embodiment of Kurdishness through music, which Gunes (2012: 112–15) has identified, it is an embodiment of Kurdish indigeneity.

The Impact of Rojava

A third central way in which transnational Kurdish indigeneity has been empowered is through the recent events and transformations occurring in Syria. The 'Arab uprisings have given momentum to the movements and struggles of the non-Arab indigenous peoples by holding out the hope of socioeconomic and political change via toppling or severely weakening oppressive regimes reviled by Kurds, as evidenced in the case of Syria's Kurds' (Yadirgi, 2017: 21). The violence and the existential threat brought about by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in the region has further mobilized Kurds to come together and form a local political structure under the leadership of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) (Leezenberg, 2016). The Syrian Kurds also formed the People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Women's Protection Unit (YPJ), which inflicted a series of defeats on ISIL. The PYD and the YPG are regarded as being linked to the PKK and thus categorized as terrorist organizations by Turkey. Despite this, they have been in co-operation with the US and the EU in their fight against ISIL.[7] Syrian Kurds established 'autonomous administrations' in the three cantons of Rojava: Kobane, Jazira and Afrin; the latter was captured by Turkey in early 2018, and can be seen as part of Turkey's continuing 'policy of containment vis-à-vis the Syrian Kurds' (Bozarslan, 2014: 8). What is important for my argument is that the fight against ISIL has empowered Kurds and allowed them across different countries in the Middle East and the diaspora to nurture their connections as part of a transnational indigenous movement seeking autonomy. Despite the political fragmentation and diversity of languages and political actors, Rojava represents an indigenous

7 This chapter was completed before the Turkish offensive in 2019.

uprising for Kurds. Some of the diasporic actors in France and the UK clearly acknowledged this in interviews. For example:

> We Kurds did not suddenly discover there were Kurds on the other side of the border. We knew this. But Rojava brought us together. It made us see an indigenous uprising was possible. (Male, 29)
>
> Kobane [war] was very important for us. It was as if the indigenous voices [of the Middle East] could now be heard in Europe. I felt connected with my brothers [Syrian Kurds]. (Male, 51)
>
> Europe has now got to know Kurdish women. We could fight ISIS in [YPJ] uniforms but also wear our cultural clothing. [Referring to the H&M clothing range,][8] Europe even copied our women's fashion . . . Kurdish women are pushing this indigenous freedom movement. (Female, 38)

The enthusiasm for political change and the success against ISIL in Rojava strengthened the emotional links and connections between Kurds, as well as extending the spatial and temporal boundaries of Kurdish indigeneity. Driven by the idea of democratic autonomy and anti-capitalist ideals, it fostered national awareness amongst Kurds in diaspora and transnationalized it further. It also strengthened a Kurdish sense of indigeneity – reminding Kurds of the borders that divided them across national states and through colonialism. The border was, of course, an imposition on Kurds well before diasporic activism or the war in Syria. Kurds perceived borders and political geography as something they had to work with, as part of everyday struggles of being colonized and ruled. As my interviews showed, Rojava made it possible for Kurds to see intra-Kurdish borders more vividly. Today it continues to shape diasporic Kurds' understanding of their history and their transnational connections across borders, thus their sense of space and time.

Consequences of Kurdish Transnational Indigeneity for Indigeneity and Transnationality

Conceptualization of Kurds as a transnational indigenous group has consequences for wider understandings of indigeneity. Firstly, we know from transnationalism studies that the term transnational requires us not to ignore states, but to revisit conceptualizations of the state 'not as a "thing" but as a specific social relation inserted into larger social structures' (Robinson, 1998: 565). In other words, it helps to go beyond reifications of the state. Similarly,

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8 H&M, a high-street clothing company, developed a range of clothing based on Kurdish women's uniforms (see Gupta, 2016).

we need to re-examine and trace the specific social relationships which indigeneity creates within and across borders, and explore its relationship to globalization (Samson and Gigoux, 2015). This is because the Kurdish example shows that it is a case of *when* indigeneity and transnationalism meet; not *whether*. Transnationality brings new cultural forms as migrant indigenous groups create new hybrid cultures and practices and force us to rethink the relationship between 'roots and routes' (Clifford, 1997). It provides scope for thinking and speaking from more than one system of knowledge (Mignolo, 2002).

Secondly, Kurdish transnational indigeneity can push us to rethink indigenous politics, especially the way they regain influence transnationally, even if they have not held power nationally. As has been identified (Samson, 2008), indigenous peoples, except perhaps for in Bolivia and Mexico (parts of Chiapas), are at the receiving end of policies and interventions directed at limiting their freedoms. They, on the whole, continue to be governed by institutions and states that curb their rights and restrict their freedoms. Kurds are an interesting example of indigenous peoples who are re-emerging transnationally in the diaspora, despite their voice and power being curtailed by national interventions in their homelands. In other words, '[e]ven though indigenous peoples have virtually no influence in national politics' (Samson, 2008: 4), Kurds are an interesting example of the fact that indigenous groups can gain influence via *transnational* routes.

Thirdly, Kurdish transnational indigeneity can challenge us to rethink the close relationship between indigeneity and land. Historically, the link between indigeneity and territory has been a close one. Given the movement of indigenous peoples within nation-states and also across national borders, how should we rethink this relationship? Can peoples be indigenous or be seen to be doing indigenous politics if they no longer live on that land or if the connection between them and the 'original land' is no longer immediate, practical or possible? For example, is indigeneity diminished for a Zapatista who has been displaced or is now part of the diaspora living in the US? A default position on indigeneity might agree with this as the link between territory, colonization and indigeneity is tightly conceived. It is no surprise that the struggle to occupy and claim American Indian lands by English Puritan colonizers in North America through the deployment of the dogma of terra nullius was of central importance (Samson, 2008). Terra nullius (land that belongs to no one but the colonizers) was Christian Puritan dogma. It was taken up through the works of, for example, the English philosopher John Locke and used for justifying occupation. Jean-

Jacques Rousseau and Emmerich de Vattel and many other thinkers and legal theorists also drew a distinction between soil which was cultivated, and that which was not cultivated, and deemed the latter terra nullius in order to justify the West's occupation of the land. Terra nullius policies were also justified if indigenous groups fell short of 'civilization', 'modernization' or 'development' (Samson, 2008: 5–6). Contemporary struggles of indigenous peoples thus involve invoking a close relationship between rights to land, and rights to language, culture, religion and so on. Given the transnationalization of indigeneity (e.g. the Kurdish issue and the migrations of Kurds), how do we conceptualize the relationship between territory and indigeneity? As I showed in this chapter, transnationality brings to the table a new category of indigeneity, transnational and deterritorialized indigeneity, and forces us to think through indigenous identity in new ways.

Last but not least, this conceptualization of Kurdish transnational indigeneity can help challenge the immutable and static understandings of indigeneity. Indigeneity is historically constituted, socially specific and should be understood in relation to wider economic and social structures, in a dynamic and flexible way, similar to the identification which has been made with regard to tribalism, landlords and emirs (e.g. Ozok-Gundogan, 2014). Rethinking it via transnationalism helps avoid essentialist constructions of indigeneity.

Consequences of Kurdish Transnational Indigeneity for Kurdish Studies

As scholars of Kurdish studies, we should not miss the subtle but vital shift taking place in Kurdish mobilization, especially in diaspora and vis-à-vis the discourse of 'autonomy' and indigeneity. This is because there are various consequences, including unintended ones, of the Kurdish issue being increasingly framed and understood as a transnational indigenous one. Below I outline some of these future possibilities:

- It can drive the Kurdish issue to be framed less as a regional issue, and more as a global one.
- It can drive a closer relationship between Kurds and the Kurdish diaspora; and between Kurdish diaspora and other associations and organizations in the West, and expand North–South alliances and transnational campaigns.
- It can shape Kurdish demands for recognition, autonomy and social justice in line with, and similar to, the language of other indigenous demands

around the world. It can thus shift and reshape discourses which have dominated Kurdish mobilization in the last thirty years.

- It can create new relationships between Kurds and other indigenous groups from disparate parts of the world. Such new relationships can enhance 'South to South' conversations which have already begun to develop (Demir, 2017b). These can lead to Kurdish demands becoming connected to other indigenous groups and thus present new opportunities for global collective action.

- As indigenous rights have already been codified in international documents such as the UNDRIP which contain a number of articles protecting indigenous peoples from the arbitrary acts of states, the increasing presentation of the Kurdish peoples as an indigenous group might lead to Kurdish rights being recognized and classified as part of international law, and provide a new form of legitimacy to their claims. The rights ensured in the UNDRIP articles already overlap with many of the demands of the pro-Kurdish political party (HDP) in Turkey. For example, UNDRIP Article 4: 'Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions'; Article 5: 'Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State'; Article 8: 'Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture'; Article 10: 'Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories'; Article 14: 'Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning'; Article 36: 'Indigenous peoples, in particular, those divided by international borders, have the right to maintain and develop contacts, relations and cooperation, including activities for spiritual, cultural, political, economic and social purposes, with their own members as well as other peoples across borders' (United Nations, 2007). Article 46 limits indigenous rights by stating that the rights accorded through the UNDRIP cannot challenge the integrity of the political unity of a state.

- The framing of the Kurdish peoples as indigenous could mean that international pressure on states with a significant Kurdish population (e.g. Turkey and Iran) could continue through different routes, e.g. through the introduction of new programmes which monitor and maintain their rights under UNDRIP.

Conclusion

This chapter traced the transformation of the Kurdish issue into a transnational indigenous one and argued for the parallel shift which needs to take place in our understanding of the Kurdish issue, namely, that the Kurdish issue should no longer be understood as 'minority rights within a state / regional system' but one which centres on the issue of Kurdish transnational indigeneity. I examined the way in which this transformation occurred by considering the impact of diaspora, the impact of Rojava and indigeneity. By taking Kurdish transnational indigeneity as a case study, we are also able to see that transnationality and indigeneity should not be seen as opposites or in conflict. On the contrary, Kurdish transnational indigeneity allows one to go beyond the straitjacket of essentialist and utopian understandings of both indigeneity and transnationalism and weaves them across space and time.

This chapter also examined Kurds as an interesting example of how indigenous groups can gain influence via *transnational* routes. In the near future, it is expected that demands for recognition, autonomy and social justice with respect to Kurdish indigeneity will be elevated to the global stage, transnationalizing it not just by crossing spatial borders, but temporally by further seeking to upset the nineteenth-century arrangements. I suspect that Kurdish *roots* will continue to be articulated through transnational *routes*.

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Kurdish Diaspora
A Transnational Imagined Community

BARZOO ELIASSI

Introduction

This chapter engages with the formation of the Kurdish diaspora, with a particular focus on Kurdish communities in Western Europe. The concept of diaspora has commonly been used to describe the Jewish dispersion around the world and their continuous emotional, political and cultural ties with a Jewish homeland. Formation of diasporas like the Jewish and Armenian diasporas was historically situated within the context of statelessness and destruction of homeland (see Kenny, 2013). Unlike the Jewish and Armenian diasporas, the Kurds remain as a trapped trans-border community in the politically volatile Middle East and have not been able to achieve political autonomy or statehood. The concept of diaspora has been appropriated and conceptualized within different disciplines from a wide range of perspectives. It is often assumed that diaspora formation entails a triadic relationship among the country of origin, the country of settlement and the ethnic group dispersed within and across different states (Cohen, 2008; Safran, 2005).

The concept of diaspora is contested particularly in relation to the ways diasporas are conceived as concrete and bounded entities and expected to correspond to some typological criteria (Anthias, 1998; Betts and Jones, 2016; Brubaker, 2005; Ragazzi, 2017; Soysal, 1998). Anthias (1998) and Soysal (1998) insisted that the concept of diaspora is not a break with ethnicity and race since it tends to reproduce the essentialism of ethnic and racial boundaries and obstructing the formation of trans-ethnic identities and solidarities. Ragazzi (2017: 7) frames his contestation of diaspora uncompromisingly and declares that there is no such thing as diaspora, and diasporas are neither mobile nor transnational communities. His framing is highly informed by Brubaker's (2005) seminal essay on diaspora, where Brubaker maintained that

the concept of diaspora has lost its semantic, conceptual and analytical power since it is used in a non-discriminatory way to embrace a wide range of identities. According to Brubaker, it is far more productive to talk about diasporic projects, claims, idioms and practices than ethnocultural fact. This implies a move from reification of group identities to the historical and political contingency of diasporic projects and mobilizations. Diaspora as a normative category does not only intend to describe the world but also to remake it (Brubaker, 2005: 12–13).

Although Ragazzi (2017) represents an extreme version of the constructivist ontology, it is important to bear in mind that diasporas do have boundaries but are 'defined and highlighted situationally, dialectically and over time, in action, through performance and periodic mobilization' (Werbner, 2015: 51). To claim that a diaspora is imagined and politically contingent does not entail that diasporic identities lack content and will be less real in their effects and impacts, although there is a wide consensus around the social construction of states and nations, that not all nations are equally subjected to contestation and controversy (Betts and Jones, 2016). Deconstructive rhetoric is often spouted in the face of the Kurds as not qualifying as a nation or upholding a premodern tribal identity not suitable for running a modern world. In contrast, the Turkish nation is viewed as well defined with a clearly defined national and geographical border. While the existence of Kurdistan (even if it precedes the modern Syrian, Iraqi and Turkish nation-states) is often disputed or even denied, the geography of the Turkish nation is exteriorized as universal objectivity.

It is widely held that nationalism is considered both inevitable and desirable in our world. However, not all nationalisms can be put in the same basket as equally reactionary or radical in its emancipatory sense (Davidson, 2016). It is important to pay attention to who is using nationalism as part of oppression and who is using it in something like a liberation struggle, but more importantly, we need accord attention to which groups have access to state power to endorse their national agendas and which groups lack such power. For example, Kurdish nationalism is contained, criminalized and punished for wanting the same thing that non-Palestinian Arab, Turkish and Persian nationalisms have achieved (Eliassi, 2018). Therefore, we cannot equate dominant nationalisms with subaltern nationalisms through a prescriptive anti-nationalism (Clifford, 1994: 307).

Being dispersed, resisting assimilation and retaining a continuous orientation towards the 'original' homeland are constitutive hallmarks of many

diasporic identities (Brubaker, 2005). This minimal definition provided by Brubaker cannot be fixed across generations since younger generations who have not been or grown up in the 'original' homeland will experience their old and new homes differently, which in turn can lead to divided allegiances and belongings. Notions of community, family, home and homeland are thus altered, renegotiated and redefined in the light of historical rupture that immigration, dislocation and relocation create across different generations, gendered identities, temporalities and spaces (Alinia and Eliassi, 2014; Eliassi, 2013; Radhakrishnan, 1996). Accordingly, diasporas cannot be reduced to a single experience but as a category in motion. Like all identities, diaspora does not have a life outside of history, representations and human agency with an unambiguous meaning; rather, it is constituted and reconstituted through the dynamics of historical challenges, political situations, crisis, interests and priorities both in the country of origin and the country of settlement. As Sökefeld (2006) argues, it is important to analyse and ask how, by whom and for which political purpose essentialist conceptions of identities are deployed by different actors. All essentialism attempts to achieve some political goals, whether they are emancipatory or exclusionary. In sum, diasporic identities and claims engage with contestation, affirmation and negotiation of the naturalized political order and relations of inclusion and exclusion in the home countries depending on those group memberships that are felt to encompass the social actors.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four sections. First, I provide a short overview of Kurdish migration within the boundary of the Middle East. Second, I discuss Kurdish diaspora formation in the Western context with a focus on Western Europe. Third, I discuss the differences between stateless and state-linked diasporas, with a focus on how minority rights are conceived by the Kurdish diaspora and its dominant others in Europe. Given that Kurds have faced and experienced the most severe form of assimilationist politics and policies in Turkey (Gunes, 2012), it is not surprising that claiming a Kurdish identity in diasporic contexts will be interpreted and conceived as irredentist and separatist by members of the dominant Turkish ethnicity that is neatly coupled with the sovereign state of Turkey. Based on my own empirical data, I will use some individual narratives of Kurdish migrants in Europe in order to illustrate lived experiences of collective sufferings and misrecognition in diasporic contexts that haunt Kurdish subjectivities. Finally, I conclude with reflections about the future of the Kurdish diaspora in light of the continuous political violence and instability in the Middle East.

Kurdish Diaspora in the Middle East

Forced displacement and exile are central features of Kurdish history. Such collective displacement was at the beginning generally limited to the political geography of the Middle East, mainly within the boundaries of the Ottoman and Safavid empires and Iraq, Turkey and Syria. Following the Chaldiran battle in 1514 between these two empires, the Kurdish concentration on the borders revealed the military and security importance of the Kurds in the region. Both empires used collective displacement as a means of solidifying their geopolitical borders and interests (Bozarslan, 2018). While the Ottomans used the Kurds as a stronghold against the Safavids, the Safavids endeavoured to undo the dense Kurdish population by dispersing and displacing Kurds from north-western to north-eastern frontiers of the Safavid Empire.

Today, the majority of the displaced Kurds within Iran live in the province of Khorasan, far from the Kurdish mainland, and their total number is estimated at 1 million. Many of them have retained their ethnic identity and are Kurmanji speaking (Madih, 2007). Another considerable Kurdish community is found in Lebanon whose history goes back to the Sheikh Said Revolt in 1925 and World War II. Their number is estimated to be around 100,000. Many of these Kurds came from rural backgrounds and belong to one of the most deprived communities in Lebanese society with a high level of illiteracy and underpaid labour. Moreover, due to the lack of Kurdish schools in Lebanon, the majority of Lebanese Kurds have lost their language and speak predominantly Arabic. Their political and legal inclusion and integration into Lebanese society have been obstructed by the sectarian basis of political power and demographic order in Lebanon (Meho and Kawtharani, 2005).

Iraq is another country that has deliberately exposed Fayli Kurds in Baghdad to deportation and deprivation of Iraqi citizenship. Since Fayli Kurds were Shiites and Kurdish, the Iraqi state under the Ba'ath rule defined them as an internal enemy and disloyal to the Arabic identity of Iraq. Between 1971 and 1972, the Ba'ath regime deported first 50,000 Fayli Kurds who lacked Iraqi citizenship but having permanent residency for decades. In April 1980, the Ba'ath regime deported 200,000 Fayli Kurds that held Iraqi citizenship and all their properties were confiscated. Dispossession and expulsion to Iran became their fate (Eskander, 2006).

If we cast the net wider, we will find another significant Kurdish diaspora formation within the territorial boundary of the Turkish state. Following deprivation and military confrontation between the PKK (Kurdistan Workers'

Party) and the Turkish state, several million Kurds have left their homes in western cities of Turkey. Thousands of villages have been destroyed and a billion acres of forest have been burned by the Turkish state. This forced displacement, whether economically or politically motivated, has contributed to the formation of a Kurdish diaspora in western Turkey (Houston, 2001). The Kurdish diaspora in western Turkish cities has been viewed as a 'Kurdish invasion', where Kurds are racialized both in public and popular discourses as inferior (Ergin, 2012) and culturally incompatible with modern city life and represented as backwards, criminal, violent and separatist (Saracoglu, 2009: 645).

Many Kurds have internalized these negative images and equate Kurdishness with ignorance, incivility and with an interest in their allegedly parochial identity (Houston, 2001). This Orientalist discourse deployed against the Kurds aims to create a hierarchical political order and reinforce the idea of Turkish identity as the master and noble identity that needs to be embraced by the Kurds in order to enter a civilized social order. Thus, Orientalist discourse has been a constitutive feature of Turkish assimilation policy against the Kurds (see Zeydanlioglu, 2008). Paradoxically, while the existence of an ethnopolitical Kurdish identity has been historically denied, muted and punished by the Turkish state, ordinary Turks both recognize their distinct ethnic identity and justify exclusionary discourses with reference to their real or alleged differences. In popular Turkish representation, Kurds are both viewed as disrupting security and benefit scroungers (Saracoglu, 2010). Following epistemic violence that either defines the Kurds as a problem or non-existent, the Kurdish diaspora in these Turkish cities is both de-constituting itself as Turkish by adapting and assimilating into a Turkish identity and/or constituting itself as Kurdish as a form of resistance towards assimilation.

Due to militarization of Kurdish regions of Turkey, 12,000 Kurdish refugees sought refuge in Makhmour, a disputed area between the Central Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Region. These refugees are living in Makhmour refugee camp, 40 miles south-west of Kurdistan Region's capital Erbil. The current Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, threatened in 2018 to strike against this refugee camp since it is believed to be what Erdoğan calls a 'breeding ground' for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Following the Syrian war, hundreds of thousands of Kurds fled the country and sought refuge in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and Turkey. The majority of them are placed in established refugee camps in Dohuk, Erbil/Hawler and Sulaymaniyah/Slemani. Few of these refugees have managed to establish a life outside of the refugee camps. While they acknowledge their Kurdish

identity, many of them are yearning back for their lost homes in Syria (Bahram, 2018). In KRI, there are equally thousands of Kurds who fled the Islamic regime of Iran during the 1980s and were first located in the outskirts of the city of Ramadi by the Ba'ath regime. Following the collapse of the Ba'ath regime in 2003, many of these Kurdish refugees sought asylum in the west and KRI and some of them returned back to their villages in eastern Kurdistan/Iran. They are now mainly living in the cities of Kalar and Erbil/Hawler in the Kurdistan Region. Unlike Syrian Kurds, many of these Kurdish refugees are better integrated despite legal and social thresholds and economic dependency.

Although this chapter started with looking into collective forced migration faced by the Kurds within Middle Eastern states, this chapter engages primarily with the formation of the Kurdish diaspora in Western Europe that has become home for hundreds of thousands of Kurdish immigrants and refugees in search of political, cultural and economic rights. I try to summarize and discuss an important feature of the Kurdish diaspora in Western Europe and how political subordination and oppression of the Kurds juxtaposed with economic inequalities in the Middle East continue to shape a politicized Kurdish diaspora. Needless to say, the Kurdish diaspora is culturally, religiously and politically heterogenous. However, it is possible to talk about an imagined transnational Kurdish community – which is more discursively cohesive and expressed during times of crisis in the Middle East where Kurds face different forms of violence and existential threats as a people and a minoritized nation in search of political freedom in authoritarian states across the region.

Kurdish Diaspora Formation in the West

Kurdish migration to Western countries is a relatively new phenomenon. There are no accurate data about the number of the Kurds in the West since the Kurds lack a unified nation-state and are often officially registered as Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian nationals. However, the size of the Kurdish diaspora is increasing due to the continuous armed conflicts in the Middle East and particularly in Syria and Iraq, where many Kurds of Syria and Yezidis have left their homes. The emergence of the extremist and ruthless Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) in 2014 left many Yezidis homeless and traumatized, whereby many young women were sexually abused and raped. According to Wahlbeck (2018), Kurdish organizations tend to exaggerate the number of Kurdish diasporas in the West. The number of Kurds

during the 1990s was estimated to be 660,000 in Germany, 120,000 in France, 80,000 in the Netherlands, 60,000 in Austria, 50,000 in the United Kingdom, 70,000 in Switzerland, 40,000 in Sweden, 60,000 in Belgium and some several thousands in Greece, Italy, Denmark, and Finland. There is also around a 75,000-strong Kurdish community in the US and 50,000 Kurdish migrants in Canada. Despite its recent history in the West, the size of the Kurdish diaspora is modestly estimated to exceed 1 million (Wahlbeck, 2018; see also Hashemi, 2014). Of course, this is just an estimation and some numbers might be much higher than indicated above. Close to 85 per cent of all Kurdish diaspora comes from the Kurdish regions of Turkey (Hashemi, 2014).

In order to understand the formation of Kurdish diasporas in the West in the latter part of the twentieth century, we need to consider two major reasons. The first is related to the ongoing suppressive assimilation policy and structural discrimination that Kurds are subjected to in the Middle East, which has triggered Kurdish resistance, guerrilla wars and political activism. The Kurdish regions are not only economically underdeveloped but they have also been continuous sites of armed conflicts and subjected to militarization due to state violence and guerrilla activities. Middle Eastern states have not historically viewed Kurds as legitimate constituents and citizens of their societies and continue to view them as marked citizens and politically framed as a national security issue. The Kurdish diaspora can thus be described as a conflict-generated diaspora that is engaged in framing homeland politics and conflict. The second development that engendered mass Kurdish emigration, mainly from Kurdistan of Turkey, was related to the economic boom in Western Europe that stimulated recruitment of a large number of Kurdish guest workers (Hassanpour and Mojab, 2005).

During the 1960s, the Kurdish immigrants to Europe mainly consisted of young intellectuals pursuing their education. It was in Europe that Kurds from different parts of Kurdistan could meet and articulate the ground for a common politicized Kurdish identity. Many of them were involved in forming student associations and supporting Kurdish grievances in the Middle East. Kurdish immigrants who were defined as guest workers from Turkey mainly arrived during the 1970s. These immigrants perceived themselves and were identified by the receiving societies as Turkish. This pattern of identification came to a change under the influence of Kurdish students and the PKK who started 'a reawakening' of Kurdish identity among these 'economic' immigrants. Following the state violence and clashes between Kurdish guerrilla movements in Iran, Iraq and Turkey, many Kurdish refugees fled their homes from 1980 to 2000 (Sheikhmous, 2000).

The formation of the Kurdish diaspora within various West European countries has been examined through a number of studies in Sweden (Alinia, 2004; Eliassi, 2013; Emanuelsson, 2005; Galip, 2014; Khayati, 2008; Mahmod, 2011; Zetterval, 2013), the United Kingdom (Demir, 2012; Eliassi, 2016; Fernandes, 2018; Griffiths, 2002: Uguris, 2004; Wahlbeck, 1999), Germany (Eccarius-Kelly, 2002, 2018), France (Mohséni, 2002) and Finland (Toivanen and Kivisto, 2014; Wahlbeck, 1999). The focus of these studies has generally engaged with the migratory experiences of Kurdish migrants across different generations, their political involvement in the country of origin, gender relation in diasporic contexts, language use and preservation in transnational contexts, development of Kurdish literature and novels, experiences of social inclusion and exclusion in the Western Europe and politics of statelessness and home. Following migration, gender relations become sites of a battlefield between patriarchal order of the Kurdish community across different generations and racist representations of Kurdish masculinity and families in European contexts (Eliassi, 2013).

Following migration, many Kurdish intellectuals, artists, writers and political activists created a politicized ground for the Kurdish diaspora in countries like Sweden that is functioning as the centre of gravity for the diaspora and transnational political activism (Khayati, 2008). For instance, Kurdish literature and novels have been partly developed in diasporic contexts where Sweden takes a leading role in supporting the Kurdish language (see Ahmadzadeh, 2003; Galip, 2014). Sweden hosts also one of the most successful football clubs in the diaspora, namely, Dalkurd FF, founded in 2004 but managed in 2018 to play one season in Allsvenskan, the highest professional football league in Sweden. They are currently playing in Superettan, the second highest football league in Sweden. Kurdish associations are important in diasporic contexts since influential public figures and animators can create and sustain discourses of Kurdish identity and organize demonstrations and conventions in support of the Kurds (see Sökefeld, 2006).

Influential Kurdish associations and institutes in Europe include the Federation of Kurdish Associations in Sweden, the Council of Kurdish Associations in Sweden, the Kurdish Union in Sweden, the Kurdish Institute in France, Kon-Kurd in Belgium, Yek-Kom and Kom-Kar in Germany and the Kurdish Cultural Centre and the Kurdish Community Centre in the UK. The Kurdish Institute in Paris has had a central role in diasporic cultural activity and spreading information and knowledge about the Kurds and endorsing Kurdish rights in the Middle East (Hashemi, 2014). These animators are central in constructing a politicized Kurdish identity and bringing into existence a Kurdish diaspora by using ideas, network and

money. Political animators are important in paving the ground for the emergence, evolution and impact of the diaspora in the country of settlement and the country of origin and the dispersed population (Betts and Jones, 2016). For instance, they have had an important role in consolidating the idea of an oppressed Kurdish identity that cuts across different national boundaries, and are involved in lobbying for recognition of Kurdish language and rights, through a variety of mobilizing practices such as associational activities, satellite and radio channels and activities in cyberspace among different Kurdish generations in different community forums. As a result of these political activities, the Kurdish 'question' can no longer be viewed as an internal question to those Middle Eastern states that subject Kurds to structural discrimination and political violence. The Kurdish question has managed to advance from being an internal issue to a European and international question (McDowall, 2004). As van Bruinessen (2000) maintains, the state oppression of the Kurds has paradoxically facilitated a transnational network of Kurdish political activism that defies state policies and challenges the political order that subordinates the Kurds.

An important site for the construction of a politicized Kurdish identity is cyberspace where a virtual Kurdistani identity has been created through online activities, such as personal and political websites, blogs, news sites, talk forums, Facebook and YouTube (Mahmod, 2011; Sheyholislami, 2010). Likewise, online activities not only offer Kurds with an important political and social space to articulate a trans-border Kurdish identity worldwide but can also enable them to communicate, contest and negotiate their differences and heterogenous formation of Kurdish identities. This is of course not done consistently in Kurdish but a variety of languages that are accessible and intelligible to them. In the context of globalization and communication technologies, the Kurdish diaspora and stateless nations have particularly found a way to challenge the official state discourses and circumventing its sovereignty, although in a restricted way.

The Kurds were among the first stateless nations to launch a satellite channel: MED TV in 1995. This was a revolutionary moment in Kurdish history since it came to be seen by many Kurds as their first national television station. The launch of MED TV was regarded as subversive and a 'mouthpiece of terror' by the Turkish state. Not surprisingly, Turkey pursued its diplomatic power to prevent its broadcasting. This channel was obliged to change its name and country locations several times in order to escape the political and diplomatic harassment of the Turkish state (Ayata, 2011; Hassanpour, 2003). In recent decades, we have seen a huge proliferation

of Kurdish satellite channels. These channels are affiliated with Kurdish political parties from all four parts of Kurdistan. While they all claim to be the main guardians of Kurdish identity and rights, party politics and interests juxtaposed with a cult of personality around their leadership and martyrs shape the content of their broadcasting (Eliassi, 2013).

Also, not all European states are equally endorsing and supporting Kurdish transnational activism. In the context of European complicity with repressive Turkish long-distance nationalism and diplomacy, the UK takes a front role against Kurdish activism targeting the Turkish state. Despite the more favourable political contexts in the UK, compared to Turkey, Kurds of Turkey tend to be more surveilled, targeted and exposed to a securitization process in the UK since the PKK is labelled as a 'terrorist organization' by the US, the European Union and Turkey. This UK policy under the banner of fighting terror is also complicit with the Turkish government's policy and its intelligence agency that turns Kurds into a suspect community and frames transnational Kurdish struggle for political rights, gender equality and pluralism in the ethnocratic and authoritarian Turkey as an expression of 'terror' (Fernandes, 2018).

It is worth mentioning that migration can have a transformative impact on Kurdish identity formation in diasporic contexts. Immigration has enabled Kurds from all four parts of Kurdistan with a democratic political space in the West where they can negotiate, overcome and integrate their differences. Yet, this is not to say that political antagonism among different Kurdish political parties evaporates in the diaspora. Indeed, many of the political and ideological differences are often strengthened in the diaspora. Based on my fieldwork, the PKK is viewed as a disrupting political force by members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), led by Massoud Barzani, and Kurdish parties from eastern/Iranian Kurdistan. This antagonism is best expressed on social media where PKK members or supporters expose the KDP to harsh critique for being led by a tribal, patrimonial and corrupted elite that endorses the oppressive policies of the Turkish state in order to weaken the PKK's sphere of influence in Kurdistan. In contrast, KDP members view the PKK as an anti-Kurdish force through abandoning the claims of Kurds to political sovereignty and statehood and accepting an insignificant autonomy under the banner of democratic autonomy.

These political divisions are often reflected in diasporic contexts and segregating activities of Kurdish community organizations. The question of which Kurdish flag diasporic Kurds should use during demonstrations that support Kurdish demands and collective pain is one of the most infected

intra-Kurdish issues. During the many demonstrations that I have participated in and observed, several PKK supporters view the official flag of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as a 'Barzani flag' and reject it as the universal flag of all Kurds. In contrast, one Kurdish interviewee in Sweden told me that he did not understand where the PKK have got this new flag from, which is waved in northern Kurdistan/Turkey and Rojava/Syria, since, 'it looks more like an African flag than a Kurdish one.'

Despite this ideological antagonism, partisans of different political parties and associations tend to reach a compromise and use both flags in order to avoid further fragmentation of the Kurdish diaspora communities. This becomes particularly evident when Kurds experience critical events that need a united front. There is an awareness among influential Kurdish figures that for a Kurdish identity politics to succeed, they need to underscore their collective sufferings and common bonds instead of stressing their political and ideological differences. Thus, diasporic animators often ask for unity and downplay intra-Kurdish differences when Kurds are facing political and lethal violence in the Middle East. The activism and financial and moral support of diaspora to Kurdish movements make them into important key players in shaping and influencing Kurdish party politics.

While diaspora is often discussed in relation to endorsing or wrecking peace (Brinkerhoff, 2011; Koinova and Tsourapas, 2018), I find the vulnerable position of the Kurds in the Middle East as complicating this dichotomous conception of diasporic mobilization practices. While the Kurdish diaspora, for instance, fights for recognition and acknowledgement of Kurdish identity, the Turkish diaspora is generally pursuing to retain its master position. For example, in April 2017, the Turkish diaspora in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Norway supported the constitutional referendum in Turkey that paved the way for presidential powers that Erdoğan pursued and achieved, which created both divisions in Turkey and in diasporic contexts (Koinova and Tsourapas, 2018).

Crises, critical events and wars are central to diasporic political mobilization. Critical events trigger 'emotional response for those in diaspora who feel attached to the homeland' (Mavroudi, 2018: 1310). Moreover, critical events are important since they provide the condition for the materialization of an imagined transnational community among dispersed immigrant communities (Sökefeld, 2006). This is not to say that all putative members of the Kurdish diaspora can be counted on to mobilize and support Kurdistan at times of crisis, particularly in the context of protracted conflicts where a crisis is often the rule rather than the exception. Yet, within the Kurdish diaspora, there are

core members, academics and influential figures who can appeal to passive and silent members of the Kurdish diaspora at times of crisis and existential threat that Kurds face in the wider Middle East (see Shain and Barth, 2003: 452).

Critical events like the Siege of Kobane by Daesh between 2014 and 2015 showed how Kurdish identity was organized globally to win support for the Kurdish women and men fighting against Daesh/ISIL. While the city of Kobane was largely destroyed, it became nevertheless an important victory for the Kurds in general and a turning point in the war against Daesh/ISIL. Two other contemporary events created huge distress for the Kurdish diaspora: the loss of Kirkuk to the Iraqi army and Shiite militias and the invasion of Afrin by the Turkish army and Islamist militias. When the people of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the disputed area voted in September 2017, the vast majority of the voters supported the Kurdish referendum on independence. However, this referendum brought together Iran, Iraq and Turkey to avert Kurdish independence.

In October 2017, the Iraqi army along with Shiite militias took over approximately half of the areas under Kurdish control without much resistance from the Kurdish peshmergas (armed forces of KRI). The leading political parties KDP and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) started immediately a media war and exchanging accusation of treason. The loss of the multi-ethnic city of Kirkuk with a Kurdish majority which was supposed to be the engine of Kurdish independence created a huge sense of despair, humiliation and defeat among Kurdish diasporans. The Rudaw Media Network that is affiliated with the KDP succeeded in turning the son (Bafel Talabani) and the family of the late PUK leader Jalal Talabani into traitors and collaborators. Yet, the KDP did not explain why it gave up the territories to Shiite militias and the Iraqi army that were under its military control. Turning a specific fraction of the PUK into traitors and collaborators provided the KDP with two discursive weapons, to explain why the referendum failed and intensifying the already division within PUK. In this context, a Kurdish interviewee in Switzerland talked about this loss in the following way:

> Imagine, you go and vote for Kurdish independence, and are dreaming about Kurdish freedom where Kurds can once in their history be in control of their land. And you wake up in the next morning, you see Iraqi tanks entering Kirkuk and smearing Kurdish flag and Kurdish identity and dignity. In war, you can either win or lose but this is not a normal defeat but treason. It is much difficult to accept this defeat because it was caused by treason. Both the PUK and KDP betrayed Kurdistan and sold our land and dignity to the

Shiite militias. I can tell you that I was depressed for two months after losing Kirkuk and did not dare to open my Facebook account in order to avoid images of defeat by my fellow Kurds. On Facebook, Kurds dispersed around the world were mourning this humiliating defeat. I have not recovered from that. I was so depressed that I almost wanted to give up being a Kurd. But compare Kirkuk to Afrin. Yes, we lost Afrin in a war but our brave guerrillas fought almost two months against one of the most powerful states in the region and the world. And that did not hurt me so much, because it was an honourable defeat.

During the Turkish invasion of Afrin in 2018, Kurdish diasporas clashed with pro-Erdoğan supporters at Hannover Airport in Germany and Kurdish pro-testors blocked railway stations in London and Manchester in order to gain support for Afrin and in condemning the Turkish military invasion of Afrin. Rallies were held around the world in support of Afrin without affecting the outcome of the invasion. The British position was complicit in that Turkey was protecting its national security and as such criminalizing Kurdish right to political autonomy and justifying Turkish aggression and violence against Afrin. Once again, many Kurds in diaspora felt that they have been sold out by the major powers despite being celebrated as fighting on behalf of the world and humanity against Daesh/ISIL. This shows that diaspora has a limited role in affecting homeland politics and gaining international support despite its fervent transnational political activism.

The Stateless Kurdish Diaspora
and Its Dominant Others

Due to the political normativity of nationalist thoughts and the nation-state system, it is analytically helpful to distinguish between stateless diasporas and state-linked diasporas (Sheffer, 2003). The Kurdish diaspora has been described as a stateless diaspora (Eliassi, 2013), which is involved in challenging the exclusionary policies of the states of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. Likewise, due to proliferation of different diasporas like victim diasporas, labour diasporas, trade diasporas, imperial diasporas and cultural diasporas (Cohen, 2008), it is theoretically urgent to make a semantic and analytic distinction between different diasporas and their trajectories as the result of national contexts (authoritarian or democratic) and group positions (majority or minoritized) that they have held prior to and after migration (Eliassi, 2013).

While state-linked diaspora like the Turkish diaspora tends to defend the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Turkish state through reinforcing

'the ruling institutions, political practices and official history of the Turkish state' (Şenay, 2013: 377), the Kurdish diaspora is more aspirational and largely challenges the states, attempting to redefine and subvert the identity of the states and their citizenships. Whereas both state-linked and stateless diasporas are engaged in long-distance nationalism (see Anderson, 1992), there are significant asymmetrical political relationships that exist in a world of nation-states. Unlike stateless diaspora, state-linked diasporas can often gain international recognition and enjoy recognition as the representative identity of a state outside of the 'original' homeland.

Although a large number of stateless diasporas like the Kurds, Tamils and Tibetans are predominantly politicized because of ethnic and religious oppression in their country of origin, members of state-linked diasporas tend to be engaged with the present political upheavals and challenges in their states and attempt to obstruct its threatened mastery and identity. What is striking about the experiences of the Kurdish diaspora in various European states is that they often encounter aversion and denial of their identity from members of the Turkish diaspora. According to the members of the Kurdish diasporas from all four parts of Kurdistan in Sweden and the UK, many of these conflicts can start with the question 'where are you from?' and if the response to the question is Kurdistan, it can become like dropping a bomb in the conversation. The very reference to Kurdistan as the site of one's belonging is interpreted by some Turkish subjects as entailing dissolution of the Turkish identity and state. The experiences of misrecognition and misrepresentation still haunt the Kurdish diaspora both in everyday life and intuitional contexts. Consider the following account by a twenty-four-year-old woman who is attacked by a Persian male for claiming a Kurdistani identity:

> Once I was in the gym and doing work out. A Persian male approached me and asked in Danish if I was an Arab, Turkish or Iranian. I said, no, I am Kurdish. He said: 'Well, are you Iranian?' I said no, I am from Kurdistan. The man freaked out when I said Kurdistan and started harassing me and spouting out racist slurs and screaming in my face: 'You [Kurds] do not exist, you do not exist on the map, you are Persian.' If people were not around in the gym, he would have used physical violence. After that, I was in shock for days and started thinking about my parents and the reasons why they have always talked about the need to defend our Kurdish identity against oppression in the Middle East. Before this event, I was not very committed to Kurdish identity but now I am more conscious. I thought we lived in a democratic country.

Although this is an individual experience, it has wider and generalized value since this sense of superiority and priority of Persian identity is a central

feature of Iranian political order reflected also in diasporic contexts where minorities are viewed as undermining the unity of Iran through their assumedly parochial, provincialized, divisive identities. This experience of misrecognition is also felt in institutional contexts when Kurdish migrants apply for Iranian identity cards and passports at the Iranian embassy in Stockholm. Consider this intuitional encounter that determines the cultural and political Otherness of the Kurds in Iranian national imagination:

> I am a Kurd from eastern Kurdistan [Iran] and was born in a refugee camp in Iraq. I was given a Kurdish name by my parents. My family moved back to our village in Kurdistan. In Iran, my two younger brothers and I had to change our Kurdish names and the authorities replaced them with Persian and Arabic names. In school, I was always called by my Persian name but at home and with friends, I was hailed with my Kurdish name. When I got married to a Kurdish woman in Sweden, one of the first things I did was to get back my Kurdish name on my Swedish identity cards. I visited the Iranian embassy to issue an Iranian passport for my newly born son. They asked me which name I had chosen for my son. I replied: Kardo. The embassy told me that they cannot accept this name and suggested a Persian name, Ardashir. I refused and one of the staff at the embassy told me indignantly: 'Today you ask for a Kurdish name, tomorrow you will be asking for a Kurdish state like those [Kurds] in Iraq.' But I told them, this is the name we have chosen for our son and nothing more. They reluctantly accepted it when we had to prove that the name was not an anti-revolutionary name.

This illustrates how oppression and symbolic violence operates across national borders targeting stateless nations, where they are obstructed from naming their children. As Bozarslan (2018: 8) puts it, for the Kurds, the primary issue has been 'their unsatisfied demand to become masters of their own destiny and to obtain the right to have their own say on what they thought they were in history or in any given present-time, and who they wanted to be in future'. Although multiculturalism is gradually becoming delegitimized and threatened due to the far-right nationalisms across the West, there are different conceptions of the political freedom and opportunities that Western policies provide stateless diaspora and state-linked diasporas. For instance, while the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden and the UK and wider Europe view multiculturalism as a political arrangement through which they can gain ethnic and cultural recognition denied in Iran, Syria and Turkey, a large part of the Turkish diaspora tends to view multiculturalism as a force that instigates ethnic separatism among non-sovereign ethnic and religious identities with whom they share the same political space in the

West. Thus, the state-linked diaspora is considered as an ambassador of the state (Şenay, 2013) and is more likely to affirm the continuity of the state identity due to fears of political disintegration and the relinquishment of ethnic, religious and linguistic privileges enjoyed by the dominant ethnic group. However, this is not to say that all members of state-linked diasporas support or do not challenge the authoritarian governments in the country of origin, but when it comes to the question of state identity or sovereign identity, the issue becomes intricate and politically sensitive. The state-linked diaspora often supports the dominant group's desire for sovereign agency and mastery that justifies relations of subordination and identity-based political, cultural and economic subordination (see Markell, 2003).

In a study with a focus on Turkish and Kurdish immigrants in the Netherlands, conducted by Verkuyten and Yildiz (2006), the authors maintain that while Kurdish immigrants champion minority rights both in the Netherlands and Turkey, Turkish immigrants endorsed minority rights in the Dutch context but held negative positions towards minority rights and cultural diversity in Turkey. Turkish immigrants feared that minority rights would undermine and threaten the majority (Turkish) rule and state unity. This view converges with the dominant Turkish state conception of the Kurdish question, that giving Kurds the right to education in their languages will destabilize the Turkish identity and pave the way for separatist tendencies among the Kurds. In other words, the Turkish diaspora, by and large, shared the conception of the Turkish state's way of seeing minority rights. This stance is not only specific to the Dutch context but applies well to other European contexts (see Eliassi, 2013). While the Kurdish struggle has been viewed as a question of national liberation in a colonial context, dominant Turkish representations tend to view it as a question of 'foreign conspiracy' and 'separatist terror' (Yadirgi, 2017).

As Mügge (2012) illustrates through the cases of Turkey and Suriname, the ideologies of nationhood in these countries highly affect the transnational identities of their immigrant population. In contrast to the Surinamese state that sees unity in diversity, the Turkish case represents an ideology of ethnic nationalism and thus buttresses rather than deterritorializes its national borders and national identity among its diaspora. These ideologies also impinge on how their diasporas relate to non-sovereign identities in diasporic contexts and in the homeland. In the same vein, Kastoryano (2004) argues that while stateless diasporas are involved in resisting the state nationalism that subordinates them, the state-linked diasporas tend to extend the nationalism of their home countries and establish a transnational nationalism.

This becomes noticeably evident whenever members of Kurdish diasporas protest against the Turkish state's oppression of the Kurds on the streets of European countries, the risk of violent clashes with pro-government/state members of Turkish diasporas increases, which have occurred in Sweden, Germany, the UK, France, the Netherlands, the United States, among others.

Conclusion

Although the presence of the Kurdish diaspora is relatively new in the European contexts, it has nonetheless developed as a transnational community, enabled and facilitated by global communication technologies that can be effectively used to politically mobilize resources in support of the Kurds in the Middle East. What makes the Kurdish diaspora a politicized diaspora is the persistent exclusion and violence of the states which Kurds are inhabiting in the Middle East. It is during times of crisis and critical events that the Kurdish diaspora is materialized through its claims, lobbying and rallies across the West. Although migration can imply assimilation for many transnational communities, the Kurdish ambivalence vis-à-vis assimilation becomes tangible. It is also true that Kurds might be more receptive to assimilation due to their minoritized backgrounds in the country of origin and experiences of adaptation to the dominant culture and language. However, the political activism of diaspora and the strong attachment to Kurdish identity due to political oppression in the Middle East is a persistent reminder that Kurds have not come to the West to assimilate but to continue struggling for recognition of their identities and identity-based rights. This is, however, not the same thing as rejection of the country of settlement and creating a ghettoized diasporic community. On the contrary, many Kurds regard integration into the country of settlement and its political structure as an effective tool to lobby for the Kurds and affect the foreign policy of the country of settlement vis-à-vis the authoritarian states in the Middle East. This means that the Kurdish diaspora remains a politicized diaspora as long as Kurds are politically, culturally and economically subordinated. No doubt, the communication technologies like satellite channels and particularly Facebook have facilitated for the Kurds to virtually meet face to face and reproduce multiple, varied and contradictory forms of Kurdishness and claims and grievances.

As Adamson (2016) points out, the rise of cyberspace provides a new arena that can engender political interaction, political consciousness and identity in global contexts of identities. The fragmentation of predominantly

Kurdish-inhabited lands and people across different states is also reflected in diasporic contexts through party-based politics, although with one major difference. It is much more likely that Kurds from all four parts of Kurdistan can be found in the same pro-Kurdish rallies than in the Kurdish mainland, and this elucidates why diaspora nationalism has often been at the forefront of nation-building processes in many countries. Following the continuous political instability and violence in Kurdistan, Kurds will continue seeing emigration as a strategy to escape oppression and create new homes where there is already a dispersed and imagined transnational Kurdish community (see Wahlbeck, 2018).

As Betts and Jones (2016) rightly argue, political life is geographically relocated due to authoritarianism and one of the most important spaces to construct opposition politics is outside of the territory and jurisdiction of those authoritarian states. The most important part of politics might take place in transnational contexts since political activists, dissidents and opponents are not allowed to operate in their country of origin. Of course, it is not only diasporas who are politically persecuted that engage in transnational political mobilization, but many authoritarian regimes like Turkey also work hard to mobilize extra-territorially to strengthen their position, gain loyalty and weaken transnational opposition like the Kurdish one. As long as the Kurds are subjected to political, cultural and economic exclusion in the Middle East, the Kurdish diaspora will invoke a victim narrative in order to motivate transnational political mobilization that aims to alter and redefine the oppressive state structures in the Middle East. What is also significant to the persistence of the Kurdish diaspora is the rise of far-right parties in Europe that are explicitly and discursively attacking multiculturalism and rights of minorities. By constructing an enemy image of Muslim immigrants from the Middle East, the Kurdish diaspora might be forced to politically engage with and resist different regimes of exclusion in the Middle East and Europe that target minority rights.

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The Women's Movement
in Kurdistan-Iraq

CHOMAN HARDI

The history of women's activism in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is closely intertwined with the history of political resistance. In the 1950s, women mobilized against political oppression. Later, they joined the struggle as members of the underground movement, as couriers, as protectors and nurturers of male fighters, and sometimes as the peshmerga (those who face death) fighters. However, only a few women played leadership roles in the resistance. Leyla Qasim, the twenty-two-year-old student who was a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), was hanged by the Ba'ath state for an alleged attempt on Saddam Hussein's life in 1974 (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2010: 41). Ayisha Qasim Yunis (known as Ayisha Gruka), who joined the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) in the 1950s, was a brilliant strategist and leader who inspired trust and rallied people for political action (Jawad, 2015). She was executed by the Ba'ath government in 1988 (Halaq, 2015).

The majority of women who joined the political parties played secondary roles in the revolution. They supported the men and hoped that once Kurdistan was liberated, men and women would be equal. They prioritized national liberation over gender equality. Women who joined the ICP integrated gender and class oppression into their activism. From the early days, they defended women's rights, tried to eliminate illiteracy and unemployment amongst women and fought for legal reform (Nasrulla, 2015).

After 1992, when a form of autonomy was attained, civil society organizations, including independent women's organizations, proliferated. This growth in the 1990s and 2000s, combined with the end of the four-year Kurdish civil war in 1998, led to the formation of collaborative networks and umbrella organizations. Now we can speak of a women's movement that, despite its internal shortcomings and outside obstacles, has been able to bring about change in the

region (Hardi, 2013). This chapter builds on my two earlier studies about the women's movement in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Hardi, 2013, 2019). It draws on the voices of a group of experts to highlight the achievements and limitations and focus on what to do next to surpass the perceived stagnation.

Research about women's activism highlights concerns about the transformation of grassroots movements into funding-dependent non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that focus on short-term projects rather than long-term change (Alvarez, 1999; Jad, 2007; Tarrow, 1994). Islah Jad (2007: 623) describes NGOization to be 'the process through which issues of collective concern are transformed into projects in isolation from the general context in which they are applied without taking due consideration of the economic, social, and political factors affecting them'. Sonia Alvarez (1999) expresses concerns about the consequences of NGOization in Latin America when grassroots, political organizations in the 1970s turned into organizations that dealt with policy assessment and project delivery in the 1980s and 1990s. Manji and O'Coill (2002: 3) argue that through offering marginal relief from poverty, the NGOs in Africa undermine 'the struggle of African people to emancipate themselves from economic, social and political oppression'.

James Petras (1999: 431) goes further and argues that NGOs are 'demobilizing popular movements … undermining resistance' because they fill gaps in service provision and deliver 'inferior services to fewer recipients'. Even though Arundhati Roy (2004) stays away from generalizations, she also believes that NGOs, through helping those in need, can 'blunt the edges of political resistance'. In other words, NGOization is a process by which a community's long-term structural problems are resolved through providing short-term, and sometimes insufficient, help to the marginalized and voiceless groups. This is seen to have the potential to 'blunt' resistance, 'undermine' it and consequently prevent political change, which is what social movements strive to achieve.

Critics also contrast the dedication of grassroots activists with the motivation of NGO staff (Alvarez, 1999; Tarrow, 1994). NGO staff are generally seen to be skilled and educated professionals who may or may not be morally dedicated to the issue they are addressing. They earn a reasonable income and might change jobs if offered better salaries elsewhere. The dedication and long-term commitment that is associated with social movement activists are perceived, perhaps accurately, to be missing in NGO staff. In reality, despite differences between social movements and NGOs, there are often blurred lines between the two. Social movement activists may be more passionate advocates than NGO staff, but they are often under-resourced, subject to

burnout and lack protection. The steadier income of NGOs means that professionalized NGO staff can work on the same issue more intensely and for longer periods than activists who do not have funds to work on issues full time.

The concern about NGOs also arises, at least in part, out of confusion about roles. The role of NGOs is to support the disadvantaged members of their communities, not to launch revolutions. While some NGOs are implicated in mismanagement and corruption, the majority provide essential services to those in need. Therefore, it seems unfair to blame NGOs for systematic problems that are beyond their control and scope. We live in communities, and we expect community members to help each other, not to watch and do nothing when others suffer. While it is important to deal with the root causes of problems, it is equally important to provide protection and comfort to women whose lives are in danger, who cannot afford legal representation in courts, who are exploited because they are unaware of their rights and entitlements and who need to develop their skills to find work. It is important to study the obstacles that prevent organizations from achieving longer-term change.

Broadly, this chapter draws on my observations and ongoing engagements with the women's movement through providing training, meeting and exchanging ideas, partnering in events and campaigning. Specifically, it draws on ideas shared in a focus group discussion about the women's movement held in January 2019 in the KRI, which tried to address the movement's slowdown in recent years and to identify strategies to overcome the challenges and barriers it faced. In total, fourteen participants took part in this discussion, which included NGO representatives, activists, academics, gender advisers, writers and representatives of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).[1] I present a brief overview of the women's movement in the KRI before analysing the focus group discussion, highlighting the

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1 The workshop participants were Lanja Abdullah, Director of Warvin Organization; Bahar Munzir, Director of People's Development Organization (PDO); Shokham Ahmad, Director of Women's Legal Assistance (WOLA); Parez Hama, a journalist and media manager of Khanzad Organization; Awezan Nuri, a staff member of People's Development Organization in Kirkuk; Bakhal Abaubakr, an academic and previous director of Islamic Women's Organization; Amal Jalal, Director General of High Council of Women's Affairs; Khanim Latif, the previous director of Asuda and gender adviser to Iraq's president; Gulstan Ahmad, Director of Human Rights Organization in Halabja; Farman Osman, Director of Human Rights Organization in Chamchamal; Ikrama Ghaib, an activist and previous director of Women's Media and Education Centre in Germian; Sargul Qaradaghi, an academic and politician; Roza Hussain, a writer and activist living in Norway; and Chnoor Ali, an activist.

progress made in women's rights, and identify the ongoing challenges and barriers to gender equality in the KRI.

The Women's Movement in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)

Initially, even when women paid attention to gender equality, they did so under the umbrella of their political parties (Hardi, 2013). Members of the Communist Party of Iraq established the Iraqi Women's League in 1952. In the same year, women associated with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) founded the Kurdistan Women's Union. In 1989, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's (PUK) Women's League of Kurdistan was formed. This tradition continued even after the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was established in 1992, when the smaller parties followed suit, each forming its own women's organization.

The efficacy of politically affiliated organizations to address gender inequality has been questioned. Shahrzad Mojab (1996) sees these organizations as superficial nods by the political parties towards gender equality. She argues that while the nationalist movement in this region depends on enlisting women's support, 'it discourages any manifestation of womanhood or political demands for gender equality' (Mojab, 1996: 73). Another problem associated with these kinds of organizations is that often their relationships have 'mirrored that of the political parties they were closely affiliated with. There were periods of little or no communication during the Kurdish civil war (1994–8) and it was a long time before real collaboration could take place again' (Hardi, 2013: 6).

Despite these criticisms, it would be unfair to argue that politically affiliated women's NGOs have been useless. Based on my observations and interviews since 2005, I have found that due to support from political parties, these NGOs have had the resources to grow and expand their services, targeting not only the larger cities but also the marginalized towns and districts. In a patronage system, backing from a senior member of a political party has empowered these organizations to challenge tribes and influential families in ways that are not available to independent NGOs.

This women's rights movement faces major obstacles, including rejection from within the community. On 8 March 2019, a well-known male presenter of a TV programme shared a long post on his Facebook page attacking the women's movement. He addressed women's NGOs as well as women activists, MPs and politicians, and accused them of being 'intellectually

empty', 'corrupt' and divisive in the community. He accused women activists of abusing vulnerable women and trafficking them. He called them a 'curse' and a 'mafia', holding them responsible for the difficulties that women in the community are facing.[2] While this particular Facebook post was only shared 3 times and liked by 111 people three days after it was first posted, it is representative of a popular view condemning the women's movement.

On a regular basis, TV presenters who interview activists attack the women's movement, but this kind of attack can also be seen on social media and in daily conversations. Every time a woman's murder or case of abuse gets media attention, the women's movement is condemned. In these debates, the perpetrators of the crimes are conveniently missing. While those who abuse, kill, rape, harass and buy women are men – usually powerful men – it is the women activists who are blamed for failing the victims and not protecting them, as if they are responsible for these attacks (Hardi, 2020).

Feminists have long argued that gender inequality is a political issue and addressing it requires major structural changes in society. Despite our efforts to create this understanding, we are still finding it difficult to get men involved in the struggle, specifically men who, because of their social, economic and political positions, have more power.

Advances in Women's Rights in the KRI

The workshop focused on three themes. The achievements of women's organizations in this region were highlighted alongside the internal and external obstacles, and views were solicited about the way forward. One of the issues addressed in the focus groups discussion was the achievements of the NGOs and civil society organizations that have been working to advance gender equality in the KRI for the past twenty-seven years. Specifically, the participants categorized their achievements into legal reform, change in consciousness and women's increased participation in public space.

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2 These are some of the sentences he used: 'You leave the women's problem alone, women in this region will have no problem'; 'You stop talking big about women's rights, women will get all their rights'; 'You stay away from women, and women will be braver and more active'; 'You take money under the pretext of protecting women from murder, you undermine women's rights under the guise of women's rights, you sell women under the guise of protecting women'; 'You leave, and Kurdish women will be stronger and more determined.'

Legal Reform

Activists who were interviewed between 2009 and 2013 for a previous study (Hardi, 2013), as well as those who took part in the 2019 focus group, agreed that legal reforms are among the most important positive changes initiated by the women's movement. The changed laws were described to be 'a source of pride'. Issues of concern included women's protection, as well as their civil and political rights. The political change provided a window of opportunity for women's participation in governance. Following the fall of the Ba'ath state, the Iraqi constitution established a minimum 25 per cent representation for women in the parliament in 2005. Four years later, the minimum quota for women in the Kurdistan Region was increased to 30 per cent.

Great advances have also been made in relation to women's protection. In 2000, after tireless lobbying by the women's NGOs, Jalal Talabani, the leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), suspended the use of Article 409 of law number 111 in the 1969 Iraqi Penal Code regarding 'honour' killing (Danish Immigration Service, 2018). Two years later, 'honour killing' was officially criminalized by the Kurdistan parliament (Sulaiman, 2013: 34). In 2011, the Law of Combating Violence within the Family was another leap forward. Punishable offences included violence within the family (physical, sexual, psychological), exchange of brides (including exchanging a child for a grown woman), giving a woman in exchange for blood feuds,[3] forced prostitution, encouraging suicide through violence, forced sex with husband (otherwise known as marital rape), miscarriage caused by violence and female genital mutilation (FGM).

The Kurdistan parliament reformed law number 188 of the Iraqi Civil Status Law of 1959 in 2008. The reforms included imposing more restrictions on polygamy, recognizing forced marriage as a punishable crime, giving women the right to prohibit polygamy and to claim the right to divorce in their marriage certificates and recognizing women as the legal guardians of their children in case of husband's death or absence, amongst other conditions. More recently, in 2018, a ground-breaking decree was passed by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Affairs which mandated gender studies in Kurdistan's universities. Even though the status of gender studies centres remains uncertain, more than thirty universities are now planning to teach gender studies. Funded by the European Union, the Center for Gender and Development Studies at AUIS is preparing Arabic and Kurdish resources

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3 When a tribe murders a man from another tribe, sometimes to stop the violence women are given to the tribe who has lost a son.

in gender studies, which can be utilized by professors who are new to the field. It is hoped that this initiative will help the new gender studies centres to flourish.

It is important to remember that while these reforms and decrees are impressive, implementation has been ad hoc (Hardi, 2013). Legal reform, on its own, cannot improve the women's situation. To be effective, it must be accompanied by a culture change within the police force, judiciary, media and the larger community. There also remain many laws or gaps in the law that discriminate against women, including inheritance law (Tabet, 2005), nulling the crimes of rapists who marry their victims (Article 427, 1969 Iraqi Penal Code), the abortion ban (Article 417, 1969 Iraqi Penal Code), lack of paternity leave, women's lack of eligibility to become legal guardians and to pass on their own names to their children in the case of children born out of rape or outside of marriage[4] and men's right to force women to have children.[5]

Two of these discriminatory laws have been particularly salient in the context of the Yezidi genocide when women were raped and forcibly impregnated by Islamic State (IS) fighters. Although some doctors risked their careers and carried out unlawful abortions to help the women, the majority of the survivors have been forced to carry their pregnancy through only to have their children taken from them (Oppenheim, 2019). The children cannot have Iraqi IDs under their mothers' names, and they are not accepted by the community. They are either left behind with IS fighters or given up for adoption, adding to the women's and children's ongoing suffering and torment. The Yezidi tragedy could have been a turning point for laws regarding abortion and guardianship of children in Iraq and Kurdistan. Unfortunately, these necessary legal reforms never took place.

Changed Consciousness

The participants pointed out the changes in women's consciousness but also within the larger community about women's issues, which has paved the

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4 People's Development Organization, along with WOLA Organization and a group of independent lawyers, are working on preparing a new bill for the Kurdistan parliament entitled 'My Name Is My Mother's Name', which allows children to carry their mother's names and mothers to be considered legal guardians of their children.

5 In January 2018, Women's Legal Assistance, Middle Eastern Research Institute and the Ministry of Interior submitted a bill to the Kurdistan parliament requesting that two articles should be added to the Law of Combating Violence within the Family. These are: forcing women to have children and forcing women to have a pregnancy test to determine the sex of the fetus.

way for women's increased participation in public space. Khanim Latif, who is the Gender and Civil Society Advisor to Iraqi President Barham Salih, and Bekhal Abubakr, who is an academic and a senior member of the Kurdistan Islamic Union, believed that, compared to the 1990s, more women are aware of their rights and entitlements. Director-General of High Council of Women's Affairs Amal Jalal and Gulstan Ahmad, who is Director of the Human Rights Organization in Halabja, added that women are not only aware, they also no longer accept their oppression, hide the problems they face or are silenced by tradition and cultural norms. Amal clarified that 'whether it is through [women's] organizations, the law, the outside world, or the media, she speaks.' Roza Hussain, a writer and activist based in Norway, felt happy about younger women's maturity and confidence compared to her own generation: 'They are much more aware than those of my time. This is to be celebrated.'

Things have also improved on the community level. Khanim compared the 1990s to the more recent years and noted that women used to negotiate with their families in order to study, travel, receive scholarships or work. It is now easier for women to study, work, own shops and businesses and participate in politics. Even families from remote villages send their daughters to university in the cities. Khanim clarified that sceptics may say that the families only agree to their daughters receiving higher education because they want them to earn money. Whatever the reason, she argued, women are making progress.

Both Amal and Khanim highlighted the larger-scale changes. Amal clarified that 'there are women's organizations, there are laws, there are institutions, shelters and the presence of tens of fair men who work with us.' Khanim added that, years ago, when she and her colleagues were trying to establish a shelter for women's protection, people were questioning them about basic facts. 'Why do you say combating violence against women?' they were asked, 'where is the violence committed against women?' Nowadays, Khanim stressed, men themselves talk about it and no one questions whether or not this is a real issue anymore.

Roza observed that not only women's rights violations are no longer denied by the public, but women's oppression is also no longer seen as normal or right. She remembered that people used to say, 'If a woman does "unethical" things, why should she not get killed?' Such views are no longer popular, and this signals a change in mentality. She attributed this change to the 'men and women . . . who worked in this field, put in the effort, gave their time, at a cost to their own lives, they endangered their lives.'

Journalist and staff of Khanzad Organization Parez Hama stated that people from across the social and political stratum are involved in the women's rights movement, from young people to old, teachers, academics, activists and politicians – this in itself is a hopeful indicator of change of consciousness. People no longer believe that it should be just women activists who carry the burden. Ikrama Ghaib, who was the previous director of Women's Media and Education Centre in Germian, provided positive examples of men in positions of power, such as the police and the judiciary, who stood by her and supported victimized women. Even though a lot seems to depend on the goodwill of those involved, now there are men who support women.

Politician and women's rights activist Sargul Qaradaghi mentioned the dwindling of tribal practices such as exchanging brides amongst families and bridal price. She remembered that in the 1990s part of the women's organizations' aims was to eliminate these practices as well as illiteracy. Now, this stage has passed, and the NGOs are focused on protecting these achievements and promoting women's place in decision-making centres. It is important, according to Sargul, to make women's participation effective by supporting them to do better.

Despite these improvements, within large sections of the community, and specifically in the areas where there is a shortage of NGOs working for gender equality (see below), major issues remain in relation to recognizing women as full and independent human beings, capable of making their own choices in life. Between December 2018 and April 2019, I facilitated five focus group discussions about sexual and gender-based violence in five towns.[6] Each focus group consisted of ten participants, including activists, caseworkers, journalists, lawyers, police officers, security officials and religious leaders. Each discussion began by first exploring the meaning of gender and it centred around the participants' understanding of issues related to sexual and gender-based violence.[7] It aimed to 'problematize' widespread views that are detrimental to gender equality and women's participation in the region.

The differences in the level of debate compared to that in the larger cities was immediately apparent. Some participants tried to change the discussion and focus on men's rights, which, according to them, were violated by those defending gender equality; others used religion to silence the debate, and still others, who saw themselves as women's allies, failed to understand some issues because of their inability to escape binary and essentialist thinking. If

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6 These towns are unnamed to protect them from stigmatization.
7 Gender is still a new concept and there are various misunderstandings of this term (see Hardi, 2013).

once the debate cited that women are weak and therefore cannot make their own decisions, some now argue that women are 'naturally kind' and therefore they need guidance and protection. Even within two hours of the discussion, one could see some people develop a more nuanced understanding, but it was clear that there is a great need for engaging the public in these debates more often.

Increased Participation in Public Space

More women are now present in public space, according to participants. Women now take charge and even lead. Bekhal believed that women play a larger role in politics, media and academia. Director of People's Development Organization Bahar Munzir argued that women's presence in the media and academia, the fact that the women's movement itself is taken into consideration, are all big achievements. Director of Women's Legal Assistance Shokhan Ahmad, Khanim and Ikrama argued that there are more professional working women, including in the conservative and marginalized areas where women used to be denied an education. Ikrama highlighted success stories of women who, helped by activists and caseworkers, have been able to reclaim their lives and build better futures for their children. She also identified how in a conservative community like the Germian region women now own pharmacies and businesses that are open till midnight, something that was hard to imagine fifteen to twenty years ago. Girls are more encouraged to get an education and get degrees; they are no longer told that marriage is their destiny and they should not waste their time in school.

It is true that there are more professional women in the public space, but the achievements are still rather limited. Focusing on women's participation in politics and governance we see that the quota system which secured women 30 per cent parliamentary representation and city council positions are usually filled by party loyalists who may not be capable of or interested in reinforcing gender equality.[8] Women are under-represented in important parliamentary committees and are confined to the women's committee

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8 Gulstan Ahmad spoke about times when opportunities are lost. Elections and new cabinets open up opportunities for women but in Gulstan's view, the women who end up occupying important posts are usually those who are politically affiliated and they are not part of the women's movement; they have 'not worked for women even for one day'. It takes these women time to understand the women's situation and because of this, there is regress. Competent women who have worked on women's issues are usually sidelined and not given positions, and so loyalists win the seats. As a result, 'Many of the women have not been able to make change while in those high posts.'

(Hardi, 2013). More notably, from the first cabinet in 1992 until the eighth cabinet, which ended in 2019, 'the ratio of women in all of the top leadership positions of Presidency, Speaker of Parliament, Prime Minister, City Councils, political parties, and the legislative system has been zero' (CGDS, 2019). In February 2019, Vala Fareed Ibrahim became the first woman speaker, followed by Rewaz Fayeq Hussein in July of the same year.

The executive body of the government lags behind the parliament. In April 2019, the Gender Balance Group of the ninth cabinet campaigned to ensure at least 30 per cent representation in the executive positions of minister, general director, adviser, the presidency, the leadership of political parties and leadership of legislative council. On 10 July 2019, the parliament voted in the new cabinet, which consists of twenty-one ministers, three of whom are women (Wahab, 2019).

According to the World Bank (2016: 102), the overall female unemployment rate in the KRI is 21 per cent compared to men at 4 per cent. Also, the labour force participation amongst women is one of the lowest compared to Iraq, Jordan and Iran: 'When women do find employment within the KRI it is primarily within the service sector (93.1 per cent) as opposed to the agricultural (4.7 per cent) or industrial (2.2 per cent) sector' (World Bank, 2016: 7). The service sector here refers to retail establishments, hotels, restaurants and communication services. Overall, it can be argued that despite progress, there are major barriers to women's participation in the labour force and in politics and governance.

The Challenges Ahead

The barriers that impede further progress were identified to be both internal and external. The internal problems of the movement can be summarized as follows. Bekhal identified an ideological conflict between women's rights activists to be a hindrance. It has obstructed the establishment of 'a balanced, co-operative and mutual message', which could unite activists and facilitate solutions. This has led to confusion amongst women in general: 'We have created a situation that women don't know where we are leading them. One of us thinks religion is the source of the problems and another thinks it is the solution.' Similarly, Lanja Abdulla, Director of Warvin Organization, questioned the 'philosophy . . . objectives . . . and methods' of the women's movement. In her view, instead of seeing equality as the end, the means of achieving equality have become the end: 'Our organizations are the tools, but they have become the objective.' In this respect, rather than focusing on the

organization's objective of gender equality, the survival of the organization itself has become the objective. 'Division and enmity' between activists is another internal problem, according to Khanim. She believed that women activists sometimes do things in spite of each other.

Gulstan agreed that part of the problem is the number of women's organizations, 'which have lost women's vision and objectives'. She identified how NGOs with different political or religious ideologies clash. If religious leaders stand against a woman's issue, then the women activists who are affiliated with those parties will not support the issue: 'party politics is dominant in the women's cause.' Lanja agreed that 'When you are doing politics, you will be forced to stand by your party's decisions and you cannot confront your leaders and hold them accountable.'

Amal believed that women's organizations have been like 'Paracetamol tablets and anaesthetics for the problems and obstacles' because they work effectively during crises, but they don't tackle the root causes of the problems. Bekhal highlighted the widening rift between men and women. She argued that because the main target of the women's movement has been women themselves, men are not equally invited to take part in the discussion and even when they are, they do not participate. Men are feeling targeted and there is a backlash. They are accusing the women's movement of causing problems between men and women. But, she pointed out, 'if [men] don't understand, if we each sing a different song, then we can't reach a solution.'

Lanja stressed the importance of engaging in critical self-reflection by getting together and discussing the movement's progress and problems. Parez agreed on the need to reflect and update strategies. She pointed out that after twenty-seven years, the slogans of the movement have not changed much; they have not been updated. Amal also highlighted the stagnation of demands, 'our demands have not changed much, and change is happening with the speed of a turtle.' Gulstan and Sargul added that such discussions would help identify the hierarchy of needs and help with constructing a comprehensive and co-ordinated regional plan which would be more effective than different organizations prioritizing different issues at any one time.

Another issue, according to Lanja, is the exhaustion felt by activists who experience hopelessness when their efforts are regularly thwarted and when they face smearing campaigns alone. At critical moments, according to Lanja, when an activist is attacked by political or religious parties, she feels completely alone: 'How can you win a war when those around you cannot support you?'

Ikrama, Farman Osman, who is Director of the Human Rights Office in Chamchamal, and Awezan Nuri, who works at the People's Development Organization in Kirkuk, all found the focus on the urban centres and marginalization of small towns, districts, villages and disputed territories to be a major problem. This can be gathered from the shortage of civil society organizations that focus on the women's cause in these areas. Ikrama argued that in these regions, there is a lack of sufficient support for women who are fighting for their rights and this isolation prevents them from escaping oppressive situations.

Activist Chnoor Ali argued that the marginalization of small towns is part of a bigger problem of not reaching different sectors of the community and being '[un]able to form a popular movement'. She argued that the activists are getting bored with each other, of seeing the same faces in all the different projects. As a journalist, Parez agreed that whenever it comes to women speaking in the media channels there are eight to ten women who do this on behalf of a large population. She questioned why the other women are not speaking for themselves and wondered if this is about them facing difficulties accessing these means or about them not being willing.

Another problem, according to Lanja, is the 'intellectual shortage because of lack of resources, lack of gender studies in universities, lack of expertise in feminism, lack of knowledge about the feminist movements in Europe in all the different phases'. Language barriers and years of isolation (the sanctions prevented the entry of books and travelling) have meant that few activists have experienced other movements and travelled to other places to see how other women have done it. Roza agreed that despite being a success, the women's movement has intellectual shortcomings which makes it hard to know where it is heading: 'This is a feminist movement which is relatively successful . . . It is true that it is divided but most importantly it must be theoretically strengthened.'

The external obstacles were identified in the following manner. Roza argued that the prevalent view that gender equality needs to be addressed by women's organizations alone must be challenged. It is important to acknowledge that 'the political authority is responsible for the lives of citizens in this community.' In Roza's experience the authorities have no 'interest' and no 'will' to improve women's situation: 'They don't show interest because they really don't see it as a loss when they see all these women are being killed in this community.'

Khanim also stated that there is a 'lack of real will by the political power of the Kurdistan Region' to tackle human rights in general, including women's

rights. Even though there are some 'cosmetic changes', according to Khanim, there is no genuine will to change things. Parez reiterated Khanim's view when she stated that the government is more interested in seeming progressive rather than serious problem-solving. This is mainly because, according to Parez, it creates institutions without making them viable, 'institutions such as the Advisory Centre for Families, the shelters, the Directorate of Combating Violence in the Family. They are in reality a mess … [the government] dedicates no money for these institutions, especially during the financial crisis.'

Farman and Chnoor discussed lack of co-ordination within the government which undermines achievements. Chnoor pointed out that there are now gender units in nine ministries, an achievement of the High Council of Women's Affairs with the Ministry of Higher Education. The ministries of finance and planning, which are not included in this project, can 'cut the budget of the gender units', Chnoor clarified. Like Parez, she believed that the government is more interested in establishing such institutions and units but does not think carefully about their sustainability. The staff who are working in these units, according to Chnoor, 'are usually very busy and don't have time for this issue, they don't even believe in it.' A more sustainable plan needs to be developed to deal with these issues.

Khanim blamed 'the disorganized and disorderly' international NGOs and donor organizations for deterring women's NGOs from their original objectives through prioritizing and funding certain issues and ignoring others. Chnoor also observed that since 2013 when the Islamic State crisis intensified, 'The UN and international agencies are focusing on IDPs and refugees; the host community is marginalized.' Amal agreed that instead of Kurdistan's needs becoming the directive, NGOs follow the funders' priorities and change their mandates.[9]

Bahar and Sargul highlighted the absence of widespread support and lack of endorsement from the larger community. Gender equality, Bahar pointed out, is the concern of a few NGOs and activists who care – it has not become an issue in the neighbourhoods, the public sphere, the workplace. This lack of popular base may partly be caused by smearing campaigns launched by political parties and religious leaders to destroy trust in the organizations and reduce the impact of activists. Shokhan argued that some work hard 'to make women's organizations look bad. Our good work is not highlighted but we are criminalized.' She also spoke of the frustration felt by activists when the community does not acknowledge how they go over and above their

9 These issues are confirmed by our study (Hardi, 2019).

prescribed roles and continue to support women, long after the funding has finished. Women's voluntary work, which extends into their weekends and evenings, is not recognized.

Shokhan, Lanja, Bekhal, Bahar, Sargul and Amal stated that the media not only does not shine a light on activists' work, in fact through belittling successful women, insensitively addressing sexual and gender-based violence and siding against the women's movement it plays a major negative role. Shokhan argued that activists themselves are not capable of highlighting their own work either. She explained that she is a lawyer, not a writer or journalist. She felt unable to express herself and convey the achievements appropriately. Lanja highlighted the need for a platform: 'We need the media. We need a stage for speaking. One of the women's organizations problems is that we don't have a platform.'

Another highlighted problem was the bias in the legislative council where political backing, rather than capability, secures individuals a place in the Judicial Institute. Shokhan argued that because nepotism is the deciding factor, some graduating judges are of questionable quality: 'Some of the female judges are worse than the men. A woman judge once told me: "You messed up women's lives."' Khanim, Roza and Amal added that the failure of the judiciary system in implementing reformed laws is another major obstacle, as well as the prominent bias against women who seek justice.

The long list of problems identified by this group of participants highlights the difficult situation that women activists are dealing with in this region. Considering the fact that many of the early women's rights organizations were politically affiliated, it is no surprise that they are ideologically divided, and they find it difficult to trust and work with each other. At this time, when these organizations are losing momentum and disillusionment is on the rise, there is a need for a unified vision and collaborative efforts more than ever. Perhaps larger symposiums are needed to engage in more critical self-reflection while at the same time working towards establishing a joint platform for action and visibility.

The Way Forward

The participants proposed solutions to the problems and obstacles mentioned above. They came up with a number of ideas to deal with the challenges. They identified new approaches and efforts to be adopted by the government, the NGO sector, universities, the media, the religious leaders and the larger community.

The Government

The participants saw the political will to effectively address gender inequality and commitment to change as the key to progress. In this respect, it is important to work with political leaders to bring about real change. Amal argued that while it is important to continue campaigning and raising awareness, 'we should also pressurize the regional president, prime minister, all their deputies, the ministers to take on quality change and not just issue decrees and decisions.' Also seen as key factors were a collaboration between the government and the NGOs, as well as co-ordination between the different sectors of the government. A good example to highlight the absence of co-ordination is that of the August 2018 Decree by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, which led to the establishment of the gender studies centres in all of Kurdistan's universities. Unfortunately, because of a lack of co-ordination with the ministries of finance and planning, the fate of these centres is now uncertain.

The importance of following up with ministerial directives was also highlighted. The directives of the Ministry of Education, for example, must be respected by teachers, schools and educational institutions. Likewise, the directives of the Judicial Council must lead to changed practices in the courts. Chnoor proposed a mechanism to pressurize the authorities and to make them commit to their directives and follow through. For example, organizations' meetings with authorities should be made public, with a presence from the media. Documenting any promises made and following up may help with implementation.

Amal, who used to work in the NGO sector and is now working in the government, spoke of the need to 'institutionalize gender equality'. In her view, this includes restoring the women's rights committee in the parliament,[10] securing women's representation on all parliamentary committees and mainstreaming gender equality in all the institutions and ministries. She highlighted the importance of studying the structure, directives, work environment and actual participation of women in governmental institutions in order to have a road map for the future, which can be assessed at intervals.

The participants also highlighted three specific areas that the government needs to target: women's security and protection, the judiciary and the education sector. Khanim stressed that the government must be held accountable for the safety and security of its citizens, including women.

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10 This was dismantled in October 2018 and was joined with the Human Rights Committee.

Both the general public and the government need to understand this issue clearly. When a woman is killed, most of the time it is not the failure of women's rights NGOs but that of the government. In line with women's protection, Gulstan argued that the police academy must be educated on women's issues because the police are essential in protecting women and investigating cases of sexual and gender-based violence. Sargul added that this kind of education must be compulsory for the Judicial Institute as well.

Roza highlighted the government's responsibility to provide economic security. In this sense, NGOs cannot replace the government. Their professional development and livelihood projects for women must be seen as efforts to alleviate unemployment and to address a shortage of services provided by the government. Ikrama stressed the importance of financial independence for women, specifically those in abusive relationships. This could take the form of benefits for women who have young or disabled children and the provision of skills development and job opportunities. Roza added that the authorities must also provide nurseries for young children so that young mothers can participate in the workforce.

Bekhal argued that motherhood must be protected by the government through appropriate maternity leave: 'Why should [a young mother] get her stipends cut after having a baby when she has just brought a new generation of life to this country and has gone through all that trouble?' Sometimes, she pointed out, women who return from maternity leave find that they have been moved to another position or reduced in rank. She argued for paid maternity leave because currently, the policy seems to punish women for having children: 'This woman has brought a new child into this country. She has not committed a crime.'

Amal and Shokhan argued that the Judicial Institute, where 'the female graduates are as bad as the male graduates', needs to be reformed. They also highlighted the importance of putting energy into monitoring court proceedings to ensure the implementation of the reformed laws, policies and strategies. Roza suggested that to improve the quality of judges, there must be gender-related courses in the Judicial Institute programme to help future judges understand gender inequality and women's legal situations in Kurdistan. Women's NGOs, she argued, 'should be the pressure group to force the government to change, both monitoring it, following up, and advising on how to do it'. Sargul also reiterated that 'We need to make sure that the next groups of judges are not the same as before.' She was uncertain about the effectiveness of gender-sensitive training for qualified judges because 'when someone becomes a judge, they look down on the

accused, the lawyers, and representatives of NGOs.' Gender sensitivity, respect for human dignity and autonomy must be taught before they graduate, she argued.

Khanim stressed that the government must play an active role in reforming the education sector, where children can learn alternative and egalitarian values. In the current system, children are in school for four hours a day, while they spend a larger part of their time in their neighbourhoods, with few to no entertainment facilities. From her point of view, the government, with help from the media, should also educate parents about children's need for sleep and for protection from exposure to adult media content. Sargul agreed that institutional reform is required: 'We really can't speak with the teachers and students one by one but changing the system will guarantee the change we want.'

Roza highlighted the importance of the Ministry of Education in the world because it 'constructs society'. Alongside changing the education curriculum, it is important to reform the College of Education, which produces teachers. The ministry should have its own directives that are obeyed by staff. Teachers should not be allowed to skip some lessons because they find it embarrassing or offensive, or because of their religious or cultural views. Roza argued that teachers must be reminded that 'You are a civil servant, you get paid by the state. You cannot ignore the rules that are in place and that you have studied . . . You will be prosecuted if you do.' Awezan reiterated the importance of teachers, as a group, recognizing that they must not engage in discrimination and that they need to treat students with sensitivity and care: 'Sometimes the teachers themselves create problems between students . . . they teach girls not to mingle with boys, turn boys into monsters in their eyes and teach girls to cover themselves and be scared.' These attitudes and views, she stated, cause major problems for them as teenagers and young adults.

The NGOs

Concerning the role of the NGOs, Parez and Gulstan argued that the women's rights NGOs must first work on strengthening and professionalizing their workforce to manage the difficulties of the job. Parez pointed to the importance of hiring the right people and training them well before they start working on these sensitive issues. 'These people won't come on board with one or two days of training. There needs to be a comprehensive project so that these people do their job . . . far from politics and nepotism.' Gulstan also argued that the NGOs must have clear guidelines, objectives and a programme to support the education of new staff.

To tackle the issue of divisions amongst women activists and the isolation of activists who become targeted, Roza suggested creating support networks. This would foster a culture of accepting diverse politics and ideological views and standing behind each other at times of crisis: 'It is important that we create this supportive mentality amongst women.' Bahar also argued for 'the establishment of a centre for supporting women activists. There is no place that supports us.' Such a centre, according to Bahar, could provide support for activists who are targeted, and protect their rights from a legal point of view. Lanja argued that it is time for the women's movement to identify priorities and become more focused and co-ordinated. This kind of co-ordination and organization, according to Lanja, would also strengthen the movement and make the international agencies more perceptive of their recommendations.

Bekhal argued that the NGOs need to work with universities (see below) to shape and inform research and identify the most urgent issues: 'There are cases that we need to work and focus on; there are issues that affect a large number of people we currently ignoring.' Shokhan believed that the NGOs need to form alliances with international agencies, reporting directly to the UN and to human rights organizations in Geneva, London and New York. This, she argued, is a more effective strategy than being voiceless and locally bound. It helps make the issues become internationally known. This is important, according to Shokhan, because both the KRG and the Iraqi government only pay attention when donor governments and international institutions raise these issues: 'I may write a thousand reports about the failures in court proceedings but unless these reports come from Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International, the government denies them. We should influence the outside so that they can influence the government.'

The Universities

Concerning the role of universities, Awezan identified the need to research the community and investigate the ways in which men are also victimized by their community: 'We should have research and studies about social problems to see where they originate. No man wants his wife to face problems and having to kill her as a result. Society makes him reach this decision. These same men from here, when you take them to another environment, they change. So they too are victims . . . If there are studies, we can identify the problems and be more effective.' Shokhan also hoped that the universities would play a bigger role in disseminating research and knowledge: 'Our research is not valued but if the American University [of Iraq-Sulaimani]

identifies the problems and solutions, then it will be more useful for the government.'

Roza spoke about the way governments in Scandinavia utilize universities to investigate social problems and find solutions: 'Whenever there is a problem, such as forced marriage . . . they will fund a university to conduct a study about its dimensions, how it works, whether it is a phenomenon, what the solutions are and what should be done.' Farman expressed support for the newly opened gender studies centres in the universities because of the role they can play in producing knowledge on women's issues and sexual and gender-based violence. He argued that these centres need to be better supported in order to survive. On the other hand, he expressed concerns about the use of research: 'Research is being done . . . The issue is, are these research papers being read? Are they worked on? . . . Every piece of research has a number of recommendations and suggestions. I believe that if the suggestions were acted on, the women's situation would now be at another level.' He argued that the government needs to be pressurized to act on the suggestions.

Bahar argued that universities, specially AUIS, can play an important role in helping women develop their leadership skills through specific pro-grammes, targeted at the younger generation of women. She hoped that 'AUIS becomes a place for the development of such women who can influence the community and diminish patriarchy'. This is specifically true, she argued, for young women who suddenly rise to power: 'I've seen female parliamentarians who were shaking while speaking on an issue, and that hurts my heart. We need to ignite these women . . . We want them to create change.' This, according to Bahar, means that they should not be passive presenters of reports produced by NGOs and research centres, but people who can develop solutions and fight for change. Such a woman 'needs to represent me in parliament'.

The Media

On the role of the media and speaking of the media's failure regarding women, Amal argued that AUIS can influence media practices through holding a conference for decision-makers in the media channels to discuss the way the media victimizes women. It would be good, she added, to develop awareness and policy to change current practices. Along these lines, one of our EU-funded projects at the Center for Gender and Development Studies is monitoring Kurdish and Arabic media. Four popular satellite channels, two in Kurdish and two in Arabic, were selected for this

purpose. The project started in October 2018 and will continue for two years. With the ultimate aim of effecting change, the objective is to determine in what ways these media channels victimize women, reproduce gender stereotypes and engage in symbolic violence against women. The results of this study, along with recommendations for change, will be shared with the community, the media channels and the Ministry of Culture.

Chnoor spoke about the importance of utilizing films and documentaries to create understanding about women's issues: 'It is important that we document cases of GBV . . . through documentary films that will be translated into international languages.' She also highlighted the importance of feature films that could create empathy and understanding in Kurdistan: 'This is an effective way to showcase this issue to an audience.' Several participants also highlighted the importance of having a platform for gender equality advocacy. The tireless work done by the women's rights organizations needs to be reported without being distorted. This would help alleviate the negative views associated with the movement in the community. The public needs to understand the extent of efforts, the resilience of the patriarchal system and activists' ongoing responses.

Religious Leaders

In this region, imams regularly attack women through their Friday sermons, which are then broadcast on social media. In one particular case, Mulla Mazhar spoke on his TV channel and called Kurdish women 'dinosaurs' for not allowing their husbands to practise what religion has allegedly given them the right to do: polygamy. After a major outcry from men and women, headed by Bahar, the channel was closed down for a while. Bahar and the group also filed a complaint against the mulla in court, only to be dismissed by the judge, leading to a major smear campaign of everyone involved. Generally speaking, there is scepticism about the willingness of religious leaders to help women's cause. During my own conversations with women who work in the field, some argue that working with religious leaders will be useless because they are 'hypocrites' who will come to the meeting, pretend to care and then continue their war against women.

Ikrama, on the other hand, argued that imams can and should play a role in this process. She reasoned that people listen to them a lot more than they listen to activists: 'When we were working on FGM, we had a team that visited villages. A midwife said to me, "Even if a thousand doctors and social workers and lawyers tell me don't do it, I will, but if an imam tells me it is haram, then I won't."' Ikrama also reminded everyone that because the

Friday sermons are well attended, they can become a platform for supporting women.

The Larger Community

The participants also insisted on the importance of engaging the larger community and getting women themselves to participate in this struggle, rather than leaving this to a small number of activists who are exhausted and experiencing burnout. Bahar argued that gender equality must become an issue in the neighbourhoods, the public sphere and the workplace. She suggested that activists should go back to the neighbourhoods, one by one, and convince each one to adopt the cause. Each neighbourhood that comes on board could then make a public statement: 'For example, hang something that says "this alley is free of violence" or "in this alley women are not killed".' Referencing her organization's earlier work on FGM, they managed to convince some villages to fill out a pledge not to engage in this practice. In return, Bahar's organization provided a small service to each village as appreciation, such as providing a generator or furnishing a school: 'I am honestly tired of conferences and I haven't gone on TV for three years now. We have to return to the people and the people must support us.'

Conclusion

In an earlier study (Hardi, 2013) I wrote about the resilience of the patriarchal system in Kurdistan, which adapts itself to changes and survives. I argued that this system launches an 'invisible war' against women by taking theoretical steps towards equality and undermining these steps in practice. This system reforms old laws and produces new, gender-sensitive laws, but fails to implement them. It adopts a quota system for women's participation that is even higher than the central government's but appoints women who will not be a threat to the patriarchal system. A third dimension must be added to this invisible war: discrediting and tarnishing the reputation of activists so as to destroy community trust and discredit their work.

The participants of this study acknowledged the weaknesses of the women's movement but also highlighted the importance of a holistic approach. The solutions they provided to pave the way forward identified the need for the various sectors to work together, including the government, civil society organizations, academic institutions, the media, religious leaders and the community. This, once again, emphasized an important understanding which is currently missing: achieving gender equality is not the

responsibility of NGOs alone, and it will be impossible without the engagement of the larger community.

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A Struggle within a Struggle
A History of the Kurdistan Women's Freedom Movement, 1978–2019

ISABEL KÄSER

Introduction

The history of the Kurdistan Women's Freedom Movement[1] spans four decades, transcends the borderlands between Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran and moves between the mountains and the cities of these four countries, as well as beyond, especially the European diaspora. It is also intricately linked to the wider Kurdistan Freedom Movement, better known as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, PKK), which emerged and developed in a context shaped by the ramifications of post-WWI border drawing and nation-building (1920s), the legacy of numerous Kurdish revolts and their suppression (1920s–1930s), the coups in Turkey (1960, 1971, 1980), the Cold War (1947–91), the Gulf War (1990–1), the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq (2001/2003), Turkey's EU accession negotiations (2005–), the 'Arab Uprisings', or better the wave of protests that engulfed the predominately Arabic-speaking region (2010–), the 'Rojava Revolution' (2012–) and the attempted coup in Turkey in 2016, which saw Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan crack down even more harshly on internal (Kurdish) dissent.

The Kurdistan Women's Freedom Movement, which developed alongside the Kurdistan Freedom Movement and has built separate political and military structures, has been fighting at the forefront of many of the battles in the Kurdish Middle East; from the co-mayors in south-eastern and eastern

1 Tevgera Azadiya Jinên Kurdistanê (in Kurdish) or Kurdistan Women's Freedom Movement (in English). The name of the whole movement (Tevgera Azadiya Kurdistanê) translates to Kurdistan Freedom Movement. Here, I also use Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement or the Kurdish women's movement.

Turkey (Bakur) to the woman combatants in northern Syria (Rojava). This movement has a forty-year history but has only caught the gaze of the Western (scholarly) eye with the defence of Kobanî (Syria) and Şengal (Iraq) against the attacks of the so-called Islamic State (IS or Daesh) in 2014. Despite the upsurge in journalistic, academic and activist work in the wake of the 'Rojava Revolution', few publications do justice to the complexity of this women's movement, its historical development and ideological underpinnings (Çağlayan, 2012, 2020; Dirik, 2018; Flach, Ayboğa and Knapp, 2016; Herausgeberinnenkollektiv, 2012; Jongerden, 2017). To understand how this democratic and gender-equal alternative is currently being built, I often asked my interlocutors across the Kurdish Middle East, 'How did you get here? (Enloe, 2014), How did women come to play such central roles in the movement?' 'We had to fight in order to be able to fight,' a former female guerrilla told me about her experience of the double struggle to be taken seriously by her male comrades, as well as actively fighting against the external enemies in the many wars the PKK has been engaged in since the mid-1980s. Nevertheless, the women's movement managed to establish its own army (1995) and party (1999) within the PKK and has established the co-chair system and the women's quota in the political sphere. Especially since the official announcement of Democratic Confederalism (2005),[2] which officially enshrined women's centrality in the written ideology of the movement, the women's movement has developed and diversified into the cultural, political and military spheres. How much 'the party' can do in each part of Kurdistan is constantly shifting and the boundaries between armed and political activism are often fluid.

This chapter traces parts of that history and zooms into one crucial moment of contestation between the women and men of the movement; the formation of the Kurdistan Women's Workers' Party (Partiya Jinên Karker ên Kurdistanê, PJKK) in 1999. I ask to what extent these internal struggles can help us understand how the women managed to carve out the space for autonomous organizing within the wider movement, how the liberation of women came to feature so prominently in the movement's ideology and how this speaks to ongoing debates around nationalism and feminism (Al-Ali and Tas, 2018a; Çağlayan, 2012; Dirik, 2018; O'Keefe, 2013). I trace how developments in the 'mountains' influenced the 'cities' and discuss how Democratic

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2 Democratic Confederalism is the council-political form, based on radical democracy, sustainable ecological, gender equality and self-defence. It foresees a collaboration between different regional assembly and self-governance structures, the smallest entity being the commune (Jongerden and Akayya, 2013).

Confederalism and its women's structures are being implemented to varying degrees in the four parts of Kurdistan, highlighting some of the tensions that emerge between the claim to liberation and the clear framework around the 'free woman'. This chapter is based on existing (academic) literature, as well as ethnographic research (2015–19), namely, in-depth interviews with both current and former female members of the Kurdistan Freedom Movement, in the armed and the political spheres. This chapter is by no means a complete account of the Kurdish women's movement but offers a glimpse into a rich and complex history of a women's movement struggling for space and visibility to realize its particular version of liberated women and a liberated Kurdistan.

Going Beyond the State: Women as Markers of Democratic Confederalism

Post-colonial and transnational feminists have examined the conflictual relationship between nationalism and feminism in the context of post-colonial liberation struggles and nation-building, cautioning that nationalisms are often gendered in their repertoire, in their performativity and in the assigned gender norms and relations. Women in national liberation movements tend to be the markers of modernity, progress and democracy but also representing the soil, the earth and honour of the nation, while men are typically depicted as the defenders and builders of the nation (Najmabadi, 1997; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989). Even if women play key roles in the armed and political resistance, patriarchal systems that predated independence struggles tend to be further entrenched by war and militarism and women are often pushed back into the private sphere post-conflict (White, 2007: 864). The debate whether nationalism is a hindrance to feminist activism or if nationalisms can enable women's movements engages scholars to this day (Abu-Lughod, 1993, 1998; Al-Ali and Tas, 2018a; Chatterjee, 1993; Cockburn, 1998, 2007; Jayawardena, 1986; Kandiyoti, 1991; O'Keefe, 2013).

To understand the make-up and potential of the spaces that open for women or that women create within nationalist movements, it is crucial to ask what kind of feminism and what kind of nationalism are being practised and to examine their temporality: at what point does a nationalist struggle open spaces for women? What kind of spaces open for women? For which women? How do women create and use these spaces? At what point do these spaces become narrower again? (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2011). In her work on women's involvement in the Northern Ireland conflict (1968–98), Theresa

O'Keefe found that nationalist movements can be a catalyst for feminist activism and that feminist nationalism in Northern Ireland developed precisely because of the attempts to marginalize and silence women, who partly gained strength because of nationalism's patriarchal tendencies (O'Keefe, 2013: 186). This line of argument is important for this study, as the Kurdish women's movement came up against many internal and external hurdles that shaped not only its organizational structures and tools but also its ideological canon. Adding to this ongoing debate, Nadje Al-Ali and Latif Tas have argued that '[r]ather than conceptualising nationalism and feminism as two separate, often competing or contradictory political movements, our analysis points to the dialectic relationship between the two' and have shown that each relationship needs to be analysed in its respective context (Al-Ali and Tas, 2018a: 469–70). Democratic Confederalism, the political system the Kurdish Freedom Movement is in the process of implementing across the Kurdish Middle East, links the liberation of women to that of the land. Contrary to previous nationalism in the Middle East, women are not considered passive bearers of culture and traditions and it is not up to the men to defend their land and women (Aktürk, 2016; Najmabadi, 1997). In Öcalan's liberation ideology, as well as in everyday practice, women are seen as active agents responsible for their liberation, the liberation of other women and that of humanity. Öcalan refers to women as the 'oldest colonised group' (Öcalan, 2013: 56); it is they who suffer most from the three 'ills of our contemporary civilisation': patriarchy, capitalism and nation-states, which he calls 'capitalist modernity' (Burç, 2018: 11). It is therefore in their power and responsibility to throw off the shackles of colonial oppression by getting organized 'in a movement for woman's freedom, equality and democracy; a movement based on the science of woman, called *Jineolojî* in Kurdish' (Öcalan, 2013: 56) and fight for 'democratic modernity' instead. The women who can defend themselves and are organized in autonomous women's structures and prepared to dedicate their lives to the struggle are the new marker of this liberation ideology, most visibly so in Rojava, where women have become the antithesis to the barbaric other: Daesh, the many jihadi groups fighting in Syria, the Syrian regime and the Turkish state. This chapter asks whether the fact the movement is not fighting for a nation-state but a non-state democratic and gender-equal confederation enabled women to create more sustainable spaces and fill them with different forms of claim-making? I combine O'Keefe's (2013) argument regarding women's ideal position within national liberation movements to develop feminist agendas and change a party from within, and Al-Ali and Tas's (2018a) emphasis on the dialectic nature between

nationalism and feminism, to build my analysis of the rupture points and moments of internal contestation, which I argue have fundamentally challenged some of the underlying gender roles and patriarchal structures while reinscribing others.

The Early Years: Women Fight for Space

Since the adoption of the Turkish Civil Code in 1926, women had been important markers of the modern and Westernized Turkish nation-state: women had the right to vote; polygamy was outlawed; child custody and the right of divorce was granted to both parents. However, these new laws for a long time remained formal, focused on urban centres and upper-class Turkish women. 'The state assigned women's rights only to a particular circle of women within a society that was regarded integral to the national project built on the paradigms of "one state, one nation, one language, one flag"' (Burç, 2018, 6; Kandiyoti, 1987). Kurdish women were thus left out, and their plight was largely ignored by the state feminist organizations that emerged over the following decades. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that Kurdish women were politicized as part of the revolutionary left and later the PKK (Al-Ali and Tas, 2018b; Yüksel, 2006). The PKK emerged against the background of the 1971 military coup in Turkey, which cracked down harshly on the revolutionary left and civil society more broadly. Revolutionary groups were forced into the private spheres such as university dormitories in Ankara, where they formed 'friends' groups', reading and discussing politics. As early as 1972–3, one of these groups started to assemble around Abdullah Öcalan, then a student at Ankara University. At the time they referred to themselves as the 'Kurdistan Revolutionaries' and started to build a dedicated group of cadres (Jongerden, 2017: 235–6). Over the next four years, the group further developed its Marxist–Leninist ideology and the idea of Kurdistan as a colony that needed to be liberated through a 'people's war'. They agreed on the need for an armed struggle and expanded recruitment to different provinces in the Kurdish south-east of the country, where female cadres such as Sakine Cansız were at the forefront of mobilizing women for the cause (Cansız, 2015).

The official history of the PKK starts on 27 November 1978, with the founding congress in Fis, a small village near Lice in the Diyarbakir district. The founding members included twenty-two Kurdish and Turkish students such as Abdullah Öcalan, Sakine Cansız, Kesire Öcalan, Cemil Bayık, Mazlum Doğan, Kemal Pir and Duran Kalkan, among others. Sakine and Kesire were

the only two women present at the founding congress. Sakine, who became an important figure of the women's movement, writes in her memoirs that she only briefly spoke at the congress and not about the topic that was closest to her heart: the role of women in the war of national liberation. Being too intimidated to speak at length in the presence of the more experienced male members, the congress did not discuss further the ideological and practical position of women in the party (Cansız, 2015: 393–400). Shortly after the founding congress, the PKK staged its first attacks in Hilvan and Siverek in the province of Şanlıurfa in eastern Turkey, during which Kurdish landlords who collaborated with the state were targeted. In response, Turkish nationalists attacked the city of Maraş in December 1978 and the state announced martial law in thirteen Kurdish provinces. Sakine and many of her comrades were arrested in Elazığ in 1979, prior to the military coup (Cansız, 2018: 14). To avoid meeting the same fate, Öcalan and a few of his followers escaped to Damascus, where the party's headquarters would be based for the next twenty years. Political and economic instability, as well as violent conflicts between right- and left-wing groups, led to another military coup on 12 September 1980. This brutal crackdown destroyed or significantly weakened the new groups and parties that had formed across the political spectrum in the 1960s and 1970s. The brutal military regime reigned from 1980 to 1983, followed by a slow return to civil rule. During that time, most of the PKK cadres either fled abroad or were imprisoned. For the latter, the resistance against Turkish state brutality continued behind bars. Sakine Cansız, Mazlum Doğan and Mehmet Hayri Durmuş, among many others, staged hunger strikes and death fasts in Diyarbakir Prison between 1980 and 1982.[3] Zelal, a London-based activist and former party member, recounts the developments in the early 1980s as follows:

> Until 1984 [start of the guerrilla war], it was the political prisoners who kept the party alive. This gave the people hope and the party in Syria time to get organized. At the same time, people started to build associations in Europe. Because of the support of the people for the resistance in the prisons, the party could send guerrillas to people's houses where they talked about their struggle and garnered support for the upcoming armed struggle. With 1984 everything completely changed. Now the big party was around the guerrilla. The attacks of '84 gave hope to people, also to Kurdish students in

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3 Mazlum Doğan, Hayri Durmuş and Kemal Pir were three founding members of the PKK who died during the big death fast in 1982. Mazlum hanged himself in protest of the prison conditions on Newroz, 21 March 1982. They all became important symbols of resistance (Gunes, 2012: 98).

the Turkish cities. They started to organize at the universities and in the late '80s and early '90s there was a big wave of students who joined the party.[4]

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the PKK developed into the only significant Kurdish party which started to pose a military and political challenge to Turkey's authority in the Kurdish regions (Gunes, 2012: 101). At that time many women were active as student organizers in Istanbul or Ankara, in the guerrilla, as well as the so-called 'city guerrillas'. City guerrillas were party-affiliated cadres who organized the civilian populations in the villages and towns. Because women could go undetected for longer than men, who were known to the security forces, many of the grassroots activities were carried out by female cadres. These city guerrillas were particularly active in cities like Cizre, where Kurdish consciousness was strong, and people were sympathetic towards the PKK. They used important dates such as Newroz (Kurdish New Year) or 15 August (date of the first guerrilla attack), to stage their opposition.[5] One of these city cadres was Bêrîvan, who had been successfully organizing and educating women in Cizre, building women's committees and militias that were able to operate between the different districts. Her death in January 1989,[6] its commemoration a year later and the brutal state response fuelled the uprisings (serhildan) that continued and spread across eastern Turkey until 1993, mobilizing large numbers of women to join the guerrilla force (Herausgeberinnenkollektiv, 2012: 19). Gültan Kişanak, a key figure in the legal parties and at the time of our interview the co-mayor of Diyarbakir, explained the emergence of the women's movement as follows:

> The Kurdish Women's Movement developed from two sources. The first was the prison resistance. The second strand emerged in the early '90s when state repression targeted the livelihoods of people. Many people don't know about it and it is not yet analysed: when the Turkish state was targeting people, village, homes and gardens, women's responses were related to the principle of self-defence; they were defending their livelihoods and were politicized that way. The resistance started in prison and merged with the women defending their livelihood. They got politicized by themselves, because of the state violence, they went on the street and became political actors. . . . Compared to other women struggles where a group of intellectual

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4 Interview with Zelal, 1 June 2018.   5 Ibid.

6 In January 1989, Turkish police forces caught up with her and surrounded her house. Legend has it that she answered calls to surrender with slogans of resistance and fought to the last bullet in order to free her trapped comrades, before being murdered (Herausgeberinnenkollektiv, 2012: 533).

women were trying to reach the masses, this movement developed the opposite way. Therefore, it was possible to gain a mass character and gain political representation. . . . Of course, we also need to talk about women who started to participate in the guerrilla ranks. Like in many patriarchal societies there were specific roles for women in the eyes of men. . . . But after they saw that women leaving the village and joining the guerrilla they couldn't behave in the same way. This had a great impact on society. Because these classical roles started to be questioned within the family. The women's struggle was not only against state violence but also against the patriarchal roles in Kurdish society.[7]

Gültan describes an important dynamic that has been a dominant factor shaping the women's movement: the simultaneous struggle in the activist, political and armed spheres, taking place in the prisons, villages, municipalities and the mountains.

The Making of the 'Free Woman'

In the first party programme of 1978, the women's question was not yet formally addressed. Like other national liberation movements, it was thought that women would gain their freedom in the course of the anti-colonial struggle. From the mid-1980s onwards, however, Öcalan put a lot of intellectual labour into the ideological creation of the 'free women's identity' and role within the movement, a process that went hand in hand with the foundation of the Mahsum Korkmaz Academy in the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a large number of women went to the Academy for party education, where the triple oppression of women was first discussed: the intersecting dynamics emerging from nationalism, capitalism and patriarchy. As a result of these discussions, the first women's union, the Kurdistan Union of Patriotic Women (Yêkitîya Jinên Welatparêz ên Kurdistanê, YJWK), was established on 1 November 1987, not in Kurdistan but in Hannover, Germany. This organization educated Kurdish women in the diaspora and mobilized more women to join the armed resistance in Kurdistan (Herausgeberinnenkollektiv, 2012: 20).

Handan Çağlayan, whose analysis traces the development of the 'free women's identity' from the 1980s to the late 1990s, shows that the biggest challenge in the effort to mobilize Kurdish women for the armed struggle was to overcome the honour (*namûs*) barrier, which links men's honour to

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7 Interview with Gültan Kişanak, 5 January 2016.

women's bodies and sexuality. In earlier writings, Öcalan had described women as being 'pulled down'; referring to being locked up in the house, dependent on men and always in danger of damaging their honour. Due to their inferiority, women, in turn, pulled men down, holding them back in their nationalist pursuits and stopping them from joining the party. This barrier needed to be removed so that women could leave the house and join the movement, thus freeing themselves from their state as 'slaves of slaves'. Until the early 1990s, Öcalan changed this discourse so that the liberation of men and all of society was hinged on women's liberation (Çağlayan, 2012: 10–11). In this process, he linked women's powers to a mystical past, the Neolithic era when women of Mesopotamia were not only free but the makers of their own destiny. In this paradigm shift women needed to liberate themselves from the shackles of slavery in order to rediscover their inner goddess (Îştar), while the men were tasked with killing the 'dominant man': 'Indeed, to kill the dominant man is the fundamental principle of socialism. This is what killing power means: to kill the one-sided domination, inequality, and intolerance. Moreover, it is to kill fascism, dictatorship, and despotism' (Öcalan, 2013: 51). Women could only become 'free' by dedicating their life and death to the party as desexualized goddesses,[8] living up to the example set by Zîlan,[9] one of the first female martyrs who became a symbol of women's unfaltering dedication to the cause (Duzel, 2018: 12). In the party education that each new recruit undergoes, guerrillas learn to become a 'militant', a determined revolutionary. As I have argued elsewhere, this process of becoming 'free' also entails much disciplining of each individual body; learning self-control (oto-kontrol) and how to curb physical urges such as hunger, tiredness and sexual desires are a key prerequisite in a revolutionary's life (Käser, 2019). My research supports Çağlayan's findings that while some women would only repeat the party slogans of liberation and goddesses, others skilfully used the powerful identity bestowed upon them to keep organizing and insert their demands into the political agenda of the movement (Çağlayan, 2007).

In the 1990s, the Kurdish political space changed profoundly. The PKK had turned into a permanent and legitimate actor, and the People's Labour Party (Halkın Emek Partisi, HEP), the first pro-Kurdish political party, started to organize around 'Kurdishness' in Turkey. The HEP was not founded by the

8 Upon joining the PKK all female and male guerrillas are tasked with abstaining from sexual and romantic relationships.
9 Zîlan died on 30 July 1996, when she detonated a bomb in the middle of a military parade in Dersim (Herausgeberinnenkollektiv, 2012: 541).

PKK but shared a social basis with PKK supporters and martyr families. By entering electoral politics, the HEP and its successors gained access to state-allocated legal, political and material resources and helped to legitimize the Kurdish Freedom Movement through votes. The pro-Kurdish political parties were and still are heavily restricted by the PKK and the Turkish establishment's intolerance, a tension that plays out in power struggles within the legal parties over how closely to work with the PKK (Gambetti, 2009: 54; Watts, 2010: 14). The legal party could not adopt the radical discourse of the PKK or its military hierarchy; instead, it developed both as a Kurdish and left-wing party, advocating human rights and the democratization of Turkey (Bozarslan, 2012: 12). Despite pressure from the PKK and the Turkish establishment, it was the Kurdish movement's efforts to diversify through civic organizations, trade unions, media outlets, women's organizations and international alliances that has turned the PKK's militaristic strategy into a social movement (Gambetti, 2009: 54). Women were integral to this process. Similar to their comrades in the mountains, in 1996 they created a separate women's congress within the Kurdish political movement, established associations and published journals such as *Roza* (politically independent) and *Yaşamda Özgür Kadın* (linked to the Kurdish Freedom Movement). These journals developed into important sites where the women's movement could set itself apart from the male-dominated Kurdish Freedom Movement and from the feminist movement in Turkey (Yüksel, 2006: 780–1). As part of the political work they also started to organize around the women's quota. The HADEP was the first political party in Turkey to introduce a voluntary 25 per cent women's quota in 2000. Over the next few years, women worked tirelessly to increase this quota to 35 per cent, before it was eventually set at 40 per cent in 2005 (Çağlayan, 2020: 97).[10]

Apart from the political struggle in the cities, the 1990s was also a period of intense wars between the PKK and the Turkish army and their Iraqi Kurdish allies (KDP/PUK).[11] In the early 1990s, the Turkish army destroyed up to 4,000 villages in eastern Turkey, in an attempt to break the support and supply networks of the PKK. Millions of Kurds migrated to urban centres

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10 In the 1990s and 2000s, numerous pro-Kurdish parties were shut down: the HEP in 1993, DEP in 1994 and the Democratic Society Party (DTP) in 2009. The Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP), founded in October 2012, has come under immense pressure to win in 2015 when it managed to win 13 per cent of the popular vote and entered the parliament with eighty MPs (Gunes, 2019: 222).

11 KDP stands for Kurdistan Democratic Party (Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê), ruled by the Barzani family; PUK stands for the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (Yekêtî Niştîmanî Kurdistan), ruled by the Talabani family.

such as Diyarbakir, the western cities of Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir, and the European diaspora. Around 20,000 people fled to Iraqi Kurdistan and eventually settled near the town of Maxmur, establishing the Maxmur refugee camp (Yılmaz, 2016). While more women were joining the guerrilla and fighting in its military ranks from the 1990s onwards, more were also dying, some of them committing spectacular acts of resistance. Bêrîvan, Bêrîtan[12] and Zîlan left a particularly significant mark, each of them sparking a new era of female mobilization. The resistance of Bêrîvan helped to spark the uprisings in Cizre in 1989 and Bêrîtan's death leap in 1992 pushed Öcalan to initiate a separate women's army in 1993. While this was only a promise, in the beginning, autonomous women's structures started to take shape with the preparation for the first women's congress in 1995. At the party headquarters in Syria, Öcalan and the women at the Academy had formulated forty-five questions, such as: How do you develop into a determined fighter? What is the influence of Islam? Why do women get distracted by men? What does honour mean in a liberated society? What is the meaning of marriage? Are marriage and revolution a contradiction? What is the meaning of the first love? How should sexuality in relationships be understood and lived? (Solina, 1997: 336). These questions were the basis for the discussions during the congress in 1995, where a twenty-three-member executive council was elected. They formed the Free Women's Union of Kurdistan (Yekîtiya Azadiya Jinên Kurdistan, YAJK), under which women started to build their independent units, aiming to organize and live autonomously from their male comrades (Herausgeberinnenkollektiv, 2012: 22). 'That was a very difficult time,' commander Zaxo recounted during our interview, 'we were like children, trying to walk but we kept falling down. But what we lacked in physical strength, we made up with our will to resist (îrade).'[13] At the end of the 1990s, around 30 per cent of the PKK's members were women. They remained absent from the upper echelons of power but their presence and acceptance among the rank-and-file members had a great impact on slowly but surely challenging ideas around gender norms in the wider Kurdish society and politics (McDonald, 2001: 148). This process, however, was not

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12 Bêrîtan fought during the Southern War against an alliance of Turkish government and KDP/PUK allies. Legend has it that she fought until her last bullet in Xakurke, when she was cornered by approaching peshmerga forces, who said, 'Surrender, and we will marry you off and you will live like a rose.' To escape her capture, Bêrîtan jumped off the cliff she was standing on. Her death became a symbol of the will to resist (îrade) of Kurdish women and the symbol of the women's army that was initiated in 1993 (Herausgeberinnenkollektiv, 2012: 535).

13 Interview with Zaxo, 17 March 2017.

without its contradictions and setbacks, as will be further discussed in the next section.

The Formation of the PJKK

All my interlocutors emphasized that the early years, especially the 1990s, were a particularly difficult period, not only militarily but also internally; the 'battle of the sexes' being a constant feature of daily life and struggle. 'Just because we joined a revolutionary movement did not mean that the men in the party had changed. In the early years we struggled against the same hierarchies in the party as in society,' I was repeatedly told. Öcalan was in Damascus, training cadres, producing ideology and sending reports to the mountains, while brutal wars were raging on in Bakur and Başur, and where women and men were mainly concerned with their own survival:

> At that time, we weren't so critical and this [the women's movement] was not our priority. Our priority was the revolution because there was a big war with a clear enemy; the Turkish government and the Turkish army, and our goal was to fight against the Turkish government. When I was a guerrilla in Bakur I can tell you honestly, I didn't think so much about the women's movement. Because our priority was different: you are in a war, you have to survive and you have to fight.[14]

Another former cadre describes the quest to be accepted as equals as follows:

> We are women, so of course, we have physical limitations. Men are stronger than women; that's a fact. In the mountains, it was like a competition. We had to do everything like the men, or we didn't stand a chance. For example, if he carried 50 kg of flour then I have to do that too. Normally my body cannot carry 50 kg but in order to get accepted by the men, I had to do it. We had to fight in praxis with men. If he goes and attacks a *karakol* [Turkish army outpost] then I have to do that too and then we can talk about equality. In the mountains, we experienced this the hard way and fought for this equality physically.[15]

In March 1998, Öcalan finally published his official *Ideology of Women's Liberation* (*Bîrdoziya Rizgariya Jinê*). He had been in a constant discussion with women, pushing them to think about what a women's army would look like, how a women's party would be organized and according to what kind of ideology. Öcalan was the one who formulated the questions, structured the

14 Interview with a former cadre, 14 May 2018.
15 Interview with a former cadre, 11 May 2018.

discussions and lectures, and it was those lectures that were recorded, transcribed and sent to the different mountain camps as educational material. Nevertheless, women's everyday fight in the mountains, their resistance in the prisons and their deaths in protest of Turkey's oppression influenced him greatly; 'he saw women as power and wrote the liberation ideology accordingly.'[16]

The time between the publication of the women's liberation ideology in March 1998 and Öcalan's arrest one year later was crucial for the women's movement. Morale was high, as more women were put into leadership positions and their organizational and military power grew. When Öcalan spoke to the commanders of a certain region, he always made sure to speak to the female leader as well:

> Öcalan was a weapon for women, and women were a weapon for Öcalan. Öcalan was able to control the men through the women. Men are better at lying and could have told him something different [about the situation in an area]. But women had a good and special relationship with him. He was a weapon for us; we were a weapon for him.[17]

At the end of 1998, the sixth party congress was held in the mountains. In preparation for this congress, Öcalan sent his instructions in which he frequently discussed the formation of a new women's party. However, during the congress, on 15 February 1999, Öcalan was arrested, which sent shockwaves through the Kurdish Middle East, as well as the diaspora. Despite the chaos, the proceedings in the mountains continued and after the general congress ended, a woman's congress was held. Commander Zaxo remembered: 'Almost all women agreed that if we don't do it now [form their own party], we would never do it. Apo is in prison now, but we have his writings and his paradigm to support us.'[18] During that congress, the women decided to go ahead with the planned formation of a women's party and thus turned the YAJK, a union, into the PJKK, a party. The predominantly male leadership tried to pressure the women to not go ahead with their women's party:

> [They] said we are now going through difficult times: Öcalan was arrested and all the power needs to be united in the central committee. A separate party, an independent party, can weaken us, and the enemy can use this situation. They argued like this and said we don't accept your [women's] congress. This resulted in a big fight between the women and the leadership.

16 Interview with a former cadre, 11 May 2018.
17 Interview with a former cadre, 14 May 2018.   18 Interview with Zaxo, 17 March 2017.

> The 200 women who participated in the congress were kept in a valley and weren't allowed to do anything. It was like an open prison.[19]

Abandoned by the leadership, the women were kept hostage in a valley for almost three months. Here, they tried to find a way out of their predicament. According to my interlocutors, the women did not want to speak against the party because their leader had just been arrested, but at the same time, women's gains could also not be compromised. 'It was difficult to find a way. If you say we accept the general leadership it means you lost the women's struggle, and all the power will be in men's hands. But if you resist, they respond with violence, psychological violence.'[20] After a few months of back and forth negotiations, joint meetings were held, during which the female leaders chosen by the women were punished and removed from their post. In their place, they put women chosen by men. 'This was a big blow for women. This really broke the women's morale and was a turning point, like before and after Jesus. . . . We saw that men would leave nothing to us, and we saw them becoming more patriarchal again.'[21]

This power struggle between men and women and women allied with men continued throughout the following year. During the seventh party congress in late 1999 and early 2000, women disagreed with the general direction Öcalan's brother Osman tried to take the party, as well as the names of potential leadership candidates. In protest, they all cut their hair to shoulder length, a sign of having lost everything. At that same congress, nineteen women refused to be part of the leadership and were put in detention in a valley yet again. The men accused them of working against the party and of collaborating with the enemy. They also put pressure on women by withholding food and clothes.[22] Eventually, negotiations between the opposing factions resumed and women were told to hold their congress. During that congress, the PJKK became the PJA (The Free Women's Party, Partiya Jina Azad). 'It became evident that slowly the women had lost their power, also because many of them changed their position and moved closer to the men, admitting that the decision to form the PJKK as an independent party was wrong. This was a great setback.'[23] Thereafter, the overt opposition to men stopped and it became clear that any women's party would exist within the framework of the PKK, and not independently from men.[24] This is

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19 Interview with a former cadre, 14 May 2019.   20 Ibid.   21 Ibid.
22 Interview with Zaxo, 24 March 2017.   23 Interview with a former cadre, 14 May 2018.
24 The women's movement underwent numerous name changes and processes of restructuring: 1987, YJWK; 1995, YAJK; 1999, PJKK; 2000, PJA; 2004, PAJK (Party of Free Women in Kurdistan, Partiya Azadiya Jin a Kurdistan). Today, the PAJK functions

still the case today: the women are able to operate within their autonomous ranks as long as they do not transgress the boundaries set by the umbrella of the KCK (Koma Civakên Kurdistan, Kurdistan Communities Union), the KJK (Koma Jinên Kurdistan, Kurdistan Women's Union) and Öcalan's liberation ideology.

Between the Mountains and the Cities

In the tumultuous years that followed Öcalan's arrest women also continued their organizational efforts in the civilian and political sphere. Having the PJA, a (weakened) women's party, in the mountains supported their efforts in expanding their grassroots and cultural work. They opened women's associations across the country, where they offered education courses to women in minority and linguistic rights, women's and children's health issues, Kurdish and Turkish language courses and women's history. Advances made by women in the mountains had a great impact on the struggles of their comrades in political parties and prisons. Zelal, who was serving a seven-year prison sentence due to her political activism as part of the women's movement in the 1990s, remembers the importance the publication of the women's liberation ideology had on their work in prison:

> That was very important. At that time, I was in prison and we celebrated this. Because before that whenever we talked about a special women's organization, party or association, even in prison our male friends were telling us we are trying to separate the party; we are trying to spill the blood of the party. Or that we are taking the side of the Turkish government because we are attacking the party. But when this ideology was published, they couldn't say anything anymore.[25]

After his arrest, Öcalan continued to rethink and reformulate his vision for a democratic future of Kurdistan and Turkey. He abandoned the goal to establish an independent Kurdistan and introduced Democratic Confederalism; a democratic, ecological, gender-equal social system; a bottom-up system of self-government. Democratic Confederalism seeks to develop a mode of

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as the ideological branch and is organized as a confederal structure alongside the YJA-STAR, the armed Free Women Units (Yekîneyên Jinên Azad ên Star), YJA, the political front Union of Free Women (Yekitiya Jinên Azad), and the Women's Youth Organization (Komalen Jinên Ciwan), all under the umbrella of the Association of Kurdistan Women (Komalên Jinên Kurdistan, KJK, previously Koma Jinên Bilind); see Koma Jinên Bilind (2011) and Jongerden (2017).

25 Interview with Zelal, 1 June 2018.

ordering beyond the nation-state and capitalism that goes hand in hand with a process of social reconstruction (Jongerden and Akayya, 2013: 171–8). The guerrillas should henceforward merely engage in 'legitimate self-defence'. Naturally, many guerrillas and party cadres who had fought for an independent Kurdistan and lost thousands of their friends in the war opposed this new ideology. At the same time, Osman Öcalan, who had previously tried to take on his brother's leadership role, proposed the 'reform of social relations', in an attempt to legalize romantic and sexual relationships within the party. All former and current party members I spoke to had vehemently opposed this reform, knowing it would only lead to the weakening of the women's structures, something Osman had intended all along. Due to ideological differences and the staunch opposition he faced, Osman left the party in 2004.[26]

During Newroz in March 2005, Democratic Confederalism was officially declared as the new party objective. With this announcement, women's centrality in the struggle was finally official. Shortly after, Öcalan proposed the co-chair system, suggesting that all political leadership positions should be occupied by a man and a woman. Having the backing of the leadership once again, women continued to organize and mobilize around the co-presidency system and the 40 per cent women's quota. Female activists and politicians who were involved in this process stress that having Öcalan's support was important but did not shield them from the resistance they continued to face from their male comrades. Quite the opposite; due to internal resistance it was only in 2007 that women were able to create their own election committee and select their own candidates. That same year, the women's movement managed to get eight female MPs elected (of twenty-two in total), and the numbers have been rising steadily since then (Al-Ali and Tas, 2018c: 15–16; Sahin-Mencutek, 2016: 476). During our interview in Diyarbakir, Ayşe Gökkan, a KJA[27] activist, recounted the continuous struggle as follows:

> In 2010, we organized a big conference, where the men said, we have solved the problem between men and women; you no longer need the separate women's organization. And we said, really, you solved it? How? At every conference, we discuss this, still. At every conference, we say, no, we are not

26 Interview with a former cadre, 11 May 2018.
27 KJA was the Congress of Free Women (Kongreya Jinên Azad), the umbrella structure of all women's organizations linked to the Kurdistan Freedom Movement in Kurdish Turkey (Bakur). It was shut down as part of the state crackdown on pro-Kurdish institutions in late 2016. In 2017, it reopened as the TJA, the Free Women's Movement (Tevgera Jinên Azad).

equal. The problem is not you, but the system, the state, the family. You and I don't have a problem, the system is the problem, so we have to continue our struggle.[28]

This struggle reached another important milestone with the establishment of the Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP) in 2012, a broad coalition of Kurdish and Turkish leftists and anti-racist, anti-homophobic, anti-nationalist, anti-sexist and pro-peace ethno-religious minority organizations and parties. Within the HDP women organize autonomously in the Women's Assembly and the co-chair system is applied throughout (Burç, 2018: 8). In the 2014 local elections, the HDP won 102 municipalities in the south-east of Turkey and in the 2015 general elections managed to pass the 10 per cent threshold to enter the parliament of Turkey.

As a parallel effort to the political struggle, the women's movement also started to develop Jineolojî, the 'women science'. Proposed by Öcalan in 2008 and since developed in 'the mountains' and in women's centres across the Kurdish Middle East and at Jineolojî workshops in Europe, Jineolojî and its advocates have put into writing their collective experiences and knowledge, which emerged from four decades of political and armed struggle, finding a new vocabulary for understanding the intersecting modes of oppression they are fighting. For members of the movement, Jineolojî is a philosophical and intellectual practice that challenges male knowledge production and rewrites histories from a female perspective, as well as a political practice to mobilize women and give them a voice and awareness about their history and position in society (Jineolojî Committee Europe, 2018). Importantly, it was not Öcalan alone who opened the door for discussions around Jineolojî, but women had in fact already been discussing versions of Kurdish feminisms in the prisons in the 1990s:

In 1995, we were discussing women's rights in prison with a party cadre. She said we should have our own version of Kurdish feminism because our struggle is so rich and complex – and that we could call it Jineolojî. Back then her ideas were rejected by our comrades because feminism was seen as bourgeoise, as a foreign concept. After a while, I started doing a lot of research and started to call myself a feminist. I was the black sheep! One time I wrote an article about the different feminist movements in history and submitted it during the 'history month' we organized in prison. And I won the first prize! They later told me that they didn't want to give it to me but they had to because they couldn't find anything wrong with my research.[29]

28 Interview with Ayşe Gökkan, 14 November 2015.
29 Interview with Zelal, 2 May 2019.

This quote illustrates the complex trajectory of Jineolojî, as well as the fact that the women had to navigate interwoven power structures at all times, opposing dogmatism and conservatism also in their own ranks. Aside from internal power struggles and knowledge production, from 2005 onwards the wider Kurdish Freedom Movement focused on the transnational development of Democratic Confederalism through umbrella structures and political parties such as the Democratic Society Congress (Demokratik Toplum Kongresi, DTK) in Bakur in 2007, the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekitiya Demokratik, PYD) in 2003 and the Movement for a Democratic Society (Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk, TEV-DEM) in Rojava in 2011, the Party of Free Life in Kurdistan (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê, PJAK) in Rojhelat in 2004 and the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (Partiya Çareseriya Demokratîk a Kurdistanê, PÇDK) in Başur in 2002, which in 2014 changed its name to the Freedom Movement (Tevgera Azadî). These four contexts are starkly different, not least in terms of how the respective states respond to the expansion and consolidation of the Kurdistan Freedom Movement.

In Syria, PKK members who stayed behind after Öcalan's expulsion in 1999 had established the PYD in 2003. After having been based in Syria for over 20 years, the PKK enjoyed much support among the Kurdish population, not least because as many as 10,000 Syrian Kurds had joined the PKK from the 1980s onwards, creating a network of sympathizer and martyr families between Damascus, Aleppo and Qamishlo (Montgomery, 2005: 134). Between 2003 and 2012, the party further expanded this network clandestinely, as the 'Damascus Spring' was only short-lived and repression of Kurdishness, as well as other forms of political dissent, was particularly harsh throughout the 2000s (Yildiz, 2004). At that time the PYD was merely one among dozens of then still illegal Kurdish parties in Syria and only managed to gain the monopoly over the political and military field with the outbreak of the Syrian Uprising (Schmidinger, 2018: 79–85; Tejel, 2009). Since then, the PYD and its armed wings, the People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, YPG) and the Women's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Jin, YPJ), took control of Cizîr, Efrîn and Kobanî regions (later cantons). Over the course of the last eight years battle lines have shifted considerably, with the YPG/YPJ venturing out far beyond the Kurdish north-east to Raqqa and Deir al-Zor, but also losing Afrin after the Turkish invasion and occupation in February 2018 (Schmidinger, 2018). For the women's movement, the importance of Rojava cannot be underestimated. Rojava has been labelled a 'women's revolution', given the large numbers of women who joined and fought against Daesh, committing

spectacular acts of resistance in Kobanî, Şengal, Raqqa and during the last battle against Daesh in Baghouz. Behind the front lines, party cadres and civilian activists have worked tirelessly to establish the civil structure that would match the successes on the battlefield. Building on the grassroots work undertaken since 2003, and the longstanding support for the PKK in the region, women built their structures according to Öcalan's model of Democratic Confederalism. Under the umbrella of Kongreya Star, the women's umbrella structure, countless women's houses, academies, communes, co-operatives and a women-only village have been established, and child and forced marriage, as well as polygamy, have been banned where the PYD and its sister parties hold power (Dirik, 2018; Flach, Ayboğa and Knapp, 2016: 117–23). Seeing what women are capable of, on and beyond the battlefield, has created new imaginaries of what a multi-ethnic and gender-equal society could look like, the 'Rojava experience' giving new momentum to the Kurdish movement in the region and beyond.

In the Iranian part of Kurdistan, or Rojhelat, the PKK has officially only been active since 2004, when the PJAK was established. The PJAK's goal is to secure the right of self-determination for the Iranian Kurds, through both political and armed struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran (Bozarslan, 2009: 111–12). The PJAK camps are located in Iraqi Kurdistan, close to the Iranian border, from where party cadres go on mobilizing and education missions to Rojhelati towns and villages. If attacked in this process, or to take revenge for previously fallen guerrillas, the armed wings of the movement (YRK: Yekîneyên Parastina Rojhilatê Kurdistanê, Eastern Kurdistan Units, and HPJ: Hezên Parastina Jin, Women's Defence Forces) would use force to defend themselves. Overall, the PJAK operates along the same parameters as its sister parties in Bakur, Rojava and Başur, aiming at organizing society according to Democratic Confederalism and training political and military cadres according to Öcalan's liberation ideology (Käser, 2019). During the wave of protests in Iran in 2017 and 2018, the PJAK tried to position itself as the only opposition force with the necessary political and military power and a feasible plan to stabilize and democratize Iran. In a declaration published in August 2018, they proposed Democratic Confederalism as a viable alternative for all of Iran, stressing the important role of women in the democratization process (ANF, 2018). Importantly, the PJAK is only one of the armed groups fighting for the rights of Kurds in Iran, a region that has a long history of Kurdish nationalist efforts (Koohi-Kamali, 2003). The Society of Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan (Komalay Şoreşgerrî Zehmatkêşanî Kurdistanî Îran, or Komala) and the Kurdish Democratic Party

of Iran (KDPI, Hîzbî Dêmokratî Kurdistanî Êran) are two other armed opposition groups that have been fighting for the liberation of Iranian Kurdistan (Rojhelat). From the beginning, Komala (est. 1969) has had women in its ranks, who were actively engaged in the armed resistance against the new Islamic Republic in the 1980s. 'Women played a very important role in Komala; we worked in logistics, health, education and especially after the revolution also as fighters. We tried to create true equality between men and women and shared everything, our life and our work,' Tuba Kamangar, a Komala member and former fighter, told me during an interview. 'Of course, some men had conservative ideas, but our goal was freedom and humanity for everyone, and we really lived that in our ranks and worked hard to educate people in the villages.'[30]

Iraqi Kurdistan also has a rich history of women's participation in wars of national liberation; both Kurdish parties in Iraqi Kurdistan (KDP and PUK) have had women in their military forces (peshmerga) since the 1970s. However, women were mostly kept in supportive roles such as underground activities, nursing and logistics, rather than active combat or decision-making positions (Begikhani, Hamelink and Weiss, 2018: 11). These wars of national liberation were set in a strictly patriarchal system, and especially since the 1980s, set in a region tied to the local history of consecutive wars, genocides, sanctions and invasion and occupation (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009; Mojab, 2000, 2004). As seen in many other post-liberation settings, 'patriarchy' endured, and women's equality was postponed in favour of the greater goal, such as the liberation of Iraqi Kurdistan (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009: 45; Fischer-Tahir, 2009). The PKK has been a constant presence in Iraqi Kurdistan since the 1990s, not least because the party's headquarters are located in the Qandil mountains in Iraqi Kurdistan. From there the party sent troops to fight back Daesh in Şengal, Kirkuk and Maxmur. The women's organizations linked to the Kurdistan Freedom Movement and working in the political sphere, RJAK (Rêxistina Jinên Azad ên Kurdistanê, Kurdistan Free Women's Organization) and REPAK, the Kurdish Women's Relations Office, provide education courses for women, organize demonstrations and especially the latter builds regional and international political alliances. The movement is perhaps most visible in Maxmur camp where around 15,000 refugees from Bakur (Botan region, mainly Şırnak and Hakkari) have lived since 1998. Here the Kurdish Freedom Movement has established a miniature version of

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30 Interview with Tuba Kamangar, 23 April 2019.

Democratic Confederalism, with women and youth structures running alongside the general commune–council–assembly structure.

In eastern Turkey, or Bakur, the movement over the past thirty years has undertaken huge efforts to mobilize women in the public sphere and get them organized around the liberation project penned by Öcalan. The continuous pushback against patriarchal norms in society and the party was only possible due to the large-scale women's network that had been established over the previous decades and unified by umbrella organizations such as the Democratic and Free Women's Movement (Demokratik Özgür Kadın Hareketi, DÖKH), later the Congress of Free Women (Kongra Jinên Azad, KJA) and currently the Movement of Free Women (Tevgera Jinên Azad, TJA). Before the urban wars (2015–16), the attempted coup (July 2016) and the ensuing crackdown on the pro-Kurdish parties and organizational structures, every female member of a political party such as the Democratic Regions Party (Demokratik Bölgeler Partisi, DBP) or the HDP was automatically part of the KJA, and now the TJA.

The KJA streamlined women's work in all spheres of activism (education, health, diplomacy, self-defence, etc.) and implemented the ideas around women's liberation according to the writings of Öcalan. It also offered educational courses in Jineolojî and a one-month KJA course was mandatory for every woman who wanted to work in a municipality in Bakur. Aside from the opposition within their own ranks, the whole movement has been under sustained attack by the Turkish state. Throughout the past decades, different governments have targeted Kurdish politicians, union members, women's structures and civil society activists, a strategy that increased during the KCK trials between 2009 and 2011, when around 9,000 politicians, human rights and peace activists, union members and activists of the women and youth movements were arrested.[31] Considering the role Kurdish women had been playing in building these versatile structures, it comes as no surprise that 40 per cent of the people arrested as part of the KCK trials were women (Herausgeberinnenkollektiv, 2012: 48–50):

> Because of Kurdish women's roles in the party, the state directly attacks them. The Kurdish women's movement at that point [2010] was not just one organization but between the guerrilla, the parliament, the many associations and the media, it was a diverse entity. . . . It was a powerful identity to be a Kurdish woman. But the state attacked all the different aspects of the

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31 The KCK trials started in 2009 as a renewed effort to crack down on the political organizations of the Kurdistan Freedom Movement. They continue to this date.

Kurdish women. They knew that Kurdish women are the blood and heart of the movement.[32]

In a watershed election in June 2011, thirty-five Kurdish MPs, eleven of them women, were elected to the parliament of Turkey. As a result, state repression increased further. The list of state atrocities committed against the Kurdish population exceeds the scope of this chapter, but it is important to note that apart from the relatively peaceful years between 2013 and 2015, the Turkish government under Erdoğan's leadership has done everything in its might to demobilize and destroy the Kurdish Freedom Movement, in all its spheres of activism. Brutal acts of state violence include the Roboskî massacre in 2011; the failure to act while Kobanî was attacked by Daesh in 2014; the Suruç attack in 2015; the urban wars in Bakur from 2015 to 2016;[33] the removal of HDP MPs' parliamentary immunity; and the imprisonment of around 6,000 HDP and DBP members and co-mayors after the attempted coup in 2016. Municipality-run women's organizations, civil rights groups and charities, which provided vital legal and social services, have since been closed down.[34] On 1 February 2019, in the latest attempt to weaken the women's movement, former co-mayor of Diyarbakir Gültan Kişanak and former HDP co-chair Sebahat Tuncel were sentenced to a fourteen- and fifteen-year prison sentence, respectively, for their political activism.

Conclusion

Women's participation in revolutionary movements often has not translated into representation in positions of political power (Enloe, 1988; White, 2007), a fact that the Kurdish women's movement is acutely aware of. 'We have studied all the previous revolutionary movements and the role of women in them,' commander Newroz told me, 'and we learned a lot from them. We understood that we have to have independent organizational structures in peace and wartime in order to prevent men from taking back power.'[35] In this chapter I have demonstrated that the struggle of women within the Kurdistan Freedom Movement, which enables them to stand so

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32 Interview with Zelal, 1 June 2018.
33 For details on the violence inflicted by the Turkish army on Kurdish civilians during the urban wars and the extent to which this violence was targeting women specifically, see Göç Izleme Derneği (2019).
34 For exact numbers of co-mayors arrested and municipalities taken over by government-appointed 'trustees', see Gunes (2019: 226).
35 Interview with Newroz, 25 August 2016.

firmly at the forefront of the military and political struggles, was by no means linear but fraught with ideological battles and internal power struggles. Due to these rupture points, women have managed to influence the leadership, which played a role in Öcalan eventually enshrining the importance of women's liberation in the written ideology. Today the liberation of the land is synonymous with the liberation of women, and it is they who are currently the markers of progress in Kurdistan. Contrary to previous nationalisms in the Middle East, such as in Iran (Najmabadi, 1997), Turkey and earlier Kurdish nationalisms (Aktürk, 2016), women no longer need to be protected but are asked to participate in all areas of self-defence and non-state nation-building. In the movement's ideology, honour is not left up to the men to defend but an honourable woman is she who picks up a weapon or stands in elections in order to defend herself and fight for the freedom of others. Women have not only been using spaces provided by a patriarchal organization but they have rewritten it into separate women's structures. Öcalan opened certain doors but it was the women who engaged in a daily struggle against the 'male mentality' in society and the PKK. Here, new roles have been assigned, new gender norms and relations have been defined: women become goddesses and men kill their 'dominant man'. Women and men are treated as equal comrades in the party, love is directed towards the struggle and the land and other physical or personal desires are curbed. However, I agree with Handan Çağlayan, who argues that the discursive transformation from women into goddesses still involves contradictions. For instance, the process of becoming party subjects is not open to all women, but only to women who are prepared to desexualize themselves when entering the public sphere (or the party), similarly to other anti-colonial liberation movements. The identity of the 'free woman' is hinged on an idea of purity, an unfaltering dedication and attachment to the homeland, fighting and very likely dying for it (Çağlayan, 2012: 22; Weiss, 2010). Despite the women's movement's claim of difference from previous revolutionary struggles and sustainability in terms of women's centrality, as well as the fact that this is a liberation ideology not hinged on the idea of a nation-state, the ideology remains deeply gendered, with the 'free women' being a progressive but essentialized marker of the aspired 'non-state nation' (Käser, 2019). Here I have demonstrated that with the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement it is never a clear-cut either/or case, but very much a both/and one; this movement complicates and confirms, reinvents and reproduces theories and tropes on nationalism and feminism. Despite or perhaps because of these contradictions, this women's

movement has made tremendous gains in terms of gender-based equality and justice far beyond the guerrilla ranks. It is too early to say whether these gains will be sustainable beyond the battlefield, not least because the movement as a whole is under sustained attack from all sides in all four parts of Kurdistan. Yet, the historical trajectory of the autonomous women's structures, the mechanisms in place to defend them, the developments in Rojava and the continuous resistance in Bakur give us informed reason to be optimistic that women will continue to not only be the markers but also the makers of the emerging democratic confederations in the Kurdish Middle East.

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