



In the Shadow of Secularism: Kurdish Ulema and Religious Nationalism from Sheikh Said to Hizbullah

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IN THE SHADOW OF SECULARISM:
KURDISH *ULEMA* AND RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM FROM SHEIKH SAID
TO HIZBULLAH

by

Gülsüm Küçükşarı

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DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Süreyya Başar...

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ABSTRACT

Kurdish *ulema*, a religious class with a strong influence on Kurdish social life, have developed various forms of religious nationalism. This study offers a possible reading of the accounts of Kurdish *ulema* during the Turkish Republican period, as a neglected form of Kurdish nationalism. I illustrate how they defined the Kurdish nation in the name of religion, supplied religious metaphors and symbols central to the representation of the Kurdish nation, and even produced an alternative to secular nationalism by sharing the underlying grammar of modern nationalism. This calls into question the concept of Kurdish nationalism as something uniform and secular.

Such accounts of religious nationalism were largely suppressed in modern Kurdish history writing under Marxist influences. Since the 1940s, this historiography often marginalized the narratives of Kurdish *ulema* by setting them apart from Kurdish national struggle. This project provides the first in-depth analysis of the role of Kurdish *ulema* in the story of the development of Kurdish nationalism during the Turkish Republican period (1920s-1990s). My analysis challenges the dichotomy in the Kurdish nationalist historiography that Islamic and Kurdish identities are exclusive of one another.

Kurdish *ulema* combined their Islamic identity with a strong sense of Kurdish national consciousness. Some envisioned the Kurdish nation's liberation in education, some in joining secular national movements, some in conformity with Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood and some in political Islamic resistance. I emphasize that Kurds, whether secular or religious, formed a united front against Kurdish regional underdevelopment, exclusivist state policies, and exploitative sheikhs as late as the late 1960s. There has been an overlap between opposing Kurdish groups and the division between them was not primordial. These initially similar

concerns, however, were gradually shaped by different popular ideologies of their day: nationalism, Marxism, and Islamism, in Turkey and around the world.

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND SPELLING

The primary sources I used in this study are Ottoman Turkish, Turkish, Kurdish and I included the translations of all the quotations I used in this study into English. I transliterated the texts in Ottoman Turkish in Latin characters, and had the help of Abdusselam Becirmani to transliterate the Kurdish texts from Arabic letters to Latin characters. There are some inconsistencies in spelling of some non-English words due to their common usage in Turkish, Kurdish and Arabic alike. For example, Arabic words that entered the English language such as “sheikh” and “madrasa” appears the same in the text, but the reader will come across Turkish and Kurdish spellings of the same words such as “şex” and “şeyh” in the footnotes when citing someone’s work.

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the unstudied and under-studied accounts of Kurdish religious scholars from the early to the late republican period. My goal is to shed light on competing conceptions and assertions of Kurdish identity; that is, how Kurdish Islamic selves reflected their visions of nationalism, their struggles against the political and social status quo in defending Kurdish rights. I illustrate how Kurdish *ulema*¹ under repressive state policies, developed various forms of religious nationalism. They defined the Kurdish nation in the name of religion,² supplied religious metaphors and symbols central to the representation of the Kurdish nation³ and even produced an alternative to secular nationalism by sharing the underlying grammar of modern nationalism.⁴

This dissertation suggests a possible reading of Kurdish *ulema*'s accounts as a neglected form of Kurdish nationalism. Such accounts of religious nationalism were largely suppressed in modern Kurdish history writing under Marxist influences, representing certain Kurds as 'more equal' than the others. Since the 1940s, this historiography often marginalized the narratives of Kurdish *ulema* by setting them apart and outside of the Kurdish national struggle.⁵

¹ *Ulema* is the plural form of Arabic word *alim*, which literally means scholar who specialized in Islamic sciences. Kurdish mullahs who were trained in Kurdish madrasas were among the *ulema* class, as well as those sheikhs, who had madrasa education. All mullahs are educated in madrasas whereas not all sheikhs had madrasa education. A sheikh, as the leaders of a Sufi tradition, has the authority to teach a Sufi practice, while a mullah has the authority to teach Islamic sciences such as jurisprudence.

² Philip S. Gorski and Gülay Türkmen-Derviřođlu, "Religion, Nationalism, and Violence: An Integrated Approach," *Annual Review of Sociology* 39, (2013):194.

³ Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and nationalism: four approaches," *Nations and Nationalism* 18, 1, (2012): 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 12-13, Roger Friedland, "Money, Sex, and God: The Erotic Logic of Religious Nationalism," *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Nov., 2002): 383.

⁵ This discourse gradually increased in tone with the establishment of the Kurdish ethnic nationalist movement, *Partiya Kerkeran Kurdistan* (PKK) in 1978 with its Marxist ideology.

In contrast to the Marxist historiographical narrative, what stood out among the materials that a number of Kurdish mullahs handed me was the internal critique of the Kurdish conservatives from the 1910s to the 1980s against Kurdish sheikhs. These conservatives shared the apprehension and anger of Marxist critiques towards social injustices caused by sheikhs, which was something you do not easily come across when reading Kurdish history. I was quite interested in this internal critique, in enormous amount, which was anti-Marxist and pro-Kurdish in essence. To be honest, it was quite puzzling in the beginning, considering that nationalism and religion have been mostly set apart as contrasting in the Kurdish context. Why were the conservatives, some of them sheikhs themselves, condemning sheikhs for the betterment of the Kurdish nation? What I found frequently in this literature was a critique against the nationalist and secular policies of the Turkish state and its perpetuation of the Kurdish social status quo through a Kurdish-Turkish brotherhood discourse. I directed my focus towards the religious figures who were against the sheikhs as well as those who wrote critically against the Turkish state.

Examining the Kurdish *ulema's* visions of nationalism, their opposition to some Turkish state policies and their critique of the corrupt sheikhs as a social problem (not as part of a Marxist class analysis), I draw three major conclusions. Firstly, Kurdish religious leaders indeed produced literature demonstrating that they combined their Islamic identity with a strong sense of Kurdish national consciousness. This calls into question the approach to the concept of Kurdish nationalism as something uniform and secular. Building upon the insights of Janet Klein,⁶ I argue that Kurds continued to give the concept various meanings during

⁶ Janet Klein, "Kurdish nationalists and non-nationalist Kurds: rethinking minority nationalism and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1909," *Nations and Nationalism* 13, 1, (2007).

decades of the republican period also, and there were Kurdish nationalists, or Kurdists, in republican Turkey who were fully committed to upholding Kurdish national interests while still envisioning their fate as intertwined with that of the Turks.⁷ This analysis also challenges the dichotomy in the Kurdish nationalist historiography that Islamic and Kurdish identities are exclusive of one another. For instance, I identify the considerable literature Kurdish religious leaders produced against the corrupt sheikhs as an important aspect of defending Kurdish national interests. My research findings attest that a good number of Kurdish *ulema* talked harshly against the sheikhs' exploitation of religious feelings and people's economic resources long before the rise of secular Kurdish nationalism.

Secondly, the Kurdish *ulema* cannot be generalized as one homogenous class; rather, they expressed their concerns about the Kurdish nation's problems in differing and sometimes completely contrasting ways. Some envisioned the Kurdish nation's liberation in education, some in joining secular national movements, some in conformity with Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood and some in political Islamic resistance. Finally, I emphasize that Kurds, whether secular or religious, formed a united front against Kurdish regional underdevelopment, exclusivist state policies, and exploitative sheikhs as late as the late 1960s.⁸ There has been an overlap between opposing Kurdish groups and the division between them was not primordial. These initially similar concerns, however, were gradually shaped and

⁷ Ibid.,” 137.

⁸ Hamit Bozarslan, “Political Aspects of Kurdish Problem in Turkey,” *The Kurds: a Contemporary Overview*, ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (London, New York: Routledge, 1992), 99-100.

differentiated by the popular ideologies of their day:⁹ nationalism, Marxism, and Islamism in Turkey and around the world.

Genres of Kurdish Religious Nationalism

Many scholars argue that the secularist bias in the study of nationalism has long obscured the complex relationship between religion and nationalism.¹⁰ Some of the most prominent scholars of nationalism like Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm largely neglected religious factors in their discussions,¹¹ and the widespread agreement among them was that modern nationalism was an inherently secular phenomenon.¹² Leading scholars of the discipline now recognize that nationalism, many times, formed along religion, influenced by it or borrowed from religious rhetoric.¹³ Nationalism formed along religious lines may occur when nation is defined in the name of religion,¹⁴ when religious and national boundaries coincide,¹⁵ when the nation is imagined as composed of all and only those who belong to a particular religion,¹⁶ when religion is used

⁹ Janet Klein's analysis has been inspirational. She writes as follows: "*the nationalist identities that many today see as self-evident were instead the result of a complex set of historical contingencies within which people opted for identities that might not make sense to the perspective that sees the formation of the modern nation-state and nationalist identities as entirely linear. ...within the larger process of making up people, individual persons made choices within the classifications,*" see Janet Klein, *Margins of Empire* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 13.

¹⁰ Brubaker, "Religion and nationalism: four approaches," 15, Gorski and Türkmen-Derrişođlu, "Religion, Nationalism, and Violence," 194, Barbara-Ann J. Rieffer, "Religion and nationalism: Understanding the consequences of a complex relationship," *Ethnicities*, Vol 3 (2), (2003): 223.

¹¹ J. Rieffer, "Religion and nationalism," 215.

¹² Gorski and Türkmen-Derrişođlu, "Religion, Nationalism, and Violence," 203.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁵ Brubaker, 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

as the primary diacritical marker to identify ethnicity,¹⁷ and when religion supplies fundamental metaphors and symbols to the representation of the Kurdish nation for them.¹⁸

We see a similar development in the studies on Kurdish nationalism as well. While the scholarly literature has addressed the emergence and development of Kurdish secular nationalism have been addressed more in scholarly literature, it has also recognized that Kurdish nationalism was not uniform¹⁹ and there was a relation between religion and nationalism.²⁰ In these studies, the period of the late nineteenth century has been a fertile source for providing varieties of Kurdish nationalism: the sets between the Westernized and the traditional Kurdish elite, between the Kurdish-Ottomanists and Kurdish separatists, reflected some of this diversity.

This study adds to the academic efforts to unfold the diverse nature of Kurdish nationalism through analyzing the discourses of Kurdish *ulema* continuing during the early to the late 20th period of the Turkish Republic. I illustrate how Kurdish religious leaders

¹⁷ Ibid., 15.

¹⁸ Ibid., 9.

¹⁹ Janet Klein, "Kurdish nationalists and non-nationalist Kurds," Hakan Özoğlu, "Nationalism and Kurdish Notables in the Late Ottoman-Early Republican Era," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 33, No.3, (2001), Martin Strohmeler, *Crucial Images in the Presentation of a Kurdish National Identity*, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), Hamit Bozarslan, "Political Aspects of Kurdish Problem in Turkey," Djene Rhys Bajalan, "Princes, Pashas and Patriots: The Kurdish Intelligentsia, the Ottoman Empire and the National Question (1908-1914)," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, (2016).

²⁰ Martin van Bruinessen, *Popular Islam, Kurdish nationalism and Rural Revolt: the rebellion of Sheikh Said in Turkey (1925)*, in *Religion and Rural Revolt*, Papers presented to the fourth interdisciplinary workshop on peasant studies, University of British Columbia, ed. Bak, János M., and Gerhard Benecke (New Hampshire, Manchester University Press, 1984), Hakan Yavuz, "Five Stages of the Construction of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 7, No 3, (2001), Fulya Atacan, "A Kurdish Islamist Group in Modern Turkey: Shifting Identities," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.37, No 3, (2001), Ümit Cizre Sakallioğlu, "Kurdish Nationalism from an Islamist Perspective: The Discourses of Turkish Islamist Writers," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 18, No.1, (1998), Lale Yalçın-Heckman, "Ethnic Islam and Nationalism among the Kurds in Turkey," *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion politics and literature in a Secular State*, ed Richard Tapper, (London: London I.B. Tauris, 1991), Cuma Çiçek, "The Pro-Islamic Challenge for the Kurdish Movement," *Dialectical Anthropology* 37 (1), (2013): 159-63, Kamal Soleimani, "Islam and competing nationalisms: The Kurds and the Turks in the late ottoman era," (Unpublished dissertation, Columbia University, 2014), Zeki Sarigil and Omer Fazlioglu, "Exploring the Roots and Dynamics of Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism in Turkey," *Nations and Nationalism* 20 (3), (2014): 436-58.

defined the Kurdish nation in the name of religion and in doing so, how they followed different paths. While the works of some *ulema* directly contributed to the Kurdish national discourse, there were those who upheld the idea of Turkish-Kurdish religious brotherhood (*umma*) while being Kurdistans at the same time, which is a complete paradox from a secular nationalist point of view. On this level of discussion, I build upon the discussions of Janet Klein and Miroslav Hroch on minority nationalisms. Hroch²¹ argues that nationalism is only one of many forms of national consciousness, such that the discourses of Kurdish *ulema* in support of Kurdish Turkish brotherhood revealed a valid form of national consciousness. The Kurdish *ulema* persisted through processes of assimilation and integration in diverse ways, yet they also affirmed their support for Turkish-Kurdish unity.²² I am inspired by Klein's argument that "*national movements among non-dominant groups in multi-ethnic states can be fully committed to their own movement while continuing to envision their fates as intertwined with the other, even dominant, groups.*"²³ She maintains that this sort of national consciousness does not comply with the concept of nationalism in the strict sense of the word,

²¹ Miroslav Hroch, "From national movement to the fully-formed nation: the nation-building process in Europe," *New Left Review*, (1993): 6. He says: "the onset of the modern stage of nation-building can be dated from the moment when selected groups within the non-dominant ethnic community started to discuss their own ethnicity and to conceive of it as a potential nation-to-be. I term these organized endeavours to achieve all the attributes of a fully-fledged nation (which were not always and everywhere successful) a *national movement*. The current tendency to speak of them as 'nationalist' leads to serious confusion. For nationalism *stricto sensu* is something else: namely, that outlook which gives an absolute priority to the values of the nation over all other values and interests."

²² Here it is important to look at minority identities and their modes of resistance to assimilation and persecution. Minorities demonstrate various forms of resistance such as culminating strong religious or national identities to strengthen themselves against outside attacks, demystifying the prevailing ideology by constructing a powerful and critical everyday discourse against the dominant group, or strive to change their societies by non-movements, which may turn into social movements or politics when the opportunity comes. For further discussions, see James C. Scott, *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 317, Yaelle Azagury, "Sol Hachuel in the Collective Memory and Folktales of Moroccan Jews" in Emily Gottreich and Daniel J. Schroeter, *Jewish culture and society in North Africa*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 195, Asef Bayat, *Life as politics: how ordinary people change the Middle East*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2010), preface, ix.

²³ Janet Klein, "Kurdish nationalists and non-nationalist Kurdistans," 137.

and carries with it the risk of confusion in vocabulary, which might entail finding new vocabulary in talking about Kurdish nationalism.²⁴

The texts in focus were produced parallel to the historical developments in the history of Turkey and the development of Kurdish national consciousness. They reflect the discriminatory policies of the ethnicist and secularist Turkish state, religious openings that came in the 1950s with the multi-party politics, the rise of Marxism, and the state's position against Communism, the success of Barzani-led Kurdish nationalism (1961-1975), the influence of political Islamic ideology after the Iranian revolution (1979) and the dominance of the PKK's ideology in Kurdish nationalism since the late 1970s.

For example, as a product of the post-Kemalist nationalist period, Evdirehîm Rehmî Hekarî in *Ehl-i Sünnet* (1947-1954) glorified Turkish Muslimness, which looks completely contradictory both to his secret writings and to his ardent Kurdish nationalist identity in *Jîn* journal. During the 1950s, conservative writers in Turkey inserted a religious notion into the Turkish nationalist discourse to fight against the rigid secularist nature of the Kemalist state. This cultural movement produced the 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis,' in which Hekarî also took part, as part of his strategy to fight against the oppressive policies of the state.

Apart from that, the writings of Mullah Amadettin Yetiz (b.1937) and Mullah Hasan Sofya (b.1943) are reflective of the influence of Marxist discourse and leadership on the Kurdish religious community from the 1950s on. Both mullahs were accused of disbelief and communism due to their support for Kurdish nationalists, which is informative about the struggles within the Kurdish religious class since the 1950s as well as the position of the state against communism. Both individuals were completely disillusioned with the Turkish

²⁴ Janet Klein, "Kurdish nationalists and non-nationalist Kurds," 137.

discourse on Kurdish-Turkish religious brotherhood, which appeared only fake and pragmatic on the Turkish side, even after the religious opening in 1950.

The writings of some Kurdish *ulema* against Kurdish nationalism after the late 1940s, then, such as Khalifa Yusuf (1885-1965), Mullah Ali Zile (1923-1995), and Mullah Yasin (1906-1995), should be read within the setting of the ongoing Marxist influence on Kurdish national identity, during which a reaction developed from among religious Kurds. The rise of Marxism among Kurds since the late 1940s gradually bestowed on the new secular elite as opposed to sheikhs, the leadership of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey.²⁵ This gave way to a gradual increase in Kurdish historical discourse in the stories of corrupt sheikhs. State secularism doubled with the use of Marxist/secularist nationalism, both at odds with Kurdish folk Islam. Especially after the Iranian revolution in 1979, which generated hope in the Muslim world for an Islamic resurgence in general, Mullah Zile supported an Islamic revival led by Kurdish Muslims in Turkey as an alternative to secular nationalism.

The Significance of the Study: Kurdish *ulema* as sources for the study of nationalism, not stereotypes

Kurdish historiography employed three main arguments against the Kurdish religious class in placing them outside of the Kurdish national struggle. Unfortunately, the narratives on the corrupt sheikhs subsumed almost the entire story about the Kurdish religious class and they were represented as a homogenous group as a result. First, the religious class was represented as co-opted by the state and damaging to Kurdish national awareness. Second,

²⁵ The leadership of traditional sheikhs in Kurdish uprisings against the state was formerly represented by Sheikh Said in Turkey in 1925.

they were depicted as reactionary, corrupt and exploitative of Kurdish resources, necessitating a new and Marxist leadership for Kurdish nationalism. Third, nationalist and Islamic ideals were seen as mutually exclusive, since propagating Islam and Muslim brotherhood had only functioned to pacify Kurdish national awareness for centuries. These charges automatically disqualified and delegitimized the *ulema's* political, historical and nationalist accounts as they were all colored by their Islamic identity.

The focus of Marxist historiography on how Kurdish religious leaders used religion to exploit the Kurdish nation's financial, emotional and human resources obscured the emergence, among the religious class itself, of self-criticism against the exploitation of religion by some Kurdish religious individuals. What often goes unnoticed by Kurdish Marxist historiography is that, there were a number of Kurdish *ulema* raising criticism against the social status quo and the exploitation of the Kurdish masses. For instance, long before the rise of Marxist analysis and their accusation of sheikhs as working with the Turkish state, members of the Kurdish *ulema* raised considerable criticism against the corruption of the Kurdish traditional elite, sheikhs and *aghas*.²⁶ In their writings, Kurdish conservatives regretfully pointed at the increasing number of affluent sheikhs that the Kurdish poor masses used to work for unpaid and support unquestioningly.

In addition, Kurdish Marxist historiography overlooked the religious persecution the Kurds faced at the hands of the Kemalist regime and did not consider the Kurdish-Islamic

²⁶ Doğubeyazıtli Halife Yusuf, *İrşadu'l-İbad Min Avamil Mü'minin ve Türkçe Tercümesi 2*, trans. El-Hacc Muhammed Nezaket Bahaeddin El-Huseyni (İstanbul: Hira, 1998), Said Nursi, *İçtimai Dersler*, (İstanbul: Zehra Yayıncılık, 2012): 89-149, Abdulhadi Timurtaş, *Botan müderrislerinin piri : Molla Muhammed Zıvıngi*, (İstanbul: Kent Yayınları, 2008).

literature that the Kurds produced at this time²⁷ as memorable examples of fighting for the Kurdish nation. Süleyman Çevik, the editor of *Nûbihar* Kurdish journal, who often acquires Kurdish unpublished works from Kurdish personal archives for editing and publishing purposes, informs me that Kurdish *ulema* produced innumerable works, published and unpublished, under the Turkish Republic, mostly on religious issues.²⁸ My interviewees argued that the Kurdish *ulema* prioritized the survival of their religion over the survival of their nation under the revolutionary secular reforms of the Turkish state.²⁹ That was because Kurdishness without Islam would lose its meaning for them.³⁰ This is why, they said, they did not produce as great numbers of writings on the Kurdish issue as they did on Islam.

By ‘otherizing’ sheikhs and their religion, Marxist historiography put up a wall between Kurdish nationalism and Islamic allegiance. Allegiance to Islamic ideals, according to Kurdish Marxist authors, worked against Kurdish national interests while benefiting the imperial states immensely. It was smart, for those imperial nations, to support Islamic concepts such as Muslim brotherhood in order to calm any dissonance from minorities like

²⁷ This refers to the religious literature such as books on Islamic faith and theology, manuscripts of religious books for children and madrasa students. Most of them are handwritten and unpublished, although Nubihar publications have recently published some of them. It is a huge literature and I came across a number of them in Kurds’ personal archives during my fieldtrip. Some examples include, Seyid Eliyê Findikî, *Diwan* trans. Selman Dilovan (İstanbul: Nûbihar Yayınları, 2011), Doğubeyazıtli Halife Yusuf, *İrşadu'l-İbad Min Avamil Mü'minin ve Turkce Tercümesi 2*, trans. El-Hacc Muhammed Nezaket Bahaeddin El-Huseyni (İstanbul:Hira, 1998), Mulla Ali Zile El-İlmî, *Diwana Mela Eli Ilmi: Jiyân, Berhem u Helbesten Wi*, trans. Necati Zivingi (İstanbul: Banga Heq, 2012), Yasin Toprak, *Rawdul Hayat Keşfün-Nikab*, 2011, Mele Abdullah Babniri, *Diwana Babniri* (İstanbul: Nûbihar Yayınları, 2012), Muhammed Said Yıkılmaz, *Bi Delail-is Salat*, (Diyarbakır: Soz Matbaasi), Yıkılmaz, El-Fütuhât'üs-samedîyye fi'r-reddi ala Müğâletat'il- Vehhabiyye,”(Diyarbakır, Soz Matbaasi), Yıkılmaz, “Menhel'ül-Vüdd Fi Beyani Gazveti Bedr'in ve Uhud,” unpublished, Mela Ehmede Heyderi, *Diwane Haydari* (İstanbul: Nûbihar Yayınları), 2012.

²⁸ Author’s phone interview with Süleyman Çevik, October 15, 2015.

²⁹ Interview with Said Yaz and Mullah Said Yıkılmaz’s son Diyarbakır June 2012.

³⁰ Bruinessen argues that Kurds had a stronger allegiance to their religion than their ethnic identity. This is why Kurdish secular nationalists were not able to unite Kurds of different religious convictions in the name of ethnic nationalism in major uprisings such as Sheikh Said and Dersim.

the Kurds, while it had been quite costly to the Kurds to propagate Islamic ideals. Imperial states used Islamic ideology and the concept of Muslim brotherhood to pacify Kurdish national consciousness;³¹ therefore, supporting Islamic perceptions only served Turkish national interests.

Besides this historiographical marginalization, discourses of Islamic Kurdistan and its evolution in time have not created as much interest in academia, either, as much as the roots and developments of Kurdish secular nationalism did. Yet, as I will show here, there is a long history of Islamic Kurdishness stemming from a strong history of Sufi networks and religious scholars going back generations before secular or leftist nationalism came to dominate the political sphere.

The body of writings that Kurdish historiography devoted to the representation of the Kurdish religious class from the 1940s forward stands out within the context of Turkey, particularly because Turkish historiography since its foundation in 1923 was at least equally interested-if not more-in the religious class and their so-called backwardness. The Kemalist state fashioned Kurdish traditional notions of identity and culture as ‘reactionary,’ ‘tribal,’ and an outcome of regional ‘backwardness’ as a part of its reforms of nation-building.³² Conservative Kurds already suffered the consequences of the ‘*gerici*,’ (backward) and ‘*irticaci*,’ (reactionary) discourse of the state;³³ they were irritated by the same discourse Kurdish secular nationalists employed. Many Kurdish conservatives deemed the Kurdish

³¹ İsmail Beşikçi, *Kürt Aydınım Üzerine Düşünceler* (Ankara: Yurt Kitap Yayın, 1991), 25-29.

³² M. Hakan Yavuz, “Five Stages of the Construction of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey,” 9.

³³ The state waged an extensive pacification program against them by ‘orientalizing’ them through a discourse of *gerici* and *irticaci*, especially after the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925. The rebellion broke out as a response to the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924. The Law to Maintain Order, *Takrir-i Sükun Kanunu*, was passed right after the rebellion and Independence Tribunals, *İstiklal Mahkemeleri*, arrested 7,500 people, executed 660 people and exiled all family families/tribes involved in the rebellion to Western Anatolia.

nationalist movement, dominated by a secular ideology, to be disastrous for Kurdish religious identity.³⁴ Kurdish Islamic circles considered PKK-dominated nationalism as to be a project for loosening the ties of Kurdish people with Islam, just as the Turkish language reform functioned for the Kemalists during the formative years of the Turkish republic.³⁵ The leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, was referred as “Atakürd”³⁶ among religious circles to signify the anti-religious character of the movement and their disapproval of it. Consequently, conservative Kurds were in conflict with the rising nationalist movement under Marxist leadership from the 1950s on³⁷ and many deemphasized their ethnic identity as a response.³⁸ The significance of this study lies in its bringing to light a relatively unknown story of Kurdish *ulema*’s visions within the story of the development of Kurdish nationalism.

Data and Methods

I utilized a number of methods in this study. My data comes from a variety of sources such as interviews, archival materials, books and journal publications. In the summers of 2012 and 2013, I took a field trip to İstanbul, Diyarbakır and Batman, where I conducted interviews with twenty individuals including Kurdish mullahs, writers and academics. The

³⁴ My interviewees, Said Yaz and Abdusselam Becirmani.

³⁵ My several interviewees, Mullah Muhammed Said Yaz, Mullah Abdusselam Becirmani, Mullah Süleyman Kurşun and Süleyman Çevik.

³⁶ Hamit Bozarslan discusses how Abdullah Öcalan remodeled the PKK into a party dominated by a single man along the lines of Atatürk in Turkey, see further discussion, Hamit Bozarslan, “Kurds and the Turkish State,” *The Cambridge History of Turkey Volume 4: Turkey in the Modern World* ed by Resat Kasaba, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 351.

³⁷ Bruinessen, “The Kurds and Islam,”

http://www.hum.uu.nl/medewerkers/m.vanbruinessen/publications/Kurds_and_Islam.htm, *Personal academia page of Martin van Bruinessen*, February 27, 2014, accessed March 2015, 2

³⁸ In 1979, under the influence of the Iranian Islamic revolution, Hizbullah was established, charging the PKK with serving Communism, murdering Muslims and dividing the Kurdish community. Hizbullah interpreted the PKK initials to stand for *Partiya Kafirana Kurdistan*, Kurdistan Infidel Party, and started an armed struggle against it.

interviews were held in one-on-one settings and lasted about 1.5 to 2 hours. I continued with a number of follow-up phone interviews and e-mail correspondence with many of these individuals for several years. In these interviews, I inquired about the conservative definitions of Kurdish nationalism, their approach to the dominance of Marxism in the nationalist field, and what they personally produced for the development of Kurdish culture, identity, and nation under the prohibitions of the Turkish state. I was interested in how they reconciled their Islamic identity with nationalist and Kurdist ideals. The primary sources I used include writings by Kurdish nationalist, conservative and Marxist intellectuals and Kurdish sheikhs and mullahs, published and unpublished alike. I also examined a number of Turkish and Kurdish periodicals, all issues of *Jîn* (1918-1919), all issues of *Ehl-i Sünnet* (1947-1954), the eighteenth issue of *Büyük Doğu* (February 10, 1950), and a few issues of *Ronahi* (1943-1946), *Rojî Kurd* (1913) and *Hawar* (1932-1943).

The historical circumstances in which these sources were produced are different and revolve around a 70-year time period. Choosing such a long time period is justified mainly by the lack of accessible sources on Kurdish Islamic discourses that focus on a short period of time and that are rich in information. I was literally tracing the footsteps of any Kurdish religious figure I came across during my research.

I started by reading the *Jîn* journal, and then *Ehl-i Sünnet*, the latter of which was published in Turkish by an earlier *Jîn* contributor, a religious Kurdish nationalist, Evdirehîm Rehmî Hekarî (1890-1958). Hekarî was a passionate nationalist, who produced a good amount of literature on the Kurdish past, corrupt sheikhs, and Turkish state policies as well as on the Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood and the dangers of the communist thought from the 1910s to the 1950s. It was puzzling to see Hekarî in two different identities from the late

Ottoman period to the Turkish Republic and in his unpublished and published works. I discovered his unpublished works through the networks I developed during my fieldtrip in İstanbul. Once a vocal Kurdish nationalist, he became a self-proclaimed Turkish-Muslim in his *Ehl-i Sünnet* journal. He was even more: an anti-Kemalist. Hekarî's writings unfolded the deceptions of the official Turkish discourse on Kurds.

I obtained most of the primary source materials from the families of Kurdish mullahs who had passed away, or from the mullahs themselves if they were still alive. Some of them are still unpublished and some were only published very recently. Although some unpublished (or recently published) writings I examined probably did not reach further than the local audience, I was impressed during my fieldtrip by how the writings or correspondence of respected Kurdish religious figures, even of the past, still circulated and were known to Kurdish madrasa professors that I interviewed. These writings possibly reflected ideas that ordinary Kurds showed interest in and were influenced by.

Outline of the Dissertation

The first chapter of this study provides a historical backdrop on discourses of the Kurdish past from the late Ottoman State until the early Turkish Republic. It will briefly examine Kurdish Sufi and clerical networks and their historical influence on the dynamics of Kurdish social life. A thorough discussion of the twentieth-century historical background will present how Kurds were exposed to a mix of different ideas, worldviews and allegiances at the turn of the century, namely Islam, Ottomanism, nationalism and Westernization; these identities were not necessarily mutually exclusive at that time. This discussion will be

followed by an examination of Kurdish Islamic historical writing and Kurdishness expressed mainly in an Islamic framework in early 20th century literature.

The second chapter will assess theories of historiography and nationalism and the relation between them as it relates to Kurdish historical writing under nationalist and Marxist influence. This chapter will provide the stages of Kurdish nationalism since the late Ottoman Empire, its transformation into a Marxist nationalism since the 1940s, and will discuss the highlights, silences and shifts of Marxist history writing from earlier Ottoman-Kurdish historiographies.

Chapters three, four and five introduce Kurdish religious figures and examine their diverging methods of struggle for the Kurdish nation in different time periods and different contexts. In chapter three, I will analyze Hekarî's (1890-1958) writings. Hekarî was an ardent and religious supporter of Kurdish nationalism in the 1910s and continued to be so in his unpublished writings in the 1940s. Yet he asserted himself as a Turkish Muslim in *Ehl-i Sünnet* and thus combined in himself two identifications—Kurdish patriot and Turkish Muslim—in support of the brotherhood of Muslims. This combination challenged the dichotomy, put forth by the Kurdish secular nationalists, between commitment to the Kurdish nation and support for the Islamic ideal of the *umma*, the unity of Turks and Kurds. The discussion of Hekarî's writings and critiques of Turkish republican policies in his *Ehl-i Sünnet* journal reveal an example of a Kurdish religious intellectual combining contradictory aspects of being a Kurdish nationalist, a Turkish Muslim and a religious intellectual at the same time.

Chapter four deals with the religious and linguistic consciousness fostered by *Khalifa* Yusuf Topçu of Ağrı (1885-1965) and Mullah Yasin Toprak of Diyarbakır (1906-1995). Both

individuals embraced Islamic education (Khalifa Yusuf particularly promoted education in the Kurdish language) for the progress of Kurds and their liberation from the financial, religious and emotional exploitation of corrupt sheikhs. Both supported the brotherhood of Muslims and embraced apolitical stance. Topçu was able to publish his book *İrşadu'l-İbad* in 1948 in Syria and in 1960 in Turkey, in which he ruthlessly attacked the exploitative sheikhs and criticized Kurds for not appreciating the use of Kurdish as much as other nations sustained their own languages. The more Kurds were educated, the more easily they would recognize their religious rights and know about the limits of sheikhs. This would invalidate the sheikhs' authenticity. Both leaders embraced an educational method from the bottom up.

The fifth and sixth chapters discuss two diverging political stances among Kurdish religious circles represented by three mullahs: Mullah Hasan Sofya of Diyarbakır and Mullah Amadettin Yetiz of Batman in support of secular nationalism, and Mullah Ali Zile opposed to it. These pro and anti-nationalist stances developed their discourses in conversation and in competition with one another. The fifth chapter details the ideologies of Mullah Amadettin Yetiz and Mullah Hasan Sofya, who both found Marxist leadership acceptable for the time being, yet supported their nationalism through a religious discourse. They accepted the Marxist leadership of nationalism out of lack of a better alternative and only partly influenced by the ideology. This category completely distrusted the Turks' use of *umma* ideology since in practice Turks were far from behaving brotherly to the Kurds. The sixth chapter focuses solely on Mullah Ali's opposition to nationalism for the sake of a political Islamic ideal. He believed that Islamic political power would bring a true liberation to Kurds. This stance was both revolutionary and rebellious against the Turkish state and its secular roots. Mullah Ali combined in his character a total rejection of nationalist thought and a severe criticism of

Kurdish Marxist ideology. He completely embraced political Islamic ideology and had close ties with the Kurdish Hizbullah in its formative years. Investigating the impact of the Iranian revolution on a prominent Kurdish mullah, this chapter also explores the roots of political Islam planted in the Sufi-dominated Kurdish region of Turkey in the 1980s. The chapter also discusses the correspondence between Mullah Amadettin and Mullah Ali Zile—with their contradictory political views—on the idea of nationalism and demonstrates how far Kurdish Muslim voices could go in heterogeneity.

I interviewed a number mullahs during my fieldwork, although I only chose those mentioned above to be the main focus of this study. There are many reasons why I chose these particular mullahs and sheikhs for inquiry. Although the ones I chose are not representative of a particular group in the strict sense of the word, one major thing about them is they can all speak to a different trend in the current Kurdish society: Kurds who support religious education through madrasa tradition in Kurdish language is keeping the legacy made by Mullah Yasin and Khalifa Yusuf still alive. Mullah Ali's example stands significant as radical Islamic wing is still influencing many Kurds. ISIS has hundreds of recruits from among the Kurdish public. Mullah Amadettin and Mullah Hasan speak to those religious Kurds who are disillusioned by the promises of the *umma* notion, the Kurdish and Turkish brotherhood, and put their hopes in the Marxist leadership of the Kurdish cause. They have a large number of audience; those Kurds who once refused to pray behind the state-appointed mosque imams and chose to join the “civic Friday prayers” and listen to Kurdish sermons started by the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) in 2011 as a part of a civil-disobedience

project,³⁹ may be considered among them.⁴⁰ As for Hekari's audience, we may consider those Kurds who secretly cultivate their Kurdish identities. Feeling uncomfortable to talk about it openly, they identify as Turkish Muslims in the larger context of the Turkish society while supporting basic Kurdish rights such as right to education in the mother tongue.

The concluding chapter maintains that the evidence provided in this study offers a case to illustrate the complex relationship between religion and nationalism. It evaluates, in a nutshell, the active stance of the Kurdish ulema in Turkey's current political setting, which is dominated by an Islamic version of the ethnicist Kemalist system. It briefly discusses the responses of the Kurdish ulema to the denial of Kurdish basic rights under a religious discourse. It also assesses how the writings and discourses of Kurdish ulema in the twentieth century continue to give shape to current discussions among Kurdish religious circles on Islam and Kurdish and Turkish nationalism.

³⁹ Kumru Başer, "Diyarbakır da Sivil Cuma," *BBC Türkçe*, June 3, 2011, accessed November 12, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2011/06/110603_election_baser_blogs10.shtml

⁴⁰ These Friday prayers ended with the state regulation accepting Friday sermons to be given in Kurdish by the state-appointed imams. See "Friday sermon delivered in Kurdish in Turkey," *World Bulletin*, March 8, 2014, accessed November 12, 2016,

<http://www.worldbulletin.net/haber/130520/friday-sermon-delivered-in-kurdish-in-turkey> and "Kürt Din Alimleri: Sivil Cumalar Amacına Ulaşmıştır," *Siverekname*, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.siverekname.com/haber/kurt-din-limleri-sivil-cumalar-amacina-ulasmistir-901.html>

CHAPTER 1 THE EVOLUTION OF KURDISH IDENTITIES (1910s-1990s)

This chapter provides a historical background on the evolution of Kurdish identities in the past century. Identifying Kurdish discourses colored with Islam, nationalism and Ottomanism—particularly from the late Ottoman State to the late Turkish Republic—will help illustrate the shades of meaning Kurds gave to Kurdish nationalism in different time periods, before and after the supremacy of secular nationalist discourse. Kurdish national consciousness has evolved in many different forms and never exclusively belonged to a particular group, namely Kurdish ethnic and secular nationalists.⁴¹

The sections in this chapter are ordered as follows: it first provides necessary information about historical patterns of Kurdish social life and Kurdish identity and then discusses Kurdish discourses produced during the Republican era. Before delving into the late Ottoman writings of Kurdish religious intellectuals, it is necessary to examine Kurdish clerical and Sufi networks and their historical influence on the dynamics of Kurdish social life. Following that exploration is an investigation into the roots of Islamo-Ottoman Kurdish identity historically perpetuated by the Ottoman state and the Kurdish *emirs*. This background information will provide the reader a base to locate the centuries-old influence of Islamic and Ottoman identities on the Kurdish psyche. Subsequently, the Kurdish national struggle is examined under the new Turkish Republic.

⁴¹ For a nuanced analysis of early Kurdish nationalism and its various forms see Klein, “Kurdish nationalists and non-nationalist Kurdistans.” The following studies illustrate as well, the various forms of Kurdish nationalism, Özoğlu, “Nationalism and Kurdish Notables in the Late Ottoman-Early Republican Era, Strohmeler, *Crucial Images in the Presentation of a Kurdish National Identity*, Bajalan, “Princes, Pashas and Patriots: The Kurdish Intelligentsia, the Ottoman Empire and the National Question (1908-1914).”

Mullahs, Madrasas and Kurdish Islamic identity

Madrasas have had a long history of existence in Kurdistan since the 11th century. Madrasas have been, primarily, places of Islamic learning, theology, doctrine, *fiqh*,⁴² *hadith*,⁴³ Qur'anic commentary and Arabic language.⁴⁴ In his travel notes from the 17th century, Evliya Çelebi delineated the types of madrasas in Diyarbakır, how they were centers of education in many Islamic sciences as well as reading and recitation of the Qur'an.⁴⁵

Martin van Bruinessen talks about three types of madrasas in Kurdistan.⁴⁶ One form was established during the 12th and 13th centuries by non-Kurdish dynasties. These were later combined with the Ottoman centrally-administrated madrasas,⁴⁷ focusing on the education of *ulema*, who could be appointed as judges, jurisconsults and teachers in the government system. Mullah Gürani (d.1488), who was the first *mufti*⁴⁸ of İstanbul, studied in these madrasas.⁴⁹ Although these madrasas situated in Kurdistan, they were not particularly Kurdish. The other two types of madrasas were independent of the Ottoman educational curriculum. The rulers of the autonomous Kurdish emirates within the Ottoman Empire established their own madrasas. Famous Kurdish literary figures such as Ehmede Xani (1650-1707) and Mela Ceziri (1570-1640), who made Kurdish language and literature flourish, studied in these madrasas.⁵⁰ The third type is the village madrasas attached to some village

⁴² Islamic jurisprudence

⁴³ Collections of the reports that quote what Prophet Muhammad said.

⁴⁴ Zeynelabidin Zinar, "Medrese Education in Northern Kurdistan," 13-17.

⁴⁵ Bruinessen, "Religion in Kurdistan," in *Mullas, Sufis and Heretics: The Role of Religion in Kurdish Society: Collected Articles*, (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2000), 69.

⁴⁶ See Bruinessen, "The Kurds and Islam"

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁸ Mufti is a scholar of Islamic law who gives rulings on religious matters.

⁴⁹ Bruinessen, "The Kurds and Islam," 13.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

mosques, run entirely by villagers' voluntary service; and financed by the village people. Kurdish village madrasas played a significant role in keeping the Kurdish culture and identity alive, cultivating a feeling of belonging to the past and a sense of Kurdish national awareness in the past century and a half.

Village madrasas were traditionally attached to a mosque, and each had their independent financial resources in the form of cultural lands rented out to peasants or properties attached to them as pious endowments, *waqfs*.⁵¹ While the income coming from these resources was administered by the local mullah in some places, in others it was administered by sheikhs or sayyids.⁵²

Various stories circulated to demonstrate the madrasas' divine legitimacy in the eyes of the people: madrasas were under God's protection. Madrasas were the only places to learn how to read and write in Kurdish during the Ottoman period⁵³ and even during the Turkish Republican period, when they became a clandestine organization due to the state ban on madrasas. The instruction was in Kurdish, and earlier Kurdish works on the Islamic sciences were studied. Madrasa students lived in madrasas with their teachers and were financially supported by the village population. The fact that the students stayed in their school for 24 hours made madrasas fulltime educational institutions.⁵⁴ A student could choose his mullah and apply to him personally and change him at any point of his education simply by passing the oral test given by the mullah of his choice.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Zinar, 5.

⁵² Ibid., 6.

⁵³ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁴ Halil Çiçek, *Şark Medreselerinin Serencamı*, (İstanbul: Beyan Yayınları, 2009), 85, 110.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 79, 107.

Kurdish mullahs taught in Kurdish village madrasas not to educate future jurists or government religious officials, but precisely to train village mullahs to meet the need of villagers. Being a village mullah was the most prestigious and glorious job⁵⁶ one could have in Kurdish society. A mullah's prestige increased in accordance with the number of older students he had in a village, and having only a few students would not bring him much respect.⁵⁷ Next to his religious functions, a mullah also served the social function of peacemaking during conflicts. It is often the case that the quarreling parties or an oppressive landlord would stop fighting due to his intervention.⁵⁸

The authority of mullahs came from their historical role as judges, and their religious verdicts were obeyed by village people. The society was historically accustomed to solving its issues in accordance with Islamic law, and that is why mullahs continued to be turned to rather than official authorities even during the republican period. However, the standing of a mullah is not comparable to a sheikh's. For sheikhs' authority surpasses as the village and tribal borders and they have a command over larger populations.

The Place of Sheikh and *Tekke*

For a better appreciation of the great societal respect Kurds had towards the sheikhs, one has to remember that Kurdistan has been a source of Islamic mysticism, *tasawwuf* or *tariqa*, for centuries, with the domination of two major *Sufi* orders, the *Qadiriyya* and *Naqshbandiyya*. Sheikhs, *tariqas* and *tekkes* (dervish lodges) have all been the components

⁵⁶ Although being a village mullah was not an official position, villagers provided and maintained a house for him and for his family. His financial needs were also taken care of by villagers, see Zeynelabidin Zinar, 7-8.

⁵⁷ Zinar, 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

of Kurdish life over the centuries.⁵⁹ While the *Naqshbandi* presence in Kurdistan goes back to three and a half centuries ago,⁶⁰ *Qadiriyya* sheikhs traced their origin to *Sayyid* Isa and *Sayyid* Musa, brothers who lived in the 15th century.⁶¹ Sheikhs ordain *khalifas*, their representatives, in numbers and send them to different and further locations to continue and spread their orders.

Becoming a sheikh is a matter of studying under the guidance of a master for years before one can earn an *ijaza*, a certificate of accomplishment and authority to practice teaching what one has learned. Sheikhs functioned in diverse ways in the tribal Kurdish society; their miraculous acts, known as *karama*, pastoral care and reconciliatory role during the never-ending tribal fights caused them to enjoy the highest authority over the Kurdish population.⁶²

Being connected to a sheikh in Kurdish society, even loosely, is considered a part of being a good Muslim; as the famous saying goes “one either chooses a sheikh to follow, or else Satan becomes one’s sheikh.”⁶³ As people arrived at sheikhs’ lodges with gifts, they asked for a special prayer or psychological treatment for their problems, which ranged from physical illnesses to mental problems in their families. Kurdish oral tradition is filled with the mysterious miracles of sheikhs, illustrating divine approval of their greatness. For instance,

⁵⁹ Mesut Yeğen, “The Turkish State Discourse and the Exclusion of Kurdish Identity,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32 (2), (1996): 220.

⁶⁰ Dina Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandīs in the Ottoman World, 1450-. 1700*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 66,71.

⁶¹ Sheikhs were prime figures not only in Kurdish Muslim society; the Ahl-i Haqq religion in Kurdistan was also based on the impact of Sufi individuals. The same brothers also comprised the founding myth of the Ahl-i Haqq religion in Kurdistan, and *Sayyid* Isa’s son *Sultan* Sahak is believed to be a divine incarnation, see Bruinessen, “The *Qadiriyya*,” 2-3.

⁶² Martin van Bruinessen, “Popular Islam, Kurdish Nationalism and Rural Revolt,” 18.

⁶³ Bruinessen, *Agha, Sheikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992), 215.

when the widely respected sheikh Mahmud of Urumiya was executed by Murad IV in 1639, people started to talk about how the sultan experienced a divine punishment as a result. On the same day the sultan had the sheikh executed, he became paralyzed.⁶⁴

Kurds also recognized the sheikhs as the best mediators during tribal conflicts. Tribal conflict was an indispensable part of Kurdish life since a disagreement between two individuals had the potential to escalate into a tribal matter involving other family members in the fight.⁶⁵ The opposition between families sometimes resulted in blood feuds, which could only be ended, like other fights, with the intervention of a higher authority, *aghas*, *emirs*, sheikhs or mullahs recognized by the two families. The greater the fight the harder it was to find an agreeable mediator.⁶⁶ Sheikhs provided the most acceptable intermediaries since they resided far from their birthplace and did not have blood links to the local tribes.⁶⁷

The authority of sheikhs was also related to their fulfillment of the role of Kurdish *emirs*, which were replaced by Ottoman governors appointed from the central state after the 19th century centralization. The Ottoman administrators lacked the moral authority the *emirs* once had, and they were not able to successfully deal with the tribal conflicts, since the

⁶⁴ Bruinessen, "The *Naqshbandi* Order in Seventeenth Century Kurdistan," *Personal Academia Page of Martin van Bruinessen*, February 27, 2014, accessed November 1, 2015
http://www.academia.edu/5953956/The_Naqshbandi_Order_in_Seventeenth-Century_Kurdistan, 5.

⁶⁵ Mehmet Emin Bozarslan, *Doğunun Sorunları*, (Diyarbakır: Şafak Kitabevi, 1966), 79.

⁶⁶ Bruinessen, *Agha Sheikh and State*, 77. Although sheikhs and aghas' mediatory role in tribal fights is often acknowledged, Kurdish intellectuals argued how this role was also manipulated in favor of the sheikhs and *aghas*. Bozarslan argues that *aghas* and respected leaders of tribes support tribal conflicts and benefit from their continuation, since after the fights are over the tribal leaders only increase their fame and authority by being the reconciliators between the tribes.

⁶⁷ Bruinessen, "Popular Islam," 286.

Kurdish community did not respect their authority as much as they did that of the Kurdish *emir*.⁶⁸ It was only sheikhs who were able to fill the power void.⁶⁹

Qadiriyya sheikhs in Kurdistan were drawn from two large families of hereditary sheikhs with great economic resources, Talabanis and Barzinjis, who that traced their origin to Sayyid Isa and Sayyid Musa of the 15th century. While Barzinjis had their major centers in the city of Süleymaniye in Iraq, the Talabani family's central *tekke* is in Iraq's Kerkuk. In Turkey, it is Bitlis and the village of Tillo that have been centers of the *Qadiriyya*.⁷⁰ Among well-known sheikhs with great fame and influence in the Barzinji family was Ma'ruf of Node (1753-1836). Sheikh Ma'ruf penned many books on devotion and doctrines as well as a Kurdish-Arabic dictionary, while he enjoyed, at the same time, a great influence at the court of Kurdish Baban dynasty in Süleymaniye.⁷¹ The most famous sheikh of the Talabani family was Abdurrahman Khalis⁷² (d.1858), who studied with Sheikh Ma'ruf for quite some time and established the central *tekke* in Kerkuk.⁷³ Both the Talabani and Barzanji families, with extensive areas of land under their direct control, were tribal and feudal formations and had tribal conflicts. Members of both families in the 20th century became influential in Iraqi politics, owing their influence to the charisma of their leading religious members. Hasan

⁶⁸Bruinessen, "Religion in Kurdistan," 44.

⁶⁹Bruinessen, "Kürtler Arasında Bir Siyasi Protesto Aracı Olarak Nakşibendi Tarikatı," in *Kürdistan üzerine yazılar*. (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1995), 85.

⁷⁰Ibid., 16.

⁷¹Bruinessen, "The *Qadiriyya*," 6.

⁷² Sheikh Abdurrahman also gained a reputation as a poet writing in Persian, Ottoman Turkish and Gorani Kurdish. He ordained dozens of *khalifas*, each having their own *tekke* in various parts of Kurdistan and also in Samarkand, Medina, Tanta in Egypt and Syria. Sheikh Abdurrahman's son, Riza Talabani, was a famous poet also, whom Bruinessen considers to have written probably the most scurrilous poems in Kurdish, see Bruinessen, "The *Qadiriyya*," 11, 12. One of his poems about Sultan Abdulhamid II, reveals a beautiful example of a satire in disguise of an appraisal, see Ayhan Geverî, "Şeyh Riza Talabanî ve Sultan Abdülhamid'e Yazdığı Kasideleri," *Kürt Tarihi*, No.1, (June-July, 2012): 50-51.

⁷³ Bruinessen, "The *Qadiriyya*," 10.

Talabani, sheikh Abdurrahman's great-grandson, was a government minister in 1959-1963. Mukarram Talabani was a member of the Iraqi communist party, and Jalal Talabani became a leading nationalist leader.⁷⁴

The influence of the Qadiriyya has decreased today, due to the great influence and rapid growth of the Naqshbandiya since the nineteenth century. Naqshbandis were able to draw even former *Qadiris* into their orbit,⁷⁵ like the Barzinji family.⁷⁶ The enormous rise of Naqshbandiyya in the 19th century was owed to the highly charismatic Mawlana Khalid (Dhiya'ad-din Khalid Baghdadi (1776-1827)). Mawlana Khalid, a Kurd from Shahrazur in Kurdistan, is the most significant figure in the *Naqshbandi* spiritual lineage after the Indian Scholar Imam Ahmed Sirhindi (1564-1624), the very founder of the *Naqshbandi* order. Like Sirhindi, Khalid's name signified the branch of the order, the *Khalidiyya*, and the *Khalidiyya* order has become almost synonymous with the *Naqshbandiyya* in the Western Islamic world today.⁷⁷

Mawlana Khalid's disciples came from all around Syria, the Hijaz, Iraq, Kurdistan, Anatolia and the Balkans and *Khalidi sufi tekkes* spread rapidly in the first decades after his death.⁷⁸ His branch displaced the hegemony of the *Qadiriyya*.⁷⁹ In 1820, his disciples numbered about 12.000.⁸⁰ Mawlana Khalid gave *ijaza* to different family members and different ethnicities and sent his *khalifas* to several parts of Kurdistan, the Ottoman Empire

⁷⁴ Bruinessen, "The Qadiriyya," 13.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁷⁶ Müfid Yüksel, "*Kürdistan'da Değişim Süreci*," (Ankara: Sor Yayıncılık, 1993), 83.

⁷⁷ Hamid Algar, "The *Naqshbandi* Order: A Preliminary Survey of Its History and Significance," *Studia Islamica*, No.44, (1976): 148, 149.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 149.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 149.

⁸⁰ Farhad Shakely, "The *Naqshbandi* Shaikhs of Hawraman and the Heritage of Khalidiyya-Mujaddidiyya in Kurdistan," *International Journal of Kurdish Studies*, issue1/2, vol.19, (2005): 122.

and Indonesia to practice the *Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya* form of Sufism.⁸¹ In that sense, The *Naqshbandi* order offered an alternative to the *Qadiriyya* through its non-hereditary order, issuing *ijazas* for those who did not come from a sheikhly family.⁸²

Two other important families in Kurdistan with significant numbers of scholars and sheikhs are the Nehri and Arvas *sayyid*⁸³ families. The Nehri *sayyids* were affiliated with the *Qadiriyya* until the early nineteenth century. However, after Mawlana Khalid's arrival in Süleymaniya, Sayyid Taha, the head of the Nehri family, became Khalid's *khalifa* and the family joined the *Naqshbandiyya* tradition.⁸⁴ The present Arvasi family *sayyids* all descend from Abdurrahman Arvasi, who led Qadiri orders, while his two grandsons, Fehmi and Sibgatullah (d.1870), gained *ijaza* from various orders and became *khalifas* of both *Qadiriyya* and *Naqshbandiyya*.⁸⁵ Sibgatullah Arvasi was Sayyid Taha's *khalifa* in the *Naqshbandi* tradition and he is the third significant person in the Golden Chain of the Naqshbandi-Khalidi tradition's Nehri branch. Seyyid Fehmi's son, Sheikh Abdulhakim Arvasi (d. 1943), played a critical leadership role in the print-based *Büyük Doğu* (Greater Orient) intellectual circle in Turkey, led by Necip Fazıl, the famous Turkish man of literature.⁸⁶ Abdulhakim Arvasi also served as a head imam of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque in İstanbul.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Bruinessen, "The *Naqshbandi* Order," 1. Many of the great ulama in the great cities of the Ottoman realm of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have also been affiliated with the Naqshbandiya-Khalidiya: Mehmed Emin Ibn Abidin (d. 1836), a prominent faqih; Sheikh Ahmed Ziyaeddin Gumushaneli (d.1893), an intimate of Sultan Abdulhamid II and a foremost authority on hadith; Musa Kazim Efendi, ŞeyhuIslam from 1910 to 1911 (d. 1920); and Sheikh Mehmed Zahid Duzceli Kevseri (d. 1954), one of the many great Turkish scholars that went into exile after the abolition of the Caliphate, see Algar, 149.

⁸² Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 136.

⁸³ Sayyid is a title given to those who are believed to come from the progeny of Prophet Muhammad.

⁸⁴ Bruinessen, "The *Qadiriyya*," 13.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁶ Yavuz, 140.

⁸⁷ Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 108.

The *Naqshbandi* order had great social and political influence in nineteenth and twentieth century Kurdistan; in fact, *Naqshbandi* sheikhs formed the new elite class in Kurdish society.⁸⁸ In this regard, the centralization reforms in the 19th century that abolished Kurdish autonomous administration were highly influential. Appointed Ottoman administrators in Kurdistan could not fulfill the role of former Kurdish *emirs* especially in prevention of tribal conflicts. The failure of the central government in restructuring order in Kurdistan resulted in the rise sheikhs as new actors in Kurdish politics.⁸⁹

Several rebellions were led by *Naqshbandi* sheikhs, such as the rise of Sheikh Ubeydullah Nehri (d.1880), Seyyid Taha Nehri's son, Sheikh Said rebellion (d.1925),⁹⁰ and Mustafa Barzani's nationalist movement (1945 until 1975).⁹¹ Indeed, the *Naqshbandi* order throughout Turkey was able to lead or motivate many rebellions such as the incident of 31 March 1909 and the Menemen incident of 1930, against the radical secularizing reforms of

⁸⁸ Yüksel, 83. According to Müfid Yüksel, there was a hierarchical order among *Naqshbandi* sheikhs, which was as follows: Arvasi and Nehri sheikhs, sheikhs of Norşin, Ohin, Palu, Taşkesen, Zokayd (Kürtalan), Barzan, Berzenji, Zibar, Baban, Cizre, Kızıltepe, Hıms, Tawela, Hazne (Syria), Firsaf, Cezni, Küfra, Ankaf, Kasrik, Batman, Zilan Aktepe, Arabkend and Hawil, see Yüksel page 84.

⁸⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, "Kürtler Arasında Bir Siyasi Protesto Aracı Olarak Naksibendi Tarikati," 85

⁹⁰ Sheikh Said was the grandson of Sheikh Ali Palevi, the *khalifa* of Mawlana Khalid in the Diyarbakır's Palu region. Neither Sheikh Ubeydullah nor Sheikh Said is a part of any Naksibendi Halidi Sufi chains, all of which show the names that carried the Naksibendi tradition to certain areas. After the death of Mawlana Khalid, both Nehri and Palu families established a hereditary sheikhhood from father to son, which was based on landownership, see Serdar Şengül, "Halidi Nakşibendilik ve Medreselerde İlim anlayışının Dönüşümü," *Kıyam ve Kital: Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyete Devletin İnşası ve Kolektif Şiddet*, (İstanbul: Tarih VakfıYurt Yayınları, 2015), 346.

⁹¹ Bruinessen, "The *Naqshbandi* Order," and Shakely, 131. Hamid Algar states that the Khalidiyya *Naqshbandiyya* are the most important advocates of militant resistance to the intrusion of irreligion into Muslim society. They opposed the westernizing tendencies that began in the Ottoman lands with the Tanzimat and reached their peak in the establishment of the republic. In the republican period, they have continued a passive resistance against the westernizing reforms. For instance, Şeyh Mehmet Esat Erbili (born in today's Iraq in 1847), the grandson of Sheikh Hidayetullah, the *khalifa* of Mawlana Khalid in Erbil, was arrested and killed by the republican regime in 1930 after the celebrated Menemen affair. The Menemen incident has been presented in the official historiography of the Republic as a clash between "the forces of darkness and those of the Enlightenment," see Yavuz, 140.

the Turkish republic.⁹² The Kemalist establishment was particularly fearful of the *Naqshbandi* order because *Naqshbandis* were able to arouse mass resistance against its antireligious policies from 1925 through 1930.⁹³ As a result Sufi lodges were closed down on November 30, 1925, and were replaced with *Halkevleri* (people's houses), which promoted obedience to the secular state and its policies.⁹⁴ Members of the *Naqshbandi* community faced severe persecution, exile, arrest and even execution during the single-party period until the 1950s.⁹⁵ During this period, the *Naqshbandi* families showed their opposition to the state through promoting underground madrasas, refusing to send their children to state schools and declining to get Turkish identification cards of citizenship.⁹⁶ According to Şerif Mardin, as the Protestant ethic worked for the rise of capitalism, the *Naqshbandi* order worked the same way for the social mobilizations of Muslims.⁹⁷ During the multi-party period after the 1950s, madrasas and *tekkes* benefited from more religion-friendly politics. The government gave opportunity to sheikhly families to become deputies in the national assembly,⁹⁸ which continued for the following decades and eventually led to their integration into the state system.⁹⁹

⁹² Şerif Mardin, "The Nakşibendi Order in Turkish History," in Richard Tapper, *Islam in Modern Turkey: religion, politics and literature in a secular state*, (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 1991), 121-122.

⁹³ Yavuz, 139 and Mardin 122.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 139 and Shakely, 132.

⁹⁵ Yavuz, 140 and Yüksel, 101. The role of the *Naqshbandi* order in the development of Kurdish culture and literature was significant, as many Khaliddiyya deputies and disciples were also poets and scholars. Mawlana Khalid himself wrote poems in Kurdish, Persian and Arabic and often quoted lines of poetry from Hafiz, Mawlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi, Jami, Shah-i Naqshband and others in his hundreds of letters and treatises, indicating his appreciation of poetry. This tradition was further developed by his disciples. For instance, the first khalifa of Mawlana Khalid, Uthman Siraj ad-Din I, started the *Naqshbandi* center in Hawraman in the 1830s, which has been the most important Sufi and Kurdish cultural center in Iraqi Kurdistan during the last one and a half centuries, see Shakely, 132.

⁹⁶ Yüksel, 105,106.

⁹⁷ Mardin, 123.

⁹⁸ Giyaseddin Emre, a sheikh from Ohin madrasa and Abdulmelik Firat, Shiekh Said's grandson are one of the earliest examples to these deputies, see Yüksel, 102.

⁹⁹ Yüksel, 103.

The Relation Between Sufi and Madrasa Networks

Mawlana Khalid started the new tradition of appointing all his *khalifas* from among madrasa graduates, which in time combined the *tekke* and madrasa traditions.¹⁰⁰ In his recent study on *Naqshbandi* influence on the madrasas, Serdar Şengül elaborates how the *Naqshbandiyya* sheikhs, after the spectacular rise of the *Khalidi-Naqshbandiyya*, dominated madrasa circles by establishing and sponsoring them.¹⁰¹ Mawlana Khalid, a madrasa mullah himself, insisted that a sheikh must be educated in Islamic sciences as well. This tradition was continued by his disciples and those after them. For instance, Norşin *madrasa* networks centered in Bitlis¹⁰² established by Abdurrahman Tağı, the *khalifa* of Sibgatullah Arvasi, have been greatly influential in the religious life of Kurds.¹⁰³ Besides being an influential *Naqshbandi* sheikh, Abdurrahman Tağı taught as a *madrasa* mullah there. Some famed Kurdish *ulema* were educated in those madrasas.¹⁰⁴ Tağı's *khalifa*, Fethullah Verkanisi, also established the Ohin madrasa in Bitlis, which was the most influential after the Norşin madrasa.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Yüksel, 82-88.

¹⁰¹ Şengül, 321.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 356.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 347.

¹⁰⁴ Mullah Said Nursi (1876-1960), the founder of the Nur movement in Turkey, Sheikh Şefik Arvasi (1884-1970), a contributor in the Kurdish *Jîn* journal (1918-1919), Sadrettin Yüksel, and Abdulkhakim Arvasi, went to Norşin madrasa and studied with Abdurrahman Tağı. See Necmettin Şahiner, *Son Şahitler Bediüzzaman Said Nursi'yi Anlatıyor*, vol I, (İstanbul: Nesil Yayınları), 2003, 26 and Yüksel, 213. Other ulema who studied at Norşin and Ohin madrasas were Sheikh Alauddin, Mehmet Emin Er, Halil Günenç, Ali Arslan, Ali Meylani, Mazhar Taşkesenlioğlu, Mullah Hasip Seven, Muhammed Şirin, Mullah Abidin, Sheikh Halid, Sheikh Asım, Mullah Salih el-Buhti, Mulla Muhyeddin, Mehmet Çağlayan, Abdulkkerim Saruhan and Mullah Burhan from Tillo, see Yüksel, 213-214.

¹⁰⁵ Halil Çiçek, "Tatvan ve Cevresinde İlmî calismalar ve Ohin Medresesi Ornegi," *Uluslararası Dünden Bugüne Tatvan ve Cevresi Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, (İstanbul, 2008), 571 cited in, Mehmet Bilen, "Ohinli Şeyh Alauddin ve Hadis Usulüne Dair Manzumesi," *Atatürk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, No 37, (2012): 90.

The fact that many sheikhs after Mawlana Khalid were also scholars in the traditional Islamic sciences equipped them with the ability to be Sufi masters and juristic authorities at the same time, the latter of which was traditionally the job of madrasa mullahs.¹⁰⁶ According to Şengül, the juristic authority sheikhs gained was of primary significance in their filling the authority political void caused by the abolition of the Kurdish emirates in the 19th century. Many Kurds, even today, prefer to solve their problems according to Islamic law and do not want to turn to the Turkish state's courts.¹⁰⁷ Şengül maintains that if sheikhs had not been able to combine in themselves Islamic Sufi and scholarly education in the 19th century, they would not have enjoyed the authority they had over large populations.¹⁰⁸

Sheikhs' scholarly education and their establishment, control, and sponsorship of madrasas had negative effects also. Their domination of the madrasa circles meant the hegemony of sheikhs over mullahs; any criticism that might come from the madrasa *ulema* was prevented,¹⁰⁹ and a check and balance system against the sheikhs' authority was almost lost. According to Zeynelabidin Zinar, until the 1940s a village mullah could only take up a mullah position in a village on the orders of a sheikh or at the request of an agha.¹¹⁰ Even if in later years, a mullah was able to take up a position without the approval of the controlling sheikh his stability and respectability in the village all depended on his relationship with the locally influential sheikh.¹¹¹ There were cases when a mullah had to leave a village due to a

¹⁰⁶ Şengül, 336.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 336, and Abdulhadi Timurtaş, "Mullah Muhammed Zivingi ve İlmî Kisiligi," *Sarkiyat İlmî Arastirmalar Dergisi*, no1, 2009, accessed January 13, 2016, <http://dergipark.ulakbim.gov.tr/sarkiat/article/viewFile/5000109852/5000102177> , 107.

¹⁰⁸ Şengül, 336.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 336.

¹¹⁰ Zinar, 7.

¹¹¹ Çiçek says that mullah İsmail from Syria, who was very vocal about his opposition to the sheikhs, lost his respectability and credibility as a result and people called him Mele Simo, implying an insult, Çiçek, 155.

high number of disputes with controlling sheikhs.¹¹² This is why some mullahs turned down offers of mullah-ship from sheikhs¹¹³ as they knew they had to be bound by the sheikh's ideas and directives. There were other mullahs, though, who would live peacefully with the sheikh without questioning him.¹¹⁴

Below is provided the Norşin Naqshbandiyya chain of authority, *silsile*, (see Figure 1) and the Norşin family tree (see Figure 2) in order to demonstrate the relationship between *Naqshbandi* Sufism and the madrasa establishment. Many *Naqshbandis* were also madrasa mullahs. The chains also show the political influence of *Naqshbandis* in Turkey.

¹¹² Interview with Mullah Yasin Toprak's son, Muhammed Toprak. Muhammed Toprak mentioned that his father had to change places many times due to his conflicts with the controlling sheikhs. Şengül also tells a similar story in "Halidi Naksibendilik," 326.

¹¹³ Timurtaş, 107.

¹¹⁴ Şengül, 327.

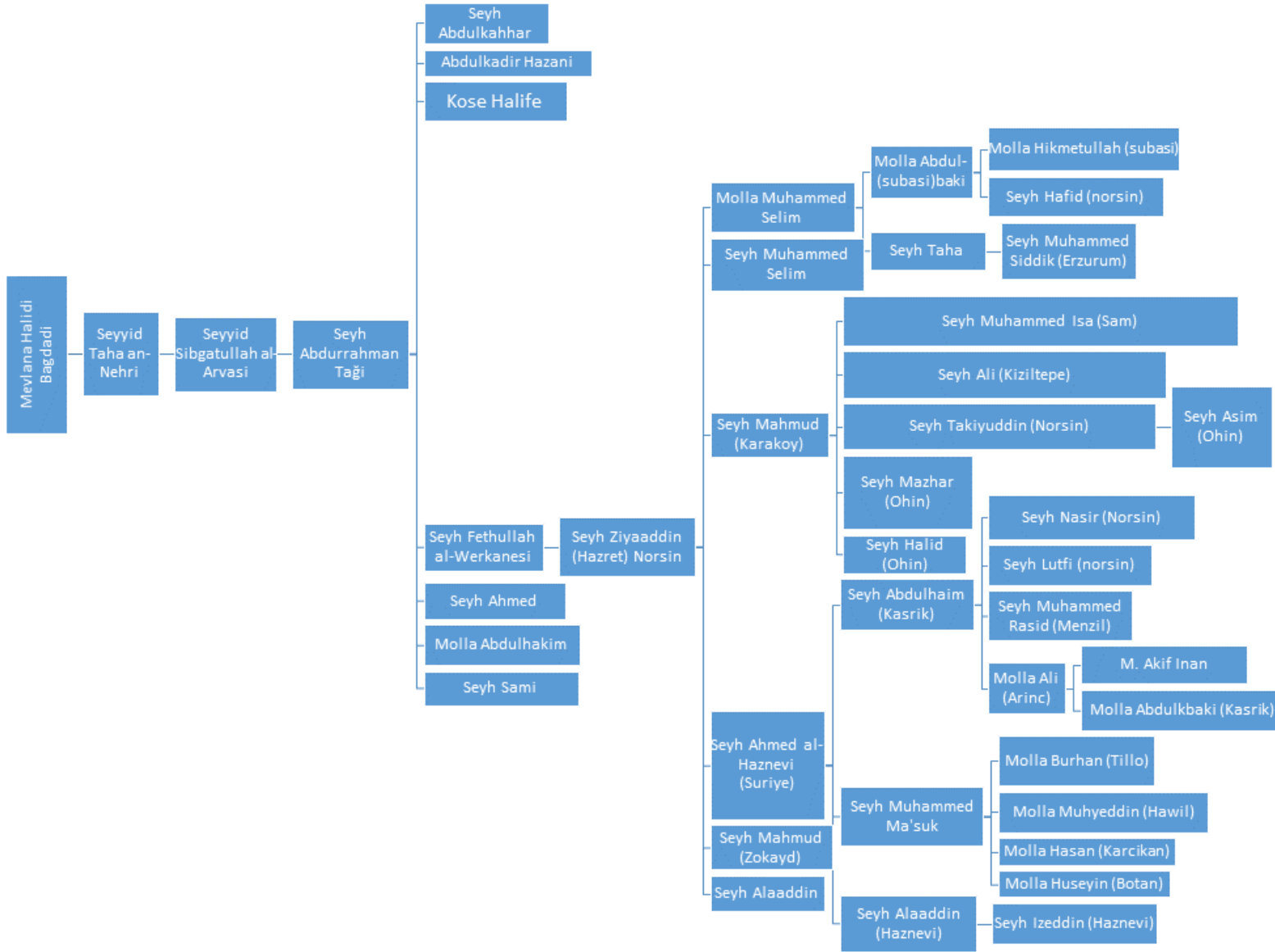


Figure 1 Norşin Naqshbandiyya Chain, based on Müfid Yüksel's, "Kürdistan'da Değişim Süreci," 220. Sheikh Abdurrahman Taği was the founder of the Norşin madrasas. Sheikh Sibgatullah Arvasi was the brother of Sheikh Şefik Arvasi's grandfather and Sheikh Şefik was Sheikh Abdulhakim Arvasi's nephew. One of the granddaughters of Sheikh Şefik, Didar, married a son of Yusuf Bozkurt Özal, a brother of the late Turkish president Turgut Özal. See Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 108. One of Fethullah Verkanisi's grandsons, Gıyaseddin Emre, became a deputy in the Turkish national assembly in the 1950s. See Yüksel, 102.

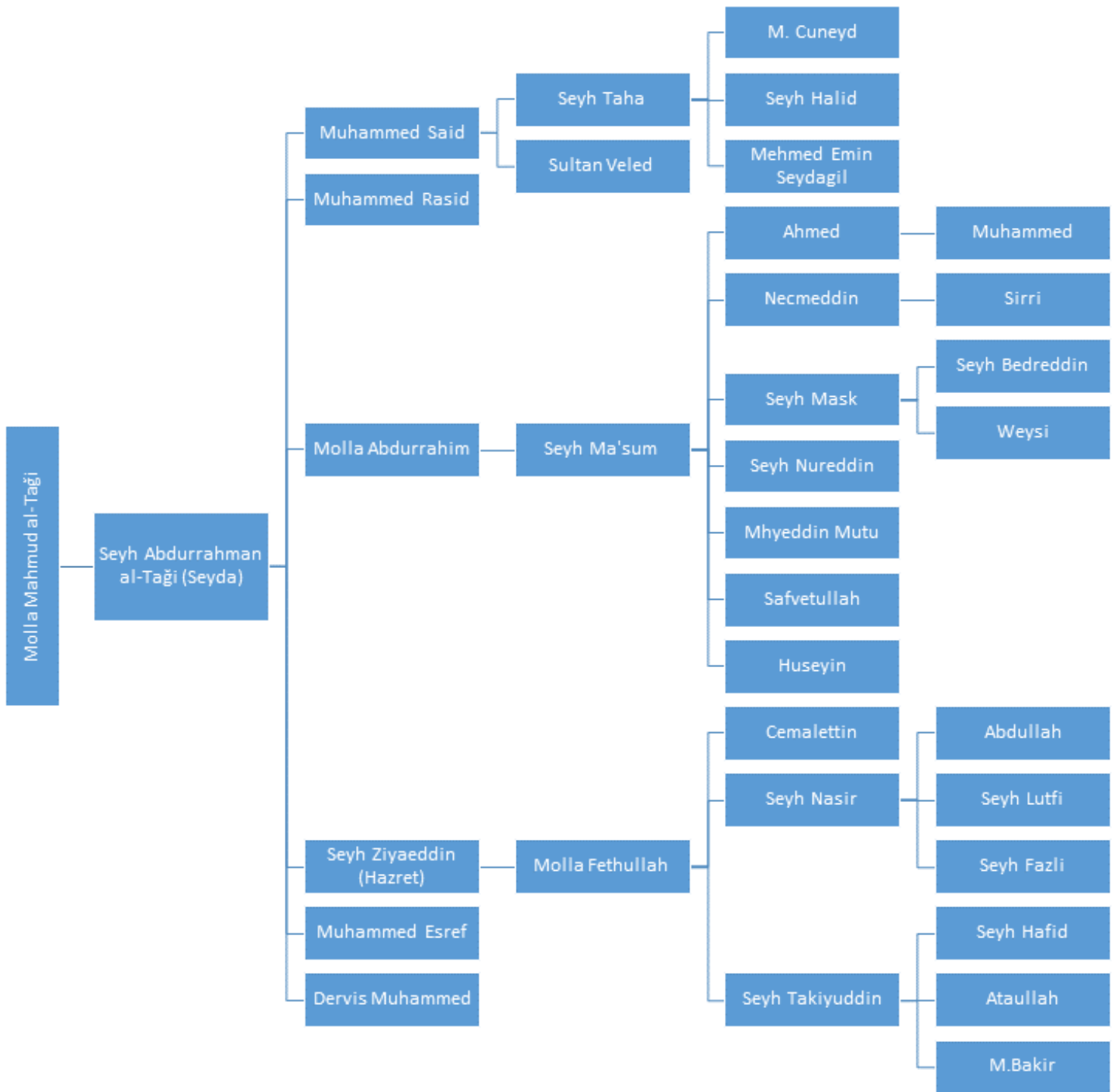


Figure 2 Norşin Family Tree, based on Müfid Yüksel's, "*Kürdistan'da Değişim Süreci*," 221. Sheikh Masum's son Sheikh Maşuk gave Naqshbandiyya ijazat and the title khalifa to Mullah Yasin Toprak of Diyarbakır whom I will discuss in chapter 4.

Mullahs' Critique of Sheikhs

Twentieth-century Muslim reformists, in general, objected to Sufism. The Muslim reformists condemned all supererogatory and supplementary prayers of Sufism as innovation (*bid'a*), and therefore objectionable.¹¹⁵ Besides, these reformists were very critical of the role enjoyed by sheikhs and how they required their followers to surrender themselves to the sheikhs' judgment.¹¹⁶ To them, Sufi practices violated orthodox religious doctrines and were also inappropriate to the autonomy of the modern person, suggesting an interaction between Western discourses of secular modernity and the Muslim reformist discourse.¹¹⁷

In reference to Kurdish mullahs, their objection to sheikhs generally emanated from the particular practices of some sheikhs who took advantage of their authority. There was a rise in the conflict between mullahs and sheikhs in the late 19th century and after; many mullahs criticized sheikhs for being unqualified and manipulative of people's feelings and financial resources.¹¹⁸ Mullahs were also irritated that the unqualified sheikhs benefited from their father names to dominate madrasa circles, without a proper education either in Sufism or in the Islamic sciences.¹¹⁹ These so-called sheikhs not only betrayed their father's legacy but they also diminished the respectability of sheikhhood.¹²⁰ For many Kurdish mullahs, it was those 'false sheikhs,' not Sufism itself, that was to blame.

¹¹⁵ Martin Van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell, *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam*, (I.B. Tauris, 2007), 7.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁸ Timurtaş, 118. It is important to note that the tension between Islamic theologians and Sufism was not peculiar to modern times and was a much older phenomenon. There were efforts in premodern Islamic history to bring Sufism closer to sharia or to purify Sufism from non-orthodox practices. See, Muhammad Abduh Haq Ansari, *Sufism and Shari'a: A Study of Shaykh Ahmed Sirhindi's Effort to Reform Sufism*, (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1986) and Hamid Algar, introduction to *Principles of Sufism*, by Al-Qushayri, trans. Von Schlegell, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1992.)

¹¹⁹ Şengül, 359.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 359.

Nonetheless, the discourses of Kurdish mullahs against the sheikhs were also informed by Islamic reformists as well as modern notions of secularism. Some Kurdish mullahs were of the opinion that Sufism was not very practical in the modern age, as it was ill-equipped for the intellectual assaults of materialism.¹²¹ Kurdish mullahs had contemporary concerns, such as the desire to embrace material progress and civilizational advances, and the need to cultivate their native language and Kurdish identity, all of which ‘false sheikhs’ stood against.

A significant point of dispute between sheikhs and mullahs in the republican period was their differing stance against the state’s ethnicist policies and the relative underdevelopment of the Kurdish region. Some sheikhs preferred to stay silent in order to maintain their already established status and called those who raised their voice against state policies separatists and communists.¹²² Since the 1930s increasing number of sheikhs had been coopted by the system to assist the government in the suppression of Kurdish nationalism.¹²³ Many mullahs were exposed to ideas of Kurdish nationalism in madrasas and raised their voice against the state, which many times positioned them against the sheikhly establishment.

Roots of Sunni-Ottoman Identity

¹²¹ Şükran Vahide, “Man as Vicegerent of the Earth: How New is Said Nursi’s Interpretation?” in Hasan Hörküç, *God, Man and Mortality*, (Işık Yayıncılık, 2015).

¹²² *Ibid.*, 327.

¹²³ Robert Olson “The Creation of a Kurdish State in the 1990s?” *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. XV, No 4, (Summer, 1992): 14 mentioned in Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, “Kurdish Nationalism from an Islamist Perspective,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 18:1, (2007): 86.

Ottoman identity was a part and parcel of Kurdish identity; even in the early twentieth century when nationalist thoughts were on the rise. Most Kurds at the time who deemed themselves nationalists considered themselves as Ottomans as well.¹²⁴ Kurds utilized the Islamo-Ottomanist historiographical tradition inherited from earlier centuries in their twentieth century nationalist writings.

The origins of Islamic and Ottomanist Kurdish identity go back to the 16th century when Selim I defeated the Shiite Safavid Shah İsmail in 1514 with the cooperation of the Kurdish tribes in Eastern Anatolia. Kurdish emirates agreed on integration into the Ottoman Empire under a religiously-framed pact: the Ottomans granted administrative autonomy, in different levels, to Kurdish emirates in return for Kurdish loyalty to the Ottomans. The imperial center sought to inculcate loyalty¹²⁵ by promoting the idea that the Ottomans were the safeguards of the Muslim *umma* and the protectors of Sunni Islam against the Shiites. The Kurds were expected to help the Ottomans protect Sunnism by defending the borderlands. Idris-i Bitlisi, a Kurdish Ottoman statesman, employed a powerful Islamo-Ottomanist discourse¹²⁶ during the Ottoman-Safavid war in order to secure the agreement of many Kurdish leaders.

Eighty-three years later, in 1597, Sharaf Khan, once the Kurdish emir of Bitlis and the author of the history of the Kurdish emirates in his *Sharafnama*, depicted the Ottomans as the “champions of *Sunni* Islam and the protector against innovation and perversion, namely,

¹²⁴ Klein, “Kurdish Nationalists and non-Nationalist Kurds,” 135.

¹²⁵ Tyler Conklin, “The Politics of Loyalty: The Confessional and Ethnic Loyalties of the Kurds in Seventeenth Century Eastern Anatolia”, (Unpublished Master Thesis, Hungary, Central European University, 2014), 19.

¹²⁶ Naci Kutlay, *Türk siyasal İslamcılığında Kürt damarları*. (Kızılay, Ankara: Beybûn, 2005), 67.

Shiism.”¹²⁷ Islam was an “essential element” of Kurdish identity;¹²⁸ and that is why Kurds had to pay allegiance to the Sunni Ottomans. *Sharafname* served to legitimate Kurdish autonomy and stressed Kurdish loyalty to the state at the same time.¹²⁹ In the seventeenth century, Vani Efendi (d.1685), a religious scholar from Kurdistan and one of the most influential mosque preachers in İstanbul, stated in his Qur’anic commentary *Araisü’l-Kur’an wa Nafa’is al-Furkan* (1679-80) how the Kurds fought alongside the Turks to defeat the Byzantines in the battle of Manzikert (1071), which opened the doors of Anatolia to Turks and to conversion and conquest.¹³⁰

In the seventeenth century, Ottoman high officials benefited from the *umma* notion for winning Kurdish allegiance as it related to Ottoman Sunni identity. At the time, growing Kurdish dissatisfaction was alarming Ottoman officials, who feared it would bring the loss of Kurdish loyalty. In his advice letter of 1632, Aziz Efendi warned Sultan Murad IV that there was an increasing Kurdish discontent due to the suppression of their privileges by the Ottoman provincial governors, which would result in losing the Kurds to the Safavids.¹³¹ He credited the Kurds with being loyal subjects of the Ottomans and “a staunch fortress for the

¹²⁷ Djene Rhys Bajalan. “Şeref Xan's Sharafnama: Kurdish Ethno-Politics in the Early Modern World, Its Meaning and Its Legacy”, *Iranian Studies*, 45:6, (2012): 810

¹²⁸ Martin van Burinnesen, “Kurds and Islam,” 16.

¹²⁹ In 1684, Mistafa Beg, the Kurdish ruler of the principality of Egil, had Şam’i translate the work into Ottoman Turkish, to which Şam’i added an appendix and talked about how Kurdish political leaders would read and discuss *Sharafname* in their meetings. Şam’i also includes in the appendix local histories of Egil and Palu between 1597 and 1684 and mentions Mistafa Beg and Mehmed Kucar Beg answered the call of the Ottoman governor of Diyarbakır Kaplan Pasha in 1676 to join the Ottoman campaign to Chyhyryn in today’s central Ukraine. He described how “honorable lord of Egil, Mistafa Beg, and the honorable lord of Palu, Mehmed Kucar Beg, fought as brave men!” See Conklin, “The Politics of Loyalty,” 56, 59-60.

¹³⁰ Vani Efendi said the Turks inherited the task of fighting the Christians because the Arabs failed to do so, and Kurds helped the Turks in the mission. Conklin, “The Politics of Loyalty,” 45 and Marc David Baer, *Honored by the glory of Islam: conversion and conquest in Ottoman Europe*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 206-209.

¹³¹ Özoğlu, *Kurdish notables and the Ottoman state*, 58.

Muslim states”¹³² at the Ottoman-Alevite border.¹³³ The discourse on Kurdish loyalty to the Ottomans, and thus to the *umma* ideal, provided both sides with a discursive weapon to remind each other of their initial agreement: The emphasis on the enduring Kurdish loyalty and bravery implied that the Ottomans reminded themselves to respect Kurdish autonomy and that Kurds had to stay loyal and responsive to Ottoman calls if they wanted to enjoy the privileges of autonomy in their affairs.

While the Ottomans credited the Kurds with loyalty to the Sunni Ottoman notion of *umma* to keep their support, they did not want Kurdish leaders to gain enough power to pose a threat to the state. Murad IV (1623-1640) had a charismatic sheikh, Aziz Mahmud of Urmia, executed, fearing the potential danger of his arming of tens of thousands of followers for a rebellion since Sheikh Mahmud had protested the imposition of extra taxes to finance a military campaign.¹³⁴ Similarly, the Ottoman state was alarmed when Bedirhan Pasha, the leader of the Bedirhan emirate, declined to send his tribal troops when they were called up by the Ottoman army during the Ottoman–Russian war in 1828-29.¹³⁵ The Ottoman state was motivated to bring down this powerful emirate, since a virtual independence was not part of

¹³² Önder Beyter and Rezan Ekinci, “Kürd Emirlerinin Muktedir Oldukları Zamanda Yaptıkları Hizmetler,” *Kürt Tarihi 2*, (İstanbul: İmaj Matbaacılık, 2012): 21.

¹³³ Aziz Efendi reminded the Sultan that when the Shiite forces seized the Diyarbakır fortress in 1515, the Kurdish emirates communicated with the Kurds in the castle by sending this message to them:

“You, as the true descendants and believers of the Sunni creed... it is better that your name be erased from the earth than that you be made subject to [Shiism] that inauspicious band of corrupt practice...it now behooves you to act in accord with your Islamic fervor and in agreement with the law of the Prophet knowing that the Ottoman Sultan who shares your religion and belongs to the same sect...let us rely upon the portals of his court...his imperial grace will be forthcoming and that by freeing the aforementioned fortress and bestowing it on us he will provide to us the basis of our salvation and refuge. See Rhoads Murphey, *Kanun-name- i Sultani li Aziz Efendi, Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures 9*, edited by Sinasi Tekin, Gonul Alpay Tekin (Harvard University Office of the University Publisher, 1985), 12-1.

¹³⁴ Martin van Bruinessen, “Religious Life in Diyarbakır: Religious Learning and the Role of Tariqats,” in Mullahs, *Sufis and Heretics: The Role of Religion in Kurdish Society*, (İstanbul: ISIS Press, 2000), 75.

¹³⁵ Klein, *Margins of Empire*, 58.

the Ottoman-Kurdish deal.¹³⁶ Bedirhan's emirate, which distinguished itself locally for its expansive power,¹³⁷ later fell under the jurisdiction of the new governor of Diyarbakır in 1846,¹³⁸ forcing Bedirhan Pasha to rebel against the government, since the government aimed to divide his land and weaken his authority.¹³⁹

Later in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Abdulhamid II placed a new emphasis on Islam and his personal religious role as a caliph, as the savior of the umma. He tied Islamism to Ottomanism, since the focus of loyalty was the Ottoman sultan as caliph. Emphasizing his own role as caliph, he generated support from Muslims within and outside the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴⁰ He made sure that the powerful Kurdish emirates were under Ottoman control. This change in the administrative policy in the 19th century marked the end of the hereditary governing rights of the sons of Kurdish ruling families such as the Bedirhans. Abdulhamid II placed in charge of his newly developed Hamidiye cavalry the tribal leaders who were rivals against the ones who had revolted earlier.¹⁴¹ For instance, he usurped the power of Bedirhan Pasha (d.1869) by placing the power in the hands of his rival.¹⁴² Resentful of Hamidian policies, Bedirhan Pasha's sons, Mikdat and Abdurrahman, joined the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress) and wrote extensively critiquing the government and the

¹³⁶ Ibid., 58.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 58.

¹³⁸ Özoğlu, *Kurdish notables and the Ottoman state*, 60.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 71.

¹⁴⁰ Abdulhamid II's pan-Islamism has been described as a pragmatic policy that used Islamic symbols and upheld the Ottoman state's Islamic identity and Muslim subjects' morale following their losses in wars. He felt the feeling of despondency among his Muslim subjects and wanted to create a feeling of hope. Toward this aim, he made the person of the sultan to acquire a certain "aura of sacrality" as the caliph, which reached to the extent that his hair and fingernails were saved, washed in silver containers and sent to the Hicaz every year as part of the caravan of *surre alayi*, which bore annual gifts to the Holy places every year. See, Selim Deringil, "The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808 to 1908," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, 1, (1993): 11.

¹⁴¹ Janet Klein, "Claiming the Nation: The Origins and Nature of Kurdish Nationalist Discourse," (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Princeton University, 1996), 20.

¹⁴² Ibid., 20.

Sultan. As the two brothers founded the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kürdistan*, in 1898, their critique of the Sultan and their nationalist rhetoric was still imbedded in Ottomanism.¹⁴³ The ‘Kurdish loyalty card’ was used on both levels for two ends: the Kurds hoped to urge the Ottoman state to grant more autonomy and privileges, while the Ottomans used it to prevent Kurdish *emirs* from rebelling.¹⁴⁴

Mustafa Kemal used the same Ottoman notions of the *umma* and the caliph to draw support from the Kurds for Turkey’s Independence War (1919-1923) when Kurdish nationalists were not able to mobilize the Kurds for separatist Kurdish nationalist interests. Mustafa Kemal employed a discourse of Islamic unity and loyalty to the caliph: “our first task is to rescue him (caliph)...our most trusted supporters in this brethren are our Muslim brothers.”¹⁴⁵ The ethnic tie meant little to Kurds, compared to the religious brotherhood they valued.

Again, the Kurds were not passive receivers of the *umma* concept; the power of the *umma* discourse among the Kurds lay in the fact that the Kurds considered themselves as essential elements of the *umma* ideal because of protecting the borders of the Ottomans. The Kurds did not propagate the notion simply for religious ideals; their support for Kurdish Turkish Muslim brotherhood revealed their secular concerns, which were to remind the Ottomans their initial agreement with the Kurds and restore their privileges. If the Ottomans wanted Kurdish loyalty to realize the *umma* ideal, they had to give heed to Kurdish concerns.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴⁴ Conklin, “The Politics of Loyalty,” 30.

¹⁴⁵ Selim Deringil, “The Ottoman Origins of Kemalist Nationalism,” Namik Kemal to Mustafa Kemal.” *European History Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (1993),174. Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 123, Martin van Bruinessen, “Constructions of ethnic identity in the late Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey: The Kurds and their Others,” *Personal Academia Page of Martin van Bruinessen*, February 27, 2014, accessed December 10, 2015, http://www.hum.uu.nl/medewerkers/m.vanbruinessen/publications/constructions_of_ethnic_identity.htm

The Kurds did not show loyalty to the caliph for the sake of his religious discourse on the *umma* no matter what. Abdulhamid II is a case in point. His emphasis on loyalty to the caliph and his policy to repress any criticism against himself gained him many critiques from all parts of the society, including the Kurdish *Sufis* and *ulema*. They disliked his absolutism and his restriction of different religious opinions that worked against his unifying role as caliph.¹⁴⁶ Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), with its emphasis on constitutionalism and freedom of the press appealed to a diverse audience in its early years and it was able to speak to many *ulema* against Hamidian absolutism.¹⁴⁷ For example, Erbilli Esad Efendi (1847-1931), a Kurdish *Naqshbendi* sheikh, severely criticized Abdulhamid II's despotism in his opening speech at the founding of the *Cemiyet-i Sûfiye* (Council of Sufis) in İstanbul when he said, "during the dark age of the cursed period of despotism both *Sharia* and *tarikât* (*Sufism*) were shrouded and concealed," and he praised the CUP, "who turned the Muslim world from decline (*tedenni*) to progress (*terakki*)."¹⁴⁸ Said Nursi, a Kurdish mullah (1876-1960), warned Kurdish workers in İstanbul to support constitutionalism against the absolutism of the Sultan: "Constitutionalism is justice and the *Sharia* itself. As long as the Sultan submits to our Prophets' orders and goes in his path, he is the caliph. Then we will obey him. Otherwise, whoever does not obey the Prophet and is an oppressor, he is a bandit, even if he is (known to be) a caliph."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Kemal H. Karpat, *The politicization of Islam: reconstructing identity, state, faith, and community in the late Ottoman state*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 158.

¹⁴⁷ Amit Bein, *Ottoman ulema, Turkish Republic: Agents of Change and Guardians of Tradition*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 2011), 35.

¹⁴⁸ Brian Silverstein, "Sufism and Governmentality in the Late Ottoman Empire" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29, 2, (2009): 178-79.

¹⁴⁹ Nursi, İçtimai Dersler, 160. Nursi supported the Young Turks' participation in the World War I on the side of the Central Powers, by participating in drafting of the jihad fatwa, proclaimed by the Young Turks, to go into war, for the survival of the Ottoman empire. It was despite the fact that some local personalities in Kurdistan approached him to prepare an insurrection against the Young Turks, who were, they said, godless and

Kurds who wrote in support of the *umma* notion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries revealed concern that Kurdish rights be respected by the caliph, rather than a complete obedience to his orders. Haydarizade Efendi, who was the Kurdish Ottoman grand *mufti* in 1918-1920, talked of the Kurdish Ottoman past with pride, yet the only reason Kurds recorded their own military successes under the Ottoman history was because Kurds were devout Muslims responsive to the call of the Muslim caliph for uplifting the word of God. Kurds were proud of being a “servant” and a “captive” to Islam, to the caliph and the Ottoman state. Yet Kurds were also very dignified and conceited, refusing to submit to the bossy and imperative attitudes of another nation.¹⁵⁰

Kurdish support for the Ottoman caliph decreased gradually as the Kurds lost the privileges they enjoyed under the Ottomans over time. Especially in the Turkish republican period, when the caliphate institution was abolished with the rise of rigid secular reforms, the notion of *umma* gained new meanings for religious Kurds. With the rise of Islamic political ideologies and movements during and after European colonialism, the meaning of *umma* grew to an idea similar to nationalism,¹⁵¹ very different than its Ottomanist meaning. On the

Freemasons. Nursi saw the Young Turks’s entrance into war to be the last chance for the empire to survive. See Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 88.

¹⁵⁰ Haydarizade İbrahim, “Bir Hasbihal,” *Jîn*, No 1, 7 November 1918 in M. Emin Bozarlan, Vol. 1 (Uppsala, Sweden, 1985), 204.

¹⁵¹ European imperialism contributed to the conceptual linking of *umma* to nationalism. Jamaluddin Afghani, Sayyid Qutb and Abu’l Ala Mawdudi all employed the term in its national sense. By linking the social, economic, political, and cultural lives of the *umma* together, the colonial-era pan-Islamist movements found ways to resist foreign domination. Contemporary Islamist movements also build on the transborder characteristic of the *umma* notion, and they urged people to fight for the imagined community of the *umma* against Europeans. See Robert A. Saunders, “The Ummah as Nation: a reappraisal in the wake of the Cartoons Affair,” *Nations and Nationalism* 14, 2, (2008): 307-309.

other hand, there were those who simply lost their trust in the *umma* notion and expressed the opinion that the notion reflected indifference to Kurdish problems.

Islam, Ottomanism, and Kurdish Discontent: Autonomists and Secessionists

Kurdish intellectuals published journals and expressed their frustration with Ottoman policies beginning in the late 19th century. They were highly influenced by ethnic nationalist thoughts, although they did not automatically give up their historic convictions toward Ottomanism. Kurdish intellectuals did not openly discuss the option of a separate state until the fall of the Ottoman State. Many Kurds envisaged themselves as members of the Ottoman State while employing nationalist discourses, so they inserted their Islamic and Ottomanist visions into their writings as well. The existence of strong ties to religion among the Kurds prevented nationalism from becoming “the primary focus of allegiance”¹⁵² for them, since their Islamic identity strengthened their attachment to the Ottomans as the embodiment of the Islamic caliphate.

In the late 19th century, the priorities were restoring the economic and educational situation of Kurdistan and reviving Kurdish history, culture, and literature, rather than promoting Kurdish ethnic difference.¹⁵³ These groups aimed to promote Kurdish literature, history, and culture. In the 19th century, religious and secular oriented intellectuals, madrasa and *mektep*-graduates alike mixed loyalty to the Ottomans with an awareness of Kurdism. Articles in journals during that time present Kurds as a separate group but an integral part of Ottoman society at the same time.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Second Constitutional Period of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 8.

¹⁵³ Özoğlu, *Kurdish notables and the Ottoman state*, 77.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

For instance, the *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (the Society for Mutual Aid and Progress of Kurdistan) defined its goals in 1908 as seeking solutions among the Kurdish tribes, uniting for mutual support, and encouraging commerce, education, and agriculture.¹⁵⁵ The group published a newspaper in which they included articles on Kurdish history. This group also focused on getting the government to act to resolve problems in Kurdistan, such as the disputes between Armenian and Kurdish landowners.¹⁵⁶ *Kürt Teali Cemiyeti* (the Society for Kurdish Advancement) in 1918 expressed its goal as ensuring the general well-being of the Kurds.

Yet at the same time, Kurdish ethnicity as a distinctive difference was expressed more and more, especially in the early 1900s, along with Kurdish expectations, disappointments and anger. Some Kurds at that time expressed their consternation at certain policies that seemed to favor Turks over Kurds: “the government takes money from the Kurds and spends it on the Turks; the poor Kurds are slaves to this government,” wrote Abdurrahman Bedirhan in a *Kürdistan* journal in 1901.¹⁵⁷ Nuri Dersimi stated in his memoirs that the CUP government’s propagation of Turkism after the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 aroused pro-Kurdish sentiment even among Kurds who were only minimally interested in the Kurdish cause.¹⁵⁸ Historical narratives in *Roji Kurd*, published in 1913 by the first legal Kurdish student organization, the *Hevi* group, depicted the Kurds as heroic, self-sacrificing, committed, and faithful.¹⁵⁹ The Kurds took pride in their Ottoman identity in this period,

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 78.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 79.

¹⁵⁷ Klein, “Claiming the Nation,” 109.

¹⁵⁸ Özoğlu, *Kurdish notables and the Ottoman state*, 80. According to Özoğlu Nuri Dersimi seems with this claim to project his later feelings onto others.

¹⁵⁹ See Ebu Rewsen, “Kürtlüğün Kahramanlık Hikayelerinden İki Cesur Sima,” in *Roji Kurd* 4, (August 1913) in *Di Sedsaliya We De Roji Kurd*, 303, M..., “Kürt Büyüklerinin Huzurunda Selahaddin Eyyubi,” *Roji Kurd*

while at the same time nationalism was beginning to take root among them. *Roji Kurd* included a number of articles emphasizing the importance of recording Kurdish history for the nations of the world.¹⁶⁰

After the Mudros Armistice of 1918, which signaled the end of the Ottoman Empire, secessionist voices rose against the majority Turks.¹⁶¹ In 1919 Kurdish intellectuals reacted against what they saw as the hostile policies and sentiments of the government: in the publication of the General Office of Tribes and Immigrants Kurdish existence was denied and they were described as Turks. The Kurds denounced this Turkifying strategy as “evil.”¹⁶² One article in the journal *Jîn* (published 1918-1919) denounced the fact that Kurdistan was constantly referred to by such names as the eastern provinces, the eastern regions, eastern Anatolia, the frontier, or even Armenia, yet never by its real name.¹⁶³

Under the influence of nationalist ideas, *Jîn* writers in 1919 called for proverbs and stories from their readers in order to create as rich a repertoire as possible to prove the rootedness of the Kurds in history. Recording Kurdish history was critically important to prove to the world that Kurds had existed from time immemorial. Abdullah Cevdet asserted in va Kurdish-Ottoman journal in 1913 that “Kurds could no longer take pride in traditional history books like *Sharafname*” (*The Book of Honor* by Sharafkhan in 1597), in which the Kurds were only honored to be part of the Ottoman people. Kurds had to create new histories;

3, (August 1913) in *Di Sedsaliya We De Roji Kurd*, 289, Kerkuklu Necmeddin, “Kürt Talebe Cemiyeti ve Kürtlerin Hilafet Makamina Hizmetleri,” *Roji Kurd* 1 (June 1913) in *Di Sedsaliya We De Roji Kurd*, 243.

¹⁶⁰ Abdullah Cevdet, “Bir Hitap,” *Roji Kurd* 1, (June 1913) in *Di Sedsaliya We De Roji Kurd 1913* (İstanbul: Enstituya Kurdi), 99-100, Salih Bedirhan, “Kılıçtan Evvel Kalem,” *Roji Kurd* 1 (August 1913) in *Di Sedsaliya We De Roji Kurd*, 286-288.

¹⁶¹ Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 117.

¹⁶² Barzincizade Abdulvahid, “Gönül İsterki,” in Klein “Claiming the Nation,” 110.

¹⁶³ Klein, “Claiming the Nation,” 111.

they needed to have exceptional characteristics and a remarkable past to survive and to be esteemed in the 20th century.¹⁶⁴ Cevdet realized the role of nationalist historiography: “nations who do not master their history and their future cannot have an independent existence...and become the possession of others.”¹⁶⁵

The Kurds tried to establish an authentic past by inventing traditions.¹⁶⁶ In their attempts to create national consciousness, Kurds collected Kurdish idioms, folktales and historical accounts. They also appropriated the idea of national holidays; the festival of Newroz was elevated, the existence of Kawa the Blacksmith, a Kurdish mythological figure, was presented as a given fact, and the founding works of Kurdish literature were rediscovered, edited and studied by the intelligentsia.¹⁶⁷ They wrote on Kurdish history, language, literature, education and the activities of women in social life in their press that could help them build a nationalist discourse: Kurds are a nation and thus deserve a state of their own¹⁶⁸ in order to get recognition from the world powers. Ehmede Xani’s *Memu Zin* (1692) also gained new nationalist interpretations. Kurdish writers re-interpreted the 17th-century writer Xani, whose *Nûbihar a Bucikan* and *Eqîdeya Îmanê* had been the major textbooks in Kurdish madrasas for centuries,¹⁶⁹ as an outspoken Kurdish nationalist.

Many Kurdish intellectuals considered language as the basic foundation of national existence. Abdullah Cevdet proposed to get rid of the Arabic alphabet’s “old and fusty letters”

¹⁶⁴ Abdullah Cevdet, “Bir Hitap,” 241.

¹⁶⁵ Hamit Bozarlan, “Some Remarks on Kurdish Historiographical Discourse in Turkey (1919-1980)” in *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, edited by Abbas Vali (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publisher, 2003), 24.

¹⁶⁶ E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition*. (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 6-7.

¹⁶⁷ Bozarlan, “Kurdish Historiographical Discourse,” 25.

¹⁶⁸ Ahmet Özcan, *İmparatorluk çökerken yeni bir ulus tahayyülü: Kürt milliyetçiliğinin yayım organı Jîn, 1918-1919* (Ankara: Lotus, 2007), 26

¹⁶⁹ Zinar, 12-13.

that Kurds had used for centuries.¹⁷⁰ Kurdiye Bitlisi supported the standardization of the Kurdish language by eliminating Persian and Arabic words.¹⁷¹

A brief look at Kurdish secular intellectuals will help us understand how secular nationalism was able to find a route among the Kurds. Many Kurdish intellectuals in the early 20th century were educated either in Europe or in Western schools within the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷² These intellectuals were deeply under the influence of positivism and social Darwinism, and in principle they shared the political program of the Turkish Unionists¹⁷³ and the nationalist elites.¹⁷⁴ These Kurdish elites learned much from the Turkish nationalist discourse and followed it in practice. For instance, also called ‘Young Kurds’ for their involvement in the Young Turk movement,¹⁷⁵ the secular Kurdish elite seem to have worked together with Turkish secular intellectuals on changing the Arabic alphabet into Latin script.¹⁷⁶ It is not a coincidence that Abdullah Cevdet was a leading figure of Kurdish nationalism while being one of the founders of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) at the same time. It is not to ignore the fact that Young Turk movement was in actuality a heterogeneous collection of opposition groups, including atheistic positivists and dissident members of the ulema at the same time, formed in response to the despotic policies of

¹⁷⁰ Cevdet, “Bir Hitab,” 242.

¹⁷¹ Kurdiye Bitlisi (Halil Hayali), “Kürtçe’ye Dair 2,” *Jîn*, No 15, 30 March, 1919 in M. Emin Bozarslan, Vol. 3, 688.

¹⁷² Hamit Bozarslan, “Kurdish Historiographical Discourse,” 21.

¹⁷³ It is important to note that Abdullah Cevdet’s leading role in the Young Turk movement prevented him from promoting his anti-religious ideas openly since the Young Turk movement included many religious individuals also. See M. Şükrü Hanioglu, “Garbcılar: Their Attitudes toward Religion and Their Impact on the Official Ideology of the Turkish Republic,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 86 (1997): 3, accessed October 7, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/stable/pdf/1595808.pdf?acceptTC=true>, 134.

¹⁷⁴ Bozarslan, “Kurdish Historiographical Discourse,” 22.

¹⁷⁵ Djene Bajalan, *Kurds for the Empire: “The Young Kurds” (1898-1914)*, (İstanbul Bilgi University Master’s Thesis, 2009).

¹⁷⁶ Klein, “Claiming the Nation,” 101.

Abdulhamid II. Abdullah Cevdet had a huge impact on the formation of a new Turkish regime as well, due to his anti-Islamic, positivist, and pro-Western ideology. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of ethnic nationalist Turkey in 1923, even offered Cevdet a seat in the parliament despite his past identity as a Kurdish nationalist.¹⁷⁷ Cevdet quoted Atatürk to have said to him: “Doctor, until now you have written about many things. Now we may bring them to realization.”¹⁷⁸ However, he did not become a deputy because of his earlier activities as a Kurdish nationalist.¹⁷⁹ The close tie among Kurdish and Turkish secular intelligentsia proves significant, especially in comparing both groups’ discourses against religious backwardness.

The lifestyles of these Young Kurds were often very Westernized, which set them apart from the average Kurd.¹⁸⁰ Young Kurds viewed the past as Kurdish struggles with backwardness, ignorance, and illiteracy,¹⁸¹ and backwardness was linked to religion. These were supposedly the primary obstacles holding Kurds back from civilization and nationhood. An example of this perspective is found in the Kurdish-Ottoman *Jîn* journal (1918-1919), which sheltered a number of nationalist writings: “The religious fanatics are from the *mütegallibe*,¹⁸² (the old-fashioned and the usurpers) hiding behind different shapes and colors. They fear that the awakening of the people will leave them without so much as a single slave, and that their wealth, earned without effort, will be gone with the wind.”¹⁸³ Abdullah Cevdet translated books on Western good manners and admonished Muslims for not

¹⁷⁷ Hanioglu, “Garbcılar,” 147.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 147.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 147

¹⁸⁰ Bajalan, *Kurds for the Empire*, 65.

¹⁸¹ Klein, “Claiming the Nation,” 88.

¹⁸² Mentioned in Bozarlan, “Kurdish Historiographical Discourse,” 23.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 23.

replacing their outdated manners with the good manners of Europe.¹⁸⁴ In Cevdet's own words, "a nation that thinks that it should spend five hours out of twelve every day in carrying out a religious rite [referring to Islamic daily prayers] cannot secure a place in its struggle with the mentality of the 20th century."¹⁸⁵ Some Kurdish nationalists were completely alienated from the ethical and religious mores of their people. In the *Kurdistan* journal, Mikdad Mithat Bedirhan despised the Kurdish tradition of generosity to others, preferring modernization and education instead: "In times like this, conflicts are not solved through generosity, but with rifles and cannons."¹⁸⁶

Despite the reinforcement by some Kurdish secular intellectuals of a polarization between the secular and the religious in their support for ethnic nationalism, secular notions were not able to take the place of Kurds' religious convictions.¹⁸⁷ Secular rationality was only able to influence Kurdish Islamo-Ottomanist views and transformed some Kurds' articulation

¹⁸⁴ Hanioglu, "Garbcilar," 142.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 142.

¹⁸⁶ Klein, "Claiming the Nation," 89.

¹⁸⁷ In the 20th century, the Kurdish elites differed in their understanding and promotion of Kurdish nationalism; they were politically divided between autonomists and the advocates of Kurdish independence. Even though we can talk about a split between the autonomist and the secessionist, it is critically important to remember that nationalism ran its course in both parties, and Kurdish Islam and nationalism were able to merge at that time. The decline of the Ottoman state was the catalyst to distinguish those who prioritized Kurdish ethnic nationalism from those who prioritized Islamic unity. According to Özoğlu, the split occurred based upon kinship and religious ties. Those from a *Naqshbandi Sufism* and a *madrassa* background mostly supported autonomy and viewed Kurdish independence as a violation of the unity of the Islamic *umma* principle. Seyyid Abdulkadir, who was the president of the *Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan*, represented the faction for autonomy, but the *Naqshbandi* faction he represented was against complete autonomy even after the end of the Ottoman State. Those who supported a separate state option mostly had a secular background and were members of the same families, such as Bedirhanis and Cemilpasazades. However, Emin Ali Bedirhan worked closely with Seyyid Abdulkadir in SAK, despite his opposing views on autonomy. Emin Ali's secessionist agenda, his deposing of Abdulkadir and Abdulkadir's re-election, led to the breakup of the organization in the end. See Özoğlu, *Kurdish notables and the Ottoman state*, 98, 117, 118, 123, 124.

of their religious convictions in a manner that is commensurate with modern sensibilities of nationalism.¹⁸⁸

The Kurdish Past from an Islamic View: Kurdish Islamic Historiography

The Kurds wrote their history under Islamic and Ottomanist visions as late as 1919 in *Jîn* journal. *Jîn* (1918-1919) was the last journal Kurds published before the fall of the Ottoman State. This journal contained many examples of both secular nationalist and Islamic interpretations of the Kurdish historical experience. Nationalism and Islam were intertwined in *Jîn*'s writings, not as exclusive categories but as interactive components of Kurdish ethnic consciousness in the minds of many Kurdish intellectuals.

Many Kurdish writers contributed to the cultivation of a Kurdish Islamic and cultural identity, as part of a national consciousness, through publishing the literary works of medieval or modern Kurdish Islamic figures, invoking their names in the journals together with their poems or legacies. Reviving these individuals' works demonstrated the historic existence and continuity of Kurdish identity embedded in Islam. For example, the 14th-century Kurdish Islamic scholar Said Taftazani was well remembered, as he had written treatises on Islamic theology, logic, law and an exegesis of the Quran. Seyyid Sharif, Melaye Hekari, Mufti Zehawi from Bagdad, Ottoman Şeyhulislam Haydarizade İbrahim Efendi, Şeyh Kadiri, Mela Abdussamed from Kerkuk, Iraq, and mullah Said-i Kurdi were only some of many Kurdish Muslim scholars as contributing to the body of Islamic theology remembered in *Jîn*. In his poem, Latif advised Kurds to be proud of them and to follow them.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ For a nuanced discussion of how secular notions affected religious understanding in the modern world, see Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Effect: an Incommensurable Divide?" *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 35, No. 4, (Summer 2009).

¹⁸⁹ Qazi Latif, "Xezel," *Jîn* No 7, 2 January 1918 in M. Emin Bozarlan Vol 2, 381.

For instance, the journal highlighted the religious and scholarly persona of Ehmede Xani (1650-1707), whose identity was secularized and nationalized with the rise of an ethnic nationalist discourse.¹⁹⁰ In *Jîn*, Xani was referred to as “Mullah Ehmede Xani” and “Hazretleri,”¹⁹¹ a word of respect often used for religious people, these words were used by the journal committee in an announcement on the publication of his *Mem u Zin*, a work that sheltered Xani’s patriotic visions, and that was presented to *Jîn* readers as the work of a religious mullah. In 1906 in Cairo, Kürdizade Ahmet Ramiz (1878-1940) published the medieval Kurdish *Mevlid-i Nebevi*, the special commemorative prayer to celebrate the Prophet’s birth and a must read in all Kurdish madrasas throughout the years. Sheikh Şefik Arvasi, a *Jîn* writer, republished it in 1909 in İstanbul for the purpose of nurturing Islamic Kurdish consciousness. The Kurdish Women Advancement League, which organized charitable and religious activities, had *Mevlid-i Nebevi* recited in its opening ceremony in 1919.¹⁹²

Kurds brought religious arguments to back their nationalist feelings. A poem by Haci Ebdulqadir, a writer in *Jîn* journal, emphasized the idea of love for the motherland as a reflection of one’s faith in God, which, was expressed by Prophet Muhammad’s words and the Quran.¹⁹³ Nejad Tefvik brought to attention the life of Mawlana Khalid (1779-1827), Kurdistan’s most influential *Nakshbandi* Sufi sheikh in the eighteenth-century, who lived a good portion of his life abroad. In his poem Khalid reminisced about his motherland as

¹⁹⁰ M. Nuri Dersimi, *Mektup: Mümtaz Mütefekkir Celadet Ali Bedirhan’ın Türkiye Reisi Cumhuriyet Gazi Mustafa Kemal Paşa Hazretlerine Yazdığı Açık Mektup (1933)*, (Institute Kurde de Paris, 1973),16.

¹⁹¹ *Jîn* No 11 in M. Emin Bozarslan Vol 3, 15 February 1918, 519.

¹⁹² Mehmet Emin Bozarslan, “Kürd Kadınların Çalışmaları”, *Jîn*, Vol. 1 (Uppsala, Sweden, 1985), 151.

¹⁹³ Hacı Ebdulqadir, “Asar-ı Eslafdan,” *Jîn* No 5, 1918 in M. Emin Bozarslan Vol 1, 306.

incomparably beautiful compared to other lands.¹⁹⁴ Making Khalid speak on love for motherland would undoubtedly cultivate Kurdish conservative feelings of support for the Kurdish nation. In *Jîn*, we also see many references to Salahaddin-i Ayyubi, known as Saladin in the West, the Kurdish founder of the Ayyubid dynasty (1171-1260). By conquering Jerusalem, a city sacred to Islam, from the Crusaders, Ayyubi combined in his persona a religious zeal along with love for one's people. Evdirrehîm Rehmîyê Hekarî published in *Jîn* the first Kurdish play, *Meme Alan*, based on the story of saving Jerusalem from the attack of the Crusaders and showing how Kurds enthusiastically answered the call from the Kurdish bey to join Salahaddin's forces.¹⁹⁵

Conservative Kurds also concerned themselves with the question of Kurdish origin, a popular nationalist query of their time. Tefvik from Süleymaniye, a writer in *Jîn*, stated that he was more convinced by the argument of the nineteenth century Kurdish poet, Hacı Qadir Koyi, that Kurds were from the progeny of the Prophet Noah than by the nationalist explanation that they came from the Aryans.¹⁹⁶ Koyi's poem was also published in an earlier issue of *Jîn*.¹⁹⁷ Koyi makes a reference to the Qur'anic story of the flood and how the Qur'an mentions that the ark of the Prophet Noah settled on the Cudi Mountain¹⁹⁸ in the Kurdish region. He argued that the people who stayed around the Cudi Mountain after the flood and never left their ancestors' lands were the Kurds. Koyi presents the Kurds' long settlement in the region as a reflection of their love for their motherland, which for him was evidence for

¹⁹⁴ Nejad Tefvik, "Kurd Buyuklerinden Hazreti Mevlana Halid," *Jîn* No 2 in M. Emin Bozarslan Vol. 1, 154.

¹⁹⁵ Evdirrehîm Rehmîyê Hekarî, "Piyesa Kurdî: Meme Alan", *Jîn* No 15 in M. Emin Bozarslan Vol. 3, 674.

¹⁹⁶ Süleymaniyeli Tefvik, "(2)," *Jîn* No 7 in M. Emin Bozarslan Vol. 2, 384.

¹⁹⁷ Hacı Ebdulqadir, "Asar-ı Eslafdan," 306-307.

¹⁹⁸ Quran, (11:44). In the Old Testament Noah settled on Mount Ararat.

one's faith as articulated by the Prophet Muhammad's words and the Quranic verses. Koyi inserts his Ottomanist vision in his historicization of Kurdish origin: Kurds control the Persians but they are obedient to the Turks.¹⁹⁹

Hekari's play, *Meme Alan*, published in the 15 and 16th issues of *Jîn*, combines Kurdish religious and nationalist feelings. The play idealized a Kurdish leader of the Muslim community against non-Muslims in the person of Salahaddin Ayyubi (1138-1193). Hekari's particular choice of a Kurdish leader and his call to all Muslims for *jihad* for the protection of Jerusalem demonstrates how he intentionally chooses particular images to create Kurdish national and religious fervor. Kurds were the most obedient subjects to the orders of a Muslim leader in defending their nation's and Muslims' benefit at the same time.

The encounter with nationalist thought influenced the viewpoints of many Kurdish Islamic intellectuals. The examples provided above constitute only a few examples of Islamic interpretations of the past colored with nationalism in the early 20th century.

The Early Republican Period: The Sheikh Said Rebellion and its Aftermath

Only a year after the closing down of the madrasas, the young Turkish state targeted the caliphate institution as part of its secularization program. The replacement of madrasas with modern Western-style schools already created frustration in religious circles, and Sheikh Said was one of those who condemned it.²⁰⁰ Sheik Said was the grandson of Sheikh Ali Septi, who was the khalifa of Mawlana Khalid in Palu. He had his own madrasa and a *tekke* there, and the professed aim of his revolt was to break the secularizing reforms of the Turkish

¹⁹⁹ Hacî Ebdulqadir, "Asar-ı Eslafdan," 307.

²⁰⁰ Bruinessen, "Popular Islam, Kurdish nationalism and Rural Revolt," 282.

state.²⁰¹ In his sermons, published pamphlets, letters to tribal leaders and visits to religious leaders, he invited them to rebel against the Kemalist regime as a religious duty.²⁰² He was a very influential leader among the Sunni-Zaza²⁰³ tribes, and he made visits to all Sunni-Zaza residences to convince people to join a rebellion.²⁰⁴ He even sent letters to Alevi-Zaza tribal leaders, Halil Veli and Haydar aghas in Varto in today's city of Muş, and he wrote:

It is with the intention to free Islam (*din-i mübini Ahmedi*) from the oppressions of M. Kemal, a disbeliever, that we have set off to go to Susar. It is incumbent upon all Muslims those who say 'Lailahe illallah Muhammedun Resulullah', regardless of their Sufi tradition and their school of law (*mezhep*), to carry out this jihad. I am highly confident that your Muslim tribe with great zeal and bravery will join this law of sharia and this great jihad. Oh, you the helpers, let us free our religion and honor from these disbelievers, and we will give you the lands you want. This godless government aims to make us godless like themselves. It is an obligation to fight against them.²⁰⁵

In the sermon he gave in Piran, Diyarbakır, on February 13, 1925 he addressed people as follows:

Madrasas have been closed down. The Ministry of Religion and Endowments is abolished and the religious schools are now controlled by the Ministry of Education. Some godless writers insult religion and dare to talk against the Prophet in newspapers. I would start today, if only I could, fighting against this and endeavor to lift up religion.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Ibid., 281.

²⁰² Cihat Kar, "80. Yılında Şeyh Said Ayaklanması ve Gerçekler," https://saklibelgeler.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/Şeyhsaid_ayaklanmasi.pdf, accessed September 10, 2016, 2.

²⁰³ Zaza was an archaic Iranian language rather different from Kurdish proper or Kurmanji.

²⁰⁴ Kar, 2.

²⁰⁵ İlhami Aras, *Adım Şeyh Sait*, (İstanbul: İlke Yayınları, 1992), 35-36. "Din-i mübini Ahmedi'yi, kafır olan M. Kemal'in yed-i zulmünden tahlis etmek (Kürtarmak) gazası niyetiyle susar'a hareket edildi. Bu gaza ve cihadın mezhep ve tarikat tefrik edilmeden, 'Lailahe illallah Muhammedün Resulullah' diyen bütün İslam muvahhidleri üzerinde farz olduğundan, büyük bir gayret ve seccat sahibi olan Müslüman aşiretinizin de şeriat-ı garrayı Ahmediyye'ye ve bu cihad-ı ekbere itba' edeceğinize itimadım berkemaldir. Ya eyyühel-ensar, dinimizi ve namusumuzu bu mülhidlerin(imansızların) elinden Kürtaralım, size istediğiniz yerleri verelim. Bu dinsiz hükümet bizi de kendisi gibi dinsiz yapacaktır. Bunlarla cihad farzdır."

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 37. "Medreseler kapatıldı. Din ve Vakıflar Bakanlığı kaldırıldı ve din mektepleri Milli Eğitim'e bağlandı. Gazetelerde birtakım dinsiz yazarlar dine hakaret etmeye, Peygamberimize dil uzatmaya cüret ediyorlar. Ben bugün elimden gelse, bizzat dövüşmeye başlar ve dinin yükseltilmesine gayret ederim."

The rebellion started in Piran, where most of the recruits were from,²⁰⁷ and then spread among the Zaza tribes in Piran, Genç, Solhan, Kiğı, Karlıova, Palu, Maden, Karakoçan, Elaziz, Siverek, Eğıl, Ergani, Çermik, Çüngüs, Hani, Lice, Kulp, Varto, Hınıs and Tekman.²⁰⁸ In his address, then the prime minister, Ali Fethi Okyar, stated that the rebels locked up telegraph lines, invaded prisons, and attacked the government's mansions in Genç, Çabakcur, Hani ve Palu, taking the gendarmeries as captives. They attacked the army corps shouting 'Sallallahu Muhammed! Surrender! Surrender!'²⁰⁹ In the town of Hani a mail man was held up, and the town Darahini was easily taken as most of its gendarmerie was already Kurdish and they joined the sheikh.²¹⁰ Sheikh Said appointed his own governor, a *mufti* and a gendarmerie commander.²¹¹ At the beginning of March Diyarbakır was besieged by about ten thousand rebels.²¹²

Although the Sheikh Said rebellion initially attempted to halt the reforms of the state and used religious discourse to recruit people to its orbit, there was also a nationalist aspect to the rebellion. According to Bruinessen, the revolt was originally decided by the nationalists, not by Sheikh Said.²¹³ The first preparations for the revolt were made by a clandestine organization formed by nationalist Kurds in 1923, Azadi, and they approached Sheikh Said to benefit from his influence in order to mobilize the masses against the state.²¹⁴ Azadi aimed to establish an independent Kurdistan, yet they lacked the power to gain Kurdish

²⁰⁷ Bruinessen, "Popular Islam, Kurdish nationalism and Rural Revolt," 283.

²⁰⁸ Aras, 1.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 4.

²¹⁰ Bruinessen, "Popular Islam, Kurdish nationalism and Rural Revolt," 288.

²¹¹ Ibid, 288.

²¹² Ibid, 289.

²¹³ Ibid, 287.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 283.

mass support. So the group decided to give the revolt an Islamic appearance by choosing a sheikh to lead it.²¹⁵

The government, in its quietly prepared counter-offensive, sent troops of about 35.000 men and suppressed the rebellion.²¹⁶ Sheikh Said and forty-seven other leaders of the revolt were executed and a law to subdue all dervish orders was passed.²¹⁷ It is argued that Mustafa Kemal and radical Kemalists manipulated the Sheikh Said revolt, exaggerating its potential overall effects in the country, as they were aware that to implement the radical reforms, they needed the total silence of any opposition.²¹⁸ The Sheikh Said rebellion resulted in the Law on the Maintenance of Order (*Takrir-i Sukun Kanunu*), passed a month after the Sheikh Said Rebellion (February-March, 1925), which enabled the state to ban any organization or publication considered harmful to public order in the whole country for two years. Under this law, nearly 7500 people were arrested and 660 were executed.²¹⁹ After another rebellion, which broke out in the hills of Mount Ararat, more than 20,000 Kurds were forcibly settled in western Turkey.²²⁰ The last revolt occurred in Dersim in 1937, in which 13.000 people died as a result of the destruction of villages, mass murders and forced resettlements that continued until 1938.²²¹

²¹⁵ Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 105.

²¹⁶ Bruinessen, "Popular Islam, Kurdish nationalism and Rural Revolt," 291.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 291.

²¹⁸ Hakan Özoğlu, *From Caliphate to Secular State: Power Struggle in the Early Turkish Republic*, (Praeger, 2011), 119.

²¹⁹ Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1993), accessed March 27, 2015,

<http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzEyMDgxNl9fQU41?sid=51e34186-c24b-423b-b1ae-6271fc625975@sessionmgr4004&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1,173>

²²⁰ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 172.

²²¹ Bruinessen, "The Suppression of the Dersim Rebellion in Turkey (1937-38)," *Personal Site of Martin van Bruinessen*, last modified February 27, 2014, accessed December 9, 2015, 4-6.

http://www.hum.uu.nl/medewerkers/m.vanbruinessen/publications/Dersim_rebellion.pdf

After the 1930s, Kurdish nationalists were not able to continue stirring up political rebellions due to heavy state suppression, exiling and executions in response to earlier Kurdish uprisings. Kurdish nationalist activity took refuge in silence in Turkey while Kurdish Islamic identity was only able to survive clandestinely after this period. Many Kurdish nationalists left Turkey or narrowed their focus to a course of cultural nation-building.²²² Many leaders of the Kurdish resistance dispersed to various countries of the Middle East where they were able to write freely.²²³ Turkey condemned Celadet and Kamuran Bedirhan to death for once cooperating with a British intelligence officer, Major Noel, in 1919 to create an independent Kurdistan.²²⁴ Celadet and other members of his family published Kurdish journals, *Hawar* (1932-1943), *Ronahi* (1943-1946) and *Roja Nu* (1943-1946) in Syria, and Kamuran Bedirhan was the editor of the *Roja Nu* weekly newspaper and its complementary addition, *Ser* (1943-1945), in Beirut. Celadet became the president of Hoybun nationalist organization there in 1927.²²⁵ Nuri Dersimi (1890-1973), Ihsan Nuri (1893-1976), Ekrem Cemilpasha (1891-1974) and Kadri Cemilpasha (1881-1973), Osman Sabri, Hasan Hîşyar (1907-1985), and Cegerxwîn (1903-1984) were some other important names who either wrote memoirs or contributed to the Kurdish journals which were building the backbone of the Kurdish past from a nationalist viewpoint. Celadet's journal *Hawar* used the Latin alphabet in its Kurdish publications. The writings in exile achieved a rapid literary growth, later to be transferred to Turkey.²²⁶

²²² Hamit Bozarslan, "Kurds and the Turkish State," 344.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 344.

²²⁴ Özoğlu, *Kurdish notables and the Ottoman state*, 101.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

²²⁶ The Kurdish national struggle continued in literary form during the period of exile and later. It will be addressed in the second chapter. For a nuanced analysis of the exile literature see Ahmet Serdar Aktürk,

In the 1950s and 1960s many Kurdish university students, living in various Turkish cities, were exposed to the ideas of nationalism, Marxism and class difference.²²⁷ Under the 1961 constitution that brought some democratic openings to the country, new modern intellectuals instead of tribal leaders voiced Kurdish problems, and in socialist vocabulary. They articulated the inequality of social classes and suggested a socialist revolution.²²⁸ The partially democratic development of Turkey allowed the establishment of a socialist party, the Turkish Workers' Party.²²⁹ The party opened its door to Kurds in 1970 in order to expand its base in the country.²³⁰ Kurdish intellectuals in exile had already started questioning state tyranny and adopting a socialist world view in confrontation with the tribal elite during the decades of Kurdish political silence between 1938 and 1960. The writings of the exiled intellectuals circulated clandestinely in Turkey in the 1950s.²³¹ The new Kurdish nationalist elite elaborated their historiographical discourse building on the early nineteenth century's Western nationalist narrative, yet proposing communism to prevent Kurds from further tragedies in the future.

Kurdish Nationalism and the Question of Its Leadership: The Rise of Marxism

"Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria: Finding a Nation in Exile" (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2013).

²²⁷ Romano, 42.

²²⁸ M. Hakan Yavuz, "Five Stages of the Construction of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey," 9.

²²⁹ David McDowell, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 408.

²³⁰ Yavuz, "Five Stages," 10 and Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 43.

²³¹ Hamit Bozarslan, "Kurdish Historiographical Discourse," 34.

Mullah Mustafa Barzani, a conservative tribal leader in Iraq, became the symbol of Kurdish nationalism from the 1960s to 1975. Under his leadership, the Kurds obtained extensive rights of autonomy from the Iraqi government in 1970.²³² Although Kurdish nationalists in Iraq were generally leftists, they supported Barzani with their political organizations, as they believed Barzani could mobilize the Kurds effectively in a short time through his already existing ties as a tribal leader, a large landowner, and the brother of a sheikh, Sheikh Ahmad Barzani.²³³ Early in 1958, Kurdish nationalists under Barzani were able to obtain recognition for Kurdish national rights, as the Iraqi constitution declared Arabs and Kurds to be associates in Iraq and guaranteed their rights within the Iraqi whole.²³⁴ From the late 1960s to 1975, Barzani was able to unite Kurds from different linguistic and religious backgrounds under his leadership.²³⁵ Some Kurds from Turkey joined the Barzani forces; the movement had a great impact on the ethnic awareness of Turkey's Kurds, strengthening their sense of identity, and many were inspired by the success of the rebellion.²³⁶ The truce made between Saddam Hussein and Mustafa Barzani in 1970 accepted Kurdish as the second official language of Iraq. Barzani's revolt led many Kurds in Turkey to value their banned language and conceive of Barzani as the father of their nation.²³⁷

²³² Romano, 192.

²³³ Ibid., 188, and McDowell, 316.

²³⁴ Romano, 190.

²³⁵ Bruinessen, "Kurdish Nationalism and Competing Ethnic Loyalties," *Personal Site of Martin van Bruinessen*, accessed April 2, 2016, 17, http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Bruinessen_Kurdish_nationalism_and_competing_ethnic_loyalties-libre.pdf

²³⁶ Bruinessen, "İsmail Beşikçi: Turkish Sociologist, Critic of Kemalism, and Kurdologist," *Personal Academia Page of Martin van Bruinessen*, last modified February 27, 2014, accessed December 10, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/12777734/İsmail_Be%C5%9Fik%C3%A7i_Turkish_sociologist_critic_of_Kemalism_and_kurdologist and Romano, 114.

²³⁷ Hamit Bozarslan, "Kurds and the Turkish State," 345.

However, although the Barzani rebellion in Iraq was initially accepted by Kurdish nationalists in Turkey as the main reference point, that was changing in the late 1960s.²³⁸ The leadership of traditional sheikhs in Kurdish uprisings against the state, formerly represented by Sheikh Said in Turkey in 1925, gradually changed hands with the rise of a new secular elite in the 1960s. Although the clandestine KDP in Turkey, the ideological equivalent of Barzani's KDP, was able to bring together a number of urban notables and Kurdish *ulema*,²³⁹ it was not able to succeed in leading Kurds in Turkey. One of the reasons was its attempt to continue the traditional leadership of *aghas*.

The creation of the KDP in Turkey in 1964 signified the factions in Kurdish nationalism; while some refused the dominance of Marxist ideology in the Kurdish movement, some Kurdish intellectuals refused to allow the transfer of power from the traditional Kurdish leaders to the national assembly, elected through using their tribal ties.²⁴⁰ There was a tension between those supporting traditional leadership and those believing in socialist ideology to resolve the Kurdish problem in Turkey. The failure of the Barzani revolt in Iraq in 1975 was interpreted by Kurdish nationalists as the loss of the last chance of traditionally-led Kurdish nationalism.²⁴¹

The period after 1960 is considered to be a new era in Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, since the 1960 military coup brought new social rights and introduced some political openings with the 1960 constitution. Although Kurdish nationalism was strictly rejected by the state as

²³⁸ Ibid, 347.

²³⁹ Hamit Bozarslan, "Political Aspects of Kurdish Problem," 98.

²⁴⁰ McDowell, 408, Hamit Bozarslan, "Political Aspects of Kurdish Problem," 99.

²⁴¹ Hamit Bozarslan, "Kurdish Historiographical Discourse," 37.

it was before,²⁴² the opening aided the growth of leftist movements in Turkey, in which Kurds joined.²⁴³ Turkey's Workers Party, with its communist ideology, was very attractive to many Kurds, since more than any other party it was open to listening to the problems of the Kurdish nation and offered the opportunity for ordinary Kurds, not *aghas* or tribal leaders, to voice their views and opinions.²⁴⁴ Among these Kurds, many were educated university students, who detested the exploitation of the traditional leaders, rejected their leadership and questioned the land ownership of the *aghas*.²⁴⁵ The leftist groups staged countrywide protests in Turkey asking for an end to Kurdish oppression as well as recognition of their rights.²⁴⁶ They employed a socialist language to express the regional underdevelopment of Turkey's east.²⁴⁷ The leftist groups' protests in the Kurdish regions demanded an end to Kurdish suppression as well as the abolition of sheikhdom and landlordship.²⁴⁸ These mass protests introduced a new type of Kurdish mobilization that was not under the leadership of the traditional elite but was formed by urban-based, modestly-educated students and young professionals.²⁴⁹ The secularization of Kurdish identity and the emergence of a non-traditional and revolutionary elite were realized as a result of Kurdish contact with socialist ideology.²⁵⁰

Kurdish nationalist organizations emerged in great numbers in the 1970s, breaking away from the Turkish leftist movements and forming their own Kurdish left-wing

²⁴² Ferzende Kaya, *Mezopotamya Sürgünü: Abdülmelik Fırat'ın Yaşam Öyküsü*, (İstanbul: Anka Yayınları, 2003), 194.

²⁴³ Romano, 41.

²⁴⁴ McDowell, 409.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 409.

²⁴⁶ Romano, 42.

²⁴⁷ Yavuz, "Five Stages," 9 and Romano, 41.

²⁴⁸ Ayşe Betül Çelik, "Ethnopolitical Conflict in Turkey: From the Denial of Kurds to Peaceful Co-existence?," *Handbook of Ethnic Conflict: International Perspectives*, ed. Dan Landis, Rosita D. Albert (New York, Dordrecht, Heidelberg and London: Springer Science & Business Media, 2012): 247.

²⁴⁹ Romano, 43.

²⁵⁰ Yavuz, "Five Stages," 9.

societies.²⁵¹ The Eastern Revolutionary Cultural Hearths (DDKO) was one of them, which blended Marxism and Kurdish nationalism in the name of social justice and equality.²⁵² In 1969 DDKO was formed as a working class and student movement by stressing the greater economic injustices faced in the Kurdish region of Turkey.²⁵³ The founding objectives of this organization were to get Kurdish students involved in cultural activities as well as mobilizing them within democratic and revolutionary institutions working for the brotherhood and equality of nations.²⁵⁴

Competing Identities during the Rise of Kurdish Urban-Educated Class: Conservatives and Leftists (1940-1960)

Kurdish urban-educated intellectuals were not unified in their promotion of Kurdish rights during the rise of socialist thought among the Kurds. Two main tendencies existed, the conservatives and the leftists. Those known as ‘Forty-niners,’ who were active in the Kurdish cause, included individuals of different tendencies: some had a strong Islamic background. It is important to note, however, that the split remained a secondary concern in the beginning, since promoting Kurdish rights was challenging in itself and it was able to unite them and to help them overlook their differences.²⁵⁵ Forty-niners were generally more concerned with Kurdish history, culture and national oppression than with the Marxist analysis of economic oppression and exploitation. They opened university dorms *Dicle* and *Firat* in 1942 and 1948

²⁵¹ Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 47.

²⁵² Yavuz, “Five Stages,” 10.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁵⁴ Çelik, “Ethnopolitical Conflict in Turkey,” 248.

²⁵⁵ Martin van Bruinessen, “İsmail Beşikçi,” 5.

in İstanbul,²⁵⁶ which were able to gather Kurdish underprivileged students and Kurds from notable families alike to infuse in them Kurdish consciousness through organized activities.

Kurdish urban-educated nationalists considered *Dicle* as having provided the earliest phase of the Kurdish political movement.²⁵⁷ Students spoke in Kurdish in the dorm, and performed Kurdish traditional and national dances.²⁵⁸ Every year on March 21st, students and founders celebrated *Newroz*, inviting Kurdish businessman and intellectuals in İstanbul.²⁵⁹ Celadet Bedirhan's *Hawar* journal was secretly introduced to the students in the dorm²⁶⁰ and was read among Kurdish students there.²⁶¹ Abdurrahim Rahmi Zapsu, a religious scholar and a strong opponent of Marxist ideology, was among the directors of the *Dicle* dorm in 1943,²⁶² and supported it financially. Different Kurdish perspectives were obviously welcomed in *Dicle* dorm, demonstrating, how, in this early stage of the rise of a new type of Kurdish secular nationalism, Kurdish intellectuals were able to exchange ideas and had common grounds. For example, Musa Anter, a secular writer, was able to ask Zapsu to marry his daughter and married her in 1944.

From the 1940s towards the end of the 1960s, Kurdish secular nationalism was not unified under Marxist ideology. The conservative and secular nationalists were still able to cooperate as well in the late 1960s despite their different ideologies. Some leftist intellectuals

²⁵⁶ The dates of the opening of these dorms change in different sources. Tarik Ziya informs that *Dicle* was founded in 1939 in Tarik Ziya Ekinci, *Lice'den Paris'e Anılarım*, (İstanbul: İletisim Yayınları, 2010), 196.

²⁵⁷ Hülya Yetişen, "Tarik Ziya Ekinci ile Roportaj," *Kurdistan Post*, June 2011, accessed December 3, 2015, <http://www.kurdistan-post.eu/tr/roportajlar/tarik-ziya-ekinci-ile-roportaj-hulya-yetisen>

²⁵⁸ Yetişen, "Tarik Ziya Ekinci ile Ropörtaj," and Mustafa Remzi Bucak, *Bir Kürt Aydınından İsmet İnönü'ye Mektup*, (İstanbul: Doz Yayıncılık, 1991), 8.

²⁵⁹ Bucak, *Bir Kürt Aydınından İsmet İnönü'ye*, 8 and Ekinci, *Lice'den Paris'e Anılarım*, 200.

²⁶⁰ Ekinci, *Lice'den Paris'e Anılarım*, 201.

²⁶¹ Bucak, *Bir Kürt Aydınından İsmet İnönü'ye*, 8.

²⁶² Ekinci, *Lice'den Paris'e Anılarım*, 198 and Necat Zivingi, *Zana u Rewsenbir: Evdirehim Rehmiye Hekari, Jiyan, Berhem u Helbesten Wi*, (İstanbul: Avesta Yayınları, 2015), 4.

refused the Marxist ideology.²⁶³ Until 1969, Kurdish demands primarily focused on Kurdish rights to be protected by a constitutional guarantee in Turkey, and on Kurds' fights against the underdevelopment of the Kurdish region.²⁶⁴ Promoting Kurdish civic and social rights was able to bring thousands of Kurds together in demonstrations and meetings regardless of their different ideologies.²⁶⁵ They organized together the well-known *Doğu Mitingleri*, the Eastern Meetings in 1967-1969, which portrayed their central concern as protesting the relative deprivation of Turkey's Eastern region.²⁶⁶ Conservative Kurds were also influenced by the Kurdish left-wing organization, DDKO, and they became founders of some of its branches.²⁶⁷ A mullah named Ebdullaye Xarzi (Abdullah Beyik) spoke in Kurdish in the opening ceremony of DDKO's Batman branch, stating "it is our right to gather so as to give an end to tyranny and poverty."²⁶⁸ This organization defined an Eastern problem, instead of a Kurdish problem, which placed the emphasis on the economic and educational deprivation of the Kurdish region. These meetings were held in 12 different places in the region with the attendance of ten thousand people, and received international attention.

However, after the 1970s, Kurdish youth's understanding of the Kurdish problem evolved from regional underdevelopment to a national problem, where a nation is oppressed by the police of global imperialism with the aid of local collaborators, sheikhs and *aghas*.²⁶⁹

²⁶³ Hamit Bozarslan, "Political Aspects of the Kurdish Problem," 99.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 99-100.

²⁶⁵ The Eastern meetings, *Doğu mitingleri*, were held in 1967-1969 in twelve different Kurdish cities with the attendance of about ten thousand people.

²⁶⁶ Naci Kutlay, "Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları ve Öncesi," *Kovarabir*, No: 5, August 2010, accessed November 23, 2015,

<http://www.kovarabir.com/2010/08/m-naci-kutlay-devrimci-dogu-kultur-ocaklari-ve-oncesi/>

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Bozarslan, "Political Aspects of the Kurdish Problem," 101.

On one side, until the 1970s many Kurdish intellectuals viewed the Kurdish problem as part of Turkey's democratization struggle; the recognition of Kurds and of the right to speak and have education in Kurdish, and economic development of the Kurdish region, would only make the country a more democratic place for both Kurds and Turks. Another faction proposed, however, that the only way to solve this problem was through a socialist revolution.²⁷⁰ This understanding developed in parallel with the extremely rapid increase of the activities of the working class and the student movement in Turkey.²⁷¹ Having found the Turkish socialists welcoming enough to offer a global framework to express Kurdish rights, Kurdish nationalist demands were suddenly radicalized²⁷² under its influence, including views like the destruction of feudalism, liberating Kurdistan from the national and local collaborators of imperialism.²⁷³

Although Kurdish concerns were initially similar, more Kurds found the existing leftist organizations such as Turkish Workers' Party more vocal in bringing up Kurdish concerns. The impact of modernization on Kurdish youth, their urbanization, their separation from traditional life styles, their exposure to new ideas, and their integration into a market economy was also a significant factor in bringing a greater number of young Kurds to side with the non-traditional leadership of the Kurdish movement.

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²⁷⁰ Yetişen, "Tarik Ziya Ekinci ile Roportaj."

²⁷¹ Bozarslan, "Political Aspects of the Kurdish Problem," 100.

²⁷² Ibid., 100.

²⁷³ Ibid., 100-101.

Although DDKO was outlawed by the state in 1971, its ideology was carried on and gained strength as state repression increased.²⁷⁴ After the 1980 military coup, many Kurdish activists were imprisoned.²⁷⁵ This state repression provided the Kurdish Workers Party, PKK, formed by an earlier DDKO member, Abdullah Öcalan, with the discursive means to recruit the youth for an armed struggle against the state, and it only became more popular as a result of state policy.²⁷⁶ PKK aimed to establish a Kurdish state with the help of some foreign countries, and targeted not only Turks but also the assimilated Kurds and those who were allegedly collaborators of the Turkish state.²⁷⁷ From 1984 to 2001, 4.400 civilians, 5.018 soldiers, 4.302 civil servants and 23.279 PKK militants were killed in the war between the state and the PKK.²⁷⁸ According to Hakan Yavuz, the traditional relationship between Islam, tribe and nationalism was ended by the PKK, whose ideology was to destroy the Kurdish traditional structure, which was based on the domination of sheikhs and *aghas*, and to create a socialist pan-Kurdish state.²⁷⁹ The PKK attacked alternative Kurdish organizations that were not of Marxist-Leninist ideology.²⁸⁰

In its first years, the PKK was able to win the sympathy of people by opposing exploitative tribal chiefs and landlords. It was supposedly offering the Kurdish people a way out of subordination to feudalism.²⁸¹ What distinguished the PKK from other Kurdish nationalist organizations was its strategy that appealed to people who had had enough

²⁷⁴ Yavuz, "Five Stages," 10, Hamit Bozarslan, "Political Aspects of Kurdish Problem," 100.

²⁷⁵ Yavuz, "Five Stages," 10, Romano, 131.

²⁷⁶ Yavuz, "Five Stages," 12.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-12, Hamit Bozarslan, "Political Aspects of Kurdish Problem," 100.

²⁸⁰ Romano, 136.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

problems with feudal landlords and *aghas*.²⁸² The land distribution was extremely unbalanced in the society. While the 8 percent owned over 50 percent of the land, the eighty percent of people either had 5 hectares or no land at all.²⁸³ In its formative periods, the PKK avoided direct confrontation with the state;²⁸⁴ it has only been engaged in warfare with the Republic of Turkey since 1984.²⁸⁵ The PKK established as its primary goal to break the power of the tribal and religious elite in its “anti-feudal and anti-colonial” struggle.²⁸⁶ The PKK went a step further in its Marxist analysis of the Kurdish religious class; “collaborators” included all members of the traditional elite, who denied or under-stated their Kurdishness, as well as those who cooperated with the Turkish colonial system.²⁸⁷ The PKK leaders argued that Turkey had colonized the Kurdish-populated regions in Turkey, enforcing this colonization by means of the Kurdish traditional elite or the bourgeoisie.²⁸⁸ This is why all violent activities of the PKK in its early years from 1978 until 1984 were directed against other Kurds,²⁸⁹ whom the movement deemed enemies of the Kurdish region within. Even after 1984, the “enemy within” never became a lesser consideration compared to the attacks on state soldiers.²⁹⁰

²⁸² Ibid., 73.

²⁸³ McDowall, 243.

²⁸⁴ Romano, 130.

²⁸⁵ Bozarlan, “Kurdish Historiographical Discourse,” 21.

²⁸⁶ Bruinessen, “The Kurds in Turkey,” *Personal Academia Page of Martin van Bruinessen*, last modified February 27, 2014, accessed December 10, 2015, 7,

http://www.academia.edu/2521187/The_Kurds_in_Turkey

²⁸⁷ Bruinessen, “The Nature and Uses of Violence in the Kurdish Conflict,” *Personal Academia Page of Martin van Bruinessen*, last modified February 27, 2014, accessed December 10, 2015, 5

http://www.academia.edu/3776022/The_nature_and_uses_of_violence_in_the_Kurdish_conflict

²⁸⁸ Çelik, “Ethnopolitical Conflict in Turkey,” 250 and Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 134.

²⁸⁹ Bruinessen, “The Nature and Uses of Violence in the Kurdish Conflict,” 4.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 4.

The PKK charged and attacked religion for keeping Kurds in their backward and oppressed condition.²⁹¹ Before 1980, the PKK youngsters drew hostile reactions from local Kurdish people due to the group's refusal to fast during the month of Ramadan and their habit of smoking in public when everybody else was fasting.²⁹² The movement softened their attitude towards religion in the early 1980s and refrained from direct contradiction of people's belief so as not to draw people away at first contact.²⁹³ Their publications, however, continued to present tribal and religious loyalties as backward and as obstacles to the Kurds' political development.²⁹⁴

The PKK highlighted the oppression Kurds suffered due to their ethnic difference to mobilize Kurds against the Turkish state.²⁹⁵ While the PKK insurgency changed the values and goals of many Kurds,²⁹⁶ many conservative Kurds felt great unease with the group's involvement of Marxist ideology in the Kurdish struggle. Leading figures of Kurdish Marxism who were committed to the Kurdish cause related Kurdish problems to the Kurds' adoption of Islam and fought against this religion, discouraging many conservative Kurds from taking part in the Kurdish cause.²⁹⁷ A dichotomy emerged in the minds of many Kurds between Islamic belief and Kurdish nationalism. Religious Kurds viewed nationalist discourse as embedded in Marxism and inseparable from it. They were afraid that any expression of Kurdish nationalism would conflict with their belief in Islamic principles, and

²⁹¹ Romano, 134.

²⁹² Lale Yalcin Heckmann, "Ethnic Islam and Nationalism among the Kurds in Turkey," in *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion, Politics and Literature in a Secular State*, ed. Richard Tapper (London: British Academic Press, 1994), 117.

²⁹³ Heckmann, "Ethnic Islam and Nationalism," 117.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁹⁵ Romano, 131.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁹⁷ Süleyman Çevik, "Kürtlerin İki Farklı Dünyası," *İlke Haber*, March 2015, accessed September 5, 2015, <http://www.ilkehaber.com/yazi/Kürtlerin-iki-farkli-dunyasi-13052.htm>

as a result they did not show any sympathy toward the PKK until the late 1980s, when the PKK moderated their approach to Islamic practices.²⁹⁸

After the Iranian Revolution: The Ideological Formation of Hizbullah in Turkey

The religious ideology of the Iranian revolution and the successful leadership of a clerical leader against a secular political leader created an excitement in some circles in Turkey, which experienced a similar rigid secularism since the foundation of the Republic. The religious ideology of the Iranian revolution and the successful leadership of a clerical leader like Khomeini against the secular political leadership of Muhammed Reza Shah created hope and excitement in some circles in Turkey, a hope to eliminate Turkish secularism in a similar way. In the early 1980s, a revolutionary religious movement, Hizbullah, was formed in Diyarbakır, influenced specifically from the Iranian revolution and engaged in an armed conflict with the ethno-nationalist PKK in 1990s.

Reza Shah founded the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925 with the British support. He became the only authority in Iran after banning all political parties and controlling the army. The secular and nationalist discourse used in Reza Shah's Iran bore a lot of resemblance to Atatürk's Turkey established in 1923. Both placed a strong emphasis on their ancient national culture in the formation of the national identity of their citizens. Western technology as well as its code of behavior, life and clothing styles was adopted as a pre-requisite for a more developed nation: veiling of women was banned and Western suits were adopted for men. Both Reza Shah and Atatürk worked to turn a pluralistic society into a homogenous one.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ Yüksel, 32, Heckmann, "Ethnic Islam and Nationalism," 117.

²⁹⁹ McDowell, 222-223.

Both suppressed many tribal and regional revolts and silenced the religious authority as well as the voices of opposition through exile, jail, and execution.³⁰⁰ The revolutionary, rapid and top down changes Reza Shah introduced to Iran caused a wide social discontent, which was able to bring together many different social classes of the society and created a popular revolution in 1979.³⁰¹

Hizbullah in Turkey's Kurdish region was able to recruit members for its war against the PKK through the propaganda that the PKK or *Partiya Kafiran Kurdistan*, Kurdistan Infidel Party as they called it,³⁰² was serving Communism, dividing Kurdish Muslims and murdering Muslims.³⁰³ Hizbullah benefited greatly from the irritation of the Kurdish conservatives over the Marxist leadership of Kurdish nationalism, since this leadership prompted some negative political and nationalist responses from Kurdish conservatives and Kurdish *ulema*. While some found this leadership acceptable until a possible Kurdish independence, others completely rejected nationalism and formulated Kurdish-Islamic political answers as alternative solutions to Kurdish problems.

Prominent members of Hizbullah like Hüseyin Veliöğlü targeted Kurdish madrasas and established close relationships with Kurdish mullahs in order to be better recognized and respected in public, especially during Hizbullah's propaganda stage.³⁰⁴ Turkish Hizbullah

³⁰⁰ Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media Big Revolution: Communication, Culture and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 19, accessed 19 January 2015, ProQuest Ebrary.

³⁰¹ Mehdi Semati, ed. *Media, Culture and Society in Iran: Living with Globalization and the Islamic State* (Florence KY, USA: Routledge, 2007), 28, accessed January 19, 2015, ProQuest Ebrary.

³⁰² Mustafa Gurbuz, *Rival Kurdish Movements in Turkey: Transforming Ethnic Conflict* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 37. PKK initials actually stand for *Partiya Kerkeran Kurdistan*, Kurdistan Workers' Party.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁰⁴ Emrullah Uslu, "From Local Hizbollah to Global Terror: Militant Islam in Turkey. *Middle East Policy* 14, 1, (2007): 128.

had no organic link with Hizbullah in Lebanon or in other parts of the Middle East.³⁰⁵ Members of Hizbullah in Turkey were not Shia Muslims, therefore, and did not have the same clerical political leadership that existed in the Shia belief system. They still took the Iranian Shia revolution as a model; their books and pamphlets talked in favor of the Iranian regime.³⁰⁶ Some members of Hizbullah had been to Iran and received their theological and military training there, and the Sunni-Shia difference was ignored in favor of fighting together against their common enemy: atheism.³⁰⁷ Hizbullah in the Kurdish region did not challenge the secular republic directly; instead, the PKK with its communist ideology was Hizbullah's primary target.³⁰⁸ In response to the PKK's exceptionally successful campaign in the region in the 1980s and 1990s, Hizbullah started its armed conflict in the 1990s and targeted journalists, professionals and pro-PKK activists, killing over 500 individuals by the end of 1993.³⁰⁹ Since 2013, Hizbullah embraced legal activism by establishing *Hür Dava* party, which is often called *HÜDA-PAR*, while a more radical wing in the group left the movement as a result and joined the Islamic State, ISIS.³¹⁰

³⁰⁵ Bulent Aras and Gokhan Bacik, "The Mystery of Turkish Hizballah," *Middle East Policy* 9, 2, (2002): 149, J Gorravett, "Talking Turkey: Discovery of 50 Murdered Bodies Spotlights Links Between Turkish Government, Kurdish Islamist Group," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, XIX, 3, (2000): 30. Retrieved March 1, 2016 from

<http://ezproxy.library.arizona.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/218813221?accountid=8360>

³⁰⁶ Aras and Bacik, 149.

³⁰⁷ McDowell, 433.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 433.

³⁰⁹ Gorravett, McDowell, 433.

³¹⁰ In the local elections in 2014, *Hüdapar* emerged as the third major political party with the 12.000 votes it received from the public. This success encouraged many activists to continue party politics, while the legalization disappointed some others like Halis Bayuncuk, the leader of ISIS in Turkey to leave the group and join underground Islamist organizations. Bayuncuk left Hizbullah to join al-Qaeda in Turkey, and later ISIS. See Mustafa Gurbuz, *Rival Kurdish Movements in Turkey: Transforming Ethnic Conflict*, 38.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a descriptive analysis of the Kurdish Islamic identity in the past century. It aimed to establish the historical background of the evolution of Kurdish Islamic identity and Kurdish discourses influenced by Islam, nationalism and Ottomanism in order to reveal how Kurds loaded Kurdish nationalism with different meanings at different times. Especially before the rise of Kurdish secular nationalism, Kurdish Islamic consciousness comprised a main element of Kurdish national consciousness. However, the original Kurdish Islamo-Ottomanist views were affected by secular rationality, and Kurds expressed their religious convictions in a manner commensurate with modern sensibilities of nationalism.³¹¹ A major conclusion of this chapter is that although the Kurdish Islamic identity had strong roots, its role in Kurdish consciousness changed as a result of the rise of secular ideologies; nevertheless, Kurdish nationalism in its developmental stages was not uniform and had room for non-secular visions of autonomy and national independence. This idea will be supported with more evidence through the following chapters.

³¹¹ For a nuanced discussion of how secular notions effected religious understanding in the modern world see, Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Effect: An Incommensurable Divide?"

CHAPTER 2

KURDISH NATIONALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY UNDER THE TURKISH REPUBLIC: REVISIONS, HIGHLIGHTS AND SILENCES (1923-1990)

This chapter assesses theories of historiography as it relates to Kurdish historical writing under nationalist and Marxist influences. It provides the stages of Kurdish nationalism since the late Ottoman Empire and its transformation into a Marxist nationalism since the 1940s, and discusses the highlights, silences and shifts in the nationalist historiography. I will trace how Kurdish nationalist historiography evolved under the Turkish Republic and the implications of this transformation.³¹²

This chapter is concerned with the power relations among Kurds and Turks as well as the power relations among competing communities of Kurds: traditional and secular. During the late Ottoman and early Republican period, Kurdish traditional leaders, sheikhs, and their religious discourse were more effective in mobilizing the Kurdish masses. The best way to form a Kurdish mass rebellion was through an Islamic discourse, not through a secular nationalist one. As power relations among the Kurds changed and the leadership of the Kurdish nationalist movement passed into the hands of secular nationalists, so did the Kurdish nationalist discourse and its approach to the religious class.

Kurdish nationalists used the discourse on Turks and Kurds as inseparable nations instrumentally in the early days of the Republic; however, they utilized an anti-Ottomanist and anti-Kemalist discourse with the increasing ethnicism and persecutions of the state. By the early 1920s, the positive portrayal of the Ottoman past had all but vanished and a strong anti-Ottoman feeling came to dominate Kurdish nationalist historiography in Turkey. In the

³¹² Examining the transformations in the Kurdish nationalist representations of the Ottoman past and the Turkish Republic and its shifts, will enhance our understanding of the power relations among Turks and Kurds in Turkey.

1920s, the Ottomans were, for the most part, deemed tyrannical and backward usurpers who failed to bring civilization to the Kurds. This attitude only increased with the rise of Marxist trends in Kurdish nationalism from the 1940s onward. Turkish despotism was not a new phenomenon under Turkish Republic according to this historiographical trend; Kurds had been suffering from the time Kurdish emirates were integrated to the Ottoman state.³¹³

I classify, in this chapter, Kurdish nationalist discourses in three categories: (a) writings as responses to official Turkish depictions of Kurds, (b) as legitimization literature for Kurdish independence (against the evil Turks and despotic Ottomans), and (c) as writings in support of the secular and later Marxist leadership of Kurdish nationalism against the corrupted religious class. I will also trace how Kurdish nationalists utilized the methodologies of Turkish nationalists in establishing the Kurdish historiographical narrative.

The study of historiography informs us about the society in which a particular narrative was produced. As Foucault's theory on the relationship between power and knowledge contends, societies are subjected to certain discourses as truths, which are established by the control of power. Within the discipline of history, it is the dominant discourse of historians that determines what is true and untrue in history, what is worth mentioning and what is not. Those in power among the Kurds were able to produce knowledge, which is embodied in current Marxist historiography, and their version of the past prevailed over another contestant: the traditional leaders and their narratives. The rise of

³¹³ It was the Turks, who were on power, and thus able to produce knowledge on Kurds and spread it in Turkey. This supports Foucault's theory that knowledge is produced by power and history is the construction of the powerful. See Michael Foucault, *Nietzsche, Genealogy and History*, accessed December 13, 2015 <http://home.lu.lv/~ruben/Foucault%20-%20Nietzsche.%20Genealogy.%20History.pdf> Therefore, Kurdish nationalists' use of history was a combination of responding and revising the Turkish official historiography.

negative representations of the Kurdish religious class in the nationalist discourse corresponds to the rise of secularists in the leadership of the Kurdish nationalist movement.

The theory of historiography questions why history was written the way it was written, and it approaches past histories with caution: the writers of history might have been biased or they might have mangled the truth through incompetence, willful manipulation or the ultimate patronage.³¹⁴ As part of a political program, the nationalist historiographies analyze the past to legitimize the present actors and their projects.³¹⁵ Marxist historiography categorized Kurdish nationalism and Islamic allegiances as two diverging ideals by claiming that Islamic ideals always worked against Kurdish national benefit while benefiting the imperial states. The overemphasis of Marxist historiography on the corrupt Kurdish religious class concealed the heterogeneous nature of the religious class and their discourses and efforts for the Kurdish nation. Marxist historiography constructed the past to serve the interest of the emerging secular Kurdish nationalist ideals.

Because there is no chance of knowing exactly what happened in the past, historians debated how to do proper history and how to treat historical narratives throughout the twentieth century. One particular approach differentiates between ‘descriptive analysis’ and ‘perspective analysis.’ The former accepts the creators of historical narratives as witnesses to historical events and is more concerned about the accuracy of the account. For the perspective analysis, however, the accuracy of the account is not a concern at all, at least not as much as

³¹⁴ Michael Bentley, “General Introduction: The Project of Historiography”, *A Companion to Historiography* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 14, accessed October 9, 2015, <https://analepsis.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/companion-to-historiography.pdf>

³¹⁵ Bozarslan, “Kurdish Historiographical Discourse,” 15-18.

whether the narrative is representing the social categories that the creator of the narrative is assigned to.³¹⁶

This dissertation approaches historical narratives through prespective analysis. In this chapter, particularly, it focuses on the Kurdish nationalist representations of the Kurdish past, its ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys,’ its shifts, revisions, silences and highlights in an attempt to reveal the significance of these writings under different periods of the Turkish Republic. It is less important, then, whether Kurdish nationalists represented the past ‘accurately’ and it is more important how they represented the past for what ends.

Responses to Official Depictions of Kurds

Kurdish nationalism failed and was rejected with the foundation of the ethnicist Turkish Republic. Thus, in this period, Kurdish history writing not only fostered a sense of Kurdish antiquity- that Kurds existed from time immemorial and therefore possess the right to political identity and control of territory³¹⁷ as a people. It also developed as a narrative mainly in response and in reaction to the official state historiography.³¹⁸ For a long time Kurdish intellectuals struggled against Kemalism’s policy of denying the very existence of the Kurds.³¹⁹ From the mid-1920s to the end of the 1980s, the existence of a separate Kurdish identity was officially rejected: every citizen of Turkey, irrespective of their ethnicity, was a

³¹⁶ June Purvis, “Using Primary Sources When Researching Women’s History from a Feminist Perspective,” *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 1, No.2, (1992): 273-306.

³¹⁷ Umut Özkırımlı, *Theories of nationalism: a critical introduction* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 58.

³¹⁸ Bozarlan, “Kurdish Historiographical Discourse,” 20.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

Turk.³²⁰ In fact, it was even claimed that Kurds were descendants of Turkish tribesmen who had migrated from Central Asia.³²¹ Kurdish nationalists resisted this gross misrepresentation of Kurds in Turkish historiography, and particularly the dehumanization of Kurds inherent in the civilization-backwardness paradigm, which provided the justification for discriminatory Turkish policies.

For a short time after the foundation of the Republic, some Kurdish nationalists like İhsan Nuri³²² and Yusuf Ziya Bey³²³ preferred association with Turks, while they were secretly active in the *Azadi* nationalist organization. Thus, the discourse on Turks and Kurds as inseparable nations was used instrumentally by Kurdish nationalists as well as by Turks. In 1923, M. Şükrü Sekban, a Kurdish doctor, published an open letter, “What Kurds Want from the Turks,” which dealt with what Turkish policy towards Kurds should and should not be.³²⁴ He tried to eliminate in this letter all sources of Kurdish disloyalty and to prove that Kurds never desired separation from Turkey. The true Kurdish heroes, he said, were not those who sought separation from the Turks, but those who recognized true Kurdish interests as Idris Bitlisi once did in forming the Turkish-Kurdish association.³²⁵ He brought forth the reaction of Kurds to the Treaty of Sevres (August 10, 1920): “On the day the treaty was signed and the political rights of the Kurds were officially recognized, we remained with the Turks

³²⁰ Mesut Yeğen, “The Turkish State Discourse and the Exclusion of Kurdish Identity,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, (1996): 216.

³²¹ Martin van Bruinessen, “Constructions of ethnic identity in the late Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey: The Kurds and their Others,” *Personal Academia Page of Martin van Bruinessen*, last modified February 27, 2014, accessed December 10, 2015, 7, http://www.academia.edu/2573523/Constructions_of_ethnic_identity_in_the_late_Ottoman_Empire_and_Republican_Turkey_the_Kurds_and_their_Others

³²² İhsan Nuri stayed as an officer in the Turkish army until 1924 while being a member of the *Azadi* movement mentioned in Strohmeier, 87.

³²³ Yusuf Ziya Bey became a member in the first national assembly of Turkey while being an *Azadi* member.

³²⁴ Strohmeier, *Crucial Images*, 78.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

in painful mourning.” At the same time, Sekban listed what Kurds wanted in return for their loyalty: Kurds not to be Turkified, not to be neglected, not to be wiped out or deported, but to be recognized as a nation and allowed to conduct education in their mother tongue.³²⁶ Sekban’s utilization of a discourse of loyalty and brotherhood was merely a strategic ploy to get the Turkish government to consider Kurdish needs and interests.³²⁷ Sekban’s letter exhibited the constraints placed on Kurdish nationalist discourse by the victory of the Turkish nationalists. Such friendly depiction of Kurdish-Turkish brotherhood was doomed to death after a short while, and a complete shift occurred in reaction to Turkish state policies against Kurds. Kurdish nationalists even considered Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood and Kurdish national benefits as mutually exclusive categories.

The Turkish state under M. Kemal Atatürk forcibly repressed Kurdish rebellions and justified its policy as efforts to civilize the “feudal and reactionary” Kurds. İsmet İnönü, the prime minister after Atatürk, publicized the goal of the continuing state reaction to the Dersim rebellion (1937-1938) as cleaning Dersim from the usurpers, to get rid of the *agha*, sheikh, and feudal system, so that they could build roads, bridges, and schools in the city.³²⁸ Basically the Turkish state was bringing civilization to this underdeveloped part of Turkey, which cost the Kurds 13.000 deaths as a result of the destruction of villages, mass murders and forced resettlements.³²⁹ Ministry of the interior in 1935 argued that even the military campaigns were

³²⁶ Ibid., 78.

³²⁷ Ibid., 79-80.

³²⁸ Tuğba Doğan, “Dersim Rebellion in 1937-38 According to Archival Documents,” *History Studies*, (January 2012): 163, accessed December 1, 2015,

http://www.historystudies.net/Makaleler/1495650815_8-Tu%C4%9Fba%20Do%C4%9Fan.pdf

³²⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, “The Suppression of the Dersim Rebellion in Turkey (1937-38),” 4-6.

not able to cure the backwardness of the Kurdish tribes.³³⁰ A reform program with ‘civilized methods’ was necessary, which was to place the province under a military governor with extraordinary power to arrest and deport³³¹ people when necessary. This way the people of Dersim also share in the blessings of the republic.³³²

Kurds wanted to demonstrate to Turks in particular that the Kurds were not religious reactionaries. Indeed, Kurds Latinized the Kurdish alphabet and circulated Westernized periodicals to secularize their children in exile.³³³ Instead, it was the Turks who were responsible for the underdevelopment of the Kurdish society: “From the day the Turks set foot in the Kurdish motherland, they brought nothing but barbaric aggression toward the language, the nationality, and the culture,” wrote a Kurdish author in exile.³³⁴ Mehmet Emin Bozarslan, a state *mufti* in Diyarbakır, wrote in 1960s, how the state was not even sincere in its claims to civilize Kurdistan by a land reform: the land reform promised by the state was not put into practice and the *aghas* continued to rule over the Kurds as a result of their cooperation with the state.³³⁵ In response to the official Turkish description of Kurds as “mountain Turks,” implying wildness and savagery, Celadet Bedirhan pointed out the many advantages of Kurdistan’s mountainous geography, writing that the mountains prevented easy access to Kurdistan and protected the Kurds from Ottoman attempts to make them loyal subjects, as well as providing them freedom from military service and taxes.³³⁶

³³⁰ Martin van Bruinessen, “Genocide in Kurdistan? The Suppression of the Dersim Rebellion in Turkey (1937-38) and the Chemical War Against the Iraqi Kurds (1988),” *Personal Site of Martin van Bruinessen*, last modified February 27, 2014 accessed December 9, 2015, 13.

http://www.hum.uu.nl/medewerkers/m.vanbruinessen/publications/Bruinessen_Genocide_in_Kurdistan.pdf

³³¹ Bruinessen, “Genocide in Kurdistan?” 13.

³³² *Ibid.*, 13.

³³³ Bozarslan, “Kurdish Historiographical Discourse,” 28.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*,” 30.

³³⁵ Mehmet Emin Bozarslan, *Hilafet ve Ümmetçilik Sorunu*, (İstanbul: Ant Yayinlari, 1969), 222.

³³⁶ Aktürk, “Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria,” 155.

The exile literature produced an alternative reading of the history of the early Turkish Republic. In his open letter to Mustafa Kemal in 1933, Celadet Bedirhan listed what the Kurds had suffered under the new republic. Celadet's narrative of the Kurdish past was completely silenced or misrepresented in Turkish official history. The main elements of Celadet's criticism against the policies of the Turkish state were as follows:

- The republican troops killed thousands of Kurdish men and children and destroyed a village after the Ararat rebellion of 1930;
- The state unjustly represented Sheikh Said as an enemy against Muslims who worked for British money and Armenian causes;
- The Independence Tribunals (Istiklal Mahkemeleri) mandated the execution of many Kurds simply because they were Kurds;
- The state banned the Kurdish language;
- The state deported many influential Kurdish sheikh and agha families;
- The state intentionally deprived Kurdish children of education through policies preventing even opening a single high school in all of Kurdistan, out of fear that if Kurds were educated they would be awakened to their situation;
- The state forced families with names that sounded Kurdish to change their family names or leave their homes;
- The official narratives represented Kurds as ignorant, thieving, and mountain dwelling (meaning uncivilized), or simply denied their existence.³³⁷

In his memoirs, Kadri Cemilpasha talked of the Sheikh Said rebellion as 'the savior' of Mustafa Kemal's government, as opposed to how the rebellion was officially depicted as reactionary and a challenge to the young Republic. The rebellion in fact served to provide Mustafa Kemal a security discourse as a powerful justification for imposing martial law

³³⁷ See Dersimi, *Mümtaz Mütefekkir Celadet Ali Bedirhan' ın Türkiye Reisicumhuru Gazi M. Kemal Paşa Hazretlerine Yazdığı Açık Mektup*.

throughout the country. Mustafa Kemal was able to implement the ruthless Independence Tribunals not only in the Kurdish region where the rebellion arose but also in Ankara, the central city, to make sure that all of his opponents were “cleaned out.”³³⁸

Musa Anter (1920-1992): Unfolding Kurdish History Under Turkey

Musa Anter (Şeyhmus Elmas)³³⁹ was among the powerful voices of the Kurdish cause during the Republican period.³⁴⁰ Anter’s significance lies in his challenges to the official Turkish historiography. He established in 1948 the *Dicle Kaynağı* newspaper in order to “educate the Turkish officials in humanity” rather than to fight with them.³⁴¹ He expressed his goal in publishing *Dicle Kaynağı* as to reveal the historical persecutions Kurds had suffered under the Turkish Republic, including “the Zilan genocide, the Sheikh Said rebellion, the Ağrı [Ararat] uprising, Dersim, Sason . . . together with innumerable exiles and genocides.”³⁴² In his 1959 article in *İleri Yurt*, a local newspaper, he pointed out that newspapers and magazines in İstanbul and Ankara did not even mention the events occurring in the Kurdish region.³⁴³ He published, he said, in order to bring voice to the silenced. He was

³³⁸ Kadri Cemil, *Doza Kurdistan= Kürdistan davası: Kürt milletinin 60 yıllık esaretten Kürtuluş savaşı hatıraları*, (Ankara: Oz-Ge Yayınları, 1991), 94.

³³⁹ Anter’s mother named him Şeyhmus after Sheikh Şeyhmus, whom she went to ask for praying for a son for her. And Anter was given the last name Elmas, meaning diamond, by the Turkish regime. He changed both his names and acquired the last name Anter, meaning worthless. See <http://bilalrojava.tr.gg/Musa-Anter.htm>

³⁴⁰ Anter belonged to the Kurdish intellectual circle that was more concerned about the development of the Kurdish region, financial, cultural and educational within borders of Turkey, than a revolution against the state. Anter was arrested many times and served in prison many years for writing about the relative underdevelopment of the Kurdish region and the cultural and ethnic oppression of the Kurds. He employed withering sarcasm in his writings on Kurdish repression. For this cause, he joined the Marxist Turkish Worker’s Party (TIP) and supported the Eastern Revolutionary Cultural Hearths (DDKO), both of which, however, he later left. See, Andrew Mango, “Turks and Kurds,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 30 No.4, (Oct. 1994): 978-980.

³⁴¹ Müslüm Yücel, *Tekzip: Kürt Basın Tarihi*, (İstanbul: Aram Basım Yayın, 1998), 67-68.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 69.

arrested in 1959³⁴⁴ due to a Kurdish poem, “Qımlı” (Stink Bug), he published in *İleri Yurd*, in which he referred to the Turkish policy of destroying Kurds. Publishing a Kurdish poem created a heated debate among newspaper editors, to which debate Anter responded with article 39 of the Treaty of Lausanne (1924) that Turkey had signed after World War I. The article articulated the right of Turkish citizens to use any language in matters relating to their private or commercial relations.³⁴⁵ Anter also published two Kurdish political magazines, *Dicle-Fırat* and *Deng*.

By the 1950s, he supported the recognition of the Kurdish rights to education in their native language, publishing in Kurdish, and economic development of the region within Turkish borders.³⁴⁶ Anter devoted his writings to making Kurdish grievances under Turkey known; he was predominantly concerned with the regional underdevelopment and ethnic persecutions the Kurds suffered from.³⁴⁷ He beautifully elaborated his main concern in his opening words to his memoirs:

When Rezaizade Ercüment Ekrem Talu delineates his life story, he describes his birth place and family home as such: ‘Marmara is the most

³⁴⁴ Naci Kutlay, *49’lar Dosyası*, (İstanbul: Fırat Yayınları, 1994), 163. Anter belonged to the group forty-niners.

³⁴⁵ Baskın Oran, “Minority Concept and Rights In Turkey: The Lausanne Peace Treaty and Current Issues,” *Armenian Genocide Research Center*, August 8, 2006, accessed December 5, 2016, <http://armenians-1915.blogspot.com/2006/08/913-minority-concept-and-rights-in.html>

³⁴⁶ Ahmet Alış, “Üç Devrin Tanığı: Modern Kürt Siyasi Tarihinin İçinden Musa Anter’i Okumak,” *Birikim Dergisi*, September, 2010, accessed December 10, 2015, <http://www.birikimdergisi.com/guncel/uc-devrin-tanigi-modern-Kürt-siyasi-tarihinin-icinden-musa-anteri-okumak>

³⁴⁷ When the split between the Kurdish secular and religious communities became clearer with the rise of Marxist worldviews, Anter stayed in close contact with the Kurdish seculars. Although Anter was in touch with Kurdish nationalists, he refused to join the organizations involved in violent activities. He did not support the strategy of armed struggle which emerged powerfully with the rise of the PKK in 1978; however, he saw intimidation and suppression by the Turkish state as the main reason for the radicalization of many Kurds in the PKK. He withdrew to his native village when terrorist activity began to spread in Turkey. See, Ahmet Alış, “Üç Devrin Tanığı,” <http://www.birikimdergisi.com/guncel/uc-devrin-tanigi-modern-Kürt-siyasi-tarihinin-icinden-musa-anteri-okumak>

civilized region in Turkey; İstanbul is the most beautiful city there; the Bosphorus is the most delightful part of İstanbul. Sariyer is the sweetest township and Yeni Mahalle is the most superior neighborhood of Sariyer. And the mansion of Rezaizade's is the most fabulous in Yeni Mahalle...it is right there that I was born.' Sure, he was Rezaizade Ekrem's son.

Let's look at who I am: Kurdistan is the most underdeveloped region of Turkey. Mardin is the least developed city within Kurdistan and Nusaybin is the most afflicted district there; Stilîlê (Akarsu), is the poorest township of Nusaybin; Zivingê is the most backward village in Stilîlê and I was born, according to state registers, in this village inside cave number 2.³⁴⁸

Although he was charged with separatism and imprisoned for many years, he insisted that he did not support a separate state option, but only a recognition that Turkey owed its existence to Turks and Kurds equally and the Kurds had to enjoy their rights as much as the Turks of Turkey.³⁴⁹ In the 1930's, Anter developed connections with the Kurdish intellectuals in Damascus—such as Cegerxwîn, the Bedirhan brothers, Kadri Cemil, and Ekrem Cemil Pashas—while a teenager during his school vacations. Anter told in one article that Cegerxwîn³⁵⁰ made him memorize his nationalistic and epic poems from his first book of poetry, *Diwan: Agir u Pirusk*, and Anter would disseminate them in Turkey by making

³⁴⁸ Musa Anter, *Hatıralarım*, (İstanbul: Avesta Yayınları, 1999).

³⁴⁹ Musa Anter, *Vakayiname*, (İstanbul: Avesta Yayınları, 2002), 105-107. Despite parting ways with the PKK, Anter's socialist ties gained him the "atheist" label among Kurdish *aghas* and religious leaders. There was a motivation behind labeling one "an atheist" in a conservative society like the Kurds: it was an effective weapon to deprive someone of credibility in society. The rise of socialist thought among the Kurdish nationalists definitely irritated the religious communities, and it resulted in complete rejection of the Kurdish cause among some conservatives.

³⁵⁰ Cegerxwîn, the most influential Kurdish national poet in the 20th century, was once a mullah himself, who later embraced a Marxist perspective. He came to be a powerful voice for Kurdish peasants and against the corruption of the Kurdish traditional leaders from the 1950s forward. Cegerxwîn was born in Mardin, which is in present day Turkey, although his family moved to Syria when he was thirteen. He had his madrasa education there and served as a village mullah from 1928 to 1936. Since Cegerxwîn did not live in Turkey, he was not involved in the Kurdish political movements or organizations inside Turkey, although he was a political activist outside. He joined the Communist party of Syria in 1949 supporting the Soviet Union against Western colonialism. He later joined the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria in 1957, and worked as a lecturer in Kurdish language and literature at the University of Baghdad in Iraq from 1958 to 1963. He moved to Stockholm in 1979 and died there in 1984. See, Metin Yüksel, "I Cry Out So That You Wake Up: Cegerxwîn's poetics and politics of awakening," *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 4, (2014): 541, 542.

Kurdish children and the youth memorize the poems.³⁵¹ He considered Cegerxwîn his teacher.³⁵²

What seems missing in these representations of the Kurdish past is the religious persecution Kurds were going through. Bedirhan and Anter courageously listed the Kurdish problems, yet the violations of Kurds' rights of Islamic practices did not make inroads into their narrative. The Sufi lodges and madrasas were closed down and religious education was denied by the state for eight years when Celadet wrote his letter, yet he chose to keep silent on the subject. In fact, the closing of the madrasas had a tremendous effect not only on Kurdish religious life; it was also a blow to Kurdish literary and cultural development. Indeed, madrasas were the only places where Kurds were able to get an education in the Kurdish language at that time. Given that Celadet devoted much of his writings to Kurdish cultural and educational development, his silence on the elimination of madrasas can only be explained by his political ideologies. Bedirhan's silence might have well been an intentional choice, since some Kurdish ethnic nationalists were highly critical of the madrasa curriculum. Cegerxwîn was very critical of the Kurdish madrasas, which did not teach social sciences, engineering, art, or astronomy. When the educated class of other nations came together, they would collect money to help their needy, said Cegerxwîn, while the Kurdish educated class (which was also the religious class) was fed by its needy and did not offer anything to them.

³⁵¹ Anter, *Hatıralarım*, 342.

³⁵² Interestingly, Anter married in 1944 the daughter of Evdirrehîm Rehmîyê Hekarî, (Abdurrahim Rahmi Zapsu), a Kurdish religious scholar, a conservative voice in the *Jîn* journal. Zapsu was passionate in opposing socialist thought in the 1940s and 1950s. When Anter asked for Hale's hand in marriage, Zapsu quizzed him, "What is the purpose of forming a family," to which Anter formulated his pages-long answer. Zapsu's intellectual career and his religious discourse are examined in the next chapter, which explains why Zapsu was deeply interested in the worldview of his future son-in-law. See, Anter, *Hatıralarım*, 389.

Cegerxwîn found it embarrassing that the Kurdish educated class did not even produce books in their native tongue.³⁵³

İsmail Beşikçi (b.1939): the PKK and the Awaited Kurdish Intellectual

With his seven-volume series of studies on Kemalist policies in Turkey, İsmail Beşikçi offered a systematic critique of official Turkish ideology and historiography.³⁵⁴ After completing his dissertation on the Kurdish *Alikan* tribe in 1965, Beşikçi produced more books challenging the official ideology on the Kurds,³⁵⁵ resulting in his imprisonment for 17 years in total. Turkish by descent, Beşikçi revisited the official Turkish history that related to the Kurds, such as the resettlement law of 1932 and the mass killings of the Kurdish Dersim population through military campaigns in 1937-38.³⁵⁶ His book *Doğu Anadolu'nun Düzeni* (1967) critically engaged with the assimilation policies of the state as well as how the feudal system of the Kurdish region was strengthened by the government, contrary to Kemalist claims. Beşikçi's history of Kurdish political and social life was the first of its kind in Turkey and for a long time the only dissenting analysis.³⁵⁷

Another major contribution of Beşikçi is his deconstruction of the “Turkish Thesis of History” and the “Sun Language Theory” supported by M. Kemal Atatürk to “scientifically prove” that Turks and their language constituted the origin of all great civilizations. He argued

³⁵³ Cegerxwîn, “Qulu al-Haq Walaw Anfusakum (Tell the Truth Even to Your selves),” *Hawar* (Arabic Kurdish Section) 10, (October 23, 1932): 6.

³⁵⁴ Bruinessen, “İsmail Beşikçi,” 12.

³⁵⁵ Some of his books on the subject are as follows: Beşikçi, *Türk-Tarih Tezi, Güneş-Dil Teorisi ve Kürt sorunu*, (Ankara: Komal, 1977), Beşikçi, *M. Kemal Atatürk, UNESCO & destruction of Kurdish identity in Turkey*, (Croydon Park, NSW: Committee for Decolonization of Kurdistan, 1986), and Beşikçi, *Bilim, Resmi ideoloji, Devlet, Demokrasi ve Kürt Sorunu*, (İstanbul: Alan Yayıncılık, 1990).

³⁵⁶ Bruinessen, “İsmail Beşikçi,” 13.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

that these theories were not only imaginative fictions but also faulty in their denial of Kurdish ethnicity in the Kemalist discourse in that they attempted to prove that Kurds were pure Turks racially and linguistically.³⁵⁸

Beşikçi's writings stood to legitimize a Marxist leadership and revolution against the exploitative states. He argued that the Kurds lacked intellectuals of their own working class who supported Kurdish rights in "a secular nationalist framework"³⁵⁹ and that Kurdish pride lay in the Kurds' comprehension of how Kurds were historically exploited, *not* in fighting for the honor of *other* nations, such as for the Ottomans.³⁶⁰ He regarded states like the Turks, Persians, and Arabs to be exploitative and to have made use of all institutions, including religion, in the course of their oppressive actions. It made perfect sense that these nations remained strongly attached to Islam, since Islam worked perfectly for their exploitative goals. Likewise, Kurdish sheikhs used religious knowledge to continue imposing their authority over the lower classes and collaborated with the Turkish state to continue their status quo.³⁶¹ Beşikçi recommended that the Kurds review their relationship with Islam to consider if it had not worked only to diminish their national awareness and make them easier to manipulate.³⁶²

From the 1980s on, Beşikçi embraced a radical stance of support for the Kurds' guerrilla warfare against the Turkish state under the PKK (Kurdistan's Workers' Party). Polemical though it was, Beşikçi maintained that a new class of Kurdish workers or bourgeoisie, needed for the revolutionary overthrow of the feudal system, did not emerge

³⁵⁸ Ibid.,14.

³⁵⁹ İsmail Beşikçi, *Kürt Aydını Üzerine*, (Ankara: Yurt Kitap Yayın, 1991), 93.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 95.

³⁶¹ İsmail Beşikçi, *Doğu Anadolu'nun Düzeni: sosyo-ekonomik ve etnik temeller*, (İstanbul: E Yayınları, 1969), 144-147.

³⁶² Beşikçi, *Kürt Aydını Uzerine*, 40-42.

until the PKK process started. As for those who supported Kurdish rights in the past, both the leftists and the conservatives, they could only be considered among the “traditional movements.”³⁶³ In Beşikçi’s perspective, the kind of Kurdish intellectuals needed was those who grew frustrated with the traditional structures of Kurdish society and wanted to overthrow it by creating a socialist Kurdish state, as exemplified in the persona and in the goal of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK.³⁶⁴ Beşikçi regards the militant actions of the PKK as significantly important³⁶⁵ for Kurdish freedom.³⁶⁶ Despite his view of religion as a tool for exploiting others, Beşikçi himself employs the powerful religious discourse of *shaheed*, martyr, for PKK fighters killed in the war against the state.³⁶⁷

The fact that PKK remains controversial among the Kurds, situates Beşikçi’s stance in complete support of PKK at one pole of the Kurdish ideological split. While Beşikçi studied the Kurds in a scholarly fashion through the 1960s and 1970s, he later shifted his focus by producing sympathetic literature on the PKK, legitimized its struggle and supported its ideology.³⁶⁸ Despite his significant efforts in publishing revisions to Turkish historiography, Beşikçi is simply silent on how the Turkish state targeted religious freedom and the right to religious education for the Kurds in his writings. He highlighted state persecutions, and the exploitation of religion by state and religious elites, in order to justify a free Kurdish state led by a Marxist revolution.

³⁶³ Ibid., 8, 93.

³⁶⁴ Hakan Yavuz, “Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey” in *Nationalism and Minority Identities in Islamic Societies*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 243.

³⁶⁵ Beşikçi, *Kürt Aydini Uzerine*, 68.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 69.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 1, 49, 51.

³⁶⁸ Bruinessen, “İsmail Beşikçi,” 15.

Legitimization Literature for Kurdish independence: Evil Turks and Despotic Ottomans

Kurdish nationalist history writing worked to justify why Kurds had to free themselves from the authority of 'evil-Turks.' In parallel with that line of thinking, Kurdish nationalists, who once spoke earnestly for Kurdish-Ottomanism, made a tremendous change in their representation of the Ottoman past, also. They expressed the Kurdish experience in the Ottoman State in a totally different fashion than how they presented it before Turkey came into existence. The call to rebellion by *Azadi* nationalist organization in 1924 said,

The Turks, the Ottomans, have unfortunately gradually enslaved us over 400 years in the name of religion and the Islamic caliphate. They have led us into darkness and ignorance... They occupied our land and destroyed it. Kurdistan was never such a ruin as today... our land was never so neglected... We are obliged to liberate ourselves from this bitter and unhappy life... They have never tried to teach us fine things, mutual love, tolerance, science and art. They have continually shown us the way to a nomadic life...³⁶⁹

After the 1930's, the Kurdish nationalists totally rejected the Ottoman rulers of the past. Kadri Cemil Pasha condemned the "cruel administration of the Ottomans" as well as the Turkifying policy of the Turks.³⁷⁰ Celadet Bedirhan revealed his view of the Kurdish problem as something that had existed since the Kurds pledged their allegiance to Sultan Selim I in the 16th century, rather than dating from Republican times or the late nineteenth century.³⁷¹ If one scrutinizes Ottoman history, he argued, Kurdish dissent can be found to underlie a number of historical circumstances. Kurdish discord in the Ottoman State was revealed by the Kurdish feudal structure, or by Kurds' embracing a Shafi'i Muslim school of law different from the Hanafi School that was adopted in central Anatolia and the Balkans. The Kurds'

³⁶⁹ Strohmeier, *Crucial Images*, 89.

³⁷⁰ Kadri Cemil, *Doza Kurdistan*, 70.

³⁷¹ Dersimi, *Mümtaz Mütefekkir Celadet Ali Bedirhan' ın Açık Mektubu*, 16.

adoption of the Shafi'i School worked against Hanafism silently.³⁷² Later Kurdish dissidence was revealed as tribal rebellion. He argued that the foundations of the Kurdish nationalist struggle appeared in the 20th century were laid in the 17th century in/by Ehmede Xani's literature.³⁷³ Although Celadet Bedirhan once considered the Ottoman state the Kurds' "homeland"³⁷⁴ and wrote reassuring poems to Ottoman soldiers during the Balkan Wars and World War I,³⁷⁵ he expressed different views thereafter. Celadet and Kamuran Bedirhan agreed to fight with the British against the Ottoman pan-Islamic policy (unifying Muslims under the Ottoman banner) in order to achieve an independent Kurdistan.³⁷⁶ The Bedirhan brothers, who celebrated Islamism and Ottomanism in 1913,³⁷⁷ viewed Kurdish Ottoman history during the Turkish Republican period as a failure that imposed tyrannical rule over the Kurds.

In contrast to their pro-Ottomanist writings before the fall of the Ottomans, the Bedirhan brothers exhibited a transformation in their approach and took a typical nationalist approach to history after the Ottomans fell: recasting the Ottoman past as cruel and tyrannical would justify their current goal of Kurdish national liberation. Likewise, the Turkish nationalists depicted the Ottoman past as backward and despotic. In order to avoid sharing the defeat of the Ottomans and to establish his secular nationalist state, Atatürk had to create a discourse arguing that it was not the Turks who were defeated; on the contrary, it was the traitors, religious fanatics and the backward Ottomans. Süreyya Bedirhan, Celadet and

³⁷² Ibid., 16.

³⁷³ Ibid., 16.

³⁷⁴ Celadet and Kamuran Bedirhan, *Edirne Sükutunun İç Yüzü*, (İstanbul: Avesta, 2009), 24.

³⁷⁵ Ahmet Serdar Aktürk, "TRT Şeş'te Celadet Ali Bedirhan'ı Görmek," *Kürt Tarihi* 2, (August-September 2012): 51.

³⁷⁶ Aktürk, "Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria," 209.

³⁷⁷ Celadet and Kamuran Bedirhan, *Edirne Sükutunun İç Yüzü*, 24.

Kamuran's brother, charged the Ottoman sultans with "deceit, hypocrisy, and treachery" as well. Süreyya argued that Kurds throughout their history had only tolerated but never approved the authority of the Turks, whose goal was "to wipe out different ethnicities through shedding blood or assimilation."³⁷⁸ Süreyya Bedirhan identified the nineteenth century Kurdish revolts as a reaction against this "Turkish despotic governance."³⁷⁹ He recalled with regret that in the 16th century the Kurds had supported the Ottomans against the Safavid Dynasty in Persia, since the Turks did not stay true to their promise and abolished Kurdish autonomy (sub-sovereignty) in the 19th century.³⁸⁰ The designation of the Ottomans as "enemies lowering the Kurdish flag and raising the Ottoman flag"³⁸¹ and of Turkish as "the language of the enemy"³⁸² discloses the stance of many Kurdish nationalists towards the Ottoman Empire.

Kadri Cemil's *Doza Kurdistan* (1969) legitimated Kurdish freedom as well as employing a revisionist perspective on some historical events that were recorded differently in official Turkish history and other sources. Kadri Cemil criticized the Ottomans for intentionally placing Turkman tribes into the Kerkuk Kurdish region in the 17th century in order to guarantee Turkish dominion over the region. The original owners of the petroleum in the Kerkuk-Sarizor region, therefore, were the Kurds of the Zoroastrian religion, he argued, who converted to Islam later.³⁸³ Kadri Cemil Pasha addressed educated Kurdish youth in 1952 and informed them that what harmed the Kurdish nation most were ignorance and the

³⁷⁸ Dr. Bleç Serko (Süreyya Bedirhan), *Kürt Sorunu, Kökeni ve Nedenleri*, (İstanbul: Avesta, 2009), 32.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 31-33.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, *Kürt Sorunu*, 28-30.

³⁸¹ Aktürk, "Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria," 147.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 163.

³⁸³ Kadri Cemil, *Doza Kurdistan*, 72.

torpidity caused by the Kurdish religious and tribal elite. By supporting the Ottoman caliph as the leader of all Muslims, the Kurdish elite prevented Kurdish national consciousness from arising and growing.³⁸⁴ The Kurds had to take lessons from the hard work of the nations that had gained their independence from the “oppressive chain”³⁸⁵ of the Ottoman Empire.

The Kurdish Ottoman past became the target of Marxist nationalist criticism as well to legitimize Kurdish freedom. The Ottomans illegitimately benefited from the Caliphate system at the expense of people’s despair.³⁸⁶ The Ottoman Sultans did not qualify for the Caliphate, mainly because the caliphate originated as a republican system in which people vote for their governors. It was transformed into a sultanate in the 7th century and lost its revolutionary, democratic and republican meaning.³⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the Ottomans, like their predecessor Muslim states, justified their class despotism through a powerful caliphate discourse. The Caliphate was a strong exploitative tool in convincing people that the caliph was the political and religious leader of the *umma*, Muslim community worldwide, thus Ottoman governing was entirely compatible with Islamic principles.³⁸⁸ Many Kurdish nationalists believed that the Kurds’ strong attachment to Islam and the Ottoman caliph as the leader of the *umma* resulted in their national unconsciousness, and it was the Kurdish religious elite that was responsible for popularizing the *umma* concept and Muslim brotherhood. Consequently, pre-modern history books like *Sharafname*, in which Ottoman loyalty is a de facto element, cannot serve to awaken a national consciousness, let alone a Marxist one. The pro-*umma* and pro-Ottoman discourse of the Kurdish religious elite

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 207.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 208.

³⁸⁶ M. Emin Bozarlan, *Hilafet ve Ümmetçilik*, 138.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 42, 70.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 73.

presented a contradicting narrative to the Marxist and nationalist discourses as well and it was not worthy of consideration.

Mehmet Nuri Dersimi (1890-1973)

Mehmet Nuri Dersimi's³⁸⁹ writings are significant examples of the Marxist tendency to see the Kurdish past as a class struggle, therefore legitimization of a free Kurdistan. He was a ruthless critic of the Ottomans and was proud that the Kurds in Dersim were able to transform Islam, "the religion of the Arabs," into their own version through mixing it with their essential religion of Zoroastrianism.³⁹⁰ Many Kurdish nationalists took pride in a historic connection to the Zoroastrian religion as much as they reflected anger towards the Kurds' connection to Islam, which was transmitted from the "colonial" Arabs. Due to the Kurds' strong attachment to Islam, they were exploited by the Turks and Arabs by means of religion. Another exploiter was the Kurdish elite class, which included the traditional leaders of Kurdish society, sheikhs, Muslim *sufi* leaders, and *aghas*, the landlords. These three groups were enriched by their unjust use of the wealth of their people, Dersimi said. Islam was used by these leaders to silence any objection.

M. Nuri Dersimi's prefatory article in Celadet Bedirhan's open letter to Atatürk incorporates significant Marxist vocabulary as well in its attempt to explain the Kurdish and Ottoman past as a fight between the exploiters, i.e., the imperialist powers, and the workers, i.e., the peasants. He regarded the Ottoman Turks "as having lingered in primitive stages of social, economic, and intellectual development."³⁹¹ The nations under Ottoman authority, as

³⁸⁹ Dersimi was born in Dersim, today's Tunceli. He belonged to the Alevi sect of Islam, a type of Shiism, which has been predominant among the Kurds in Dersim. See, Hakan Yavuz, "Five Stages," 8.

³⁹⁰ M. Nuri Dersimi, *Kurdistan Tarihinde Dersim*, (Halep: Ani Matbaasi, 1952), 22.

³⁹¹ Dersimi, *Mümtaz Mütefekkir Celadet Ali Bedirhan' in Açık Mektubu*, 1.

a result, also experienced the same unfortunate fate and were not able to follow the course of progress seen elsewhere in human civilization. He argued that the most primitive social organizations, tribal society and feudalism, were perpetuated under the Ottoman State and that the state had no intention to follow or adopt contemporary world developments, such as the fall of feudalism in Europe.³⁹² The rise of the bourgeoisie in Europe spilled over their national borders and took root inside the Ottoman land. The non-Muslim minorities, “the subjects”³⁹³ as they were vulgarly called, were only slaves and captives in this state, and they placed their hope in Europe for their emancipation. The Turkish peasants were also desperate; their lives were wasted fighting the wars of this nomad and raider state.³⁹⁴

Justifying the need for Kurdish liberation, M. Nuri Dersimi’s writings also aimed to incite the national excitement of Kurdish youth. Hamit Bozarslan considers his address to Kurdish youth as an example of how Kurdish nationalists used Turkish nationalist models in creating their historiographical literature. The efforts of Kurdish nationalists to find evidence for their nation’s antiquity resembled those of the Turks.³⁹⁵ Dersimi’s address was structured and worded like Atatürk’s statement to the Turkish youth,³⁹⁶ and Dersimi’s was as passionate, if not more, as Atatürk’s.

In his four-page address to the Kurdish youth (1969), Dersimi championed “fighting” to survive as a nation, since it was required by the natural law. Dersimi argued that “a race is

³⁹² Ibid., 2.

³⁹³ Ibid., 3.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 2-3.

³⁹⁵ Kurdish nationalist history writing developed in exile through following the methodological and interpretive examples of Turkish state historians and Kurdifying them, since Kurds lacked the instruments and funds of a state to write an official history. For example, in the 1950’s Ihsan Nuri wrote *Nejadi Kurd* (The Origin of Kurds) as an attempt to provide an essential prehistory. Kurds looked for the origins of their nation in ancient history to prove that their nation had existed, not as a branch of the Turkish race but as a separate ethnicity. See, Bozarslan, “Kurdish Historiographical Discourse,” 33.

³⁹⁶ Bozarslan, “Kurdish Historiographical Discourse,” 33, 34.

the predatory monster of another race, and the relationship is the same between nations and human beings.”³⁹⁷ He was apparently greatly influenced by Charles Darwin’s theory of “natural selection,” the preservation of some races in the struggle for life, and the need to adapt to changing circumstances. Dersimi communicated to the Kurdish youth that the Kurdish nation had endured much fighting throughout its history in order to survive, and Kurds never gave up. He advised them to say “yes,” to fighting against any challenge to their nation’s survival, because this spirit had the wisdom of Kurdish survival.³⁹⁸ Dersimi mixed the Kurdish tribal value of honor with the revolutionary spirit for freedom. Kurdish youth were expected to take revenge if they had enough honor, and he exclaimed that “we will open the red dawns of Kurdish freedom with our blood.”³⁹⁹ Dersimi used the clearest language in his invitation to fight as a way to bring about a Marxist revolution. He saw the past with his Marxist lenses as the story of the exploiter (the Turks, the Arabs, the Persians) and the exploited (the Kurds).

Mehmet Emin Bozarslan (b.1935): The Ottoman Caliphate versus the Revolutionary Spirit of Islam

Bozarslan’s⁴⁰⁰ main critique centered on the hypocrisy behind the Islamic caliphate system and the exploitation by the sheikhs and *aghas* to legitimize Kurdish fight for freedom.

³⁹⁷ Nuri Dersimi, *Kurdistan Tarihinde Dersim*, 337.

³⁹⁸ Dersimi, *Kurdistan Tarihinde Dersim*, 337.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁴⁰⁰ Mehmet Emin Bozarslan made an immense contribution to Kurdish literature through his literary works along with his books critically analyzing Kurdish problems, the history of the caliphate institution and Kurdish tribal structure. Bozarslan was born in Diyarbakır, was a Kurdish madrasa graduate and served as a state *mufti*, fatwa giver, for almost a decade. He was also a DDKO member and was arrested many times under charges of separatism. He was jailed for several months in 1968 for publishing the Kurdish alphabet in Latin letters. He resigned from his position as a state *mufti* in 1969 and was tried with other members of DDKO in 1971, after which he was sent to prison again until 1974. He moved to Sweden in 1979, seeking asylum, and has been living

The 'exploitative' Islamic caliphate system and the ideology behind it necessitated a Marxist revolution. In Bozarslan's evaluation, although all religions are sacred revolutions in support of the poor, the wronged, and the ordinary people against the injustices of oppressors, they were later employed by the governing class and the capitalists, who are the agents of oppression.⁴⁰¹

While he was highly influenced by Marxist thought and its embrace of revolutionary change, he followed a different approach from a regular Marxist.⁴⁰² He juxtaposed Islam with a Marxist revolutionary spirit, with which he strove to prove that both Ottomans and the Kurdish religious elite misinterpreted the religion for their selfish interests. Bozarslan's book, *İslamiyet Açısından Şeyhlik ve Ağalık* (1964), created controversy among religious circles because he attacked, in the book, the Kurdish elite as well as the sheikhs' practice of Sufism. He argued that Sufism, *tarikatchılık*, was heretical because it did not originate during the time of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, and he attacked the sheikhs and their exploitation of the Kurdish peasants by the use of Sufism.⁴⁰³

Bozarslan employed a Marxist perspective in his narratives of Islamic and Ottoman history and Kurdish tribal structure, especially as presented in his book, *İslamiyette Hilafet ve Ümmetçilik Sorunu* (1969). According to Bozarslan, the exploitative system that existed

there since then. See, Metin Yüksel, "A Revolutionary Kurdish Mullah from Turkey: Mehmed Emin Bozarslan and His Intellectual Evolution," *Muslim World*, Vol 99, issue 2, 2009, 357-362.

⁴⁰¹ M. Emin Bozarslan, *Hilafet ve Ümmetçilik*, 355.

⁴⁰² Bozarslan was mainly disturbed by the Kurdish region's underdevelopment, cultural, educational and economic. He supported education in Kurdish for the Kurds in order to bring literacy to Kurdish peasants and argued that this was not a challenge against Turkishness. He published the Kurdish alphabet in Latin for the first time in Turkey in 1948, for which he was jailed for four months. See, Yüksel, "Mehmed Emin Bozarslan," 360.

⁴⁰³ Yüksel, "Mehmed Emin Bozarslan," 358.

in pre-Islamic Arabia was challenged by the message of a revolutionary religion, Islam.⁴⁰⁴ Bozarslan argued that the revolutionary state that Islam brought essentially ended with the kingdom of the Umayyads (661-750), who changed the nature of the Islamic caliphate.⁴⁰⁵ This “meaningless” caliphate, “a tool of exploitation,” was transmitted to the Ottomans in the 16th century only to further strengthen the governing class and continue their dictatorship.⁴⁰⁶

His works of translation and transliteration from Arabic to Kurdish, from Kurdish to Turkish, Arabic Kurdish to Latin Kurdish, and from Ottoman Turkish to modern Turkish included earlier Kurdish journals, newspapers, and literary classics. He produced these works when the Kurdish movement needed national symbols and a sense of national history. Bozarslan made Kurdish classics accessible to a new generation.⁴⁰⁷

Bozarslan’s comparison of Islam with a revolutionary change was indeed different from the disdain of the Kurdish left for Islam in the 1970s. His discourse with Islam also challenged historically established institutions among the conservative, such as Sufism and

⁴⁰⁴ In his depiction of the pre-Islamic Arabs, he talked about the existence of different classes, the tribal elite, the lower members of tribes, the freed slaves, and the lowest class, the slaves. When pre-Islamic Mecca became the center of trade due to its geographic location, the tribal economy was replaced with a “capitalist-like” system. The rich traders of the cities made loans to Arab Bedouins with interest, which turned the latter into slaves of the richer class. Islam’s revolution was to cause “in-depth changes in their social, economic, and belief systems . . . destroy the small, happy elite of usurious thieves, and introduce a system for the benefit of ordinary people.” See, M. Emin Bozarslan, *Hilafet ve Ümmetçilik*, 9-13, 16.

⁴⁰⁵ M.Emin Bozarslan, *Hilafet ve Ümmetçilik*, 50.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁰⁷ Martin van Bruinessen, “Mehmed Emin Bozarslan and I,” *Personal Academia page of Martin van Bruinessen*, last modified February 27, 2014, accessed December 9, 2015, http://www.hum.uu.nl/medewerkers/m.vanbruinessen/publications/Bruinessen_Mehmed_Emin_Bozarslan_and_I.pdf.2

Bozarslan’s numerous translations and transliterations include the *Kurdistan* newspaper (1898-1902); *Kurd Teavun ve Terakki Gazetesi* (1908-1909); *Jîn* (1918-1919); *Mem u Zin*, the Kurdish romance by Ehmede Xani written in 1692; *Mervanî Kürtleri Tarihi*, written in 1975 by İbnul Ezraq; and *Sharafname*. Bruinessen describes Bozarslan as “a bridge between two different social worlds, the world of the madrasa-educated and the world of the university-educated Kurds” due to his literary contribution to Kurdish national consciousness. Bruinessen stresses that Bozarslan’s knowledge of Persian, Arabic, and literary Kurdish had originated from his madrasa education, as well as the discipline of his work, which sometimes reached 18 hours a day, according to Musa Anter’s notes in *Hatıralarım*, 315. Also see, Bruinessen, “Mehmed Emin Bozarslan and I,” 2.

the caliphate institution, as later innovations. In a sense, Bozarslan's arguments were in line with the leftist revolutionaries' ideas/claims that the institution of sheikhhood needed to be abolished and that allegiance to a Muslim caliph was problematic because it only harmed Kurdish national consciousness. While there was a highlight on the exploitative state and religious class in this type of historical writing, the silence on the state's religious persecution and bans on Kurdish Islamic practices stayed the same.

In Support of a Secular Leadership of Kurdish Nationalism: the Corrupt Sheikhs

The tension between the traditional elite and the rising secularists was noticeable in exile narratives. Hajo Agha once acknowledged his anger with the Kurdish youth for being highly critical of sheikhs and aghas. He argued that the Kurdish nationalist movement owed its strength to traditional leaders like Sheikh Said who were able to mobilize Kurds for nationalist rebellions. Hajo Agha was then attacked by a reader for being “a collaborator with the enemy”⁴⁰⁸ in the Sheikh Said rebellion, for following Turkish orders against the Kurds or at best staying neutral. The story behind this charge was Hajo Agha's obedience to the Turkish government when the state ordered his tribe to march against Sheikh Said and the rebels when the revolt broke out.⁴⁰⁹ Hajo Agha later became a member of the Kurdish league Hoybun and did much of the planning of the Ararat revolt in 1929-1930.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁸Evin Ciweleq, “Resbeleka Meriyan (letters from the dead),” *Hawar* 17 (Arabic Kurdish section), (March 6, 1933): 1-2.

⁴⁰⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Sheikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992), 103.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

Hawar and *Ronahi* journals published stories that questioned the morality of sheikhs and the blind attachment of their followers to them.⁴¹¹ In one story a sheikh rapes a girl.⁴¹² In another story, a sheikh deceives his followers by claiming to be a *Mahdi* (Redeemer) who could fly and could not be killed.⁴¹³ Cegerxwîn's writings and poems, many of which were published in *Hawar*, contributed to the discourse against the sheikhs and *aghas*.

While Kurdish nationalists blamed Kurdish religious leaders for promoting ignorance in their exile literature, they did not shy away cooperating with those leaders whenever they felt necessary. In his memoirs penned in 1965, Cegerxwîn criticized Hajo Agha for being completely ignorant about Kurdishness, ignoring the benefits of his nation like any other Kurdish tribal leader.⁴¹⁴ Nevertheless Cegerxwîn supported Hajo Agha's leadership due to Hajo Agha's authority and popularity among the people. Hajo had the largest tribal allegiance in northern Kurdistan and was able to gather ten thousand people with a single call.⁴¹⁵ Cegerxwîn mentioned how Kadri Cemil Pasha, a secular nationalist, ruthlessly charged those supporting Hajo with ignorance, for in fact these Kurds were supporting the enemies of the Kurdish nation in the person of Hajo. Cegerxwîn acknowledged that he agreed with Kadri Cemil, yet he had only a handful of supporters. The reality of his time was quite different. The overwhelming majority of Kurds only followed the traditional leaders, and if the secular

⁴¹¹ See Cegerxwîn, "Ger Nexwinin (If We Do not Get Educated)" *Ronahi*, 15, (June 1, 1943): 20 and Qadri Jan, "Gulcin," *Ronahi*, 16, (July 1, 1943): 5-8.

⁴¹² Qadri Jan, "Gulcin," 5-8.

⁴¹³ Osman Sabri, "Sexe Barzan Cawan Firandin? (How was the Sheikh of Barzan Flown)," *Ronahi*, 17, (August 1, 1943): 22-24.

⁴¹⁴ Cegerxwîn, *Hayat Hikayem*, (İstanbul: Evrensel Basım Yayın, 2003), 99,102.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

nationalists wanted to do anything for the nation, they had to work under traditional leadership.⁴¹⁶

Celadet Bedirhan also chose to manage religious leaders instead of attacking them. As sheikhs and *aghas* controlled immense financial and human resources, Kurdish nationalists knew that it was vitally important for them to obtain their backing to achieve a popular success.⁴¹⁷ When he utilized the Kurdish alphabet in Latin fonts, Celadet worked with Kurdish Muslim sheikhs and mullahs to gain legitimacy in the eyes of religious Kurds and get their support.⁴¹⁸ Kurdish secular nationalists celebrated some sheikhs and *aghas* for being patriotic in advocating the Kurdish nationalist cause. Celadet listed the names of several *aghas* and a sheikh to praise their generous financial support of *Hawar*, for instance.⁴¹⁹ He lauded Hasan Agha Hajo for donating 400 Syrian liras when many others on the list were able to give only 10 liras.

A good number of *Hawar* journal issues started with some interpretation of Qur'anic verses and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Latinization of the Arabic scripts was not an easy process; many Kurds felt uncomfortable abandoning the letters of the Qur'an. Celadet Bedirhan published the fatwa, religious judgment that Sheikh Abdurrahman Garisi gave on the acceptability of using Latin letters. Bedirhan introduced Sheikh Garisi first as very knowledgeable, pious, and strong, whose students in general knew the Latin letters. Then he quoted the sheikh as saying:

God did not teach us his commandments and prohibitions in letters or in shapes. The shapes of the (Arabic) letters in the Qur'an today are significantly

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 208-209.

⁴¹⁷ Aktürk, "Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria," 199.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 172.

⁴¹⁹ Xwediye Haware (the owner of the *Hawar*), "Kiriyaariye Haware (Subscription to *Hawar*)," *Hawar* 43, (May 5 1942): 8-9.

different from the Arabic scripts used (in the 7th century) to record the Qur'an in writing.⁴²⁰

Celadet Bedirhan stressed the acceptability of using Latin letters in his journal, *Ronahi*, publishing an article by M. Ermexani. Ermexani informed readers that Mullah Enwer from Iraq's Amediye confirmed the legitimacy of using Latin letters by bringing evidence from the Qur'anic verses in response to Ermexani's query and said that he taught in those letters in his madrasa. Ermexani cited Mullah Enwer as having stated that Kurdish is read far better when written in Latin than it is in Arabic,⁴²¹ which supported the earlier thought of Kurdish intellectuals such as Halil Hayali and Abdullah Cevdet.⁴²²

Although secular intellectuals had to work together with the traditional elite for some time, among the highlights of their literature was the distinct religion of Kurds, Zoroastrianism. A good amount of discussion on Zoroastrianism as the original Kurdish religion stands out in *Hawar*.⁴²³ Celadet, Kamuran Bedirhan, and Süreyya Bedirhan, as well as many other Kurdish nationalists such as Cegerxwîn and Kadri Cemilpasha, were greatly interested in Zoroastrianism and strove to make it known as a unique Kurdish identity marker. In Kadri Cemil's book on Zoroastrianism, he reserved a section to describe it as the religion of the Kurds before Islam.⁴²⁴ He explained the sacred notion of fire, the two gods of Hurmuz (the god of goodness) and Ehriman (the god of evilness), and provided historical information about the birth and meaning of religion.⁴²⁵ Articles in *Hawar* introduced the *Zend Avesta*,

⁴²⁰ Celadet Bedirhan, "Sex Evdirehmane Garisi Cu Rehmete (Sheikh Abdurrahman Garisi Passad Away)," *Hawar* 11, (November 10, 1932): 1-3.

⁴²¹ M. Ermexani, "Mela Enwer," *Ronahi*, 12, (March 1, 1943): 210.

⁴²² See Klein, "Claiming the Nation," 101 and Abdullah Cevdet, "Bir Hitap," Cevdet had stated in 1913 that it was necessary for the Kurds to adopt an alphabet that can allow a child to read and write easily.

⁴²³ Although Kurdish journals were not allowed within the borders of Turkey, *Hawar* found its way into Turkey after the 1960s.

⁴²⁴ Kadri Cemil, *Doza Kurdistan*, 212.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 212-213.

Zoroastrianism's Holy Scripture, and Zoroaster's teachings were discussed.⁴²⁶ Zoroaster was said to have enlightened the world by introducing monotheism to humanity.⁴²⁷ No doubt, the positive view of Zoroastrianism was an expression of the nationalist ideology that Kurds had a unique religion of their own. Zoroastrian and Yezidi practices were examples of the distinctive Kurdish identity for many Kurdish nationalists, not imposed on Kurds under Turkish and Arab domination, like Islam.⁴²⁸

Cegerxwîn (1903-1984)

Cegerxwîn generated a powerful critique against the sheikhs and mullahs in his writings in *Hawar*. He appealed to them with a *hadith*, a saying of the Prophet, "Speak the truth even if it is against your own benefit."⁴²⁹ He held them responsible for the poverty, ignorance, and backwardness of the Kurds, along with the *seydas*, madrasa teachers. He complained that despite their influence on the people, the religious class never brought up issues that would trigger the Kurdish mind; in their sermons or in conversations they would not speak to awaken them or make them ask questions like "Why do the Kurds pay for oil, when it is their land that produces it?"⁴³⁰

In his books and poems, Cegerxwîn portrayed the past as an economic struggle of the workers and the peasants against the elite who manipulated lower classes' money and labor.

⁴²⁶ Kamuran Ali Bedirhan, "Zerdest u Reya Zerdest (Zerdest and the Way to Zerdest)," *Hawar*, 26, (August 18, 1935): 9-10.

⁴²⁷ Aktürk, "Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria," 214.

⁴²⁸ Martin van Bruinessen, "Religion in Kurdistan," *Personal Site of Martin van Bruinessen*, last modified February 27, 2014 accessed October 7, 2015, 1, http://www.hum.uu.nl/medewerkers/m.vanbruinessen/publications/Bruinessen_Religion_in_Kurdistan.pdf

⁴²⁹ Cegerxwîn, "Qulu al-Haq Walaw Anfusakum," 5.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

He elaborated this struggle by providing examples from his lifetime, the never-ending fights in his village and the never-ending financial struggle his family and the lower classes were going through. For Cegerxwîn, Kurds were in the initial stage of their history,⁴³¹ in which it is an essential reality that the elite, sheikhs, and *aghas* knew how to make the peasants obedient through fomenting fights among Kurdish tribes.⁴³² Kurdish consciousness could not go beyond supporting the existing control of sheikhs and *aghas* in this stage. The Kurdish elite did not yet know what a national ideal might be; they were plunderers who sought gain and fame for their tribe alone and were ignorantly serving their enemy (the Turkish state).⁴³³

Cegerxwîn explained the goal of Kurdish religious leaders, as “to stack up money and to dispossess the nation...they did not care if that was the workers’ money and the peasants’ effort that were stolen.”⁴³⁴ He condemned the religious elite for financial exploitation and for using religion to “dig out people’s bellies.”⁴³⁵ He saw ignorant sheikhs and *aghas* as enemies of the Kurdish nation to be dealt with by brute force. Kurdish religious leaders allegedly ruined Kurdish national awareness for centuries. Süleyman Çevik, the editor of the *Nûbihar*

⁴³¹ Cegerxwîn, *Hayat Hikayem*, 20.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴³³ Cegerxwîn, *Hayat Hikayem*, 21.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9. Cegerxwîn, “Deste te Mac Nakim,” 129. Cegerxwîn’s frustration with the religious leaders expanded in his attitude towards Islamic history as well as to the religion itself: “Muhammed struggled in the Arab land which was governed by tribal rules and feudalism, in the midst of plunder.” Although “Islam emerged to provide spiritual purification against mischief, pillage, robbery and the bandits,” Cegerxwîn argued, “it came to be used for robbery, disunity and as an enemy against the Kurdish nation.” In his *Tarîxa Kurdistan (Kurdistan’s History)*, 1985) Cegerxwîn claimed that Omar, the third caliph in Islamic history, encouraged the nomadic structure of Arab life. Omar motivated the Arabs to learn how to ride horses, use swords, and learn nothing but the Qur’an and did not want Arabs to adopt a city life. See Cegerxwîn, *Tarîxa Kurdistan II*, (Sweden: Wesanen Roja Nu, 1987), 8. His presentation of Omar’s time is similar to that of certain time periods in Marx’s writings: tribal life, hunting and gathering is challenged by settled Agriculture and urban stratification of labor. He approached Islamic history in terms of progress from primitive tribal life to a class consciousness revealing his Marxist interpretations of history. Towards the end of his life, Cegerxwîn expressed his regret with the “ignorant” Kurds’ strong connection to Islam, which caused thousands of them each year to go on hajj, pilgrimage, and “to throw away thousands of gold pieces for the voyage.” See Cegerxwîn, *Tarîxa Kurdistan I*, (Sweden: Wesanen Roja Nu, 1987), 17 mentioned in Bruinessen, *Religion in Kurdistan*, 2. He was totally disillusioned with Islam now. Religion meant, if anything, the independence of the (Kurdish) nation, as he expressed in a poem in 1943.

journal and the director of the *Nûbihar* publication house, argues that Kurdish socialist leaders struggled to distance people from religion and fought with Islam while the leaders of the Kurdish Islamic group discouraged people from engaging in the Kurdish issue, as they found nationalism harmful to Islamic values and Muslim unity.

Cegerxwîn wrote in his memoirs that he witnessed the dishonesty of the sheikhs at first hand and he was irritated by their hypocrisy and yet the incredible respect they received from the Kurds in return. Although Cegerxwîn gave credit to sheikhs and mullahs who led Kurdish revolts and died in the mountains as well as those who produced Kurdish literature, he thought they were quite small in number compared to the “eighty percent”⁴³⁶ of corrupted leaders.

Cegerxwîn’s critiques of the religious class stood as a justification for his support for the Marxist leadership of Kurdish nationalism. In his study on Cegerxwîn’s poetry, Metin Yüksel points to the poet’s use of Marxist vocabulary, such as equality (*wekhevî*), slave-owner (*koledar*), proletariat (*pirolêtar*), farmer (*cotkar*), capitalist (*sermayedar*), worker (*karker*), bourgeoisie (*borjiwaz*), exploited (*kefî*), revolution (*sewre*), oppression (*zordestî*), and subordination (*bindestî*), all of which reveal Cegerxwîn’s Marxist perspective on the Kurdish situation.⁴³⁷ In Yüksel’s analysis, Cegerxwîn’s poems aimed to inspire Kurdish youth to gain knowledge of how to liberate the Kurds, which would inevitably result in a revolutionary spirit and military power. He expected Kurds to take revenge on their exploiters and gain their freedom from them.⁴³⁸ Not surprisingly, Cegerxwîn invited Kurds to withdraw

⁴³⁶ Cegerxwîn, *Hayat Hikayem*, 105-106.

⁴³⁷ Yüksel, “I Cry Out So That You Wake Up,” 544.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 546.

their respect from the religious elite by refusing to follow the custom of kissing their hands: “*destê şex maçi nakin*” (do not kiss the sheikh’s hand) in his poem published in 1943.⁴³⁹ In a related poem, he said “My sheikh, I will not kiss your hand any more. Enough is enough. You have left these palaces and madrasas in ruins.”⁴⁴⁰

After the 1960s, the traditional leadership was in demise and handed its authority to the rising secular elite. The arguments against the traditional elite became a source of legitimation for Kurdish nationalist claims that these elite were the obstacles preventing Kurdish liberation from class exploitation. So much focus on the exploitative sheikhs for the sake of supporting a Marxist leadership hid the existence of self-criticism among the religious class itself, and worked to silence their discourse on the state, nationalism, Kurdish freedom, etc.

The individuals discussed so far benefited from the Marxist worldview and contributed to the body of Marxist historiographical discourse with basic highlights and similar silences. While most of them produced a counter discourse to Turkish historiography, to Ottoman historiography and against Kurdish traditional leaders, they were silent on how to work for Kurdish religious freedom from the state’s bans and discriminations. They are not informative at all about the suffering of Kurdish culture and literature with the closing down of madrasas and Sufi orders.

⁴³⁹ Cegerxwîn, “Ger Nexwinin,” 20.

⁴⁴⁰ Cegerxwîn was aware that his nationalist and Marxist discourse caused tension between him and the religious circles and that they called him “*gawir*,” godless. Once a mullah attacked Cegerxwîn for criticizing the Turks, whom he believed protected Islam and thus were not to be denigrated. The brotherhood of Turks and Kurds had been an important part of Kurdish conservative discourse. He called Cegerxwîn a godless atheist, citing verses from the Qur’an to support his claim. Cegerxwîn rejected the charge and argued back with a *hadith* that whoever labels a Muslim as an atheist, he is an atheist himself. See, Cegerxwîn, *Hayat Hikayem*, 181 and Cegerxwîn, “Deste te Mac Nakim,” *Ki Me Ez* (Diwan III, 1973), 129. Despite the tension, Cegerxwîn’s poems secretly found their way into Kurdish madrasas in Turkey; many madrasa students read, memorized, and recited them among themselves in the 1950s.

It is to be noted, however, that Kurdish intellectuals under Marxist influence were not homogenous in their ideas; instead, they utilized the Marxist perspective only to frame their already existing conceptual perspectives, which differed. When we treat their works individually, we recognize the differences in their highlights. While Cegerxwîn was completely disappointed with religion and employed Marxist tools for explanation, Bozarslan interpreted Islam as a revolutionary religion using Marxist interpretive methods. While Dersimi openly called for a fight for a revolution, Anter did not support engaging in violent activity and promoted Kurdish cultural, economic, and educational rights within Turkish borders. It seems that he sided with the leftists and Marxist intellectuals as he found them more open to listen and speak up for Kurds' rights than conservative Kurds. Beşikçi, on the other hand, embodied the politicized Kurdish Marxist nationalism and provided it with powerful historiographical materials against the Turkish state as well as the Ottoman past and exploitative sheikhs he published.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the transformations, highlights and silences in different types of Kurdish nationalist historiographies and their implications. Turkish-Kurdish Islamic brotherhood discourse was very lively until 1925, since the notion signified a political bargain: the agreement Kurds made with the Ottomans centuries ago. Nonetheless, Kurdish nationalists embraced anti-Turkish and anti-Ottoman discourse in response to increasing state persecutions.

I also evaluated the differing views contained within secular Kurdish nationalist circles before Marxist ideology was embodied with the PKK's emergence. Many Kurdish

nationalists under secular or Marxist influence before the rise of the PKK was more concerned about Kurdish regional development than a revolution against the state for a free Kurdistan. This should not conceal, however, the existence of revolutionary writings such as Cegerxwîn's and Dersimi's, before the PKK.

Therefore, the split among the conservatives and the secular were only crystallized with the emergence of a tangible Marxist armed struggle that saw Kurdish rebellion against the state as the sole solution to Kurdish problems. Marxist historiography's categorization of Kurdish nationalism and Islamic allegiances as two diverging ideals increased in tone and was analyzed more systematically with the PKK. The overemphasis of Marxist historiography on the corrupt Kurdish religious class as a branch of imperial colonialism concealed the heterogeneous nature of the religious class and their discourses and efforts for the Kurdish nation. Marxist historiography constructed the past to serve the interest of the emerging secular Kurdish nationalist ideals.

Marxism's influence on Kurdish nationalists enraged the conservatives to the point that they felt they could have nothing to do with the Marxists, whom they called godless atheists, and who they thought were against Kurdish tribal structure and the Sufi sheikhs out of hatred for Islam. Indeed, Kurdish conservatives did not show reactions to the Kurdish leftists out of the blue. As we have seen there was an increasing sense of marginalization of religion in the Kurdish leftist discourse, in its interpretation of the past, and in how Kurdish underdevelopment was linked to Kurds' attachment to religion. My point here is not to undervalue Kurdish secular nationalist concerns about the exploitation of religious values. However, the silence of the Kurdish Marxist historiography on the religious persecutions Kurds suffered under the secular regime and the unidimensional portrayal of Kurdish

resistance to the Turkish state turned a blind eye to the efforts of religious leaders in speaking up for Kurdish rights.

In the chapters that follow we will witness how individuals from the Kurdish religious class viewed Kurdish problems, offered solutions and reacted against the religious and ethnic discriminations of the state, as well as how they interpreted the exploitation of religion by the religious class. Chapter 3 engages with the writings and ideas of Evdirrehîm Rehmîyê Hekarî, a Kurdish Islamic intellectual of Ottoman and Republican periods, his view of Kurdish failures and successes in the past, his critiques of the state and the Kurdish social status quo, colored by an Islamic viewpoint, and his efforts for the development of Kurdish educational, cultural and national consciousness.

CHAPTER 3

EVDİRREHÎM REHMÎYÊ HEKARÎ: RECONCILIATION OF KURDISH NATIONALISM WITH KURDISH-TURKISH BROTHERHOOD

This chapter examines the writings of Evdirrehîm Rehmîyê Hekarî (1890-1958), who encompassed a number of the Kurdish identities discussed so far. We can talk of three main periods in constant evolution, in Hekarî's writing life span (1918-1954). In his educational poetry on Turkish children in captivity in Russia, he used the words Muslim and Turk interchangeably. He called on the Turks to find and rescue them as these children were carrying Muslim blood and they belonged to the Islamic nation.⁴⁴¹ In his *Jîn* writings, he showed a dedication to Kurdish national awareness exclusively. In the third phase between 1947 and 1954, when the expression of Kurdishness was officially rejected and the Kurdish language was banned in Turkey, he published in İstanbul the bi-weekly Turkish-language journal *Ehl-i Sünnet*, in which he defined himself as a Muslim Turk once more.

He supported Turkish-Kurdish unity (as part of the notion of *umma*) and Kurdish nationalism both at the same time in his third phase of writing. Hekarî accepted a combination of his Kurdish identity with Turkish Muslimness under the Turkifying projects of the Kemalist regime. Nevertheless, he embraced his own definition of Turkishness: inclusive of his ethnic background, nonconforming to government policies, especially to state Islam, which put the free Kurds' and Turks' freedom of religion at risk.

As I mentioned in the introduction, I am inspired by Janet Klein's argument that "national movements among non-dominant groups in multi-ethnic states can be fully committed to their own movement while continuing to envision their fates as intertwined with

⁴⁴¹ Muallim Abdurrahim Pertev, *Sokullu Numune Mektebinde Verilen Konferans Vesikalarından: Esir Çocuklara Ahlak Aşısı*, (İstanbul: Necm-i İstikbal Matbaası, 1924), 5-6.

the other, even dominant, groups.”⁴⁴² She evaluates that most ‘nationalists’ among the Kurds during the Ottoman Empire continued to envision themselves as part of the Ottoman state.⁴⁴³ I argue that this continued into the new Turkish Republic, as we had Kurdish nationalists who did not dream of a separate Kurdish state. Evdirehîm Rehmî Hekarî is a case in point. His glorification of Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood in the *Ehl-i Sünnet* journal (1946-1954), was a valid form of Kurdish national consciousness, though it looks paradoxical at first glance. Here I base my argument on Hroch’s⁴⁴⁴ that national consciousness can be reflected in diverse ways and cannot be limited to a particular form. Indeed, Hekarî’s attachment to Kurdish nation along with Kurd’s religious brotherhood with Turks challenged the secular distinction between a Kurdish nationalist and a defender of Islamic notion of *umma*.

This chapter investigates Hekarî’s vision of a Kurdish nationalism framed with Islamic notions, and his amalgamation of secular notions of nationalism with Islamic symbols. I will specifically inquire whether his embrace of a Turkish Muslim identity was a denial or a disguise of his Kurdishness, a reluctant use of a failed nationalism, or a sincere belief in the reconciliation of Kurdish-Turkish national interests. For this cause, I will analyze Hekarî’s writings in captivity, in *Jîn*, and in *Ehl-i Sünnet* and his unpublished *Gaziya Welat 4*,⁴⁴⁵ which cover about a 40-year period. I will explore Hekarî’s struggle for both his Kurdish nation and for Islamic brotherhood under a secular and ethnic nationalist regime.

Hekarî’s Islamic Background

⁴⁴² Janet Klein, “Kurdish Nationalists and Non-nationalist Kurdists,” 137.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 135

⁴⁴⁴ Hroch, 6.

⁴⁴⁵ Hekarî did not publish his *Gaziya Welat 4*, for it included poems contrary to the Turkish state ideology.

Hekarî (see Figure 3) was born in 1890 in the Ottoman vilayet of Van.⁴⁴⁶ His father, Seyid Mustafa Pertew, was descended from Abdulkadir Jilani, a great mystic and the founder of Qadiri Sufism.⁴⁴⁷ Hekarî graduated from *Dar al Mu'allimin*, a teacher-training school in Van, and later he studied at Sheikh Taha Arvasi's madrasa there. His professor Sheikh Taha Arvasi served as the Hakkari deputy in the Ottoman assembly during the Second Constitutional Period, and he was later appointed by the last Sultan in 1919 as a professor of Islamic jurisprudence at the prestigious Süleymaniye madrasa in İstanbul.



Figure 3 Hekarî's portrait

Source: The cover picture of Necat Zivingi, *Zana u Rewşenbir Evdirehîm Rehmi Hekkari Jivan, Berhem Helbesten Wi*, (İstanbul: Avesta, 2015)

Hekarî was one of the last graduates of the İstanbul *Dârulfünûn-u Osmanî's* faculty of religion (*Ulum-u Aliye-i Diniye*) of the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁴⁸ Hekarî started acting and writing early as an education activist. He was only 22 years old when he became one of the founders of *Kürt Talebe Hevi Cemiyeti*, (Kurdish Hope Student Organization) in 1912.⁴⁴⁹ The

⁴⁴⁶ Ottoman *eyalets*, provinces, in the late 19th century were subdivided into sub-provinces and further into districts. Hakkari, where Hekari was from, was a province in the *Vilayet* of Van when Hekari was born.

⁴⁴⁷ Hazım Kılıç, *Helbestvan û Nivîskarê Welatparêz Evdirehîm Rehmiyê Hekarî*, (Danmark: Weşanxana Xanî & Bateyî, 1991), 15.

⁴⁴⁸ Hazım Kılıç, 15.

⁴⁴⁹ Mehmet Emin Bozarslan, "XX. Yüzyılın Başlarında Kürt Dernekleri," Turkish Introduction, *Jîn*, Vol. 1 (Uppsala, Sweden, 1985): 113.

essential goal of the organization was to advance the educational standard of the Kurds through opening new schools in Kurdistan, providing financial support for students, and reviving the Kurdish language and literature. The Kurdish Hope Student Organization was definitely not promoting a separate Kurdish state. The idea of a Kurdish state was not explicitly propounded until after the end of World War I, when the Ottoman Empire was falling apart. After the Mudros Armistice on 30 October 1918, Hekarî was among the members of the recently formed *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* (Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan) established on 17 December 1918. He was a powerful voice of Kurdishness through his several poems and essays in the *Jîn* journal, the publication of the organization initiated on 7 November 1918. He wrote passionately on the love of nation. He had at least one article in each of the journal's 25 issues, most of which will be analyzed in this chapter.

Hekarî's Kurdish nationalism seems to have been highly influenced by his strong attachment to Islam. After the foundation of the Turkish nationalist republic in 1923, Hekarî wrote many Islamic books in Turkish and published them,⁴⁵⁰ leaving his Kurdish writings unpublished as required by law. Hekarî adopted 'Zapsu' as his last name in 1934 (when Turkish law required regularization of surnames), referring to the Zap River within the city of Hakkari.⁴⁵¹ Also, instead of spelling his name as pronounced in Kurdish Evdirrehîm Rehmîyê, he had to spell it as Abdurrahim Rahmi. Abdurrahim Rahmi Zapsu of the Republican period became more active with his Islamic identity and published his own religious journal, *Ehl-i Sünnet*, from 1947 to 1954.

⁴⁵⁰ His works are listed at the end of the chapter.

⁴⁵¹ Hazım Kılıç, 20.

Hekarî married his daughter Hale to Musa Anter (1920-1992), a well-known Kurdish secular nationalist, journalist and thinker. Hekarî's grandson from his son Mustafa Pertev, Cüneyd Zapsu, is one of the founders of the Justice and Development Party, which is currently in power in Turkey.

Friends of Significance: Said Nursi (Kurdi) and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek

Hekarî was a student and friend of Said Nursi (1876-1960),⁴⁵² who was famed as a gifted debater and actively involved in Kurdish nationalist associations in İstanbul in his early career. Nursi, a madrasa graduate and a mullah, wrote in journals and gave speeches to Kurds on the sorry state of the Kurdish social structure as well as on the political issues of his time. Nursi was primarily a religious scholar, but he was also actively involved in politics until the early 1920s. He stayed away from politics and focused solely on writing his influential Qur'anic commentary in Turkish, becoming the founder of a religious revivalist movement, the *Nur* movement, in Turkey.⁴⁵³

Hekarî was highly influenced by some of Nursi's ideas⁴⁵⁴ and employed them in his writings from the 1910s to the 1950s. As World War I broke out, Hekarî along with Nursi's

⁴⁵² For a nuanced analysis of Nursi's life and his Nur movement see, Şükran Vahide, "Toward an Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi," in İbrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), and Hakan Yavuz, "Print-Based Islamic Discourse: Nur Movement," in Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 151-178.

⁴⁵³ Nursi's writings have been so influential in the Kurdish region and he relates to all of the major figures of this study. However, Nursi's ideas and writings deserve an entire other study, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

⁴⁵⁴ Hekarî's and Nursi's perspectives on *jihad*, nationalism, madrasa education and corrupt Kurdish sheikhs bore resemblance from 1910s towards 1950s. His inclusion of Nursi's experience in Russian captivity, trial cases, and ideas in his *Ehl-i Sünnet* journal (1947-1954) probably gained him more popular readership, since Nursi's faith movement was on the rise among both Turks and Kurds in Turkey in those years. Besides, Nursi was an unprecedented example to emulate for Hekarî: Nursi's Islamic identity was flavored with his Kurdishness.

madrassa students in Van fought for the Ottomans during World War I (1914-1918) on the Eastern Front against the Russians and Armenians in the voluntary militia forces formed by Said Nursi on the orders of Enver Pasha.⁴⁵⁵ Hekarî, Nursi, and many others were captured and taken prisoner by the Russians two years later, in 1916. There is no evidence that Nursi and Hekarî stayed together during their captivity. Instead, Hekarî states in his captivity writings that he was placed in Nargin Island in the Caspian Sea in 1917⁴⁵⁶ but Nursi was in the city of Kostroma. Hekarî only heard from a witness that a Russian general ordered Nursi's execution for daring to refuse to stand before him. Hekarî made the story known years later in his *Ehl-i Sünnet* as evidence of Nursi's faith and courage and that the general pardoned Nursi on learning that he was a Muslim scholar and would not stand before anyone but God.⁴⁵⁷

Hekarî's great respect for Nursi and employment of Nursi's ideas in his journal shed light on Hekarî's embrace of Turkish-Kurdish unity in 1940s and 1950s despite his earlier nationalist thought and his existing convictions on in Kurdish progress. Nursi's and Hekarî's defense of Kurdish rights already overlapped a great deal during the Ottoman period. Although Nursi never denied his Kurdish identity after the Turkish state was founded, he stayed away from emphasizing his Kurdishness, which might have caused political polarization and might have harmed his primary goal of the revival of Islam in Turkey. In fact, even as early as 1909, Nursi stated that he paid allegiance to Selim I's idea of Islamic

⁴⁵⁵ Vahide, 9.

⁴⁵⁶ Kılıç, 17.

⁴⁵⁷ "Bediüzzaman'ın Akıllara Hayret Veren Bir Seciyesi," *Ehli Sünnet*, No 46, Vol 2, 15 (October 1948): 10.

unity, *umma*, as Selim I invited the Kurds and the Kurds paid allegiance to him. He declared that he was not a member of any group or party that fostered separatism.⁴⁵⁸

For some time, Hekarî also formed a close friendship with Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983), an influential Islamist Turkish nationalist, novelist, poet, and activist. Kısakürek is widely known and appreciated in Turkey; his nationalistic poems, which have been included in school text books. Hekarî worked together with Kısakürek as an administrator for *Büyük Doğu* League. Kısakürek established the journal *Büyük Doğu* (*The Great East*, 1943-1978), in which he boldly published his anti-Kemalist reading of Turkish history. For many of his publications he went through various court trials and prison terms from 1944 until his death in 1983.⁴⁵⁹ Kısakürek was a madrasa student of Kurdish Abdulkhakim Arvasi beginning in 1934. Abdulkhakim Arvasi was the brother⁴⁶⁰ of Hekarî's teacher Sheikh Taha Arvasi and was a well-known Sunni scholar and mystic who taught in various madrasas and mosques of İstanbul for many years. He taught in Van for 30 years before he moved to İstanbul when the Russian Army invaded the eastern part of Turkey in WWII.

Hekarî's close contact with a Turkish nationalist like Kısakürek was predicated by their common opponent: the anti-religious policies of the state. Hekarî followed the traces of Kısakürek and other conservative Turks in his frequent employment of Turkish Muslimness in his journal, which was bound up with opposing the revolutionary reforms of the secular state. Hekarî parted ways with Kısakürek due to their different perspectives on Kurds. Indeed, it is more about Hekarî's break up with Kısakürek than his relationship with him that this

⁴⁵⁸ Said Nursi, "İki Mektebi Musibetin Şehadetnamesi," *İçtimai Dersler*, (İstanbul, Zehra Yayıncılık, 2012), 163.

⁴⁵⁹ Burhanettin Duran, Cemil Aydın, "Competing Occidentalisms of Modern Islamist Thought: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu on Christianity, the West and Modernity," *The Muslim World*, Volume 103, Issue 4, (October 2013): 7.

⁴⁶⁰ Hazım Kılıç, 15.

study is concerned. It is the presumption of this study that Hekarî employed Turkish Muslim identity as a way to raise his Kurdish voice and for more functional uses than Kısakürek did.

Hekarî Between Nationalism, Islam and Ottomanism (1910s-1945)

As mentioned earlier, we can categorize Hekarî's writings in three groups. His captivity writings during WWI maintained an Ottomanist vision.⁴⁶¹ He used the words Muslim and Turk interchangeably. Hekarî's work was published later in 1918 by *Jîn* publications. He made the captive children held by the Russians speak in his poem:

I am a Muslim and will never be a disbeliever,
Look at my blood, it is the blood of a Muslim,
(He is) a murderer who forces me change my nation (millet)
You do not even make such a talk...
They took me out of my land...it is in ruins.
Yet Turks are searching to find me; they will soon find us,
God will make us a great nation.⁴⁶²

Hekarî intertwined religion and nationalism here. The children cry out to the Russians not to change their *millet*, nation, which is used with religion interchangeably. In the Ottoman definition, *millet* is made of the members of a particular religion regardless of ethnic differences. Therefore changing one's *millet* means changing one's religion. In the second

⁴⁶¹ His Ottomanist vision did not completely change with time; he continued to have an Ottomanist side for the nostalgic periods of the Ottomans, in which Kurds had autonomy. The celebration in the 135th issue of *Ehli Sünnet* of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II for conquering İstanbul, being a just ruler and establishing freedom of conscience reveals Hekarî's approval of earlier Ottoman leadership of the Muslim world. *Ehli Sünnet* No 135, (June 1 1953): 1-2. He was disillusioned with the Ottomans as "false Turks," as he called them, as Turkish nationalism became more active and Kurds started to lose their earlier status in the Ottoman State, starting with the Tanzimat reforms (1876). This will be analyzed in the following pages.

⁴⁶²Abdurrahim Pertev, 5-6.

"Ben İslamim asla gavur olamam
Benim kanım bakın İslam kanıdır
Beni başka millet yapan canidir
Böyle sözü ağzınıza almayın...
Çıkardılar beni...yurdum...yanıyor
Fakat beni şimdi Türkler arıyor
Yakınlarda onlar bizi bulacak
Allah bizi büyük millet yapacak."

line, what makes a crime is the changing of children's religion, who were Muslims by blood. Hekarî's formulation of "Muslim by blood" can be interpreted as his employment of the underlying grammar of modern nationalism in relation to religion. Although one's blood is used in reference to racial categorizations of nations, he used blood as a defining element of one's religion, an interesting combination of modern and traditional definitions of nations, *millet*. Here the "nation is imagined as composed of all and only those who belong to a particular religion."⁴⁶³ Hekarî uses religion as the primary diacritical marker to identify ethnicity,⁴⁶⁴ thus he defines nation in the name of religion.⁴⁶⁵ Hence, his reference to the Turkish *millet* to save the children in the third line does not refer to a specific category of the Turkish race. He used the idea of the Turkish *millet* to define Muslims of the Ottoman State in general, including Kurds. In Hekarî's mind Kurds and Turks still made one nation: the Islamic nation.

Hekarî was the author of the first Kurdish play in 1918 that circulated in the *Jîn* journal (1918-1919). His writings in *Jîn* (1918-1919) both in Kurdish and Ottoman Turkish constituted his writings in the second phase. In this phase, Hekarî had problems with Turks in the racial sense of the word. In *Jîn*, Hekarî's nationalism was still inspired by his Islamic devotion, yet he neither revealed an unquestioning obedience to Ottoman authority, nor did he exalt the Kurdish Ottoman past and Kurdish-Turkish unity with glory, as opposed to many of his colleagues. In contrast to that, Hekarî's *Jîn* writings gained clearly passionate Kurdish nationalist tones, where he treated Kurds as a separate ethnicity. Hekarî was still supportive of a caliphate institution as it appeared in his play *Meme Alan*; he was not satisfied with a

⁴⁶³ Brubaker, 15.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁶⁵ Philip S. Gorski and Gülay Türkmen-Derviřođlu, 194.

non-Kurdish ruler to lead the Muslim nation. In the play, he suggested that the caliphate was best reified under a Kurdish ruler, Salahaddin Ayyubi (1138-1193), who led the Muslim army against the Crusaders and recaptured Jerusalem. The Kurds were the most loyal subjects to the orders of the caliph in defending their nation's benefit.

Meme Alan can be viewed as veiled criticism of the Ottoman caliphate. In the play, the concepts of *umma* and Kurdishness are incorporated with each other in the embodiment of Salahaddin, not in a Turkish or Arab leader or a caliph. Hekarî could not expect the Turkist CUP leadership of the time to display an Islamic *umma* consciousness; many of its members were secular nationalists and even anti-religious.⁴⁶⁶ Under such a secular leadership of the empire, it is understandable that Hekarî did not promote Turkish leadership of the caliphate with Kurds serving them. Hekarî's particular choice of a Kurdish caliph can be interpreted as an indirect suggestion to Kurds to work to have their own caliph instead of obeying the caliphs of other ethnicities. Hekarî depicted a time when the Kurds were governed by their own governors (*emirs or mirs*) and were filled with national and religious consciousness. Here are some excerpts from the play:

Meme Alan: Mother, give me your blessings, the enemy has rebelled against us, they have come to take Jerusalem from the Muslims. The (Kurdish) emir ordered jihad, people are preparing for it. If I am a Kurd from Alan, and my forefathers went in the way of jihad, I should go for it also...

His mother: My son, if I do not bless you in the way of religion and the homeland, God would not bless me. If you do not go today, the enemy will triumph tomorrow. I have raised you for such a day. If you do jihad for your homeland and for your religion and exalt the name of Kurds and Kurmanjis, I bless you. May God be with you.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁶ Şükrü Hanioglu's article explores the ideology of many of the members of CUP, see "Garbcılar: Their Attitudes Toward Religion and Their Impact on the Official Ideology of the Turkish Republic," *Studia Islamica* 86, (1997). However, it is important to note that the Young Turk movement composed of various different factions, loosely affiliated with each other, such as Muslims and non-Muslims, Turks and non-Turks and the secular and the religious, their common goal being to dethrone Abdulhamid II. See M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁴⁶⁷ Ebdurrehim Rehmi, "Piyesa Kurdî: Memê Alan," Jin No 15 (March 30 1919) in M. Emin Bozarslan Vol 3, 674.

Hekarî combined in this work commitment to the Kurdish nation and religion at the same time. He uses a religious concept, *jihad*, to define Kurdish national awareness. Stating that his forefathers followed the way of jihad for the protection of homeland and religion, Hekarî presented the idea that members of the Kurdish community have a strong national and religious consciousness. He indicated in Meme Alan's (the protagonist) words the ideal commitment of a Kurd to his homeland and religion. This presentation involves the coincidence of religious and national boundaries.⁴⁶⁸ Going for a *jihad* will exalt the name of the Kurdish nation. Although Meme Alan was married to his beloved Xezal for only one week he was able to choose leaving her and risking death in order to fight to protect his people. The play highlights the concept that "the love for the motherland is greater than any other love;"⁴⁶⁹ that is why these passionate lovers are able to separate. Kurds are expected, in Hekarî's depiction, to put their love of nation and religion ahead of their love for their families, their lovers, and themselves.

At one time the Kurds had been the nation most loyal to the Ottomans; they fought for them, yet Kurdish land was devastated as a result of fighting for the Ottomans in World War I, he thought.⁴⁷⁰ With the fall of the Ottomans, the Kurds were now left to their own devices. He was cognizant that the best thing Kurds could do in the early twentieth century was to guarantee their survival as a nation first, they had "to get up and rebel against (their) servitude, how long could (they) stay a slave?"⁴⁷¹ He reasoned that Kurds were responsible to take care of their own unity and survival whatever that would take. In a world under

⁴⁶⁸ Brubaker, 9.

⁴⁶⁹ Rehmi, "Pîyesa Kurdî: Memê Alan," 677.

⁴⁷⁰ Ebdurrehim Rehmi, "Halê Me Yê Hazir," *Jîn* No 6, (December 25 1918) in M. Emin Bozarslan Vol 2, 347.

⁴⁷¹ Ebdurrehim Rehmi, "Gazîya Dûmahîkê," *Jîn* No 23, (August 28 1919) in M.Emin Bozarslan Vol 5, 977.

nationalism's command, Kurds had to prove with their pens and their efforts that they were the overwhelming majority in the region.⁴⁷² The Modern concept of nationalism provided that nations could make a claim to the right of control of a territory, and of political identity and autonomy as a people, by proving that the nation has always existed with its particular character, language, race, culture and religion.⁴⁷³ He wrote:

“Once Wilson decreed that the Turks not be given the areas populated by non-Turkish nations, and the area we Kurds live is called Kurdistan. Except for a few Ottoman officials it is not populated by Turks. If it is not populated by Turks, is it Armanians who are living here? Armanians do not even make five percent of Kurds, they can hardly be two percent...Europe does not recognize us, they do not know the overwhelming majority of Kurds. They think Kurdistan is Armenians'. If we had worked harder to make ourselves known to the world...if we do not, Armenians will take our land.”⁴⁷⁴

If Kurds could not demonstrate their ownership of Kurdistan in the same way, their religion would be wiped out as a result.⁴⁷⁵ Therefore, Hekarî reasoned, the Kurdish struggle for nationhood, within the framework of nationalism as the time required, was religiously necessitated.

Hekarî's Jihad: Proving Self-determination of the Kurdish Nation

Other than defending the nation through physical jihad, Hekarî also upheld the notion of 'jihad of the pen' as a way to prove the self-determination of the Kurds. Jihad is a comprehensive religious concept, and Hekarî emphasized the concept as striving for the Kurdish nation through writing: it was the jihad of the pen. Hekarî believed in writing

⁴⁷² Ebdurrehim Rehmi, “Halê Me Yê Hazir,” 347.

⁴⁷³ Umut Özkirimli, *Theories of nationalism: a critical introduction* (Basingstoke, Hampshire [England]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 58.

⁴⁷⁴ Ebdurrehim Rehmi, “Halê Me Yê Hazir,” 347.

⁴⁷⁵ Ebdurrehim Rehmî, “Biçûkê Negirît Memikê Naxut,” *Jîn* No 5, (December 12 1918), in M.Emin Bozarslan Vol 1, 309.

newspapers in the three key languages of the time: Kurdish, Turkish, and French. Kurdish was needed to awaken Kurds to awareness of their rights and to let them know about the developing circumstances of the world.⁴⁷⁶

Hekarî invoked and supplied different aspects of jihad as a necessary component of the way to national self-determination. Kurdish existence was threatened, based on the Wilsonian principles of self-determination that they could only have a right to Kurdistan if they were the majority. The most effective way for Kurds to counteract was by presenting evidence and convincing Europe of the Kurdish right to Kurdistan, which Hekarî evaluated as their jihad. Hekarî's notion of jihad of the pen was influenced by Nursi's concept of "jihad of the word," as Hekarî found writing more effective than rifles in his time.⁴⁷⁷ Similarly, Nursi categorized jihad in a war as an external jihad, and he argued that jihad, as the strife to uphold the Word of God in the twentieth century, was only possible through attaining "the immaterial swords of civilization, material progress, truth and justice that would rout and scatter the enemy in place of the physical sword."⁴⁷⁸ It was not through force but by persuasion that "Islam is worthy of being loved civilized Europe could be conquered."⁴⁷⁹ In parallel to this type of jihad, Hekarî believed that Europe must be persuaded of the Kurds' right to Kurdistan, which could be best achieved through jihad of the pen. This is an intertwining of religious and national boundaries, which involves inflection of nationalist discourse.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁶ Ebdurrehim Rehmî, "Biçûkê Negirî Memikê Naxut," 310.

⁴⁷⁷ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Zengin Müslüman Kardeşlerime," *Ehli Sünnet* No 26, (December 26 1947): 19.

⁴⁷⁸ Şükran Vahide, "Nursi's Interpretation of Jihad" in İbrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 97.

⁴⁷⁹ Vahide, 97.

⁴⁸⁰ Brubaker, 9.

At another level, Hekarî's jihad of the pen meant Kurdish educational development in science. Again, he was influenced by Nursi's concept of non-physical jihad. Nursi described three enemies; ignorance, poverty and conflict that Muslims had to fight against, which in fact prevented them from genuinely upholding the Word of God in the twentieth century,⁴⁸¹ the age of civilization and science. Hekarî was troubled that the Kurds were not only landless, weak, dispossessed, and uneducated but also bereft of a goal for the development of their society. Hekarî complained that Kurds attached more importance to giving a luxurious feast than donating to build a madrasa or a *mektep* (secular school).⁴⁸² Each individual of the Armenian nation, by contrast, contributed to the benefit of their nation by means of his or her profession and abilities--writers with their writings, scholars with their knowledge, politicians with their use of language, bank owners with their money.⁴⁸³ Other nations recognized the worth of uniting; their little money and little knowledge became huge when pooled together. The divided Kurds were deprived of these profits, and they were not even in an awareness of their loss. "We are still in the sleep of ignorance. If it were otherwise, we would have already guaranteed Kurdish survival."⁴⁸⁴ Like many of his contemporaries, he pronounced that Kurds were a "nation of fractions"⁴⁸⁵ and wrote essays on the importance of national unity for Kurdish endurance. Hekarî reasoned that Kurdish disunity was caused by pure ignorance and self-interestedness, valuing personal or tribal honor over national honor.⁴⁸⁶ Hekarî blamed ignorance for bringing distress, hatred, and injustice to the Kurds

⁴⁸¹ Vahide, 97.

⁴⁸² Ebdurrehim Rehmî, "Jibo Nesla Têt," *Jîn* No 8, (January 9 1919) in M.Emin Bozarslan Vol 2, 409.

⁴⁸³ Ebdurrehim Rehmî, "Piçikokek îbret," *Jîn* No 8, (January 9 1919) in M. Emin Bozarslan Vol 2, 410.

⁴⁸⁴ Ebdurrehim Rehmî, "Xewa Me," *Jîn* No 1, (November 7 1918), in M. Emin Bozarslan Vol 1, 194.

⁴⁸⁵ Ebdurrehim Rehmî, "Destê Tenê Deng Jê Nayêt," *Jîn* No 5, (December 12 1918), in M. Emin Bozarslan Vol 1, 308.

⁴⁸⁶ Rehmî, "Destê Tenê Deng Jê Nayêt," 308.

and also crippling them, since it disabled them from achieving their potential.⁴⁸⁷ This ignorance, for Hekarî, demonstrated itself in the Kurds' rejection of science; the "science" studied in Kurdish madrasas was only Arabic grammar. His jihad, striving for Kurdish survival by the most effective means, required that Kurds do more than excel in Arabic, especially at a time when other languages had more critical importance for the Kurds. Kurds must also write in Turkish⁴⁸⁸ to get the help of Muslims around the world, Hekarî wrote, and must be eloquent in French to be heard by Europeans.⁴⁸⁹ "Crying out"⁴⁹⁰ through writing would be the most effective way to draw attention to the plight of the Kurds, for it was only through making their voice heard that Kurdish rights would be recognized. It seemed to Hekarî that there was a lack of effort for the Kurdish common good and it was very worrying, especially among other nations that were newly awakened and retaking their lands by means of science and development, not by war.⁴⁹¹ Hekarî's criticism against madrasas for not providing scientific education was in line with secular critiques of madrasas.⁴⁹²

Hekarî's Fight with the Sheikhs: Removing the Obstacles in front of Kurdish Self-Determination

Hekarî with his madrasa background and ties to religious elite, still ruthlessly critiqued Sufi sheikhs, which challenges the Kurdish Marxist interpretation of sheikhs'

⁴⁸⁷ Ebdurrehim Rehmî, "Nezanîn," *Jîn* No17, (April 26 1919), in M. Emin Bozarslan Vol 4, 758.

⁴⁸⁸ Many Kurdish intellectual elites like Hekari himself knew Ottoman Turkish at the time.

⁴⁸⁹ Ebdurrehim Rehmî, "Biçûkê Negirît Memikê Naxut," 310.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 310.

⁴⁹¹ Ebdurrehim Rehmî, "Xewa Me," 194.

⁴⁹² Indeed, Hekari was not the only conservative who envisioned a reform for the madrasa education. Amit Bein, in his critical study of the ulema during transition from Ottoman state to Turkish Republic, sets forth the desire to reform madrasa education among Ottoman ulema; many were proud that the secular subjects were included in the curricula of İstanbul madrasas, before they were all abolished by the secular state. Amit Bein, 75.

exploitation only as a class struggle between the elite and the peasants. There was a growing sense among the religiously educated elite as well against the exploitation of Islamic mysticism by unqualified sheikhs as they exhibited their concern in writing and in conversations. Hekarî was troubled by these sheikhs in Kurdish society whom he blamed for preventing Kurds from getting educated and for exploiting Kurds' wealth. These sheikhs were true obstacles in front of the educational jihad Hekarî was defending. He differentiated between true sheikhs and false ones, the latter of which exhibited immoral characteristics. He alleged that the usage of religious titles such as sheikh and *alim* (scholar) by the unqualified only worked to harm religion since the unqualified would give advice contrary to Islamic faith and practice. It was the ill-intentioned false sheikhs, according to Hekarî, who should be blamed, not the sheikhhood as a whole. He critiqued the unqualified group of sheikhs ruthlessly in his unpublished satirical poem, "Come Kiss My Hands," (Werin destê min ramûsin):

Come and kiss my hands, I am the sheikh's son, this is your religious duty.
 Free yourself from any suspicions, show your indebtedness and gratitude.
 If I abandon my daily prayers, there is surely a reason.
 If I stay alone with women, do not let any evil thoughts carry doubt.
 Come and kiss my hands, do not be careless or a denier.
 Although I am not a reader, I am not ignorant.
 I am a scholar without reading; I am unfamiliar with books and sections of the Quran.
 I am like an axe in knowledge and scythes in wickedness.
 I am a double-headed axe, pious when close to Muslims.
 I am a carouser, have no knowledge of wisdom.
 Even if my actions are not in the way of Sharia, I am still the sheikh's son.
 I own the horses and the headgear (order).
 I do not remember God, nor do I send greetings to the Prophet,
 Yet I am the lodestar of the age when among other people.
 Come and kiss my hands, bring gifts in abundance.
 It is my religious duty to receive goods from you,
 Though these goods are like hand's dirt, I do not ask them as a Sufi,
 Yet it is your religious duty to give them, I am the sheikh's son, I show reluctance (in accepting your gifts).⁴⁹³ (see Figure 4)

⁴⁹³ I thank Abdusselam Bêcirmanî for sharing this poem with me. Here is the original poem:
"Werin destê min ramûsin, kurê şêx im, li we ferz e
Di wê de hûn nekin şibhe, li ser we minnet û qerz e

*Eger terka nimêjan ez bikim, tê de heye hikmet
Digel Jînkên bikim xilwet, ewê hûn qet (asla)nekin tihmet
Werin destê min ramûsin, nebin munkir, nebin xafil
Eger çendan nexwînîm ez, dîsa ez nabîme cahil
Nexwendî alim im, lewre kîtab û cuzê nanas im
Di ilmê de wekî tevr im, di nefê de wekî das im
Ku tevrekî duser im ez, li nik mislimanan biteqwa me
Li nik ehlê hewaxan im, ji heqîqet bêxeber mame
Eger çendan miwafiqê şer'ê e'falê xwe qe nabînim
Welakîn ez kurê şêx im, xwedanê hesp û dizgîn im
Ne zîkr e min, ne tehlîl e, selawatan qe naxwînîm
Dema ku biçîme nav qewman, ez im qutbê zeman ew dem
Werin destê min ramûsin, diyariyan gelek bînin
Li ser min ferz e, ku malê dinê ji destê we bistînim
Qirêja destî ye çendan, bi derwêşî qe naxwazim
Welakîn serfêkirin ferz e, kurê şêx im xwedan-naz im.”*

وەرن دێت مین راموسین
 وەرن دێت مین راموسین، کوری شیخ لوه فرضه،
 دویا هون نین شېهه، لسهوه میت و فرضه،
 اگر تره بھیران از بلم تیدا هییه جلمت،
 د کل ترنهان بلم خلوه اوی هون و ط نلن لامت،
 وەرن دێت مین راموسین، نه بن مینار، نه بن فافل،
 اگر چندان نه خویم از، دیسا از نا بسمه جاهل،
 نه خویدی عالم لورا کتاب و جزئی نا ناسم،
 د علمیدا وکی لفریم نه نغییدا وکی دا صم،
 گو طفری دوسر ان لیک سسلانان بتقومه
 لیک اهل هوا خانم، و حقیقت بی خیر نامه
 اگر چندان موافق شرعی افعال خورق نا بینم،
 ولین از کوری شیخ خدان کسپ و در لینم،
 نه دگره مین تهلیل، صلواتان قد نا خویم،
 ده ما کو بچھ نا ف قومان، از م قطب زه ما اودهم،

Figure 4 Hekari's unpublished poem in Kurdish, Werin Destê Min Ramûsin
 Source: Courtesy of Abdusselam Becirmani, İstanbul, May 2013.

Hekarî's poem used satirical language directed not only to the false sheiks but also towards their blind followers. People's ignorance only played into sheikhs' hands and prolonged their authority. Behind his satire, Hekarî summoned people to refuse to respect these sheikhs and not to kiss their hands, reminiscent of Cegerxwîn's call in his 1943 poem, when these sheikhs already abandoned their prayers and walked contrary to the way of Islamic practice.

Third Phase: Growing Concern for Islamic Awareness in Republican Turkey

In this period, his concern for the religious rights of all Muslims in Turkey appears to have grown greater than his concern for Kurdish freedom. Hekarî declared *Ehl-i Sünnet* to be “a traveling school for religious study.”⁴⁹⁴ His journal's purpose, Hekarî said, was to inject Islamic consciousness into Muslims and it was devoted to the benefit of the Muslim community, *umma*. Hekarî enthusiastically supported the concept of *umma* at this time as before, although under the Turkish republican period, when the caliphate institution was abolished, the notion of *umma* gained new meanings for him. It was no longer an Ottomanist vision, he envisioned it on a global level. Hekarî foresaw that spreading “the truths of the Qur'an”⁴⁹⁵ in order to strengthen the *umma*, Muslim unity, must be the most valuable jihad of his pen, at a time when “communists, missionaries, and Freemasons”⁴⁹⁶ would benefit from the dispersal of Muslims. He explained that the goal of his journal was to “offer the necessary Islamic knowledge to Muslims.”⁴⁹⁷ For this purpose, he published a series on various Islamic

⁴⁹⁴ Appeared on the contents page of each *Ehli Sünnet* journal.

⁴⁹⁵ Abdurrahim Zapsu, “İmam Hatip Mektepleri ve Ben,” *Ehli Sünnet*, No 115, (June 15 1952): 9.

⁴⁹⁶ Abdurrahim Zapsu, “Vicdani Umumiden bir Sual,” *Ehli Sünnet*, No 97, (April 1951): 9.

⁴⁹⁷ “Ehli Sünnetin Kütüphanesi,” *Ehli Sünnet*, No 62, (June 15 1949): 16.

topics, such as faith, rituals, jurisprudence, and the Qur'an's interpretations, which he stated would easily constitute a religious library.⁴⁹⁸ He advised his readers to give heed to the specific jihad of their time. He maintained that jihad takes its shape in accordance with the circumstances of time, sometimes through fighting, sometimes through advice and sometimes through writing.⁴⁹⁹ Those who could not write at this time of jihad of the pen were faced with the religious responsibility, *fard*, at least to support the publication that would speak for Muslims. For Hekarî it was not a time to build mosques when there was an urgent need to finance Islamic publications.⁵⁰⁰ His pen ruthlessly targeted the journalists, so-called sheikhs and scholars, and Turkish politicians who spread ideas destructive to Islam. He said his faith, his conscience, and his patriotism compelled him to speak out against the injustices Muslims confronted. He declared he would not quail at any threat, curse, or harm he might face in this cause, such as the Kemalist labeling of every opposition as fanaticism (*taassup*), backwardness (*irtica*),⁵⁰¹ bigotry (*yobazlık*), backwardness (*örümcek kafalılık*), being a rightist (*sağcılık*) or as disrespect to Atatürk, or rebellion against the state.⁵⁰²

Hekarî's struggle with the false sheikhs increased in the third phase of his writings, the 1950s, as he published many articles about them in his *Ehl-i Sünnet* journal. In this journal

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁹⁹ "Ehli Sünnet Üçüncü Cildini Bitirirken," *Ehli Sünnet*, No 71, (November 1 1949): 11.

⁵⁰⁰ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Zengin Müslüman Kardeşlerime," 19.

⁵⁰¹ The *irtica* (religious reactionism) discourse is commonly used in Turkish official historiography as a highly dangerous threat undermining the secular foundations and the established order of the new Republic.

⁵⁰² Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Bunu yaptın taassup, bunu yaptın irtica, bunu yaptın yobazlık, bunu yaptın fodlacılık, bunu yaptın örümcek kafalılık, bunu yaptın rejime muhalefet, bunu yaptın Atatürk'e hurmetsizlik, bunu yaptın hükumete itaatsizlik, bunu yaptın fırka disiplinine karşı gelmek, bunu yaptın....bunu yaptın...bunu yaptın...korkularıyla dİlimi tutacak degİlim ya!..Benim de fikrim var, dusuncem var, hayat hakkim var, ictimai mevkiim var, kalem hurriyetim var, vicdan hurriyetim var, vatanimla alakam var, milletimin ahlakiyla, seciyesiyle, imaniyla, kulturuyla, aldigi cereyani ile vazifeliyim...Yapmak ve yaptırmak kudretinde degilsem de soylemek ve yazmak zorundayim.Cunku vicdanim bana emrediyor; imanım bunu ihtar ediyor; vatanperverliğim bunu iktiza ediyor. Hicbir koltukta gozum yoktur, hic bir ocuden korkmayacagim, hicbir hafiyenin jurnaline ehemmiyet vermeyecegim, hicbir afaroza kulak asmayacagim...Vicdanimin butun mahsullerini pazara dokecegim." See Zapsu, "Sağcılık Ne Demektir?" *Ehli Sünnet* No 59, (May 1949): 10.

Hekarî's category of the "false sheikhs" broadened to include non-Kurdish sheikhs and dervishes. Therefore, from the late 1940s on, Hekarî's jihad of the pen moved to a different field, at least in his publications. He wrote that there were organized attempts inside and outside Turkey after World War II, to put the religion and unity of Muslims at great risk.⁵⁰³ In the 70th issue of *Ehl-i Sünnet*, Hekarî blamed false sheikhs and dervishes for leading people astray and claimed that some of them were in the service of Christian missionaries.⁵⁰⁴ As a way to disqualify the practices of false sheikhs, Hekarî created a section in every issue of the journal where he wrote extensively on the nature of Sufism and the Sufi practices:⁵⁰⁵

We will try to explain true Sufism in these lines. We will try counseling Muslims on how to abstain from false sheikhs and false dervishes. The Sufism we will explore is the essence of *shariah*. Sufism and shariah complement each other in the religion of Islam; they are not exclusive of one another. Whoever talks about them as two opposites are the adversaries of Muslims. They are neither sheikhs, dervishes, Sufis nor Muslims at all.⁵⁰⁶

In Hekarî's framing, the "deceitful and charlatan sheikhhood" is wrapped in supersititions and is one of the five great enemies of the faith.⁵⁰⁷ He charged the false sheikhs with hypocrisy in religion. They embraced a pious appearance and looked religiously devoted

⁵⁰³ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "İslam Birliği" *Ehli Sünnet*, No 51, (January 1 1949): 10.

⁵⁰⁴ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Hiçbir Hain El İslam Birliğini Parçalayamaz," *Ehli Sünnet*, No 70, (October 15 1949): 9. Among them were some writers and also a leading figure of secular Kurdish nationalism, Abdullah Cevdet, according to Hekarî. He satirized him with an episode in *Ehl-i Sünnet*. In this short episode, Abdullah Cevdet was complaining to his friend about a typing error in one of his publications. As he planned to write *I am the orphaned (öksüz) of this nation*, he wrongly typed *I am the ox (öküz) of this nation*, missing a letter in Turkish. And his friend tells him not to worry since it was not an error of typing, it was the fairness of typing. See Latifeci, "Hatai Mürettip," *Ehli Sünnet* No 43, (September 1, 1948): 15.

⁵⁰⁵ The discourse on some deceitful men who falsely invoked Sufism is a historical debate among Sufis and those criticizing Sufism. For instance, the pre-modern Islamic scholar and Sufi, Qushayri (b.986) in his famous *ar-Risala al-Qushayriyya* aimed to address both Sufis and those doubting the legitimacy of Sufism and show that the creed of Sufism was identical to that of the followers of the Prophet's traditions (*Ehli Sünnet*), See Hamid Algar, "Introduction," in Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, translated by B.R. Von Schlegell, (New York: Mizan Press, 1990), x, xi.

⁵⁰⁶ "Tasavvuf Nedir?" *Ehli Sünnet* No 27, (January 1948):12.

⁵⁰⁷ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "İslam Kardeşler, İmanın Düşmanlarından Kendinizi Koruyunuz," *Ehli Sünnet* No 31-5, (March 1, 1948): 4. He includes in it Communism, missionaries, Alevitism, Masonism, and deceitful sheikhhood.

to gain respect.⁵⁰⁸ Another enemy of Muslims were the communists--or the “red atheists” as Hekarî called them—who, he argued, employed this ruse as well; and they masked themselves under Islamic garments, wore the green turban or Sufi hat, yet they devalued Islamic prayers and let any vice and indecency be practiced.⁵⁰⁹ Hekarî judged that these people targeted Muslim unity by being in the service of communists, Christian missionaries, and Alevis,⁵¹⁰ the “enemies of faith.”⁵¹¹

In addition, Hekarî employed in *Ehl-i Sünnet*, like his Turkish contemporaries, the Turkish Islamic discourse to weaken Kemalism’s ethnic nationalism and rigid secularism as part of his jihad of the pen. There he defined himself as a Muslim Turk, as the main author and the editor. He differentiated between “true Muslim Turks” and “fake godless Turks,” the latter of whom he deemed responsible for the persecution of Kurds and Muslim Turks. Thus, he did not see the entire Turkish history as a continuing process of Kurdish exploitation. He inserted in the journal the relative educational and economic deprivation of the Kurdish region, and his open letters of criticism against government policies. Hekarî shared the Kurdish historiographical anger toward Turkish republican policy against the dispossession of the Kurds and against what he called “qetlê-amê,” massacres, in Dersim and Ağrı. He

⁵⁰⁸ “Müslümanlık Nedir?” *Ehli Sünnet* No 61, (June 1940): 12.

⁵⁰⁹ Abdurrahim Zapsu, “İslam Birliği,” *Ehli Sünnet* No 51, (January 1, 1949): 10.

⁵¹⁰ Hekari also discusses that Alevism was created by Christian missionaries in order to create sectarianism among Muslims. He argues that there are Alevis in Merzifon, Turkey who practice Islam exactly the same way as Sunnis, although they are classified as Alevis. However, he does not explain how this process happened clearly, see Zapsu, “Hiçbir Hain El İslam Birliğini Parçalayamaz,” *Ehli Sünnet*, No 70, (October 15, 1949): 9.

⁵¹¹ Abdurrahim Zapsu, “İslam Kardeşler, İmanın Düşmanlarından Kendinizi Koruyunuz,” *Ehli Sünnet* No 34-8, (April 1948): 4. Although Alevis in Turkey have some similar beliefs with Shiis in the central place they give to Ali, the cousin of Prophet Muhammad, Hekari argued that Alevis were not Ali’s followers. He contended that the word Alevi came from *alev*, fire, describing that it was Zoroastrians worshipping fire who established this belief. Regarding that some Kurds in Turkey were Alevis, and Zoroastrianism was a historic Kurdish religion, Zapsu’s marginalization of those faiths and his attack on communism revealed how he still considered Kurdish nationalism very differently than the Marxist nationalists.

criticized the rigid secular reforms under the Turkish republic, such as the removal of religious education from schools and the closing of the madrasas, which caused religious ignorance in general. For instance, there was a shortage of appointed imams to carry out funeral ceremonies even in villages such as Başkale in Van, known for its number of prominent religious scholars fifty years earlier.⁵¹² Inside Turkey, Hekarî noted, many Turkish newspapers were under communist and missionary influence, and the Turkish radio station was occupied by Western music.⁵¹³ Outside Turkey, it was circulated that Turks were no longer Muslims and they should be emulated by other Muslim communities. Hekarî heard this from two Muslim diplomats attending the Islam and Youth Conference held in Pakistan in 1951.⁵¹⁴

Hekarî's battle with the 'hypocrites' in the Republican period brought to his attention the government-appointed religious preachers, some of whom seemed to him to be advising Muslims contrary to Islamic jurisprudence on issues of daily prayer and fasting⁵¹⁵ and interpretation of the religious texts. For instance, he viewed it unfortunate that one preacher in İstanbul's Yeni Mosque interpreted the six arrows in the Republican People's Party's (RPP) symbolism as corresponding to six Qur'anic verses.⁵¹⁶ Hekarî ridiculed the "RPP propagandist" preacher in his journal's satire section as "Abdul Ata," a slave of Atatürk.⁵¹⁷ He also targeted the silence of the *dersiams* (government-appointed mullahs) in the face of

⁵¹² Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Milletin Büyük Bir Sevinçle Karşılacağı Kanun Tasarısı," *Ehli Sünnet*, No 28-2, (January 15, 1948): 4.

⁵¹³ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Vicdani Umumiden bir Sual," 9.

⁵¹⁴ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Vicdani Umumiden bir Sual," 9.

⁵¹⁵ "Yarım Alim Din Götürür," *Ehli Sünnet*, No 42-16, (August 15, 1948): 9.14.

⁵¹⁶ "Ramazan Mevazeleri," *Ehli Sünnet*, No 114, (June 15, 1952): 9.

⁵¹⁷ Latifeci, "Abdul Ata," *Ehli Sünnet*, No 114, (June 15, 1952): 16.

the *31 Mart* and *Menemen* incidents⁵¹⁸ when the acts of “ignorant Dervish Vahdeti”⁵¹⁹ were labeled by the secular government as *irtica*, reactionary acts, of Muslims.⁵²⁰ Hekarî argued that the *dersiams* should have explained, by using scholarly language, that Dervish Vahdeti was not representative of all Muslims.⁵²¹ By failing to do so, *dersiams* contributed to the *irtica* discourse, or reactionism, of the secular government against the religious people. The sarcastic writer in *Ehl-i Sünnet*, Hekarî himself, ironically stated that the mosque preachers did not speak their own thoughts but were directed in their speech,⁵²² referring to the government’s influence. Hekarî condemned the state-appointed unqualified mullahs. He mostly showed concern for Muslims in Turkey as the secular government’s strong control of religion increased.

Hekarî was aware that not only the Kurdish madrasa tradition, Sufism, and the sheikhs, but also folk Islam in Turkey was persecuted by “state Islam.”⁵²³ As early as the beginning of the Republic, its revolutionary reforms against Islamic practices were justified by the government in Islamic terms.⁵²⁴ The abolition of the caliphate, for example, was backed as a restoration of the true Islamic government practiced by the four Rightly Guided

⁵¹⁸ The 31 Mart rebellion was a coup in 1909, led by Dervish Vahdeti in İstanbul, aiming to put an end to the Second Constitutional Era and restore Abdul Hamid II to his position as the absolute monarch. The Menemen Incident was a protest in 1930 against the secularizing reforms of the government calling for the restoration of Sharia and the Caliphate. Some soldiers sent by local authorities were killed during the demonstrations.

⁵¹⁹ He was a journalist accused of instigating the 31 March incident asking for the restoration of sharia.

⁵²⁰ Abdurrahim Zapsu, “Dersiamlara,” *Ehli Sünnet* No 35, (May 1, 1948): 11.

⁵²¹ He says, “we are against this senseless and treacherous attack of Dervish Vahdeti more than you are for we consider anyone who employs a sacred word for his personal animosity as cursed.” In Turkish: “*Biz Derviş Vahdeti’nin bu şuursuz ve hainane kasdine sizden fazla düşmanız çünkü mukaddes bir kelimeyi şahsi garaza alet eden herkes bizce melundur.*” See *Ehli Sünnet* No 37, (June 1, 1948): 5.

⁵²² Latifeci, “İpin Ucu,” *Ehli Sünnet*, No 26, (December 26, 1947): 3.

⁵²³ M. Hakan Yavuz. *Islamic political identity in Turkey*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 54.

⁵²⁴ Amit Bein, 108.

Caliphs.”⁵²⁵ It was only a couple of years earlier that people suffered from state-sponsored preachers propagating the Turkification of prayers, the Qur’an, and the call to prayer.⁵²⁶ These preachers supported the Turkification of prayers on the grounds that people could better appreciate the meaning of religious practices in their native language, which was, for Hekarî, only argued to mask the government’s anti-religious intentions. Hekarî opined that it was only civil society attempts, not the Turkish state apparatus, that were able to answer the religious needs of Muslims. He reported receiving letters from individuals complaining about the unqualified preachers and their fatwas.⁵²⁷ He wrote that he did not trust the Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA). Like many Kurdish Muslim intellectuals and religious leaders, Hekarî prioritized Islamic awareness and Islamic education of Muslims and held the government responsible for its anti policies mostly on that ground.⁵²⁸ Although Hekarî’s concern for Kurds seems to become a secondary issue compared to religious freedom in *Ehli Sünnet*, his critique of the PRA was also very relevant to his concern for Kurdish free practice of Islam, madrasas and Islamic mysticism.

⁵²⁵ Bein, 109. It was argued that the true spirit of the original Islamic government was ended by the Umayyads, which got even worse later and the new Turkish regime made an effort to restore the genuine Islamic government in the shape of republicanism.

⁵²⁶ Yavuz. Islamic political identity in Turkey, 50.

⁵²⁷ Such a fatwa was against some ladies who entered into mosque without a headscarf. The preacher attacked them for being disbelievers. See, Abdurrahim Zapsu, “Diyanet İşleri Teşkilatından Şikayetler,” *Ehli Sünnet* No 119, (August 15, 1952): 13.

⁵²⁸ Hekari clearly differentiated between them and the single party regime, yet still had a lot of problems with some of the undertakings and affirmations of the 1950s government; he said: “*I do not have any doubts about the sincerity of the current government. Yet I cannot expect it is totally free from the mischiefs of the older ideology and I am not able to believe that wholeheartedly.*” See Zapsu, “Van Üniversitesi,” *Ehli Sünnet* No 102, 1951, 13. *As for the single party regime he said: “...we would be welcomed by gallows, extra-judicial rules, a chain of insult, an istiklal court⁵²⁸, loads of detectives, police search and filings, and we would only be able to breath in a coffin (in any opposition). For it was a one party, one ruler, one will, one controlling, one rule and one person. Today, thanks God, we have democracy, human rights, freedom of conscience, religion and press...”* See Zapsu, “Sayın Celal Bayar’a Açık Mektup,” *Ehli Sünnet*, No 116, (July 1952): 7.

Religion Under Acceptable Norms of the Secular State: PRA, İmam-Hatip Junior-Highschools against Kurdish madrasas and Sufism

With the rise of Islamic thought in Turkey since the late 1940s, the secular nationalist state was alarmed and wanted to control the Islamic awakening so that it would not become a threat to the state ideology.⁵²⁹ The opening of *İmam-Hatips*, for example, can be considered among the state's religion-controlling attempts in the late 1940s and 1950s. The state would be able to lead the Islamization of the public towards norms acceptable to the regime.⁵³⁰ The PRA was also under the control of the government, preventing the free and diverse practice of religion. Nearly half of Hekarî's writings in *Ehl-i Sünnet* were spared for discussions on how to get government-related schools and the PRA to function better.⁵³¹ The PRA and *İmam-Hatips* were obstacles in front of the free practice of Kurdish madrasas and Kurdish Sufi tradition as well.

Hekarî's essential criticism of the PRA was that it was tightly controlled by the government, whereas determination of religious orthodoxy should be more detached and independent in a secular state.⁵³² He wrote numerous letters to the PRA critiquing its submission to government intervention and advising on their poor organizational structure and hiring of unsophisticated and insulting preachers.⁵³³ Hekarî defended the traditional *sufi*

⁵²⁹ Bozkurt Güvenç, *Türk-İslam Sentezi*, (İstanbul: Sarmal Yayınevi, 1991), 234.

⁵³⁰ Güvenç, 234.

⁵³¹ These articles focused on PRA-appointed preachers, İmam Hatip school and divinity school curriculums, criticism against the PRA and expectations.

⁵³² "Diyanet İşlerini Tenkid Ediyoruz," *Ehl-i Sünnet* No 118, August 1 1952, 9. Ironically, Hekari did not oppose the establishment of a Sunni Muslim PRA despite the variety of religions practiced in Turkey. He viewed Alevism, as mentioned earlier, the second majority practiced faith in Turkey, as one of the enemies of Islamic faith.

⁵³³ Instead of providing a source of religious truth for citizens, based on proper Islamic jurisprudence, the PRA was totally managed to comply with secular government acts, Hekari charged, at the cost of harming the image of Islam.⁵³³ Hekari questioned the preachers' organization of the PRA for letting some preachers speak against the beliefs of Turkish Muslims.⁵³³ Hekari maintained that true religious scholars in history had always resisted

identification of the Kurds against the homogenizing efforts of the Turkish state. After all, Hekarî was trained under a *Naqshi sufi* himself.⁵³⁴ For instance, Hekarî complained that ‘travelling preachers’ that the PRA sent to the Kurdish region in 1950⁵³⁵ were charged to prevent dissent and create religious unity. He thought the PRA ordered them to work to disestablish the common *sufi* traditions in the area,⁵³⁶ which were “breakaways from the straight path of Islam.”⁵³⁷ This was in Hekarî’s opinion a homogenization project, an elimination of the existing different practices of Islam. The project was part of a state agenda to create a homogenized secular and nationalist Turkish identity. The elimination of Sufism was necessitated by the *irtica* discourse of the secular state; the generalization was how sheikhs made use of the religious sensitivities of the people. Instead of the elimination of Sufism, Hekarî proposed, the travelling preachers should be charged to distinguish between the accurate practice of Islamic mysticism (*Sufism*) and the “ignorant indoctrinations” of those claiming to embrace the Sufi way but having nothing to do with Sufi belief and practice.⁵³⁸ He informed the travelling preachers that disavowal of Sufi practice as a whole would bring bad consequences, especially in areas where people have strong spirituality and are quite attached to Sufi practice. He contended that *Naqshbandi* Sufism, which dominated

the state’s interference in religion; they did not comply with the most minute interference of the state into their work and mission.⁵³³ Yet the president of the PRA demonstrated nothing of the historic heroism that was now needed.

⁵³⁴ His teacher at the madrasa, Taha Arvasi, was a *Naqshi Sufi*.

⁵³⁵ BCA Fon Code 0.51. V33, Place No 4.37.5, 31.12.1950, in Metin Yüksel, “Dengbêj, Mullah, intelligentsia: The survival and revival of the Kurdish-Kurmanji language in the Middle East, 1925–1960,” (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2011), 439-443.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 440. The document tells the following: “*İslam dinine aykırı halk arasına tefrika sokacak mahiyetteki gizli ve aşıkâr telkinleri şahsiyata girişmeksizin önleyici vaazlar vermek, bilhassa yapılacak irsat ve telkinlerde tarikat ve tarikatçılık aleyhine ulu orta yürümeyerek bu yoldaki akideler ve hareketlere mukabil İslam yolunu güzelce tebarüz ettirdikten sonra bu dosdoğru yoldan başka ayrıca bir yol olmadığını, şeriatin de, tarikatın de bu olduğunu gereği gibi canlandırmak.*”

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 440. It reads: “*Hususi görüşmeler ve telkinlerde bu gibi şeylerin (tarikat ve tarikatçılık) İslam’dan ayrılmak olduğunu ve bunun neticelerini izah ve telkin etmek.*”

⁵³⁸ “*Seyyar Vaizlere,*” *Ehli Sünnet*, No 67, (September 1, 1949): 1.

the areas where preachers would go—the Kurdish region—is not to be critiqued and weakened just because of the erroneous practice of some people. *Naqshbandi* Sufism, he wrote, had been an old and well-founded practice to be respected; but the traveling preachers must critique their false imitations in their talks.

On the other hand, Hekarî did not trust the graduates of *İmam-Hatips* to be able to meet the faith-related religious needs of the public.⁵³⁹ He supported the opening of *İmam-Hatips* during the multi-party years after 1950, yet he made a lot of theoretical amendments to the *İmam-Hatip* educational structure in his journal, such as proposing a school curriculum. Hekarî was aware of the controversy about the schools, how the single party government initiated a puppet religious institution where the state could impose its ideology and have the practice of religion under its control.⁵⁴⁰ He believed that *İmam-Hatip* schools would only provide religious officials to meet the ritual needs of the public.⁵⁴¹ He called the Minister for Education to account in the face of the ineffectiveness of classes for Imam and Preacher (*İmam-Hatip*) training.⁵⁴² Some graduates of this school were not able to recite *Al-Fatiha*,⁵⁴³ the opening chapter of the Qur'an, which is to be memorized for an accurate performance of daily prayers. People did not pray behind those imams.⁵⁴⁴

⁵³⁹ Zapsu, "İmam Hatip Mektepleri ve Ben," 8. Indeed, it is still debated among current Kurdish madrasa circles that *İmam Hatips* only worked to disqualify madrasa graduates in the Kurdish region. While *İmam-Hatip* graduates are licensed to practice religious leadership, madrasa graduates were denied this right and they were only able get official recognition if they also attended *İmam-Hatip* schools.

⁵⁴⁰ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "İmam ve Hatip Mektepleri," *Ehli Sünnet*, No 104, (December 1951): 7.

⁵⁴¹ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "İmam Hatip Mektepleri ve Ben," 8.

⁵⁴² "İmam Hatip Kurşunun Feci Neticesi," *Ehli Sünnet* No 69, (October 1, 1949): 1.

⁵⁴³ Zapsu, "İmam ve Hatip Mektepleri," 7 and "İmam Hatip Kurşunun Feci Neticesi," 1.

⁵⁴⁴ Zapsu, "İmam ve Hatip Mektepleri," 7. Lale Yalcin Heckman discusses how these appointed religious leaders were still identified as the "religion of the state" and treated differently by the local people in Hakkari in the 1990s. Instead of government appointed mullahs, the local people voluntarily employed a Kurdish mullah from among madrasa graduates, who were often a part of local community through their ethnic background and life style. Lale Yalcin Heckmann, "Ethnic Islam and Nationalism among the Kurds in Turkey, 111, 112.

Hekarî reasoned that the religious education of the children and public could be met only by true scholars of religion raised by *cemaats* (civic religious organizations) and *İmam-Hatip* schools were not capable of training such individuals.⁵⁴⁵ Hekarî was in appreciation of civic attempts and *cemaats*; and their relative freedom from state enforcement. In fact, Kurdish madrasas were also civic attempts, totally funded by locals and run by voluntary mullahs. This is why they were able to continue even clandestinely after the state ban, as opposed to the central madrasas of the Ottoman period. Thus, he brought to attention the unrecognized scholars of the East, who were qualified in Islamic sciences. In another place he warned that the scholars of the country were decreasing in number and precautions should be taken.⁵⁴⁶ Hekarî was putting the madrasa graduates and mullahs in the Kurdish region under spotlights. He contended that each of these scholars was as qualified as the graduates of *Al-Azhar* in Egypt and the state should benefit from them. After offering classes to them on Turkish, literature, philosophy, geography and engineering, they would be ready for a proper religious post in the state offices.⁵⁴⁷ He expressed his regret that the madrasas were closed down and complained about the insufficient number of preachers as a result.⁵⁴⁸ He stated that there was a shortage in the number of preachers in Diyarbakır, for instance, and made an open request to the PRA to offer classes and test their students' qualifications and appoint them as preachers and *muftis*.⁵⁴⁹ Hekarî was surely aware that his offer was contrary to the continuing Kemalist agenda of popularizing its own version of state Islam. The Eastern scholars Hekarî mentioned were raised under their scholar fathers' guidance⁵⁵⁰ in

⁵⁴⁵ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "İmam Hatip Mektepleri ve Ben," 8.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁴⁷ "Yurt Seyahatinden İntibalar," *Ehli Sünnet*, No 112, (May 1952): 9.

⁵⁴⁸ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Diyamet İşlerini Tenkid Ediyorum," *Ehli Sünnet* No 120, (September 1, 1952): 9.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁵⁰ "Yurt Seyahatinden İntibalar," 9.

underground madrasas, so they were considered by the state as involved in illegal activities. Thus, Hekarî's offer was not a simple request; it was a disguised request for the legal recognition of Kurdish madrasas. He requested it anyhow, just like numerous suggestions he offered to the PRA on the structure and the curriculum of the *İmam-Hatips*, which were mostly neglected by the PRA.

Hekarî and Turkishness

Hekarî's use of the word Turk for all his readers⁵⁵¹ complied with the official narrative that everyone in Turkey was Turkish, which denied the existence of different ethnic backgrounds. Atatürk declared that "some citizens of Turkey were exposed to the ideas of Kurdishness, Lazness, Charkazness and Bosnianness, and they were wrongly called with those names. Yet it benefited no one except a few stupid reactionaries."⁵⁵²

Remarkably, Evdirehim Hekarî called himself and people of Turkey Turkish Muslims innumerable times in *Ehl-i Sünnet*. However, Hekarî's definition of Turkishness was different from that of Atatürk's, someone he accused in his unpublished work of ordering a "massacre" against the Kurds in *Dersim* and *Ağrı*, and of not being true to his word to the Kurds.⁵⁵³ In this third phase of his writings, his definition of Turkishness bore resemblance to his Ottomanist vision reflected in his captivity writings, which was not without the inclusion of

⁵⁵¹ He also used Turk as an umbrella term to refer every citizen of Turkey, as he calls the Greek citizens Christian Turks.

⁵⁵² Murat Kılıç, "Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Milliyetçiliğinin Tipolojisi," *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, No 16, December 2007, 119, accessed June 8 2016 <http://dergipark.ulakbim.gov.tr/sufesosbil/article/view/5000057659/5000054734>

⁵⁵³ Geverî, "Di Dewrê Dûmahîkê Yê Osmanî De Şairekî Kurd Ê Berhema Wî Ya Li Ser Tarîxa Kurdan: Evdirrehîm Rehmî Hekarî û "Perek Zêrîn Ji Tarîxê," *Wêje û Rexne* 5, September 14, 2015, 10, accessed November 21, 2016, <https://ayhangeveri.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/ayhan-geveri-nivisa-weje-rexne-hejmar-5-rupel-7-27.pdf>

the Islamic faith. In *Ehli Sünnet*, Hekarî's usage of Turk is accompanied by Islam in many instances. He said he does not recognize a Turkishness not accompanied by faith (*imansız bir Türklük tanımiyoruz*).⁵⁵⁴ He used the words Turk, Islam and Muslim interchangeably.⁵⁵⁵ Turks were “created Muslim” and will live as Muslims.⁵⁵⁶ His identification of Turkishness essentially carried a religious meaning instead of a secular nationalist tone. This is why he did not consider himself as part of the Turkish community who were anti-religious.

Hekarî believed that Turks were of two kinds: the genuine Turks were different than the false ones and the genuine were the overwhelming majority in his thought. He classified the Turks who had harsh policies towards Kurds and Muslims as “false Turks,” and “godless.” The “noble” and “heroic” Turks were praised for being more attached to Islam than the Arabs,⁵⁵⁷ and for fighting at the legendary *Çanakkale*, Dardanelles,⁵⁵⁸ in WWI.

Hekarî was upset with the Turks who were becoming “*dinsiz*,”⁵⁵⁹ godless, in his words, who lacked morals and religious values. Hekarî delineated them as “false Turks” in his unpublished work *Gaziya Welat 4*.⁵⁶⁰ Kemalists who idolized Atatürk⁵⁶¹ were not amongst the genuine Turks, he wrote in *Ehl-i Sünnet*. Hekarî considered many important Turkish

⁵⁵⁴ Abdurrahim Zapsu, “Ruhta İnkılap İstiyoruz,” 12.

⁵⁵⁵ A few examples he used are: “*Siz Müslümanlara bu kelimelerle nasıl hitap ediyorsunuz? Babanız anneniz ve yedi ceddiniz müslüman ve Türk değil midir?*” “*İslam ve Türk olduğumuz için bizim muhitte bundan kötü birşey olamaz...vaizlerden bazıları ehli sünnet itikadına aykırı yani yirmi milyon türk müslümanın itikadına uymayan hareketlerde bulunuyorlar.*” See *Ehli Sünnet*, “Çirkin Kelimler Altında,” *Ehli Sünnet*, No 57, 14-15, *Ehli Sünnet* No.71 (November 1, 1949): 10-11.

⁵⁵⁶ “Gazi Yiğitbaşın Meclisteki Beyanâtı,” *Ehli Sünnet* No 113, 1952, 8.

⁵⁵⁷ Hulusi Bitlisi, “Ortodoks Patriğinin İstanbul’da Tahta Çıkması Dolayısıyla,” *Ehli Sünnet*, No 54, (February 15, 1949): 13.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ehli Sünnet* No 119, (August 15, 1952): 16.

⁵⁵⁹ Geverî, “Evdirehîm Rehmî Hekarî,” 8.

⁵⁶⁰ This is an unpublished work written in 1945. In this work, Hekari reflects why he was disillusioned by Ottomans, which is explanatory for his earlier work *Meme Alan*.

⁵⁶¹ Latifeci, “Latife,” *Ehli Sünnet*, No 135, (June 1, 1953): 16.

presses to have erroneously defined secularism as opposition to religion⁵⁶² and he attacked those who wished to strip Turks of their Islam.⁵⁶³ For instance, in his thought, a writer who “slandered” Mehmed II could not carry Turkish blood and must be bereft of faith and Turkish honor.⁵⁶⁴ Hekarî contended that since the 19th-century Tanzimat reforms, Kurds had been suffering under the hands of these godless Turks. Essentially, Hekarî was one of those whose expectations of the Ottomans were not met properly after the Tanzimat reforms that abolished the Kurdish autonomy of *emirs* and required governance by appointed governors from the central state. Hekarî was also very angry at the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the party that gained power after a revolution in 1908 until 1918. The CUP proclaimed freedom in the country, yet Hekarî defines this freedom as the “devastation of the Kurds.”⁵⁶⁵ In *Gaziya Welat 4*, Hekarî holds the 1856 *Islahat* reforms and 1876 *Tanzimat* order responsible for the inception of the “massacres”⁵⁶⁶ done to Kurds. He critiques the Turkish attempts “to favor and imitate atheistic behavior”⁵⁶⁷ starting at this time. The old “comrade” changed to a “foe,”⁵⁶⁸ he says, therefore the Kurds had to think of their own survival first and foremost. According to Hekarî,

They (Turks) ordered the death of the innocent, the poor, the weak
 And the one voicing God’s name.
 They killed mullahs, sheikhs and aghas, left no honor and chastity.
 They demolished the houses, watered them with blood.
 They left the people who once were loyal to them.
 When did this brutality start?
 With the start of emulating atheism
 With the declaration of Tanzimat and the Reforms⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶² Abdurrahim Zapsu, “Sayin Celal Bayar’a Acik Mektup,” *Ehli Sünnet* No 116, 1952, 7. Hekari says writers interpreted secularism as opposition to religion and insulted Islam in their writings.

⁵⁶³ “Sütunlar Arası Tezvirata Cevap,” *Ehli Sünnet* No.129, (January 15, 1953): 14.

⁵⁶⁴ Abdurrahim Zapsu, “Yeni İstanbul’un Mahiyeti,” *Ehli Sünnet*, No. 126, (December 1, 1952): 10.

⁵⁶⁵ Geverî, “Evdirehîm Rehmî Hekarî,” 8.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁶⁸ Ebdirehim Rehmi, “Wislet,” *Jîn* No 25, (October 2, 1919) in M. Emin Bozarslan Vol. 5, 1047.

⁵⁶⁹ He reforms to the reforms in law and administration by *Islahat Fermanı* in 1856.

The aghas and Kurdish landholders lost their right of governance.⁵⁷⁰

He also wrote in *Gaziya Welat 4* that Atatürk and his group fought against the people's faith and many Kurdish Muslim scholars were put to death.⁵⁷¹ Hekarî openly blamed the members of the single-party government in *Ehl-i Sünnet* as "assassins" attacking the people of Turkey's east,⁵⁷² the Kurds. Speaking of Kemalist Turks who believed Atatürk was the sole savior of Turks excluding the soldiers who fought for independence, he wrote: "Who knows where their seeds came and mixed with us? The true Turks are Muslims; they are with us and are reading the Qur'an and praying to God. It is ordinary to have five or ten *dinsiz*, atheists, among nineteen million. A sea does not get dirty due to the (touch) of a dog's mouth."⁵⁷³

These lines he wrote only two years before he started the publication of *Ehli Sünnet*, in which he treated the state, the Kemalist ideology and Atatürk's personality a lot softer due to state regulations on respecting Atatürk's persona. Hekarî's use of the official state

⁵⁷⁰ Geverî, "Evdirehîm Rehmî Hekarî," 8.

*Wekî cûwan diçû xwûna feqîr û jar û me'sûman
Kesê navê Xudê îna li qetla wî kirin ferman
Mela û şêx û beg kuştin ne namûs û ne 'îrz hiştin
Pez û mal kirine talan navê malê wan bi xwûn şuştin...
Ji bîrsyan hin mirin hin bûn qadîd esla nema wan hal
Ne exlaq û ne namûs ma, ne mulk û xanî û navmal
Gelo ev wehşet û zorî li kengî destî pê kiribûn
Dema çavda fillan teqlîdê kufrê kirin û kafîrbûn
Dema îlani kir Xettê Humayûn got û Tanzîmat
Temamê mîr û beg girtin nema esla me taşkîlat."*

⁵⁷¹ Geverî, "Evdirehîm Rehmî Hekarî," 10.

*"Ewan xûnaxar û bêdînan ku bêheq bêsebeb kuştin
Munewer 'alim û zana ji Kurdan ma qe yek hiştin."*

⁵⁷² Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Van Üniversitesi," *Ehli Sünnet*, No.102, 1951,13.

⁵⁷³ Latifeci, "Latife," *Ehli Sünnet*, No 135, (June 1, 1953): 16, "Üzülme kardeşim üzülme, böyle düşünenler zaten bizden değildir. Kimbilir hangi tohumdan karışmıştır. Asıl müslüman Türkleri bizimle beraberdir. Onlar hem Kur'an okuyorlar, hem de dua ediyorlar. Ondokuz milyon içinde belki beş on kişi dinsiz çıkar. Deniz köpeğin ağzıyla kirlenmez."

discourse of Turkishness, then, only referred to an exclusive category of Turks, among which he could see himself a member.

In the 1950s, Turkey was in transition from the single party period to the religion-friendly multi-party period under Adnan Menderes' (1899-1961) government. In this period, Hekarî expected the Turkishness of the *Menderes* government of 1950 to be more accurate due to its relatively more welcoming approach to religion. He had hopes that the damages of the single party regime would be mended to some extent with the new government. When İsmet İnönü was the prime minister, "it was one party, one ruler, one will, one controlling, one rule and one person."⁵⁷⁴ His government persecuted the Kurds and the religious at the same time. He said the new party, obtaining the majority of votes, "came out from the very bosom of this land."⁵⁷⁵ It was more tolerant towards religious practices, bringing more democracy and freedom to Turkey. It is hard to tell, however, whether Hekarî was satisfied with Turkishness officially defined and propagated during the multi-party period, either. Hekarî still had a lot of problems with some undertakings and affirmations of the 1950 government; "I do not have any doubts about the sincerity of the current government. Yet I cannot expect it is totally free from the mischiefs of the older ideology and I am not able to believe in that wholeheartedly."⁵⁷⁶

For instance, it was "disrespectful to the religious honor of Turkish Muslims,"⁵⁷⁷ he thought, that the president Celal Bayar invited the Pope to Turkey and organized a feast for him during the month of Ramadan. In his open letter just before the elections, he argued with

⁵⁷⁴ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Sayın Celal Bayar'a Açık Mektup," *Ehli Sünnet* No 116, 1952, 7.

⁵⁷⁵ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Van Üniversitesi," *Ehli Sünnet* No. 102, 1951, 13.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 13. "Bugünkü hükümetin samimiyetinden şüphe etmiyorum. Fakat eski zihniyetin kundakçılarında tamamen Kürtülmüş da sayamıyorum ve buna bir türlü inanamıyorum."

⁵⁷⁷ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Sayın Celal Bayar'a Açık Mektup," *Ehli Sünnet* No 116, 1952, 8.

Celal Bayar, who furiously said they would not let the *sharia* and *irtica*⁵⁷⁸ opposition to any improvement exist in Turkey.⁵⁷⁹ Hekarî responded to Bayar's pressure in the pages of *Ehli Sünnet*⁵⁸⁰ and warned Bayar that the Turkish nation carefully listens to what was said against its Turkish Muslim identity. He invited the President to give heed to the voices of the Turkish Muslim spirit,⁵⁸¹ before the elections. He wrote that

Sharia of a religion is composed of commands and orders that regulate the religious life of a particular religious group. For religious people these commands are sacred, while for those without religion these orders were put together by the people, yet they still respect them... This is considered freedom of conscience and it is provided by all contemporary law systems... *Irtica* in Turkish corresponds to decline, going backward, rejecting all kinds of human development, holding on to superstitious belief inherited from one's parents, fighting against the freedom of thought and against the intellectual ability of human mind... Mr. Bayar, how did you relate these two concepts (*sharia* and *irtica*) together? Why did you juxtapose them?⁵⁸²

Hekarî found Bayar's accusation an insult to the Muslim identity of Turks, which to him was a central element of Turkishness. Therefore, the anti-religious defense of Turkishness was outside of the true Turkish Muslim spirit according to Hekarî.

⁵⁷⁸ During the republican period the words of *sharia* and *irtica* were used together as an accusation to the conservatives for being against scientific and modern development.

⁵⁷⁹ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Celal Bayar'a Açık Mektup," *Ehli Sünnet* No 58, (April 15, 1949): 10. He says, *sharia* is from the same root with the words *tashri* and *mashru*, used for judicial explanations of legality. Although Turkey was not following the Islamic judicial *sharia*, it was following the modern *sharia*. He invites him to apologize to the Turkish nation for his ignorant use of the words.

⁵⁸⁰ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Sayın Celal Bayar'a Açık Mektup," *Ehli Sünnet* No 116, 1952, 7-9 and Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Celal Bayar'a Açık Mektup," *Ehli Sünnet* No 58, (April 15, 1949): 10-11.

⁵⁸¹ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Sayın Celal Bayar'a Açık Mektup," *Ehli Sünnet* No 116, 1952, 8.

⁵⁸² Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Celal Bayar'a Açık Mektup," *Ehli Sünnet* No 58, (April 15, 1949): 11. "*Dini şeriat, yani herhangi bir dine mensup olan cemaatin hayatı diniyesini temin eden kanunlar mecmuası ki, biz dindarlara göre bu kanunlar ilahidir, velategayyerdir. Dinsizlere göre de bu kanunlar beşer tarafından kurulmuştur fakat şayanı hümmettir. Bu din ve vicdan hürriyetini bütün medeni kanunlar sağlamıştır... (irtica) bu kelimenin Türkçe mukabili gerilemek, geriye gitmek, bütün terakkileri reddetmek, babadan kalma batıl itikadlara bağlanmak, fikir hürriyetine düşmanlık yapmak, beşer dimağının düşünce kabiliyetine ilanı harp etmek... Sayın Bayar şimdi sizden soruyorum. Yukarıda izah ettiğim şeriatla bu irtica arasında nasıl bir münasebet vardır? Bu iki kelimeyi niçin birleştirdiniz?"*

A Combination of Kurdish and Turkish Muslim Identities

In this third phase of his writing, Hekarî's ethnic identification in his published and unpublished writings contradict each other. Hekarî's use of Turkish Muslim identity in *Ehli Sünnet* seems to have worked only as a disguise for his passionate Kurdish character that he expressed in his unpublished poem in 1945 in *Gaziya Welat* 4. Hekarî penned this poem only two years before his *Ehli Sünnet* publication, yet it entails his strong existing ties to Kurdisness, while he apparently appeared as a Turkish conservative nationalist in *Ehli Sünnet*. His two identifications during the same time period were bound up with broader strategies: Hekarî found legitimacy for effective criticism against the government in the Turkishness discourse. Coming on the scene with a Kurdish identity would not allow him to involve himself actively in political discussions, at least not for many years.

Hekarî's definition of the Turkish Muslim identity borrowed from the ideas of conservative Turkish nationalists on the rise in the 1940s. They amalgamated Turkishness with Islam, producing a cultural product called the "Turkish Islamic synthesis."⁵⁸³ Merging Islam and Turkishness was a response and reaction to the distancing efforts of nationalist secularism. It is argued that the new religious nationalist intellectuals wished to fight effectively against Kemalist nationalism, which alienated Turkish identity from its Islamic roots.⁵⁸⁴ Islamic writers like Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti, Nurettin Topçu, and Necip Fazıl

⁵⁸³ Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on the Roots of "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" in Modern Turkish Political Thought" *Muslim World*, Vol. LXXXIX, No.3-4, (July-October, 1999): 368.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 368 Indeed Atatürk once said, "Turks were a great nation even before they embraced the religion of the Arab. After they accepted the religion of the Arab this religion...loosened the national ties of the Turkish nation; it numbed their national feelings and enthusiasm." ("*Türkler Arapların dinini kabul etmeden evvel de büyük bir millet idi. Arap dinini kabul ettikten sonra bu din... Türk milletinin milli rabitalarını gevşetti; milli hislerini, milli heyecanlarını uyuşturdu.*") See Murat Kılıç, 119.

Kısakürek re-defined Turkish nationalism with an emphasis on Islam as a vital element of Turkish culture, to produce “Turkish Islamic synthesis.” The conservative Muslims were unable to get rid of Kemalism directly; however, linking Islam to Turkishness effectively targeted Kemalism and leftist thought in general. They were inheriting the vision of Mehmed Akif (1873-1936) in the 1920s,⁵⁸⁵ who wrote the Turkish national anthem with its Islamic overtones. Turkishness and Islam were organically tied together so that one could not be imagined without the other.⁵⁸⁶ This new intellectual generation of the late 1940s and 1950s was known to be *milliyetçi muhafazakar*, conservative nationalists, or *milliyetçi mukaddesatçı*, ‘sacred-ist’ nationalists.⁵⁸⁷ They aimed to link Turks to their Islamic past by a nostalgic depiction of the Ottoman era.⁵⁸⁸ In his writings Hekarî depicted any attack on Islamic practice in Turkey as an attack on Turkishness. He also expressed that any contribution to Muslim identity would be a provision for Turkish identity. His publications in *Ehli Sünnet*, such as a tribute to Mehmed Akif⁵⁸⁹ by Bitlisi and poems dedicated to Mehmed II and his conquest of İstanbul, were part of that discourse.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 368.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 368.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 368. From the late 1940s on, the Turkish state worried over Soviet influence and diffusion after World War II. Besides, the end of the single-party regime and the rise of the *Menderes* government in 1950 encouraged Islamic thinkers to fight against communism without facing state repercussions. During the Cold War era, when there was an anti-communist campaign in Turkey, Islamic thinkers had an opportunity to voice their demands for religious freedom. In line with the policy of the USA and its allies, they accused the RPP (Republican People’s Party) of Soviet-like repressive policies against religion. See Bein, 139.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid, 370. According to Gavin Brockett, the secular Turkish reforms were not able eradicate Muslim identities, but they transformed them. The Turkish-Islamic synthesis represented an effort to negotiate a popular national identity that accommodated rather than excluded religious identities. The increasing prominence of Islam in public debate and national politics in recent decades is also the product of this negotiation that began in 1945. See Gavin D. Brockett, *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk: Provincial Newspapers and the Negotiation of a Muslim National Identity*, (Austin, US: University of Texas Press, 2011), 223-224.

⁵⁸⁹ Nesimzade Hulusi Bitlisi, “Mehmet Akif,” *Ehli Sünnet*, No 35, (May 1, 1948): 3.

Hekarî, like his Turkish contemporaries, employed Turkish Islam to fight with and weaken Kemalism's ethnic nationalism and rigid secularism. The Turkish nationalism of the conservatives, however, was not without its excesses and immoderations for Hekarî. He criticized the Turkish Nationalists' Association, known for their religious inclinations, for going to extremes about Turkish nationalism.⁵⁹⁰ What was disturbing to a Kurd like Hekarî was the rise of an exclusivist approach in the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which was similar to the Kemalist nationalist approach.

Hekarî's breaking up with his friend and colleague Necip Fazıl Kısakürek was also related to Kısakürek's Turkish nationalist approach to the Kurdish issue.⁵⁹¹ In 1950, Kısakürek published an article in his *Büyük Doğu* journal (1943-1978) where he characterized the persecution of Kurds in Dersim as an attack of the secular government on Turkish Muslims, not as an offense against the ethnic difference of the Kurdish majority of Dersim. Kısakürek described the Kurds of Dersim as "those who are assumed to be Kurdish are genuine mountain Turks (*halis dağ Türkleri*)...we can consider the entire community in Dersim as Turkish, half being Alevi and half Sunni."⁵⁹² Kısakürek employed the Dersim victims to advance his own Islamist narrative of the Turkish history: the struggle of the religious against the secular authority.⁵⁹³ Besides, although Kısakürek challenged the official silence on the Dersim event by bringing the issue up front, his description of Kurds as

⁵⁹⁰ "Sütunlar Arası Tezvirata Cevap," *Ehli Sünnet* No.129, (January 15, 1953): 14. In the 1960s the Turkish-Islamic synthesis became the ideology of *Aydınlar Kulübü*, the Club of the Illuminated, which included academicians, journalists, and intellectuals like Prof. Ali Fuat Başgil, Arif Nihat Asya, Kemal Ilıcak, Tarık Buğra, and Süleyman Yalçın, who prepared conferences and seminars for an intellectual struggle with leftist thought. They also attempted to bring together all conservatives under one formula; the Turkish-Islamic synthesis was able to shelter together the Islamically-oriented and the Turkists. See Güvenç, 188.

⁵⁹¹ I thank Ayhan Geveî, who had an interview with a Zapsu family member, for sharing this information with me.

⁵⁹² Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, "Doğu Faciası," *Büyük Doğu*, No 18, (February 10, 1950): 3.

⁵⁹³ Sean R. Singer, "Erdogan's Muse the School of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek," *World Affairs* [serial online]. (November 2013): 176, 85.

mountain Turks went hand in hand with the Turkish official narrative: there was not any ethnicity called Kurds, the mountain Turks were wrongly assumed to be a separate race, Kurds. Kısakürek's approach to Kurds was definitely not acceptable to someone like Hekarî, who tried to establish the antiquity of the Kurdish nation in 1945 in Gaziya Welat and in 1952 in *Ehl-i Sünnet* using more subtle language.

The Turkish-Islamic synthesis that Hekarî supported as a cultural product in the 1950s was used later as a political tool and alienated Kurdish Muslims. İbrahim Arvas, a Kurd himself and the deputy of Van in the late 1940s, argued in his book published in 1964 that all branches of the Kurds were biological descendants of Turks and they should be raised with Turkish culture and taught Turkish.⁵⁹⁴ Ahmed Arvasi, an ideologue of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis in the 1980s, also argued that the Kurds were of Turkish origin, although their language was corrupted by the infusion of Persian.⁵⁹⁵ After 1980, the Turkish-Islamic synthesis was formally employed by politicians,⁵⁹⁶ since the Republican ideology had proved ineffective in building a homogenized secular nationalist identity for Turkish citizens.⁵⁹⁷ Ordinary Turkish Muslims also began to use the idea of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis and made they came to believe that any type of Kurdish expression was separatist.⁵⁹⁸ Kurdish Muslims were alienated from all sides; they were welcomed neither by the Marxist Kurdish intelligentsia due to their Islamic identity nor by the secular or religious Turks if they

⁵⁹⁴ S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Türk-İslam ülküsü* (İstanbul: Türk Kültür Yayını, 1979), 287.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 286, 287.

⁵⁹⁶ Vecihi Timuroglu. *12 Eylül'ün Eğitim Ve Kültür Politikası: Türk-İslam Sentezi*. (Ankara: Başak Yayınları, 1991), Page of contents.

⁵⁹⁷ Güvenç, 233.

⁵⁹⁸ Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu. "Kurdish nationalism from an Islamist perspective: the discourses of Turkish Islamist writers". *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18, 1, (1998): 77.

expressed their Kurdishness.⁵⁹⁹ Many Muslim Kurds, out of fear that they would be accused by their Turkish Muslim friends of being separatists or even atheist Marxists, silenced their identities and cultivated a kind of invisibility.⁶⁰⁰ According to Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, “the Muslim psyche was invaded by Kemalist ideology” through the employment of the historical Ottoman-Islamic concepts of *Devlet-i Ebed Müddet*, (The Everlasting State) and *Devlet-i Ali* (The Great State).⁶⁰¹ These concepts powerfully implied that the state was “a sanctified entity, sublime and eternal” in Turkey’s Islamic tradition,⁶⁰² and unconditional obedience to the ruler was necessary in the minds of people for the survival of the state and the territorial unity.

Hekarî’s Kurdish Identity

As I already discussed, Hekarî employed a Turkish Muslim self to fight more effectively with rigid Turkish secularism. Besides, although Hekarî was committed to upholding Kurdish national interests, he imagined the Kurds’ fate as intertwined with the Turks.⁶⁰³ However, it is important to note that he intentionally refrained from using words Kurd and Kurdish in his Turkish journal in order not to be labeled as a Kurdish separatist, as it was the official charge made against many Kurdish nationalists during that time just for employing the word Kurd. Although he defined himself as a Turkish Muslim in the journal, he continued to identify as a Kurd in his secret writings at the same time. The most striking example of Kurdish identity present in Hekarî’s works during this time occurs in his anonymous essay in *Ehli Sünnet* on the ark of the Biblical and Islamic Prophet Noah. (See

⁵⁹⁹ Müfid Yüksel, *Kürdistan’da Değişim Süreci*, 33.

⁶⁰⁰ “Süleyman Çevikle Söyleşi,” *Ilke Haber*, February 19, 2010, accessed September 5, 2015, <http://www.ilkehaber.com/haber/Süleyman-cevikle-soylesi-1.-bolum-6855.htm>

⁶⁰¹ Sakallıoğlu, 77.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶⁰³ Klein, “Kurdish Nationalist and Non-nationalist Kurdistans,” 137.

Figure 5) The ideas reflected in the essay are almost the same as the ideas in Hekari's unpublished work, *Gaziya Welat 4*. In *Ehli Sünnet* he warned the British and American scholars, who had already set up on a journey to find the wreckage of Noah's ark around Mount Ararat in Turkey, to search for the wreckage in the exact location of *Cudi* since it was the Qur'anic description of where Noah's ark settled after the flood. He claimed that the word "Cudi" was formed of two Kurdish words, "Çû" and "Dî", meaning "He went" and "He saw." He clarified this as "he (Noah) found a place as he went." That was not even contrary to the information given in the Bible since *Cudi* was a part of the Ararat Mountain chain. Here is how he explained his evidence:

...there is a village named Hestiyan at the skirts of the Cudi Mountain. Hestiyan means eighty in the local language (He means Kurdish but only says the local language). This is where the eighty homes were made right after they were saved from the flood with Noah. *Cudi* means "it found as it went" or "it found a place" in the local language. Both words prove that the name of the Cudi Mountain comes from the ship (that found as it went or it found a place). The word Nuh, Noah, means new (new father) in the local language. (Noah was the new father of humankind after the flood and as a result he was referred to with the name Nuh by the locals, who were Kurdish.)⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰⁴ "Nuh Aleyhisselam'in Gemisi," *Ehli Sünnet*, No 68, (September 1949), 16. Hekari in *Ehl-i Sünnet* enumerated the number of houses as eighty, and the name of the village as *Heshiyan*, meaning eighty. In his unpublished poem in *Gaziya Welat 4*, he talked of forty houses built after the flood and the village they made named as *Cilmal*, meaning forty houses in Kurdish. The difference in narrations was possibly caused due to the Quranic interpreters' reference to eighty people saved.

Nuh aleyhisselâmin gemisi

Aylardanberi bütün matbuat imanlarına ay kırılmamış bu mevzu hakkında meşgul oldu. Çünkü hâhâse Amerikan ve İngiliz âlimleri tarafından ortaya atılmıştır. Bir İslâm âlimi bununla meşgul olsaydı belki de; hay yobazlar vay hâlâ maâniler peşindedirler, derlerdi. Her neyse Hazreti Nuh namında bir Peygamberin mevcudiyeti tevatürle sabittir ve bunun zamanında bir tufan koptuğu inkâr edilemez. Tufandan kurtulmak için bir gemi yaptığını ve buna hayvanlardan birer çift ve kendisine iman eden insanlardan seksen hane oğulları ve ailesi ile binmiş iman etmişleri oğru da boğulmuştu. Tufan ilmince geminin bir dağ üzerine konduğunu bütün Hıristiyan Yahudi ve Müslümanlar kabule mecburdurlar. Çünkü mukaddes kitaplarında yazılır. Hatta beşirîn neslini tesbit etmek istiyen tarihçiler bile her milletin asıl ve nesobini Hazreti Nuhun birer oğluna ulaştırmak için binlerce peçere vücutta getirmişlerdir. Masamalar, bulgünükler ve maddeperestler buna inanmazlar. Bizi alâkalandırmasın.

Bütün İngiliz ve Amerikan âlimleri bunun hakikat olduğuna inanıyorlar. İlim heyetleri tertip ederek geminin enkazını aramağa çıkmışlardır. Bu çıkış mason, bolgevik ve maddecileri tekkip mahiyetindedir. Bu heyet şu imanı taşırken muhakkak ki bizim kadar ilk orta ve yüksek tahsil görmüşlerdir. Senelerce ilmi tetkikat yapmış milletlerarası birer âlim mevkiine girmişlerdir. Bunların iddiaları her hangi cahil bir mason veyahut maddeye boğulmuş sersem maddecinin iddiasına benzemez. Bu iddialar modern ilmin mahsulüdür. Yalan olmasın fakat yanlış olabilir. Biz de bu hadisenin yanlış tarafına temas edeceğiz. Hazreti Nuh zamanında tufan kopmuştur. Fakat gemi nerede durdu? İhtilâf buradadır. Gerek Ahitâtik namını taşıyan Tevrat ve gerek Ahitcedid namını taşıyan İncil mecnusalarında geminin Ararat dağında durduğu yazılır.

Ararat dağı halen Ağrı ismini taşıyan yüksek dağdan başlayarak Mardinin Cizre kasabasına yakın bir yerde vâkı Cûdi dağı da dahil olmak üzere Irak hududuna kadar uzanan dağlar silsilesinin ismi olduğuna eski ve yeni bütün coğrafya âlimleri söylerler. Kur'ânı Kerimde Cûdi ismi yazılır. Kur'ânı Kerimle kitabı mukaddes arasında ufak bir ihtilâf vardır ki, bi-

ris Ararat dîğeri Cûdi yazıyor. Bu ihtilâf âridir, hakiki değil. Çünkü Cûdi dağı da Ararat silâsının içindedir. Bunun için kitabı mukaddes umumî ismini almış. Kur'ânı Kerim bu ismi yazmıştır. Bu hale göre ortada ihtilâf yoktur. Bu ince noktaya nûz edemeyen ve Hıristiyan taassubundan kendilerini kurtarmayan sayın âlimlerin taassupları kendilerini yanlış yola sevk etmiştir. Eğer bunlar kendilerini Hıristiyan taassubundan kurtarsalardı, hiç şüphesiz ki bu ilmi hataya düşmezlerdi. Cizreyi bırakıp Doğu Bayazıt Cûdiyi bırakıp Ağrı dağında beyhude vakit geçirmezlerdi. Bu mukaddemeden sonra muhterem heyete hitap ediyorum.

Sayın heyet artık taassup zamanında değiliz, ilim zamanındayız. Hakikat nerede olursa olsun ona tâbi olmak lâzımdır. Kitabı Mukaddeste yazılı Ararat kelimesi dahilinde Cûdi ismi de vardır. Nuhun gemisi Araratın bir parçası bulunan Cûdi dağının üzerine konmuştur. Size ilmi deliller göstereceğiz:

Deliller:

- 1 — Kur'ânın Nuh sûresinin bir âyetinde «Cûdi üzerinde durdu» buyuruyor.
- 2 — Hazreti Nuhun mezarı halen Cizrededir ve herkes ziyaret ediyor.
- 3 — Cûdi dağının eteğinde (Heftiyan) namında bir köy vardır. Mahalli lisanına göre Hefti seksen demektir. Hazreti Nuhla beraber gemiden çıkan seksen hanenin ilk kurdıkları köy burasıdır.
- 4 — Cûdi kelimesi (Cûdi) giderken buldu demektir. Veyahut (Cûdi) mahalli lisanına göre yer buldu demektir. Bu iki kelime de dağın isminin gemiden mütevellit olduğuna isbat eder.
- 5 — Nuh kelimesi de buna delâlet eder. Nuh mahalli lisanına göre yeni demektir. (Nuh baba) kelimesinden de anlaşılıyor ki Nuh Aleyhisselâmın gemisi Cûdi üzerinde durmuş ve esas ismi olmayıp Yenibaba kelimesindeki muharref olan Nuh kelimesi de bu tarzda kullanılmaktadır.

Bu ilmi tetkiklerle de Nuh gemisinin Cûdi dağı üzerinde olduğu muhakkaktır. Gelecek ne olursa olsun buraya yapmanızı temenni ederiz.

TARİHÇİ

İlmî, Dini
ve İhtimal
MECMUA
15
günde bir çıkar

EHLİ SÜNNET

SAYI
69

İÇİNDEKİLER

FİYATI
25

Dini İlimler:	
Kasidei Bürde	A. GERAMI
Tefsir	H. T. HAFİDİ
Hadis	EHLİ SÜNNET
Fıkıh	EHLİ SÜNNET
Tasavvuf	TABİB ZADE
Peygamberimizi tanıyalım	ABDURRAHİM ZAPSU
Münakaşa İlimleri:	
İmam Hatib kursunun feci neticesi EHLİ SÜNNET	
Hiçbir hâin el İslâm Birliğini parçalamaz	ABDURRAHİM ZAPSU
Şark illerinin din şerefine ilhakı	Avukat HULUSİ BİTLİSİ
Kurban bayramı	ABDURRAHİM ZAPSU
Bir gafile (şiir)	M. SAİD ÇEKMEGİL
Bir mektup	VAHİT YEŞİLYAPRAK
Yabancı bilmediği için	LATİFECİ
İç ve Dış haberler	

Dizildiği yer:

M. SİRALAR

Matbaası

Figure 5 “Nuh Aleyhisselâmın Gemisi,” Ehlî Sünnet, No 68, September 1949, 16.

Obviously, the Kurdish meaning Hekari applied to the word is an attempt to “Kurdify” that land. In *Ehlî Sünnet*, Hekarî did not add any more comments to the analyses above, yet his argument in fact continued in his unpublished poem that Cezre and Botan, the area around the mountain Cudî, had been the land of Kurds since then. While other people were dispersed

around the world after the flood, the Kurds never left the place and stayed there, which showed evidence for the Kurdish nation's eternal character:

The mountain Cudî is still around Cezre and Botan
Surrounded by not any people but Kurdish tribes
Under Cudî is a village named Çilmal (“Çil” “Mal”, meaning 40 homes in Kurdish)
This refers to the forty homes saved after the flood.⁶⁰⁵

He stated that Noah, the second father of all nations after Adam, and the people around him were Kurdish very clearly:

I am of Noah's progeny, who was the king of Kurds
My nation inherited its name from Noah
God has blessed us with the monotheistic religion
All prophets had risen amongst us

The flood surely happened, says the sacred history
Christian, Jews and Muslims approve
Noah's ship settled on the Cudi
Thus is said in the Qur'an, either Cidi or Cudi.⁶⁰⁶

Hekarî claimed in his unpublished poem that Noah was the ruler of the Kurds and pushed his claim even further; all the prophets were from Kurdish progeny. Born in today's Urfa, Abraham was also a Kurd who believed in one God; “*Muhaqeq Kurd e Îbrahîm di Ruhay hatiye dunya, Nivîsî Azer'el-Kurdî temam tarîx bibîn waya.*”⁶⁰⁷ This automatically made Jews and early Christians descend from the Kurdish race. Moreover, Prophet Muhammad's tribe, the *Quraysh*, was Kurdish as well.

⁶⁰⁵ Geverî, “Evdirehîm Rehmî Hekarî,” 5.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., 5.

“*Ji nesla Hezretî Nuh im ku navê wî Melîk Kurd e
Ji wî ev navi mabû milletê min, lew dibên Kurd e
Esasê dînê Tewhîdê ji bo me xelq kirî Ellah
Ji me rabûn temamê enbiyan hem Resulellah
Di tarîxa muqeddes da muheqeq rabûye Tufan
Nesara û Yehud û Musluman pêkve dikin îman
Sefîna Hezretî Nuhî ku westaye li ser Cudî
Bi nesa ayetê ev sabit e Cîdî we ya Çudî.*”

⁶⁰⁷ Geverî, “Evdirehîm Rehmî Hekarî,” 6. “Abraham was surely a Kurd, was born in Urfa, this is to be recorded in history.”

Moses and Jesus were from Abraham's progeny,
Muhammad's grandfather was from (Abraham's) other sons. (see Figure 6, fifth and sixth
lines)

...
Quraysh was Kurdish and Kurmanji surely, a clean blood
Though forgot their original tongue, they were intelligent
They believed in *Hanif* in *jahiliyya*
Though some followed other Arabs.⁶⁰⁸

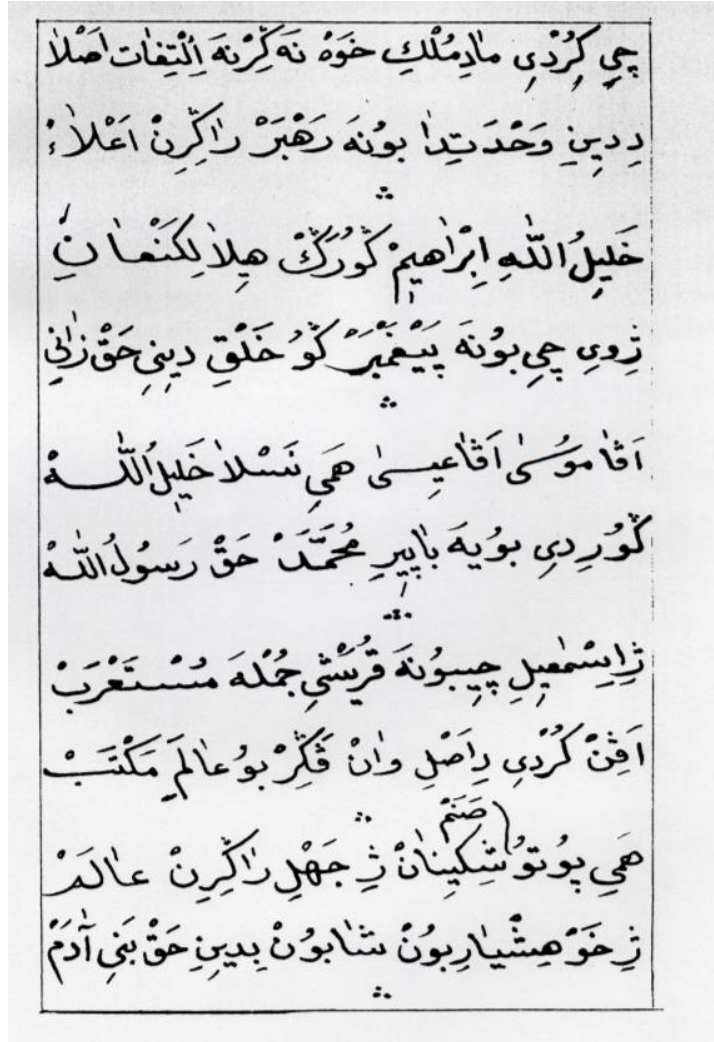


Figure 6 Hekari's own handwriting in Kurdish from Gaziya Welat 4, Ayhan Geverî's personal archives.

⁶⁰⁸Ibid., 6.

“Eva Musa eva Îsa hemî nesla Xelilullah
Kurê dî bûye bapîrê Muhemmed heq Resulellah
Qureyşî Kurd û Kurmanc in muheqqeq xwûnekî pak in
Eger çî bîr kirin ezmanê eslî lê bi idrak in
Dî weqtê cahîliyet da li ser dînê Henîfî bûn
Eger çî hin ji wana tabî ‘ê ‘Erebîyê dî bûn.”

Hekarî could not go that far in his arguments in *Ehli Sünnet*, when Kurdishness was officially in denial in those years, while the opposite was the case in his secret writings. Hence, it seems that Hekarî was being very sneaky in *Ehli Sünnet*, when he brought to attention the historical Islamic monuments of the Kurdish region, Van. A section was kept in a number of *Ehl-i Sünnet* issues on the historic architecture such as mosques, tombs and endowments in Van, where Hekarî was born. He was exhibiting the historicity of *Ahlat* in Van and its people, many of whom were Kurds. The author of the articles, Tevfik Demiroğlu, introduced them as achievements of Turkish architecture in Van, which seems, at first glance, a Turkification of Kurdish history. He stated that the architect of the Halime Hatun tomb, built in 1358 A.C., was from Van; since the inscription on it said “*elhilati*,” meaning from *Ahlat*.⁶⁰⁹ However, Demiroğlu could not argue that it was Kurdish if he wanted his article to be published under Republican Turkey.

Hekarî was able to incorporate in his writings his support of Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish economic and educational development. A special section was secured in a number of *Ehl-i Sünnet* journals for Hekarî’s reflections on his travels around Turkey, mostly in the Kurdish region. Hekarî talked about the lack of roads in Mardin, making it impossible to travel by car from one district to another.⁶¹⁰ The 67th issue brought to attention the people in Siirt, who were desperately in need of water because a bad smell surrounded the city. In Bitlis city roads were in bad condition and needed maintenance. Hekarî conveyed the public’s request to fire the Bitlis city governor, who was neglectful of the city’s needs.⁶¹¹ The journal celebrated the Bitlis city mayor for his services of constructing electrical wiring, and stocking

⁶⁰⁹ Tevfik Demiroğlu, “Van Miıntıkasında Tarihi Künbetler,” *Ehli Sünnet*, No.31, (March 1, 1948): 11.

⁶¹⁰ “Yurt Seyahatinden İntibalar,” *Ehli Sünnet*, No 112, (May 1952): 9.

⁶¹¹ “İç ve Dış Haberler,” *Ehli Sünnet*, No.67, (September 1, 1949): 11.

wheat due to the scarcity of produce in the present year. Hekarî also revealed the religious needs of the east and complained that the *Şerefiye* Mosque of Bitlis was still invaded by soldiers in 1949 despite the decision made to free the mosques from army guards.⁶¹²

Hekarî penned two long essays on the crucial need for a university in Van, his hometown, which was first articulated by his friend Said Nursi. Hekarî pointed out that the early Republican government purposefully refrained from making educational investments in the Eastern region:

I was the head of the finance office in Midyat (Mardin) in 1929...The city governor of Hakkari, Tevfik, came to Mardin. The city governor of Mardin, Necip, the field officer Colonel Tevfik and I welcomed him...During the conversation the colonel Tevfik asked him: “The people in this region are very smart, morally upright, trustworthy, self-sacrificing and courageous. Why do not we open for them quality schools and yet cause them decline with detaining politics?.. The city governor looked at me and asked where I was from... I said I was from Uskudar, (İstanbul)..Then he made this tragic explanation: Colonel Tevfik, whatever evil we have experienced, it is from these people who cannot even speak properly. Should we educate them so that they will cause more trouble? We will keep them ignorant so that we can exploit their goods.” I was petrified upon this statement.⁶¹³

Hekarî expressed his hope that the new Menderes government was not “assassins” (*suikastçi*) like the earlier government and he expected them to invest in the educational development of the East. He wrote that the CUP government saved fifty thousand gold Turkish *liras* for the project and the first steps were already taken at the start of World War I, which ended the project.⁶¹⁴ He insisted that Van was the perfect city for an Islamic university offering both secular and religious sciences, as envisioned by Said Nursi,⁶¹⁵ and it would be the start of the development of Turkey’s east.⁶¹⁶ He confessed his nostalgia for this school as an Easterner, since he grew up with hearing the thought as a child.⁶¹⁷ He also

⁶¹² Ibid., 11.

⁶¹³ Abdurrahim Zapsu, “Van Üniversitesi,” *Ehli Sünnet* No. 102, 1951, 13.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁶¹⁵ See Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 51.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 13.

discussed the critical position of Van as bordering Russia and Iran; creating a cultural center there would be a repulse against any possible sinister moves from Russia and an aid to forming a cultural unity with Iran.⁶¹⁸ To those who disputed that the east was too underdeveloped to build a university, he argued that financial development could only enter the east of Turkey together with the rise of cultural development.⁶¹⁹ He found it ironic that the opposition came from a Kemalist newspaper, *Cumhuriyet*, which proposed a western city, İzmir, instead of Van.

I already mentioned that Hekarî avoided using the words Kurd or Kurdish region, even in the articles where he talked specifically about the Kurdish cities. He did not want to sound like a Kurdish separatist nationalist; instead, he envisioned Kurdish and Turkish fate together:

I do not call it an Eastern University for I will not utter a word that would create separatism in my homeland (Turkey). My heart cannot consent to see the country in an atmosphere of separation and favoritism as a consequence of two ideologies such as the east (easternism) and the west (westernism). Those who did seduced almost half million innocent children of the country. May God curse them!⁶²⁰

He offered that a probable university in Van should not to be called an Eastern University, since such a word might sound inappropriate to the unity of Turkey's East and West.⁶²¹ Nevertheless, Hekarî demanded the recognition of Turkey's East, its history and its problems. He published in his journal an essay by Hulusi Bitlis Aktürk supporting the idea of

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., 14.

⁶¹⁹ Abdurrahim Zapsu, "Van Üniversitesi," *Ehli Sünnet* No. 102, 1951, 14.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 13. "*Ne saklayayım ben Şark'ta doğmuş bir çocuk sıfatı ile Van Üniversitesi sözünü ta çocuklukta beri işitiyordum...İster bu fikri bedbinliğime, hırsıma, ister vatanperverliğime, isterse yurtseverliğime hamlediniz. Ben bu düşüncemde müessirim...Doğu üniversitesi demedim çünkü vatani parça parça mütalaa etmek gibi vatanda ikilik kuracak bir kelime ağzımdan çıkmaz. Memleketi doğu ve batı gibi iki zihniyet arasında ayrılma kayırılma havası içinde görmeye vicdanım razı değildir. Bunu yapanlar yarım milyona yakın vatan evlatlarının masum kanlarına girdiler. Allah onlara lanet etsin!*"

⁶²¹ Ibid., 13.

Kurdish and Turkish brotherhood. The article described the voluntary incorporation of the Eastern Cities into the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century. Aktürk emphasized in his article that an accurate remembrance of September 19, the conquest of Diyarbakır, would be very valuable for the entire nation. He proudly presented that the people of Diyarbakır and other Eastern cities willingly entered into the borders of the Ottoman Empire. He provided the order of Sultan Selim I to İdris-i Bitlisi and the Sultan's *berats*⁶²² presented to the Kurdish *mirs* (without using the word Kurd or Kurdish) at their incorporation.⁶²³ The publication of the order in *Ehl-i Sünnet* had a variety of implications. First the order talks of the existence of a separate ethnic group in the East, reminding the Turkish Muslim readers of the Kurds' existence, as well as the shared history of Kurds and Turks. Second, it generated the thought that the Kurds were gently called to the Ottoman rule by the Ottoman Sultan and they accepted it without causing any chaos in the empire. It also brought up the historical fact that the Kurds were governed by their own leaders by the order of the Ottoman Sultan. Although it was a subtle call, Aktürk and Hekarî wanted recognition of the Kurdish past and Kurdish existence smartly enough.

Conclusion

Hekarî's discourse evolved in time, as reflected in his writings. Although his discourse was in constant evolution, a number of identities he embodied were also in conversation with one another. His altered emphasis on Turkish and Kurdish identity over the years might have resulted from what he considered the urgent needs of Muslims in

⁶²² Berat is a document from the Ottoman Sultan, which could issue the state approval to possess a property of the state.

⁶²³ Hulusi Bitlis Aktürk, "Bütün Şark İllerinin Din Şerefine Osmanlı Hükümetine Tav'an İltihakı," *Ehli Sünnet* No. 69, (October 1 1949): 10-11.

different time periods. He prioritized Kurdish freedom during the fall of the empire, since the other option was the end of Kurdishness, therefore the elimination of a Muslim nation for him. When World War I's threat to Kurdish Muslim existence was gone, Hekarî was alarmed to see the Turkish regime targeting the religion of both Kurds and Turks. This is why he made numerous religious publications during the republican period.

Hekarî's consistent use of Turkish Muslimness in his writings gives the impression that he transformed into a Turkish nationalist. Yet his countless attacks on the Kemalist regime and numerous serious critiques of the 1950 government, in his published and unpublished writings, position him apart from the state. The Turkish-Islamic synthesis as a cultural product was a discourse of disapproval of the conservatives towards the government, and it is for this goal that Hekarî used it. Yet he could not share the cultural race theory of the Turkish Islamic blend that Kurds were of Turkish origin. His essays with subtle references to Kurdish history, his consideration for the improvement of Kurdish living standards and his critique of the underdevelopment of the region in *Ehl-i Sünnet* all speak for his existing Kurdish identity under a Turkish Muslim apparel.

It would be simplistic to claim either that Hekarî was a convert from a Kurdish nationalist to a Turkish Muslim position or that he was a Kurdish nationalist coward in disguise. In Hekarî's essays, plays and poems from the 1920s to the 1950s, there is a heavy emphasis on Muslimness no matter whether he depicts an ideal Kurd or an ideal Turk. "The Kurdish mind had an Abrahamic honor that never worshipped idols,"⁶²⁴ he said.

Hekarî might have disguised his Kurdishness in order not to be totally silenced by the government and express his thoughts more effectively to the public. The official discourse

⁶²⁴ Geverî, "Evdirehîm Rehmî Hekarî," 6.

against the Kurds and Kurdish separatism was powerful and affected public opinion. A writer charged with Kurdish separatism would not have been read much by Turkish society. His writings not only invited the readers, delicately, to a recognition of Kurdish existence, but his journal was primarily a religious journal. He devoted his writings, his jihad of the pen, to the religious education of people as well as fighting with the communist and missionary threats he pointed out.

This chapter demonstrated, in the example of Evdirehim Hekarî's ideas, a nationalist consciousness that envisioned its own minority nation's, Kurds, interests intertwined with the interests of the dominant nation, Turks. By using religion as the primary diacritical marker to identify ethnicity, defining nation in the name of religion, Hekarî demonstrated a religious nationalist consciousness. The next chapter will unfold another type of religious nationalist consciousness that intertwined national and religious boundaries. In the example of Khalifa Yusuf and Mullah Yasin's ideas, this type of consciousness promoted the use of the Kurdish language in religious contexts and distinct Kurdish religious practices by proving historical authenticity.

The Published Works of Abdurrahim Rahmi Zapsu in Turkish

1. *Esir Bir Çocuğun Başına Gelenler* (The Experiences of a Captive Child), Jin Nesriyat 1918
2. *Bes Vakit Namaz* (Five Daily Prayers), Nur Basımevi, İstanbul, 1951
3. *Helal ve Haram* (The Permitted and the Prohibited in Islam), Bizim Matbaa, 1947-1951
4. *Şafii İlmihali* (Shafi Book of Jurisprudence), İstiklal Matbaası, 1956

5. *Temizlik ve Ahkamı* (Rulings of Cleanliness), Duygu Basımevi, İstanbul, 1951
6. *Cenaze ve Ahkamı* (Rulings of Funeral), Nur Basımevi, İstanbul, 1951
7. *Oruç ve Ahkamı* (Rulings of Fasting), Nur Basımevi, İstanbul, 1951
8. *Abdest ve Gusül* (Ritual Cleansings), Aydınlık Basımevi, İstanbul, 1951
9. *Din ve Kin* (Religion and Hatred), Aydınlık Basımevi, İstanbul, 1947
10. *Düşünüyorum ve Soruyorum* (I am Thinking and Asking), Aydınlık Basımevi, İstanbul, 1947
11. *Lisanda Nezaket Meselesi* (Politencess in Language), Aydınlık Basımevi, İstanbul, 1947
12. *Metin'in Din Soruları* (Metin's Religious Questions), Sıralar Matbaası, İstanbul, 1956
13. *Hale'nin Din Soruları* (Hale's Religious Questions), Sıralar Matbaası, İstanbul, 1956
14. *Pertev'in Din Soruları* (Pertev's Religious Questions), Sıralar Matbaası, İstanbul, 1956
15. *Ömer Hayyam*, İstanbul Matbaası, İstanbul, 1942
16. *Enbiya Tarihi* (History of the Prophets), Sıralar Matbaası, İstanbul, 1956
17. *Bir Papaza Cevap* (A Response to a Priest), Sıralar Matbaası, İstanbul, 1954
18. *Büyük İslam Tarihi* (Islamic History, 2 volumes) (2 Cilt) Sıralar Matbaası, İstanbul, 1957

The Unpublished Works of Abdurrahim Rahmi Zapsu in Turkish

1. Mütfekkirlere Kur'an-i Kerim Tefsir Hulasası (A Summary of Qur'an's Interpretation for the Thoughtful)

2. Ben Neyim (Who Am I)

3. Ehl-i Sünnet ve Ehl-i Bid'at

4. İlmî Bir Münakaşa (Sahabeler Hakkında) (A Scholarly Debate about the Companions of the Prophet)

5. Oğluma Bir Tavsiye (An Advice for My Son)

6. İmam-i Busuri'nin Aşkı (The Love of Imam-i Busuri)

7. Ahlak ve Felsefe (Morality and Philosophy)

8. Aile Tarihim ve Heyecanlı Sergüzeştler (My Family History and Exciting Ventures)

9. Şiirler (Poems)

Unpublished Works in Kurdish

Werin Deste Min Ramusin (Come and Kiss my Hands)
Gaziya Welat 4

Published Works in Kurdish

Eqida Kurdan (Kurdish Islamic Beliefs) Jin Nesriyat 1918

Meme Alan 1918

Gaziya Welat 1,2,3

CHAPTER 4

MULLAH YASIN AND KHALIFA YUSUF: FOSTERING A RELIGIOUS LINGUISTIC CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH THE USE OF THE KURDISH LANGUAGE

This chapter concentrates on the writings of Khalifa Yusuf Topçuoğlu (1885-1965) of Ağrı and Mullah Yasin Toprak (1906-1994) of Diyarbakır, who chose to produce literature in the Kurdish language when Kurdish was legally banned in Turkey. They purposefully employed Kurdish in their religious writings for the public's easier access and aimed to educate them in basic Islamic beliefs and practices so that they would not be the objects of exploitation by "fake mullahs and sheikhs." People needed to either learn Arabic or stay connected to a sheikh or a mullah even for small details of basic Islamic rituals. Khalifa Yusuf and Mullah Yasin recognized that popularizing Kurdish language usage in Islamic education was critical to delegitimize the sheikhs' monopoly of religion and free people from the sheikhs' abuse. By using Kurdish literature to denigrate sheikhs, they also helped the development of secular nationalism, and became part of a linguistic rise of secular nationalism, even unintentionally. These developments took us toward secular nationalism in time.

The main concern of the chapter is how Khalifa Yusuf and Mullah Yasin flavored their national consciousness with Islamic education and used Kurdish Islamic figures of the past for the discursive representation of the Kurdish nation. Producing religious literature in Kurdish against the sheikhs' authority at a time when the Kurdish language was officially persecuted⁶²⁵ had many implications. Firstly, these religious figures were not simply

⁶²⁵ See Welat Zeydanlioglu, "Turkey's Kurdish language policy," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, (2012): 105.

promoting the Kurdish language, but they aimed to prove the historical authenticity of using Kurdish by resting on and referring to Kurdish religious scholars of the past, who wrote in Kurdish.

Secondly, the use of Kurdish in writing for public use was a non-conforming act against the homogenization project of the Turkish state,⁶²⁶ which in itself carried the meaning of national consciousness.⁶²⁷ Specifically, Khalifa Yusuf's and Mullah Yasin's writings about applications of Shafi'i jurisprudence in the Kurdish language⁶²⁸ promoted the continuum of a distinct feature of Kurds, which was to follow Shafi'i jurisprudence as opposed to Hanafi jurisprudence, which was widely practiced by Turks in Turkey.⁶²⁹ By upholding distinct Kurdish features in religious contexts such as the Kurdish language, the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence and historical Kurdish figures central to the representation of the Kurdish nation, they intertwined religious and national boundaries.⁶³⁰ Lastly, their harsh criticism against the sheikhs' exploitation of religious feelings and the Kurds' economic resources attests not only their care for Kurdish national interest. Against the efforts of the state to disestablish the common Sufi traditions in the area through travelling preachers,⁶³¹ they also aimed to establish Sufism by purifying it from the monopoly of the exploitative sheikhs. As

⁶²⁶ Yesim Bayar, "The trajectory of nation-building through language policies: The case of Turkey during the early republic (1920–38)," *Nations and Nationalism* 17, 1, (2011): 125.

⁶²⁷ According to İsmail Beşikçi, who has written extensively on the Kurds and Turkish state policies against them, as late as the 1990s, even reading the Qur'an in Kurdish in Kurdistan was a revolutionary act, since the state was completely against anything related to Kurdishness. See Beşikçi, *Kürt Aydını Üzerine*, 45.

⁶²⁸ Shafi'i jurisprudence books in Kurdish were produced a great deal during this period, as well as many in Arabic, by Kurdish mullahs.

⁶²⁹ Kurdish Muslims had been following the Shafi'i school of law for centuries before the Republican Turkey. Shafi'i jurisprudence was taught in the Kurdish madrasas, and those who practiced Sufism in Kurdistan also followed the Shafi'i school of law as opposed to Turks following the Hanafi school for centuries. Given that, the state Islam, which targeted the madrasa and the Sufi tradition in Kurdistan was also targeting the Shafi'i identity of the Kurds as part of its homogenization project. Therefore, cultivating Shafi'i identity, which was generally accompanied with a Sufi or madrasa tradition, implied disobedience to the state policy.

⁶³⁰ Brubaker, 9.

⁶³¹ Republican Archive of the Prime Ministry, Fon Code 0.51. V33, Place No 4.37.5, 31.12.1950, in Metin Yüksel, "Dengbêj, Mullah, Intelligentsia," 439-443.

mentioned in earlier chapters, Marxist historiography's emphasis on sheikhs and mullahs using religion to exploit the Kurdish nation's financial, emotional and human resources obscured the emergence among the religious class; and Khalifa Yusuf and Mullah Yasin provide two examples of Kurdish ulema who had been raising criticism against the sheikhs' exploitation of the Kurdish masses.

Khalifa Yusuf Topcu (see Figure 7) was the son of Serif *Agha*, who worked in Ottoman Ishakpasha palace in the 19th century in Ağrı, located in today's eastern Turkey, as an artillery man. His earlier studies were under the supervision of sheikh Muhammad Jalali, who also taught Said Nursi. After the First World War, he migrated to Siirt, a province in Ottoman Kurdistan and studied madrasa sciences with Mullah Hamid there.⁶³² From there he moved to Şırnak, where he stayed for ten years. Mullah Hamid helped Yusuf Ziyaaddin Pasha to write the first Arabic-Kurdish dictionary⁶³³ published in 1894 and containing many Kurdish words and some grammar rules. The dictionary was dedicated to Sultan Abdulhamid II and named as *El-Hediyye El-Hamidiyye fi'l-lugat El-Kurdiyye*, meaning the Hamidian gift in the Kurdish Language.⁶³⁴ Mullah Hamid was also the son of Mullah Halil, the writer of *Nahj al-anam* (The way for People), a book of Kurdish madrasa curriculum on Islamic tenets. Mullah Hamid, then, must have been an important influence on Khalifa Yusuf in his later writings to raise Kurdish linguistic consciousness. Khalifa Yusuf earned the title *khalifa*, a sheikh representative, from sheikh Muhammad Nuri Addarshawi, and earned a second *ijaza* of *Naqshbandiyya* from sheikh İbrahim Hakki Al-Basrati in 1935. Later he also obtained the

⁶³² "Xelîfe Yusîf Kî ye?" *Nûbihar*, No 89, (İstanbul, 2003): 8.

⁶³³ Metin Yüksel, "Dengbêj, Mullah, intelligentsia," 61.

⁶³⁴ Kürtçe-Türkçe Sözlük, translated from the original Arabic-Kurdish dictionary by Mehmet Emin Bozarslan, (İstanbul: Cira Yayinlari,), 1978, 7.

ijaza of *Qadiriyya* in Bahgdad from sheikh Ahmad Sharafaddin Al-Qadiri.⁶³⁵ He returned to his hometown, Doğubeyazıt, after his stay in Sirnak. His books included *Tuhfetul Amilin* (The Gift for Practitioners), *Irsadul Ibad* (The Warning for God’s Servants), *Feraiz* (Religious Obligations), *Tuhfetul Zakirin* (The Gift for those who Remember God), *Xutbe* (Sermon), *Takriz* (The Praising), *Tecwid*, *Tuhfetul Ihwan* (The Gift to Brothers), *Tuhfetul Sibyan* (The Gift for Children).

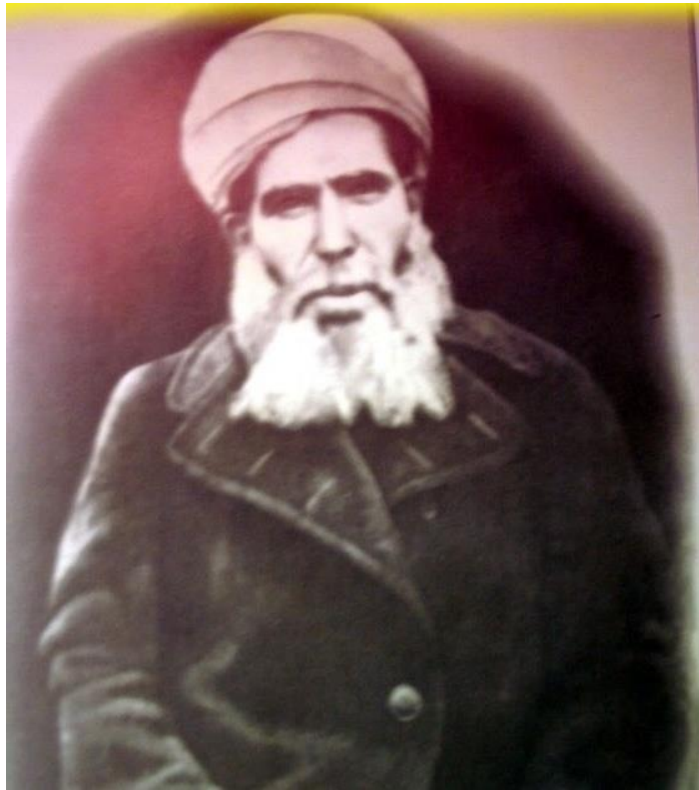


Figure 7 The portrait of Khalifa Yusuf.
Source: Xelife Yûsif, “Usûla Meratibê Hîsab,” Nûbihar No. 89, Summer 2003, 26-35.

Mullah Abdullah Tanrîkulu, Khalifa Yusuf’s grandson, informs that all the *Jalali* tribes in Doğubeyazıt, Ağrı were connected to Khalifa Yusuf and respected him. Some members of the Jalali tribe took part in Ararat uprising in 1930 against the Turkish state.

⁶³⁵ “Xelife Yusif Kî ye?” 8.

Mullah Abdullah states that Khalifa Yusuf convinced many people from the Jalali tribe not to join the rebellion, since he believed Turks and Kurds were brothers and sisters as part of Muslim *ummah*. He also reports that his grandfather turned down the offer from two Kurdish deputies of the Democratic Party in 1950s; they asked him to persuade the *Jalali* tribe to vote for their right-wing party. In return they promised to renew the mosque where he was teaching. Khalifa Yusuf turned down the offer.

Mullah Yasin Toprak was born in 1906 in Diyarbakır in today's Turkey as the son of a scholar named mullah Dervis. He was orphaned six months after he was born, and his mother had to take care of him alone after they were abandoned by his maternal uncles when Yasin was only six. He studied in Kurdish madrasas for twenty-one years, and taught there for over fifty years. He had nearly a thousand students under his supervision and gave *ijaza* to almost a hundred of them. He was both a writer and a poet. He was also known as Yasin-i *Yusri*, the one who simplifies and makes things easy for his students, and also as *Reis e Alima*, the leader of scholars. He taught in a number of villages as a village mullah.⁶³⁶ When he took an exam to be appointed as a state jurist in the 1950s, he corrected one of the questions posed by the examination committee of the Presidency of Religious Affairs. This led the PRA to ask his advice on controversial issues of jurisprudence, and they accepted Mullah Yasin's judicial opinions.⁶³⁷ Besides his identity as a mullah, Yasin Toprak also earned the *khalifa* title from Sheikh Maşuk, a *Naqshbandiyya* sheikh in Norşin in 1960s.⁶³⁸ He was known more

⁶³⁶ Z. Fuat Toprak, Muhammed Toprak, Z. Abidin Toprak, "Seyda Molla Yasin Toprak (Yusri) Hayati ve Ilmi Kisiligi," *Sarkiyat Ilmi Arastirmalar Dergisi*, No. 1, (April 2009), 121, 122, 127, accessed November 12, 2013,

<http://dergipark.ulakbim.gov.tr/sarkiat/article/view/5000109853/5000102178>.

⁶³⁷ Ahmet Erkol, "Molla Yasin Yusri ve Kesfun Nikab Isimli Eseri," in *Uluslararası Silvan Sempozyumu Kitabı*, ed. Edip Cagmar Veysel Gurhan, Erchan Gumus, (Mardin: Mardin Artuklu Universitesi, 2008), 473.

⁶³⁸ See the Norşin Naqshbandiyya chain in the first chapter.

for his mullah identity than as a *sufi*, although he had two devout *sufi* followers, *murid*, from the public. Some of his works are *Seyful Melul* (The Sword of the Poor), a negating book against a given fatwa on Friday prayer presented as a methodology of jurisprudence in Arabic, a book on how to sacrifice an animal according to Shafii jurisprudence, *Rawdul Hayat* (The Garden of Life), a poetic book written in simple Kurdish on the life after death, a Kurdish *diwan*, book of poems on love of God and the Prophet Muhammad.⁶³⁹

Delegitimization of the Sheikhs' Monopoly of Religion with Religious and Linguistic Consciousness

Khalifa Yusuf penned *Irshad al-Ibad*, a comprehensive book on Islamic *Shafii* school of jurisprudence in Kurdish, and explained his reasons for writing in Kurmanji Kurdish at the beginning of his book with a poetic introduction, *Manzum Takriz* (The Poetic Praise). Written in Arabic, Islamic sciences were an “ivory tower” for the Kurdish people. Arabic, as sacred as it is, was inaccessible to Kurdish speakers; therefore, it was used to enable false sheikhs to easily claim a monopoly of Islamic sciences. Khalifa Yusuf saw it incumbent on the learned to make religion accessible to lay people, it was a trust given to them: “it is the duty of scholars to convey religious knowledge, to those who do not know in an effective way.”⁶⁴⁰ Access to religious knowledge would be rendered possible only by writing in the language of the masses and popularizing the use of that language –Kurdish as a written language did not

⁶³⁹ Toprak,131.

⁶⁴⁰“*Lew wacib e li ser alima seraser,
Ji bo cahila dîn bejîn, bi tarîqa müyesser
Herçi ji dîn wacib e emanet.*”

See Doğubeyazıtli Halife Yusuf, “Manzum Takriz,” *Îrşadul’Ibad ve Türkçe Tercümesi* Vol.1, (İstanbul: Hira Yayinlari, 1998), 16.

exist until the 20th century- and this is what Khalifa Yusuf did.⁶⁴¹ He was very critical of the Kurdish *ulama*, who had been studying for years in the Arabic language yet do not know how to write and read in their language. If they had done and had made law in the Kurdish dialect and made the religion known to people in Kurdish, the masses would not be ignorant now.⁶⁴² The so-called sheikhs opted for the second since this would allow them to keep their authority on people, as Khalifa Yusuf so believed.

Khalifa Yusuf had a good reason to emphasize that Kurds had to be educated about Islamic belief and practice in order not to be the objects of exploitation by mullahs and sheikhs. Mullah Abdullah informs that there were only two mosques within a hundred villages of Doğubeyazıt, Ağrı from 1933 to 1940s. The call to prayer was then recited in Turkish, an alien language to Kurds. How could Kurdish people learn about their faith when all Islamic books were either in Arabic or in Turkish? He reflects that the main motivation of Khalifa in writing in Kurdish to be the need of people to learn about Islam.

“The people of Ağrı were all from the Jalali tribe, who were immigrants to the city and their knowledge of Islam back then was very limited. They were taking vows on Mount Ağrı (here he smiles and says they did not know that was against the monotheistic concept of tawhid in Islam).”⁶⁴³

Nevertheless, writing Islamic sciences in Kurdish was viewed as overstepping the Islamic limits by some Kurdish men of religion before Khalifa Yusuf wrote his book, *îrşadul’ibad*. Hence Khalifa Yusuf faced an intensive backlash in 1940’s from some sheikhs

⁶⁴¹ Metin Yüksel, “Dengbêj, Mullah, Intelligentsia,” 187.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, 189.

⁶⁴³ Interview with Mullah Abdullah Tanrikulu.

who maintained that Islamic sciences, including the explanation of Islamic tenets, were sacred, therefore, were to be written down in Arabic.⁶⁴⁴ Khalifa Yusuf resisted:

Even if the knowledge of Arabic is a pearl of great value,
It is like the bird *Anka*, its name exists, yet it is gone
If they say (this book) is in Kurmanji and it is not (as) sweet and articulate,
Far from it! Its meaning is purely exact meaning of the great Sharia.
The goal of sharia is not to be (that the language is) articulate,
The real way of sharia is religion and good deeds.⁶⁴⁵

He was confident that the understanding that Arabic could be the only language in which to convey Islamic knowledge to keep Islam's sacredness was a wrong understanding of the sacredness of Islamic sciences. Sacredness was not in letters but contained in the meaning of these disciplines.

Never lend your ear to what the ignorant and the indecent say
That he says knowledge can be gained nothing other than in Arabic
Since religion grows out of meanings
Not of words and letters.⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴⁴ When the first Kurdish interpretation of the Qur'an was written by Mullah Hasan Sheikh Sa'di in 1930, he was blamed for being blasphemous.⁶⁴⁴ Known as Kurdish nationalist mullahs, Amadettin Yetiz of Batman and Hasan Sofya of Diyarbakir were both labelled as communists, whose ideas and writings will be thoroughly discussed in the next chapter. Mullah Abdusselam Becirmani from Mardin was also called *kafir*- a disbeliever, due to his works to revive Kurdish language, focusing solely on earlier Kurdish literary and religious works. He is an accomplished translator, editor and a teacher in his own style madrasa, attached to his work office in Fatih, İstanbul. He is able to sort out the most complex handwritings of earlier Kurdish figures, puts them in an understandable Kurdish writing and Latinize them if needed. Becirmani is convinced that some Kurdish men of religion do not want to lose their authority on the Kurdish masses, and they simply try to invalidate mullahs working for Kurdish educational, literary or national consciousness by stigmatizing them as *kafir* or communist.

⁶⁴⁵ Yusuf, 15-16.

*"İlmê erebî cewherêk xayet beha ye
Wekî enqâê çûye edem, ismê wî maye...
Ger bêJîn Kurmanjî ye ne feshî û leffî e
Haşa halis me'naê şer'a şerîf e
Ji şer'ê qet meqsed fesahet nîn e
Belkî emel sehîsulûka dîn e"*

⁶⁴⁶ Yusuf, 13.

*"Guh nede wî cahilî wî bêedebî
Ku dibêje Îlim nîne ji xeyrî erebî
Lewra dîn îbaret ji me'nan e
Nekû u bi kelîme û lefz û herfan e"*

Those sheikhs also attacked him for giving fatwas, religious verdicts, in the Kurdish language, as fatwas had been traditionally written in Arabic by Kurdish religious leaders. For Khalifa Yusuf the fatwas had to be communicated to people in Kurdish since it was the language most of the population could understand. Khalifa demonstrated the logical discrepancy in attacking the fatwas written in Kurdish written as follows:

Do you convey your fatwas to people (of Kurmanji speakers) in Arabic?
 Or you first understand Arabic writings
 And then explain them to people in (their own language) Kurmanji?
 I understood Arabic the same way
 Then put them in writing in Kurmanji.⁶⁴⁷

Khalifa Yusuf maintained that the exploitative sheikhs were completely unmindful of faith and religion, they did not care about the Muslim *umma*. Their hatred of the Kurdish language had to do with their strategy to keep the masses ignorant and thus easy to manipulate. A learned public would not be as easily controlled by the sheikhs and the established order would collapse against the benefits of the so-called sheikhs. Khalifa described their agenda of accumulating worldly profits, and they fought with Khalifa, since his endeavor to create a learned public was a drawback for those sheikhs' goals:

Îrşadul' ibad is the shari'a following Prophet Muhammad's way,
 For the pious, it is like a lantern and a lamb.
 Yet for the ignorant who are called sheikh and mullah,
 It is pain and affliction; they are troubled with it strangely.
 Whatever they say was without knowledge was a slander,
 They claim what they say is gold but it is not, it is fake copper,
 When their fake copper became obvious
 They lost respect and money.
 That is why they became enemies of *Îrşadul' ibad*.
 They eat the prohibited and lead believers astray,

⁶⁴⁷ Yusuf, 14.

“*Ey kesê xebî tu ne guhdirej î,
 Ma tu fetwa ji xelq rabi erebî dibêji
 Ya tu fehm dikî ji hurû fê erebî bi qencî
 Paşî ji wan ra teqrîr dikî bi Kurmancî
 Min j ji ereb wusa fehm kiriye
 Paşî bi zimanê Kurmancî nivîsiye.*”

Until their wish come true.
 They do not want anyone in the world to know anything.
 The house [and] dishes should wait for cats and dogs,
 They go after the pleasures of the world.
 Who cares if the Muslim community of the Prophet is in ruins?
 Oh God make them weary and despicable all at once,
 Protect this dear and blessed Muslim community from their evil.⁶⁴⁸

In order to lend linguistic authenticity to the use of the Kurdish language in Islamic texts, Khalifa Yusuf referred, in the second page of his long “Manzum Takriz,” to famed figures of the Kurdish past who employed Kurdish in their writings. The attitude against writing in Kurdish was only a reflection of negligence or ignorance of the great historical Kurdish literary and religious figures, according to him. He brought to attention the Kurdish compilation of most-respected Islamic Kurdish figures to support his case.

I wish I was there at that very moment
 When you objected to my writings (to me for writing in Kurmanjî)
 You could have seen my remarkable answers,
 They would be ashamed until the day of Resurrection.
 Do not you know how many books
 Ehmedê Xanî wrote in Kurmanjî?
 Yusuf and Zuleyha and Mem and Zîn
 Lucid Nûbihar with sweet words,
 (Don't you know) the great Nehcul'enam
 Is the compiled work of Mullah Halil in Kurmanjî?
 Not even Sheikh Batê, the illuminated heart
 Who said Prophet's Mewlut in Kurmanjî?⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁸ Yusuf, 25.

“Îrşadul’îbad şer’a terîqa Mustafa ye,
 Ji bo ehlê taet her wek fener û çira ye.
 Emma ji bo cahilêd ku naw şex û mela ne,
 Êş wa li me ecêb pê muhtela ne...
 Herçî digotin bê ilm îftîra bû,
 Digotin zêr e, sifrek qelbê bêbiha bû.
 Dema ku sifir dixil ji wan bû aşikare,
 Kêm bû qedr jib o wan nema îdare.
 Lewra ji bo îrşadul’îbad bûne niyar dîkin edawet...
 Heram bixwun mu’mina ji rê derînin,
 Heta ku murad û meqseda xwe bi ceh bînin.
 Wan di vê dunyaê kes şey’ek nizane,
 Malê fîraq bimînin bi hêva pisîk û sa ne.
 Wan qesda xweşiya dunyaê seraser,
 Çi xem in ku helak bin ummeta Pêxember.
 Ya reb bike me’lul û zelîl wan bi carek,
 Hîfz bike ji şerrê wan vê ummeta ezîz, mubarek.”

⁶⁴⁹ Yusuf, 14.

He reminded his audience that Ehmedê Xanî's *Nûbihar* and Mullah Halil's *Nehcul'enam* had still been taught in Kurdish madrasas, which demonstrated the use of Kurdish as an authentic tradition. Khalifa Yusuf's reference to Sheikh Batê's *Mewlut* in Kurdish is very intelligent, as it was a work frequently encountered in Kurdish daily life. It hang on the walls of every traditional Kurdish house.⁶⁵⁰ Khalifa Yusuf was not establishing a new phenomenon; indeed, he was continuing an old Kurdish tradition, which was employed by the very religious figures themselves. Even though Khalifa's writings were not nationalistic in tone; they were, no doubt, building Islamic and Kurdish linguistic consciousness.

Mullah Yasin (see Figure 8) on the other hand, as a well-educated mullah, also was in opposition to the reality of sheikhs in his society and how they practiced *Sufism*. He confronted many sheikhs, which resulted in necessary changes of residence. Throughout his career as a village mullah, he moved from one village to another nineteen times,⁶⁵¹ after having a conflict with a sheikh, he had to leave the local village and move to a village out of that sheikh's domination.⁶⁵² Many people accepted the sheikhs' religious authority and

“Xweziya weqta tu wa dikî i'tirazê,
 Ez hazîr bibûma wê weqt û lehzê.
 Te yê bidiya ji min eceb îcabet,
 Heta qiyamet bîbûya şermî xecalet.
 Meger ku rê bi kurmancî nizanî,
 Çend kîtab gotine Ehmedê Xanî?
 Yûsuf Zelîxa û Mem û Zîn,
 Nûbihara Fesih bi elfazê şekirîn.
 Nizanî tu Nehcul'enama Celîle,
 Bi Kurmancî te'lîfa Mela Xelîl e.
 Ne Şeyxê Batê xudan qelbê munewwer,
 Bi Kurmancî gotiye Mewlûda Pêxember.”

⁶⁵⁰ Interview with Mullah Abdusselam Becirmani.

⁶⁵¹ Toprak, 123.

⁶⁵² Interview with Fuat Toprak.

judgments unquestionably, supposing that they had a high knowledge of Islam, even though the sheikhs' ideas and practices did not comply with Islamic jurisprudence much of the time. People financially supported the sheikhs and their orders at the expense of suffering from poverty. It was hard to convince people of the sheikhs' deceits when they felt so much tied to them. "People took their sick kids to sheikhs for a hope of cure, instead of a doctor,"⁶⁵³ says Mullah Yasin's son, Fuat Toprak, "they assumed the sheikhs had a "powerful breath," and if they read special prayers, one would be healed, due to the sheikhs' extraordinary healing capacity. Some sheikhs of his time spread the idea that sending kids to secular schools was a sin, which caused more illiteracy and ignorance and worked for the benefit of the exploitative sheikhs.



Figure 8 The portrait of Mullah Yasin Toprak.

Source: Z. Fuat Toprak, Muhammed Toprak, Z. Abidin Toprak, "Seyda Molla Yasin Toprak (Yusri) Hayati ve İlmi Kişiliği," *Şarkiyat İlmi Araştırmalar Dergisi*, No. 1, April 2009

A question posed to Mullah Yasin demonstrates how highly the sheikhs were venerated by the people: "is the urine of my sheikh considered clean or impure?" Toprak says, his father knew if he said it was dirty, the man would not believe him. Mullah Yasin

⁶⁵³ Interview with Fuat Toprak.

chose to communicate with him in a way he would not reject and react, and he said; “Do you think that your sheikh would wash his clothes if they are touched by his urine, or just leave them there and pray with those clothes?” and then the man understood that the sheikh’s urine was dirty.”⁶⁵⁴ The way Mullah Yasin communicated with him is very telling about his mission to access people as well as showing the educational level of some of the followers of sheikhs and *Sufism*.

Muhammad Toprak, Mullah Yasin’s son narrated a related story about the deceit of sheikhs. When he recently became a village imam at the age of 19, people insisted that after the *eid* prayer he should accompany them on their *eid* visit to the sheikh in their village. As they reached and sat around the sheikh, a woman arrived to ask the sheikh if she could donate to him her *iskat*⁶⁵⁵ money as compensation for her unperformed prayers before she died. The sheikh accepted. Then a man asked Muhammad Toprak, whether one could pay for her *iskat* while living and insisted on an answer, as he was the son of Mullah Yasin, known as *Çiyayi İlme* (the mountain of knowledge).⁶⁵⁶ Muhammad Toprak said it was acceptable to pay *iskat* as atonement for a wrong oath but *iskat* can only be paid after you die, if it is for the atonement for unmade prescribed prayers or fasts. The man was shocked that the sheikh deceitfully accepted the woman’s *iskat* money so calmly. Muhammed Toprak, his son, relates that Mullah Yasin quoted Said Nursi, from his assessment of *sufi* practice in the 20th century; “*Sufism* is a delicious coffee, now we have the coffee cup, yet it is empty.” *Sufism* existed in shape but not in meaning. It works to strengthen one’s spirituality, yet when people are without faith, *sufism* would not be able to function accurately. That is why Mullah Yasin was

⁶⁵⁴ Interview with Fuat Toprak.

⁶⁵⁵ *Iskat* is the compensational money given after death for the prayers unperformed by the deceased.

⁶⁵⁶ Toprak, 127.

more known for his identity as a madrasa mullah than as a *sufi* sheikh, although he also had a few students he taught *sufism*. He emphasized the significance of learning as a way to please God, which is the main goal of true *Sufism*, and often quoted from Ehmede Xani to strengthen his refutation of manipulated sheikhhood and *Sufism*.

Being a sheikh, a Sufi and performing miraculous deeds,
Is all about acquiring knowledge and acting on it
Then your school (madrasa) becomes where you can rest in solitude and can practice dhikr.
This (Sufi) way of yours way is purely sharia, the way to reach God.⁶⁵⁷

Mullah Yasin left a legacy of raising mullahs through madrasa education, which continues to this day. I had the opportunity to interview some of his students who became influential religious leaders themselves. Mullah Ali Zile, whom I will discuss in the sixth chapter, is one of them. His other student, Mullah Zeynelabidin Çiçek has been the author of many religious and cultural books and a Kurdish-Turkish-Arabic dictionary. Çiçek says that his unpublished dictionary, *Ferhenga Amedi: Kürdi Türki Erebi*,⁶⁵⁸ which contains nearly 25.000 words, is the first of its kind. (see Figure 9) He is also the author of *Diyarbakır'ın Fethi Tarihi ve Kültürü*⁶⁵⁹ and translated Allame Zemahşeri's book on the differences between Hanefi and Şafii jurisprudence⁶⁶⁰ into Turkish. Çiçek follows the path of Mullah Yasin and teaches as a madrasa mullah in a mosque in Diyarbakır.

⁶⁵⁷ Interview with Muhammed Toprak.

“Şex û sofîî keramet,
'ilm-xwendin hem 'emel,
xilwet e hucre, terîqa te şerî'et bê xelet.”

⁶⁵⁸ Çiçek states in the preface of his book that this dictionary was originally written by M. Cemil Seyda as Kurdish Arabic dictionary and Çiçek added the Turkish part to it.

⁶⁵⁹ Zeynelabidin Çiçek, *Diyarbakır'ın Fethi Tarihi ve Kültürü*, (Yeni Zamanlar Sahaf, 2007).

⁶⁶⁰ Allame Zemahşeri, *Hanefî ve Şafîî Mezhebi Arasındaki İhtilaflı Fıkhi Meseleler*, ed. Zeynelabidin Çiçek (Diyarbakır: Seyda Kitabevi, 2012).

- 1 -

Kürdî - کردی	Türki - ترکی	Arabi - عربی
A = Herfa yekem	Künt ⁹⁰ alfabe de bi-	الحرف الاول من الاعداد الكردية
ji alifba kürdî	rinçî Harf	
A = AN: Edatı, pur-	Çogul edatı ve harfı	اداة الجمع، حرف جر
bûni ve herfa zîr:	cerr, esre harfı	
A = herfa fiili dike	fiile izafe olupta	حرف مضاف إلى الفعل فيجمله
fail	fiili faile çeviren harfı	فَاعِلًا.
Ab = Tebox	Ağüstos ayı	شهر آب
Abasan	Suriyede bir künt	عشيرة كردية في الجزيرة السورانية.
Abide = p êker	Anıt, Abide	النصب التذكارى
Abkef	Küpük	كوبدة، الكعوب
Abone	Abone	مشاركة للمشاركة
Abori	Ekonomi	الاقتصاد
Abûr	Çift sürme aleti	ادوات الحراثة
Ac	fil dişî	عاج الفيل
Acinci = nişteci	Yerli,	الموطن، القيم
Acir (ع)	Tuğla	الاجر
Acirpij → AcurPêj	Tuğla ustası	صانع الاجر
Aciafemanı / افمان	Bir çeşit Yılan	نوع من الافاعي
(Aciz (ع) Bêhteng	Güçsüz, Aciz kims-e	العاجز
(Bêhn zaif	Sıkılmak	يضمير
Acizbun: Bêhteng		
bûn, Bêhn zaifî		
Aciz dibe	Sıkılıyor	يضمير
AD	AD	AD

Figure 9 The first page of Çiçek's Kurdish-Turkish-Arabic Dictionary

Source Zeynelabidin Çiçek, *Ferhenga Amedi: Kürdi Türki Erebi*, photograph by the author, Diyarbakır, 2013.

Mullah Yasin composed his Kurdish *Rawdul Hayat*,⁶⁶¹ including a part named *Rejection of Injustices*, in which he elucidated types of deliberately cruel and unjust acts faced in daily life and how they would be a reason for great remorse for the unjust on the Day of Judgment. In the introduction of his book, he declares the reason for writing his book was to have Muslim men and women of future generations read and pay attention to it. Simplistic it may sound; the statement relays that the audience of the book is not the elite, not the scholars, but ordinary people. Considering the widespread Kurdish tradition among the Kurdish *ulema* to write highly sophisticated literary books, some in Kurdish and some in Arabic, Mullah Yasin's was a deliberate choice to write for ordinary people. His mission of providing linguistic accessibility to people also showed itself in his book, *Akida Imane A Yeki* (The First Book on the Tenets of Faith), a book on Islamic tenets for children written in simple Kurdish in a poetic, easy-to-remember format.

Within the part, "Rejection of Injustices," the wrongs one can face from others are counted in what follows: verbal abuse, backbiting, mocking, deceit in transactions, disregarding the poor by the rich, silence in front of an injustice done to others:

one says: you vilified me and brought shame on me,
The other says: you wronged me,
You gossiped about me and made me feel dirty,
You treated me with ridicule,
You deceived me often when we were neighbors,
You were immoral towards me,
The other says: you deceived me in transaction,
You did not tell me the defects of your goods,
You unjustly sold your goods at a high price,
You told me I was young and rich,
Yet I was poor and you did not feed me,
You oppressed me intentionally,
And did not prevent oppression when you were able,
You conspired with the tyrant, and did not show mercy...
(now) they are coming from every corner, to you the robber,

⁶⁶¹ Yasin Toprak, *Rawdul Hayat*, (İstanbul: Nubihar, 2011). Mullah Yasin was not able to publish this book due to the ban on Kurdish, it is only published recently by Nubihar publication house in İstanbul.

To ask for their rights,
All people gather around you
Asking for their rights one by one.⁶⁶²

Mullah Yasin enacted in his poem the day of judgement, and how and for what reason the oppressors would face justice and the oppressed would be recompensed. By clarifying unjust acts faced daily he was making them more noticeable and building a consciousness towards oppression.

In order to strengthen people's connection to themselves, sheikhs claimed to know the very secrets of people. Fuat Toprak informs us that sheikhs were considered to know what is outside and what is secret as well. If his knowledge does not reach to what a husband and wife chat about at night in secret, he has not yet got his share from sheikhhood. For Mullah Yasin, people should not be bewildered and deceived by the miraculous deeds of sheikhs; they do not always guarantee one's high knowledge of Islam or close relationship with God. He maintained in his book that sheikhs would be of no help even in the afterlife without God's permission:

“By God, If God does not grant you his blessings,
There is none to help you, even a little, in the day of Resurrection,
Be it a beg, an agha or a sheikh.”⁶⁶³

Khalifa Yusuf called the sheikhs who prophesized about people's future lives soothsayers, which was a prohibited practice in Islamic tradition.⁶⁶⁴ Sheikhs who claimed extraordinary power for healing people's sicknesses in fact only desired people to get continuously sick so that sheikhs could get richer and richer. Khalifa ruthlessly attacked them for earning what is religiously prohibited, and called them Pharaoh erroneously claiming to

⁶⁶² Toprak, 107-108.

⁶⁶³ Toprak, 122.

⁶⁶⁴ Doğubeyazıtlı Halife Yusuf, Untitled, *İrşadul'İbad ve Türkçe Tercümesi* Vol.2, (İstanbul: Hira Yayınları, 1998), 242-243.

be Moses or a friend of God. They were not in the way of true *sufis*; they were in the service of Satan:

“The sick is crippled, unconscious
Yet the so-called sheikh (is worse since he) is unmindful of faith and religion,
He wishes God to set evils on you hundreds of times
This benefits the freeloader working with deceits and slanders
Sicknesses are their treasure
They are wolfs sucking blood, yet in the form of a man
They say “we are sheikhs, praying for you
Curing every illness all at once”
(they are) Sheikh of sleep, comfort and eating
By God, not to be even compared to a shepherd’s dog
A true sheikhhood and prayers are only deserved by friends of God
Not by the ignorant and the rebellious eaters of the prohibited
If not on the way of true mystics, dervishes
you are the Pharaoh, do not claim you follow the calling of Moses.”⁶⁶⁵

Mullah Yasin, on the other hand, assessed that people’s lack of Islamic knowledge was not only a religious drawback, but it also had to do with their material loss. If they were able to identify the sheikhs’ inaccuracy on religious issues, that would unavoidably lead them to question the sheikhs’ intentions. Then they would make their donations to their own poor people and the needy instead of to the sheikhs. Only then, they could progress as a people. He once warned a villager not to sacrifice his animal in the sheikh’s dwelling, hoping that it would be more meritorious and more pleasing to God: “You are taking away the share of the poor, by sacrificing your sheep in the sheikh’s place and donating it to him. You have to take care of the poor around your residence first and foremost.”⁶⁶⁶

Mullah Yasin and Khalifa Yusuf’s efforts in Islamic education of the public in Kurdish was emerged from both religious concerns and their consciousness of the development of the Kurdish people. They both aimed to communicate clearly with the ordinary people and to discredit sheikhs who mystified things.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., 242-243.

⁶⁶⁶ Interview with Muhammed Toprak

Kurdish National Consciousness Beyond the Locale

Khalifa Yusuf exhibited a clear national consciousness when he expressed his distress with the Kurds' deprecating their native language. He was troubled by Kurdish linguistic unconsciousness, which was contrary to the pride shown by other nations in their native language, such as Turks, Persians and Europeans. It is enough of an embarrassment to be illiterate in one's ancestors' language: "*Tu ku exmeki lisani abai xu nizani, Şerm heya bike kemtir jisani.*"⁶⁶⁷ The Kurdish men of literacy were famed in accordance with their command of the Arabic language, not of their own: "*Bi ilm arabi nave xu (xwe) diki tu malum, bi zanini li dunyai axiretixu (xwe) diki rezilu mahrum.*"⁶⁶⁸ Khalifa believed that undervaluing the ability to learn and write in their own language was not only humiliating but also detrimental to the Kurds in both worlds. Therefore, debating against the sheikhs who opposed Khalifa for writing in Kurdish was not, for Khalifa, merely a fight to reveal true and false sheikhs. This corrupted order stood against Kurdish development.

"The Turk (Rom) and European [and] Persian have all seen
They have written their religion and denomination in their own language
They are writing every science and work in their language
Each of them likes and is proud of their language
Except for the Kurmanjî that is without art [and] nobility
Except for some of them, the evil and the ignorant
Do not want happiness neither in this world and nor in the after,
If they see an issue in their language
They get annoyed by it, they turn their face from it
They hate it, never do they look at it
Even though it is from Shari'a and the Prophet's hadith."⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁷ Yusuf, 156.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., 156.

⁶⁶⁹ Yusuf, 26.

*"Rûm û firenk û ecem cumle û dîne,
Dîn û mezheb bi lîsanê xwe nivîsîne
Dinivîsin bi lîsanê xwe her funûn û karî
Her yek bi zîmanê xwe dîkin ucub û iftîxarî
Ji xeyrî be 'dek ji wan cahil bê necabet*

His comparison of Kurds to other nations below implies that Kurds would be deprived of any development that other nations produced due to their practical use of their language. Khalifa criticized the Kurds' lack of love and pride towards their national language since it costs them a great price as a result. He compares other nations producing all kinds of literature in their own language and he problematizes the atypical Kurdish opposition to writing in Kurdish.

His relating of Kurdish language and the Kurds to the situation of other languages and nations is very comparable to the national feelings expressed in Ehmede Xani's poetry. By expressing his apprehensions beyond his locale, Khalifa Yusuf approaches the Kurdish problem on a national level. As Xani questioned the inferior situation of Kurds to other nations, Khalifa Yusuf problematizes the Kurds' low perception of themselves as the reason of their inferior situation. For Khalifa Yusuf, using Kurmanji would make a significant change in the Kurds' perception of their identity and the development of their society.

Fostering Distinct Features of the Kurds: Promoting Shafii Jurisprudence and Madrasa Education

Khalifa Yusuf's and Mullah Yasin's educational writings in Shafii jurisprudence demonstrated their consciousness of the need to keep Shafi'i jurisprudence active and practiced among the Kurds as it had been historically. That is why in 1960, when Kurdish

*Navên bibînin li دنیا û axret seadet
Eger bi zimanê xwe mes'elek bibînin
I'rad jê dîkin ruwê xwe jê dizivrînin
Nefret jê dîkin tu car lê nakin nezer
Ger çi bibe şer'û hedîsa Pêxember."*

was still prohibited in Turkey, Khalifa Yusuf took the risk and ordered his son, Sheikh Mustafa, to take his book to Ankara for a second publication.⁶⁷⁰ Mullah Abdullah narrates that in 1960, his uncle Sheikh Mustafa was afraid to take the book to Ankara. This is why the book had, on its cover page, a Qur’anic verse, “God is the best protector,”⁶⁷¹ (see Figure 10) penned by Khalifa Yusuf for protection from any persecution. Khalifa Yusuf was able to get his book published in Ankara by using a different name, Abdullah Naqshbandi, and the address of the publication was a wrong address. Khalifa Yusuf only put his real name by encoding the consonants of his name in Arabic letters, Y, S, V, F at each corner of a rectangular shape he made (see Figure 1111); in which he wrote the sum of the numerical value of each letter Y, S, V, F; 156, according to the calculation named *abjad*.⁶⁷² He was able to have four thousand copies of his book at that time.⁶⁷³

⁶⁷⁰ When *Khalifa* Yusuf published *Irshadul Ibad* for the first time in 1949 in Syria, he stayed in Damascus for about three months to get his book published there under the name of *Majma’ al-Masail*.

⁶⁷¹ Qur’an, 12:64

⁶⁷²The Abjad numerals refer to the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet, each of which is assigned a numerical value. It has been used to interpret the hidden meaning out of words.

⁶⁷³ Interview with Mullah Abdullah.

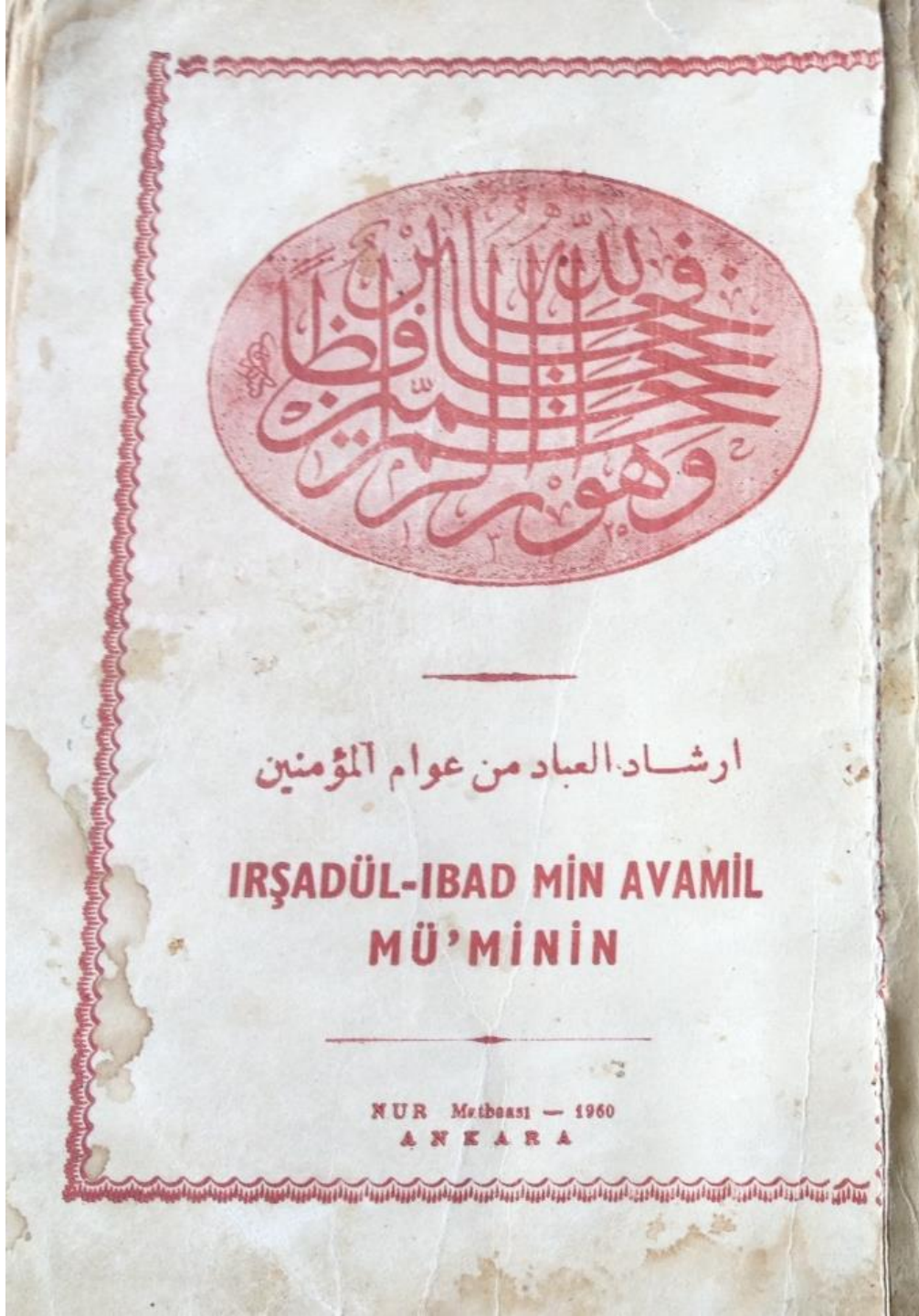


Figure 10 The Qur'anic verse, God is the best protector, appears on the cover page of Khalifa's book. Source: Abdullah Naksibendi, *Irshadul Ibad min Avamil Mu'minin*, Ankara: Nur Matbaasi, 1960.

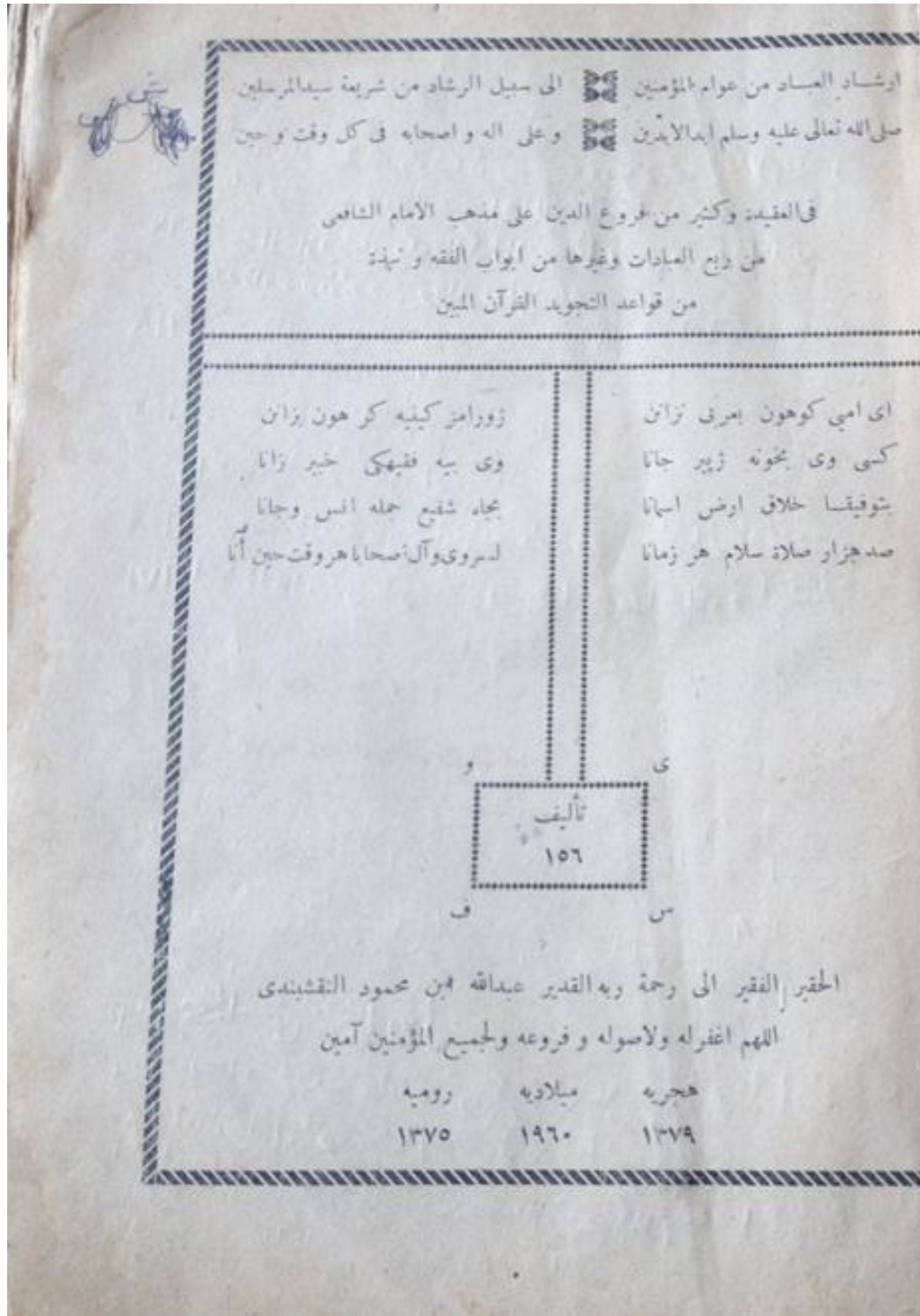


Figure 11 Khalifa Yusuf encoded the consonants of his name in Arabic letters, Y, S, V, F making a rectangular shape at the front page of his book.

Source: Abdullah Naksibendi, *Irshadul Ibad min Avamil Mu'minin*, Ankara: Nur Matbaasi, 1960.

When Khalifa Yusuf visited Mecca for pilgrimage, he brought with himself a table for inheritance rules according to Islamic Shafi'i School of law. He wrote an explanation of how to use this table in Kurdish, which could be of great use to the Kurdish public. He published *Faraiz*, the Shafii law on inheritance, in the early 1960s.⁶⁷⁴ This would not only help them to calculate shares of inheritance after the decease, it would also work to reveal the forgery and deceit done by sheikhs in inheritance calculations. His grandson tells that this table (see Figure 12) showing the inheritance rules in detail is still in use in Ağrı, Doğubeyazıt, where the Islamic Shafi'i School of law reigns.

⁶⁷⁴ Metin Yüksel, 203.

جدول اُمّت میراث الشریعی

به نصیب وی درین نایف ویدا مکتوبه اگر وارث ددویون نصیب وان دوی خاتا کو اسم وان راست هفت هاسته ز جدول کلما زور زور وارث لبال جیبه بی آخر زور وی
 وارث کولبال راستیه اگر (وارث) نئی ویا زید ترین بی بکری نصیب بی اول
 بستگانه هم دکل بصکا ز زحف بو نصیب وی اوی هندکه پاش وارث گالی بکره
 ذکره دکل نای پاش دکل ناک وها دکل جمع وارثا اگر منق بو حصتاری دکل حصا کل وان او حصت زور ویه اگر حصتاری مختلف بو توکو دکل
 دکل بی اول هم اوبد بی وی اگر حصه وان وکه هف بون نصیب وی اوبه اگر مختلف بون نصیب وی دکل وان نصیب وی اوی هندکه بی وها بک دکل وارث ناک
 این ابن بو دکل جد خانا (هشادا) جمع دن زور جد کما سربال چه سسه او زور حله دستا بی باقیه اوز زور ابن ابنه (ویا وارث بنا ابن بو دکل اخ ژان دسا
 ابنیه (ویا وارث ابن امیه دکل اخ ژان ام) دختایا هشت دهاتا جمع دن بی لیر پال جب حصه او زور اخ ژانیه مال زور ابن امیه وها قیاس بکه اگر نئی ویا جاز ویا زید
 دکل هف جمع بین .

Figure 12 The inheritance table according to Shafii jurisprudence Khalifa brought from Saudi Arabia. The table is in Arabic while the above explanation is in Kurdish. Source: The courtesy of Khalifa Yusuf's grandson, Mullah Abdullah.

In the picture, the explanation of the inheritance table is placed at the top of the reverse triangle. It elaborates how the calculation should be done to find out the share of each family

member after a decease.⁶⁷⁵ For an accurate calculation of inheritance shares and their distribution Khalifa Yusuf also penned a booklet on practical math in Kurdish, which is unpublished.⁶⁷⁶

Khalifa Yusuf's writing a book for basic mathematics to use in inheritance calculations makes at least one thing clear: ordinary Kurdish people would not need to go to a religious authority to get their inheritance shares calculated, if they used the materials provided by Khalifa Yusuf. In general, villagers wished to get their shares calculated by the sheikhs to attain a precise calculation. Yet Mullah Abdullah relates that there were sheikhs who fooled people by sparing a share for themselves from the inheritance of others' deceased relatives. By writing his book and providing an inheritance table for the use of the public,

⁶⁷⁵ The table indicates the number of possible inheritors as thirty as written on the first line of the table in small boxes. If there is only one inheritor his/her share is written right under the tiny triangle under the box carrying the name of his/her kinship to the deceased. If there are two inheritors, such as the son (specified as box number 1 in Arabic numerals) and the grandson (marked as 4), one needs to put his fingers on boxes 1 and 4 and drag his fingers down to the point of their intersection: here are two words: mahjub and maal. The word at the top refers to the share of the person whose name is written in the box to the left, and the bottom word refers to the one on the rightmost box. Thus, the grandson of the deceased cannot get a share from the inheritance; it is entirely inherited to the son. Take number 2 and 5; the daughter and the daughter of the son. They intersect at the box saying assudus (one sixth), annesf (the half). Hence the daughter (number 2) gets the half of inheritance, indicated by the word at the top of the box, and the daughter of the son (number 5) gets the one sixth of the inheritance. I thank Mullah Abdussalam Becirmani for his help in clarifying the formula of this inheritance table.

⁶⁷⁶ He first explained the number and digits: He picks a random number and explains how the value of each number is calculated according to the value of their digits: 752126432 has eight digits: the units digit is 2, the tens digit is 3, the hundreds digit is 4, the thousands digit is 6, the ten-thousands digit is 2, the hundred thousand digit is 1, the one millions digit is 2, the ten millions digit is 5 and the hundred millions digit is 7. He then describes the increase to billions, to trillions, quadrillions, etc. His book also elucidates the basic math rules of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division with quite a number of examples. Additionally, he provides original formulas to multiply certain numbers in more simple ways. For instance, he formulates a rule for multiplying the numbers from 10 to 20. Take 12 and 17. The units' digit of the first number (2) is added to the second number (17), which equals 19. 19 is multiplied with 10 and it is 190. Finally, the units' digit of the original numbers, 2 and 7, are multiplied and the result is 14. 14 is added to 190, and the result is 204. This is Mullah Abdussalam Becirmani's explanation. For a detailed analysis of Khalifa Yusuf's formulas for calculation see Xelîfe Yûsif, "Usûla Meratibê Hisab," transliterated by Abdusselam Becirmani, *Nûbihar* No. 89, (Summer 2003): 26-35.

Khalifa Yusuf was defending the Kurdish people against the abuse of sheikhs, revealing their treacheries, and undermining their authority as a result.

Mullah Yasin made his main efforts in promoting Kurdish madrasa culture. His response toward the religious policies of the government was not very positive. Mullah Yasin was convinced that the abolition of the madrasas threatened the survival of the Kurdish Islamic tradition, since madrasas made a bridge between the past and the present. In order to fill the void as much as possible, he devoted his efforts to raising scholars in underground madrasas.⁶⁷⁷ The closing down of the madrasas was also a blow against Islamic education, and he supported the running of underground Kurdish madrasas, which was done in secrecy and in persistent continuity despite the risk of arrest, torture and even death. For him, the Imam and Preacher schools, newly opened in 1951, in which religious sciences were taught, could not serve as an alternative to madrasas since the students of these schools were not raised as scholars but as state officials to lead prayers, give sermons, etc. Mullah Yasin took it very seriously that knowledge was conveyed not out of a formal obligation, but out of an inner call. The madrasa was a face-to face learning experience with the scholar and the scholars were plain volunteers. His concern was also the monopolization of religion by the state. Imam and Preacher schools were not free organs but operated under the government agenda and its policies. He once said of the Presidency of Religious Affairs as a state formulation intended to implement state-approved Islam into the public; the PRA was a necessary component of the secular Kemalist system.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁷ Interview Muhammad Toprak

⁶⁷⁸ Interview with Fuat Toprak.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated the linguistic mission of Khalifa Yusuf and Mullah Yasin, who exhibited their national awareness through making the Kurdish language and religion accessible to the people. Against the critique they faced from the status quo, they aimed to establish the linguistic authenticity of Kurdish by referencing well-known Kurdish Islamic figures who used Kurdish in their works. They did not support the creation of a free Kurdish state; however, they did not conform to the suppressing and homogenizing policies of the state, either. For them, promoting the use of the Kurdish language and the practice of the Shafi'i school of Islamic law, were not to work against the territorial integrity of the state.⁶⁷⁹ In their thought, Kurdish and Turkish unity was an important aspect of Islamic brotherhood. As for the Sufi and sheikh establishment, they did not want to destroy these organizations, yet they still fought against the exploitative status quo in Kurdish social life. Lastly, their criticism of the sheikhs' exploitation of the Kurds confirms their care for Kurdish national interests.

Khalifa Yusuf and Mullah Yasin were equally critical of the sheikhs, indicating the existence of self-criticism within the religious class. Rather than aiming to remove the *sufi* organization from public life, Khalifa Yusuf and Mullah Yasin's attempt could be described as a protest; they wanted to inform the public about Kurdish manipulation as well as the manipulation of religion. In some ways, it is reminiscent of the protest of Martin Luther of the 15th century, a Catholic priest himself, who rejected many practices of the Catholic

⁶⁷⁹ Klein, "Kurdish Nationalists and Non-Nationalist Kurds," 147.

Church for corrupting people's faith. His translation of the Bible for people to learn what was and what was *not* in the Bible is comparable to Khalifa Yusuf's and Mullah Yasin's writings on Islam in Kurdish. These would empower people to discern the manipulations of the religious class.

Khalifa Yusuf and Mullah Yasin embraced a slow and bottom-up approach for the end of manipulations in Kurdish society; they worked to undermine sheikhly exploits through their relationships on individual and social levels. Kurdish ethnic nationalism was influenced by Marxism and the regime under which it developed, Kemalism;⁶⁸⁰ therefore it supported the idea of revolutionary change from the top down; and revolution only meant "to shake down the entire social structure and establish once again, ...to change people's lifestyles and increase the living standards."⁶⁸¹ The revolutionary idea of change embedded in Kurdish nationalism is one of the reasons why an inner criticism towards the religious establishment, such as Khalifa Yusuf's and Mullah Yasin's, is not significant enough to be cited in the history of Kurdish national struggle.

This chapter provided an example of religious nationalist consciousness, which intertwined religious and national boundaries by promoting the use of the Kurdish language in religious contexts and distinct Kurdish religious practices through proving a historical authenticity. As opposed to Khalifa Yusuf and Mullah Yasin's belief in Kurdish development within the territorial integrity of the Turkish nation, the next chapter will present an example of a religious nationalism in support of an independent Kurdish state. Mullah Amadettin and Mullah Hasan regarded Islam as a motive for supporting Kurdish nationalism and maintained

⁶⁸⁰ Hamit Bozarslan, "Political aspects of Kurdish Problem," 110.

⁶⁸¹ M. Emin Bozarslan, *Hilafet ve Ümmetçilik Sorunu*, 223.

that for Kurdish independence and the end of religious and ethnic tyranny, secular and religious Kurds had to work together.

CHAPTER 5

MULLAH AMADETTİN AND MULLAH HASAN SOFYA: RELIGIOUS ARTICULATION OF SECULAR NATIONALIST DISCOURSE

This chapter brings to light the writings and thoughts of two Kurdish mullahs, Mullah Amadettin Yetiz of Batman (b. 1937) and Mullah Hasan Sofya of Diyarbakır, who accepted the secular leadership of Kurdish nationalism and interpreted nationalism through the use of religious terminology. Coming from a religious background, these Kurdish mullahs justified their convictions within a religious framework. While religion did not define the boundaries of the Kurdish nation, it supplied fundamental metaphors and symbols to the representation of the Kurdish nation for them.⁶⁸² They regarded Islam as a motive for supporting Kurdish nationalism.

For Mullah Amadettin, religious leaders should have supported Kurdish independence out of their religious convictions, if not for any other reason. Kurdish independence was about protecting the wealth, honor and faith of the Kurdish people, which were also the concern of the religion of Islam. He was very disappointed with the mullahs who refused to work with the increasing number of Kurds leaning towards socialism. He believed that for Kurdish independence and the end of tyranny, secular and religious Kurds had to work together. Both he and Mullah Hasan castigated other mullahs for manipulating religious concepts like the *umma* against the benefit of the Kurds. The concept of *umma* was emptied of meaning for them. It was remarkable to discover in my interviews that Mullah

⁶⁸² Brubaker, 9.

Hasan criticized the use and popularization of the idea of *umma* and thought this was simply a justification for the Kurds' passive stance against the Turkish state's injustices in the 1970s: "What if the other siblings forget about their brotherhood?" The idea of *umma* was also abused, according to him, in that Muslim unity would not even be possible without both sides agreeing to respect each other's rights. Their comprehension of Kurdish nationalism was the product of various political ideologies in action, most importantly the rise and fall of the Barzani revolt in Iraq.

Kurdish Mullahs and Secular Nationalism

Many of my interviewees, contemporary Kurdish mullahs, were convinced that the PKK, as an influential Kurdish Marxist organization in an armed conflict with the state, was a project to turn Kurds away from religion.⁶⁸³ In my face-to-face interview with Mullah Amadettin, he expressed his distrust of the PKK's Marxist ideology. He considers that the big mistake the Kurdish secular nationalists made was to mix nationalist thought with socialism and secularism. Kurdish society in general was very religious and traditional, definitely irritated by socialist and secularist arguments. In order to have more Kurds awakened to a nationalist cause, and to cause national consciousness to take root in such a society, he considered that a religious base was essential. That is why he regrets that Cegerxwîn's powerful voice for the Kurdish cause was raised in support of Marxism and that he ceased to be a religious figure who could have effectively motivated the Kurdish masses better.

⁶⁸³ Interview with Mullah Zeynelabidin Çiçek, M. Said Yaz, Mullah Süleyman Kurşun of Diyarbakır.

Mullah Amadettin was a keen supporter of Mustafa Barzani's independence movement and his goal to build a state for the Kurds. In 1965, he opened the representation office of Barzani's Kurdistan Democrat Party in Batman⁶⁸⁴ and ran the organization, although the KDPT was illegal and only worked clandestinely in Turkey. He supplied religious images from Islamic history to support Barzani and his independence movement:

You are Luqman the physician, with your work Kurdish land grow beautiful,
Kurdish nation, Muslim, Christian and Yezidi, bows in front of you, you are a good
person.
You are the Rustem of Kurdish mythology in courage,
As for justice, you are Omar and Noşirewan,
In beauty you are like Joseph
You scared the enemy,
You are the thorn in the eye of the enemy (their nightmare),
Turks, Arabs and Persians.⁶⁸⁵

Mullah Amadettin supported the Kurdish political party in Turkey founded in 2001 by Sheikh Said's grandson Abdulmelik Fırat, the Rights and Freedoms Party (HAK-PAR), as an alternative to the Marxist Kurdish armed movement, the PKK. Fırat objected to the PKK's ideology and its armed struggle with the state. By his party the Kurdish agenda would be carried to the legislative assembly and Kurdish rights would be sought in legal ways.⁶⁸⁶

Background Information

Beginning his madrasa education in Batman in 1950, Mullah Amadettin Yetiz (b.1937), known as Seydaye Gurdili (see Figure 13), was influenced by the ideas of Cigerxwîn, whose *divan* he first read in 1951-1952.

⁶⁸⁴ The KDP in Turkey was born out of conservative circles; its founding secretary was Faik Bucak from the great *agha* family of Siverek. This is why he was assassinated months after the foundation of the KDP in Turkey and his family was attacked by the PKK in 1978 due to their ties with the Turkish government.

⁶⁸⁵ Mele Amadettin Yetiz (Seydaye Gurdili), "Qahremanê esra bîsta Mistefa Barzan î tu," *Banga Yekîtî bo Azadî*, (İstanbul: Nûbihar, 2012), 15.

⁶⁸⁶ Ferzende Kaya, *Mezopotamya sürgünü: Abdülmelik Fırat'ın yaşam öyküsü*, (İstanbul: Anka Yayınları, 2003), 268.



Figure 13 Mullah Amadettin Yetiz reading his book, *Banga Yekîtu bo Azadî*, (İstanbul: Nûbihar), 2012. Source: Photograph by the author, Batman, June 2013.

Cigerxwîn's ideas on Kurdish nationalism were spreading quickly in madrasa circles after the 1950s, as attested by many of my informants who attended madrasas during those years.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁷ Interview with Mullah Süleyman Kurşun, Mullah Hüseyin Gündüz, Mullah Hasan Sofya, Mullah Zeynelabidin Çiçek.

Mullah Amadettin claims to be the first person to celebrate *Newroz* in Batman, in a village called Akuba, in 1960. He saw it as nothing more than a national celebration, since that was the day the Kurds got their freedom from the oppressions of Dahok. His celebration, however, was not well received by all mullahs in the 1950s, when there was an open split between Kurdish mullahs influenced by nationalism and those who rejected it due to religious convictions. Mullah Amadettin was then called Zoroastrian and atheist by some mullahs around him who objected to the *Newroz* celebration as a Zoroastrian practice. A number of Kurdish mullahs were reactionary toward nationalism, mainly because of secular nationalism's non-conforming attitude towards Islam. Celebration of *Newroz* as a welcome to spring was an old Zoroastrian tradition practiced by the Arabs in 7th-century Madina, and the Kurdish mullahs knew that Prophet Muhammad banned this celebration for Muslims.⁶⁸⁸ That was why it was not simply interpreted as nationalist, but for some Kurdish mullahs it also implied a re-introducing of a prohibited pre-Islamic practice.

Mullah Amadettin was not the only one to be criticized as atheistic. Mullah Hasan Sofya of Diyarbakır combined his teachings on the Islamic sciences with efforts to increase awareness of the Kurdish condition among his students. He did not consider this work to be secular in nature. In fact, he was never convinced that what he was doing was sinful, although he became infamous as a communist. Mullah Hasan Sofya was born in Diyarbakır in 1943. He started his studies with Mullah Abdulmati in 1956 and studied in several other madrasas. He became a madrasa professor in 1966. He was a friend of Mullah Amadettin Yetiz, and aligned with him in his political ideology. He supported the Barzani-led Kurdish movement and he was critical of the Marxist ideology of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey.

⁶⁸⁸ Interview with Mullah Zeynelabidin Çiçek.

Nonetheless, he agreed with Mullah Amadettin on unity among the Kurds and disregarding ideological differences in order to reach the higher goal of Kurdish independence.

Religious Justification for Nationalism

Mullah Amadettin did not completely shun the secular nationalists; instead he opted to unite with them when there was no better choice. He has believed that for Kurdish independence and the end of tyranny, secular and religious Kurds had to work together. The responsibility for the freedom of one's nation was not a secular or luxurious concern at all; Mullah Amadettin saw it as a necessary step for Kurdish improvement in every matter. Since Kurdish subjugation would eventually bring about the end of everything the Kurds had, including religion, in his thought religiosity required working for one's nation.

Is this not a shame that some of you are leftist and some are the opposite?
The Kurdish land is under the feet of the enemy
Speak up for yourself all together (not separately)
Know that the unity of ants stopped the fight of Solomon
After (we get) independence, you can choose to be a leftist or a conservative
Or with whomever you may wish to link your voice.⁶⁸⁹

It was through an Islamic discourse that Mullah Hasan and Mullah Amadettin convinced themselves to support the Kurdish cause. They referred to the Prophet's *hadith* and Qur'anic injunctions in their discussions on Kurdish rights. They did not employ the Marxist discourse of "exploitation," instead they reclaimed an Islamic discourse inherent in Kurdish nationalism by using the Islamic notions of the equality of all nations, justice and love for the homeland, which were more familiar to the Kurdish people. Mullah Amadettin used to bring

⁶⁸⁹ Yetiz, 48.

*"Ne şerm e qey ji bona we hinek rast û hinek çep bin
Di bin lingê neyara de dimîne xakê Kurdane
Bi yekîfî digel tevde daxwaza xwe bi mêranî
Bizanin yekîtiya morî dikuşt şêrê Silêmane."*

examples to his friends from the life of Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Prophet Muhammad, for instance, did not prohibit one's love for his tribe; therefore, being awakened to the rights of one's nation out of love for one's nation would be completely acceptable. He narrates that after the Muslim community in the 7th century won the first battle with the Meccans, they captured Omar's brother among the hostages. When Omar asked Abubakr what to do with them, Abubakr told him that these were his own people, his own tribe. He used to say to his friends, "If Abubakr considered non-Muslim Meccans still among his tribe, how could we not fight for the rights of our Muslim Kurds?"⁶⁹⁰

The poems of Sheikh Abdurrahman Aktepi (d.1910) constituted another religious reference for Mullah Amadettin, as he often read them as a student in the madrasa with his like-minded friends. As religious as he was, Aktepi often expressed his love for the Kurdish language and his sorrow for the Kurds' lack of enthusiasm for reading in Kurdish. He was an inspirational model for them in the madrasa. Sheikh Abdurrahman Aktepi authored a *manzume*, a long poem about the Prophet Muhammad's miraculous *Mi'raj*, the night journey, and explained why he penned it in Kurdish:

I put these words in a form of poetry with honorable and sweet eloquence using my Kurmanji,
There is not a language as sweet as Kurdish,
Yet there are also not readers of poetry in this language,
If I could find any readers, the words would fall from my mouth like water streaming from a river,
Then I would write many books of poetry, bringing questions and answers in a poetic form,
Now I authored this poem only wishing that
Turkish and Persian poets will never say there were no Kurdish poets famed
We certainly had them, with their poetry sweet and in supreme beauty
By writing this in Kurmanji, I cut the tongue of Turks who speak against us
And indicated to them there are proficient poets among the Kurds.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁹⁰ Interview with Mullah Amadettin Yetiz.

⁶⁹¹ Abdurrahman Şemseddin Aktepi, *Ravdu'n Naim: Bi Şerhin Nef'il 'Amim*, compiled by Zeynelabidin Çiçek, (Diyarbakir, Mektebe Seyda), 42-43. I thank Mullah Zeynelabidin Çiçek for bringing this to my attention and for his translation.

"Binêrin li şiran heçî zaniye
Çi terkîbekî sirfî kurmanci ye

Aktepi obviously esteemed the Kurdish language and made great efforts to prove to other nations that Kurdish was a language that produced high literature and many illustrious authors. Pouring down from the mouth of a devout Kurdish sheikh, these lines secured the idea that writing in Kurdish, expressing Kurdishness or supporting Kurdish rights to their mother tongue could not be sinful. Indeed, Kurdishness was esteemed in Kurdish religious circles long before communism started. This is why neither Hasan Sofya nor Mullah Amadettin felt that they were violating the brotherhood of Muslims, nor were they supporting Marxist ideology. In fact, a religious discourse on love for the motherland, love for one's fellows in the nation, shaped the backbone of Mullah Amadettin's definition of nationalism as well as the Kurds' deteriorated situation.

The Idea of the *Umma* and the Charge of Being a Communist

Hasan Sofya took the calls for *umma* brotherhood with a large grain of salt, since the concept only benefited one brother, the Turks, while the Kurds were suffering. Kurdish mullahs maintaining the idea of *umma* ignored the inequalities between Kurds and Turks on the grounds that the two nations were brothers and sisters in religion. Mullah Hasan did not find this approach reasonable or religious enough. The *umma* concept, he still believes, is only valid when both sides agree and act on it and when one party does not victimize the

*Ji kurmanciya xwe me anî nîzam
Muella û şîrîn û efseh kelam...
Ku turk û faris nebêJîn tu car
Ne bun kurdî nîşani îşqa xedar
Wereng şairi kurdî şîrîn kelam
Şîrê wan zêde ehse nîzam
Welêkin teassub nemaye li me
Ji vé tirk û faris cimaye li me
Me ev çendi lefzi şîrîn çêkirin
Zebané di tirkan me pé jêkirin.”*

other. If the opposite was true, then the *umma* concept was already violated. The employment of this concept by Kurds, therefore, was for him a sign of indifference to the Kurdish people's despair, and he believed that the Turkish "brothers" had to stop discriminating and recognize their Kurdish brothers' rights.

Yet the opposite was the case. Nihal Atsız, a prominent writer on Turkish nationalism in the 1960s, caused many Kurdish demonstrations throughout the country in 1967 due to an article he published in *Ötüken* magazine:

Let the Kurds go away from Turkey! But to where? To wherever they like! Let them go to Iran, to Pakistan, to India, to Barzani. Let them ask at the United Nations to find them a home in Africa. Let them go away before the Turkish nation gets angry. The Turkish race is very patient, but when we get angry we are like lions. Let the Kurds ask the Armenians about us!⁶⁹²

Another article in this same anti-Kurdish magazine stated that "when we tell the Kurds their home truths, they do not blush with shame, because they do not have the face of human beings."⁶⁹³ Although the state discourse denied Kurdish existence and defined Kurds as mountain Turks, racism was still manifest; being Kurdish was to be a primitive rustic.⁶⁹⁴ The Kurds of Malatya, for instance, were regarded as foreigners.⁶⁹⁵ A letter written by a general in Diyarbakır's *Silvan* police office in 1964, published in the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, reads:

It is fairly easy to make a living here. I think I wasted my time there (in Ankara). 125 kuruş is just such little money to free someone here. Beating works so effectively here. If I ever get someone, I never release them without getting 500 lira. I am so tough... I make the Kurds tremble with fear. Our office takes care of 19 villages...It is very busy...I have purchased land in Diyarbakır and will build an apartment block.⁶⁹⁶

Mullah Hasan had experienced similar discrimination when he served in the military. He was first awakened to the situation of the Kurds through Cegerxwîn's works that he

⁶⁹² Romano, 110.

⁶⁹³ Ibid., 110.

⁶⁹⁴ McDowell, 409.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid.,

⁶⁹⁶ Bozarlan, *Doğunun Sorunları*, 129.

obtained from a mullah in the 1950s. He listened to Cegerxwîn's poetry on Friday nights, when the students had a break and read Cegerxwîn's poems to each other in the madrasa. His awakening grew greater after he joined the Turkish military in 1963. His commanding sergeant physically abused him several times for no reason and called him '*kro*', a demeaning word describing rough and uneducated men with a heavy accent in Turkish. Weak and offended at the time, he was in fact empowered to speak up against the discrimination Kurds had been going through. He wrote poems with a Kurdish national consciousness.

Mullah Hasan's students were actively involved in discussions and debates with students of other mullahs on Kurdish issues. Mullah Hasan's students memorized the poems of their professor on Kurdish misery and read them during crowded weddings, when students were traditionally given *ijaza*, the license to teach Islamic sciences. Here are some lines from a poem read by his students at a couple of weddings in 1977:

We are the Kurds, the sons of Kurds, our homeland is Kurdistan
With its plains, mountains, and uplands
Yet it has four enemies on it: Turks, Arabs, Russians and Persians
They live in comfort
Yet the owner of the land is without food, without water
It is as though the Kurds are deaf and blind
Do not they see all that?
Come and see, all nations became free
Are Kurds not humans?
If you read with our beautiful language
You would be delighted
If you read in your own language
It is without trouble
And you will be a source of knowledge.⁶⁹⁷

Due to Mullah Hasan's efforts to raise national consciousness among his students, some mullahs in the 1970s warned the youth to keep away from him. There was a common attitude in the 1970s, Mullah Hasan says, for one speaking of Kurdish rights to be categorized

⁶⁹⁷ Hasan Sofya, Unpublished writings. I thank Mullah Hasan Sofya for sharing his unpublished writings with me.

as a communist, since at that time Kurdish exploitation was articulated first and foremost by the Marxist students. A record in *Ronahi* journal indicates that this attitude existed even in the 1940s. A mullah preaching on the love for one's nation as a reflection of faith alarmed some listeners, and they warned him that his thought was stepping out from the way of *seydas* and following Cegerxwîn's ideas.⁶⁹⁸

The charge of being a communist was possibly connected to state policy also. In the 1960s, Turkish nationalism labelled the Kurdish question as a 'foreign provocation', a 'communist threat', which threatened not only Turkish security, but also the religion.⁶⁹⁹ Equating any Kurdish dissent with a threat to religion and nation or with communism disqualified the Kurdish opposition in the eyes of the Turkish public. For instance, a number of demonstrations organized in the Kurdish region as a reaction to Nihal Atsız's *Ötüken* writing mentioned above were depicted in Turkish newspapers as being a communist agenda.⁷⁰⁰ As mentioned earlier, the Kemalist regime popularized the Ottoman Islamic tradition of reverence to the state (*Devlet-i Ali, Devlet-i Ebed-Müdded*),⁷⁰¹ and many Kurdish Islamic writers complained that Turkish Muslims identified themselves with the nationalist state's territorial unity as a result, and ostracized Kurdish identity. They either quickly condemned Kurdish nationalism or remained indifferent to Kurdish problems,⁷⁰² since both implied separatism in the Turkish mind. Clearly, the condemnation of any Kurdish expression as separatist and communist enabled the state to silence Kurdish-Muslim dissent.

⁶⁹⁸ M. Besir Heseni, *Ronahi*, 17, (1943): 32.

⁶⁹⁹ Mesut Yeğen, *Müstakbel Türk'ten Sözde Vatandaşa: Cumhuriyet ve Kürtler*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006), 137 and Kaya, 195.

⁷⁰⁰ Bozarıslan, *Hilafet ve Ümmetçilik*, 342.

⁷⁰¹ Sakallıoğlu, "Kurdish Nationalism from an Islamist Perspective," 77.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, 78 and Müfit Yüksel, *Kürdistan'da Değişim Süreci*, 34.

That is why Hasan Sofya found the pleas to protect *umma* brotherhood and the charges of Communism and separatism dishonest and deceitful. The concept of the *umma* was only exploited by Turks, he reasoned; supporting basic Kurdish rights had nothing to do with propagating Communism.

Constructive and Destructive Nationalism

In his effort to religiously rationalize Kurdish nationalism, Mullah Amadettin makes a classification of nationalism by referring to Said Nursi's conceptualization of *müsbet* and *menfi milliyetçilik*, constructive and destructive nationalism. He says Nursi describes positive nationalism as a way of reinforcing Islamic brotherhood, which should serve Islam and be an element of it, but not take its place. Nursi maintains that Muslims should not regard each other as strangers because of the idea of nationalism, for "the peoples and tribes of Islam are most in need of one another, and each is more oppressed and more poverty-stricken than the others, and they are crushed beneath European domination."⁷⁰³ Although Mullah Amadettin's nationalism envisions the creation of a separate Kurdish state, he still chooses to define it with Nursi's category of constructive nationalism. He argues that supporting the nationalism of a minority group, which only wishes to possess what Kurds were unjustly deprived of, is not a negative, racist nationalism. Nursi explains his view of destructive nationalism as racism, which builds itself up through exploiting other races. This is definitely not what Kurds want, according to Mullah Amadettin, "We do not want to be the head of other nations, assimilate or discriminate against them; we differ from Turkish nationalists who say how

⁷⁰³ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, "Twenty-Sixth Letter," *Letters*, <http://www.nur.gen.tr/en.html#maincontent=Risale&islem=read&KitapAd=Letters%20%28%20revised%20%29&KitapId=499&BolumId=8789&Page=374> Accessed February 23, 2013.

happy to call oneself a Turk. We just want to be freed from the dictates of other nations.”⁷⁰⁴ Mullah Amadettin’s view of Kurdish nationalism does not totally fit in either of Nursi’s categories; nevertheless, adopting Nursi’s concept provides him a religious validation and justification. Mullah Amadettin was reserved about using the word ‘nationalist’ for himself; he instead described himself as having strong patriotic feelings. It is possible that it was a demonstration of his concern not to be associated with the PKK, officially recognized as a terrorist group by the Turkish state, and not to be automatically stigmatized and blamed for supporting “negative nationalism.”

Sheikhs and the State

Mullah Hasan identified the discrimination of the state as well as that of the Kurdish traditional leaders as the cause of the misery of the Kurdish people. He wrote in the early 1980s: “Hey friends, I am injured, screaming out of the pain of two wounds, caused by the arrow of the cruel and the sword of the servant.” He explains that the servant here stood for the Kurds’ traditional leaders, namely sheikhs, mullahs and *aghas*, who were then believed to have cooperated with the state to actualize the discriminatory policy of the government toward the Kurds in the 1980s in exchange for economic and political benefits. These “servants” were advocates of tyranny and they facilitated the work of the state with their work inside Kurdish society. Although “the enemy is far and the servant is close, the enemy comes with the sword of the servant.”⁷⁰⁵ Mullah Hasan continued his poem, “It is no doubt that the death of the tree comes from the worm inside itself.”⁷⁰⁶ The “servants” of discrimination

⁷⁰⁴ Interview with Amadettin Yetiz.

⁷⁰⁵ Hasan Sofya, Unpublished poem. “Enemy” here stands for the discriminatory policy itself.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

inside Kurdish society functioned as the main reason for the downfall of the Kurdish people. This is why, in Mullah Hasan's thought, struggling against the sheikh and the *agha* was vital for the betterment of the Kurdish situation. Mullah Hasan attacked these sheikhs in the following poem:

The sheikh is pulling the ear of the ignorant (admonishes)
And the *agha* is supporting him
The mullah rides the horse without a halter or lead ropes,
The *agha* holds the lead ropes in his hand
Who knows what the mullah will do?
I do not know who grieves for this trouble?
Yet it is the wedding of the sheikh, crowded
The sheik and the *aghas* should not be followed
Talk righteously as the talk of the Qur'an
The rope of the drum is on mullah's shoulder.
The *agha* is playing the drum
Who cares if the ignorant is hungry?
This is the wedding of the sheikh, crowded.⁷⁰⁷ (see Figure 14)

⁷⁰⁷ Hasan Sofya, Unpublished poem.

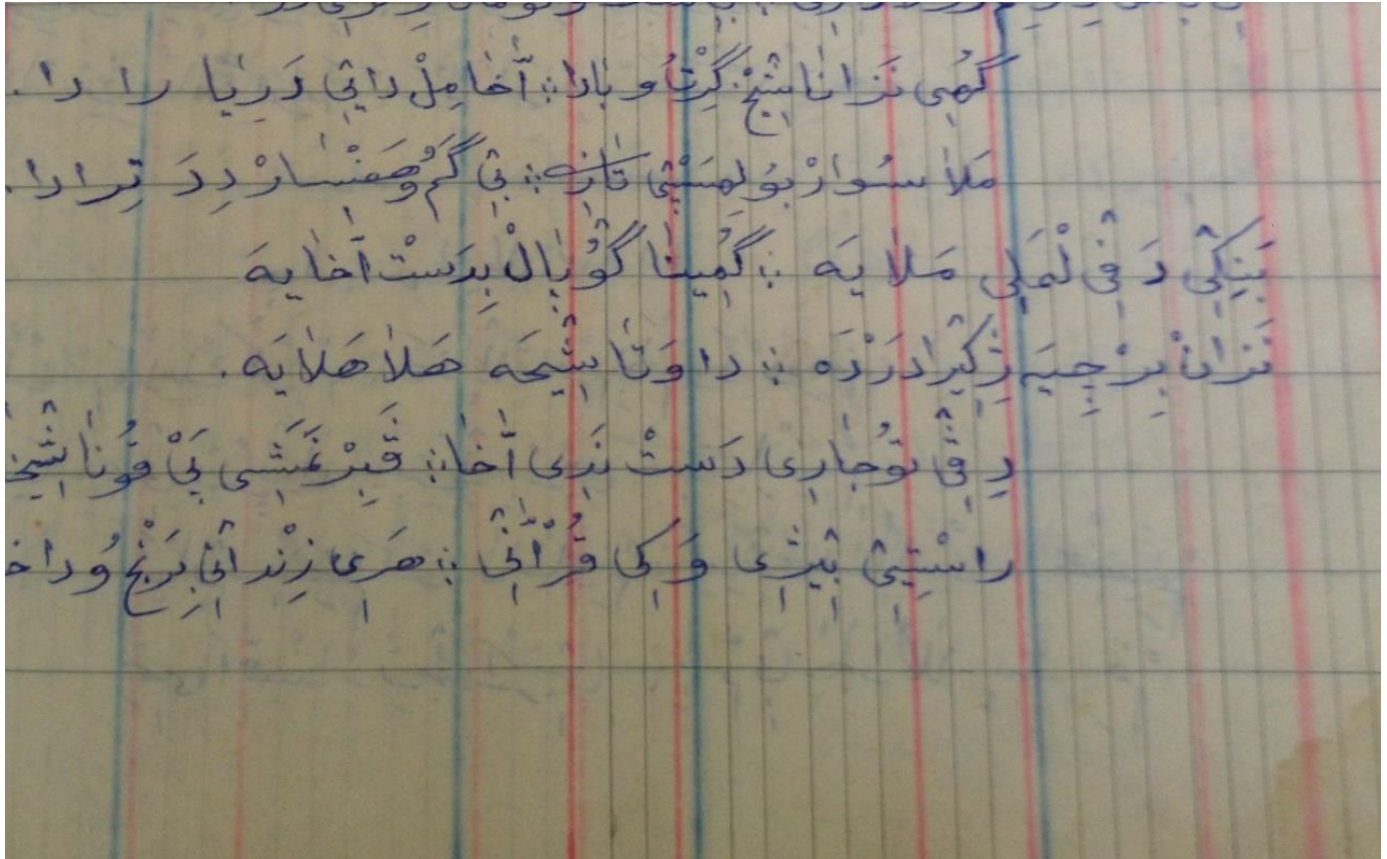


Figure 14 Hasan Sofya's above poem in its original Kurdish.

Source: Photograph by the author from the personal notebook of Hasan Sofya, page 32, Diyarbakır, June 2013.

Mullah Amadettin also questioned the authenticity of sheikhs and mullahs who were indifferent to the disturbing state of the Kurdish nation. Mullah Amadettin stressed that he respected sheikhs who practiced the Islamic mystical tradition correctly. Yet, for him, there was a group of false sheikhs causing people to remain unaware and oblivious in the face of their own destruction. He criticized them as part of his concern for the Kurdish nation:

You, the *aghas*, wake up, there is a great plundering,
 Look at the situation of your homeland, you are now without faith and honor
 You will not be dignified without having love for your land
 Stop oppressing the Kurds, it is such a shame
 You the sheikhs, today you are much reprimanded and blamed
 If you are a person of religion, do not accept tyranny
 Those sheikhs once hanged before the mosque in Diyarbakır
 Had faith and honor, died for this cause
 What use are you to us, if not struggling for your people?

Whether you are a Nakşi, Geyli⁷⁰⁸ or even the *qutb* of the age?
You, the imams (mullahs), wake up from your sleep, and warn the Kurds
That they should not part from each other
You always preach about charity, why never about homeland to ignorant Kurds?⁷⁰⁹

In the late 1970s, critiques against the traditional leaders were commonplace among the PKK fighters. The PKK targeted some tribal leaders because of their close ties with the government and called them ‘Kurdish collaborators with the Turkish state.’⁷¹⁰ For the PKK, an armed struggle was necessary to eliminate Turkish colonialism and its Kurdish supporters.⁷¹¹ One major reason that caused Kurdish secular nationalists to distance themselves from religion was how they witnessed Islam being used by both the Turkish state and the Kurdish tribal leaders for the exploitation of the Kurds. Despite the Kemalist anti-“feudal” rhetoric and its blaming the religious leaders for the preservation of the feudal structure of Kurdistan, the feudal lords had been strengthened since 1950.⁷¹² Religious and tribal leaders turned out to be powerful vote-getters for the rival parties, which provided them patronage and strengthened their influence in return.⁷¹³ Kurdish secular nationalists strongly rejected the concentration of the leadership of Kurdish nationalism in the hands of traditional leaders.⁷¹⁴

⁷⁰⁸ Nakşi and Geyli are the names given to different Sufi paths in Islamic mystical tradition

⁷⁰⁹ Yetiz, 48-49.

“*Gelî axa ji xew rabin çî talan û çî tajane
Biner halê welatê xwe we ne namûs û îmane
Li dinyayê bilind nabî welatperwer nebî axam
Gelek şerm e tu dev berde ji zilma xelkê gundane
Gelî şexa ji we îro dikin pîr gazin û lewme
Tu madem ehlê dîn î dîn stem carek qebûl nake
Belê qurba tu nabînê tenê her em êsîr mane
Ewan şexê li Amed ku li ber mizgeftê xenqandin
Xwed î namûs û îman bûn di vê rê de serî dane
Ji bo qewmê xwe re ger ku nexebitê dê çî kim bot e
Tu Nexşî bî tu Geylî bî welew bî qutbê zemane.”*

⁷¹⁰ Hamit Bozarslan, *Kurds and the Turkish State*, 349.

⁷¹¹ Ibid

⁷¹² Bruinessen, “İsmail Beşikçi,”

http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/İsmail_Beşikçi.htm

⁷¹³ Ibid.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

Conclusion

Mullah Amadettin and Mullah Hasan defended Kurdish nationalism, a right to a free Kurdish state, in a religious framework and they supported cooperation with Kurdish secular nationalists for the realization of Kurdish independence, even if it was not the ideal collaboration. They embodied the change towards secularism in the religious class: they used secular rationality and religious arguments in balance with modern sensibilities. This is how they employed religious myths, symbols and metaphors, and they referred to influential Islamic figures of the past to answer why Kurds had to be a free nation. Independence was a primary concern in a state when Kurdish existence was denied and discriminated against, for discrimination would eventually be a threat to the Kurdish religion. They were not exclusive about defining the Kurdish nation, every Kurd, religious or secular, belonged to the nation. For them, the idea of *umma* lost its significance. They were disillusioned with the concept as it was used against Kurdish national interests.

While this chapter provided an example of religious nationalism in support of the aims and promises of secular nationalism, the next chapter focuses on an example that represents a distinct alternative to secular nationalism. In the example of Mullah Ali Zile, the following chapter presents religious nationalism in an anti-nationalist framework, while sharing the fundamental grammar of modern nationalism.

CHAPTER 6

RELIGION AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO SECULAR NATIONALISM

This chapter engages with the ideology of Mullah Ali Zile of Diyarbakır (1923-1995), who, in his son's words, transferred the ideology of the Iranian revolution to Turkey. Mullah Ali held negative feelings towards Kurdish secular nationalism due to its exclusivist attitude towards Islam. In Mullah Ali's principle, a person's religion and nation are inseparable. They make the body and the spirit of a person, and elevating nation without religion or at the expense of religion cannot be an accurate defense of the Kurdish nation. Mullah Ali's ideas, and the distinctly religious content of programs for the order of public and private life, represented an alternative to secular nationalism.⁷¹⁵ Although he said he entirely rejected nationalism, his ideas, such as that the Muslim community should have a restored Caliphate and have their own state, shared the underlying grammar of modern nationalism.⁷¹⁶

Mullah Ali Zile was irritated that most of the Kurdish nationalists in the 1970s were allergic to Islam and considered it as the reason for Kurdish backwardness.⁷¹⁷ Mullah Ali Zile had an entirely different vision of nationalism. Mullah Ali was influenced by the ideologues of modern Islamic political thought, such as Sayyid Qutb, Hasan al-Banna, Jamaladdin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh. He embraced political activism, protesting the status quo within Kurdish society in particular and Turkey in general. M. Said Yaz, Mullah Ali's son and the imam of Diyarbakır's Central Great Mosque, strongly believes that Islamic political thought developed in the Kurdish region under his father's leadership. Yaz describes his

⁷¹⁵ Brubaker, 13.

⁷¹⁶ Brubaker, 13-14.

⁷¹⁷ Interview with M. Said Yaz

father as an activist who wished Muslims to be awakened to their loss of religious values, and to be involved in political action.⁷¹⁸ This was the prerequisite to defending Kurdish rights. According to Yaz, Mullah Ali's writings designated the Iranian revolution as the beginning of an Islamic political revival; he strove to bring other Muslims to his conviction and motivate them to start an Islamic political movement in Turkey.

Mullah Ali Zile (see Figure 15) was born to Husna and Hacı Hasan, his father being a prisoner who fought with the military police and escaped from military service. Hacı Hasan was also against the traditional system in favor of *aghas*. Hacı Hasan named his sons after the most famous prisoners of his time: Seyyid Khan and Sertip. Sertip was later named Ali as a teenager by his madrasa teacher, Mullah Yasin Toprak, afterwards becoming known as Mullah Ali Zile.⁷¹⁹ Zile started his education with the local imam in his village as a child, and he moved to Syria in early 1942 where he studied at Sheikh Ahmet Haznevi's madrasa until 1945. He returned to Diyarbakır in 1946 after spending about a year of study in Mardin with Mullah Abdullah Qoxi, and started teaching in Mullah Yasin Toprak's madrasa there.⁷²⁰ He then started teaching as a mullah in various villages for forty-five years.⁷²¹

⁷¹⁸ Interview with M. Said Yaz.

⁷¹⁹ Interview with M. Said Yaz.

⁷²⁰ Arafat Yaz, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi Müderrislerinden Silvanlı Molla Ali Zıla (İlmi) Hayatı Eserleri ve Kişiliği," (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Dicle University, 2012), 12,30.

⁷²¹ Ibid., 38.

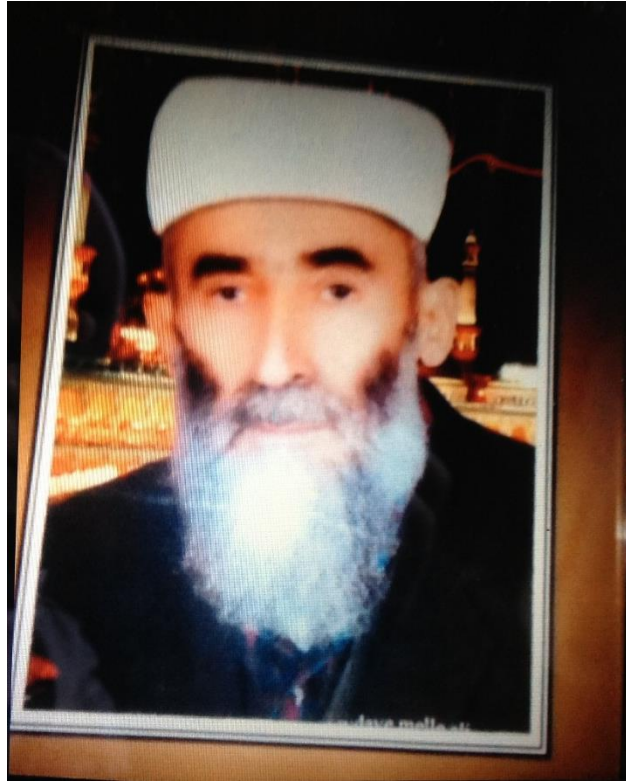


Figure 15 The portrait of Mullah Ali Zile. Source: The courtesy of his son Mullah Said Yaz.

Irritation with Secular Nationalism

Mullah Ali was one of those who assessed the PKK's ideology to be detrimental to Islam and the Kurds. He was irritated that Kurdish nationalists opposed speaking up for Kurdish rights in an Islamic framework and he witnessed how defenders of Kurdish nationalism discarded Islam in time.⁷²² Zile was convinced that if these nationalists ever got the opportunity, they would abolish religion right away.⁷²³ Considering how Kurdish secular

⁷²² Yaz, 91-92.

⁷²³ Interview with M. Said Yaz and Mele Süleyman Kurşun in Diyarbakır. There is an existing belief among contemporary Kurdish mullahs that the Kurdish language was also fostered by these secular nationalists in order to break its tie with religion. The media organs with ties to the PKK use a very secular language, stripped of its religious connections.⁷²³ The mullahs do not believe that the PKK ever had a genuine dedication to defending Kurdish rights.

nationalists distanced themselves from Islam and how they pushed aside Kurdish mullahs of religious conviction, Mullah Ali rejected their view of nationalism; he viewed it as a project to destroy the Kurds' connection to Islam.⁷²⁴ As a response, he used to say that “a real Kurd is the one who is in the path of religion, the one who walks away from religion is not a Kurd.”⁷²⁵ Nonetheless, he continued to speak up for Kurdish rights through Islamic references.

In a lost book he penned in the mid-1970s, *El-Qadiyyatu 'l-Kurdiyyatu wa 'l Hallu 'l-Islamiyyu 'l-Leha* (The Kurdish Question and an Islamic Answer), he explained his Islamic vision as an answer to the Kurdish question.⁷²⁶ His vision of Kurdishness was about prideful acknowledgment of one's Kurdishness; that a Kurd is not inferior to an Arab or any other nation and that Kurdish was to be as much respected as any other language.⁷²⁷ He said, “Why separate me into two parts? My spirit has a right to practice religion as much as my person to speak his mother tongue. Language cannot be without religion and religion not without language.”⁷²⁸ Mullah Ali showed a linguistic awareness, which he reflected in his writings in Kurdish.

Mullah Ali disputed with mullahs who aligned with secular nationalists for Kurdish freedom. He considered Cegerxwîn (1903-1984) a disappointing example of a Kurdish mullah. Cegerxwîn's influential poems in Kurdish on the misery of Kurdish peasants⁷²⁹ and calls for equality were powerful and they were obtained in manuscripts in Kurdish madrasas

⁷²⁴ Interview with M. Said Yaz.

⁷²⁵ Yaz, 107.

⁷²⁶ Interview with M. Said Yaz.

⁷²⁷ Yaz, 92.

⁷²⁸ Interview with M. Said Yaz.

⁷²⁹ Metin Yüksel tez, 209-210

in the 1950s and read among students and mullahs with enthusiasm. Some even memorized them before the manuscript could be torn or burnt out of fear of the state.⁷³⁰ Cegerxwîn was a member of Kurdish associations from 1938 to 1946 but joined the Communist party of Syria in 1949. Cegerxwîn's tone gradually changed and highlighted the communist ideology for Kurdish freedom, outside of an Islamic framework. This was what made his nationalist ideology unacceptable to Mullah Ali.

Mullah Ali knew Cegerxwîn as Mullah Musa from Syria when he was studying in a madrasa there in the 1940s. Cegerxwîn was travelling around to various madrasas and had contact with madrasa mullahs during those years in Syria. Later in Turkey Mullah Ali wrote a parallel poem to Cegerxwîn's, refuting his nationalist ideas influenced by Marxism. In those correspondent poems, Mullah Ali named himself *Cîgernûr*, the illuminated heart, parallel to Cegerxwîn's name, which meant the bleeding heart. It is not exactly known when this poem was written, but it was many years after his education in Syria, as his son states. Here are some couplets:

Cegerxwîn

My land, you are the bride of this world
Full of gardens, meadows, fountains and paradise

Cîgernûr

You are an example of paradise in the form of *Îrem* gardens,
Only that you are in the hands of the bloodthirsty
Flirtatious, charming, angel and a fairy
Many sacrificed themselves in your way
My land is a land, not an idol, not a *Lat*
It only bore Muslim children
Yet when it was surrounded by bandits
Stripped off its head, body and revealed its privates
(What) came in crown, in good luck and weapons,
(is) in the hands of the blind, deaf, foolish and the ignorant
You broke off the "we" from *welat* and the promise of religion
(My land) completely dried up and got rotten and became a second *Lat* (an idol)⁷³¹

⁷³⁰ Interviews with Mullah Amadettin Yetiz of Batman, Mullah Süleyman Kurşun in Diyarbakır, Hasan Sofya in Diyarbakır and Mullah Hüseyin Gunduz in İstanbul.

⁷³¹ *Welatê min tuyî bûka cihané*

Cegerxwîn

Charming, delicate and beautiful,
 Very pretty, white and young
 Her head is the crown of Salahaddin-i Kurdi
 Her forehead is the sun in heavens⁷³²

Cîgernûr

You abandoned religion, exchanged righteousness with mischief
 That is why you worship the blind and the deaf
 When you were adorned with religion and the world
 You were the angel of the world
 Risale-i Nur has risen like the sun
 From the qutb⁷³³ of the time, Bedî' Ustad
 Brought with it a lesson for brotherhood and faith
 Like that of the time of the Prophet
 Don't you have intelligence, eyes or ears?
 Said Kürdi is the sun of the heavens

Cegerxwîn

We have two ingrained and brutal sicknesses
 Poverty and ignorance
 Your son Cegerxwîn always moans
 With the pain of poverty and ignorance

Cîgernûr

Cîgernûr cares for religion and nation
 Religion is spirit and nation is the body
 If the soul of religion leaves the body, the body is a carrion
 A poison and it brings poverty and ignorance too.
 A true Kurd is in the way of religion
 Who abandons religion is not a Kurd but a murderer."⁷³⁴

*Hemî bağ û bihişt û merg û kanî
 Wekî bağê Îrem cennet mîsalî
 Welê çibkim di destê xûnxaranî
 Delal û dîlber û hur û perî tu
 Gelek ewlad ji bo te rûhê deranî
 Welatê min welat e ne ku lat e
 Ku lew Îslamê lê ewladê deranî
 Dema nêrî li te pêçî eşqîya
 Ser û ber tazî kêr 'ewretê deranî
 Ji text û bext û rext û tacî hafî
 Di destê kor û ker ehmeq nezanî
 Te wawa wesl û we'da dîn ku jê kir
 Hemî hişk û rizî bû latê sanî*

⁷³² *Şepal û şox û şengî naz û rindî
 Gelek şêrîn û gewr û pîr ciwanî
 Serî taca Salahuddînê Kurdî
 Enî roj e di birca asîmanî*

⁷³³ Qutb is a Sufi term meaning the leader of saints and a perfect human being.

⁷³⁴ Yaz, 101-107.

*Du îşê me hene dijwar u gëddar
 Xizanî yek evê din her nezanî
 Cegerxwîné kuré te her dinale
 Jibo jana xizanî u nezanî*

In these lines, Mullah Ali agrees with Cegerxwîn that Kurdistan is a beautiful land, yet he adds that it is only a land and it should not be treated like an idol. In the hands of Marxists like Cegerxwîn, whom Mullah Ali called bandits and the bloodthirsty, all the beauty of the Kurdish land was destroyed. In Mullah Ali's view, Cigerxwîn's embrace of Marxist thought resulted in his erroneous opinion of the Kurdish land, idolizing the land without the spirit, the religion, embedded in it. This could only lessen the value of the Kurdish land. Mullah Ali even refused to accept a tribute to the Kurdish land if it reflected a Marxist worldview. He was also of the opinion that poverty and ignorance could not be overcome without adopting religion. Kurdish nationalism exclusive of religious values could only create dangerous individuals, in his view. Mullah Ali also argued in the poem that Kurdistan only bore Muslim children, an exclusivist view of non-Muslims in the Kurdish land. Indeed, the Kurds had historically practiced diverse religions, although Muslims were in the majority. Mullah Ali discredited secular nationalism and even its praise of the Kurdish land because of its ideology contrary to Islam.

As for mullahs influenced by Cigerxwîn's ideas who agreed to collaborate with secular nationalists, they had their share of Mullah Ali's addresses also. Mullah Ali was convinced that Kurdish nationalists were far greater in number and they would dictate Marxism to the rest of the Kurds after a possible Kurdish freedom. He critiqued the idea of nationalism for not being an authentic Islamic idea, and harshly attacked those who followed

*Cîgernurê dibê Jîn dîn û millet
Welê dîn rûh e millet cesedanî
Ku ruhê dîn ji wan bê der mirar in
Zehîrin hem xizanî û nezanî
Heqîqî Kurd ew e ku bi dîn ve bigre
Ne Kurd e ê ji dîn dev bedre canî.*

that ideology in one of his poems. His hostility towards nationalism was targeted by Kurdish nationalist mullahs who used to exchange letters with him, each refuting the other's ideas. Here are some couplets from *Who Am I*, written in the late 1960s, clarifying Mullah Ali's take on Kurdish secular nationalism:

I am not Kurdish or Turkish or from Fisat, Bosat or Kulp
Not a Zaza, Badik or Xi, not from the tribe of Barzani
I am far from any negative restrictions, orders and linkages
I am a Muslim of Qur'anic religion and of the nation of Muhammad-Abraham
I am not of the harmful cause out of ignorance, not a slave of *Lat* and *Welat*⁷³⁵
I am not a worshipper of nationalism; do not follow short-term and cheap objectives
I am not a racist, not climate or color-crazy, not a nationalist with a negative cause
I am not a patriot of ignorance, God forbid, I am not of them
I am one, came for the one, I say one and I see only one
I am from the tribe of '*La uhibbū 'l-afilin*'⁷³⁶ and I serve for them.⁷³⁷

Mullah Ali's denial of his Kurdishness in the first line is reminiscent of the response of a late Ottoman sheikh al-Islam, the grand *mufti* Mustafa Sabri Efendi (1869-1954), rejecting secular Turkish nationalism. He declared his resignation from the Turkish nation and chose to identify with his religion instead of his ethnic identity.⁷³⁸ This was a reaction to the policies of the Turkish regime, which he called "apostate" and "anti-Islamic," that "trampled on the religion of Islam and violently silenced the (genuine) *ulema*."⁷³⁹ Considering that Kurdish secular nationalism developed by adopting many of the aspects and methods of Turkish secular nationalism,⁷⁴⁰ it does not come as a surprise that Kurds like Mullah Ali targeted Kurdish nationalism's attitude towards religion in a similar fashion.

Mullah Ali's sharp language towards Kurdish nationalism and his denial of his ethnic affiliation intimidated Mullah Amadettin Yetiz of Batman, and he refuted Mullah Ali in a

⁷³⁵ Lat is the name of a major idol worshipped by the Meccan polytheists during the time of Prophet Muhammad. Welat is the Kurdish word for homeland.

⁷³⁶ It is a saying attribute to Prophet Abraham in the Qur'an, meaning, "*I do not love those that perish.*"

⁷³⁷ Yaz, 100.

⁷³⁸ Bein, 112.

⁷³⁹ Ibid., 112.

⁷⁴⁰ Bozarlan, "Kurdish Historiographical Discourse," 33.

response poem he wrote in the late 1960s. He attested that his nationalist thoughts were not derived from idolatry or ignorance but from his beliefs as a Muslim. He never thought his ideas and actions were incompatible with his religion; instead, he believed in the religious dynamic of the nationalist cause. In his poem, Mullah Ali's association of *Lat*, a prominent idol of pre-Islamic Arabia in the 6th century, with *Welat*, the Kurdish notion of homeland, must have been very disturbing to Mullah Amadettin. Mullah Ali employed the Islamic concept of *tawhid*, the oneness of God, as an antithesis to nationalism, as appears in his lines stating, "I am not a patriot of ignorance, God forbid, I am not of them, I am one, came for the one, I say one and I see only one." Mullah Ali's harsh words describing nationalists were probably very upsetting, since Mullah Amadettin, too, identified as a Muslim and could not accept being associated with blasphemy. He penned his refutation to Mullah Ali:

"You do not have an origin, a race
Nor a basis or a nation
To my understanding, you are a 'nothing'
You made up a new religion, my teacher
You went ahead of the *Mahdi*, the *Dajjal* (the anti-Christ)
How do you claim to be a Muslim
You try to leave the way of the Qur'an
Have you become a judge yourself?
...
May God forbid (what you say), I am
(certainly) a believer
Do you work for the CIA, do they pay you?
Or are you a fascist? I am an awakened Kurd."⁷⁴¹

Mullah Ali's lines blamed nationalists for worshipping the nationalist ideology, which was a charge of blasphemy. Mullah Amadettin wanted to speak for himself and his support for nationalism through this poem, rejecting his support for nationalism be defined as idolatrous. In Mullah Amadettin's view the charge of blasphemy was unjust, and Mullah Ali's interpretation of Islam was inaccurate; thus, he was simply making up a new religion. Mullah

⁷⁴¹ "Mele Imamuddin Bersifa Mele Ali Daye," *Diwana Mele Abdullah Babiniri*, (İstanbul: Nûbihar, 2012), 47.

Ali's refutation of his Kurdishness in the above lines was only a refutation of Kurdishness defined by the nationalist ideology. Indeed, he loaded Kurdishness with Islamic references.

Mullah Ali's Ties to Hizbullah

Mullah Ali was strongly attached to the Islamic political awakening, for he dreamed of an Islamic order of public and private lives brought to Kurds and Muslims by an Islamist government. He praised the Islamic revolution of Iran with these words: "Blasphemy and disunion turned pale, when the (foundation of) Islamic and religious Republic was heard."⁷⁴² The Iranian revolution that ended Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's authoritarian secular monarchy was inspirational to Mullah Ali, as the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925 and its secular and nationalist discourse bore many similarities to Atatürk's Westernized Turkey. The religious ideology of the revolution and its successful leadership by a clerical leader like Khomeini against the secular political leadership of Reza Shah created hope and excitement in some circles in Turkey, a hope to eliminate Turkish secularism in a similar way. One such group was the Hizbullah- originally named the *Vahdet* movement and organized in Diyarbakır in 1980. In a few years two different wings, gathering in *Menzil* and *İlim* bookstores, were established as a result of their separation from *Vahdet*.⁷⁴³ According to Said Yaz, his father played a pivotal role in the ideological formation of Hizbullah's *İlim* wing; he had close relations with Hüseyin Veliöğlü, the official founder of Hizbullah in Turkey.

Mullah Ali dedicated many poems to Ayatollah Khomeini and his revolution. He relied on Khomeini's slogan claiming to go beyond denominational differentiation, *La*

⁷⁴² Yaz, 83.

⁷⁴³ Fuat Akyol, "Hangi Hizbullah?" *Aksiyon*, January 22, 2000, accessed December 1, 2016, https://web.archive.org/web/20151212191620/http://www.aksiyon.com.tr/kapak/hangi-hizbullah_505770

Sunniyye La Shi'iyye, Islamiyyah, Islamiyyah (not Sunnism, not Shi'ism, but Islam and Islam). He was a believer in the *umma* concept,⁷⁴⁴ and his vision of *umma* was about the global Islamic revival. He described Khomeini as “holding the Prophet’s tradition and the Qur’an in his hands”⁷⁴⁵ and his way as “entirely about God’s religion and about service to Islam.”⁷⁴⁶ Mullah Ali put trust in politics for Islamic revival. He viewed Khomeini as a representative of the Islamic voice and the protector of the Muslim *umma* against the exploitation of the West.⁷⁴⁷ Mullah Ali warned Muslims to follow Khomeini’s way, since he interpreted a Qur’anic verse and some of the Prophet’s sayings as referring to him. Khomeini and his revolutionaries were *Mahdis*⁷⁴⁸ of the time and “Khomeini brought the orphaned religion from afar and placed it on heads and chests.”⁷⁴⁹ The verse he referred to was, “If ye turn back (from the Path), He will substitute in your stead another people; then they would not be like you!”⁷⁵⁰ The example of a successful revolution led by a Shii leader was God’s choice, and Mullah Ali put aside the Sunni-Shia denominational difference between Iran and the majority Kurds and developed ties with Iran in order to foster a similar “awakening” in Turkey.

Said Yaz remembers numerous visits of Hüseyin Veliöğlu⁷⁵¹ to his father’s home, and their close contact. Hüseyin Veliöğlu used to stay overnight in Mullah Ali’s home, discussing

⁷⁴⁴ Yaz, 91.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., 84.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., 87.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., 86

⁷⁴⁸ In Islamic belief, the Mahdi is the foretold temporal ruler before the end of time who will redeem religion and bring justice.

⁷⁴⁹ Yaz, 86-88.

⁷⁵⁰ Quran, 47:38.

⁷⁵¹ According to Uslu, Velioglu foresaw Hizbullah’s development through three distinct stages, first one of which was the propaganda (teblig) stage. In this stage, radicals strive to persuade people to adopt Islamic religious practices, to establish an Islamic state and administration, to live in accordance with Islamic rules and to struggle to safeguard the Islamic way of life. See Uslu, 130. It is in this propaganda stage that Velioglu tried

issues on Kurdish troubles and Islamic answers. The PKK with its leftist ideology was not representing Kurdish dissent as it should be, and it only posed a danger to Kurds. Hüseyin Velioğlu had the leadership of the *İlim* wing, which embraced an armed strategy in time. Under the leadership of Velioğlu, the *İlim* wing aimed to eliminate the *Menzil* wing due to its rejection of the *İlim* group's armed strategy and political Islamic ideology. Mullah Ali's connection with *İlim* ended as it started its radical conflict with other groups. The *İlim* wing under Velioğlu initiated an armed conflict against the PKK as well for its leftist ideology and for establishing a revolutionary Islamic state, and was named Hizbullah then.⁷⁵² Hizbullah members were predominantly and passionately Kurdish, and it is argued that it can be seen as a “virtually linear descendant of the participants of Sheikh Said revolt of 1925, a Kurdish-Islamic insurrection that sought to remove the secular Kemal Atatürk regime and restore the caliphate.”⁷⁵³ Some members of Hizbullah had been to Iran and received their theological and military training there, and the ideologues of the group ignored the Sunni-Shia difference in favor of fighting together against their common enemy: atheism.⁷⁵⁴

What the *İlim* group meant to Mullah Ali in its formative years of non-conflict was that he was planting the seed of a political Islamic awakening in Turkey in its Kurdish region, to be led by all Kurdish members. Hizbullah reinforced the Kurdish consciousness of Islamist Kurds, and it claimed to seek the liberation of the entire Muslim *umma* and primarily the Kurds.⁷⁵⁵ He thought the political Islamic awakening, like the Iranian revolution, would bring

to establish close relationships with prominent leaders like Mullah Ali, who could influence many people in the community.

⁷⁵² M. Hakan Yavuz and Nihat Ali Özcan, “The Kurdish Question and Turkey's Justice and Development Party,” *Middle East Policy*, 13, 1, (2006), 107.

⁷⁵³ Emre Uslu, “From Local Hizbollah to Global Terror: Militant Islam in Turkey,” *Middle East Policy* 14, 1, (2007), 128.

⁷⁵⁴ McDowell, 433-434.

⁷⁵⁵ Uslu, 131.

back what had been taken unjustly from Muslims and Kurds with the introduction of the Republican regime.

Discrediting Secular Nationalism and Fatwa Letters (1975-1990)

Mullah Ali's religious nationalism arose in conjunction with a liberation movement⁷⁵⁶ as a result of the ethnic and religious persecution Kurds suffered under the state. Mullah Ali delivered his fatwa letters against the Turkish secular regime and its secular law to some Kurdish mullahs. According to his son Mehmed Said Yaz, Mullah Ali was primarily concerned with uplifting religion, as the Turkish Republican regime brought with it revolutionary changes to the practice of religion. Therefore, Mullah Ali's first priority was to work for a wider Islamic awakening and then Kurdish rights would be sought within an Islamic framework. Mullah Ali attacked Turkish nationalism, which developed outside of religion in the first place, and described how Turkish nationalist policies in the early and middle 1900s discriminated against the Kurds and naturally gave birth to and strengthened Kurdish nationalism.⁷⁵⁷ He opposed the state policy that denied the Kurds' existence and banned their language.

In one of his fatwa letters he expressed that supporting the secular regime was infidelity since the secular state legislated lawful what is considered unlawful in the Qur'an and prohibited what the Qur'an permitted. The secular state legislated law contrary to Islamic principles and thus committed infidelity.⁷⁵⁸ Whoever supported this regime was also an infidel since approval of infidelity was

⁷⁵⁶ Barbara-Ann J.Rieffer states in her article that there are repeated examples of Islamic national liberation movements. She says these groups feel that they are oppressed by their rulers who are ethnically and religiously distinct. See Barbara-Ann J.Rieffer, "Religion and nationalism: Understanding the consequences of a complex relationship," *Ethnicities*, Vol 3, 2, (2003): 226.

⁷⁵⁷ Yaz, 93, 100.

⁷⁵⁸ Voting in a secular system is considered apostasy by *Hizbullah* and other extremist groups, even when the party voted for is an Islamic-oriented party. The formation of the political party *Hudapar* (meaning God's party) in the Turkish secular system in 2012 caused a division within *Hizbullah* circles. Indeed, the topic has been brought to the fore by the publication and media organ of ISIS in Turkey. As recently as June 2015, the ISIS media used posters all around Turkey calling people "not to vote and not to be blasphemous against (your) Creator." (Oy Kullanma, Yaraticına Şirk Koşma)

faithlessness. One such letter opened with the words, “rejection to those who defend idols and call to them in the name of religion and yet say they are the peace-makers.”⁷⁵⁹ (see Figure 16)

⁷⁵⁹ Unpublished, Personal archives of M. SaidYaz.

(2)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

رَدَّ عَلَى الذِّي يَدْفَعُونَ عَنِ الطَّغُوتِ وَيَدْعُونَ إِلَيْهِ
بِسْمِ الرَّحْمَنِ تَائِلِينَ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مَصْلُحُونَ

الحمد لله . والصلوة والسلام على رسول الله . وعلى آله وصحبه المجاهدين
في سبيل الله . وعلى المواليين لأوليائه . والمعادين لأعدائه . غير المصنوعين
والضالين إلى يوم لقائه .

أما بعد فقد ثبت في النقول الشرعية واضحاً أنه إذا نرى الهلال في بلدة قاصية
وجب الصوم على ساير أهل الدنيا عند الأربعة والأربعين عند الشافعية
وإن اختلف المطالع إلا على ذلك فهو عندهم فعلى القريب فقد قطع عن البعيد . . .
وهذا الخلاف إذا كان ذلك البعيد حاكم شرعي أو محكم ويكون صومهم مبنياً
على حكمه بالرؤية كما هو العادة في البلاد الإسلامية اليوم أيضاً لا يجب
تحريم صلاته الرؤية للرؤية والنفاذ من اللطافة من الشارع بالطهارة والباقي
إذا لم يرد في شرقه ولا في غرب كل غربي بالنسبة فمن عكس . والثالث إذا لم يثبت
الهلال حاكم يراه والآخر جهات مشرق الشافعية العمل بمقتضى آثاره وإن
اختلف المطالع .

الحاصل يجب الصوم على الصوم والقطر أيضاً حد ثلثه أمور بالتبوت عند حكم
أو محكم بعدل أولاً وبعدلين آخراً وبعدد النواتر ولو من لغار وهو ما
أخبر به جمع يمتنع توطلوهم على الكذب وبالاستفاضة وهي ما شاع
بين الناس مستدلاً لاصل .

الخلاصة أن البعيد إذا بلغه من غيره أشك حاكم يراه أو رفع عنه حكم الرؤية بما
الكلية اعتماداً على حساب الخونة أو روى في أحد شرق بالنسبة إليه يصح الحكم مع اختلاف
المطالع ولم يفتى إجماعاً ويجب قضاء ما أظن أنه عملاً بمطالعها في هذا استفت
المصنف الأربعة وسائر النقول مصادقة وأختار فاصحة ولا تعجل .
في استشارة الأعمام للاستناد بدين الزمان تخصي الزمان بكثرة طرق المحاورة
والمناقلة والمعاينة فماتت الأمة لمعالة وهو كولاية وهي كبلدة واتصل الرحم
بين أهل الدنيا مستد في المنقول الزمان له أعلم أن هذه المدينة السيفرية
المعيرة للأرض بلدة واحدة تعارف أهلها وتتاجرون إلى حلال فناء على هذه

Figure 16 The fatwa letter of Mullah Ali in Arabic that opens with a rejection, his own handwriting. Source: The personal arcives of Mullah Said Yaz.

Said Yaz interprets that his father attacked all mullahs who supported the secular system.

Here is a fatwa of Mullah Ali on the issue of voting in a secular system:

Question: What is the ruling of Islamic law on those charging believers with disbelief who are participating in the absolute democratic election? Answer: whatever intention she/he has and whatever party the person is, it is helping to establish a man-made legislation and if they are pleased with this legislation that is not sent down from Allah and with the one who is not ruling what has sent down from Allah, so those people are disbelievers.⁷⁶⁰ (see

Figure 17)

Mullah Ali changed his perspective when the Islamist party was founded by Necmeddin Erbakan and began to support his party from 1983 on.⁷⁶¹ He voted for his party and recommended people to vote for him.⁷⁶² Instead of shying away from politics in a secular system as he once supported in his fatwa, he continued to engage in politics with an Islamic revivalist vision.

⁷⁶⁰ Unpublished, Personal archives of M. Said Yaz.

⁷⁶¹ Yaz, 89.

⁷⁶² Ibid., 89.

- ٥ -
بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ
- ١ -
(١٢)

دَسَلَّ، حَفْظَهُ اللّٰهُ تَعَالَى مَا حَكَمَ شَرَعِ اللّٰهِ جَلَّ وَعَلَى الَّذِيْنَ يَكْفُرُوْنَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ
بِدْخُولِهِمْ فِي الْاِتِّخَابِ بِتِ الدِّيْعَةِ فَرَطِيَّةً مُّطْلَقًا بِأَيِّ نِيَّةٍ كَانَتْ مِنْ أَيِّ حِزْبٍ
كَانَ قَاتِلِيْنَ كُلِّ مَنْ يَشَارِكُ فِيهَا فَهُوَ كَافِرٌ لِانْتِهَائِهَا تَصَاوُرًا عَلِيًّا قَامَةً تَشْرَعُ
بِالشَّرْوَاجِزِ وَتُفَوِّجُ مِنْهُ الرِّضَا بِغَيْرِ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللّٰهُ رَوْسًا لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِهَا أَنْزَلَ
اللّٰهُ فَأَوْلَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ،

الجواب: هذا من شرعهم الا دعوى الا شرعي بجهلهم المركب اللامدحسي بال
علم منهم بشروط الكفر وموانعه وموجباته لان الآية الكريمة ليست على
ظاهرها واطلاقها قطعا بل المراد عند جمهور الفقهاء على ما نقله بالفصل والتحقيق
الامام العيني المصنفي المشهد الطاهر للاضواء في كتابه دخول دعاة الاقضية، والعلامة
الشهيد عبد القادر عوده في كتابه الشرع الحنائن والاشهاد البيهقي والحسن البنا
وغيرهم من اعظم السلف وفحول الخلفاء رحمة الله عليهم ورضوانه ابدانياً
ان من حكم بغير ما انزل الله جاحداً فمكدر الحكمه تعالى او رغباً عنه ومفضلاً
عليه بخبره فهو كافر اما من اقر بحكم الله وحكم في الامر على خلافه فهو
ظالم فاسق ويزال له قال السدي وعطاء، وجميع فقهاء اهل السنة وهو
قول ابي حنيفة ومالك والشافعي وابن حنبل وابن حزم وجميع الفرق
الاسلامية الا خوارج والمعتزلة، طهارة وغيره ايضا
قال النووي رحمه الله اعلم ان مذهب اهل الحق ان لا يكفر احد من اهل القبلة
ولا يكفر اهل الاضواء والبيدع اهـ

دع، ومن المنفق عليه ان من يستحسب من المسلمين احكاماً غير ما انزل الله
ويترك بالحكم بها كل او بعض ما انزل الله من غير تأويل يقتضيه صحة فانه
يصدق عليهم ما وصفهم الله تعالى به من الكفر والظلم والفسق كل بحاله
فمن اعرض عن الحكم بحمد السيرة مثلاً لا يفضل غيره من الاوضاع البشرية عليه
فهو كافر قطعاً ومن لم يحكم به لعلية اخرى غير الجحود والتكفر فهو ظالم ان

Figure 17 The above mentioned fatwa by Mullah Ali Zile in its original Arabic form, his own handwriting. Source: Mullah Said Yaz's personal archives.

Mullah Ali's *Irshad* Letters (1975-1990)

Mullah Ali believed that the PKK's ideology was dangerous to the Kurds, and he struggled with its Marxist and nationalist ideology through discourse and writing. As an alternative to the PKK's ideology he offered his Islamic political activism, and he sent letters of *irshad*, guidance, to *Sufi* sheikhs and influential religious leaders to critique their way of Islam and to direct them to the "straight path", which was to get politically united for the Islamic cause. Said Yaz recounts that his father also used to write *tebliğ*, conveyance, letters to madrasa mullahs and hand them to him and Hüseyin Veliöğlü for multiplication and delivery. *Tebliğ* letters were informative letters about the significance of Sayyid Qutb, Sayyid Hawwa, Mawdudi, Jamaladdin Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and their new perspective on Islam. In addition, Mullah Ali also wrote fatwa letters to send to Kurdish mullahs, in which he expressed his opinions on religious issues.

Hüseyin Veliöğlü took this effort of guidance a step forward, forcing other religious groups who were on the "wrong path" either to accept his leadership or to fight with him; this way his group would be the only alternative for political governance after the current secular regime would be defeated.⁷⁶³ Hence, Hizbullah concentrated on attacking religious leaders of different convictions. For instance, twenty-two mosque imam s were killed between 1990 and 1993 as a result of their resistance to delivering weekly sermons as ordered by Hizbullah.⁷⁶⁴ The group also executed the leader of the Kurdish Nurcu movement along with many Kurdish businessmen in 2000.⁷⁶⁵ Yavuz and Ozcan state that the group was regularly funded by Iran in order to spread its religious ideology through opening many bookstores in southern Turkey,

⁷⁶³ Bulent Aras and Gokhan Bacik, "The Mystery of Turkish Hizbullah," *Middle East Policy* 9, 2, (2002): 151.

⁷⁶⁴ Aras and Bacik, 151.

⁷⁶⁵ Yavuz, and Özcan, 107.

and the group worked closely with tribal structures and religious networks there.⁷⁶⁶ Bookstores played a major role in spreading the Hizbullah ideology, as has been the case with other ideologies like feminism, by providing space for public discussion, having an influence on the publishing industry and building communities through and around print.⁷⁶⁷

In his letters of *irshad* to leaders of various *Sufi* orders and religious communities between 1975 and 1990, Mullah Ali emphasized the concept of Islamic unity and asked them to unite as Muslims on a common ground. He invited them to “the service of religion,” which in his mind was the creation of an “Islamic insurgency.”⁷⁶⁸ *Irshad* literally means to show the path, and as a religious term it means to guide people to the straight path by providing methods for the straight path. *Murshid*, which comes from the same root, refers in *Sufi* practice to the spiritual guide, who instructs his disciples on the *Sufi* path. By inviting Muslim leaders to an insurgency, Mullah Ali believed he presented them with the straight path towards God’s pleasure and the way to serve God’s religion.

In those letters Mullah Ali divided men of religion into two categories; those who made use of religion, and those who benefited religion. He explained that men of religion received great respect and some were even financially supported by the village people due to their connection to religion. Nevertheless, many of them were not doing any good to religion.⁷⁶⁹ This was the reason he penned these letters. Mullah Ali attacked sheikhs who allegedly numbed people and benefited from their wealth.⁷⁷⁰ In the face of the disunity of the

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., 107.

⁷⁶⁷ Kristen Amber Hogan, *Reading at feminist bookstores: Women's literature, women's studies, and the feminist bookstore network*, (PhD Dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 2006).

⁷⁶⁸ Interview with M. Said Yaz.

⁷⁶⁹ Interview with M. Said Yaz.

⁷⁷⁰ Yaz, 61.

Muslims, they “do not read, do not encourage to read, stay without effort and pain.”⁷⁷¹ He clashed with some *Sufi* sheikhs in verbal discussions or through letters. In his poem, he called out to them to become active for a Muslim cause, and to that end, they were to read and learn from the works of Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. Clearly, Mullah Ali was inviting them to embrace political Islam.

One such letter was directed to Mullah Burhan, who was a madrasa professor in Tillo, Siirt, and a sheikh. Mullah Burhan was the *khalifa* of Sheikh Maşuk Norşin⁷⁷² in *Nakshbandi sufism*, and he did not let his students read the books of Hasan al-Banna, Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb in his madrasa. Once he burned in the stove the *Jundullah*, a book by Said Hawwa, when he found his student reading it.⁷⁷³ Mullah Ali disapproved of Mullah Burhan and sent him a letter of reproof in the early 1980s, as he considered the creators of modern Islamic thought to be the ideologues of an Islamic awakening and of a necessary insurgence. Being the addressee of Mullah Ali’s *irshad* letters negatively affected some individuals, such as Mullah Yasin, his former madrasa professor and a very close friend. Zile sent Mullah Yasin a letter inviting him to awaken to the global issues affecting the Muslim World and to promote political Islamic action. He sent many similar “letters of *irshad*, guidance,” to Kurdish Islamic leaders.⁷⁷⁴ Mullah Yasin was thoroughly upset with Mullah Ali Zile’s pursuit of political Islamic trends and declining interest in raising future Islamic scholars in Kurdish madrasas who would be the transmitters of knowledge to future generations. Mullah Yasin’s opposition to politics was a result of his conviction that political trends were not stable; they come and

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., 61-63

⁷⁷² See the Norşin Naqshbandiyya chain in the first chapter.

⁷⁷³ Interview with M. Said Yaz.

⁷⁷⁴ Interview with M. Said Yaz.

go, while the education of the people was an unchangeable need. Mullah Yasin inscribed a satirical poem to Mullah Ali unfolding his great disappointment with him:

I planted two apple and apricot trees in the heart's soil,
I watered it with the heart's blood and protected it with the spirit
I am so worried about that branch of mine,
Since I trashed it as it got rotten,
Oh you friends do not blame me for breaking this rotten tree from my heart,
It dried up, did not bear any fruits.
Out of good intentions, we planted seeds in the poor tea sand (hardly fertile),
Yet we could not harvest, a stink bug destroyed it.⁷⁷⁵ (see
Figure 18)

To this, Mullah Ali responded with a mixture of self-defense, assurance of his decent position and criticism. Mullah Yasin and his student Ali became good friends again, but they were totally divided on their approach to politics. Mullah Yasin continued in his madrasa type educational activities as his prime concern until the end of his life. This all suggests how fragmented the Kurdish society was and still is.

⁷⁷⁵ Yaz, 80.

[لَلَا سْتَاذِ مَلَا يَاسِيْنَ فِي حَبْوِ تَلْمِيْذِهِ مَلَا عَلِي عَلِي]
 دَمَا سَيْفُو دَمَا مَشِيْتِي دَبَاغِ دِلْدَا مَن دَانِي *Hatali*
 مَحْوَنَادِل سَفِي كِرْوَان مَد سَهَارُوخ لِبَرْدَانِي
 لَسْرَشَا غَاخُو يَا تَرْجِيْن وَ نَا زَك پَرَا سَف دَا رَم
 كُو بُو كَرَمِي زَبَاغِ دِل مَه أَقِيْت پَاشِيَا خَانِي (۱)
 مَكِه دَر مَان دِي مَسْكِيْن لَسْرَشَا غَاخُو يَا تَرْجِيْن
 كُو بُو دَا رَا زَقُو م لُو مَن لِكُو كَاوِي طِفِر دَانِي
 تَمَاشَا كِيْن لُو ي دَا رَا زَقُو م هَوْن شَكِي يَارَان
 رِزِي بُوَاو زَكُو كِي لُو زَبُو صُو ي مَه هِلْنَا فِي
 اَمِيْدَا مِيْن نَمَا اِيْدِي زَكُو كِ اَوِيْدَه چِيْلَه
 چِكُو لِيَسْتِي رَه رَا كَر زَكُو كِي دُو دِنْفَسَانِي
 جَزَا مَاجِهْل وَ تَرْكِيْبِي دِ شَكَل رِي شَا غُرُو رِ اَو
 نَبُوْن قَابِل تَدَاوِي لُو نَدَاوِي مَن تُو دَر مَانِي
 نَكُو طَنَكِه سَرَا يَا دِل تُو پَر مَزِي فِي جِي نَابِي
 بَعْقَلِ كَر چُو كِي تُو بِنْفَسِ حَوَقِي بَحْرَانِي
 بِي رِيَا قَا نَبِي صَعْتِ نَا چِه اَو اِي شَا غُرُو رِي قَط
 شَرُو بُو حَبُو هَم دَر زِي تَمَامِي فِي فَايْدَه مَن زَانِي
 زَنِي مَ پَالَك رَشَا نَدِي مَن دَا رِضِيْدَا سِمَلِ اِنِي (۲)

دُو تَا سَيْفُو دُو كَا مَشِيْتِي نَبِي
 dofarun

Figure 18 . Mullah Yasin's poem addressed to Mullah Ali in Kurdish.
 Source: Photograph by the author, the courtesy of Mullah Zeynelabidin Çiçek, a former student of Mullah Yasin, Diyarbakır, June 2013.

Ties to Nurcu Movement

Mullah Ali introduced the study of Said Nursi's *Mesnevi Nuriye* and *İşaratu'l-İcaz* in Arabic in his madrasa,⁷⁷⁶ disseminated his thoughts in many Kurdish towns, and made financial contributions for the publication of Nursi's books.⁷⁷⁷ Nursi is known to have intentionally stayed away from politics from the 1920s on and did not advocate taking over the state. Besides, Nursi believed that the state needed to be neutral and in the service of the people; therefore its employees did not have to be Muslims, they just needed to answer public needs in accordance with the law.⁷⁷⁸ Despite his certain belief in political activism, Mullah Ali praised Nursi and Khomeini as *Mahdis*⁷⁷⁹ and advised people to follow both at the same time. His poem reads, "Listen to Bediuzzaman and Khomeini if you wish to restore your religion."⁷⁸⁰ Interestingly enough, Mullah Ali's attraction to the Iranian revolution was not negatively affected by his close connection with Said Nursi's writings since Nursi embraced an apolitical vision after the Republican period.

In his poem directed to Mullah Ali, Mullah Amadettin expressed his surprise at Mullah Ali's close readings of Said Nursi.

May God forbid (what you say), I am
(certainly) a believer
Do you work for the CIA, do they pay you?
Or are you a fascist? I am an awakened Kurd...
This is what you had taken from Said Nursi?
I am well aware of Nursi's writings; your words have nothing to do with his ideas
Read so that you learn who I am, I am the child of a Kurd.⁷⁸¹

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid., 44-45.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid., 71, 75.

⁷⁷⁸ Hakan Yavuz, "Nur Study Circles (Derşhanes) and the Formation of New Religious Consciousness in Turkey," in İbrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Islam at the Crossroads: On the life and thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 303, Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 161-162.

⁷⁷⁹ Yaz, 73.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., 85.

⁷⁸¹ "Mele İmaduddin Bersifa Mele Ali Daye," 47.

Mullah Amadettin, too, was greatly inspired by Said Nursi's life; he viewed Nursi's early life as a case of strife for Kurdish national benefit, and he wrote many poems of praise dedicated to him. Mullah Amadettin also found religious justification from Nursi's writings for his constructive nationalism. Surprising as it sounds, Mullah Amadettin and Mullah Ali each regarded Nursi's ideas as validating his own ideology, although their thoughts were completely different on the idea of Kurdish nationalism.

During my interview with Said Yaz in Diyarbakır, Yaz handed me a thank-you letter his father received from Nursi (see Figure 19) for translating some of Said Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* collection into Kurdish despite his sharp contrast with Nursi's ideas of Kurdish nationalism. Said Yaz kept the thank-you letter in his personal archive at home.⁷⁸² At a time when Kurdish was officially banned and writing in Kurdish was still controversial even in Kurdish religious circles, Mullah Ali was contesting the idea of writing the religious sciences in Arabic alone and the idea that writing in Kurdish belonged only to the Kurdish secular nationalists.

⁷⁸² Yaz, 71,75.

باسمه سبحانه
 كسدم عبيدك و حمة الله براته
 عزيز صديقه قرا نرس
~~استاد~~
 استاد نيك اوراده و هواليسنده بولونان علمايه مخصوصا التتخي نكته بي
 ترجمه ايدرد مد علي قره ائمه جوهره سوز ايدور . جوهره ملا الله ديور . وعينه قره ائشي
 عبدالمجيد بي قبول ايدور . دگره شيو . با يني ترجمه ده بگندي .
 دائما . نورس . حسنه كونديلهر باره كلدي .
 نالما . يقينه صولنده سزك تقريضا بولونان . سلام نورس مخوم فخرسته
 اسكده عدد اولاره سزه كله جاك . طبع مصر في بخا صديبي اومه ليرار .
 استاد بخرم عاندد .
 هم استاد نرس هم نرسك جوهره سوز ايدور . دكارشدي بي بطران .
 الباقي لوباقه
 قرا نرس
 ذبير صونفور جيديله بايرام

Figure 19 The appreciation letter Mullah Ali received from Said Nursi. The letter was sent to Mullah Ali in Ottoman Turkish by close students of Said Nursi.

Source: Courtesy of Mehmed Said Yaz and Arafat Yaz.⁷⁸³

⁷⁸³ “Aziz Siddik Kardeşimiz, üstadımız orada ve havalisinde bulunan ulemaya hususan altıncı nükteyi tercüme eden Molla Ali kardeşimize çok selam ediyor, Maşaallah diyor ve aynen kardeşi Abdulmecid gibi kabul ediyor ve beğeniyor. Yaptığı tercümeyle beğendi. Saniyen nurlar hesabına gönderilen para geldi salisen yakında, sonunda sizin takriziniz bulunan risale nurun umum fihristesi seksen aded olarak size gelecek. Tab masrafı yani

End of Hizbullah Ties

Mullah Ali was completely disenchanted with the Iranian regime after visiting Iran in 1987 and reading Khomeini's last will after his death in 1989; he saw many beliefs of the Shia as contrary to Sunni Islam. He also realized Hüseyin Veliöđlu's secret connections with SAVAK, the Organization of Intelligence and National Security of Iran, and he broke his ties with Veliöđlu. He realized that Veliöđlu only wished to take advantage of Mullah Ali's influence for a secret political agenda, and he once told his son, "I swear to God, he has no connection with the Qur'an or with Islam." Mullah Ali then wrote a refutation of Shi'ism and Khomeini after Khomeini's death:

Theirs is the habit of denial and deceit,
Creating faction, charging others with blasphemy and denigrating the Sunni imams,
Mocking with the religion books, insulting
And leading Muslims astray,
Their name is Muslim yet they are far from it,
As our Prophet mentioned in his sayings,
They called their (regime) shariah
Without having the credibility,
They are in the depths of ignorance
They see their ignorance as true knowledge.⁷⁸⁴ (see
Figure 20)

nakdiyesi on liradır. Üstadımıza aittir. Hem üstadımız hem bizler çok selam ederek dualarınızı bekleriz. Elbaki, huvelbaki, Kardeşleriniz Zübeyr, Sungur, Bayram, Ceylan."

⁷⁸⁴ *Diwanu Ustazil Mele Ali Ilmi*, Unpublished Divan, 86. I thank M. Said Yaz for providing me a copy of this diwan.

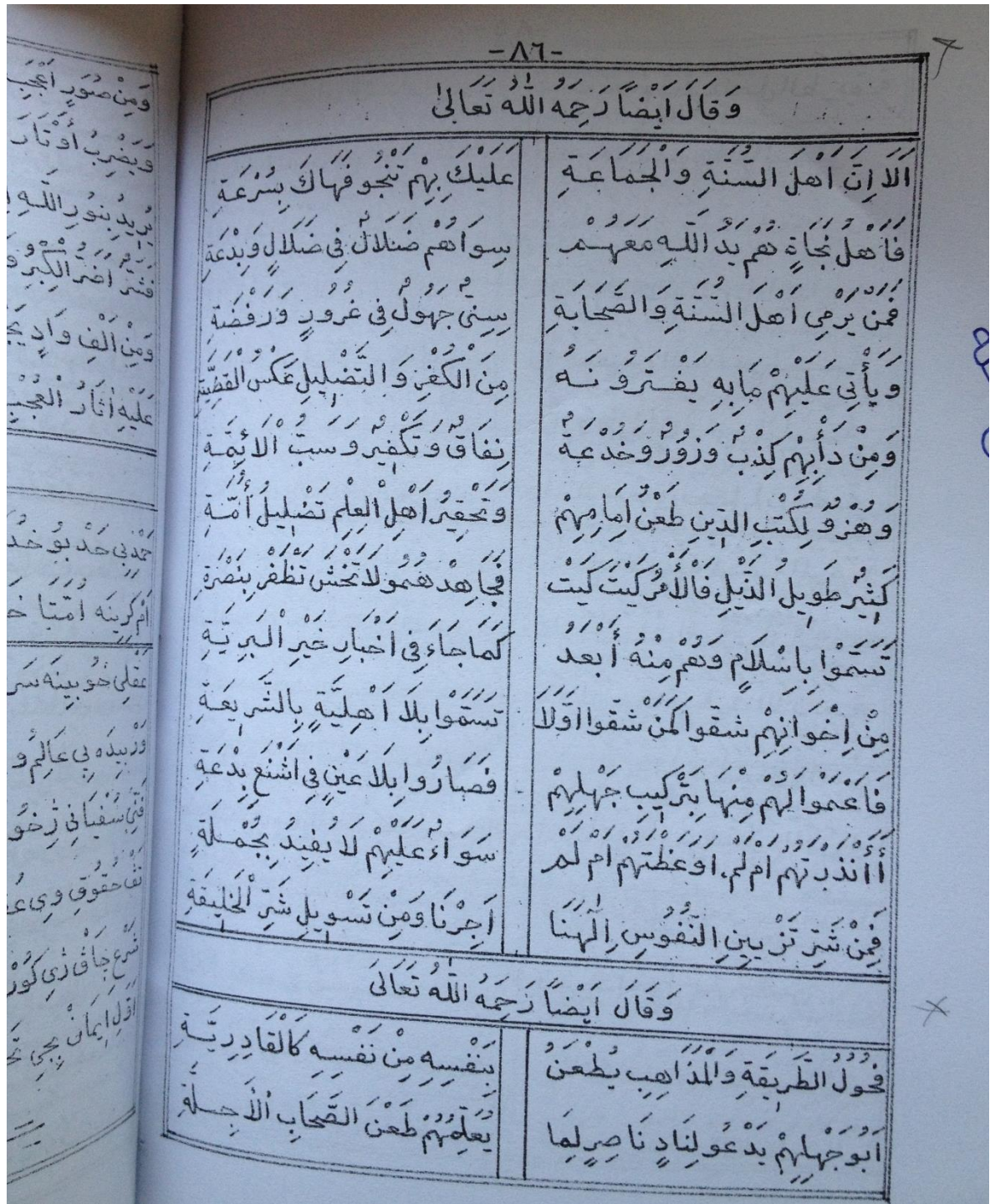


Figure 20 Mullah Ali's refutation to Shiism and Khoemini in Arabic. It is Mullah Ali's own handwriting. Source: Photograph by the author from *Diwanu Ustazil Mele Ali Ilmi*, Unpublished Divan, personal archives of Mullah Said Yaz, 86, Diyarbakir, June 2013.

Mullah Ali's disillusionment with the Iranian revolution allowed him to re-assess

Nursi's methodology of creating Islamic consciousness without getting into the political

sphere or dangerous political demonstrations.⁷⁸⁵ Mullah Ali began to believe that it was through nothing else but peaceful means that Islamic rejuvenation could be planted in the Kurdish region.⁷⁸⁶ This did not mean, however, that Mullah Ali completely avoided politics; he continued to support the Islamic political parties founded by Necmettin Erbakan from 1983 to 1998, the National Order, National Salvation and Welfare parties.⁷⁸⁷ He not only voted for Erbakan's party but also aroused public support for him.⁷⁸⁸

Conclusion

Mullah Ali rejected secular nationalism and its promises while he offered an alternative under an Islamic revival, which could also bring liberation to the Kurds from persecution and an ethnic and religious recognition. Therefore, his ideas and hopes for an Islamic state like Iran, in which Kurdish identity would be recognized and Islamic identity would be protected, were alternatives to secular nationalism's hopes for a free Kurdish state.

Mullah Ali supported a religiously framed Kurdish nationalism, born out of oppression by the secular ideology and its political system. Turkish ethnic nationalism, with its suppressive discourse and policies, not only produced its antithesis, Kurdish ethnic nationalism. Its excessive restrictions on religious expression and practice brought to life a Kurdish Muslim dissent as well, since many Kurds felt threatened by the rigid rules and bans of the secular state. Besides, the Marxist domination of Kurdish nationalism made many Kurdish conservatives fear a second religious persecution that the Kurds might suffer under

⁷⁸⁵ Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, 154-155.

⁷⁸⁶ Interview with M. Said Yaz.

⁷⁸⁷ Yaz, 89.

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

Marxism, if the Marxists ever rose to power over the Kurds. That is why many conservative Kurds refused Marxist framings of Kurdish problems, Kurdish rights, etc.

Mullah Ali was never optimistic about the Kurdish secular nationalists; indeed, he was troubled about their leadership of the Kurdish cause. He suspected that Kurdish secular nationalists, like their Turkish counterparts, would break away from Islam when they got enough power, which would bring another catastrophe for the Kurds. Kurdish dissent from state policy was not limited to state's ethnic discrimination; after all, Kurdish madrasas and *Sufi* lodges were locked down, and Kurdish Islam was also harmed. Therefore, Mullah Ali believed in the priority of an Islamic state, which would, in his thought, automatically grant Kurds their rights to ethnic and religious expression.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

Scholars have pointed out the absence of a discussion of religion in the literature on nationalism until fairly recently.⁷⁸⁹ Religious nationalism was regarded as a contradiction in terms; the most prominent ideologues of nationalism such as Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm largely ignored religion's role in the rise of nationalism and focused on economic factors.⁷⁹⁰ Nationalism was inherently secular⁷⁹¹ and it could replace religion but could not coexist with religion.⁷⁹² It is now acknowledged by scholars of nationalism that religion and nationalism coexist. A similar progress is observable in the studies of Kurdish nationalism: it is not until recently that studies started to deeply engage the relationship between religion and Kurdish nationalism. These studies, however, mostly focus on the late Ottoman and the early Republican period.

This study is deeply engaged with accounts of Kurdish religious scholars from the early to the late Republican period in order to bring forward examples of types of religious nationalism present in the story of Kurdish nationalism as late as the 1990s. By illustrating various forms of religious nationalism that the Kurdish *ulema* developed under repressive state policies, this study calls into question the concept of Kurdish nationalism as something uniform and secular. My research findings challenged Kurdish history writing under Marxist influences since the 1940s, which often excluded the narratives of Kurdish *ulema* from the story of Kurdish national struggle⁷⁹³ with the accusation that they worked for the Turkish

⁷⁸⁹ Gorski and Türkmen-Derrişođlu and Barbara-Ann J.Rieffer, 215.

⁷⁹⁰ Barbara-Ann J.Rieffer, 215.

⁷⁹¹ Gorski and Türkmen-Derrişođlu, 203.

⁷⁹² Ibid., 194.

⁷⁹³ This discourse gradually increased in tone with the establishment of the Kurdish ethnic nationalist movement, *Partiya Kerkeran Kurdistan* (PKK) in 1978, with its Marxist ideology.

state and with corrupt sheikhs and that they pacified Kurds by supporting the religious concept of Turkish Kurdish brotherhood.

The Kurdish *ulema's* visions of national consciousness, and their struggle with discriminative state policies, as have been discussed so far, have been multifold. An Islamic identity with a strong sense of Kurdish national consciousness produced an atypical formulation of nationalism: being fully committed to Kurdish national interests while still envisioning their fate as being intertwined with the Muslim Turks⁷⁹⁴ even after the republican period. The sheikhs' exploitation of people's religious feelings and economic resources had been a concern to Kurdish *ulema* long before the rise of secular Kurdish nationalism; and they aimed to cope with it through educational, linguistic and religious consciousness. Some proposed the Kurdish nation's progress to lay in religious and linguistic consciousness, some wanted to liberate them through joining secular national movements, some offered conformity with the Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood and some supported political Islamic resistance. The varied nature of religious nationalism among Kurds challenge the dichotomy in the Kurdish nationalist historiography which posits that Islamic and Kurdish identities are exclusive of one another.

With the Kurdish *ulema* approaching Kurdish nationalism from varying perspectives, my study also provided examples of how Kurdish identities evolved under different time periods. The changing approach to the concept of *umma*, from an enthusiastic support to complete distrust, was especially illuminating of the evolving Kurdish identities. Some *ulema* envisioned the concept as a religious ground for Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood, some

⁷⁹⁴ Klein, "Kurdish nationalists and non-nationalist Kurds," 137.

considered it as a motive for an Islamic revival, and some others completely blamed its usage since, they believed, the notion helped those in power to continue their established control.

Continuing Debate: Marxists or Religious Nationalists?

Why did many Kurdish *ulema* reject the Marxist defense of Kurdish national interests? Many Kurdish conservatives were very skeptical of the Kurdish Marxists, whom they blamed for introducing secularism into the Kurdish region. The goal of the Marxists, for these conservatives, has nothing to do with solving Kurdish problems; instead, they work in order to destroy the Kurdish attachment to Islam.

The issue of framing the Kurdish question in secular and Marxist tones or through religious references is one of the most controversial of the continuing debates. The conflict between secular nationalists, the traditional elite, Marxists and conservatives of various types remains unresolved in the twenty-first century. Despite their common critique of the state for ethnic discrimination and of the tribal and religious leaders to the same extent, many Kurdish conservatives and Marxists today are not able to work together against the social injustices Kurds have been facing.

Given the ongoing conflicts among Kurdish nationalists and Kurdish religious extremists, it is very tempting to conclude that Kurds have deeply rooted opposing ideologies causing their endless fights.⁷⁹⁵ In fact, Kurdish Marxism's exclusivism toward other Kurdish

⁷⁹⁵ Kurdish ethnic nationalists and religious extremists have been killing each other across the Turkish border in opposition groups. According to some data sets on the subject, 1,500 Turkish citizens joined YPG Kurdish nationalist fighters from 2014 to 2015, and almost 50 percent of the total 1300 ISIS recruitment from Turkey is made up of Kurds. "Türkiye'den IŞİD'e 1300, PYD'ye ise 1500 Kişi Katıldı," *T24 Bağımsız İnternet Gazetesi*, July 31, 2015, accessed September 15, 2015, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/turkiyeden-isisde-1300-pydye-ise-1500-kisi-katildi,304659>

groups as collaborators,⁷⁹⁶ and its restriction of political pluralism within the Kurdish nationalist camp in Turkey,⁷⁹⁷ only developed as a later phenomenon. The later political developments, the rise of political Islam and the rise of the PKK, the Marxist armed movement- perpetuated the discrepancy between Kurds of different ideologies. What developed initially was competing identities,⁷⁹⁸ as I tried to show in this study, which were later dressed in different ideological outfits and politicized by the use of available cultural framings.⁷⁹⁹ One tends to neglect the fact that Kurds are a people of the borderlands, making them prey to the power politics of territorial hegemony for centuries. A hegemonic fight that was essentially about the domination of land and its resources was converted to an ideological war,⁸⁰⁰ and the people of the borderland were played off against each other in different ideological formations. The current fight between the PKK and the Kurdish religious reactionaries is only a reflection of how the tension between the conservatives and the secularists has been manipulated by the producers of terrorism.

For instance, studies argue that Hizbullah's ideology is not a local product in the Kurdish region, nor is PKK's Marxism,⁸⁰¹ yet they had to accommodate local values and sympathize with local problems for approval and support. A case in point is that Hizbullah used madrasa networks to spread its ideology and benefited from the popularity of a figure

⁷⁹⁶ Bozarslan, "Political Aspects of the Kurdish Problem," 102.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid., 110.

⁷⁹⁸ Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 116.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid., 100.

⁸⁰⁰ Klein, *Margins of Empire*, 14.

⁸⁰¹ Gurbuz, 38-39.

like Said Nursi, despite its drastic political Islamic ideal, which was in direct conflict with Nursi's passive insurgency.⁸⁰²

Religion rates as a significant criterion that Kurds employ to measure the merits and flaws of people. Indeed, Kurdish ethno-nationalists understood that the best way to sell nationalism to the Kurds was through the use of religion, and they included Islam in their propaganda after the 1980s.⁸⁰³ One of them acknowledged that employing Marxist discourse in the Kurdish region was like dancing without music,⁸⁰⁴ since the Kurds did not support the nationalist ideology if it was in direct contrast with their belief.

The Kurdish Marxists' rude treatment of religion only produced resentment and the unintended outcome of anti-nationalists undermining its goal to unite the majority of Kurds under its secular leadership. Marxists have not only targeted the traditional leaders, but their narratives continue to denounce Islam, whose ideology of peace, justice and equality supposedly ended with the battle of Kerbela in 680, which was the turning point in the *Sunni-Shia* conflict.⁸⁰⁵ While many conservatives labeled Marxist nationalists as infidels and anyone dealing with Kurdish issue as communists, Marxists applied an exclusivist tone in their discourse on religion and religious practice.

⁸⁰² Even the local religious figures discussed in this study anchored their perspectives on a popular figure, which turned into familiar and more trustable people in the eyes of people. I am amazed by how many of the figures discussed in this study employing Said Nursi in defending their contrasting visions on politics and nationalism.

⁸⁰³ Lale Yalcin Heckmann, 117. Kurdish ethnic nationalist also felt threatened by the electoral success of the Islamic-oriented Justice and Development Party in 2007, and embarked on constructing a new image at peace with Islam. For instance, Abdullah Öcalan requested the establishment of a religious science academy in Urfa and the recitation of *Mevlûd*, the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, at the funeral ceremonies of the PKK fighters. See, Gurbuz, 115.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸⁰⁵ İsmail Beşikçi, "İslam'ın Barış, Huzur, Adalet ve Eşitlik Anlayışı Kerbela'da Son Buldu," *Nerineazad*, accessed November 3, 2016,

http://www.nerineazad.com/columnists/İsmail_Beşikçi/ahmet-turhalliyla-roportaj

On the other hand, the fact that Kurdish conservatives were oversensitive and reactionary to secular notions of nationalism was partly because the foundation of the Turkish secular republic and its persecution of the Kurdish *Sufi* and *madrassa* tradition had a profound impact on the Kurdish Muslim psyche. Realizing that a similar trend of secularism had been developing among the Kurdish secular intelligentsia, many conservatives rejected assertions of secular notions of nationalism, Latinization of the Kurdish alphabet and the narrative condemning Kurdish traditional values as reflections of backwardness. The Kurds had already heard about all these discourses under the Turkish secular nationalists, and their experience with the Republic only brought torture and affliction. For a long time, many conservatives resisted Kurdish Latin letters, calling them *Ladin*, no religion, and refused to deal with issues of nationalism and Kurdishness, as they did not trust the secular figures pronouncing them. When the same secular people invited Kurds to speak up for Kurdish rights, many conservative Kurds smelled a rat in the call.

It is only with this background that the reactions of Kurdish *ulema* to secular nationalism and the relatively slower development of nationalist discourse among them can be better comprehended and examined. When nationalism and religion are held to be two opponents and the division between them is considered impassible, the major factor, the oppressive policies of the status quo, behind the Kurdish *ulema*'s resentment of nationalism and the Marxists' reactions to religion, go unnoticed; and the real story of the development of Kurdish nationalism remains to be unfolded.

Under JDP (Justice and Development Party) Rule

Turkey's current political setting is dominated by an Islamic version of the nationalist Kemalist system and Kurdish ulema continue to produce discourses on Islam, nationalism and state policies in writing, discourse and in action. Kurdish *ulema* continue to raise their voices against the denial of Kurdish basic rights masked under a religious garb. On April 19, 2012, Hayrettin Karaman, the famed professor of Islamic law, known for his fatwas favoring the interests of the JDP government, issued a fatwa named "the road to separatism must be closed,"⁸⁰⁶ which generated much critique from the Kurdish Islamic circles. In his fatwa, Karaman proposed that the Kurdish demands such as the right to education in the native language must be rejected if these demands are parts of the steps to eventually separate the Muslim *umma*,⁸⁰⁷ Kurds and Turks. Mullah Süleyman Kurşun from Diyarbakır judged the fatwa as completely political, and blamed Karaman for issuing fatwas that the secular system wants of him.⁸⁰⁸ Muhammed Sıddık Şeyhazade, the leader of Med-Zehra Nur group, termed the fatwa as non-Islamic, and being in the service of the Kemalist system.⁸⁰⁹

This study already discussed how the Turkish state has long used the *umma* discourse to silence the Kurdish dissent, which caused many conservative Kurds, as well as seculars, to lose trust in the notion.

⁸⁰⁶ Hayrettin Karaman, "Bölünmeye Giden Yol Kapatılmalıdır," *İslam Hukuku Profesoru Hayrettin Karaman'ın Websitesi*, April 19, 2012, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.hayrettinkaraman.net/makale/0875.htm>

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid. Also see, Karaman, "Çözüme Katkı," *İslam Hukuku Profesoru Hayrettin Karaman'ın Websitesi*, June 17, 2012, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.hayrettinkaraman.net/makale/0901.htm>

⁸⁰⁸ Cesim İlhan, "Seyda Süleyman Kurşun ile Karaman'ın Fetvasına Dair," *Hinis Haber*, May 22, 2012, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.hinishaber.net/ozel-haber/seyda-Suleyman-Kurşun-ile-karamanin-fetvasina-dair-h859.html>

⁸⁰⁹ Cesim İlhan, "Dindar Kürt aydınları: "Bunlar Kemalist sistemin fetvâlarıdır," *Sediyani Haber*, May 26, 2012, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.sediyani.com/?p=11851>

Many of my interviewees expressed their disapproval of the state's continuing religious assimilation through the *Diyanet*, the PRA, and the *İmam-Hatip* schools. The state-appointed mosque imams were not well respected in the society if they were not local, since they were mostly educated in the state's *İmam-Hatip* schools, not in Kurdish clandestine madrasas. The Kurds still believe that the madrasas raise Islamic scholars as opposed to *İmam-Hatip* graduates, who are simply state officials. The state has intervened in Kurdish religious understanding and practice through the *Diyanet*'s sermons dictated to mosque imams. Said Yaz relates that he has refused to give sermons sent by the *Diyanet* for 30 years now, and he has been warned and fined many times. The state claims that the *Diyanet* exists to facilitate the understating and under-practicing of religion, although its critics only find it an instrument of the government's supervision, assimilation and better management of Turkey's Muslims.

There is increasing awareness inside the Kurdish religious community that the current government, with its heavy Islamist propaganda, only comforts religious Kurds through religious slogans such as religious brotherhood, *umma*. Employing the religious brotherhood discourse to Kurds is like offering candy to them⁸¹⁰ for deceit. The government has not restored any constitutional rights to Kurds, such as the right to education in the native language. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's recent display of a *Diyanet*-published Kurdish-language Qur'an during his speech in the Kurdish region before the 2015 elections proves especially illuminating here. Erdoğan proudly presented to Kurds the first Kurdish interpretation of the Qur'an by the state, claiming how much Kurdish rights have been

⁸¹⁰ Mücahit Bilici, "Müslüman Ol Kürt Olma!" *Taraf*, May 16, 2015, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.taraf.com.tr/yazarlar/musluman-ol-kurd-olma/>

restored during his rule. His motivation was questioned in public, especially after the editor of the Kurdish Qur'an, Dr. Kadri Yıldırım, announced that it was published right before the elections, before receiving editorial approval, to his great surprise. Erdoğan wanted to benefit from the translation before his election campaign was over. Some religious Kurds reacted to it and viewed this as Erdoğan's manipulation of religion. While the Kurds hoped for a new constitution from Erdoğan to restore their basic rights, he could only offer them a Kurdish Qur'an, which was not even sound.⁸¹¹ Bilici asks why the government often uses religion to get votes from the Kurds instead of meeting the needs of the Kurdish ethnic community as a whole. The government puts an emphasis on the Kurds' Islamic identity as if the Kurds were all Muslims. According to Bilici, Erdoğan says Kurds ought to be Muslim but not Kurdish.⁸¹²

Erdoğan's apology in November 2011 for the Dersim massacre in 1938 was also judged as "insincere" after the Roboski airstrike in December 2011, when thirty-four Kurdish civilian smugglers were bombed by F-16 Fighting Falcons of the Turkish Air Force due to wrong information coming from the intelligence service.⁸¹³ Neither Erdoğan nor any of the ministers attended the funeral of the civilians and Erdoğan did not apologize to the families of the victims.⁸¹⁴ Süleyman Çevik, the editor-in-chief of the *Nûbihar* journal, blamed Erdoğan for helping the oppression of the Kurds⁸¹⁵ by refusing to talk about the Roboski airstrike.

⁸¹¹ Ibid.

⁸¹² Bilici, "Müslüman Ol, Kürt Olma!"

⁸¹³ "Baransu: Uludere'de MİT'ten Rapor üstüne rapor," *En Son Haber*, January 2, 2012, accessed November 12, 2016,

<http://www.ensonhaber.com/baransu-uludere-de-mitten-rapor-ustune-rapor-2012-01-02.html>

⁸¹⁴ Süleyman Çevik, "Ölen Kürt Olunca Özür Neden Gelmez," *İlke Haber* January 21, 2012, accessed November 12, 2016,

<http://www.ilkehaber.com/yazi/olen-kurt-olunca-ozur-neden-gelmez-3534.htm>

⁸¹⁵ Süleyman Çevik, "Roboski'nin Acısı Devam Ediyor," *İlke Haber*, June 8, 2012, accessed November 12, 2016,

<http://www.ilkehaber.com/yazi/roboskinin-acisi-devam-ediyor-4795.htm>

Erdoğan was angry with journalists' questions about the event, and related the issue to abortion, saying that each abortion, equals a Roboski,⁸¹⁶ underrating the big tragedy. To Erdoğan's address to Kurds, "My brother, what do you lack (as a Kurd)? Have you been able to be a president as a Kurd in this country? Yes, you did, a prime minister? Yes, you did. A minister, yes you did...What do you want more, what do you want?"⁸¹⁷ a Kurdish Islamist writer and politician responded that Kurds want *zexnepurt u kuzzulkurt (zıkkımın kökü)*, meaning that the Kurds expressed their demands innumerable times, yet Erdoğan must have a problem understanding them.⁸¹⁸ It seems that the current government has already caused religious Kurds' disillusionment with the religious version of the Turkish nationalist state.

This study aimed to carve out a few examples of Kurdish Islamic narratives prominent in the twentieth century, as an effort to elucidate the overlapping nature of religion and nationalism in the Kurdish context during the Turkish Republican period. The mullahs discussed in this study speak to Kurdish religious audience and continue to leave their legacy on the continuing and evolving Kurdish national identities. Although the discourses belong to certain periods in the past, they continue to affect the development of current Kurdish identities and nationalist ideologies.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

⁸¹⁷ "Erdoğan'dan Kürtler'e: Daha ne istiyorsun?" *Rudaw*, March 15, 2015, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://rudaw.net/turkish/middleeast/turkey/150320152>

⁸¹⁸ "Altan Tan'dan Erdoğan'a yanıt: Kürtler zıkkımın kökünü istiyor!" *Radikal*, March 23, 2015, accessed November 12, 2016,

<http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/altan-tandan-erdogana-yanit-Kürtler-zıkkimin-kokunu-istiyor-1319488/>

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