

THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MAJOR KURDISH MOVEMENTS:

AN ANALYSIS OF THE KURDISH MOVEMENTS FROM THE BEDİRHAN
REBELLION (1847) TO THE SHEIKH SAİD REBELLION (1925)

by

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Title: The Nature and Characteristics of the Major Kurdish Movements: An Analysis of Kurdish Movements from the Bedirhan Rebellion (1847) to the Sheikh Said Rebellion (1925)

This work evaluates the important Kurdish rebellions, which are the Bedirhan Rebellion (1847), the Sheikh Ubeydullah Rebellion (1880), the Koçgiri Rebellion (1921) and the Sheikh Said Rebellion (1925). While the first three of the rebellions took place during the Ottoman era, the last one, the Sheikh Said rebellion broke out in republican Turkey. The aim of this work is to introduce the continuity and differentiation in the Kurdish rebellions; nevertheless, it does not attempt to explain the history of Kurdish nationalism inasmuch as nationalism constitutes only one aspect of the latter two rebellions mentioned above.

The centralization attempts of the state that started from the Tanzimat period and continued into the republican era were a major threat to the local Kurdish aghas and sheikhs. The Bedirhan rebellion and the Sheikh Ubeydullah rebellion were typical examples of resistance against the centralization of the Ottoman state, and they broke out in order to preserve old prerogatives and expand the authority of the tribal leaders over Ottoman Kurdistan. In spite of the changing slogans and the diversity of the participants, the local Kurdish leaders were the main actors of the Koçgiri rebellion and the Sheikh Said rebellion, since any government intervention or centralization endeavor was a challenge to their authority. However, a nationalistic dimension was added to the Kurdish movement in the twentieth century. This new dimension stemmed from the educated Kurds, who evolved from self-awareness to nationalism and participated in the Koçgiri and Sheikh Said rebellions. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to refer one or two reasons and to rely exclusively on the nationalist discourse with respect to the Kurdish movements. Being aware of this reality, this thesis discusses the issue within a larger context of the Tanzimat, the Hamidian period, and the republican era.

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Başlık: Başlıca Kürt Ayaklanmalarının Niteliği ve Genel Özellikleri: Bedirhan Ayaklanmasından (1847) Şeyh Said Ayaklanmasına (1925) Kürt Hareketlerinin Bir İncelemesi.

Bu çalışma önemli Kürt ayaklanmalarından, Bedirhan ayaklanması (1847), Şeyh Ubeydullah ayaklanması (1880), Koçgiri ayaklanması (1921) ve Şeyh Said ayaklanmasını (1925) değerlendirmektedir. İlk üç ayaklanma Osmanlı döneminde meydana gelmişken, Şeyh Said ayaklanması Cumhuriyet döneminde yaşanmıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Kürt isyanlarındaki devamlılık ve farklılaşmayı ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bununla birlikte, bu Kürt milliyetçiliğinin tarihsel gelişimini anlatmak anlamına gelmemektedir. Zira, Kürt milliyetçiliği bahsedilen ayaklanmalardan yalnızca son ikisi için sebepler arasında sayılabilir.

Tanzimat dönemiyle başlayan ve Cumhuriyet döneminde de süren devletin merkezileşme çabaları, Kürt ağaları ve şeyhleri için çok ciddi bir tehdit oluşturuyordu. Bedirhan ayaklanması ve Şeyh Ubeydullah ayaklanması, Osmanlı Devleti'nin merkezileşmesine karşı direnme hareketlerinin tipik örnekleri olup, aşiret liderlerinin eski imtiyazlarını korumak ve Osmanlı Kürdistan'ı üzerindeki otoritelerini genişletmek için çıkardıkları isyanlardır. Değişen sloganlara ve katılımcıların çeşitliliğine rağmen, her türlü devlet müdahalesini ve merkezileşme çabasını otoritelerine karşı tehdit olarak algılayan yerel Kürt liderler, Koçgiri ve Şeyh Said ayaklanmalarının da en önemli aktörleriydi. Bununla birlikte, yirminci yüzyılda Kürt hareketine milliyetçi bir boyut eklendi. Bu yeni boyut, Koçgiri ve Şeyh Said ayaklanmalarına da katılan, Kürtlük bilincinden milliyetçiliğe doğru evrilen eğitilmiş Kürtlerden kaynaklanıyordu. Bununla beraber, Kürt hareketleri sözkonusu olduğunda, bir ya da iki sebepten bahsetmek ve milliyetçi söylemlere dayanmak yanıltıcıdır. Bunun bilincine vararak, bu tezde konu, Tanzimat, Abdulhamid dönemi, ve cumhuriyet dönemini de içine alan geniş bir bağlamda tartışılmaktadır.

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INTRODUCTION

The Kurdish issue has been subject to the manipulation of different groups since it continues to be a political problem not only regionally but also internationally. Nationalist discourses on the subject, from both the Turkish side and the Kurdish side, seem to dominate the written works in spite of several cool-headed studies. In such an environment, history is used mostly as a tool for the nationalist groups in order to prove their own points of view. However, we have certain historical sources that can help to come to more rational deductions.

In search of the evolution of the rebellions that broke out in Ottoman lands where the Kurds were living and the Kurdish organizations, the period of time in which the Ottoman centralization policies started to modify the existing power relations between the Ottoman state and the local Kurdish authorities constitutes the beginning of this study. While determining this time space, it was seen that each subject is closely interrelated to one another and the chronological scope of the thesis is set from the Tanzimat to 1925. Since changing conjuncture both internally and externally modified the nature of the Kurdish rebellions and organizations, the period that is chosen seems to give a chance to view this evolution.

The Ottoman state applied considerable reform policies during the Tanzimat period in order to centralize the authority and enforce new social and economic systems. Since the strong notable families drew benefit from the old order, the new administrative policies were bothersome. Furthermore, it was not only the

administrative and economic reforms but also the new perception of citizenship that affected the internal social structure of Ottoman society. The Tanzimat policies help us to understand how things sorted out specifically in the regions where the Kurds were living; however, one must not forget that all the developments of the nineteenth century specifically after the Tanzimat were not unique for the Ottoman Kurds since it was more or less the same case for many ethnic groups under the Ottoman rule. Besides Anatolia, the Tanzimat principles were applied in Balkan and Arab regions. It was Mithad Pasha in Danube, who put into force certain reforms in order to achieve the integration of Bulgaria to the central state. This was an attempt to reduce the power of local Muslim notables.¹ The centralization policies and new administrative reforms were against the power spoiled and privileged local chieftains of the old order. Thus, the Kurdish rebellions of the period will be scrutinized within the context of Ottoman universality. As the importance of the Tanzimat is obvious, the first chapter will start with a short analysis of the era.

After the Tanzimat, there were two important Kurdish rebellions, the Bedirhan rebellion (1847) and the Sheikh Ubeydullah rebellion (1880) both of which were related closely to the changing power relations between the local Kurdish leaders and the Ottoman state. Broadly speaking, the first chapter is about how the Kurdish aghas who were incorporated into the Ottoman state in the sixteenth century and given an autonomous status after the incorporation tried to bring under control within the context of the centralization efforts of the Ottoman state which began in the nineteenth century with Mahmut II.

¹ Yonca Köksal, "The Application of Tanzimat Reforms in Bulgaria: State Building in the Ottoman Empire (1839-1878)," p. 15.
Available (online) at:
<http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/kokkalis/GSW1/GSW1/11%20Koksal.pdf#search=%22tanzimat%20yonca%20k%C3%B6ksal%22>.

Literally, the application of the Tanzimat principles throughout Ottoman lands was not achieved, at least simultaneously. Furthermore, the state did not have the same kind of relationship with all Kurdish tribes; some of them were advocates of the Ottoman state and expanded their authority at the expense of other Kurdish tribes. This created imbalances on administrative and social bases, which also fed the tribal rivalries. However, the Hamidian period was the peak point for the deepening of the divergences and imbalances among Kurdish tribes. The Hamidian period (1876-1909) points to a differentiated kind of relationship between the Ottoman state and the Kurdish tribes with the construction of the Hamidiye Light Cavalry and the *Aşiret* schools. As is known, Abdulhamid II tried to construct a strong central authority and his period of time can be regarded as the maturation era of the Tanzimat policies. It will be analyzed that how the establishment of a militia like Hamidiye Light Cavalry contributed to the existing economic and political gap among the Kurdish tribes. Furthermore, the Kurdish students of the *Aşiret* schools and also other Kurds who were trained in modern schools of the Hamidian period gave birth to a different type of Kurdish profile. Some of these educated Kurds participated in the Young Turk movement in the following years.

Obviously, Kurdish nationalism will be discussed throughout the chapters in spite of the different and various motivations of the Kurdish rebellions and organizations. In the context of this thesis, the term “Kurdish movement” only refers to any act carried out by Kurds; thus, “Kurdish nationalist movement” is something different and requires more than Kurdish participants. Sharing the definition of Hakan Özoğlu regarding Kurdish nationalism, it is adopted in this thesis that:

“Kurdish nationalism” refers to an intellectual and political movement that is based mainly (though not entirely) upon two premises-the belief in a consistent

Kurdish identity, which is rooted in an ancient history; and the conviction of an unalienable right for self-determination in a historic Kurdish homeland or territory.²

The Kurdish nationalism does not refer to only longing for an independent Kurdish state but also to demands for autonomous status under the state authority. Inasmuch as Kurdish intellectuals and notables who inclined to nationalism were not necessarily secessionists, the seeds of Kurdish nationalism were implanted with the organizations and publications that emphasized on Kurdish identity, history and literature. In spite of the fact that the initial Kurdish organizations or publications were not nationalist, they contributed to the emergence of Kurdish nationalism in the following years. In the second chapter, the organizations which were established by Kurdish intellectuals will be scrutinized mostly within the context of the Young Turk movement.

In the liberal atmosphere of the Young Turk Revolution, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (Society for the Mutual Aid and Progress of Kurdistan, SMPK) was established in İstanbul in 1908. It was followed by *Kürt Talebe-i Hevi Cemiyeti* (Kurdish Hope Student Society) in 1912 and *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* (Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan, SAK) in 1918. These elitist Kurdish organizations had different charters and one can observe the evolution of their aims from self-awareness to nationalism. Analyzing this evolution within the context of the Ottoman state and international community will help us to grasp the multidimensional character of the Kurdish issue in the 1920s.

Besides the Turkish nationalist ideology of the Unionists, there were some more concrete Unionist implementations that provoked Kurdish nationalism and

² Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), p.10.

assisted the formation of Kurdish political identity. Also the relationship between the Kurds and the CUP will be examined in the second chapter.

After World War I, the Kurdish issue was on the agenda of the European powers which encouraged Kurdish nationalists within and outside the Ottoman state. Since the Ottoman state was about to disintegrate, Kurdish nationalism was a reaction to this and also sought new supporters in eastern Anatolia beside İstanbul. On the other hand, the changing international and domestic environment which was convenient for the formation of a Kurdish national unity were not enough to unite all or a significant amount of Kurds to struggle for a Kurdish state. In the third chapter, first the important differentiations among Kurds will be discussed. As a special case, the Dersim Kurds will be analyzed, which will help us to understand the dynamics or failure of the later Kurdish rebellions which specifically broke out in Dersim.

The most important Kurdish rebellion of the Turkish National Struggle, which of the Koçgiri tribe, helps us to anticipate one face of the Kurdish movement during the twentieth century. Since the Alevi faith was something not tolerated in the Ottoman state and Dersim had a long history of rebellions, Koçgiri tells us more than Kurdish nationalism. Military service and taxes were more problematic issues in Dersim than they were in other Kurdish locations. Beside that, there was a lack of unity among the Kurdish tribes because of religious differentiation and tribal interests.

The second important issue of the third chapter is the Sheikh Said rebellion. There are debates on the reasons for this rebellion; some people emphasize the religious dimension of the rebellion qualifying it as a reaction against the abolition of the caliphate on March 3, 1924, while others address Kurdish nationalism as the reason for the rebellion. Besides the above mentioned subjects, other aspects of the rebellion will be analyzed such as the abrogation of *aşar*.

This thesis first aims to analyze general characteristics of the important Kurdish rebellions and organizations during the Ottoman period and the Republican era until 1925. This evolutionary path would lead us to abstain from any generalizations and capture the duality or versatility in each Kurdish movement and organization. When working on this subject, the most challenging thing is the biased and nationalist sources which make any academic study very difficult. There are two basic sides of the debate on the Kurdish issue: the Turkish nationalists and the Kurdish nationalists. Telling the story in a nationalist discourse makes history as a tool which would help to construct the desired past for both sides. Furthermore, this perception requires different dimensions of the subjects to be subordinated or eliminated to nationalism. Thus, it is very difficult to stay away from the comments of nationalist discourses since the subject that is studied necessitates approaching this kind of sources. This does not mean that there are not any scientific and serious studies on the subject; however, they are rare when it is compared to other sources.

There will be a general overview and comments on some of the later Kurdish rebellions during the republican era in the conclusion chapter. The centralization attempts of the government, as one of the most important subjects of this thesis, seem to have crucial effects on the outbreak of the further Kurdish rebellions. Taking into consideration the rebellions in Dersim, which had been one of the focal places of resistance against the state authority, was also on the agenda of the republican Turkey in 1930s. Thus, the continued and differentiated features of the Kurdish rebellions requires more studies; however, it seems that the main argument of this thesis, the centralization attempts of the government as one of the most significant reasons of the Kurdish rebellions, could also be a valid argument for the later Kurdish rebellions mentioned in the conclusion chapter.

CHAPTER I
EFFECTS OF OTTOMAN CENTRALIZATION POLICIES ON EASTERN
ANATOLIA

The Tanzimat Period

The victory of Çaldıran gave the control of the region from Erzurum to Diyarbakır to the Ottoman state. The People of the region were nomadic tribes and depended on raising livestock. On the other hand, the *Kızılbaş* Turkomans who resisted any centralization policies of the Ottomans in the sixteenth century migrated to Azerbaijan. This created a power vacuum in eastern Anatolia.³ After the Ottoman state took control of the region, Sunni Kurdish tribes recognized the authority of the Sunni Ottomans. İdris-i Bitlisi, a former officer of the Akkoyunlu state, assisted Selim I to coordinate relationship between the Kurdish tribes and the Ottoman state. As a result of this attempt, the Ottomans conceded semi-autonomous status to these tribes in exchange for some sort of service. This way of cosseting the tribal leaders was not innocent of reason since they were expected to help the Ottoman army during military campaigns.

The Ottoman state's aim was to settle nomadic tribes of central and eastern Anatolia; however, the nomads opposed the centralization attempts of the state. Furthermore, these attempts resulted in disorder and trouble since some nomadic tribes pursued brigandage in the mountainous areas. The Ottoman state was not able to take control over the nomads during this period.

³ M. Mert Sunar, *Tribes and State: Ottoman Centralization in Eastern Anatolia 1876-1914* (MA Thesis. Bilkent University, 1999), p. 19.

There was an ongoing struggle among the eastern Anatolian tribes that was stimulated by the Ottomans as a way to control these tribes. The Ottoman land system in eastern Anatolia gave way to a kind of quasi-feudal structure in the region. *Yurtluk* and *Ocaklık* as hereditary land enabled tribes to enjoy autonomy to some extent. The central government used the rivalry among tribe members and among different tribes in order to control the degree of this autonomy. The tribes which were awarded by the state grew at the expense of the other ones.

It was mostly the nineteenth century centralization policies that enabled the Ottomans to take control of the nomads and some tribes to a large extent. The announcement of Tanzimat in 1839 was a clear declaration of administrative and financial centralization, and also a new perception of Ottoman citizen. The Tanzimat was a plan to create more efficient state tools for control of the Ottoman lands. Since centralization was on the agenda of the state, it was necessary to control the Ottoman provinces. Besides the reform attempts, it was obvious that the decay of the Ottoman state system gave way to disorder and existed or new focal centers were rose up out the new conditions of the Ottoman state. The structure of the eastern provinces of the Ottoman state was more or less the same until the implementation of the centralization policies of the Tanzimat period. In 1840, efforts were made to get rid of the semi-independent *mültezims* (tax farmers) and replace them with tax collectors directly employed by the central government. According to Stanford Shaw, losing the control over tax collection “made the provincial governors much more subject to central control than had traditionally been the case.”⁴ However, it has to be noted that this plan was not so successful and the state had to return to previous methods in the following years.

⁴ Stanford J. Shaw, “Local administrations in the Tanzimat,” *150. Yılında Tanzimat* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1992), p.33.

It is doubtless that the Tanzimat was a new era for the Ottoman financial structure. The Ottoman tax system was revised during the Tanzimat period. According to this, there was a decrease in the amount of the *aşar* (tithe) and it was decided that it would be collected as 1/10 of the harvest. Until the Tanzimat, *aşar* was not collected as relevant to its meaning. As is known the word “*aşar*” means 1/10; however, it was used to be collected as 1/3, 1/5, and 1/8 of the harvest according to the changing agricultural conditions in provinces. Some different ways were used to collect the *aşar*, such as *emanet usulü* (temporary responsibility) with the agency of *muhassıls* (tax collector), but this was not very successful. The service was again given to *mültezims* (tax farmer) with an auction system and the winner would collect the taxes for two, three or five years. Collecting *aşar* directly from the taxpayers was very difficult, thus beside the first three years of the Tanzimat, *iltizam* (tax farming) was used in order to collect *aşar*. Aside from the problems of collecting, it was discussed to abrogate the *aşar* and replace it with property tax since the first one prevented agricultural production as a tax based on *gayrisafi* (gross) products.⁵ However, the state could not get rid of the old tax system during the Tanzimat period.

Helmuth Von Moltke mentions that in 1838, regardless of their social status (tribal leader or ordinary peasant), all Kurds complained about two things: taxes and military service. Now the Ottoman state promised them security in exchange for their loyalty and paying taxes. In spite of all the efforts, the state was not able to prevent the arbitrary implementations of the *mültezims* and also replace them with state officials as the tax collectors.⁶

⁵ Abdullatif Şener, “Osmanlı Vergi Reformları,” *150. Yılında Tanzimat* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1992), pp. 262-263.

⁶ Helmuth Von Moltke, *Moltke'nin Türkiye Mektupları* (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1999), pp. 238-240.

Beside the financial reforms of the Tanzimat period, there were important social changes in Ottoman society at that time. The non-Muslim citizens of the state were participants in the local assemblies in the provinces and subdivisions of provinces (*livas*) after the Tanzimat. It was not something liked by the Muslim population of the Ottoman state because from that time on, non-Muslims were as efficient members of these local assemblies as Muslims were. Furthermore, in some cases, the rich and efficient non-Muslim members were at higher levels than the poor Muslim citizens. Thus it is obvious that the equality bearing implementations of the Tanzimat period raised the tension among different groups of the Ottoman society. The changes in the social life of the Ottoman citizens can be observed in the following example written by İlber Ortaylı. Ortaylı mentions a small story that took place in Trablusşam in 1850. According to the story, a Christian corpse was being carried on the shoulders of the people, which was severely opposed by *mutaassıp* (fanatic) Muslims since until that time it had been carried on a mule.⁷

As another aspect of the subject, some Christians who previously had seemed to accept Islam declared that indeed they were Christians. Changing religion specifically from Islam to Christianity or other religions was something strange and new for the Tanzimat period. The reason behind that was the relatively liberal atmosphere of the period and also the abrogation of some of the taxes levied on the non-Muslim population. So the administrative reform attempts of the nineteenth century had important social effects. Since the equality of Muslims and non-Muslims was not something that could be easily adopted by the Muslim population, it raised the tension specifically in the relatively underdeveloped parts of the Ottoman state.⁸

⁷ İlber Ortaylı, "Tanzimat Döneminde Tanassur ve Din Değişirme," *Tanzimat'ın 150. Yıldönümü Uluslararası Sempozyumu 31 Ekim-3 Kasım 1989*, Ankara (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1994), p. 487.

⁸ Sunar, p. 31.

Analyzing the later Kurdish rebellions in eastern Anatolia needs to grasp this social change in Ottoman lands.

All the developments of the Tanzimat period were not something special for eastern Anatolia since it was more or less the same case for many ethnic groups because Tanzimat policies were against the power-spoiled and privileged local chieftains of the old order. However, the period did not start from 1839. Nearly all of the local hereditary rulers, who fed from the great autonomy in the Ottoman lands, began to be controlled starting from the 1820s. It was decided by the Ottoman government that the appointed officials would take the place of these tribal leaders in order to establish central authority. After the removing of the local hereditary leaders of the Western provinces, the same began to happen in the East.⁹ There were several strong Kurdish dynasties at that time: Bahdinan in Amadiya, Soran in Rawanduz, Baban in Suleymaniye, and Botan in Cizre.¹⁰ On the other hand, there were some obstacles of the time to the restoration of central authority in the eastern provinces due to the crisis with Mehmet Ali Pasha, the governor of Egypt. The Ottoman state retarded the centralization process so as to obtain the necessary support from the tribes. Besides the extra situations such as assistance required for military campaigns, there were other reasons for the delay since the Ottomans did not want to evoke any uprising of the tribes. For the reasons mentioned above, the Ottoman state was slow in the implementation of the centralization policies. However, all the local dynasties besides the Botan Emirate were affected by the centralist policies of the Ottomans until the end of the 1830s. The leader of the Botan Emirate is known for the rebellion in 1847 carrying his name.

⁹ Sunar, p. 24.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

The Bedirhan Rebellion

Bedirhan Pasha was the last Kurdish emir in Ottoman lands. He became the head of the Botan Emirate in Cizre in 1835 and starting from the early years of his reign, he helped the Ottoman state to solve the regional disputes.¹¹ We learn the details of the Ottoman campaigns against some Kurdish tribes in the 1830s from Helmuth Von Moltke. According to Moltke, Bedirhan Pasha assisted the Ottoman state during these campaigns against other Kurdish tribes. The main targets of two important campaigns were Sait Bey Citadel and the region between Muş and Hazo, Garzan. As a small construction, the citadel may not seem to have been so important for the Ottoman state; however, it was one of the focal points of resistance against the state authority. Thus straightening Sait Bey out was indispensable and immediate. At the end, the citadel was destroyed and Sait Bey was surrounded by Ottoman soldiers, who were assisted by Bedirhan Bey's men.¹² The second arduous target was Garzan, which was an impassable region for the Ottoman army. One of the main reasons for the Kurds' resistance was the fear of lifelong military service. After the bloody and harsh fight, there was a significant amount of casualties in the Ottoman army and captives from Garzan.¹³ The Ottoman administrators were determined to discipline all the local powers, which was not so easy and necessitated the support of other strong local entities. This created a kind of rivalry and conflict among Kurdish tribes. On the other hand, it was not only due to the Ottomans' attempts that tribal unification was not achieved since these tribes pursued their own interests. Beside that, Bedirhan Bey helped the Ottoman state during the Nizip Campaign against

¹¹ Özoğlu, p. 70; Moltke, p. 222.

¹² Moltke, p. 231.

¹³ Ibid., p. 235.

İbrahim Pasha of Egypt, which was a harsh defeat for the Ottoman state; on the other hand, a successful struggle for Bedirhan Pasha.¹⁴ According to Moltke, there were many deaths during the war, which brought the attention to eastern Anatolia. The Ottoman state collected soldiers from the places where the Kurds were living; however, people were escaping to the mountains of the region. The ones who were caught strained to fight and also were treated as captives.¹⁵

This was the time that the Bedirhan Family gained power with the backing of the Ottoman state, which released many rights to the Bedirhans in exchange for the assistance to the Sultan. It is obvious that there was a trade off between the state and Bedirhan, which made Botan Emirate the most powerful Kurdish principality of the time. Hakan Özoğlu quotes a paragraph from the writings of two American missionaries, Dr. Wright and Mr. Breath, who spent time in Cizre with Bedirhan (1846):

(Bedirhan) told us that eight years ago, when he was weak and Turkey strong, he entered into an engagement with the latter; and that now, though the power changed hands, he did not violate his word...He is an uncommon man. Eight years ago he was poor, without power, and little known. The Turkish government then took him by the hand; and now his wealth is incalculable¹⁶

In order to prevail on his influence, Bedirhan Pasha benefited from the tribal rivalries. He acted on the side of Nurullah Bey to counter his rival, Süleyman Bey who had Nestorian allies. Since Bedirhan wanted one of his allies as the ruler of Hakkari, the neighboring region of Cizre, he supported Nurullah Bey. Furthermore, Kurds under Bedirhan Pasha's control attacked the Nestorians in 1843. The

¹⁴ Wadie Jwaideh, *Kürt Milliyetçiliğinin Tarihi, Kökenleri ve Gelişimi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999), p. 172.

¹⁵ Moltke, p. 319.

¹⁶ Özoğlu, p. 71. He quotes this part from the Wright and Breath, "Visit of Messrs. Wright and Breath to Bader Khan Bey." *The Missionary Herald* 42 (November 1846): 381. Also Jwaideh, p. 124.

Nestorian tribes which supported Süleyman Bey to be the ruler of Hakkari were targeted by Bedirhan. However, this was the time when American and English missionaries were dealing with the Nestorians and they warned the Ottoman government to stop Bedirhan Pasha's acts against the Nestorian tribes. In spite of stopping attacks against the Nestorians at that time, Bedirhan and Nurullah started assault against the Nestorians in Hakkari in 1846.¹⁷

Besides that, it was known that Bedirhan Pasha backed the opponents to the implementations of the Tanzimat reforms in Van. These groups consisted of local notables who were resisting in order to not lose their privileges.¹⁸ Thus, under the cloak of stopping the aggression against the Nestorians, the Ottoman state wanted to eliminate the Botan emirate which was not only a powerful local entity but also an important threat to the central authority which was tried to be strengthened by the Tanzimat policies. Indeed it was the Tanzimat and following centralization policies that bothered Bedirhan, who enjoyed the semi-autonomous structure of the Botan Emirate and was at the top of his power.

Since the Tanzimat policies necessitated new administrative implementations and also administrators of the Tanzimat sought new ways of controlling provinces, changing boundaries of the provinces was an applied way of doing it. Thus, Cizre was conjoined to Mosul after being separated from Diyarbakır. This meant that the Ottoman state divided the territory controlled by Bedirhan Bey as an attempt to break up his power and constitute central authority in eastern Anatolia.¹⁹ According to an archival document, Vecihi Pasha, the governor of Diyarbakır, seemed to be trying to calm Bedirhan Pasha down. As is depicted in the following part from the archival

¹⁷ Sunar, p. 32.

¹⁸ Sunar, p.33.

¹⁹ Mehmet Alagöz, *Old habits Die Hard A Reaction to the Application of Tanzimat: Bedirhan Bey's Revolt*. MA Thesis. Boğaziçi University, 2003. p. 61; Özoğlu, p. 71.

document, which was printed by Nazmi Sevgen and also referred to by Hakan Özoğlu, the new administrative policies of the Ottoman state were opposed by Bedirhan since they restricted the control of this power blinded, semi-autonomous ruler:

We have heard that there exists disharmony and quarrelsomeness between you and the governor of Mosul, Mehmet Pasha, stemming from the attachment of Cizre district to Mosul, and that you are full of anxiety (*vesvese*)....As long as you serve and stay loyal to the Ottoman state, Mehmet Pasha cannot do you harm. The matter was referred to Istanbul and to the governor of Mosul, Mehmet Pasha. Hence, you should be free from such anxiety.²⁰

Like most of the Kurdish tribal leaders, Bedirhan was a tax-collector and he was affected strongly by the new administrative policies of the state since it was aimed to get more revenue for the central government. Thus, the above-mentioned contract among the sides was violated by the state, which had been so willing to cooperate with Bedirhan during the hard days of the Ottomans.

In 1847, the Ottoman army was ready to struggle against Bedirhan because there was no longer the threat of İbrahim Pasha of Egypt. The commander of the Anatolian army, Osman Pasha was sent to fight against Bedirhan. The struggle between the two sides continued nearly eight months and finally, Bedirhan Pasha surrendered. He was sent to Istanbul first, and then exiled to Crete where he acted as an intermediary between the Muslims and Christians. In return, the Ottoman state awarded him with the title of “pasha.”²¹

After the suppression of the Bedirhan’s revolt, Nurullah Bey of Hakkari was also sent to exile.²² The Ottoman state applied a gradual repression against the local

²⁰ Nazmi Sevgen, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu’da Türk Beylikleri: Osmanlı Belgeleri ile Kürt Türkleri Tarihi* (Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1982). This part is translated by Özoğlu.

²¹ Özoğlu, p. 72.

²² Sunar, p. 33.

Kurds and did not wage a total campaign against all the Kurdish tribes. Instead, disobedient tribes were overcome with the assistance of other powerful Kurdish authorities such as Bedirhan Pasha of Botan; however, the next time it was his turn to be exposed to the centralization policies of the state. The Bedirhan rebellion was a clear reaction against the centralization policies of the government, which were put into force by the Tanzimat. This constituted the main reason for the Bedirhan rebellion.

The Sheikh Ubeydullah Rebellion

The Şemdinan Family, one of the most important and effective Kurdish dynasties, was located in the Nehri village of Şemdinan in Hakkari. The family claimed to be the descendants of the Prophet Mohammad. Thus the Naqshbandi-Khalidi members of the family with the title of *sayyid*, which means descendant of the Prophet, had an important influence on the region and surrounding areas. After the defeat of the Botan Emirate, the political and economic power in the regions where the Kurds were living was held mostly by religious Kurdish leaders and the era between 1870 and 1880 was the high point of the Naqshbandi Şemdinan family. As is written by Özoğlu, Naqshbandi sheikhs were not only religious but also the political and economic leaders; however, until that time sheikhs were only the advisors of the tribal leaders.²³

Since the defeat of the Botan Emirate, there was no record of a powerful Kurdish authority in eastern Anatolia; however, it was just after the 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian war that Sheikh Ubeydullah took the leadership in the regions

²³ Özoğlu, p. 73.

where the Kurds were living in Ottoman state and Iran.²⁴ It was just before the war that General Kürt İsmail Pasha, the governor of Erzurum, informed Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Pasha that Sheikh Ubeydullah could assist the Ottoman army with 50,000 horsemen.²⁵ The Sheikh played an important role during the war by using his spiritual effect on the Kurds, which showed his power before 1880 and maybe encouraged him for a movement for the following time.

The Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-78 made the life of the people very difficult; many young people died and with the poor harvest of 1879, the population was faced with starvation. According to the archival document that Mehmet Ali Kılıç mentions in his MA thesis, in Diyarbakır “people held demonstrations against the lack of bread in bakeries and high prices.” Beside that, he also points to the contraband activities of deserters after the war. Furthermore, the government levied high taxes which increased the burden on people.²⁶ Eastern Anatolia was thus disorganized and complicated to a large extent, which in turn paved the way for an upheaval.

Tobacco cultivation was a widespread means of gaining income, specifically in the Nestorian-inhabited regions of the Şemdinan district. Sheikh Ubeydullah was given the responsibility of collecting tobacco taxes; however, he claimed that he was not able to do this since villagers sold the tobacco directly to Iran and paid no taxes to the government. On the other hand, there was some evidence that the Sheikh himself sold the tobacco to Iran. Furthermore, his son-in-law sent a letter to the governor of Van stating that the Sheikh had to be deported and he could collect taxes

²⁴ Ibid., p. 74.

²⁵ M. Firat Kılıç, *Sheikh Ubeydullah's movement* (MA Thesis. Bilkent University, 2001), p. 8.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

as well.²⁷ This was a black point for the Sheikh, who seemed to enjoy his power at the expense of the Ottoman authority.

The government had a long-standing intention to deport Sheikh Ubeydullah since his power as an administrative and religious leader was enough to constitute a big threat to the Ottoman state authority. The most convenient place for such a deportation was Hejaz, a holy city for a religious leader. The Ottoman government called the Sheikh to Istanbul several times; each time he found some excuses and did not go to Istanbul. Furthermore, each invitation to Istanbul served as another chance for the Sheikh to express new demands. In a letter dated 1879, he complained about several things and suggested solutions for the problems. First, the Sheikh complained about disorder in Van and Erzurum, the activities of corrupt officers and the increasing oppression by Christians of Muslim villagers. Furthermore, the Armenian issue was on the agenda of the international community and the Berlin Congress necessitated reforms in the Ottoman provinces where the Armenians lived. He opposed any plan for the annexation of Van to Armenia.²⁸ Second, besides emphasizing some religious matters, he mentioned Iranian support to the order's followers and demanded the same from the Ottoman government. For example, he required tax exemption for disciples.²⁹

Özoğlu argues that Ubeydullah wanted to be a ruler as Bedirhan was and quotes a part from a British report from Emilius Clayton, the vice-consul of Van:

The Sheikh (Ubeydullah) was going to send his son to Constantinople with the following proposal. He will point out the large sum paid to the Sultan by Beder Khan Bey, when semi-independent, and will offer to pay a still larger

²⁷ Kılıç, pp. 54-55.

²⁸ Since we cannot mention an Armenian state at that time. It should refer to removing all Muslims out of Van and make it an Armenian settlement as a whole

²⁹ Kılıç, pp. 60-62.

sum if his authority over Kurdistan is recognized, and his rule is not interfered with.³⁰

Indeed, Sheikh Ubeydullah was willing to pay for his autonomy; however, his demands were not acceptable for the state.

In 1880, Sheikh Ubeydullah, getting the support of the local Christians (Nestorians) beside the Kurds, held an uprising against Qajar Persia and the Ottoman state. During the military campaign against him, he was proposed to go to Medina by the Ottoman authorities; however, he rejected it every time. Due to the hot weather in Medina, he requested that be deported to Mosul and this time the government rejected his demand.³¹ As he was the loser, he did not have many options. Finally, Sheikh Ubeydullah and his son Sheikh Abdulkadir had to accept to go to Medina via Mosul. The Sheikh died in Medina a year later, in 1883. His son, Abdulkadir, stayed there until 1908.³²

Özoğlu mentions the Armenian related article of the 1878 Berlin Treaty as the main reason for the rebellion since Ubeydullah declared he would oppose an independent Armenian state whatever the cost.³³ It seems that the Armenian issue constituted one of the reasons for the Sheikh's movement. On the other hand, more important motivations could have been the increasing repression of the government since Ubeydullah was extending his control and authority day by day and demanding new privileges for him and the Naqshbandi order's followers, such as tax exemption.

Thus both Kılıç and Özoğlu insist on the power struggle between Sheikh Ubeydullah and the Ottoman state and how Ubeydullah was seeking to establish his authority over eastern Anatolia and negotiating with the Ottoman government. On

³⁰ Özoğlu, p. 76. (The letter was dated 11 July 1880, in Parliamentary Papers)

³¹ Kılıç, pp. 87-88.

³² Ibid., p. 89.

³³ Özoğlu, p. 74.

the other hand, Wadie Jwaideh characterizes Ubeydullah's movement as a nationalist uprising serving the aim of establishing an independent Kurdish state.³⁴ However, we do not have enough evidence for such an idea since pursuing personal, tribal, or religious demands does not mean that a religious and tribal leader was a Kurdish nationalist. Furthermore, he wanted to enjoy full authority in Kurdistan without giving up his loyalty to the Sultan and the religious identity of Ubeydullah enabled him to secure the support of many people. Finally, nationalism seems to be a fantasy as the reason for the Sheikh Ubeydullah's movement. Noting the hard conditions and lack of authority in eastern Anatolia, Sheikh Ubeydullah emerged as a religious tribal leader and sought ways to intensify his power.

Explaining the dynamics of the relations between the Ottoman state and the rebellious Kurdish tribes, Hamit Bozarslan mentions a tacit contract between the Ottoman state and the Kurds:

This contract obviously did not legitimize violent opposition to the state, and when it occurred, it was strongly suppressed. But, as in different European state traditions, the Ottoman state tradition conceived of rebellion, or at least resistance, as a means of bargaining and negotiation by the subordinate peripheral groups for improving their status within the state. Many examples in Kurdish history- going back to Sharafnama, but also covering the entire nineteenth century- show that the tacit contract was a complex game of contest and coercion, through which new power relations were negotiated between the peripheries and centre. The rebellion was an instrument for the renewal of the unwritten contract of rights versus obedience and legitimization.³⁵

³⁴ Ibid., p. 76. Özoğlu refers to the Ph.d dissertation of Jwaideh, "Kurdish National Movement: Its Origin and Development" (Syracuse University, 1960).

³⁵ Hamit Bozarslan, "Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey: From Tacit Contract to Rebellion (1919-1925)," in Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism ed. by Abbas Vali (Costa Mesa, Calif: Mazda Publishers, 2003), p. 186.

It seems that there was resistance of the Kurdish notables to the centralization policies of the state in general; on the other hand, it did not stem from nationalist motives.

Hamidiye Light Cavalry and *Aşiret* Schools

The Hamidian period (1876-1909) was the maturation and advanced period of the Tanzimat. Knowing the lack of the Tanzimat period, Abdulhamid's key term was central authority. Despite the fact that there was accelerating foreign pressure on the Ottoman state for the implementation of certain reforms, Abdulhamid improved some counter plans for the continuation of the centralization process. He tried to collaborate with selected parties of the Ottoman periphery. In 1891, the Hamidiye Light Cavalry (*Hamidiye Alayları*) was constructed as a special militia, composed of selected Sunni Kurds. The Russian Cossacks were taken as the model. The number of men for a single regiment was between 500 and 1,150 and each regiment was commanded by its own tribal leader.³⁶ The Hamidiye regiments were irregular; however, they were under the authority of the 4th army corps in Erzincan. Their main responsibilities were to prevent foreign invasions at the borders and to keep the Armenian population of the eastern provinces under control. The Hamidiye Light Cavalry is worth analyzing because it points to the changing Ottoman-Kurdish relationship. Furthermore, inasmuch as there was no administrative and regular military authority over the Hamidiye regiments, it was very prestigious for a Kurdish tribe to constitute one of these regiments. There was a new kind of hierarchy among the Kurdish tribes since some of them were ranked on the state's side. According to

³⁶ Martin van Bruinessen, "Kurds, States, and Tribes", Paper presented at the conference "*Tribes and Powers in the Middle East*", London, SOAS, Birkbeck College and Iraqi Cultural Forum, January 23-24, 1999. Available at <http://www.let.uu.nl/~Martin.vanBruinessen/personal/publications/Kurds,%20states,%20tribes.htm>.

Bruinessen, the economic and political differences among Kurdish tribes were fed mostly after the construction of the Hamidiye Light Cavalry because, as explained, those tribes which constituted the regiments enjoyed an enormous degree of power and autonomy at the expense of the Armenians and other Kurdish tribes.

Furthermore, regarding the hierarchical differentiation among the Kurdish tribes, Bruinessen claims that “It also sowed the seeds of tribal conflicts that would surface decades later.”³⁷

As another important implementation of the Hamidian period, it is necessary to examine the *Aşiret* schools. Given the fact that it was a social engineering project for eastern Anatolia, these schools aimed to inculcate allegiance to the state in young Kurdish students. Besides that, clever and promising children of eastern Anatolian notables were educated for administrative and military duties.

In 1886, forty–eight students from Hicaz, Yemen, and Trablusgarp were sent to Istanbul to be educated at Harbiye military academy. Then it was decided to establish a school for tribes in İstanbul. First, invitation letters were sent to the Arab provinces in order to get Arab students for the school in Kabataş. However, the student profile was not restricted to Arabs, but also Kurds and Albanians were stipulated to participate in the school in the second year.³⁸ In the regulations of the school, it was written that:

The principal aim for the founding of the schools to enable tribal people to partake of the prosperity that emanates from knowledge and civilization, and to further augment their well-known natural inclination towards and love for the Great Islamic Caliphate, and the Sublime Ottoman Sultanate, as well as

³⁷ Bruinessen, p. 12.

³⁸ Eugene L. Rogan, “Asiret Mektebi: Abdulhamid II’s School for Tribes (1892-1907),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 28, no:1 (Feb., 1996), p. 86.

to strengthen and confirm earnest loyalty to the state and religious duties incumbent on them by the *Şeriat* and civil laws...

Upon completion and receipt of diploma, when the students return to their tribes, they will work as teachers in schools which are intended to be opened in their environs, or in some other appropriate service and will be hired by the state civil service.³⁹

The *Aşiret Mekteb-i Hümayun* was devised with a five-year education program and the curriculum was approved by the *Meclis-i Vükela* (cabinet). The curriculum consisted of religious lessons featuring the Quran and catechism. Beside that, students were taught several Turkish lessons (orthography, reading, grammar, writing, and syntax), French, Ottoman and Islamic history, and arithmetic and so on.⁴⁰ Teaching Turkish to the prospective local administrators and officials of the state was one of the most important aims of the school.

As mentioned above, the *Aşiret* Schools were for Arab students at first. However, when the news came to the Kurdish tribes (mostly that constituted the Hamidiye regiments), they demanded that their children be accepted to these school. First, the Zilan tribe sent a telegram in order to the demand acceptance of children from their tribe.⁴¹ As a result of these kinds of requests, the Kurdish students started to be accepted to the school. When the lists of students are examined; however, it is seen that the number of Kurdish students decreased year by year. For the first year, there were thirteen students accepted; the second year four; the third year three; the fourth year only one, and finally, the fifth year there

³⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

⁴¹ Alişan Akpınar and Eugene L. Rogan, *Aşiret Mektep Devlet. Osmanlı Devleti'nde Aşiret Mektebi* (İstanbul: Aram Yayıncılık, 2001), pp. 91-92.

were no Kurdish students at the Aşiret School.⁴² Alişan Akpınar claims that Kurdish students could be directed to military schools.

Since the Aşiret Schools did not serve their original aim, they were closed down in 1908. When the Aşiret schools had been first established, it had been planned to open schools where the tribes were located. However, no school was opened beside the one in İstanbul. Many new schools were opened at tribes' locations but they were not called Aşiret schools.⁴³

Taking into consideration the Kurdish students of the *Aşiret* School, their number was not great and the ones who graduated from the school generally served to Ottoman army. In spite of this low attendance and certain aim of the school, the acts of some of the graduates were opposite of the aim of the school. Cibranlı Halit Bey, one of the graduates of the school, established the *Azadi* (Liberation), a nationalist Kurdish organization, and was one of the protagonists of the Sheikh Said Rebellion. He was from the Cibran tribe and after graduating from the Aşiret School, continued to military school. We do not have enough information about the fate of graduates; however, the certain thing is that the school did not serve the aim.

The issue of Anatolian Reform was one of the important results of the 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian War, and afterwards the Armenian issue was on the agenda of international community. The Berlin Congress (1878) brought some obligations for the Ottoman state. The Sublime Port had to promise to implement certain reforms where the Armenian citizens lived, and beside that, it was obliged to protect the Armenians against the Kurds and Circassians with whom the Armenians had lived nearby under the Ottoman administration.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., p. 96.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 126.

⁴⁴ Ali Karaca, *Anadolu Islahatı ve Ahmet Şakir Paşa (1838-1899)* (İstanbul: Eren Yayıncılık, 1993), pp. 37-38.

Şakir Pasha as the *Anadolu Islahatı Umum Müfettişi* (Public Inspector of the Anatolian Reform) was the chief responsible person who would control the implementation of the reforms demanded by the European powers. Convincing them was indispensable for the state so as to prevent the formation of an Armenian state on Ottoman soil. Furthermore, there were people in eastern Anatolia acting as the local counterparts of Şakir Pasha. They checked the implementation of reforms and intervened in local disputes between Armenians and Kurds, which were very common in those days. Saadettin Pasha, who was appointed as one of the head of local investigation committees, wrote in his memoirs the relationship between the Armenians and Kurdish tribes in Van in 1896. It seems that the tension was very high in the region because of Kurdish attacks against Armenians, who were more self confident than any previous time because of the international backing. Saadettin Pasha mentions how Kurds (generally members of the Hamidiye Cavalry) were confused with the intervention of the state to the region since they had collaborated with state officials for long years.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, with the power granted them and the worsening situation of the state, they were so aggressive against Armenians than any time before. The new era with the Anatolian Reform pointed to the changing characteristics of the relationship between the Ottoman state and the Kurdish tribes, which disclosed it particularly in the further Kurdish rebellions. These compulsory reforms and substantial ethnic and religious differentiations in eastern Anatolia pointed to the decreasing control of the Ottoman state in the region; however, Abdulhamid II's policies were serious attempts to prevent this decrease.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Sami Önal, *Sadettin Paşa'nın Anıları-Ermeni Kürt Olayları (Van, 1896)* (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2003), pp. 20-21.

⁴⁶ Bayram Kodaman, "Hamidiye Hafif Süvari Alayları (II Abdülmamit ve Doğu Aşiretleri)" *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi*, no. 32 (1979), pp. 435-436.

On the other hand, we learn that how the local administrators were left alone by the government at the same period. Ebubekir Hazim Tepeyran who was the governor of Mosul between the years of 1889 to 1902 explains the wild acts of the Hamidiye cavalries in the region in his memoirs. He mentions that the Hamidiye cavalries continued committing crimes since they knew that they would not be punished whatever their crime was. Tepeyran states that the government wanted investigation of the crimes which were committed by the Kurdish tribes that constituted the Hamidiye cavalries; however, it was only a demand and there was not penalty despite the certain proofs of the crimes.⁴⁷ Thus, it seems that there were some new institutions to provide security and equality in the eastern provinces and also new government officials who were taught to behave in law; however these were not enough to prevent the violent acts of the Hamidiye cavalries since the state support continued for these tribes. So it is understandable why both the Young Turks and Kurdish intellectuals criticized strongly the Hamidiye cavalries. On the one hand, there were attempts to make the central authority stronger; on the other hand, the collaboration with some of the Kurdish tribes continued. This was an important duality for the Hamidian period.

Finally, the Ottoman state attempted to restore its authority through the centralization policies of the nineteenth century. The centralization attempts bothered not only the Kurdish tribes but also different groups living under Ottoman rule. Considering the Ottoman universality helps us to understand and describe the characteristics of the Kurdish movement of the period. Indeed, the Kurdish rebellions of the period were reactions against Ottoman centralization since it meant the cut of power for the local tribes. On the other hand, the pressure of the

⁴⁷ Ebubekir Hazim Tepeyran, *Hatıralar*, (İstanbul: Pera Turizm ve Ticaret, 1998), pp. 434-435.

European powers necessitated reformation in eastern Anatolia where the Armenians lived. While attempting to realize these reforms, the Ottoman state took some precautions against the formation of an Armenian state. The Hamidiye Light Cavalry was one of them, which in turn deepened the controversies between Christians and Muslims. It was an ongoing controversy since the Tanzimat, which had brought a new kind of Ottoman citizenship based on more equality. In addition to that, the Hamidiye Light Cavalry complicated the relationship among the Kurdish tribes. This contributed to the existing problems among them. As a social engineering project, the Aşiret School was not only for Kurdish students from tribal origins, but also for other Muslim subjects of the state such as Arabs and Albanians. The following period observed the emergence of Arab, Albanian, and Kurdish intellectuals as well, mostly educated in Istanbul and Europe. However, we do not know whether the graduates of the Aşiret School pursued any aims on Kurdism⁴⁸ or Kurdish nationalism beside the later acts of Cibranlı Halit Bey.

⁴⁸ This term does not necessarily mean Kurdish nationalism. Kurdism is understood as the cultural enlightenment of Ottoman Kurds in this context.

CHAPTER II

EARLY KURDISH ORGANIZATIONS AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE KURDS AND THE CUP

The First Kurdish Newspaper *Kürdistan* and “Kurdish” Young Turks

The Hamidian period cannot be explained only with the strict and tough implementations or the pan-Islamist politics of the Sultan. It was Abdulhamid II who increased the number of the schools all over the Ottoman land and gave path to the enlightenment of young Ottoman citizens. İstanbul was a meeting place of the students from far points of the state, where a secret organization, *İttihad-ı Osmani Cemiyeti* (Society for Ottoman Unification) was established by the students of *Askeri Tıbbiye* (Military Medicine School) in 1889. *İttihad-ı Osmani* referred to the multi-ethnic character of the society. The ones who constructed the Society were İbrahim Temo (Albanian), Mehmet Reşit (Circassian), İshak Sükuti and Ziya Gökalp (Kurd) and besides them there were Turkish members of the society.⁴⁹

Since the term “Young Turks” does not refer only to the members who were ethnically Turkish, but also to Arab, Albanian, and Kurdish ones who demanded certain reforms for the Ottoman state and criticized the Sultan. As it was very difficult to voice dissent in Ottoman lands, many opponents came together abroad. *Le Salut de l’Albanie* was published in Albanian, Turkish and Greek in Brussels; *Pro-Armenia* was published in France and the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kürdistan* began to be published in Cairo in 1898.⁵⁰ M. Midhat Bedirhan was the founder of the *Kürdistan* as well as being a member of the Bedirhan family. The articles in *Kürdistan*, the Turkish

⁴⁹ Naci Kutlay, *İttihat Terakki ve Kürtler* (İstanbul: Koral-Fırat Yayınları, 1991), p. 26.

⁵⁰ Kutlay, p. 23.

and Kurmanci newspaper, tried to attract attention to the bad behavior of Ottoman officials in the regions where the Kurds were living and showed the first signs of a trans-tribal Kurdish identity.⁵¹ During the period in Cairo, the newspaper had an educational mission since Bedirhan complained of the lack of literacy in eastern Anatolia. He hoped Kurdish society would capture the contemporary issues, as seen in his following words:

I, as one of the distinguished members of the Kurdish notables, because of the Prophet's order commanding "you all are shepherds and responsible for your flock," to fulfill my obligation; publish this newspaper in Kurdish with the hope of educating the Kurds in arts and science and raising their consciousness to the modern level.⁵²

M. Bedirhan called for the improvement of Kurdish-Armenian relations, generally by citing the related verses of the Quran and sayings of the Prophet Muhammed. He emphasized how Islam opposed the assault of non-Muslims.⁵³ Furthermore, some articles in the newspaper related to the causes of backwardness in the regions where the Kurds were living and criticism of Abdulhamid II were published in the Armenian newspaper, *Troşak*.⁵⁴ There was visible solidarity between Kurdish and Armenian intellectuals in diaspora.

The second period of the newspaper started in Geneva and was published by Mithat's brother, Abdurrahman Bedirhan, who had close relations with Armenian organizations. Via Armenian committees, he sent some declarations and announcements to eastern Anatolia which invited Kurds to wake up from "sersemletici uyku" (dizziness sleep).⁵⁵ Beside the good relations with the Armenians in Europe, the writers of *Kürdistan* got closer to the Young Turks in Geneva. As it is known

⁵¹ Özoğlu, pp.35-36.

⁵² Ibid, p. 36.

⁵³ Celile Celil, *Kürt Aydınlanması*, (İstanbul: Avesta Basın Yayın, 2000), p. 26-27 and 39.

⁵⁴ Kutlay, p.17.

⁵⁵ Celil, p. 30.

Osmanlı was first published by the “Kurdish” Young Turks, Abdullah Cevdet, İshak Sükuti and some other Turkish intellectuals in Geneva in 1897. The newspaper consisted of articles in which Abdulhamid II was criticized strongly and Ottomanism was emphasized. The Albanian İbrahim Temo, a founder of the *Osmanlı* as well, wrote many articles on Albanians and participated in Albanian congresses. However, this was not something abnormal for the charter of the Society. Similarly, Abdullah Cevdet and İshak Sükuti wrote on the equality and freedom of the Ottoman citizens. Sometimes they wrote articles for *Kürdistan*, besides writing articles on Ottoman Kurds in *Osmanlı*. Furthermore, they assisted Abdurrahim Bedirhan financially to ensure the printing of *Kürdistan*. Şükrü Hanioglu mentions that the Unionists, thus, took *Kürdistan* under the control after this time.⁵⁶

The father of Prens Sabahattin, Mahmut Pasha was in Geneva with his sons and took over *Osmanlı* newspaper from İshak Sükuti in 1900.⁵⁷ This did not change the relationship between the Young Turks and A. Bedirhan since they both opposed Abdulhamid II and criticized him. On the other hand, it has to be noted that starting from the end of the 1890s, Turkish nationalism began to gain support from more Unionists, who would be more effective in the following years. For instance, Halil Muvaffak Bey wrote a letter to İshak Sükuti and described publishing *Kürdistan* as trouble for him. Besides that, Tunalı Hilmi brought out commentaries on how Turks were superior to the other Ottoman subjects.⁵⁸

Abdurrahim Bedirhan criticized Kurdish tribal leaders, who collaborated with Abdulhamid II, for their exploitation of Kurdish society and violence against Armenians. On the other hand, he had never called Kurds to upheaval against the

⁵⁶ Şükrü Hanioglu, *Osmanlı İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Jön Türklük* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1985), p.282.

⁵⁷ Sina Akşin, *Jön Türkler ve İttihat Terakki* (İstanbul: İmge Yayınevi, 2001), p.59.

⁵⁸ Hanioglu, p. 632. There is no date for the letter.

Ottoman monarchy. In the final stage, Abdurrahman Bedirhan was not so different from the Young Turks, who required a constitutional monarchy.⁵⁹ Thus the editors of *Kürdistan* were parallel to the Young Turk ideologists, who emphasized the unity of the Ottoman state and indivisibility of the Ottoman territory in spite of calling for a Kurdish uprising, which was not for nationalist purposes.⁶⁰ The Sultan was trying to keep Kurds, who were important Muslim subjects of the Ottoman state, under control with different tools, such as, the Hamidiye Light Cavalry and the Aşiret School. Any reactionary movement, in spite of being elitist and far from the center, was seen as dangerous. So *Kürdistan* was prohibited in Ottoman lands and the writers were stripped of citizenship. The activities of Kurdish intellectuals around *Kürdistan* were early versions of the later Kurdish elitist organizations in İstanbul, like *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, *Kürt Talebe-i Hevi Cemiyeti*, and *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti*. These Kurdish societies will be discussed in the following parts; however, it is obvious that all these movements were elitist at the core as *Kürdistan* was.

Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti

⁵⁹ Celil, p. 35.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

After the announcement of the Constitution in 1908, Ottoman citizens from different ethnicities were pleased since there was a free environment for them to express their demands. Many activist opponents, who had been sent into exile by the Sultan or fled from oppression, started to return to the Ottoman land. One of them was Sayyid Abdulkadir, the son of Sheikh Ubeydullah of Nehri. He was welcomed by an excited Kurdish group (generally Kurdish porters) in İstanbul. This welcome seems to be related closely to the religious identity of Naqshbandi Sayyid Abdulkadir. After a while, Sayyid Abdulkadir, Bediüzzaman Said-i Kürdi, Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, Hacı Tevfik (Piremerd) and some other Kurdish intellectuals came together and established *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (Society for the Mutual Aid and Progress of Kurdistan, SMPK) in 1908. This was the first time that Bedirhans, Şemdinans, and Babanzades acted together for a Kurdish organization. The SMPK was thus under the control of noble Kurdish families. Participation in the Society was restricted: Only Kurds who resided in İstanbul and were able to read and write in Turkish were accepted. However, literacy in Kurdish was recommended, although not compulsory. So the Kurdish porters who had welcomed Sayyid Abdulkadir were not potential members of the Society. Özoğlu claims that this shows how the founders of the society saw themselves Ottoman rather than Kurd. Besides that, Turkish was the only way of communication with other Ottoman citizens and Kurds who spoke different dialects of Kurdish.⁶¹

The aim of the Society did not differ so much from the Young Turk projects and the loyalty to the Ottoman state was indispensable for the founders of the SMPK. According to the charter of the SMPK, the founders aimed:

⁶¹ Özoğlu, p. 79.

There has been established a beneficial society (*cemiyet-i hayriye*) by the name of *Kürdistan Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti* to consolidate Kurdish ties (*revabit*) with (the Ottoman state) while protecting the Constitution (*Meşrutiyet*) as the only way for progress and explaining to those Kurds who are not aware of the virtues of the Constitution (*Kanun-u Esasi*) that is responsible for the happiness of the people and also compatible with the great rules of Islam. (It shall) protect the high esteem (*mübeccele*) of being an Ottoman and strengthen the relations with the Armenian, Nasturi and other citizens of the Ottoman Empire. (It shall also seek) solutions to the problems amongst the tribes and confederacies (*kabail* and *aşair*) by uniting them (and it shall) encourage commerce, agriculture, and education.⁶²

Apparently, the SMPK was remote from Kurdish secessionism or nationalism since it focused on the Ottomanism and tried to find solutions to the problems in the regions where the Kurds were living within the Ottoman state.

The Society started to publish a newspaper called *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* in 1908. The articles in the newspaper described the social and economic backwardness of the Ottoman Kurds in addition to focusing on Kurdish history and literature. In an article, Sayyid Abdulkadir, the lifelong leader of the SMPK, criticized the Hamidian policies in eastern Anatolia which was breaking up Kurdistan by collaborating with some tribes at the expense of others and using them against the non-Muslims. Furthermore, he emphasized Ottomanism as the only way of integration.⁶³ In another article, Babanzade İsmail Hakkı stated that Kurds had accepted Ottoman sovereignty voluntarily and now one could not imagine any Kurdish identity without the Ottoman identity and vice versa.⁶⁴ Obviously, the Hamidian policies were at target of the members of the society but not the Ottoman state since the latter and the Ottoman identity were not obstacles for the advancement of Kurds. However, the writings of the Kurdish intellectuals indicate that they described Kurds

⁶² Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler* I.cilt (İstanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları, 1984) p. 409. This part is translated by H. Özoğlu.

⁶³ Naci Kutlay, *21. Yüzyıla Girenken Kürtler* (İstanbul: Peri Yayınları, 2002), p. 154.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 152-153.

as one of the primary components of Ottoman society. The emphasis on the unification of Kurds throughout the Ottoman land and getting rid of the perpetual tribal clashes does not signal Kurdish nationalism. Apparently, it shows how Kurdish notables and intellectuals desired their nation to be a determinative and powerful member of the Ottoman state.

There was an inclination of Kurdish notables and intellectuals, generally coming from Kurdish families which were exiled to İstanbul, to the Unionists since the early times of the Young Turks. Indeed, the rapprochement of the Unionists and Kurds was not restricted to the ones in İstanbul. The local Kurdish notables who were disgusted by the persecution of Hamidiye cavalry units, corrupt officials and Abdulhamid II's policies in general collaborated with the Unionists. The Young Turks who complained about the same things led local Kurds in uprisings. As an example, in 1907 Cemilpaşazade Mustafa, Ziya Gökalp, and Müftü Suphi Efendi organized people against the acts of the commander of Hamidiye regiments, İbrahim Pasha of Milli tribe.⁶⁵ Furthermore, a telegram sent from Diyarbakır in order to protest the annexation of Crete to Greece.⁶⁶ Obviously, there is no certain thing signaling problems between the Unionists and the SMPK in the first year of the Constitutional period.

There were Kurdish clubs, organized by the SMPK, in Diyarbakır, Bitlis, Mosul, Bağdat, Muş and Erzurum. The SMPK influenced these clubs; however, as time passed local Kurdish clubs acted more independently. This did not refer to any deviation from the general policies of the center. The members of the Kurdish clubs were not intellectuals as they were in İstanbul. Generally, the rich Kurds who were effective in their cities as the dignitaries of tribes, who were seeking ways of being

⁶⁵ Kutlay, *21. Yüzyıla Girerken Kürtler*, p. 70.

⁶⁶ Tunaya, p. 404.

embedded to the new regime, participated in the Kurdish clubs.⁶⁷ The club in Bitlis was very popular among Kurds and it was well organized. This was met with suspicion by the Armenians located in the region.⁶⁸ Furthermore, a small rebellion occurred in Bitlis in 1909 where club members were seen as responsible. However, the SMPK did not accept any role in that movement and tried to calm people down in Bitlis. Nevertheless, Unionists wanted to close down the club in Bitlis and finally, the Club announced the participation in the club of the Committee of Union and Progress.⁶⁹

Another important point related to the SMPK was a note given to the government of Kamil Pasha in 1909. According to this, the SMPK demanded the government take some steps for “*Anadolu ahvalinin tahkik ve ıslahı* (Investigation and reformation of Anatolian problems)” and send a mission to the region. As a result, Kamil Pasha charged a group with solving the problems between the Kurds and Armenians and territorial conflicts. In addition to that, the mission attempted to deal with the non-useful and corrupt government officials. The SMPK also touched on poverty in some eastern cities and also delivering food to the people of those cities was on the agenda of the mission.

Tunaya points to the decisions of the *Meclis-i Vükela* related to the Ottoman Kurds and the regions where the Kurds were living in the year 1909.⁷⁰ The deputies from Van, Dersim, and Hakkari complained about the bad conditions in these cities and emphasized the indifference of the previous government (*devr-i sabık*) and the constitutional government (*devr-i Meşrutiyet*) when it came to reforms and progress in Kurdistan. According to them, the eastern provinces were seen as an “orphan child” by

⁶⁷ Celil, p. 66.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Tunaya, p. 405.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 406.

the Ottoman governments.⁷¹ Mithad Bey, a representative from Van, pointed out that his province was known as the Siberia of the Ottoman Empire. The Dersim representative complained of the region's underdevelopment and low literacy rate and stated that only one in ten thousand of Kurdistan's overall population could read."⁷²

The SMPK and other Kurdish associations and schools were closed down in İstanbul in 1909. It is obvious that the Society did not aim any nationalist purpose and separation from the Ottoman state. The charter of the SMPK and acts of its members do not give any clues about their intent regarding separatism; however, some researchers come to different analyses with the same information. One should not be mistaken about SMPK's cultural nationalism or demands for the progress of Kurdistan. Also, the inclination of some of the members to Kurdish nationalism in the following years does not mean they had the same motivations in active years of the SMPK.

Kürt Talebe-i Hevi Cemiyeti

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 407.

⁷² Ibid.

The first legal Kurdish student organization was *Kürt Talebe-i Hevi Cemiyeti* (Kurdish Hope Student Society), which was founded in 1912 and operated until 1914. During the war years, *Hevi* was closed and started to operate again in 1919, which lasted until 1922. According to the charter of *Hevi*, the society first aimed to introduce Kurdish students to each other and stimulate brotherhood and unity among them. Furthermore, studies on Kurdish language and literature were on the agenda of the society. Kurdish students who came to İstanbul for educational purpose would be guided and assisted by the members of the society. It was emphasized that *Hevi* would not involve in politics; the aim was the scientific and social progress of the Kurds.⁷³ *Hevi* was established at *Halkalı Ziraat Koleji* (Halkalı Agricultural College), to which many Kurdish students attended. One of the founders of *Hevi*, Zinar Silopi (Kadri Cemil Paşa) tells the story of the establishment of society in the following words:

In 1922, I started *Halkalı Ziraat Mekteb-i Alisi*. With the Kurdish students in the school, we conversed focusing on national problems. In the meantime, the accountant of the school, Halil Hayati Bey's illumination and guidance strengthened our national feelings.

.....

I, Ömer Cemil Pasha, the son of Van deputy Tevfik Bey; Fuat Temo, Cerrahzade Zeki of Diyarbakır announced the establishment of the society with the permission of the government after gathering in the mosque of the school and preparing the regulation of the student organization called "Hevi."⁷⁴

Silopi insists that *Hevi* was a Kurdish nationalist society; however, his claims need to be well analyzed since he seems to refer his own feelings or his latter ideology to the *Hevi*. According to Silopi, M. Şükrü Sekban who favored them financially also inspired them with Kurdish nationalist feelings. However, Sekban is mostly known for

⁷³ Malmisanij, *Kürt Talebe-Hevi Cemiyeti*, (İstanbul: Avesta Basın Yayın, 2002), p. 61.

⁷⁴ Zinar Silopi (Kadri Cemil Paşa), *Doza Kurdistan (Kürdistan Davası)* (Ankara: Özge Yayınları, 1991), pp. 34-35.

his book in which he claims Kurds are of Turkish origin.⁷⁵ In the following years, both Musa Anter and Naci Kutlay wrote that Sekban was ashamed of his book since it was made up in order to return to Turkey.⁷⁶ Sekban claimed that there was not any nationalist motivation of Hevi; on the other hand, one cannot easily rely on his statements for the reason mentioned above. Silopi claims that Hevi was established in order to evoke the nationalist feelings of the Kurdish people and improve Kurdish culture. While defending his claim, he mentions that the *Roja Kurd* (both Turkish and Kurdish), the first periodical of the society, aimed to spread the usage of Kurdish language among Kurds. Nevertheless, this does not mean that *Hevi* was nationalist, since it was not so different from the attempts of Albanian Şemsettin Sami. Şemsettin Sami had prepared an Albanian alphabet based on the Latin alphabet as Abdullah Cevdet had recommended to the members of *Hevi* use the Latin alphabet, which was seen to be more convenient for the Kurdish language.⁷⁷ It is better to have a look at the writings and sayings of the other members for a clear understanding of the characteristics of the Society.

Roja Kurd, the first periodical of *Hevi*, was published in Turkish and Kurmanci. Leading Kurds like Selahaddin Eyyubi, Bedirhanzade Hüseyin Kenan Pasha were featured on the cover of the periodical. The aim of *Roja Kurd* was explained as social and scientific progress without any political motivation. There were important writers of the periodical such as Abdullah Cevdet, Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, Lütfi Fikri, and Midhat Bedirhan. The articles published in *Roja Kurd* supported the aim of *Hevi* since the writers generally focused on the backwardness of Kurds and tried to find solutions for illiteracy and poverty. They tried to draw attention to the high level of literacy and social well-being of the other Ottoman

⁷⁵ Mehmet Şükrü Sekban's book is *Kürt Meselesi*. Ankara: Kon Yayınları, 1979.

⁷⁶ Malmisani, pp. 90-92

⁷⁷ Silopi, p. 41.

citizens, specifically the Armenians. In an article published in 1913, Abdullah Cevdet emphasized that “the most effective way of unification is individualism (*Birleşmenin en etkili çaresi tefridir*).” According to him, the demand for the unification of the Ottoman subjects could not clash with their individualism since individualism did not mean separation (*tefrik*).⁷⁸ He wrote this article as a response to accusations that *Roja Kurd* was a separatist newspaper. In another article, Lütfi Fikri wrote that:

A Kurdish nation that has constantly fought against its neighbors, for example, the Armenians, and has attempted to separate itself from the Ottoman State can not survive and prosper during this century. Distancing itself from peace by even the slightest amount can lead to total and permanent ruin.⁷⁹

It is obvious that the writers of the periodical were trying to build an Ottoman Kurdish citizen who was literate, well-educated, active in the government, and knew what was going on in the world. This was the only way of getting over the backwardness in Kurdistan.

After *Roja Kurd* was prohibited by the government, *Hetawe Kurd* began to be published by *Hevi*. The writers and subjects of the articles were almost the same with as those for *Roja Kurd*. There was a column called “Letters from Kurdistan” with information about different places where the Kurds were living. In a letter dated June 1914, Cındo from the *Terkan* tribe reported that the names of many Kurdish villages had been changed.⁸⁰ This was an implementation of the CUP government before World War I according to the 1913 *İskan-ı Muhacirin Nizamnamesi* (Regulations for the Inhabiting of Immigrants). *Hevi* stopped its activities until the end of the war and the second term of the society did not show many differences from the first period, in

⁷⁸ Malmisanij, pp. 209-210.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 217-218.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 155.

spite of the nationalist politics of the CUP government and changing conditions after the war.

The second term activities of *Hevi* were again closely related to the education of Kurds, and scientific and social progress of the Kurdish nation; however, the members were more interested in politics. In spite of the declaration of *Hevi* regarding its disinterest in political issues, the members did not hide their sympathy for Şerif Pasha, who was the Kurdish delegate at the Paris Conference.⁸¹ Since there is no clear sign of a certain deviation from the first period, all the comments for the period until 1913 are valid for the year after 1919 for *Hevi*. The second term of the society ended in 1922 with the government's prohibition. Some members of *Hevi* later became important figures of the Kurdish nationalist struggle, such as Ekrem Cemilpaşa, Kadri Cemilpaşa, Memduh Selim, and Muhammed Mihri. On the other hand, the later position of these *Hevi* members is not enough to label the society as having been Kurdish nationalist. Obviously, *Hevi* caused a cultural and ethnic consciousness among some Kurds but, as mentioned earlier, we need more than that in order to call *Hevi* Kurdish nationalist.

The Policies of the CUP during the War Years

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 180-181.

There were small-sized Kurdish uprisings before World War I, which resulted in the arrests of many Kurds. For practical reasons, the Unionists released many Kurds from prisons on the eve of WWI. In addition, government officials were sent to the region in order to strengthen the loyalties of the Kurdish tribes. Some of the Naqshbandi sheikhs acted as government officials and persuaded some tribes, which had revolted against the Ottoman State previously, to fight on the Ottoman side.⁸² Not only tribe members but also Kurdish intellectuals and notables who were abroad for education or escaped from the oppression of the Committee of Union and Progress came back to struggle for the Ottoman State. However, one must be aware of the centralist and nationalist politics of the Unionists throughout their government. Obviously, the Ottomanism or unification of the subjects was subordinated to Turkish nationalism during the CUP government. Turks were seen as the dominant element of the Ottoman State. There was no clear Kurdish national movement during this period. Nevertheless, any later Kurdish movement was not immune from the negative effect of the CUP.

The CUP accepted the *İskan-ı Muhacirin Nizamnamesi* on 13 May 1913 and established *İskan-ı Aşair ve Muhacirin Müdiriyeti* in 1914. Also it was 1916 that the law of *İskan-ı Aşair ve Muhacirin Müdiriyeti-i Umimiyesi Teşkilatı* was put into force. The Kurdish names of the settlements, mountains, and all geographical places started to be changed into Turkish. Furthermore, the Unionists tried to change the demographic structure of the regions where the Kurds were living mostly by mandatory migration.⁸³

Talat Pasha ordered the preparation of new figures illustrating the ethnic identities of the population from all governors of provinces and sanjaks on 20 July

⁸² Fuat Dündar, *İttihat Terakki'nin Müslümanları İskan Politikası (1913-1918)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), p. 138.

⁸³ Malmisanij, p. 20.

1915. Also it was the first time that the government wanted the allocation of Muslim population into ethnic identities.⁸⁴ Beside that, on January 26, 1916 Talat Pasha sent an authenticated telegram to the provinces of Konya, Kastamonu, Ankara, Sivas, Aydın and Adana; sanjaks of Kayseri, Canik, Eskişehir, Karahisar, and Niğde in which he states:

Since it was devised to send Kurds, who took refuge to the inner parts of the Ottoman land during the wartime, to the western Anatolian provinces, it is necessary to get more detailed information about Kurds who lived in provinces/subdivisions and the Kurdish villages: Where are Kurds located? What is their population? Do they preserve their language and traditions? How is their relationship with the Turkish villagers? A more detailed survey on the subject with the additional sights and implementation of the investigation is required.⁸⁵

Another telegram sent by Talat Pasha to Diyarbakır province shows how he was decisive in carrying out a kind of assimilation against the Kurdish nation:

It is not appropriate to send Kurdish refugees to places like Urfa or Zor in the southern region. Sending them to that region would render them useless and harmful since they would be more Arabic than Turkish in that region and perhaps begin to protect their own nationalities. Therefore, it is necessary to send and relocate them as described below.

....
It is necessary that Kurds do not live in clans and are not able to protect their own nation. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to separate the respected people of the clan from the others. Sending them separately to the districts of Konya, Kastamonu, Nigde, and Kayseri can do this.⁸⁶

⁸⁴Dündar, pp. 60-61.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 140. "Ahval-i harbiye dolayısıyla dahile iltica eden Kürdlerin Anadolu vilayet-i garbiyesine sevkleriyle müteferrikan iskanları mutasavvır ise de evvel emirde dahil-i vilayet/livada Kürdler ve Kürd köyleri hakkında tafsilatlı malumat alma icab ettiğinden: Nerelerde ne kadar Kürd köyleri vardır? Nüfusları mikdarı nedir? Lisan ve aded-i asliyelerini muhafaza ediyorlar mı? Türk köylüsü ve köyleriyle münasebetleri ne derecedir? Serian tahkikat icrasıyla mufassalan ve ilave-i mutaalarıyla birlikte inbası"

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 141. "Kürd mültecileri Urfa, Zor gibi haval-i cenubiyeye göndermek kesinlikle caiz değildir. Bunlar oralarda ya Arablaşmak veyahut milliyetlerini muhafaza etmek suretiyle yine gayrı müfid ve muzır anasır halinde kalacakları cihetle matlub hasıl olamayacağından mültecilerin bervechi-zir sevk ve iskanları lazımdır.

....

Talat Pasha wanted to settle Kurdish immigrants who came from the eastern provinces to the western parts of Anatolia where they would constitute the minority of the whole population. The Kurdish population of eastern Anatolia was delivered to Turkish villages as small groups. It was certain that the Unionists did not want those immigrants to return to their previous locations after the war. As a sign of this certain decision, Fuat Dündar describes how the Unionists studied other countries' relocation experiences. Furthermore, the CUP government prepared instructions for inhabiting (*aşiret ve muhacirlerin iskan talimatnamesi*) in 1918, which decrees that relocation would continue not only for Kurds but also for the ethnically different population of the Ottoman State.⁸⁷ It was claimed by Celadet A. Bedirhan that the Unionists' decision to deport Kurds to Turkish provinces resulted in the deaths of many Kurds because of hunger and gendarmes' violence on the way. He cited 700,000 as the number of the deported Kurds.⁸⁸ This seems to be exaggerated; however, Dündar also notes that many Kurds died during the immigration because of cold weather, infections, and inadequate help and so on.⁸⁹

Thus, the Young Turk ideology of 1908 which was based on the unification of the Ottoman subjects was no longer valid since the turkification of the population was on the agenda of the CUP government. Despite the fact that, the Unionists had strongly criticized the Hamidiye Light Cavalry; during WWI, as the continuity of it, the *İhtiyat Süvari Alayları* were constructed against the Russian invasion or threat. The Kurdish tribes which were seen loyal to the State constituted these regiments and

Kürd mültecilere gittikleri yerlerde aşair hayatını yaşamamak ve milliyetlerini muhafaza edememe için aşiret reisleri behemehal efraddan ayırmak lazım geldiğinden bunlar arasında ne kadar zi nufuz eşhas ve rüesa var ise efraddan bilatefrik Konya Kastamonu vilayetleriyle Niğde ve Kayseri sancaklarına ayrı ayrı sevk edilmelidir.”

⁸⁷ Dündar, p. 154.

⁸⁸ Bedirhan, Celadet Ali, *Bir Kürt Aydınından Mustafa Kemal'e Mektup* (İstanbul: Doz Basım Yayın, 1992), p. 18.

⁸⁹ Dündar, p. 149.

provided soldiers for the Ottoman army. However, the ones who had been regarded as suspicious were sent to western or inner Anatolian cities. After the resignation of Talat Pasha, the new government announced that all of the immigrants could return to their land.

Many Kurdish activists who were CUP members or close to the Unionists started to participate in *Hürriyet ve İtilaf Partisi* (Liberal Union Party) in 1910s, which seemed to be more suitable for the ethnically different Ottoman citizens like Greeks, Armenians, and Kurds. Sayyid Abdulkadir and Lütfi Fikri were proponents of the party. In addition, many who had been deported abroad by the CUP, such as Niyazi Efendi (ex-Diyarbakır deputy), Ahmet Ramiz Efendi, and Şerif Pasha, became members of the Hürriyet and İtilaf (Liberal Union Party).⁹⁰ Furthermore, Şerif Pasha provided economic assistance to the party.⁹¹

Zinar Silopi and Nuri Dersimi describe how the Unionists provoked Kurdish nationalism with their jingoist politics. Dersimi, who was a university student during WWI, describes the high tension between Turkish and Kurdish students of the University with the following words:

When we went to school, we would see Turkist slogans on the blackboard in large letters saying, “Happy are those who call themselves Turks” and “Long live Turks.” As a response, we would have to write on the board “Long live Kurds and Kurdistan” and “Happy is the one who says, I am a Kurd.”⁹²

Silopi, as a Kurdish nationalist during the Republican period and a former-officer of the Ottoman Army, states how Ottomanism turned into Turkism with the

⁹⁰ Kutlay, p. 100.

⁹¹ Tunaya, p. 282.

⁹² Nuri Dersimi, *Hatıratım* (İstanbul: Doz, 1997), p. 31. In spite of the increasing Turkish nationalism, the sayings of Dersimi do not seem to be consistent with the conjecture since “Happy are those who call themselves Turks” is a later statement and “Happy are those who are Turks” could be a more logical slogan for that time. This part is translated by H. Özoğlu.

nationalist policies of the CUP and gave way to nationalist organizations established by the Muslim nations of the Ottoman State.⁹³

In spite of this growing tension, there were many Kurdish intellectuals and politicians who supported Kurdish unity under Ottoman rule. As an example of this group, Dersimi mentions Dersim deputy Lütfi Fikri Bey and Sayyid Abdulkadir.⁹⁴ It seems that most of the Kurds were loyal to the Ottoman State in spite of the CUP's Turkish nationalism. According to Naci Kutlay, the local notables of Diyarbakır had been under the influence of the CUP and started to incline to the Kurdish Clubs after the Armistice. Furthermore, the *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* and its local branches diverged from the Istanbul government gradually despite the fact that they negotiated and nearly agreed on an autonomous Kurdistan.⁹⁵

Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti

As mentioned above, the Kurdish notables and intellectuals who had supported the CUP at the beginning of the 1900s started to change their minds as time passed. Although the Unionists' policies bothered the Kurds just before and during WWI, there was no visible nationalist movement among them. On the other hand, the conditions after the war were ripe for secessionist movements since WWI made Kurdistan an international problem and the Ottoman state was about to disintegrate. The point 12 of President Wilson's 14 Points enhanced the hope of an autonomous Kurdistan specifically among some Kurdish notables.⁹⁶ The Wilsonian principles and

⁹³ Silopi, p. 33.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 35.

⁹⁵ Naci Kutlay, *21. Yüzyıla girerken Kürtler* (İstanbul: Peri Yayınları, 2002), p. 295.

⁹⁶ Point 12 of Wilson's 14 Point: The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles

the disintegration of the Ottoman State encouraged the Kurds, specifically those who had a long history in previous Kurdish organizations. *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* (Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan, SAK) was established under these conditions after the Mudros Armistice.

The president of the SAK was Sayyid Abdulkadir, a member of the *Meclis-i Ayan* at the same time. Not only Sayyid Abdulkadir but also other founders of the society were familiar with the previous Kurdish organizations. İsmail Göldaş gives a list of the executive committee which is agreed upon by Zinar Silopi, M. Emin Bozarlan, and Kendal Nazan:

1st vice president: Emin Ali Bedirhan (Botan)
2nd vice president: Fuat Pasha (Süleymaniye)
Secretary General: Hamdi Pasha
Accountant: Sayyid Abdullah (son of Sayyid Abdulkadir)
Founding members: Colonel Halid Bey (Dersim), Colonel Mehmet Ali Bedirhan Bey (Botan), Mehmet Emin Bey (Süleymaniye), Hoca Ali Efendi, Şefik Ervasi (Van), Şükrü Baban (Süleymaniye), Fuad Baban (Süleymaniye), Fetullah Efendi, Şükrü Mehmed (Bakırmaden).⁹⁷

Göldaş also notes that Mehmet Şükrü Sekban (quoted from Tunaya) and Said-i Nursi, who later became the founder of the *Nurcu* movement, were founding members of the SAK. Özoğlu stresses the monopoly of some notable Kurdish families in the

should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.

⁹⁷ İsmail Göldaş, *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* (İstanbul: Doz Yayınları, 1991), pp. 26-27.

leadership of the SAK. The active families of the organization were the Bedirhans, the Şemdinans, the Babans, and the Cemilpaşazades. However, Özoğlu states that the rivalry between Şemdinans and Bedirhans was so severe that it created two poles in the SAK.⁹⁸

Oğuz Aytepe claims that the aim of the SAK was to establish an independent Kurdistan under the suitable conditions of the Armistice.⁹⁹ Since the constitution of the organization touched on political issues, it was undoubtedly different from the previous Kurdish organizations. So as to understand whether the SAK was Kurdish nationalist, Özoğlu looks at the acts and publications of the society. Before doing this, the seal of the SAK gives important information regarding the real intent of the society. Cevat Dursunoğlu refers to the seal where “Kürt Teali Cemiyeti” was written in Turkish and “Autonomie du Kurdistan” in French. Dursunoğlu claims that the founders wanted to hide their purpose from the Kurds who very well knew that autonomy would bring catastrophic results.¹⁰⁰

Since the activities of the members and articles in *Jin*, the newspaper of the SAK, help us to understand the aim of the organization, Silopi mentions the visit of the executive committee of the SAK to the foreign representatives in İstanbul:

The SAK leaders visited American, British, and French representatives in İstanbul and argued for the national rights of the Kurdish people. In a meeting with the American representative, Sayyid Abdulkadir, Emin Ali Bedirhan, Said Nursi, and Dr. Mehmet Bey pointed out the boundaries of Kurdistan on the map and asked for alliance on the sea. Upon the reply of the American representative indicating the U.S. intention to create an independent Armenia at the expense of land called Kurdistan, Said Nursi responded, “if Kurdistan had a seacoast, you would destroy it with your naval power; but you cannot enforce such a decision in the mountains of Kurdistan.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Özoğlu, p. 82.

⁹⁹ Oğuz Aytepe, “Yeni Belgeler Işığında, Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti,” *Tarih ve Toplum*, no. 174 (June 1998), p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ Cevat Dursunoğlu, *Milli Mücadele'de Erzurum* (Ankara: 1946), p. 18.

¹⁰¹ Silopi, p. 57. This part is translated by H. Özoğlu.

An Armenian state was on the agenda of the international community, which was unacceptable by Kurds. Furthermore, Dursunoğlu wrote that he and Süleyman Nazif asked Sayyid Abdulkadir and the other members of the SAK for the participation of the Kurdish Club, which was like a branch of the SAK, in the *Vilayat-ı Şarkiye Müdafaa-i Hukuk-u Milliye Cemiyeti* since there was an Armenian danger in the east. However, they stated that they had received the assistance of the international community, and also advised them to think of the fate of Turks.¹⁰² This shows that the Kurds who sought international assistance were intending to establish an independent or at least an autonomous Kurdistan.

In spite of the attempts of the SAK members to achieve the autonomy or independence of Kurdistan, there were differentiations among them. The first group, lead by Sayyid Abdulkadir, supported Kurdistan's autonomy under Ottoman rule. The second group, on the other hand, demanded an independent Kurdistan State. This group was represented by the Bedirhans and Cemilpaşazades. Aytepe states that the conflict among the members seems to have been very serious at the end of 1919 and during 1920 since *Jin* stopped being published and some members left the SAK. Bedirhans and Cemilpaşazades established a new organization called *Teşkilat-ı İçtimaiye Cemiyeti*, which brought an end to the SAK.¹⁰³

There was no certain decision for the prohibition; however, the SAK was closed down at the end of the Turkish National Struggle. Furthermore, Sayyid Abdulkadir burnt all the documents of the SAK. Those who had supported an independent Kurdistan escaped from Turkey after the Turkish National Struggle and

¹⁰² Dursunoğlu, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰³ Aytepe, p. 10.

went to Syria. Kamuran and Celadet Bedirhan, Tütüncübaşı Şükrü, and Police commissary Nizamettin established *Hoybun* with the Taşnak Armenians.¹⁰⁴

The SAK was the most nationalist Kurdish organization of the Ottoman period. The previous organizations, newspapers and periodicals were a reflection of the Kurds' demand for better conditions. Furthermore, Kurdish notables and intellectuals tried to provide a kind of Kurdish consciousness with the promotion of Kurdish history and literature. Sometimes they applied to the government for the improvement of the conditions in the regions where the Kurds were living by favoring from the liberal atmosphere of the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. Then, in spite of the radicalization of the CUP, many Kurds did not abandon their loyalty to the Ottoman State. Instead, they sought new political parties for the political opposition. However, WWI brought out important changes for the Ottoman State. For the reasons mentioned above, the Ottoman subjects looked for the self-determination of their nations. The Kurdish nationalism at the end of the war was a response to the disintegration of the Ottoman State rather than being a reason for it.¹⁰⁵

It can be said that there was always a clash among Kurdish tribes with certain reasons and in addition to that the struggle among the Kurdish notables or intellectuals was another fact. As mentioned above, Kurdish nationalists who came together at the SAK were very different from each other. The SAK was not immune to the long lasting rivalry among two important Kurdish families; the Şemdinans and the Bedirhans. Besides that, in spite of the disintegration of the state, many Kurdish nationalists including Sayyid Abdulkadir still wanted an autonomous Kurdistan under Ottoman rule. The main figures and activities of the SAK are so important since the Koçgiri Rebellion which was inspired by the SAK will be analyzed in the next part.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Özoğlu, p. 125.

Furthermore, many important members of the SAK were again on the stage during the Sheikh Said Rebellion, which is also the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

TWO IMPORTANT KURDISH REBELLIONS OF THE 1920s: KOÇGİRİ AND SHEIKH SAİD REBELLIONS

Dersim Kurds

Before analyzing the Koçgiri and Sheikh Said rebellions, it is better to have a look at Dersim Kurds due to their social differentiations from the other Kurds and radical relationship with the state. Dersim, the northwestern part of Kurdistan and roughly the present province of Tunceli, was mainly the settlement of Alevi Kurds. Since this part of Kurdistan was mountainous and naturally isolated from the other provinces, Dersim was an ideal place for Alevis, both Turks and Kurds, to stay away from Sunni Ottoman influence. Martin van Bruinessen emphasizes the common features between Dersim Alevis, mostly Kurdish originated, and Alevi Turks. Indeed, Dersim Alevis were more radical and had more Iranian influence than Anatolian Alevi Turks. Bruinessen mentions that all *gülbanks*, a kind of prayer said by the *Alevi dedes* (religious men), were Turkish and there was no Kurdish one in Dersim, referring to the observations of Ali Kemali and Nuri Dersimi. This is remarkable since the Dersim Alevis were Kurdish. However, Alişer and Seyid Rıza (first as one of the protagonists of the Koçgiri Rebellion and the second one the leader of another rebellion in 1925) tried to replace these Turkish *gülbank* and *nefes* with Kurdish poets. Furthermore, the Hacı Bektaş Tekkesi was the holiest place after Dersim for Dersim tribes, which was the pilgrimage place for Alevi Turks.¹⁰⁶ Thus *Alevilik* seemed to have been as determinative as being Kurdish for the Dersim population.

¹⁰⁶ Martin van Bruinessen, The debate on the ethnic identity of Kurdish Alevis: “*Aslımı inkar eden haramzadedir*”. Available (online) at <http://let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Alevikurds.htm>.

Noting the problematic and weak relationship between Dersim's Kurdish tribes and the Ottoman state, the administration of the region was not easy for the Ottomans. During the Ottoman period Dersim was connected to Bayburt subdivision, Diyarbakır province, and Erzurum province by turns. In 1848 Dersim became a district governed from Hozat; however, the control over the district could not be ensured. After the Tanzimat, local aghas and sheikhs were appointed as the administrators of the region, which in turn continued the lack of authority in Dersim.¹⁰⁷ The rebellions in Dersim continued during the Tanzimat period. In 1850 there was a big intervention to Dersim, just after a rebellion, in order to (“...*Dersim ekrad ve eşkiyasının ıslah-ı hal ve terbiyesi madde-i matlubası bu kerre tamamıyla husul gelerek silahlarının toplanması...*”) collect arms, draft soldiers (*Kurra-i Şer'iyye*) and collect taxes.¹⁰⁸ The Ottoman State started to locate soldiers at some determined points of Dersim. In spite of all efforts, the government was not able to control the Dersim tribes until 1852. After this date, the Ottoman State tried to collaborate with some of the tribes in order to control them. As an example of that collaboration, the Koçgiri Tribe was upgraded to a subdistrict and Diyap Agha was appointed as the *müdür* (administrator). On the other hand, these attempts were not equally effective for all Dersim tribes.¹⁰⁹ The tribal leaders of Dersim were given official status such as *kaymakamlık* (head official of a district); on the other hand, none of these precautions or applications helped the Ottoman State to control Dersim. There were so many military campaigns into the region during the nineteenth century.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Cemal Şener and Ahmet Hezarfen, *Osmanlı belgelerinde Dersim Tarihi*, (İstanbul: Etik Yayınları, 2003), p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ İbrahim Yılmazçelik, *XIX. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Dersim Sancağı* (Elazığ: Çağ Ofset Matbaacılık, 1999). p. 67.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 72.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 73.

It was obvious that there would be a war with the Russians just before 1877 and the Dersim aghas applied to the Russian Consul at Erzurum. They proposed to assist the Russians in case of a war against the Ottoman State.¹¹¹ Beside that, Şakir Pasha, who was placed as *Anadolu Islahatı Umum Müfettişi* (Public Inspector of the Anatolian Reform) in 1895, was warned about the Christian missionaries' acts in Dersim in 1898. Since the Dersim Kurds had good relations with Armenians and Protestants, they were prone to collaborate and be influenced by them.¹¹² The Dersim tribes were perceived unreliable as well as incorrigible.

There were three important rebellions in Dersim at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Dersim tribes were noted because of the plunder and pillage they carried out. Specifically, when the weather conditions got better, bandits invaded nearby villages. In spite of people's complaints, this situation continued for a long time. However, in 1907, as a result of another invasion by Dersim tribes to Kemah and Çemişgezek for plundering, battalions in Dersim were mobilized against these tribes. Because of the harsh weather conditions, chastening was not finished.¹¹³ The next year another military campaign was carried out in Dersim. Ongoing attacks on *karakols* (police stations) and plundering were unbearable, which necessitated other intervention. *Tedip and tenkil* (chastening and repressing) was carried out in Dersim in 1908 on the command of Neşet Pasha. Nevertheless, it was again not completed. The Dersim deputies demanded a permanent solution for the problem in 1909 inasmuch as people got tired of the plundering. In the end, another military operation, this time more comprehensive, was devised; however, the necessary administrative reforms did not follow it.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ *Dersim: Jandarma Genel Komutanlığı Raporu* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1998), p. 110.

¹¹² Karaca, p.77.

¹¹³ Burhan Özkök, *Osmanlılar Devrinde Dersim İsyanları* (İstanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1937), pp. 7-9.

¹¹⁴ Özkök, p. 34.

Thus Dersim had an important experience of uprising, and these Dersim originated rebellions specifically broke out because of military service and tax collection. The thing that make Dersim different from other Kurdish regions was the tradition of uprising against state authority. In addition to that, it was difficult for the Ottoman State to find a collaborator in Dersim due to the religious differences and geographical obstacles. Plundering was one of the important problems of Dersim; however, the Ottoman influence was too weak in the region that it could not prevent it for long years.

The Koçgiri Rebellion

Koçgiri Rebellion was one of the important resistances to the Ankara government during the Turkish National Struggle. The main tribe that carried out the rebellion was Koçgiri, people of which were located in Hafik (Koçhisar), Zara, İmranlı, Suşehri, Refahiye, Kemah, Divriği, Kangal, Kuruçay, and Ovacık. The 135 villages around the region were under the control of the Koçgiri tribe, which was a kind of confederation of tribes such as İbolar, Geriyalar, Sefolar, Sarolar, Balolar, and Laçınlar. Most of the researchers are in agreement with each other on the Alevi-Kurdish identity of the Koçgiri tribe. However, Kurdish nationalism, Turkish nationalism, or Alevi fanaticism makes qualification of the Koçgiri rebellion very difficult. Since there are not enough sources on the subject, we have to rely on mostly lapsed and prejudiced sources. When it comes to explaining the diary of the rebellion, most of the writers refer to the same events; on the other hand, some of them omit something or add something in order to reinforce their assertion. Under these conditions, it seems more convenient to analyze all these nationalist and

fanatic discourses. Naturally, this does not mean that it will lead us to the real definition of the rebellion. However, analyzing general perceptions concerning the Koçgiri Rebellion can give us further impetus for a better understanding.

As mentioned above, there is a consensus among many writers that Koçgiri was an Alevi-Kurdish tribe.¹¹⁵ *Genelkurmay* sources also state the same thing; however, it is also mentioned that the Koçgiri tribes spoke Turkish as well as Kurdish. One more thing in these sources is about the Turkish names of places in Koçgiri villages.¹¹⁶ Baki Öz notes that all the tribes of Koçgiri were Alevi, but he is suspicious about the Kurdish origin of these tribes. Öz claims that Koçgiri tribes were Turkish originated. On the other hand, the generally spoken language in Koçgiri region was Kurmanci. He adds that these tribes became Kurdish during the Ottoman period.¹¹⁷ It is not only Baki Öz, but also Şadillili Vedat and Kenan Esengin describe Koçgiri tribes as Turkish in essence.¹¹⁸ Martin van Bruinessen discusses the ethnic origin of the Alevi-Kurds in his article, “*Aslımı inkar eden haramzadedir.*” In spite of the official Turkish view and claims of some Western academics such as Irene Melikoff, he does not rely on the claim that Alevi Kurds were kurdicized Turcoman *kızılbaş* tribes. Instead, he states that:

It is hard to imagine from whom these tribes could have learnt Kurdish or Zaza, given the fact that social contacts with Shafi`i Kurmanc and Zazas are almost nonexistent. In Sivas, on the other hand, Kurdish (and Zaza) Alevi have long been in close contact with Turkish Alevi, without the latter being assimilated. I propose the alternative hypothesis that a considerable part of the ancestors of the present Alevi Kurds were neither Turcomans nor

¹¹⁵ Uğur Mumcu, *Kürt-İslam Ayaklanması 1919-1925* (Ankara: Tekin Yayınevi, 1992), p. 35; Suat Akgül, *Dersim İsyanları ve Seyit Rıza* (Ankara: Berikan Yayınları, 2001), p. 20; Nuri Dersimi, *Haturatım* (İstanbul: Doz Basım Yayın, 1997), p. 98; Mustafa Balcıoğlu, *İki İsyan (Koçgiri, Pontus) Bir Paşa (Nurettin Paşa)* (Ankara: Nobel Yayın, 2000), p. 130; Ali Kemali, *Erzincan: Tarihi, coğrafi, toplumsal, etnografi, idari, ihmal, inceleme araştırma tecrübesi* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1992), p.125.

¹¹⁶ *Türk İstiklal Harbi VI. Cilt “İç ayaklanmalar” (1919-1921)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1964), p.151.

¹¹⁷ Baki Öz, *Belgelerle Koçgiri Olayı* (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 1999), p. 25.

¹¹⁸ Şadillili Vedat, *Türkiye’de Kürtçülük Hareketleri ve İsyanlar* (Ankara: Kon Yayınları, 1980) p. 35; Kenan Esengin, *Milli Mücadele’de iç Ayaklanmalar* (Ankara: Ulusal Basımevi, 1969) p. 180.

belonged to the followers of Shah Isma`il, but rather were Kurdish- and Zaza-speaking adherents of other syncretist, *ghulat*-influenced, sects.¹¹⁹

Furthermore, Bruinessen points to how Kurds emphasized on Sunni Islam and denied existed heterodox Kurdish identity, which may harm the trust of the Ottoman Sultan to Kurds.¹²⁰ Thus, as the heterodox Kurdish identity is something that goes back to the first times of the Kurds under Ottoman control, it seems strange to describe Dersim Alevi as kurdicized people who were Turkish in origin. Bruinessen notes how Koçgiri and Dersim tribes had many similar religious customs with the Alevi Turks of Anatolia. Indeed this necessitates regarding Alevism as important as Kurdish identity for these tribes. Also we know that there were Turkish *gülbanks* and *nefes* said in Alevi-Kurdish rituals, which do not solely prove the Turkish origin of these tribes, but point the Alevism of these Kurds.

In search of the origins of Kurds, there has been a widespread and common Turkish official perception that Kurdishness does not refer to a separate national identity since Kurds are originally Turkish. Also, some Alevi writers are affected by this official view and deny the Kurdish identity of the Dersim Alevi. Bruinessen sees this attempt to prove Turkishness of Alevi to the Kemalist regime.¹²¹ Baki Öz, who is one of them, describes the origins of the Koçgiri tribe leaders after stating the Turkishness of the villages living under the rule of Koçgiri tribes. As mentioned earlier, he claims that people living in the region called them Kurd as the time passed; however, the indisputable thing is the Alevi identity of those people. When it comes to the leaders of the Koçgiri tribe, who organized and

¹¹⁹ Bruinessen, "*Aslımı inkar eden haramzadedir*" *The debate on the ethnic identity of the Kurdish Alevi*. Available (online) at <http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Alevikurds.htm> Ghulat is used for the extremist shi'ite sects which exaggerate the status of Ali.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

carried out the rebellion, Öz claims that they were Shafi'i originated and their grandfather came from Palu of Elazığ. Koçgiri tribe leaders during the rebellion were Haydar Bey and Alişan Bey. Their father, Mustafa Pasha, claims Öz was awarded with the title of "pasha" by the Ottoman State as a result of their service and loyalty to Abdulhamid II.¹²² This view needs to be read with suspicion seeing the Alevi and Kemalist orientation of Öz. As it is seen in the following sentences of his book, he constructs historical writing in accordance with an anachronic view:

Mustafa Pasha was very attached to the Ottoman sultan. His sons Alişan and Haydar Bey were both raised with this same attachment and later resented M. Kemal's actions. M. Kemal's opposition to feudalism and desire to establish a national state can be seen as factors for this resentment.¹²³

It is clear from these sentences that Öz would like to prove that Alevis could not revolt against a government led by Mustafa Kemal. If there is such a rebellion, then there must be Sunni origins of the protagonists of the Koçgiri rebellion. In addition to that, Öz introduces Mustafa Kemal's anti-feudal views that bothered Alişan Bey and Haydar Bey. On the other hand, we know that these people were offered to be deputy or head of district by Mustafa Kemal in order to appease their opposition to the Ankara government. Furthermore, there were Dersim deputies (such as Diyar Agha and Meço Agha) in the first assembly who were tribal leaders as Alişan and Haydar. Thus, one must be careful when describing Mustafa Kemal as anti-feudal at the beginning of 1920 since he was not using different tools from the Ottoman sultans who gave official duties and the title of pasha to the local tribal leaders.

Among all these different perceptions, the most convincing and acceptable description regarding the ethnic and religious identity of the Dersim and Koçgiri

¹²² Öz, p. 20.

¹²³ Ibid.

tribes seems to be Alevi-Kurdish¹²⁴. However, it is not only the ethnic origin of Koçgiri's Alevi population, but also other differences concerning the nature and development of the rebellion exist among the writers. Comparing the information from different sources, we learn certain facts about the rebellion in spite of the differentiation in comments.

The four main protagonists of the rebellion were Nuri Dersimi, who was sent to the region by the SAK, Alişan Bey and Haydar Bey, leaders of the Koçgiri tribe, and Alişer, the clerk of Alişan Bey and Haydar Bey and also a poet. Nuri Dersimi was a veterinarian and came to Sivas for official service in 1919. Dersimi writes in his memoirs that he met with Haydar and Alişan and there were other tribes that he would visit according to the program given to him by the SAK.¹²⁵ It seems that Nuri Dersimi was sent to the region in order to construct branches of the SAK in places where the Kurdish population lived. In spite of the SAK's support to Dersimi at the initial stage; this assistance did not continue during the rebellion. There can be several reasons for this; it was in 1920 that the SAK was split into two groups, which were led by the Şemdinans and the Bedirhans. In later writings of Dersimi, we see how he complained about the autonomist view of Sayyid Abdulkadir, which was, according to him, a reason for the failure of the rebellion.¹²⁶ On the other hand, there is no sign of support from the secessionists for example, the Bedirhan family, to the rebellion. Obviously, the support of the SAK or the break up of this support does not prove the real motivation of the rebellion as an autonomous Kurdistan or a Kurdish state. It is better to look over the evolution of the rebellion for a complete understanding.

¹²⁴ There were also Alevi-Turks in the region but Alevi Kurds constituted the majority.

¹²⁵ Dersimi, *Hatıratım*, p. 98.

¹²⁶ Dersimi, *Kürdistan Tarihinde Dersim* (İstanbul: Doz Basım Yayın, 1997), p. 133

In 1919, it was recognized by Mustafa Kemal that Dersim and Koçgiri Kurds were organizing around the branches of the SAK in the region. He wanted to meet with Alişan Bey in order to get support of this tribe leader and offered him to be deputy of Sivas. However, Alişan refused this proposal by putting his aim as to prevent any Armenian state in Kurdistan according to the Wilsonian principles. He claimed that they were getting organized against this threat.¹²⁷ Mustafa Balcıoğlu who refers to Nuri Dersimi's memoirs writes that Alişan Bey refused Mustafa Kemal's proposal and declared they would work for a re-organization in Kurdistan according to the Wilsonian principles. It is really strange how Balcıoğlu derives this information from Dersimi's writings since he points to something different. However, this can be regarded as an attempt to emphasize on the Kurdish nationalist side of the rebellion, which reflects the general perception of Balcıoğlu regarding the Koçgiri rebellion.

When the Grand National Assembly was holding its first meeting in Ankara, the leaders of Dersim and Koçgiri tribes declared that they would support the government if Ankara recognized Kurdistan's autonomy. If we have to make a description, the previous words of Alişan Bey to Mustafa Kemal and also this declaration make Koçgiri an autonomist Kurdish movement. Although Kurdistan's autonomy was stipulated for the support, this shows these tribes were willing to live under the rule of the Ankara government. However, the following days of the rebellion observed some secessionist acts which were generally led by N.Dersimi and Alişer. Alişer was making propaganda speeches in Ovacık and Hozat with the aim of gaining the support of more people in March 1920, while Nuri Dersimi talked about an army of 45,000 soldiers in order to excite people and encourage the

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.134.

tribes to revolt.¹²⁸ Hence, while investigating the causes of the Koçgiri rebellion, there are two important bases; one is official demands of the tribes and the other one is the memoirs. Sometimes they contradict with each other; however, the first one is more reliable.

There were sudden attacks to police stations in July 1920, which were undertaken by some Koçgiri and Dersim tribes. Kangal-Zara and the surrounding region were controlled by these tribes. Furthermore, the former commander of the gendarmerie and leader of *Şadan* Tribe, Paşo, attacked battalion carrying ammunition in August 1920. All these attacks were at the eve of the Koçgiri rebellion and it is possible that these tribes carried out plunder and pillage, which was quite ordinary during Dersim's history. Generally, these events are perceived as secessionist movements which were coordinated with the Koçgiri rebellion. Nevertheless, there is not enough evidence to support the above mentioned perception. For the purpose of plundering Dersim tribes had committed many attacks during the previous years. So the attacks in 1920 seem to be pursuance of a Dersim tradition. Just after the attack of Paşo, Alişan was appointed as the deputy head of Refahiye, while his brother, Haydar Bey was appointed as the rural manager of İmranlı.¹²⁹ It seems that Koçgiri tribe leaders were expected to prevent those kinds of attacks.

Nuri Dersimi and Alişan Bey organized a meeting with the participation of different tribal leaders in Hozat in November 1920, where all participants made holy speeches according to the Dersim faith and swore to struggle until achieving their demands written on the prepared note at the end of the meeting (Hozat Declaration, November 15, 1920). According to the declaration; first, the Ankara

¹²⁸Akgül, p. 21.

¹²⁹ Dersimi, *Kurdistan Tarihinde Dersim*, p.140.

government had to explain whether it accepted the articles of the Sevres Treaty¹³⁰ related to Kurdistan autonomy. Second, the Kurds who had been arrested in Elazığ, Malatya, Sivas, and Erzincan had to be released. Third, the Turkish officials had to withdraw from the territory where Kurds constituted the majority of the population. Last, Turkish soldiers had to withdraw from the Koçgiri region¹³¹ This ultimatum was given to the governor of Dersim by the leader of the Abbasan tribe, Meço Agha, who later became a deputy at the GNA. After this reached Ankara, the government sent a *heyet-i nasıha* (advice commission) to the region and tried to persuade the Kurdish leaders to collaborate with the Ankara government; however, Western Dersim Tribes' leaders sent a telegram to the GNA on December 25, 1920 and stated that their new desire as an independent Kurdistan surrounding Diyarbakır, Elaziz, Van, and Bitlis.¹³² It seems very likely that the Sevres Treaty encouraged the secessionist Kurds in Koçgiri and Dersim more than any time and some of them acted independently while declaring their demands. Furthermore, there was no acceptance message from the Ankara government for Kurdistan autonomy, at least we do not know, which was demanded in April 1920. If there was not any unofficial promise of Ankara government or Mustafa Kemal to recognize Kurdistan autonomy, this could have encouraged secessionists. Just after the Hozat Declaration, the Ankara government succeeded in convincing some important tribal leaders (Diyap and Meço Agha, Ahmet Ramiz, Hasan Hayri) to participate in the GNA. At the same time 72 Kurdish deputies declared their loyalty to the Ankara government against the Allied States.¹³³ Diyar and Meço Agha

¹³⁰ See the Appendix A.

¹³¹ Paul J. White, *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers? The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey* (London-New York: Zed Books, 2000), p. 71.

¹³² Dersimi, *Kürdistan Tarihinde Dersim*, pp. 141-142.

¹³³ Hasan Hayri was the most important figure of these deputies, who was hanged after Sheikh Said Rebellion.

claimed that they went into the GNA in order to defend the rights of Kurdistan; on the other hand, they were regarded as traitors by many separatist Kurds.¹³⁴

During those days, some Kurdish propagandists told people that the Kurds would be deported like the Armenians, which increased participation in the rebellion.¹³⁵ On the other hand, Armenians were also propaganda tools for Mustafa Kemal and Kazım Karabekir to persuade Kurds not to rebel. The Ankara government sent a rumor among Kurds that British imperialism aimed to form an Armenian state on the territory where the Kurdish population lived.¹³⁶ This propaganda worked since it was impossible for Kurds to live under Armenian control. Furthermore, Kazım Karabekir states that he warned the Kurds of British aims because it had been decided to construct an Armenian state on Ottoman territory called “Kurdistan” geographically.¹³⁷ So it is interesting how Armenia or Armenians were used as propaganda tools both by Kurds and the Ankara government.

As the attacks of the tribes expanded, the Ankara government again sent a *heyet-i nasıha*¹³⁸ to the region with the aim of convincing the Kurds of the damages and costs of the movement; however, this did not serve the purpose.¹³⁹ There were two important figures in Koçgiri at that time: Nuri Dersimi and Alişer. The Ankara government attempted to arrest Dersimi because he was held responsible for the murder of Ayanoğlu Mustafa, post manager. However, Seyit Rıza, an effective tribal leader and organizer of the Kurdish Rebellion of 1925, warned the

¹³⁴Balcıoğlu, p.137.

¹³⁵ Mumcu, p. 37, Öz, p.135.

¹³⁶ Doğu Perinçek, *Kemalist Devrim 4-Kurtuluş Savaşı'nda Kürt Politikası* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1999), p. 125.

¹³⁷ Kazım Karabekir, *Kürt Meselesi* (İstanbul: Emre Yayınları, 1994), p. 10.

¹³⁸ The head of the mission was Şefik Bey who was a judge of the Supreme Court (Temyiz Mahkemeleri).

¹³⁹ Kabacalı, p.35.

government to release Nuri Dersimi. The Ankara government did not want to clash with Dersim tribes, so Dersimi went free.¹⁴⁰

On the other hand, insurgents were waiting for spring to start the final attack and were continuing their preparations. Besides that, there were counter-attempts against the rebellion from some tribes. The Ankara government was also trying to capture deserters in Dersim. However, tribal brigands, who were headed by Zalim Çavuş, assisted the arrested Kurdish deserters, who were being sent from İmranlı and Zara, to go free.

After this event, Colonel Halis moved the 6th Cavalry to Zara and then entered İmranlı on 13 February 1921. İmranlı was surrounded by Kurds who wanted Miralay Halis to surrender. After the battle between the 6th Cavalry and the tribal brigands, Colonel Halis and his cavalry were captured by the insurgents. Nationalist Kurdish sources¹⁴¹ mention a *Divan-ı Harp* (martial court) that decided the execution of Colonel Halis but the same event is written in a different way in *Genelkurmay* sources, which say that Miralay Halis was killed during the bloody struggle with insurgents.¹⁴²

According to Kurdish sources, Kangal, Divriği, Kemah, and Dersim were under the control of Koçgiri tribes in the first months of 1921. On the other hand, harsh winter conditions prevented the Koçgiri tribes from moving forward because it was impossible to go over Munzur Mountain.¹⁴³ The insurgents dependent on Alişer entered Kuruçay, a town of Erzincan and seized the head of the district

¹⁴⁰ Nuri Dersimi, *Kürdistan Tarihinde Dersim*, (İstanbul: Doz Basım ve Yayın, 1997) p.145.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 144. After the execution of Miralay Halis Bey, Dersimi also mentions that the insurgents flew a Kurdish flag at İmranlı. It seems that Dersimi describes the events of the day as he would like to remember, but not as they were. This kind of made-up narration necessitates to be more cautious of any researchers while reading Nuri Dersimi and many writers who relies on his memoirs.

¹⁴² Rahmi Apak, *Türk istiklal Harbi/ İç Ayaklanmalar, 1919-1921*, (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1967), p.154.

¹⁴³ Koçgiri Halk Hareketi, p. 60.

(*kaymakam*) and some officials.¹⁴⁴ As a result of this visible success, the Kurds sent a telegram to the GNA on 11 March 1921 and stated:

The majority of the populations in the following districts are Kurdish: Koçgiri, Divriği, Refahiye, Kuruçay and Kemah. We request that these districts be combined into a single Kurdish province and that a governor of local Kurdish origin be appointed to this province. We also request that the current administrator of justice and all official employees continue with their jobs.

Heads of Koçgiri tribe: Muhammet and Taki;
Heads from Dersim tribes: Mustafa, Seyithan, Muhammet, Munzur;
Alişer from the Prophet's ancestry

According to Rahmi Apak, they threatened the Ankara government at the end of the telegram and stated that if this problem was not solved in that way, the rebellion would disseminate to Erzincan, Van, Diyarbakır, and Erzurum and there would be a bloody war.¹⁴⁵ It seems that as time passed the insurgents stepped down their demands from a Kurdish state to an autonomous province.

The interesting point is that in all of the sources on the subject, it is written that the Koçgiri tribe was headed by Alişan Bey and Haydar Bey; however, the above mentioned telegram was signed by Muhammet and Taki as the heads of the Koçgiri tribe. In spite of this strange case, there is no one who makes an explanation about Muhammet and Taki, whose names are only seen at the end of the above mentioned telegram. Thus, this is another skeptical point of the rebellion for which we do not have a clear explanation for the time being. As a result of this telegram, the Council of Ministers (*İcra Vekilleri Heyeti*) sent the Central Army to

¹⁴⁴ Apak, p. 159.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.161.

the region with full administrative power on March 14, 1921 and martial law (*Örfi İdare*) was declared in Sivas, Erzincan, and Elazığ.¹⁴⁶

According to Zinar Silopi, the Ankara government tried to gain some time by sending a *heyet-i nasıha* to the region since Nurettin Pasha was trying to get ready to struggle against Kurds. This reached significant success since Haydar, one of the leaders of the Koçgiri tribe, believed that the rebellion had to be stopped and they had to seek Kurdish national demands by negotiating and compromising with the Turkish government.¹⁴⁷ On March 13, the Commander of the Chief Army, Nurettin Pasha, was sent to quash the rebellion with extra-ordinary authority.¹⁴⁸ Besides the soldiers from the army, Eğin and Kemah troops, and *Giresun müfrezesi* headed by Osman Agha (Topal Osman), came to fight against the rebels.¹⁴⁹

As stated by Rahmi Apak and Kenan Esengin, *tenkil* was carried out by Nurettin Pasha against the Kurds who were from the Koçgiri and Dersim tribes. Furthermore, Nurettin Pasha declared that those who had not participated in the rebellion would not suffer from *tenkil*.¹⁵⁰ The rebels spread the rumor that the Ankara government would massacre all the people in the region, so Nurettin Pasha tried to convince people that they would not be hurt.¹⁵¹

The first factionist movement in the Koçgiri Rebellion was the Ginyan Tribe's collaboration with the government by spying on the other tribes. The Koçgiri Rebellion had really hurt after the leader of the Ginyan Tribe, Murat Pasha defected. Furthermore, Haydar Bey and 2,000 insurgents were prevented from returning to Dersim by Kör Pasha from the Kureyşan tribe was slaughtered, and Azamet, who was

¹⁴⁶ Koçgiri Halk Hareketi, p. 63.

¹⁴⁷ Silopi, p.80.

¹⁴⁸ Kabacalı, pp. 35-36.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Kenan Esengin, *Milli Mücadele'de iç Ayaklanmalar* (Ankara: Ulusal Bas., 1969). pp. 188-189.

¹⁵¹ Balcıoğlu, p. 155.

the commander of the İmranlı front line, was killed. However, the fight continued around İmranlı and Koçgiri, and partly in Zara.¹⁵² The Central Army quashed the Koçgiri rebellion after a last operation on April 11, 1921. There had been very bloody fighting between the sides. On 17 June 1921, the rebellion was fully finished and Alişan Bey and Haydar Bey surrendered.¹⁵³

However, lengthy discussions were held in the Assembly after the Koçgiri Rebellion was quashed. Nurettin Pasha was criticized strongly by the deputies from eastern Anatolia. These deputies claimed that the government had given extraordinary rights to Nurettin Pasha who used violence and carried out *tenkil* against the insurgents. Furthermore, they wanted judgment of Osman Agha because of the harsh acts against the Kurds.¹⁵⁴ Nurettin Pasha's defensive speech was read in the Assembly and Mustafa Kemal made a calming speech which then resulted in the lifting of the judgment decision against Nurettin Pasha.¹⁵⁵ Nurettin Pasha had suggested to deport insurgents to the inner parts of the country in order to pacify and turkify them; however, this was not accepted by the Assembly and Nurettin Pasha was dismissed from the commandership of the Central Army.¹⁵⁶ On the other hand, Kenan Esengin criticizes Mustafa Kemal and other deputies because of their decision. According to him, the precautions suggested by Nurettin Pasha were necessary to prevent further rebellions such as the Sheikh Said Rebellion.¹⁵⁷

The insurgents were judged by the *Harp Divanı* and nearly 300 Kurds were punished by several penalties such as execution, life sentence, and imprisonment.

However, all the insurgents were forgiven by the Assembly except Nuri Dersimi

¹⁵² *Koçgiri Halk Hareketi* (Ankara: Komal Yayınları, 1976) p. 74.

¹⁵³ Mumcu, p. 38.

¹⁵⁴ Kabacalı, p. 36.

¹⁵⁵ Naci Kutlay, *21. Yüzyıla Girerken Kürtler*, p.305.

¹⁵⁶ Öz, p. 244.

¹⁵⁷ Esengin, pp. 192-193.

and Alişer.¹⁵⁸ It seems that Mustafa Kemal did not want to take harsh decisions in order not to encourage further rebellions by Kurds.

The sectarian differences among Kurdish tribes constituted one of the reasons for the failure. As Bruinessen states, the Sunni tribes did not support the Koçgiri Rebellion because they regarded it as an “Alevi rebellion,” which restricted participation in the movement. Furthermore, most of the leaders of the Dersim tribes cooperated with Mustafa Kemal because they had respected him.¹⁵⁹ It seems that these leaders of tribes could not refuse Mustafa Kemal’s offers such as being deputy. Furthermore, all of the tribes that had contributed to the movement had always been in bargaining with the central authority. They demanded certain things from the Ankara government. Since the Ottoman state was about to dissolution and the international community was concerned about the Kurds more than any time, some of the Kurdish tribes wanted to take advantage of this situation. On the other hand, this did not mean that there was compromise among the Ottoman Kurds. Besides the religiously different Shafi’i and Alevi Kurds, there was disagreement among Alevi Kurdish tribes of Koçgiri and Dersim. There were two groups of Kurdish nationalists after the WWI: the secessionists and the autonomists. The Koçgiri rebellion seems to be carried out by the latter ones; however, secessionist Kurds were also involved in the rebellion. So it seems to be more rational to think that Kurdish nationalism was increasing among Kurdish intellectuals in big cities and local Kurdish notables were affected by this; however, they also had different motivations because of the tribal and sectarian structure of Kurdish society. Even though the tribes, which were involved in the Koçgiri rebellion, were Alevi-Kurds,

¹⁵⁸ Öz, pp. 245-246.

¹⁵⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State on the Social and Political Organization of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Boks, 1992), p. 269.

some of Dersim's tribes that were also Alevi did not contribute to the rebellion for the above mentioned tribal reasons.¹⁶⁰

As mentioned earlier, the SAK supported the rebellion at first; however, only Nuri Dersimi was active during the struggle. Besides that, Nuri Dersimi was aware of how the Alevi-Sunni distinction was a determinant factor as tribal structure in Kurdish Society and he wrote about his proposal to the SAK, which was not accepted, in his memoirs:

I took the floor and suggested that we send, as soon as possible, a delegation to the Kurdish Alevi areas in order to refute (the idea that) relations between the Sunni and Alevi Kurds were cold. (I explained that) in the case of a Kurdish (uprising) in the Alevi areas, the Sunni Kurds may remain quiet, and, in case of a national liberation movement in the Sunni areas, the Alevi Kurds might behave in a similar way. The Turkish government forces could profit from this situation.¹⁶¹

The control of the rebellion was in the hands of tribal leaders. Moreover, in spite of the fact that imperial powers, especially Britain, seemed to be ready to assist Kurdish insurgents before the rebellion, stayed away from it.¹⁶² On the other hand, Nuri Dersimi insisted that the young Kurdish organizers agitated for independence, while the leaders of the rebellion only asked for autonomy. Dersimi predicated the failure of the rebellion to several reasons such as the SAK was about to be broken up at the start of the rebellion so there was not enough support from the Istanbul side. Furthermore, the Allies did not assist the insurgents in spite of the articles of the Sevres Treaty related to Kurdistan autonomy. Tribal rivalries and clashes put the lid on a unified movement, since the tribe was the determinative

¹⁶⁰ Öz, p. 250.

¹⁶¹ Bozarlan, p. 174.

¹⁶² Öz, p. 251.

element of Kurdish society. In addition to all these factors, there was a lack of uniting power among Kurds that could enable them to go beyond the religious and sectarian controversies.¹⁶³

Since there are question marks on the sources about the Koçgiri Rebellion, we have to be cautious; on the other hand, a rational look at the existed studies may lead us to several conclusions. First, the telegrams sent to the Ankara government during the rebellion show that Kurdistan autonomy under Turkish government was aimed by Koçgiri and Dersim tribes. This is important since there is a widespread perception that the Koçgiri rebellion broke out to establish an independent Kurdistan. It is obvious that there were secessionists who participated and sometimes took control of the rebellion; however, it is not enough to call this rebellion secessionist. Second, some people qualify the Koçgiri Rebellion as a civil commotion, which is irrational since the Kurdish population of the region were peasants who had no nationalist motivations.¹⁶⁴ The peasants who contributed to the Koçgiri Rebellion were only following the orders of their tribes' leaders and nationalism was not on the agenda of the ordinary Kurds who lived under tribal life structure. Furthermore, using Alevi symbols during the preparation of the rebellion as well as utilizing them when it broke out shows how the protagonists of the rebellion were local-minded.

¹⁶³ Dersimi, p. 18.

¹⁶⁴ Öz, p. 253.

The Sheikh Said Rebellion

Analyzing Koçgiri, which was a Dersim-originated Alevi Rebellion, is not enough to understand the general characteristics and different features of the Kurdish movements during the 1920s. At that point, the Sheikh Said Rebellion must also be surveyed in order to abstain from any generalizations and misunderstandings related to the Kurdish movement. The most common perception about the Sheikh Said Rebellion is that it was an attempt to renew the sultanate and the caliphate. Furthermore, the official Turkish sources insist on the religious and foreign-supported side, namely English intervention and provocation, of the Sheikh Said Rebellion, which denies the nationalist, economic, and social aspects of the event. In fact, this general view requires a closer look at the conjuncture of the time since the motivation for the rebellion was more than a simple longing for past institutions. As it is the case, this perception brings us to the wrong view that the Kurdish issue could be seen as a problem of the past.¹⁶⁵

The main actor of the rebellion, Sheikh Said was a religious and tribal leader and had an important wealth. The Kurdish tribal leaders of eastern Anatolia generally had religious titles, as did Sheikh Said. He was a student of Mevlana Halid, who had implanted the Naqshbandi order in the regions where the Kurds were living. Mevlana Halid (1776-1827) had been very effective among Kurds during his lifetime and afterwards. Among his other students, in addition to Sheikh Said, there was Sheikh Ubeydullah, the protagonist of another Kurdish rebellion.

¹⁶⁵ Mesut Yeğen, *Devlet Söyleminde Kürt Sorunu* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003), p. 133.

The sheikhs were the chief mobilizers of Kurdish society, so they carried out the main Kurdish rebellions. Furthermore, Bruinessen points out:

As in other tribal societies, networks of *madrasas* and sufi orders have functioned as mechanisms of social integration, overcoming segmentary division. Not surprisingly it was in the *madrasa* environment, where students from various parts of Kurdistan met and where besides Arabic and Persian the Kurdish language was cultivated, that the idea of a Kurdish "national" identity first emerged. The first poets whose works expressed pride in the Kurdish heritage were closely associated with the *madrasa* and it was through the *madrasa* networks that their works were spread and became known. Sufi orders brought forth solidarities that cut across tribal and regional divisions. The first Kurdish uprisings with a nationalist aspect were almost without exception led by shaykhs of sufi orders.¹⁶⁶

Thus, this network was the source of the Sheikh Said's transtribal effectiveness.

Indeed, many Kurds supported Mustafa Kemal during the National Struggle in order to protect the Caliphate from foreign attacks. However, after the announcement of the Republic, the caliphate was abolished on March 3, 1924.

Zinar Silopi (Kadri Cemil Paşa) claims that:

Taking off the mask on his face, as Mustafa Kemal Pasha separated religion from everyday life and removed the Caliphate, Turkish and Kurdish but specifically the Kurdish religious people started to lose their sympathy for and faith in him.¹⁶⁷

This is not a wrong view since the Kurdish sheikhs were religious people who had always respected the Caliphate and owed their political and economic power to their religious identity. When analyzing the results of the decision that was taken on March 3, 1924, one must imagine the multidimensional effects of it. Obviously, the abolition of the Caliphate was an attempt to eliminate religious authorities in

¹⁶⁶ Martin Van Bruinessen, *The Kurds and Islam*, Available (online) at http://let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Kurds_and_Islam.htm.

¹⁶⁷ Silopi, p. 85.

Turkey who were as effective as the government. Indeed it was a power struggle and a counter attack was unavoidable. Thus, the perception of the abolition of the Caliphate differed between the elite and the ordinary Kurds. Hamit Bozarslan explains the reasons for the Kurdish radicalization specifically after 1923; as the first point, he claims that the Kurdish elite perceived that, now, it was Turkish nationalism rather than Muslim fraternity that constituted the core of the new state.¹⁶⁸ The abolition of the Caliphate as another point to increase the Kurdish resistance means more than an end to a religious institution, which had a very restricted meaning for an ordinary Muslim Ottoman citizen-Turk or Kurd; indeed it was the abolition of the collective identity of Turks and Kurds of Turkey. Bozarslan mentions a letter of Sheikh Said to the Kurdish *ulema* (religious scholars) and tribes and quotes the following sentences from this letter:

Previously, we had a common Caliphate, and this gave to our religious people a deep feeling of being a part of the same community as the Turks. Since the abolition of the Caliphate, the only thing left us is the sense of Turkish repression.¹⁶⁹

This letter points to the religious sensitiveness of the Sheikh. However, one should not overlook the power of religious discourse in mobilizing people and it is obvious that Sheikh Said was one of the persons who knew best the real meaning of being a powerful political and religious leader and its effect on people. The impact of the abolition of the Caliphate is undeniable as a reason of the rebellion. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the rebellion was a religious uprising. Furthermore, it served as a good basis to unite differently motivated participants of the rebellion. The diversity of the aims or motivations of the protagonists and participants of the

¹⁶⁸ Bozarslan, p. 178.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 180.

Sheikh Said rebellion is obvious; however, this does not mean that all of them were equally important. By the way, the most challenging one to the long-lasting privileges of the sheikhs and aghas does not seem to be the abolition of the Caliphate.

There was another significant event months after the abolition of the Caliphate, that is, the abrogation of *aşar* on February 17, 1925. Despite the fact that it occurred a few days later than the outbreak of the Sheikh Said Rebellion, the abrogation of *aşar* was something that had been discussed since the Tanzimat period. Furthermore, it was decided to be abrogated during the *İzmir İktisat Kongresi* (February 17, 1923). *Aşar* was a centennial tax. The central government had always difficulty in collecting this tax. It was a general view that the *aşar* could not be collected without the *iltizam* system since there were many unsuccessful attempts of the government starting from the Tanzimat period in order to replace *iltizam* with other ways of tax collection. It seems that the collection of *aşar* with *iltizam* was seen as a big obstacle to the construction of state authority in the Ottoman periphery. However, due to the several reasons it was very difficult to collect *aşar* by the state officials. Furthermore, the abrogation of *aşar* was also discussed during the Tanzimat period; on the other hand, the government could not venture such a radical decision in those days inasmuch as the *aşar* constituted one of the most important sources of state income. It is thought-provoking why the government was discussing to abrogate such an important source of income and investigating new ways of collecting it from the early years of the Tanzimat. One cannot overlook the parallel development of the centralization policies of the state and the discussions on the collection and abrogation of *aşar*. The local notables with the government officers constituted the members of the local assemblies. As is

known, penetration to the periphery necessitates first the suppression of local powers. Thus, cutting income is one of the most effective ways of this suppression since the local notables with the local state officials decided how to distribute *aşar* in the provincial budget and sent the remaining part to the central government. From the collection to the distribution, *aşar* was favoring different groups beside the state. As is known, *mültezims*, who were also local tribal leaders, took an important portion from the collected taxes. It seems that since the central government was not able to control the collection of the *aşar* and distribution of income that was obtained from the *aşar* in local level, it was decided that the tax be abrogated. Obviously this cut of income was two-sided; in spite of the inconveniences in the collection and distribution, the government had an important income from this tax. However, the local tribal leaders benefited from the *aşar* more than the central government did. Considering the aims of the newly established Turkish Republic, it was willing to lose an important source of income in order to construct a strong central authority by weakening the power of local entities.

Paul Gentizon mentions the poor conditions in eastern Anatolia, which had worsened throughout the long war years. Furthermore, he notes that although the government was decisive about making reforms in Kurdistan, this would be difficult in an area where traditional ties were so strong.¹⁷⁰ There were traditional ways of making money for Kurdish aghas such as collecting *aşar*. At that point, Gentizon claims that the Sheikh Said rebellion was not immune from the abrogation of *aşar* since it meant the disappearance of an important income for the tribal leaders. The new system applied in Kurdistan was not acceptable to local

¹⁷⁰ Paul Gentizon, *Mustapha Kemal ou l'orient en marche* (Paris: Edition Bosserd, 1929), p. 73.

leaders because it meant that their power had become on the target of the Turkish government.¹⁷¹ Taking into consideration the economic and related social effects of the abrogation of *aşar*, it seems that the practical effects of this decision were more vital than the abolition of the Caliphate for Kurdish tribal leaders.

Nevertheless, there was a more elite group which was effective during the preparation of the Sheikh Said rebellion. Indeed these people constituted the more nationalist side of the rebellion. In June 1923, Miralay Halit Bey from the Cibran Tribe and some other Kurdish officers, such as Bitlisli İhsan Nuri, Süleymaniyeli Mülazım Hakkı Şaveys, and Hertulu Hurşit, came together and constructed a political organization called the Azadi (*Hizbe Azadiya Kurdistan*).¹⁷² As a result of a small uprising of some officers at Beytüşşebap garrison, the Ankara government arrested Cibranlı Halit Bey, Yusuf Ziya Bey,¹⁷³ and Hacı Musa Bey and nearly other twenty people; however, there was not enough evidence to charge these people, on the other side, Sheikh Said was called before judge; however, he refused.¹⁷⁴ According to Nader Entessar, the Kurdish officers' uprising at Beytüşşebap garrison in September 1924 was not successful but “gave impetus to Sheikh Said Rebellion”.¹⁷⁵

Members of the Azadi such as Miralay Halit Bey, Hacı Musa Bey, Yusuf Ziya Bey and Kör Hüseyin Pasha had collaborated with the Unionist government during the First World War; however, they became important figures of the Kurdish opposition against the Kemalist government in the 1920s.¹⁷⁶ Martin Van Bruinessen states the main arguments of the officer members of the Azadi. First,

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p. 72.

¹⁷² Silopi, p. 86. *Hizbe Azadiya Kürdistan* meant Kurdistan Independence Party.

¹⁷³ Both Halit Bey and Yusuf Ziya were the first graduates of Aşiret Mektebi, and also Halit Bey was one of the successful students placed in the cards, which were printed for propaganda purpose as Abdulhamid wished. Kahraman, pp. 60-61.

¹⁷⁴ Silopi, p. 87.

¹⁷⁵ Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism* (USA: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 1992), p. 83.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 183.

there was a widespread fear of being deported to the West by the Kemalist government. In addition, Kurdistan, as a geographical term, was taken out from the books, and speaking Kurdish was restricted. Third, the Caliphate was abolished. Moreover, there was not enough service from the government, and beside that Turkish soldiers seized the animals of Kurdish villagers. Last, Kurdish officers were generally used for the most difficult and undesirable works in the army.¹⁷⁷

Nader Entessar points out that the abolition of the Sultanate and the Caliphate lifted the legitimacy of the religious and tribal leaders, who took their authority from these institutions.¹⁷⁸ It seems that the protagonists (officers and tribal leaders) of the rebellion had some similar and different motivations; however, they came together for a rebellion against the republican government. In spite of the long-lasting attempts of Azadi in order to go beyond the sectarian and tribal differences among the Kurds, it was achieved only to a limited extent since eastern Anatolia under Sunni-Kurdish control was not acceptable to the Alevi-Kurds. Furthermore, poor Kurds without strong tribal ties stayed away from the rebellion since the rebellion was not against the aghas and sheikhs who exploited them, but instead against the government that tried to get rid of these exploiters.¹⁷⁹

Despite the fact that it was planned to start months later, the rebellion started in Piran on February 13, 1925 with a skirmish between the Sheik's men and the gendarmerie battalion. The fight lasted nearly two months and Sheikh Said was captured on April 15, 1925. During his trial at the Independence Tribunal, he claimed that he was very disturbed by the implementations of the government

¹⁷⁷ Martin Van Bruinessen, p. 415.

¹⁷⁸ Entessar, p. 83.

¹⁷⁹ Bruinessen, p. 420.

regarding the religious issues.¹⁸⁰ After the rebellion, the official Turkish view was more prone to describe the Sheikh Said rebellion as a nationalist Kurdish rebellion; on the other hand, as time passed, it started to be portrayed as a religious uprising. It seems that portraying it as a Kurdish uprising was less dangerous than stressing the abolition of the Caliphate since the latter was bothersome not only for Kurds but also Turks in those days.

Besides that, there is a general view of qualifying this rebellion, in fact, all the rebellions against the Kemalist government, as the provocation of other states, specifically Britain.¹⁸¹ It is obvious that there had been English spies and missionaries in Ottoman territory for long years, as they filed their detailed reports to the Foreign Office. As an example English E.W.C. Noel's reports show how they were aware of the problems and dynamics of eastern Anatolia, even a simple disagreement among two Kurdish tribes was well-known by him, and of course by his counterparts in Britain.¹⁸² On the other hand, it is a misinterpretation that collecting information, preparing reports, or trying to provoke some tribes could not be seen as an essential cause of the rebellion since this view only serves the degradation of ethnic, social, and political aspects of the Sheikh Said Rebellion.¹⁸³

Bruinessen, who sees the nationalist motivations in the Sheikh Said rebellion, notes that it was the land-owners' fear of losing privileged positions, the dissatisfaction of the tribal leaders who were prevented to join the parliament, and the secular structure of the new state instead of Ottomanism, which of all brought out the Kurdish reaction in the Sheikh Said rebellion.

¹⁸⁰ Ahmet Süreyya Örgüven, *Şeyh Said isyanı ve şark İstiklal Mahkemesi* (İstanbul: Temel yayınları, 2002), p. 12.

¹⁸¹ Mumcu, p. 35; Kabacalı, p. 39; Perinçek, pp. 95-98, 103.

¹⁸² Mim Kemal Öke, *İngiliz Ajansı Binbaşı E.W.C. Noel'in "Kürdistan Misyonu" 1919* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1992), p. 26.

¹⁸³ Yeğen, p. 152.

The Republican government aimed to take under control the local Kurdish leaders who threatened the central authority, which in turn damaged these leaders' interests. Thus, more than Kurdish national demands, they were tribal interests caused the Sheikh Said rebellion. Besides that, there was an excellent tool in the Sheikh's hands when the caliphate was abolished. It was a good cover for the anger caused by the abrogation of *aşar*, and could be used to mobilize the local Kurdish people. After recognizing the nationalist motivations of some rebels, we have to take into consideration the contemporary events and their relation with the outbreak of the rebellion. Instead of engaging the Sheikh Said rebellion to one of its causes, it is better to see all the components. However, one should not overlook the fact that it was the abrogation of *aşar* which inspired mostly the Sheikh Said rebellion.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined the general characteristics of the major Kurdish rebellions and organizations starting from the Tanzimat period. The centralization attempts in the Tanzimat period, which were opposed by sheiks and aghas, were not completed in eastern Anatolia until the early years of the republican era. In this case, all of the Kurdish rebellions analyzed in this thesis seem to have been interrelated since the local tribal leaders continued to be key figures that held the political and economic power among Kurds. To the contrary of the claims that the Bedirhan rebellion and the Sheikh Ubeydullah rebellion were nationalist Kurdish movements, it was shown how these rebellions broke out as reactions against the centralization policies of the Ottoman state. Furthermore, the other two rebellions that were examined in this thesis, the Koçgiri rebellion and the Sheikh Said rebellion, were later movements against the state authority, and once more, the main actors were sheikhs and aghas.

Obviously, the centralization policies of the Tanzimat period helped to control some of the tribes; however, the Tanzimat principles were not applied throughout the Ottoman lands. On an equal basis, the Ottoman state needed the assistance of some Kurdish tribes at the expense of others, which in turn created new local powers. However, it has to be noted that there was no important Kurdish authority in the Ottoman Kurdistan after the defeat of Bedirhan Pasha until the emergence of Sheikh Ubeydullah as a tribal and religious leader. Indeed, the rise of Sheikh Ubeydullah, the Naqshbandi leader, pointed to a new kind of leadership that merged the political power of the agha and the religious power of the sheikh in the tribal leader.

So it can be argued that in spite of certain reforms that were carried out during the Tanzimat period, the local Kurdish leaders continued to be a threat to the central authority. Indeed, one of the reasons for this continuation was the call of the state for tribal assistance during the wartime (such as the Ottoman-Russian war of 1877-78) and the campaigns against the local threats.

The Hamidian period was the maturation period of the Tanzimat reforms since the central authority was strengthened. Abdulhamid II's policies enabled the integration of some eastern Anatolian tribes to the state. The Hamidiye Light Cavalry and Aşiret schools were important tools of this integration. The Hamidian period also witnessed the rise of the Kurdish tribes which made up the Hamidiye regiments, at the expense of other Kurdish tribes and the Armenians. It is interesting that Abdulhamid II planned to construct a strong central authority; on the other hand, he promoted the Hamidiye Cavalry regiments and granted considerable rights and privileges to them. It was shown that in spite of Abdulhamid II's centralization policies, the Sultan gave rise to the local tribal authorities who regarded themselves above the Ottoman officials. It can be claimed that the state was able to obtain more revenue for the central government and was more effective in eastern Anatolia after the Tanzimat period and specifically during the Hamidian period; however, this did not mean that the state authority was able to break up the authority of the local tribal authorities completely. Since the tribes that constituted the Hamidiye regiments were more powerful than the local government officials, this reflects the duality during the Hamidian period.

Beside the relatively good relations with the Kurdish tribes, the Hamidian period also witnessed the first signs of the opposition from the Kurdish intellectuals and notables who had been educated and lived in İstanbul or away from the Ottoman lands. Most of them were engaged in and coordinated with the Young Turk

movement. It is suggested in my thesis that Kurdish intellectuals and notables who constituted the SMPK, Hevi or published *Kürdistan* were advocates of Ottomanism. Inasmuch as many ethnic groups were more interested in their history, literature, and ethnic identities after the Young Turk revolution, self-awareness of the Kurdish intellectuals is not exceptional.

One must not overlook the turn of Kurdish self-awareness of the Second Constitutional period to Kurdish nationalism specifically after WWI. It is suggested in this thesis that the Kurdish rebellions evolved to be more nationalist; however, the nationalist segment of the rebellions were Kurdish intellectuals and notables who were educated and had close relations with the Young Turks, at least in one period of their lives. The Unionists' inclination to Turkish nationalism together with the disintegration of the Ottoman state encouraged Kurdish nationalism.

It has been argued that since Kurdish nationalism was a product of post-War conditions and had limited support from local Kurds, it became more understandable why nationalist Kurds were not able to establish an independent or autonomous Kurdistan. However, it must be noted that Kurdish nationalists were divided into two groups. The autonomist faction advocated Kurdistan as a province of the Ottoman state while the secessionists campaigned for an independent Kurdistan. The secessionists were led by the Bedirhan family, whose members were deported from the Ottoman Kurdistan many years ago. The Naqshbandi Kurds, on the other hand, were more prone to support an autonomous Kurdistan. Sayyid Abdulkadir, who was the president of the SAK and a member of Naqshbandi tariqa, led the autonomists. Furthermore, these different objectives caused the disintegration of the SAK, which was the most nationalist Kurdish organization among the other ones that were analyzed in this paper.

It was emphasized in this thesis that the disciples of the Naqshbandi order were always involved in Kurdish movements and they were dominant over other Kurdish nationalists. However, it seems that religious linkages between the members of the Naqshbandi order and the Ottoman Caliphate prevented their involvement in the secessionist faction.

There was another noteworthy group of Kurds located in Dersim. It was argued that the Dersim Kurds had a consequential experience of uprising since the Alevi Dersim tribes did not want to send soldiers for the Ottoman army and refused to pay taxes. Beside that, they had different religious faiths and were not sympathetic to the Sunni Ottoman authorities. The pillage and plunder that was carried out by the Dersim tribes resulted generally in state intervention. Unfortunately, we have limited information about the Koçgiri rebellion that was carried out by the Koçgiri and Dersim tribes. Furthermore, the evidence that we have is confusing because there are misleading statements in the sources. In this case, the past experiences of the Ottoman state in Dersim and acts of the Dersim tribes in previous years allow us to understand the general characteristics of the region. What I focused on in my thesis is that Alevism was as determinative as Kurdism in the identity formation of the Dersim tribes. In spite of supporting the Kurdish nationalist segment of the Koçgiri rebellion, I questioned the aim of the rebellion. It seems that the Koçgiri and Dersim tribes who used Alevi symbols during the rebellion were well aware of the position of the Sunni Kurds. Furthermore, the aim of an independent Kurdish state in Dersim region, I suggested, must be a fantasy even in the minds of the rebels. As is seen in the declarations during the Koçgiri rebellion, it was demanded that the Ankara government recognize the autonomy of the places where the Alevi Kurds lived. As

another example of the factional acts in the Kurdish movements, some of the tribal leaders collaborated with the Ankara government during the Koçgiri rebellion.

Beside the objectives of the Koçgiri rebellion, the attitude of the Ankara government is worth to analyzing. The Ankara government achieved to persuade some tribal leaders to participate in the GNA. This way of collaboration strengthened the positions of tribal leaders and it was suggested in my thesis that this kind of collaboration prevented any socio-political changes in Kurdistan from the Tanzimat period. The aghas and sheikhs continued to be dominant in Kurdish society since the defeat of some tribal leaders was achieved with the assistance of other tribal leaders. It was the case for Kurdistan that the wealth and power of the aghas and sheikhs increased since they had good relations with the local representatives of the central government in eastern Anatolia. If there was any opposition of the government officials to the local leaders, the winning part was the latter since the state behaved in favor of the aghas and sheikhs, who collaborated with them.

After the proclamation of the Republic, an important decision was taken by the government, which was a considerable threat to eastern Anatolian tribes. I suggested that the abrogation of *aşar* in February 1925 was a big challenge to the Kurdish tribes which collected *aşar* and were decisive in local assemblies for the distribution of income. The *aşar* continued to be one of the important sources of income for the state until its abrogation in 1925. In 1924, *aşar* constituted the 25% of the budget with an income of TL 27.500.000.¹⁸⁴ It was subject to the regulations of the Ankara government in the first years of 1920s; however, finally, it was decided to be abrogated during the *İzmir İktisat Kongresi*. The collection of *aşar* had always been problematic for the Ottoman authorities since the effective ways of collection were not

¹⁸⁴ Ahmet Mahmut Saraç, *Aşar Vergisinin Kaldırılması* (MA Thesis. Marmara University, 1999), p.46.

found. Furthermore, it was an obstacle to the establishment of central authority. The Sheikh Said rebellion was not immune to the decision taken about the *aşar*.

Furthermore, the abolition of the Caliphate was effective for the outbreak of the rebellion since the Caliphate represented the religious unity of the Muslim subjects from different ethnic identities. When this institution was removed, it was perceived as a further step towards Turkish nationalism. However, this could have been a more rational issue for the members of the *Azadi* who inspired the rebellion. On the other hand, the religious aspect of the decision seems to be more important for the members of the Naqshbandi order since their authority stemmed from their religion and it was the religious titles that gave the chance of being trans-tribal leaders with their political roles.

To sum up, the story of the Kurdish rebellions first tells us that it was the centralization of the government which was very effective at the outbreak of the rebellions mentioned above. In spite of the changing circumstances and differentiation of the governments and tribal leaders, opposition to the centralization policies constituted the most important feature of the Kurdish rebellions. However, as time passed the nationalist aspirations started to be forceful in Kurdish rebellions. It was after the increase of Turkish nationalism and the disintegration of the Ottoman state that the self-awareness of Kurdish intellectuals turned to Kurdish nationalism. Since the Kurdish movement contained many fractions internally, the Kurdish rebellions that I analyzed served as examples of the conflicts between the local tribal leaders and Kurdish intellectuals, and also among Kurdish tribes.

Since this study did not go beyond the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925, it was not mentioned about the future Kurdish rebellions. However, it is helpful to look at these rebellions in order to capture the further evolution of the Kurdish movements. This

study emphasized on the radicalization of the state in centralization policies as time passed and made a connection between these centralization attempts and the Kurdish rebellions. Thus, the following important Kurdish movements after the Sheikh Said rebellion can also give us the chance of pursuing the interrelation mentioned above. There were significant Kurdish uprisings that took place in Ağrı and Dersim in late 1920s and 1930s. The assimilation policies against the Kurds and centralization of the government were regarded as big threats by Kurds since they were also contested against the Ottoman state because of the tax collection and conscription. There were several uprisings in Ağrı starting from 1926. It seems that the compulsory migration, which was a common way to achieve the aims of the government that were mentioned above, constituted one of the most important reasons of the Ağrı rebellion. Since many Kurdish families were being deported to western Anatolia, the Kurdish tribes which were subject to this deportation resisted against the government.¹⁸⁵ After the suppression of the rebellion, the rebels went to Iran. On the other hand, since the government wanted to eradicate all the seeds of the rebellion, there was another military campaign to Ağrı in 1927. Beside that, it was in 1930 that the last Ağrı rebellion took place with the support of the Kurds who came from Iran. İhsan Nuri Pasha was the leader of the rebels who tried to capture the control of Ağrı. The skirmish lasted about one week and many important Kurdish leaders died. After the *tedip and tenkil* in Ağrı, there were other Kurdish regions which were regarded as potential threats to the centre and its assimilating policies by the government. According to a report that was prepared by the Chief of General Staff Fevzi Çakmak and sent to the Ministry of the Interior on September 18, 1930:

¹⁸⁵ Alpay Kabacalı, p. 57.

- 1) During my investigations in the Erzincan province, I realized the need for *tedip and tenkil* for the Aşkirik, Gürk, Dağbey, and Haryi villages which cause economic damage and unrest in the province. (...)
- 2) The Kurds in the centre of Erzincan try to kurdify the Turkish villages and disseminate the Kurdish language among them by making use of *Alevilik*. The Kurdishness could be dominant throughout Erzincan in a few years. Many Turkish villages, which are Turkish in essence but Alevi at the same time, speak Kurdish by giving up their own language since they believed that Alevilik is the same as Kurdishness. After the registration of Rusaray, Mitini, Şınçığı, Kürtkendi, and Kelarik villages which are the reason for the events and the cause of all the villainy in the region, it is necessary to deport the population of these villages to Thrace. Some of the chieftains have to be kept in the centre of the province under police supervision. The necessary steps have to be taken in order to ensure that these Alevi Turkish people speak Turkish.
- 3) It is known that some of the officers in the centre of the province are ethnically Kurdish. For example, the investigating magistrate of Erzincan, Şevki Efendi of Pülümür safeguards Kurds and gathers them in his house in the evenings. It is necessary to deport this man out of the province and all other officers like him.¹⁸⁶

This report was prepared after the suppression of the Ağrı rebellion and the new target was Pülümür. It is obvious that Turkish nation state was decisive to assimilate the Kurds and beside that the centralist policies of the government were more radical than the Ottoman period and early years of the Republic.

Another important Kurdish rebellion in 1930s took place in Dersim. The Dersim rebellion in 1937 was inspired mostly by the tribal leaders who opposed to the government's attempts in the region after the announcement of Tunceli law in 1935. With this law, the city of Tunceli was established and General Abdullah Alpdoğan was appointed as the *Umumi Müfettiş of Tunceli* (General Inspector of Tunceli), who had many extraordinary rights to straighten the Dersim Kurds out.¹⁸⁷ The Dersim rebellion which was led by Seyit Rıza was an attempt to prevent government intervention in the region. Since the government attempted to construct government buildings, schools, and an effective administrative structure in Dersim, it was opposed

¹⁸⁶ Kabacalı, p. 85.

¹⁸⁷ Kabacalı, p. 91.

strongly by the Dersim tribes which were used to living more independently than the other Kurdish groups in Ottoman lands.¹⁸⁸

It seems that all these Kurdish rebellions that took place in the 1920s and the 1930s took root from Kurdish nationalism. However, since this study emphasized on the centralization attempts of the government from the Tanzimat period to the Republican era, also the later rebellions do not seem to be immune to the centralist and assimilating policies of the government. All these rebellions were restricted to some regions and the protagonists were not able to get the support of the Kurds from other regions. Moreover, when it is thought that these rebellions were broke out in the regions where the Ottoman state was also in difficulty to penetrate, one can observe the continuity of the interrelation between the centralization of the state and Kurdish movements in following rebellions after the Sheikh Said rebellion.

The Kurdish rebellions were tried to be examined in a larger context in this thesis and the same thing could be done for the later Kurdish rebellions, which would help to grasp the dynamics of the Kurdish movements and Kurdish nationalism in general. The continuous points between the rebellions which were analyzed in this study and later Kurdish rebellions in the 1920s and 1930s seem to be interesting and could be subject of another study. Having a broader perspective is important and helpful in all studies whatever the subject is; however, it is more vital for the complicated matters like the Kurdish issue.

¹⁸⁸ Baki Öz, *Dersim Olayı*, (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 2004), p. 177.

APPENDIX A

SEVRES TREATY

AUGUST 10, 1920

SECTION III. KURDISTAN

ARTICLE 62

A Commission sitting at Constantinople and composed of three members appointed by the British, French and Italian Governments respectively shall draft within six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia, as defined in Article 27, II (2) and (3). If unanimity cannot be secured on any question, it will be referred by the members of the Commission to their respective Governments. The scheme shall contain full safeguards for the protection of the Assyro-Chaldeans and other racial or religious minorities within these areas, and with this object a Commission composed of British, French, Italian, Persian and Kurdish representatives shall visit the spot to examine and decide what rectifications, if any, should be made in the Turkish frontier where, under the provisions of the present Treaty, that frontier coincides with that of Persia.

ARTICLE 63

The Turkish Government hereby agrees to accept and execute the decisions of both the Commissions mentioned in Article 62 within three months from their communication to the said Government.

ARTICLE 64

If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas.

The detailed provisions for such renunciation will form the subject of a separate agreement between the Principal Allied Powers and Turkey.

If and when such renunciation takes place, no objection will be raised by the Principal Allied Powers to the voluntary adhesion to such an independent Kurdish State of the Kurds inhabiting that part of Kurdistan which has hitherto been included in the Mosul vilayet.

Source: <http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/versa/sevres1.html>

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