

THE ORIGIN OF TURKEY'S KURDISH QUESTION:
AN OUTCOME OF THE BREAKDOWN
OF THE OTTOMAN *ANCIEN RÉGIME*

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THE ORIGIN OF TURKEY'S KURDISH QUESTION:
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by

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Title: The Origin of Turkey's Kurdish Question: An Outcome of the Breakdown of the Ottoman *Ancien Régime*

This thesis looks at the impact of the transformation of Ottoman society from a multi-ethnic, religious and decentralized structure (i.e. the Ottoman *Ancien Régime*) to a modern nationhood on its Kurdish citizens. The roots of the Kurdish discontent with Turkish authority are traced back to the reaction of the Kurdish notables to the centralization reforms of the *Tanzimat* period. The main focus of the thesis is, though, on the period of revolutionary transformation from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. Until the official destruction of the empire, under which the symbols of the Ottoman Muslim *millet* had served as a common bond between Turks and Kurds, the latter stayed devoted to the former's struggle for survival and independence. However, after 1922, and especially from 1924, the radical emergence of the modern identity of the Turkish Republic alienated the Kurdish population and hence came Kurdish rebellions. The thesis argues that the fall of the Ottoman *Ancien Régime* and the subsequent modernization was inevitable, however the methods and the pace of nation-building could have been different; in a sense, more evolutionary than revolutionary in nature. Why that course wasn't opted and how this influenced the Kurdish question of Turkey is analyzed by examining key historical facts of the time through an extensive survey of the literature relating to that early period of the Turkish Republic.

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Başlık: Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorununun Kökeni: Osmanlı 'Eski Rejim'inin
Yıkılmasının Sonucu

Bu tez, Osmanlı toplumunun çok-etnisiteli, dini ve adem-i merkezîyetçi Osmanlıcılık'tan modern bir ulusa radikal bir dönüşüm süreciyle geçişinin Kürt yurttaşlar üzerindeki etkisini ele almaktadır. Her ne kadar tez, Kürt sorununun arka planını Kürt yerel liderlerin Tanzimat dönemindeki merkezileştirme reformlarına dayandırarak 19. yüzyılın ortalarına kadar geriye gitse de, ana odak noktası, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndan Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ne geçiş dönemidir. Tezde, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun resmi olarak yıkılmasına dek, imparatorluğun "Müslüman milleti"ne ait değer ve sembollerinin Türkler ve Kürtler arasında hala bir bağ olarak etkili olduğu ve Kürtleri Türklerin hayatta kalma ve bağımsızlık kazanma davasına bağladığı savunulmaktadır. Ancak 1922'den, özellikle de 1924'ten sonra, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin modern kimliğinin radikal bir biçimde belirginleşmesi Kürt nüfusu yabancılaştırmış, bir tepki olarak Kürt milliyetçiliği güçlenmiş ve buradan da Kürt isyanları doğmuştur. Tez, ulus devletler çağında Osmanlıcılığın çöküşünün kaçınılmaz olduğunu vurgulamakta, ancak ulus-inşasında kullanılan yöntemler ve hızın farklı olmuş olabileceğini savunmakta, "devrimsel yerine evrimsel bir yaklaşım olabilirdi" görüşünü savlamaktadır. Bu yaklaşımın neden hayata geçme şansı bulamadığı ve bunun Türkiye'nin Kürt sorununun nasıl etkilediği, tez boyunca, Türk tarihinin söz konusu dönemiyle ilgili literatürün kapsamlı bir incelemesi yoluyla ortaya konmaktadır.

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PREFACE

One of Turkey's deepest concerns has always been the threat of dismemberment and at the core of this primal fear lies the separatist tendencies among Turkey's largest non-Turkish ethnic group, the Kurds.

In this thesis, an account of the genesis and evolution of the Kurdish question during the early years of the Turkish Republic is presented. (The term “Kurdish question” refers to the problematic of how Kurds will be incorporated into the nation-state of Turkey—or, for that matter, into other neighboring nation-states with Kurdish populations such as Iraq, Iran and Syria.) The emergence of Turkey’s Kurdish question, I argue, was due to neither treason by the Kurds nor oppression by the Turks. It was the inevitable result of transition from a pre-nationalistic, multi-ethnic, religiously-defined and de-centralized empire — which I prefer to call the Ottoman *Ancien Régime* — to a modern nation state. The nature and the pace of this transition, though, are contentious. This thesis argues that the beginning of centralization in the Ottoman Empire in the *Tanzimat* ("Reorganization") period was the earliest root cause of Kurdish discontent: local Kurdish leaders—just like many other local notables throughout the empire—did not want to lose their centuries-old, *de facto* autonomies and established privileges. Added to this was the rise of Kurdish nationalism at the turn of the century. This modern ideology at first merged with and later on surpassed the reaction that the Kurdish notables have shown to

modernization since *Tanzimat*.

A third factor that intensified the problem by reinforcing Kurdish nationalism was the effort of the Republican Turkey to create a strictly secular and nationalist society from the remnants of the Ottoman Empire, which included the Kurds. Turkey's Kurds, most of which had been loyal to the Ottoman State, had difficulty embracing this new regime which offered them nothing but assimilation. This assimilationist policy paradoxically helped Kurdish nationalism, a marginal movement in the Ottoman Empire, to flourish in the formative years of the Turkish Republic.

In other words, this study examines how the Turkish nation building process exacerbated its own Kurdish question.

To be sure, nation building has never been uncomplicated in any part of the world. Yet some European societies had the chance to create nation-states through long and evolutionary processes, which worked through building national markets and consequent socio-economic integration among the different components of the populaces. Other European societies were forced by their elites to more rapid and revolutionary changes, and focused on creating nations through the education and indoctrination of their citizens. Having been late in social modernization, Turkey's founders opted for the latter revolutionary path.

The social impacts of this project have been studied extensively in academia. However studies focusing on the impact of Turkish modernization, and especially of Kemalism, on the Kurdish question are rare. There are good reasons for this: The subject was taboo in Turkey until late 1990's, and it is still a sensitive one. There is an understandable concern for keeping the founding principles of the Turkish Republic intact. However, and arguably, those principles can be better preserved and

advanced if the Turkish intelligentsia understands both the virtues and the mistakes of the early Republican period. A critical examination of the origin of the Kurdish question, similarly, can be helpful to formulate better policies for the future of that question.

This is the mindset behind this thesis. Of course there are other worthy studies that have dealt with the subject, such as that of Kemal Kirişçi and Gareth Winrow¹, however this thesis is focused specifically on the correlation between the Kurdish and Turkish nationalisms of the early republican period.

The method is a literature survey of a wide range of sources relating to this topic. Some sources are focused directly on the Kurdish question; most others are various books and articles that present interesting information about the *zeitgeist* of the era and how it related to the Kurdish situation. Much of these are Turkish language sources.

The thesis carries out a chronological examination of events relating to the Kurdish question in the final decades of the Ottoman Empire and the early republican period. Of course, a study of this size is never enough to shed light on every single particular event or phenomenon relating to the question. Thus, only the most significant ones are taken into consideration.

The first chapter of the thesis is a brief introduction. It also presents a short summary of some of the political science theories that might help us understand and explain the nature of nation-building and the role of elites in such societal changes.

The second chapter, titled "The Ottomans and the Kurds," makes a brief overview of the Kurdish situation in the final century of the Ottoman Empire. The

¹ Kirişçi, Kemal and Gareth M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict* (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997).

Kurdish reaction to the *Tanzimat* reforms to centralize the empire is examined and this structural transformation is explained as the end of the *Ancien Régime* and therefore the earliest root cause of the Kurdish question. In this chapter the differences between the Islamist policy of Sultan Abdülhamid II and the nationalist aspirations of the Young Turks are underlined and how this related to the Kurds is also explained. The chapter also includes a summary of the story of the Kurdish nationalist intellectuals who, without any notable success, tried to create a sense of national identity among the Kurds of the empire.

The third chapter, titled "Kurds during the Turkish War of Liberation," presents an overview of the Kurdish situation during World War I and the consequent Turkish War of Liberation. The rhetoric used by Mustafa Kemal Pasha (Atatürk) to win the Kurds to the national cause is also examined.

The fourth chapter, titled "Post-War Years and the Sheikh Said Rebellion" examines how Kurdish nationalism gained momentum in the aftermath of the Turkish War of Liberation. It also takes a look at the studies of Ziya Gökalp, who made a sociological analysis of Turkey's Kurds and offered an evolutionary strategy to integrate them into society. This chapter gives a detailed account of the way to and the course of the Sheikh Said rebellion, which is a watershed event in the history of the Turkish Republic.

The fifth chapter, "The *Takrir-i Sükûn* and Its Kurdish Discontents" evaluates the impact of *Takrir-i Sükûn Kanunu* ("The Law for the Maintenance of Order") on the Kurdish population of Turkey. It also examines how the Turkish elite of the time was divided between conservatives such as Kazım Karabekir and revolutionaries such as İsmet İnönü and how the vision of the latter dominated the policy towards Kurds in the second half of the 1920s.

The sixth chapter, "The Single Party and the Kurds," explains how the authoritarian political approach and the Turkish ethno-nationalism of the 1930s alienated the Kurdish citizens of Turkey. The chapter also tells about two important post-Sheik Said Kurdish uprisings, the Ağrı (Ihsan Nuri) and Dersim rebellions.

The final chapter is the conclusion.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Turkish Republic has been very much determined by the clash between the Ottoman legacy and the project of creating a secular nation state. The founders of the Republic, who were deeply influenced by the French-Jacobin tradition, were social engineers who thought that they could — and should — create a new nation in modern terms. They admired the nation states of the Western world, with a single nation, a constitutional government, a secular legal system and way of life, and economic development. They wanted to create such a nation from the remnants of the Empire. Their effort for this task is popularly known as the *Türk İnkılabı* ("Turkish Renovation").

This was not an easy task. The remnants of the Empire were neither a single nation, nor a secular society. Thus a social transmutation was thought to be necessary. The crucial point was to replace the traditional sense of identity, which was based on religion, with a modern sense of identity, which would be based on nationalism. Despite all the great effort to assure this conversion, there occurred some serious obstacles. As Kirişci and Winrow note, "Islam had functioned as a kind of transcending bond of national unity among the Moslem population of the Ottoman Empire. The attempt to replace Islam by Turkish nationalism as a new transcending

bond to establish a political community would be only partially successful."²

The argument presented in this thesis is that this "unsuccessful part" of the Turkish Renovation lies in the origin of the Kurdish question in Turkey. The Kurds existed before this social conversion, but their existence was not a "question" *per se*. By the new identity of the Turkish State, the very presence of the Kurds became a question. In this study, I will draw the main lines of the Kurdish issue in the era of "Turkish Renovation" and will try to analyze the origin of the Kurdish question and the responses of the Turkish state.

Nations and Their Origins

Before examining the history of the Kurdish question, taking a look at some of the political theories about the origin of modern nations might be helpful.

People have a tendency to think of their past in terms of their present. The same is true for the sense of identity. It is generally assumed that the concept of nation is a somewhat eternal reality, and nations are in existence from the beginning of history. However, in the words of Hans Kohn, "it is only in recent history that man has begun to regard nationality as the center of his political and cultural activity and life."³ Similarly Benedict Anderson defines nations as "imagined communities," for they were only abstract solidarities.⁴ Ernest Gellner goes further by defining the modern nation as an "invention." He argues,

In fact, nations, like states, are a contingency, and not a universal necessity. Neither nations nor states exist at all times and in all

² Kirişçi and Winrow, p. 14.

³ Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (Toronto: Collier, 1960), p. 13.

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

circumstances. Moreover, nations and states are not the same contingency. Nationalism holds that they were destined for each other; that either without the other is incomplete, and constitutes a tragedy. But before they could become intended for each other, each of them had to emerge, and their emergence was independent and contingent. The state has certainly emerged without the help of the nation. Some nations have certainly emerged without the blessings of their own state. It is more debatable whether the normative idea of the nation, in its modern sense, did not presuppose the prior existence of the state.⁵

Yet other social theorists disagree with "modernists" like Anderson and Gellner and argue that modern nations are not totally rootless; they are based on pre-nationalistic ethnic identities. Anthony D. Smith is a prominent supporter of this view. Smith claims that modern nations are based on a longer development than many scholars are willing to admit. He argues that modern nations are based on much older cultural groups which he calls "ethnie."⁶

Whether modern nations have ethnic origins or not, it is a widely accepted fact that they arose due to a long process of nation-building. According to Kohn, this process included the rise of print capitalism, public education systems, the growth of population, and new information and propaganda techniques.⁷

An important factor in this nation-building process is the role of elites, some of whom consider themselves as the vanguards of national consciousness. Watson, in his book *Nation and States*, summarizes the role of elites as follows:

... A nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they constitute one. It is not necessary that the whole of the population should so feel, or so behave... When a significant group holds this belief, it possesses "national consciousness". Common sense suggests that if this group is exceedingly small (let us say, less than one percent of the population), and does not possess great skill in propaganda, or a strong disciplined

⁵ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 6-7.

⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

⁷ Kohn, p. 18.

army to maintain it until it has been able to spread national consciousness down into much broader strata of the population, then the nationally conscious elite will not succeed in creating a nation, and is unlikely to be able to indefinitely remain in power on the basis of a fictitious nation.⁸

Thus, the role of elites in modern nation-building is significant. In some countries, the formation of the nation-state and the necessary cultural shift for this political goal was forced by the elites and the transformation was very rapid. That is why such cases are generally defined by revolutions. The French Revolution is widely accepted as the mother of all such nationalist revolutions. According to David A. Bell, the radical phase of the Revolution was the moment when "the idea of French as a uniform national language, rather than just the language of an educated elite, acquired the powerful ideological charge which it has retained ever since."⁹

However, not all modern nations arose through such revolutionary acts. In England, for example, the power of elites operated in parallel with existing social, economic and cultural traits and the shift from traditional society to the nation was a long-term evolutionary process. Was that a more healthy and stable way to build a nation?

A political theorist worth noting at this point is Edmund Burke. As a British statesman and political thinker of the eighteenth century, and an ardent critic of the French Revolution, Burke is known traditionally as the founder of political conservatism. He is mostly known for his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), a forceful attack on the principles of the French Revolution and French Enlightenment. The French Enlightenment defined rationalism as the sole and

⁸ Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977), p. 5.

⁹ David A Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 45.

omnipotent guide for humans and their societies. The natural outcome of this conception in the political sphere was the assumption that societies are formed by human will and it is possible to reconstruct them again by human reason. Burke was a radical opponent of this rationalistic political concept. He argued that society is neither a product of human reason nor is it possible to reconstruct it by the same tool.¹⁰

The twentieth-century social philosopher F. A. Hayek inherited some of Burke's views and he regarded the "constructivist" mentality that recognizes no limits to the authority or competence of human reason as a grave threat to the preservation of civilized order. Hayek argued that the preservation of free government and civilized society depends upon man's willingness to be governed by certain inherited rules of individual and collective conduct whose origin, function, and rationale he may not fully comprehend. Thus, any attempt to reconstruct a society by human reason will fail to do so. The attempt will not become what it aims to be — a founder of a new society — but will become only one of the factors that shape the historical experience of that society.

From all of these theoretical arguments, I derive a tridimensional conclusion: First, nations and nation states are modern entities that are formed through the destruction of traditional structures and identities, and the construction of new ones. Second, the builders of these modern entities are, especially in the revolutionary cases, a group of elites who consider themselves as the vanguards of the people. Third, the modernization effort carried out by these elites is destined to be much more problematic and complex from what they envision; because human societies

¹⁰ John MacCunn, "Religion and Politics," In *Edmund Burke: Appraisals and Applications*, ed. by Daniel E. Ritchie (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), p. 191.

can never fully be reconstructed by human will.

This framework may help us understanding the origins of the Kurdish question. I suggest that the origins of the Kurdish question lie first in the destruction of the Ottoman *Ancien Régime*, which was based on a decentralized political structure that gave many privileges to local notables including those of the Kurds. The centralization effort of the *Tanzimat* period sparked the first Kurdish revolts and sewed the seeds of Kurdish self-consciousness. That consciousness, which was merged with the rise of Kurdish nationalism at the turn of the century, reasserted itself when Republican Turkey emerged with an agenda for creating a modern nation from the multi-ethnic remnants of the Ottoman Empire. In other words, the Turkish Republic, paradoxically created a permanent "question" from the ethnic group that it tried to amalgamate.

CHAPTER II

THE OTTOMANS AND THE KURDS

When the Ottoman Empire was still in its pre-modern age, there was not any major ethnic problem that disturbed the Porte. The components (*anasır*) of the Empire had communal autonomies and found spaces to survive in the de-centralized Empire. The very fact that the Empire did not have any ethnic identity helped different ethnicities to co-exist. There was a division based on religious grounds (i.e. the Muslims were superior to the *dhimmis*, i.e. non-Muslim "protected" communities), but ethnic divisions between the single "nation" of Islam were watered down. This so-called *millet* system was one of the great factors that helped the co-existence of different communities under the Ottoman banner.

Contemporary Turks have a tendency to conceive the Ottoman Empire as a "Turkish State," but the Ottomans had a different perception of themselves. Kirişçi and Winrow summarize the Ottoman mind:

In Ottoman society nationality was determined on the basis of a person's membership in a religious community. This was not much different from Western Europe in the sixteenth century when religion constituted the basis of an individual's identity. At a time when Europeans referred to the Ottoman Empire as "Turkey" and to its subjects as "Turks," the Turks thought of themselves primarily as Moslems; their loyalty belonged ... to Islam and to the Ottoman house and state. Moslems basically belonged to the "community of Islam," and were the subjects of the Sultan, their Caliph. For most Moslems ethnic and national identity were not as salient as religious affiliations. As Ziya Gökalp, a leading ideologue of Turkish nationalism, noted 'before [1908], there were Turks, but there was no idea "we are the Turkish nation" in the collective consciousness of that people: in other words, there was no Turkish nation at that time. The

Turks were basically an "ethnic category." Outside observers were able to identify the Turks as a distinct group with their own, separate language, culture and history. Many Turks themselves though had little or no self-awareness of an ethnic identity.¹¹

Kurds, an ethnic group distinct from the Turks and the Arabs, used to live in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire with a *de facto* autonomy that was granted to them. Thanks to the decentralized structure of the empire, the Ottoman government did not interfere in the tribal structure of the Kurds and the Kurds remained loyal to it, uninfluenced from the nationalist sentiments that were carried out from the West. As Kirişçi and Winrow note, "in the late nineteenth century within the Ottoman Empire, the typical Arab, Albanian or Turk was not aware of his separate ethnic identity. Likewise, the Kurds were not ethnically self-conscious. The population of the Ottoman Empire rather identified themselves on religious grounds."¹²

But the *millet* system entered into a period of decay by the rise of the modern nationalistic agendas. In the nineteenth century, the Christian communities of the empire, in a sort of domino effect, started to rebel against the Ottoman State by organizing national uprisings — some of which would end with national liberations. The Ottoman State responded by trying to create an identity that would unite all the components of the empire, regardless of their religion or ethnicity. This idea, known as "Ottomanism" would be the hallmark of the *Tanzimat* ("Reorganization") period, the modernization effort which started in 1839.

However, modernization would bring other challenges which would influence the Muslim components of the Empire and, to a degree, would reap their reaction.

¹¹ Kirişçi and Winrow, p. 22.

¹² Ibid. p. 23.

Kurds were among them.

Tanzimat's Centralization and Its Discontents

The *Tanzimat* reforms, which were announced by the famous *Hatt-i Serif of Gülhane* ("Noble Edict of the Rose Chamber," November 3, 1839), were designed to bring about modernization. Their main goal was to centralize the state administration and increase state revenues by collecting taxes directly from the local population, whereas local notables had been enjoying that privilege for centuries.

Most local notables, however, did not like this idea and hence came their resistance. The reforms were first implemented in provinces close to the center such as Edirne, Bursa, Ankara, Aydın, İzmir, Konya and Sivas. In further provinces, reactions were stronger. The newly established *Meclis-i Vala-yi Ahkam-i Adliye* (Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances) had to postpone the reforms in Trabzon for six years since "the notables were not accustomed to pay taxes to the center."¹³

Tanzimat was destined to clash with the Kurdish notables, too. Hakan Özoğlu explains the relative autonomy of the Ottoman Kurdistan until the mid-nineteenth century, i.e. before the *Tanzimat* reforms were put in practice:

Although the Ottoman state oversaw the function of the Kurdish emirates, organized as districts or *sancaks*, Kurdish rulers enjoyed de facto autonomy, particularly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; the strong emirates were almost in complete control of their own internal affairs, paying only lip service to Istanbul.¹⁴

This was the very structure the *Tanzimat* reforms were intended to change. The

¹³ Musa Çadırcı, *Tanzimat Dönemi'nde Anadolu Kentlerinin Sosyal ve Ekonomik Yapıları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınevi, 1991), p. 197

¹⁴ Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 59

Ottoman state was "desperate to find extra income" in the face of "the challenge posed by the West and to meet the financial responsibilities that such an overwhelming restructuring required." And, "the most logical way to fill the central treasury was to introduce a centralization policy through which the state would collect taxes directly. This, of course, meant diminishing or destroying the existing power structure, which favored the local Kurdish rulers."¹⁵

One of the most prominent of those rulers was Bedirhan Bey of the Botan emirate. The members of the Bedirhan family used to be *mütesellims* (tax collectors) for long and the new centralization policy was a direct challenge to this privilege. Consequently came the Bedirhan revolt of 1847, which was "exclusively a response to the Ottoman recentralization policies."¹⁶ The revolt was an effective one and the Ottoman government had to send a heavily armed army to crush it. Bedirhan Bey surrendered to the Ottoman forces and was sent to Istanbul in 1847. He was later deported to Crete. Yet his revolt would be a source of inspiration for Kurdish nationalists which would appear half a century later.

After the crushing of the Bedirhan revolt, Sultan Abdülmecid was named "the Conqueror of Kurdistan" by the *Meclis-i Vala-yi Ahkam-i Adliye*. Actually the province "Kurdistan" was created in that very year with an Ottoman *irade* (imperial order) dating 13 December 1847, right after the crushing of the revolt. From that year on, the Kurdistan province would exist for seventeen years. The capital of the province was, at first, Ahlat and the province covered Diyarbekir, Muş, Van, Hakkari, Cizre, Botan and Mardin. In the following years, the capital was transferred several times, first from Ahlat to Van, then to Muş and finally to Diyarbekir. Its area

¹⁵ Özoğlu, p. 60

was reduced in 1856 and the province of Kurdistan within the Ottoman Empire was abolished in 1864. Instead, the former provinces of Diyarbekir and Van have been re-constituted.

According to Özoğlu, the Ottoman *salnames* (yearbooks) of this period, reveal "the Ottoman determination to break the traditional power structure in Kurdistan and to implement the almost unprecedented policy of governing the region without delegating any authority to the traditional Kurdish ruling families."¹⁷ However, Tanzimat reforms could actually never be fully implemented in Kurdistan.¹⁸ Centralization efforts faced fierce opposition and led to a second uprising in 1855, the *Yezdan Şer* revolt.

Abdülhamid II and The Sheikh Ubaydallah Revolt

The subsequent period in Ottoman history is the reign of Abdülhamid II, one of the most controversial figures in the whole Ottoman saga. He is criticized widely for the authoritarian nature of his regime. But he was also a modernizer. According to Kemal Karpat,

The reign of Abdülhamid (1876–1909) witnessed the explosive growth of the middle class (split along ethnic-religious lines as Muslim and non-Muslim), of free enterprise, foreign investment, the further privatization of state lands, the professionalization and growth of the bureaucracy, the rise of a new corps of army officers, and unprecedented development in transportation and communication. At no time in its history had the Ottoman society undergone such a profound transformation.¹⁹

¹⁶ Özoğlu, p. 60

¹⁷ Özoğlu, p. 63

¹⁸ Musa Çadırcı, *age*, s. 196

¹⁹ Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 412.

An important Kurdish revolt that took place in the early years of Sultan Abdülhamid's reign — the Sheikh Ubaydallah revolt of 1880-1881, the most notable Kurdish uprising in the late Ottoman Empire — warned him about the fragility of the Kurdish question. Ubaydallah was an extraordinary figure; a religious leader who attempted to break away from the empire to found an independent Kurdish state. That is why Robert Olson describes his revolt as the genesis of Kurdish nationalism.²⁰ However, according to Van Bruinessen, there is no evidence that Ubaydallah succeeded in establishing a sense of national consciousness among the Kurds.²¹ Even the nationalist aspirations of Ubaydallah are under dispute. According to David McDowall, "Shaykh Ubaydallah remains for many the first great Kurdish nationalist, but the evidence is hardly conclusive.... the revolt bore little evidence that it was anything other than the kind of tribal disturbance."²² Kirişçi and Winrow have a similar conclusion: "Apparently, Sheikh Ubaydallah had led a localized revolt in reaction to attempts by the Ottoman authorities to impose more centralized control."²³ McDowall explains that Ubaydallah was not a nationalist in the modern sense, but a tribal leader with great loyalty to the Caliph-Sultan and only seeking regional autonomy:

Henry Trotter, consul-general at Erzurum, made a fine but crucial distinction in the question of loyalty to the Ottoman government which the mirs half a century earlier would readily have understood. "I believe," he reported to his ambassador, "the Sheikh (Ubaydallah) to be more or less personally loyal to the Sultan; and he would be ready to submit to his authority and pay him tribute as long as he could get rid of the Ottoman

²⁰ Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheik Said Rebellion, 1880-1925* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1989), pp. 1-7.

²¹ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kürdistan Üzerine Yazılar* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1993), p. 137.

²² McDowall, p. 53.

²³ Kirişçi and Winrow, p. 42.

officials, and be looked *de lege* as well as *de facto* the ruling chief of Kurdistan." This was consonant with what Trotter had himself been told by his vice-consul in Van a year earlier: that the shaykh was quite willing to pay tribute to the sultan in lieu of taxes. Shaykh Ubaydallah had confirmed this orally when he had met Abbott outside Urumiya. Abbott had asked him whether it was his object to form Kurdistan into a separate Principality, independent of the Porte or merely to weld together its rude components, reduce order out of chaos and become the responsible head of the Kurdish nation, answerable to the Sultan for their good conduct and the collection of taxes? To this the Sheikh replied that nobody ever doubted his loyalty to the Sultan, but that he had a very poor opinion of the Pashas [i.e. the provincial administration]. It would seem that while using the vocabulary of contemporary European nationalism, he was more probably after the resurrection of an autonomous principality as these had existed before the extension of administration under the Ottoman Tanzimat.²⁴

To Abdülhamid, the Ubaydallah revolt, which started in the fourth year of his 33 year old reign, symbolized the dilemma he was facing: He had to centralize the empire to keep it powerful and intact, but centralization was creating a fierce reaction from local notables, and this reaction was threatening the unity of the empire. Along with the Ubaydullah revolt, there was also a revolt in Yemen led by Zaydi imams, and other signs of discontent in various Arab regions. Abdülhamid felt that he had to continue with modernization, but also that he needed to restore some features of the *Ancien Régime*, most notably the autonomy of local notables in Kurdish and Arab regions. He also looked for a new spiritual and ideological bond that would keep the various components of the empire intact. Ubaydallah's contempt with the pashas along with his lip service to the Sultan-Caliph was illustrative. Perhaps, the local Muslim notables of the empire might have been kept at bay by referring to the role of Islam as a source of political unity. Hence came Abdülhamid's policy of "Islamism," through which he would give Islam and the concept of Caliphate a new political role and meaning.

²⁴ McDowall, pp. 55-56.

Abdülhamid and Islamism

To Abdülhamid — who faced the independence of several Christian nations from the Ottoman Empire in the The Congress of Berlin (June 13 - July 13, 1878) — it was clear that it was not possible to keep the non-Muslim components of the Empire under the Ottoman banner for long. But the *millet* (community) of Islam, the core of the Empire, still constituted a single identity. It seemed possible to keep all Muslim ethnic groups united under the Ottoman banner as a single *millet*. Abdülhamid didn't try to realize this goal by simply reiterating the traditional concepts, though. Quite the contrary, he attempted to create a new Muslim *millet*, by giving a novel and much more profound meaning to traditional Islamic concepts such as the Caliphate. While the pre-modern sultans rarely referred to themselves as Caliphs, Abdülhamid both resuscitated the importance and transformed the meaning of this historic title.

Therefore, during the Hamidian regime, Islamism as a new force became the official ideology of the empire. In the process, the *Nakşibendi* order received the Sultan's patronage and became instrumental in organizing the popular basis of Islamism. Yusuf Akçura, one of the prominent critics of the Abdülhamid regime — and the vanguard of another school of thought called "Turkism" — explains the religious tone of Hamidian rule:

The present-day ruler tried to substitute the religious title of Caliph for the terms Sultan and Padişah. In his general policies, religion, i.e. the religion of Islam, held an important place. In the curricula of the secular schools the time allotted to religious instruction was increased; the basis of education was religious. Religiosity and pietism — even if it were external and hypocritical — became the most important means for attracting the protection of the Caliphal favor. The imperial residence of Yıldız was filled with hojas, imams, seyyids, sheikhs, and sherifs. It became a custom to appoint men with turbans to certain civil posts. Preachers were sent among the people to inspire firmness in religion,

strong loyalty to the office of the Caliphate — to the person who occupied that office rather than the office itself — and hatred against the non-Muslim peoples. Everywhere tekkes, zaviyehs, and jamis were built and repaired. Hajis won great importance. During the pilgrimage season, pilgrims passing through the city of the Caliphate were honored by the blessing and favor of the Ruler of the Muslims. Their religious allegiance and loyalty of heart to the office of the Caliphate was sought. In recent years envoys have been sent to the countries of Africa and China thickly populated by Muslims. One of the best means of carrying out this policy has been the building of the Hamidiye-Hijaz Railway. Yet with this political policy the Ottoman Empire resumed the form of a theocratic state that it had tried to abandon in the period of the Tanzimat.²⁵

Obviously Akçura was not pleased with the authoritarian and puritanic nature of the Hamidian regime. But a crucial question was whether this regime and its official ideology was a viable project to save the disintegrating empire. Akçura argued that Islamism was also destined to fail like Ottomanism had, and argued in favor of another formula, Pan-Turkism (*Tevhid-i Etrak*), which will be examined below.

One of the focuses of Sultan Abdülhamid's Islamism would turn out to be Kurdistan. He retreated back from the centralization reforms and, in a sense, followed a policy which was some sort of a return to the *Ancien Régime*. At the same time, he initiated an Islamist policy in order to integrate the Kurds into his new Muslim nation. He flattered them with the Hamidian regiments he formed by recruiting men from their tribes and the courtesy he has shown to the Kurdish notables.²⁶

There were two main motives for forming these units: First, the bellicose

²⁵ Yusuf Akçura, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (Three Policies), ed. by H. B. Paksoy (Istanbul: ISIS Press 1992) Available [online]: http://vlib.iue.it/carrie/texts/carrie_books/paksoy-2/cam9.html [August 12, 2006].

²⁶ According to Mehmet Fırat Kılıç, "establishing Hamidian regiments became a political decision after [Shaik Ubaydallah's] movement." See, Mehmet Fırat Kılıç, *Sheikh Ubeydullah's Movement* (Master's thesis, The Department Of Political Science And Public Administration, Bilkent University, Ankara, November 2003), p. 3.

character of the Kurdish tribes would be incorporated in the Ottoman military power, especially against the Russian and Armenian threats. The second motive was to strengthen the Kurdish loyalty to the Ottoman State by rallying them under the Ottoman banner. Abdülhamid also founded an elite school for the sons of Kurdish tribal chiefs, the *Mekteb-i Aşiret*, and sent out his own Sunni missionaries to mobilize the provincial Muslims for his politics. Even some Alevi chiefs from Dersim sent their sons to the *Mekteb-i Aşiret*.²⁷ Abdülhamid also complimented Kurdish notables by giving them special prizes and offering his personal companionship.

The Hamidian Regiments and the overall Islamist policy proved to be useful and the Sunni Kurdish masses stayed loyal to the Ottoman State in its final decades. The efforts of Kurdish nationalism remained confined in the few intellectual circles that did not have any considerable impact on the Kurdish population. Most Sunni Kurds remained loyal to empire. But since they remained within the concept of the *Ancien Régime*, they would have trouble in fitting into the new regime that would be foretold by the Young Turks and, later on, established by the Kemalists.

The Young Turks and Turkism

The Young Turks (Turkish *Jöntürk* from French *Jeunes Turcs*) were a constitutionalist, progressive, partisan movement which sought to organize a political revolution against the rule of Sultan Abdülhamid. The movement was first established among military students in 1889. With the official establishment of first the Committee of Progress and Union (CPU) and its successor, the Committee of

²⁷ Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the*

Union and Progress (CUP), the Young Turks became members of a political party.

The Young Turks held different views on several political issues. However they also had striking commonalities, especially in regards to their *Weltanschauung*. They were the military or civil elite that had been influenced greatly by the French perception of modernity.²⁸ Although they used the rhetoric of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, the Young Turks "admired authoritarian theories that defended a strong government and enlightenment from above," according to Şükrü Hanioglu. Hanioglu adds that the Young Turks' worldview was based on "biological materialism, positivism, Social Darwinism and Gustave Le Bon's elitism," thus they found egalitarianism "unscientific."²⁹

Among the Young Turks, the most notable Turkish nationalist was the aforementioned Yusuf Akçura. His famous work titled *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (Three Policies), which was a real blueprint for the Pan-Turkist movement — and which is quoted above — gives some highlights on this subject. Akçura, while defending Turkism against the two other policies, namely Ottomanism and Islamism, accepted that there were ample grounds in favor of Islamist policy:

Islam is one of the religions which put much importance on political and social affairs. One of its tenets may be formulated by the saying that "religion and nation are the same." Islam abolishes ethnic and national loyalties of those who embrace it. It also tends to do away with their language, their past and their traditions. Islam is a powerful melting pot in which peoples of various ethnicities and beliefs, produces Muslims who believe they are a body with the same equal rights. At the rise of Islam there was within it a strong orderly political organization. Its constitution was the Koran. Its official language was Arabic. It had an

Ottoman Empire. 1876-1909 (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), pp. 68-111

²⁸ There are different paths to modernism, though. See Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenments* (New York: Knopf, 2004).

²⁹ Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 313.

elected head and a holy seat.³⁰

Akçura, while arguing about some weaknesses of Islamist policy, again could not cease to accept the viability of Islamist project:

In spite of all these forces, which have weakened the power of Islam, religious beliefs are still very influential. We can safely say that among the Muslims skepticism toward their faith and the doctrine of atheism are not yet wide spread. All followers of Islam still seem to be faithful, enthusiastic, obedient believers, who can face every sacrifice for the sake of their religion. Still many Muslims are saying "Thank God, I am a Muslim," before saying "I am a Turk or an Iranian." Still the majority of the Muslims of the world recognize the Emperor of the Ottoman Turks as their Caliph... Moreover, the internal obstacles against this policy are greater in number than those which were unfavorable to the policy of Pan-Islam. For one thing, the Turkish nationalistic ideas, which appeared under the influence of Western ideas, are still very recent. Turkish nationalism — the idea of the unification of the Turks — is still a newborn child. That strong organization, that living and zealous feeling, in short, those primary elements which create a solid unity among Muslims do not exist in Turkishness (*Türklük*). The majority of the Turks today have forgotten their past!³¹

Yet as an outsider to the Ottoman Empire—he was an immigrant from Russia—Akçura was not a central figure in the Young Movement. He was not even a member of the CPU or the CUP. The ideologue that would shape the Turkism of these parties, and the Young Turk movement in general, was Ziya Gökalp, whose nationalism was moderate and pro-Islamic then Akçura's. However there are different views on this matter: Şükrü Hanioglu argues that Yusuf Akçura's race-based Turkism was indeed influential in the early Young Turk movement, specifically after the Congress of 1902. According to Hanioglu, Young Turk publications dating from this period such as *Şura-yı Ümmet* and *Türk* were full of

³⁰ Yusuf Akçura, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (Three Policies), ed. by H. B. Paksoy (Istanbul: ISIS Press 1992) Available [online]: http://vlib.iue.it/carrie/texts/carrie_books/paksoy-2/cam9.html [August 12, 2006].

³¹ Ibid.

Turkist articles. "Until late 1907 CPU propaganda had strong Turkist or even Turkish nationalist themes."³²

This was the period when the Young Turks were still an opposition movement against the Islamist regime of Abdülhamid. What if they had come to power and tried to realize their policy of Turkism? Of course Turkism could irritate the non-Turkish Muslim elements of the empire, and thus lead to its destruction. That's why the Young Turks had to tone down their Turkish nationalism in the period beginning with 1908, the year that they came to power when the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) staged its *coup d'état*. According to Hanioglu:

Undeniably, the leading members of the CPU, and later the CUP, had strong Turkist proclivities, and contrary to what scholarship has maintained until now, this had been the case long before the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913. Articles published in *Şura-yı Ümmet* beginning in 1902, and in *Türk* beginning in 1903, leave no doubt regarding the CUP's predilection for Turkism... Beginning in late 1907, however, the focus on race disappeared from the public propaganda of the CPU because of its incompatibility with Ottomanist propaganda.³³

Hanioglu defines the post-1908 Ottomanism of the Young Turks as "political opportunism." Faced with the reality of a still multi-religious and multi-ethnic empire, "CUP leaders exploited Panturkist, Panislamist, and Ottomanist policies simultaneously. Scholars have too often tried to argue that the CUP adhered to one of these ideologies to the exclusion of others, but such was never the case."³⁴

In other words, the appeal of Turkism as an ideology had to be disregarded in the face of the socio-political reality that the Young Turks faced. Mustafa Kemal would employ a similar pragmatism during the years of the War of Liberation (1919-

³² Hanioglu, p. 295

³³ Hanioglu, pp. 299, 297

³⁴ Hanioglu, p. 298

22), which will be examined in the next chapter.

The Failure of Kurdish Nationalism

In the preceding pages, the nature of the Kurdish revolts in the post-*Tanzimat* were explained as a reaction to the ending of the *Ancien Régime*: Centralization was a major challenge to the long-established privileges of local Kurdish notables and hence came their resistance. However, at the end of the century, a new phenomenon emerged among the Kurds: nationalism. This was not a reaction to modernization as it has been the case in the Bedirhan and Sheikh Ubaydallah revolts. Quite the contrary, this was the very product of modernization itself.

No wonder that this new phenomenon emerged among the Kurdish intelligentsia based in Istanbul or foreign capitals. At the turn of the century — during the Islamist regime of Sultan Abdülhamid — a number of sociopolitical and literary organizations started to advance the cause of Kurdish nationalism. In 1897, the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kurdistan*, was founded by the members of the prominent Bedirhan family, which had spearheaded the revolt of 1847 (This time, it was the Westernized Bedirhans who were taking the charge). *Kurdistan* served as a conduit for the dissemination of Kurdish culture and nationalistic activities. This publication appeared irregularly for several decades in Cairo and some European capitals. In 1908, the Bedirhans and Şerif Pasha of Suleymaniye formed a number of Kurdish literary clubs and an educational society. The Kurdish school in Istanbul educated Kurdish children until it was closed by the authorities in 1909.³⁵ In addition to Istanbul, other centers of Kurdish culture and language were established in

³⁵ Derk Kinnane, *The Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 142.

Diyarbakır, Mosul, and Baghdad.

The Kurdish intelligentsia and their activities, however, had minimal impact outside the major urban areas. In the countryside, the nationalist Kurdish intellectuals were viewed unfavorably by the Kurdish aghas and khans, who regarded them "with hostility and suspicion as carriers of ungodly and revolutionary ideas."³⁶

It was not only the Kurdish but also the Turkish intelligentsia that these traditional Kurdish notables looked at with suspicion. McDowall describes the resentment among religious Kurds against the Young Turk regime as follows:

A number of religious shaykhs began stirring up local feeling against the new regime. Ever since the beginning of Tanzimat the shaykhs had disliked the new vocabulary of the Ottoman reformers that included terms like "nation" and "society" in place of "umma," appealing to abstract and secular concepts rather than loyalty to the sultan and caliph. Sultan Abdülhamid had offered a respite for thirty years; now the alarm bells were ringing again and nowhere more than in eastern Anatolia. "This is the end of Islam," exclaimed the Kurdish Mufti of Kharput, on hearing of revolution.³⁷

Nevertheless, disturbances of the ultra-conservative Kurdish rural leaders did not result in widespread opposition. CUP leaders were wise enough to be political opportunists, and they stuck to the Pan-Islamist rhetoric of Abdülhamid in order to rally the Kurds and other non-Muslims for the preservation of the empire. They revived the Hamidian regiments under the name *Aşiret Alayları* (tribal regiments). Under the Young Turk regime, therefore, most Sunni Kurds remained unaffected by the nationalist aspirations of the modernist Kurdish intelligentsia. The former's

³⁶ In addition to the urban-rural dichotomy that undermined development of unified Kurdish nationalist organizations, intense rivalry among prominent families also undermined Kurdish unity. For example, distrust between the prominent Badr Khan and Abdul Qader families was so intense that spied on each other and provided information to the Ottoman authorities. This type of information proved invaluable to the Porte as she sought to contain the emerging Kurdish rebellion in the crumbling empire. See Kinnane, p. 25.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 96.

loyalty to the Ottoman State would also continue during the war years, the period of 1914-22.

CHAPTER III

KURDS DURING THE TURKISH WAR OF LIBERATION

Right after the fall of the Hamidian regime, the Ottoman Empire entered into a perpetual state of unrest and war that would last for a decade and a half. In 1908 the turmoil in Istanbul gave Austria-Hungary the opportunity to annex Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Italians invaded Tripoli in 1911 and gained sovereignty there in 1912. The two Balkan Wars from 1912 to 1913, the first a complete disaster, and the second less so, cost the Ottomans most of their territory in the Balkans. Ottoman citizens from all over the Empire, including many Kurds, were taken under arms to fight in these conflicts.

But the real slaughter and "total war" started with the Ottoman entry into the Great War in October 1914. By entering the war on the German side, the Ottoman Empire found itself targeted by the greatest armies — and navies — of the world. The British and the French plans to pass the Dardanelles in order to assist their eastern ally, the Russian Czar, resulted in one of the bloodiest battles of the Great War. During this battle, which encompassed a twelve-month period from February 1915 through to the Allied evacuation in December 1915 and January 1916, Ottoman casualties reached 250,000 men, which included many Arabs and Kurds along with the Turkish majority. The epic defense of Gallipoli was a sign that the Ottoman concept of "holy war" — in defense of the Caliphate, Sultanate and *vatan* as a land of Islam — was still powerful among the Muslim citizens of the empire, which included

the Kurds. The Kurds were effective especially in the eastern front. According to McDowall:

.... The Kurds... provided substantial manpower for the Ottoman army. Thousands of Kurdish conscripts perished with the Third Army at Sarikamish, and on other fronts. Naturally, there was an almost universal reluctance to serve in the regular army, but even so, many were enrolled and the greater part of the Ottoman forces in the region was Kurdish.³⁸

McDowall asks, "Why did the Kurds co-operate in government orders so willingly," and argues, "Muslim identity certainly counted for much."³⁹

Also, the Kurdish-Armenian tension was a factor strengthening the Turko-Kurdish religious alliance. The Ottoman authorities recruited Kurds in the war against the Armenian insurgency. When Russian forces entered the Kurdish area during the war, many Armenians welcomed them as liberators and aided the Russians in their slaughter of the Kurds. This threat — and the heavy-handed response to it — was an important factor that united Kurds and Turks in World War I. According to Hassan Arfa, "the Kurds fought bravely against the Russians, responding loyally to the Sultan-Khalif's appeal for the Holy War."⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the nationalist Kurdish intelligentsia had its own agenda. They saw the Great War as an opportunity to find political support for their popularly weak effort of Kurdish nationalism. They had contacts with the allies and received their support at the Paris Peace Conference. Şerif Pasha, a Kurdish ex-general of the Ottoman army and the champion of the Kurdish nationalist cause, attended the Peace Conference, signed an agreement with the Armenians in favor of an independent

³⁸ Ibid. p. 105.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 104.

⁴⁰ Hassan Arfa, *The Kurds: A Historical and Political Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 26.

Kurdish state and gained support from the Allies. The document that Şerif Pasha issued jointly with Boghos Nubar, the Armenian representative, on November 20, 1919, read:

We are in complete agreement in jointly seeking from the [Peace] Conference the constitution, in accordance with the principals of nationalities of a united and independent Armenia and independent Kurdistan, with the assistance of a Great Power... We confirm moreover our complete agreement to respect the legitimate rights of the minorities in the two states.⁴¹

For the nationalist Kurds, this was a welcome move. Sheikh Abdul Kadir and several of the Bedirkhans, along with Ekrem Cemilpashazade of Diyarbakır, expressed their satisfaction.⁴² Yet Şerif Pasha's initiative received only condemnation from the conservative Kurdish leaders in Anatolia, who favored the newly emerging resistance against the Allies. Kirişçi and Winrow note,

Kurdish participation in the resistance movement was further strengthened after news arrived from the Peace Conference in Paris in November 1919 that the Kurdish national representative Şerif Pasha had reached a deal with the Armenians... The revulsion among Kurds at this news led to a number of telegrams being sent to Paris. In these it was argued that the Kurds did not want to separate from Turks. Ten Kurdish tribal leaders from Erzincan sent a telegram to the French High Commissioner in Istanbul protesting at Şerif Pasha's actions. They declared that Turks and Kurds were "brothers in terms of race (*soy*) and religion." Similar telegrams critical of Şerif Pasha and expressing solidarity between Kurds and Turks were also sent to the Ottoman parliament in January 1920, two days before the adoption of the National Pact. In March 1920 a declaration stressing Islamic solidarity and opposition to efforts to separate Kurds and Turks was signed by 22 Kurdish tribal leaders.⁴³

This was the dominant attitude in Kurdish society in the aftermath of the Great War. Turkey was being carved up by the Allies and some Kurdish nationalists like

⁴¹ McDowall, p. 131; FO 371/4193 File 44/156272 of 28 November 1919.

⁴² Ibid.

Şerif Pasha were seeking to get a piece of the pie in favor of a Kurdish state.

However, they constituted a minority.

Major Noel and His Failure

Meanwhile, the British were hoping to use the Kurds as leverage against the Turks for their regional designs, which included the creation of Armenia. One of the proposed agents of this plan was Major E.W.C Noel, who had been the assistant to the British Political Resident in the Persian Gulf and was sent to Turkey in 1919. Noel's mission was to explore the possibility of winning Kurds to the British side, in way similar to what Lieutenant-Colonel T. E. Lawrence had achieved with his role during the Arab Revolt of 1916-18.

In a letter to Earl Curzon and dated July 10, 1919, the Istanbul-based Admiral Sir A. Callthorpe, to whom Noel was responsible, assessed the Kurdish situation and possible policies. He said,

Major Noel thinks great advantage might be gained from every point of view by assistance of Kurdish Chiefs along Northern mountain frontier of Mesopotamia. Those who are in Constantinople now are (1) Abdul Kadir, whose territory is most easterly, (2) the Bedirkhans, the most known and respected family in Kurdistan (both of these representing feudal system) and (3) less powerful representatives of more sedentary population... who however occupy high posts in Turkish bureaucracy here. I have acceded to proposal that representatives of these three shall return to Kurdistan not altogether [sic] with but separately from Major Noel so as not to connect them intimately but with object of joining him there in order to track through country for purpose in first place of impressing on tribes necessity for maintaining order.

The two latter requested that I would guarantee safety of their families during their absence for they stated Kurdish Club at Diarbekir has been closed by orders of Turkish Government: that certain Kurds who had

⁴³ Kirişçi and Winrow, p. 79.

welcomed Noel on his journey hither had subsequently been molested and that owing to Kurdish national movement and their petition to Peace Conference which had become known to Turks they felt you might be alarmed on general lines...

In second place they show great anxiety as to activities of Musttapha [*sic*] Kemal who has splendid material for propaganda in occupation of Smyrna and in rumours of independence of Armenia as well as in... Kurdish tribes. They wish to know whether this High Commission would be ready to shut their eyes to any action they might take against him.⁴⁴

Those Kurdish leaders who wanted permission from the British to take action against Mustafa Kemal were a certain type of Kurds, tough. Based on his observations about these Istanbul-based notables, Callthorpe, in the same letter, commented, "I have been very much struck by the wideness of present breach between Kurds and Turks and it must of course not be forgotten that former are not very strict Moslems, a large percentage indeed not being Moslems at all."⁴⁵

In fact, those "not Muslim at all" Kurds were a minority in the Kurdish population of the empire. Among those with strong Islamic feelings, on the other hand, the idea of solidarity with Turks was indeed strong. Major Noel observed this phenomenon during his mission. According to Mim Kemal Öke, who analyses the British major's numerous letters and memos to his superiors, "Noel stressed that there were two main trends among the Kurds, the 'Islamists' and the 'nationalists.'" He believed that it would be more advantageous to Britain to support the nationalists, because Turks were cooperating with the Islamists.⁴⁶

Noel's alliance with Bedirhans and other prominent Kurdish nationalists did

⁴⁴ Bilal N. Şimşir, *İngiliz Belgelerinde Atatürk (1919-1938)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1992), vol I, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Mim Kemal Öke, *İngiliz Ajanı Binbaşı E.W.C. Noel'in "Kürdistan Misyonu" (1919)* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1989), p. 51-52.

not bear fruit, and after some skirmish with the Kemalist movement (Mustafa Kemal ordered Noel's arrest along with the latter's partner, Ali Galip, who had conspired against the participants of the Sivas Congress), he had to leave Anatolia. In late September 1919, in the last days of mission, when approached by old Kurd who had some complaints about the Turks, Noel reacted, "come on, you still love the Turks in depths of your hearts and you just can't do without them."⁴⁷

"Kurdistan" in The Treaty of Sèvres

Kurdish nationalists' efforts for an independent Kurdistan found support in The Treaty of Sèvres signed on August 10, 1920. This document included an article that argued,

... If Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 (Southeastern and some parts of Eastern Turkey) 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.

So the point was — or at least shown to be — the will of the Kurdish population. If the "majority of the population" in the Kurdish areas opted for independence from Turkey, the Council of the League of Nations (which were dominated by the Allies) would give them support and therefore independence would come. This indicates that the Kurdish nationalists who were lobbying in the Western capitals did succeed in finding political support for their cause.

⁴⁷ Öke, p. 99

The Koçgiri/Dersim Revolt

In 1920-21, during the early days of the Turkish War of Independence, an uprising, led by the influential Koçgiri tribe, broke out among the Alevi Kurds of western Dersim and Sivas. A large number of local leaders united behind the demand of autonomy for Kurdistan. They sent telegraphic ultimatums to the Grand National Assembly demanding the release of Kurdish prisoners, the withdrawal of non-Kurdish officials from Kurdistan, the recognition of autonomy, and later even complete independence.⁴⁸ Their proposed Kurdistan included Sunnis and Alevis, and Kurmanji and Zaza speakers.

Support from other segments of Kurdish society was, however, not available. Therefore the Kemalist troops were able to suppress this revolt without much trouble. Most Sunni Kurds at the time saw it as an Alevi uprising and they saw no reason to support it.⁴⁹ This was a sign that, despite the heterodox Alevis, the orthodox Sunni Kurds still saw their fate as tied to the Turks.

The difference between the Sunni and Alevi Kurds on the issue of cooperation with the Turkish authorities had some precedence. When the Kurdish nationalist intelligentsia had tried to gain popular support in the Kurdish areas, it was the Alevis that showed a considerable interest. According to McDowall,

Kurdish nationalists, particularly those who explored the chances for a Kurdo-Armenian alliance, could only mobilize national feeling among those who felt least threatened by Armenian ambitions. Of these the clearest group was Alevi, which did not share the fear felt by many Sunni Kurds further east...When the *Kurdistan Ta'ali Jamiyati* was formed in Istanbul at the end of the Great War, one or two Alevis were among

⁴⁸ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaik and State*, p. 280.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 278.

them... who opened party branches among the Kuchgiri tribal group. The establishment of these branches was the prelude to a major rising in November, led by Alishan Beg against the Kemalists.⁵⁰

McDowall goes on further to describe the situation of the Alevi Kurds:

This (Kuchgiri revolt) was not the first occasion on which the Alevi had crossed swords with the Kemalists, for they had tried to foil the Sivas Congress in September 1919 by blocking the Pass of Erzincan. They were hostile to the recovery of the Turkish state, because this suggested growing control of Dersim, which had been temporarily subdued for the first time only in 1878... The nationalist rhetoric employed by Kuchgiri leaders had evinced no perceptible response from the Kurdish masses.⁵¹

Thus, the failure of the Koçgiri Revolt was due mainly to its Alevi character and the loyalty of the Sunnis to the Turkish rule. According to David McDowall, "S Sunni tribes... had already committed themselves to the Kemalists who, at this juncture, had not yet even hinted at the Turanic and secularist ideology they would subsequently impose."⁵²

A manifestation of this phenomenon was the close cooperation between the Sunni Kurdish leaders and the leader of the Ankara government, Mustafa Kemal Pasha, thanks to the latter's strong pan-Islamic rhetoric.

Mustafa Kemal and the Kurds

An important reason for the failure of the Dersim uprising is that many other chieftains of Dersim, as well as of other parts of Kurdistan, had strong confidence in Mustafa Kemal and supported his cause. Many local Kurdish leaders knew Mustafa Kemal personally, for he had been appointed the commander of the 16th Army Corps

⁵⁰ McDowall, p. 184.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 185-86.

⁵² Ibid. p. 186.

at Diyarbakır in 1916. He had stopped Russian advances and many, not unnaturally, considered him as their protector.

Moreover, he had made friends with many chieftains, and assured them of his love for the Kurds. He had invited prominent Kurds, even Kurdish nationalists, to the Erzurum and Sivas congresses, and he promised that Kurds and Turks would have equal rights in independent Turkey. In the first Representative Committee (*Heyet-i Temsiliye*) a few Kurds were appointed, and in the Grand National Assembly the Kurds were proportionally represented. At the beginning of the first rebellion in Dersim, Mustafa Kemal invited the instigators for talks. The only one who went, Alişan (chieftain of the Koçgiri tribe), was made a candidate for the Assembly.⁵³

In 1919-21 Mustafa Kemal's contacts with Kurdish chieftains appeared to be better than those of the Kurdish nationalist organizations that were seeking opportunities for creating a Kurdistan in the borders of the *Misak-ı Milli*. (These were continuations of the Kurdish organizations that were active in the pre-War era.) As the *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* (Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan) of Diyarbakır told Major Noel, in spite of a general nationalist feeling, they had been deterred from proclaiming an independent Kurdistan, "owing to the Turks having won over two of the principal local notables who are influential among surrounding tribes."⁵⁴

McDowall comments on this "Ottomanist" policy of the Ankara government and Mustafa Kemal Pasha:

Until the foundation of the republic and the crystallization of ideology in 1923, the Kemalists envisaged, or pretended to, a Muslim state,

⁵³ For details, see; Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaik and State*, p. 278-79.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 279.

composed of the Kurdish and Turkish remnants of the empire. This was implicit in the National Pact, and explicit in Kemalist action and utterance. Mustafa Kemal was perfectly aware of Kurdish separatist tendencies, of the Kurdish clubs in Istanbul and of the dangerous implications of the Noel mission. There was a Kurdish question undoubtedly, but at this stage its threat was as a Trojan horse for the British or the Armenians to wrest eastern Anatolia from Ottoman control... Mustafa Kemal pragmatically stressed the unity of Turks and Kurds, condemning foreign (essentially British) plots to wean the Kurds away. This was consonant with the resistance movement already operating when Mustafa Kemal arrived in Anatolia. For the Society for the Defense of Rights of Eastern Anatolia was already issuing rallying calls that appealed to Kurdo-Turkish unity. Such calls appealed to unity centered on the controlling religious idea of empire.⁵⁵

Mustafa Kemal Pasha, emphasized this idea of unity in September 1919 as follows:

As long as there are fine people with honor and respect, Turks and Kurds will continue to live together as brothers around the institution of the Caliphate, and an unshakeable iron tower will be raised against internal and external enemies.⁵⁶

He was also keen to emphasize that the nation was not a single ethnicity but "a mixture of one Muslim element." "Do not imagine," he told the Great National Assembly,

that there is only one kind of nation within these borders. There are Turks, Circassians and various Muslim elements within these borders. It is the national border of brother nations whose interests and aims are entirely united... the article that determines this border is our one great principle: around each Islamic element living within this homeland's borders there is a recognition and mutual acceptance in all honesty to their race, tradition and environment... God willing, after saving our existence, this will be solved among brothers and will be dealt with.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ McDowall, p. 187.

⁵⁶ "Sizler gibi dindar ve namuslu büyükler oldukça Türk ve Kürt birbirinden ayrılmaz iki öz kardeş olarak yaşayacaktır, Makam-ı Hilafet etrafında sarsılmaz bir vücut halinde iç ve dış düşmanlarımıza karşı demirden bir kale halinde kalacakları şüphesizdir."; *Atatürk'ün Tamim, Telgraf ve Beyannameleri*, ed. Nimet Arsan, vol. 4 (Ankara: Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Yayını, 1964), p. 71.

⁵⁷ "Meclis-i âlinizi teşkil eden zevat yalnız Türk değildir, yalnız Çerkes değildir, yalnız Kürt

Even apart from the confidence that Mustafa Kemal inspired, it is not surprising that many Kurdish chieftains turned to him: He had power that he might delegate to them, whereas the nationalist Kurdish organizations did not. The latter might count on the Allies' good will and on the provisions of Sèvres but most chieftains thought that the Allies were in the first place the Armenians' friends, not the Kurds. Mustafa Kemal was the most likely person to protect Kurdish lands from Armenian claims.

Thus, in November 1919 the Kurdish delegation at the Peace Conference saw its efforts to convey the demands for Kurdish independence protested by a series of telegrams to the Peace Conference from Kurdish chieftains declaring that they did not want separation from the Turks.⁵⁸

Admiral Sir J. M. de Robeck, the British High Commissioner in Istanbul, also had noted the role of pan-Islamic sentiments among Kurds in his "confidential" letter to Earl Curzon, dated September 27, 1919. As for "Mustafa Kemal Pasha's movement and the situation in Kurdistan," Robeck noted, "There can be no doubt that, whatever progress the Kurdish national movement has made, there is a large body of ignorant Kurdish sentiment which looked to the Sultan-Caliph for guidance."⁵⁹

The same "ignorant Kurdish sentiment" ensured loyalty to the Ankara

değildir, yalnız Laz değildir. Fakat hepsinden mürekkep (oluşan) anasır-ı İslamiye'dir, samimi bir mecmuadır. Binaenaleyh bu heyeti aliyenin temsil ettiği, hukukunu, hayatını, şeref ve şanını kurtarmak için azmettiği emeller, yalnız bir unsur-u İslam'a münhasır değildir. Anâsır-ı İslamiye'den mürekkep bir kütleye aittir.... Bu mecmuayı teşkil eden her bir unsur-u İslam, bizim kendimiz ve menafii (menfaatleri) tamamiyle müşterek olan vatandaşımızdır ve yine kabul ettiğimiz esasatın ilk satırlarında bu muhtelif anasır-ı İslamiye ki vatandaşlardır, yekdiğerine karşı hürmeti mütekebile ile riayetkârdırlar ve yekdiğerinin her türlü hukukunun, ırkı, içtimai, coğrafi hukukuna daima riayetkârdırlar."; *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri*, vol. 1 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1985), p. 73.

⁵⁸ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaik and State*, p. 281.

⁵⁹ Bilal N. Şimşir, *İngiliz Belgelerinde Atatürk (1919-1938)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu

government, thanks to its strong pan-Islamic rhetoric. Mustafa Kemal, was aware that he had to keep Kurdish ethnic feelings at bay in order to win the War of Independence. His pro-Kurdish language continued well through 1923, the year that the Turkish Republic was born. According to Cemil Koçak, Mustafa Kemal promised "autonomy or some sort of limited self-government" to the Kurds in 1923, at an interview he gave to a group of journalists in İzmir.⁶⁰ However, according to Koçak, "his actual final goal was a unitarian state, like the one [Turks] have today."⁶¹

Yayımları, 1992), vol I, pp. 115-116; The Foreign Office number of the letter is 1758/M/1743

⁶⁰ Neşe Düzel, Interview with Cemil Koçak, "Atatürk 'Kürtlere Özerklik Verilecek' Dedi," *Radikal*, November 13, 2006

⁶¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

THE POST-WAR YEARS AND THE SHEIKH SAID REBELLION

It was the last days of May 1921. Two important men who had left Samsun were on their way to Ankara, traveling on a spring carriage. One of them was Rıza Nur, and the other one, who had just returned from exile in Malta after one and a half years, was Ziya Gökalp. Years later, as well as praising him, Rıza Nur would complain about the quietness of his companion:

Ziya was the only thinker and scholar within the *İttihatçı* (Unionist) ranks. The country should have benefited from him. We had been on the opposite sides for 10 years. But, when it comes to the homeland, things are different. Men with merit should take charge. But he does not talk much. He usually sulks, unless you ask him something. And he is very brief when he speaks. We are on our way to Ankara, traveling on spring carriages.⁶²

One of the issues that Gökalp talked about was the social structure of new Turkey. Gökalp, then, was thinking that it was necessary to formulate a Kurdish policy to be implemented after the War. He mentioned to Rıza Nur that it was necessary to establish a research institute for this.⁶³

Following their arrival in Ankara, Rıza Nur became the Health Minister. But

⁶² "Ziya, İttihatçılar'ın içinde yegane bir düşünür kafa ve âlim adamdı. Memleket ondan istifade etmeli. Vakıa on yıl muhasım (karşıt) saflarda bulunduk. Ama vatan işi başka. Kıymetli adamları iş başına koymalı. Yalnız pek az konuşuyor. Siz sormazsanız, hep somurtuyor. Laf ağzından damla damla çıkıyor. Yaylılarla beraber Ankara'ya gidiyoruz."; Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, vol 3 (İstanbul: Altındağ Yayınevi: 1968), pp. 816-817.

⁶³ Ali Nüzhet Göksel, *Ziya Gökalp'in Neşredilmemiş Yeni Eseri ve Aile Mektupları*, (İstanbul: Diyarbakır'ı Tanıtma Derneği, 1956), pp. 8-9.

Ziya Gökalp was assigned to a lower rank at the Ministry of Education. He did not stay there long, and in autumn he moved back to Diyarbakır his place of birth. Not long after that, Rıza Nur sent a letter to Gökalp asking him to research Kurdish tribes living in the east, thinking, "The country should have benefited from him." Rıza Nur was to describe this later, as below:

While I was working as the Minister of Health, which coincided with the revolt, I asked Ziya Gökalp to research the Kurds. I wanted to collect this information to learn about the scientific and economic aspects of the issue so that I could take action to tell the Kurds that they are actually Turkish. As far as I know, these people, who are now called Kurds, are actually Turkish. But they need to be told and taught that.⁶⁴

Consequently, Gökalp did a study and wrote a paper titled *Kürt Aşiretleri Hakkında Tetkikler* (Investigations About Kurdish Tribes) and submitted it to the government in Ankara. Gökalp, as a sociologist, knew how important the issue was, and until his early death in 1924, he wrote many significant essays for various magazines on Kurds and how inseparably integrated Kurds and Turks were.

Ziya Gökalp's Observations

Gökalp pointed out several important points in his essays. First, according to him, the main difference between Turkish and Kurdish peoples was their ways of life: Turks were settled as opposed to the nomadic Kurds. The former lived in cities whereas the latter lived on mountains. And this social difference also implied a possibility of transformation between the two. In Gökalp's words,

⁶⁴ "Sıhhiye vekili iken, isyanın da o vakit bu vekaletle ait olmasından istifade ederek, Ziya Gökalp'e Kürtler'i tetkik ettirdim. Maksadım, bu gibi malumatı toplayıp vaziyeti ilmi, iktisadi bir surette öğrendikten sonra, Kürtler'e Türk olduklarını anlatmak için teşkilat yapıp faaliyete geçecektim. Bugün Kürt denilen bu adamların çoğunun Türk olduğunu bilirim. Yalnız onlara bunu bildirmek, öğretmek lazımdı."; Ziya Gökalp, *Kürt Aşiretleri Hakkında Sosyolojik Tetkikler*, ed. Şevket Beysanoğlu, (İstanbul: Sosyal Yayınlar, 1992), p. 6.

As Turks have more aptitude towards urban civilization, the cities have become the centers of Turkishness, and Kurdish people who arrive at those places later are being Turkified. However, the Turkomans, on the other hand, who live in villages and in tents, have more tendencies to Kurdishness, who are more resilient under desert conditions.⁶⁵

Under these conditions, concluded Gökalp, it was necessary to transform nomadic Kurds in the mountains into a settled urban community, not only to integrate them with Turks but also to modernize them. Thus Gökalp, in his report, argued for moving Kurds to plain areas and making them land owners. Otherwise, the “mountain life” would always be a source of problem:

First, the rugged mountains do not allow subsistence by agriculture. Second, they lack government infrastructure. For these two reasons the mountaineers are impelled to get armed and attack the plain areas, which means that the people living in the plain areas are always under a threat, facing constant danger. They have to get arms, just like the people living at the edge of the desert, and they have to become armed tribes, too. In order to give the settled tribes a break there is only one solution. This solution is to move the people that live on the mountains to plain areas and give them land to settle. What is the point of living in the mountains, which do not allow agriculture when we have so much empty yielding plain areas? Dersim is a mountain of this kind and that’s why we have incidents there every year.”⁶⁶

Gökalp also pointed out to another problem, which allowed the aghas in the region to exploit the populace, i.e. the *iltizam* regime:

İltizam means selling of the government property right to an individual

⁶⁵ "Türkler şehir medeniyetine daha istidatlı olduklarından şehirler Türklük merkezi halini almakla beraber, oralara gelen Kürtler'i de Türkleştirmektedir. Köylerde ve çadırlarda yaşayan Türkmenler ise, sahra medeniyetinde daha kuvvetli bulunan Kürtlüğe temessül etmektedirler."; Ibid. p. 130.

⁶⁶ "Sarp dağlar, evvela, içindeki ahaliyi ziraatla geçindiremez. Saniyen, hükümetin tedibatından masundur. Bu iki sebep dağlıları, müsella (silahlı) yaşamaya ve ovaların zengin köylerine tecavüz etmeye sevkeder. Demek ki bu ovaların ahali de daimi bir tehdit, daimi bir tehlike altındadır. Bunlar da çöl ağzındaki halklar gibi silahlanmak, müsella (silahlı) bir aşiret olmak mecburiyetindedir... Mukim (yerleşik) aşiretlere nihayet vermek için yalnız bir çare vardır. Bu çare, sarp dağlarda oturan halkların ovalara indirilmesi, orada arazi verilerek yerleştirilmesidir. Bu kadar mahsuldar (verimli) ve boş ovalarımız varken, ziraat kabiliyeti olmayan sarp dağlarda oturmanın ne manası vardır? Dersim de böyle bir dağ olduğu içindir ki her sene orada vukuat eksik olmuyor."; Ibid. p. 47.

from the public in exchange of money. If a sinister person becomes a *mültezim* (the one who owns iltizam) he could do evil against peasants. This is partly the reason why peasants become slaves once they hand in their lands to the aghas. Disestablishing the iltizam regime would also benefit the Anatolian villages too.”⁶⁷

Gökalp also argued that Kurds were not accustomed to being soldiers, and they did not wish to serve in faraway places, as they did not have “an established sense of homeland.” He suggested establishing local battalions from them and guiding those who wished towards getting involved in other employment such as “construction and public works.”⁶⁸

In short, he thought the problem in the region stemmed from the Kurdish life style (i.e. mountain life), their tribal social structure, and suggested transforming these structures into settled and more modern forms with the help of social and economic reforms. According to Gökalp’s sociology, new dynamics such as urban life, development of commerce and education would lead to widespread use of Turkish and help to integrate Kurds into Turkish culture while preserving their own identity.

Another important point of Gökalp’s work would be his emphasis on the shared beliefs and values of both communities and unity of their history. In his famous essay titled *Türkler ve Kürtler* (“Turks and Kurds”), dated June 5, 1922, he wrote:

The fact that both Turks and Kurds gave same significance and value to our Milli Misak (National Borders) shows that the faithful connection and loyal attachment between both communities is sincere beyond

⁶⁷ "İltizam usulü hükümet hakkının para mukabilinde, ahaliden bir ferde satılması demektir... Fena bir adam mültezim olunca, köylülere de her türlü fenalığı yapabilir. İşte, köylülerin bir ağa bularak arazisini ona ferağ ettikten sonra onun esareti altına girmesi, kısmen bu iltizam usulü yüzündendir... İltizam usulü kaldırılırsa, Anadolu köyleri için de büyük bir nimet olur."; Ibid. p. 48.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 48.

imagination. As a matter of fact, our Country has not suffered from the Kurds since *Meşrutiyet* (Constitutional Monarchy). Is it not a fact that these faithful people have given us a friendly hand and shared our sorrows during our most catastrophic days, such as the Balkan Wars and Armistice? Is not it true that same loyal people are now taking part in the Liberation Struggle with all of its ranks, and shouting “all or nothing” together with the Turkish people? ... Such historical examples show that Turks and Kurds are friends who always fought with faith in order to protect our special land from the enemy and our holy religion from any disturbances.”⁶⁹

In the last paragraph of his essay he claims, “Turks and Kurds are united both physically and spiritually as they have shared a religion, history and geography for a thousand year,” and finishes by declaring, "No Turk is a Turk unless he likes Kurds, No Kurd is a Kurd unless he likes Turks."⁷⁰

Gökalp was born and grew up in Diyarbakır, and he knew the region well. Furthermore, he was one of the pioneers of sociology in Turkey and able to investigate events with sociological depth. Based on such knowledge and experience, he established a policy that he thought needed to be implemented in the East of Turkey:

1) A socio-economic development project should transform the Kurds into settled agricultural life.

2) The “brotherhood” between Kurds and Turks needed protection, and to achieve that the common beliefs, values and historical unity needed to be upheld.

Gökalp’s study was re-produced as four copies. One of the copies was directly

⁶⁹ "Milli misakımızın Türkler'le Kürtlere aynı kıymeti, aynı ehemmiyeti vermesi gösteriyor ki, bu iki millet arasında vefa bağları, sadakat rabitaları her türlü tasavvurun fevkinde bir samimiliğe malikdir. Filhakika Meşrutiyet'ten beri devletimiz Kürtler yüzünden hiç bir rahatsızlığa uğramadı... Balkan Harbi gibi, Mütareke zamanları gibi en felaketli günlerimizde, bize dostluk elini uzatan, bizimle samimi dert ortaklığı eden bu vefalı millet değil miydi? Bugün İstiklal Mücadelesi'ne de bütün heyetiyle iştirak edip Türkler'le beraber 'hep yahut hiç!' diyen bu sadakatli millet değil midir?... İşte bu tarihi misaller gösteriyor ki, Türkler'le Kürtler, muazzez vatanımızı düşmandan, mukaddes dinimizi fesattan esirgemek için daima birlikte cihada atılmış iki dost millettir.”; Ziya Gökalp, *Küçük Mecmua*, edition 1, June 5, 1922, quoted in Ibid. p. 115-117.

sent to Mustafa Kemal Pasha, who praised the work. The government asked Gökalp to extend his study, but he was ill and had no one to help him. Therefore, the study was postponed to the post-war period. However, Gökalp did not live long after peace was established. He could not continue his research on the Kurds and study Turkish sociology, an issue in which he was particularly interested. He died in poverty.

An important detail of the foregoing events is the fact that Rıza Nur, who had commissioned the study from Ziya Gökalp, had a very different perspective. From the beginning, it was his objective to “tell Kurds that they are actually Turkish.” That was what he had in mind and he was willing to achieve that with or without the help of sociologists such as Gökalp. The approach of people who thought like Rıza Nur would become more dominant, and Kurdish policy in following years would be drawn up on such line of thinking.

And also, according to Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, Mustafa Kemal was not, in general, inclined to Ziya Gökalp’s thinking.⁷¹ (Other scholars such as Niyazi Berkes,⁷² Kemal Karpat,⁷³ Erol Güngör⁷⁴ and Taha Parla⁷⁵ also pointed out that there were important differences between the revolutionary Kemalism and evolutionary Gökalp with regards to several issues.)

The revolutionary approach was going to get more radical over the Sheikh Said rebellion, and starting from the *Takrir-i Sükûn Kanunu* ("The Law for the

⁷⁰ Ziya Gökalp, *Kürt Aşiretleri Hakkında Sosyolojik Tetkikler*, p. 118.

⁷¹ Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *Tek Adam*, vol. 3 (Istanbul: Remzi Yayınevi, 1981), p. 180.

⁷² Niyazi Berkes, *Türkiye’de Çağdaşlaşma* (Istanbul: Doğu-Batı Yayınları, 1978), p. 521.

⁷³ Kemal Karpat, *Türk Demokrasi Tarihi* (Istanbul: Afa Yayıncılık, 1996), p. 62.

⁷⁴ Erol Güngör, *Türk Kültürü ve Milliyetçilik* (Istanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 1987), p. 228 – 230.

⁷⁵ Taha Parla, *Ziya Gökalp, Kemalizm ve Türkiye’de Korporatizm* (Istanbul: İletişim yayınları, 1993).

Maintenance of Order") period, which was initiated to quash the Sheikh Said rebellion, a radical project that ignored the ethnicity and culture of Kurds and aimed at telling them that they were “actually Turkish” would be implemented.

From *Anâsır-ı İslamiye* to a Modern Nation

The nation state is an important element of modernity. In the course of modernization, nation states have been formed, albeit in different ways, and gathered people under their authority. Modernization, nation-building and nation states are directly linked to, and supportive of, each other.

The two most important historical achievements of Atatürk were winning the War of Independence and transforming Turkey into a modern nation-state. Some of the discourses and policies required to achieve these two different targets had to differ. The policies of the War of Independence and the “modernization” policies implemented after the victory had their own specific priorities. For the first target, the main priority was to unite all ethnic groups that lived inside the borders of Turkey in order to win the National Struggle and free the country from the occupying forces, without emphasizing any one of them in particular. The term *Anâsır-ı İslamiye* (Islamic elements) referred to this. However, the concept of “Turkey” was always in the foreground, and during that stage, Mustafa Kemal Pasha often used terms such as “Turkey’s People” and “Turkey’s Government.” Also, he gave speeches with reference to various ethnic identities before the “Grand National Assembly of Turkey.” The constitution of 1921, the *Teşkilât-ı Esasiye Kanunu*, also used the terms “Türkiye Devleti” and “Türkiye” to name the state and the country it referred to. It is in this respect, historical facts suggest, “Turkey” had been the underlying concept behind the late Ottoman “national” awareness and the coming

nation state; and the Kurds supported the National Struggle, accepting, internalizing and committing themselves to, this concept.

As far as the second target, i.e. modernization, the priority was to give a common, modern and “national” identity to the *Anâsır-ı İslamiye*. As in the cases of many other countries, this was achieved by identifying and indoctrinating the paramount identity (in this case Turkish identity), which was the largest, most central and historical, as well as pioneering, in the history and struggle for independence. In other words, as sociologist Hüsametdin Arslan notes, “the Republic called all its Muslims ‘Turks’.”⁷⁶

What is critical in this context is the fact that Turkey had to achieve this transformation of identity within a decade, although similar phenomena had taken decades or centuries in western countries that had gone through similar processes. That is what is actually meant by a popular phrase from one of the Turkish national hymns, “We created 15 million young people in just 10 years.”

The accelerated version of the modernization process in Turkey inevitably created a fault line. As a matter of fact, there were other alternative, evolutionary projects, which aimed to create narrower fault lines, such as Ziya Gökalp’s transition project (also, Kazım Karabekir’s project, which will be mentioned later). However these evolutionary visions were not given any chance, particularly after the Sheikh Said Rebellion and due to the fear of dismemberment that it had created. The sociological perspective was ignored due to a sense of political urgency. Between the years 1920 and 1930 a number of studies were conducted at the *Türk Ocakları*

⁷⁶ Neşe Düzel, Interview with Hüsametdin Arslan, "1923 Müslümanlara 'Türk' dedi," *Radikal*, December 19, 2005

(Turkish Hearths) on Kurds, but this trend did not continue.⁷⁷

The epicenter of this social fault line was the transformation of the existing common identity that had been defined by Islam into another idea, which asserted that all citizens of the new state are “Turks.” According to Kemal Kirişçi and Gareth Winrow, "Islam had functioned as a kind of transcending bond of national unity among the Moslem population of the Ottoman Empire. The attempt to replace Islam by Turkish nationalism as a new transcending bond to establish a political community would be only partially successful."⁷⁸

The Kurdish question would arise from the unsuccessful part of that identity replacement.

The Abolition of the Caliphate

The Caliphate had been the leadership of the Muslim *umma* (community of believers) since the passing away of the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam. During medieval times, the institution suffered from but survived many turbulences and politically unsettled periods. The last powerful caliphs were the Abbasids, whose power declined after the 9th century and remained only as symbolic figures after the 13th.

It is widely believed that the Ottomans assumed the Caliphate with Sultan Selim I's conquest of Egypt in 1517, but in fact there is no document from that

⁷⁷ In 1931, Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, in his periodical *Dağyolu* (Mountainroad), states that prior to that date nineteen foreign language books relating to the Kurdish question had been translated into Turkish. (Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, *Dağyolu*, vol 2 [Ankara: Türk Ocakları İlim ve San'at Hey'eti Neşriyatı, 1931], pp. 24-25) However, neither those investigations nor other studies were published by anyone including *Türk Ocakları* and other public and private institutions.

⁷⁸ Kirişçi and Winrow, p. 67.

period which supports this view. According to Halil İnalcık, the idea of Sultan Selim I taking over the Caliphate from the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mutawakkil III (who was completely subordinated to the Mamluks) is actually an 18th century invention.⁷⁹ The first Ottoman document in which one can find the title “caliph” is The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (also spelled *Kuchuk Kainarji*), which was signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire on July 21, 1774, following the victory of the latter in the Ottoman-Russian war of 1768-1774. The Italian text of the treaty refers to the “Supremo Califfo Maomettano,” or the Supreme Caliph of the Muslims.⁸⁰

The drive behind the Ottoman Empire’s unearthing of the title caliphate, which had been apparently discarded for centuries, was the need to find a new source of power for the declining empire. Although this tendency started in the late 18th century, its reached its zenith during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, who was the only Ottoman Sultan who attached more importance to the Caliphate than any other title. “Always and everywhere the title *Emir-ül Müminin* [the commander of the faithful] should come first” he decreed, “the title Ottoman Sultan should come second.”⁸¹

According to Mümtaz’er Türköne, it was the political need for pan-Islamism that led to the rise of the Ottoman Caliphate, not the other way around.⁸² Sultan Abdülhamid II saw the need for emphasising the Caliphate, since he thought this

⁷⁹ Halil İnalcık, “Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda İslam,” *Dergâh*, vol. 30 (1993)

⁸⁰ Gilles Veinstein, “Les Origines du Califat Ottoman,” *Les Annales de l’autre Islam*, vol. 2 (1994)

⁸¹ “Her zaman, her yerde Emir-ül Müminin ünvanı başta gelmeli, Osmanlı Padişahı ünvanı ise ikinci sırada belirtilmelidir.”; Sultan Abdülhamid II, *Siyasi Hatıratım*, (İstanbul, 1974)

⁸² Mümtaz’er Türköne, *İslamcılığın Doğuşu*, (İstanbul, 1991), p. 56

inspired the most powerful ideology to unite the Islamic components of the Empire and even to form a global Muslim stance against European imperialism. This was a convenient policy: “The Caliphate has been a useful weapon in the Ottoman’s diplomatic arsenal and used by Abdülhamid to curb the European forces in the hope that it would create tension within their borders.”⁸³

Mustafa Kemal Pasha also used the Caliphate in an effective way. He wanted to prevent this institution being used against the National Struggle, and tried to ensure it functioned *for* the struggle, not against it — a goal which he succeeded in attaining. However, following the victory of 1922 and starting from 1923, the Kemalist rhetoric started to change. This was because the country was now saved from occupation, and it was time to “modernize” it. The existence of a political authority other than the Grand National Assembly of Turkey would have been an obstacle against national sovereignty as well as the modernization project. Even though, arguably, the power of the Caliphate could have been limited — as the Italian revolutionaries did with the Vatican — the continuation of this pre-modern authority in any form was not compatible with the Kemalist Regime’s revolutionary modernization project.

It might be worth mentioning here that the Caliphate is not a religious or spiritual institution such as the Papacy. In Islam, the power of determining rights and wrongs in terms of religion has been in the hands of the muftis, not the Caliph, and the office of the latter used to be a political institution, which directed state matters. Correspondingly, according to Mümtaz’er Türköne, “the Ottoman Caliphate was an institution based not on strong a support from the shariah, but on trust; the reason for

⁸³ "Ottoman Empire: The Rule of Abdülhamid II," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (2004).

the Ottoman Caliphate to gain legitimacy and widespread popularity was the fact that many Muslims have lost their independence.”⁸⁴

That was also the basis of the argument put forward by the Judiciary Minister Seyyid Bey, who supported Mustafa Kemal in the abolition of the Caliphate. The fundamental analysis of Seyyid Bey, in his speech given at the Grand National Assembly, was to differentiate between the religious and the non-religious. He convinced a great number of conservatives in the Assembly, showing that the Caliphate was not a spiritual but a political institution.⁸⁵

Therefore the debates regarding the abolition of the Caliphate needed to be structured in terms of politics and not religion. And, to some extent, it was the case. For example, Kazım Karabekir Pasha, who opposed the abolition, based his arguments on political grounds. Mosul was the hot-issue on the agenda and Karabekir, who noted, “we are weaker now than we were during the Liberation War,” argued that the abolition of the Caliphate at that stage would put off Kurds and weaken Turkish claims in Mosul. Therefore he suggested the abolition take place in the future.⁸⁶ In this matter, too, Karabekir’s approach was not revolutionist but evolutionist.

But in accordance with the *zeitgeist*, revolutionism prevailed and abolishing the Caliphate seemed urgent and necessary. This was a determined step towards creating a modern nation state. But it had its own costs, which included the loyalty of

⁸⁴ “Osmanlı hilafeti, şer’i temellerinin sağlamlığından güç alan bir kurum değildir; itibari bir kurumdur. Osmanlı hilafetinin meşruiyet kazanması, geniş bir Kabul mazhar olması, doğrudan doğruya Müslümanların bağımsızlıklarını yitirmeleri ve siyasi olarak hilafetin değer kazanmasıyla ortaya çıkmıştır.”; Türköne, p. 65

⁸⁵ For the full text of Seyyid Bey’s speech in contemporary Turkish, see Kemaleddin Nomer, *Şariat, Hilafet, Cumhuriyet, Laiklik: Dini ve Tarihi Gerçeklerin Belgeleri* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1996), pp. 55-56.

⁸⁶ Kazım Karabekir, *Kürt Meselesi* (İstanbul: Emre Yayınları, 2004), pp. 145 - 158.

the Kurds.

The Kurds and the Caliphate

As McDowall points out, the Sunni Kurds had felt uncomfortable by the abolition of the Sultanate two years prior to the end of the Caliphate.⁸⁷ However, the solution to separate the Caliphate from Sultanate to preserve the former had been a relief for them, because it was this religious title that really mattered for the religiously minded. Hassan Arfa, who had been the Chief of the General Staff during Shah's years in Iran and briefly worked as Iran's Ambassador to Turkey, described Kurdish sensitivity towards the Caliphate issue based on his observations in Anatolia in 1922:

Traveling at that time through north Kurdistan and Turkey on horseback, a journey of forty days during which time I spent the nights in peasant cottages where I talked with my hosts, I was able to observe the deep concern of the Anatolian peasants for the fate of the Ottoman monarchy. I first received the impression that the Kurds were not very much interested in this question, but I realized afterwards that their outlook on the events taking place in Istanbul was concerned more with the religious significance of the Ottoman rulers than with the political, and as the Khalifate was to be preserved by the regime (Abd-el-Majid Effendi, Sultan Abd-el-Aziz's son, was nominated Khalif), the Kurds were satisfied that the religious aspect of Turkey was being preserved.⁸⁸

The Caliphate was abolished on March 3, 1924 together with the Ministry of Sharia and Trusts, and the title was taken from Abdülmecid Efendi and declared as belonging to the "moral personage of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT)." This was a political formula to end the Caliphate as well as a requirement of the political concept that all sovereignty belonged to the GNAT, in other words

⁸⁷ McDowall, p. 142.

⁸⁸ Arfa, p. 33.

the “national sovereignty” doctrine. But the Kurds saw it differently. According to Van Bruinessen:

with the abolition of the caliphate (March 1924) the most important symbol of Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood disappeared. It became possible to condemn the Ankara government as irreligious, an accusation that seemed to be confirmed by other measures it took. This argument carried more weight than any other with many of the Kurds, who were strongly committed to Islam.⁸⁹

Actually, as seen in the previous chapter, the discontent of Kurdish notables with the center went back to mid-19th century, during which the Ottoman Empire initiated its centralization reforms in order to integrate Kurdistan into the rest of the country. Moreover, Kurdish nationalism arose as a political movement in the early 20th century. In other words, the disenchantment of Kurdish notables with the center in the post-1923 period is not unprecedented. However, the abolition of the Caliphate and the perceived rapid de-Islamization of the Turkish state gave Kurdish notables a strong argument to rally against Ankara's authority, in way not too dissimilar to the rebellion of Sharif Hussain of Mecca in 1916. Sharif Hussain had referred to the apparent secularism and Turkism of the Young Turks to justify his more mundane motives⁹⁰; now his Kurdish counterparts would take a somewhat similar stand against the Kemalists.

Yet the abolition of the Caliphate was a much more radical step than those of the Young Turks. Nader Entessar, professor and chair of the Department of Political Science and Law at Spring Hill College, argues;

the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 undermined the old Ottoman

⁸⁹ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaik and State*, p. 281.

⁹⁰ William L. Cleveland, "The Role of Islam as Political Ideology in The First World War," *National and International Politics in the Middle East: Essays in Honour of Elie Kedourie*, ed. by Edward Ingram (London, Frank Cass, 1986), pp. 89-80

concept of a Muslim *umma* (community) and allowed the Kemalist secular notion of a Turkish nation to emerge. Because Kurdish religious and tribal leaders had derived their authority from the twin institutions of the Sultanate and Caliphate, the abolition of these removed the temporal and spiritual basis of their legitimacy, which led the Turkish Republic to outlaw all public manifestations of Kurdish identity. This Kemalist threat to Kurdish identity and sociopolitical structures brought Kurds with competing, and sometimes diametrically opposed, viewpoints together in a common struggle against republican Turkey.”⁹¹

McDowall also thinks that March 3, 1924 was a turning point:

On 4 March Mustafa Kemal abolished the caliphate. This was the real body blow... This cut the last ideological tie Kurds felt with Turks. The closure of the religious schools, the *madrasas* and *kuttabs*, removed the last remaining source of education for most Kurds. By stripping Turkey of its religious institutions, Mustafa Kemal now made enemies of the very Kurds who had helped Turkey survive the years of trial, 1919-22. These were the religiously-minded, the shaykhs and the old Hamidiye aghas who had genuinely believed in the defense of the caliphate. It was among such people, who on the whole had repudiated any previous connection with them, that the Kurdish nationalists now built their resistance.⁹²

Uğur Mumcu agrees that the proclamation of the Republic followed by the abolition of the Caliphate created a reaction within the Kurdish tribes. According to Mumcu, the abolition of the Caliphate had fuelled the explosion of Kurdish Nationalism, which had already been developing. The preparations for Sheikh Said rebellion started during the spring of 1923, and "Kurd Halit" from Cibran contacted the members of the *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* (Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan) in Paris, and Sheikh Said was elected as the head of the secret Kurdish organization. On April 15, 1924, Şahin Bey, the chief of the Bozan tribe, published a declaration in Aleppo calling “Twenty million Kurds, from the mountains of Süleymaniye to the Black Sea” to rebel. The declaration used the abolition of the

⁹¹ Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), p. 83.

Caliphate for propaganda and accused the Turkish Republic for blasphemy.⁹³

The Rebellion and the Rebels

The rebels were planning to start the rebellion a couple of months later than it had actually erupted, that was, when they were better prepared. However, one incident set off the rebellion prematurely: on February 13, 1925, the gendarmerie dropped by the house of Sheikh Said, in Bingöl (then, Çapakçur) province, Ergani district, Eğil commune and Piran village, to arrest some of his guests, but their request was answered with gun fire. The incident grew into an armed conflict between the Sheikh's men and government forces, which quickly turned into a rebellion. A considerable number of people, approximately 7.000 armed men from different Kurdish tribes, joined it. Later, this armed force would increase to 30.000.⁹⁴

Sheikh Said, a *Nakşibendi* sheikh, was one of the local Kurdish leaders who had reacted to the abolition of the Caliphate, and he had decided to stand up against the young Republic for defending religion as well as due to the newly emerging ethnic cause amongst Kurds. He declared that he wanted to bring back Mehmed Selim Efendi, the eldest son of Sultan Abdülhamid, who was living in Beirut, and re-establish the Caliphate and Sultanate.⁹⁵

Vahdettin, the last Ottoman Sultan, had declared his positive feeling about the rebellion to a French newspaper and wished that it would be successful. Ankara took

⁹² McDowall, p. 192.

⁹³ Uğur Mumcu, *Kürt-İslam Ayaklanması* (Istanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 1991), p. 57-58.

⁹⁴ Yaşar Kalafat, *Şark Meselesi Işığında Şeyh Said Olayı, Karakteri, Dönemindeki İç ve Dış Olaylar* (Ankara: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1992), p. 104.

⁹⁵ Geoffrey Lewis, *Modern Turkey*, (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 98.

this as a proof of involvement of the escapee Sultan in the rebellion.⁹⁶

Ankara had always been suspicious of Sheikh Said's behavior. One of his sons — he had 5 sons and 5 daughters — had visited Istanbul to talk to one of the prominent Kurdish leaders, Seyyid Abdülkadir, the head of the *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* (Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan). Although the topic of the discussion was unknown to the intelligence officers in Ankara, they were concerned. Sheikh Said had also seen some ex-Ottoman army officers of Kurdish origin who had escaped to Iraq after the Nestorian uprising. The clash that occurred when Sheikh Said refused to let his guests to be questioned by the gendarmerie, for he was worried about the ongoing investigation against the above-mentioned people, triggered the rebellion.

First, Sheikh Said cut the telegram wires so that the government and army units could communicate neither with each other nor with Ankara. This showed that, however small, there were some arrangements in place. As the rebellion spread, martial law was declared in 14 provinces and there were several clashes with casualties. In a speech at the Parliament, Minister of Justice Mahmut Esat Bozkurt warned, “the east is on fire.”⁹⁷

The rebellion was led by a faction that included Sheikh Said and other local notables. These people had a tremendous traditional power over the local people, and they were also very possessive about it. Incidents had taken place at the gates of the Elazığ Independence Court, where the “slavish loyalty” towards the sheikhs was expressed. The devotees used to kiss the thresholds of the doors of their sheikhs.

⁹⁶ Ahmet Emin Yalman, *Gördüklerim ve Geçirdiklerim*, 2nd ed, vol. 2, (Istanbul: Pera, 1997), p. 994.

⁹⁷ Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, pp. 217 – 233.

Şevket Süreyya Aydemir describes similar customs, such as people crawling on their knees when passing in front of the lodges and mansions of the aghas, beys or sheikhs, and mentions incidents where sheikhs and aghas put leashes on their “slaves” and tie them in their barns, as a token of their “absolute loyalty.”⁹⁸

According to Kazım Karabekir, “the people were so desperately ignorant that they could go on their knees and bark like an animal” in front of their sheikhs. “The loyalty of the tribe people towards their aghas,” wrote Karabekir,

comes from their ignorance and their willingness to benefit from the things that could be destroyed by the tyranny of their chief. The more power and influence the government loses, the more influence these chiefs gain. And the chiefs do their best to stop any breaching of their influence, just like a despotic ruler. The influence of the chiefs would increase even more, if the government’s civil servants did not listen to the individuals, and their affairs were handled by their chiefs.⁹⁹

The Azadi

However the rebellion was not only the work of Sheikh Said or the religious leaders around him. Behind the scenes, a secular nationalist organization played a great role that was first known as the *Ciwata Azadi Kurd* (Kurdish Freedom Association) that later changed its name to the *Ciwata Kweseriya Kurd* (Kurdish Independence Association). This organization, which was also known simply as the *Azadi* (Freedom), was established in Eastern Anatolia between 1921 and 1924 and was a cause of concern for Ankara. According to Hamit Bozaslan, the founders of

⁹⁸ Ibid. pp. 226 – 227.

⁹⁹ "Aşiret bireylerinin reislerine karşı olan bağılıkları cehaletlerinden ve reislerin zalimane muamelesiyle talan edilecek şeylerden istifade fikrinden ileri gelmektedir. Hükümetin kudret ve nüfuzu azaldıkça, aşiret reislerinin nüfuzu artar. Her aşiret reisi müstebit bir hükümdar gibi, bu nüfuzun ihlal edilmemesi için elinden gelen her şeyi yapar. Hükümet memurlarının münferit kişilerin dinlememesi ve kişilerin her türlü işlerini reisleri vasıtasıyla halletmeleri, reislerin nüfuzunu güçlendirir."; Karabekir, pp. 11, 53.

Azadi included atheists such as Fehmi ê Bilal.¹⁰⁰

Sheikh Said first was involved in the preparations of the rebellion by participating in the *Azadi* congress held in 1924. The close collaboration that Sheikh Said — who had started a rebellion to restore the *sharia* — had with this secular and even atheist group can only be explained by ethnic motives.

The government in Ankara was worried about the *Azadi* organization. Previously, some Kurdish officers who had been thought to have links with the organization had been expelled from the army, and membership in the organization was banned. It is also interesting that the members of the organization included some Hamidiye aghas who had served the Ottoman regime and some former officers from the Ottoman army.

According to Robert Olson, the *Azadi*'s objectives were threefold: "to deliver the Kurds from Turkish oppression; to give Kurds freedom and opportunity to develop their country; and to obtain British assistance, realizing Kurdistan could not stand alone."¹⁰¹

The first organized activity of the organization was the arrangements for a mutiny amongst the army officers at Beytüşşebap Garrison, in September 1924. Some Kurdish army officers in the garrison were *Azadi* members, and the plan involved a sudden uprising in order to gain control of the stronghold, in the hope that they would encourage Kurdish Leaders (chiefs and sheikhs) to rebellion and thereby start a "national awakening." But *Azadi*'s plan did not work as the commander of the garrison heard about the plan beforehand, and arrested the ringleaders and therefore

¹⁰⁰ Hamid Bozaslan, "Kürt Milliyetçiliği ve Kürt Hareketi," In, *Milliyetçilik: Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce*, ed. Tanıl Bora (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), p. 849.

¹⁰¹ Olson, p. 45.

quashed the mutiny, and local Kurdish leaders did not support the mutiny as it was expected.

Following this incident most of the *Azadi* leaders fled to Iraq and contacted the British. However, although the British noted that *Azadi* was a "very powerful weapon against Turkey in case of war," they did not give them the support for which they had hoped.¹⁰²

Azadi officers presented their British interrogators a long list of complaints about the treatment of the Kurds by the Turkish government:

1. A new law on minorities aroused suspicion. The fears were that the Turks planned to disperse the Kurds throughout western Turkey and settle Turks in their place in the east.

2. The Caliphate, one of the last ties binding Kurds and Turks together, had been abolished.

3. Use of the Kurdish language in schools and law courts was restricted. Kurdish education was forbidden, with the result that education among the Kurds was virtually non-existent.

4. The word "Kurdistan" (used previously as a geographical term) was deleted from all geography books.

5. All senior government officials in Kurdistan were Turks. Only at lower levels, were carefully selected Kurds appointed.

6. Relative to the taxes paid, there were no comparable benefits received from the government.

7. The government interfered in the eastern provinces in the 1923 elections for

¹⁰² Ibid. p. 50.

the Grand National Assembly.

8. The government pursued the policy of continuously setting one tribe against another.

9. Turkish soldiers frequently raided Kurdish villages taking away animals; requisitioned food supplies were often not paid for.

10. In the army the Kurdish rank-and-file were discriminated against, and generally selected for rough and unpleasant duties.

11. The Turkish government attempted to exploit Kurdish mineral wealth, with the aid of German capital.¹⁰³

During a congress organized by the *Azadi* in 1924, it was decided to start a widespread rebellion in May 1925 which would involve all Kurdish regions. One of the most prominent names in the congress was Sheikh Said. He played an important role in convincing some unwilling and indecisive ex-Hamidiye commanders. Said even convinced local Kurdish people to collaborate with the Russians. As Van Bruinessen points out, local Kurdish leaders were not particularly keen on collaborating with the Russian Bolsheviks to fight against the Turks; however, Sheikh Said convinced them on the grounds that the practices of the Ankara Government were in conflict with Islam.¹⁰⁴ Thus the background work of Sheikh Said rebellion was completed towards the end of 1924.

The rebellion, which started in Piran in February 1925 and lasted more than two months, was the first real threat that the young Turkish Republic faced.

¹⁰³ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaik and State*, p. 283.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p. 281.

1924, A Turning Point

When we look at the actual series of events in 1924, we see a great transformation among the Kurds. In previous chapters, it has been mentioned that during the last days of the Ottoman Empire some Kurdish intellectuals and army officers called for independence, but the Kurdish masses and local leaders resisted these calls on the basis of factors such as their religious connection with the Turks. However, in 1924, some local Kurdish leaders were starting to accept the nationalistic discourses and plans of Kurdish nationalist organizations, such as *Azadi*. According to Robert Olson, “For an ordinary Kurd who joined the rebellion, the religious and national motives were interwoven.”¹⁰⁵

Abdlmelik Fırat, a former member of the parliament and grandson of Sheikh Said, thinks that this was due to the fact that, unlike the discourse of Mustafa Kemal during the War of Liberation (1919-22), the Constitution of 1924 made no reference to Kurds.¹⁰⁶ Indeed the seeds of this shift were sown in 1922 and onwards. According to Dr. Hseyin Koca “starting from 1922, the region was dominated by a bureaucracy which only mentioned Turks,”¹⁰⁷ and this created discontent.

Therefore, the Sheikh Said rebellion can be partly interpreted as a reaction to the end of the Ottoman *millet* and the emergence of a new nation state promoting a secular identity. Moreover, the continuing disenchantment with the fall of the *Ancien Rgime* in the 19th century, and the steady destruction of the privileges it used to offer to the Kurdish notables was an important impetus behind the reaction to

¹⁰⁵ Olson, p. 145.

¹⁰⁶ Abdlmelik Fırat, "PKK bir provokasyon hareketidir," *Aksiyon*, May 26, 2003.

¹⁰⁷ Hseyin Koca, *Yakın Tarihten Gnmze Hkmetlerin Doęu-Gneydoęu Anadolu Politikaları* (Konya: Mikro Yayınları, 1998), p. 85.

Ankara. Iranian general Hasan Arfa grasps this fact when he underlines the bitterness of “the landowners who were worried about losing their privileges and some tribes chiefs who were frustrated for not being allowed to be re-elected to the GNAT” as an important incentive in the Kurdish dissidence.¹⁰⁸

The Kurdish Opposition to Sheikh Said

Despite all of the above, the Sheikh Said rebellion was supported only by a minority of Turkey's Kurds. The local leaders who supported the rebellion were mostly influential in the countryside and did not have the same influence in the urban areas. For example, in Diyarbakır, which could be considered as the center of Kurdish culture, there was almost no support for the rebellion. Sheikh Said's attempt to capture Diyarbakır failed. In other cities, such as Elazığ, Kurdish citizens reacted negatively to the pillage of the rebels and pulled back their support.¹⁰⁹

Such extreme behavior proved to many that most of the rebels were not actually fighters with idealist motives, but thugs with mundane intentions. The story of a villager from Diyarbakır, who initially supported the rebellion for religious reasons but regretted it later, is illuminating:

As the Sheikh Said rebellion started and tribes approached our village we went outside our village to welcome them and were grateful to God that we saw that day. We brought them to our village and everybody sacrificed sheep, as many as they could afford. However, the newcomers were not happy and told us to sacrifice as many as they wanted. During the night they became even crueler. They started to beat us. They almost raped women. The following morning we helped Turkish soldiers, and then we promised to each other that we would never give our assent to

¹⁰⁸ Van Bruinessen, *Kürdistan Üzerine Yazılar*, pp. 154-155.

¹⁰⁹ Olson, pp. 36-37.

them.¹¹⁰

Sheikh Said also expressed his disappointment with the “looters that followed him” when he stated to the court, “You cannot achieve anything with this people... I am done with this people, no one assents to the *sharia* anymore.”¹¹¹

As was pointed out by Uğur Mumcu, “Sheikh Said... fought together with some Kurdish tribes, the most important of them being the Lolan, Hormek and Hayderan. However, several Kurdish tribes almost competed with each other to send telegrams to Ankara to express their loyalty.”¹¹² In fact the rebellion was initiated and conducted by the Sunni Zazas, who are a minority amongst Kurds.¹¹³ Only 50-51 of the 715 tribes and groups living in the East and Southeast Anatolia joined the rebellion.¹¹⁴

The majority of the prominent Kurdish scholars were also opposed to the rebellion. The reply given to Sheikh Said by Said Nursi — who would later write *Risale-i Nur* collection and would become the founder of one of Turkey's mainstream schools of Islamic thought — is noteworthy:

The Turkish Nation has carried the flag of Islam for centuries. They have had many saints as well as many martyrs. One should not hold sword against the children of such a nation. We are Muslims and brothers;

¹¹⁰ “Şeyh Said isyanı başladığı zaman aşiretler köyümüze yaklaşınca köy dışında onları karşılamaya gittik ve bugünleri gösterdiği için Allah'a şükrettik. Onları köyümüze getirdik ve köyde herkes gücü kadar koyun kesti, gelenler buna razı olmayıp 'bizim istediğimiz kadar keseceksiniz' dediler... O gece zulümleri arttı. Bizi dövmeye başladılar. Az kaldı namusa tecavüz edeceklerdi. Sonra sabahleyin Türk askerlerine yardım ettik ve o günden sonra birbirimize yemin ettik ki biz bunlara razı olmayız.”; Koca, p. 98.

¹¹¹ “Bu ahali ile bir şey olmazdı... Ahaliden sıtkım sıyrıldı, şeriata razı olan ahali kalmamıştır”; Koca, p. 98.

¹¹² “Şeyh Sait... ayaklanma sırasında Lolan, Hormek ve Hayderan aşiretleri başta olmak üzere Kürt aşiretleri ile dövüşmüştü. Bir çok Kürt aşireti de Ankara'ya bağlılık telgrafı çekmek için birbirleriyle yarışmıştı.”; Mumcu, pp. 103.

¹¹³ Yaşar Kalafat, *Şark Meselesi Işığında Şeyh Sait Olayı* (Ankara: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1992), p. 103-104.

¹¹⁴ Koca, p. 82.

please do not let brothers fight. *Sharia* does not allow that. You hold your swords against external enemy. Sword may not be used at home. Our only hope for salvation this time is to be illuminated and guided by the Koran and truth of our faith. It is to destroy ignorance, which is our biggest enemy. Please do give up your attempt. Thousands of men and women may perish because of a handful of villains.¹¹⁵

It should be noted that Said Nursi was asking for loyalty to the Turkish Republic on the basis of religious brotherhood, although the Republic had recently abolished the Caliphate.

Sheikh Said at the Independence Court

The rebellion was quashed towards the end of April 1925. Sheikh Said and other rebels were tried by the Eastern Independence (*İstiklal*) Court — a continuation of the expeditive Independence courts that were set up by the Ankara government during the War of Liberation in order to try and punish dissidents. During the trial Sheikh Said insisted that the rebellion had been the result of a simple incident, and that there had not been a long preparation process. He said he just wanted to ensure that the government implemented the *sharia*. According to Ergün Aybars, by insisting on his Islamic goals (and by refusing nationalist ones), he tried to escape capital punishment, and might have even hoped to be pardoned.¹¹⁶

In the bill of indictment, the prosecutor stated that Sheikh Said and his

¹¹⁵ "Türk Milleti, asırlardan beri İslamiyet'in bayraktarlığını yapmıştır. Çok veliler yetiştirmiş ve şehitler vermiştir. Böyle bir milletin torunlarına kılıç çekilmez. Biz Müslümanız, onlarla kardeşiz, kardeşi kardeşle çarpıştırmayınız. Bu şer'an caiz değildir. Kılıç, harici düşmana karşı çekilir. Dahilde kılıç kullanılmaz. Bu zamanda yegane kurtuluş çaremiz, Kur'an ve iman hakikatlarıyla tenvir ve irşad etmektir. En büyük düşmanımız olan cehaleti izale etmektir. Teşebbüsünüzden vazgeçiniz. Zira akim kalır. Bir kaç canı yüzünden binlerce kadın ve erkekler telef olabilir."; Necmeddin Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen Taraflarıyla Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (İstanbul: Yeni Asya Yayıncılık, 1990), p. 268.

¹¹⁶ Ergün Aybars, *İstiklal Mahkemeleri*, vol I-II/1920-1927 (İzmir: İleri Kitabevi, 1995), p. 312.

accomplices had organized the rebellion deliberately, and “hidden behind the glorification of the Prophet’s religion... their real objective was to separate a certain part of Turkish land from the motherland, and destroy and breakup the unity of the country.”¹¹⁷

In fact the rebellion was organized and clearly driven by Kurdish cause.” In *İstiklal Mahkemeleri* (The Independence Courts), Ergün Aybars argues:

Certain evidence, including the fact that it did not stem from only a religious motive to establish *sharia*, as was claimed by Sheikh Said, as well as the orders given at the beginning and during the event, the way that the captured soldiers and officers were called (“enemy soldiers”) or the way that Kurdish tribes who rejected to join the rebellion were referred to (as “evil” or “Turk”) and the titles printed on the documents issued by Sheikh Said who captured the 3rd Army’s Commandership, (such as “Kurdistan Ministry of War” or “Kurdistan Government”) showed that the incident did not have a simple single objective, but it was extensive and far-reaching.¹¹⁸

The Court ruled that the real objective of Sheikh Said had been to establish a Kurdish State. The Eastern Independence Court held other cases in relation to the rebellion too. A total of 81 people were tried in relation to Sheikh Said’s case, and 49 of them were sentenced to death by execution. Forty seven of them were executed; the death sentences of Hasan (son of Salih) and Hüseyin Hilmi Bey were later changed to ten years of imprisonment on the basis of the former being under age and the latter had “served the country” as an official charged with governing a provincial district. Twelve of the accused were released, including the Mufti of Darahani,

¹¹⁷ “Peygamber dininin yüceltilmesi perdesi altında... asıl amaç olarak Türk vatanının belirli bir kısmını ana yurttan ayırmak, vatanın birlik ve beraberliğini bozup dağıtmak”; Ibid., p. 314.

¹¹⁸ “Ayaklanmanın, Şeyh Sait’in dediği gibi, yalnız din ve şeriat gereklerinin uygulanmasının sağlanması için çıkmadığı; başlangıç ve gelişmesi sırasında verdiği emir ve görevlerden, esir aldıkları asker ve subaylara ‘düşman askeri’, ayaklanmaya katılmayan Kürt aşiretlerine de ‘melun’ veya ‘Türk’ denmesi, Üçüncü Ordu Komutanlığının eline geçen Şeyh Sait’e ait belgelerin üzerinde ‘Kürdistan Harbiye Nezareti, Kürdistan Reisi’ veya ‘Hükümeti’ başlıklarının kullanılmış olması, olayın basit bir amaca yönelik değil, geniş ve yaygınlığını gösteriyordu.”; Ibid. p. 315.

İsmail Bey, and the head of the People's Party, Rüştü Bey. The charges against five people were found to be ungrounded, and their cases were dismissed. Others were sentenced to imprisonment for different prison terms, ranging from one to ten years. *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, the daily newspaper, interpreted the quashing of the rebellion and executions as evidence of "the power of the Turkish revolution" and suggested, "the country will not have peace and prosperity unless Sheikh Said's ideas are completely destroyed."¹¹⁹

The rebellion was over, however, Pandora's box was opened. Although not as big as this one, new uprisings were to follow.

The British Factor and the Fate of Mosul

In the official Turkish history, the existence of the "British hand" is often mentioned in relation to the Sheikh Said rebellion. This is a theme common to Turkish history textbooks, and usually taken as a fact. But was that really the case? It is difficult to say "yes" to this question. In *Kürt-Islam Ayaklanması* (Kurdo-Islamic Rebellion), Uğur Mumcu states that the British followed the rebellion, and some rebels indeed contacted the British authorities, but they could not get any tangible help. In his book on Sheikh Said, Yaşar Kalafat also concludes, "Despite numerous claims, there was no conclusive documentary evidence on the role of the British in the rebellion."¹²⁰

The only tangible proof of British support to Sheikh Said and his accomplices are some weapon catalogues from the British weapon factories received by the

¹¹⁹ "Türk inkılabının gücü... Şeyh Said düşüncesi yok edilmedikçe memlekette huzur ve refahın kurulamayacağı"; Ibid. pp. 310 – 327.

¹²⁰ "Bu konuda çeşitli iddialar ortaya atılmışsa da İngiltere'nin isyandaki yeri hakkında

sheikh during the early days of the rebellion. According to Mete Tunçay, this was an “arms deal,” and the British weapon manufacturers were not acting with approval from the British Government. He also argues “it is difficult to believe that this incident was instigated by the British.”¹²¹ Uğur Mumcu criticizes Tunçay’s comments and argues that the weapon manufacturers of that time would not have acted independently from their government.¹²² But the fact remains that there is no evidence except the weapon catalogues.

A report sent to Paris by the French High Commissioner in Baghdad following the rebellion includes these remarks: “Sheikh Said who had been working with the Istanbul Kurdish Committee, an organization aiming to establish a Kurdish State under the British mandate since 1918... had contacted Major Noel, who is the most prominent name with respect to Britain’s Kurdish Policy.”¹²³

Consequently, it is possible to suggest that despite the existence of British interest in the issue and contacts with the British authorities, there is no evidence showing that the British actively supported or organized the rebellion. In line with this, the Prime Minister of the time, İsmet İnönü, stated, “the Sheikh Said rebellion seems to have been the result of a propaganda that has been nested in our country for years. But there is no definite proof of evidence that the British had prepared the rebellion directly or staged it.”¹²⁴

belgelere dayalı kesin bilgiler ortaya konulamamaktadır”; Kalafat, p. 179.

¹²¹ “Bu harekete İngiliz kıstırtmalarının yol açtığı, savı inanılması güç görünüyor”; Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nde Tek Parti Yönetiminin Kurulması, 1923-31* (Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1981), p. 130.

¹²² Mumcu, p. 216.

¹²³ “Şeyh Said’in 1918 yılından beri, amacı İngiliz mandası altında bir Kürt devleti kurmak olan İstanbul Kürt komitesine bağlı olarak çalıştığı... İngilizlerin Kürt politikasında temel unsur olan Binbaşı Noel ile ilişki kurduğu”; Mumcu, p. 168.

¹²⁴ “Şeyh Said isyanında memlekette senelerden beri yuvalanmış propagandanın eseri

However, there is no doubt that Britain benefited from the rebellion. The British government, which was in a dispute with Turkey over Mosul at that time, drew up an argument from this internal conflict. A report sent by the French Commissionaire in Baghdad to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in March 1925 states, "the Kurdish rebellion could not have exploded at a better time [for the British]. The rebellion will prove to the commission investigating the Turkish claims on Mosul that Turks are unable to establish peace even amongst Kurds living in their country."¹²⁵

In his book *Türk-İngiliz İlişkileri, 1919-1926* (Turkish-British Relations, 1919-1926) Ömer Kürkçüoğlu explains how the abolition of the Caliphate played an influential role in these events:

The abolition of the Caliphate not only played an important role in the Kurdish rebellion, it also weakened the Turkish claims in Mosul, the population of which is mainly Kurdish. If the Kurds of Mosul who are alien to nationalism said to have chosen Turkey over Iraq, it must have been because of their loyalty to the Caliph, i.e. Islam... But, whatever the real reasons were, and even if it was aimed to comfort the British anxiety over religious issues, abolishing the Caliphate before the Mosul conflict was resolved was a major moral hit to Turkey's claim in Mosul. One British official in Mosul wrote how surprised they were when they received the news that the Caliphate had been abolished, and hardly believed that. The British official also stated that: "The Turkish propaganda that fused Kurdistan as a volcano ready to erupt was based on the Kurds' total loyalty to the Caliph, and Turks cutting their own throat was incredible, almost too good to be true for Britain." And, he adds, "of course, we took advantage of the situation." The strict measures that the Turkish Government had taken against the Kurdish uprising [also] created reaction amongst the prominent members of the local Kurdish community in Mosul, and such reactions created conditions that could be easily exploited by the British.

görülmüştür. Şeyh Sait isyanını doğrudan doğruya İngilizlerin hazırladığı veya meydana çıkardığı hakkında kesin deliller bulunamamıştır."; İsmet İnönü, *Hatıralar*, 2. Kitap (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınları, 1987), p. 202.

¹²⁵ Mumcu, p. 97.

Whatever the reasons were — even if it was thought that it would have a positive influence on the Mosul conflict — the decision to abolish the Caliphate created conditions that eventually worked against Turkey in relation to Mosul, as it played a role in Kurdish rebellion.”¹²⁶

Historian Waide Jwaideh also mentions the strong sympathy felt by the Iraqi Kurds towards Turkey before the abolition of the Caliphate. According to Jwaideh “the Kurds, who had identified themselves with the Ottomans and their tradition for centuries, obviously, were not happy to see the British coming to their country, whom they saw as invaders belonging to a foreign religion and culture.”¹²⁷ Moreover, “The effective pan-Islamic propaganda that had been run by Turks in the British occupied regions of Kurdistan had created an anti-British attitude amongst Kurds.”¹²⁸

However, with the abolition of the Caliphate followed by the Sheikh Said rebellion, such propaganda lost its influence.

¹²⁶ "Halifeliğin kaldırılmış olması, Kürtlerin ayaklanmasında önemli rol oynadığı gibi, Kürt unsurunun çoğunlukta bulunduğu Musul üzerindeki Türk iddiasını da zayıflatmıştır. Milliyetçi düşünceye yabancı olan Musul Kürtleri'nin, Türkiye'yi Irak'a tercih ettikleri söylenebiliyorsa, bunun başlıca nedeni, Halife'ye yani İslam'a olan bağlılıklarıydı... Musul sorununun çözüme kavuşturulmamış olduğu bir sırada Halifeliğin kaldırılması; İngiltere'nin İslam etkeni dolayısıyla duyabileceği endişeyi gidermek için, ya da öteki nedenlerle alınmış olsa da, sonuçta Türkiye'nin Musul tezine manevi bir darbe indirmişti. İngiltere'nin Musul'daki bir görevlisi, Halifeliğin kaldırıldığı yolundaki haberleri hayretle karşılayıp, inanmakta güçlük çektiklerini yazmaktadır. Bu İngiliz görevlisi, o zaman kadar 'Kürdistan'ı patlamaya hazır bir volkan gibi kaynaştıran Türk propagandasının, Kürtler'in Halifeye kesin bağlılığına dayandırıldığını, Türklerin kendi bindikleri dalı kesmelerinin ise, İngiltere için inanılmayacak kadar mükemmel bir şey olduğunu' belirtmektedir. İngiliz görevlisi, 'tabii, bu yeni durumdan kendimiz için yararlanmayı ihmal etmedik' diye eklemektedir. Türk Hükümeti'nin Kürt ayaklanmasına karşı aldığı sert önlemler [de], Musul'daki mahalli Kürt ileri gelenlerinin tepkisine yol açmaktaydı. Bu tepkilerin İngiltere bakımından 'yararlanmaya' elverişli bir ortam hazırladığı görülüyordu. Hangi nedenlere dayanırsa dayansın — hatta Musul sorununda olumlu bir etkisi olabilir diye alınmış olsa bile — Halifeliğin kaldırılması kararı, Kürtler'in ayaklanmasında rol oynadığı için, sonuç olarak Musul bakımından Türkiye'nin aleyhine bir durum yaratmıştır."; Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, *Türk-İngiliz İlişkileri (1919-1926)* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları, 1978), pp. 290-291.

¹²⁷ Waide Jwaideh, *Kürt Milliyetçiliğinin Tarihi: Kökenleri ve Gelişimi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999), p. 286.

¹²⁸ Ibid. p. 317.

CHAPTER V

TAKRIR-I SÜKÛN AND ITS KURDISH DISCONTENTS

The Sheikh Said rebellion was a significant event. According to Metin Toker, the son-in-law of İsmet İnönü and the author of *Şeyh Said ve İsyanı* (Sheikh Said and His Rebellion), “this rebellion was of the few important turning points of the history of the Republic.”¹²⁹ Kurdish nationalism, which had been limited in scale before this incident, came onto the stage of history.

The rebellion evoked the fear of disintegration and collapse in Turkey, which had just come through the National Struggle and announced the republic. The Law on the Maintenance of Order — in Turkish, *Takrir-i Sükûn Kanunu* — came into force on March 4th, 1925. This law, which was initially planned to be effective for two years, was going to be abolished on March 4th, 1929 after being expanded for a period of another two years.

The liberally educated Fethi Okyar, who was the prime minister during the rebellion, believed that the measures to be taken against the rebellion and martial law should be limited. However, he resigned soon. İsmet İnönü, who believed that heavy-handed measures were needed, formed the new government. The expeditive Independence Courts, which were re-activated under the *Takrir-i Sükun*, were equipped with greater powers, laid out severe punishments for those who were

¹²⁹ Metin Toker, *Şeyh Said ve İsyanı* (Ankara: Akis Yayınları, 1968), p. 5.

considered as opponents to the regime, and closely controlled the press and unions.

However, there were many who thought that such a severe approach could bring negative results. Moreover, some of those were among the elite cadre who had led the War of Liberation. Especially, Kazım Karabekir Pasha, Ali Fuat Pasha and Rauf Bey pointed out that the new period, which had started with The Law on the Maintenance of Order could create social tensions. Ali Fuat Pasha stated the following during a speech at the assembly: "Rebellions, actions of backward thought shall be eliminated and the rebels and backward thinkers shall be punished. There is no doubt in this matter. However, the administrative mechanism should refrain from pressures which could limit the natural rights and freedom of the people."¹³⁰

Rauf Bey said: "I am worried that the *Takrir-i Sükûn* will bring lack of order." Kazım (Karabekir) Pasha was opposed to the Independence Courts, which were re-established through this law. Karabekir stated that the Independence Courts had been established for war crimes during the War of Liberation and that these courts could not act against the press and the opposition, and "sovereignty of the people would be eliminated" if parties were closed down and the press was imposed sanctions. He warned, "if İsmet Pasha thinks that the Independence Courts are a means of reform, he is unfortunately mistaken... enacting this law would not honor the history of the Republic."¹³¹ Lawyers such as Feridun Fikri and Turkists such as Halil Turgut, who was ideologically close to Ziya Gökalp, were amongst the ones who opposed the *Takrir-i Sükûn* and the Independence Courts during the discussions in the parliament.

¹³⁰ "Ayaklanmalar, gerici eylemler yok edilmeli, ayaklanmacılar ve gericiler cezalandırılmalıdır. Buna şüphe yoktur. Ancak, milletin doğal haklarını ve özgürlüğünü kısıtlayacak baskı yöntemlerine idare mekanizmasında yer verilmemesini rica ediyorum."; Mumcu, p. 86.

¹³¹ "Takrir-i Sükun'un sükunsuzluk getireceğinden şüphe ediyorum"; "İsmet Paşa hazretleri eğer İstiklal Mahkemelerini islahat (reform) aleti zannediyorsa pek ziyade yanılıyorlar... bu

Minister of Justice Mahmut Esat Bey who spoke on behalf of the government during discussions regarding the freedom of press argued that the Independence Courts were normal judicial courts: “Gentlemen, the government is not impounding or adjudging, it is merely showing the criminals the doors of the court. What else could be done in the most civilized countries?”¹³²

“Law of Violence”

However, the situation was not as simple as that. The *Takrir-i Sükûn* led to silencing of the opposition and criticisms in the country, just like Karabekir and his friends had warned. Renown Turkish journalist Ahmet Emin Yalman, who, in his memoirs, talked about the closing of newspapers in that period, refers to the *Takrir-i Sükûn* as the “law of violence”¹³³

The law would also deal with the *Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (PRP - Progressive Republican Party), which was founded on November 17, 1924, by prominent figures such as Ali Fuat Cebesoy, Kazım Karabekir, Refet Bele, Rauf Orbay and Adnan Adıvar. The party was liberal in economy, and relatively conservative in religious and social issues. It was committed to the newly established republican regime. However, the party was accused for encouraging the Sheik Said rebellion, and — although there was no concrete evidence for that — was closed down in June 5, 2005. This was also the beginning of the single party regime led by the *Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası* (RPP - Republican People’s Party), which had been

kanunu kabul etmek, Cumhuriyet tarihi için bir şeref değildir.”; Mumcu, pp. 87-86.

¹³² “Efendiler, hükümet hapsediyor ve hükmetmiyor, suçlulara mahkemenin kapısını gösteriyor. En medeni memleketlerde de bundan başka ne yapılabilir.”; Kazım Karabekir, pp. 18-44; İsmail Göldaş, *Takrir-i Sükun Görüşmeleri* (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1997), pp. 428-469.

¹³³ “Şiddet kanunu”; Yalman, p. 992.

founded by Mustafa Kemal on September 9, 1923.

Mustafa Kemal, in his *Nutuk* (Address) that he declaimed in 1927 in the RPP Congress, blamed the PRP with strong terms. He defined it as “a party established by the most treacherous minds” and as “a shelter for the assassins and backward thinking people in the country," and argued that its program was drawn by “murky people," “[who] serve the external enemies in their efforts to destroy the new Turkish state, the young Turkish republic.”¹³⁴

These statements did not reflect the reality of the PRP; they only reflected how it was seen by the regime under those circumstances and the extent of the worry that the Sheikh Said rebellion had created. This worry is understandable if we consider the magnitude of the Sheikh Said rebellion and fragility of the newly established regime.

While the *Takrir-i Sükûn* smashed the opposition which was not involved in the Sheikh Said rebellion, it unleashed its real wrath on the rebellion region. The leaders of Sheikh Said rebellion were captured and sentenced to death with other rebels. However, many prominent members of the Kurdish community who had not involved in the rebellion were also arrested and some of them were deported to different regions of Anatolia.

A personal account of the tragedies of those years comes from an interview in Samsun in March 2005.¹³⁵ The father of the interviewed, Bahri Akduman, was taken into custody and accused of being related to Kurdish rebellions in the region on his

¹³⁴ “En hain dimağların mahsulü... Memlekette suikastçilerin ve mürtecilerin sığınağı... Harici düşmanların yeni Türk devletini, taze Türk cumhuriyetini mahvetmeye matuf planlarını kolaylıkla uygulamasına hizmete çalıştığı”; Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Nutuk*, volume 2 (Ankara: Maarif Vekâleti Yayını, 1962), pp. 889 – 890.

¹³⁵ This is a personal interview by the author, made in a cafe in Samsun in March 2005.

way to buy bread from a bakery in Diyarbakır, in 1925. The gendarmerie had fettered his and other detainee's hands and feet and then sent them to Çorum on a journey, to be conducted mostly on foot. The journey lasted 57 days. After being under arrest for 3.5 years in Çorum he had been released.

During the period of the *Takrir-i Sükûn* similar individual tragedies were lived, and at the same time an assimilationist policy that would alienate the majority of Kurdish people that had stayed away from the rebellion, was introduced. The Kurdish language, and any symbols and statements relating to Kurdish culture were banned. And a prolonged policy aimed at persuading the Kurds that they were actually Turkish was initiated.

"No Mercy in Politics"

Most of the applications conducted in the period of *Takrir-i Sükûn* were not requisite policies; they were the results of a specific *Weltanschauung*. According to Metin Toker, the following extract from the daily *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* represented the "philosophy of the period":

We have to keep our revolution alive, maintain our freedom, eliminate the intrusions of external powers and enforce our republic. We should always keep in mind that there is no mercy in politics. There is only power and interest. And finally, there is the respect and affection to be obtained by might.¹³⁶

Yet the policy that followed the Sheikh Said rebellion only increased the reaction among the Kurds. According to Abdülmelik Fırat, a former member of the parliament and the grandson of Sheikh Said,

¹³⁶ "İnkılabımızı yaşatmak, istiklalimizi muhafaza, haricin tecavüzlerini karşılamak ve kuvvetlendirmek mecburiyetindeyiz. Unutmamalıyız ki siyasette merhamet yoktur. Kuvvet ve menfaat vardır. Ve nihayet, kuvvetin celbeceği hürmet ve muhabbet vardır."; Toker, p. 105.

Not all the tribes and sheiks in the eastern part of the country cooperated with Sheikh Said. On the contrary, they dispatched fidelity telegraphs to Atatürk. If the Turkish Republic had only judged and punished rebels against the state together with Sheikh Said, the reaction would not have been so great. They said, ‘They mutinied against the Republic and they wanted to establish a Kurdish state. We wanted to live with Turkish people, we supported Atatürk, and we are living together...’ However, when the people who supported Atatürk, not Sheikh Said, were disdained, the reactions expanded.”¹³⁷

This rising reaction stimulated Kurdish nationalism, which had been not so well established even during Sheikh Said rebellion. Kurdish aghas, beys and sheiks, were deported to the western regions of the county although they had not been involved in the rebellion, and experienced severe physical and psychological difficulties. Some of them returned to the east despite the orders of the government; such as K r H seyin Pasha and his sons, who had been deported to Kayseri, and İbrahim Agha who had been deported from Ađrı. Some Kurds had gone "up to the mountains," a term used in Turkish to define going outlaw. These people opposed Republican soldiers in their regions together with their fellow men and they ruined the safety and order of these regions by committing plunders and pillages.¹³⁸ Some of them went to Syria, Iraq and Iran and joined in anti-Turkish organizations.¹³⁹

Not only was a development of this kind not possible in this region, but also ethnic nationalism gained ascendancy. In order to recognize this, it should be noted

¹³⁷ "Dođu'daki b t n aŐiretler, boylar, Őeyhler, Őeyh Said ile beraber deđildi. Daha  ok Atat rk ile beraber olup bađlılık telgrafları  ektiler. T rkiye Cumhuriyeti, Őeyh Said ile beraber devlete karŐı kıyam edenleri yargılayıp cezalandırsaydı, tepki bu kadar b y k olmazdı. Derlerdi ki, 'Cumhuriyete karŐı geldiler, K rt devleti kurmak istediler. Biz de beraber yaŐamak istedik, Atat rk ile beraberdik, biz de beraber yaŐıyoruz...' Ama Őeyh Said ile deđil Atat rk ile beraber olanlar da beraberce horlanınca tepki b y d ."; Mumcu, p. 182. Mumcu incorporates Fırat's words without any comments. However, after the extraction he argues, "The world has changed. We live under different conditions now. The people of today's civilized world should live together in peace regardless of their nation, ethnic origin, race, religion and faith."

¹³⁸ Koca, p. 108.

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 531.

that Kurdish nationalism was still a limited force among Turkey's Kurds at the time of the Sheikh Said rebellion. These statements of Kemal Feyzi, who participated in the rebellion out of his nationalist zeal, to the prosecutor Ahmet Süreyya during his trial, were illuminating in this regard:

I worked hard to establish a free Kurdistan. I lived with tribes for years. Worked in provinces... After all my journeys and activities now I think that something I assumed as real, like many others, is nothing, but an imagination: There is no Kurdish community to be called a nation. My old aims and dreams, beliefs were nothing but useless and improper illusions.¹⁴⁰

Indeed, "There was no Kurdish community to be called a nation." There were intellectuals and "pioneers" who wished to create such a nation. However, there was no serious ethnic identity awareness amongst Kurdish people in 1925. For this reason, only a rebellion sparked by a religious motive, i.e. Sheikh Said rebellion, could be influential among the Kurds.

Following this incident, many Kurdish rebellions occurred. And then an ethnic Kurdism, which was completely separated from the religious identity, started to develop. The First Inspector General Dr. İbrahim Tali (Öngören) Bey, who worked in the rebellion area, stated: "Sheikh Said rebellion is the last exercise of the spiritual forces in the eastern provinces. Following the days after this incident, Kurdish ideals started to prosper instead of religious inspirations for the Kurdish people."¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ "Ben, bağımsız bir Kürdistan kurulması için çok çalıştım. Yıllarca aşiretler içinde yaşadım. Vilayetlerde uğraştım... Bütün bu gezilerim ve faaliyetlerimden sonra gördüklerim bana şu kanıyı verdi: Birçokları gibi benim de önceden sandığım bir şeyin bugün bir ham hayal olduğunu anlamış bulunuyorum. Ortada millet denecek bir Kürt topluluğu yokmuş meğer. Benim, o eski bütün emellerim ve hayallerim, inançlarım hep boş, yersiz bir kuruntudan başka bir şey değilmiş."; Mumcu, p. 117.

¹⁴¹ "Şeyh Said isyanı, Şark vilayetlerimizdeki manevi kuvvetlerin son tatbikatıdır. Bu hadiseyi takip eden günlerde Kürt'ün ruhuna tarikat telkinatı [telkinleri] yerine Kürtlük mefkuresi aşılarmaya başlamıştır."; Koca, p. 113.

The Ağrı and Dersim Rebellions

Baskın Oran summarizes the situation following the Sheikh Said rebellion as follows:

The spirit of the War of Liberation had vaporized. Although it is not told in textbooks, there was not a single year in which there was no rebellion in this region from this date to the death of Atatürk... The nationalism of the majority (Turkish), which had been a reaction to imperialism, created a nationalism of the minority (Kurdish), which was a reaction to it.¹⁴²

The most important rebellions that Oran mentions were the İhsan Nuri Pasha and Dersim rebellions.

The rebellion of İhsan Nuri Pasha, who had been a Kurdish officer in the former Ottoman army, was organized in coordination with an organization called *Khoybun* (in Kurdish, "Liberation"), which was based in Syria and Lebanon and established by a group of Kurdish intellectuals. This rebellion, which was conducted with a non-religious nationalist motive and leadership, was a first in Kurdish history in terms of its secularism. İhsan Nuri, who was supported indirectly by the Shah Riza of Iran, became influential around Bitlis, Van, Ağrı and Botan in 1929. This rebellion was so powerful that it could only be crushed in the summer of 1930 by an army of 45,000 men. A pitched battle in which 15,000 soldiers, siege artillery and combat planes were used by the Turkish army took place in July 12, 1930.¹⁴³ Finally, the rebels were confounded. Some of the leaders, including İhsan Nuri, fled to Iran and others were caught and executed following trials.

¹⁴² "Kurtuluş Savaşı'ndaki işbirliği dağılmıştır. Nitekim okul kitaplarında yazmaz ama, bu tarihten Atatürk'ün ölüm tarihine dek, bu bölgede ayaklanma olmayan bir tek yıl geçmemiştir... Emperyalizme tepki olarak doğan bir çoğunluk (Türk) milliyetçiliği, yarattığı tepkiyle, bir azınlık (Kürt) milliyetçiliği doğurmuştur."; Baskın Oran, *Atatürk Milliyetçiliği: Resmi İdeoloji Dışında Bir İnceleme* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1993), pp. 219-223.

¹⁴³ McDowall, p. 205.

The Dersim rebellion broke out in March, 1937. The rebellion was started by an Alevi leader, Sheikh Seyid Rıza, and was supported by the Yusufkan and Denemen tribes as well as his own tribe, Abaşuhakkı. Although the leader of the rebellion was a "sheikh," the nature of the rebellion was ethnic, not religious. Seyid Rıza, who got nearly 1.500 men together, and attacked the gendarmerie and police stations in Dersim. The army deployed great efforts to quash the rebellion and overcome a guerrilla group, which fought with hit and run tactics. Seyid Rıza, his two sons and some other tribe leaders were caught, judged and sentenced to death in November, 1937. However, the rebellion continued for months. It was completely quashed in October, 1938. During this period, serious military operations including air bombardment were organized on Dersim and 50,000 soldiers and 40 combat planes were used in these operations.¹⁴⁴ The government renamed Dersim, "Tunceli" in order to eradicate the bad memories. Martial Law in Tunceli continued until 1946 and military blockade would continue until 1950.

These incidents were parts of a chain of events that accelerated the development of an ethnic-Kurdish consciousness in the region. A letter sent by British Ambassador R. C. Lindsay to Prime Minister Austen Chamberlain on October 16, 1925, included the following remarks right after his comments on the modernization efforts in Turkey

Kurdish rebellion, which broke out in the previous spring, was a disastrous shock in terms of this policy. There is nationalism in Kurdistan, but it is Kurdish, not Turkish. nationalism. And the Turkish nationalism, which is being imposed by the government, is too rigid and sectarian to convince the Kurdish people, especially in terms of its secularization program which is very unpopular among conservative

¹⁴⁴ McDowall, p. 209.

Kurds.¹⁴⁵

The Alternative Project of Kazım Karabekir

Could there be a different policy on the Kurds after the Sheikh Said rebellion?

One figure that should be recalled here is Kazım Karabekir Pasha. He had warned the government to take precautions against a possible rebellion as early as 1922, and, in the post-war period, he argued for reforms in the east. But all his ideas fell on deaf ears.¹⁴⁶ There were four basic elements in Karabekir's project for reforming Kurdish areas. First, enrolling children under the age of twelve in boarding schools. Second, making Tribal Officer Regiments, which were the continuation of Hamidiye Regiments, productive in agricultural development and road constructions by transforming them into agricultural squads. Third, mixing sheiks and other clergy in the region with teachers and lawyers who could speak Kurdish and were university graduates. Therefore, ensuring the people in the region was educated in a modern way without separating them from religious roots. And fourth, dividing other tribes into smaller sections to employ them in the local development projects, starting from the Lake Van area; opening Turkish channels, which were high cultured, qualified and which would set an example for social life and production for

¹⁴⁵ Bilal N. Şimşir, *İngiliz Belgeleriyle Türkiye'de "Kürt Sorunu" (1924-1938)*, 2nd edition (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1991), p. 80.

¹⁴⁶ Kazım Karabekir Pasha wrote that after he arrived at Ankara from Erzurum towards the end of 1922, he made some warnings about the "Kurdish Reforms," and even spoke to İsmet Pasha in Bursa and then to Minister of Internal Affairs Recep Peker asking his memoranda to be taken into account. But his memoranda are missing. No information has been kept by the ministries of the newly established Ankara Government, which were being newly organized at the time. Karabekir's request from Recep Peker included to collection of the related files from the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Education in Istanbul; translation and examination of scholarly work on Kurdish, especially from Russian and English; implementing integration policies such as schools, roads and economic integration and initiating a "substantial program," and he warned him that unless such action was taken promptly havoc was inevitable. (K. Karabekir, *Kürt Meselesi*,

local people in order to neutralize the Armenian propagandas and Kurdish actions in the region.¹⁴⁷

In brief, Karabekir proposed a solution which would consider the religious sensitivities of Kurdish people, impose no compulsion for any change in their identities, instigate for production by introducing them to modern education and thus increase their economic integration with the rest of the country. This project had similar aspects with the one developed by Ziya Gökalp a few years earlier.

Yet whether such projects were actually feasible in the Turkey of the 1920's is questionable. The country was impoverished by subsequent wars and the government had very scarce resources. Rehabilitating the east in the way Karabekir had envisioned would require a powerful economy, which was definitely not case with early republican Turkey.

On the other hand, one could argue that the mindset of the new regime was different than that of Karabekir and his like-minded, and that attitude mattered as well. The *ostpolitik* conducted by İsmet İnönü governments considered the “eastern question” basically from a perspective of security and hoped that the problem would be resolved by compelling the Kurds to accept that they were in fact Turkish, and by oppressing reactions through state power. As stated in the “Kurdish Report” prepared by Prime Minister İsmet İnönü, dated August 21, 1935, the practices of the period were based on a “severe assimilation policy.” And it was believed that any problem could be solved by the “omnipotent bureaucracy.”¹⁴⁸

However, these assimilation efforts backlashed. Integrating conservative Kurds

particularly pp. 11-14, 49-61; 180-197).

¹⁴⁷ Karabekir's project is outlined by Hüseyin Koca. See Koca, pp. 525-26.

¹⁴⁸ “Sert bir asimilasyon politikası... Kadir-i Mutlak bürokrasi”; Ibid. p. 533.

in terms of politics and sociology could have only been possible by considering traditional religious and cultural values. Public education centers (*Halkevleri*) and village institutes (*Köy Enstitüleri*), which were products of a more modernist and revolutionary paradigm, had only symbolic and limited influence. Conservative Kurds did not want to benefit from the limited education facilities, fearing, “our children will become faithless.”¹⁴⁹ Amongst the people in the region "hatred" developed against migrants being sent from other regions in order to balance the Kurdish majority in the region.¹⁵⁰ The policy to force Kurds to migrate into western regions created a great discontent. Because, migrating to west meant a great deal of economic and psychological pressure.

For these reasons, government policies did not achieve any success except for military purposes. Hüseyin Koca states the following comments in his book, which is an expansion of his doctoral thesis where he examined the eastern policies of successive Turkish governments:

Although the nation state philosophy laid important duties on the state in the process of market integration in economic field and nationalization, as a result of lack of resources, the railway and road projects planned for the First General Inspectorships region were constructed for domestic security and connecting the mines in the region to the external markets, instead of connecting economic institutions in the region to the national market which would ensure economic integration. As a result of these wrong practices and scarcities, the locals of the region did not leave their habits of using pre-republican market routes of the Ottoman age.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ “Çocuklarımız gavurlaşacak”; Ibid. p. 536.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 536.

¹⁵¹ ““Milli devlet felsefesi iktisadi alanda pazar bütünlüşmesi ve militleşme sürecinde devlete önemli görevler yüklemesine rağmen, bu dönemde özellikle Birinci Umumi Müfettişlik bölgesinde yapımı planlanan demir ve karayolu projeleri, kaynak yetersizliği yüzünden bölgedeki kitleleri ekonomik entegrasyona götürecek milli pazarlara bağlaması gerekirken, sadece iç güvenliğe ve bölge madenlerini dış pazarlara bağlamaya yönelik inşa edilebildi. Bu hatalı uygulama ve imkansızlıklar neticesinde zaten fakir olan bölge halkı, Cumhuriyet öncesi Osmanlı pazar güzergahı alışkanlıklarını bırakmadı.”; Ibid. pp. 534-35.

In sum, the economic integration, which is a crucial step in nation-building, did not realize, and Kurds of Turkey stayed in close contact with markets in Syria, Iraq and Iran, as in the period before the nation-state. When this commercial network, which was once legal, became illegal as a result of boundaries of the Republic, a local economy based on smuggling arose.

Understanding Ankara

While examining the negative results of the policies of the Ankara government, one should not fail to consider the specific conditions of the period. The priority of the period, in which the Republic was newly established and great dangers were confronted, was naturally security and survival. A huge empire had disintegrated, minorities forming this empire had separated and announced their independence, and moreover, they had cooperated with the “enemy,” such as Russia and Britain. The reaction of the Republic to the Sheikh Said rebellion, which coincided with the British efforts to seize Mosul, should be understood in these circumstances.

Besides, central planning based on security concerns, which led to failure of economic integration in eastern Turkey, maybe considered as an obligatory policy considering the conditions of the period. It is possible to assert that there had not been sufficient investments in the Southeast; but in those days all the important economic facilities were built in the inner parts of the country because of a possible enemy invasion. This is particularly obvious in the case of Karabük Iron-Steel Facilities. As stated by a minister of the period, Hilmi Uran, defense concerns, which are military assumptions, came before the economic appraisals even in the policy

regarding railways.¹⁵²

Perhaps, the most important lesson to be learned from the Kurdish history of the early days of the Republic represented by rebellions and oppressions would be, on the contrary to what was expressed by *Hakimiyeti Milliye* as “respect and affection,” could not be called by “might.” To the opposite, such action would only lead to alienation one way or another.

¹⁵² Hilmi Uran, *Hatıralarım* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1959), pp. 259, 351.

CHAPTER VI

THE SINGLE PARTY AND THE KURDS

While thinking over Turkey's Kurdish question, it is helpful to consider analyses made by social scientists on similar ethnic issues, because this question is an example of a process experienced in many other countries of the world. It comes out of an effort of central states established in the modern age to amalgamate indigenous communities with different cultures and languages into a single national identity. This effort requires making all the communities within the boundaries of the nation accept a common language and culture. Because, otherwise, it would not be possible to integrate these communities with each other, develop economic and cultural exchange between them, and thus establish a modern country.

However, the method for this necessary effort is of great importance. Albert F. Reiterer of the Institute for Research in Ethnic and National Issues (IRENI) in Vienna argues the following in reference to study of the social scientist, Eleanor Weber:

E. Weber (1976, 94) points also to the alienation this meant for countryside people who had to switch into a language foreign to them, "that reflected none of [their] feelings and experience." Nation-building was a process of alienation. We may say that at this stage of historical development national integration with its consequences in the linguistic realm was necessary; a national *lingua franca* was unavoidable. However, this is not the point. The alienation coming together with national integration was not caused primarily by the dissolving of

parochial seclusion.¹⁵³

To adapt this suggestion to Turkey's Kurdish question, the following can be said: Spreading a common language (Turkish) has been a necessary policy for ensuring the national integrity of Turkey. Although this policy has led to alienation among the Kurdish people, the real reason for this alienation is not this policy that asserts the common language as Turkish.

Then, what is the real reason? And, therefore, what is the real problem?

Reiterer argues,

Alienation was caused primarily by the contempt of the countryside people by those coming from the urban centres, of the lower classes by the upper classes; of the centre by the periphery. That is, nation-building was seen by many people as forced upon them, and as a conquest of their world by an alien outside power.¹⁵⁴

When Turkey's case is considered in terms of Reiter's analysis, the real reason why Kurdish people in Turkey have shown an alienation from and reaction to the "center" should be that they have thought that the center, including the bureaucracy, overlooked and suppressed them. Indeed, according to Martin Van Bruinessen, the assimilationist policies of the single party period resulted in such alienation. He argues:

The compulsory adoption of surnames in 1934 turned numerous Kurdish families into Türks, Öztürks, Tatars, or Özbeks; their villages also had to give up their Armenian or Kurdish names for Turkish ones. Speaking Turkish became obligatory for all villagers coming to town; in the years of high Kemalism villagers had to pay a fine for each Kurdish word that they uttered. These policies were an irritant, that further alienated the village population from the government, but they did not contribute

¹⁵³ Albert F. Reiterer, "Minorities And Minorities' Policies In Europe," (ed) Eduard Staudinger, *Hidden Minorities*, Universität Graz, 2002. Available [online]: http://homepage.uibk.ac.at/~c40285/reiterer_texte/pdf/Radenci.pdf [August 12, 2006].

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

much to assimilation.¹⁵⁵

Another policy aimed at assimilating the Kurds was the Law on Resettlement (*İskân Kanunu*), which resulted in mass deportations:

The most spectacular method of forced assimilation practiced by the Republican authorities was that of mass deportations. Deportations (*sürgün*) are, of course, part of the Ottoman heritage but it is only in the republican period that we find them used as a tool of nation-building. The text of the 1934 *İskân Kanunu* makes unambiguously clear that by then the primary aim of the planned population transfers was the assimilation of non-Turkish elements to Turkish culture. Art. 2 of this law divides the country in three settlement zones: those where the population of Turkish culture had to be increased, those where the groups to be assimilated could be resettled, and those which for various reasons (health, security, etc.) had to be evacuated. In the years preceding this law, deportations of Kurds had taken place for security reasons or in retaliation of Kurdish rebellions, but as a secondary objective the thought of assimilation may already have played a part as well.¹⁵⁶

These policies have not been successful, as the persistence of Turkey's Kurdish question indicates. Yet, interestingly, the failure of the government's efforts towards assimilation was not only due to the authoritarian nature of these policies, but also to the lack of the power to implement them. This was especially the case with education. According to Van Bruinessen, it was the lack, not the presence, of education in Kurdish regions that impeded assimilation:

The closing of the medreses in 1924 effectively banned education in non-Turkish vernaculars for the Muslims (because of the Lausanne Treaty a similar ban for non-Muslims was formally not possible). The only formal education that was henceforth available was in Turkish, even though this meant that communication between the teachers and students was minimal. For several decades, this meant that the level of education in the

¹⁵⁵ Martin van Bruinessen, "Race, Culture, Nation and Identity Politics in Turkey: Some Comments," Presented at the Mica Erteğün Annual Turkish Studies Workshop on Continuity and Change: "Shifting State Ideologies from Late Ottoman to Early Republican Turkey, 1890-1930", Department of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University, April 24-26, 1997. Available [online]: http://www.let.uu.nl/~Martin.vanBruinessen/personal/publications/Identity_politics_in_Turkey.pdf [April 7, 2007].

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Kurdish countryside remained very low compared to western Turkey. The very inadequacy of education there prevented the village schools from functioning as effective means of assimilation.¹⁵⁷

The inadequacy of education in Kurdish regions seem to be in parallel with the lack of the RPP (Republican People's Party, or *Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası*) organizations in the thirteen provinces situated in the east and southeast. Hakkı Uyar argues, "The RPP did not trust in local administrations because of its revolutionary-Jacobin mentality"¹⁵⁸, and that was the reason for the RPP's absence in the east. However, an alternative explanation might be that the RPP simply didn't have the means to establish itself in these remote regions. The unwelcoming attitude of the Kurdish notables towards the representatives of the central authority — a phenomenon that had dated back to the mid-19th century — could well be another additional factor that halted the RPP's establishment in the predominantly Kurdish provinces. It could even be argued that the RPP appeased Kurdish notables by halting the advance of modernization in their territories.

What would make the matters even worse would come in the 1930's: Turkish ethnic nationalism, an ideological current whose origins went back to Yusuf Akçura and found ample ground to flourish in Turkish nationalist circles after the untimely death of Ziya Gökalp,¹⁵⁹ whose nationalism, as aforesaid, was based on culture, not ethnicity, and was much more embracing towards the Kurds.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ "Devrimci – Jakoben anlayışı içinde taşra örgütlerine fazla güvenmiyordu."; Hakkı Uyar, *CHP Tüzükleri* (İstanbul: Türkiye Sosyal Ekonomik Araştırmalar Vakfı, 2000), p. 37-46.

¹⁵⁹ Büşra Ersanlı, "Bir Aidiyet Fermanı: 'Türk Tarih Tezi'," *Milliyetçilik: Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce*, ed. by Tanıl Bora (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), p. 802

Ethnicity and Identity in the 1930s

In the Turkey of the 1930s, pseudo-scientific racist theses found official acceptance. The address for these was the Association for the Examination of Turkish History (currently, the Turkish Historical Society or *Türk Tarih Kurumu*). The president of this institution was the Secretary General of Presidency, M. Tevfik Bey and its vice-presidents were Yusuf Akçura and Reşit Galip, and the latter two had the real ideological initiative.

This initiative resulted in the sponsoring of biological racist theses. Many “scientific” presentations were submitted to the Congress of Turkish History in 1932 about the distinctive and superior features of the "Turkish race." Anthropologist Şevket Aziz Kansu argued that Turks were the ancestors of European races basing his “phrenology” on the following argument:

In phrenology, there are specific diameters. These diameters are of a biological, scientific importance as indications of determinism in organic evolution of life based on physic-chemical factors... Where does this type called as the European type stem from? Will you relate this to Europe? Will you relate Europe to this? We could give a clear answer to this question: brachycephal Europe is related to us.¹⁶⁰

During this period, theses were developed arguing that the origins of the Turks dated back to 12,000 years or even 20,000 years. According to such views, all languages and all civilizations had stemmed from Turks in prehistoric ages.¹⁶¹ In fact, through these theses, a historical base for secularism was sought, which would

¹⁶⁰ "Kafa ilminde bazı muayyen kuturlar vardır. Bu kuturlar fiziko-şimik âmillere bağlı hayatın uzvi tekamülündeki determinizmanın ifadesi olmak itibarile biyolojik, rasik bir kıymet arzederler... Avrupai tip dediğimiz bu tip nereden gelmiştir? Bunu Avrupaya mı bağliyacaksınız? Yoksa Avrupayı ona mı? Tereddütsüz cevabını derhal verelim ki brakisefal Avrupa bize bağlıdır."; *Birinci Tarih Kongresi Tutanakları* (Ankara: Maarif Vekâleti, 1932), p. 271.

¹⁶¹ Nazan Maksudyan, *Türklüğü Ölçmek: Bilimkurgusal Antropoloji ve Türk Milliyetçiliğinin Irkçı Çehresi 1925-1939* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2005).

marginalize Ottoman history (in a way, Seljuk history, too) and create a superior Turkish image in the Neolithic age.

Minister of National Education Reşit Galip silenced criticisms and warnings coming from prominent historians, such as Zeki Velidi, Fuat Köprülü and Ahmet Refik.¹⁶² Zeki Velidi went to the University of Vienna, leaving the country humiliated by Reşit Galip; he returned to Turkey in 1939.¹⁶³ Ahmet Refik Altınay, who was known as “the man who popularized history,” was banned, too; he was dispelled from the university through the great purge conducted by Reşit Galip under the 1933 "university reform."

Büşra Ersanlı, in her work titled *İktidar ve Tarih* (Power and History), argues that the reinterpretation of history has been an inseparable part of the “enlightenment” in Turkey, as has been the case in the world. The nationalistic history and Turkism theses were aimed at creating an ethnic homogeneity, and the positive aspects of Ottoman history were eliminated. A synthetic, invented “historical consciousness” was created that would give “Turks” a sense of superiority. Moreover, citizenship was defined according to the acceptance of this new generic identity, and “consciousness of citizenship” and “historical consciousness” were merged during the 1930s.¹⁶⁴

According to Mete Tunçay, Kemalism was at first a modernization project, which would stretch from cities to villages without discriminating between Turks or Kurds and taking citizenship as the defining concept. However, this project devolved over time. According to Tunçay, “at the beginning, Kemalism defined

¹⁶² Ersanlı, pp. 800-810.

¹⁶³ Tuncer Baykara, *Zeki Velidi Togan* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1989), pp. 20 – 24.

‘Turks’ as the citizens of Turkish Republic. There was no problem as long as this was the case. Kurds, Armenians and Greeks were Turks as citizens of Turkish Republic. However, when progeny and race were included — such concepts were introduced in the 1930s — of course it was an unfortunate incident...”¹⁶⁵

This ethnic nationalism was expressed not only in books, newspapers and congress halls in the 1930s. The fact that a requirement such as “genuine Turkishness” was included in addition to egalitarian requirements such as citizenship, education and age in the public advertisements for the personnel to be employed in state institutions, the army and the bureaucratic institutions of the period shows that the concept of “Turk” implied not only citizenship, but also ethnicity. In some of these ads, “being a subject of the Turkish Republic and a member of the Turkish race” or “being of Turkish stock” was required in addition to being a Turkish citizen. When Keriman Halis became Miss World, this was celebrated bluntly as an evidence of “the beauty of the Turkish race.”¹⁶⁶

As for the identification of the nation, blood ties were called for. The “Turkish nation” was described as the “association of people who live in Turkish land, speak Turkish language and have Turkish blood.”¹⁶⁷

To be fair, the Kemalist regime was never fully racist or fascist; however, it

¹⁶⁴ Büşra Ersanlı, *İktidar ve Tarih* (İstanbul: Afa Yayınları, 1992), whole book, esp. p. 157.

¹⁶⁵ “Kemalizm başlangıçta Türk’ü, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti vatandaşı olarak tanımladı. Böyle olduğu sürece bir sorun yoktu. Kürt de, Ermeni de, Rum da Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin yurttaşı anlamında Türk’tü. Ama işin içine soy, ırk falan girince, ki 1930’larda girmeye başladı, tabii bu kötü bir gelişme oldu...”; Metin Sever, Interview with Mete Tunçay in *Kürt Sorunu: Aydınlarımız Ne Düşünüyor?* (İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1992), pp. 278.

¹⁶⁶ “Türkiye Cumhuriyeti tebaasından ve Türk ırkından olmak... Türk soyundan olmak”; Ahmet Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), esp. pages 193 and onwards.

¹⁶⁷ “Türk Yurdu üzerinde yaşayan, Türk diliyle konuşan ve Türk kanını taşıyan insanların birliğine Türk milleti denilir.”; Füsun Üstel, *Makbul Vatandaş’ın Peşinde* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), pp. 168-172.

was influenced by the ideological schools of the period with such characteristics. The regime did not measure the phrenology of its citizens nor categorize its people according to such criteria; however, racist statements influenced social life as well as textbooks.

Such an atmosphere, without doubt, could not but alienate Turkey's Kurdish citizens. The trauma of the *Takrir-i Sükûn* was amplified with this racist Turkism rhetoric, which only paved the way for more Kurdish rebellions.

Celal Bayar's Report on the East

In 1934, Minister of Economy Mahmut Celal Bey (Bayar) organized a trip to Turkey's eastern provinces in order to conduct investigations and on his return, in December, submitted a report to the office of the prime minister. The report, which consisted of 70 typewritten pages, was mostly related to economic matters, but it also included some interesting observations concerning the political situation in the region. Bayar stated the following:

Our eastern provinces were not under our full authority until our regime. The previous governments wished to conduct their authority over people through aghas and sheiks. It was an age of mutual interest made possible through division of the money collected from people by aghas and sheiks between government and these feudalistic people. It cannot be said, though, that we completely control the Eastern region. The most important forces in which we should trust are our army and gendarme... Since last year, following the trips of our Prime Minister, İsmet İnönü, developments in the fields of administration and economy are becoming apparent. We have seen newly employed intellectual lieutenant colonels, educated managers. This means that a basis for government establishment has been initiated. There are also advanced measures in the financial system... Government buildings, especially the ones in the towns, are neglected. It is worrisome that the people who work in these buildings for long periods will lose their energy and negotiation

capabilities.¹⁶⁸

The statements of Bayar show that the bureaucratic modernization, which commenced together with *Tanzimat* (Administrative Reforms) had reached the eastern part of the country only in the 1930s. Of course, this was a great delay. Tribal life was not in harmony with this administrative modernization. With the above-stated ideological policy and Sheikh Said rebellion, the situation had gone worse. The following statements of Bayar were noteworthy in terms of the ethnicity problem:

There is a clear problem in the eastern provinces in terms of authority and administration. The Turkish and Kurdish spirits are at extreme ends following Sheikh Said and Ağrı rebellions. The strong measures used for repressing the rebellion are understandable and suitable. However, the administration shall show no discrimination following the rebellions, as a separate and moderate system.¹⁶⁹

In his report, Celal Bayar stated, "our Kurdish-speaking citizens have a genius vigor in their lives," and that they settled on empty lands and worked the lands with their children whom they brought to these areas, too. He continued,

We should continually work in order to eliminate detrimental aspects of the policy to be externally imposed and connect these citizens to the motherland. As long as these people are formally told that they are

¹⁶⁸ "Doğu illerimiz rejimimize gelinceye kadar kat'î bir tarzda hakimiyetimiz altına girmemiştir. Geçmiş hükümetler, halk üzerindeki hakimiyetlerini ağalar ve şeyhler vasıtasıyla yürütmek istemişlerdir. Ağalar ve şeyhler soyduklarının bir kısmını hükümet erkânına vermek suretiyle müşterek idare-i maslahat devri yaşanmıştır. Şark'ta bugün için dahi tamamen yerleştiğimiz iddia olunamaz. İstinat edeceğimiz en mühim kuvvet: Ordumuz ve jandarmamızdır... Geçen sene, Başvekilimiz İsmet İnönü'nün seyahatlarından sonra idarî ve malî sahalarda yapılmaya başlanılan yenilikler göze çarpmaktadır, Yeni başlamış münevver kaymakamlar, tahsil görmüş yeni müdürler karşımıza çıkmışlardır. Hükümet teşkilatının esasları kurulmaya başlanmış demektir. Malî sistemde de ilerlemiş tedbirler görülmüştür... Hükümet binaları, bilhassa kazalardakiler pek perişandır. Bu binalar içinde uzun müddet oturup çalışanların enerji ve müzakere kabiliyetlerini kaybedeceklerinden korkulur."; Nurşen Mazıcı, *Celal Bayar: Başbakanlık Dönemi, 1937 – 1939* (İstanbul: Der Yayınları, 1997), pp. 155.

¹⁶⁹ "Doğu illerinde hakimiyet ve idare bakımından göze çarpan bariz bir hakikat vardır. Şeyh Sait ve Ağrı isyanlarından sonra Türklük ve Kürtlük ihtirası karşılıklı şahlanmıştır. İsyân edenleri tenkil etmek için kullanılan şiddetin mânâsı anlaşılır ve yerindedir. İsyândan sonra fark gözetmeksizin idare etmek de, bundan ayrı ve mutedil bir sistemdir."; Ibid. p. 156.

foreign elements, what we will have is nothing but a reaction. Today, it seems like these people are prevented from getting education and governmental jobs, for they are Kurds. It would be fair to say that the administrative personnel do not know exactly what system they should follow in relation to these citizens. I believe that clear instructions should be given to these personnel in an organized way. This would prevent hesitations and prevent conflicts that may be caused by personal interpretations.¹⁷⁰

The most critical point of Bayar was his warnings that the Kurds would "react... if these people were formally told that they are foreign elements." Truly, in a public discourse in which "being of the Turkish stock" was a condition for employment, it was unavoidable that Kurds would react. Moreover a humiliating and sarcastic discourse developed against the Kurds. For example, as for Kurds who commenced the Ağrı rebellion, *Cumhuriyet*, the prominent newspaper of the period, wrote, "feelings and minds of these people operate through simple instincts just as in common animals."¹⁷¹

Journalist Yusuf Mazhar, in his *Cumhuriyet* article titled "Ararat Eteklerinde" (Hillsides of Ararat), argued, "Kurds spread on the land like witch grass; they are creatures which are detrimental to the region in which they live. They have been newcomers to other places too, they are like a disease."¹⁷²

It is even possible to trace the influence of Social Darwinism in the racist

¹⁷⁰ "Haricen sokulmaya çalışılan politikanın muzır (zararlı) cereyanlarını kırmak ve yurddaşları ana vatana bağlamak için devamlı çalışmak ister. Kendilerine yabancı bir unsur oldukları resmi ağızlardan da ifade edildiği takdirde, bizim için elde edilecek netice bir aksülamelden (tepkiden) ibarettir. Bugün Kürt diye bir kısım vatandaşlar okutturulmamak ve devlet işlerine karıştırılmamak isteniliyor. Ve daha doğrusu bu kısım vatandaşlar hakkında ne gibi bir sistem takip edileceği idare memurlarınca vazih olarak bilinmiyor. Bunu bir sisteme bağlayarak kendilerine sarıh bir talimat çok yerinde ve faideli bir tedbir olarak telakki etmekteyim. Hiç olmazsa bu suretle tereddütlerin ve zatî içtihatlarla müstenit hareketlerin önüne geçilmiş olur."; Ibid. p. 229.

¹⁷¹ "Bunlar ayırıkotu gibi sarıldıkları toprakta yayılır fakat bastıkları yere zarar verir mahluklardır. Bir çok yere hastalık sirayet eder gibi sonradan yerleşmişlerdir."; "Temizlik Başladı: Zeylan Deresindekiler Tamamen İmha Edildi," *Cumhuriyet*, July 13, 1930.

¹⁷² Yusuf Mazhar, "Ararat Eteklerinde," *Cumhuriyet*, August 19 1930; quoted in Emin

attitude towards the Kurds in the 1930s. The following remarks by Minister of Foreign Affairs Tevfik Rüştü (Saraçoğlu) had overt Social Darwinist tones:

As far as the situation of Kurds is concerned, their cultural levels are so low and their mindsets are so underdeveloped that they cannot exist within the Turkish national structure... As they are not strong in terms of their economy, they will lose the struggle that they have with Turks who are more advanced and intellectual... Most of them could migrate to Iran or Iraq, the remaining ones will be subject to destruction which is inevitable for the weak in the struggle for life.¹⁷³

In a political attitude which involved such exclusions and humiliations, alienation became unavoidable for the Kurds. Actually this alienation was not valid only for Kurds, but also for all the social groups who felt humiliated and excluded by the system. It was much more deeply felt among the Kurds of the young Turkish Republic.

“Although These People Were of the Purest Turkish Stock”

Many events and statements dating from the 1930s show that Kurdish citizens were treated unfavorably. One of the striking features of the period is that Kurds were now identified as “Turks who lost their identities,” quite unlike the “Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood” discourse of the National Struggle. In line with this argument, a comment about Sheikh Said in the 4th volume of a *History* textbook published by the Ministry of Education in 1931 was interesting:

Among Turks living in the eastern provinces who consider themselves separate from Kurds because of external political provocations and bad

Karaca, *Ağrı Eteklerindeki Ateş* (Istanbul: Alan Yayıncılık, 1991), p. 66.

¹⁷³ "Kürtlerin durumuna gelince, kültürel düzeyleri o kadar düşük, zihniyetleri o kadar geridir ki, Türk ulusal yapısı içinde barınmazlar... Ekonomik yönden uygun olmadıkları için, daha ileri ve kültürlü olan Türklerle giriştikleri yaşam mücadelesini kaybedeceklerdir... Çoğu İran veya Irak'a göçebilir, kalanlar ise yaşam mücadelesinde zayıfların yok olması sürecine tabi olacaklardır."; David McDowall, p. 200.

policies conducted by the sultanic administration, there were every kind of negative policy inculcations, although these people were of the purest Turkish stock. The primary provocation means of all these inculcations were untruthful cries such as “religion is being eradicated.” Some sheiks and some traitor politicians, which were led by an illiterate, fanatic adherent called Sheikh Said, made some of the people living in mountains and villages with no idea about the issues in the real world rebel, by instigating them through revealing their fanaticism, and they plundered the cities. These loonies opposed against the Republic by cooperating with non-Muslim foreign minorities, although they talked about Islam and religion, they were not aware of the power of order and justice over them. This traitorous rebellion aroused rage and hatred in the whole country. Some religious crooks whose interests were lost through the Revolution and parties of the previous age and sly politicians who wished to make use of all these incidents considered treachery and betrayal actions in the eastern provinces as promising incidents.¹⁷⁴

In the other sections of this text, it says that the PRP is such a traitor party. The notable point in the text is that being of the Turkish progeny is used as a base for political loyalty.

One of the sharpest statements of the mentality that related citizenship to being “a real Turk” would be the notorious comment by Minister of Justice Mahmut Esat Bozkurt. Bozkurt had earlier argued that “the spiritual issues aside, Islam is nothing, but the Arabian mindset and Arabian civilization applied to prayers.” In a speech on September 17, 1930 in Ödemiş, as the of Minister of Justice, he stated the following with respect to citizens who were not “real Turks”:

¹⁷⁴ "Asılları en saf Türklük kökünden geldiği halde asırlardan beri hariçten giren siyasi tahrikler ve saltanat idaresinin fena siyasetleri yüzünden bir kısmı kendilerini Türklükten ayrı saymaya başlamış olan şark vilayetleri Türkleri arasında her türlü menfi politika telkinleri yürütülüyordu. Bütün bu telkinlerin en birinci tahrik vasıtası ‘dinin elden gittiği’ yolundaki sahte feryatları. Başlarında Şeyh Said adlı gayet cahil bir softa bulunan bazı şeyhlerle yabancıların aleti olan bir kaç hain politikacı dağlarda ve köylerde dünya hadiselerinden habersiz yaşayan bir kısım halkı bir taraftan taassuplarını tutuşturarak, diğer taraftan şehirleri yağma etmek vaadi ile hırslarını uyandırmak suretiyle isyan ettirdiler. İslamlıktan ve dinden bahsettikleri halde Müslüman olmayan yabancı unsurlarla anlaşıp ittifak ederek Cumhuriyet aleyhine kalkan bu sersem başlar, üzerinde hazır duran nizam ve adalet kılıcının ne kadar keskin olduğundan gafil idiler. Bu çok haince ayaklanma bütün memlekette taşkın hiddet ve nefret uyandırdı. İnkılaptan hasis menfaatleri zarara uğrayan bazı din sahtekarları ile eski devir artığı zümreler ve bütün bunlardan istifade etmek isteyen sinsi politikacılar hep şark vilayetlerindeki ihanet ve hiyanet hareketinden ümide düştüler.”; *Tarih, IV, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti* (İstanbul Devlet Matbaası, Maarif Vekaleti, 1931), p.

It is my firm opinion, and let friend and foe hear it, that the lords of this country are the Turks. Those who are not real Turks (*öz Türk*) have only one right in the Turkish fatherland, and that is the right to be servants and slaves.¹⁷⁵

These statements aroused reaction among the Greeks in that period. Mahmut Esat made the matters even worse by his dim apology, "I meant other minorities, not foreigners in my speech." According to Mete Tunçay, Bozkurt was unseated from the Ministry of Justice after this speech.¹⁷⁶ Kurdish leaders of course also read the chauvinistic statement of Mahmut Esat published in the daily *Milliyet* on September 19, 1930. And of course they inferred a message from it. One of them was İhsan Nuri Pasha, a former officer in the Ottoman army, who led the aforementioned Ağrı Rebellion. İhsan Nuri, who had already devoted himself to the Kurdish cause made use of the statements by Mahmut Esat for propaganda. According to him, the state had shown its racist mentality through the statements of Minister of Justice in Turkey "in which millions of Kurds, Laz and Circassians live," and "Kurdish people had figured out the policy of Turkey." The Kurdish people, according to İhsan Nuri, should uprising in order to oppose this policy and "make other races rebel with them."¹⁷⁷

190 and onwards

¹⁷⁵ "Benim fikrim ve kanaatim şudur ki, dost da düşman da bilsin ki, bu memleketin efendisi Türk'tür. Öz Türk olmayanların Türk vatanında bir hakkı vardır, o da hizmetçi olmaktır, köle olmaktır."; Dragoş C. Mateescu, "Kemalism in the Era of Totalitarianism: A Conceptual Analysis," *Turkish Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, June 2006, pp. 225-241.

¹⁷⁶ "Ecnebileri değil, diğer unsurları kastettim."; Hakkı Uyar, '*Sol Milliyetçi*' Bir Türk Aydını: *Mahmut Esat Bozkurt* (Istanbul: Büke Yayınları, 2002), p. 116.

¹⁷⁷ "İçinde milyonlarca Kürt, Laz ve Çerkez'in yaşadığı Türkiye'de devlet... ırkçılığını göstermiş... Kürt ulusu, Türkiye'nin bu siyasetini anlamış ve karşı koymak amacıyla ve diğer ırkların da Kürtlerle birlikte ayaklanması için harekete geçmiş"; Emin Karaca, *Ağrı Eteklerindeki Ateş* (Istanbul: Alan Yayıncılık, 1991), pp. 131-132.

The Mind of Ankara

Why did the Republican regime choose to have such a radical break from its wartime policy towards Kurds, a policy that ensured their loyalty in the turbulent years of the War of Independence?

Actually Mustafa Kemal was aware of the Kurdish question in those years and that is why he generously used the rhetoric of Islamic brotherhood to keep Kurds in line with the national resistance against the occupying powers. But he was also aware that his post-war project would not fit the Kurdish chieftains who supported him against the "infidel." The Ottoman Empire has been lost, and, according to Mustafa Kemal, a clean break was necessary. Here we see the influence of rationalist revolutionism, which Mustafa Kemal, like most of his contemporaries, inherited from French revolutionaries.

A more solid factor determining the Kemalist policy on the Kurds was the fear of dismemberment — which was not totally unjustified. They had the bad memory of losing a vast empire because of national liberation movements, which brought the Turkish nation to the brink of the infamous Treaty of Sèvres. The elite of the Young Turkish Republic also kept in mind that in Sèvres the Allies had supported the idea of an independent Kurdistan. This led them to think that any concession given to the Kurdish ethnic identity would revive the Sèvres conditions and lead their young republic to destruction. According to Nader Entessar,

The post-World War I Treaties of Sèvres and Lausanne heightened the Turkish Republic's fear of further dismemberment and intensified the desire of the leadership to suppress all non-Turkish ethnic identities. No country has been as preoccupied with the eradication of Kurdish national

identity as Turkey in the twentieth century.¹⁷⁸

Consequently, the Turkish government invented the term "Mountain Turks" to refer to the country's Kurdish population. This has made the status of the Kurds in Turkey very different from the fate of the Kurds in Iran and Iraq, where their ethnic identity and equality have been recognized by law, if not always in practice.

Interestingly, however, Turkey's Kurds are more integrated into the Turkish society than Iraq's or Iran's Kurds are to their host societies. This is mainly thanks to the modernization of Turkey, a process which undoubtedly owes much to the Turkish Republic and its core principles such as secularism and national sovereignty.

¹⁷⁸ Nader Entessar, p. 81.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

As seen in the preceding chapters, the origin of Turkey's Kurdish question is very much tied to the fall of the Ottoman State. The end of this colossal empire and the rise of a nation-state from its ashes could be ethnically unproblematic only if the remnants of the former constituted a single ethnic group. Yet this was not the case. Kurds were a major non-Turkish ethnic group that the Turkish Republic inherited and their existence created a problem, simply because the opportunity that the Ottoman system presented to them — to exist as Kurds *per se* — disappeared in the modern Turkish Republic.

However, it should be noted that Kurdish nationalism preceded the founding of the Turkish Republic. Even before Kurdish nationalism, there was the reaction of the Kurdish notables to the centralizing reforms of the *Tanzimat* modernization, which threatened their long-established privileges as tax collectors and *de facto* rulers. The menace to these privileges with the end of the Ottoman *Ancien Régime*, was the first breach in the traditional co-existence between Turks and Kurds. Moreover, Kurdish intelligentsia started to promote nationalist ideas at least two decades before the fall of the Empire, in the turn of the century. Their influence was very limited among Kurdish masses, to be sure, but they were acting as vanguards and it was inevitable that their ideas would become more powerful with the advent of modernization. On

the other hand, the Ottoman system could not live forever and it was inevitable that Turkey would transform itself into a modern secular nation-state. This transformation had to encompass the Kurdish citizens, too.

The question, and the focus of the controversy, was the pace and the methods of this transformation. The Kemalist project, inspired by the French Enlightenment and its faith in the power of human reason to reconstruct human societies, preferred a radical and state-driven "Turkification" policy on the non-Turkish elements of the Empire, the Kurds being the primary one. Besides this revolutionary assimilation agenda, there were more conservative/reformist — in a sense "Burkean" — and integrationist views such as those outlined by the sociologist Ziya Gökalp and Kazım Karabekir Pasha, a war hero. Both Gökalp and Karabekir insisted on the importance of preserving the traditional value systems that had been acting as ties between the Turks and the Kurds for centuries. They also emphasized the need to support agriculture and other forms of economic development in the eastern provinces in order to integrate the Kurds, which were mostly tribal, into Turkish society.

Yet the Republican regime preferred revolutionary assimilation to evolutionary integration, mostly due to comprehensible worries about a possible dismemberment of the newly founded Republic. These worries were sparked by the Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925, which was a watershed event in Turkish history. The rebellion was a reaction to both the secularism and the distinct Turkish identity of the Republic. It was crushed severely and the following period of political authoritarianism, established by the law of *Takrir-i Sükûn* ("The Law on the Maintenance of Order"), further radicalized the newly emerging Kurdish nationalism. The Turkist tendencies and rhetoric of the Republican People's Party, the uncontested ruler of the single party regime, in the 1930's also contributed to the alienation of the Kurds. The period

1925-38 is characterized by subsequent Kurdish uprisings and the military incursions of the Turkish state.

The striking fact is that much of those rebellious Kurds were loyal to the Istanbul and later the Ankara governments during World War I and the consequent War of Liberation. Kurds joined both wars on the side of their Turkish brethren against whom they saw as their common enemy — the Russians, the Armenians and the Allies. Mustafa Kemal Pasha ensured this alliance by using a very compelling rhetoric towards the Kurds during the War of Liberation, which appealed to their feelings of Islamic solidarity and brotherhood. The dramatic post-war shift in the rhetoric and policies of the Ankara government, which replaced Islam with secularism and supra-ethnic nationhood with Turkism, alienated conservative Kurds and thus unintentionally empowered the newly emerging Kurdish nationalism and its separatist aspirations.

Today, Turks, and especially their policy makers, need to look back to the early Republic and the genesis of the Kurdish question by asking the right questions about what went wrong and what can be done in the future.

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