

Between Accommodationism and Separatism:
Kurds, Ottomans and the Politics of Nationality
(1839-1914)



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Abstract

This dissertation examines the origins and development of ethno-national mobilisation amongst the Kurds of the Ottoman Empire in the decades leading up to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. It argues that, like other elements of Ottoman community, over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the idea that the Kurds constituted a ‘nation’ gradually proliferated amongst Kurdish intellectual and political leaders. This nascent ‘national consciousness’ found concrete expression in the establishment of a series of newspapers, journals and organisations claiming to represent the views and interests of the Ottoman Kurdish community. However, while a growing number of Kurds began to see themselves as part of a ‘Kurdish nation’, the political implications of Kurdish ‘nationhood’ remained controversial. Indeed, from its inception the Kurdish movement contained within it a number of factions which held very different opinions on what precisely constituted the Kurds’ national interests. This included some who attempted to secure the advancement and development of their people within the framework of the empire (accommodationists) and others who sought national independence (separatists). This study seeks to highlight the diversity within the Kurdish movement and, more importantly, shed light on the reasons behind it. In doing so, it will become possible to create a more nuanced historical narrative of the origins and nature of the Kurdish question, a question which remained a major political issue facing Middle Eastern leaders and statesmen today.

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Transliteration, Spelling, and Nomenclature

The variety of sources used in this study have made it difficult to employ a standard transliteration system throughout the text. Turkish words and names have been rendered according to modern Turkish orthography. Kurdish names have also been spelt in the Turkish fashion, although in cases where the reader maybe more familiar with a Latinised Kurdish version this has been added in parentheses. In the transliteration of Arabic and Persian words, personal names and place names, I have been sparing in the use of diacritical marks. Otherwise commonly accepted English forms are used, especially for Arabic and Turkish place names (e.g. Baghdad, Damascus) words (e.g. Madrasa, Sharia) and titles (e.g. Emir, Agha, Pasha). When quoting directly from sources, I have maintained the proper names, whether of places, individuals, or tribes, as they are spelt in the original document.

Abbreviations

CUP: Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*)

FAP: Freedom and Accord Party (*Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası*)

Hêvî: Kurdish Students' Hope Society (*Kürt Talebe Hêvî Cemiyeti*)

KSMP: Kurdish Society for Mutual Aid and Progress (*Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti*)

KSPE: Kurdish Society for the Propagation of Education (*Kürt Neşr-i Maarif Cemiyeti*)

KTG: The Kurdish Mutual Aid and Progress Gazette (*Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi*)

PKK: Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*)

Introduction

Writing in the *Economist*, journalist Amberin Zaman observed that many commentators had hailed 2014 as “the year of the Kurds”, highlighting the growing strength of movements claiming to represent the Middle East’s long marginalised Kurdish community.¹ In Turkey, after some three decades of violent struggle between the Turkish military and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, hereafter PKK), in 2012 Turkey’s then Prime Minister Tayyip Recep Erdoğan announced that the government was entering into negotiations with representatives of the Kurdish movement in order to bring the conflict to an end. Events further to the south have been even more dramatic. Following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, Kurdish groups took advantage of the breakdown of government authority to establish a series of autonomous ‘cantons’ in the country’s predominantly Kurdish north-east. In Iraq, where Kurdish self-rule has been in effect since the early 1990s, the President of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Masoud Barzani, announced plans to hold a referendum on the issue of Kurdish independence, following the fall of Mosul to the forces of the ‘Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant’ in late July. These developments have brought the so-called ‘Kurdish question’ to the forefront of the international political agenda.

Nevertheless, historically the study of the Kurdish community – its language, history, society and politics – has been difficult. Until recently, the nation states in which the majority of the Middle East’s Kurdish population reside, Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, generally regarded the Kurdish community and manifestations of Kurdish ethno-cultural distinctiveness as a potential threat to the unity and territorial integrity of the state as well as the broader political stability of the Middle East

¹ Amberin Zaman, “Kurdish Calculus”, *The Economist: The World in 2015*, (December 2014).

state system. This stance included opposition to benign academic undertakings, with primary sources and research materials often being difficult to gain access to or obtain.² In fact, some researchers were confronted by official hostility and, at times, draconian legal sanctions.³ Perhaps the most well known example of the potential dangers which faced those entering the field of Kurdish studies was the fate of Ismail Beşikçi. In the 1960s and 1970s Beşikçi, an ethnic Turk, wrote a number of sociological and historical studies on the Kurdish community for which he was jailed, for a total of 17 years, on charges of conducting separatist propaganda.⁴ Given these difficulties, in the past the academic study of the Kurds constituted a relatively marginal area within the broader field of Middle Eastern studies. This state of affairs has somewhat improved over the last two decades. The relative liberalisation of Turkey *vis-à-vis* public discussion of the Kurdish issue, the institutionalisation of Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq and the growing international profile of movements claiming to represent the interests of the Kurdish community across the Middle East have all contributed to a renaissance in the field of Kurdish studies. Today a growing number of scholars are examining a variety of subjects pertaining to the Kurds, ranging from language and culture to politics and history.

While the Kurdish movement has, without doubt, made real and quantifiable gains over the last few decades, the so-called ‘Kurdish question’ has far from been resolved. The problematic relationship between those defined as or defining themselves as Kurds and the nation states in

² For example, historian Janet Klein, whose work focused on the Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments raised from amongst the Kurdish tribes in the 1890s, was denied access to the Ottoman archives. See Janet Klein, “Power in the Periphery: The Hamidiye Light Cavalry and the Struggle for Ottoman Kurdistan, 1890-1914” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2002), 10.

³ See Clémence Scalbert-Yücel and Marie Le Ray, “Knowledge, Ideology and Power: Deconstructing Kurdish Studies”, *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, No. 5 (2006), <http://ejts.revues.org/777>.

⁴ On Ismail Beşikçi see Martin van Bruinessen, “Ismail Beşikçi: Turkish sociologist, critic of Kemalism, and Kurdologist”, *The Journal of Kurdish Studies*, Vol. V (2005), 19-34.

which they reside continues to constitute a very real political question. At its core, it is a question about how the Kurds should be incorporated in the nation states of the region and on whose terms. Over the course of the twentieth century Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey struggled, often through violent and oppressive means, to solve this seemingly intractable issue. Likewise, Kurdish political leaders also adopted various stratagems, ranging from peaceful protest to violent armed struggle, in their quest to secure ‘Kurdish rights.’ Therefore, unsurprisingly, the politicisation of Kurdish identity and the emergence of political movements claiming to represent the interests of the Kurdish community have constituted one of the central concerns for scholars working in the field of Kurdish studies.

The research presented in this thesis seeks to contribute to the growing body of academic literature concerning the origins and evolution of the Kurdish movement and, more broadly, the ‘Kurdish question’. It focuses on developments within the Ottoman Empire between the promulgation of the reform decree of 1839, the so-called *Tanzimat* edict, and Ottoman entry into the First World War in October 1914. Such a study is timely, especially during a period in which developments in the Middle East are leading many to call into question the political settlement arrived at in the region following the division of the Ottoman Empire into discrete nation states at the end of the First World War, a system of nation states from which the Kurdish community was excluded. Hence this study is an engagement not only with the existing scholarship on the genesis of Kurdish ‘nationalism’ but also with the theoretical literature concerning the origins of national identity and its impact on the politics of ‘multi-national’ societies such as the Ottoman Empire. Through such an engagement, it seeks to provide a more nuanced account of the early history of the Kurdish movement.

Theoretical Concerns: Nations and Nationalism

One of the central themes of this study is ‘nationalism’. Therefore it is perhaps prudent to elaborate on how concepts such as ‘nationalism’ and ‘nation’ will be understood and defined. Here ‘nationalism’ will primarily be understood as a *political doctrine*, one which “holds that the political and national unit should be congruent...”⁵ John Breuilly, building on the Gellnerian definition of nationalism, suggests that this doctrine is based upon three premises:

- a) There exists a unique nation.
- b) Its interests and values take priority over all other interests.
- c) It must be as independent as possible.⁶

Nationalist activists and scholars often seek to present the ‘nation’ as a primordial entity. While nations may go through periods of decline and even dormancy, they are regarded as the lead coryphée in the historical process. Hence nationalism is assumed to possess deep historical roots, while national identity is envisioned as “a natural part of human existence, as natural as sight or speech”.⁷ This is most certainly the case for many of the peoples of the modern Middle East. Turks, Persians, Arabs, Armenians and Kurds all seek to trace the history of their respective peoples back into the mists of time.

However, despite the widespread nature of such views, this study proceeds from the assumption that nations and nationalism are fundamentally modern phenomena. Although various theorists of nationalism have highlighted specific dynamics associated with ‘modernity’- print-capitalism, industrialism, the modern bureaucratic state, the growth of literacy or secularism – most agree that

⁵ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1983), 1.

⁶ John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1993), 2.

⁷ Umut Özkırımlı, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 35.

the ‘nation’ is a relatively novel concept.⁸ Its origins are usually traced back to late eighteenth-century Europe and America, after which the discourse of nationhood and nationalism proceeded to spread, resulting in the proliferation of nation states (or aspiring nation states) and ultimately coming to define the global political order. Today we live in a ‘world of nations’, as most states, whatever the composition of their populations, seek to present themselves both domestically and to the world at large as *national*.⁹ Moreover, at the present time, “the nation-state (or would be nation-state) remains the basic political unit. It continues to define the primary space in which political arguments take place. The competing ideas of a world market dominated by multinational corporations to whom we owe loyalty or international proletarian solidarity are equally implausible”.¹⁰

This study’s chronological focus, which primarily covers events from the mid-nineteenth century until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, coincides with nationalism’s first phases of development and straddles the transition from a ‘pre-national’ to a ‘national’ world order.¹¹ In

⁸ For examples of ‘modernist’ scholarship on nationalism see Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991); Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction”, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Granger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (London: Canto, 1992), 1-14; Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

⁹ Significantly, a 1971 survey of 132 entities generally considered to be states claimed that only 12 states could justifiably be described as ‘nation states’, while a further 25 contain a nation (or potential nation) which constitutes over 90% of the state’s total population. See Walker Connor, “A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a...” in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.), *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 39. Nevertheless, a survey of state constitutions in 2000 found that 143 begin with the claim that a ‘nation’ or ‘people’ have the right to rule themselves. Philip G. Roeder, *Where Nation-States come from: Institutional Change in the Age of Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 9.

¹⁰ James Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993), 152.

¹¹ A number of historians and scholars have sought to periodise the emergence of nationalism. Philip Roeder posits that there have been four main ‘bursts’ of nation state creation between 1816

1815, when Europe's statesmen met in Vienna to forge a peace settlement in the aftermath of the destruction and devastation of the Napoleonic Wars, the principle of nationality was ignored and Europe's map was remade according to dynastic interests. Yet just over a century later, following the end of the First World War, a new generation of European peacemakers not only took the principle of nationality into account, but claimed to be guided by it. However imperfectly this principle may have been applied, there is little doubt that the 1919 Versailles settlement represented a significant moral victory for the principle of national self-determination: "the illusion that nationality possessed a natural and self-evident role in politics had been very well established".¹² The days in which dynasticism and colonial empires could co-exist with the nation state were seemingly numbered.¹³

James Mayall, a prominent theorist of international relations, observed that the nation should be regarded as an "integral part of the history of liberty".¹⁴ The European Enlightenment and its expressions in the American and French Revolutions had undermined the conceptual legitimacy of privilege and proclaimed the 'people' as the font of political legitimacy. In both France and the United States, the 'nation' was synonymous with the 'people' and was understood as a unified body of citizens possessed of the same natural rights and responsibilities. The term 'nation' was an old word, derived from the Latin verb *nascī* ('to be born').¹⁵ It had passed into English through

and 2000: from the Congress of Vienna (1815) to the Congress of Berlin (1878), the first quarter of the twentieth century, the three decades following the Second World War and the period following the end of the Cold War in 1991. Roeder, *Where nation-states come from*, 6. A similar periodisation is offered by Ernest Gellner. See Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (Phoenix: London, 1997), 38-46.

¹² Gellner, *Nationalism*, 43.

¹³ Roeder, *Where nation-states come from*, 45.

¹⁴ Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society*, 42

¹⁵ 'Nation' is directly related to the Latin noun *nātiō/nation*, defined in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* as meaning: 1) the birth of a child, 2) people, race, nation, 3) a class of people, 4) set, race as a characteristic of persons, nationality, 5) the place of origin (of natural products). *Oxford Latin*

Old French and was used in a number of contexts to describe human collectives presumed to share certain ‘ethnic’ characteristics, such as common descent or shared culture.¹⁶ However, in the late eighteenth century the term took on new meanings more akin to a community of ‘citizens’. In this sense, the idiom of nationhood transformed the “austere, classical and unashamedly elitist universalism of the Enlightenment” into “the warmer and culturally and historically specific language of political romanticism”¹⁷ In short, ideals of universal rights and popular sovereignty were to be realised along *national* lines. Indeed, whatever its later manifestations, nationalism was, in the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century, almost synonymous with the liberal movement’s calls for greater representative democracy. Both ideologies shared a common enemy

Dictionary, s.v. “*nātiō*”. Significantly, in Roman political discourse *nātiō* was often counterpoised with the concept of citizenship, *civitas* (community of citizens). Thus Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C) remarked, “*Omnes nationes servitutem ferre possunt: nostra civitas non potest...* (All races/peoples can endure enslavement, but our community of citizens cannot...)” Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cicero Orationes. Philippicae 7-14* (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 2009), 120.

¹⁶ For example, during the Middle Ages student ‘nations’ existed in a number of European universities. At St. Andrews in Scotland there were four ‘nations’: Albany (later Fife), Angus, Lothian and Britain, corresponding to north-west, north-east, south-east and south-west Scotland. The system of nations was used until 1858 to elect the university’s rector. In Sweden, the ‘nations’ (*nationer*) took their names from various Swedish provinces. In Paris, four nations were recognised, including the ‘French nation’, and applied to students from the Romance language-speaking areas, including most of modern France, Italy and Spain. The Norman nation referred to students from the Normandy region, while the nation of Picard was applied to those from regions of north-eastern France and today’s Belgium. The English nation (later the German nation) was applied to students from Germany, the Netherlands, and Great Britain. According to Robert Rait student nations originated in the University of Bologna at the end of the twelfth century. Robert Rait, *Life in the Medieval University* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 14. Susan Reynolds has pointed out that in early medieval Europe ‘nation’ could refer to the population of a kingdom. She terms these communities ‘regal communities’. However, these were not ‘nations’ in the modern sense and gave way to a notion of a society stratified into ‘estates’. See Susan Reynolds, “Medieval *Origines Gentium* and the Community of the Realm”, *History*, Vol. 68, No. 224 (1983), 375–548. While hinting at common origins and shared culture, pre-modern uses of the term ‘nation’ do not possess the same social or political implications as their modern counterpart.

¹⁷ Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society*, 44.

in the absolutism of the post-1815 European ‘Restoration’.¹⁸ For nationalists, ‘nationality’ provided the criterion by which human collectives might be defined as a ‘people’ and hence exercise the right to self-rule. It was built on the conceit that humanity is divided not only according to gender but also according to ‘nationality’.¹⁹

Yet despite the apparent ascendancy of the nationalist political principle made manifest in the proliferation of discrete nation states, precisely on what grounds a people could claim ‘nationhood’ was, and remains today, a highly contested issue. French scholar Ernest Renan (1823-1892) wrote in his celebrated 1882 essay *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* that the ‘nation’ was ‘a spiritual principle’, a voluntary association, a ‘daily plebiscite’, of people who shared both a common view of history and a historical destiny.²⁰ This voluntaristic notion of nationhood was almost diametrically opposed to the opinions of the German historian Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896), who espoused a more organic notion of nationhood. For him, nationality was a ‘fact of nature,’ an objective phenomenon identifiable by certain traits such as ‘language’, ‘culture’ and ‘common origin’.²¹ Such distinctions have led some scholars to posit a distinction between two different ideals of nationhood, one ‘voluntaristic’, the other ‘organic’.²²

¹⁸ Iván Zoltán Dénes, “Liberalism and Nationalism: An Ambiguous Relationship”, in Iván Zoltán Dénes (ed.), *Liberal Nationalisms and the Legacy of Empires* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 1-17.

¹⁹ Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society*, 40. Elie Kedourie made a similar observation. He argued that nationhood seeks “to supply a criterion for the determination of the unit of population proper to enjoy a government exclusively its own, for the legitimate exercise of power in the state, and for the right organization of a society of states.” Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 1.

²⁰ Ernest Renan, “Qu'est-ce qu'une nation”, in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.), *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 17-18

²¹ Andreas Dorpalen, “Heinrich von Trietschke”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 7, No. 2/4 (1972), 21-35.

²² Anthony D Smith, “Voluntarism and the Organic Nation” in Anthony D. Smith (ed.), *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (London: Polity, 2000), 5-25.

This dichotomy has proved extremely long-lived within Anglo-Saxon scholarship, often being reformulated under the heading of ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ nationalisms. Yet despite the popularity of this ethnic/civic dichotomy, it has been subject to sustained criticism.²³ Certainly, nationalisms in Britain, France, the United States, the Netherlands and Switzerland possessed a strong institutional component. However, nationalist discourses in these countries are not entirely devoid of references to more ‘organic’ notions of community. Indeed, Eric Kaufmann has argued that the United States of America, usually held up as an exemplar of civic patriotism, was one of the first ‘ethnic’ nations, built on an Anglo-American ethnic core, the ‘English race in America.’ The United States’ history of exclusionary laws against racial minorities, such as African Americans and Native Americans, as well as restrictions placed upon the immigration of individuals from certain ‘undesirable’ nations, such as China and Japan, call into question the inherent inclusiveness of the United States, the archetype of the ‘civic nation’.²⁴ More often than not, the exaltation of the civic ideal of nationality is “a mixture of self-congratulation and wishful thinking”.²⁵

In a similar vein, so-called ‘ethnic’ nations often referenced values more associated with civic nations, such as shared homeland and political institutions. For example, while Germany is often presented as the prototype of ‘ethnic’ nationalism, John Breuilly observes that a proposal from the Frankfurt Parliament for a unified German nation state, made during the 1848 revolution, was largely in the civic-territorial mould.²⁶ Hence it is often difficult to make a clear-cut distinction

²³ See Taras Kuzio, “The Myth of the Civic State: a Critical Survey of Hans Kohn’s Framework for Understanding Nationalism”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2002), 20–39; Bernard Yack, “The Myth of the Civic Nation”, *Critical Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1996), 193-211.

²⁴ Eric Kaufmann, “American Exceptionalism Reconsidered: Anglo-Saxon Ethnogenesis in the “Universal” Nation”, *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 33 (1999), 437–58; also Eric Kaufmann, “Ethnic or Civic Nation? Theorizing the American case”, *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, Vol. 27, No. 1–2 (2000), 133–55.

²⁵ Bernard Yack, “The Myth of the Civic Nation”, 196.

²⁶ Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 104-109.

between ‘ethnic’ and ‘civic’ conceptions of nationhood. In a survey of 73 European ethnic groups/nationalities, Czech sociologists Jaroslav Krejčí and Vitězslav Velímský concluded that some 42 could be described as *both* ‘political’ (territorial and institutional) and ‘cultural’ (folkloric and linguistic).²⁷

We can therefore conclude that a ‘scientific definition’ of the nation is impossible. Ultimately, nationality possesses no basis in human biology, nor can it be gauged by any ‘objective’ measures. As Miroslav Hroch observed, nations are “integrated not by one but by a combination of several kinds of objective relationships (economic, political, linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, historical), and their subjective reflection in collective consciousness. [However,] *Many of these ties could be mutually substitutable - some playing a particularly important role in one nation-building process, and no more than a subsidiary part in others*”.²⁸ Given such ambiguity, it is perhaps more fruitful to think of the nation as “a category of practice, nationhood as an institutionalised cultural and political form, and nationness as a contingent event or happening, and refrain from using the analytically dubious notion of ‘nations’ as substantial and enduring collectives”.²⁹

²⁷ The study observed that ‘language’ was the most significant marker in defining ‘nationality’ (60 out of 73). However, only 47 groups were linguistically *exclusive*. Jaroslav Krejčí and Vitězslav Velímský, *Ethnic and Political Nations in Europe* (London: Croom Helm, 1996). Also see Peter Hoppenbrouwers, “The Dynamics of National Identity in the Later Middle Ages”, in Robert Stein and Judith Pollmann (eds.), *Network, Region and Nation: Shaping Identities in the Low Countries* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 25-26.

²⁸ Miroslav Hroch, “From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe”, in Gopal Balakrishnan (ed.), *Mapping the Nation* (London: Verso, 1996), 79. [My emphasis].

²⁹ Roger Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and National Questions in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1996), 21.

Nationality and the End of Empires: National Movements beyond Nationalism?

The history of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth century has often been portrayed as one of terminal decline. It was a period in which the Ottoman Empire faced new challenges resulting from an increasingly unfavourable international balance of power and in which state elites, in order to better compete with an ascendant West, endeavoured to refashion the centuries-old Ottoman polity into a modern territorial state. It was an age in which new ideologies and intellectual currents, emanating primarily from Europe and North America - liberalism, constitutionalism, positivism and nationalism, to name but a few - impacted and influenced the world views and perceptions of many Ottoman subjects. More broadly, it was an era in which old certainties, continuities and patterns of economic, social and political organisation were fundamentally challenged, one in which the viability, indeed the very existence, of the 'Eternal State' (*devlet-i ebed-müddet*) was being called into question.

The opinion that the Ottoman Empire was an anachronism, a relic of a bygone age in a rapidly progressing world, was prevalent amongst many of its European contemporaries. Indeed, the empire's apparent weakness and decrepitude earned it the unflattering epithet of 'the sick man of Europe' - a sick man that was finally put out of his misery in 1918. To nineteenth-century liberals, the general structural and institutional model of an 'advanced' country was that of the modern territorial state (the *nation* state). Vast and often ancient polyglot empires which had managed to survive into the 'modern age', such as those of the Manchus, Qajars and Ottomans, were clearly not nation states and hence "very obviously (it seemed) obsolescent".³⁰ The view that the Ottoman polity was 'historically doomed' has also constituted a central theme in post-Ottoman historiography. Indeed, the main mystery in understanding late Ottoman history had been, as Feroz

³⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire* (London: Abacus 1989), 23.

Ahmad formulated it, not its demise but “that it survived as long as it did”.³¹ Nationalism has long been regarded as one of the forces, if not *the* force, which can account for the eventual collapse of the Ottoman imperium. The rise of national consciousness amongst the various communities residing in the empire’s vast territories resulted in, it is claimed, the emergence of seemingly irreconcilable political aspirations. In short, the Ottoman polity was unable to deal with the ‘national question’.

Such perceptions have meant that the narrative of late Ottoman history is often constructed in a retrospective fashion, as a prelude to a number of discrete national histories rather than a distinct historical era in its own right. For historians of Turkey, it was the period in which Turkish national consciousness, after centuries of submergence beneath the dead weight of degenerate Ottoman cosmopolitanism, came of age, a process which culminated in the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923.³² Historians of the Arab lands likewise have tended to regard the period as one of Arab ‘awakening’, in which Arab intellectuals slowly rediscovered their ancient glory. Alongside this story of cultural awakening, we are presented with a political account in which the Ottoman Turks, particularly in the aftermath of the 1908 Constitutional Revolution, attempted to Turkify the empire’s population, with the consequence that Arabs came to see their destiny within an Arab nation state.³³ Analogous narratives are also widespread amongst the various peoples of the

³¹ Feroz Ahmad, “The Late Ottoman Empire”, in Martin Kent (ed.), *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 5.

³² Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993); Stanford Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Justin McCarthy, *The Ottoman Turks: An Introductory History to 1923* (London: Longman, 1997). Suna Kili, *The Atatürk Revolution: A Paradigm of Modernization* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2003).

³³ George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: Kegan Paul, 2000); Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983); Rashid Khalidi, “Ottomanism and Arabism in Syria before

Balkans.³⁴ The longevity of such narratives is understandable. For both Arab and Turkish nationalisms, they provide a retrospective logic for the partition of the Ottoman Empire into discrete ‘national’ constituencies. However, the consequence of the ‘nationalist logic’ inherent in much historical writing is that “the Ottoman legacy has been difficult to assess and appreciate...”³⁵

However, in more recent decades a growing school of revisionist historiography which has examined the development of ‘national sentiment’ within ‘multi-national’ empires has allowed for the construction of more nuanced narratives regarding the relationship between nationalism and imperial decline. In his comparative study of ‘national revivals’ amongst the ‘small nations’³⁶ of Europe between the late eighteenth century and the end of the First World War, Miroslav Hroch divided the evolution of such movements into three distinct phases:

Phase A: Activists strive to lay the foundation for a national identity. They research the cultural, linguistic, social and sometimes historical attributes of a non-dominant group in order to raise awareness of the common traits, but they do this without a firm organizational base or “pressing specifically national demands to remedy deficits...”

1914: A Reassessment”, in Rashid Khalidi et al. (eds.), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 50-70.

³⁴ Paschalis Kitromilides, “Imagined Communities and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans”, *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 19 (1989), 149-194.

³⁵ Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire: 1700-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 192.

³⁶ Hroch points out that his use of the term ‘small nations’ is not a quantitative measure. Rather, it is used in order to distinguish them from ‘ruling/great nations’ (i.e. France, England, Germany, Denmark and so on). He identified three criteria for identifying ‘small nations’ “(a) did not possess ‘their own’ ruling class, i.e. a ruling class belonging to them ethnically, but were dominated by a ruling class of more or less alien nationality... (b) admittedly formed an ethnic (and sometimes even historical) unit, but never an independent political unit; (c) lacked a continuous tradition of cultural production in a literary language of their own, or had once possessed one, which was subsequently obliterated or underwent serious degeneration.” Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 8-9.

Phase B: Constitutes a period of “patriotic agitation” in which “A new range of activists emerged, who seek to win over as many of their ethnic group as possible to the project of creating a future nation”.

Phase C: The majority of the population forms a mass movement. “In this phase, a full social movement comes into being and the movement branches into conservative-clerical, liberal and democratic wings - each with its own program”.³⁷

At first glance, such a model may seem teleological. However, Hroch, whose work focused on *national movements* rather than the doctrine of nationalism, observed that while many such movements have been labelled ‘nationalist,’ they may not be nationalist *stricto sensu*, and that identifying them as such can lead to “serious confusion”.³⁸ Historian Ellen Comisso makes a similar point. While recognising that the spread of ‘modernisation’ over the course of the nineteenth century did result in the growth of ‘national consciousness’ and, to a lesser extent, political activities by groups claiming to speak in the name of their particular national constituencies, she observes that:

[W]hat form that activity took could vary quite widely, and it did and does not “inevitably” culminate in the demand for a sovereign state and secession. In short, once individuals come to feel that they are Polish, Czech, Hungarian, German, or what have you, ‘nationalism’ (again, the demand for a state of one’s own or redrawing borders to join a state outside one’s current polity) is by no means the automatic outcome.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid, 23.

³⁸ Miroslav Hroch, “Learning from Small Nations”, *New Left Review*, No. 58 (2009), 49.

³⁹ Ellen Comisso, “Empires as Prisons of Nations Versus Empires as Political Opportunity Structures: An Exploration of the Role of Nationalism in Imperial Dissolution in Europe”, in Joseph W Esherick, Hasan Kayalı, and Eric van Young (eds.), *Empire to Nation* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 144.

Comisso continues by noting that, if we look at the situation of particular nationalities within functioning multi-national empires, groups and individuals representing certain national communities possessed a variety of objectives. These included:

- Insurrectionaries/Nationalists: Those demanding the establishment of a sovereign nation state or the redrawing of inter-state boundaries in order to conform to the contours and territory of ‘national settlement’.
- Pragmatists/Accommodationists: Those who eschewed the creation of a separate nation state in favour of a greater voice in local and imperial politics, education rights, access to the civil service, subsidies for cultural institutions and perhaps some form of autonomy. However, different groups (liberals, conservatives, aristocrats, capitalists, intellectuals, etc.) within the ‘accommodation’ camp often possessed conflicting views on the nature and form of such an ‘accommodation.’
- Collaborationists/Assimilationists: Those who ‘defected’ from one nationality to another. This can either be figuratively (collaboration) or literally (assimilation).⁴⁰

Comisso’s remarks are based mainly on the experience of the Habsburg Empire in the period between the French Revolution and the end of the First World War. However, they are relevant to the study of national movements in other multi-national empires. Of particular importance is her observation that it was often the pragmatist camp which was politically dominant. Indeed, the ‘insurrectionist’ current, which is often lionised in post-independence scenarios, was often only a minority current, a political refuge of cranks and outsiders.

Consequently we must be careful not to presuppose a *nationalist* orientation to the activities of all national movements. It is entirely possible for individuals and organisations to claim to represent the interests of a particular ‘national’ group, whilst simultaneously regarding their fate as being

⁴⁰ Ibid, 144-153. Comisso includes, for the sake of completeness, two further categories. The first is ‘parochial’, which she uses to describe those for whom rural social relations were the primary focus of identity. This, she argues, was the position of the majority of the peasant population in multi-national polities such as Austria, Russia and the Ottoman Empire. She also includes ‘anti-nationals’ – namely those who were activists and defined themselves as non-national. This is particularly relevant with regard to the socialist movement.

bound to the destiny of other ‘nations’ within a ‘multi-national polity’. Both Hroch and Comisso are attuned to the fact that national movements and national consciousness do not necessarily equal political nationalism and that the apparently inevitable ‘victory of nationalism’ in the aftermath of the First World War was not the necessary outcome of a long process of ‘national revival’, but occurred as a result of quite contingent historical factors. Indeed, Comisso points out that the sudden rise to prominence of ‘insurrectionary currents’ in the post-1918 world can be accounted for by the war itself, more specifically by the fact that the warring powers often sponsored ‘nationalist’ factions amongst the minority groups of enemy powers.⁴¹ Such observations should lead us to consider the inherent plurality within ‘national’ movements. They also provide a better insight into the complexities of political life within multi-national states.

Such critical approaches to nationalism and national identity have greatly influenced much of the more recent work which has engaged with the issue of ‘nationality’ in the late Ottoman period. This is particularly true with regard to studies pertaining to predominantly Muslim peoples such as Turks and Arabs. For example, in their examinations of ‘Turkist’ associations and publications in the late Ottoman period, scholars such as Masami Arai, Erik Jan Zürcher and Howard Eissenstat have shown that, while desires to transform the Ottoman Empire into an ethnically Turkish nation state were harboured by some, most notably Turkish-speaking émigrés from Russia, such as Ismail Gasprinski (1851-1914) and Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935), most Turkish activists raised within the empire remained committed to the framework of a multi-national empire.⁴² Equally, Ernest

⁴¹Ibid, 159-160.

⁴² See Masami Arai, *Turkish Nationalism in the Young Turk Era* (Leiden: Brill, 1992). Also Erik Jan Zürcher, “Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish Nationalists: Identity Politics 1908-1938”, in Kemal Karpat (ed.), *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Howard Eissenstat, “The Limits of Imagination: Defeating the Nation and Constructing the State in Early Turkish Nationalism” (PhD diss., The University of California, 2007).

Dawn's work on Arabism and Ottomanism has shown that, while separatist 'Arab nationalism' had some appeal amongst Christian Arab intellectuals, their Muslim counterparts generally linked the revival of Arab culture and society to the revival of Islam and the survival of the Ottoman state.⁴³ More recently, Hasan Kayalı's pioneering study on Arabo-Turkish relations in the Second Constitutional Period (1908-1918) has demonstrated that, while certainly political conflict existed between Turkist elements in Istanbul and Arab leaders, both sides sought to reach some form of political accommodation which would keep the empire intact. Both Kayalı and Dawn assert that the *predominant* sentiment among the Arabs of the Ottoman Empire remained "allegiance to the Ottoman sultan and remaining an integral part of the Islamic empire..."⁴⁴ In the words of one scholar of Ottoman Palestine during the Second Constitutional Period: "Although there was opposition to some of the policies adopted by revolutionary leaders, *most Palestinian Arab political figures behaved as if they could influence the course of events in the empire*".⁴⁵

Historiography: Reassessing Kurdish Nationalism

Before engaging directly with the existing literature pertaining to Kurdish activism in the late Ottoman period, it is perhaps first necessary to briefly discuss the state of scholarship on Kurdish nationalism more generally. Much of the older academic literature on the subject was largely descriptive and often lacked theoretical sophistication. Such works tended to regard the existence of the Kurds as a relatively well-defined community and identity as unproblematic and, moreover, presented a historical narrative in which the desire for national independence was the logical and

⁴³ Ernest Dawn, "Ottomanism to Arabism", *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (1961), 378-400.

⁴⁴ Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 212.

⁴⁵ Donna Robinson Divine, *Politics and Society in Ottoman Palestine: The Arab Struggle for Survival and Power* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 145. [My emphasis]

indeed necessary outcome of growing ‘national consciousness’.⁴⁶ This somewhat simplistic interpretation of the history of Kurdish political mobilisation has proved to be remarkable persistent and continues to influence much journalistic writing on the subject in the West, especially amongst those seeking to romanticise the Kurdish struggle.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, the renaissance in Kurdish Studies of the last decade and a half has led a number of scholars to challenge long held assumptions concerning the evolution and orientation of the Kurdish ‘nationalism’. While this renaissance is still in its infancy, a new generation of political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists and historians are attempting to engage in a more nuanced appraisal of the Kurdish identity and the history of Kurdish political mobilisation. Certainly, variously academics working on the Kurdish issue have approached the question from different perspectives. However, a common characteristic of this new generation is that, compared to its predecessors, it has attempted to approach the issue with a greater degree theoretical sophistication, often drawing upon the wider debates current in the field of nationalism studies.⁴⁸

This is particularly evident scholarship on the development the Kurdish movement in Turkey. The upswing in interest in recent history of Kurdish politics in Turkey is understandable considering

⁴⁶ See for example Cecil J Edmonds, “Nationalism and Separatism”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1971), 87-107; Stephen Pelletiere, *The Kurds: An Unstable Element in the Gulf* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1984); Edmund Ghareeb, *The Kurdish Question in Iraq* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981).

⁴⁷ A good example of this romanticisation of Kurdish movement can be found in the work of author and journalist Stephen Mansfield. See Stephen Mansfield, *The Miracle of Kurdistan: The Remarkable Story of Hope Reborn in Northern Iraq* (Franklin, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2014).

⁴⁸ See for example Abbas Vali, “Genealogies of the Kurds: Constructions of Nation and National Identity in Kurdish Historical Writing”, in Abbas Vali (ed.), *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2003), 58-113; Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*. (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005); David Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jordi Tejel Gorgas, *La question kurde: passé et présent* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2014).

the sustained nature of Kurdish political mobilisation over the past three decades. However, academics such as Cengiz Güneş, Ahmet Aliş, Christopher Houston, Nicole Watts, Güneş Murat Tezcür, Joost Jongerden and Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya have sought to refine our understanding of Turkey's Kurdish movement by moving beyond a narrative that portrays the Kurdish issue as a clear cut struggle between 'Kurds' and 'Turks'. Although hailing from different disciplinary backgrounds and possessing ideological perspectives, all these scholars have attempted to more thoroughly examine the aims and objectives of a variety of Kurdish actors and, in doing so, they have brought into sharp relief the inherent diversity within both Kurdish movement and, more broadly, Kurdish society. This diversity can be understood in numerous ways: the debates regarding the appropriate tactics through which Kurdish 'rights' might be secured, the ideological struggles between leftists, liberals and Islamists and even the controversies concerning the nature of what it is to be a Kurd. It also includes the contentious discussions relating to the ultimate objectives of Kurdish political mobilisation and, more specifically, the question of whether Kurdish political actors should strive for national independence or seek some form of accommodation within the Republic of Turkey.⁴⁹ Consequently, they have called into question an implicit assumption found in earlier works that the Kurds constitute a relatively homogeneous group and that Kurdish activism is necessarily synonymous with a separatist political agenda. It is

⁴⁹ See Cengiz Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey: From Protest to Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2012); Ahmet Aliş, "The Process of the Politicization of Identity in Turkey: The Kurds and the Turkish Labor Party (1961-1971)" (MA diss., Boğaziçi University 2009); Christopher Houston, *Islam, Kurds and the Turkish Nation-State* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Nicole Watts, *Activists in Office: Kurdish Politics and Protest in Turkey* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010); Güneş Murat Tezcür, "Kurdish Nationalism and Identity in Turkey: A Conceptual Reinterpretation", in *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, No. 10 (2009), <http://ejts.revues.org/4008>; Joost Jongerden and Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya, "Democratic Confederalism as a Kurdish Spring: the PKK and the Quest for Radical Democracy", in Mohammed M.A. Ahmed and Michael M. Gunter (eds.) *The Kurdish Spring: Geopolitical Changes and the Kurds* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2013), 163-185.

within the context of this emerging reassessment of Kurdish ‘nationalist’ politics that this study on the history of Kurdish movement in the late Ottoman period seeks to situate itself.

The existing academic literature on Kurdish ‘nationalism’ in the late Ottoman era offers an interesting counterpoint to Arabic and Turkish narratives of the period. In many of the older studies on the subject, the late Ottoman period is presented as one of rising national consciousness coupled with growing irreconcilability of Kurdish aspirations and the policies of the ‘Ottoman-Turkish’ state.⁵⁰ For example, Soviet historian Mikhail Semenovich Lazarev, in his chronicle of political developments in the immediate aftermath of the 1908 Constitutional Revolution, described the Ottoman Empire as a “prison house of nations, in the truest sense...” and claimed that the centralising and assimilationist policies of the ‘Young Turk’ administration, which were justified with reference to ‘racist pan-Turkism’, were doomed to complete failure, as “evidenced... by the rapid rise of the Kurdish movement under the Young Turk regime”.⁵¹ As in the case of other ‘nationalist histories’, the Ottoman Empire appears as a hollow shell, a ‘prison house’, from which its subject peoples sought to escape, or, in the case of the Turks, one which they wished to transform into a true nation state. From this perspective, the tragedy was that the Kurds ‘failed’ to obtain statehood in the post-Ottoman political order.

⁵⁰ See Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Its Origins and Development* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006); Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989); Mikhail S. Lazarev, *Kurdistan i Kurdskaia Problema: 90-E Gody Xix Veka - 1917 G* (Moscow: Nauka 1964); Mikhail S. Lazarev, *Imperializm I Kurdskaa Vopros, 1917-1923* (Moscow: Nauka, 1989); David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B Taurus, 1998); Kamal Madhar Ahmad, *Kurdistan During the First World War* (London: Saqi, 1994); Celîlê Celîl, *Kürt Aydınlanması* (Istanbul: Avesta, 2000); Rohat Alakom, *Eski İstanbul Kürtleri 1453-1925* (Istanbul: Avesta, 1998); Joyce Blau, *Le problème kurde* (Brussels: Centre pour l’étude des problèmes du monde musulman contemporain, 1963).

⁵¹ Lazarev, *Kurdistan i Kurdskaia Problema*, 144.

Nevertheless, the more nuanced ‘revisionist’ appraisals of Turkish and Arab nationalism in the late Ottoman period have not gone unnoticed in more recent studies. A number of scholars, most notably Martin Strohmeier, Hakan Özoğlu and Azad Aslan, have sought to revise the narrative of Ottoman-Kurdish relations.⁵² These studies are most certainly a welcome addition to the historiographical debate. Most significantly, they are based upon a closer reading of Ottoman sources, in particular the writings of Kurdish intellectuals and activists. In line with other revisionist accounts of nationalism in the late Ottoman period, they have sought to demonstrate that Kurdish political nationalism was primarily a *response* to the collapse of the empire in 1918. The idea that Kurdish nationalism gained popularity, especially amongst ‘intellectual’ circles, following the end of the First World War, seems largely correct. However, such narratives remain problematic for a number of reasons.

Firstly, these studies tend to focus exclusively on the activities of the primarily Istanbul-based Kurdish intellectual and political elite. While the activists of this section of Kurdish society are, without doubt, extremely important to understanding the development of the Kurdish movement,⁵³ existing studies almost completely fail to examine the attitudes of other sections of Kurdish society

⁵² Martin Strohmeier, *Crucial Images in the Presentation of a Kurdish National Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); Süleyman Azad Aslan, “The Clash of Agencies: The Formation and Failure of Kurdish Nationalism 1918-1922” (PhD diss., Royal Holloway and Bedford College, 2007).

⁵³ Scholars and theoreticians of nationalism have often emphasised the critical role of intellectual and professional elites in the formulation, articulation and propagation of the national idea. Anthony D. Smith, for instance, observed that “the intellectuals and intelligentsia are the only stratum with an abiding interest in the very idea of the nation...” Thus, whereas such ‘leading classes’ of particular national movements varies, “the pivotal role of professionals and intellectuals must remain constant or the movement risks disintegration.” See Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 57. Also see Dominic Boyer and Claudio Lomnitz, “Intellectuals and Nationalism: Anthropological Engagements” in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 34 (2005), 105-120.

such as provincial ‘notables’.⁵⁴ Secondly, Strohmeier and Özoğlu utilise sources in Ottoman-Turkish exclusively and do not examine sources in the various Kurdish dialects. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, these scholars are hindered by the historiographical questions they seek to answer, namely the ‘origins’ of and/or the reasons behind the ‘failure’ of ‘Kurdish nationalism’.⁵⁵ This has resulted in a partial and biased understanding of Kurdish identity politics “in the sense that certain expressions of Kurdish identity are prioritized and others ignored”.⁵⁶ We are left with a teleological narrative in which ‘cultural’ and ‘apolitical’ Kurdish ‘proto-nationalism’ is transformed into a ‘fully-fledged’ political nationalism following the First World War. There has been, with very few exceptions, a complete failure to either examine seriously the objectives of the pre-1914 Kurdish movement or to distinguish amongst various trends within it.⁵⁷ In a broad sense, it is this teleological narrative that this study seeks to scrutinise and challenge. It is an ambitious attempt to present a more refined political history of the ‘Kurdish movement’ in the late Ottoman period.

⁵⁴ The defining characteristics of the Kurdish ‘notable’ classes were that they wielded “political authority in and collecting respect from their communities due to their genealogical and religious background... [and] functioned at various degrees as intermediaries between the state and the people.” Hakan Özoğlu, “Nationalism and the Kurdish Notables in the late Ottoman-Early Republican Era”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, No. 33 (2001), 384-385.

⁵⁵ Özoğlu, for instance, is motivated by his desire to shed light on “the nature and the origin of Kurdish nationalism”, a phenomenon which he describes as “one of the most explosive and critical predicaments in the Middle East”. Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 1.

Similarly, Aslan states that his study seeks to cover the “the beginnings of Kurdish nationalism and the failure of the early Kurdish nationalists to establish an independent Kurdish state during the period following the First World War”. Aslan, “The Clash of Agencies: The Formation and Failure of Kurdish Nationalism 1918-1922”, 10.

⁵⁶ Tezcür, “Kurdish Nationalism and Identity in Turkey: A Conceptual Reinterpretation”, <http://ejts.revues.org/4008>

⁵⁷ A notable exception is Janet Klein’s article on Kurdish reactions to the 1908 Constitutional Revolution. See Janet Klein, “Kurdish Nationalists and Non-Nationalist Kurdistans: Rethinking Minority Nationalism and the Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1909”, *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2007), 135-153.

In this study it is argued that, although in a general sense we witness the growth of ‘national sentiment’ amongst various elements of the Kurdish elite over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it would be a vast oversimplification to frame this development in terms of a shift from ‘culturally’ orientated activism towards ‘fully blown’ separatist nationalism as implied in the works of Aslan, Strohmeier and Özoğlu. In contrast, this study will contend that during this period the idiom of Kurdish nationhood was mobilised in a variety of different ways in a multiplicity of contexts. More precisely, it is possible to identify the simultaneous, or near simultaneous, emergence of both ‘accommodationist’ and ‘separatist/nationalist’ tendencies within the Kurdish movement. Thus the central question is not why Kurdish separatist nationalism evolved from ‘cultural’ or ‘apolitical’ but why different Kurdish political actors adopted their particular stance towards the ‘Kurdish issue’.

In order to answer this question this study seeks to examine the various ways in which the process of Ottoman reform and modernisation impacted on different elements of Kurdish society. More specifically, it examines the differing experiences of various sections of the Kurdish elite - ranging from ‘traditional’ provincial notables, such as tribal leaders and Sufi sheikhs, to an emergent caste of ‘westernised’ intellectuals and professionals - and how this affected their outlook on the ‘national question’. Of course, central to this is the evolution of relations between the Ottoman state and various elements of Kurdish society. However, it is important to move beyond the ‘state-society’ perspective to understand the evolution of the Kurdish movement. This includes examining the ways in which the development of national movements amongst other Ottoman peoples, such as the Armenians and Arabs, impacted on Kurdish activism. It is also necessary to look at the ways in which the discourse of Kurdish nationhood was mobilised as a function of intra-elite and even inter-generational struggles within Kurdish society. In doing so, not only can

we provide a more nuanced appraisal of Kurdish politics in the late Ottoman period, but also gain some insight into the dynamics that have shaped Kurdish activism in the post-Ottoman era.

Sources and Chapter Outline

This thesis is based on a study of a diverse set of sources in a variety of languages. I have endeavoured to be as thorough as possible in reviewing the secondary literature on Ottoman and Kurdish history, utilising works in English, French, Kurdish and Turkish. Where possible I have also consulted works in Persian and Russian. This has allowed me to gain a good overall picture of the state of the existing historiography pertaining to the Kurds during the Ottoman period. Of course, given the politicised nature of the present day ‘Kurdish question’, it is always important to remember that very often the secondary literature, especially with regard to works written by Kurdish or Turkish scholars and activists, reflects the political concerns of the authors. In terms of primary sources, I have also sought to make use of a wide set of resources. These include chronicles written in Turkish and Persian, as well as poetry written in the various Kurdish dialects. This also includes the memoirs of Ottoman and Kurdish political figures active during the period in question, as well as the writings of the myriad of European officials, soldiers, journalists and missionaries who came into contact with the Kurdish community. I have also examined Ottoman and British archival sources. In terms of the former, these consist primarily of consular reports from British officials stationed in Kurdish-inhabited regions, which are housed at the National Archive (formerly the Public Records Office) in Kew, London. In terms of the latter, I have examined Ottoman documents produced by various arms of the Ottoman bureaucracy housed at the *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* (The Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archives) in Istanbul. Another important resource, especially in understanding the political attitudes of various Kurdish political actors, has been the Ottoman-Kurdish press which emerged during the final decades of the

empire's existence. This includes the newspapers *Kürdistan* (Kurdistan) published between 1898 and 1902, *Şark ve Kürdistan* (The East and Kurdistan), published in 1908, the *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Gazetesi* (The Kurdish Mutual Aid and Progress Gazette), published between 1908 and 1909, and the journals *Rojê Kurd* (Kurdish Day) and *Hetavê Kurd* (Kurdish Sun), published between 1913 and 1914. Evidently - as in the case of the secondary literature - it is always important to bear in mind the specific points of view and prejudices contained within the primary source materials.

In terms of structure, this thesis is organised into six chapters. Chapter I, entitled 'Ethnicity and Empire: The Kurds and the Ottoman Empire (1514-1839)', provides a broad historical overview of relations between the Kurds and the Ottoman Empire prior to the nineteenth century. This includes an examination of the way in which the Ottoman Empire sought to govern its Kurdish-inhabited dependencies, as well as the impact of Ottoman rule on Kurdish society. It also scrutinises the nature and meaning of the Kurdish identity (or identities) prior to the age of nationalism, through an examination of sources produced by both Ottoman and Kurdish actors. In doing so, it engages with the theoretical literature pertaining to the 'ethnic origins' of modern national identity. While not rejecting the idea that nations and nationalism are modern phenomena, it argues that prior to the nineteenth century the Kurdish community might best be understood as what Anthony D. Smith described as an *ethnie*. Indeed, the notion that Kurds constituted an ethnic community helped frame the way in which Kurdistan was administered. This was manifest in the 'condominial' system of governance the Ottomans adopted in the region, whereby certain districts were administered by centrally appointed officials, while others were organised into autonomous emirates ruled by local Kurdish dynasties. The chapter suggests that the existence of a Kurdish *ethnie*, one which possessed a certain degree of institutional recognition, provides important

historical context for the evolution of modern notions of Kurdish nationhood in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Chapters II and III examine the period between the promulgation of the *Tanzimat* reform edict of 1839 and the outbreak of the 1908 Constitutional Revolution. In doing so, they concentrate on the gradual evolution of ‘modern’ notions of Kurdish identity and highlight the different contexts in which the idiom of Kurdish nationhood were mobilised. Chapter II, entitled ‘Reform and Rebellion: The Making of the Kurdish Question (1839-1883)’, focuses primarily on the *Tanzimat* era (1839-1876) and the evolution of relations between Istanbul and the Kurdish-inhabited periphery. More precisely, it highlights the impact on this relationship of efforts to transform the empire into an approximation of a European ‘nation state’ through the creation of a standardised system of provincial administration and the propagation of a unified Ottoman ‘national’ identity based on civic equality for Muslims and non-Muslims. During the 1830s and 1840s, these reforms resulted in conflict between the central government and the Kurdish emirates. The emirs were defeated by the mid-nineteenth century. However, while the emirs’ resistance was motivated by a desire to maintain or expand their ‘feudal’ privileges rather than by nationalism, their overthrow provides important context for the emergence of the first glimmerings of ‘modern’ Kurdish nationalism. For many elements of Kurdish society, in particular the Kurdish tribes, the *Tanzimat* order in Kurdistan and the Ottoman ‘citizenship’ project appeared in a profoundly negative light. On the one hand, the increasingly centralised nature of the Ottoman administration meant an increase in taxation and the implementation of conscription, while on the other the notion of civic equality between Muslims and non-Muslims was regarded as a threat to traditional Muslim superiority. Discontent was further exacerbated by the apparent weakness of the Ottoman state and its seeming inability to protect Muslim interests following its defeat in the Ottoman-Russian War

of 1877-1878. This set the stage for a large-scale Kurdish revolt between 1879 and 1882. However, unlike early examples of Kurdish unrest, the revolt's leader, Sheikh Ubeydullah, a charismatic religious notable, mobilised the idiom of Kurdish 'ethnic' distinctiveness in a novel way, namely as a justification for the creation of a unified Kurdish 'nation state'.

Chapter III, entitled 'The Kurds in the Age of Autocracy: Towards a National Movement (1883-1908)', focuses on developments from Sheikh Ubeydullah's death in 1883 until the outbreak of the Constitutional Revolution in 1908. The period conforms largely to the reign of Sultan Abdühamid II (r. 1876-1909), who sought to govern the empire as an autocrat. Although the Hamidian autocracy continued to pursue policies directed at modernising the Ottoman polity, it modified the parameters which had governed the reform process during the *Tanzimat* era. In a general sense, efforts to construct a unified Ottoman 'national' identity shifted away from the 'civic' Ottoman patriotism of the *Tanzimat* era toward an emphasis upon the empire's Islamic heritage. The regime also sought to defuse growing Muslim dissatisfaction with the reform process, including amongst the Kurds, by tempering centralisation and administrative standardisation through extensive use of political patronage. In the Kurdish context, this included efforts to integrate influential Kurdish notable families, including the descendants of powerful Kurdish emirs such as the Bedirhans and the Babans, into the apparatus of the Ottoman state. On the provincial level, the sultan's 'Kurdish policy' also involved patronising Kurdish notables and, more specifically, tribal chieftains and Sufi sheikhs. This was partly motivated by a desire to avoid a repeat of the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt. However, the sultan also sought to secure the loyalty of chieftains and sheikhs, who wielded considerable influence over the Kurdish tribes, to both counterbalance the rise of Armenian nationalism and act as an alternative system of autocratic political control. This policy directive was most evident in the establishment of the Hamidiye

Cavalry Regiments. In terms of the development of the Kurdish movement, the period between 1883 and 1908 conforms to Hroch's Phase A, with a growing number of Kurds showing increasingly 'scholarly' interest in Kurdish history, culture and language. However, although in political terms the sultan enjoyed considerable success in securing the loyalty of the Kurds, some elements of the Kurdish community came to oppose the regime. Although much of this opposition was largely related to local economic and political struggles and did not carry any 'national' implications, some Kurds began to frame opposition in more 'national' terms, including both 'nationalist separatist' and 'accommodationist' variants. In terms of the former, the chapter highlights the work of the poet and religious scholar Hacı Kadir-i Koyi (Hacî Qadir-î Koyî), who called on Kurds to overcome their educational 'backwardness' and internal divisions in order to establish their own 'nation state'. In terms of the latter, it examines the attitudes of an emergent class of Kurdish 'intellectuals and professionals'. It argues that, although many members of the Kurdish intellectual and professional class had provincial 'notable' origins, they were part of a new cosmopolitan Ottoman Muslim governing class, a class which had been brought into being by the reform process in order to staff the newly modernised state institutions. Significantly, this new class, which included Turks, Arabs, Albanians, Circassians as well as some Kurds, was familiar with Western scientific and philosophical ideas. Hence Kurdish members of this new governing elite constituted a specifically *Ottoman* Kurdish elite, with most receiving schooling within the empire's 'modern' state education system and pursuing careers within Ottoman officialdom. While members of this new elite displayed a keen interest in the fate of their 'nation', for them the 'Kurdish question' was primarily a socio-cultural and socio-economic question, albeit one aggravated by the maladministration of the Hamidian regime. In political terms they rejected separatist Kurdish nationalism in favour of an 'accommodationist' political outlook that might best

be described as ‘Ottoman patriotism with Kurdish colours’. This political stance is clearly articulated in the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kürdistan* (Kurdistan), established in 1898 by a group of Kurdish political exiles with links to the opposition *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (The Society for Union and Progress), known in the West as ‘The Committee of Union and Progress’ (hereafter, CUP).

Chapters IV, V and VI cover a much shorter historical period, namely the six years between the Constitutional Revolution of July 1908 and Ottoman entry into the First World War in October 1914. In general terms, this period conforms to Hroch’s Phase B, the phase of “patriotic agitation”, and witnessed the emergence of a more organised and active Kurdish movement, or perhaps more accurately, Kurdish *movements*. Chapter IV, entitled ‘Revolution and the Emergence of a National Movement: Kurdish Activism in Istanbul (1908-1911)’, focuses on activities amongst the Ottoman Kurdish intellectual and political elite in Istanbul between 1908 and 1911. It argues that the 1908 Constitutional Revolution and the establishment of a constitutional political order elicited a wave of optimism amongst the revolution’s makers, the CUP, and their sympathisers. This optimism was shared by members of the Ottoman Kurdish elite, which included individuals who had played a pivotal role in the evolution of the opposition to Sultan Abdülhamid II and who maintained strong links with the new CUP-led ‘Young Turk’ administration. However, while many held important positions within the post-revolutionary political order and engaged in Ottoman politics, they also took an interest in the ‘Kurdish question’, organising the first significant Kurdish associations. This chapter examines two specific organisations established by Kurdish elites in the capital in the aftermath of the revolution: the Kurdish Society for Mutual Aid and Progress (*Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, hereafter KSMP), which was active between Autumn 1908 and Spring 1909, and the Kurdish Society for the Propagation of Education (*Kürt Neşr-i Maarif Cemiyeti*, hereafter

KSPE), active between 1910 and 1911. It argues that both these organisations were ‘accommodationist’ and represented the highpoint of ‘Ottoman patriotism with Kurdish colours’, with members seeking to assist the constitutional regime in the task of ‘modernising’ the Kurds and Kurdistan. It concludes by examining the failure of these organisations. This failure can be partly accounted for by the growing authoritarianism of the CUP, which increasingly dominated post-Hamidian Ottoman politics. However, it is argued that divisions amongst the Ottoman Kurdish elite, in particularly between those who remained loyal to CUP and those who joined the growing cohorts of the opposition, also help to account for the short-lived nature of both the KSMP and the KSPE.

Chapter V, entitled ‘Hope in Hard Times: Youth Mobilisation and the Kurdish Students’ ‘Hope’ Society (1912-1914)’, scrutinises the attitude of the post-1908 generation of Kurdish students, mostly studying in Istanbul, towards the ‘national question’ through an examination of the Kurdish Students’ Hope Society (*Kürt Talebe Hêvî Cemiyeti*, hereafter *Hêvî*), one of the most active pre-1914 Kurdish associations. *Hêvî* has usually been regarded as a response to an increasingly assertive Turkish nationalism within the Ottoman Empire. It is argued that this interpretation is a vast oversimplification. Certainly, in a general sense, these youth activists were reacting to an atmosphere of increasing ‘national’ polarisation. However, this was not simply a response to the rise of Turkism but also developments amongst other Ottoman peoples as well as certain ‘anti-national’ Islamists. Furthermore, this chapter argues that their activism was also promoted by what they perceived as the older generation of Kurdish leaders’ lack of interest in the ‘national’ question. Like their elders, *Hêvî* continued to see the ‘Kurdish question’ in cultural and developmental terms. Yet although they did not regard ‘separatist nationalism’ as the solution to the Kurds’ problems and remained committed to the continuation of the Ottoman state, they emphasised the need for

Kurds to look to their own development rather than relying on the state. In this regard, the ideology they espoused was closer to the phenomenon of ‘cultural nationalism’, namely an ‘organic revival’ of Kurdish culture, rather than the ‘Ottoman patriotism with Kurdish colours’ of the older generation.

Chapter VI, entitled ‘Kurdistan in the Constitutional Age: From Protest to Nationalism (1908-1914)’, shifts focus to developments in the Kurdish-inhabited provinces. Following the fall of the Hamidian regime, the new CUP-led administration sought to end the privileges granted by the autocracy to elements of the Kurdish notable elite and establish a firmer and more centralised political order in Kurdistan. Consequently those groups, especially tribal chieftains and Sufi sheikhs, who had benefited from Sultan Abdülhamid II’s patronage, were fearful of the new government’s intentions towards them. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution this resulted in the establishment of provincial branches of the KSMP. However, the political orientation of these ‘Kurdish clubs’ was significantly different from that of the organisation’s central branch in Istanbul. Under the rubric of ‘Kurdish rights’ many Kurdish notables sought to maintain the privileges they had won under the autocracy. In this sense, although provincial Kurdish activism in the immediate aftermath of the 1908 Constitutional Revolution was largely ‘accommodationist’, unlike the Kurdish movement in the capital it possessed an anti-constitutionalist *élan*. The chapter continues by examining developments following the dissolution of the KSMP in 1909. It argues that the CUP’s drive towards centralisation, coupled with the apparent ascendancy of the Ottoman Armenian community, further exacerbated tension between tribal leaders and Sufi sheikhs and the central government in the years before the outbreak of the First World War. Much of the discontent was expressed in religious terms, but there were also a number of individuals who sought to harness this discontent in the region in order to forge a movement (or movements) directed at

securing some form of Kurdish self-rule. This included a ‘pro-autonomy’ movement in the Cizre-Bohtan region, led by Bedirhanzades Hüseyin Pasha and Hasan Bey. It also included a faction, led by Bedirhanzade Abdürrezzak Bey, which sought direct Kurdish dissatisfaction towards the CUP and acquire Russian support in his endeavour to establish an independent Kurdish nation state.

Ottoman entry into the First World War in 1914 represents the end point of this study and marks the beginning of a distinct historical period during which war ravaged Ottoman society, culminating in the final collapse of the empire following the end of hostilities. Hence developments following the outbreak of the First World War are beyond the scope of this study. Of course, considering the relevance of the ‘Kurdish question’ in the post-Ottoman era, 1914 was hardly the end of the Kurdish movement. Therefore this study will conclude by examining some of the ways in which the pre-1914 Kurdish movement not only impacted on Kurdish political mobilisation during and in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, but also how it foreshadowed broader trends within the Kurdish movement in the post-Ottoman Middle East.

Chapter I: Ethnicity and Empire: The Kurds and the Ottoman Empire (1514-1839)

The mainstream Kurdish nationalist, hailing from Diyarbakir, Mahabad or Arbil, is “primordialist”. For him/her the Kurdish nation is a primordial entity, a natural formation rooted in the nature of every Kurd, defining the identity of people and community throughout history.

Abbas Vali¹

That Kurdish nationalists tend to regard their “nation” as a primordial category possessing an ineffable cultural essence and stretching back to time immemorial ought not to be surprising. Such perceptions are not limited to Kurdish nationalists, but constitute a common feature of many ‘nationalisms’. Nevertheless, as elaborated on earlier, this study is predicated on the idea that ‘nations’ and ‘nationalism’ are fundamentally modern phenomena. Still, while largely adopting the modernist conception of ‘nations’ and ‘nationalism’, this study also draws upon critiques of ‘radical’ modernism found in the works of Anthony D. Smith, John Hutchinson and John Armstrong. While accepting the modernity of ‘nations’ and ‘nationalism’, these scholars have sought to highlight the *longue durée* aspects of ‘nation-formation’ and most notably the relationship between pre-modern ‘ethnic communities’ and evolution of modern national identities, the so-called ‘ethno-symbolic’ approach.² Smith defines ethnic communities - or as he

¹ Abbas Vali, “Genealogies of the Kurds: Constructions of Nation and National Identity in Kurdish Historical Writing”, in Abbas Vali (ed.), *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2003), 59.

² See for example Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Anthony D. Smith, “Gastronomy or Geology? The Role of Nationalism in the Reconstruction of Nations”, *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1995), 3-23; John Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); John Hutchinson, “Myth against Myth: The Nation as Ethnic Overlay”, *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 10, No. 1-2 (2004), 109-124.

terms them *ethnies* - as “named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity...”³ and argues that such communities have existed throughout history.

These arguments have been roundly criticised by numerous modernist theoreticians who reject the idea that there is any meaningful link between modern nations and the pre-national past. Such scholars have accused scholars such as Smith of doing nothing more than providing a more theoretically sophisticated version of ‘nationalist’ primordialism.⁴ However, the dichotomy drawn by modernist theoreticians of nationalism between ‘constructivism’ and ‘essentialism’ in their criticisms of the ethno-symbolic approach is problematic. As John Armstrong pointed out: “The principal remaining disagreement is over the antiquity of some inventions and the repertory of pre-existing group characteristics that inventors were able to draw upon”.⁵ In other words, one must concede that there are circumstances (ethno-cultural specificities, institutions, buildings and relics of history) which exist “independent[ly] of the wishes and dreams of ‘nationalists’...”.⁶

³ Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 23.

⁴ For modernist critiques of ethno-symbolism see Ernest Gellner, “Ernest Gellner’s reply: Do nations have navels?” *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1996), 366-370. Umut Özkırımlı, “The nation as an artichoke? A critique of ethno-symbolist interpretations of nationalism” *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2003), 339-355. These debates have been echoed in studies pertaining to the Kurds. See Vali, “Genealogies of the Kurds: Constructions of Nation and National Identity in Kurdish Historical Writing”, 58–105; Hakan Özoğlu, “Does Kurdish Nationalism have a Navel?” in Ayşe Kadioğlu and Fuat Keyman (eds.), *Symbiotic Antagonisms* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2011), 199-222; Michael Gunter, “The Modern Origins of Kurdish Nationalism”, in Mohammed Ahmed and Michael Gunter (eds.) *The Evolution of Kurdish Nationalism* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2007), 1–17.

⁵ John Armstrong, “Towards a theory of nationalism: consensus and dissensus”, in Sukuma Perival (ed.), *Notions of Nationalism* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995), 36.

⁶ Miroslav Hroch, “Learning from small nations”, *New Left Review*, No. 58 (2009), 55.

In summary, the ethno-symbolist does not argue that modern nations ‘grow’ directly from pre-modern *ethnies*, but rather that:

Even if nations and nationalism are temporally and *qualitatively modern* they draw much of their content and strength from pre-existing *ethnies*... Hence, the study of the components of *ethnies* (myths of descent and election, attachment to homelands, shared memories of ethno-history, various symbols of identity, etc.) has become an important focus for illuminating the origins and persistence of nations.⁷

In short, a central premise of the ethno-symbolists is not that the past *dictates* the present but that the past *influences* the present and that the capital of myths, symbols and rites inherited from the past affects how modernity is experienced and negotiated. It is this approach that will inform this chapter as it examines the evolution of Ottoman-Kurdish relations in the period between the early sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries and, more broadly, the evolution and nature of the Kurdish community prior to the age of nationalism.

The Origin of the Kurds

Contrary to the opinions of Kurdish nationalists, the category Kurd is not an eternal or natural human categorisation but one which has been constituted by the historical process. According to a number of scholars, the earliest reference to the Kurds is to be found in Pahlavi language sources dating from the late Sassanid period, although the designation only seems to have gained wider usage following the rise of Islam in the seventh century.⁸ Early Muslim accounts of Islam’s initial

⁷ Montserrat Guibernau and John Hutchinson, “Introduction: History and National destiny”, *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 10, No. 1-2 (2004), 2.

⁸ The Kurds appear in the *Kār-nāmg-ī Ardashīr-ī Pābagān* (The Book of Deeds of Ardashīr, son of Bābağ) and are described as being amongst the enemies of the Iranian Sassanid dynasty’s founder Ardashīr I (r. 224-241). See Arshak Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Harvill Press, 1948), 16. Garnik Asatrain also highlights the use of the term *martōhm-ī kurtān* in a number of Pahlavi texts of the sixth and seventh century. Garnik Asatrain, “Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds”, *Iran and the Caucasus*, No. 13 (2009), 28.

advances describe the communities of Kurds, who controlled certain mountainous enclaves in present-day northern Iraq and western Iran, resisting the Arab invasions. Nevertheless, over the subsequent three centuries the majority of these communities seem to have converted to the Muslim faith.⁹ Following their conversion to Islam, Kurdish groupings came to play a significant role in the history of the Islamic world. In their rugged homeland, which came to be known as ‘Kurdistan’,¹⁰ Kurdish leaders established a number of relatively sophisticated dynastic states.¹¹

⁹ Arshak Poladian, “The Islamization of the Kurds (7th-10th Centuries AD)”, *Acta Kurdica*, Vol. 1 (1994), 21-26.

¹⁰ The notion of a Kurdish ‘homeland’ evolved gradually over the course of the Middle Ages. Muslim scholars used various toponyms to describe the zone of Kurdish settlement. In the eleventh century, the Central Asian geographer Muhammad al-Kashgari (1005-1102) included a region named *Ard al-Akrād* (Land of the Kurds) in his map of the world. Other medieval Islamic scholars used different toponyms: *Dār al-Akrād* (Place of the Kurds), *Zūzan al-Akrād* (The Summer Pastures of the Kurds), *Jibal al-Akrād* (The Mountains of the Kurds) and *Bilad al-Akrād* (The Country of the Kurds); see Boris James, “Le territoire tribal des Kurdes et l’aire iraquienne (X^e-XIII^e siècles): esquisse des recompositions spatiales”, *Revue d’études sur les mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, No. 117-118 (2007), 101-126. In this sense, the Persianate term *Kurdistān* (Land of the Kurds) was a relatively late innovation. It is commonly cited as being an invention of the twelfth-century Seljuqid Sultan Sanjar (r. 1118-1153), who used it as the name of a vast province stretching from western Iran into Azerbaijan, Diyarbakır, Mosul and Armenia. This claim originates from the fourteenth-century Atlas *Nuzhat al-Qulūb* of Hamd Allah Mustawfi; See Hamd Allāh Mustawfī Qazvīnī, *The Geographical Part of the Nuzhat al-Qulūb*, trans. Guy Le Strange (Leiden: Brill, 1919), 105. Baki Tezcan points out that this source was written some two centuries after the reign of Sultan Sanjar and hence the labelling of this province as Kurdistan is retrospective. He notes that earlier chronicles do not mention ‘Kurdistan’, although the late thirteenth-century chronicle *Tarikh-e Jahangushay-i Juvaini* does mention a *Vilayat-e Ekrad* (Province of the Kurds). See Baki Tezcan, “The Development of the Use of ‘Kurdistan’ as a Geographical Description and the Incorporation of this Region into the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century”, in Kemal Çiçek, Ercüment Kuran, Nejat Göyünç and İlber Ortaylı (eds.), *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilisation*, Vol. 3 (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2000), 540-53. However, Asatrain notes that the term also appears (in a plural form *K’rdstanac*) in Armenian sources of the twelfth century to describe certain territories to the south of Amid (Diyarbakır); Asatrain, “Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds”, 19-20.

¹¹ Between the ninth and eleventh centuries, Kurdish leaders founded a number of small Muslim emirates across a large swathe of the mountainous zones between Western Iran and Eastern Anatolia. The most significant were the Shaddadids (951–1174) in Azerbaijan and Armenia, the Rawīdids (955–1071) in Azerbaijan, the Marwanids (990–1096) in Diyarbakır and Lake Van and the Hasanwayhids (959–1095) in Hulwan, Dinawar and Nihawand as well as the regions of Hamadan and Shahrazur.

However, perhaps the most celebrated Kurdish leader of this era was Saladin (r. 1174–1193), the Muslim hero of the counter-crusades and founder of the Ayyubid dynasty. His military victories, most notably over the Egyptian Fatimids and the Christian Franks, won him a vast empire stretching from North Africa, Egypt and the Hejaz to Syria, Iraq and Anatolia. The influence of Kurdish elements on broader Middle Eastern affairs went into decline following the fall of the Ayyubids in the mid-thirteenth century. Still, Kurdish tribal groups and noble houses continued, as they had done since the earliest days of Islam, to constitute an important element in the politics of their homeland, albeit more often than not as vassals of larger and more sophisticated Muslim empires.¹² This included following the Ottoman conquest of Kurdistan in the early sixteenth century.

Numerous scholars have sought to historicise the origins of the Kurds and it has been suggested by some that the term ‘Kurd’ emerged during the medieval period out of a socio-economic categorisation – a synonym for nomad - rather than an ethnonym.¹³ Historian Boris James has

¹² On the Kurds in the Medieval period see Vladimir Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953); Andrew S. Ehrenkreutz, *Saladin* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1972); Boris James, *Saladin et les Kurdes* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006); Also see James, “Le territoire tribal des Kurdes et l’aire iraquienne (x^e-xIII^e siècles): esquisse des recompositions spatiales”, 101-126.

¹³ The renowned orientalist Vladimir Minorsky observed that early Muslim authors often deployed the term Kurd in a vague and haphazard manner. He cites Hamza al-Iṣfahānī (893-970), who stated that the Persians referred to the Daylamites as ‘the Kurds of Tabaristan’, as they used to call Arabs ‘the Kurds of Suristan’. Minorsky continued by noting that other Islamic sources of the tenth century used the term to describe “any Iranian nomads of Western Persia, such as the tent-dwellers of Fars.” See Vladimir Minorsky, “The Gūrān”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1943), 75. This has led to the suggestion that in the early Middle Ages, the term ‘Kurd’ possessed socio-economic connotations, being applied to communities of nomads, bandits or the ‘bedouins’ of Iran, rather than referring to a specific ‘ethnic’ group. See Basil Nikitin, *Les Kurdes, étude sociologique et historique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1956), 9; Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: its Origin and Development* (Syracuse, NY: The University for Syracuse Press, 2006), 12; Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 26; Hakan Özoğlu, “The Impact of Islam on Kurdish Identity Formation

argued that this interpretation of the evolution of the Kurdish identity is a vast over simplification. He points out that, although the category ‘Kurd’ had a strong association with the pastoral way of life, it should be located within a broader register of ethnic categorisation, articulated by medieval Muslim scholars from the ninth century onwards pertaining to the warlike and tribal peoples, including Turks, Berbers and Bedouin Arabs. At the same time, James highlights evidence which suggests that, from the eleventh century onwards, elements from within the Kurdish community identified with the designation.¹⁴ This suggests that by the time of the Ottoman conquests in the early sixteenth century, notions of Kurdish distinctiveness had already been fairly well established. Therefore, in examining the Kurds following the Ottoman conquest, it is helpful to think of them not merely as a social or ethnic categorisation, but an *ethnie*.¹⁵ However, this is not to suggest that the advent of Ottoman rule over much of Kurdistan in the early sixteenth century did not impact on the evolution of the Kurdish identity. On the contrary, as will be seen, Ottoman administrative practices in Kurdistan deeply affected the development of Kurdish politics, culture and identity.

in the Middle East”, in Mohammed M.A. Ahmed and Michael Gunter (eds.), *The Evolution of Kurdish Nationalism* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2007), 19-35. Asatrain, “Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds”, 22-30.

¹⁴ See Boris James, “Ethnonymes arabes (‘ağam, ‘arab, badw, turk...): le cas kurde comme paradigme des façons de penser la différence au Moyen Âge”, *Annales Islamologiques*, No. 42, (2009), 93-126. James highlights in particular the struggle between Kurdish and Turkish elements within the elite of the Ayyubid state in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Factional politics based on ethno-regional solidarities was a feature of numerous pre-modern Muslim empires, including the Ottoman Empire. See Metin Kunt, “Ethnic-Regional (Cins) Solidarity in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Establishment”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1974): 233–239.

¹⁵ Smith distinguishes between *ethnies* and ethnic categorisations. While the former is, at least to a certain extent, a subjective categorisation, “Ethnic categories are populations distinguished by *outsiders* as possessing the attributes of a common name or emblem, a shared cultural element (usually language or religion), and a link with a particular territory.” see Anthony D. Smith, *Myth and Memory of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12-13.

Ottoman Kurdistan: Conquest and Governance

The Ottoman advance eastwards into Kurdistan was largely prompted by the meteoric rise of Shah Ismail (r. 1501-1524), the founder of Iran's Safavid dynasty (1501-1736). Shah Ismail began his career as the leader of the Safaviye, a Sufi religious order which gained a large following amongst the Turcoman tribesmen in Azerbaijan, the Caucasus and Anatolia. These warriors came to be known as the *Kızılbaş* (Red Hats) on account of their distinct red headgear which symbolised their utter dedication and loyalty to the Safaviye.¹⁶ In 1501, the *Kızılbaş* overthrew Iran's ruling house, the Turkic Akkoyunlus, and Ismail was crowned Shah at a ceremony in Tabriz. Over the subsequent decade, Ismail and his followers carved out a vast empire stretching from Kurdistan and Iraq in the west to Khorasan and Sistan in the east. Like the Ottomans, the Safavids were Turkish speakers. Still, such linguistic commonalities were eclipsed by matters of faith which deeply divided the two dynasties. While the Ottomans were Sunnis, Islam's majority sect, Shah Ismail proclaimed Shi'ite Islam the official religion of his new empire.¹⁷ Subsequently, the Iranian population, which in the early sixteenth century was largely Sunni, was forcibly converted to the

¹⁶ The term *Kızılbaş* (Persian: *Qezelbash*) was originally applied to the Turcoman groupings who supported the Safaviye. Within the Ottoman context, the term gradually evolved to encompass not only Turcoman tribesmen but other communities with pro-Shi'ite beliefs. Reşat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press: 2009), 36.

¹⁷ The sectarian struggle amongst the Muslim community, between the Sunnis and Shi'ites, dates back to Islam's formative years in the seventh century. The dispute originated over the question of the succession of leadership of the Muslim community following the death of Prophet Mohammad. The majority group, those who would become the Sunni, believed the most pious Muslim ought to lead and thus elected Abu Bekir as Caliph. A minority favoured members of the Prophet's family; this group, who would come to be known as the Shi'ites, regarded Ali, Mohammad's son-in-law and cousin, as Prophet Mohammad's rightful successor.

religion of the ruling dynasty. It was the beginning of Iran's transformation into a predominantly Shi'ite realm.¹⁸

The rise of a militant Shi'ite empire on its eastern flanks constituted an existential threat to the Ottomans. Not only was Iran's new sovereign a capable military commander, but his religious message also proved popular, especially amongst the Turcoman tribes of Anatolia, a group which had lost its power and status within the Ottoman political order. Tensions came to a head during the latter days of the reign of Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512). In 1511, a major pro-Safavid revolt broke out in the region of Tekke in south western Anatolia.¹⁹ The rebellion was crushed, but the threat presented by Safavid ideology to the stability of the empire was apparent. Sultan Selim I (r. 1512-1520), who seized the throne from his ailing father in 1512, immediately took measures to counter the Safavid menace. He had the Muslim authorities in Istanbul issue a fatwa declaring Shah Ismail and his followers' heretics, thus making it permissible for Muslims to slay them. It is reported that he ordered some 40,000 Safavid sympathisers, residing in Ottoman lands, to be put to the sword. Finally, in the spring of 1514, the Ottoman sovereign assembled a vast army and marched east to meet the Safavid threat. In late summer, Ottoman and Safavid armies, under the command of their respective sovereigns, met at Çaldıran, located to the north east of Lake Van and deep within the Kurdish inhabited regions of Eastern Anatolia. The ensuing battle was costly

¹⁸ The religion of the *Kızılbaş* was a somewhat unrefined and millenarian mode of 'extremist' Shi'ite belief. However, Shah Ismail adopted the more formalised 'twelver' variety of Shi'ite Islam as the 'state religion' of his new empire. Tensions between the two groups remained a perennial feature of Iranian politics throughout the sixteenth century. It was only in the early seventeenth century that the political and military power of the *Kızılbaş* was broken. See Kathryn Babayan, "The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbash Islam to Imamite Shi'ism", *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1/4 (1994), 135-161; Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 7-30.

¹⁹ Şahabettin Tekindağ, "Şah Kulu Baba Tekeli İsyanı", *Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi*, No. 4 (1968), 54-59.

for both sides, but it was the Ottomans who emerged victorious. Shah Ismail was wounded and fled the field. The Ottomans subsequently advanced into Azerbaijan, briefly occupying the Iranian seat of government, Tabriz. The onset of winter and discontent amongst his forces eventually forced Sultan Selim I to withdraw to Anatolia. Nevertheless, the victory at Çaldıran marked the beginning of more than four centuries in which the majority of Kurdistan was subject to the House of Osman.²⁰

From the perspective of Istanbul, Kurdistan, with its rugged and inhospitable terrain, was a frontier land far from the imperial capital. The Kurds were merely another addition to the diverse and heterogeneous Ottoman population. The Kurds themselves were extremely diverse people. Their language was divided into several highly distinctive ‘dialects’.²¹ Indeed, the seventeenth-century

²⁰ On Sultan Selim I’s campaigns against the Safavids and the Battle of Çaldıran see Solakzâde Mehmed, *Tarih-i Solakzâde*, (Istanbul: Mahmud Bey Matbaası, 1298 [1881-1882]), 378-382; Celâl-zade Mustafa, *Selim-nâme*, Ahmet Uğur and Mustafa Çuhadar (eds.), (Ankara Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1990), 169-171; Eskandar Monshi, *History of Shah ‘Abbas*, trans. Roger Savory, Vol. 1 (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978), 67-74. Also see Selâhattin Tansel, *Yavuz Sultan Selim* (Ankara: Millî Eğitim Basımevi, 1969), 31-94; Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structure of Kurdistan* (London: Zed, 1992), 136-145; Hakan Özoğlu, “State-Tribe Relations: Kurdish Tribalism in the 16th and 17th Century Ottoman Empire”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1996), 5-27; M. Mehdi İlhan, *Amid (Diyarbakır)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2000), 5-14; Ebru Boyar, “Ottoman Expansion in the East”, in Suraiya Faroqhi and Kate Fleet (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 97-114; Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press: 2009), 115-116.

²¹ Linguistic diversity has long been associated with the Kurdish community. The tenth-century Muslim scholar al-Masudi (896-956) noted that the Kurds spoke a language he described as being ‘Ajamiyya (non-Arab/Iranian) but that “each variety of Kurd possessed its own Kurdish dialect (*li-kull naw’ min al-Akrād lahum lughā bil-kurdiyya*).” Ali ibn al Ḥusayin al Mas’ūdī, *Les prairies d’or*, Vol. 3, trans. Charles Barbier de Meynard and Abel Pavet de Courteille (Paris: l’imprimerie Impériale, 1861), 251. Although Kurdish nationalists tend to insist on the inherent unity of the Kurdish language, the Kurdish population, in fact, speaks several highly distinctive ‘dialects’. Today, the most widespread ‘dialect’ is Kirmancî, which itself is broken down into several regional varieties and spoken in areas of present day Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. In the more southerly regions of present day Iraq and Iranian Kurdistan, the Soranî dialect, which also possesses a number of sub-dialects, is the dominant idiom. Aside from these two main varieties, there are other

Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi observed that there were “no less than twelve varieties of Kurdish, differing from one another in pronunciation and vocabulary, hence they often have to use interpreters to understand one another's words”.²² The Kurds were also diverse in terms of the faiths they professed. The majority were Sunni Muslims, although they adhered to the Shafii *mezhep*, as opposed to the Hanafi *mezhep* favoured by the Ottomans.²³ There were also sizable minorities that belonged to different sects. These included pro-Shi'ite elements, as well as more exotic communities like the Ahl-e Haqq and the ‘devil- worshipping’ Yezidis.²⁴ In addition, in

highly distinctive Kurdish idioms, most notably Zazakî, spoken largely in the Dersim region, and Guranî, which is spoken in regions between Kermanshah, Halabja and Luristan. From a linguistic perspective, these various ‘dialects’ possess significant differences and can be regarded as separate languages. For instance, Kirmancî contains gender, whereas Soranî does not. However, from a social, political and psychological perspective, all these ‘languages’ can be regarded as being ‘Kurdish’. See Philip Kreyenbroek, “On the Kurdish Language”, in Philip Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (eds.), *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview* (London: Routledge, 1992), 63-83; Michiel Leezenberg, “Gorani Influence on Central Kurdish: Substratum or Prestige Borrowing?” Paper presented at the 1992 Conference on Bilingualism in the Iranian World, Bamberg, Germany. It should be noted that, although linguistic diversity has, historically, been the norm amongst the Kurds, today’s configuration of Kurdish dialects most likely does not conform to the configuration in earlier centuries.

²² Quoted in Martin van Bruinessen, “Onyedinci Yüzyılda Kürtler ve Dilleri: Kürt Lehçeleri üzerine Evliya Çelebi”, *Studia Kurdica*, No. 1-3 (1985), 33; Also see Martin van Bruinessen, “Kurdistan in the 16th and 17th centuries, as reflected in Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname”, *Journal of Kurdish Studies*, No. 3 (2000), 1-11.

²³ *Mezheps* (Arabic: *Madhhab*) are the various schools of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) pertaining to the application of Islamic law. Historically, the most significant schools in the Sunni world are the Hanafi, Shafii, Malaki and Hanbali. On the Kurds adherence to the Shafii School see van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 23.

²⁴ See Philip G. Kreyenbroek, “On the Study of Some Heterodox Sects in Kurdistan”, in Martin van Bruinessen (ed.), *Islam des Kurdes: Les Annales de l'autre Islam* (Paris: ERSIM, 1998), 163–184. On pro-Shi'ite religious communities amongst the Kurds see Hans-Lukas Kieser, “L'Alévisme Kurde”, *Peuples Méditerranéens*, No. 68-69 (1994), 57-76; On the Yezidis see Christine Allison, “Yazidis”, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online Edition, 1995, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/yazidis-i-general-1> (12 March 2014); Eszter Spät, *The Yezidis* (London: Saqi, 2005); John Guest, *Survival among the Kurds: A History of the Yezidis* (London: KPI, 1993). On the Ahl-e Haqq see H. Halm, “Ahl-e Haqq”, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online Edition, 1982, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ahl-e-haqq-people> (12 March 2014).

many places the Kurdish population was intermixed with other non-Kurdish communities; Turcoman and Arab tribesmen, Christian populations such as the Armenians and Assyrians and enclaves of Jews. Kurdistan was not the exclusive ‘homeland’ of the Kurds, but a territory shared with a host of other ethnic and religious communities.

The Kurdish population was also politically fragmented. They were predominantly a tribally organised people and divided into a myriad of distinct groupings.²⁵ Nevertheless, it would be misleading to associate all Kurds with the pastoral way of life, as the level of social and political complexity of Kurdish communities varied greatly. While some Kurds followed a nomadic and tribal way of life, there were also settled populations living in more socially diverse and politically sophisticated communities. At the time of the Ottoman conquest, as in earlier periods, alongside communities of nomadic and semi-nomadic tribesmen, more urbanised and refined Kurdish nobles governed a multitude of emirates based in fortified towns dotted across the Kurdish highlands. In the early sixteenth century, the most significant of these enclaves included Bitlis, Soran, Ardalan, Çemişgezek, Cizre-Bohtan (Cizre), Hasankeyf, İmadiye and Hakkâri.

²⁵ Taking anthropologist Richard Tapper’s lead, ‘tribe’ here is defined as “a localised group in which kinship is the dominant idiom of organisation, and whose members consider themselves culturally distinct (in terms of customs, dialect or language, and origins); tribes are usually politically unified, though not necessarily under a central leader. Such tribes also form parts of larger, usually regional political structures of tribes of similar kinds; they do not usually relate directly with the state, but only through these intermediate structures.” This intermediate level of tribal organisation is the confederation, which he defines as “more heterogeneous in terms of culture, presumed origins and perhaps class organisation, yet politically unified under a central authority.” The confederation, “as groups of tribes united primarily in relation to the state or extra-local forces”, can be further distinguished “from coalitions or clusters of tribes, more ephemeral unions for the pursuit of specific local rivalries, perhaps within a confederation and probably without central leadership.” Richard Tapper, “Introduction”, in Richard Tapper (ed.), *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 9. Also see van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 133-204.

Given Kurdistan's unforgiving terrain and its segmented political landscape, providing a viable administrative settlement which would secure the empire's eastern marches was a major strategic challenge. The Ottoman conquest of Kurdistan was realised at a time of rapid imperial expansion. Early Ottoman conquests were generally achieved in a piecemeal fashion. Neighbouring states were reduced to vassalage and only subsequently brought under more direct forms of control.²⁶ This gave rise to a relatively centralised mode of feudalism, the so-called *timar* system, which has often been regarded as a defining feature of classical Ottoman provincial administration.²⁷ The Sultan granted control of fiefs to a variety of provincial officials, ranging from provincial cavalymen to the governors (*sancakbeyi*) of counties (*sancaks/livas*) and the governors-general (*beylerbeyi*) of provinces (*eyalets/beylerbeyiliks*). However, unlike in many parts of Europe, such grants were not made, at least in theory, on a hereditary basis. Fiefs remained the property of the sultan and within his powers to reassign. Moreover, although in practice the lower levels of this system cavalymen often had local origins and were able to pass on their holdings, those within the upper echelons of provincial administration, including county governors and governors-general were generally drawn from amongst the sultan's 'slave' retinue, the *kul*, and were generally unable to pass on their lands and position to their off-spring.²⁸

²⁶ Halil Inalcik, "Ottoman Methods of Conquest", *Studia Islamica*, No. 2 (1954), 103-129.

²⁷ Feudalism is understood here as a socio-economic system in which land rent is the dominant mode for the acquisition of surplus product. As Josef Matuz points out: "Whether the feudal class appropriated the right to levy such land rent within the framework of a decentralized system of government — as was customary in Europe — or a highly centralized one, as matters stood for some time in the Ottoman Empire, is immaterial to the essence of a feudal system of production. It merely indicates which variety of feudalism is to be dealt with." Josef Matuz, "Nature and Stages of Ottoman Feudalism", *Asian and African Studies*, No. 16, (1982), 283.

²⁸ See Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire in the Classical Age 1300-1600* (London: Phoenix, 1973), 104-118; Colin Imber, "Government, Administration and Law", in Kate Fleet and Suraiya Faruqi (eds.) *Cambridge History of Turkey*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 226-232; Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 177-215.

In the late fifteen century, much of Anatolia and the southern Balkans were administered in this fashion. However, in the first half of the sixteenth century, the pace of Ottoman expansion quickened dramatically. During Sultan Selim I's brief eight year reign, not only was much of Kurdistan brought under Ottoman control, but also Syria, Egypt and the Hejaz. Under Selim I's successor, Süleyman I (r. 1520-1566), better known in the west by the sobriquet 'the Magnificent', the limits of Ottoman sovereignty were extended even further to include Iraq, North Africa and Hungary. Such rapid territorial enlargement radically altered the empire. Whereas upon Selim I's ascension to the throne in 1512 the empire was a major regional power, by the time of Sultan Süleyman's death in 1566, it was a global power with pretensions of universality. The Ottoman sultans were no longer merely kings; they were the Caliphs of Islam and the Custodians of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina.

The speed of Ottoman expansion also far outstripped the empire's ability to assimilate new territories. Nonetheless, the Ottomans proved to be extremely pragmatic in their approach to provincial administration. In acquisitions far from the empire's heartlands, existing social and political structures were often maintained in order to facilitate an easier transition to Ottoman rule. Ottoman rulers were more concerned with maintaining order and extracting revenue from new holdings than imposing the administrative practices of Anatolia and the Balkans upon such regions. As a result the nature and form of Ottoman rule was extremely diverse.²⁹ This pragmatism and flexibility is very much apparent in the administrative solutions they adopted in Kurdistan.

²⁹ For example, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *beylerbeyliks* such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Yemen, Basra, Baghdad, Lahsa, Tripoli, Tunis and Algeria were not divided into *timars*. Other outlying regions such as the Crimea, Hungary and Romania were more akin to vassal kingdoms than 'provinces'. See Gábor Ágoston, "A Flexible Empire: Authority and its Limits on the Ottoman Frontier", *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1-2 (2003), 15-31.

Following their victory at Çaldıran, the first major challenge facing the Ottomans was consolidating their rule in the east. While the Safavids had been defeated, their influence in Kurdistan had not been broken. *Kızılbaş* forces remained in control of a number of strategic fortresses across the region, including Kemah, Mardin, Urfa and Van. Moreover, following Çaldıran, Sultan Selim I gradually began to turn his attention southwards towards the conquest of Syria and Egypt, which allowed Shah Ismail to reoccupy Azerbaijan and despatch forces to retake the city of Diyarbakır. Still, while the political situation in Kurdistan was uncertain, the Safavids' alienation of many of the region's important Kurdish noble houses served to benefit the Ottomans.

With the rise of the Safavids, some Kurdish leaders adopted the faith of the *Kızılbaş*, most notably the emir of Hakkâri, İzzeddin Şir, and his son Zahid.³⁰ Nevertheless, the most influential and powerful Kurdish emirs remained Sunni and religious tensions between the two sides were palpable even to outside observers. One Italian visitor to Bitlis noted that:

All the Curds are truer Mahometans than the other inhabitants of Persia, since the Persians have embraced the Suffavean doctrine, while the Curds would not be converted to it and, though they wear the red caftans, yet in their hearts they bear a deadly hatred to them.³¹

Shah Ismail's efforts to undermine Kurdish leaders and replace them with his own *Kızılbaş* followers were also a major source of friction. According to one account, a group of sixteen Kurdish noblemen, including the emirs of Bitlis, Hasankeyf, Cizre-Bohtan, Hizan and Sason, travelled to Shah Ismail's summer retreat of Khoy in order to pledge fidelity. However, upon

³⁰ Ebru Sönmez, *İdris-i Bitlisi: Ottoman Kurdistan and Islamic Legitimacy* (Istanbul: Libra, 2012), 8; van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 148. Also see Hans-Lukas Kieser, "L'Alévisme Kurde", *Peuples Méditerranéens*, No. 68-69 (1994), 57-76.

³¹ Charles Grey, *A Narrative of Italian Travels in Persia in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1873), 157.

arriving at their destination, the Shah's *Kızılbaş* commanders accused them of various crimes, upon which all but two were "clamped in irons and imprisoned".³²

The Ottomans' attitude towards Kurdistan's ruling classes stood in stark contrast. Sultan Selim I largely delegated the task of establishing new administrative structures for Kurdistan to İdris-i Bitlisi, a Sufi mystic, former member of the Akkoyunlu administration and an individual with intimate knowledge of Kurdish affairs.³³ Sultan Selim I's objective was not merely to bring the Kurds into submission, but to mobilise them as an auxiliary force to help secure Ottoman sovereignty over Kurdistan. Central to this was the integration of the various Kurdish elements, most importantly the Kurdish emirs, into the Ottoman political order. Sultan Selim I granted Bitlisi wide powers in managing relations with the Kurdish notables. For example, an imperial decree (*firman*) from 1516, ordered:

[Grant] ranks and incomes in whatever manner is proper, register detailed copies of their *timars* (fiefs) and *berāts* (imperial warrants), and send them to me so that they may be kept here and every issue can be known; declare in detail which *livā* (county) was distributed to whom and for what reason they were distributed and what the *beys*' [the Kurdish leaders'] titles, subjects and incomes are...³⁴

³² Sharaf Khan [Şeref Han], *Scheref-nameh ou Histoire des Kourdes par Scheref, Prince de Bidlis*, Vol 1 (St. Petersburg: Gregg International, 1860), 411.

³³ İdris-i Bitlisi was born in the village of Sulıqan, in Iranian Azerbaijan. His father was Mevlana Şeyh Hüsameddin Ali-ül Bitlisi, a member of the Nurbahçıye Sufi brotherhood and an official in the Akkoyunlu (Persian: Aq Qoyunlu) chancellery. İdris-i Bitlisi followed in his father's footsteps, joining the Akkoyunlu administration. However, following the Safavid revolution, Bitlisi fled to the Ottoman Empire. He emerged as one of the leading figures at the court of Sultan Selim. He authored numerous political and diplomatic reports as well as a history of Selim's reign composed in the Persian language. Sönmez, *İdris-i Bitlisi*, 29-60; Also see Cornell H. Fleischer, "Bedlīsī, Ḥakīm-al-Dīn Edrīs" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online Edition, 1989, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bedlisi-mawlana-hakim-al-din-edris-b> (March 1 2014).

³⁴ See Sönmez, *İdris-i Bitlisi*, 112. Also see Hoca Saadeddin, *Tac üt- Tevarih*, Vol. 2 (Istanbul: Tabhane-i Amire, 1279 [1862]), 322-323.

Bitlisi toured widely, making contact with numerous disaffected Kurdish leaders. “In total”, recorded one Ottoman chronicler, he “won the hearts of twenty five of the famed [Kurdish] emirs and with his sweet tongue brought them to obedience and submission to the [Ottoman] sovereign”.³⁵ Kurdish support proved pivotal in extending Ottoman sovereignty across much of Kurdistan. In 1515, Kurdish forces under the command of Mir Şeref, the emir of Bitlis, assisted the Ottoman military commander, Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha, in his campaign to relieve the city of Diyarbakır from Safavid encirclement. Similarly, the Kurdish ruler of Hasankeyf, Melik Halil, participated in the campaign to wrest control of Mardin from its *Kızılbaş* masters. Further to the south, Bitlisi’s intervention prompted the emirs of Soran and Cizre-Bohtan to seize the cities of Mosul and Kirkuk in the name of the Ottoman Sultan. Kurdish forces also played a vital role in the 1516 battle of Koçhisar, at which Safavid power over much of western Kurdistan was decisively broken.³⁶

The precise contours of the administrative system in Ottoman Kurdistan evolved gradually over time. Initially, Ottoman territories in the east were divided into two separate administrative units, the ‘province of Diyarbakır’ (*eyalet-i Diyarbekir*) and the ‘province of Kurdistan’ (*vilayet-i Kürdistan*). The former was organised in a similar fashion to other *tumar* provinces in Anatolia and the Balkans. In contrast, the latter denoted those enclaves governed by Kurdish rulers.³⁷ As

³⁵ Solakzâde, *Tarih-i Solakzâde*, 378. Earlier in the text, Solakzade refers to ‘emirs of the Kurds’ (*ümera-yı Ekrad*).

³⁶ See van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 136-145; İlhan, *Amid (Diyarbakır)*, 5-14; Sönmez, *İdris-i Bitlisi*, 98-110.

³⁷ The terms *eyalet* and *vilayet* are, in certain respects, synonyms. However, before the 1864 provincial reorganisation, *eyalet* was generally used to describe the highest level of provincial administration. Therefore the use of *vilayet* was an anomaly which implicitly highlighted the district’s unique status as other provinces are referred to as *eyalets* in the same document in which *vilayet* of Kurdistan is mentioned. The ‘province of Kurdistan’ did not form a contiguous territory nor did it possess a governor-general. Kurdish enclaves were divided into two categories: Bitlis, Soran, Çemişgezek, Cezire (Cizre), Hasankeyf, İmadiye and Hakkâri were described as those

Ottoman influence was pushed further eastwards over the course of the sixteenth century, new provinces (*eyalets/beylerbeyliks*), including Mosul (1535), Van (1548), Şehrîzor (1554) and Urfa (1586) were established. These new provinces were, in part, organised according to the *timar* system. However, enclaves governed by Kurdish nobles (which had previously constituted the province of Kurdistan) continued to exist, although they were also better integrated into Ottoman administrative structures, being brought under the purview of Ottoman governors-general.

Kurdish emirs and tribal leaders continued to possess considerable autonomy and enjoyed ownership of their ‘ancestral’ lands on a hereditary basis in return for which they were expected to provide military support for the Ottomans in times of war. The most prestigious Kurdish emirates were afforded a significant degree of political and economic independence. Although subject to Ottoman governors-general, these entities, which came to be known as *hükûmets* (regimes) were granted to their rulers as *yurtluk/ocaklık* (hereditary fiefs) and remained exempt from Ottoman taxation. There were also other forms of autonomous entity, sometimes known as *ekrad sancakları* (Kurdish counties). These administrative districts were granted to less prestigious tribal leaders and were, in terms of taxation, similar to regular ‘Ottoman counties’ (*Osmanlı sancakları*). However, unlike regular counties, the local tribal leadership enjoyed a degree of security over their ancestral lands, which were granted to them as hereditary fiefs.³⁸

governed by the ‘great emirs of Kurdistan’ and Sason, Çapakçur, Sinar, Ziddîk (Zirrîk?), Hizan, Palu, Eğil, Atak and Hizzo as those governed by the ‘lesser emirs of Kurdistan’. See TSA D. 5246 (1525) reproduced in Metin Kunt, *The Sultan’s Servants: The Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government, 1550-1650* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 109-116.

³⁸ For example, in his description of the administrative situation in Diyarbakır, the seventeenth-century Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi noted that the province consisted of nineteen *sancaks* and five *hükûmets*. The *hükûmets* were Cizre, Eğil, Genç, Palu and Hazzo. These entities were “exempted from registration [for tax purposes] (*tahrir olunmamış*).” Moreover, they were not divided into ‘fiefs’ (*timar ve zeamet*) and their ‘rulers’ (*hakimler*) possessed the land as ‘private property’ (*mülkiyet*) and retained the right to dispose of local revenue as they saw fit. The rulers

The Ottomans also sought to administer Kurdistan's considerable population of nomads in order to assess taxes and arrange grazing rights. For instance, in the sixteenth century, two large tribal federations were registered in Diyarbakır: the *Kara Ulus* (Black Federation), consisting largely of nomadic Kurds, and the *Boz Ulus* (Grey Federation), consisting largely of nomadic Turcomans.³⁹ The nomadic populations of Aleppo were registered in a similar manner. The 1518 *Tahrir Defteri* (Tax Register) divided the region's tribal population into three 'ethnic groups' (*taife*); Arabs, Turcomans and Kurds. Each of these groups was in turn subdivided into smaller tribal groupings, with the 'Kurdish community' (*taife-yi Ekrad*) consisting of four groups: the Ekrad, the Süleymaniye, the Çubi and the Alikanlu.⁴⁰

The Ottoman administration also offered limited recognition of the Kurds' religious prejudices. The dispensation of Islamic justice in the Ottoman realm was the responsibility of a network of *kadıs* (Muslim judges), appointed by Istanbul and independent of Ottoman provincial officials.⁴¹

of these *hükumets* enjoyed the privilege of being addressed in imperial communications by the honorific title of 'Your Excellency' (*cenab*) and held the rank of 'independent governor-general' (*serbest mir-i miranlık*). Out of the remaining districts, twelve were organised as in other parts of the empire. However, eight (Sagman, Kulp, Mihrani, Tercil, Atak, Pertek, Çapakçur and Çermik) were designated as 'hereditary fiefs' (*ocaklık/yurtluk*). While these were similar to regular *sancaks* in most respects, in that they were subject to Ottoman taxation, they were held by local Kurdish tribal leaders who maintained the right to pass on their holdings to their offspring. See Evliya Çelebi, "Der Beyan-ı Kanunname-i Süleyman Han be eyelet-i Diyarbakır-i Kürdistan", in Martin van Bruinessen and Hendrik Boeschoten (eds.), *Evliya Çelebi in Diyarbakır* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 120-127. Smaller Kurdish clans were also allowed to maintain 'tribal' holdings. A seventeenth-century Ottoman official, Ayn-i Ali Efendi, noted that in the provinces of Van, Diyarbakır and Şehrîzor (Shahrazur) there were more than four hundred tribal leaders (*mir-i aşiretler*) who, while being subject to Ottoman 'county governors' (*sancakbeyis*), possessed their 'fiefs' (*zemets*) on a hereditary basis. Ayn-i Ali Efendi, *Kavanin-i Ali Osman* (Istanbul: Tasvir-i Efkar Matbaası, 1280 [1863-1864]), 35.

³⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, "Introduction", in Martin van Bruinessen and Hendrik Boeschoten (eds.), *Evliya Çelebi in Diyarbakır* (Leiden: E.J Brill, 1988), 27.

⁴⁰ T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 397 *Numaralı Halep Livâsı Mufassal Tahrîr Defteri, (943 / 1536)* (Ankara: Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı 2010), 40-42.

⁴¹ On the *kadı* system see Imber, "Government, Administration and Law", 132-140; Imber, *The Ottoman Empire*, 216-251.

The Sultanate generally appointed members of the *ulema* schooled in the Hanefi *mezhep* to the most important positions in the empire's judicial hierarchy, even in regions where other Sunni *mezheps* predominated.⁴² This pattern was maintained in those areas of Kurdistan where centrally appointed governors presided. However, in those districts which possessed the status of a *hükümet*, local rulers were permitted to appoint Shafiis, who received imperial confirmation, to the highest echelons of the local Islamic judicial structures.⁴³

In general terms, Ottoman rule in Kurdistan prior to the mid-nineteenth century might best be described as a 'condominium' in which power was distributed between centrally appointed officials and the region's Kurdish nobility. In return for submission and military support, the Ottomans afforded Kurdish leaders both autonomy and protection.⁴⁴ Indeed, in order to avoid conflict amongst the Kurds, the Ottomans sought to maintain the balance of power amongst the various Kurdish notables. An imperial decree, dating from the reign of Süleyman I, outlines the perimeters of Kurdish autonomy. After highlighting the service of the Kurdish emirs (*Kürt beyleri*) to the Ottoman state in the time of Sultan Selim I and during Pargalı İbrahim Paşa's (1493-1536) campaigns against Iran as well as confirming their holdings as *yurtluk/ocaklık*, stated that: "There must not be any conflict or discord Amongst them [the Kurdish emirs]...". The document further

⁴² Jane Hathaway, *The Arab Lands Under Ottoman Rule, 1516-1800* (Harlow: Pearson, 2008), 46-48.

⁴³ Sabri Ateş, "Empires at the Margins: Towards a History of the Ottoman-Iranian Borderland and the Borderland Peoples", (PhD diss., New York University, 2006), 64-65. Ateş cites the Japanese scholar, Kumiko Saito. Unfortunately, I was unable to access her work.

⁴⁴ For a general overview of Ottoman administrative practices in Kurdistan prior to the nineteenth century see van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 151-175; van Bruinessen, "Introduction", in *Evliya Çelebi in Diyarbakir*, 17-28; Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 53-59; Mehmet Öz, "Ottoman Provincial Administration in Eastern and South Eastern Anatolia", in Kemal Karpat and Robert Zens (eds.), *Ottoman Borderlands: Issues, Personalities and Political Change* (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 145-156; Ágoston, "A Flexible Empire; Authority and its Limits on the Ottoman Frontier", 17-23.

stressed that when issues over the possession of a particular territory arose (for example when an emir died without an heir) “whoever the emirs of Kurdistan (*Kürdistan beyleri*) find fitting will succeed and will hold these lands for eternity as private property (*mülkiyet*)”.⁴⁵ Hence Ottoman policies sought both to foster good relations amongst the Kurdish emirs and to include them, as a collective, in regional decision-making regarding Kurdish-held territories. At the same time, these policies, implicitly, precluded any one Kurdish emir from consolidating power across Kurdistan.

The Ottomans’ primary objective was to reduce internal conflict amongst the Kurds in order to better harness their ‘martial spirit’. Sultan Selim I’s success in thwarting Safavid efforts to reassert control over Kurdistan demonstrated the importance of winning over the Kurds. Kurdish allies could tip the balance in favour of one side or another by providing logistical, transport and reconnaissance support, as was the case during Süleyman I’s successful ‘Campaign of the Two Iraqs’⁴⁶ of 1533-1535,⁴⁷ or by withholding it, as in the case of the Safavid Shah Abbas I’s (r. 1588-1629) victory over Ottoman forces at Sufiyan in 1605.⁴⁸

There is little doubt that many amongst the Ottoman ruling classes regarded the Kurds as an important element in Ottoman defence strategies for the empire’s eastern frontiers. For example, Koçi Bey (d.1650), a reform-minded official, in his enumeration of the military forces available

⁴⁵ Nazmı Sevgen, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu’da Türk Beylikleri: Osmanlı Belgeleri ile Kürt Türkleri Tarihi* (Ankara: Türk Kültür Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1982), 42-43. For an English translation of this document see Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 53.

⁴⁶ The ‘two Iraqs’ (*Irakeyn*) refers to *Irak-ı Arab* (Arabian Iraq), consisting of Baghdad and Basra and *Irak-ı Acem* (Iranian Iraq) which refers to the regions of central-western Iran. Although Süleyman I was forced to retreat from Azerbaijan, the campaign resulted in the Ottoman conquest of Baghdad.

⁴⁷ Aziz Efendi, *Kanûn-Nâme-i Sultânî li Aziz Efendi*, trans. Rhoads Murphey (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University, Office of the University Publisher, 1985), 14.

⁴⁸ Colin Imber, “The Battle of Sufiyan, 1605: A Symptom of Ottoman Military Decline”, in Willem Floor and Edmund Herzig (eds.), *Iran and the World in the Safavid Age* (London: I.B Taurus, 2012), 91-101.

on the empire's eastern marches, stated that the provinces of Diyarbakır and Van as well as the “Kurdish enclaves dependent on them (*ana tâbi Kürdistan*)” could supply 50,000 soldiers and, when supplemented with forces raised in the province of Erzurum, were more than enough to combat any Iranian advance.⁴⁹ However, it was the traveller and raconteur Evliya Çelebi who perhaps most succinctly summarised the strategic niche which the Kurds occupied within the vast Ottoman imperium, remarking that:

If the six thousand Kurdish tribes and clans in these [Kurdistan's] high mountains would not constitute a firm barrier between Arab Iraq (*sic!*)⁵⁰ and the Ottomans, it would be an easy matter for the Persians to invade Asia Minor (*diyar-i Rum*). (...) In these vast territories live five hundred thousand musket-bearing Shafi'i Muslims. There are seven hundred and seventy six fortresses all of which are inhabited. God willing, their [the Kurds'] fortresses shall remain standing always. Let Kurdistan remain forever between the House of Osman and the Shah of Iran.⁵¹

The Kurds were evidently seen by Evliya as brothers in religion and a martial people who, residing in their mountainous homeland, formed a bulwark against the ‘heretics’ of Iran.

Ottoman Kurdistan: Power, Politics and Culture

Despite Evliya Çelebi's portrayal of the Kurds as loyal guardians of the frontier, Ottoman hegemony over Kurdistan did not go unchallenged. Indeed, at times, relations between the Ottoman administration and the Kurdish nobles and tribal leaders could be quite turbulent. Certain Kurdish communities, such as the *Kızılbaş* Kurdish tribes of Dersim, or the Yezidis of Mt. Sincar, were, by their very nature, anathema to the Sunni Ottomans. Such groups resided far from the

⁴⁹ Koçi Bey, *Koçi Bey Risalesi: Şimdiye Elde Edilememiş Olan Tarihî Eserin Tamamı*, trans. Ali Kemal Aksüt (Istanbul: Vakıf Kütüphanesi, 1939), 26.

⁵⁰ Evliya clearly meant *Irak-ı Acem* (Iranian Iraq).

⁵¹ Quoted in van Bruinessen, “Onyedinci Yüzyılda Kürtler ve Dilleri: Kürt Lehçeleri üzerine Evliya Çelebi”, *Studia Kurdica*, 33. Also van Bruinessen, “Kurdistan in the 16th and 17th centuries, as reflected in Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname”, 1-11. It should be noted that Evliya Çelebi's numbers were most likely inflated.

centres of Ottoman military and political power, in some of Kurdistan's most inaccessible regions and so, despite periodic confrontations, terrain provided them with the means to maintain a large degree of independence from the empire.⁵²

Disputes also arose, at times, between the Ottoman administration and Sunni Kurdish leaders. For instance, in 1531 Süleyman I assigned the fief of Bitlis to the Safavid governor-general of Azerbaijan, Olama Beg Takkalu, in return for his assistance against his former masters. The town's Kurdish ruler, Mir Şeref, who had been a close ally of Sultan Selim I, was left with no alternative but to seek sanctuary in Iran.⁵³ In 1578 Sultan Murad III (r. 1574-1595) restored Bitlis to its Kurdish governors and the town regained its autonomous status as a *hükümet* dependent on the province of Van. Still, relations between Bitlis's emirs and the Ottoman governors-general of Van were not always harmonious. In 1655 Van's Ottoman governor, Melek Ahmed Pasha, launched a

⁵² For example, in 1640 Ahmed Melek Pasha launched a campaign against the Yezidi Kurds of Mt. Sincar in response to their raids on villagers and merchants in the vicinity of Mardin. See Evliya Çelebi, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman*, trans. Robert Dankoff (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 167-174. Similarly, documents from the eighteenth century mention the existence of a number of Kurdish tribes in the Dersim region who maintained beliefs similar to that of the *Kızılbaş* and who rejected Ottoman authority. Documents often refer to them as "Ekrad eşkiyası (Kurdish bandits)" See Ahmet Hezarfen, *Osmanlı Belgeleri'nde Dersim Tarihi* (Istanbul: Etik, 2003), 27-62. Also see Mehmet Yıdırım, "Dersimli Aşireti'den Dersim Sancağı'na", *Tunceli Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (2012), 23-37.

⁵³ According to Ottoman sources, Mir Şeref revolted and was recognised as governor by the Safavids, after which Sultan Süleyman appointed Olama Beg Takkalu, the former Safavid governor of Azerbaijan, in his place. See Solakzâde, *Tarih-i Solakzâde*, 483-484; Peçevi İbrahim Efendi, *Peçevi Tarihi*, Vol. I, trans. Bekir Sıtkı Baykal (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1981), 129. According to Mir Şeref's grandson, Mir Şeref had no intention of deserting the Ottomans, but as a result of Olama Beg Takkalu's intrigues, as well as his promise that, were he to be awarded the governorship of Bitlis, he would be able to bring Azerbaijan into the Ottoman fold, Mir Şeref was forced to flee to Iran. Sharaf Khan [Şeref Han], *Şeref-nameh*, 422-423. According to Eskender Monshi, prior to his appointment to the governorship of Bitlis, Olama Beg Takkalu was the *Amir al-Omara* ('supreme military commander') of Azerbaijan, but wished to become *Vakil* ('Vice-Roy') and *Mokhtar al-Saltaneh* ('Executive of the Affairs of State') in place of Chuha Soltan Takkalu. He marched on the royal camp but was forced by Shah Tahmasb I to flee to Van, after which he "withdrew his allegiance from the Safavid house and... departed for Istanbul." Monshi, *History of Shah 'Abbas*, 83.

punitive campaign against the town's ruler, Abdal Khan, following the latter's refusal to assist in removing an earth mound outside Van's castle, a refusal which was interpreted as a refusal to perform military service. Bitlis's septuagenarian emir was subsequently deposed in favour of another member of his clan, Zeyaeddin.⁵⁴ The conflict between Abdal Khan and Melek Ahmed Pasha was symptomatic of a more systematic confrontation between centrally appointed Ottoman officials and Kurdish nobles over the course of the seventeenth century, with Ottoman governors-general in Kurdish-inhabited provinces often seeking to intervene in the internal affairs of Kurdish emirates as well as to extract cash revenues from theoretically tax-exempt Kurdish districts, mainly through bribery and the applications of punitive 'fines'.⁵⁵

These confrontations have been regarded as the product of a gradual shift towards greater administrative centralisation on the part of Istanbul.⁵⁶ This interpretation of events is, however, a vast oversimplification. While Ottoman governors-general often sought to centralise *provincial* power, this did not necessarily mean that the influence and power of Istanbul increased as, during the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ottoman governors-general increasingly acted independently of the central administration. Hence some palace officials, such as Aziz

⁵⁴ On the campaign see Robert Dankoff, "Introduction", in Robert Dankoff (ed.), *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 8-11; Evliya Çelebi, "Part II", in Robert Dankoff (ed.) *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis* (Leiden: Brill 1990), 164-395. Also see van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 159; Armenag Sakisian, "Abdal Khan: seigneur kurde de Bitlis au XVIIe siècle, et ses trésors", *Journal Asiatique*, CCXXIX (1937), 253-70.

⁵⁵ This can be observed in the 1670-1671 account books of Ömer Pasha, the *beylerbeyi* of Diyarbakır. For example, the emir of Cizre-Bohtan, Mir Mehmed, paid 5,000 *kuruş* in order to secure his appointment as *sancakbeyi* of his supposedly hereditary fief. Ömer Pasha also extracted cash contributions from *hükümet*s such as Tercil, Cizre-Bohtan and Palu. See Metin Kunt, *Bir Osmanlı Valisinin Yıllık Gelir-Gideri: Diyarbakır, 1670-71* (Istanbul: Boğazici Yayınları, 1981), 35, 51 and 52.

⁵⁶ See Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 57-69; Amir Hassanpour, "The Pen and the Sword: Literacy, Education and Revolution in Kurdistan", in Anthony R. Welch and Peter Freebody (eds.), *Knowledge, Culture and Power: International Perspectives of Literacy as Policy and Practice* (London: Falmer, 1993), 40-42.

Efendi, were deeply troubled by the actions of certain Ottoman officials in Kurdistan. In his seventeenth-century reform treatise Aziz Efendi condemned the actions of the governors-general who “through their avarice dismissed a part of them [the Kurdish emirs] from office while executing others without reason”. The result had been that many Kurdish leaders had fled their homes “out of fear of being dismissed or executed and their places were given either to the relatives of the provincial governors or to other outsiders in contradiction to the terms of the treaty agreements”.⁵⁷ Evidently, Aziz Efendi regarded this as an unfortunate state of affairs and urged the sultan to reaffirm such treaties of agreement with Kurdistan’s nobility.

The decline of Kurdish autonomy, which Aziz Efendi had observed in the seventeenth century, was not permanent. In reality, the power, influence and status of particular Kurdish tribesmen and noble houses fluctuated. In certain cases, Kurdish administered districts did lose their autonomous status, although not always as a result of conflict with the Ottoman administration. During the reign of Sultan Selim I, Hasankeyf had been an important centre of Kurdish power and its ruling house, known as *meliks* (kings), enjoyed enormous prestige as the descendants of the Ayyubids. However, the family died out at some point during the sixteenth century, after which their holdings were transformed into a regular Ottoman *sancak*.⁵⁸ Still, whereas some Kurdish administered districts lost their autonomy, other Kurdish groupings won greater liberties. In the sixteenth century the province of Çıldır, located on the boundaries of Georgia, was composed of fifteen counties (*sancaks*), four of which Kurdish tribes held on a hereditary basis. By 1800, the province

⁵⁷ Aziz Efendi, *Kanûn-Nâme-i Sultânî li Aziz Efendi*, 14-15.

⁵⁸ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 146.

was made up of twenty-two counties, nineteen of which were under the control of Kurdish tribal leaders.⁵⁹

Indeed, far from resulting in a progressive weakening of Kurdish nobles and tribesmen, the advent of Ottoman sovereignty in fact furnished some with opportunities for advancement. Wealthy Kurdish leaders could, in certain cases, purchase positions within the upper echelons of provincial administration, positions which had originally been reserved for members of the imperial elite. For instance, in 1585 Mustafa Ali, a madrasa educated Ottoman official, received an appointment from Grand Vizier Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha to the position of financial director (*defterdar*) of Baghdad. However, he found upon arrival that the position had already been purchased by the Kurdish county governor (*sancakbeyi*) of Derteng, Sohrab Bey.⁶⁰

On occasion, the rapid rise of certain Kurdish clans could result in their eventual downfall. In the sixteenth century, the Canpolads were granted the district of Kilis, located in the north of Aleppo province. Ottoman documents referred to the territory as ‘the *liva* of the Kurds’,⁶¹ which meant the recognition of its status as a hereditary military fief administered by a Kurdish clan. The Canpolads proved capable political operators and in 1604/1605 Hasan Canpolad advanced to the position of Aleppo’s governor-general.⁶² Success seems, however, to have bred hubris and ultimately the clan fell from grace, when in 1606 Ali Canpolad, Hasan Canpolad’s nephew,

⁵⁹ Ibid, 160.

⁶⁰ Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 119.

⁶¹ Stefan Winter, *The Shiites of Lebanon under Ottoman Rule, 1516–1788*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 41

⁶² According to a list of Ottoman governors-general of Aleppo, Canpoladoğlu Hasan was appointed governor-general in 1013 A.H. (1604), after which no governor-general is listed for 3 years. Alphonse Mingana, “List of the Turkish Governors and High Judges of Aleppo from the Ottoman Conquest to A.D 1747”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, No. 10 (1926), 517.

conspired with the Tuscans and Anatolian rebels to extend his clan's hereditary rights to include the governorship of Aleppo. The revolt was crushed; the Canpolads were stripped of their lands and forced to flee to the mountains of Lebanon. Nevertheless, the Ottomans continued to allow Kurdish control over Kilis throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, assigning it as a tax-farm to Kurdish tribal leaders.⁶³

Other Kurdish clans were able to expand their influence more permanently. One such case is that of the Babans. In the early sixteenth century the Babans were a relatively minor Kurdish dynasty residing in the frontier province of Şehrizor (Shahrazur). Nevertheless, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Babans were able to enlarge their sphere of influence by supporting the Ottomans in their periodic campaigns against Iran. The Babans initially held the rank of *sancakbeyi*, but in 1678 the clan's paramount chief, Süleyman Baba, travelled to Istanbul and was raised to the rank of pasha, a recognition of military service against Iran.⁶⁴ In the summer of 1721, taking advantage of the political chaos which accompanied the Afghan occupation of Iran, the Babans raided the province of Kermanshah, devastating the region before being driven off.⁶⁵ Despite such setbacks, some of the Babans' other campaigns produced more enduring results. By the late eighteenth century the Baban emirate had expanded greatly, encompassing

⁶³ Winter, *The Shiites of Lebanon under Ottoman Rule, 1516–1788*, 41; Stefan Winter, “Les Kurdes de Syrie dans les archives ottomans (XVIIIe siècle)”, *Études Kurdes*, No. 10 (2009), 135-139. Also see Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 189-228

⁶⁴ Claudius James Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan, and on the site of ancient Nineveh; with journal of a voyage down the Tigris to Bagdad and an account of a visit to Shirauz and Persepolis*, Vol. 1 (London: James Duncan, 1836), 81. Also see Metin Atmaca, “The Politics of Alliance and Rivalry on the Ottoman-Iranian Frontier: The Babans (1500-1851)”, (PhD diss., Albert Ludwigs University, 2013), 38-41.

⁶⁵ Willem Floor, *The Afghan occupation of Safavid Persia 1721-1729* (Paris: l'Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 1998), 155.

much of southern Kurdistan, including the districts of Kirkuk, Koysancak (Koya), Qasr-e Shirin and Zehaw.⁶⁶

Significantly, perhaps the most serious challenge to Ottoman authority over the Kurdish homeland came not from the ambitions of Kurdish notables, but rather from Iranian subversion. While Ottoman power over Kurdistan generally prevailed, in the region's more easterly extremities Iranian influence remained paramount. This state of affairs was, in part, facilitated by these areas' geographical proximity to the Iranian heartlands. However, it was also made possible by the fact that Shah Ismail's successors adopted more conciliatory policies towards Kurdistan's nobility. Although some Kurdish populated regions, such as Kermanshah, were organised as imperial provinces, the Iranian administration recognised the Kurdish rulers of Sinne (Sanandaj), the Ardalān, as the province's hereditary rulers.⁶⁷ Similar privileges were also extended to the Mukriyan tribal confederation in the region south west of Lake Urmia.⁶⁸ Iran too was keen to make use of the Kurds' apparent 'martial spirit' in order to protect her borders. Indeed, the Kurds' reputation as warlike frontiersmen prompted several Iranian monarchs, most notably Shah Abbas I, to transplant Kurdish speaking tribesmen to Khorasan, thereby establishing a network of

⁶⁶ On the Babans see van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 171-173; Kaws Kaftan, *Baban, Botan, Soran: 19. Yüzyıl Bölgesel Kısa Kürt Tarihi*, (Istanbul: Nûjen, 1996), 11-24. Celilê Celîl, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Kürtler* (Istanbul: Özge, 1992), 53-64. Also see Atmaca, "The Politics of Alliance and Rivalry on the Ottoman-Iranian Frontier", 25-61.

⁶⁷ The Ardalān emirate was by far the most significant Kurdish polity in Iran. Its zone of influence roughly corresponds to the present day Iranian province of Kurdistan (*Ostān-e Kordestān*). The territory was gradually brought under Safavid control after 1524. The House of Ardalān ruled the region almost continuously between the sixteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries. Willem Floor, *Safavid Government Institutions*, (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2001), 87. Also see Sheerin Ardalān, *Les Kurdes de Ardalān entre la Perse et l'Empire ottoman*, (Paris: Geuthner, 2004); P. Oberling, "Banī Ardalān, *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Online Edition, 1988, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bani-ardalan-a-kurdish-tribe-of-northwestern-iran-now-dispersed-in-sanandaj-senna-and-surrounding-villages> (Accessed 24 April 2012).

⁶⁸ On the Mukriyan confederation see Muhammed Emin Zeki Beg, *Kürtler ve Kürdistan Tarihi* (Istanbul: Nûbihar, 2011), 184-192.

autonomous Kurdish tribal districts in the northern part of the province in order to defend the frontier from Uzbek and Turkmen raiders.⁶⁹

More serious from the perspective of Istanbul, however, were Iranian efforts to court Kurdish leaders within the Ottoman zone of influence. Following their flight from Ottoman lands, Mir Şeref's clan were treated by the Safavids with honour and respect. In fact, Mir Şeref's grandson, Şeref Han, was brought up within the imperial household under the protection of Shah Tahmasb I (r. 1524-1576) and educated alongside the Shah's own offspring. The Safavids evidently sought to shape Şeref Han into a pro-Iranian Kurdish leader, one who might bring Bitlis and perhaps other Kurdish territories under Iranian control. At the age of 12 he was given the rank of emir of the Kurds, a rank he held for three years. Following the accession of Shah Ismail II (r. 1576-1578), Şeref Han was awarded the title of 'high emir of the Kurds' (*amir al-omara al-akrad*), a position responsible for representing all the governors and rulers of Kurdistan, Luristan and Guran as well as the Kurdish tribes at the Safavid court.⁷⁰

The Safavids' efforts to mould Şeref Han into a leader through whom Iranian influence in Kurdistan might be extended were ultimately a failure. In 1578, while serving as governor of

⁶⁹ The transplantation of Kurdish tribes to Khorasan began during the reign of Shah Ismā'il I. However, the policy became more systematic under Shah Abbas. Between 1598 and 1601, he settled 45,000 Kurdish families in Khorasan, establishing five autonomous Kurdish tribal districts in the region between Astarabad and Chenaran. Three of these autonomous realms survived into the nineteenth century and were only suppressed in the late 1830s. The majority of Khorasani Kurds are Shi'ites and speakers of the Kirmancî dialect of Kurdish. In the eighteenth century, Nadir Shah transplanted some of the Khorasani Kurds to Gilan in order to strengthen that region's defences against Russia. See Abbas-Ali Madih, "The Kurds of Khorasan", *Iran and the Caucasus*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2007), 11-31; Komaki Shohei, "Khorasan in the Early 19th Century", *The Journal of Sophia Asian Studies*, No. 13 (1995), 80-108; Pierre Oberling, "Khorasan i. Ethnic Groups", in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online Edition, 1989, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/khorasan-1-ethnic-groups> (14 April 2014).

⁷⁰ Sharaf Khan [Şeref Han], *Scheref-nameh*, 427-428.

Nakhchivan, Şeref Han defected to the Ottomans, accepting an offer to restore his family to Bitlis. Despite this setback, competition for the loyalties of Kurdish leaders remained a perennial feature of Ottoman-Iranian relations. In fact, on occasion, such rivalries could provoke broader confrontations. In 1821, Babanlı Mahmud Pasha switched his allegiance from the Ottomans to the Qajar Crown Prince of Iran and governor of Azerbaijan, Abbas Mirza. The resulting political disorder prompted the reform-minded Abbas Mirza to invade Ottoman Kurdistan, where he scored a stunning victory over a numerically superior Ottoman force at Erzurum. The Ottoman-Iranian War of 1821-23, which one historian described as the ‘Baban War of Succession’, ended, thanks to European intervention, with Ottoman influence restored to the Babans’ capital of Süleymaniye.⁷¹ Still, this was a demonstration that Iranian subversion constituted the principal threat to Ottoman hegemony over Kurdistan well into the nineteenth century.

In many ways, the contest between the Sunni Ottomans and Shi’ite Iranians which played out in Kurdistan explains the ability of certain Kurdish populations to maintain their autonomy. The imposition of too direct a form of administration over Kurdistan, as Shah Ismail had discovered in the early sixteenth century, could prompt Kurdish leaders to defect to a sovereign more willing to permit them a greater degree of autonomy. However, the longevity of the Ottoman ‘condominium’ in Kurdistan was not entirely a matter of military and political expediency. Ottoman elites also seem to have regarded Kurdish autonomy as politically legitimate, so long as Kurdish leaders rendered appropriate submission and military support. This feudalistic relationship was shaped, at least implicitly, by the notion that the Kurds constituted a distinct people with their own ‘aristocratic’ elite. This did not mean that they were a politically unified people; Ottoman policies

⁷¹ Ateş, “Empires at the Margins”, 39. For a detailed examination of the conflict see Atmaca, “The Politics of Alliance and Rivalry on the Ottoman-Iranian Frontier”, 120-146.

sought to manage rather than eradicate divisions amongst the various Kurdish communities. Nevertheless, in a broader sense, the Ottoman administration seems to have regarded the Kurdish nobility as the *appropriate* interface between the empire and the wider Kurdish community. Hence, although the fate of particular Kurdish tribes and noble houses fared differently over time, the broad institutional and ideological basis of the Ottoman-Kurdish condominium remained intact for over three centuries.

There is little doubt that these institutional arrangements impacted favourably upon the material prosperity and cultural development of at least some elements of the Kurdish community. Evliya Çelebi, who visited Kurdish-administered Bitlis in the mid-sixteenth century, came across a thriving community. The town's market was full of activity and, according to our informant, made up of twelve thousand shops⁷² and an impressive tanning and leatherwork industry. Much of Bitlis's population, including many of the artisans and tradesmen, were Christian Armenians.⁷³ Nevertheless, Evliya Çelebi's also highlighted the existence of a 'civilised' caste of Kurds in the town. The city's ruler, Abdal Han, is portrayed as a veritable 'renaissance man', who presided over an elaborate court culture and was the master of "one thousand skills".⁷⁴ Evliya also offers a description of a stratum of urbanised Kurdish tribesmen, the Rojiki, the clan of Bitlis's ruler. According to the author, these men were not warlike tribal warriors like other Kurds but "sophisticates, men of learning and culture, with henna on their hands and beards and antimony on their eyes".⁷⁵

⁷² This number was certainly inflated.

⁷³ Evliya Çelebi, "Part I", 70-71. Also see Zak'aria of Agulis, *Journal of Zak'aria of Agulis*, trans. George A. Bournoutian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2003), 86 and 102.

⁷⁴ Evliya Çelebi, "Part I", 90-140.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 62-63.

Claudius Rich's early nineteenth-century description of Süleymaniye, the seat of the Baban emirate, depicts a similarly complex and diverse society. Rich, who arrived in the city in 1820, portrayed an elaborate court culture and a town of some ten thousand souls with five "khans" (covered markets), two good mosques and "a very fine bath".⁷⁶ Indeed, the architectural legacy of powerful Kurdish emirs is still very much apparent across Kurdistan.⁷⁷ Such impressive feats of engineering included the ancient Armenian fortress of Hoşap, located on the Van-Hakkâri road, rebuilt by the ruler of the Mahmudi emirate in the mid-seventeenth century.⁷⁸ Kurdish rulers also commissioned civilian structures including mosques, inns and covered markets. Perhaps the most extraordinary is the palace complex at Beyazıt (Doğubeyazıt), built by the town's Kurdish rulers over the course of the eighteenth century.⁷⁹

This material prosperity was matched by developments in the cultural sphere. As might be expected, the domains of powerful Kurdish lords served as important centres of Kurdish cultural production. Evliya Çelebi, upon visiting the emirate of İmadiye, recorded the existence of a lively literary scene and produced a copy of a *kaside* written by a member of the local *ulema* in the

⁷⁶ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, 85.

⁷⁷ It should be noted that outside powers such as the Ottomans were also responsible for many public works in Kurdistan. For example, the city of Diyarbakır, the seat of the governor-general of Diyarbakır, boasted four mosques designed by the renowned Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan (1489-1588). See Machiel Kiel, "The Physical Aspects of the City", in Martin van Bruinessen and Hendrik Boeschoten (eds.), *Evliya Çelebi in Diyarbakir*, (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 57. The Armenians have also left a considerable mark on the region's architectural landscape, including fortresses, churches and monasteries. For a more general discussion on the notion of the 'Kurdish city' see Martin van Bruinessen, "Kurds and the City", in Hamit Bozarslan and Clémence Scalbert-Yücel (eds.), *Joyce Blau, l'éternelle chez les Kurdes* (Paris: Institut Kurde de Paris, 2013), 273-95.

⁷⁸ Thomas Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey: An Architectural and Archaeological Survey*, (London: The Pindar Press, 1987), 212-215.

⁷⁹ Yusuf Çetin, "Ağrı ve Çevresinde Osmanlı Döneminde Mimari Yapılaşma", *Güzel Sanatlar Fakültesi Dergisi*, No. 10 (2007), 127-149.

region's Kirmancî dialect of Kurdish.⁸⁰ Other Kurdish emirates also promoted Kurdish vernacular literary production. The pro-Iranian Ardalan patronised works in the Guranî dialect. One record of this is a collection of Guranî poems compiled by Sheikh Abdul Momen II (1739-1797), an intimate of Ardalan emirate's late eighteenth-century ruler, Khusrow Khan the Great.⁸¹ Equally, the history of the literary idiom of the Soranî dialect was intimately linked with the rising fortunes of the Baban emirate in the late eighteenth century.⁸²

It was not only the courts of Kurdish emirs that provided an environment in which a flowering of written works in Kurdish vernaculars could occur. Kurdistan's networks of madrasas were also important centres of cultural and intellectual vitality. These colleges gained a reputation as centres for Shafii learning, where the rational sciences, which had declined in religious education across much of the Ottoman Empire, continued to be taught.⁸³ Much of the teaching in such Muslim colleges was most likely conducted in Arabic and Persian. However, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the production of pedagogical texts in the Kirmancî dialect of Kurdish, most notably the work of the eighteenth-century religious scholar Ali Teremahi (*Elî Teremaxî*) (d. 1785), suggests that, particularly in rural colleges, religious education was, at least

⁸⁰ Van Bruinessen, "Kurdistan in the 16th and 17th centuries, as reflected in Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname*", 1-11. Also see Joyce Blau, "La littérature kurde", *Études Kurdes*, No. 10 (2012), 8-11.

⁸¹ See Abdul Momen Mardoukhi, *Anthology of Gorani Poetry* (London: Soane Trust for Kurdistan, 1998); Blau, "La littérature kurde", 11-12.

⁸² The dialect was often referred to as Babanî Kurdish until the 1920s. The Baban emirate was a major centre of Soranî language production. The earliest literary production in Soranî is the poetry of Ali Berdeşani (*Elî Berdeşanî*) (d. 1812), who was a member of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Baban ruler Abdurrahman Pasha's court. His poem praising the Baban emir is his best known work. Blau, "La littérature kurde", 13-15. It is also worth noting that the term Soranî comes from the name of another important Kurdish emirate, Soran, also located just to the north of the zone of Baban influence.

⁸³ Katib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, trans. Geoffrey Lewis (London: Tinling & Co. 1957), 26; Also see Khalid al-Rouayheb, "The Myth of the 'Triumph of Fanaticism' in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire", *Die Welt des Islams*, No. 48 (2008), 196-221.

partially, conducted through the medium of Kurdish.⁸⁴ In short, the political and institutional arrangements which prevailed in Kurdistan between the early sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries provided an environment in which Kurdish culture could prosper and develop.

Kurdish Identity before Nationalism

Despite their immense diversity in terms of language, religion and social organisation, it seems evident that prior to the nineteenth century Ottoman travellers and statesmen regarded the Kurds as a distinct ethnic group. It also seems apparent that the idea that the Kurds constituted a distinct ethnic group helped shape Ottoman (and eventually Iranian) strategies towards the governance of Kurdistan. Indeed, it can be argued that the methods by which the Ottomans (and Iranians) sought to administer Kurdistan contributed to the maintenance of the Kurds as a distinct ‘ethnic’ people. This is not to suggest that ethnic identities were ‘insular’ or ‘static’.⁸⁵ An important aspect of ethnic identities in the pre-modern world is their contextual nature. As Walter Pohl remarked, “ethnicity hardly ever occurs in its pure form; it has to attach itself to other, more tangible forms of community...”.⁸⁶ Therefore, in examining manifestations of Kurdish ‘ethnic awareness’ in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is necessary to highlight the social and political

⁸⁴ On the vernacularisation of religious education in Kurdistan see Michiel Leezenberg, “Elî Teremaxî and the vernacularization of madrasa learning in Kurdistan”, *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 47, No.5 (2014), 713-733.

⁸⁵ A similar argument is made by Reşat Kasaba. See Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire*, 9.

⁸⁶ Walter Pohl, “Introduction: Ethnicity, Region and Empire”, in Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner and Richard Payne (eds.), *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: the West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300-1100* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 10. Similar observations have been made by a number of other scholars, namely that ‘ethnicity’ is a ‘thin concept’ which largely depends on other factors, including class, gender and religion. See, for example, Fredrik Barth, “Introduction”, in Fredrik Barth (eds.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 9-38; Thomas Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Pluto Press, 1993), 1-18. Also see Walter Pohl, “Conceptions of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies”, in Lester K. Little and Barbara H. Rosenwein (eds.), *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 13-24.

context within which it was articulated. In doing so, it will become apparent that membership of the Kurdish community did not entail a single ‘essential’ social or political meaning but a multiplicity of meanings.

In certain contexts, the distinction between Kurd and non-Kurd served as a differentiator within the socio-economic hierarchy of ‘lord-peasant’. In examining the economic system which prevailed in Ottoman Kurdistan, Şevket Pamuk observed that “the Ottoman state had recognized... the autonomy of the Kurdish tribal lords in exchange for military obligations and orderly payment of tribute. The political, administrative and legal autonomy of tribal lords and the lord-peasant bonds remained strong until the nineteenth century”.⁸⁷ In many regions, Kurdish tribal groupings dominated ethnically and religiously distinct peasant communities such as Armenians or Assyrians. However, throughout Kurdistan there also existed communities of Kurdish speaking Muslim peasants. While, on linguistic grounds, it might be attractive to classify these groups as Kurds, such communities – which lacked tribal affiliations – were often regarded as entirely distinct from the tribally organised elements of Kurdish society. Such distinctions were readily apparent to the early-nineteenth century traveller Claudius Rich. Rich, who toured the region around Süleymaniye, observed that the circumstances of the Kurdish subject peasantry were “wretched” and likened their conditions to those of “negro slaves of the West Indies...”.⁸⁸ According to Rich’s informants, this peasant caste constituted the vast majority of the region’s population, outnumbering tribesmen “at least four or even five to one”.⁸⁹ Moreover, Rich highlighted the enormous cultural gulf which separated the peasantry from their tribal cousins,

⁸⁷ Şevket Pamuk, “Commodity Production for the World Market and Relations of Production in Ottoman Agriculture, 1840-1913”, in Huri Islamoğlu-Inan (ed.), *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 194.

⁸⁸ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, 89

⁸⁹ Ibid.

with non-tribal peasants easily identifiable in appearance, speech and custom.⁹⁰ In examining the differences between what he described as “the *sipah* (‘the military/clannish Kurds’)” and “the *rayah* or *keuylees* (‘the peasantry’)”, Rich concluded that that the “peasantry in Koordistan are a totally distinct race from the tribes...”⁹¹ Such perceptions were reinforced by his encounters with Kurdish tribesmen. Rich records that one Kurdish tribal headman had complained bitterly that “the Turks call us all Koords, and have no conception of the distinction between us; but we are quite a distinct people from the peasants; and they have the stupidity which the Turks are pleased to attribute to us...”⁹² Such distinctions seem to have existed throughout Kurdistan, although the terminology used to distinguish between ‘tribal’ and ‘non-tribal’ elements of the Kurdish speaking population varied.⁹³

The socio-economic dimension of the pre-modern Kurdish identity is certainly important to consider. Indeed, it is possible to further refine our understanding of the Kurdish *ethnie*. Given the relationship between socio-economic status and membership of the Kurdish community, the Kurdish *ethnie* might best be described as a “lateral” or “aristocratic” *ethnie*, namely an ethnic community which encompasses only the very top layer of what we might today regard as the

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid, 80.

⁹² Ibid, 89.

⁹³ Some of the other designations used to identify the peasant ‘caste’ include: *kirmanc*, *misikin*, *köylü*, *goran* and *kolahspee*. For an extensive discussion on the ‘caste’-like distinction between Kurdish tribesmen and the Kurdish speaking peasantry see van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 105-121. Also see Martin van Bruinessen, “Kurdish Society, Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Refugee Problem”, in Philip Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (eds.), *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview* (London: Routledge, 1992), 39; Atmaca, “The Politics of Alliance and Rivalry on the Ottoman-Iranian Frontier”, 108-111.

Kurdish community.⁹⁴ Therefore, within the region, Kurdish identity served to maintain the distinction between the tribal ‘aristocracy’ and the subject peasantry over which they ruled.

However, this was not the only context in which the Kurdish identity was mobilised. In fact, in the period between the late sixteenth and early nineteenth century it is possible to identify several manifestations of Kurdish ‘ethnic awareness’ linked to particular ‘political arguments’. Perhaps one of the most significant works in this regard is Şeref Han Bitlisi’s *Sharafnama* (Book of Honour/ Book of Şeref), composed in Persian and completed in 1597. Şeref Han’s lively political career in service to both the Safavid and Ottoman dynasties has already been discussed in some detail. Yet it is for his scholarly endeavours that he is most remembered today. The *Sharafnama* provides information concerning the Kurds’ origins, culture and character, as well as an account of Kurdistan’s leading noble houses and its political history. The Kurdish linguist and historian, Amir Hassanpour has claimed that, as the first work focusing specifically on the Kurds and Kurdistan, the *Sharafnama* should be regarded as an early manifestation of Kurdish ‘national’ sentiment.⁹⁵ It seems beyond doubt that Şeref Han regarded himself as a Kurd and more importantly took pride in his ethnic identity. Nevertheless, the political message contained within the work was extremely different from the ‘nationalistic’ meaning with which some modern scholars imbue it.

⁹⁴ The aristocratic *ethnie* is contrasted to a demotic ethnic identity which is not based on class but upon a strong sense of cultural (or religious) unity. See Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 52–4; Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 193–4. Also see van Bruinessen, “Kurdish Society, Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Refugee Problem”, 39.

⁹⁵ Amir Hassanpour, “Making the Kurdish Identity: Pre-20th Century Historical and Literary Discourses”, in Abbas Vali (ed.), *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2003), 110-14.

Most strikingly, far from condemning the sovereignty of outsiders, Şeref Han was an ardent Ottoman partisan. The *Sharafnama*'s introduction included a panegyric dedicated to the reigning Ottoman sovereign, Sultan Mehmed III (r. 1595-1603).

[He is] the pearl upon the diadems of the most magnificent Sultans, the precious progeny of the most honourable and illustrious *khaqans*,⁹⁶ a haven for noble *qeysars*, and a sanctuary for the greatest *khosrows*;⁹⁷ he to whose court the greatest *Khaqans* pay homage and whom honoured Sultans venerate as the helm of Sunnism, who is protector to the people of the tradition of Muhammad and the consensus of the Muslim community (*umma*), the abolisher of the vestiges of heresy and perdition, a great Sultan, worthy of obedience, the most just and perfect *Khaqan*, indispensable to his subjects, bearing the Caliphate's standard with justice and beneficence, the author of the verses of grace and compassion upon the pages of space and time, with a heavenly mandate to rule the two worlds and to prosper in happiness in both, Sultan of the two seas and all the lands between them, custodian of the Two Holy Shrines, third to the two Omars,⁹⁸ and second to Alexander, the Possessor of Two Horns,⁹⁹ he who broadens the cover of safety and security, the object of divine grace, the munificent King Abu al-Mozaffar Sultan Muhammad Khan [Sultan Mehmed III], may God preserve his domains and his dominion and adorn the two kingdoms on earth and in heaven with his virtuousness and benevolence.¹⁰⁰

Elsewhere in the text, Şeref Han was keen to assert the religious affinities between the Kurds and the Ottomans. While numerous sources attest to the existence of pro-Safavid elements amongst the Kurdish community, the *Sharafnama* makes no reference to them, noting that:

All Kurdish communities are religiously Shafii, a branch belonging to Islamic jurisprudence and the Prophet's tradition, peace be upon him. They follow the Companions of the Prophet and Great Caliphs and are adherents

⁹⁶ *Khaqan* was a title initially reserved for the kings of Turkestan and China, but came to refer to any Turkic king.

⁹⁷ While *Qeysar* derives from Caesar and was used to refer to the rulers of Anatolia, *Kasra* is the Arabised form of *Khosrow*, the proper name of the most celebrated Sassanid king, which was popularly used in Iran to denote the sovereign.

⁹⁸ A reference to the Umayyid Caliphs, Omar I (634-644) and Omar II (717-720).

⁹⁹ "Alexander, the possessor of Two Horns", refers to Alexander the Great of Macedonia (r. 336 BC-323 BC).

¹⁰⁰ Sharaf Khan [Şeref Han], *Scheref-nameh*, 4-5.

of the magnanimous *ulema* and observe the ordinances of prayer, alms, pilgrimage to Mecca and fasting with complete assiduousness and they do this without reservation.¹⁰¹

Şeref Han's partisanship was perhaps shrewd politics considering his early career. Nonetheless, it was more than opportunism. Şeref Han's record of the Ottoman 'conquest' of Kurdistan was quite telling in this regard. In his description of events following Çaldıran, he recounts discussions between Sultan Selim I and İdris-i Bitlisi concerning the place of the Kurdish nobility in efforts to secure the Ottoman hold over Kurdistan:

The great scholar İdris honourably presented to the Sultan the requests of the emirs of Kurdistan for the Ottoman ruler to bestow upon them their hereditary territories, to appoint an individual amongst them to grandeur and the seat of governor-general (*beylerbeyi*), who in alliance with them would descend on Kara Han [the Safavid commander] and drive him from Diyarbakır. In reply, the Sultan said to them that whosoever among the Kurdish emirs or rulers was most worthy of being supreme commander (*amir al-omara*) should be appointed amongst them, one whom other Kurdish emirs would submit to in obedience, [so that they] could move against the *Kızılbaş* in order to repel and eliminate them. The scholar İdris advised that there existed an inherent plurality amongst them and none would consent to bow their heads to the others, even if the desired end was to divide and dismember the *Kızılbaş* community. [He suggested that] someone from the Ottoman court should be appointed to this difficult task; so that the Kurdish emirs would be compliant and obedient towards him and this arduous and important task would be resolved swiftly.¹⁰²

The accuracy of this account, which was written over eighty years after the fact, is perhaps less significant than what it tells us about Şeref Han's perception of how Ottoman sovereignty was established over Kurdistan. Far from perceiving it as a 'conquest', Şeref Han regarded the establishment of Ottoman rule over Kurdistan as having been realised with the consent of the Kurdish nobility and as a liberation from the 'tyranny' of the 'heretical' Safavids. Moreover, the

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 14-15. Şeref Han notes that the only exceptions to this were a few Yezidi tribes who lived in the region of Mosul. He makes no reference to other religious communities amongst the Kurds.

¹⁰² Ibid, 416-417.

Sharafnama portrays İdris-i Bitlisi's recommendation to place a non-Kurd in overall command of Kurdish forces as an act demonstrating his political acumen and not a betrayal. While Şeref Han emphasised his community's glorious history, he was fully aware of its political divisions and indeed sought to rationalise this state of disunity rather than condemn it.¹⁰³

Şeref Han's ideas were evidently shared by other members of Kurdistan's princely elite. Between the late sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the rulers of other Kurdish emirates commissioned copies of the work. In 1684 Şam'i, a scribe in the service of Mustafa Bey, the ruler of Eğil, completed a translation into Ottoman Turkish and included an appendix relating the histories of the Eğil and Palu emirates between 1597 and 1684. Significantly, the *Sharafnama* tradition transcended partisanship amongst the Kurds. Şeref Han's original work implicitly recognised that the Kurdish community extended beyond the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire and included the histories of those who remained Iranian vassals, such as the Ardalán and the Mukriyanis. Moreover, the work itself was appropriated by pro-Iranian Kurdish leaders. In 1810, the Ardalán

¹⁰³ The *Sharafnama* claims that this disunity could be attributed to a curse placed upon the Kurds by the Prophet Mohammad. The text recounts that "as the renown and message of the prophetic mission of Mohammad and the repute and song of his praised calling, peace be upon him, sent the corners and borders of the world into an uproar, the world's *Khaqans* and its sublime Sultans desired to array themselves with the bonds of vassalage and devotion to that superior leader and place upon their shoulders the mantle of subjection and obedience to that exceptional being. Oğuz Khan, who in those years was one of the greatest Sultans of Turkistan, sent from amongst the Kurdish nobles a man named Boğduz with a detestable appearance, a gigantic physique, an ugly countenance and dark complexion to the Prophet, to the court of fortune, the abode of the man of distinction of this world and the next, *Sayyed* [Master] of both humans and *Jinns*, the highest invocations and most perfect salutations upon him, to express the purity of their beliefs and sincerity of intentions. As the unsightly emissary appeared before the beatific Prophet, the highest of men, repulsed and disgusted by his form and spirit, questioned him on his tribe and clan. He said: "I am from the community of the Kurds". The Prophet replied: "May the sublime and exalted Creator prevent this community from ever uniting, for otherwise the world shall perish by their hands." Sharaf Khan [Şeref Han], *Scheref-nameh*, 16-17. This passage is interesting not only in that it provides a quasi-religious rationale for Kurdish disunity but also because it links the Kurds to Ottoman dynastic myths in the figure of Oğuz Khan.

commissioned a copy of the *Sharafnama* that included an appendix covering the history of their dynasty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁰⁴

One might conclude that, in political terms, the *Sharafnama* represented the political conservatism of Kurdistan's princely elites. In this context Kurdish ethnicity was mobilised as part of a subtle defence of the *existing* political arrangements, a system in which much of Kurdistan was left in the hands of its 'native' nobility. Şeref Han and those who commissioned copies were individuals whose power and influence were intimately linked to their relationship with the Ottoman and Iranian administrations. In this sense, politically, the work embodied a spirit of pragmatism which existed within Kurdish political culture, a willingness to co-operate with larger imperial neighbours so long as their 'traditional' liberties and freedoms were maintained. This was quite clearly explained near the beginning of the work:

The great sultans and magnanimous *khaqans* likewise have not coveted their [the Kurds'] districts and provinces, [and are] content merely with their tribute, subordination and acquiescence to heed the call to arms and prepare for campaigns, [an agreement made] without the condition of being conquered. And if, occasionally, some sultans have assiduously sought to conquer and occupy the lands of Kurdistan, they have suffered untold trials and tribulations; and in the end have become remorseful and filled with regret, and again returned [the lands] to their possessors.¹⁰⁵

The wish of the work's author was to present Kurdistan's aristocratic classes as responsible and gallant leaders, the appropriate interlocutors between Kurdish society and imperial power. In this sense, although a work of history, the *Sharafnama* can be regarded as a political treatise. It was a dialogue between a Kurdish lord and his feudal overlord, one that outlined the appropriate

¹⁰⁴ For detailed information on the *Sharafnama* manuscripts see Anwar Soltani, "The Sharafnama of Bitlisi: Manuscript Copies, Translations and Appendixes", *The International Journal of Kurdish Studies* 20, No. 1/2 (2006), 209-14. Also see Anwar Soltani, *35 Destnûsî Şerefnameyê Betlîsî le Kitêbxanekanêyê Cihan* (Jönköping: Kitêbê Erzan, 1997).

¹⁰⁵ Sharaf Khan [Şeref Han], *Scheref-nameh*, 18-19.

relationship between the imperial state and the Kurds.¹⁰⁶ Such arguments are clearly different from those of modern nationalists.

However, pre-modern Kurdish political culture also contained a more radical side, an impulse to increase autonomy or even shake off the influence of ‘outsiders’ completely. Kurdish oral traditions often lauded those leaders who defied the imperial powers. The epic of Dimdim Castle, which is based on historical events that occurred in the early seventeenth century, is one such folktale. It chronicles the story of Emir Khan, the ruler of the Bradost emirate and his struggle against the Safavids, who in 1610 attempted to conquer his fortress of Dimdim.¹⁰⁷ Emir Khan was ultimately defeated and killed and Iranian contemporaries of the siege of Dimdim tended to regard Emir Khan’s resistance as a manifestation of typical Kurdish mutiny and treason. Nevertheless, the Kurdish folkloric tradition, given literary form in Faki-yi Tayran’s (Feqiyê Teyran) *Beytê Dimdim* (1590–1660?), presents Emir Khan and his followers as martyrs who died in a conflict against outside oppression.¹⁰⁸

This impulse, amongst at least some elements of the Kurdish community, to end their vassalage is perhaps most evident in the work of the seventeenth-century religious scholar and poet, Ahmed-i Hani (Êhmedê Xanî). Compared to Şeref Han, Hani was a man of relatively modest origins, a member of the Hani tribe of northern Hakkâri. Hani authored several works in the Kirmancî dialect

¹⁰⁶ For a more detailed discussion on the politics of the *Sharafnama* see Djene Rhys Bajalan, “Şeref Xan’s Sharafnama: Kurdish Ethno-Politics in the Early Modern World, Its Meaning and Its Legacy”, *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 6 (2012), 795-818.

¹⁰⁷ Dimdim Castle was located on Mt. Dimdim in the Bradost region, around Lake Urmia. It held a dominant position overlooking the road, south of the city of Urmia. Dimdim Castle was destroyed following the revolt, although its ruins are still visible today.

¹⁰⁸ See Amir Hassanpour, “Dimdim”, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online Edition, 1995, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dimdim> (1 March 2014). Also see Zeki Beg, *Kürtler ve Kürdistan Tarihi*, 180-184

of Kurdish, but is best known today for his masterpiece, *Mêm û Zin*.¹⁰⁹ The poem is set in the emirate of Cizre-Bohtan, which is ruled over by a “Kurdish emir of Arab descent (*nesla wê ‘Ereb emîrê Ekrad*)”.¹¹⁰ It is a literary version of the folktale *Mêm-i Alan*, and recounts the doomed love affair between a boy of humble origins, Mêm, and the daughter of Cizre-Bohtan’s emir, Zin. The work touches on various themes, including love and religion; however, it is remembered today primarily for the political message contained within its introduction.

In this introduction, known as ‘our troubles’ (*derdê me*), Hani reflected, in sombre tones, on the Kurds’ geo-political role as the guardians of the frontiers:

Look, from the Arabs (*‘Ereb*) to the Georgians (*Gurcan*),
The Kurds have become like towers.

The Ottomans (*Rûm*) and Iranians are surrounded by them,
The Kurds are on all four corners.

Both sides have made them
Targets for the arrows of faith.

They are said to be keys to the borders
Each tribe forming a formidable dam,

Whenever the Ottoman Sea [Ottomans] and Tajik Sea [Iranians]
Flow out and agitate.

The Kurds get soaked in blood,
Separating them like an isthmus.

For Hani, such vassalage was intolerable to a people who could not “accept dependency”. Significantly, he laid the blame for this shameful state of affairs upon “people of stature (*xalqê*)

¹⁰⁹ Other works by Xanî include *Eqîdeya Îmanê* (The Path of Faith) and *Nûbihara Biçûkan* (The Spring of Children).

¹¹⁰ Êhmedê Xanî [Ahmed-i Hani], *Mêm u Zin* (Stockholm: Nefel, 2004), 61.

namdarî)” and “the ruler and emirs (*hakim û emîran*)”, asking: “What fault lies with the poets or paupers (*şa ’ir û feqîran*)?” Hani longed for a Kurdish monarch to emerge and put an end to what he regarded as the Kurds’ subjugation.

If only we possessed an emperor,
If God saw fit to grant him a crown,

If a throne were appointed for him,
We would spread out.

If only a crown were placed upon his head,
Without doubt we would find our remedy.

He would sympathise with us, the orphans,
Liberate us from the clutches of tyrants.

We would be undefeated by those Ottomans (*Rûm*),
We would not become ruined by owls.

We are condemned and impoverished,
Defeated and subjugated by the Turks and Persians (*Tirk û Tacik*).

God willed our destiny so,
[And] those Ottomans (*Rûm*) and Iranians (*’Ecem*) dominate us.

However, the fragmented nature of Kurdish society prevented the Kurds from realising their true potential:

If only we possessed unity,
Together we could have established [our] hegemony.

Those Ottomans and Arabs and Iranians,
All of them would be our slaves.

We would perfect religion and state (*dîn û dewlet*);
We would learn science and wisdom.¹¹¹

Hani’s lamentations on the Kurds’ subjection, his longing for a Kurdish sovereign and his criticism of Kurdistan’s political establishment have earned him a reputation as the ‘father’ of modern

¹¹¹ Xanî [Hani], *Mêm û Zin*, 43-47.

Kurdish nationalism’,¹¹² and undoubtedly Hani’s words lend themselves to a nationalistic interpretation.¹¹³

Nevertheless, Hani’s work must be understood within the social and political context of late seventeenth-century Kurdistan. Although Hani clearly regarded the Kurds as a distinct people, different from Turks, Arabs and Iranians, his notion of the Kurdish community was most likely quite different from that held by modern Kurdish nationalists. For Hani, the Kurds were a community of tribes, not a unified (or potentially unified) people. His call for the unification of the Kurds under a Kurdish leader was not a call for the creation of an integrated Kurdish ‘nation state’. Rather, Hani wished to see the Kurdish tribes co-operating under the leadership of a Kurdish sovereign so that they might bring their neighbours into submission and create a universal Muslim empire. In this sense, far from prefiguring modern nationalism in his poetry, Hani more likely sought to reverse the roles of ‘subjugator’ and ‘subjugated’. Therefore, while such a yearning is evidently an indication of a strong sense of ‘ethnic awareness’, it ought not to be conflated with modern conceptions of nationhood.

Conclusions: The Ethnic Origins of Kurdish Nationalism?

In utilising the term *ethnie* to describe the Kurdish community prior to the nineteenth century, this chapter has sought to distinguish pre-modern manifestations of Kurdish ‘ethnic awareness’ from modern conceptions of nationhood and nationalism. Clearly, the notion that, at least in part,

¹¹² Hassanpour, “The Pen and the Sword: Literacy, Education and Revolution in Kurdistan”, 44-46; Hassanpour, “Making the Kurdish Identity”, 118-131. Farhad Shakely, “Kurdish Nationalism in Mam u Zin of Ahmad-î Khânî”, (Unpublished Paper).

¹¹³ Martin van Bruinessen noted that when he first encountered *Mêm û Zîn*, he suspected that its ‘nationalistic’ lines might have been the addition of a later copyist. This was not the case. See Martin van Bruinessen, Ehemdi Xani’s “*Mêm û Zîn* and Its Role in the Emergence of Kurdish National Awareness”, in Abbas Vali (ed.), *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2003), 40-57.

membership of the Kurdish community was defined by socio-economic status – its ‘aristocratic’ nature - is anathema to modern Kurdish nationalism. However, pre-modernity bequeathed to the modern Kurdish movement a rich ethno-history upon which to draw: “a popular *living past* has been, and can be, *rediscovered* and *reinterpreted* by modern nationalist intelligentsias”.¹¹⁴ This past included cultural artifacts such as language, religion and literature but also included political and institutional elements. As Eric Hobsbawm observed, “the most decisive criterion” in ‘proto-national’ identification is membership of a lasting “political entity”.¹¹⁵ In this sense, the institutional legacy of Ottoman and Iranian administration of Kurdistan is significant. On one hand, the Kurds had a long tradition of political association with their large imperial neighbours. Yet, on the other, this association was realised through a complex set of institutional arrangements which recognised the Kurds’ socio-political specificity. The Kurds were not simply a community defined by an amalgamation of cultural traits, but a people that possessed its own noble classes and its own traditions of independence, autonomy and self-government. Therefore, in order to understand the conditions surrounding the emergence of both the ‘Kurdish question’ and the Kurdish movement, it is now necessary to examine how Istanbul’s efforts to transform the empire into a modern territorial state over the course of the nineteenth century impacted on the Ottoman-Kurdish ‘condominium’.

¹¹⁴ Smith, *Myth and Memory of the Nation*, 9. [My emphasis].

¹¹⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 58.

Chapter II: Reform and Rebellion: The Making of the Kurdish Question (1839-1883)

Still, I am far from thinking that Europe has heard the last of this Kurdish question. It will probably be asked hereafter, what is to be done with Kurdistan?

W. G. Abbot, British Consul at Tabriz, 1881¹

Perhaps the greatest testament to Ottoman success in managing relations with the Kurdish community between the early sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries was that, despite periodic challenges, Ottoman suzerainty over the majority of Kurdistan prevailed throughout this period. By the early nineteenth century, however, the empire was beset by a host of new challenges. In geo-political terms, the economic, political and military power of the Ottoman Empire was in sharp decline *vis-à-vis* the Great Powers of Europe. At the same time, a trend towards greater decentralisation which had emerged during the eighteenth century threatened the continued unity and territorial integrity of the state. In response to this state of affairs, Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839) undertook a set of institutional reforms in order to strengthen the empire. These policies involved a concerted effort to centralise political power within the empire and to remake and restructure imperial institutions along western lines. The pace and intensity of these reforms accelerated in the late 1830s, coming to be known as the *Tanzimat* (Reorganisation).

This chapter examines the impact of the reforms pursued during the *Tanzimat* period (1839-1876) on Kurdish society. While the Ottoman reformers did enjoy some success in asserting central government authority over Kurdistan during this period, they failed to provide a stable or orderly

¹ PRO FO 60/441, Tabriz (10 August, 1881).

system of administration for the region. This failure was particularly evident in more rural tribal districts where the reforms promoted growing disorder, resistance and inter-communal conflict. This growing crisis in Kurdistan was exacerbated by the political and military crises which overtook the empire in the late 1870s and culminated in the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt of 1879 to 1882. This revolt was by no means the first major Kurdish revolt the Ottomans had faced in the nineteenth century. However, it was both the largest and, more importantly, the first to mobilise the idiom of Kurdish 'nationhood' to legitimatise itself. In short, it signaled the first glimmerings of Kurdish political nationalism and, more broadly, the origin of the 'Kurdish question'.

The Fall of the Emirs: *Tanzimat* Centralisation and the Kurds

The Gülhane edict of 1839 began a process by which the empire's non-Muslims populations gradually acquired legal equality with Muslims. For the statesmen of the *Tanzimat* era, it was hoped that this concession would win both the respect of an ascendant Europe and the loyalty of the empire's non-Muslim communities. In short, the Ottoman political leadership sought to create an Ottoman political 'nation' in which Muslims and non-Muslims were unified through a set of shared rights and responsibilities towards the state. As a leading Ottoman statesman of the era put it, "the fusion of all subjects... with the exception of purely religious affairs..."² was the only way to ensure the salvation of the Ottoman imperium. This involved a radical re-conceptualisation of the term Ottoman (*Osmanlı*). Historically, the term had been used to describe members of the House of Osman and the Sultan's dynastic retinue. However, over the course of the nineteenth century it became an appellation applied to *all* Ottoman subjects, who became members of the

² Roderic Davison, "Turkish Attitudes Concerning Christian and Muslim Equality in the Nineteenth Century", in Roderic Davison (ed.), *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History, 1774-1923* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press: 1990), 117.

‘Ottoman nation’ (*Osmanlı milleti*).³ Contrary to the expectations of political elites in Istanbul, reform efforts did not produce the desired results. Western influence on the internal affairs of the empire continued to grow. The European Great Powers utilised strengthened extra-territorial rights to promote Christian merchants, who through European intervention gained tax exemptions and immunity from Ottoman law. It was in the predominantly Christian regions of the Balkans that the *Tanzimat* reforms had their most deleterious effects. In 1829, the Greeks had become the first Christian people to win their independence from the Ottoman Empire. The *Tanzimat* statesmen, keen to avoid further losses in the Balkans, hoped that their reforms would head off secessionism and nationalism amongst the other Christian peoples of the region. Yet, ironically, the centralising measures which accompanied Ottoman efforts to forge a unified Ottoman polity, especially with regard to the issue of taxation, contributed to the growth of social and political unrest in the region and, ultimately, of nationalist movements.⁴

In the predominantly Muslim Asiatic provinces of the Ottoman Empire, including in Kurdistan, the social and political disruptions brought about by centralisation and growing European influence were no less great than in the Balkans. However, unlike in the empire’s European territories, these did not, at least initially, have ‘nationalist’ implications. The policies adopted by the Istanbul government during the *Tanzimat* brought hitherto peripheral and largely autonomous regions of the empire more firmly into the orbit of the central administration. As in the Balkans, local political elites in Kurdistan, most notably the Kurdish emirs, resented the central

³ David Kushner, “Self-Perception and Identity in Contemporary Turkey”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1997), 219-220. Also see Erik Jan Zürcher, “The Vocabulary of Muslim Nationalism”, *International Journal of the Sociology of Science*, Vol. 137, No. 1 (1999), 81-92.

⁴ Halil İnalçık, “The Application of the Tanzimat and its Social Effects”, *Archivum Ottomanicum*, No. 5 (1973), 127.

government's efforts to impose its authority across the region. Indeed, there was a fundamental contradiction between the desires of Kurdish emirs to maintain, or even expand, their autonomy and the central government's objective of transforming the Ottoman polity into an approximation of a centralised European 'nation state'. Therefore it is unsurprising that much of the decade following the promulgation of the Gülhane edict was characterised by conflict.

Initial campaigns to bring Kurdistan under firmer government control can be traced back to the mid-1830s.⁵ In 1834 Sultan Mahmud II appointed Reşid Mehmed Pasha governor-general (*beylerbeyi*) of Diyarbakır, granting him extensive power to reorganise administration in the region.⁶ Diyarbakır's governor-general proved to be extremely energetic, engaging in numerous campaigns against Kurds across the province. Most notably he defeated Mir Mohammad of Rawanduz, the rebellious emir of Soran,⁷ as well as putting an end to the autonomy enjoyed by the

⁵ During his more than three decades in power, Mahmud II undertook numerous campaigns in order to assert Istanbul's primacy over provincial affairs. See Stanford Shaw and Ezel K. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 14; Sükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 60-62. The specific timing of his campaigns in Kurdistan can most likely be accounted for by the failure of any of the major Kurdish emirs to support the Ottoman defence forces during the Ottoman-Russian War of 1828-1829. Sinan Hakan, *Müküs Kürt Mirleri ve Han Mahmud* (Istanbul: Peri, 2002), 48.

⁶ In addition to becoming *beylerbeyi* of Diyarbakır, he was appointed *vali* (governor) of Rakka and *mütesellim* (tax-collector) for Muş; BOA HAT, 1588/39 (20 March 1834), BOA HAT 1589/35 (29 August 1834). Also see Suavi Aydın and Jelle Verhij, "Confusion in the Cauldron: Some Notes on Ethno-Religious Groups, Local Powers and the Ottoman State in Diyarbekir Province, 1800-1870", in Joost Jongerden and Jelle Verheij (eds.), *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbekir, 1870-1915* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 31.

⁷ Mir Mohammad of Rawanduz had risen to the leadership of the Soran emirate in 1814. He quickly sought to expand his holdings, launching attacks against the Emir of İmadiye, Ismail Pasha, and the Yezidis of Sincar. His actions brought him into conflict with the Ottoman administration. He was evidently captured and brought to Istanbul. He was apparently offered the 'governorship of Kurdistan,' although it is unclear in administrative terms what this offer precisely entailed. However, he was murdered whilst *en route* to take up the position. On Mir Mohammad of Rawanduz see Sinan Hakan, *Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde Kürtler ve Kürt Direnişleri, (1817-1867)* (Istanbul: Doz, 2011), 83-86; David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B.

emirs of Hazzo, Hani, Inicak and Silvan.⁸ Reşid Mehmed Pasha died in 1836 and was replaced by Çerkez Hafız Mehmed Pasha, who continued the efforts of his predecessor to establish Ottoman authority across Kurdistan. His most noteworthy success was against the Garzan Kurds, a powerful coalition of nomadic tribes which dominated the region between Batman and Siirt.⁹ Despite an impressive string of victories, Mehmed Pasha was unable to complete the work of his predecessor. His efforts to unseat Han Mahmud, the emir of Müküs, were unsuccessful.¹⁰ And in June 1839 much of Mehmed Pasha's work towards asserting central government control over Kurdistan was undone following his defeat at the hands of the Egyptians at the Battle of Nizip.¹¹

Nevertheless, following the Gülhane edict, promulgated in November 1839, the campaign to remove Kurdish potentates and replace them with centrally appointed officials received renewed impetus. Such efforts were vigorously opposed by local Kurdish notables. For example, in the early 1840s, Babanlı Ahmed Pasha endeavored to maintain his independence from the Ottoman Empire, resisting the efforts of Necip Pasha, the governor of Baghdad, to remove him from office. Indeed, he even sought to 'modernise' the economic and military infrastructure of his emirate in order to better resist Ottoman attempts at displacing him. According to a British official who visited the Baban capital of Süleymaniye in 1844, Ahmed Pasha was an industrious leader who possessed a "liberal education" and "a taste for the new order of things..." He worked to improve

Tauris, 1997), 40-42; Kaws Kaftan, *Baban, Botan, Soran: 19 Yüzyıl Bölgesel Kısa Kürt Tarihi* (Istanbul: Nûjen, 1996) 45-56.

⁸ James Brant, "Notes of a Journey through a Part of Kurdistan, in the Summer of 1838", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 11 (1841), 359-360.

⁹ Hakan, *Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde Kürtler ve Kürt Direnişleri*, 88-90; Brant, "Notes of a Journey through a Part of Kurdistan, in the Summer of 1838", 354.

¹⁰ Han Mahmud of Müküs had emerged as a major Kurdish leader in the early 1820s, expanding his holdings to include much of the region between Lake Van and the Iranian frontier. See Hakan, *Müküs Kürt Mirleri ve Han Mahmud*, 63; Brant, "Notes of a Journey through a Part of Kurdistan, in the Summer of 1838", 387.

¹¹ See Aydın and Jelle Verhij, "Confusion in the Cauldron", 34-37.

agricultural output within his domains and even established a small centrally-controlled army dressed and drilled in the European fashion.¹² It was only after considerable campaigning by Ottoman forces from Baghdad that the Pasha was finally defeated in 1845.¹³ He was subsequently replaced by his brother, Abdullah Pasha, who governed Süleymaniye as the centrally appointed *kaymakam*. However, he too was removed from office six years later, putting an end to the last vestiges of the Baban emirate.¹⁴

Perhaps the best known example of Kurdish resistance to the impositions of the *Tanzimat*, however, is that of Bedirhan Bey, the ruler of the Cizre-Bohtan emirate. Bedirhan Bey had come to power in 1835 following the removal of his cousin, Seyfeddin Bey, by Reşid Mehmed Pasha,¹⁵ securing his position through cooperation with the Ottoman authorities. However, as Ottoman influence in Kurdistan waned following the Battle of Nizip, Bedirhan emerged as the dominant force in central Kurdistan and, ultimately, the focal point of resistance to the *Tanzimat*. In 1840, in a bid to consolidate his position, he entered into alliances with a number of other Kurdish emirs, most notably Han Mahmud of Müküs and Nurullah Bey of Hakkâri.¹⁶ He was, like Babanlı Ahmed Pasha, also active in reforming the administrative structures of his emirate, creating elite military

¹² See J. F. Jones, “Narrative of a Journey through parts of Persia and Kurdistan”, *Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society*, No. 8 (1849), 249-335.

¹³ PRO FO 78/2713, Mosul (12 July 1845)

¹⁴ Abd al-Qader bin Rostam Babani, *Seyer al-Akrad dar Tarikh-e Jografya-ye Kordestan* (Tehran, 1998), 166-167; Sabri Ateş, *The Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843-1914*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 74-75; Metin Atmaca, “The Politics of Alliance and Rivalry on the Ottoman-Iranian Frontier” (PhD diss., Albert Ludwigs University, 2013), 175-176.

¹⁵ Hakan, *Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde Kürtler ve Kürt Direnişleri*, 79-83.

¹⁶ On Bedirhan Bey’s alliances with other Kurdish emirs see Ahmet Kardam, *Cizre-Bohtan Beyi Bedirhan: Direniş ve İsyân Yılları* (Ankara: Dipnot, 2011), 103-130 and 217-282. Also see Hakan, *Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde Kürtler ve Kürt Direnişleri*, 157-192.

units under his personal command as well as establishing a centralised judicial system.¹⁷ Bedirhan Bey's actions evidently constituted a serious impediment to Istanbul's designs towards a centralised provincial administration in the region. Hence in 1842, in a bid to weaken Bedirhan Bey's authority, the Ottoman government attempted to divide his territories by transferring administrative jurisdiction of Cizre from Diyarbakır to Mosul.¹⁸ This measure proved, at least in the short term, to be counter-productive. Bedirhan Bey was pushed into open rebellion. He began minting coins and even had the Ottoman sultan's name removed from the recital of the *hutbe* (Friday prayers).¹⁹ Resistance from Bedirhan Bey and his allies continued for almost five years and even garnered the attention of the European powers following his massacre of Nestorian Christians in 1843 and 1846. Ultimately, the revolt was crushed. In 1846, Bedirhan's ally Han Mahmud was captured and a year later Bedirhan himself was forced to surrender to government forces.²⁰ With the mainstay of Kurdish resistance to the central government broken, the remaining

¹⁷ According to Lütfi (Ahmed Ramiz), who published a brochure on the history of the Bedirhan Revolt in 1907, Bedirhan Bey significantly reorganised the administration of the emirate. This included the established central military force (*hassa*), to which the tribes each contributed 100 footmen and 100 cavalymen, as well as a consultative committee (*meclis-i meşveret*) to assist in governance and the dispensation of justice. Lütfi, *Emir Bedirhan* (Istanbul: BGST, 2007), 32-33.

¹⁸ Nazmi Sevgen, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu'da Türk Beylikleri* (Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1982), 66-69.

¹⁹ In an article published in 1924, Süleyman Nazif, a native of Diyarbakır, claimed to have seen a coin issued in 1842 in the name of "*Emir-i Bohtan Bedirhan*". Süleyman Nazif, "Nesturiler", *Son Telegraf*, (22 October 1924). The article is reproduced in Malmîsanij, *Cizira Botanlı Bedirhaniler* (Istanbul: Avesta, 2000), 261-265.

²⁰ Kardam, *Cizre-Bohtan Beyi Bedirhan*, 274.

Kurdish emirates were abolished.²¹ By 1850 Ottoman Kurdistan had been, at least on paper, brought under Istanbul's direct authority.²²

It has been suggested that Bedirhan Bey's objective was to establish an independent Kurdish nation state,²³ although a number of scholars have questioned such conclusions.²⁴ Certainly, his minting of coins and his removal of the sultan's name from the recital of the *hutbe*, both traditional symbols of sovereignty in the Islamic world,²⁵ suggest that, after 1842, Bedirhan Bey sought independence from the Ottomans. Moreover, some of his policies, most notably his efforts to reform the administration of his emirate, look very much like modern state building.²⁶ Still, it seems highly unlikely that nationalistic ideals, in any modern sense, motivated either Bedirhan Bey or his followers. His efforts towards establishing his independence and modernising the infrastructure of his emirate were most likely inspired by dynastic ambitions similar to those harbored by Mehmed Ali of Egypt. In short, his movement was the last gasp of the traditional order which sought to resist the advances of Istanbul.

²¹ For example, Nurullah Bey of Hakkâri, who had defected to the Ottoman side during the latter phases of the Bedirhan revolt, was removed from office in 1849. Sevgen, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu'da Türk Beylikleri*, 158-170; Hakan, *Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde Kürtler ve Kürt Direnişleri*, 268-271.

²² Similarly processes occurred in Iranian Kurdistan, albeit at a slower pace. The last Kurdish emirate in Iran, the Ardalan emirate, was abolished in 1867. See Ateş, *The Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands*, 37.

²³ See, for example, Kaftan, *Baban, Botan, Soran*, 65; Muhammed Emin Zeki Beg, *Kürtler ve Kürdistan Tarihi* (Istanbul: Nûbihar, 2011), 221.

²⁴ See Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structure of Kurdistan* (London: Zed, 1992), 179-180; Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 70-72.

²⁵ Henri Lammens, *Islam: Beliefs and Institutions* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 104.

²⁶ A similar point can be made about the 'reformist' policies adopted by Babanlı Ahmed Pasha.

The Tanzimat State in Kurdistan: Integration and Disintegration

The implications for Kurdish society of the *Tanzimat* reforms were significant. In administrative terms, Kurdish-inhabited regions of the empire were reorganised into regular Ottoman provinces governed by centrally appointed officials. Although this process of reorganisation has its roots in the latter years of the reign of Sultan Mahmud II, it only came to be expressed systematically in the late 1840s with the defeat of the emirs. In 1847 the Ottoman official gazette, *Takvim-i Vekayi* (The Calendar of Events), announced that the province of Diyarbakır (*eyalet-i Diyarbekir*), the counties (*sancak*) of Van, Muş and Hakkâri and the districts (*kaza*) of Cizre, Bohtan and Mardin, would be united into a new province, the province of Kurdistan (*eyalet-i Kürdistan*), which would be governed in accordance with the regulations of the “beneficial *Tanzimat* (*Tanzimat-ı hayriye*)”.²⁷ This opened the way for the application of numerous reforms in the region. Perhaps one of the most significant of these was the Land Code of 1858 (*Arazi Kanunnamesi*), which regularised the system of land registration. The state was confirmed as the *de jure* owner of agricultural lands, but granting of land as *de facto* private property was made possible through the issuing of title deeds.²⁸ In 1864 further reforms in provincial administration were undertaken with

²⁷ “Resmi Tebligat”, *Takvim-i Vekayi*, (14 December 1847). The 1848 Yearbook (*Salname*) divided the province into three counties (*sancak*): Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van. However, those districts included within the administrative boundaries of ‘Kurdistan’ seem to have been in a state of flux. At various times in the province’s existence, districts such as Mosul, Dersim, Harput and Malatya were placed under the jurisdiction of Kurdistan’s governor. The province of Kurdistan was abolished in 1868, although at that point it was a much smaller administrative unit consisting of the counties (*liva/sancak*) of Diyarbakır, Mardin and Siirt. See Kürdoloji Çalışmaları Grubu, *Osmanlı Kürdistan* (Istanbul: BGST, 2011), 93-130.

²⁸ On the Land Code of 1858 see Ömer Lütfi Barkan, “Türk Toprak Hukuku Tarihinde Tanzimat ve 1274 (1858) Tarihli Arazi Kanunnamesi”, in Ömer Lütfi Barkan (ed.), *Türkiye’de Toprak Meselesi* (Istanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1980), 291-375. For a more critical assessment see Huri İslamoğlu, “Property as Contested Domain: A Reevaluation of the Ottoman Land Code of 1858”, in Roger Owen (ed.), *New Perspectives on Property and Land in the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 4-62. For a detailed study on the application of the Land

the passage of the Statute of Provincial Organisation (*Teşkil-i Vilayet Nizamnamesi*).²⁹ This opened the way for the creation of a raft of new local government institutions, including a uniform system of provinces (*vilayet*), counties (*sancak/liva*) and districts (*kaza*), advisory provincial councils composed of both Muslim and non-Muslim notables and, following the passage of the 1869 Statute of Public Education (*Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi*), an orderly empire-wide system of state- sponsored schooling.³⁰

Although these reforms were significant, in reality their application in Kurdish-populated regions was uneven at best. For example, Mosul, which lost its provincial status between 1850 and 1878, becoming a dependency of Baghdad for much of that time, only saw limited reform.³¹ Local governors generally lack the military and financial wherewithal to implement the directives issued by the Sublime Porte. Indeed, it was only after the arrival of the telegraph system in the region, following Sultan Abdühamid II's (r. 1876-1909) ascent to the throne, that Mosul was brought more firmly under the authority of the central government.³² The weakness of the *Tanzimat* in Mosul can be contrasted with the considerable progress made in the province of Diyarbakır.³³ This

Code in Kurdistan see Oya Gözel, "The Implementation of the Ottoman Land Code in Eastern Anatolia" (MA diss., Middle East Technical University, 2007).

²⁹ Under the new regulations, the usage of the term *eyalet* was ended and the term *vilayet* came to designate the highest administrative division in the empire. For a general overview of the reforms to provincial administration undertaken during the *Tanzimat* era see İlber Ortaylı, *Tanzimat Devrinde Osmanlı Mahallî İdareleri (1840-1880)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2011). Also see Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Vol. 2, 88-89.

³⁰ On the 'Statute of Public Education' see Selçuk Akşin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1908* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 86-90.

³¹ For an overview of Mosul's administrative status during the *Tanzimat* see Ebubekir Ceylan, "Ottoman Centralization and Modernization in the Province of Baghdad, 1831-1872" (PhD diss., Boğaziçi University, 2006), 117-122.

³² Sarah Shields, *Mosul before Iraq: Like Bees Making Five-sided Cells* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 37-40.

³³ The province of Diyarbakır was divided into five counties (*sancak*): Amid (Diyarbakır), Siirt, Mardin, Mamüretülaziz and Malatya.

progress is largely attributable to Hatunoğlu Kurt İsmail Pasha (1818-1897),³⁴ who held the province's governorship from its establishment in 1868 until 1875.³⁵ Very much a man of the *Tanzimat*, Hatunoğlu Kurt İsmail Pasha, had made a name for himself in 1865 through his involvement in the Reform Corps (*Fırka-ı Islahiye*), a military expeditionary force which was sent to settle the nomadic tribes of Cilicia.³⁶ The pasha brought the same vigour to Diyarbakır when he assumed office, establishing an impressive number of new institutions including an appellate court (*istinaf mahkemesi*), a directorate of education, a provincial newspaper, an office of public works, a telegraph department, a regiment of gendarmerie, a provincial council and metropolitan councils for provincial centres such Diyarbakır, Mardin and Lice.³⁷ Indeed, Hatunoğlu Kurt İsmail Pasha's successes in reforming the institutions of the province apparently won the confidence of both Muslim and non-Muslims in the city.³⁸

For certain elements of Kurdish society, particularly for well-to-do townfolk who resided in major provincial centres, the expansion of provincial administration provided new opportunities for advancement and integration into the empire's expanding governing classes. For instance, Ahmed Cemilpaşa (1837-1902), the patriarch of the Cemilpaşazade dynasty of Diyarbakır, which emerged as one of the town's leading families in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, served in numerous capacities in local government, including as a member of the provincial council, as well

³⁴ Hatunoğlu Kurt İsmail Pasha was a native of Kars and ethnically belonged to the Karapapak (Qarapapaq), a Turkic people closely related to the Azeri Turks. He began his career as a cavalry officer and served as both a military officer and a civil administrator. Selahattin Tozlu, "Karapapaklar Hakkında Bazı Notlar II", *Karadeniz Araştırmaları*, No. 9 (2006), 98-99.

³⁵ Oktay Karaman, "Diyarbakır Valisi Hatunoğlu Kurt İsmail Hakkı Paşa'nın Diyarbakır'daki Aşiretleri Islah ve İskân Çalışması (1868-1875)", *History Studies* (2012), 230.

³⁶ Andrew Gould, "Lords or Bandits? The Derebeys of Cilicia", in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1976), 496-499.

³⁷ Oktay Karaman, "Hatunoğlu Kurt İsmail Hakkı Paşa'nın Diyarbakır Valiliği" (MA diss., Atatürk Üniversitesi, 1999). Also see Aydın and Verhij, "Confusion in the Cauldron", 43-45.

³⁸ Aydın and Verhij, "Confusion in the Cauldron", 44.

as holding various offices across Diyarbakır province during the 1860s and 1870s.³⁹ However, it was not only townsfolk who found new careers in the service of the Ottoman state. The overthrow of the emirates did not mean the dispossession of the princely classes, but rather their exile from Kurdistan and integration into the modernised bureaucratic hierarchy in a deliberate policy of co-option. For example, Nurullah Bey of Hakkâri received an imperial pardon, was elevated to the rank of ‘head gatekeeper of the imperial porte (*dergâh-ı âli kapıcıbaşılığı*)’ and granted an increased salary on condition he resided in Crete.⁴⁰ Babanlı Ahmed Pasha was similarly granted an honorable exile from Kurdistan. After being removed from his position at the head of the Baban emirate, he served as governor-general (*beylerbeyi*) of Yemen, county governor (*mutasarrıf*) of Van, and later provincial governor (*vali*) in Erzurum, Aleppo and, finally, Adana.⁴¹ Like Nurullah Bey, Bedirhan Bey was also exiled to Crete. However, he too was treated with respect by the Ottoman authorities. In 1857, he was raised to the rank of commander of commanders (*mir-i miran*) and a year later he was awarded the Fourth Degree *Mecidiye* medal.⁴² Indeed, according to one of his descendants he was even considered by the sultan as a candidate for the throne of Romania.⁴³ Thus, despite their removal from Kurdistan, the Kurdish princely classes maintained their elite status. Indeed, two families in particular, the Babanzadeler and the Bedirhanzadeler would continue to play important roles in both Ottoman and Kurdish politics throughout the final decades of the empire’s existence.

³⁹ Malmîsanij, *Diyarbakırlı Cemilpaşazadeler ve Kürt Milliyetçiliği* (Istanbul: Avesta, 2004), 17-26.

⁴⁰ BOA MKT.UM 343/82 (1859).

⁴¹ Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmanî yahud Tezkire-yi Meşahir-i Osmaniye*, Vol. 1 (Istanbul: Matbaa-yı Amire, 1308 [1892/1893]), 302.

⁴² Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmanî yahud Tezkire-yi Meşahir-i Osmaniye*, Vol. 2 (Istanbul: Matbaa-yı Amire, 1308 [1892/1893]), 13. Also see Sabri Ateş, *The Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 83.

⁴³ Abdürrezak Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya* (Istanbul: Perî, 2000), 12.

Still, while the *Tanzimat* strengthened central government control over urban centres such as Diyarbakır, developments in rural districts, home to the vast majority of the Kurdish population, exposed the weaknesses of the reforms. On a most basic level, the destruction of the emirates had a profoundly negative effect on law and order in the region. The emirs had played an important role in the region's political eco-system, acting as arbiters in tribal disputes and possessing an excellent knowledge of local affairs. The new centrally-appointed Ottoman governors lacked both the traditional authority, the military capacity and the local knowledge to deal with growing tribal unrest and lawlessness.⁴⁴ As Mahmud-ı Beyazidi (1797-1867), a Kurdish religious scholar, observed in the 1860s, "In the districts of Bohtan, Hakkâri and Behdinan most of the time there is not a day that goes by without a hullabaloo. Everyday there are two or three altercations, be it between two villages or two towns or even within a single neighbourhood".⁴⁵ Thus, as Stephen Longrigg noted, in practice, the *Tanzimat* regime "was precarious, nominal, [and] barely operative in the tribes and remoter mountains...".⁴⁶

Not only had the reforms resulted in disorder, the arrival of the *Tanzimat* state in Kurdistan brought with it increased taxation. This was deeply shocking to Kurdish tribal leaders who had often enjoyed tax exemptions. James Brant recounted that in his conversations with one such individual, he had inquired:

...how he was so imprudent as to attempt to resist Reshid Mohammed Pasha, invested as he was with authority from his sovereign. The Haji replied that neither he nor his fathers were ever subjected to Pashas, or

⁴⁴ See PRO FO 78/1669, Erzurum (28 February 1862). This report claims that the Ottoman authorities were unable to cope with Kurdish unrest partly on account of their complete lack of local intelligence, including accurate population statistics. Also see Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 224-34.

⁴⁵ Mahmûdê Beyazîdî, *Adat û Rusûmatnameê Ekradiye* (Istanbul: Nûbihar, 2012), 86.

⁴⁶ Stephen Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (Oxford: Clarendon, Press), 286.

paid taxes to the Sultan, and he could not understand why he should be forced to do so; he had therefore resisted as long as he could.⁴⁷

Elsewhere, Brant noted that, according to his informants, taxation had increased six-fold since the fall of the emirs.⁴⁸ Even more disturbing from the Kurdish perspective was conscription. Indeed, such was the fear of conscription that, according to the British diplomat and archaeologist Austen Henry Layard, the Zibari tribes, who resided in the vicinity of Rawanduz, consented to new taxes “rather than run the risk of an invasion, and still more dreaded evil conscription”.⁴⁹ Taxation and conscription remained constant sources of friction between the government and the Kurds throughout the *Tanzimat* era. In July 1867, the British Consul in Erzurum, J.G. Taylor, reported that fear of tax increases was prompting some tribesmen to flee across the Iranian border, with some tribes such as the Haideranless (Haydaranlı) openly defying the government. In a similar vein, he refers to the “agitated state” of Restikootan (Reşkotanlı) Kurds near Muş, citing the reasons for this disaffection as taxation and conscription.⁵⁰ A decade later, in a report detailing the state of the Ottoman 4th Army Corps, which was comprised mainly of Kurdish conscripts, Sir Henry Elliot, who also served as British Consul at Erzurum, observed that, such was the Kurdish antipathy towards military service that “Koordistan possesses no army which could make even a show of defense against the Russians [who] would march practically unopposed through the country”.⁵¹ In short, as the historians Suavi Aydın and Jelle Verheij succinctly put it, for many

⁴⁷ Brant, “Notes of a Journey through a Part of Kurdistan, in the Summer of 1838”, 361.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 360

⁴⁹ Austen Henry Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon: Travels in Armenia, Kurdistan and the Desert* (New York: Putman, 1853), 371.

⁵⁰ PRO FO 78/1989, Erzurum (6 July 1867).

⁵¹ PRO FO 195/1100, Erzurum (5 November 1876).

Kurds in rural districts their first experience of Ottoman ‘citizenship’ had been “one clearly defined in terms of responsibilities and without rights”.⁵²

This discontent was heightened by the perception that the reforms were undermining traditional Muslim dominance in the empire. During the mid-nineteenth century many Kurds, as well as their Christian neighbours, were acutely aware of the increasing influence of the European powers over the Ottoman government and “saw this in terms of a confrontation between Christendom and Islam”.⁵³ For example, following the Battle of Nizip, Ashahel Grant, a British missionary, observed that the defeat of the Ottoman army had been,

...ascribed by the mass of the people to the European uniforms and tactics... [and] great opposition was raised against it, and all Europeans as the reputed cause of it. This spirit, under the influence of Moslem bigotry, and a jealousy lest, in the weak state of the country, Christianity would rise upon the ruins of Islam, was carried to such an extent, that we not only heard ourselves cursed in the streets as infidel dogs, but, as it is said, there was a determination expressed to kill all the Europeans in the place.⁵⁴

Moreover, the notion of legal equality between Muslims and non-Muslims was anathema to many Muslim Kurds. As one tribal leader declared to Layard, when questioned on his attitudes towards the *Tanzimat*, that it “had destroyed all Mussulman spirit, had turned true believers into infidels, and had brought his own tribe to ruin”.⁵⁵ The influx of Western missionaries into the region after the 1830s only served to exacerbate these growing tensions in the region.⁵⁶ Thus it was not only

⁵² Aydın and Verhij, “Confusion in the Cauldron”, 34

⁵³ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 229.

⁵⁴ Asahel Grant, *The Nestorians* (London: John Murray, 1841), 32.

⁵⁵ Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh*, 20.

⁵⁶ On missionary activity in Kurdistan see Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Iskalanmış Barış* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2005); Julius Richter, *A History of Protestant Missions in the Near East* (New York: AMS Press, 1970); David H. Finnie, *Pioneers East: The Early American Experience in the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967). For example, William Ainsworth, who travelled to the Hakkâri emirate on behalf of the Church of England in the early 1830s, recorded the atmosphere of suspicion which greeted him when he arrived in one village. The local tribal

inter-tribal violence which undermined peace and security in Kurdistan, but growing sectarian violence. For instance, British Consul Taylor observed in 1866, during a tour of the frontier regions around Ardahan, Kars, Bayezit and Van, that the Kurdish tribes were increasingly “uncontrollable” and their attacks on the local Armenian population were forcing many Christians to migrate to Russia and Iran.⁵⁷

In summary, there is little doubt that the reforms of the *Tanzimat* profoundly changed the political landscape in Kurdistan. In certain respects, the reforms had intensified the linkages between Kurdistan and Istanbul to unprecedented levels. However, while the central government had managed to remove the Kurdish emirs and establish *de jure* authority over the region, in practice, its broader objective of providing an orderly regime had failed. In many places the writ of centrally appointed officials did not extend far beyond the limits of urban centres. Worse still, efforts to raise taxes and conscript soldiers from the Kurdish tribes created a reservoir of discontent. This unstable state of affairs was only exacerbated by the political and military crises which overtook the empire between 1876 and 1878.

Crisis, Revolution and War (1876-1878)

During the *Tanzimat*, imperial policy was dominated by an extremely limited cadre of bureaucrats who relied on the passivity of the sultan in order to lead the empire. Most of the ‘men of the *Tanzimat*’ were Istanbul-born and the leading figures of the period, Mustafa Reşid Pasha (1779-

leader immediately harangued the visitor, asking whether he was aware “that Franks are not allowed in this country...” When one of the local Christians explained that he had invited Ainsworth, the tribal headman “turned... and said, more deliberately and quietly, ‘You are the fore-runners of those who come to take this country; therefore it is best that we should take first what you have, as you will afterwards take our property.’” William Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea, and Armenia*, Vol. 2 (London: John W. Parker, 1842), 242.

⁵⁷ PRO FO 195/939, Erzurum (19 March 1869).

1858), Fuad Pasha (1814-1869) and Âli Pasha (1815-1871) had begun their careers in the Translation Bureau (*Tercüme Odası*) which had been established during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II in 1821. The Translation Bureau had rapidly become a hotbed of reformist ideas and an incubator for a new generation of Ottoman governing elites, a caste of Muslim professionals and intellectuals who were not only familiar with western languages, technical knowhow and political principles but felt themselves “Europeans in spirit, dress, and ideal”.⁵⁸ This is not to suggest that the political leadership of the Sublime Porte were democrats or even liberals in any meaningful sense of the word. They did not seek to expand political participation and tended to maintain themselves through political patronage. However, the haughty authoritarianism of the Porte’s governing elite soon spawned a novel form of political opposition, the so-called ‘Young Ottomans’.⁵⁹ The Young Ottomans were members of the empire’s emergent governing class, individuals schooled in the empire’s reformed education system and employed in the empire’s reformed state institutions. Perhaps the movement’s best known spokesman was the journalist and revolutionary Namık Kemal (1840-1888). An Ottoman patriot, he utilised concepts such as *vatan* (homeland) and *millet* (nation) in a recognisably modern sense, criticizing the *Tanzimat* Pashas and drawing upon Ottoman and Islamic symbols, concepts and history in order to legitimise his arguments for popular sovereignty and constitutional government.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Stanford Shaw, “Some Aspects of the Aims and Achievements of the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Reformers”, in William Polk and Richard Chambers (eds.) *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 37. Also see Elisabeth Özdalga, “Introduction”, in Elisabeth Özdalga (ed.), *Late Ottoman Society: An Intellectual Legacy* (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2005), 3-5.

⁵⁹ Carter Vaughn Findley, “The Tanzimat”, in Reşat Kasaba (ed.), *Cambridge History of Turkey*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 30-31.

⁶⁰ On Namık Kemal see Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 283-336.

The ideas of the Young Ottomans remained marginal in the 1860s. However, in the 1870s, domestic and international pressures on the empire intensified greatly. In response to this evolving crisis, a camarilla of high-ranking bureaucrats, led by Ahmed Şefik Midhat Pasha (1822-1884), looked to the establishment of a constitutional government as a solution to the empire's mounting problems. In 1876 the crisis came to a head with the overthrow of Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861-1876). He was replaced by Murad V (r. May-August 1876), an Ottoman prince sympathetic to constitutionalist ideals. However, his apparent mental instability led to his removal and the enthronement of Sultan Abdülhamid II, who promptly approved the empire's first written constitution, the *Kanun-ı Esasi*.⁶¹ The Constitution of 1876 was an important landmark in the history of the Ottoman reform movement. It provided the empire with its first parliament and embodied the 'civic-territorial' notion of Ottoman nationhood which had emerged during the *Tanzimat*.⁶²

Constitutional government was short-lived. In 1877 the Ottoman Empire was invaded by Russia, which provided Sultan Abdülhamid II an excuse for suspending parliament. In the long term, this first experiment in constitutionalism would be extremely significant, as it would provide a focal point for opposition to the sultan and his efforts to govern as an autocrat.⁶³ However, in the short

⁶¹ For a detailed discussion of the circumstances surrounding the promulgation of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876 see Robert Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period: A Study of the Midhat Constitution and Parliament* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963). Also see Benjamin C. Fortna, "The reign of Abdülhamid II", in Reşat Kasaba (ed.), *Cambridge History of Turkey*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 42-47.

⁶² Article eight proclaimed: "All individuals who are subjects of the Ottoman state (*Devlet-i Osmaniye*) are to be known as Ottoman (*Osmanlı*) whatever their religion (*din*) or sect (*mezhep*) is; the status of Ottoman is acquired and lost according to conditions which are legally determined." Article seventeen stated: "All Ottomans (*Osmanlıların kaffesi*) are equal before the law and, except in matters of religion or sect, possess the same rights in and responsibilities towards their country." Kemal Gözler, *Türk Anayasaları* (Bursa: Ekin Kitabevi, 1999), 30-31.

⁶³ Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic reform in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 221.

term, the advent of constitutional rule elicited little popular enthusiasm in Kurdistan.⁶⁴ Of greater significance to the region was the outbreak of the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878. Following the Russian declaration of war in April 1877, a Russian army crossed from the Caucasus into eastern Anatolia. Despite stiff resistance, Ottoman forces were unable to halt the Russians, who seized the towns of Kars, Ardahan, Beyazıt (Doğubeyazıt) and, on 19th February 1878, Erzurum. This defeat, combined with the advance of Russian forces on Istanbul, forced the Ottoman government to sue for peace, and on 3rd March the Treaty of San Stefano was signed, bringing hostilities to an end. The Treaty of San Stefano, which imposed particularly harsh conditions on the Ottomans, was superseded in July 1878 by the Treaty of Berlin, following the diplomatic intervention of Britain. Nevertheless, while the Treaty of Berlin moderated Russian demands on the empire, the war had been a clear defeat and a profound psychological shock for Ottoman Muslims.⁶⁵

In Kurdistan the immediate impact of the war was a breakdown of what little semblance of order had been established in the region over the course of the preceding three decades. In January 1879 Consul Henry Trotter reported that the region was in “such a state of anarchy as had not been known for many years...” with an increase in Kurdish attacks on Armenians as well as a rise in “intra-Kurdish quarrels...”.⁶⁶ The prevailing atmosphere of chaos reverberated across Ottoman Kurdistan, impacting regions as far afield as Dersim and Urfa.⁶⁷ Tensions in the region were further

⁶⁴ This is not to suggest it went unnoticed. Istanbul received a number of congratulatory memorandums (*mazbata*) from Kurdish towns including Dohuk, Süleymaniye and Rawanduz. See BOA Y.EE 68/6 (12 January 1877).

⁶⁵ Kemal. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 136-153.

⁶⁶ PRO FO 78/2991, Diyarbakır (5 January 1879).

⁶⁷ See PRO FO 78/2991, Diyarbakır (9 May 1879); PRO FO 78/2991, Erzurum (21 June 1879).

exacerbated by an influx of Kurdish refugees from regions devastated by the war,⁶⁸ plagues of locusts, crop failures and the rising spectre of famine.⁶⁹ This chaotic situation provided the context for the largest, and what would turn out to be the last, major Kurdish revolt of the nineteenth century, the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt.

The Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt: Early Kurdish Nationalism?

The Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt can be distinguished from Kurdish unrest earlier in the nineteenth century in a number of ways. On a most basic level, the extent and intensity of the unrest dwarfed early unrest in the region, encompassing a vast territory stretching from the eastern environs of Diyarbakır in the west across the Lake Van region and into Iranian Kurdistan. Moreover, unlike during the earlier phases of resistance to the *Tanzimat*, the revolt's leader came not from Kurdistan's traditional ruling class, the emirs, but a dynasty of Sufi sheikhs. At the same time, the nature and objectives of the revolt have been subject to a much greater degree of debate and controversy amongst scholars of Kurdish history than earlier uprisings. For some it was an unequivocal expression of Kurdish nationalism, motivated by a desire to throw off the yoke of the Turkish and Iranian oppressors.⁷⁰ Others scholars have rejected this assessment, arguing the uprising was motivated by religion, tribalism and the sheikh's desire for self-aggrandisement.⁷¹ David McDowall, a historian of the Kurds, described it as nothing more than "the kind of tribal

⁶⁸ PRO FO 195/1237, Erzurum (16 August 1879).

⁶⁹ Celîlê Celîl, *1880 Şeyh Ubeydullah Nehri Kürt Ayaklanması* (Istanbul: Pêrî, 1998), 54; Robert Speer, *Hakim Sahib, The Foreign Doctor: A Biography of Joseph Plumb Cochran, M.D. of Persia* (New York.: Fleming H. Rowel Company, 1911), 67-73.

⁷⁰ See Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1989), 2-7; Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 75-101; Also see Celîl, *1880 Şeyh Ubeydullah Nehri Kürt Ayaklanması*, 5-15.

⁷¹ Anja Pistor-Hatam, 'Sheikh Ubaidullah's Revolt and the Kurdish Invasion of Iran: Attempts at a New Assessment', in *The Journal of Kurdish Studies*, Vol. 4 (2002), 19-30; Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 76-77.

disturbance, but on a larger scale, that already bedevilled the region”.⁷² In reality, the nature of the revolt was more complex than either school of thought on the subject recognises, standing at the crossroads between ‘traditional’ tribal resistance to government interference in Kurdistan and the emergence of modern Kurdish nationalism.

Before analysing the nature of the revolt, it is perhaps first helpful to provide an brief outline of the uprising. The revolt itself can be divided into three distinct stages and targeted not only the Ottoman authorities but also those in Iran. Indeed, it should be noted that the rebellion’s most violent episodes occurred in Iranian Kurdistan. The first stage occurred in late August 1879, when tribes loyal to Sheikh Ubeydullah clashed with government troops in the region southeast of Hakkâri.⁷³ A few days later British officials reported that rumors were circulating that one of the Sheikh’s sons, along with 900 tribesmen, had attacked Ottoman officials. Government forces apparently were successful in repulsing the Kurdish attack. However, the continued state of disorder which prevailed in the regions around Lake Van prevented the government from pressing its advantage.⁷⁴ Clashes between the Kurdish tribes of Hakkâri and Ottoman officials continued throughout September.⁷⁵ The resulting stalemate eventually led both sides to seek terms; Sheikh Ubeydullah agreed to render submission to the Ottoman government in return for a promise that “no punishment is to be meted out to the Kurdish rebels by the local authorities”.⁷⁶ The willingness

⁷² McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 53.

⁷³ PRO FO 78/2991, Erzurum (30 August 1879).

⁷⁴ PRO FO 78/2991, Erzurum (5 September 1879).

⁷⁵ PRO FO 78/2991, Erzurum (19 September 1879).

⁷⁶ PRO FO 78/2991, Erzurum (3 October 1879); Also see PRO FO 78/2991, Erzurum (27 September 1879). This includes a translation of a letter from Sheikh Ubeydullah to the *vali* of Van, dated 24 September 1879, in which Ubeydullah states that the tribes under his authority had ceased their hostilities and that he had dispatched his son, Sheikh Abdülkadir, to deal with the tribes and secure the release of Ottoman soldiers taken hostage. The letter also declares Ubeydullah’s “fidelity to the Porte.”

of both sides to seek an amicable solution to the conflict was most likely influenced by the rapid onset of winter, which in the mountainous districts of Hakkâri is quite severe. However, Sheikh Ubeydullah's influence in the region was far from broken. Indeed, his encounter with Ottoman forces served to further enhance his position, as he had rebelled against the government and avoided any official sanction.

The second and most dramatic phase of the revolt occurred almost exactly one year later. By the summer of 1880 it was clear that Sheikh Ubeydullah was preparing for a fresh round of campaigning. In July a Chaldean bishop informed the British Consul in Van that Sheikh Ubeydullah was gathering men and had called a "mass meeting" of "all the Aghas [tribal leaders] from a large area, including Mosul".⁷⁷ A month later, it was reported by Colonel İskender Bey, an Ottoman officer tasked with gathering information on the situation in Kurdistan, that Sheikh Ubeydullah had still not submitted to government authority and the incapacity of local officials to enforce submission was leading the "Kurds to believe they could take advantage of the situation".⁷⁸ However, this time, Sheikh Ubeydullah's target was not the Ottoman authorities but those across the border in Iran. Ubeydullah advanced with a main force from the region of Hakkâri towards Urmia, placing the small Iranian garrison in the town under siege. Further to the south, a second column of Kurdish tribesmen crossed into Iranian territory under the command of Sheikh Ubeydullah's son, Sheikh Abdükadir. Bolstered by Iranian Kurdish tribesmen, this second force quickly seized the town of Sabilagh (Mahabad) and advanced on the predominantly Shi'ite town of Miandoab. The conflict was brief but intense. At Urmia, Ubeydullah's main force, although armed with modern Henri-Martini rifles (distributed to the tribes during the Ottoman-Russian

⁷⁷ PRO FO 195/1315, Van (24 July 1880).

⁷⁸ PRO FO 195/1316, Diyarbakır (28 August 1880).

War), lacked the artillery needed to capture the town. Meanwhile, at Miandoab, a massacre of the town's population stiffened the resolve of Iranian forces to resist the Kurdish advance. By November, with Iranian reinforcements on the way from Tabriz, both Sheikh Ubeydullah and Sheikh Abdülkadir had retreated back into Ottoman territory.⁷⁹

With the onset of winter, neither the Iranian nor Ottoman government was in any position to press Ubeydullah's forces. Throughout the winter of 1880/1881 all sides busily prepared for the resumption of hostilities in the spring. However, with growing cooperation between Istanbul and Tehran, the Sheikh's position became untenable and in May 1881 he accepted an invitation from Sultan Abdülhamid II to visit Istanbul.⁸⁰ Once in the capital he "seemed to give himself up to religious meditation, his one lasting desire being to visit the sacred shines".⁸¹ However, far from eschewing politics, the sheikh was secretly making plans to raise the flag of rebellion one last time. In the summer of 1882 he fled the capital, returning to his fortress in the mountains of Hakkâri. Once in the region, he immediately began to gather tribesmen. However, Ottoman forces were quickly mobilised and Ubeydullah was arrested and exiled to Mecca, where he died a year later.⁸²

The revolt was over.

⁷⁹ There are a number of firsthand accounts of Sheikh Ubeydullah's invasion of Iran. These include Samuel Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs* (New York N.Y.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1895); Speer, *Hakim Sahib, The Foreign Doctor*, 74-101. Also see Eskendar Qurians, *Qiyam-e Shaikh Ubeidullah dar Ahd-e Shah Naser al-Din* (Tehran: Donya-ye Danesh, 1356 [1978]). There are also a number of secondary accounts of the revolt. However, by far the most significant study is Sabri Ateş, "In the name of Caliph and Nation: The Sheikh Ubeidullah Rebellion of 1880-1881", *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 5 (2014), 735-798. Ateş's study makes extensive use of Ottoman, Iranian and British documentation. Another important study is that of Celile Celîl, which draws extensively on Russian sources. See Celîl, *1880 Şeyh Ubeydullah Nehri Kürt Ayaklanması*, in particular 125-168.

⁸⁰ BOA Y.PRK.ASK, 7/34 (31 May 1881).

⁸¹ Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs*, 121.

⁸² *Ibid*, 122-123. Also see Ateş, "In the name of Caliph and Nation", 779-783.

The issue of the revolt's leadership is significant in understanding the socio-political changes which the *Tanzimat* reforms had, unintentionally, brought about in Kurdistan. The Kurdish revolts of the early and mid-nineteenth century had been led by the emirs, who had dominated the region's affairs for centuries. In contrast, Sheikh Ubeydullah derived his authority from his leadership position within Kurdistan's numerous Sufi brotherhoods (*tarikats*). In the broader Islamic world, a strong distinction has often been made between the doctors of religion, the *ulema*, and the leaders of the Sufi orders, the sheikhs. The former were scholars who sought to maintain and protect the Islamic tradition through study of Islamic legal tradition and often acted as state functionaries. In contrast, Sufis sought spiritual enlightenment through gnosis, the mystical search for truth. In Weberian terms, while the *ulema*'s authority was 'traditional' and 'legal-rational', that of the Sufi sheikh stemmed from his religious "charisma", his access to spiritual truths.⁸³ Sufism has long constituted an important element of Islam as practised by the Kurds and, as Martin van Bruinessen observes, a clear distinction between members of the 'orthodox' *ulema* and Sufis is often difficult to make, with sheikhs often taking on the role of a member of the *ulema* by acting, for example, as a *müfti*, a religious functionary appointed by the government to act as the supreme authority on the interpretation of Islamic law within a particular administrative jurisdiction. A sheikh might also function as a *molla* which, in Kurdish usage, was applied to the prayer leader in a mosque.⁸⁴ In the early nineteenth century, Kurdish religious life was dominated by two particular *tarikats*, the Kadiriye and the Nakşibendiye-Halidiye.⁸⁵

⁸³ See Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organizations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 328-33, 358-73. On Sufi orders see Dale F. Eickelman, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice Hall, 1981), 222-35

⁸⁴ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 210. For example, Bedirhan Bey appointed a Nakşibendi sheikh, Sheikh Azrail, head of the emirate's judiciary. See Lütfi, *Emir Bedirhan* 33.

⁸⁵ On the historical development of these two orders see Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 213-233; Also see Martin van Bruinessen, "Islam des Kurdes", *Les Annales de l'Autre Islam*, No.

Historically, Sufi sheikhs had played an important role in Kurdish political life, often acting as intermediaries between the Ottoman sultanate and Kurdish emirs. In fact, as noted in the previous chapter, İdris-i Bitlisi, the architect of the Ottoman-Kurdish alliance in the early sixteenth century, was a member of the Nurbahçiyeye Sufi order. In the early nineteenth century the Sufi sheikhs continued to fulfill this role with rebellious Kurdish emirs. For example, in 1845 Necip Pasha, the Ottoman Governor of Baghdad, dispatched Mulla Ali Kahyai, a Sufi sheikh “much venerated by the Kurds”, to secure Babanlı Ahmed Pasha’s submission.⁸⁶ Similarly, in 1847 the Ottoman authorities sought to enlist the Nakşibendi sheikhs of Cizre as mediators in negotiations with Bedirhan Bey.⁸⁷ The removal of the emirs and the concurrent failure of the central government to establish a stable regime in Kurdistan only served to enhance the role of the sheikhs in Kurdish political life. In practical terms, they became the only effective sources of trans-tribal authority and, building on extensive religious networks, the Sufi leaders were able to leverage their religious prestige to act as arbiters in tribal disputes.⁸⁸ Moreover, in an atmosphere of heightened religious sensitivity, they were also able to present themselves as the protectors of Islam and the traditional order against the perceived threat of Christian ascendancy.⁸⁹ Thus an unintended byproduct of the *Tanzimat* had been to increase the influence of the sheikhly class to unprecedented levels.

5 (1998), 13-35. The Nakşibendiye-Halidiye order was founded by a native of Süleymaniye, Sheikh Diyaddin Halid al-Şehrizori (1779-1827), better known as Mevlana Halid-i Bağdadi. The order spread throughout Kurdistan (and beyond) in the early nineteenth century.

⁸⁶ Ahmed Pasha subsequently shot the man, which led many Kurds to desert his cause. See PRO FO 78/2713, Mosul (12 July 1845). Babani, *Seyer al-Akrad*, 161.

⁸⁷ Sevgen, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu’da Türk Beylikleri*, 80-82.

⁸⁸ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 210.

⁸⁹ For example, Consul Taylor observed that in the region around Muş, “sheikhs or holy men” were inciting Kurdish tribesmen to attack the local Christians out of fear they might side with Russia in a future war. PRO FO 195/939, Erzurum (19 March 1869). Also see Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 210.

Sheikh Ubeydullah was very much a representative of this ‘rising class’. He was a member of the Sadat-ı Nehri dynasty, a family that claimed descent from the twelfth-century mystic Abdülkadir Geylani, the spiritual progenitor of the Kadiriye order. The family, which had originally resided in the region of Aqrah,⁹⁰ claimed it had been spreading the teachings of the Kadiriye Sufi order uninterruptedly since the time of Abdülkadir Geylani’s son, Abdülaziz (d. 1205/1206). However, in the early nineteenth century the family switched allegiances from the Kadiriye order to the Nakşibendiye-Halidiye order, a move which coincided with the family’s resettlement in the village of Nehri, located to the northeast of Hakkâri.⁹¹ The rise of the Sadat-ı Nehri’s political influence in Kurdistan can be traced back to the turbulent middle decades of the nineteenth century following the overthrow of the Hakkâri and Cizre-Bohtan emirates. As in other parts of Kurdistan, the failure of the Ottoman authorities to adequately fill the political void vacated by the emirs left Sheikh Ubeydullah’s father, Sheikh Taha, the *de facto* master of a large swathe of central Kurdistan, stretching from Van and Cizre into Iran.⁹²

Following his assumption of the leadership of the Sadat-ı Nehri sheikhly dynasty in the early 1870s, Sheikh Ubeydullah continued to expand his family’s sphere of influence. In 1875, a report from Ali Necip, an Ottoman bureaucrat, observed that the population of the border region “extending from Beyazıt to Süleymaniye are Sunnis, many are the sheikh’s followers and he has his deputies (*halife*) in these regions. All look to him for protection...”.⁹³ Sheikh Ubeydullah’s role in regional affairs was further enhanced by the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878. With Russian

⁹⁰ Aqrah (Akre) is located in present-day Northern Iraq.

⁹¹ Martin van Bruinessen, “The Sâdatê Nehrî or Gîlânîzâde of Central Kurdistan”, *Journal of the History of Sufism*, No. 1-2 (2000), 79-91; Also see David Mackenzie, “A Kurdish Creed”, in *A Locust’s Leg* (Lund: Humphries, 1962), 162-164.

⁹² Van Bruinessen, “The Sâdatê Nehrî or Gîlânîzâde of Central Kurdistan”, 81-82; Lale Yalçın-Heckmann, *Tribe and Kinship amongst the Kurds* (Frankfort am Main: Peter Lang, 1991), 57-61.

⁹³ BOA Y.EE 35/112 (13 May 1875).

forces advancing, the regular army in a demoralised and dilapidated state, the Ottoman government was forced to call upon the Kurdish tribes for military support. Initially, a colonel from the regular army was dispatched to Eleşkirt in order to raise tribal irregulars, but the attempt ended in fiasco when the officer, Ahmed Bey, failed to report for duty.⁹⁴ Subsequently, the Ottoman military called upon the assistance of the Sufi sheikhs in the *jihad* against Russia. Sheikh Ubeydullah answered the call, raising tribal irregulars⁹⁵ and joining the Ottoman defense of Beyazıt.⁹⁶ Thus, following the conclusion of the war, he emerged as the leading figure in Kurdistan, possessing a vast following amongst the Kurdish tribes.

In certain respects it seems that religious sensitivities and anger at the *Tanzimat* reforms, rather than nationalism, played an important role in mobilising the sheikh's followers. According to a Russian report, in a speech given shortly before his attack on Iran, Sheikh Ubeydullah had informed his supporters: "The Ottoman Empire was established about 555 years ago. The Ottomans built their empire by means of illegal rebellion. Islamic law demands the Sultan be a descendant of the Prophet. [Hence] Ottoman rule over the Islamic world is illegal". Moreover, alluding to the *Tanzimat*, he claimed that "the Ottoman government has acknowledged the infidel's laws and given up Islamic law. As a result it is weakening and decaying". After condemning the rule of the Turks, he continued: "It is not only the Ottomans [who are infidels]; the Iranians too are infidels for the Iranian government have forbidden Sunnis from performing the call to prayer

⁹⁴ Mehmet Arif, *Başımıza Gelenler*, (Istanbul: Tercüman, 1962), 396.

⁹⁵ According to British reports Sheikh Ubeydullah had raised some 4,000 tribal irregulars by May 1877. See PRO FO 195/1140, Erzurum (10 May 1877). Sheikh Ubeydullah was apparently so successful in recruiting men for his militia that in the Lake Van region that the commander of Ottoman regular forces, Faik Pasha, was unable to find Kurdish recruits and so was forced to rely on Ubeydullah's auxiliaries. See Pytro Averyanov, *Osmanlı İnan Rus Savaşlarında Kürtler (19. Yüzyıl)* (Istanbul: Avesta, 2010), 153-178.

⁹⁶ For a detailed account of Sheikh Ubeydullah's participation in the campaign see Mehmet Fırat Kılıç, "Sheikh Ubeydullah's Movement" (MA diss., Bilkent University, 2003), 4-18.

and they neither respect our blessed ancestors or their graves”.⁹⁷ Similarly, when seeking to negotiate the surrender of Urmia, he was reported to have made equally anti-Ottoman statements during a meeting with the Deputy Ottoman Consul in the town. Apparently Sheikh Ubeydullah, during the course of these discussions, had pointed at a group of his supporters and declared: “Look at those men! They used to be the rulers and chiefs of great tribes, yet long years of oppression by the Ottoman government degraded them, and they are like animals now. Finally they have decided to end their hopelessness. Under my rule there will be no such oppression and tyranny”.⁹⁸

However, while religion and discontent at ‘oppression’ brought about by the *Tanzimat* state provide extremely important elements of Sheikh Ubeydullah’s discursive arsenal, he was also aware of the growing potency of nationalist discourse in regional affairs. This is particularly evident in his reaction to the terms of the 1878 Treaty of Berlin, which had brought the Russian-Ottoman War to an end. In the agreement, for the first time, the issue of relations between the Kurds and their Christian neighbours was explicitly internationalised, with the Porte promising “to carry out, without further delay, the improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and Kurds”.⁹⁹ This evidently raised fears of an Armenian takeover, worsening the already strained relationship between Muslim Kurds and Christian Armenians. In the summer of 1879, rumours began circulating that Sheikh Ubeydullah had promised a group of tribal chiefs that he would “sweep all the Christians from the land”.¹⁰⁰ A year later, it was reported that the Sheikh had heard “that the Armenians are going to have an independent state in Van, and that the Nestorians are

⁹⁷ Averyanov, *Osmanlı İnan Rus Savaşlarında Kürtler*, 188-189.

⁹⁸ Qurians, *Qiyam-e Shaikh Ubeidullah dar Ahd-e Shah Naser al-Din*, 98.

⁹⁹ Article LXI, “The Treaty of Berlin” in Jacob C. Hurewitz (ed.), *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 414.

¹⁰⁰ PRO FO 78/2991, Van (29 August 1879).

going to hoist the British flag and declare themselves British subjects”. This, he declared, he would never permit, even if he had to “arm the women”.¹⁰¹ Indeed, in a letter to Sultan Abdülhamid II, he warned that Muslims would not allow the formation of an “Armenian state (*devlet-i Ermeni*)” and asserted that the power of the Caliph had been severely undermined by the *Tanzimat* reforms.¹⁰²

Fears that an Armenian state might be established on Kurdish territory, combined with discontent directed at Istanbul and Tehran, most likely prompted Ubeydullah to think in ‘national’ terms and provide important context for his most famous utterance, made while in conversation with an American missionary, in which he allegedly declared that:

The Kurdish nation, consisting of more than 500,000 families, is a people apart. Their religion is different, and their laws and customs distinct. We are also a nation apart... the Chiefs and Rulers of Kurdistan, whether Turkish or Persian subjects, and the inhabitants of Kurdistan, one and all are united and agreed that matters cannot be carried on in this way with the two Governments [Ottoman and Iranian], and that necessarily something must be done, so that European Governments, having understood the matter, shall inquire into our state. We want our affairs to be in our hands, so that in the punishment of our own offenders we may be strong and independent, and have privileges like other nations... This is our object ... Otherwise the whole of Kurdistan will take the matter into their own hands, as they are unable to put up with these continual evil deeds and the oppression which they suffer at the hands of the [Ottoman and Iranian] governments.¹⁰³

This document does not necessarily suggest that Sheikh Ubeydullah was an ardent ‘nationalist’ ideologue. He probably possessed only a rudimentary understanding of the principle of nationality,

¹⁰¹ PRO FO 195/1315, Van (11 July 1880).

¹⁰² BOA Y.PRK.KOM 3/66 (21 August, 1882).

¹⁰³ Parliamentary Papers, Turkey, (1881), No. 5, (5 October 1880). This document has been extensively quoted. See McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 53. Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 75. It should be noted that, while the author of this document uses the terms ‘nation’ and ‘people’, it is impossible to know the precise vocabulary used by Sheikh Ubeydullah.

one most likely gleaned from his discussions with westerners residing or working in the region.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, Sheikh Ubeydullah repeatedly expressed his willingness to compromise on the issue of outright independence for Kurdistan. One British official suggested that the sheikh was “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 officials, and be looked upon as *de lege* as well as *de facto* the ruling chief of Kurdistan.”¹⁰⁵ Indeed, he even framed his objectives in terms of a return to ‘traditional’ Kurdish self-government. According to one British report from early 1881, Ubeydullah was planning to send his son to Istanbul with a proposal which would “point out the large sum paid to the Sultan by Bedir Khan Beg, when semi-independent...” and with an offer “to pay a still larger sum if his authority over Kurdistan is recognised, and his rule is not interfered with”.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, his political objectives were much broader than simply a restoration of traditional Kurdish autonomies. He does not seem to have indicated any wish to see Kurdistan former emirs return to the region. Moreover, judging from his actions as well as his statements to European

¹⁰⁴ Sheikh Ubeydullah had numerous interactions with westerners including missionaries. For example, Dr Joseph Cochran, an American missionary based in Urmia, visited the sheikh in Nevçiya (near Hakkâri) in April 1880. In a letter written two months later, Cochran, who described Sheikh Ubeydullah as the “the third man in ecclesiastical rank in Islam” as well as “civil monarch of the Kurds”, was impressed with his interest in the west noting that: “He has seemed disposed for some years past to get into closer relations with us and the civilized world.” Cochran also noted that: “He regards the Turks and Persians as deceptive people, not living up to their religion, and altogether too depraved to hope that they will ever again hold the position they once commanded among the other nations. Regarding them in the light that he does, and situated as he is between them, he wishes to have the moral, if not material, support of a better people and government.” Speer, *Hakim Sahib, The Foreign Doctor*, 75.

¹⁰⁵ Parliamentary Papers, Turkey, (1881), No. 5 (20 October 1880). Quoted in McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 55.

¹⁰⁶ Parliamentary Papers, Turkey, (1881), No. 5 (1 May 1881). Quoted in Süleyman Azad Arslan, “Clashes of Agencies: Formation and Failure of Early Kurdish Nationalism (1918-1922)”, (PhD diss., Royal Holloway and Bedford College, 2007), 63.

officials, it seems that his objectives were the unification of Ottoman and Iranian Kurdistan into a single administrative entity, something quite different from the fragmented system of emirates which had existed prior to the *Tanzimat*. Indeed, in the speech given to supporters on the eve of the invasion of Iranian Kurdistan, he openly stated that his objective was to first conquer the part of Kurdistan in Iranian hands after which he would use that land's rich resources to make war upon the Turks.¹⁰⁷ When questioned concerning his intentions by one British official, Sheikh Ubeydullah stated that "he wished to reorganise Kurdistan". Furthermore, he hinted at more transformative objectives:

He felt that the moment had arrived when something ought to be done for Kurdistan. He loved his countrymen. They were sorely in need of reforms. It was true that they were uneducated, undisciplined, addicted to brigandage and altogether in a most barbarous condition. He was anxious to remedy these evils and place his people in the position to which as human beings they were entitled.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, a report from an American journalist, who encountered Sheikh Ubeydullah during his stay in Istanbul, contained the observation:

When any foreigner calls to see him, the Sheikh takes him into a private room and overwhelms him with questions: Why are the western lands so prosperous? How does government subsist and yet keep the love of the people? What measures can the Kourds take to attain national importance, and internal development?¹⁰⁹

It seems clear that Sheikh Ubeydullah's political world view had been impacted by the doctrine of nationality, and the nationalist dimensions to the revolt make it distinct from earlier examples of Kurdish resistance. While 'nationalism' does not seem to have played a role in coordinating or

¹⁰⁷ Averyanov, *Osmanlı İnan Rus Savaşlarında Kürtler*, 189.

¹⁰⁸ PRO.FO. 60/441, Tabriz (1 October 1881).

¹⁰⁹ See "Obeidoullah in Constantinople", *The New York Daily Tribune* (10 September 1881). Also quoted in Ateş, "In the Name of Caliph and Nation", 776-777.

mobilising Kurdish tribesmen, it did provide Sheikh Ubeydullah with a discursive framework through which to legitimate and advance his political agenda. In this sense, it constituted an early example of latent notions of Kurdish ethnic distinctiveness in a novel political context, namely as a justification for the creation of a unified Kurdish nation state. In short, the Ubeydullah Revolt provides that starting point for the study of a distinctly modern form of Kurdish national identity.

Conclusions: Balkan Parallels

In certain respects, parallels can be drawn between the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt and the early phases of ‘nationalist’ resistance in the Balkans. As John Bruilley observed with regard to the Serbian case:

The Serbian state was created not by nationalist pressure from within but by the need to respond to the weakness of central government. By the end of the eighteenth century the authorities were unable to protect the inhabitants from the depredations of the janissaries... The consequent anarchy reached a peak in the first decades of the nineteenth century.... Local resistance was finally provoked when the Janissaries massacred Serbian notables and many others. It began with appeals to Constantinople to restore order. When it became obvious that the government could not do this the only alternative was to impose control locally...¹¹⁰

In essence, nationalism “was less a response to central government or a dominant cultural group than a narrow reaction on the part of local notables to unpopular agents of Ottoman government...”¹¹¹

In a similar vein, Sheikh Ubeydullah’s nationalism was not the product of a prolonged or widespread period of ‘national revival’. It was in essence a political reaction to the socio-political dislocations wrought in Kurdistan by the destruction of the emirates and subsequent efforts to

¹¹⁰ John Breuilley, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1993), 138.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 139.

establish a centralised system of provincial government. The tensions brought about by these developments and the concurrent failure of the central government to provide stability in the region contributed to the de-legitimisation of Ottoman rule. This process reached its apogee in the aftermath of the Ottoman-Russian War. The Ottoman defeat, combined with the complete breakdown of law and order in the region and the fear that the Great Powers were about to establish an Armenian state on Kurdish lands produced a perception that the Ottoman government was no longer able to protect 'Muslim' interests. This state of affairs created a situation in which Sheikh Ubeydullah assumed the mantle of Kurdistan's 'protector'. In this sense, both in the case of the Serbian movement of the early nineteenth century and the Ubeydullah Revolt of the 1880s, nationalism served the function of 'legitimation', namely "to justify the goals of the political movement both to the state it opposes and also to powerful external agents, such as foreign states and their public opinions".¹¹²

Of course, the Serbian movement, as well as other 'nationalist' movements in the Balkans culminated in the formation of 'nation states'. By the 1880s, Greece, Serbia, Romania and Montenegro had achieved full national independence, while Bulgaria had won extensive autonomy. In contrast, the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt did not result in the formation of a Kurdish political entity, autonomous or otherwise. However, this difference in outcome can be accounted for primarily by the attitudes of the European Great Powers. Greek independence was secured largely thanks to the Anglo-French naval victory over the Ottoman-Egyptian fleet at the battle of Navarino in 1827. At the same time, Russian backing secured Serbian, Romanian and Montenegrin autonomy, while these states achieved independence through the agreement of the European

¹¹² John Breuilly, "Approaches to Nationalism", in Gopal Balakrishnan (ed.) *Mapping the Nation* (London: Verso, 2012), 167.

powers at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. While Sheikh Ubeydullah too looked for Great Power patronage, particularly from Great Britain,¹¹³ no such support was forthcoming.¹¹⁴ European officials and statesmen in London, St. Petersburg and Paris saw no advantage in the creation of an independent Kurdistan. Indeed, some Europeans (as well as Armenians) regarded Sheikh Ubeydullah's movement as an Ottoman-inspired 'plot' to avoid fulfilling the provisions of the Treaty of Berlin which committed the empire to the protection of the Armenian population.¹¹⁵ Thus, unlike the early Balkan nationalists, the Kurds won no powerful external patron.

At the same time, the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt alerted Ottoman officials to the potentially explosive nature of the 'Kurdish question'. For example, as the sheikh's forces crossed into Iran, a report from the 4th Army High Command to the Ministry of Defense warned that the sheikh's aim was to establish "a new government for the Kurds", and knowing that was not immediately possible on the Ottoman side of the frontier he had invaded Iran. However, the report cautioned that should the sheikh be successful, support for him would grow and "because of their ethnicity/race (*kavmiyet*) the participation of our people close to the frontier in his movement would be natural".¹¹⁶ Another report from the 4th Army, issued following the sheikh's flight from Istanbul in 1882, warned that he "was determined to control Kurdistan all the way up to

¹¹³ According to the American missionary Joseph Cochran, Ubeydullah "was very much interested in getting British support". Speer, *Hakim Sahib*, 74. On negotiations between Great Britain and Sheikh Ubeydullah see PRO FO 60/441, Tabriz (1 October 1881).

¹¹⁴ The British Consul in Tabriz, W.G. Abbot, told Sheikh Ubeydullah, in no uncertain terms, that "he must look for no encouragement or support from England..." and that "[p]eace within the borders of Persia and Turkey, civil and religious liberty for Musulmans and Christians alike, order and discipline amongst the Kurds, their welfare no less than that of Armenians...are objects which the government I have the honour to represent would be happy to see attained." PRO FO 60/441, Tabriz (1 October 1881).

¹¹⁵ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion*, 6.

¹¹⁶ BOA Y.PRK.ASK 3/72 (19 November 1880).

Baghdad”.¹¹⁷ The Istanbul government received similar dire warnings concerning Sheikh Ubeydullah’s intentions from their counterparts in Tehran.¹¹⁸ These concerns prompted the newly enthroned Sultan Abdülhamid II to adopt a raft of new policies to defuse Kurdish unrest. As the sultan, when outlining his political priorities, was reported to have stated: “Above all, it is necessary to reshape the Kurds amongst us and make them a part of us”.¹¹⁹ The sultan’s new ‘Kurdish policy’ would profoundly impact upon the evolving relationship between the Kurds and the Ottoman government and, consequently, play an important role in shaping the development of the Kurdish ‘national revival’ which emerged in the three decades of Hamidian rule.

¹¹⁷ BOA. Y.PRK ASK, 14/38 (8 September 1882).

¹¹⁸ A memorandum from the Iranian Foreign Office pointed out that the sheikh had made it known through the British consulate at Tabriz that he intended to unite the Kurds of Iran and the Ottoman Empire and set up an independent dominion (*eyalet-i müstakil*). BOA. Y.PRK.EŞA 2/73 (21 November 1881).

¹¹⁹ Sultan Abdülhamit, *Siyasî Hatıratım* (Istanbul: Dergâh, 1999), 51.

Chapter III: The Kurds in the Age of Autocracy: Towards a National Movement (1883-1908)

Every person who is a Muslim desires the continuation of the Ottoman state. As we have seen, the reason behind the illness of the state stems from the administration, which needs to be cured and the reasons behind this illness removed. The health of the state is our health and the demise of the state is our demise.

Abdurrahman Bedirhan, *Kürdistan*, 1899¹

Despite the best efforts of the statesmen of the *Tanzimat*, their formula of Ottoman civic patriotism did not win the allegiance of the broader Ottoman population. On one hand, legal equality between Muslims and non-Muslims failed to arrest the advance of separatist nationalism amongst Ottoman Christians, while on the other, it alienated the many Ottoman Muslims who felt the empire's tradition of Muslim superiority was being eroded. The religious orientated nationalism of Sheikh Ubeydullah's movement in the early 1880s was merely one expression of broader Muslim alienation.² At the same time, rather than alleviating external pressure, the reforms of the *Tanzimat* seemed to be merely expediting the growth of Western influence over imperial affairs. This was perhaps most starkly demonstrated in the creation of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration in 1881, a body which allowed for an unprecedented degree of European control over the empire's finances.³ These profound crises deeply affected both the Ottoman state and broader Ottoman society and, thus, provide important historical context for understanding the policies adopted by Sultan Abdülhamid II. More precisely, they help to contextualise his rejection of constitutionalism

¹ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, "Întîzar", *Kürdistan* (6 August 1899).

² See Kemal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 117-154.

³ See Edhem Eldem, "Ottoman Financial Integration with Europe: Foreign Loans, the Ottoman Bank and the Ottoman Public Debt", *European Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2005), 431-445.

and his establishment of an absolutist political order based up the supreme authority of the Sultan-Caliph.

This age of autocracy, known as the Hamidian era, would last for over three decades and was only brought to an end by the 1908 Constitutional Revolution. Nevertheless, in spite of the regime's authoritarian nature and the restrictions placed upon public debate, the Hamidian era was a time of great political and intellectual ferment. While the 'Young Ottomans' had been suppressed, their dream of constitutional empire was far from extinguished, providing inspiration for a new generation of political activists - the so-called 'Young Turks' – who organised in opposition to autocracy. The period also witnessed an intensification of 'national sentiment' amongst various peoples inhabiting the empire. This was most notable in the case of the Kurds' close neighbours, the Christian Armenians, with Armenian activists, during the 1880s and 1890s, founding a number of political organisations seeking to advance the Armenian cause.⁴ During the Hamidian era, none of the empire's predominantly Muslim communities generated a 'national' political movement as well organised or active as that of the Armenians. Still, a growing number of Turks, Arabs and Albanians began to take interest in issues pertaining to their respective 'nations'.⁵ Much of this interest was academic in orientation and often lacked direct political implications, conforming to 'Phase A' of Hroch's periodisation concerning the emergence and development of national

⁴ For an overview of the Armenian movement in the Ottoman Empire during the Hamidian era see Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1963).

⁵ See David Kushner, *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism, 1876-1908* (London: Frank Cass, 1977); Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Los Angeles CA: University of California Press, 1997), 31-51; George Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874-1913* (London: I.B Taurus, 2006), 72-105.

movements. Nevertheless, such developments provide a background to the rapid proliferation of ‘national’ activism which took place after 1908.

In this regard, developments amongst the Kurdish community were similar to other Ottoman Muslim peoples. Certainly, it is possible to observe a gradual intensification in ‘scholarly’ interest amongst some elements of Kurdish society in regard to their culture, history and language. In 1894 Sheikh Yusuf Ziyaeddin Pasha published the first Kurdish-Turkish dictionary,⁶ while in 1900 a group of religious scholars established the first Kurdish cultural association, the *Kürdistan Azm-i Kavi Cemiyeti* (The Kurdistan Strength of Purpose Society), which published several works on Kurdish history and literature.⁷ Yet, in an era of autocracy and political repression, not all manifestations of an emergent Kurdish ‘national consciousness’ could be described as being purely scholarly.

This chapter seeks to contextualise the politicisation of the Kurdish identity during the Hamidian era. In order to do so it is first necessary to examine the ideological and political orientation of the autocracy and, in particular, its shift away from the ‘civic’ Ottomanism of the *Tanzimat* era toward an emphasis upon the empire’s Islamic heritage. It is also necessary to highlight the impact of this shift on the way in which the imperial government related to the Kurdish community and, more

⁶ Yusuf Ziyaeddin, *al-Hediyet’ul Hamdiye fi’l-Lugat-il Kurdiye* (Istanbul: Saadet, 1310 [1894/1895]).

⁷ There is very little information on this group. According to Cemilpaşazade Kadri, it was established in Istanbul in 1900 by Diyarbekirli Fikri Efendi. However, it seems that the organization was mainly active in Egypt, where Diyarbekirli Fikri Efendi had moved in 1904 in order to pursue his studies at Cairo’s renowned al-Azhar seminary. Other individuals associated with the group include: Kürdizade Ahmed Ramiz Bey, Mustafa Hacı Ömer, Molla Ahmed Hasi, Liceli Molla Said, Molla Yusuf Hoşini and Gonigli Halife Selim. The group published a religious poem (*mevlid*) written in the Kirmancî dialect of Kurdish by Hasan Ertuşi (d. 1491). It also published a pamphlet, written by Kürdizade Ahmed Ramiz Bey, on Bedirhan Bey. See Malmîsanij, *Diyarbakir’de Kürt Ulusçuluğu (1900-1920)* (Istanbul: Vate, 2010), 15-21. Also see Malmîsanij, *Kürt Milliyetçiliği ve Dr. Abdullah Cevdet* (Uppsala: Jina Nû, 1986), 44-45.

specifically, Kurdistan's notable classes. It will be argued that, in a general sense, Sultan Abdülhamid II adopted a far more conciliatory approach to Kurdish social and political elites, seeking, under the aegis of Islam, to integrate them more fully into the Ottoman body politic, mobilise them against the threat presented by the rise of the Armenian movement and secure their loyalty to the autocracy. In this regard, the sultan's 'Kurdish policy' enjoyed some success, especially amongst the tribal chieftains and Sufi sheikhs who benefited most from his largess. Nevertheless, a minority, from a variety of elite backgrounds, came to oppose the regime. Some of this opposition was primarily related to parochial concerns and did not carry any 'nationalistic' implications. Others, however, began to frame their opposition through the vocabulary of 'nationalism'. These included Hacı Kadir-i Koyi (Hacî Qadir-î Koyî) (1815?-1897), a Kurdish poet and religious scholar, who was an early advocate of 'separatist nationalism'. Perhaps more significantly, it also included an emergent class of Ottoman Kurdish intellectuals and professionals. While members of these new elites displayed a keen interest in the fate of their 'nation' and were often at odds with the Hamidian regime, they rejected separatism. Instead they regarded the establishment of a constitutionalist political order as the framework in which a resolution to the 'Kurdish question' could be found. This political stance is clearly articulated in the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kürdistan* (Kurdistan), established in 1898 by a group of Kurdish political exiles with links to the 'Young Turk' movement.

The Hamidian Synthesis: Autocracy and Islam

To European observers, Sultan Abdülhamid II was a reactionary and quintessentially 'oriental' despot. Sir Charles Eliot, a British diplomat posted to the Ottoman Empire in the 1890s, remarked that "the reign of Abd-ul-Hamid is probably the nearest approach which the world has ever seen

to real autocracy - that is, a state where everything is directed by the pleasure of the ruler”.⁸ Certainly, the sultan brooked no challenge to his absolute authority. Following his termination of the empire’s flirtation with constitutionalism, he moved quickly to bring the Sublime Porte, which had largely determined the direction of imperial politics for over three decades, into a state of submission.⁹ He also created a network of spies and informants (*hafiyeye, jurnalci*), which compiled secret dossiers on the activities of bureaucrats, officers and other potential malcontents. At the same time, an army of censors brought the press under tight control, forbidding the publication of anything that might, even tangentially, undermine or threaten the authority of the sultanate.¹⁰ Yet, as with the previous generation of Ottoman political leaders, the sultan was acutely aware of the problems facing the empire and fully apprehended the need for reform and modernisation. Hence, despite its authoritarian superstructure, the Hamidian regime continued many of the modernising policies initiated by the previous generation of Ottoman reformers, most notably in the field of public instruction.¹¹

⁸ Charles Eliot, *Turkey in Europe* (London: Odysseus, 1900), 130.

⁹ Perhaps one of the most significant moves of the sultan in this regard was the exile and eventual murder of one of the key architects of the Constitution of 1876, Midhat Pasha. Sultan Abdülhamid II removed Midhat Pasha from the Grand Vizierate in February 1877, forcing him into exile in Europe. In 1878 he returned to the empire, thanks to British pressure, and was appointed governor of Syria. However, he resigned from that post in 1880 on the grounds that Istanbul had failed to support his efforts to reform the province’s administration. In 1881, after a brief stint as governor of Izmir, Midhat Pasha was arrested and placed on trial for the murder of Sultan Abdülaziz. He was sentenced to exile in Yemen, where he was murdered in his cell in 1884. See Bruce Masters, “Midhat Pasha (Ahmed Şefik Midhat Pasha, Ahmet Şefik Midhat Pasha)”, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York, NY: Infobase, 2009), 378-379.

¹⁰ Mehmet Ali Beyhan, “II. Abdülhamid Döneminde Hafiyeye Teşkilatı ve Jurnaller”, *İlmî Araştırmalar*, No. 8 (1999), 65-83.

¹¹ For an overview of the reforms of the Hamidian era see Benjamin Fortna, “The reign of Abdülhamid II”, in Reşat Kasaba (ed.) *Cambridge History of Turkey*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 38-61; Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 72-108. On the expansion of education see Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, state and education in the late Ottoman Empire*

As a shrewd political operator, Sultan Abdülhamid II was well aware that police measures and brute authority would neither sustain the empire nor maintain his autocracy. Of particular urgency, especially during the early days of the autocracy, was the need to overcome the prevailing mood of pessimism and alienation existent amongst the Ottoman Muslim population. Sir William Ramsay, a Scottish archaeologist and biblical scholar who travelled widely in Anatolia between 1881 and 1882, recollected that, at the time, a “hopeless despondency about the future of the country reigned everywhere in Turkish society. Prophecies were current that the end of Turkish power was at hand...”¹² Perhaps more troubling was the fact that it was not only amongst the Kurds that Muslim discontent was beginning to don nationalistic garb. For instance, in the aftermath of the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 events in Albania unfolded in a very similar manner to those in Kurdistan. A combination of factors, including discontent towards centralisation, exacerbated by economic crisis and fears that Albanian lands were about to be partitioned amongst Greece, Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria, provoked the formation of the League of Prizren in 1878. This alliance of Albanian notables, both Muslim and Christian, united under the banner of protecting Albanian rights and vigorously opposed the territorial claims of the aforementioned Balkan powers. In order to realise these objectives, the league established an armed militia. Such popular mobilisation soon brought them into conflict with the Ottoman administration and a large-scale revolt in Albania was only suppressed in 1881.¹³ Even in Syria,

(London: Oxford University Press, 2002). Also see Bayram Kodaman, *Abdülhamid Devri Eğitim Sistemi* (Ankara: Türk Tarik Kurumu Basımevi, 1991).

¹² William Ramsay, *The Intermixture of Races in Asia Minor: Some of its Causes and Effects*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), 49.

¹³ On the League of Prizren see Stavro Skendi, “Beginnings of Albanian Nationalist and Autonomous Trends: The Albanian League, 1878-1881”, *American Slavic and East European Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1953), 219-232. Also see Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle*, 38-71.

which had been relatively untouched by the conflict with Russia, Arab dissatisfaction was also beginning to take on anti-Ottoman and anti-Turkish motifs.¹⁴

Hence, as Ramsay noted, in order to “recreate a feeling of hope among his Moslem subjects... Abd-ul-Hamid introduced a new religious idea: he revived the idea of the Khalifate, on which his predecessors had laid no stress. He planned out a scheme of strengthening Mohammedan feeling and making Turkey the centre of Mohammedan revival”.¹⁵ In other words, in order to address this profound crisis in morale, the Hamidian regime attempted to project a public image of itself as “tradition-loving, Islamic, and free from the worries and discomforts of change”.¹⁶ In doing so, the sultan hoped to refashion and reinvigorate his relationship with the empire’s Muslim subjects, based upon the institution of the Caliphate rather than a “contractual agreement inspired by Europe”.¹⁷ The shift from the Ottoman civic patriotism of the *Tanzimat* to a public identity in which Islam took centre stage did not involve the complete rejection of the *Tanzimat* citizenship project. Although the regime’s emphasis on Islamic identity was certainly exclusionary, non-Muslims did not, for example, lose their legal rights as Ottoman subjects. Sultan Abdülhamid II’s policies were a modification rather than repudiation of earlier efforts to construct an Ottoman ‘nation’.

Indeed, in certain respects, the renewed emphasis upon the empire’s Islamic identity reflected demographic realities. While the empire Sultan Abdülhamid II inherited continued to be home to

¹⁴ Shimon Shamir, “Midhat Pasha and Anti-Turkish Agitation in Syria”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1974), 115-141. For a translation of an anti-Turkish pamphlet which circulated in Syria in 1881 see Jacob Landau, “An Arab Anti-Turkish Handbill, 1881”, *Turcica*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (1977), 215-222. Also see Tufan Buzpinar, “Osmanlı Suriyesi’nde Türk Aleyhtarı İlanlar ve Bunlara Karşı Tepkiler, 1878-1881”, *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, No. 2, (1998), 73-89.

¹⁵ Ramsay, *The Intermixture of Races in Asia Minor*, 49-50.

¹⁶ Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London: Hurst, 1998), 255.

¹⁷ Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 31.

immense ethno-cultural diversity, with the loss of largely Christian territories in the Balkans following the Ottoman-Russian War of 1876-1877, the demographic balance within the empire shifted decisively in favour of the Muslim element.¹⁸ Thus, within the Ottoman ‘nation-building’ project, Islam came to play a similar role to that played by ‘vernacular languages’ and ‘ethnic cultures’ in the nation-building projects of Europe.¹⁹ Pro-government Islamist political discourse filled the pages of a tightly controlled press,²⁰ while the system of state education was mobilised in order to infuse a new generation with a common set of Ottoman-Islamic values and political attitudes.²¹ In other words, the Hamidian regime placed the propagation of a standardised Ottoman-Islamic identity at the heart of the empire’s reinvigorated ‘official nationalism’.²² Hence, far from

¹⁸ Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1914* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1995), 109-112. Also see Donald Quartaert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 116.

¹⁹ Stein Tonessen and Hans Antlov have pointed out, in their examination of Asian nationalisms, as a result of the continent’s vast cultural and linguistic diversity, religious identities have often played “much the same divisive role” in the process of ‘nation building’ as “vernacular languages have played in Europe.” Stein Tonessen and Hans Antlov, “Introduction” in Stein Tonessen and Hans Antlov, *Asian Forms of the Nation* (London: Curzon, 1996), 23-24.

²⁰ Dimitry Zhantiev, “Islamic Factor in the Consolidation of Ottoman Rule in the Arab Provinces during the Reign of Abdulhamid II”, in Barbara Michalak-Pikulska (ed.), *Authority, Privacy and Public Order in Islam* (Leuven: Leuven Peeters, 2006), 455.

²¹ See Benjamin Fortna, “Islamic Morality in Late Ottoman ‘Secular Schools,’” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 32, no. 3 (2000), 369-393. Also see Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 93-111.

²² The term ‘official nationalism’ was popularised by Benedict Anderson. Anderson argued that during the nineteenth century, ‘official nationalisms’ were a typical response for dynastic states (such as Britain, Austria-Hungary and Russia) who found themselves confronted with the increased potency of the principle of nationality. Official nationalisms sought to naturalise the state and dynast’s rule over their often diverse populations. In short, they endeavoured to shore up the ideological foundations of the state through “stretching the short, tight skin of nation over the gigantic body of empire”. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), 83-112. This theoretical model provided a point of departure for Selim Deringil’s ground-breaking work on public discourse and political legitimation during the Hamidian era. See Selim Deringil, “The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808 to 1908”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. 1 (1993), 12-39; Also see Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, 1-11.

being a manifestation of innate Muslim fanaticism, this emphasis on Islam followed an impeccable secular logic. In an ever-hostile political environment, Sultan Abdülhamid II sought to transform the Islamic sentiment of the empire's majority into a form of Ottoman-Muslim patriotism to ensure both the continuation of the state and the survival of the autocracy.

However, the sultan's re-emphasis of the empire's Islamic heritage constituted only part of his efforts to overcome Muslim disaffection. The regime also sought to win over Ottoman Muslims by allowing them to share in the fruits of modernisation and reform. This involved a pivot eastward regarding the expenditure of the empire's limited resources, with the sultan prioritising the predominantly Muslim Asiatic regions of the empire.²³ Kurdish-inhabited provinces, for instance, witnessed a concerted effort to expand the presence of state institutions, especially in terms of state education. In early 1886, a British report detailed Ottoman government efforts to establish new schools in Hakkâri and Bitlis.²⁴ Writing of Van in 1894, Harry Finnis Blosse Lynch mentioned the arrival of a new director of public instruction who had, within the space of a few months, established six new primary schools, three secondary schools and "was in hopes of opening an Idadiyeh (Lycée) during the following summer".²⁵ Lynch observed similar efforts in more remote regions, noting that in Patnotz, a large village near the Iranian frontier (and home of the Haydaranlı tribe), the government had ordered the construction of "a solid stone structure... to serve several purposes, a mosque, a school, and a residence for the chief...".²⁶ However, perhaps the most

²³ Thus in imperial almanacs (*salname*) predominantly Arabic-speaking provinces were listed first, while bureaucrats stationed within those provinces received higher salaries as well as greater resources. Moreover, the state educational infrastructure in those regions was rapidly expanded in order to facilitate the integration of young Arabs into the Ottoman bureaucracy. Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 32. Engin Akarlı, "Abdülhamid II's Attempt to Integrate Arabs into the Ottoman System", in David Kushner (ed.), *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 79.

²⁴ FO 195/1552, Erzurum, (5 February 1886).

²⁵ Harry Finnis Blosse Lynch, *Armenia: Travels and Studies* (London: Longmans, 1901), 100.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 422.

striking example of the sultan's desire to provide educational opportunities to Ottoman Muslims was the establishment of the 'Tribal School' (*Aşiret Mektebi*) in 1892. Although the school, located in Istanbul, had originally been conceived as a conduit through which sons of Arab tribal leaders could be introduced to and educated in the values of 'Ottoman-Islamic' civilisation, the scheme's popularity meant that its doors were soon opened to the offspring of Kurdish tribal leaders as well.²⁷

The Politics of Patronage: Sultan Abdülhamid II and the Kurdish Notables

The sultan's emphasis on providing Ottoman Muslims with greater access to public instruction was, in many ways, a continuation of policies initiated during the *Tanzimat*. Perhaps a more significant deviation from *Tanzimat* orthodoxy was the sultan's extensive use of patronage to secure the loyalty of powerful Muslim notables and draw them more firmly into the Ottoman body politic. This politics of patronage operated on numerous levels. For example, whereas during the *Tanzimat* Turkish-speaking natives of Istanbul had dominated the upper echelons of the Ottoman bureaucracy, the sultan used political patronage to ensure a more ethnically diverse cross-section of Ottoman Muslim society was integrated into imperial government.²⁸ Important Kurdish notables

²⁷ On the 'tribal school' see Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, 101-104; Eugene Rogan, "Aşiret Mektebi: Abdülhamid II's School for Tribes (1892-1907)", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1996), 83-103.

²⁸ For example, under Sultan Abdülhamid II a number of important Arab notables attained high office. 'Arab' Ahmed İzzet Pasha, a Damascene notable, joined the ranks of the palace chamberlains and, thanks to the sultan's support, emerged as one of the most influential figures in the Hamidian era, rising to the rank of second secretary (*ikinci katip*) as well as being placed in charge of overseeing the construction of the Hejaz railway. Similarly, another Arab, Sheikh Ebülhüda es-Seyidi, a native of Aleppo and leader of the Rifaiye Sufi order, assumed the position of *kazasker* of Rumelia, one of the highest ranking positions within the empire's religious hierarchy, in 1885. See Caesar Farah, "Arab Supporters of Sultan Abdülhamid II: İzzet al-Abid", *Archivum Ottomanicum*, No. 15 (1997), 189-219; Caesar Farah, "Reassessing Sultan Abdülhamid II's Islamic Policy", *Archivum Ottomanicum*, No. 14 (1995/1996), 194-198; Akarlı, "Abdülhamid II's Attempt to Integrate Arabs into the Ottoman System", 78; Butrus Abu-Manneh, "Sultan Abdulhamid II and Shaikh Abulhuda Al-Sayyadi", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1979),

benefited from this new policy of ‘authoritarian positive discrimination’. In certain respects this was the continuation of a trend which had emerged during the *Tanzimat* era. As noted in the previous chapter, although Kurdistan’s emirs had been removed from their fiefs and exiled from their homeland, their exile had been an honourable one, with many finding new careers in Ottoman officialdom. Nevertheless, Sultan Abdülhamid II not only continued this policy but accelerated it, in particular with regard to two of Kurdistan’s most influential ‘princely’ families. The first of these were the Babans, with numerous members of Süleymaniye’s former ruling house attaining high office during the Hamidian era. For example, Babanzade Mustafa Zihni Pasha enjoyed a successful career as an Ottoman bureaucrat and governor,²⁹ while Babanzade İsmail Pasha (also known as Bağdatlı İsmail Pasha) rose through the ranks of the gendarmerie corps, eventually earning the rank of brigadier-general (*mirliva*).³⁰ However, perhaps the best known and most successful Babans of the Hamidian era were *Kürt* (Kurdish) Said Pasha and his son Mehmed Şeref Pasha. The former served as the empire’s foreign minister twice and later became president of the Council of State (*Şura-yı Devlet*), a position he held until his death in 1907.³¹ The latter enjoyed a similarly successful career, attaining the rank of lieutenant-general (*ferik*) in 1896 and, two years later, earning an ambassadorial appointment to Sweden.³²

131-153; Zhantiev, “Islamic Factor in the Consolidation of Ottoman Rule in the Arab Provinces during the Reign of Abdulhamid II”, 456-457; Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 258-259.

²⁹ Rohat Alakom, *Şerif Paşa: Bir Kürt Diplomatinin Fırtınalı Yılları* (Istanbul: Avesta, 1998), 19.

³⁰ “Babanzâde İsmail Paşa”, *Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 1 (Istanbul: Dergâh, 1977), 275; Hulûsi Kılıç, “Bağdatlı İsmâil Paşa”, *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 4 (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi Genel Müdürlüğü, 1991), 447-448.

³¹ *Kürt* (Kurdish) Mehmed Said Pasha was a member of the Handan family, a minor branch of the Babans. See Alakom, *Şerif Paşa*, 16; Sinan Kunalp, *Son Dönem Osmanlı Erkân ve Ricali, 1839-1922: Prosopografik Rehber* (İstanbul: İsis, 1999), 103.

³² Ali Birinci, “Şerif Paşa, Mehmed”, *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 39 (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi Genel Müdürlüğü, 2010), 1-2. Also see Alakom, *Şerif Paşa*, 15-37.

Yet Sultan Abdülhamid II's promotion of the Babans pales in comparison to the indulgence shown by the sultan towards the Bedirhans, the descendents of Cizre-Bohtan's former emir, Bedirhan Bey. Although the dynasty's progenitor had passed away in 1868, thanks to the patronage of the sultan his progeny emerged as possibly the most influential Kurdish family in the empire. According to one account, some 200 members of the clan were appointed to posts within the imperial bureaucracy.³³ For instance, Bedirhan Bey's eldest son Mehmed Necip Pasha served as a county governor (*mutasarrıf*) in Aydın and Homs, while his son, Abdürrezzak Bey, after serving in the Ottoman embassy in St. Petersburg, was made Master of Ceremonies at the Imperial Palace. Other members of the Bedirhan clan were appointed to even more prestigious and politically sensitive positions. Ali Şamil Pasha was placed in charge of the strategically important Selimiye military barracks in Istanbul, while during the mid-1880s Rıza Bahri Pasha briefly served as the sultan's adjutant (*yaver*).³⁴

Such was the degree of patronage and favouritism shown towards the Bedirhans that the sultan apparently felt the need to reply to critics of his policy of favouring the family, noting that: "Of course, everyone is free to think what they will. However I am of the opinion I am on the right path...".³⁵ The latitude granted to the Bedirhan clan also caught the attention of European observers, with Sir Charles Eliot noting that: "Here [in Istanbul] they behaved much as they did in the wilds of Asia Minor, holding themselves above all law, and defying the representatives of the Government. If they ever obeyed the orders of anyone less than the Sultan, it was merely from

³³ Kendal Nazan, "The Kurds under the Ottoman Empire", in Gérard Chaliand, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou and Michael Pallis (eds.), *A People without a Country: The Kurds* (London: Zed, 1993), 25.

³⁴ For a detailed history of Bedirhan Bey's descendents and their careers in the Ottoman bureaucracy see Malmîsanij, *Cizira Botanlı Bedirhanler* (Istanbul: Avesta, 2000), 79-234.

³⁵ Sultan Abdülhamit, *Siyasî Hatıratım* (Istanbul: Dergâh, 1999), 52.

diplomacy and politeness”.³⁶ In fact, the power and influence of the Bedirhans was only curtailed when the family dramatically fell from grace in the summer of 1906. This was not, however, the product of any political rift or fundamental change in policy. Rather, it was the result of a petty quarrel between Abdürrezzak Bey and Istanbul’s governor, Rıdvan Pasha, which deteriorated into a blood feud ending in the murder of the latter. Faced with such blatant lawlessness, the sultan, who had unsuccessfully tried to mediate between the two parties, was forced to take action and deported the entire Bedirhan clan to Tripolitania.³⁷

Political patronage was also central to Sultan Abdülhamid II’s strategies concerning provincial administration. In Kurdistan this involved the adoption of a more compromising and conciliatory posture in dealings with the region’s myriad Kurdish tribal chieftains and Sufi sheikhs. It should be noted that, even prior to the Hamidian era, the weakness of the Ottoman administration outside the region’s major urban centres often forced provincial administrators into working with tribal elites.³⁸ Nevertheless, these elites, who held sway over Kurdistan’s extensive ‘tribal zones’, had

³⁶ Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 416.

³⁷ The dispute had begun over the poor state of a road in front of Abdürrezzak Bey’s home, escalating as both sides began attacking each other’s supporters. The conflict culminated when a group of Kurds, apparently acting on the orders of Abdürrezzak Bey, murdered Rıdvan Pasha while on the way to his summer home in Erenköy. The culprits promptly were arrested, but then released, thanks to the intervention of Abdürrezzak Bey’s uncle, Ali Şamil Pasha. See “The Fall of the Bedr Khans”, *The Times* (23 August 1906); Halidé Edib, *Memoirs of Halidé Edib* (London: John Murray, 1926), 223-224; Rohat Alakom, *Eski İstanbul Kürtleri (1453-1925)* (Istanbul: Avesta, 1998), 48-54.

³⁸ In 1862 the British Consul at Erzurum and Sivas reported that the Kurds were still under the influence of their “chiefs, or Aghas, whom the local government then employed as Mudirs.” FO 78/1669, Erzurum (28 February 1862). Also see Gökhan Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 75. At times, administrative divisions were even constructed in such a way as to accommodate intra-tribal rivalries. For example, the district of Midyat was divided into two administrative units, the Halilbegli and the İsabegli, named after the chiefs of the Heverki and Dekşuri tribes. See Suavi Aydın and Jelle Verhij, “Confusion in the Cauldron: Some Notes on Ethno-Religious Groups, Local Powers and the Ottoman State in Diyarbekir Province, 1800-1870”, in Joost Jongerden and Jelle Verheij (eds.), *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbekir, 1870-1915* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 40, footnote 113.

been the source of much of the resistance to the reforms of the *Tanzimat* era. Moreover, in a general sense, the objectives of the Ottoman officials of the *Tanzimat* era were to reform in spite of resistance, create a standardised mode of provincial administration and, ultimately, pacify the region. Hence, the existence of well-armed Kurdish tribesmen, who paid more heed to the commands of the chieftains and sheikhs than the provincial administration, was regarded as a serious impediment to the realisation of these objectives. Therefore, to reform-minded Ottoman officials, an orderly administration in Kurdistan could only be created through the enactment of significant changes to the socio-economic structure of the region's largely tribal society. As one report forwarded to the Ottoman Council of Ministers (*meclis-i vükela*) in January 1880 stated, the Kurdish community could only be brought into the "circle of civilisation (*daire-i medeniyet*) by means of sedentarisation and settlement (*tavattun ve iskanlarıyla*)..."³⁹ In short, the officials of the *Tanzimat* era regarded themselves as active agents of reform, pursuing their objectives despite opposition and resistance.⁴⁰

In contrast, while far from rejecting the *Tanzimat* in its entirety, Sultan Abdülhamid II possessed a set of political priorities which differed from the previous generation of Ottoman reformers. In regions such as Kurdistan, the transformative nature of *Tanzimat* centralisation had unintentionally unleashed a host of centrifugal forces which threatened to undermine the territorial integrity of the empire. As we have seen, in the early days of the autocracy, the most worrying of these was the outbreak of anti-government rebellions amongst predominantly tribally organised peoples such as the Kurds and Albanians. The Hamidian regime's main concern was to contain these forces,

³⁹ BOA YA.RES 5/17 (14 January 1880).

⁴⁰As Ussama Makdisi has argued, the world view of many Ottoman reformers in the nineteenth century was shaped by a set of 'orientalist' attitudes, which dictated that certain 'backward' peoples such as the Kurds were in need of 'civilising'. See Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 107, No. 3 (2002), 768-796.

stabilise imperial politics and consolidate the empire's Muslim elements under the auspices of the autocracy. In practice, this meant tempering some of the more transformative aspects of *Tanzimat* centralisation with the patronage of powerful Muslim provincial interests. Muslim provincial notables were potential allies of the regime, especially in districts far from the capital.⁴¹ Consequently, in Kurdistan, tribal chieftains and Sufi sheikhs came to be looked upon as potential pillars of a new political order in the region, one which would insulate it from the twin threats of external aggression and internal subversion. In short, accommodating the interests of Kurdish tribal elites became not simply a matter of practicality but a guiding principle of policy. It is to the impact of this shift in policy on the affairs of Kurdistan that will now be examined in greater detail.

Containing Armenia: The Hamidian Regime, the Kurds and the 'Armenian Question'

As seen in the previous chapter, the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt constituted a major challenge to Ottoman authority over Kurdistan. It therefore seems obvious that the rebellion helped precipitate the sultan's change in attitude towards the governance of Kurdistan. However, the Hamidian era also witnessed the emergence of a new threat to Ottoman sovereignty in its eastern provinces, the rise of the 'Armenian question'. In many districts of Eastern Anatolia, most notably in the so-called 'six provinces' (*vilayet-i sitte*), Van, Erzurum, Bitlis, Mamuretülaziz, Diyarbakır and Sivas, Muslim Kurdish and Christian Armenian populations were heavily intermixed. During the *Tanzimat* relations between the two communities had become increasingly strained, leading to calls from the international community for reforms that might ameliorate the position of the Armenians. As early as 1878 the Armenian Patriarch, Nerses Varjabedian, had successfully lobbied Russia for the inclusion of an article committing the Ottoman Empire to reform of the

⁴¹ On Arab regions of the empire see Akarlı, "Abdülhamid II's Attempt to Integrate Arabs into the Ottoman System", 80-85. On Albania see Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle*, 106-139.

‘Armenian inhabited’ provinces in the Treaty of San Stefano,⁴² a commitment which was subsequently carried over into the Treaty of Berlin, signed five months later. However, this was far from the end of the ‘Armenian question’, as, during the 1880s and 1890s, a number of Armenian revolutionary organisations were founded. The most significant of these were the *Armenakan* Party, established in Van in 1885, the *Hunchakian* Party, established in Geneva in 1887 and the *Dashnaktsutyun*, established in Tiflis in 1890. By the early 1890s, these groups were engaged in low-level guerrilla warfare, assassination and terrorism against Ottoman government targets.⁴³

The crisis culminated in 1894, when the strained relationship between Kurds and Armenians exploded in widespread inter-communal violence. Over the next two years a bloody cycle of massacre and counter-massacre would engulf the empire’s eastern provinces. Although the precise cost to the Ottoman Armenian community is still debated, estimates of the number of Armenians killed range from 20,000 to 300,000.⁴⁴ The so-called ‘Armenian Crisis’ of 1894 to 1896 attracted considerable international attention at the time and earned Sultan Abdülhamid II the unflattering epitaph of the ‘Red Sultan’.⁴⁵ Although international outcry failed to halt the bloodshed, more

⁴² Münir Süreyya, *Ermeni Meselesinin Siyasî Tarihçesi (1877-1914)* (Ankara: Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, 2001), 7.

⁴³ See Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 90-131 and 151-178; Gerad J. Libaridan, “What was Revolutionary about the Armenian Revolutionary Parties of the Ottoman Empire”, in Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek and Norman M. Naimark (eds.), *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 82-112. An interesting collection of documents concerning the activities of the Armenian ‘Committees’ (*Komiteler*), focusing primarily on the *Hunchakian*, has been published by the General Directorate of the Turkish Prime Ministerial State Archives. See T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, *Ermeni Komiteleri (1891-1895)* (Ankara: Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, 2001). The documents frequently refer to the Armenian revolutionaries as ‘nihilist and anarchist’ (*nihilist ve anarşist*).

⁴⁴ Robert Melson, “A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian Massacres of 1894-1896”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (1982), 489.

⁴⁵ On international responses to the ‘Armenian Crisis’ see Roy Douglas, “Britain and the Armenian Question, 1894-7”, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 19, No.1 (1976), 113-133; Richard G. Hovannisian, “The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire”, *East European Quarterly*, Vol.

generally the Armenian struggle and the sympathy it garnered in the West presented a clear challenge to Ottoman sovereignty in its eastern provinces. Sir Charles Eliot, writing on the political atmosphere prevailing in the empire in the mid-1890s, noted: “Foreigners were talking of Armenia as they had once talked of Bulgaria. The Turks thought that there was a clear intention to break up what remained of the Ottoman Empire and found an Armenian kingdom”.⁴⁶

Part of the Hamidian response to the growing prominence of the ‘Armenian question’ was to assert the Kurdish and, therefore, *Muslim* character of those regions where Kurds and Armenians lived side by side. Writing in 1890, a palace official forwarded a memorandum to the Grand Vizier’s office which sought to explain the sultan’s attitude towards the issue. In it he noted:

It is needless to declare that, with the exception of the Hejaz, in all localities of the Glorious Ottoman Lands Armenians can be found. Of a certain locality, whose inhabitants are predominantly Kurdish, and whose name came to be known as Kurdistan since ancient times, some malignant mouths have been talking [describing] as Armenia. Though these ill intentions are cast with the purpose of creating an Armenia, just the way used in earlier formations of the Danube, i.e. a certain principle was established to determine the boundaries, the locality known as Kurdistan is there today, and the Muslim folk inhabiting it is [are] incomparably more numerous than Armenians. Consequently it is not at all right to change the name of the locality to Armenia, and furthermore, it is not at all possible to draw boundaries that would include Armenian localities, under the heading ‘vilayets inhabited by Armenians’.⁴⁷

The regime’s sensitivity towards the usage of the term ‘Armenia’ and its potential political implications was clear. Indeed, Eliot observed that “all maps marking any district as Armenistan

6, No. 1 (1972), 1-26. Also see Matthew S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 253- 260.

⁴⁶ Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 401.

⁴⁷ First Chamberlain signed as Süreyya to Prime Ministry (1 August 1890), reproduced in English in Ertuğrul Zekâi Ökte (ed.), *Ottoman Archives, Yıldız collection, the Armenian question*, Vol 3 (Istanbul: Historical Research Foundation, 1989), 292-293.

are confiscated...” and that, despite the fact that “in many parts of Asia Minor the population is mixed... the Turks prefer to call such districts Kurdistan...”⁴⁸

However, the sultan’s efforts to counter-balance the claims of Armenian nationalists through asserting the ‘Kurdishness’ of the empire’s eastern provinces went far beyond the realm of symbolism. The regime actively protected Kurdish tribal leaders even when they engaged in oppressive and violent acts towards Armenians. As early as 1879 the sultan successfully reneged on the empire’s international commitments to pursue reforms aimed at protecting the Armenian community from the transgressions of Kurdish tribesmen.⁴⁹ Indeed, it soon became apparent that the Ottoman government was not only reluctant to rein in Kurdish tribesmen but was, in certain instances, actively strengthening their position. In 1881, for example, it was reported that the Ottoman government was, in fact, distributing weapons to Kurdish tribesmen, while simultaneously seeking to disarm the Armenians.⁵⁰ No event symbolised this nascent trend more than the ‘Hacı Musa Incident’. In 1888, Hacı Musa, a prominent sheikh from Muş, abducted and raped a young Armenian girl, Arménouhie, forcing her to convert to Islam and changing her name to Gülizar. Thanks in large measure to the international attention the case garnered, the girl was subsequently returned to her family. Yet Hacı Musa, who was summoned to Istanbul and placed

⁴⁸ Eliot, *Turkey in Europe*, 383-384.

⁴⁹ For example, a series of British reports detail the efforts of an Albanian officer by the name of Abeddin Pasha to reform the administration of Diyarbakır province in 1879. Abeddin Pasha’s labours won him the admiration of British officials operating in the region but he soon found his efforts frustrated by the actions of the sultan, most notably when he sought to exile some 20 Kurdish tribal leaders. After summoning the group to the provincial capital on the pretext of discussing reform, Abeddin Pasha had the group arrested and deported. However, they had only been transported as far as Aleppo before an order from the palace granted them a reprieve, allowing them to return to their homes. See Stephan Duguid, “Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1973), 140-141.

⁵⁰ FO 195/1376, Erzurum (9 June 1881).

on trial in 1889, was acquitted, a verdict which caused outrage amongst both the Armenian and international community.⁵¹

However, no initiative of the Hamidian era confirmed the impression that the sultan intended to use the Kurdish tribes as a means of destroying the Armenian community more than the formation of the Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments (*Hamidiye Hafif Süvari Alayları*). Established between 1890 and 1892, the Hamidiye regiments, which were modelled on Russian Cossack regiments, were ostensibly set up to provide the Ottoman army with a pool of light cavalry to “defend the realm against foreign attacks and aggression”.⁵² Their members were drawn from amongst the predominantly Kurdish tribes of eastern Anatolia, who joined as tribal units rather than individual conscripts. Whereas larger tribes were allowed to supply men and horses for an entire regiment and, in some cases, more than one, smaller tribes were able to join by committing enough men and horses to constitute a company. The units were officered by both members of the regular army and tribal leaders, who received special military training in the Hamidiye Cavalry School (*Hamidiye Süvari Mektebi*) in Istanbul. Although a tribal leader could rise to the rank of colonel (and later brigadier-general),⁵³ his executive officer had to be drawn from the ranks of the regular army.

⁵¹ Arménouhie Kevonian, *Les noces noires de Gulizar* (Paris: Parentheses, 1993); Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 224-226; Sarkis Narzakian, *Memoirs of Sarkis Narzkian* (Ann Arbor, MI: Gomidas Institute, 1995), 17-20.

⁵² See Anonymous [Ottoman Government?], *Tensikat-ı Askeriye cümlesinden olarak Hamidiye Süvari Alaylarına Dair Kanunname* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Osmaniye, 1308 [1890]), 1. This thirteen-page ordinance (*kanunname*), consisting of fifty three articles, outlined the regulations governing the organisation structure of the Hamidiye regiments. According to these regulations, each regiment was to be made up of between 512 and 1152 men-at-arms divided into between four and six companies. Tribesmen supplied their own horses, clothing and saddles and the government was responsible for distributing arms, ammunition and supplies. It should be noted that the Hamidiye regulations made provisions for the recruitment not only of Kurds, but also of Turkmen, Arabs and Circassians.

⁵³ An amended version of the regulations governing the Hamidiye published in 1896 allowed for the formation of Hamidiye divisions (*liva*) under the command of a tribal leader. See Bayram

Authority over the Hamidiye, which by the beginning of the twentieth century numbered some 64 regiments, was placed in the hands of Field Marshal (*Müşir*) Mehmed Zeki Pasha, the sultan's brother-in-law, who assumed control of the Ottoman Fourth Army Corps, headquartered at Erzincan.⁵⁴

Many observers were sceptical of the military efficiency of the regiments.⁵⁵ For example, after reviewing Russian troops in Kars, Lord Warkworth, who personally encountered the Hamidiye regiments in the mid-1890s, wryly noted that: "If ever Turkey has to meet such a force in the field with her undisciplined and ill-equipped rabble of Hamidieh cavalry, she may well be hopeless of the result".⁵⁶ However, while the Hamidiye regiments failed to gain a reputation as a disciplined military force, they soon become notorious for their persecution of the Armenians. Writing from the town of Akantz (Erciş), Lynch observed that the enrolment of the Haydaranlı and Adamanlı Kurds in the Hamidiye scheme "has been attended by the usual result -- a general relaxation of the law. Robberies [against Armenians] are committed under the eyes of the Kaimakam, and stealing is scarcely considered an offence".⁵⁷ Indeed, Haydaranlı chieftain and Hamidiye commander, Kör

Kodaman, *Şark Meselesi Işığında Sultan II. Abdülhamid'in Doğu Anadolu Politikası* (Istanbul: Orkun, 1983), 52-62.

⁵⁴ For a general overview of the Hamidiye regiments see Kodaman, *Şark Meselesi*, 36-81; Janet Klein, "Power in the Periphery: The Hamidiye Light Cavalry and the Struggle for Ottoman Kurdistan, 1890-1914" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2002), 32-56. Also see Pytro Averyanov, *Osmanlı İnan Rus Savaşlarında Kürtler (19. Yüzyıl)* (Istanbul: Avesta, 2010), 197-224.

⁵⁵ Even before the regiments were established the British Consul in Erzurum, Colonel H. Chermiside, pointed out "the small effective value of the irregular Kurdish levies in the past campaigns and the embarrassments they caused to the Turkish Generals in 1877-8." He went on to highlight the fact that, although there was support amongst "the most intelligent Turkish officials" for the adoption of "the Russian Cossack system... there would be a considerable danger of it being an inefficient Cossack system." Chermiside also questioned the validity of the Cossack model, noting that Russian military circles generally held Cossack regiments in low regard, seeing them "as quite useless for fighting." FO195/1617, Erzurum (20 December 1888).

⁵⁶ Lord Warkworth [Henry Algernon George Percy], *Notes from a Dairy in Asiatic Turkey* (London: Edward Arnold, 1898), 93.

⁵⁷ Lynch, *Armenia Travels and Studies*, 26.

Hüseyin Pasha, became particular well-known for his predations on Armenian (as well as Kurdish) peasants. Indeed, it was reported in late 1895 that: “The authorities do not seem willing to court-martial him, under the pretext that no Armenian or Kurdish witness would be willing to testify against him. In reality they fear upsetting a powerful Kurdish tribe”.⁵⁸ The constant raids and land seizures engaged in by Hamidiye tribes, which reached its apex during the inter-communal violence of the mid-1890s, became a fact of life in many of the empire’s eastern provinces. Thus, in large measure, the issue of Armenian-Kurdish relations in the Hamidian era of the Ottoman Empire’s existence was defined by the so-called ‘agrarian question’, namely the process through which Hamidiye tribes expropriated the property and lands of Armenian peasants.⁵⁹

The Ottoman government’s apparent willingness to allow Hamidiye tribes to expropriate Armenian lands, often violently, gave rise to the opinion that the Hamidiye regiments were a ploy to ‘resolve’ the ‘Armenian question’ through a ‘cull’ of the Armenian Christian population. According to Armenian activist S. V. Bedickian, it was the “fixed policy” of the sultan to depopulate those regions of strong Armenian settlement so as to leave no province with an Armenian majority. Thus, he continued: “[In order] to carry out this infamous policy... there was created the ill-famed organization called the Hamidieh Cavalry, composed of the very race, the Kurds, who had so long been the scourge of the Armenians...” noting that a “large numbers were brought to Constantinople, banqueted by the Sultan, and, loaded with presents and fully equipped for their future work...” were sent back to the provinces “to do police duty amongst the

⁵⁸ FO 195/1880, Erzurum (28 November 1895).

⁵⁹ For an extensive discussion on the relationship between the Hamidiye and the ‘agrarian question’ during the Hamidian era see Klein, “Power in the Periphery”, 256-304; also Stephan H. Astourian, “The Silence of the Land: Agrarian Relations, Ethnicity, and Power”, in Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek and Norman M. Naimark (eds.), *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 55-81.

Armenians”.⁶⁰ Bedickian’s opinion was shared by a reporter from *The Times* who, writing in 1895 during the height of the inter-communal violence, claimed: “The fact is, the Government hoped to finish the business [the Armenian Question] by means of the Kurds...”⁶¹

This interpretation of the motivations behind Hamidian policy in the empire’s eastern provinces, especially in terms of the establishment of the Hamidiye regiments, has been shared by a number of subsequent historians.⁶² The ‘Armenian factor’ is most certainly important in understanding government thinking towards the Kurdish population. For instance, Hamidiye regiments were generally raised only in districts containing large Armenian populations.⁶³ At the same time, it is also important to consider the heavily intertwined political fates of the Kurdish and Armenian populations. As one British official noted in 1899, the Armenian question was “merging with the Kurdish question...”⁶⁴ an observation that would not be lost on the early Kurdish activists. Nevertheless, to consider the Hamidian regime’s policies towards the Kurds and their impact on Kurdish society solely through the lens of inter-communal relations would be a mistake. The sultan’s patronage of Kurdish tribal notables was motivated by objectives which went beyond simply ‘countering’ Armenian nationalism.

⁶⁰ S. V. Bedickian, *The Red Sultan’s Soliloquy* (Boston, MA: Sherman, French and Company, 1912), 17-18.

⁶¹ *Times* (30 March 1895).

⁶² See Reymond Kévorkian, “La formation des régiments de cavalerie Kurde Hamidié: Introduction”, *Revue d’Histoire Arménienne Contemporaine*, Vol. 1 (1995), 31-32; Astourian, “The Silence of the Land”, 63-65.

⁶³ Kodaman, *Şark Meselesi*, 47.

⁶⁴ FO 195/2059, Erzurum (5 January 1899).

The Sultan's Parallel State: Tribal Emirates and Sheikhdoms

In her monograph on the Hamidiye regiments, historian Janet Klein perceptively notes that, from its inception, the organisation possessed what she describes as a “manifold mission”.⁶⁵ This included countering Armenian militancy. However, it was also to be a mechanism through which the ‘barbaric’ Kurdish tribes could be introduced to Ottoman civilisation, a vehicle for their ‘ottomanisation’. Perhaps more importantly, it became a medium through which the sultan could distribute favour and patronage, which ensured that “not only were the interests of the enlisted tribes not in opposition to those of the government, but they became intimately connected, especially to one part of the Hamidian regime, namely the sultan himself and his supporters, chief among them Zeki Pasha”.⁶⁶ In many cases this involved protecting Hamidiye tribes from punishment when they engaged in violence against the Armenian populations. However, it was by no means the case that all Hamidiye commanders engaged in violence against Christians. Indeed, without doubt the most famous Hamidiye commander, Milli İbrahim Pasha (see below), became known for his benevolent attitude towards Christians, protecting many Armenians from Muslim gangs during the violence of the mid-1890s.⁶⁷ Moreover, in many instances, Hamidiye tribes received protection not from the allegations of Armenians or their supporters, but from accusations of wrongdoing emanating from both the Ottoman bureaucracy and the broader Muslim population. The overall result of this protection was that, through enrolment in the Hamidiye, tribal leaders

⁶⁵ See Klein, “Power in the Periphery”, 24-27.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 125-126.

⁶⁷ Joost Jongerden, “Elite Encounters of the Violent Kind: Milli İbrahim Paşa, Ziya Gökalp and Political Struggle in Diyarbakir at the turn of the 20th Century”, in Joost Jongerden and Jelle Verheij (eds.), *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbakir, 1870-1915* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 55-84.

were able to establish what Janet Klein termed ‘new tribal emirates,’⁶⁸ which lay beyond the control of the provincial authorities.

One such individual was Miranlı Mustafa Pasha, the paramount of the Miran tribe, a nomadic confederation which resided in the district of Cizre. Miranlı Mustafa Pasha (also known as ‘Musto Keçelo’)⁶⁹ was amongst the first wave of Kurdish tribal leaders to enrol in the Hamidiye, providing men and horses for two full regiments. The pasha’s enrolment in the Hamidiye allowed him to expand his wealth, power and authority rapidly. He eliminated rivals within his tribe, extorted tribute from villages, extracted tolls from merchants and travellers who crossed his territory and raided the holdings of his rivals.⁷⁰ His actions earned his tribe “an atrocious reputation for all kinds of villainy”.⁷¹ Yet the sultan took no action against him. Indeed, one British official noted that, despite numerous complaints from locals which had been corroborated by the governors of Diyarbakır and Mosul, the central government referred the issue to Zeki Pasha, who rejected them and “even strongly censure[d] the valis for complaints against Musto Pasha...”.⁷² Ebubekir Hazim Bey, who served as governor of Mosul province between 1899 and 1901, confirmed this picture, recounting an incident in which Mustafa Pasha had raided the Arab Gergeri tribe, a raid in which “a number of Arabs had been killed and many animals had been stolen...”. In response, Mosul’s governor sought the return of the animals but soon found his orders countermanded by Zeki Pasha,

⁶⁸ Klein, “Power in the Periphery”, 125.

⁶⁹ Musto Keçelo translates as ‘Musto the Bald’.

⁷⁰ For an account of Mustafa Pasha’s activities see Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structure of Kurdistan* (London: Zed, 1992), 186-187; Klein, *Power in the Periphery*, 126-147; Abdulsasır Yiner, “Miranlı Mustafa Paşa Örneğinde Hamidiye Alayları Askerî Gücünün Kötüye Kullanımı”, *History Studies*, Prof. Dr. Enver Konukçu Armağanı (2012), 449-464.

⁷¹ Mark Sykes, “The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire”, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 38, (1908), 460.

⁷² FO 424/202, Mosul (4 December 1900). Quoted in Klein, “Power in the Periphery”, 146.

who stated: “Mustafa Pasha is a loyal servant of the supreme sultanate. He would not commit such acts”.⁷³ Indeed, ultimately Miranlı Mustafa Pasha’s mastery of Cizre and its environs only ended upon his death during a tribal confrontation in 1902.⁷⁴

Other Kurdish Hamidiye commanders, however, proved to be far more successful in consolidating and securing their influence. Perhaps the most best known example of this was Milli İbrahim Pasha, the leader of the Milli confederation.⁷⁵ This large confederation had long constituted a significant political force in the southern districts of Diyarbakır province, although during the *Tanzimat* its influence was curtailed.⁷⁶ Through his enrolment in the Hamidiye and the patronage and support of the sultan and Zeki Pasha, Milli İbrahim Pasha was able to reassert the Milli’s dominance in the southern plains of Diyarbakır. From his tribe alone he raised six full regiments and was eventually able to bring some twenty raised from neighbouring tribes under his control.⁷⁷ Milli İbrahim Pasha and his family also received numerous decorations from the imperial palace.

⁷³ Ebubekir Hâzım Tepeyran, *Hatıralar* (Istanbul: Pera, 1998), 450.

⁷⁴ Yiner, “Miranlı Mustafa Paşa Örneğinde Hamidiye Alayları Askerî Gücünün Kötüye Kullanımı”, 463.

⁷⁵ The Milli confederation is also known as the ‘Mil’, ‘Millo’, ‘Milan’ or ‘Milanlı’.

⁷⁶ The Milli confederation is mentioned in Ottoman sources dating back to the sixteenth century. In the eighteenth century the Ottomans sought to settle the Milli tribes, which enjoyed a reputation as fierce raiders. The leaders of the tribes were recognised as heads of settlement (*iskân başı*). In the mid-eighteenth century Mahmud bin Keleş Evdo attempted to establish an autonomous emirate in the Habur valley. Although these efforts were thwarted, the Milli remained a major force in the districts around Mardin. Indeed, in the early 1830s the Milli tribe seized control of the town. Reşid Mehmed Pasha put an end to Milli rule in Mardin in 1835. See Ercan Gümüş, “XVI. Yüzyıldan XIX. Yüzyıl kadar Mardin İdaresinde Milli Aşireti ve Aşiretin Nüfuz Mücadeleleri”, in İbrahim Özcoşar and Hüseyin Güneş (eds.), *Uluslararası Mardin Tarihi Sempozyumu Bildirileri* (Istanbul: n.p., 2006), 815-829; Stephan Winter, “The Other ‘Nahdah’: The Bedirxans, the Millis and the Tribal Roots of Kurdish Nationalism in Syria”, *Oriente Moderno*, Year 25 (86), No. 3 (2006), 467-468. Aydın and Verhij, “Confusion in the Cauldron”, 28-31.

⁷⁷ Jongerden, “Elite Encounters of the Violent Kind”, 63. It should be noted that in a comparison of various lists of Hamidiye regiments, compiled between 1897 and 1904, the number of Hamidiye regiments drawn directly from the Milli tribe varies between four and six. See Klein, “Power in the Periphery”, 351-359.

In December 1902, Milli İbrahim Pasha was raised to the rank of brigadier-general (*mirliva*),⁷⁸ while his sons Abdülhamid, Mahmud and Timur all attained the rank of lieutenant-colonel (*kaymakam*) and were each given command of a regiment.⁷⁹ Even the pasha's wives received imperial recognition, with two members of his harem, Şemsi and Adile, receiving the Order of Compassion (*Şefkat Nisani*).⁸⁰ Such favour allowed Milli İbrahim Pasha to rapidly expand his influence and construct for himself a 'little empire' centred on his base of operations in the town of Viranşehir.⁸¹

Significantly, Milli İbrahim Pasha's domain was built largely at the expense of other elements of the region's Muslim populations. For example, in the spring of 1901 Milli İbrahim Pasha launched a particularly successful campaign against the predominantly Arab Şammar tribe.⁸² Yet, as Ebubekir Hazim Bey noted, despite protests from the governor of Diyarbakır, the pasha was shielded from arrest and prosecution by Zeki Pasha. Indeed, Hazim complained that, not only was nothing done, but the pasha's actions "did not do the slightest harm to his influence and the esteem in which he was held by Istanbul. On the contrary, with a force that grew day by day... he did as

⁷⁸ BOA İ.TAL 292 (4 December 1902).

⁷⁹ Jongerden, "Elite Encounters of the Violent Kind", 63.

⁸⁰ BOA İ.TAL 201/1320 (8 February 1900). In 1878 Sultan Abdülhamid II instituted the Order of Compassion (*Şefkat Nişanı*) as an award specifically for women. See İbrahim Artuk, "Nişan", *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 33 (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi Genel Müdürlüğü, 2007), 154-156.

⁸¹ Mark Sykes, who toured the region in the first decade of the twentieth century, described Milli İbrahim Pasha as "the most interesting person in Jazirah", noting that: "When he started life at ten years of age, his father was a prisoner in Diabakir, and he himself a penniless refugee in Egypt. He now stands out a brigadier-general in the Turkish army, master of fourteen thousand lancers and horsemen, the leader of twenty-two distinct tribes, and chief of the Milli Kurds... Ibrahim is a man with many enemies, his position requires him to be at constant war with his neighbours, the Arab and Kurdish tribes without his confederation long to see him killed..." Mark Sykes, "Journeys in North Mesopotamia", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (1907), 385-386.

⁸² See BOA Y.PRK.UM 53/93 (6 April 1901) and BOA DH.TMIK.M 102/10 (8 April 1901). Also see Tepeyran, *Hatıralar*, 441-450.

he pleased and lived like a king...”.⁸³ Küçük Said Pasha, who served as Sultan Abdülhamid II’s Grand Vizier a total of six times, made a similar observation. He described Milli İbrahim Pasha as a “soldier only in a superficial sense”, stating that he “oppressed the people [of Diyarbakır] and destroyed their sense of tranquillity”. He continued by recounting that this state of affairs resulted in numerous complaints from both the people and the governorship of Diyarbakır. Consequently, the Council of Ministers submitted a report to the sultan which recommended that the pasha “be brought before the courts. However, His Majesty did not accept this”.⁸⁴ Thus on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution Milli İbrahim Pasha remained one of the most powerful figures in Kurdistan.

However, it was not only Hamidiye commanders who received the patronage and protection of the sultan. In Kurdish-populated districts in which Hamidiye regiments were not established, such as in the province of Mosul, Sultan Abdülhamid II also sought Kurdish notable allies. This is evident in the rise of the Berzinci family of Süleymaniye. The Berzincis were an influential dynasty of Kadiriye Sufi sheikhs who had long dominated religious life in the former Baban capital.⁸⁵ However, following the ascension of Sultan Abdülhamid II to the throne, the Berzincis developed close relations with the palace, thanks to the high esteem in which the sultan held one particular member of the family, Sheikh Ahmed, better known as Kak Ahmed.⁸⁶ This close relationship was

⁸³ Tepeyran, *Hatıralar*, 450.

⁸⁴ Sait Paşa, *Sadrazam Sait Paşa Anılar* (Istanbul: Hür, 1977), 239-240. In this passage Said Pasha refers to the leader of the Milli tribe as Mustafa Pasha. He clearly confused Milli İbrahim Pasha’s name with that of Miranlı Mustafa Pasha.

⁸⁵ For example, following the founding of Süleymaniye in 1784, a member of the Berzinci family, Maruf Mode (1752-1838), was placed in charge of the town’s main mosque and library. He was also placed at the head of the Baban emirate’s religious hierarchy. See Halkawt Hakim, “Le Conflit entre la Qâdiriyya et la Naqshbandiyya dans le monde kurde au début du XIXe siècle”, *Journal of the History of Sufism*, Vol. 1-2 (2000), 154-155.

⁸⁶ According to Cecil J. Edmonds, a British officer who served in Süleymaniye following the Great War and who developed an intimate knowledge of the town’s history, Kak Ahmed earned a

capitalised upon by Kak Ahmed's grandson, Sheikh Said, who benefited greatly from the sultan's support. In the 1880s and 1890s, Sheikh Said established a vice-like hold on the city, setting up a network of spies, dominating the market, pursuing a vendetta with the Talabani sheikhs of Kirkuk and, through an alliance with the warlike Hamavand tribe,⁸⁷ seizing the goods of merchants who sought to pass through the region.⁸⁸ Yet the sultan avoided taking any decisive action against either Sheikh Said or his rivals in Kirkuk, constantly overriding efforts of Ottoman provincial officials and military officers to imprison or exile the sheikhs.⁸⁹ Ebubekir Hazim Bey complained bitterly about this state of affairs, noting that: "There were two Sufi sheikhs whom the sultan respected: Sheikh Ali Talabani in Kirkuk and Sheikh Said in Süleymaniye..." Thus, when the

reputation as a miracle worker and, upon the recommendation of the Governor of Baghdad, received an invitation to the imperial palace. Kak Ahmed declined the sultan's invitation, instead sending one of his famed talismans which were reputed to possess the power to deflect bullets. According to the story, the charm was tested successfully on a bullock, after which a handwritten letter, warning against putting the charm to such frivolous uses again in the future, miraculously appeared in the sultan's personal quarters. These minor miracles apparently convinced the sultan of the sheikh's mystical powers and he was awarded the income of five villages. See Cecil J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 75-76. The veracity of these events may be doubted but the outcome of the sultan's esteem for Kak Ahmed and his descendents deeply affected political life in Süleymaniye and its environs.

⁸⁷ Sykes described the Hamavand as "The most valiant, courageous and intelligent of the Baban Kurd tribes. Splendid horsemen, crack shots, capable smiths, bold robbers, [and] good agriculturists..." Sykes, "The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire", 456. Ely Banister Soane, another British official possessing an excellent knowledge of the Kurds, described them as having "made a name for themselves among their countrymen, outdoing the wildest in foolhardy raids, and the bravest in their disregard of any danger..." Ely Banister Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise: With Historical Notices of the Kurdish Tribes and the Chaldeans of Kurdistan* (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard and Company, 1914), 174.

⁸⁸ BOA Y.A.RES 35/14 (9 November 1886) in T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, *Musul-Kerkük ile İlgili Arşiv Belgeleri (1525-1919)* (Ankara: Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, 2010), 179-182. Also see Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise*, 187-191; Gökhan Çetinsaya, "II. Abdülhamid Döneminde Kuzey Irak'da Tarikat, Aşiret ve Siyaset", *Divan İlmî Araştırmalar*, No. 7 (1999), 155-158. Also see Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 74-86.

⁸⁹ For example, in January 1896, the sultan refused a request from Brigadier-General İsmail Pasha to remove the Berzincis from the region. See BOA Y.A.RES. 77/82 (20 January 1896) in T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, *Musul-Kerkük ile İlgili Arşiv Belgeleri*, 243-246.

governor sought to take action against them, the sultan refused, stating: “It is not appropriate to banish (*tenkil*) the sheikhs and grandees of Islam (*meşayih ve ekabir-i İslam*) upon the accusations of Armenians”.⁹⁰

Sheikh Said was able to further increase his control over the region following an audience with the sultan in 1901.⁹¹ According to an account from Rafiq Hilmi,⁹² the sultan invited Sheikh Said to Istanbul “in accordance with a special policy which he had adopted towards the Kurds...”. and was apparently greatly impressed by the sheikh. Thus he determined “to forge even closer ties with the family...”, lavishing gifts upon his entourage and providing Sheikh Said with a “secret communications code to be used in emergencies via the telegraph service”. Consequently, in the final years of the Hamidian era, Sheikh Said’s hold on Süleymaniye tightened, with “groups of minor civil servants... [becoming] totally subservient to the Sheikhs”, and the majority of the population following the sheikh’s “interest and requirements...”⁹³ Ely Banister Soane, a British military officer who visited the town shortly after the Constitutional Revolution, confirmed this picture, claiming that Sheikh Said, the sultan and ‘Arab’ İzzet Pasha⁹⁴ had formed a “ring for the exploitation of Sulaimania district, a combination whereby the trio became enriched...” And so, he went on to explain, the sheikh, “without being in any way responsible officially for Sulaimania, was free to crush the people and squeezing the province till there remained but himself and his family, enormously enriched, contemplating an exhausted and ruined town and country”.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Tepeyran, *Hatıralar*, 372.

⁹¹ FO 195/2096, Mosul (4 June 1901).

⁹² Rafiq Hilmi (1898-1960) was a native of Kirkuk and a contemporary and intimate of Sheikh Said’s son, Sheikh Mahmud (1878-1956).

⁹³ Rafiq Hilmi, *Yaddasht: Kurdistan at the Dawn of the Century* (Greenford: New Hope, 1998), 29-30.

⁹⁴ See footnote 27.

⁹⁵ Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise*, 188.

At first glance, the formation of ‘new tribal emirates’ or, in the case of Sheikh Said, a ‘petty sheikhdom’ was a return to an earlier political order in Kurdistan. Certainly, the political landscape in Kurdistan during the Hamidian period, at least superficially, resembled the ‘condominium’ which had formed the basis of Ottoman-Kurdish relations prior to the *Tanzimat*. Yet the Hamidian regime did not ‘roll back’ the apparatus of the bureaucratic state which the *Tanzimat* reforms had established; it merely shielded its Kurdish allies from the actions of Ottoman officials. For Sultan Abdülhamid II, modernisation and reform, including the creation of a standardised and hierarchical bureaucratic apparatus of state, were of secondary importance to the broader political goal of concentrating all executive power in the hands of the Sultan-Caliph. Furthermore, the sultan was wary of any potential threats to his unfettered authority, including those emanating from within the apparatus of the state. Hence, far from being a negation of *Tanzimat* centralisation, the patronage and empowerment of Kurdish notables was a manifestation of the Hamidian regime’s desire to maintain absolute authority, representing “a parallel system of control of the East, independent of the regular bureaucracy and army, whom he [the sultan] did not fully trust”.⁹⁶

Voices of Opposition: Hacı Kadir-i Koyi and Kurdish Nationalism

In assessing the Hamidian era, Kurdish *homme de lettres* Kendal Nazan once remarked of the Hamidian period that: “Abdulhamid’s Kurdish policy was crowned with success. Shaikh Obeidullah’s was the last major insurrection...”. He went on to conclude that “Kurdish nationalism, which could easily have flourished during this period, remained confined to a few intellectual circles. People themselves blamed their woes not on the ‘good and pious Baba Hamid’ but on the

⁹⁶Martin van Bruinessen, “Kurds, States, and Tribes”, in Faleh Jabar and Hosham Dawod (eds.), *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East* (London: Saqi, 2002), 174. This observation was made regarding the Hamidiye regiments. However, the same rationale would most certainly apply to the sultan’s support for Sheikh Said.

worthless officials who failed to carry out his orders”.⁹⁷ In many ways, Nazan’s remarks, which carry an unmistakable sense of bitterness, contain an element of truth. Considering the pervasiveness of violence in Kurdistan during the Hamidian era, it would be erroneous to claim that the regime put an end to the unruliness of the Kurdish tribes. Yet, between the end of the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt and the outbreak of the Constitutional Revolution, Kurdish lawlessness did not coalesce into a movement that might challenge the sultan’s authority over Kurdistan. Indeed, while many Westerners and Armenians referred to Sultan Abdülhamid II as ‘the Red Sultan’ or ‘Abdul the Damned’, to many Kurds, especially those who had benefited from his patronage, he was affectionately known as ‘Father of the Kurds (*Bavê Kurdan*)’.⁹⁸

However, this success was a qualified one. As noted in the previous chapter, many urban notables (*eşraf*) in Kurdistan had, in fact, benefited from the *Tanzimat* reforms as they provided new career opportunities in addition to, more generally, enhancing the economic and political significance of Kurdistan’s urban centres. Thus the Hamidian regime’s empowerment of tribal elites, whose bases of power were located in more rural districts, was the cause of much resentment. For example, in Süleymaniye the Berzincis raised opposition amongst “the merchant and trader classes... [who] were secretly trying to undermine them and their influence”.⁹⁹ In Diyarbakır, perhaps the most significant urban centre in Kurdistan, opposition to the Hamidian order amongst the town’s Muslim elite was also keenly felt. In a letter published in the newspaper *Kürdistan* (see below) in April 1899, an individual claiming to be “from amongst the notables of Diyarbakır (*ji Eşrafên Dîyarbêkrê*)” accused the regime of maladministration, noting that: “Whether they are a provincial

⁹⁷ Kendal [Nazan], “The Kurds under the Ottoman Empire”, 26.

⁹⁸ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 186.

⁹⁹ Hilmi, *Yaddasht*, 30.

governor (*walî*), county governor (*qaîmmeqam*) or district prefect (*mudîr*), all those officials sent [to govern] us are oppressors and without a sense of justice; they are ruining Kurdistan”.¹⁰⁰

However, it was the predations of the sultan’s favourite, Milli İbrahim Pasha, which most antagonised Diyarbakır’s urban elites. By 1900 the pasha’s influence was expanding northward towards the provincial capital, allowing him to extract tribute from villages owned by the notable classes.¹⁰¹ In 1905 discontent in the town exploded into protest, when a group of local dignitaries led by Piriñçizade Arif¹⁰² occupied the town’s telegraph office demanding that the pasha be brought to justice. The failure of the government to take action resulted in another round of protests in the winter of 1907, during which the telegraph office was again occupied and demands for the arrest of Milli İbrahim Pasha were made.¹⁰³ Still, while opposition to the Hamidian order in Kurdistan amongst certain elements of the Kurdish population was significant, it could hardly be described as nationalistic, with the demands of protestors being largely shaped by parochial economic and political struggles.

Nonetheless, not all Kurdish voices raised in opposition to the Ottoman administration during the Hamidian era were without nationalistic implications. One of the most interesting of these is that of Hacı Kadir-i Koyi (Hacî Qadir-î Koyî), a Kurdish religious scholar and poet. Koyi was born in

¹⁰⁰ Ş.M, “Kaxidek e jî Kurdistanê Hatî” *Kürdistan* (1 April 1899)

¹⁰¹ Jongerden, “Elite Encounters of the Violent Kind”, 75; Klein, “Power in the Periphery”, 200.

¹⁰² Piriñçizade Arif was the editor of *Diyarbakır*, the provincial gazette. He later became a successful businessman and landowner and served in numerous capacities in the provincial administration, including as a member of the provincial council, chairman of the directorate of public works and trade and as a member of the appellate court. See Joost Jongerden, *The Settlement Issue in Turkey and the Kurds: An Analysis of Spatial Policies, Modernity and War* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 248.

¹⁰³ Jongerden, “Elite Encounters of the Violent Kind”, 76-77; Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 106-107. Also see BOA Y.PRK.ASK (3 December 1907) and BOA Y.MTV (4 December 1907).

the village of Qoreqerac (Gorqaraj) near the small town of Koysancak (Koya) in present-day Iraqi Kurdistan some time during the second decade of the nineteenth century. He received a religious education in various madrasas located in Kurdish-inhabited regions of both the Ottoman Empire (Koysanack, Erbil, Hoşnav and Süleymaniye) and Iran (Sardasht, Sabilagh and Ushnuviya), eventually becoming an expert on Islamic jurisprudence (*fakih*). It seems he spent the majority of his life in Kurdistan and was most certainly an eye-witness to the changes visited upon the region by the *Tanzimat* reforms. Then, most likely during the 1870s, he left his homeland and took up residence in Istanbul, where he served as a tutor to the Bedirhans.¹⁰⁴ Scholars of Kurdish literature have placed Koyi's work within the so-called 'Nali School',¹⁰⁵ a literary movement which developed in the Süleymaniye region during the nineteenth century. The poets of the 'Nali School' who wrote in the Soranî/Babanî dialect of Kurdish initially flourished thanks to the patronage of the Baban emirs,¹⁰⁶ although despite the fall of the Babans, Soranî- language poetry continued to thrive throughout the nineteenth century, primarily in Kirkuk and Iranian Kurdistan.¹⁰⁷ Some sections of Koyi's oeuvre were composed during the 1880s and 1890s, while he was in Istanbul.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Qanatê Kurdo, *Tarîxa Edebyeta Kurdi*, Vol. 2 (Stockholm: Wêşanên Roja Nû, 1985), 18-19; Halkawt Hakim, "Le nationalism de poète Koyî (1817-1897)", *Confluences Méditerranée*, No. 34 (2000), 22-23; Also see Farhad Shakely, "Hâjî Qâdir-î Koyî Part II: From Political Agitation to a Modern and Rational Nationalism", *Kurdish Globe* (7 February 2010).

¹⁰⁵ The 'Nali School' is also sometimes referred to as the 'Southern Kirmancî School'.

¹⁰⁶ Sheikh Nali (Sheikh Kadir Ahmed Şeveysi), the poet after whom the movement was named, had been an influential figure in the court of Babanlı Ahmed Pasha, following him into exile after his removal from power. Kurdo, *Tarîxa Edebyeta Kurdi*, Vol. 2, 5-6.

¹⁰⁷ See Philip G. Kreyenbroek, 'Kurdish Written Literature', *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 2005, available at <http://www.iranica.com/articles/kurdish-written-literature> (accessed on 22nd November 2013).

¹⁰⁸ Although the precise dating of specific poems in Koyi's body of work is extremely difficult, he references specific historical events such as the independence of the Balkan nations (1878), the Mehdist Revolt in Sudan (1881-1899), the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the construction of the Eiffel Tower (1889).

Although a man from a conservative religious background, Koyi was clearly impressed by the achievements of ‘modern’ civilisation. He paid tribute to the miracles of Europeans who had raised the Eiffel Tower “into the heavens”, and who increased their vocabulary ever year by “one hundred and fifty words a year, to name [new] arts and sciences”. This admiration is not restricted to the Europeans. Like many Ottoman subjects, Koyi was greatly impressed by the success of the Japanese in adapting the European dominated global order.¹⁰⁹ He celebrated the accomplishments of the Japanese people, describing them as the possessors of “science and arts” and a nation of barely forty million who had struck down the Chinese, a people which “reporters and writers say number four hundred million”.¹¹⁰ At the same time, Koyi contrasted the achievements of other peoples with the backwardness of his own people. In a number of his works he criticised his community for their lack of solidarity.¹¹¹ He also complained about the underdevelopment of the written idiom in Kurdish, lamenting:

If only books and records and histories and letters,
Were written in the Kurdish language.
Then our mollas and scholars, our princes and emperors,
Would remain famous, for ever known and distinguished.¹¹²

At the same time, he censured the Kurdish *ulema*, “both great and small”, who had not “read two words in Kurdish”.¹¹³ In particular, he singled out the Sufi orders, which had come to dominate Kurdistan in the second half of the nineteenth century, for condemnation. He described them as

¹⁰⁹ On Ottoman perceptions of Japan see Renée Woringen, *Ottomans Imagining Japan: East, Middle East, and Non-Western Modernity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). 111-218.

¹¹⁰ Hacî Qadir-î Koyî, *Dîwan-î Hacî Qadir-î Koyî* (Stockholm: Nefel, 2004), 104-108.

¹¹¹ See Ibid, 113 and 156.

¹¹² Ibid, 60.

¹¹³ Ibid, 156.

“teaching laziness”, being interested only in “collecting treasure and lands” and busying themselves with “symbolism, coyness and wishing... while the science of Europe has reached the impossible”.¹¹⁴

In addition to attacking Kurdistan’s powerful Sufi brotherhoods, Koyi also idealised the pre-*Tanzimat* political order. In a work entitled ‘The Land of Cizre and Bohtan (*Xak-î Cizîr û Bohtan*)’ he mourned the passing of the emirates.

Where is the governor of Sanandej and the heir apparent of
Rawanduz?

Where are the rulers of Baban, the emir of Cizre and Bohtan?

[...]

Where are the times when Kurds were free and
independent?¹¹⁵

In his poem ‘The Rulers and Emirs of Kurdistan’ (*Hakim û Mîrekan-î Kurdistan*) Koyi praised all the Kurdish emirs, “from Bohtan to Baban”, who were the protectors of Islamic law and the “seyyids and sheikhs” of the “people and nation (*qewm û millet*)”.¹¹⁶ Such nostalgia for the past can be found in the works of other Soranî-language poets of the second half of the nineteenth century.¹¹⁷ Indeed, it seems to have been a not uncommon sentiment in broader Kurdish society.

Writing in 1885, one British official observed that “... the good old times of the Kurdish Begg are

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 104.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 11.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 124.

¹¹⁷ For example, Koyi’s contemporary and fellow Soranî-language poet Sheikh Rıza Talabani (1842-1910) wrote a panegyric dedicated to the Babans entitled: “When Süleymaniye the capital of the Babans (*Sulaimanî ke darulmilk-î Baban*)”. In it he wrote: “I remember Süleymaniye when it was the domain of the Babans,/ It was neither subject to the Iranians (*Acem*) nor slave-driven by the House of Osman... Alas for that time, that epoch, that age,/ When the jousting-ground was the plain of *Kanî-yî Askan* [A district in Süleymaniye].” This translation belongs largely to Edmonds. See Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, 57-58; Also see Sêx Reza-yî Talebanî, *Diwan-î Sêx Reza-î Talebanî* (Stockholm: Nefel, 2004), 107. On Sheikh Rıza Talabani see Kurdo, *Tarîxa Edebyeta Kurdi*, Vol. 2, 23-24.

not only spoken of, but are fresh in the memory of every middle-aged man, and though the form of government has disappeared, the habits, customs and associations remain".¹¹⁸ Similarly, in 1900 a British official who conducted a tour to the regions south of Lake Van reported that the Kurds in the region made constant reference to the government of Bedirhan Bey.¹¹⁹

However, this affection for the days of the emirates was essentially backward-looking and is perhaps best understood as an echo of the dynastic loyalty which the emirates had generated. In contrast, Koyi, who used vocabulary such as *millet* (nation), *qewm* (people/race/ethnicity) and *welat* (homeland)¹²⁰ in a very modern sense, seems to have reinterpreted the age of Kurdish emirates as a 'golden age' of *national* self-rule. Even more indicative of his nationalist world view were his urgings to the Kurds to heed the examples of other 'nations' which had shaken off a foreign yoke:

Just yesterday the people of Sudan stood up like lions,
Now they are independent, the envy of all the world,
Bulgarians and Serbs and Greeks, also Armenians¹²¹ and
Montenegrins,
All five do not number as many as the Baban,
Each one is independent, each and all are states,
Possessors of armies and banners, generals and field staffs.¹²²

It is striking that Koyi drew inspiration from not only the Muslim Sudanese, but also Christian nations that had won their independence from the Muslim Ottomans. In this regard, Koyi's perception of the Armenians is extremely interesting. In the opening section of 'The Land of Cizre

¹¹⁸ FO 424/169, Erzurum (19 January 1885). Quoted in Duguid, "Politics of Unity", 145

¹¹⁹ FO 195/2082, Van (16 September 1900).

¹²⁰ See Koyi, *Diwan*, 83, 90 and 97.

¹²¹ This statement was most certainly rhetorical, as the Armenians had not established a nation-state at the time Koyi was writing.

¹²² Koyi, *Diwan*, 85.

and Bohtan' Koyi seems to allude to the inter-communal violence of the mid-1890s, and warns Kurds of the slogan: "Long live Armenia and down with the Kurds...".¹²³ Yet it is clear that, although he regarded the Armenians as rivals, he also saw them as exemplars, writing:

It is the right of the Armenians [to independence?]; they do
good deeds,
They are not like us, making claim on each other with swords.
For the science of war and industry, for the bonding of the
nation,
They send their young and old to Europe.¹²⁴

Evidently the unity and purpose he perceived the Armenians as possessing was something he wished the Kurds to emulate.

As a Kurd writing at a time when the Kurds might well be regarded as one of the groups most favoured by the Ottoman government, Koyi is somewhat of an idiosyncratic figure. In certain respects, his criticism of Kurdistan's religious establishment, his admiration for Christian nations and, above all, his advocacy of an independent Kurdish nation state mark him out as a radical. Yet in other ways he might be regarded as conservative. His critique of the sheikhs was partly based on his belief that they had usurped the power of the true leaders of the Kurdish 'nation', the emirs. Koyi's Kurdistan was a hierarchical one. His vision of independence was to be realised in the form of a national kingdom and, most likely, he looked to his patrons, the Bedirhans, to provide Kurdistan with its king. The source of Koyi's peculiar understanding of nationalism might be located in his social and intellectual origins. He had witnessed the fall of the Kurdish emirates at first hand, a process which had meant the loss of an important source of patronage for his work. This helps explain not only his idealisation of the pre-*Tanzimat* political order but his advocacy

¹²³ Ibid, 83.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 85-86.

for Kurdish national independence. Koyi, who had been exposed to newfangled ideas such as nationalism during his residence in the imperial capital, may well have seen in the establishment of a Kurdish national kingdom an alternative source of patronage for Kurdish-language writers such as himself.

Koyi died in Istanbul in 1897. However, although his dream of Kurdish independence remained marginal, he was far from being the only Kurd to take an interest in the ‘national question’. Only a year after his death, two of his students, the brothers Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan and Abdurrahman Bedirhan, would publish the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kürdistan*. *Kürdistan*’s editors eulogised Koyi.¹²⁵ Yet while the Bedirhan brothers shared Koyi’s concerns regarding the ‘backwardness’ of Kurdish society, they would reject Kurdish separatism. Indeed, even though *Kürdistan* would take a strong editorial line against the administration of Sultan Abdülhamid II, the newspaper’s contributors would regard the fate of the Kurds as inseparable from that of the broader Ottoman community. This stance can be accounted for by the close relationship between the nascent caste of Kurdish intellectuals and professionals, of whom the Bedirhan brothers were members, and the Ottoman state.

The ‘Ottoman Kurdish’ Elite and the Struggle against Autocracy: Young Turks and Young Kurds

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the reforms of the *Tanzimat* had given rise to a caste of Muslim professionals and intellectuals, individuals who had been schooled in the empire’s reformed education system and who, by and large, found employment in the ever-expanding bureaucratic apparatus of the Ottoman state. It was as an integral part of this new Ottoman governing class that the new Kurdish professional and intellectual elite was formed. One important

¹²⁵ Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, “Untitled”, *Kürdistan* (19 May 1898).

aspect of these new elites was that they often overlapped with Kurdistan's traditional notable classes. There was, of course, a certain degree of diversity. Some hailed from relatively modest origins. Dr Abdullah Cevdet, who would come to play a significant role in both Ottoman and Kurdish affairs, was the son of a minor Ottoman military official.¹²⁶ Dr Şükrü Mehmed Sekban, another important figure in the Kurdish intellectual milieu, was the son of a second lieutenant in the Ottoman army.¹²⁷ The lawyer (and later journalist) Mevlanzade Rıfat was the son of Abdurrahman Nacim, a respected librarian who hailed from one of Süleymaniye's sheikhly dynasties.¹²⁸ Others had far more prestigious origins, most notably members of the Bedirhan and Baban families whom Sultan Abdülhamid II had deliberately sought to integrate into the empire's governing classes. Nevertheless, although some possessed strong claims to leadership over Kurdish society by virtue of their notable lineages, the defining feature of these new elites was that they derived social and political influence *primarily* from their links to the reformed Ottoman bureaucracy and/or their participation in broader Ottoman imperial politics.

One of the important characteristics of these new elites was that they often had formative experiences which set them apart from daily life in the empire's Kurdish-inhabited provinces. Many had spent most or, in some cases, all of their lives outside Kurdistan, studying at elite institutions in Istanbul and enjoying careers in the Ottoman bureaucracy. Both Dr Abdullah Cevdet and Dr Şükrü Mehmed Sekban, although of provincial origins,¹²⁹ completed their education in the empire's institutes of higher learning in Istanbul and, after graduating, entered government service.

¹²⁶ Şükrü Hanioglu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi* (Istanbul: Üçdal, 1983), 5.

¹²⁷ Şükrü Mehmet Sekban, *Kürt Sorunu* (Istanbul: Kamer, 1998), 11.

¹²⁸ Ali Birinci, "Abdurrahman Nacim", *Müteferrika*, No. 8-9 (1996), 109-166.

¹²⁹ Dr Abdullah Cevdet was born in the town of Arapkir, while Dr Şükrü Mehmed Sekban was born in the town of Ergani.

Mevlânzade Rifat was born in the Istanbul suburb of Küçükçekmece and, after studying at the Imperial College of Law, entered the Ottoman bureaucracy.¹³⁰ The Ottoman diplomat Mehmed Şerif Paşa was also born in Istanbul, studying both at the Imperial High school at Galatasaray and at Saint-Cyr military academy in France.¹³¹ The founders of the newspaper *Kürdistan*, Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan and Abdurrahman Bedirhan, had similar formative experiences. The former was born in Crete, educated in Istanbul at the Üsküdar Military High School and later the Imperial High School, going on to pursue a career in the empire's civil court system.¹³² The latter was born in Damascus and was also an alumnus of the Imperial High School. After graduation he too entered Ottoman officialdom, serving as chief secretary in the ministry of education's department for the administration of high schools.¹³³

The socialisation of these Kurdish professionals in the empire's 'westernised' educational and bureaucratic institutions also meant that many possessed philosophical outlooks very different from the Kurdish majority. Dr Abdullah Cevdet, for instance, was an outspoken supporter of not simply modernisation but complete 'westernisation'.¹³⁴ Mevlânzade Rifat also held views that would scandalise conservative Kurdish society, becoming an advocate of female emancipation and gender equality.¹³⁵ Differences between these elites and mainstream Kurdish society also extended

¹³⁰ Murat Issı, "Hürriyet Âşığı Bir Osmanlı-Kürt Aydını Mevlânzâde Rifat Bey", *Toplumsal Tarih*, No. 196 (2010), 72; Ali Birinci, "Tarihin Gölgesinde Meşahir-i Meçhuleden Birkaç Zat (Istanbul: Dergâh, 2001), 381.

¹³¹ Alakom, *Şerif Paşa*, 15. Ali Birinci, "Şerif Paşa, Mehmed", 1.

¹³² Malmîsanij, *İlk Kürt Gazetesi Kurdistan'ı yayımlayan Abdurrahman Bedirhan* (Istanbul: Vate, 2009), 107-113.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 11. Also see Abdurrahman Bedirhan, "Sultan Abdülhamid-i Sani Hazretlerine", *Kürdistan* (14 December 1900).

¹³⁴ See Ramazan Uçar, "Abdullah Cevdet'in Batı Medeniyeti ve Batılılaşma Anlayışı", *Toplum Bilimleri Dergisi*, No. 5 (2011), 7-30: Also see Hanioglu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, 182-193.

¹³⁵ See Mithat Kutlar, *Nuriye Ulviye Mevlan ve 'Kadın Dünyası'nda Kürtler* (Istanbul: Avesta, 2010), 77-83.

into their private lives. For example, both Abdurrahman Bedirhan and Abdürrezzak Bedirhan married educated European women and lived personal lives that would not have been unfamiliar to a contemporary bourgeois of Paris or London.¹³⁶ Indeed, Mehmed Şerif Pasha became well-known in European circles as a *bon vivant*, earning himself the sobriquet ‘Beau Cherif’. As Hasan Arfa, the son of an Iranian diplomat, put it, he was “easy-going, fond of champagne, night clubs and the good life in general, and appeared to have plenty of money to procure for himself what he wanted”.¹³⁷ It is, of course, necessary to avoid over-generalisations. These new elites also contained more conservative elements. The renowned Islamist reformer, Said-i Kürdi, who would play an important role in both Kurdish and Ottoman intellectual life, was a product of Kurdistan’s traditional network of madrasas.¹³⁸ Similarly, Sheikh Ubeydullah’s son, Sheikh Abdülkadir Efendi, who served as a religious functionary in the capital following the end of his father’s revolt, was a more conservative individual with stronger connections to ‘traditional’ Kurdish society.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, in general terms this new social and political elite represented the most ‘ottomanised’ elements of Kurdish society, constituting a peculiarly *Ottoman* Kurdish elite.

Considering the ‘ottomanised’ nature of these elites and, more generally, the privileged position of the Kurds in the Hamidian political order, the anti-regime stance taken in *Kürdistan* should not be regarded, as the scholar Joyce Blau once claimed, as the “crystallisation” of a desire for “emancipation” from the Turkish yoke.¹⁴⁰ While certain members of the Ottoman Kurdish elite

¹³⁶ Malmîsanij, *İlk Kürt Gazetesi Kurdistan’ı yayımlayan Abdurrahman Bedirhan*, 23-25.

¹³⁷ Hasan Arfa, *The Kurds: A Historical and Political Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 31.

¹³⁸ Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press: 1989), 65-82.

¹³⁹ Şükrü Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 85.

¹⁴⁰ Joyce Blau, *Le problème kurde* (Brussels: Centre pour l’étude des problèmes du monde musulman contemporain, 1963), 30.

were anxious about the condition of their ‘nation’, the issue of ‘national oppression’ was hardly a major concern, especially for privileged individuals such as the Bedirhan brothers. Instead, the source of this ‘Kurdish’ opposition should be located within the context of the opposition that developed in response to Sultan Abdühamid II’s suspension of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876 and his efforts to rule as an autocrat, the so-called ‘Young Turk’ movement.

Despite its name, which reflected European rather than Ottoman perceptions, the term ‘Young Turks’ came to encompass an array of opposition groups that included Ottoman subjects from various social origins and a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. As it was for both the statesmen of the *Tanzimat* and Sultan Abdülhamid II, the central question for the movement was, as the eminent historian Tarık Zafer Tunaya phrased it: “How can this state be saved? (*Bu devlet nasıl kurtarılabilir?*)”¹⁴¹ The answer for the various factions within the Young Turk movement, the most significant of which was the *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (Society for Union and Progress), known in the West as the ‘Committee of Union and Progress’ (hereafter, CUP),¹⁴² was the overthrow of the autocracy and the restoration of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876. Such a revolution, they believed, would lay the foundations for a rejuvenated Ottoman polity. This new order, based upon meritocratic principles and the rule of law, would do away with the corruption and cronyism of the Hamidian regime and strengthen the empire against the threats presented both by internal discord and Western imperialism.

There was, of course, significant disagreement amongst the members of the constitutionalist opposition regarding the means by which these goals could be achieved. This was particularly evident regarding the question of soliciting foreign support to secure the sultan’s removal from

¹⁴¹ Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Hürriyet’in İlanı* (Istanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2004), 51-53.

¹⁴² On the early development of the CUP see Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 71-172.

office. These tensions came to a head during the 1902 Congress of Ottoman Liberals (*Ahrar-ı Osmaniye Kongresi*), held in Paris, and resulted in a major split within the CUP between Prince Sabahaddin's¹⁴³ 'decentralist' faction and Ahmed Rıza Bey's¹⁴⁴ 'centralist' faction.¹⁴⁵ It has been observed that some elements of the movement, especially those associated with Ahmed Rıza Bey, showed an inclination towards 'Turkist' political ideals.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, even within the centralist faction, which would be the main force behind the constitutional revolution, the Turkist proclivities of some of the movement's leaders were of secondary importance to the fulfilment of "their supreme goal: the salvation of the empire".¹⁴⁷ Ultimately, at least in public, all factions rallied around the principle of 'the unity of elements' (*ittihad-ı anasır*),¹⁴⁸ the profoundly Ottomanist idea that a constitutional empire could provide a framework within which the various ethnic and religious communities residing in the sultan's vast domains could live in harmony.

The 'Ottomanist' objectives of the 'Young Turks' proved attractive to those Kurds whose material and political interests were linked to the Ottoman state but who chafed under the sultan's autocratic rule. Indeed, members of the Ottoman Kurdish elite played a significant role in the formation and development of the constitutionalist movement. The initial opposition cell from which the CUP

¹⁴³ Prince Sabahaddin was a nephew of Sultan Abdülhamid II. Despite being a member of the Ottoman dynasty, he fled the empire in 1899, becoming an active member of the liberal opposition. Following the Paris Congress, he organised his followers into the Society for Private Initiative and Decentralisation (*Teşebbüs-i Şahsi ve Adem-i Merkeziyet Cemiyeti*).

¹⁴⁴ Ahmed Rıza Bey was an ardent positivist, a long-time opponent of the regime and the *de facto* leader of the Young Turk movement in Europe. Following the Paris Congress, he organised his supporters into the Committee for Progress and Union (*Terakki ve İttihad Cemiyeti*). In 1907 this group merged with the Ottoman Freedom Society (*Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti*), an opposition group founded by Ottoman officials stationed in the Balkans.

¹⁴⁵ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 173-199.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 208-209.

¹⁴⁷ Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 296.

¹⁴⁸ The term *unsur/anasır* (element/elements) was frequently used in late Ottoman political discourse to refer to the different 'ethnic' or 'religious' community within the empire.

grew, established in 1889 by four students at the Imperial Medical School in Istanbul, included two Kurds, Dr Abdullah Cevdet and Dr İshak Sükuti.¹⁴⁹ Dr Abdullah Cevdet in particular was to become an influential opposition figure, publishing opposition newspapers such as *Osmanlı* (The Ottoman) and *İçtihad* (Conviction), whilst in exile.¹⁵⁰

As the opposition to the regime gained momentum, other Kurds became involved. For example, in 1896 Mevlanzade Rıfat was convicted of holding anti-regime views.¹⁵¹ The ranks of these ‘Young Kurds’ also came to include individuals who had enjoyed considerable patronage from the sultan. Mehmed Şerif Pasha, while representing the Ottoman government in Sweden, secretly provided financial support to Young Turk exiles.¹⁵² Sheikh Abdülkadir Efendi became a member of the CUP’s Istanbul branch and was exiled to the Hejaz following his involvement in an abortive coup attempt in 1896.¹⁵³ Some members of the Bedirhan clan, long before the family’s dramatic fall from grace in 1906, also joined the struggle against the regime. For example, Osman Bedirhan and Mahmud Bedirhan fled to British-administered Egypt, becoming members of the CUP’s Egyptian branch.¹⁵⁴ *Kürdistan*’s founders Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan and Abdurrahman Bedirhan also left the empire to become opposition activists. Abdurrahman Bey, in particular, was an active member of the ‘Young Turk’ movement, attending the 1902 Congress of Ottoman Liberals along with another Kurd, Hikmet Baban.¹⁵⁵ Therefore when examining the ways in which the writers in

¹⁴⁹ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 71.

¹⁵⁰ Hanioglu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, 29-127.

¹⁵¹ Issi, “Hürriyet Âşığı Bir Osmanlı-Kürt Aydını Mevlanzâde Rıfat Bey”, 73.

¹⁵² Ahmed Rıza, *Ahmed Rıza Bey’in Anıları* (Istanbul: Araba, 1988), 19; Alakom, *Şerif Paşa*, 34-37.

¹⁵³ Yuriy Petrosyan, *Sovyet Gözüyle Jön Türkler* (Ankara: Bilgi, 1974), 200-201; Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 86; Sina Akşin, *Jöntürk ve İttihat ve Terakki* (Istanbul: Remzi, 1987), 29-30.

¹⁵⁴ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 163-164.

¹⁵⁵ Malmîsanij, *İlk Kürt Gazetesi Kurdistan’ı yayımlayan Abdurrahman Bedirhan*, 14; Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 192-193.

Kürdistan understood the ‘Kurdish question’, one must be cognisant of the fact that the newspaper reflected a ‘pro-Kurdish’ trend within the CUP rather than a separate political movement.

The First Kurdish Newspaper: Education, Leadership and Despotism

The first edition of *Kürdistan* was issued on 21 April 1898 and it continued to appear at intermittent intervals between 1898 and 1902. Its first editor was Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, but from the sixth issue onwards this position was taken over by his younger brother Abdurrahman Bedirhan. Although initially *Kürdistan* featured articles only in the Kirmancî dialect of Kurdish, after the fourth issue it also included articles in Ottoman Turkish. The first five issues were published in Cairo, but subsequently the publication of *Kürdistan* was moved successively to Geneva, London and Folkestone. It is unclear whether Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan undertook the publication of *Kürdistan* on a personal initiative or at the request of the CUP. However, after the editorship passed to Abdurrahman Bey, the CUP connection became more explicit, with Dr Abdullah Cevdet, who ran an opposition printing press in Geneva, providing both moral and material support for the newspaper’s publication.¹⁵⁶ During the Congress of Ottoman Liberals, which is reported on in *Kürdistan*’s final issue,¹⁵⁷ Abdurrahman Bedirhan sided with Ahmed Rıza’s centralist faction. A commitment to continue the publication of *Kürdistan* was apparently made but came to nothing.¹⁵⁸ In 1905 Abdurrahman Bedirhan received a royal pardon and returned to the empire, putting an indefinite hold on any hopes he had for reviving his newspaper.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Malmîsanij, *Kürt Milliyetçiliği ve Dr. Abdullah Cevdet*, 15; Fatih Ünal, “II. Meşrutiyet, Ulusçuluk ve Kürt Ayrılıkçı Hareketi”, *Doğu Batı*, No. 46 (2008), 70-73.

¹⁵⁷ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Ahrar-ı Osmaniye Kongresi”, *Kürdistan* (14 April 1902).

¹⁵⁸ Hanioglu, *Preparation for Revolution*, p. 29.

¹⁵⁹ Malmîsanij, *İlk Kürt Gazetesi Kurdistan’ı yayımlayan Abdurrahman Bedirhan*, 36. However, Abdurrahman Bedirhan was deported to Tripolitania along with the rest of his family in 1906.

Kürdistan was no doubt read by a small circle of Ottoman political exiles in Europe and Egypt, especially after it started to include articles in Ottoman Turkish. Furthermore, although the Ottoman authorities quickly attempted to prohibit the newspaper's dissemination within the Empire,¹⁶⁰ it seems that some copies were smuggled into imperial territories. The newspaper itself carried a notice in each issue stating that a certain number of copies, which ranged between 200 and 2000 depending on the issue, were distributed free of charge in Kurdistan. *Kürdistan* also published letters from readers. For instance, the third issue included a letter thanking the publisher for producing a Kurdish newspaper, from a certain 'N.H of Damascus' who stated that he had come across a copy in the city, while the fifth issue published a letter from Seyyid Tahirê Botî of Adana.¹⁶¹ *Kürdistan* also published letters from readers residing within Ottoman Kurdistan, including Mardin and Diyarbakır.¹⁶² Ottoman documents confirm that the newspaper reached Ottoman Kurdistan. For instance, in a communication from the provincial authorities in Bitlis to the Ministry of the Interior, it was noted that the paper had been distributed to pilgrims returning to the Empire via Suez and Alexandria.¹⁶³ Even so, it is difficult to assess how wide the readership was within the empire in general and the Kurdish populated provinces in particular.

Like other educated elements of Ottoman society, regardless of ethnic or religious background, these 'Young Kurds' were eager to promote modern education and learning, which they saw as the surest path to social progress, amongst their compatriots. Indeed, the issue of education was one of the areas in which there was little difference between the attitude of the Hamidian regime

¹⁶⁰ BOA İ.MTZ 30/1685 (30 April 1898).

¹⁶¹ See N.H, "Teqrîz jî Şamê Hatîye", *Kürdistan* (19 May 1898). Also see Seyyid Tahirê Botî, "Jibo Cerîdeya Kurdistanê", *Kürdistan* (16 June 1898).

¹⁶² For example see "Kaxizeke Erebi, ji Ulemayên Mardînê Alimek Xweyfedl û Kerem Rêkirîye", *Kürdistan* (30 November 1898); Also see Ş.M, "Kaxidek e jî Kurdistanê Hatî", *Kürdistan* (1 April 1899).

¹⁶³ BOA DH.MKT 2473/105 (17 April 1901).

and its opponents. Hence, in certain respects, *Kürdistan* functioned as an educational journal, seeking to promote learning amongst the Kurds, in particular regarding their culture and history. This ‘enlightening’ mission was very much evident from the newspaper’s subtitle, which described its mission as being “to encourage the awaking and study of arts amongst the Kurds”.¹⁶⁴ Under the editorship of Abdurrahman Bey this was changed to encouraging “scientific and artistic education amongst the Kurds...”.¹⁶⁵ *Kürdistan*’s contributors displayed a deep concern regarding the lack of education amongst the Kurds. Abdurrahman Bey lamented that the “Kurds know nothing of the history of Kurdistan...”,¹⁶⁶ while a letter published in the paper pointed out that Kurds were “in their manner [behaviour] an excellent specimen of humanity; they are courageous, they are gallant... [Yet] their shortfall is in science and knowhow”.¹⁶⁷

Consequently *Kürdistan* provided a forum for the publication of articles pertaining to Kurdish language and culture. It serialised Ahmed-i Hani’s seventeenth-century narrative poem *Mem û Zîn*,¹⁶⁸ as well as publishing a biography of the Kurdo-Islamic leader Saladin Ayyubi.¹⁶⁹ The editors also included articles examining the history of their forefather’s emirate.¹⁷⁰ The pages of *Kürdistan* were also replete with praise for those who had contributed to the development of Kurdish culture and urged Kurds to take an interest in educational matters. In the third issue Mikdat Midhat Bey commended Sheikh Yusuf Ziyaeddin Pasha for his work on the Kurdish language.¹⁷¹ In a later article, the German orientalist Martin Hartmann was also singled out for his interest in

¹⁶⁴ See *Kürdistan* (21 April 1898).

¹⁶⁵ See *Kürdistan* (19 May 1898).

¹⁶⁶ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Untitled”, *Kürdistan* (30 November 1898).

¹⁶⁷ Ş.M, “Kaxidek e jî Kurdistanê Hatî”, *Kürdistan* (1 April 1899).

¹⁶⁸ *Mem û Zîn* was published over eighteen issues between 5 May 1898 and 5 November 1901.

¹⁶⁹ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Selahedînê Eyûbî”, *Kürdistan* (19 April 1899).

¹⁷⁰ See Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Hukkamên Cezîretu îbnî Umer”, *Kürdistan* (30 November 1898); Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Bedirxan Beg”, *Kürdistan* (1 April 1899).

¹⁷¹ Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, “Untitled”, *Kürdistan* (19 May 1898).

the Kurdish language and the newspaper stated that it hoped this interest would “become something from which the Kurds themselves learn”.¹⁷² *Kürdistan* also praised other Muslim peoples who had heeded the call for education and sent their children to study. Mikdat Midhat Bey wrote that the “Iranians have many schools and madrasas, [and] they send their children to distant lands in order to study. Now three-quarters of the sons of the Iranian notable class (*begzâdeyên*) study at the Military College in Istanbul”. He implored the Kurds to follow this example, urging the Kurdish notable classes, the “emirs and aghas (*mîr û axayên*)”, to send their children to school in order to acquire “knowledge and skills”.¹⁷³

Significantly, this quest for enlightenment and education was in part presented as a religious obligation, with Mikdat Midhat Bey invoking, in one article, the hadith: “To seek for knowledge is a religious duty of all Muslim men and women”.¹⁷⁴ This was not dissimilar to the discourse employed by the Hamidian regime. Indeed, *Kürdistan* even commended some of the educational innovations of the sultan. For example, Mikdat Midhat Bey paid tribute to Sultan Abdülhamid’s ‘Tribal School’, writing:

A few years ago a school was established in Istanbul... They only accept the children of the tribes. All, from Baghdad to Damascus, from Yemen to the Şammer and Anze, send their children to Istanbul. In this Tribal School they study.... [and] in six to seven years the intelligent from amongst them graduate, afterwards returning to their villages and towns. The state pays them money every month. They become civil servants and, step by step, they become county governors and eventually provincial governors.

¹⁷² Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Întibah”, *Kürdistan* (1 April 1899). The Wrocław-born orientalist Martin Hartmann used *Kürdistan* in his studies on the Kurdish language. See Hugo Makas, *Kurdische Texte und Kurdische Studien* (Amsterdam: APA-PHILO Press 1979), 1-3.

¹⁷³ Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, “Untitled”, *Kürdistan* (21 April 1898).

¹⁷⁴ Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, “Kullukum Raîn we Kullukum Mesûlun en Reîyyetîhî”, *Kürdistan* (19 May 1898).

He went on to appeal to “all emirs and tribal chiefs (*mîr û axano*)...”, demanding: “You too send your children to study! The rich [amongst you] build schools in your villages and for God’s sake hurry!”¹⁷⁵

However, the editors of *Kürdistan* were not solely concerned with cultural and educational matters. The newspaper also engaged in more politically oriented debates. One such issue, which the editors of *Kürdistan* tackled, at least implicitly, was that of leadership. The Bedirhan brothers often wrote articles in the form of open letters to both the sultan and the Kurdish notable elites. This reflected the editors’ perception of themselves as constituting the Kurdish ‘ruling class’, which was linked to their membership of an important family of Kurdish emirs.¹⁷⁶ In an article addressed to the Kurdish notables, Mikdat Midhat Bey highlighted his noble origins. “*Ulema*, emirs and tribal chieftains of the Kurdish people!” he wrote. “You all know my origins. My ancestor was Khalid ibn al-Walid,¹⁷⁷ our tribe is Bohtan and our famous bloodline is the Azizan”.¹⁷⁸ In another article, this time addressed to the sultan, Mikdat Midhat Bey again presented himself as a ‘natural leader’ of Kurdish society. In order to explain to the sultan his rationale in publishing a Kurdish newspaper, he wrote:

I, your slave, who is from amongst the most distinguished Kurdish emirs and with the objective of fulfilling the commandment of the Prophet that ‘a shepherd must attend to his flock’, have set up and published this

¹⁷⁵ Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, “Untitled”, *Kürdistan* (21 April 1898).

¹⁷⁶The newspaper, for instance, included a history of the Cizre-Bohtan emirate. See *Kürdistan* (30 November 1898); *Kürdistan* (15 December 1898); *Kürdistan* (9 February 1899).

¹⁷⁷ Khalid ibn al-Walid, also known as ‘God’s drawn sword (*Sayful-Lahi l-Maslul*)’, was an important figure in early Islamic history and an individual from whom the Bedirhans claimed descent.

¹⁷⁸ Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, “Untitled”, *Kürdistan* (21 April 1898). While the family of Cizre-Bohtan’s former rulers came to be known as the Bedirhans in the nineteenth century, their original name was the Azizan.

Kurdish newspaper in order to encourage the Kurds towards scientific and artistic education...¹⁷⁹

While the Bedirhan brothers were eager to bring ‘modern’ civilisation to the Kurds, their understanding of Kurdish society was conservative and hierarchical. As important Kurdish notables, the Bedirhan brothers seem to have regarded themselves as the appropriate intermediaries between the Ottoman state and broader Kurdish society.

On the issues of education and leadership, the discourse used in *Kürdistan* was similar to that found in the work of Koyi. However, the newspaper did not share Koyi’s anti-Ottoman separatism. Although *Kürdistan*’s contributors were critical of the policies of the Hamidian regime in the empire’s Kurdish-inhabited provinces, far from viewing the issue from a separatist perspective they viewed it through the lens of Ottoman patriotism. They identified the Ottoman Empire as their primary homeland, of which Kurdistan formed an indivisible part. Indeed, the writers in *Kürdistan* constantly stressed the strategic importance of Kurdistan to the defence of the Ottoman homeland, in particular against Russia, and pressed for modernisation of the region. In an open letter to the sultan, Mikdat Midhat Bey wrote: “As is known by your Majesty, the Kurds are amongst the most distinguished nations that form the Eternal Ottoman State, and Kurdistan is also a locality that shares borders with two neighbouring states and above all obstructs the attacks of the enemies [Russia and Iran] on Anatolia”.¹⁸⁰ Abdurrahman Bey expressed a similar opinion. He besought the government to conduct public works projects in Kurdistan on the grounds that: “For the continuation of the Ottoman regime the importance of the protection of Kurdistan as the only base

¹⁷⁹ Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, “Şevketlu Azametlu Sultan Abdülhamid-i Sani Hazretlerine Arzihal-i Abidanemdir”, *Kürdistan* (2 June 1898). For a similar appeal from Abdurrahman Bey see Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Şevketlu Azametlu Sultan Abdülhamid-i Sani Hazretlerine Arzihal-i Abidanemdir”, *Kürdistan* (10 October 1898).

¹⁸⁰ Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, “Şevketlu Azametlu Sultan Abdülhamid-i Sani Hazretlerine Arzihal-i Abidanemdir”, *Kürdistan* (2 June 1898).

against Russia is of course absolutely apprehended by His Majesty as well...”¹⁸¹ In a later article, it was stated: “Today for the territorial integrity and continued political life of our state whatever degree of need exists to keep Rumelia in hand, the region of Kurdistan feels the same degree of seriousness and need”.¹⁸² In short, the future of the Kurdish homeland was seen as a question of great importance not only for the Kurds, but also for the future survival and continuation of the Ottoman polity.

Nevertheless, *Kürdistan* separated the issue of loyalty to the Ottoman state, from the ‘corrupt’ administration of Sultan Abdülhamid II. As might be expected, this included extensive criticism of the sultan’s policies in Kurdistan and, more precisely, the Hamidiye Regiments. The newspaper asked: “Is there anyone else bringing oppression to Kurdistan but the Hamidiye, who are armed by the sultan and carry his name?”¹⁸³ Another article stated: “These Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments, as with all innovations of the sultan, were established with a corrupt purpose”.¹⁸⁴ *Kürdistan* singled out the Hamidiye commander Miranlı Mustafa Pasha for particularly harsh criticism:

This man who is found at the head of the tribe, ten or fifteen years before this was a shepherd whom they called ‘Bald Misto.’ We do not know how he became a favourite of the sultan, but his ability to create mischief appealed to the sultan, who thought he would help in spilling blood and injuring people. He made him a pasha with the rank of commander of a Hamidiye division. Now imagine what such a man is capable of doing: a traitor whose own son has become his enemy and a person who has raped his own daughter-in-law. Would he not massacre Armenians and raid Muslims?¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Sultan Abdülhamid Han-ı Sani Hazretlerine”, *Kürdistan* (1 April 1899).

¹⁸² Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Hamidiye Süvari Alayları”, *Kürdistan* (14 September 1901). Also see Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Alayênê Siwarênê Hemîdî”, (14 September 1901).

¹⁸³ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Kürtler ve Ermeniler”, *Kürdistan* (14 October 1900).

¹⁸⁴ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Hamidiye Süvari Alayları”, *Kürdistan* (14 September 1901). Also see Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Alayênê Siwarênê Hemîdî”, (14 September 1901).

¹⁸⁵ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Kürtler ve Ermeniler”, *Kürdistan* (14 October 1900).

This criticism of Miranlı Mustafa Pasha echoed complaints levelled by disgruntled members of the Ottoman bureaucracy, although it perhaps also reflected Abdurrahman Bey's discomfort at seeing a tribal 'upstart' dominating the affairs of his family's former emirate.

Kürdistan's critique of Hamidian rule in Kurdistan also extended to its impact on Kurdish-Armenian relations. Abdurrahman Bey confessed that: "In the conflict between Kurds and Armenians, I know that Kurds have killed many innocent Armenians. [And] Kurds committed such sins because of their ignorance".¹⁸⁶ Another article proclaimed that: "The killing of Armenians is a sin for which the Kurds are responsible...",¹⁸⁷ while, in an extended piece entitled "To the Kurds (*Kürtlere*)", Abdurrahman Bey asked his fellow Kurds:

By slaying powerless Armenians do you not destroy your own land and your own homes? Do not those officials and governors who urge you to loot and raid leave you empty-handed? Indeed, have they not taken not only those things you possess but also your honour? Have you fallen into such ignorance that you engage in murder and looting, which is forbidden by God and the Prophet? With these [actions] are you not also ruining your afterlife?¹⁸⁸

This opposition to anti-Armenian violence was not merely rhetorical. Abdurrahman Bey and his ally Dr Abdullah Cevdet also sought to engage with the Armenian movement. The former published an abridged version of 'To the Kurds' in *Droshak* (Little Flag), the official newspaper of the *Dashnaktsutyun*.¹⁸⁹ The latter also published in *Droshak*. In an article addressed to an

¹⁸⁶ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, "Hel Yestewîllezîne Yelemûne Wellezîne La Yelemûne", *Kürdistan* (30 November 1898).

¹⁸⁷ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, "Welat-Weten", *Kürdistan* (15 December 1898).

¹⁸⁸ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, "Kürtlere", *Kürdistan* (13 March 1901).

¹⁸⁹ See *Droshak*, No. 4 (1901) in Yervand Sarkisian, "Documents from the History of Armenian-Kurdish Relations (Appeals of Kurdish Intellectuals to their Compatriots)", *Acta Kurdica*, Vol. 1 (1994), 32-34. Apparently Abdurrahman Bey's appeal was printed as a pamphlet and distributed amongst Kurdish tribesmen by Armenian revolutionaries. See Garabet Moumdjian, "Armenian Kurdish Relations in the Era of Kurdish National Movements (1830-1930)", *Bazmavep*, No. 1-4 (1999), 309-310; Garabet Moumdjian, "Struggling for a Constitutional Regime: Armenian-Young

Armenian audience he noted: “You will probably agree that a Kurd hardly ever joins the Armenians’ protests against the government, which is wrongly considered to be the advocate of ‘Kurdish elements’”. He went on to proclaim that “Armenians and Kurds are alike both in features and traditions – they belong to the same family. Nations living under tyranny must unite. There is no other way”. The article concluded by highlighting the work done by the editors of *Kürdistan*, who advocated “peaceful coexistence with the Armenians...”.¹⁹⁰

However, *Kürdistan*’s critique of the Hamidian regime went beyond issues directly pertaining to the Kurds and Kurdistan. The newspaper also carried news and comment regarding developments in other parts of the empire and displayed a particular concern for the fate of other Muslim peoples. For example, in a somewhat prophetic article Abdurrahman Bey expressed his fears about Italian intentions towards Tripolitania. He noted that Italy had sent troops and two warships to Naples without consulting the Ottoman government. This action, he claimed, had been taken “because the whole world knows that Abdülhamid does not protect his nation or his nation’s homeland. Our government has no influence on foreigners. For this reason the Muslims of Tripolitania are all alone and abandoned”. He concluded by warning that: “At some point in the future, Italy will arrive there [Tripolitania] with its canons and rifles. Our sultan, whom ignorant people regard as the Caliph, the Imam of Islam and the Shadow of God, will leave the defenceless people of Tripolitania to the cannons of Italy”.¹⁹¹

Turk Relations in the Era of Abdulhamid II, 1895-1909” (PhD diss., University of California, 2010), 48-49.

¹⁹⁰ *Droshak*, No. 1 (1900) in Sarkisian, “Documents from the History of Armenian-Kurdish Relations”, 29-30.

¹⁹¹ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Untitled”, *Kürdistan* (19 April 1899).

This concern for the broader Ottoman homeland in general and its Muslim inhabitants in particular is most palpable in *Kürdistan*'s treatment of the 'Cretan question'. In an article published in November 1898 the author mourned the state of the Muslims on the island and censured the government for its inaction, claiming that the Western powers were aiding the rebels while the Ottoman government did nothing. Thus "The Muslims have become ruined and defenceless". The article further urged Kurds to learn from the situation in Crete, warning that: "One day this situation may befall you as well! Now would it not be a shame for Kurds to see their wives and children in the hands of Russian soldiers?"¹⁹² Another article laid the blame for the losses in Crete squarely at the feet of the sultan stating that Muslims of Crete were "victims of the tyranny of Abdülhamid".¹⁹³ One of the most forthright criticisms in *Kürdistan* of Sultan Abdülhamid II's Cretan policy came from Bahriyeli Rıza. He condemned the Hamidian regime's "appeasement (*idare-i maslahat*)", blaming it for the loss of "the island of Crete, which is the most important part of our homeland (*vatan*)". He went on to narrate that, although the Greeks had sent troops to the island, the Ottoman government had ordered its soldiers to refrain from any action until eventually: "The patience of our soldiers... those brave, patriotic lions of ours, ran out... they attacked the enemies and, by being immune to the traitorous and criminal orders of the palace, proved to the world that they are still the old Ottomans".¹⁹⁴ Significantly, the author not only identified with the Ottoman homeland and the Ottoman army but also with the Ottoman past.

For *Kürdistan*'s contributors, Western intervention in Ottoman affairs was seen as profoundly negative, and secessionist movements were regarded with hostility. They looked to the principle of *ittihad-ı anasir* for a solution to inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict. As stated in one article:

¹⁹² Anonymous, "Girîd", *Kürdistan* (4 November 1898).

¹⁹³ Anonymous, "Girîd", *Kürdistan* (9 February 1899).

¹⁹⁴ Bahriyeli Rıza, "İdare-i Maslahat ve İşar-ı Ahir", *Kürdistan* (1 February 1900).

“Be they Armenians [or] be they Kurds, if they want to be liberated from this situation and this oppression, they can be successful [only] through unity and alliance. Hand in hand and in brotherhood, they [should] search for the necessities of happiness”.¹⁹⁵ More concretely, the restoration of the constitution was seen as a necessary precondition for the salvation of the empire.

As one article proclaimed:

In fact, the remedy for all is the Ottoman Constitution (*Qanunê Esasî*). When this Constitution is fully implemented, then people will be aware of their rights and the curse of a despotic emperor and his civil servants will vanish. Thereafter missionaries will not be able to corrupt people, [and] even Western states will not interfere in our affairs.

Like many other Ottoman revolutionaries the article’s author offered Japan as a model of what a constitutional government could achieve in the face of Western imperialism,¹⁹⁶ noting that: “Thirty-five years ago, Japan was under the control of foreign states. But from that time [onward] they have based their rule on an organised foundation and... saved themselves from exposure to foreigners”. The article concluded by appealing for the Ottomans to follow Japan’s example.¹⁹⁷

For the Bedirhans, as well as the other contributors to *Kürdistan*, the ‘Kurdish question’ was primarily a socio-cultural question, related to the need for modernisation and education amongst the Kurdish community. Certainly they regarded the despotism of the sultan as negatively affecting the Kurds and Kurdistan, but they remained loyal to the Ottoman political project. In ideological terms, they regarded Ottoman Empire as first and foremost a Muslim empire and the Kurds as a Muslim people. Therefore the fate of the Kurds was intertwined with the continuation of the Ottoman state. At the same time, for Ottoman Kurdish elites, such as the Bedirhan brothers, the

¹⁹⁵ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Kürtler ve Ermeniler”, *Kürdistan* (14 October 1900).

¹⁹⁶ Indeed, many members of the ‘Young Turk’ movement hope to transform the Ottoman Empire into the ‘Japan of the Near East’. See Hanioglu, *Preparation for Revolution*, 304.

¹⁹⁷ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Kürdistanê de Esasa Nîfaqê”, *Kürdistan* (14 March 1902).

empire continued to be regarded as an ‘opportunity structure’, one in which they could play an important role provided that the despotic regime of the sultan could be removed. In the words of Abdurrahman Bey: “The health of the state is our health and the demise of the state is our demise”.¹⁹⁸ In this sense, despite a keen interest in Kurdish affairs, their political outlook did not differ significantly from their Turkish compatriots within the CUP.

Conclusions: Separatism and Accommodationism

Sultan Abdülhamid II’s policies towards the Kurds and Kurdistan may well have been successful in avoiding a repeat of the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt and, more importantly, in winning the regime a number of powerful Kurdish supporters. Moreover, the period did not witness the emergence of an organised Kurdish movement. However, the idea that the Kurds constituted a distinct ‘nation’ facing a specific set of social and political issues continued to gain ground amongst various elements of the Kurdish elite. A common theme about which all early Kurdish activists displayed concern was the general lack of education amongst the Kurds and, more generally, the community’s ‘backwardness’. Nevertheless, in political terms early ‘Kurdish’ discourse contained both ‘separatist’ and ‘accommodationist’ trends. For Koyi the potential of the Kurdish nation could only be fulfilled through the establishment of a Kurdish nation state. It is quite striking that Koyi, an individual from a provincial and religious background, was an early advocate of Kurdish separatism. This, taken in conjunction with the nationalistic *élan* of Sheikh Ubeydullah’s revolt, should highlight the importance of ‘traditional’ notable elites in the evolution of modern Kurdish nationalism. Certainly, in the short term, the Hamidian regime’s patronage of such elites limited the appeal of ‘separatism’ amongst them. Even so, the less accommodating stance of the post-1908 ‘Young Turk’ regime meant that some ‘traditional elites’, such as tribal chieftains and Sufi sheikhs,

¹⁹⁸ Abdurrahman Bedirhan, “Întîzar”, *Kürdistan* (6 August 1899).

would come to adopt more ‘nationalistic’ ideas. More precisely, the mobilisation of Kurdish identity would provide a discursive framework through which Kurdish notables who felt threatened by the post-Hamidian order could articulate their demands.

In contrast, the nascent Kurdish intellectual and professional elite, the element of Kurdish society most familiar with Western political ideologies such as nationalism, eschewed separatism. For these elites, with their ties to both Kurdish society and the Ottoman polity, the salvation of the Kurdish community was envisaged as an integral part of the broader quest to ‘save’ the faltering Ottoman polity. Kurdishness was, in effect, a subordinate identity to Ottomanness. Indeed, the general political outlook of the Ottoman Kurdish elite, including those who contributed to *Kürdistan*, might most correctly be described as ‘Kurdish-Ottomanism’; an Ottoman patriotism with Kurdish colours. It was Dr Abdullah Cevdet who, in a 1907 article published in the journal *İçtihad*, most concisely expressed this ‘accommodationist’ outlook: “Look, I am a Kurd and I love Kurds and Kurdishness (*Kürtleri ve Kürtlüğü*). However, in so far as I am a citizen of Turkey (*Türkiya vatandaşlarımdanım*), equal in terms of rights and responsibilities, *I am before everything a Turk*”.¹⁹⁹ Abdullah Cevdet’s use of the terms ‘Turkey’ and ‘Turk’ (which he uses as synonyms for ‘Ottoman Empire’ and ‘Ottoman’) was not a rejection of Kurdish identity, but rather an affirmation of his commitment to the Ottoman polity. This political perspective would continue to predominate in the immediate aftermath of the 1908 Constitutional Revolution, even as the Kurdish movement gained a greater degree of organisational distinctiveness through the establishment of the first significant Kurdish associations, associations which were, quite tellingly, based in Istanbul rather than in Kurdistan.

¹⁹⁹ *İçtihad* (20 March 1907) quoted in Hanioglu, *Siyasal Düşünür olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, 217. [My emphasis].

Chapter IV: Revolution and the Emergence of a National Movement: Kurdish Activism in Istanbul (1908-1911)

They say that ‘Progress’ is to know of art and learning; to provide for the education and welfare of compatriots. They say ‘Union’ is an alliance with your compatriots, even if they are Armenians.

Seyyah Ahmed Şevki, *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Gazetesi*, 1908¹

The 1908 Constitutional Revolution, better known in the West as the ‘Young Turk’ Revolution, was a seminal moment in the history of the Ottoman Empire. In the most immediate sense, the events of July 1908 were the fruition of the CUP’s long years of struggle against Sultan Abdülhamid II and the apparatus of his autocracy. On 3rd July 1908 a junior officer in the Ottoman army with connections to the CUP, Ahmed Niyazi Bey, along with a band consisting of both army regulars and Albanian auxiliaries, took to the mountains of Macedonia. The group had been assembled under the pretext of pursuing a band of Macedonian-Bulgarian revolutionaries. However, in actuality, the company had been formed with the objective of forcing the sultan to restore the Constitution of 1876. The effect of Niyazi Bey’s actions was electrifying. They precipitated a general revolt amongst Ottoman military personnel stationed in the Balkans, many of whom were either in league with the CUP or, at the very least, sympathetic to their cause. No longer able to rely on the support of the army and facing the prospect of the Second and Third Army Corps marching on the capital to dethrone him, the sultan capitulated and on 23rd/24th July issued a decree providing for the convention of a new ‘general assembly’ (*meclis-i umumi*). Over

¹ Seyyah Ahmed Şevki, “Ey Gelî Kurd”, *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5 December 1908).

thirty years of autocracy had crumbled within less than a month.² This marked the beginning of a period in Ottoman history which would come to be known as the ‘Second Constitutional Period’ (*İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi*). The *devr-i istibdad* (age of tyranny) was over; the *devr-i hürriyet* (age of freedom) had begun.

Historians have often debated the extent to which the events of July 1908 can be truly described as revolutionary. Şükrü Hanioglu observed that, while the CUP and its allies self-consciously identified their achievements with the great revolutions of 1789 and 1848, their goals were fundamentally conservative: the *restoration* of the 1876 Constitution and the *salvation* of the imperial order.³ Nevertheless, the overthrow of the autocracy had a radical effect on imperial politics. Although Sultan Abdülhamid II was able to retain his throne, the infrastructure of his autocracy, most notably his censors and his network of informants, was dissolved. Many Ottoman subjects greeted the fall of the autocracy with great enthusiasm. Crowds of Muslims and Christians took to the streets of the capital and fraternised in a show of inter-communal solidarity. On 27th July *the Times* reported that: “The people of Turkey, without distinction of race or creed, have burst forth into very natural transports of jubilation upon the revival of the Constitution of 1876”.⁴ A local observer, the social reformer Halide Edib,⁵ described the atmosphere as being as if the

² For an overview of the events of July 1908 see Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Hürriyet’in İlanı* (Istanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2004), 13-19. Also see Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 210-279; Aykut Kansu, *1908 Devrimi* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2009), 97-153.

³ Şükrü Hanioglu, “The Second Constitutional Period: 1908-1918” in Reşat Kasaba (eds.), *Cambridge History of Turkey*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 66.

⁴ “The Situation in Turkey”, *The Times*, (27 July 1908).

⁵ Halide Edib Adıvar (1885-1964) was political activist, social reformer, feminist, novelist and early proponent of Turkish nationalism. For an overview of her activities during the Second Constitutional Period see Derya Iner, “Halide Edib Adıvar's Role as Social Reformer and Contributor to Public Debate on Constitutionalism, Status of Women, Educational Reform, Ottoman Minorities, and Nationalism during the Young Turk Era (1908–1918)” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison 2011).

entire population had caught the “fever of ecstasy”.⁶ Indeed, in the heady days following the sultan’s proclamation, many of the Greek, Bulgarian and Macedonian rebel bands, which had rendered much of the empire’s European territories ungovernable, either descended from the mountains or else withdrew to Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria.⁷

Amongst the revolutionaries and their sympathisers such auspicious signs served to bolster a sense of optimism. There was belief that the restoration of constitutional rule would pave the way for a brighter future. In place of what they regarded as a corrupt and despotic regime, a new political order based upon the rule of law, parliamentarianism and a meritocratic bureaucracy would be established. This, they assumed, would unite all Ottoman subjects, regardless of their ethnic or confessional backgrounds, in addition to obstructing the efforts of the Great Powers to intervene in the domestic affairs of the empire. The Ottoman Kurdish intellectual and professional elites, which included individuals who had played a pivotal role in the evolution of the ‘Young Turk’ movement, were also caught up in the wave of popular enthusiasm. This small, but influential, segment of Kurdish society looked forward to the prospect of better days. The revolution would also be a significant landmark in the development of Kurdish activism. With the termination of the autocracy, Kurdish activists were free to organise openly. The Kurdish movement had come of age; it had matured into a phase of more systematic and organised ‘patriotic agitation’.

This chapter examines the rise of Kurdish activism amongst the Istanbul-based Ottoman Kurdish intellectual and political elite between 1908 and 1911. Looking at the Kurdish case within the

⁶ Halide Edib, *Memoirs of Halidé Edib* (London: John Murray, 1926), 258.

⁷ A. L. Macfie, *The End of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Longman, 1998), 39-40. Christopher Psilos, “From Cooperation to Alienation: An Insight into Relations between the Serres Group and the Young Turks during the Years 1906–9”, *European History Quarterly* Vol. 35, No. 4 (2005), 547-548.

broader post-revolutionary context regarding the issue of ‘nationality’, it seeks to ascertain the political orientation of this activism. It focuses specifically on two Kurdish ‘civil society’ organisations established in the imperial capital, during this period. The first is the Kurdish Society for Mutual Aid and Progress (*Kürt Teaviün ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, hereafter KSMP), active between autumn 1908 and spring 1909, and the second is the Kurdish Society for the Propagation of Education (*Kürt Neşr-i Maarif Cemiyeti*, hereafter KSPE) active between 1910 and 1911. This chapter argues that these associations represented the continuation of the Kurdish Ottomanism (or Ottoman patriotism with Kurdish colours) manifest in the newspaper *Kürdistan*, which was examined in the previous chapter. Indeed, it is argued that they marked the high-water mark of this ‘accommodationist’ political outlook with members of both organisations seeking to cooperate with the constitutionalist regime in order to assist in the task of ‘modernising’ the Kurds and Kurdistan. The chapter concludes by examining the reasons behind the failure of these organisations. One of these was the increasingly authoritarian nature of the post-revolutionary CUP-dominated administration. Another was the increasingly factionalised nature of the Ottoman Kurdish elite. This includes conflicts based on personal rivalries, but perhaps more importantly splits caused by the broader divisions within imperial politics, namely the struggle between the CUP and the emergent ‘liberal’ opposition movement.

A Spring Time of Peoples: The 1908 Revolution, the Unionists and ‘National Questions’

Before examining in detail the impact of the revolution on the Ottoman Kurdish elite and the nascent Kurdish movement directly, it is perhaps useful to assess the ‘national question’ within the broader Ottoman context. As noted in the previous chapter, while the CUP contained Turkist tendencies long before 1908, its leadership was pragmatic. The organisation’s primary goal was to maintain the existence of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire. This was to be achieved

through legal equality - both in terms of rights and responsibilities - for all imperial subjects. The CUP's 1908 programme made this point clear:

Everyone, regardless of race or religion (*cins ve mezheb tefrik edilmeksizin*), possesses complete equality and freedom and is subject to the same obligations. All Ottomans are equal in the eyes of the law (*huzur-ı kanunda*) and in terms of rights and duties. All subjects will be eligible for appropriate official posts according to their competences and aptitudes. Non-Muslims will also be subject to the law of conscription.

Furthermore, the Unionists committed themselves to protecting and maintaining “religious freedoms (*edyanın serbesti-yi icrası*)” and “confessional privileges granted to the various religious communities (*cemaat-ı muhtelifeye verilmiş olan imtiyazat-ı mezhebiye*)”.⁸ This formulation was not too dissimilar to the civic brand of ‘Ottoman patriotism’ promoted by the *Tanzimat* statesmen and embodied in the Ottoman Constitution of 1876.⁹

Yet the CUP's commitment to legal equality for all Ottoman subjects, as a method through which the ‘unity of elements (*ittihad-ı anasır*)’ could be achieved, did not forestall the emergence of active and vocal national movements amongst the various subject peoples of the empire. The vivification of Ottoman political life meant that after years in which the sultan's censors and spies had stifled public debate, Ottoman subjects were now free to discuss the issues of the day without fear of punitive action. This resulted in an explosion in the numbers of newspapers and periodicals freely available as well as the emergence of a whole host of societies and associations claiming to represent all manner of interest groups and causes. Given the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional

⁸ Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler: İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi*, Vol. 1 (Istanbul: İletişim, 2007), 99.

⁹ The CUP's programme recognised Turkish as the ‘official language’. However, this was nothing more than a reiteration of a provision within the 1876 constitution.

structure of Ottoman society, this included the formation of a host of ‘national’ clubs, associations and societies.

Even so, neither the level of organisation nor the trajectory and political orientation of specific national movements was uniform. Amongst some the empire’s Christian ‘nations’, in particular, national movements had, long before the 1908 revolution, passed into a phase of organised political activity. Moreover, their political orientation was not simply determined by dynamics relating to these communities’ internal development; they were also greatly influenced by a number of international factors, including the attitudes of the Great Powers. The establishment of Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian nation states in the Balkans over the course of the nineteenth century had also impacted the development of these movements as well as their relations with the Ottoman government. The Balkan nation states sought to promote ‘external homeland nationalism’ amongst ‘accidental diasporas’ of co-nationals residing in Ottoman territories.¹⁰ This did not, of course, mean that all Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks living in the Ottoman Empire slavishly followed the irredentist desiderata of Belgrade, Sofia and Athens. Athanassios Souliotis, a Greek military officer who had witnessed first-hand the unfortunate consequences of the contest for supremacy in Ottoman Macedonia, sought, after the revolution, to encourage the Ottoman-Greek community’s co-operation with modernising forces within the empire.¹¹ Analogously, within days

¹⁰ These two concepts, ‘accidental diaspora’ and ‘external homeland nationalism’, have been elaborated on by Roger Brubaker. The first refers to communities which come into being “through the disintegration of previously multi-national political structures”. The second refers to nationalisms that are orientated towards “putative ethnonational kin who are residents and citizens of other states. They assert states’ right – indeed obligation – to monitor the condition, promote the welfare, support the activities and institutions, and protect the interest of “their” ethnonational kin in other states.” Roger Brubaker, *Accidental Diasporas and External “Homelands”* (Vienna: Institute for Advanced Studies, 2000), 1 and 4.

¹¹ Umut Özkırımlı and Spyros A. Sofos, *Tormented by History: Nationalism in Greece and Turkey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 20. On the competing claims of the Balkan nation-

of the revolution the CUP was in talks with members of the Bulgarian-Macedonian movement on the possibility of resolving, permanently, the imbroglio in Ottoman Europe.¹² However, the overall balance of forces was centrifugal; amongst the Christian peoples of the Balkans there was an increasing tendency towards identifying with their ‘external homelands’. As one Greek deputy succinctly put it, he regarded himself “as Ottoman as the [French owned] Ottoman Bank”.¹³

An interesting comparison might be drawn with the empire’s Armenian community. Again, post-revolutionary Armenian political mobilisation built on a pre-existing organised movement. However, unlike the Greeks or Bulgarians, they lacked a ‘nation state’, a patron which would seek to subvert Ottoman rule at the same time as acting to promote and protect the interests of the community.¹⁴ Hence the Armenian movement sought actively (and perhaps with greater sincerity than the Greeks or Bulgarians) to co-operate with the CUP. Upon the news of the revolution, the *Dashnaktsutyun* ended its calls for European intervention and terminated its propaganda in

states to Ottoman Macedonia see Basil C. Gounaris, “Social cleavages and national “awakening” in Ottoman Macedonia” in *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 29 (1995), 409-426.

¹² Psilos, “From Cooperation to Alienation: An Insight into Relations between the Serres Group and the Young Turks during the Years 1906–9”, 548-556; Fikret Adanır, “The Socio-political Environment of Balkan Nationalism: the Case of Ottoman Macedonia 1856-1912” in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Michael G. Muller, and Stuart Woolf (eds.), *Regional and National Identities in Europe in the XIXth and XXth Centuries* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1998), 249-253.

¹³ Feroz Ahmad, “Unionist Relations with the Greek, Armenian, and Jewish Communities of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914”, in Feroz Ahmad (ed.), *From Empire to Republic*, Vol. 1 (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press, 2008), 103.

¹⁴ It ought to be noted that the European Great Powers often acted as patrons towards the Christian ‘nations’ of the Ottoman Empire, although their patronage was dependent upon their broader foreign policy objectives. In this regard, Russia sought, at times, to act as a patron of the Ottoman-Armenians. However, relations between Tsarist Russia and the Russian Armenian population deteriorated in the early twentieth century due to the oppressive anti-Armenian policies of the Transcaucasian governor Prince Grigorij Golicyn. See Richard G. Hovannisian, “Russian Armenia: A Century of Tsarist Rule” in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (March, 1971), 40.

Europe.¹⁵ On 1st September 1908 it issued a manifesto for Armenian parliamentarians in which, although calling for a decentralised form of administration, it recognised the territorial integrity of the Ottoman polity of which ‘Turkish Armenia’ formed an indivisible part.¹⁶ For its members, the constitutionalist regime offered the best prospect for both securing national rights and providing redress for some of the injustices of the past, principally the illegal seizure of Armenian lands by Kurdish tribesmen.

The significance of ‘nationality’ amongst some Ottoman-Christian communities was readily apparent to Muslim observers. Some believed this fetishisation of ethnicity and nationality to be a purely Christian malady. In 1909, philosopher and CUP deputy for Edirne, Rıza Tevfik,¹⁷ stated in parliament that:

For Slavs, Romanians, or whoever else, religion (*din*), ethnicity/race (*kavmiyet*) and nationality (*milliyet*) are separate issues. Amongst us Muslims, there are Arabs, Albanians, Bosnians as well as various other ethno-racial elements (*unsur*). [However] they never defend their nationality. They say ‘I’m an Arab’ or ‘I’m a Bosnian’, but [above all] ‘I’m a Muslim’...¹⁸

Certainly, the Islamic identity of the Ottoman polity remained a strong focus of loyalty amongst the Muslim population. Nevertheless, Rıza Tevfik’s views were perhaps wishful thinking. Turks, Arabs, Albanians, Circassians as well as Kurds had long since begun to take an interest in the

¹⁵ Dikran Mesrob Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule: 1908-1914* (Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 16-17.

¹⁷ Rıza Tevfik Bölükbaşı (1868-1949) was an Ottoman medical doctor, philosopher, polymath and politician. In 1908 he was elected to the Ottoman parliament as the CUP member for Edirne. However, he split from the CUP in 1911 and a year later was briefly detained by the Ottoman authorities. Abdullah Uçman, “Rıza Tevfik Bölükbaşı”, *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 35 (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi Genel Müdürlüğü, 2008), 68-70.

¹⁸ Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi*, Vol. 3 (Ankara: T.B.M.M. Basımevi, 1991), 131.

conditions of their respective ‘nations’. The revolution gave further impetus for this tendency as it provided conditions in which this gradual growth in ‘national sentiment’ could emerge openly. Within months of the revolution associations such as the Society for Arab-Ottoman Fraternity (*Uhuvvet-i Arabiye-i Osmaniye Cemiyeti*), the Circassian Society for Union and Mutual Aid (*Çerkes İttihat ve Teaviin Cemiyeti*) and the Albanian Union (*Bashkim*), had been established.

Yet this wave of ethno-nationalist mobilisation did not signify the growth of demands for a sovereign and independent nation-state. For example, the Society for Arab-Ottoman Fraternity, established in Istanbul at the beginning of August 1908, stated in its programme that its objectives included, protecting the constitution and sultanate, propagating Ottoman patriotism and encouraging fraternal relations between the Arabs and other Ottoman nationalities.¹⁹ The aims of the Circassian society were similar.²⁰ Albanian activism was more pronounced; within ten months of the revolution, the Albanians had convened four national conferences and founded sixty-six cultural clubs, fifteen literary societies and sixty-eight schools.²¹ Even so, Albanian activities too were largely cultural and pro-constitutionalist in orientation.

Such groups sought merely ‘national’ development and progress within the framework of a constitutional empire. In certain cases these activities conflicted with the integrative instincts of

¹⁹ Eliezer Tauber, *The Emergence of the Arab Movements* (Oxford: Routledge, 1993), 63.

²⁰ The organisation’s charter stated that its aims were “to teach and secure, amongst the Circassians, religious obligations, good morals and the fundamentals of constitutionalism and civilisation and, by establishing and encouraging trade, industry and agricultural relations, to bring about material and spiritual advancement [amongst them]; and to bring to light their past and present deeds, conditions, surroundings, their language, their place in the histories of humanity as well as their past morals and customs.” “Çerkes İttihat ve Teaviin Cemiyeti Nizamname-i Esasiyesi”, (29 January 1909) quoted in Elmas Zeynep Arslan, “Circassian Organizations in the Ottoman Empire (1908-1923)” (MA diss., Boğaziçi University, 2008), 36. [My translation]

²¹ George W. Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874-1913* (London: I.B Tauris, 2006), 163-164.

the CUP. Despite the significant support the revolution had received from Albanians, the Unionists viewed the efforts of the Albanian movement to adopt a single ‘national alphabet’ based upon the Latin script with deep suspicion.²² In contrast, tensions between the Society for Arab-Ottoman Fraternity and the CUP were not directly related to issues of ‘nationality’.²³ Amongst the organisation’s founders there were numerous individuals who had maintained close relations with the *ancien régime*. Indeed, the association’s president, Shafiq al-Mu’ayyad al-‘Azm, was accused of having been a spy for the sultan.²⁴ Such individuals may have regarded the organisation as a vehicle through which they, by presenting themselves as the representatives of Arab opinion in the new constitutional order, might maintain their political influence. However, the Unionists increasingly regarded them as an opposition group and a focal point of ‘reactionary’ activities.²⁵ In short, while the flowering of national sentiment amongst Muslims following the revolution was not uncomplicated, their ‘nationalist’ clubs and associations generally combined a desire for the

²² Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle*, 165-166; Stavro Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 371-378.

²³ Nevertheless, nationality-based mobilisation did elicit some criticism from Islamists. Babanzade Ahmed Naim, a Kurd but also a prominent Islamic thinker, criticised the Arab-Ottoman Fraternity group in an article entitled *Arab Kardeşlerimize Bir Nasihatimiz* (Our Advice to Our Arab Brothers). He asked whether Ottoman Muslims could put up with difficulties presented by “organising under a name which evokes a meaning damaging to the Islamic unity amongst our Muslim brothers...” He pointed out that “zeal for ethnicity and race (*asabiyet-i kavmiye ve cinsiye*)” was an enemy of Islamic unity. Ahmed Naim, “Arap Kardeşlerimize bir Nasihatimiz”, *İttifak Gazetesi* (30 August 1908); Also see Mehmet Ertuğrul Düzdağ, *Türkiye’de İslâm ve ırkçılık meselesi* (Istanbul: Cihad Yayınları, 1976), 116-117.

²⁴ Shafiq al-Mu’ayyad al-‘Azm was a Muslim of Syrian origin. Under Sultan Abdülhamid II he served as a translator at the Palace and later as a commissioner in the Public Debt Administration and the Tobacco Concession.

²⁵ Tauber, *The Emergence of the Arab Movements*, 64-65; Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 68-69; Elie Kedourie, “Political Parties in the Arab World” in Elie Kedourie (eds.) *Arabic Political Memoirs and Other Studies* (London: Frank Cass: 1974), 41.

educational and material progress of their ‘nation’ with a commitment to constitutionalism and the continuation of the Ottoman polity.

The Ottoman Kurdish Elite and the Revolutionary Moment

While the events of July 1908 elicited not only a wave of euphoria but also a sense of inter-communal solidarity and unity of purpose, expectations regarding the outcome of the revolution were in no way uniform. This can be observed quite clearly in the response of the Ottoman Kurdish elite, which encompassed a host of individuals with differing educational backgrounds as well as political and ideological orientations. For veteran opposition activist and westerniser Dr Abdullah Cevdet, it held the prospect of unity and understanding amongst all Ottoman peoples, regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliations. In a short pamphlet, entitled *Bir Hutbe: Hemşehrilerime* (An Address to My Compatriots) and published while the author was still in British administered Egypt, he proclaimed “My Compatriots! Today is the Festival of Freedom, Come one and all, let us make peace. All citizens, Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Albanians, Armenians, Greeks, Bulgarians and Jews, in short, Muslims and non-Muslims, all citizens embrace one another”.²⁶

These were quite different from the expectations of the Islamic reformer Said-i Kürdi (Nursi) who also welcomed the restoration of constitutional rule. In a speech delivered in both Istanbul and Salonika in the days immediately following the 24th July proclamation, he declared that the “new constitutional government has been born like a miracle...”²⁷ However, he clearly anticipated that the revolution would bring about a revival amongst the followers of Islam. He noted that Ottomans would gladly take from foreigners those “aspects [of western knowledge] useful for civilisational

²⁶ Abdullah Cevdet, *Bir Hutbe: Hemşehrilerime* (Egypt: Matbaa-i İctihad, 1909) reproduced in Mehmet Bayrak (ed.), *Açık-Gizli/Resmi-Gayrıresmi Kürdoloji Belgeleri* (Ankara: Özge, 1994), 14-18.

²⁷ Said Nursî, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursî'nin İlk Dönem Eserleri* (Istanbul: Söz, 2007), 420.

progress...”, namely science and industry. However, he also urged the ‘Ottoman nation (*Osmanlı milleti*)’ to remain true to its Muslim spiritual origins, citing Japan as an example of a nation which had adapted to the needs of modern civilisation but had “defended its national customs (*adat-i milliyeleri*)”.²⁸ Such divergent views were not the preserve of the Ottoman Kurdish elite. Differing interpretations of Ottoman political identity would cut to the heart of many of the issues which would come to the fore over the coming years. Yet, at least at an elite level, the revolutionary moment had temporarily obscured these deep-seated rifts, rifts between Muslims and Christians, Turks and non-Turks, conservatives and radicals, centralisers and decentralisers. In the short term, joy at the overthrow of autocracy far outweighed any misgivings about the future direction of imperial policy.

The near universal popularity of the revolution amongst the Ottoman Kurdish elite, however, was not simply born out of an abstract dislike of autocracy. A general amnesty issued by the government allowed longstanding opponents of the *ancien régime* such as Dr Abdullah Cevdet and Mevlanzade Rifat to return to the empire and participate in imperial politics. It also paved the way for the rehabilitation of the Bedirhan clan, which, at the time, was still languishing in internal exile in Ottoman North Africa for the involvement of some of its members in the murder of Rıdvan Pasha in 1906. A number of Kurdish public figures also received important posts within both the CUP and the new administration. CUP financier Mehmed Şerif Pasha was rewarded for his efforts with the chairmanship of the CUP’s Pangaltı branch.²⁹ Another of the CUP’s Kurdish backers, Sheikh Abdülkadir, was appointed to the upper house of the Ottoman parliament, the Assembly of

²⁸ Ibid, 425.

²⁹ Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler: İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi*, Vol. 1, 253; Metin Kayahan Özgül, *Türk Edebiyatında Siyasi Rüyalarda* (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 1989), 121.

Notables (*Heyet/Meclis-i Ayan*).³⁰ Babanzade Ismail Hakkı's relationship with the new order was even closer. The son of Babanzade Mustafa Zihni Pasha, he had been educated at the Imperial High School at Galatasaray, before attending the Civil Service College (*Mekteb-i Mülkiye*). However, he was expelled in his final year for refusing to accept sweets distributed during a ceremony honouring Sultan Abdülhamid II. Subsequently he pursued a career as a man of letters, taking work at the Istanbul daily *İkdam* (Effort). Following the revolution, he became a regular columnist in the CUP mouthpiece *Tanin* (Echo) and was elected to parliament as the CUP backed member for Baghdad.³¹

While the new constitutionalist regime did not seek to integrate Ottoman Kurdish elites into imperial politics in the same self-conscious manner as its predecessor had, Kurdish public figures continued to play a significant role in Ottoman political life. However, just as Abdurrahman Bedirhan's participation in the constitutionalist movement a decade earlier did not preclude his participation in efforts towards the 'enlightenment' of the Kurds, the involvement of leading Kurdish public figures in the constitutionalist regime and the CUP did not preclude them from taking part in the nascent Kurdish movement. Kurdish political and intellectual leaders continued to engage in politics in a dual capacity, as both Ottoman Muslims and members of the Kurdish community.³² The desire to reform and reinvigorate the Ottoman polity and the urge to attend to

³⁰ "Meclis-i Ayan ve Seyyid Abdülkadir Efendi", *Kürt Teaviün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (19 December 1908).

³¹ Faysal Mayak, "Babanzâde İsmail Hakkı'nın *Tanin*'de Yayımlanmış Makalelerine Göre Osmanlı Devleti ve Dış Politika (1911)", *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, Vol. 3, No. 11 (2010), 421. On Babanzâde İsmail Hakkı's election to the Ottoman Parliament see "Meclis-i Ayan ve Seyyid Abdülkadir Efendi" *Kürt Teaviün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (19 December 1908).

³² Stavro Skendi makes a similar point regarding the empire's Albanian community. Highlighting the important role that Albanians had played within the Young Turk movement, he argues that they "took part in a dual capacity, as Moslem members of the Turkish empire and as members of the Albanian nationality." Stavro Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 335.

the needs of the Kurdish community were, as they had been for *Kürdistan*, very much seen as complementary aspirations.

The Formation of the Kurdish Society for Mutual Aid and Progress

As already highlighted, the post-revolutionary Ottoman Empire bred a lively civil society in which newspapers and associations catering to ‘national’ constituencies became commonplace. Newspapers focusing on Kurdish issues were published on the initiative of small groups of individuals. Amongst these was *Şark ve Kürdistan* (The East and Kurdistan). The paper was edited by Malatyalı Bedri, a military officer who had fled the empire during the days of autocracy. Following the revolution Malatyalı Bedri had returned to Istanbul and was employed by the government. However, he was also active in journalistic circles.³³ *Şark ve Kürdistan* was a curious endeavour in that it united Kurds with Muslim Bosnians. Malatyalı Bedri’s collaborators were Hersekli Ahmed Şerif and Hersekli İsmail, individuals associated with the conservative newspaper *Seda-yı Hakk* (The Voice of God/Right) and *El-İslam* (Islam).³⁴

Despite its conservative editorship, it possessed a pro-constitutionalist editorial line but was critical of western hypocrisy towards Muslim peoples. Indeed, the paper was published with the subtitle: “A newspaper which portrays the political situation of the East and the West’s crimes against humanity (*Şarkın vaziyet-i siyasiyesiyle garbın insaniyete karşı şaibelerini musavvir gazetedir*)”. Malatyalı Bedri evidently regarded the Kurds as the victims of this hypocrisy. In an article entitled *Kürtler ve Kürdistan* (The Kurds and Kurdistan), he highlighted the hardships that Kurdistan had suffered following the 1878 Treaty of Berlin, and pointed out that “the Europeans and

³³ On Malatyalı Bedri see Murat Issı, “Ömür Boyu Süren Osmanlılık Serüveni- Bir Osmanlı-Kürd Aydını -Malatyalı Bedri”, (Unpublished Paper).

³⁴ Şark ve Kürdistan Projesi, “Bir II. Meşrutiyet gazetesi olarak Şark ve Kürdistan” *Müteferrika*, Vol. 35 No. 2 (2009) 3-7.

Europeanised Ottomans” had written in the Western press about the conditions of the Kurds in a biased manner and “in the fashion of a horror story (*gulyabani hikâyesi tarzında*)...”³⁵ The newspaper did, however, recognise the shortcomings of the Kurdish population. In particular, it focused on education and carried an article concerning the issue by Said-i Kürdi.³⁶

Şark ve Kürdistan was not the only attempt to establish a Kurdish-oriented newspaper. In the year that followed the revolution, members of the Bedirhan family took advantage of the liberal atmosphere to briefly revive the newspaper *Kürdistan*,³⁷ while Said-i Kürdi applied to the government for permission to publish his own Kurdish newspaper.³⁸ Significantly, these initiatives were undertaken by individuals based in Istanbul and not in the Kurdish populated periphery. The dominance of Istanbul within the early Kurdish movement is quite logical. Istanbul was the centre of the imperial government; hence it was only natural that the Ottoman Kurdish elite, many of whom had found employment within the apparatus of the central state, would base themselves there. Moreover, as the empire’s seat of modern learning, Istanbul was also the primary destination for provincial boys seeking to further their education and one day take their place within the venerable institutions of the ‘Eternal State’. The city was also home to a significant population of Kurds of more humble origins. It was estimated, for instance, that by 1908 the Kurdish community in Istanbul numbered approximately 30,000, many of whom made a living working as porters.³⁹

³⁵ M. Bedri, “Kürtler ve Kürdistan”, *Şark ve Kürdistan* (19 November 1908).

³⁶ Molla Said-i Meşhur, “Kürtler Yine Muhatactır”, *Şark ve Kürdistan* (19 November 1908).

³⁷ BOA ZB 270/104 (3 November 1908).

³⁸ According to government documents this newspaper was to be entitled, *Marifet ve İttihad-ı Akrad* (The Skills and Unity of the Kurds). BOA DH.MKT 2730/76 (5 February 1909).

³⁹ For this estimate see PRO FO 11625/88/65 58505/24, Constantinople (23 December 1924). The total population of Istanbul, according to the 1906/1907 census, was 864,662, making Kurds around 3.4% of the city’s total population. Ottoman census statistics did not record the ‘ethnic’ breakdown of the empire’s Muslim population. However, according to the same statistics, Istanbul’s Muslim population was 431,759 (49.9%), making Kurds around 6.9% of the city’s Muslim community. The census statistics can be found in Servet Mutlu, “Late Ottoman Population

Given their proximity to the beating heart of imperial politics, it should be unsurprising that the first Kurdish association of any significance, the Kurdish Society for Mutual Aid and Progress, was established on the initiative of the capital's Kurdish community. Moreover, although affiliates in Kurdish populated towns such as Malatya, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Hınıs, Muş, Mosul, and Van were soon set up, its centre remained in Istanbul (See Chapter VI).

The association was founded in September 1908 during a gathering of over 500 Kurdish intellectuals and notables held in the Vezneciler district of Istanbul. The atmosphere in which this meeting occurred was extremely pro-revolutionary and, according to reports in the Armenian press, concluded to cheers of: "All of us support the constitution and law for [the sake of] the brotherhood and solidarity of the empire's nationalities".⁴⁰ Sheikh Abdülkadir was named the association's president and Field Marshal İsmailpaşazade Ahmed Pasha, a member of the royal family through marriage, served as vice-president. It counted numerous Kurdish public figures amongst its membership including *Şark ve Kürdistan* editor Malatyalı Bedri, Unionist parliamentarian Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, diplomat Mehmed Şerif Pasha, Emin Ali Bedirhan, a leading member of the Bedirhan clan,⁴¹ as well as the religious reformer Said-i Kürdi. The association subsequently published a bulletin, the *Kürt Teaviün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (The Kurdish Mutual Aid and Progress Gazette, hereafter *KTTG*)⁴²

and its Ethnic Distribution", *Nüfusbilim Dergisi/Turkish Journal of Population Studies*, No. 25, (2003), 11.

⁴⁰ Malmısanij, *Kürt Teaviün ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Gazetesi* (Istanbul: Avesta, 1999), 17-18.

⁴¹ Like other members of his family, Emin Ali Bedirhan was employed in Ottoman officialdom during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II. He was an inspector in the Ottoman court system. See Malmısanij, *Cizira Botanlı Bedirhanler* (Istanbul: Avesta, 2000), 129-146.

⁴² The *KTTG* ran between 5th December 1908 and 30th January 1909 and, in total, nine issues were published. There are no records of further issues after January 1909. The KSMP entrusted the editorship of the newspaper to Süleymaniyyeli Tevfik ("*Cemiyet tarafından müntahab sahib-i imtiyaz ve müdir ve muharriri*") and the lead-writer (*sermuharrir*) was Diyarbekirli Ahmed Cemil.

News of the association's formation was warmly received in the CUP press. On 6th October 1908, *Tanin* carried a notice announcing that “influential ulema, sheikhs and tribal chiefs from amongst the Kurds, as well as intellectuals (*erbab-ı fikr ü kalem*)” had established a new society, “the Kurdish Society for Union and Progress’ (*Kürt İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*)”. The article went on to note that the society's primary objectives were:

to work for the unity of all individuals, regardless of ethno-racial differences (*bilâ tefrik-i cins*), to spread education, to extend equality, to put an end to national enmity (*muhasamat-ı milliye*) amongst the tribes and clans, which has been a stain on the moral character of the Kurds for centuries, and to guarantee the intellectual development (*terbiye-i fikriye*) of this important Ottoman element (*bu unsur-ı mühimm-i Osmanî*), which is in its character both pure and resolute...

It concluded by noting that efforts towards providing the basis for good relations amongst ‘Ottoman elements (*anasır-ı Osmaniye*)’ could not be looked at with anything but appreciation, and “without doubt the future efforts of the ulema and sheikhs within the society will bring many benefits”.⁴³

The KSMP and the ‘Kurdish Question’: Unity, Development and Enlightenment

Some of the more nationalistically inclined Turkish historians have sought to characterise the KSMP as a ‘separatist’ organisation. One recent book on the subject argued that, although the association did not openly advocate the partition of the Ottoman homeland or Turkey, it did

It was published with the subtitle: “A religious, scientific, political, literary and social newspaper, to be published once a week for now (*Şimdilik haftada bir defa neşrolunacak dini, ilmi, siyasi, edebi, ictimai gazetedir*).” Although primarily in Ottoman-Turkish, it included Kurdish language sections with articles in both the Kirmancî and Babanî/Soranî dialects. It was administered from the KSMP's headquarters in the Cashiers Club in Istanbul. In 1908 an individual named Müftizade Reşid Efendi applied for permission to publish a weekly journal named *Kürt* (The Kurd). BOA ZB 238/33 (19 November 1908). Its journal was also published in the name of the KSMP. See BOA DH.MKT 2625/54 (26 October 1908).

⁴³ Anonymous, “Kürt İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti”, *Tanin* (6 October 1908).

promote a separatist strain of ‘Kurdism/Kurdish nationalism (*Kürtçülük*)’ as it “only developed projects and programs for Kurds”.⁴⁴ Accusations that the KSMP was a crypto-separatist organisation, however, are unfounded. Its goal was not the creation of an independent or even autonomous Kurdistan. Dr Mehmed Şükrü Sekban, a young physician who joined the KSMP, recollected that the association’s membership had no interest in obtaining even “the smallest privilege (*en ufak bir imtiyaz*)” for the empire’s Kurdish population.⁴⁵ The outlook of the association was fundamentally pro-Ottoman and pro-constitutionalist.

The KSMP’s charter (*nizamname*), published on 2nd October 1908, outlines the objectives of the association clearly. These included:

- Introducing the constitution, which is in accordance with Islamic law and guarantees the prosperity of the nation [i.e. the Ottoman nation] and the security of the homeland, to Kurds who are not aware of it.
- Defending constitutional government and parliament which are the main paths of religion and progress.
- Intensifying the bond between the Kurds and the authority of the Caliphate and Sultanate.
- Promoting good relations between the Kurds and citizens belonging to [other] Ottoman elements such as the Armenians, Nestorians etc.
- Eliminating the conflicts that arise from time to time between tribes and creating an atmosphere where they can live within the unity of law.
- Publishing on education, industry, trade and agriculture.⁴⁶

Such objectives, which bore a striking resemblance to those of the Arab and Circassian clubs, were in no way separatist. Far from envisaging the ‘Kurdish question’ as one relating to the Kurds’ position as a ‘subject people’, the crux of the issue was seen as stemming from the ‘backwardness’ of Kurdish society. One contributor, Seyyah Ahmed Şevki, expressed this perception regarding the underdevelopment of his people quite succinctly. He noted that while “it is known throughout

⁴⁴ Bilâl N. Şimşir, *Kürtçülük 1787-1923* (Ankara: Bilgi 2007), 259.

⁴⁵ Mehmed Şükrü Sekban, *Kürt Sorunu* (Istanbul: Kamer, 1998), 26.

⁴⁶ Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler: İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi*, Vol. 1, 435.

the world that the Kurds are a wholesome, loyal and capable ethnic community/people (*qewm*), what is the point of this if there is no education or art and commerce is rare...?” He concluded: “People cannot live with such poverty”.⁴⁷

The association openly stated its wish to promote constitutionalist ideals amongst the Kurds and to strengthen the bond between the Kurdish community and the Ottoman state. It sought also to encourage peace amongst the warring Kurdish tribes. In an article published in both Kurdish (Kirmancî) and Ottoman-Turkish, another contributor, Halil Hayali, called on the Kurds to learn from past conflicts and follow the example of other Muslim nations in making peace:

The tyrannical government [the Hamidian regime] denied our bravery, our competence and our intelligence. It saw its interests in our conflict. And we, because of our ignorance, complied, we destroyed our homes and families, we saddened the spirits of our fathers and grandfathers and we made the heart of the oppressor rejoice. From this state of affairs let us learn our lesson, let us work like the Arabs, Turks and Albanians... If, by extending the hand of brotherhood, the noble Albanians have brought to the fore their valour, which emanates from true character and temperament, and abandoned hundred year old vendettas, we must like them eliminate vendettas and be as brothers. Let us protect the honour of Kurdishness, and let us with our lives and properties try to protect our homeland! Oh Kurds (*Kirmanc*),⁴⁸ love your [Ottoman] homeland, for love of homeland comes from faith. Oh brothers, remove the enmity and

⁴⁷ Seyyah Ahmed Şevki, “Gelî Walatîya”, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (12 December 1908).

⁴⁸ The author uses the term ‘Kirmanc’ and not Kurd. This term has, historically, been applied to non-tribal Kurdish-speaking peasants. This continues to be the case in the Hewlerî (Erbili) dialect of Soranî Kurdish where it is used as a derogatory term to describe recent migrants to the city. In modern times Kirmanc has been used by Kurdish nationalists as a synonym for Kurd or else, in a more limited sense, for speakers of the Kirmancî dialect of Kurdish. Other articles in the Kirmanc dialect published in the *KTTG* use the term ‘Kurd’. Its use in an address to a Kurdish-speaking audience perhaps reflects an effort to present a more popular image of Kurdish identity, one which included both tribal and non-tribal elements. It should be noted that, although in the Kurdish language version of the article Hayali uses the term ‘Kirmanc’, this is replaced by ‘Kurd’ (*Kürt*) in the Turkish version.

conflict from your hearts, make peace and take heed of the commandment
'All believers are brothers'...⁴⁹

The issue of peace between the Kurdish tribes was also linked to the question of Kurdish relations with the neighbouring peoples. One Kurdish-language (Kirmancî) article published in the *KTTG* declared:

Our nation's name (*milleta me*) is Kurd.⁵⁰ All Kurds are one. Our cities are blessed, our country is subjected to the government of the sublime Ottoman state and we are Ottoman subjects. Turks, Kurds, Armenians, Jews, Yezidis⁵¹ and Nestorians, we all are equal as we live within Ottoman territory... we are one; there is no difference between us. Our names and the names of the other blessed nations are always 'Ottoman' and our country is the Ottoman country.⁵²

The amelioration of relations with other communities, most notable non-Muslims, was a priority for the KSMP. The author of article entitled, *Kürtler ve Ermeniler* (Kurds and Armenians), stressed the cultural commonalities between the two peoples, noting that the Kurds, as the "successors of the Medes", were, like the Armenians, one of the two oldest communities in Kurdistan and emphasised that conflicts between the two groups were of recent origin. He ended by encouraging cooperation between the two groups in order to improve the situation in the region, noting that he hoped that one day Kurds and Armenians would support each other's parliamentarians based on merit and with sincerity.⁵³ Towards this end, the association's leadership entered into cordial relations with the Armenian nationalists in Istanbul, ordered provincial branches to maintain good

⁴⁹ Halil Hayali, "Weten û Îttîfaqa Kirmanca", *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Gazetesi* (23 January 1909). The statement about the brotherhood of believers is from the Qur'an, 49:10 ("Al-Hujurat").

⁵⁰ The article uses the term 'Kirmanc' as opposed to 'Kurd'.

⁵¹ Despite often being regarded as Kurds by today's Kurdish nationalists, the author regards members of the Yezidi sect as a separate community. This indicates the importance of Islam to understandings of Kurdishness, and considering the fact that this article was directed at a Kurdish audience, it most likely reflected popular attitudes.

⁵² "Kürtçe Lisanımız", *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Gazetesi* (26 December 1908).

⁵³ Hüseyin Paşazâde Süleyman, "Kürtler ve Ermeniler", *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Gazetesi* (30 January 1909).

relations with Armenians (and other communities)⁵⁴ and submitted a memorandum to the Ministry of the Interior and the Sublime Porte concerning measures which, they claimed, would resolve “permanently the conflicts which exist[ed] between Kurds and Armenians...”⁵⁵ The association’s bulletin even found space to carry a message wishing their ‘Christian compatriots (*Hristiyan vatandaşlarımız*)’ all the best for their New Year festival.⁵⁶

Another priority for the KSMP was the amelioration of the Kurds’ dire material condition. An article entitled *Osmanlı Amerikası ve Saadet-i Müstakbele-i Aşair* (The Ottoman America and the Future Happiness of the Tribes), gives an insight into the developmentalist mentality of the Ottoman Kurdish elite. In the article, Ahmed Cemil, a native of Diyarbakır, discussed the conditions of Mesopotamia (*El Cezire*).⁵⁷ This region, which was described as being “blessed”, possessed of “great potential for development” and endowed with “natural wealth”, was likened to America. The author briefly recounted the history of the great civilisations that had existed in the region, but noted that poor administration had left it a land of feuding tribes and nomads. Nevertheless, he maintained that Mesopotamia had the potential to sustain 20 million people. He noted that the land was traversed by tributaries of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. Hence, he argued, it was “possible to irrigate everywhere, since there is no unevenness of ground in the desert”. He continued by pointing out that “in the past, these streams had been connected via a

⁵⁴ For example, the government paid for KSMP president Sheikh Abdülkadir to send telegrams to the Kurdish tribes ordering them not to engage in hostile acts against Armenians and Yezidis. BOA DH.MKT 2636/67 (21 October 1908).

⁵⁵ “Kürtler-Ermeniler”, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (16 January 1909).

⁵⁶ “We celebrate with a special sincerity the New Year Holiday of our Christian compatriots. (*Hristiyan vatandaşlarımızın sene-i Miladiye yortusunu samimiyet-i mahsusa ile tebrik ederiz*). “Untitled”, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (16 January 1909).

⁵⁷ The author locates the region as lying between Syria, Iraq and Kurdistan, stretching, at its longest point, from Diyarbakır to Baghdad, approximately 700 km, and at its broadest point, from Mosul to the source of the Habur (Khabur) river, approximately 200 km, thus constituting an area of 140,000 km².

number of canals; the paths of their flow can still be seen. With a little digging, it would be quite easy to open these channels as before”. Yet the region’s problems were not purely a lack of public works; Ahmed Cemil bemoaned the continuance of the nomadic and tribal way of life. To revive the region and “to liberate the tribes and clans from this squalor and disorganisation, they must be brought into a settled state”. He noted the significance amongst the tribesmen of tribal bonds and the importance of the concepts of ‘shared revenge’ and ‘shared responsibility’. However, “under the sovereignty of a civilised government, these unhealthy and false traditions cannot be reconciled with civil and just laws or social unity”.⁵⁸ For Ahmed Cemil, the progress of the Kurdish people could only be achieved with significant changes to their traditional way of life. In many ways, Ahmed Cemil’s view reflected a more general attitude amongst educated Kurds towards tribal groupings. The solutions he presented were not dissimilar to those that Ottoman bureaucrats and statesmen had put forward in the past. Tribalism was regarded as an obstacle not only to social peace but also to the social and material progress of the Kurds and the advance of civilised government.

However, perhaps the most significant theme for the KSMP was that of education. For Halil Hayali the enlightenment of the Kurds was not merely a secular duty but a divine one. “Friends”, he urged, “open schools; endeavour to make your children learn about science. The shame of ignorance is not worthy of them. Obedience to the command of the Prophet: ‘Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave’ is a religious obligation”.⁵⁹ Said-i Kürdi, in a Kurdish language (Kirmancî) article,

⁵⁸ Ahmed Cemil, “Osmanlı Amerikası ve Saadet-i Müstakbele-i Aşâir”, *Kürt Teaviün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5 December 1908).

⁵⁹ Halil Hayali, “Weten û Îttîfaqa Kurmanca”, *Kürt Teaviün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (23 January 1909). This ‘command’ is a hadith (saying of the prophet).

informed his audience that the Kurds possessed ‘three jewels’: Islam, humanity and nationality.

However, he warned,

Ranged against these three we have three enemies that are destroying us. The first is poverty; the condition of the 40,000 porters in Istanbul is an example of this enemy’s attacks. The second is ignorance, which is a great help to the assault of the first enemy. Let us find a path to liberation for those 40,000 porters, made helpless by poverty, of whom not even one in a thousand can read a newspaper. The third is our ignorant conflict and enmity...

As for the solution, the author concluded by stating: “My final words are: education, education, education and unity, unity, unity...”⁶⁰ In a Turkish language article Said-i Kürdi reiterated the point, describing these needs as “firstly national unity (*ittihad-ı milli*)⁶¹ and secondly the propagation of the religious sciences (*ulum-ı diniye*) along with sciences necessary for civilisation (*fünun-ı lazime-i medeniye*)...”⁶² According to him, the appropriate forum for this education to take place was the Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments. These, he believed, could serve as a medium by which to introduce both religious learning and modern technical knowhow. In a later open letter to Ottoman parliamentarians, he again stressed the important role of the Hamidiye Cavalry in introducing modern technical education and religious scholarship to a Kurdish population suspicious of ‘Western’ knowledge.⁶³ Said-i Kürdi was not alone in focusing on the Hamidiye regiments and linking them to the education question. Another writer in the *KTTG*, Süleymaniyeli Fethi pointed out that “the most urgent need of the Hamidiye Regiments... [is] education in both

⁶⁰ Said-i Kürdi, “Bediüzzaman Molla Said-i Kürdi’nin Nasayihı”, *Kürt Teaviün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5 December 1908). A Turkish translation of the article was published in the following issue. See Said-i Kürdi, “Bediüzzaman Molla Said-i Kürdi’nin Gazetemizin 1 Numrolu Nüshasında Münderic Kürdçe Makalesinin Türkçesi”, *Kürt Teaviün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (12 December 1908).

⁶¹ Here ‘national unity’ ought to be understood as a call to end intertribal conflict.

⁶² Said-i Kürdi, “Kürtler Neye Muhtaç” *Kürt Teaviün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (12 December 1908).

⁶³ Said-i Kürdi, “Bediüzzaman Said-i Kürdi’nin Mebusana Hitabı”, *Kürt Teaviün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (19 December 1908).

theoretical and practical studies”.⁶⁴ Significantly, the issue of education had brought up the controversial issue of the Hamidiye Regiments and their possible place in the new constitutional order.

Inevitably, debates concerning education and enlightenment also came to overlap with another potentially explosive issue, namely the issue of Kurdish language education. The KSMP’s attitude towards Kurdish language education is striking in that it again demonstrates the extent to which Ottoman Kurdish elites had assimilated Ottomanist and state orientated perspectives. Although the organisation’s charter contained a commitment to produce Kurdish language publications, it stated that it would also “work to the utmost degree in order to educate Kurds in schools in Turkish, the official language (*lisan-ı resmi*)”.⁶⁵ Indeed, the articles governing membership criteria of the organisation’s administrative committee stipulated that, while knowledge of Kurdish and Turkish was preferred, “in cases where Kurdish is not known, good knowledge of another language is necessary”.⁶⁶ The language issue also made its way on to the pages of the *KTTG*. Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, in an article entitled *Kürtçeye Dair* (About the Kurdish Language), made the case for Kurdish language education in state schools. The author claimed that:

However backward, however lacking in language, literature, sciences, and knowledge Kurds, Albanians and so on remain, the Ottoman state too will be, to that degree, impoverished. Strength and progress is found in knowledge. Knowledge is built upon language.

He then continued by clarifying the advantages of a Kurdish language education from a profoundly Ottomanist perspective:

⁶⁴ Süleymaniyeli Fethi, “Aşayir Askerliği”, (12 December 1908).

⁶⁵ Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler: İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi*, Vol. 1, 437.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 436.

Now, let's take the example of a Kurdish child. In this person's village nothing other than his mother tongue is spoken. If we open a Turkish school in that village and if, step by step, the child is educated in Turkish, he will still become a man. If he has brains, he will also attain a level of excellence. However, he most likely will have had to waste a lot of his valuable time learning language, which is the means to acquiring science. This Kurd, if he were able to find works on the various sciences in his own language, if he could attend a school in which education was given in Kurdish, without doubt he would be raised more quickly, his education would be more complete and *he would be a more valuable member of the Ottoman family.*⁶⁷

İsmail Hakkı's article elicited an interesting response from a contributor whose name was Erzincanlı Hamdi Süleyman. Hamdi Süleyman was careful not to imply that Kurds should abandon their language. However, he rejected the idea of Kurdish language education for three practical reasons:

- 1) Turkish was the official language and knowledge of it was needed to defend one's rights.
- 2) Knowledge of Turkish was needed for service in the Ottoman army.
- 3) Kurdish lacked grammar books, dictionaries and other books.

Hence he counselled Kurds to work towards the propagation of Turkish so that their children would better enjoy the "blessings of education".⁶⁸ For the members of the KSMP, education in the Kurdish language(s) was not an end in itself, but a means to provide for the enlightenment of the Kurdish people and realise their integration into imperial society. In summation, the solution to the 'Kurdish question', in so far as it existed, was seen by the KSMP as involving not a break with

⁶⁷ Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, "Kürtçeye Dair", *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Gazetesi* (19 December 1908). [My emphasis]

⁶⁸ Erzincanlı Hamdi Süleyman, "Kürdistan'da Maarifin Tarz-i Tensik ve İhyası", *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Gazetesi* (23 January 1909).

the Ottoman polity but a combination of constitutional government, communal harmony, economic development and, above all, education.

The KSMP and Ottoman Patriotism

Although the association's membership certainly regarded the Kurds as a specific community with particular needs, Kurdish identity was clearly regarded as being subordinate to Ottoman identity. Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, writing in the first issue of the *KTTG*, stated this point clearly, noting that Kurdish identity was "before everything Islamic", then Ottoman, and only "in the third degree Kurdish". He continued by emphasising what, in his view, was the symbiotic relationship between the Ottoman and Kurdish identities:

It is not possible to contemplate any power in the world that could be successful in dissolving the ancient connection - this sincere and honourable bond - between Kurdishness and Ottomanness, Kurdishness that includes Ottomanness and, in the same way, Ottomanness that includes Kurdishness; these two words are conjoined. If, God forbid, the Ottoman polity were to be destroyed, the Kurdish community would be left scarred. If, God forbid, Kurdish community became rotten and diminished, the Ottoman polity would become feeble and wretched.⁶⁹

Indeed, authors in the KSMP's bulletin often stressed the long historical association between the Kurds and the Ottoman polity. Halil Hayali declared that "the Kurds are a great element of the Ottoman peoples... When battle took place Kurdish riders and Kurdish braves would appear at the frontiers to defend the holy [Ottoman] homeland, and would shed their blood for national honour and for the advancement of religion..."⁷⁰ Süleyman Nazif, a well-known Ottoman poet from Diyarbakır,⁷¹ offered a more concrete example of the service the Kurds had rendered to the

⁶⁹ Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, "Kürtler ve Kürdistan", *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5 December 1908).

⁷⁰ Halil Hayali, "Weten û Îttifaqa Kirmanca", *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (23 January 1909).

⁷¹ Süleyman Nazif (1869-1927) was an Ottoman official who served in numerous capacities within the Ottoman administration, including as a provincial governor. However, he is most well-known

Ottoman state. He pointed out that the Kurds had come under Ottoman rule “of their own volition (*bi'l-ihiyar*)” and stressed Kurdish service to the Ottoman Empire in the past. He recounted a story he had heard from the Quartermaster-General of the Ottoman First Army, İstanbullu Ali Rıza Pasha, who had served as a major with a Kurdish regiment during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878. “These Kurds”, he informed his readers, “stood for thirty hours against a Russian division” despite being reduced to 150 men out of an original 2,200 strong contingent. He concluded: “In front of the ramparts of Vienna and the castles of Crete you find the graves of Kurds. These ill-treated heroes at no time gave up their desire to be good Ottomans”.⁷²

This identification with the Ottoman polity is particularly evident in the line the KSMP took regarding the empire’s position in international politics. An article in the first issue of the *KTTG* noted that:

Four months ago [i.e. before the revolution] our foreign policy (*siyaset-i hariciyemiz*) was a game of European ambitions and interests. We could only secure a position within that clash of interests. Discussions amongst the Great Powers had even begun with regards to separating off, under the name of the “Three Provinces (*Vilayat-ı Selase*)”, the three provinces of Rumelia, namely the provinces of Salonika, Kosovo and Manastır (Bitola), and placing them under international observation and an autonomous administration, because of our tardiness in doing the things necessary for the interests and needs of the country. Rumelia’s current political situation has... undergone a significant change...

The author continued by noting that in the past “our government, because of its weakness, could do nothing more than pick the least bad option with regards to the political catastrophes which had been taking place for some time...”⁷³ It was hoped, however, that this state of affairs would now

today for his journalistic and literary activities. See Muhammet Gür, “Süleyman Nazif”, *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 38 (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi Genel Müdürlüğü, 2010), 92-94.

⁷² Süleyman Nazif, “Kürt ve Kürdistan”, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (12th December 1908).

⁷³ E.A, “Siyasiyat”, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5th December 1908).

come to an end with the new constitutional administration. Significant is the terminology used in the article; phrases such as ‘our foreign policy (*siyaset-i hariciyemiz*)’, ‘our tardiness (*taallülatımız*)’ and ‘our government (*hükümetimiz*)’ demonstrate a strong identification with the Ottoman polity and its interests.

This strong identification is further apparent in the attitude of the association to post-revolutionary assaults on Ottoman sovereignty such as the Austrian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (5th October 1908), which was followed a day later by the Bulgarian declaration of independence. These two acts were largely symbolic; the 1878 Treaty of Berlin had granted Austria *de facto* control of Bosnia-Herzegovina in addition to creating a *de facto* independent Bulgarian Principality. Yet symbolism matters and these two events triggered a wave of popular mobilisation amongst Ottoman Muslims which took the form of a boycott of Austrian and Bulgarian goods.⁷⁴ The KSMP wholeheartedly embraced the campaign, publishing a notice in its bulletin that described the boycott as “the most perfect weapon in the economic war launched against the Austrians” and noting its appreciation for the efforts of “our loyal and abstemious Kurds... in wielding this weapon”.⁷⁵ The paper later reported on the support given to the ‘economic war (*harb-i iktisadi*)’ waged against Austrian products by ‘our patriotic porters (*hamiyetli hammallarımız*)’,

⁷⁴ The boycott of Austrian (and also Bulgarian) products was orchestrated by the CUP, but was received with great enthusiasm by the Ottoman public. Manifestations of support for the boycott were observed across the empire, both in Rumelia and Anatolia and in the Arab provinces. One of the principal products the movement boycotted was Austrian made fezzes, leading to the movement often being known as the ‘fez boycott’. See Doğan Çetinkaya, “Muslim Merchants and Working-class in Action: Nationalism, Social Mobilization and Boycott Movements in the Ottoman Empire 1908-1914” (PhD diss., Leiden 2010), 47-107. One interesting response to the boycott in the *KTG* came from a writer by the name of Mahmud Muin. In a two part article entitled *Serpûş-i Millimiz ve Fes* (Our National Headdress and the Fez) he mourned the popular rejection of the fez, which he regarded as a symbol of Ottoman and Muslim pride. Mahmud Muin, “Serpûş-i Millimiz ve Fes”, *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Gazetesi* (16 and 23 January 1909).

⁷⁵ Anonymous, “Tahrim”, *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5 December 1908).

making it known that some of the residents in the vicinity of Dolmabahçe had collected 1,059 *kuruş* and purchased a watch for Ali Agha, the leader of the Istanbul Customs Office porters.⁷⁶ Indeed, Seyyah Ahmed Şevki held up the Istanbul porters' activities as an example to other Kurds of what could be achieved through unity.⁷⁷

The association also vocally supported popular efforts to forestall Greek efforts to seize control of the island of Crete. In a 'special article' entitled *Girit Meselesi* (The Cretan Question) published in the *KTTG*'s 6th issue and accompanied by a photograph of the Cretan town of Hanye (Chania), the author acknowledged that Bulgaria's declaration of independence and the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina had "upset this great [Ottoman] nation (*bu ümmet-i muazzama*) with the deepest hurtful memories...". However, "this time" the author continued, "Greece's annexation policy towards Crete has awoken holy feelings and righteousness in every upstanding Ottoman. Consequently, in order to protest against Greece, a demonstration has been held and everyone has taken an oath in the name of God, their honour and their conscience that they would sacrifice their lives in this cause".⁷⁸ The article was followed by a summary of a speech given at the demonstration by Süleymaniyeli Hüseyin Paşazade Süleyman Beyefendi in the name of the KSMP. In it he declared:

We, in the name of the Kurdish people, declare and swear before you that we, the Kurds, like our ancestors, will not accept even one stone of the island of Crete being surrendered to the enemy without making hills of our bones beneath the castle and walls of Crete. We would like to declare and proclaim that we share in the feelings and desires of our Cretan compatriots. Long live national unity, long live Crete.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Anonymous, "Dahili", *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (12 December 1908).

⁷⁷ Seyyah Ahmed Şevki, "Gelî Walatîya", *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (19 December 1908).

⁷⁸ "Makale-i Mahsusa", *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (9 January 1909).

⁷⁹ Süleymaniyeli Hüseyin Paşazâde Süleyman Beyefendi, "Suret-i Nutuk", *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (9 January 1909).

The sense of Ottoman patriotism is unmistakable. Far from entertaining a separatist agenda or even focusing only on ‘projects for the Kurds’, the KSMP vigorously defended Ottoman sovereignty⁸⁰ and encouraged Kurds to participate in the Ottoman public sphere. The pro-Ottoman orientation of the KSMP is also apparent in more subtle ways. The association’s bulletin was the first Kurdish periodical to include pictures and photographs. However, far from being adorned with specifically Kurdish imagery, it printed pictures relating to broader Ottoman politics, such as pictures of Istanbul, the Ottoman parliament and the sultan (see Figures 1, 2 and 3). Such imagery of the capital and core political institutions of the Ottoman state was, in no uncertain terms, an indication of where the KSMP believed the Kurds ought to look for their salvation. These were not alien bodies ruling over the Kurds, but the institutions of a Muslim empire of which the Kurds formed an integral part.

Finding a Role: the KSMP, the CUP and National Leadership

In many ways the ideological orientation of the KSMP echoed that of the newspaper *Kürdistan*, which had been published between 1898 and 1902. The central difference lies in its attitude towards the existing Ottoman government. Despite being empire loyalists, the contributor to *Kürdistan* had been implacably opposed to the autocratic regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II. In contrast, the KSMP was active at a time of great optimism, a time in which many educated Kurds believed that the restoration of constitutional rule would herald a brighter future for all Ottoman subjects. In this the aims and aspirations of the KSMP were in perfect harmony with those of the new regime. A statement from the association printed in the *KTTG* declared that “the association supports and accepts all aspirations and initiatives necessary for the splendour and development

⁸⁰ For example the *KTTG* reprinted an article first published in *Yeni Gazete* (The New Newspaper) elaborating on the issue of Ottoman sovereignty. Süleyman Nazif, “İstiklal-i Osmaniye”, *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Gazetesi* (30 January 1909).

of the Ottoman state and supports all the clauses within the political programme published by the CUP which assure the good-health and progress of the [Ottoman] homeland (*vatan*)...⁸¹ Süleymaniyeli Tevfik⁸² made a similar point, noting that “the supremacy of the constitution, along with Islamic law, must be protected”. He continued by praising the programme of the CUP, which he described as being “for the health of the homeland and the progress of all”.⁸³ Halil Hayali also lauded the achievements of the CUP: “Thanks to the efforts of the CUP, and with the help of the military”, he proclaimed, “the Constitution emerged, and all the woes of tyranny from which we had suffered disappeared”.⁸⁴ Indeed, when the CUP issued a list of candidates for election in Istanbul, the names were reproduced in the *KTTG* and the association urged the ‘great Ottoman nation (*ümmet-i muazzama-i Osmaniye*)’ to support them.⁸⁵ The KSMP was not simply a pro-Ottoman or even pro-constitutionalist organisation, it was also pro-CUP.

It might be inferred then that the KSMP, which described itself as a “charitable association” (*Cemiyet-i Hayriye*) in its charter, was established as a body which could assist the new regime in

⁸¹ Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti, “Cemiyetin Beyannamesi”, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5 December 1908).

⁸² As his name suggests Süleymaniyeli Tevfik (1867-1950) was a native of Süleymaniye. He received a religious education and went on to hold a number of posts in the local government of his home district. In the 1890s he moved to Istanbul where he studied law. In 1909 he was appointed as the district governor of Halabja. He went on to serve across the empire and was eventually appointed as the county governor of Amasya in 1918. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, he returned to his home town and today is best remembered for his Soranî poetry, written under the penname *Pîremêrd* (Old Man). Keith Hitchins, “Pîremêrd” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online Edition, 2010, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/piramerd> (12 September 2013).

⁸³ Süleymaniyeli Tevfik, “Meqsûd-î Kirdewebûnewe-yî Cem’îyet”, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5 December 1908).

⁸⁴ Halil Hayali, “Weten û Îttîfaqa Kirmanca”, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (23 January 1909).

⁸⁵ “Dersaadet Mebusları”, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (12 December 1908). The list comprised of Ahmed Rıza Bey, Manyasizade Refik Bey, Hoca Mustafa Asım Efendi, Ahmed Nesimi Bey, Hüseyin Cahid Bey, Konstantin Kostaninidi Efendi, Pandelaki Fozmidi Efendi, Halaciyani Efendi, Zehrab Efendi and Vantali Feraci Efendi.

‘enlightening’ (or indeed ‘civilising’) the Kurds and Kurdistan. However, it was not a mere tool of the Ottoman state or the CUP. It was also regarded by its membership as an advocacy group through which the Kurds could obtain their rights from the government. Seyyah Ahmed Şevki called on readers to look to the KSMP:

From this day forth, if they [officials?] harm you or cause your ruin, turn to the Society of Kurdistan [KSMP]. If an official commits evil against you or oppresses you, report it to the government. If they still do not pay heed, then write to the Society of the Kurds [KSMP] in Istanbul. They will pay heed. The Society is founded upon the ideas of the government and does not accept any villainy...⁸⁶

Thus, we might conclude that, through its identity as a civil society organisation, the KSMP sought to present itself as an intermediary body, one which could, it was hoped, negotiate relations between the Ottoman state and the Kurdish population. In short, it was a vehicle through which appropriate and responsible national leadership could be exercised.

This leadership was, of course, to be exercised by ‘appropriate’ individuals. This fact was explicitly recognised in the KSMP’s charter. In the second article, which governed membership of the association’s “Consultative Committee (*Heyet-i İstişare*)”, it was stated:

The Consultative Committee is to be formed from no more than twenty-five individuals of extraordinary fame and dignity from amongst the Kurdish sheikhs, notables and intellectuals. In order to be a member it is necessary to 1) reside in Istanbul, 2) be over the age of 25, 3) not be known for misdeeds and be possessed of good morals, 4) not have been convicted of any crimes or misdemeanours and 5) be from amongst the ulema, the sheikhs, the notables and the masters of virtue and perfection possessed of honour and esteem.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Seyyah Ahmed Şevki, “Ey Gelî Kurd”, *Kürt Teaviün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5 December 1908).

⁸⁷ Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler: İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi*, Vol. 1, 435.

Understandably, the association's elitist orientation elicited some criticism from those of less prestigious backgrounds. Dr Mehmed Şükrü Sekban claimed that the reason he had lost the election to be on the KSMP's administrative committee was his humble origins.⁸⁸ In short, leadership within the organisation was reserved for those from 'noble' families.

In certain ways, the KSMP may be compared to the Society for Arab-Ottoman Fraternity, namely as being a vehicle through which Kurdish elites could secure their influence in the new political order by acting as the champions of Kurdish interests. Indeed, Cemilpaşazade Kadri, who at the time of the revolution was attending high school in Istanbul, accused it of being an organisation of "the Kurdish pashas and princes (*paşalar ve ümera*) of the palace, whom the Sultan [had] maintained in Istanbul via either a governmental post or a stipend...", and who, following the revolutionary upheaval, had found "salvation in Kurdishness..."⁸⁹ It was the case that some members of the organisation, such as Field Marshal Ismailpaşazade Ahmed Pasha, had maintained extremely close links with the Hamidian regime. Such individuals may have believed that participation in a pro-constitutionalist Kurdish organisation might serve to secure their interests. However, unlike the leadership of the Society for Arab-Ottoman Fraternity, KSMP leaders such as Sheikh Abdülkadir and Babanzade İsmail Hakkı had close relations with the Unionists.

⁸⁸ Sekban, *Kürt Sorunu*, 26. Mehmed Şükrü Sekban notes that his opponent in these elections was Babanzade Ahmed Naim. However, given Babanzade Ahmed Naim's implacable opposition to ethnic mobilisation of any kind and the fact that none of the KSMP's documents mention him, this is no doubt a mistake. It is likely that Sekban's opponent was Ahmed Naim's younger brother, Babanzade İsmail Hakkı.

⁸⁹ Zinar Silopi [Cemilpaşazâde Kadri], *Doza Kurdistan: Kürd Milletinin 60 Yıllık Esaretten Kurtuluş Savaşı Hatıraları* (Ankara: Özge, 1991), 28.

The Kurdish Society for the Propagation of Education (1910-1911)

Despite the high hopes that the new regime would be able to arrest the empire's decline, the reality of the first year of constitutional government was disappointing. Not only did the empire suffer major setbacks in foreign policy, discontent was also growing at home. Tension exploded on 13th April 1909, when troops in Istanbul, demanding a restoration of Sharia (Islamic law) revolted against their officers and forced the cabinet of Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha to resign. The CUP was hounded from the capital and a new government under Ahmed Tevfik Pasha was installed. The counter-revolution, known to posterity as the '31st March Event (*31 Mart Vakası*),⁹⁰ was unsuccessful. The CUP was restored to power thanks to the mobilisation of pro-revolutionary forces in the Balkans, the so-called 'Action Army (*Hareket Ordusu*)' of General Mahmud Şevket Pasha. Subsequently, the CUP deposed Sultan Abdülhamid II in favour of the more pliable Mehmed V Reşad (r. 1909-1918). However, the revolutionary honeymoon was over.

The KSMP was disbanded shortly after the attempted counter-revolution, a development which will be discussed below. However, in 1910 a new Kurdish civil society organisation, the Kurdish Society for the Propagation of Education, was established in the capital. The founders included a number of former members of the KSMP, such as Emin Ali Bedirhan, Halil Hayali and Said-i Kürdi, as well as individuals who had been involved in the publication of *Kürdistan*, such as Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan, Abdurrahman Bedirhan and Dr Abdullah Cevdet. In addition, it gained the support of a number of Kurdish parliamentarians: Seyfullah Bey (Erzurum), Taha Efendi (Hakkâri), Tevfik Bey (Van) and Mehmed Efendi (Genç).⁹¹

⁹⁰ According to the Rumi calendar in use at the time, the counter-revolution occurred on 31st March 1325 (13th April 1909)

⁹¹ Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler: Mütareke Dönemi*, Vol. 2 (Istanbul: İletişim; 1999), 224. Tunaya states that the KSPE was formed in 1919. However, this is incorrect. Both the

This new association was very much a continuation of the quest for Kurdish enlightenment and education pursued both by the editors of *Kürdistan* and the supporters of the KSMP. It also continued to reflect a strongly pro-Ottoman political perspective. The organisation's charter stated that it was an "independent (*müstakil*)" society and its activities were "strictly scientific (*münhasıran ilmi*)". The section of the document pertaining to the association's purpose declared that its primarily objective was to "spread and circulate knowledge and industry amongst the Kurds who, out of all the sons of the [Ottoman] homeland, had been the most deprived of the blessings of education". In order to realise this objective, it was further stated that the association aimed, in the short term, to establish a "primary school (*ibtidai bir mekteb*)" for Kurdish children in Istanbul. In the longer term, they would, with the help of charitable donations, work towards the establishment of schools in "towns and villages in which Kurds make up the majority of residents (*ekseriyet-i sekenesi Kürt olan kasaba ve karyelerde*)" as well as amongst the "Kurdish clans and tribes who remained in the most unenlightened condition (*muzlim bir halde kalan aşair ve kabail*)".⁹²

The association soon moved forward with the first phase of its plans. In early 1910, it sought and received permission to establish a Kurdish school in Istanbul.⁹³ The school, named the *Kürt Meşrutiyet Mektebi* (The Kurdish Constitutional School), was located opposite the mausoleum of Sultan Mahmud II in the Sultanahmet district of Istanbul. The association appointed former

memoirs of a number of Kurds active at the time and research conducted by subsequent historians date the establishment of the KSPE to 1910. See Silopi, *Doza Kurdistan*, 30-33; Nuri Dersimi, *Hatıratım* (Istanbul: Doz 1997), 25; Malmîsanij, *İlk Kürt Gazetesi Kurdistan'ı yayımlayan Abdurrahman Bedirhan* (Istanbul: Vate, 2009), 81; İsmail Göldaş, *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* (Istanbul: Doz, 1991), 285. This is confirmed by Ottoman government documents. See BOA DH.MUİ 60/2 (31 January 1910) and BOA DH.MUİ (12 September 1910).

⁹² Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, Vol. 2, 224.

⁹³ BOA DH.MUİ 60/2 (31 January 1910).

Kürdistan editor and CUP activist Abdurrahman Bedirhan, as its director.⁹⁴ The project's strong Ottomanist and pro-constitutionalist character won it praise from the CUP press. A report published in *Tanin*, for example, stated that at the school's opening ceremony, held in March 1910, school leaders had spoken positively about the significance of the constitutional order and offered prayers for the health and long life of the Sultan-Caliph.⁹⁵ Indeed, the school even received a state subsidy, amounting to 1,900 *kuruş*,⁹⁶ courtesy of Babanzade İsmail Hakkı who, between March and May 1911, served as the CUP backed Minister of Public Instruction.⁹⁷ Despite the ambitious scope of the KSPE, the association's pilot school seems to have closed just over a year after first opening its doors. Indeed, it seems that the KSPE was dissolved some time in 1911, ending all its activities directed at propagating education amongst the Kurds. This marked the end of an important phase in the history of Kurdish activism in Istanbul, one which had been shaped by a sense of optimism and unity of purpose.

This prevailing mood would be shattered by growing troubles on both the international and domestic front. In late September 1911, Italy invaded Tripolitania and a year later a grand alliance of Balkan Powers attacked the empire's European provinces. Both the Ottoman-Italian War (September 1911 to October 1912) and the two Balkan Wars (October 1912 to May 1913 and June to August 1913) were disastrous for the empire. Italy annexed the empire's remaining North African provinces and Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro and Romania conquered almost all that remained of Ottoman Europe. Meanwhile, at home imperial politics became increasingly acrimonious. Ottoman politics came to be divided between those who remained loyal to the CUP

⁹⁴ BOA İMF 15/1328/M-1 (24 January 1910).

⁹⁵ "Kürt Neşr-i Maarif Cemiyeti", *Tanin* (28 March 1910).

⁹⁶ Malmîsanij, *İlk Kürt Gazetesi Kürdistan'ı yayımlayan Abdurrahman Bedirhan*, 86.

⁹⁷ BOA DUİT 8/31 (2 March 1911); Aykut Kansu, *The Revolution of 1908 in Turkey* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 226.

and a growing cohort of opposition parties which came to oppose what they regarded as the CUP's increasing authoritarian drift. This conflict culminated in the *coup d'état* of the 23rd January 1913 during which the CUP, led by the infamous 'triumvirate' of İsmail Enver, Mehmed Talat and Ahmed Cemal, established a *de facto* one party regime. These developments would deeply impact upon the Ottoman Kurdish elite in the capital.

The Failure of the KSMP and KSPE in Context: Dissolution and Disillusion

The failure of the KSMP and KSPE has often been accounted for by the growing authoritarianism of the CUP.⁹⁸ This drift towards authoritarianism can be traced back to the 1909 'counter-revolution'. Following this failed attempt to oust it, the CUP, which had sought to influence the Ottoman government indirectly in the immediate aftermath of the 1908 Constitutional Revolution, assumed a greater degree of direct control over imperial policy, implementing a series of regulations restricting civil liberties.⁹⁹ This included a 'Law on Associations', which placed strict controls on civil society organisations.¹⁰⁰ It is unclear whether the CUP administration banned the KSMP outright. The 'Law on Associations' did not forbid 'national associations' *per se*; rather, such associations were strictly forbidden from engagement in political activities. Nevertheless, according to Cemilpaşazade Kadri, it was the CUP that forced the KSMP to cease its activities,¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ See Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1989), 15; Also see M.S Lazarev, Ş.X. Mıhoyan, E.I. Vasiyeva, M.A. Gasratyan, and O.I. Jigalina. *Kürdistan Tarihi* (Istanbul: Avesta, 2007), 173.

⁹⁹ These included a 'Law on Strikes', which banned strikes in all public services and dissolved labour trade unions in the sector; a 'Press Law', which limited freedom of expression; and a 'Law on Vagabonds', which granted the government the power to arrest people unemployed for more than two months. See Hanioglu, "The Second Constitutional Period: 1908-1918", 70-71.

¹⁰⁰ Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 75; Zehra Arslan, "Ağustos 1909 Tarihli Cemiyetler Kanunu Üzerinde Meclis-i Mebusan'da Yapılan Müzakereler ve Cemiyetlerin Yapılanmasında İttihat ve Terakki Örneği" *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, Vol. 3, No. 11 (2010), 57-70; Zafer Toprak, "1909 Cemiyet Kanunu", in Murat Belge and Fahri Aral (eds.) *Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 1 (Istanbul: İletişim, 1985), 206-207.

¹⁰¹ Silopi, *Doza Kurdistan*, 28.

although this may well have been the result of the activities of its provincial affiliates rather than those of the Istanbul branch (See Chapter VI).

According to an account from Emin Ali Bedirhan's son, Süreyya Bedirhan, the closure of the KSPE was also the result of CUP hostility. In an article published in 1917, he claimed that, although the organisation's objectives were simply to promote "the enlightenment of the nation (*milletin tenviri*)", the CUP had plotted to close the organisation "under the pretence that the presence of the word Kurdish in the [association's] title was proof enough that the real reason for the formation of this society and school was not the propagation of education but to prepare the Kurdish community for national and separatist action (*hareket-i milliye ve iftirakiye*)". However, he maintained that the CUP did not "dare to order the group's dissolution directly" but instead resorted to indirect obstruction. As a result, the KSPE "which was given no peace by the government's thousand different forms of harassment finally could no longer endure and dissolved...".¹⁰²

It seems correct that the CUP's increasing authoritarianism played a part in the dissolution of both the KSMP and KSPE. However, divisions amongst the Ottoman Kurdish elite might also explain the short lived nature of both associations. For example, Cemilpaşazade Kadri noted that one of the primary reasons for the closure of the KSMP was rivalries between the Bedirhan family, led by Emin Ali Bedirhan, and the followers of the association's president, Sheikh Abdülkadir, an individual who apparently regarded himself as the "spiritual leader of Kurdistan".¹⁰³ One suspects that the Bedirhans had no intention of submitting to the KSMP's president. Conflict between the

¹⁰² See *Kürdistan*, No. 5, (31 October 1917) reproduced in Malmîsanij, *İlk Kürt Gazetesi Kurdistan'ı yayımlayan Abdurrahman Bedirhan*, 90-91.

¹⁰³ Silopi, *Doza Kurdistan*, 28.

Bedirhans and Sheikh Abdülkadir Efendi's followers would be a perennial issue within the Kurdish movement well into the 1920s. These rivalries were multi-faceted. Most obviously, it was a conflict between rival 'notables'.¹⁰⁴ However, they also perhaps reflected a deeper 'cultural' divides between the 'westernised' Bedirhans and the more 'conservative' Sheikh Abdülkadir. Another source of division, often overlooked in existing studies, was the growing factionalism amongst the Ottoman Kurdish elite brought about by the more general polarisation of Ottoman politics between 1909 and 1914.

Like other individuals active in the Ottoman public sphere, Kurdish leaders were drawn into the broader political struggles between the CUP and its opponents. In this increasingly tense atmosphere, some Kurdish public figures remained true to the CUP, most notably Babanzade İsmail Hakkı. Between 1908 and his death in 1913, he was a leading CUP parliamentarian, serving as the deputy for Baghdad (1908-1912) and later Divaniye¹⁰⁵ (1912-1913). As already noted, he also briefly served in the Ottoman cabinet as the CUP backed Minister for Public Instruction. In addition to his parliamentary and governmental positions, he was also an active pro-CUP journalist. He worked as the political editor of the CUP mouthpiece *Tanin* and gained a reputation as a specialist on foreign affairs.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, in an interview with the *New York Times* he vigorously defended CUP policies to the outside world, claiming that charges of "rash and cruel Turkification" were the "natural aftermath of the enthusiasm which represented the Constitution as something which would immediately by a kind of magic to make everyone rich and happy and destroy all

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion of the rivalries between the Bedirhans and Sheikh Abdülkadir Efendi over leadership in the Kurdish movement see Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 87-103.

¹⁰⁵ Divaniye (Diwaniya) is located between Baghdad and Basra.

¹⁰⁶ Mayak, "Babanzâde İsmail Hakkı'nın *Tanin*'de Yayınlanmış Makalelerine Göre Osmanlı Devleti ve Dış Politika (1911)", 421-437.

misfortune and all excesses”.¹⁰⁷ While Babanzade İsmail Hakkı was not a member of the CUP inner circle, he was an influential and highly respected member of the party. Hence his unexpected death in late 1913 at the age of 36 was greatly mourned by Unionists, with *Tanin* editor Hüseyin Cahid,¹⁰⁸ describing it as an “unforgettable sorrow” for his friends and “a great loss for the country”.¹⁰⁹

Babanzade İsmail Hakkı’s loyalty to the CUP was not unique. Individuals such as Sheikh Abdülkadir Efendi¹¹⁰ and Said-i Kürdi¹¹¹ also maintain cordial relations with the empire’s dominant political force. Nevertheless, other elements of the Ottoman Kurdish elite came to openly oppose the CUP and its policies. Although this included a minority who embraced separatist Kurdish nationalism and began working towards an independent Kurdish nation-state (see Chapter VI), many remained loyal to the Ottomanist ideals of revolution, expressing their disquiet at the direction of imperial politics through participation in the Ottoman opposition movement.

Mehmed Şerif Pasha is a case in point. Despite being one of the CUP’s financiers during the Hamidian era, he fell out with the party leadership soon after the revolution, leaving Istanbul for

¹⁰⁷ “Turkey’s Policies Born of Necessity”, *The New York Times* (24 September 1911).

¹⁰⁸ Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın (1875-1957) was an Ottoman-Turkish journalist, literary figure and politician. Prior to the 1908, he served in numerous capacities in the Ottoman Ministry of Education. Following the revolution he entered politics, running for parliament and establishing the CUP newspaper *Tanin* for which he served as editor. See Mustafa Çağrıcı, “Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın”, *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 43 (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi Genel Müdürlüğü, 2014), 300-301.

¹⁰⁹ Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, *Tanıdıklarım* (Istanbul: YKY, 2001), 119.

¹¹⁰ In November 1909 Sheikh Abdülkadir Efendi travelled to Van under the auspices of the CUP to encourage the Kurdish tribes to settle their land disputes with the Armenians. See BOA DH.MUİ 2839/69 (28 October 1909). In February 1913, a month after CUP *coup d’état*, he also assisted the government by issuing a proclamation calling on Kurds to join the Ottoman army. See PRO FO 195/2449, Pera (24 February 1912).

¹¹¹ In 1910 Said-i Kürdi travelled to Kurdistan in order to spread constitutionalist ideas amongst the Kurdish tribes. His experiences were published in 1911. See Said Nursî [Said-i Kürdî] “Münâzarat” in *Bediüzzaman Said Nursî’nin İlk Dönem Eserleri* (Istanbul: Söz, 2007), 433-524.

Paris.¹¹² There he became a high-profile critic of the CUP and one of the main financial backers of the opposition movement. In 1909 he helped found the Ottoman Fundamental Reform Party (*Islahat-ı Esasiye-i Osmaniye Fırkası*) and began publication of the anti-CUP journal *Mècheroutiette/Meşrutiyet* (Constitutional Government).¹¹³ In 1912 his party merged with the *Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası* (Freedom and Accord Party, hereafter FAP), a grand coalition of anti-CUP political groupings.¹¹⁴ Because of his heavy involvement in the opposition, in January 1914 the CUP attempted to assassinate him at his home in Paris.¹¹⁵ However, despite the attempt on his life, he remained an ‘Ottomanist’, writing on the eve of the First World War that his opposition to the CUP was because it was ruining his “country [the Ottoman Empire] both politically and economically”.¹¹⁶

Şerif Pasha was merely one of a number of high-profile Kurdish members of the opposition. For example, a number of Bedirhans also became involved in the FAP, with Bedirhanzade Hasan Bey standing for election in Siirt on the party’s ticket during the 1912 ‘Big Stick’ general election.¹¹⁷ Mevlanzade Rıfat also became a vocal critic of the regime, especially on the issue of press

¹¹² There is a debate concerning the reason for Şerif Pasha’s departure from Istanbul. One theory is that it was because the CUP refused to appoint him as Ottoman Ambassador to London. The other is that he was opposed to the interference of military officers in politics. See Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler: İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi*, Vol. 1, 253; Rohat Alakom, *Şerif Paşa: Bir Kürt Diplomatinin Fırtınalı Yılları* (Istanbul: Avesta, 1998), 52-53.

¹¹³ Alakom, *Şerif Paşa*, 57-62.

¹¹⁴ On the FAP see Ali Birinci, *Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası*, (Istanbul: Dergâh, 1990); also see Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler: İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi*, Vol 1, 294-343.

¹¹⁵ News of the CUP’s attempt on the Pasha’s life made European and North American headlines. See “Sherif Pasha Attacked in Paris”, *The Times* (15 January 1914) and “Turk Slain in Paris as He Tries Murder”, *The New York Times*, (15 January 1914).

¹¹⁶ Chérif, “Les Adieux de Mècheroutiette”, *Mècheroutiette* (April 1914).

¹¹⁷ FO 195/2405, Erzurum (22 May 1912); Fatih Ünal, “II. Meşrutiyet, Ulusçuluk ve Kürt Ayrılıkçı Hareketi”, *Doğu Batı*, No. 46 (2008), 92-93. The 1912 Ottoman elections have become known as the ‘Big Stick’ elections (*Sopalı Seçimler*) on account of the high level of intimidation used by the CUP to secure victory for its favoured candidates.

freedom.¹¹⁸ Another Kurdish critic of the CUP was the lawyer and Dersim deputy between 1908 and 1912, Ömer Lütfi Fikri Bey.¹¹⁹ While supporting of a certain degree of decentralisation,¹²⁰ he was a firm Ottoman patriot and played an important role in the formation of the anti-CUP movement,¹²¹ through involvement in the Moderate Liberal Party (*Mutedil Hürriyetperveren Fırkası*),¹²² and the FAP¹²³ as well as his journalistic activities.¹²⁴ Thus, while the ‘revolutionary moment’ may have, at least temporarily, obscured political divides amongst the Ottoman Kurdish elite, as the revolution entered its ‘Thermidor’ these divisions resurfaced, making unified action on the ‘Kurdish question’ difficult.

Conclusions: The Apogee of ‘Kurdish Ottomanism’

In retrospect, the constitutionalist regime’s first few years might be said to have been the apogee of ‘Kurdish-Ottomanism’, a trend first made manifest in the Bedirhan brothers’ newspaper *Kürdistan* a decade earlier. It was a period of optimism in which the Ottoman Kurdish elites sought,

¹¹⁸ Mevlanzade Rıfat was involved in the publication of a number of newspapers critical of the CUP, including *Serbesti* (Independence) and *Cihad* (Struggle). Murat Issı, “Hürriyet Âşığı Bir Osmanlı-Kürt Aydını Mevlanzâde Rıfat Bey”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, No. 196 (2010), 73-74; Also see Mevlanzâde Rıfat, *Sürgün Hatıralarım* (Istanbul: Avesta 2009).

¹¹⁹ During the Hamidian era Lütfi Fikri Bey had been an opponent of the regime, eventually fleeing to Egypt. See Ali Birinci, “Lütfi Fikri Bey”, *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 27 (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi Genel Müdürlüğü, 2003), 233-234.

¹²⁰ According to Nuri Dersmi, a Kurdish student in Istanbul, Lütfi Fikri was a supporter of Kurdish unity within the Ottoman Empire; “however, he was completely against the establishment of a separate state of Kurdistan.” Dersimi, *Hatıratım*, 35.

¹²¹ Indeed, Lütfi Fikri Bey displayed considerable personal enmity towards CUP members, including Babanzade İsmail Hakkı whom he described in his diary as “a horrid fellow”. Lütfi Fikri, *Lütfi Fikri Bey’in Günlüğü: Daima Muhalefet* (Istanbul: Arma, 1991), 60.

¹²² The Moderate Liberal Party was established in November 1909. Although in opposition to the CUP, the party was committed to the territorial integrity (*tamami-i mülkiyet*) of the empire and the sovereignty (*hakimiyet-i milliye*) of the Ottoman nation (*millet-i Osmaniye*). In 1911 its members joined the FAP. See Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler: İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi*, Vol 1, 241-251.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 309.

¹²⁴ On his journalistic activities see Ahmet Ali Gazel, *Lütfi Fikri’nin Tanzimat’ı* (Konya: Çizgi, 2007).

within the framework of the constitutional regime, to resolve the ‘Kurdish question’, a question they saw primarily in cultural and socio-economic terms. Yet, as the political struggle within the empire gained momentum, for many amongst the capital’s Kurdish elite, taking action on the ‘Kurdish question’ seems to have taken second place to the broader struggle between the CUP and its opponents. Their main concern, as it had been during the days of the autocracy, was the ‘salvation’ of the Ottoman state. This did not mean that Kurdish public figures did not continue to engage with Kurdish issues. Both Unionists such as Babanzade İsmail Hakkı and liberals such as Mevlanzade Rıfat continued to display concern for the issues facing the empire’s Kurdish population. However, the failures of both the KSMP and KSPE opened up space within the capital’s Kurdish milieu for a new group, the ‘youth’, to take a leading role in advocating for the amelioration of conditions for the Kurdish community. While the capital’s Kurdish youth, comprised mainly of students studying in Istanbul’s numerous institutions of higher learning, did not entirely eschew the ‘accommodationist’ politics of their elders, they did beginning to move away from the state orientated perspective which regarded the ‘Kurdish question’ as intrinsically linked to broader questions pertaining to the ‘modernisation’ and ‘salvation’ of the Ottoman polity. For them the Kurdish identity was no longer subordinate to the Ottoman identity, but one of equal if not greater importance.

Figures: Pictures appearing in the *KTTG*

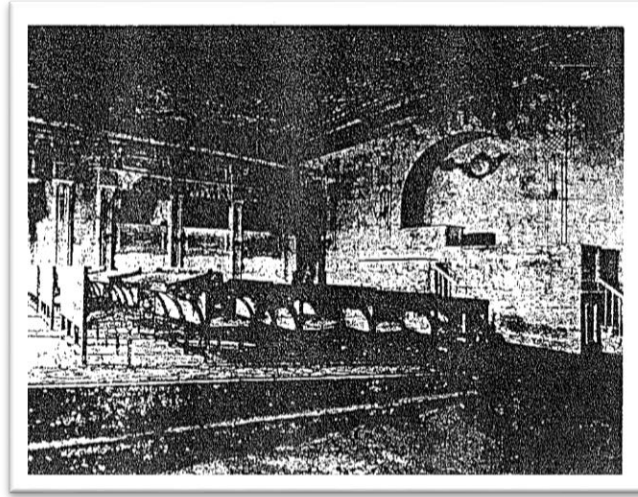


Figure 1: “The Meeting Room of the Assembly of Notables”
Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi (26 December 1908).



Figure 2: “Awaiting the Imperial Personage in front of the Ottoman Parliament”
Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi (23 November 1908).



Figure 3: “His Royal Highness Sultan Abdülhamid II”
Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi (26 December 1908).

Chapter V: Hope in Hard Times: Youth Mobilisation and the Kurdish Students' 'Hope' Society (1912-1914)

Once, the Kurds were an advanced and great nation. Today, however, while every [other] nation has progressed to the highest degree in science, in industry, in trade and in agriculture, the Kurds remain behind. Every nation has hundreds of schools and madrasas; in those schools and madrasas there are thousands of students receiving education in the religious and secular sciences (*tahsil-i ulum u fûnun*); [and] they have many books and journals which instruct [them] on the subjects of industry, trade and agriculture, in short, the paths to living well and in comfort. We, the Kurds, are unaware of these things. It is for this reason everyone attacks us with all manner of defamations and slanders. In order to be liberated from this state of affairs, we must, as soon as possible, become aware of such things [i.e. schools, books and journals] and immediately look for a solution.

A Declaration from the Kurdish Students' Hope Society, 1914¹

In August 1912 a small group of students, for the most part enrolled at the Agricultural College in Istanbul, established a new Kurdish association, the Kurdish Students' 'Hope' Society (*Kürt Talebe 'Hêvî' Cemiyeti*, hereafter *Hêvî*). The association counted amongst its founders Cemilpaşazade Kadri, Cemilpaşazade Ömer, Cerrahzade Zeki and Fuad Temo, the son of Van's parliamentary representative Tevfik Bey.² Another member of Diyarbakır's prestigious Cemilpaşazade family, Cemilpaşazade Ekrem, also claimed to have been amongst *Hêvî*'s initial organisers.³ The decision to establish a new organisation was, in part, influenced by informal conversations with members of the older generation such as Halil Hayali, the accountant at the Agricultural College and Dr Mehmed Şükrü Sekban both of whom had been involved in earlier

¹ Kürt Talebe Hêvî Cemiyeti, "Kürt Talebe Hêvî Cemiyeti'nin Beyannamesidir", *Hetawê Kurd* (23 May 1914).

² Zinar Silopi [Cemilpaşazade Kadri], *Doza Kurdistan: Kürd Milletinin 60 Yıllık Esaretten Kurtuluş Savaşı Hatıraları* (Beirut: Stewr, 1969), 28.

³ Ekrem Cemilpaşa, *Muhtasar Hayatım* (Ankara: Beybun, 1992), 18.

Kurdish associations. After obtaining official permission from the government to proceed,⁴ they began recruitment and within a short space of time had signed up some 200 members.⁵ The association's first general secretary was Cemilpaşazade Ömer; this position was later taken over by Memduh Selim, a student at the Civil Service College.

Hêvî's historical significance is manifold. On a most basic level, it can be argued that, in certain ways, *Hêvî* was the most active and successful Kurdish association established in the capital before 1914. Between August 1912 and September 1914 it published three bi-lingual (Turkish and Kurdish)⁶ journals: *Rojê Kurd* (Kurdish Day) *Hetawê Kurd* (Kurdish Sun) and *Yekbûn* (Unity).⁷ It organised branches in Lausanne and Erzurum,⁸ established connections with Babanzade Cemal's Baghdad-based newspaper *Bangê Kurd* (Kurdish Call)⁹ and opened a legal advice centre in

⁴ Silopi, *Doza Kurdistan*, 28.

⁵ Cemilpaşa, *Muhtasar Hayatım*, 20.

⁶ The association's publication's included articles in both the Kirmancî and Soranî/Babanî dialects of Kurdish.

⁷ *Rojê Kurd* ran for four issues between 19th June 1913 and 12th September 1913. Its concession holder and manager (*sahib-i imtiyaz ve müdir-i mesul*) registered as Abdülkerim; he was most likely Süleymaniyeli Abdülkerim, a regular contributor to the journal. All four issues can be found in the Istanbul Municipal Library. At least ten issues of *Hetawê Kurd* were published between 24th October 1913 and 3rd July 1914. Its concession holder and manager (*sahib-i imtiyaz ve müdir-i mesul*) was Baban Abdülaziz. Issues no. 1, no. 2, no. 3, no. 4-5 and no. 10 have been used in this chapter; these issues can be found in the Istanbul Municipal Library. The journal *Yekbûn* was quoted in Malmîsanij's study on the society. Malmîsanij, however, did not quote from the original, but rather an article from the journal found in the memoirs of Salih Bedirhan, who was a member of the association. See Malmîsanij, *Kürt Talebe Hêvi Cemiyeti: İlk Legal Kürt Öğrenci Derneği* (Istanbul: Avesta, 2002), 243-244.

⁸ According to some sources there were also branches in Geneva and Munich. However, Malmîsanij argues that these were marginal branches at best. Malmîsanij, *Kürt Talebe Hêvi Cemiyeti*, 133-37. According to Cemilpaşazade Kadri the members of the Lausanne branch were himself, Cemilpaşazade Ekrem and Şemseddin, Babanzade Ricai Nüzhe and Dersimli Selim Sabit. Silopi, *Doza Kurdistan*, 30.

⁹ An announcement carried in *Hetawê Kurd* stated that the journal *Bangê Kurd*, which it described as having been published for 'the advancement of the Kurdish community/Kurdishness (*Kürtlüğün Tealisi*),' would be sold at the association's offices. See "Bangê Kurd", *Hetawê Kurd* (23 May 1914). On *Bangê Kurd* see Kamal Madhar Kemal, *Kurdistan during the First World War* (London: Saqi, 1994), 62-63.

Istanbul for the poor and illiterate.¹⁰ *Hêvî* only ceased its activities after almost all of its active members were conscripted into the Ottoman army on the eve of Ottoman entry into the First World War.¹¹

However, the intensity of *Hêvî*'s activities and the evidently high level of motivation amongst its members are not its only claim to historical significance. Ottoman society was extremely age-conscious and deference to one's elders was expected. In the mid-nineteenth century, the pro-constitutionalist opposition, which drew inspiration from Giuseppe Mazzini's 'Young Italy' (*La Giovine Italia*),¹² had adopted the appellation 'New Ottomans' (*Yeni Osmanlılar*) as opposed to Young Ottomans (*Genç Osmanlılar*). Similarly, the term 'Young Turk', when it appeared in Turkish, was rendered as *Jön Türk*, from the French *les Jeunes-Turcs*. Again the term *genç* is conspicuously absent. While 'youth' could inspire visions of vigour and optimism, it was understood in Ottoman political discourse as denoting immaturity and a lack of experience.¹³ Such attitudes prevailed even as the youthful members of the CUP were proving themselves to be quite capable political operators. Upon first hearing 33 year old Colonel Enver's desire to assume the portfolio of the Minister of War, Grand Vizier Said Halim Pasha was shocked, replying: "My boy... You are so young! Would it not perhaps be more appropriate, if, for now, you accepted and

¹⁰ See "Osmanlı Teshil-i Mesalih İdarehanesi", *Hetawê Kurd* (23 May 1914).

¹¹ According to Cemilpaşazade Kadri, they were at the time being harassed by the governor of Istanbul, Cemal Pasha. See Silopi, *Doza Kurdistan*, 37. *Hêvî* was re-established after the First World War and was only closed in 1922 following Mustafa Kemal's reoccupation of Istanbul. Malmîsanij, *Kürt Talebe Hêvi Cemiyeti*, 163-87.

¹² The 'Young Italy' movement, which sought to create an Italian republic, inspired a number of other liberal nationalist movements in the 1830s. It gave birth to the short-lived 'Young Europe' movement which included groups from Germany, Poland, Ireland, Greece and France.

¹³ Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (New York: Harper, 2003), 58.

performed [the duties of] the head of the general staff?”¹⁴ The prejudice against young people prevalent in Ottoman politics was made manifest in more tangible ways. The electoral law reserved the franchise for males over twenty-five years of age. The age restriction for actually running for office was even more stringent with individuals having to be above the age of thirty.¹⁵ This prejudice was also reflected within the Kurdish movement; the KSMP’s charter contained similar stipulations concerning entry to the association’s governing bodies. Implied in all this was the very simple idea that politics was a pursuit for the established and *mature* Ottoman gentleman. In this sense, *explicitly* youth-led political mobilisation was nothing short of revolutionary. However, the novelty of *Hêvî* was not only related to its identity as a student organisation, but also its approach to the ‘Kurdish question’.¹⁶ Hence this chapter will seek to both examine the factors underlying such mobilisation and to understand its political orientations in relation to earlier Kurdish associations.

¹⁴ Cemal Kutay, “Enver Paşa’nın Harbiye Nazırlığında bilinmeyen Hakikatlar”, *Tarih Konuşuyor* Vol. 1, No. 2 (March 1964), 141. This article is based largely on an interview with Eşref Sencer Kuşçubaşı, the head of the Ottoman paramilitary and intelligence organisation *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* (‘The Special Organisation’).

¹⁵ Hasan Kayalı, “Elections and the Electoral Process in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1919”, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1995), 266.

¹⁶ *Hêvî* was not the only student association established during this period. For example, in 1909, Crimean Tatars studying in the capital founded the Crimean Students’ Society (*Kırım Talebe Cemiyeti*) In 1912 this organisation united with the Volga-Ural Russian Muslim Students’ Society (*İdil-Urallı Rusyalı İslam Talebe Cemiyeti*) to form the Russian Students’ Society (*Rusyalı Talebe Cemiyeti*). Hakan Kırımlı, *Kırım Tatarlarında Milli Kimlik ve Milli Hareketler (1905-1916)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1996), 199-190; Brian Glyn Williams, *The Crimean Tatars: The Diaspora Experience and Forging of a Nation* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 249. Students studying at the Military Medical College also played an important role in the establishment of the Turkist Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocağı*) association. See Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler: İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi*, Vol. 1 (Istanbul: İletişim, 2007), 460-461.

Youth Activism and ‘National’ Polarisation

According to various accounts, one of the primary factors behind the mobilisation of the Kurdish youth was the rise of Turkish nationalism. In a report written for a Soviet journal in the early 1920s, Abolqasem Lahuti,¹⁷ an Iranian constitutionalist who had sought refuge in the Ottoman Empire in the 1910s, claimed that:

The Young Turks’ racist pan-Turkist policies gave birth to the Young Kurd tendency. This attitude of the Young Turks was also the reason for the national awakening amongst Albanians, Arabs and other Ottoman nations... Many young people as a reaction to this tendency [i.e. pan-Turkism] became Kurdists... The objective of the Kurdish youth was to demand autonomy from the empire.¹⁸

This assessment is confirmed in the memoirs of certain Kurdish intellectuals who entered higher education after 1908. For example, Celadet Bedirhan, a student in 1910, recalled a meeting he had attended at which the Crimean Tatar intellectual and leading ideologue of Turkish nationalism, İsmail Gasprinski, was present.¹⁹ Gasprinski apparently gave a long speech on Turkishness, which,

¹⁷Abolqasem Lahuti (1887-1957) was born in the predominantly Kurdish town of Kermanshah. Following the promulgation of the Iranian constitution in August 1906, Lahuti became involved in the revolutionary movement. In 1911, after the suppression of the constitutionalist movement, he was forced into intermittent exile in the Ottoman Empire. He evidently established connections with the Kurdish movement in the Ottoman Empire and his poetry was published in the Kurdish journal *Jîn* (Life), a journal established in the immediate aftermath of the Great War. See Munibur Rahman, “Abu'l Qasim Lahuti: Iran's Foremost Marxist Poet”, *Journal of South Asian Literature*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1992), 115-134; Seyid Masud Rezavi, “Manzumeha-ye Khashm: Darbare-ye Zendeghi va She'rha-ye Abulqasem Lahuti”, *Falsafe va Kalam*, No. 63 (Khordad 1390 [May/June 2011]), 64-66; Kāmyār ‘Ābedi, “Lahuti, Abu'l-Qasem”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online Edition, 2009, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/lahuti-abul-qasem> (22 November 2013). On Lahuti and the Kurdish movement see Ordixan Celîl and Celîlê Celîl, “Ebulqasim Lahûtî”, in *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak* (Istanbul: Evrensel: 2008), 155-171.

¹⁸ Abolqasem Lahuti, “Kürt ve Kürdistan” (1922), reproduced and translated in Celile Celil, *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak*, 177-78.

¹⁹ İsmail Gasprinski was born in the village of Avci near Bahçesaray in the Crimea. He received his education in the Russian and later Ottoman military academies and became a pedagogue and propagandist. He was an advocate of Jadidism, a form of Islamic modernism which emphasised the need to modernise Islamic education and to improve the material conditions of Russian Muslims. He was also a proponent of pan-Turkism. He was a significant figure in both Russia and

Celadet noted sarcastically, “could be understood only with difficulty by Istanbul Turks”. Gasprinski’s supposedly argument was that “in Turkey there are only Turks and there ought not to exist any other people besides Turks”. Ironically, Gasprinski’s audience that day had apparently consisted of two Kurds, a Circassian, an Albanian, a Georgian and a Greek. The next day the lecture became the main topic of discussion amongst the group, who were “shocked and dismayed” by the opinions they had heard. In response, Celadet claimed to have penned an article on Kurdish history refuting Gasprinski’s assertions.²⁰ Nuri Dersimi, also a student at the time, expressed similar sentiments. He recollected that the CUP’s policies of ‘Turkification’ after the First Balkan War greatly impacted on the outlook of Kurdish students:

Even the Kurdish youth who, up to that time, had not carried [the idea of] Kurdishness in their minds began to regard the Turks passionately as their enemies. Now, amongst the university students in Istanbul, nationalist conflict raised its head. When we entered the classrooms, we saw slogans written on the large blackboard in great big letters, [such as] “Happy is he who calls himself a Turk” and “Long Live the Turks!” In opposition to this state of affairs, we found it necessary to enter the classroom during the break time and write on the same board; “Long live the Kurds and Kurdistan” and “Happy is he who calls himself a Kurd”.²¹

the Ottoman Empire. In many ways, his ideological orientation was influenced by pan-Slavism and Russian nationalism. His death in 1914 was not only mourned in his native Russia but also deeply felt by the Turkist movement in the Ottoman Empire. See Alan W. Fisher, “A Model Leader for Asia, Ismail Gaspirali”, in *The Tatars of Crimea: Return to the Homeland*, Edward A. Allworth (ed.), *Central Asia: 130 years of Russian Dominance, A Historical Overview* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1998), 29-47. On Gasprinski’s relationship with Turkism in the Ottoman Empire see Paul Dumont, “La revue ‘Türk Yurdu’ et les musulmans de l’Empire russe, 1911-1914”, *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, Vol. 15, No. 3/4 (1974), 315-331.

²⁰ Celadet Bedirhan, *Bir Kürt Aydınından Mustafa Kemal’e Mektup* (Istanbul: Doz, 1992), 21-23. This open letter to Turkey’s President, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was first published in December 1933.

²¹ Nuri Dersimi, *Hatıratım* (Istanbul: Doz, 1997), 31. His reference to the phrase ‘Ne Mutlu Türküm diyene’ (‘Happy is he who calls himself a Turk’) is most likely inaccurate. This phrase was first used by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in a speech delivered in 1933.

Nevertheless, although the increasingly assertive nature of the Turkish movement may well have been a significant factor promoting Kurdish youth activity, it is problematic to accept such accounts at face value. While not necessarily asserting that the accounts that have come down to us were deliberately falsified, they were written after the breakup of the empire and were therefore affected by the mutual hostility between Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms. Thus there is perhaps a tendency amongst the authors toward retrospectively presenting a narrative which starkly dichotomises the ‘oppressed’ Kurds and the ‘Turkifying’ Ottoman state.

In reality, the Kurdish youth’s perceptions of the Ottoman state at the time were much more complex. This complexity is quite apparent in *Edirne Sukutunun İç Yüzü* (The Inside Story of the Fall of Edirne), a short pamphlet published in 1913, which was authored by Celadet Bedirhan, aged 20, and his younger brother Kamuran Bedirhan, aged 18. The work examined the events of the First Balkan War and, in particular, the Bulgarian seizure of the former Ottoman capital of Edirne. Significantly, far from assuming an anti-Turkish or even anti-Ottoman tone, the book was extremely patriotic. Its rousing opening lines proclaimed:

From the Balkans smoke and flames arose. Our heads turned and our eyes were struck by the smoke and flames in front of us. The bayonets of the Bulgarians were directed towards Çatalca, [those of the] Serbs towards Üsküp, [those of the] Greeks towards Salonika and [those of the] Montenegrins towards the stones of İşkodra. *We awoke. We suffered 500,000 casualties* [and] one in five died from bullet wounds. 500,000 Rumelians (*Rumelili*) were made refugees...²²

The authors implored Ottoman citizens to take heed of the disasters in the Balkans, awake from their slumber and declare that “the Ottoman order shall remain and Islam shall endure”.²³ Celadet

²² Celadet Bedirhan and Kamuran Bedirhan, *Edirne Sukûtunun İç Yüzü* (Istanbul: Avesta 2009), 21. [My emphasis].

²³ *Ibid*, 24.

Bedirhan's opposition to Turkish nationalism and, it should be noted, the Turkish nationalism of an individual born in the Russian Empire, did not preclude a strongly felt attachment to the Ottoman polity or indeed the Ottoman 'nation'.

It is also equally important to highlight the fact that the supposed rise of Turkish nationalism was perhaps not as clear cut as has been assumed. Certainly, the years between 1908 and 1914 witnessed the rapid proliferation of Turkist ideas, especially amongst young people and intellectuals as well as amongst some CUP loyalists.²⁴ However, after the empire was stripped of much of its European territory and much of its Christian population during the Balkan Wars, it was Islam which came to be seen by many decision makers as 'the common denominator' of the Ottoman nation.²⁵ Indeed, as Erik Jan Zürcher has noted, it was not until the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 that Turkish nationalism emerged clearly as the hegemonic ideology.²⁶

It is also perhaps salient to note that the perceptions of Turkish activists as to the impulse behind their desires to organise are almost identical to those presented by Kurdish writers. For example, Halide Edib recalled that:

After 1908 all the non-Turkish elements in Turkey, Christian and Moslem, had political and national clubs. When the Turkish students of the universities saw their fellow students, whom they had so far identified with themselves, belonging to separate organizations with national names and separate interests, they began to wonder... For the first time reduced to his

²⁴ On Turkist association established between 1908 and 1914 see Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler: İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi*, Vol. 1, 440-474.

²⁵ Howard Eissenstat, "The Limits of Imagination: Defeating the Nation and Constructing the State in Early Turkish Nationalism" (PhD diss., The University of California, 2007), 65-66; also see Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2008), 19-41.

²⁶ Indeed, Zürcher has argued that the so-called 'Turkish' War of Independence (1919-1922), often regarded as the birth of modern Turkish nationalism, can perhaps best be understood as "the zenith of Ottoman Muslim nationalism." See Erik Jan Zürcher, "Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish Nationalists: Identity Politics 1908-1938", in Kemal Karpat (ed.) *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 150-179.

elements and torn from the ensemble of races in Turkey, he [the Ottoman Turk] vaguely faced the possibility of searching, analyzing, and discovering himself as something different from the rest... Cast out and isolated in his own country, he not only saw himself as different, but he had also the desire to find wherein lay the difference.²⁷

Hence it is somewhat problematic to regard Kurdish youth mobilisation as simply a reaction to the emergence of a lively Turkish movement. Turkish activists too claimed to be reacting to the increasing assertiveness of non-Turkish peoples.

Therefore we might also situate the development of Kurdish activism within a broader context, seeing it not as reacting simply to Turkism but also to developments amongst other Ottoman peoples. For example, in an article printed in *Hetawê Kurd* it was reported that in the provinces of Eastern Anatolia (Diyarbakır, Harput, Bitlis, Van and Erzurum) there were only 150 (Muslim) schools catering to around a meagre 17,000 students. Yet in the same provinces the Armenians possessed over 700 schools and, when Protestant and Catholic missionary schools were included in the figure, the number rose to 780, catering to a total of 72,000 students.²⁸ Significantly, the unfortunate state of ignorance to which most Kurds were condemned was set against the progress made, not by the Turks, but the Armenians.

Other writers placed the 'Kurdish revival' within an even broader global context. In an article published in *Rojê Kurd*, entitled *Garbla Şark, Milliyet Cereyanları* (Western and Eastern National Movements), the author seeks to explain the historical significance of nationality-based political movements. He begins by recounting how in previous centuries sectarian conflicts in Europe between Protestants and Catholics had been the cause of great bloodshed and violence. He credits

²⁷ Halide Edib, *Memoirs of Halide Edib* (London: John Murray, 1926), 323.

²⁸ Bab Nacu, "Fa-i'tabirū yā ūlī al-absār", *Hetawê Kurd* (4 December 1913). The Arabic title of the article 'Pay heed, O people of vision' is Quranic. See Qur'an, 59:02 ("Al-Hashr").

Voltaire with ending this state of affairs, which would have “without doubt resulted in the destruction of Christianity”. He goes on to claim that the ideals of which Voltaire spoke spread from France to Germany and even as far as the Slavic peoples and “all Christendom was reinvigorated. This civilised Christianity (*medeni Hristiyanlık*) placed today’s Europe ahead of us [Muslims]”. In concrete terms, this spirit of renewal brought about the birth of new ideas and feelings in the minds of the Europeans, the most important of which was the national idea.

The writer regards this idea as one of the central drives behind Europe’s progress and development. Examining the cases of France and Germany, he remarks: “Without doubt, it is feelings of Frenchness and Germanness (*Fransızlık ve Almanlık hisleri*) which have aided France and Germany in reaching their current level of perfection and progress. These two powers, which struggle with each other in order to achieve superiority in science, in war, in industry and in trade, are always those who have been brought up with this [national] feeling”. Turning to matters closer to home, the author went on to observe that:

This force which is raising Christendom upwards is also increasingly influencing and spreading to the Eastern Christians (*Şark Hristiyanları*). Despite being under the sovereignty of the crescent (*hilalin taht-ı hakimiyetinde*), they have changed [both] their social and living conditions; [and so] they have arrived at a happy and higher condition. There is no doubt that this renewing force, which is spreading directly from west to east, is [also] bringing about many great transformations in the Islamic world. For example, in recent years, in Egypt the Arabs and in Russia the Tartars have brought their societies into a more prosperous condition by establishing a number of scientific and charitable associations (*cemiyet-i ilmiye ve hayriye*).

He concluded by expressing his hope that this state of affairs will “make a great impression upon the Islamic world and especially upon the Kurdish element, which is the most backward (*bilhassa*

en geride kalan Kürt unsurunda)”.²⁹ Evidently, this historical account of the national ideal and its influence on European progress and development is somewhat simplistic. However, it is illustrative of the context in which young Kurdish activists placed their actions. Hence, in overall terms, the politicisation of the Kurdish youth should be regarded as being influenced both by an atmosphere of increased inter-ethnic competition and polarisation within the empire and by the ever-growing legitimacy of nationality based politics at a global level.

Nevertheless, it ought to be emphasised that *Hêvî* remained committed, like earlier Kurdish associations, to working within the Ottoman political system. One article published by the group, in the aftermath of the Tripolitanian and Balkan wars, praised Kurdish participation in the Ottoman army and declared it to be “a debt of honour”.³⁰ In an obituary for Bedirhani Hüseyin Kenan Pasha it was noted, approvingly, that the deceased had not only worked for the advancement of the Kurdish community, but had been an Ottoman patriot, who had (unsuccessfully) attempted to raise “forty thousand Kurdish paramilitaries (*fedai*)” to fight for the empire.³¹ Another notice published by the society congratulated Esad Efendi, who was described as being from Erbil’s virtuous *ulema* and the great sheikhs of the Nakşibendiye dervish order (*Erbil efazıl-ı ulema ve nakşibendi meşayih-i keramından*), on his appointment to “the Presidency of the Assembly of Sheikhs (*meclis-i meşayih riyaseti*)”.³² Evidently, the association regarded service to the Ottoman state, especially in such a prestigious institution, in a positive light.

²⁹ Harputlu H.B, “Garbla Şark, Milliyet Cereyanları”, *Rojê Kurd* (19 June 1913).

³⁰ Abu Revşan, “Kürtlüğün Menakıb-ı Hamasetinden İki Sima-yı Besalet”, *Rojê Kurd* (12 September 1913).

³¹ Anonymous, “Hayat-ı Meşahir: Bedirhani Hüseyin Kenan Paşa”, *Rojê Kurd* (14 August 1913).

³² Anonymous, “Tebrik”, *Hetawê Kurd* (23 May 1914). The Assembly of Sheikhs (*meclis-i meşayih*) was established in 1866. It was one of the reformed bureaucratic institutions created during the *Tanzimat*. It was responsible for extending state supervision over Sufi brotherhoods. See Bilgin Aydın, “Osmanlı Devleti’nde Tekkeler Reformu ve Meclis-i Meşayih’in

However, it seems, at least from the tone of some of the articles, that *Hêvî*'s members were cognisant of the fact that their activities could be construed as subversive. One article asked:

Does not the youth, with its pure and lofty intentions that consist of preparing the Kurdish community within the aim of service and self-sacrifice to the supreme Caliphate and the exalted Sultanate, fully deserve this protection and patronage?³³

In this desire to explain that its activism was in no way detrimental to Ottoman unity, *Hêvî* was supported by the writings of certain members of the older generation, whose articles were also published in the association's journals. For example, former Dersim deputy and opposition leader, Lütü Fikri in an article entitled *Kürt Milliyeti* (The Kurdish Nationality), explained that:

Since the restoration of the Constitution, amongst us [Ottomans], two great trends concerning nationality have been observed. The first was in no way to accept the existence of the various elements which are to be found within the borders of the Ottoman realm. Conversely the other, while accepting the existence [of multiple nationalities], works towards building harmony and balance amongst them.

He continued by arguing that the first trend had now been proved to be bankrupt. "Today we see that, for the most part, our writers and thinkers accept and are inclined to approve of the existence of various elements amongst the Ottoman [population]. Now nobody asks: What are Arabs? What are Albanians? What are Kurds? They understand very well what they are". He went on to note that while the existence of various nationalities amongst the Ottoman Christian population had long been accepted, the existence of diverse Islamic elements, up to the constitutional period and even beyond, had been left in doubt.

Şeyhülislamlik'a bağlı olarak Kuruluşu, Faaliyetleri ve Arşivi", *İstanbul Araştırmaları*, No. 7, (1998), 93-109.

³³ Hetawê Kurd, "Hêvî ve Gençlik", *Hetawê Kurd* (3 July 1914).

Significantly, he claimed that opposition to the recognition of ethnic diversity amongst Muslim Ottomans originated not from Turkish nationalists but from pious Muslims who saw such ‘divisions’ as “a work of great wickedness”. According to Lütü Fikri, such individuals would say: “Although we are all Muslim, will we not become divided by saying ‘you are an Arab, I am a Turk, he is a Laz and this is a Kurd’?!” However, our author argued that, despite the good intentions of these individuals, they were not *au fait* with the latest social developments: “They [the pious Muslims] do not know that we are living in a tempestuous century of nationality, [and] whether within the Islamic world or outside it, it is impossible to obstruct nationality [based on political] trends”. With regard to the Kurds, the author observed that they were an element which had “come to feel and comprehend their existence following the Arabs and Albanians”. This lateness he accounted for by the fact that they lived in regions of Anatolia which were far from the main urban centres, poor and unconnected to the railway system. “Nevertheless, in the end, when the time and hour [for action] arrived, they too began a movement *in accordance with the law*. Now they demonstrate an existence worthy of attention”.³⁴

In an article printed in *Rojê Kurd*, entitled *Kürtlük ve Müşumanlık* (Kurdishness and Muslimness), the CUP loyalist Babanzade İsmail Hakkı also defended Kurdish activism. He began by highlighting the importance of the Kurds in both Islamic and Ottoman history.

It is established with the testimony of both the past and the present that the Kurdish race/ethnic group (*Kürt kavmi*) form one of the most important pillars of the large family of Islam. The place of this authentic race/ethnic group (*kavm-ı asli*), which has raised many famous rulers, princes, *ulema* and poets for Islam in the one thousand and three hundred year era of [Islamic] civilisation, is no less than [those of] the other Muslim races/ethnic groups with which they have been in constant contact. The Kurds, who have made great sacrifices for the advancement of Islam with their muscles and minds [as well as] their swords and pens, do not have a

³⁴ Lütü Fikri, “Kürt Milliyeti”, *Rojê Kurd* (12 September 1913). [My Emphasis].

historical place any less brilliant historical within the Ottoman family (*aile-yi Osmaniye*).

Babanzade İsmail Hakkı then presented the case for a revival in the Kurdish language. As in his earlier writings, he linked this to the ‘advancement of religion’.

It is now understood that there is no possibility of aiding the advancement of a common religion (*müşterek bir dinin tealisine hizmet için*) in the current century by only following old paths. In order to strengthen [Islam], all the races/ethnic groups which are linked to the family of Islam (*aile-yi Islamiye*) need, first of all, to strengthen themselves.

Despite his commitment to Kurdish language education, he was eager not to be misunderstood or for the issue to be used for malign purposes.

It is necessary for the aims and objectives [outlined here] to be understood clearly and not to be misinterpreted. [The practice] by races/ethnic groups’ [of] learning in their own languages must serve to establish the unity and strength of Islam, which is the common family. Otherwise, if the language issue (*lisan meselesi*) becomes the tool of an illegitimate purpose, namely to spark division amongst races/ethnic groups, it will bring disaster in place of salvation, as well as decay, general and shared decay, in place of survival.

These lines might be understood as a subtle warning to Kurdish youth to avoid conflating the task of Kurdish revival with divisive political demands. However, at the same time, Babanzade İsmail Hakkı also defended his advocacy of Kurdish language education to religious conservatives who were troubled by any manifestation of ethnic distinctiveness amongst Muslims.

The Kurd cannot abandon religion when he reads and writes in Kurdish... [T]his great objective... cannot lead to mischief; it will, by necessity, have the most beneficial results. Have the Turks, by writing in their own language, departed from Islam? Has the language of the Iranians (*Acemler*) made them enemies of Islam? For Muslim races/ethnic groups (*akvam-ı Islamiye*) the only rule and only guiding principle is this: They are Muslims first and then Arab, Turkish, Kurdish or Iranian... The Turk must know that by developing Turkish language and literature, he is not only lifting up the Turkish element internally, [but] he is lifting up Islam; in the

advancement of Islam he will also help himself. The Arab and the Kurd must also know this categorical truth...

Significantly, unlike some other contributors to *Hêvî*'s publications, Babanzade İsmail Hakkı sought to differentiate issues of vernacular language education in the Islamic world from 'Frankish' nationalism.

To write in one's own language is not the same as the promotion of the racial/ethnic ideal (*kavmiyet fikri*) which is known by the Europeans (*Frenkler*) as 'nationality' (*nasyonalite*). To harbour the racial/ethnic ideal is already forbidden by the laws of Islam (*zaten şer'an memnu'dur*)...In however many languages Islam is protected, defended, spread and secured, it will be that much advanced. This being the case, for the Kurds – as with all the other races/ethnic groups – the programme is this: firstly as a Muslim and then as a Kurd to spread and secure the Kurdish language, because it serves Islam. One cannot contemplate a holier or greater programme for the Kurds, who are world-famous for their religious feelings.³⁵

Babanzade İsmail Hakkı's words, taken with those of Lütü Fikri quoted earlier, are noteworthy. They suggest that Muslim conservatives were regarded as amongst the most serious opponents to the recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity amongst the Muslim community.

Significantly, such religiously motivated objections were not necessarily the objections of non-Kurds. Babanzade İsmail Hakkı's older brother Babanzade Ahmed Naim was a well-known Islamist and ardent opponent of 'ethno-national' activism. As early as 1908 he had voiced his discontent at the formation of "Arab clubs", which he regarded as harmful to Muslim unity.³⁶ The developments between 1908 and 1914 did little to change his mind on the issue. In an article entitled *İslam'da Dava-yı Kavmiyet* (The Ethno-racial Cause in Islam), published in the Islamist

³⁵ Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, "Kürtlük ve Müslümanlık", *Rojê Kurd* (19 July 1913).

³⁶ See Ahmed Naim, "Arap Kardeşlerimize bir Nasihatımız", *İttifak Gazetesi* (30 August 1908); See Chapter Three, footnote 25.

journal *Sebilürreşad* (The Path of Righteous Guidance)³⁷ in 1914, he described such activism as a “European cancer” which had spread to the Muslims in the last fifteen to twenty years and only since the Constitutional Revolution had “emerged as a life and death issue” within the Ottoman Empire. For Babanzade Ahmed Naim, as for other ‘anti-nationalist’ Islamists, all forms of ethnic consciousness were regarded as anathema to religion.³⁸ The fact that such opposition was able to win support within the Kurdish community, even amongst those such as Babanzade Ahmed Naim, who were familiar with Western languages and ideals, is perhaps also the reason why Kurdish activists, of both generations, constantly stressed the compatibility of religious and (Kurdish) national goals.

Perhaps the most spirited defence of *Hêvî* came from another Kurdish elder statesman, Dr Abdullah Cevdet. In an article entitled *İttihat Yolu* (The Road to Unity), he was extremely critical of those who regarded Kurdish activism as possessing an innate tendency towards separatism. Dr Abdullah Cevdet began by recounting the reaction of a friend - a friend whom we may assume was either Turkish or a religious conservative - upon seeing a copy of *Rojê Kurd* on the doctor’s desk:

He suddenly asked: What is this? I replied: A Kurdology organ, in other words [a magazine] published in relation to social and racial research on Kurdishness. My friend opened up the journal and when his eyes fell upon an article in Kurdish he left it on the table, saying: Considering this is not in Turkish but Kurdish; that means this is a ‘separatist’ journal.

Abdullah Cevdet objected to this assessment. He pointed out that “Even after the Ottoman losses in Europe, Turkey (*Türkiya*) remained a large empire formed out of many elements”. He went on

³⁷ *Sebilürreşad* was one of the most influential Islamist journals in the late Ottoman period. It was edited by Mehmed Akif (Ersoy) and Eşref Edip (Fergan).

³⁸ Babanzade Ahmed Naim, “İslam’da Dava-yı Kavmiyet”, *Sebilürreşad* (1914), reprinted in Hüseyin Hansu, *Babanzâde Ahmed Naim* (Istanbul: Kaynak, 2007), 235-239. Also see Babanzade Ahmed Naim, *İslam’da Dava-yı Kavmiyet* (Istanbul: Tevsi-i Tabiat, 1331/1916).

to emphasise that he was “not speaking as Turk or Kurd but as a free and freethinking citizen of Turkey (*Türkiya'nın hür ve hürrendiş bir vatandaş olmak sıfatıyla*)”. He continued by arguing that unity could not be achieved by over-centralisation and warned: “In an empire made up of many elements, [the idea that] the way to [achieve] the unity of those elements is through [imposing] a single language, a single law and a single method of implimentation is a dead-end”. He went on to recount his statements at a meeting of the CUP club in Kadıköy two years earlier:

I said at that time that the unity of elements was made up of the unity of interests. By saying that, I explained how the Turkish Empire's unity was possible. Let us tie two men tightly to each other with the same rope. [And] let us put another two men side by side freely and free [to act upon] their own personal initiative. Which have the greater link, the men tied together or the two who are freely [placed] next to each other? Even to answer this question is dumb!

He concluded by citing Switzerland as an example of a country where different national and confessional groups left to their own devices were able to live in harmony.³⁹ Such an argument was very much in line with decentralist ideals. Indeed, it may be that *Hêvî*'s members were generally sympathetic to such ideals. However, the society abstained from acting in an overly partisan fashion. As the editors of *Rojê Kurd* - concerning the nature of their objectives and goals - tersely put it: “Without doubt, and also in the simplest terms, [our] objective of progress (*gayeyi terakki*), which is appropriate to now and the future, is a scientific and social vocation, completely free from political ambitions (*ihitirasat-ı siyasiyeden azade bir meslek-i ilmi ve ictimai*). Nothing else!”⁴⁰

³⁹ Abdullah Cevdet, “İttihat Yolu”, *Rojê Kurd* (19 July 1913).

⁴⁰ *Rojê Kurd*, “Gaye, Meslek”, *Rojê Kurd* (19 June 1913).

From ‘Ottoman Patriotism’ to ‘Cultural Nationalism’

In certain ways, the outlook of *Hêvî* was similar to that of earlier Kurdish associations. There were many parallels between the opinions expressed concerning the issues facing the Kurdish population in articles published by the association’s journals and those of earlier Kurdish associations. For example, one contributor to *Rojê Kurd* described “discord” (*nifak*), particularly amongst the Kurdish tribes, as being one of the most significant threats to the Kurds’ future.⁴¹ Another contributor, focusing on the “land question” in Eastern Anatolia, highlighted the need for resolving the question in an amicable way in order to improve relations between Kurds and Armenians.⁴²

However, perhaps the most significant parallel was near-obsession with the issue of education and the Kurds’ lack of it. A statement from the society published in the first issue of *Rojê Kurd* presented this state of affairs in the most dramatic terms:

For centuries, underneath the east’s stagnant and sleeping skies, there has lived a forgotten element, which is known by the name ‘Kurd’. The Kurd, it must be confessed, has, since times gone by, remained cut off from the fruits of civilisation. In the land where he lives, he has seen neither any light of knowledge, any light of civilisation nor the slightest particle of learning. In the straits of ignorance in which he has groaned for centuries no saving hand of knowledge, which would instruct him, has been able to reach him. Within this darkness of centuries, which has passed with nightmares, the Kurd has remained connected only with “the sword and the land”. It is true that amongst the factors which sustain an ethnic group/race, a nation and in particular the Kurdish community, the sword and the land have an influential place, but with one condition! With the condition that the hands and minds which are to administer that sword and land are equipped with the intelligence and understanding required by the age! But alas, it has not been possible for this to be so! Why? It is not now necessary to investigate this. The Kurd only understands that he is before

⁴¹ H, “Derdlerimizden Nifakımız”, *Rojê Kurd* (14 August 1913).

⁴² Hüseyin Sükrü, “Arazi Meselesi”, *Rojê Kurd* (12 September 1913).

everything ignorant, [and] in the simplest and clearest terms, most urgently needs knowledge.⁴³

The sorry state of the Kurds' level of education and the need to take swift action to remedy it were common themes in *Hêvî*'s publications. Diyarbakırlı Fikri Necdet regretfully conceded that “many Kirmanc [Kurds] do not know how to read or write...”,⁴⁴ while Süleymaniyeli Abdülkerim asked why it was that “in the unfortunate Kurdish town” children did not learn to read and write, while in Europe they learned “in six to seven days...”.⁴⁵

Significantly, the quest for education and enlightenment was, as it had been previously, regarded as not only a national duty but one with divine sanction. For example, in an article announcing the formation of a branch of the society in Lausanne, the need to benefit from the advances of European sciences was justified on the grounds that Islamic law commanded Muslims to receive education in sciences even if they were to be found “outside the Islamic World’ (*dar üs-salam*)”.⁴⁶ Analogously, a declaration from the society stated that: “Our true religion orders Muslims to endeavour to learn about science and industry for [the sake of] progress and happiness. In the Quran of God (*Cenab-ı Hak Kuran-ı Kerim’inde*) it is made a religious obligation for all Muslims to be educated in science and technical knowhow”. It went on to reason that: “If we wish to obey the Supreme God’s holy will, we must well understand that there is no other way than working for science, for industry and for progress. God gives the Kurds every type of intelligence and skill. We will, with effort and in a short space of time, make an important degree of progress”.⁴⁷

⁴³ Rojê Kurd, “Gaye, Meslek” *Rojê Kurd* (19 June 1913).

⁴⁴ Diyarbakırlı Fikri Necdet, “Xebat û Xwendin”, *Rojê Kurd* (19th July 1913).

⁴⁵ Süleymaniyeli Abdülkerim, “Mindal Boçî Zû Fêrî Xwendin Nabê”, *Rojê Kurd* (19 June 1913).

⁴⁶ “Kürt Talebe Hêvî Cemiyeti Lozan Şubesi”, *Hetawê Kurd* (23 May 1914).

⁴⁷ Kürt Talebe Hêvî Cemiyeti, “Kürt Talebe Hêvî Cemiyeti’nin Beyannamesidir”, *Hetawê Kurd* (23 May 1914).

Despite such similarities to earlier Kurdish publications and associations, the ideological and political orientation of *Hêvî* also possessed subtly distinct elements. The KSMP and the KSPE, through their statements and publications, explicitly linked the salvation of the Kurds to the salvation of the Ottoman polity as a whole. However, rather than articulating a Kurdish orientated version of Ottoman patriotism, as was the case for the aforementioned associations, *Hêvî*'s outlook is much closer to the phenomenon John Hutchinson has described as 'cultural nationalism'. According to Hutchinson, in contrast to political nationalists, who regard the nation in rationalist terms as a homogeneous collection of educated citizens with the nation-state serving as its ultimate political embodiment, "cultural nationalists perceive the nation... as a distinctive historical community, which continuously evolving, embodies a higher synthesis of the 'traditional' and the 'modern'". Therefore, as this community is "a spontaneous order of different groups and individuals, knit by common sentiments, it cannot be constructed like a state from above, but can only be re-animated from below".⁴⁸

This subtle but significant shift in emphasis was reflected in numerous ways in the association's publications. Two pieces, published in *Rojê Kurd* and *Hetawê Kurd* respectively, are illustrative of this point. The first listed the most pressing needs of the Kurds. These were itemised as follows:

- 1) [to learn] swiftly [how to] read and write, 2) a new kind of alphabet 3) a comprehensive dictionary in order to learn the entire Kurdish language, 4) an Islamic catechism (a book of Islamic learning), 5) a history of the Kurds' ancestors and their culture, 6) a collection of the names of places where they live and the numbers and customs of their tribes, 7) a book of arithmetic, 8) a grammar book for the Kurdish language, 9) translations of Kurdish classics, and 10) the Kurdish literature and [Kurdish] poets' names.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ John Hutchinson, "Cultural Nationalism, Elite Mobility and Nation-Building: Communitarian Politics in Modern Ireland", *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (1987), 486.

⁴⁹ M.H, "Ziman", *Rojê Kurd* (14 August 1913).

The second was a manifesto published in May 1914 which retrospectively explained the reasons for the formation of the society and its objectives:

We, the Kurdish youth, who are gathered in Istanbul's schools and madrasas in order to [acquire] scientific education, so as to fulfil our duties, which are [both] religious and national [in nature], set up, with official permission (*ruhsat-ı resmîye ile*), a society named the Kurdish Students' 'Hope' Society ... Our society's [objectives] are the following: 1) To introduce Kurdish students to one another and get them to work in cooperation and in unity for the Kurds. 2) To [research into and] bring to light the Kurdish language and literature. 3) To open madrasas and schools in Kurdistan, also to construct mosques. 4) To educate poor Kurdish children in schools, to teach them knowledge and skills [and] to provide them with [material] assistance. 5) In short, [the society's mission is] to work for the Kurds' welfare and happiness.⁵⁰

At first glance, the message of these two pieces seems to be quite similar to those of earlier Kurdish associations. However, their significance can be found not so much in what they included, but in what was absent. As noted in Chapter IV, the KSMP and KSPE sought to position themselves as intermediaries between Kurdish society and the Ottoman state. Moreover, when representing themselves to the broader Ottoman body politic, they presented the quest for Kurdish enlightenment as one intimately linked to the salvation of the Ottoman state. In contrast, *Hêvî* did not make such links explicit. The struggle for Kurdish enlightenment had become a good in itself. While not rejecting the Ottoman political identity, Kurdishness was no longer regarded as being subordinate to Ottomanness. Moreover, the Kurds had to 'help themselves' and strike out on their own path to modernity. For example, when the president of the Turkish Hearth (*Türk Ocağı*)

⁵⁰ Kürt Talebe Hêvî Cemiyeti, "Kürt Talebe Hêvî Cemiyeti'nin Beyannamesidir", *Hetawê Kurd* (23 May 1914). On the objectives of *Hêvî* also see Rojê Kurd, "Gaye, Meslek", *Rojê Kurd* (19 June 1913).

association, Hamdullah Suphi, suggested that *Hêvî* merge with his organisation, the offer was flatly rejected.⁵¹

This distinctive shift in emphasis pushed discussions into new areas. For instance, in an article entitled *Kürtlerde Kadın Meselesi* (The Issue of Women amongst the Kurds), Ergani Madenli entered into an extremely interesting discussion on the role of women in Kurdish society. He began by highlighting the increasing importance of the “question of women” on the global stage. He pointed out that European and American women had already made significant advances. “They occupy half of all universities and schools, they are competing with men in the world of work, and in order to raise themselves up further, they are continuing to struggle... they are struggling and striving in order to gain their rights of life, their future and their political and social rights”. He went on to point out that the successes of women in the West were influencing Asia, and cited Japan as an example of a country where women “are working and also being successful in obtaining their legitimate rights”. Moreover, despite the fact that the Ottoman world was generally behind on the issue of women’s emancipation, it too was witnessing the birth of a women’s movement. He then turned to the question of Kurdish women, explaining that Kurdish women were, like men, victims of ignorance. Nevertheless, he continued by highlighting the deep respect that traditional Kurdish society had for women, as well as the strong character that Kurdish women possessed. This he believed facilitated the education of women, which was essential for the Kurdish community, because “a nation’s women are a measure of their degree of development”.⁵²

Another measure of *Hêvî*’s shifting focus was its greater stress on the Kurds’ racial identity. In a Kurdish language article entitled *Esl û Nesl-î Kurd* (The Origin and Lineage of the Kurds), the

⁵¹ Silopi, *Doza Kurdistan*, 36.

⁵² Ergani Madenli, “Kürtlerde Kadın Meselesi”, *Rojê Kurd* (12 September 1913).

author stated that the Kurds were part of the ‘Aryan races/ethnic groups’ (*eqwamê Aryen*), much like Persians and Afghans. He went on to explain: “We converted to Islam and thank God we became Muslim. Some of them [the Aryans], such as the Greeks, Armenians and Germans, persisted with their ignorance. [However,] Greeks, Armenians, Germans and Portuguese all have Kurdish roots!” This writer also stresses the similarities between the Kurds and the Iranians (*Acem*). “If one reads carefully [one can observe that] they share the behaviour and customs of the Iranians. The Iranians were, in fact, Sunni, but Shah Ismail invented the Shia religion and made it the religion of the Iranians with the sole purpose of uniting them. So they [the Kurds and Iranians originally] shared the same religion”. While, for the author, Sunni Islam evidently remained a critical component of Kurdish identity, he also argued that the Kurds’ racial origins were advantageous in the task of learning western languages. “The German language has a lot in common with Kurdish. Today, if a Kurd goes to Germany, he will learn the German language in only two months. However, if a Turk or an Arab goes to learn German it will take them a year. This is because the German language is quite like the Kurdish language”.⁵³ While articles in earlier Kurdish publications tended to emphasise the Kurds’ historical association with the Ottomans, this author sought to highlight the Kurds’ racial affinities with both Europeans and Iranians and, implicitly, their superiority over Turks and Arabs.

Hêvî’s ‘cultural nationalist’ *élan* was also present in more implicit ways. Unlike the Bedirhan brothers’ newspaper *Kürdistan* and the *KTG*, *Hêvî*’s publications did not include news pieces which followed broader Ottoman politics. They were made up exclusively of articles relating to the Kurds.⁵⁴ The pictures selected to adorn the society’s journals also differed. While the *KMPG*

⁵³ Kürdi, “Esl û Neslê Kurd”, *Rojê Kurd* (12 September 1913).

⁵⁴ This point is made clear in Gülseren Duman’s quantitative analysis of the subjects tackled in the *KTG* and *Rojê Kurd*. While 24 out of 77 articles (31%) published over 9 issues in the former were

published pictures depicting images with an Ottoman oriented significance, *Hêvî* selected exclusively ‘Kurdish’ images. These included portraits of well-known historical figures of Kurdish (or supposed Kurdish) origin, such as the Ayyubid Sultan Saladin (see Figure 1), the Iranian ruler Karim Khan Zand⁵⁵ (see Figure 2) and the early nineteenth-century ruler of the Baban principality, Abdurrahman Pasha (see Figure 3). It also included photographs of more recently deceased Kurdish leaders such as Bedirhani Hüseyin Kenan Pasha (see Figure 4) and Babanzade İsmail Hakkı (see Figure 5), both of whom passed away in 1913. The association also published images of the Kurds and Kurdistan. *Rojê Kurd* included an image from Kurdistan, a portrait of the town of Erzurum (see Figure 6), while *Hetawê Kurd* printed photographs of a Kurdish family from Syria (see Figure 7) and a Kurdish tribal leader with his entourage in Severek (see Figure 8). However, this shift in focus was perhaps expressed most eloquently in the society’s name. Earlier Kurdish associations had names rendered entirely in Ottoman Turkish. *Hêvî* too adopted a largely Turkish vocabulary and structure in its name; however, for the concept ‘Hope’ they opted for the unambiguously Kurdish word ‘Hêvî’ as opposed to an Ottoman Turkish equivalent.

National Leadership and the Role of the Youth

Although we might propose that the primary discontinuity between *Hêvî* and earlier Kurdish organisations was one of emphasis, this was not the only difference. Again we return to the question of ‘appropriate’ national leadership. As one contributor explained, the task of explaining

dedicated to Ottoman affairs, all 63 articles published over 4 issues in the latter focused on Kurdish issues. See Gülseren Duman, “The Formation of the Kurdish Movement(s) 1908-1914: Exploring the Footprints of Kurdish Nationalism” (MA diss., Boğaziçi University, 2010), 130-132.

⁵⁵ Karim Khan Zand ruled much of Iran between 1750 and 1779 as *Vakil ul-Roaya* (Tribune of the Flock), never adopting the title ‘Shah’. The issue of his ‘Kurdishness’ is somewhat controversial, as his tribe, the Zand, were of Luri/Lak origins. These communities have strong cultural and ethnic links with the Kurdish community. See Ramiyar P. Karanjia, “Karim Khan Zand”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online Edition, 2013, available at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/karim-khan-zand> (11 December 2013).

and correcting the faults of society fell to the “national leaders, who, by understanding these deficiencies, correct them”. The same author, while recognising the “primitive” virtues of the Kurds, presented the duty of enlightening and educating them in paternalistic terms:

Nations and ethnic groups/races resemble children. Just as pampering children and not correcting their faults lets them get out of control, I think absolving society and considering it blameless is also not without danger. This being the case, we must consider how severely ignorant societies such as ours can be educated. If it were up to me, I would say ‘smack them on the head’... I said severely ignorant, yes, it must be admitted that Kurds are severely ignorant. How many can you find, not in a hundred, but in a thousand, who can read their Quran? The twentieth century is like a raging torrent. The ability to stand against it, not to be dragged along by it and be sucked into whirlpools, is possible only by means of the levees of civilisation and knowledge utilised in this century. An ethnic group/race cannot remain survive with only bravery or other lofty virtues and natural abilities. In order to be liberated they must be raised up. Honour [alone] cannot liberate an ethnic group/race.⁵⁶

Such elitism, indeed one might venture to say arrogance, was not new. However, who were these national leaders? Who were the appropriate individuals to, as it were, ‘beat’ the Kurds into the modern world? As we have seen, for the KSMP and the KSPE the answer, at least implicitly, had been the capital’s established Ottoman Kurdish elite. In contrast, *Hêvî* emphasised the role of the youth. In an open letter from the association “to the Students of Kurdistan (*Kürdistan mekteplilerine*)”, it was stated that:

The Kurdish Students’ ‘Hope’ Society, which sees itself as burdened with heavy and problematic duties regarding Kurdistan’s need of education, expects to be successful in all its wishes and labours thanks to the youth’s resolution and zeal... [A]s with every [other] nation, the youth’s dominant influence (*gençliğin nüfuz-ı hakimanesi*) must also be seen as quite natural in the process of awakening and renewal of the Kurdish community (*Kürtlüğün hayat-ı teyakkuz ve teceddüdünde*).⁵⁷

⁵⁶ H. “Derd ve Deva”, *Rojê Kurd* (19 June 1913).

⁵⁷ Hetawê Kurd, “Hêvî ve Gençlik”, *Hetawê Kurd* (3 July 1914).

A year earlier, the editors of *Rojê Kurd* had made a similar point, stating succinctly that Kurdishness was “the burden of the Kurdish youth”.⁵⁸

As already noted, *Hêvî*'s publications carried not only articles penned by Kurdish students, but also some written by established political figures.⁵⁹ While such individuals often defended the objectives of the organisation, they also sought to guide the Kurdish youth. In many cases, their articles took the form of paternalistic advice. For example, Dr Abdullah Cevdet, in an article published in *Rojê Kurd*, entitled *Bir Hitab* (An Address), pointed out that “there is no great work in the world, whether of the pen or of action, which has been realised without the assistance of great bravery and courage. With great urgency, I recommend this principle to the Kurdish youth”. The article focused on the importance of history to national development. Abdullah Cevdet likened a nation which is not cognisant of its past to an individual with amnesia.

If a nation does not possess a history that is perfectly recorded, it is as if that nation had never lived. Do the Kurds have [such] a history? With a [single] ‘*Şerefname*’, a nation cannot to have control of or protect its historical honour or its honourable history (*Bir (Şerefname) ile bir millet şeref-i tarihisini ve yahud tarih-i şeref tasarruf ve muhafaza edemez*).⁶⁰ [...] A nation which does not possess the history of its past or the history of its future (*müstakbelinin tarihi*)⁶¹ does not possess itself. Nations and individuals which do not possess themselves (*malik olmayan*) are slaves, the property of others. [...] Come, let us all together admit that the Kurds really do not possess a history book appropriate to our century...

⁵⁸ *Rojê Kurd*, “Gaye, Meslek”, *Rojê Kurd* (19 June 1913).

⁵⁹ It should be noted that give the lack of biographical data on the authors of some articles, it is difficult to know whether they were students or more established individuals.

⁶⁰ The sentence was a play on words, referencing the sixteenth-century history written by Şeref Han Bitlisi, the *Şerefname*, literally the ‘Book of Honour’.

⁶¹ Abdullah Cevdet recognised the peculiarity of the phrase ‘history of its future’ (*müstakbelinin tarihi*). This, he explained, was a nation’s ideals and purpose. Hence it might be best understood as a nation’s ‘destiny’.

He continued: “What do they [the Kurdish youth] want to be? Or what do they not want to be? An element in the Ottoman Empire? An element, but what type of element, a putrid and purifying element or a renewed and renewing, a living and life giving element?” He went on to offer concrete proposals for action: Firstly, to ensure that literacy amongst the Kurds reached at least 40%, and secondly, in order that children of seven or eight years of age could learn to read within a month, to abandon the existing Arabo-Persian alphabet used in Kurdish in favour of a more ‘appropriate’ system. He concluded by noting that “All other issues, in my opinion, remain of secondary importance”.⁶²

In a subsequent article, published in *Hetawê Kurd* and addressed to the “writers of the *Hetawê Kurd* newspaper (*Hetawê Kurd Gazetesi Muharrirlerine*)”, he urged the members of *Hêvî* to undertake their duty of enlightenment by returning to Kurdistan immediately. “O Kurdish youth”, he proclaimed, “only when you prefer to be appointed as the founders and teachers of primary schools in a Kurdish village rather than as governors and officials will you be on the right path”.⁶³ Similar sentiments were expressed by veteran journalist Mevlanzade Rifat. However, he disagreed with Cevdet on the timing, noting that “without a definite objective in sight, sending the Kurdish youth to Anatolia would be unnecessary, fruitless and ineffective”. He argued that in order to awaken the Kurds and “place [them] on the road of progress” language was necessary, and unfortunately the Kurdish language was not in a fit state. Therefore he advocated the formation of a “scientific council” in order to prepare modern (*usul-i cedit*) writing and grammar books in addition to a dictionary. He further expressed his hope that the members of *Hêvî* would endeavour to undertake their “national duty”. He concluded by citing the Armenians as exemplars, as they

⁶² Dr Abdullah Cevdet, “Bir Hitab”, *Rojê Kurd* (19 June 1913).

⁶³ Abdullah Cevdet, “(Hetawê Kurd) Gazetesi Muharrirlerine”, *Hetawê Kurd* (18 October 1913).

had first gathered in Europe in order to decide on necessary measures before returning to the homeland.⁶⁴

Hêvî's shifting emphasis could lead it into conflict with some members of the older generation. The debates concerning the issue of alphabet reform are illustrative of this. The question of developing an appropriate 'national script' was, of course, not the preserve of the Kurds. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, both Turkish and Persian-speaking intellectuals considered making modifications to their traditional Arabic-based scripts.⁶⁵ Such discussions were not merely animated by practicality but also by emotional and symbolic factors. For a Muslim people to write their language in a script other than the Arabic script was regarded by some as divisive and against Islam. Indeed, as already noted in Chapter IV, the issue of alphabet reform amongst the Albanians and, in particular, the inclination of many Albanian intellectual and cultural leaders towards adopting a single Latin-based national script had been particularly controversial.

No such 'Latinisation' movement existed amongst the Kurds at the time, as already mentioned, Dr Abdullah Cevdet had noted the importance of writing Kurdish in 'appropriate letters' and had,

⁶⁴ Mevlanzade Rifat, "Muhterem «Hetawê Kurd» Gazetesi Müessislerine", *Hetawê Kurd* (4 December 1913).

⁶⁵ For example, Mirza Fath-ali Akhundzade (1812-1878), an Iranian Azeri intellectual proficient in both Ottoman-Turkish and Persian, suggested the replacement of the Arabic-script used in both languages with a new script which would combined elements of both the Latin and Cyrillic scripts. H. Algar, "Ākūndzāda" *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online Edition, 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/akundzada-playwright> (11 December 2013). The Latinisation of the Albanian language has been a source of tension between the CUP and the Albanian movement. However, *Tanin* editor and CUP propagandist Hüseyin Cahid praised the Albanian efforts to introduce a Latin-based alphabet and suggested that the Turks follow suit. See Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 30; also see Frances Trix, "The Stanboul Alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bey: The Precursor to Turkish Script Reform", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, No. 31, (1999), 255-272.

according to Cemilpaşazade Kadri, explicitly expressed his preference for a Latin-based script.⁶⁶ By contrast, *Rojê Kurd*'s first issue also carried an article in which Süleymaniyeli Mesud suggested a less radical solution, namely the abandonment of the three different forms that Arabic letters take in favour of a simplified script in which only one form was used.⁶⁷ This was followed in the second issue by a letter from the Society for the Provision of Education and the Reform of Letters (*Temin-i Maarif ve Islah-ı Huruf Cemiyeti*), a mainstream Ottoman association focusing on Turkish alphabet reform.⁶⁸ The letter commended *Hêvî* on its efforts in education. It went on to enter into a discussion on the importance of alphabet reform, noting that while there were some advantages to Latinisation, Kurds, as well as other Muslim nations, should make modifications to the existing Arabic script.⁶⁹ The discussions on alphabet reform also elicited an interesting response from Babanzade İsmail Hakkı. In an article entitled *Kürtlüğün Tealisi* (The Advancement of the Kurdish World), published in *Rojê Kurd*'s third issue, he sought to remind *Hêvî* members of the importance of the Ottoman state in the solution to the Kurds' social and educational backwardness: "There is

⁶⁶ See Silopi, *Doza Kurdistan*, 35. Celadet Bedirhan introduced a Latin alphabet for the Kirmancî dialect of Kurdish in 1932.

⁶⁷ Süleymaniyeli Mesud, "Hurufumuz ve Teshil-i Kıraat" *Rojê Kurd* (19 June 1913).

⁶⁸ The "*Temin-i Maarif ve Islah-ı Huruf Cemiyeti*" is almost certainly a reference to the *Islah-ı Huruf Cemiyeti*. The association was founded in 1912 by a group led by Dr İsmail Hakkı Bey (1870-1939), a conservative intellectual from the region of Muğla. The group included KSMP veteran and Mosul governor Süleyman Nazif. From March 1914 the organisation published the journal *Yeni Yazı* (New Writing). The first issue included on its front page a new system of writing, accepted by the society's scientific council (*encümen-i ilmiye*), using a single disjointed form of Arabic letters (much like the system advocated by Süleymaniyeli Mesud). The handwriting of the early nineteenth-century calligrapher Hattat Mustafa Rakım (1757-1825) provided the basis for the forms printed. See *Islah-ı Huruf Cemiyeti*, "Islah-ı Huruf Cemiyeti Encümen-i İlmiyesince kabul olunan Eşkal-i Huruf", *Yeni Yazı* (20 March 1914). Enver Pasha, while Minister of War, took up the idea of writing Turkish in 'disjointed letters.' See Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, 29.

⁶⁹ *Temin-i Maarif ve Islah-ı Huruf Cemiyeti*, "(Temin-i Maarif ve Islah-ı Huruf) Cemiyet-i Muhteremiyesi tarafından varid olmuştur: Rojê Kurd Mecmuası Müdiriyet-i Aliyesine", *Rojê Kurd* (19 July 1913).

no doubt that the Ottoman state will work for and make no delay in providing all manner of support for the advancement of the Kurdish nation”. While he recognised that Kurds should work together themselves to improve their condition, he warned against radicalism, particularly on the issue of alphabet reform. He cautioned against changing the existing three form letter system in the Arabic script and condemned Latinisation, as “in the end, the Kurds cannot be separated from the Eastern family, [and] to copy the Albanian Latinisers would be a crime”.⁷⁰

Perhaps the most evident example of open conflict between the generations can be found in Cemilpaşazade Kadri’s account of *Hêvî*’s first anniversary celebrations in 1913. With the encouragement of Dr Mehmed Şükrü Sekban, the students congregated at the association’s headquarters in the Şehzadebaşı district of Istanbul in a meeting attended also by a number of Kurdish public figures. These included Bedirhani Halil Bey and a contingent of Kurdish parliamentarians: the Diyarbakır deputies Piriñçizade Feyzi (Independent), Piriñçizade Zülfü (CUP) and the Genç deputy (and former KSPE member) Mehmed Efendi (CUP).

General Secretary Memduh Selim Bey, in his speech, complained that the elders did not attach the necessary degree of importance to the ‘national question’. Kemal Fevzi Bey gave a long and fiery speech and supported what Memduh Selim had said. Ziya Vehbi Bey then read Ahmed-i Hani’s ode to the Kurds in his famous *kaside*, *Mêm û Zin*. Diyarbakır deputy Feyzi Bey objected to Memduh Selim’s attack upon the older generation by saying that the youth should not get involved in politics and that they should focus on their classes. He said that what had been read by Ziya Vehbi had implied that the Kurds desired independence. Şükrü Mehmed Bey [Mehmed Şükrü Sekban], objecting to Feyzi Bey’s statements, said that the fact that the older generation was uninterested in the national question had made it necessary for the youth to engage in politics.

⁷⁰ Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, “Kürtlerin Tealisi”, *Rojê Kurd* (14 August 1913).

Halil Rahmi, along with Şefik Arvas, supported Dr Mehmed Şükrü Sekban's statement, at which point Feyzi Bey left the meeting in a "frightful mood".⁷¹

As is clear from *Hêvî*'s publication of articles written by other established Kurdish leaders, not all the older generation took such a hardline on youth activism. Indeed, for those such as Dr Abdullah Cevdet, Mevlanzade Rifat and Lütfi Fikri with links to anti-CUP politics, engagement with the youth may have been seen as a way to recoup some of their lost political influence. Analogously, Unionist Babanzade Ismail Hakkı's involvement in the group most likely stemmed from his long commitment to Kurdish-language education as well as a desire to ensure that Kurdish activism did not exceed certain boundaries. Piriñçizade Feyzi's attendance at the celebrations suggests that he, like Babanzade Ismail Hakkı, was not opposed to Kurdish activism *per se*. However, he was clearly disturbed by the youth's audacity in attacking their elders and their impudent intrusion into the realm of politics.

Conclusions: Towards 'Political Nationalism'?

Viewed in a certain retrospective light, *Hêvî* may very well be regarded as representing a significant step towards 'political nationalism'. It is certainly true that some members of *Hêvî* would go on to play significant roles in the Kurdish movement in the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, it might well be assumed that many of the association's members harboured secret separatist ambitions. However, there is little evidence of this. It has been argued that *Hêvî*'s subtle shift in emphasis was prompted by the young age of its membership, a membership which lacked a fixed

⁷¹ Silopi, *Doza Kurdistan*, 43. It is unclear whether Ziya Vehbi Bey's reading of *Mêm û Zin* was intended to show that the Kurds possessed a long held desire for freedom and independence. However, the reaction of others to Feyzi Bey's comments suggests that they regarded his interpretation of the text as a slur designed to distract from the failures of the older generation.

place in society and was free from the “exigencies of family”.⁷² This may contain some truth. However, their shift in emphasis should also be seen as a function of the turbulent period in which they were operating.

It was a period in which Ottoman politics was characterised by a ‘clash of generations,’ especially within the military.⁷³ In the case of the Kurdish movement, as suggested by the events of the *Hêvî* 1913 anniversary celebrations, there was a perception amongst the youth that the older generation had failed to provide leadership on the national question. As noted in Chapter IV, the growing gulf between those who remained loyal to the CUP and those who sided with the opposition also served to undermine the older generation’s ability to exercise strong united leadership. This deficit can also be regarded as one of the main factors behind youth mobilisation. Even though the ‘Kurdish question’ continued to be framed as an issue of underdevelopment and lack of education, the established elite had yet to prove that it was able to ‘solve’ the issue.

More broadly, *Hêvî*’s members matured under quite different political circumstances from their elders. The older generation had been raised under the dictatorship of Sultan Abdülhamid II. Their fundamental political objective, namely the restoration of constitutional rule, had been fulfilled by the events of July 1908. At the same time, many members of the older generation continued to play a significant role within both the apparatus of the state and wider Ottoman politics. The younger generation lacked the shared experience that the struggle against autocracy had provided to the elders. In contrast, they had matured within a period characterised by ever growing political polarisation, ever more costly international military entanglements and the ever increasing

⁷² Martin Strohmeier, *Crucial Images in the Presentation of a Kurdish National Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 43.

⁷³ Kutay, “Enver Paşanın Harbiye Nazırlığında Bilinmeyen Hakikatlar”, 142.

authoritarianism of the CUP. Under such circumstances, the Kurds had to look to their own development.

Nonetheless, it is also pertinent to underline the fact that in terms of social origins members of *Hêvî* did not differ greatly from their elders. As in the case of earlier Kurdish associations, individuals from notable backgrounds – Cemilpaşazades, Babanzades and Bedirhans - were at the forefront.⁷⁴ In addition, the members of *Hêvî* also possessed strong links with the Ottoman state. They were in the process of receiving education in the Ottoman state school system and even those studying abroad received scholarships from the government.⁷⁵ Furthermore, they could expect to find employment in Ottoman institutions after graduation. Hence, while *Hêvî* was indeed more focused on purely Kurdish issues than earlier Kurdish organisations had been, its commitment to the Ottoman polity should not be seen as superficial. Indeed, *Hêvî* was not the most radical wing of the Kurdish movement to emerge during the six years between the revolution and the outbreak of the First World War. At the same time as *Hêvî*'s members were pursuing the agenda of 'cultural nationalism' in the imperial capital, in Ottoman Kurdistan others were seeking to capitalise on growing antipathy towards the constitutional order amongst Kurdish provincial elites in order to forge a movement directed at the complete separation of Kurdistan from the Ottoman Empire. It is to this 'nationalist/insurrectionist' faction and its evolution in the years between the revolution and the outbreak of the First World War that we will now turn.

⁷⁴ According to Malmîsanij, out of thirty-one known members of *Hêvî* six were of 'unknown' social origins while only one was said to be of 'a working-class background'. The remaining twenty-four were all of 'notable' backgrounds, including princely families, such as the Babans and Bedirhans, urban elites such as the Cemilpaşazades and the offspring of religious functionaries and leaders. See Malmîsanij, *Kürt Talebe Hevî Cemiyeti*, 73.

⁷⁵ These were cut after the government began to mobilise the army. Silopi, *Doza Kurdistan*, 43.

Figures: Pictures appearing in *Rojê Kurd* and *Hetawê Kurd*



Figure 1: “Sultan Saladin Ayyubi”
Rojê Kurd (19 June 1913)



Figure 2: “One of the Iranian Kurdish emirs: Karim Khan Zand”
Rojê Kurd (19 July 1913)



Figure 3: “One of the Baban emirs: Abdurrahman Pasha”
Hetawê Kurd (24 October 1914)



Figure 4: “The late Hüseyin Kenan Bedirhan Pasha”
Rojê Kurd (14 August 1913)



Figure 5: “The late Babanzade İsmail Hakki Bey” *Hetawê Kurd* (11 January 1914)



Figure 6: “One of Kurdistan’s fortified cities: the town of Erzurum”
Rojê Kurd (12 September 1913)



Figure 7: “A family from amongst the Kurds in Damascus who have preserved their nationality”
Hetawê Kurd (4 December 1913)



Figure 8: “His Excellency Mehmed Agha, chief of the famous Terikan tribe, one of the Kurdish tribes of Severek, and his entourage”
Hetawê Kurd (3 July 1914)

Chapter VI: Kurdistan in the Constitutional Age: From Protest to Nationalism (1908-1914)

Up till now the Kurds have received no benefit from the Young Turk Government; nothing has been done to improve the material conditions of this part of Turkey, and on the other hand taxes are more rigorously collected than under the old regime, whilst the tribal cavalry has been deprived of the privileges it used to possess. Added to this the Vilayet has suffered from a constant succession of new Valis since the constitution, so there has been no continuity of policy; the last Vali, Ahmet Izzet Pasha, himself a Kurd, was on good terms with the Chiefs, and kept down brigandage to a great extent by his personal influence, whilst the present Vali has hunted down and shot several brigands and shown that he means to keep order with a firm hand. Owing to this the Kurdish Chiefs are uncertain as to how they stand, and there is no doubt that many look upon the present regime with mistrust and suspicion.... The failure of the Turkish army in the last war and the continued occupation of the neighbouring Persian province by Russian troops has lessened the respect of the Kurds for the Government at Constantinople and increased the prestige of Russia.

Ian Smith, British Vice-Consul at Van, 1914¹

The preceding two chapters have examined the evolution of the Kurdish movement in the imperial capital, a movement which envisaged the ‘Kurdish question’ as being primarily an issue of the Kurdish community’s social, economic and cultural ‘backwardness’. However, growing awareness of the importance of the ‘national question’ was not restricted to Istanbul based Kurdish elites. The events of July 1908 had a profound impact on relations between the Ottoman Empire’s Kurdish-inhabited provinces and Istanbul. On one level, the revolution and the establishment of a constitutional regime led to a renewal of efforts to create a more centralised and standardised mode of provincial administration. In practice, this meant an assault on the privileges that many Kurdish notables had acquired during the Hamidian era. At the same time, the relative liberalisation of politics, following the breakdown of the autocracy, also facilitated the proliferation of novel concepts such as ‘nationality’ and new forms of political organisation such as clubs, societies and

¹ PRO FO 195/2458, Van (14 February 1914).

political parties in outlying regions of the empire including Kurdistan. In short, just as the revolution had presented the Ottoman Kurdish elite with new opportunities to advance their interests, so too did it for their provincial cousins.

It is within the context of these developments that this chapter will examine the evolution of the Kurdish ‘movement’ (or movements) in the provinces of Eastern Anatolia and Mesopotamia between the revolution and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. It opens by examining the immediate impact of the change of government on Kurdistan. It highlights the disquiet with which news that the empire would henceforth be governed according to the constitution was met by many Kurds, especially those who had benefited from Sultan Abdülhamid II’s patronage, and the hostility aroused by the new regime’s efforts to dismantle the political order which had been erected in the region by the *ancien régime*. In particular, it focuses on the establishment of provincial branches of the KSMP, which, although linked to the pro-constitutionalist organisation in the capital, possessed a different ideological and political orientation, becoming focal points for Kurdish discontent towards the new regime.

The chapter continues by charting the development of the Kurdish movement following the dissolution of the KSMP in the summer of 1909. It contextualises this development with reference to the prevailing social and political conditions in Ottoman-Kurdistan between 1910 and 1914. This includes an examination of the relationship between the Kurds and the central government as well as the broader dynamics which impacted upon the attitudes of Kurds, most notably the empire’s weakening international position brought about by its defeats in the Ottoman-Italian War of 1911-1912 and the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913. It is during these turbulent times that one can situate the emergence of a militant strain of Kurdish activism, which was led by members of the Bedirhan family and attracted the support of important religious and tribal notables. This

includes the development of a ‘pro-autonomy’ movement in Cizre-Bohtan, led by Bedirhanzade Hüseyin Pasha and Hasan Bey as well as a movement, led by Bedirhanzade Abdürrezzak Bey which sought the support of Russia in separating Kurdistan from the Ottoman Empire. The chapter concludes by examining the ‘Molla Selim Revolt’ of March 1914, the largest outbreak of anti-government violence to occur in Kurdistan since the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt of the 1880s. While not suggesting that the Kurdish community was unified behind calls for Kurdish independence on the eve of the First World War, by counterpoising the development of the ‘autonomist’ and ‘separatist’ movements in the provinces with the pro-Ottoman movement in the capital, we can perhaps gain a more complete picture of the early Kurdish movement as well as a greater appreciation of its inherent diversity.

The 1908 Revolution and the KSMP: Provincial Perspectives

While the restoration of constitutional rule was applauded by many in the empire, including the Kurdish elites in Istanbul, the reaction in Kurdistan was far more ambiguous. Some important urban centres in the region, such as Erzurum, Diyarbakır and Malatya after the initial atmosphere of shock and disbelief had dissipated, witnessed scenes of joy and inter-communal solidarity reminiscent of those seen in the capital.² However, elsewhere in the region the reaction to events in Istanbul was more guarded.³ In Bitlis the Muslim population was apparently deeply troubled by the term ‘equality’⁴ and pro-Hamidian officials and Kurds were seeking “an opportunity to prove

² See for example PRO FO 195/2284, Erzurum (27 July 1908); PRO FO 195/2284, Harput (20 August 1908); PRO FO 1915/2284, Harput (1 September 1908).

³ This was not true only in Kurdistan but also in other Muslim populated regions of the Empire. See Elie Kedourie, “The Impact of the Young Turk Revolution in the Arabic speaking Provinces of the Ottoman Empire”, in Elie Kedourie (ed.) *Arabic Political Memoires and Other Studies* (London: Routledge, 1974), 124-161. Also see Stavro Skendi. *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878–1912* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 341–344.

⁴ PRO FO 195/2284, Bitlis (10 August 1908).

the ‘unfitness’ of Constitutional government for Turkey”.⁵ In Harput, it was reported that Kurdish tribes were “all awaiting further developments in Constantinople with much anxiety...”.⁶ while in Van, the British Consul noted that: “At present the Kurds themselves, or at least those of them who are in touch with the Government, realise that the era of free licence... is at an end, and for the time being, most of them seem to be ‘lying low’ to see what happens”.⁷

For those who had benefited most from the sultan’s protection and patronage, such anxieties proved to be well founded as the new regime moved to dismantle the political order which the Hamidian regime had constructed in the region. For example, in November 1908 an alliance of the townspeople and government employees with the support of the county governor and the local detachment commander in the Süleymaniye region succeeded in Sheikh Said Berzinci called to Mosul “to answer for some of his malpractices”.⁸ There he was placed under house arrest and two months later he was dead, murdered during the course of a riot in January 1909.⁹ Although it seems that the government was not involved in the sheikh’s murder, the downfall of an individual so intimately connected to the Hamidian regime no doubt left an impression on the Kurds of Süleymaniye and its environs.¹⁰

⁵ PRO FO 195/2284, Bitlis (18 August 1908).

⁶ PRO FO 195/2284, Harput (26 August 1908). In fact, the Müfti of Harput apparently “exclaimed, when the nature of the Constitution was explained to him by the Acting Vali – ‘This will be the end of Islam!’” See PRO FO 195/2284, Harput (6 August 1908).

⁷ PRO FO 195/2284, Van (30 September 1908).

⁸ PRO FO 195/2284, Van (13 June 1909). Apparently following the revolution, the sheikh and his allies amongst the Hamavand had been agitating in the region, hoping “to show themselves so strong that the Government might be forced to place them in authority.” Ely Banister Soane, *Report on the Sulaimania District of Kurdistan (1910)* (Sulaimani: Kurdology Centre, 2008), 91.

⁹ PRO FO 195/2308, Mosul (14 January 1909). Also see Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti Mosul Şubesi, “Musul Hadise-i Feciası”, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi*, (16 January 1909); Hilmi, Rafiq Hilmi, *Yaddasht: Kurdistan at the Dawn of the Century* (Greenford: New Hope, 1998), 35-38.

¹⁰ PRO FO 195/2284, Van (13 June 1909).

Another important signal that the new administration had no intention of indulging Kurdish ‘lawlessness’ was its moves to bring the Hamidiye regiments under firmer control. Soon after the revolution, Marshal Zeki Pasha, the Hamidiye’s long-time patron, was dismissed from his position as commander of the Ottoman Fourth Army.¹¹ This was followed by attempts to collect government issued rifles from Hamidiye tribes and the arrest of a number of high profile Hamidiye commanders such as Milanlı Abdülkerim Bey and Kör Hüseyin Pasha of the Hayderan tribe. However, perhaps the most dramatic development in the months that followed the restoration of the constitution was the fall of the sultan’s favourite, Milli İbrahim Pasha. Istanbul issued a warrant for his arrest and, after efforts to negotiate his peaceful surrender failed, he and his followers fled their ‘capital’ of Viranşehir, taking to the nearby mountains where the pasha succumbed to dysentery in late September 1908. Subsequently, government troops and local irregulars subjected the Milli tribe to a campaign which resembled a “plundering expedition” rather than a regular military operation.¹² In addition to bringing notorious Hamidy e commanders to book, the new CUP-backed regime also moved to address the explosive issue of land. With Armenians taking advantage of their newly found freedom to press the government for redress,¹³ the early signs were that the new regime was sympathetic to their demands. For example, in Van, the chiefs of the Hayderanlı tribe were compelled to come to the town in late September 1908 in order to settle the question, agreeing to surrender lands for which they held no official title deed and to accept arbitration through the courts in other disputes.¹⁴

¹¹ PRO FO 195/2284, Erzurum (21 August 1908).

¹² PRO FO 195/2284, Diyarbakır (13 October 1908).

¹³ Janet Klein, “Power in the Periphery: The Hamidiye Light Cavalry and the Struggle for Ottoman Kurdistan, 1890-1914” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2002), 305.

¹⁴ PRO FO 195/2284, Van (30 September 1908). It was later reported that Kurds had been evicted from thirteen Armenian villages seized by the Hayderanlı tribe in the district of Adilcevaz and that

From the perspective of the Kurdish tribes, who had enjoyed a free hand under the Hamidian regime, such developments could not but provoke dismay. As one British report noted, “the Aghas have no love for the new regime, which threatens their despotic power as chiefs and curtails their right of pillage”.¹⁵ Naturally, such a rapid transformation soon provoked resistance. For example, in October 1908 the government was forced to dispatch troops to Farkin (Silvan) after rumours began circulating that local tribal leaders and the Sheikh of Zilan had “held a consultation and decided that equality between Moslem and Christian is inadmissible and contrary to the Koran wherefore they resolved to call in the neighbouring Kurdish tribes over whom they have great influence and solve the question once and for all by wiping out the Christians”.¹⁶ Meanwhile, reports from Van indicated that the tribes of Hakkâri were discussing a “common course of action” and had agreed to unite “with the view to discourage any attempt at individual disarmament of the separate tribes”.¹⁷ Such pledges of common action against the impositions of an outside power were nothing new amongst the tribes of Kurdistan, constituting a constant in the ancient calculus of tribal politics.

However, in this new age of ‘freedom’ residents of Ottoman Kurdistan, from all walks of life, were also presented with new avenues through which they could advance their interests in the form of participation in clubs, associations and political parties. Indeed, during the revolution’s first year a host of organisations were established in the region. Some, such as Diyarbakır’s ‘Club of the Hungry’ (*Açlar*), which was founded by lower class Muslims to press for the dismissal of corrupt

Kurdish aghas were no longer to be allowed “to exact forced labour or feudal dues from the Christian villagers.” PRO FO 195/2284, Van (3 November 1908).

¹⁵ PRO FO 195/2284, Van (29 November 1908).

¹⁶ PRO FO 195/2284, Diyarbakır (21 October 1908).

¹⁷ PRO FO 195/2284, Van (29 November 1908).

officials and land redistribution, were purely local affairs.¹⁸ Others, like the branches of the *İttihad-ı Muhammedi* (Mohammadan Union) formed in Harput, Elazığ, Muş and Diyarbakır,¹⁹ were linked to organisations based in the capital.²⁰ Nevertheless, even in the cases of clubs and associations linked to organisations in the capital, much of the impetus to organise in the provinces was local. This was evident with regards to the expansion of the CUP. As the CUP sought to transform itself from a secretive revolutionary organisation into something approaching a mass political party, the process of branch formation was chaotic with local notables, who began to see membership of the CUP as a way to advance their interests, establishing or becoming involved in their local committees.²¹ For instance, in Diyarbakır the local CUP branch soon fell under the control of the Pirinçizade family, with the family's patriarch, Pirinçizade Arif, securing election to the Ottoman parliament. Indeed, following Arif's death in 1909, the CUP supported the election of his son, Pirinçizade Feyzi.²² The influence of local notables on the CUP's provincial branches meant

¹⁸ According to the British Vice-Consul in Diyarbakır, the 'Club of the Hungry', which was established in March 1909, dispatched a telegram to the Ottoman Parliament demanding both the dismissal of 'corrupt' local officials and, more importantly: "That property and land, taken by force by certain Beys, Aghas, Chiefs and Leaders should be returned to the owners, or, if these are not surviving, that the land should be distributed amongst the people." PRO FO 195/3317, Diyarbakır (9 March 1909). Following the revolution, many poorer Kurds, who like their Armenian counterparts had often had their lands seized by powerful Muslim notables, began pushing for justice, submitting numerous petitions demanding the new administration address their grievances. See Nilay Özok-Gündoğan, "A 'Peripheral' Approach to the 1908 Revolution in the Ottoman Empire: Land Disputes in Peasant Petitions in Post-Revolutionary Diyarbakır", in Joost Jongerden and Jelle Verheij (eds.), *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbakır, 1870-1915* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 179-215.

¹⁹ See PRO FO 195/3317, Bitlis (8 June 1909); PRO FO 195/3317 Harput (23 June 1909).

²⁰ The Mohammadan Union was established in Istanbul in early March 1909 and implicated in the attempted 'counter-revolution' in April. On the formation and ideology of the Mohammadan Union see Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler: İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi*, Vol. 1 (Istanbul: İletişim, 2007), 217-237.

²¹ Şükrü Hanioglu, "The Second Constitutional Period: 1908-1918", in Reşat Kasaba (ed.), *Cambridge History of Turkey*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77.

²² PRO FO 195/3317, Diyarbakır (26 May 1909).

that, compared to the ideology espoused by the CUP's central body, provincial committees often possessed a far more 'conservative' political orientation. As the British Vice-Consul in Van, Bertram Dickinson, noted, following a tour of Kurdish districts, many of the people introduced to him in Siirt, Mosul, Kirkuk and Süleymaniye as the "lights of liberalism" and the leaders of the local committees of the CUP "would be looked on as reactionaries anywhere else, and rightly so".²³

Similar dynamics can be seen at work in the formation and development of branches of the KSMP which were founded in important provincial centres such as Diyarbakır, Van, Bitlis, Hınıs, Muş, Mosul and Malatya. During its brief run, the KSMP's official organ, the *KTTG*, published numerous telegrams and letters from both its regional branches and prominent provincial leaders. Some, it seems, were eager to profess their loyalty to the new regime. For example, in December 1908 the *KTTG* published telegrams from the KSMP's Diyarbakır, Bitlis and Mosul branches expressing joy at the recent opening of Ottoman parliament. It also included a message from Sheikh Said, in which he described the opening of the Ottoman parliament "which had been established with the purpose of raising the glory and majesty of the state and nation (*devlet ve milletin teali-i şen ü şevketi*)" as a "day of happiness (*yevm-i mesud*)" and "our national festival (*id-i millimiz*)".²⁴ In a later issue, the *KTTG* carried a letter from the Harunanlı and Reşkotanlı tribes which praised the constitution as being like a "heavenly tree of freedom (*tuba-yı hürriyet*)" which produced "fruits such as justice, equality and freedom (*adalet, müsavat, uhuvvet gibi*

²³ PRO FO 195/3317, Van (13 June 1909). Indeed, the dominance of the Pirinççizades, who had been implicated in the anti-Armenian violence of the 1890s, in the Diyarbakır committee led one British official to dub the organisation the "Committee of Reaction and Progress". See PRO FO 195/2284, Diyarbakır (23 November 1908).

²⁴ "Telgrafat-ı Hususiye", *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (26 December 1908).

semerat)...”.²⁵ Tribal chiefs in Midyat and Nusaybin, for their part expressed willingness to surrender their weapons to the new administration upon hearing about the “delights of freedom and justice (*lezaiz-i hürriyet ve adalet*)...”.²⁶

At first glance, such expressions of enthusiasm for the new order seem to indicate that the ideological and political orientation of the KSMP’s provincial affiliates was similar to that of its central office in Istanbul. However, in reality, the relationship between supporters of the KSMP in Kurdistan and the Kurdish elites in Istanbul was far more complex. On a most basic level, such forthright declarations of fidelity towards the new regime were mostly likely motivated by an instinct for self-preservation rather than a genuine enthusiasm for the constitutional order. Kurdish provincial elites who feared government action against them were seeking to present themselves as friends of the new regime. For example, Sheikh Said’s praise for the Ottoman parliament was no doubt motivated by his desire to overturn his house arrest in Mosul.²⁷ Thus one might conclude that through participation in the KSMP individuals such as Sheikh Said may have hoped to earn the sympathy and support of well connected Kurdish leaders in the capital.²⁸

²⁵ Harunan Aşiret Reisi Ahmed Fakih, Reşkotan Aşiret Reisi Hacı Mehmed Mustafa, “Siird, 18 Kanun-ı Evvel 324”, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (23 January 1909).

²⁶ Aziz Halil Haco, Kelebrulu Ahmed, Hasan Sıvuk, Ahmed El-Yusuf, “Midyat’tan, 24 Kanun-ı Evvel 324”, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (23 January 1909).

²⁷In fact, in January 1909 the sheikh formally petitioned parliament on the subject, claiming that his removal from Süleymaniye had been illegal. See *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi*, Vol. 1 (Ankara: TBMM Basımevi, 1982), 251-256.

²⁸ In fact, two Hamidiye commanders, Kör Hüseyin Pasha and Halil of the Karakeçi, wrote to the *KTTG*, in order to protest their treatment by the new regime. See Umum Haydaran Aşiret Reisi Hamidiye Mirliyası Hüseyin, “Kürt İttihat ve Teavün Kulübüne” *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (23 January 1909) and Karakeçi Aşireti Reisi Halil, “Siverek, 22 Teşrin-i Sani 324”, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (12 December 1908).

Nevertheless, much like the regional committees of the CUP, the KSMP provincial affiliates seem largely to have been formed on the initiative of locals.²⁹ Hence, in practice, their ideological and political orientation often reflected local sensibilities and attitudes, differing considerably from the ideals espoused by the group's leadership in Istanbul. For example, the opening ceremony of the KSMP's Diyarbakır branch, held on 21st December 1908 at the town's chief mosque and attended by an estimated 13,000 people including representatives of the government, had strong religious undertones. A British observer noted that: "All the Dervishes from the four quarters of the City, bearing religious flags, passed through the streets, followed by a great multitude uttering shouts of "Salavat". On entering the Mosque they took [an] oath to be faithful to the "Sheriat-i-Mohammed" or Islamic law and to the Padishah". Moreover, after the ceremony was concluded a petition protesting against civil law and calling for the restoration of Islamic law was circulated, garnering some 3,000 signatures from amongst those who had been in attendance. The British agent in the town suggested that the Kurds' "lack of enthusiasm" for the new regime arose from their deep suspicion of the civil court system, "and as the word 'Kanûn' [civil law] is prominent in the term 'Kanûn-i Essassi' they regard the latter with disfavour". As a result they had "declared that what they want is the "Sheriat"... with all that implies".³⁰

This reference to Islamic law - the Sharia - seems to have been an expression of Kurdish discontent at the changes brought about by the revolution, especially with regards to the status of non-Muslims. Indeed, in a later dispatch, the British agent in Diyarbakır described the Kurdish club as being "religio-fanatical... composed mostly of mullahs, hocas, and the common people, [who]

²⁹Janet Klein, "Kurdish nationalists and non-nationalist Kurdistans: rethinking minority nationalism and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1909", *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2007), 140.

³⁰ PRO FO 195/3317, Beirut (3 January 1909).

demand the shariat".³¹ This discontent, however, was not merely ideological; it had material origins. For instance, in Van, the British Vice-Consul described the membership of the local KSMP branch as being principally "Kurdish Aghas of bad character", complemented by "tithe farmers, selefji [religious scholars] and others, who fear for their illicit gains under the new regime..." He concluded that the formation of the club was a "sort of counter-blast to the violence of the Tashnakists [Dashnaktsutyun], whose talk about 'vengeance' has roused Kurdish apprehensions".³² Thus despite the pro-constitutional *élan* of the KSMP's leadership, its provincial branches seemed to be becoming focal points for resistance to the new political order.

This is perhaps most evident in the activities of the KSMP's Bitlis branch. According to Russian sources, the town's Kurdish club, which was founded in October 1908, grew rapidly, quickly dwarfing the local branch of the CUP as well as the Armenian organisations in the town. Indeed, by early 1909 it was reported that throughout the province its membership had grown to some 80,000. However, its political orientation was almost diametrically opposed to that of the KSMP's headquarters in Istanbul. Far from promoting harmony between the Kurds and their Armenian neighbours, the Bitlis club's activities increased tensions, particular after it formed an armed militia of between 10,000 and 12,000 men.³³ Indeed, the provincial authorities reported that certain members of the club had been touring the provinces denouncing the "legalisation" of marriage between non-Muslim men and Muslim women.³⁴ Relations between the Bitlis club and the government were also strained. In April 1909 the local authorities arrested a certain Sheikh Abdulgaffar Efendi who, although ostensibly tasked by the Bitlis club with the establishing of a

³¹ PRO FO 195/3317, Beirut (13 February 1909).

³² PRO FO 195/2284, Van (3 November 1908).

³³ Mikhail S. Lazarev, *Kurdistan i kurdskaia problema: 90-e gody XIX veka - 1917 g.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1972), 147; Celîlê Celîl, *Kürt Aydınlanması* (Istanbul: Avesta, 2000), 66-67.

³⁴ BOA DH.MKT 2839/69 (10 May 1909).

subordinate club in Siirt, had been, in reality, secretly inciting the local population against the constitution.³⁵ Following the outbreak of the ‘counter-revolution’ in April 1909, the anti-constitutional proclivities of the Bitlis branch of the KSMP came out into the open. The Kurdish club “cheered the return of the shariat” and then “compelled under threats of death the Young Turk officers to sign a telegram addressed to the Cabinet of Tewfik Pasha demanding the full application of the Sheriat”. This anti-constitutional agitation only ended when news arrived in the town that the reactionaries had been suppressed, which afforded the CUP an opportunity to dissolve the Kurdish club and forcibly integrate its members into their own local branch.³⁶ By the summer of 1909, the Unionists had dispersed the remaining ‘Kurdish Clubs’ in the region, bringing to an end this first phase of Kurdish activism in the provinces.³⁷

In assessing this early manifestation of ‘nationality’ based political agitation in the Kurdish inhabited province, it is quite striking that, although in organisational terms Kurdish activism the provinces were linked to Kurdish activism in the capital, its political and ideological orientation diverged significantly from the pro-constitutionalist and pro-revolutionary zeal of Istanbul’s Kurdish elites. Indeed, much of the KSMP’s membership in the provinces was made up of Kurdish elites “who were disgruntled with the new regime not merely for ideological reasons, but for material... reasons too”.³⁸ Consequently, KSMP branches in Kurdistan became vehicles through which powerful Kurdish notables sought to defend the privileges they had won under the Hamidian regime. In this sense, although Kurdish political mobilisation in the provinces in the immediate aftermath of the revolution was a form of ‘protest’, it can hardly be described as *nationalist* in

³⁵ BOA DH.MKT 2791/63 (8 April 1909).

³⁶ PRO FO 195/3317, Bitlis (8 June 1909).

³⁷ Lazarev, *Kurdistan i kurdskaia problema*, 147.

³⁸ Klein, “Kurdish nationalists and non-nationalist Kurdistans”, 141.

orientation. Indeed, in ideological terms, the movement seems to have drawn more on religious themes and symbols than tropes more often associated with nationalism such as language and common origin. Nevertheless, it is clear that at least some provincial notables saw the utility of organising along ‘national’ lines in order to protect their interests in a time of rapidly changing political circumstances.³⁹

Kurdistan under the ‘Young Turks’: Turbulent Times (1910-1914)

In the summer of 1909 Kurdistan was relatively calm. However, discontent and mistrust towards the new regime continued to simmer. As Vice-Consul Dickinson observed, “one fact which has impressed me everywhere... is the unanimous dissatisfaction with the new regime. Some speak openly, others do not, but there is no disguising the fact that the Sheriat, and not equality and fraternity, is what they want...”⁴⁰ This discontent soon developed into renewed agitation in the region. In March 1910, the British Vice-Consul in Diyarbakır reported that rumours were circulating that in Bişeri, Silvan and other parts of the province ‘Kurd Clubs’ had been “secretly organised with the object of overthrowing the present ‘Giavour’ Government, whose determination to enrol Christian recruits in the Army is particularly resented”.⁴¹ Throughout the spring of 1910, this so-called “Kurdish movement” continued to gain ground, although, as the British agent in Diyarbakır noted, the Kurds were not “sufficiently well organized to attempt insurrection against the Government...”.⁴² A similar state of tumult was also brewing further east,

³⁹ An exception to the generally anti-constitutionalist stance of KSMP’s provincial branches was the Malatya Kurdish Club. During the course of the events of April 1909, the local branches of the CUP, Dashnaktsutyun and the KSMP sent a joint telegram to the Ottoman parliament condemning the actions of the ‘counter-revolutionaries’. *Meclisi Umumî Zabıt Ceridesi*, Vol. 1 (Ankara: TBMM Basımevi, 1982), 16-17.

⁴⁰ PRO FO 195/3317, Van (13 June 1909).

⁴¹ PRO FO 195/2347, Diyarbakır (7 March 1910).

⁴² PRO FO 195/2347, Harput (15 August 1910).

in Bitlis. In April 1910 a Kurdish informant reported that a combination of Kurdish tribal leaders and Sufi sheikhs had taken an oath upon the Quran to remain faithful to the Sharia and “to carry on a relentless campaign against everything undertaken by the Young Turk...” who were presented as being “entirely irreligious and violators of Mohammadan traditions, as laughing at *namaz*, and all such religious duties; briefly as ungodly as to accept Christian soldiers into the Army”. The British agent in the town concluded that: “It is not difficult to infer that, as a result of such preaching, a profound indignation may have arisen among certain classes of the Kurdish fanatic and ignorant population”.⁴³

Faced with such disquiet, as well as the efforts of opposition political parties to capitalise on Kurdish disaffection,⁴⁴ the Ottoman government softened its approach to the Kurdish tribes. For example, rather than abolishing the Hamidiye regiments, in 1910 the government opted to reorganise them into the ‘Tribal Light Cavalry Regiments’ (*Aşiret Hafif Süvari Alayları*). Certainly, in this reorganisation Hamidiye commanders lost many of the privileges they had enjoyed under the former regime.⁴⁵ However, the CUP evidently calculated that, if they were to embark upon the complete abolition of the Hamidiye regiments, which had for many come to symbolise the despotism of Sultan Abdülhamid II, they would risk losing an important source of leverage over the Kurdish tribes. Moreover, some in official circles continued to regard the militia as an important counter-balance to the Armenian committees which had proliferated in the region in the aftermath of the revolution. Indeed, in the summer of 1911, a senior Ottoman commander,

⁴³ PRO FO 195/2347, Bitlis (22 April 1910).

⁴⁴ In early 1911, it was reported that in Diyarbakır, emissaries of Şerif Pasha and his Ottoman Fundamental Reform Party were been in the process of founding “‘secret committees’, which were said to be allying themselves with the reactionary Kurdish Clubs...” PRO FO195/2375, Diyarbakır (27 March 1911).

⁴⁵ Klein, “Power in the Periphery”, 217-231

Field Marshal Osman Pasha, gave a speech in an Armenian village, in which he argued that if the Armenians, whom he described as a “disloyal people”, wished to get the Hamidiye suppressed, they would first have to suppress their own revolutionary committees.⁴⁶ Progress on the vexed issue of land reform also seemed to come to a halt. In Bitlis, Armenian villagers were frustrated at the government’s “apathy” towards their claims.⁴⁷ In Erzurum, the British Consul complained that “all claims for the restitution of lands are met with the stereotyped reply that nothing can be done until a Bill has been passed in Parliament...”.⁴⁸ Indeed, on the eve of the 1912 general election it was reported that the CUP in Diyarbakır had promised the local Kurdish population that they would no longer be punished for atrocities against Armenians and that lands and villages that had been usurped from the Christians would not be returned to their original owners.⁴⁹

However, a partial reversion to such ‘Hamidianesque’ policies failed to arrest the growing turmoil or halt the decline of the ‘Young Turk’ administration’s prestige amongst the Kurds. Kurds were well aware of the growing internal and external difficulties facing the central government. For instance, news of rebellions in the Arabic-speaking portions of the Ottoman Empire quickly spread to Kurdistan, with the Russian Vice-Consul in Beyazıt noting in March 1911 that: “However much the Turks are disappointed with their failures in Arabia, so the Kurds are pleased with these setbacks...”. Indeed, it was reported that money was raised from amongst the Kurdish tribes for the benefit of anti-government rebels in Yemen.⁵⁰ The empire’s unsuccessful wars in North Africa and the Balkans also served to undermine the government’s authority. Indeed, the empire’s failure to defeat the Italians and then the Balkan League had a very direct impact upon the affairs of

⁴⁶ PRO FO 195/2375, Bitlis (8 August 1911).

⁴⁷ PRO FO 195/2375, Van (6 February 1911).

⁴⁸ PRO FO 195/2375, Erzurum (21 August 1911).

⁴⁹ PRO FO 1915/2405, Diyarbakır (7 May 1912).

⁵⁰ Lazarev, *Kurdistan i kurdskaia problema*, 155.

Kurdistan, reviving European interest in addressing the ‘Armenian question’. The result was that, on 8th February 1914, after two years of negotiations, the Great Powers (in particularly Russia) forced the Ottoman government to agree to a reform package which provided for European control over the so-called ‘six provinces’.⁵¹ As might be expected, this agreement further increased tensions in the region, raising fears amongst the Kurds of Armenian domination.

Consequently, the years between 1911 and 1914, were ones not only of growing lawlessness but also of increasing political tumult. Significantly, although much unrest amongst the Kurdish tribes was framed in religious terms, some important Kurdish notables also adopted ‘nationalistic’ themes. For example, in 1911, following the outbreak of the war with Italy, Seyid Ali of Hizan distributed leaflets in Siirt, Van and Bitlis proclaiming that these districts belonged to the Kurds.⁵² Similarly, Sheikh Abdüsselam Barzani and Nur Mehmed of Dohuk organised a petition that called for autonomy for five Kurdish-inhabited districts in the province of Mosul, demanding the adoption of Kurdish in administration and education, the appointment of Kurdish-speaking officials, the restoration of Sharia and the appointment of members of the Shafii school to administer it, and that tax revenues raised in the five districts should be used locally for public works.⁵³ The political and ideological conditions which prevailed in Kurdistan in the lead up to the First World War were perhaps most succinctly described by Arshak Safrastian, a native of Van serving with the British consular service. He recalled:

⁵¹ Roderic Davison, “The Armenian Crisis, 1912-1914”, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (1948), 481-505; Joseph Heller, “Britain and the Armenian Question, 1912-1914: A Study in Realpolitik”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1980), 3-26. On the projected reforms see Dikran Mesrob Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule: 1908-1914* (Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 201-229.

⁵² Michael Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 60.

⁵³ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B Taurus, 1998), 98.

Widespread robberies in isolated valleys and out-of-the-way districts and raiding of flocks of defenceless peasants increased in proportion to the Turkish defeats in the Balkans. There was also a political aspect to it. 'Kurdistan for the Kurds'; the new pass-word was being whispered from *tekké* (a shire and hostel) to *tekké* of the Sheikhs who were convinced that the Ottoman Empire had suffered the great disaster of 1912-13 because the Young Turks were godless *Farmason* (Masons).⁵⁴

It is within the context of these turbulent times, characterised by every increasing antagonism and growing political uncertainty, that we can situate the emergence of a movement or, perhaps more accurately, movements which, building on Kurdish discontent, endeavoured to unify the Kurdish community along 'national' lines in order to press for Kurdish self-rule.

The Movement in Cizre-Bohtan: From Enlightenment to Autonomy

In 1910, the British Vice-Consul in Diyarbakır reported that two members of the Bedirhan family, Bedri Bey and his brother Midhat Bey, had arrived in Kurdistan from Istanbul. After a few days spent in Diyarbakır, during which time they were hosted by Piriñçizade Feyzi, they proceeded to Cizre where they sought "to lay claim to the property owned by their father, who was exiled to Constantinople and dispossessed of his *derebeylik* of Bohtan some sixty-five years ago". Once in their ancestral homeland, the pair were greeted by the district governor, who expressed his hope that the transfer of properties currently held by the government back to their original owners would be completed by the spring of 1911. However, the report suggested that a broader political motive lay behind the return of the Bedirhans to Cizre.

The chiefs of the Bohtan Kurdish tribes, for the most part descendants of the servants of the late Bederkhan Pasha, are rallying to his sons, who, I am assured, are acting with the knowledge of the Government and with the approval of the Committee of Union and Progress. The Government apparently wishes to be able to direct the movements of the Bohtan Kurds in certain eventualities... In the old days, Bederkhan Pasha could muster

⁵⁴ Arshak Safrastian, *The Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Harvill Press 1948), 72.

120,000 fighting men, and it is stated that his sons can now command the loyalty of from fifty to sixty thousand Kurds.⁵⁵

Soon after their arrival in the region, the Bedirhan brothers began touring amongst the tribes of Bohtan, Şırnak and Siirt. Their objective was to “preach modern ideas among their fellow countrymen” and to “encourage among those ignorant masses the beginnings of primary education”. They also hoped to establish a technical school (*mekteb-i sanayi*) in Cizre. According to the plan, funds were “to be collected among the Kurds” and assistance rendered by “the Kurdish Club at Constantinople...”.⁵⁶ Hence, while the CUP may well have hoped to gain, through the Bedirhans, leverage over the local tribes, the Bedirhans themselves were apparently more “anxious to raise the intellectual status of their fellow tribesmen by the foundation of schools...”. Indeed, the Bedirhans’ desire to establish distinctive Kurdish centres of learning seemed to be “somewhat at variance with the general policy of the Committee of Union and Progress; under whose auspices Bedirhan and his brother are supposed to be travelling”.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, relations between the two sides appeared cordial enough with the pair apparently enjoying “the full confidence and sympathy of the Government” as indicated by the “warm reception” they received in Cizre and Siirt.⁵⁸

However, relations between the Bedirhans and the government soon began to cool. When two other members of the family, Hüseyin Pasha and Hasan Bey, returned to the region in the summer of 1911, their movements were “closely watched” by the authorities.⁵⁹ It quickly became apparent that the Bedirhans’ return to Kurdistan was motivated by more than a desire to ‘enlighten’ their people. By the autumn of 1911, government sources were reporting that Hüseyin Pasha, Hasan

⁵⁵ PRO FO 195/2458, Diyarbakır (29 November 1910).

⁵⁶ PRO FO 195/2375, Bitlis (29 April 1911). The “Kurdish Club at Constantinople” was almost certainly a reference to the KSPE of which Midhat Bey was a founding member.

⁵⁷ PRO FO 195/2375, Erzurum (May 1911).

⁵⁸ PRO FO 195/2375, Diyarbakır (29 April 1911).

⁵⁹ PRO FO 195/2375, Erzurum (28 June 1911).

Bey and another member of the family, Süleyman Bey, were touring the region attempting to garner support with a view to standing in the 1912 elections. Such actions were looked upon with great suspicion by the CUP-dominated authorities who sought to obstruct attempts by members of this family to run for parliament.⁶⁰ The CUP's mistrust of the Bedirhans was only increased when in early 1912 Hüseyin Pasha, who was the most senior member of the family in the Cizre-Bohtan region, dispatched a telegram to the newly formed Freedom and Accord Party (FAP) stating that "some thirty thousand Kurds were ready to join that party, and asking for instructions for the election of a deputy". This action prompted the CUP to dispatch a delegation from Bitlis "to find out about the Kurdish organization...".⁶¹ Tensions between the CUP and the Bedirhans in the Cizre-Bohtan region reached a crescendo during the elections of April 1912, during which Hasan Bey was elected to the Ottoman parliament as the deputy for Siirt. The CUP refused to accept the result and, following protests from Hasan Bey's supporters, sent troops into the district. Subsequently, a rerun of the vote was held at "the point of a bayonet", and Nazim Bey, a CUP member from Salonika and former official in the Public Debt Administration, was elected.⁶²

The Bedirhans in Cizre-Bohtan may well have hoped that through their support for the FAP, a party which advocated a measure of decentralisation, they might secure, through democratic means, both a commanding position for themselves in regional affairs and some degree of autonomy for the Kurds. However, their failure to come to power through elections prompted them to contemplate more radical action. In late 1912 it was reported that Midhat Bey and Hasan Bey were touring the districts south of Diyarbakır, meeting with "all the Kurdish Sheikhs, Beys and

⁶⁰ Fatih Ünal, "II. Meşrutiyet Ulusçuluk ve Kürt Ayrılıkçı Hareketi" *Doğu Batı: II. Meşrutiyet "100. Yıl" Cilt II*, no. 46 (2008), 92-93.

⁶¹ PRO FO 1915/2405, Bitlis (26 February 1912).

⁶² PRO FO 195/2405, Bitlis (27 May 1912).

Aghas of these Kazas and Sanjaks...”.⁶³ It was soon clear that the Bedirhans in Cizre-Bohtan were seeking to prepare the ground for an insurrection with the objective of securing some kind of self-government for Kurdistan. In fact, in March 1913, a member of Hüseyin Pasha’s retinue informed the British Vice-Consul in Diyarbakır that the pasha and his family would seek the establishment of an independent Kurdistan should the Great Powers, as a consequence of the war in the Balkans, break up the empire. However, the informant went on to note that, if the Great Powers guaranteed the unity of the empire, they would look to Great Britain to support them in coming to an arrangement with the Ottoman administration in regard “to the necessary reforms for the future Government of Kurdistan, and the necessity for a possible change in the form of the Government in order to secure the execution of the reforms and the establishment of a more stable and just and enlightened form of Government over the Kurds”.⁶⁴

Throughout the spring of 1913, the influence of the Bedirhans in the districts between Diyarbakır and Mosul was on the rise. Indeed, in a surprising turn of events, following a conflict between a Kurdish tribal leader, Derviş Agha, and the district governor of Midyat, the government appealed to the Bedirhans to help mediate the issue. In response, Hüseyin Pasha demanded to be appointed as district governor of Midyat, a request which the government denied. However, Hüseyin Pasha and Hasan Bey were subsequently invited to join an official commission tasked with ending the dispute. Once on the commission, the pair let it be known that they had no intention of allowing Derviş Agha to submit and managed to secure the dismissal of the district governors of Midyat and Cizre. While the immediate conflict was resolved, in the eyes of the local population this turn of affairs only served to enhance the prestige of the Bedirhans and diminish that of the

⁶³ PRO FO 195/2405, Diyarbakır (31 December 1912).

⁶⁴ PRO FO 195/2449, Diyarbakır (8 March 1913).

government.⁶⁵ By April 1913, it was being reported that Hüseyin Pasha and Hasan Bey, along with another member of the Bedirhan clan, Yusuf Kamil Bey,⁶⁶ had succeeded in uniting the tribes of Siirt, Zaho, Beşiri, Midyat, Cizre and Nusaybin as well as the Yezidi clans of Sincar. Although there was a “miniature armistice” in force between government forces and the tribes loyal to the Bedirhans, many expected an outbreak of violence at any moment.⁶⁷ It was also reported that Hüseyin Pasha’s emissaries were propagating the idea that an “Armenian principality was about to be established and... [calling] upon Kurds to rise in revolt to protect their national existence”.⁶⁸ By early summer there seemed to be little doubt that Hüseyin Pasha, Hasan Bey and Yusuf Kamil Bey were poised to launch an uprising directed at securing Kurdish autonomy. There were sporadic outbreaks of violence in Cizre, Midyat and Rıdvan. Indeed, Hasan Bey openly stated to a German official that they were planning a general revolt in August. However, the alliance of tribesmen which the Bedirhans had so carefully constructed remained fragile and soon unravelled, following the unexpected death of the movement’s leader, Hüseyin Pasha, in August 1913.⁶⁹

Still, despite the passing of Hüseyin Pasha and the collapse of plans for a general Kurdish revolt, Hasan Bey remained in the region lying low and attempting to stockpile weapons in preparation for a new attempt at insurrection. Naturally, the government viewed Hasan Bey with intense suspicion on account of both his anti-CUP proclivities and his influence over the tribes of the Cizre-Bohtan region. Indeed, in an effort to induce him to leave the region, the CUP offered to appoint him as a county governor in Turkish Anatolia. This he refused, replying that he would

⁶⁵ PRO 195/2283, Mosul (23 April 1913).

⁶⁶ Yusuf Kamil Bey had attempted to stand for parliament in Mosul in 1912, but the government rejected his application on the grounds that he had no connection to the province. Ünal, “II. Meşrutiyet Ulusçuluk ve Kürt Ayrılıkçı Hareketi”, 93.

⁶⁷ PRO FO 195/2449, Diyarbakır (22 April 1913).

⁶⁸ PRO FO 195/2449, Van (4 April 1913).

⁶⁹ PRO FO 195/2449, Van (22 July 1913).

only accept a post in Mardin or Siirt. In May 1914, he was interviewed by the British Vice-Consul in Diyarbakır and when asked about his objectives, replied that he would first “ask for the Kurds privileges similar to those which the Arabs had demanded, such as that Government officials in Kurdistan should be conversant with Kurdish, that the money obtained by local taxation should be used for the local needs in building roads and bettering educational facilities etc.”. Moreover, he added, it was “to England that they looked for the recognition of their claims and in England that they place their trust”.⁷⁰

In charting the evolution of the Kurdish movement in Cizre and its environs, it is possible to observe the movement’s rapid transformation from one which sought to bring about the peaceful cultural and educational ‘enlightenment’ of the Kurds to one which endeavoured to secure a certain degree of Kurdish self rule and was willing to use violence to secure its objectives. This radicalisation seems largely to have been a response to the CUP’s obstruction of the Bedirhans’ political ambitions during the elections of 1912. However, even after this, although the movement’s leaders were willing to contemplate Kurdish independence in the case of imperial collapse, they generally sought compromise with the Ottoman establishment. In 1913 and 1914, both Hüseyin Pasha and Hasan Bey, who emerged as the movement’s principal figures, continuously sought to leverage their influence amongst the tribes of southern Diyarbakır to secure official appointments within the local administration. In this sense, the movement’s objectives seem to have been largely to secure concessions, similar to those granted to the Albanians in 1911 and the Arabs in 1914,⁷¹ as opposed to separating Kurdistan from the Ottoman Empire entirely.

⁷⁰ PRO FO 195/2458, Diyarbakır (14 May 1914).

⁷¹ In 1911 the Ottoman government agreed to number cultural and administrative concessions to the Albanians, although these fell short of a unified autonomous region. George Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874-1913* (London: I.B Taurus, 2006), 185-196; Stanford Shaw and Ezel Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern*

Despite the fact that, in a tactical sense, both Hüseyin Pasha and Hasan Bey were prepared to use insurrection and foreign support to secure their objectives, in political terms they seemed willing to reach some form of accommodation with the government in Istanbul. This ‘accommodationist’ approach, however, was not shared by all, most notably Hüseyin Pasha’s nephew Abdürrezzak Bey and his supporters.

The Separatists: Abdürrezzak Bey and Russia

As noted in Chapter III, Abdürrezzak Bey⁷² first came to prominence following his involvement in the murder of Rıdvan Pasha in 1906, an event which had led to the exile of the Bedirhans to North Africa. Unlike the rest of his family, who following the Constitutional Revolution received imperial pardons and returned to the empire, Abdürrezzak Bey remained under lock and key in Tripoli for a further 22 months. Following his release in 1910, he returned to Istanbul, where he submitted a request to the Russia ambassador to be allowed to move to Tiflis, the capital of the Russian Viceroyalty of the Caucasus.⁷³ His request was approved, and in September 1910, he left the Ottoman capital for Tiflis. The ostensive reason for his journey was to engage in trade, but its true purpose was to establish links with Russian officials and secure their support for his political activities.⁷⁴ The nature of those activities soon became apparent; Abdürrezzak Bey sought nothing less than the complete separation of Kurdistan from the Ottoman Empire and hoped the empire’s

Turkey, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 288. In 1914, the Ottoman government made similar concessions to the Arabs, including mandating that all officials in Arabic-speaking provinces be conversant in Arabic. See PRO FO 195/2452 (23 April 1913); also see Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Los Angeles CA: University of California Press, 1997), 135-141.

⁷² On Abdürrezzak Bey see Michael Reynolds, “Abdürrezzak Bedirhan: Ottoman Kurd and Russophile in the Twilight of Empire”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (2011), 411-450.

⁷³ Abdürrezzak Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya* (Istanbul: Perî, 2000), 18-19.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 25.

old enemy, Tsarist Russia, would provide him with the moral and material support needed to achieve that end.

In spring 1911, Abdürrezzak Bey returned to Ottoman territory, travelling via the predominantly Kurdish districts of Maku, Khoy and Kotur in Iranian Azerbaijan, then under Russian occupation, and arrived in Van in April. The Ottoman government was extremely wary of his activities, and placed him under police surveillance. According to the British Vice-Consul, Abdürrezzak Bey, although downplaying the possibility of a general Kurdish revolt, freely admitted “that there existed an idea to form a Kurdistan autonomy...”. Moreover, he informed the British that, should Armenian self-rule become a real prospect, a Kurdish uprising would become a possibility, as the Kurds “could never tolerate an Armenian Autonomy”.⁷⁵ Despite the somewhat guarded nature of his comments to the British, Ottoman fears regarding Abdürrezzak Bey’s intentions proved to be well founded. Whilst in Van, he approached the Russian Vice-Consul with an audacious scheme for the liberation of Kurdistan, claiming that he and his associates had “everything ready”. He proceeded to outline a detailed plan of action. First he would travel to Iranian Kurdistan where he hoped, through his personal connections with the Iranian regent, Nasr al-Mulk, to be appointed governor. If this was unsuccessful, he intended to seize Urmiya or Salmas after which he planned to send telegram to the Shah offering his services as the guardian of the borders. Once ensconced in Iran, which would serve as the “first step to the foundation of an independent Kurdish principality” he planned to provoke a general revolt in Ottoman Kurdistan and, following this, “the Kurds will ask the Russian Emperor to take them under his wing and give them independence”.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ PRO FO 195/2375, Van (30 April 1911).

⁷⁶ Lazarev, *Kurdistan i kurdskaia problema*, 161-62.

Subsequently, Abdürrezzak Bey began touring amongst the tribes along the ill-defined Ottoman-Iranian frontier, where he began distributing pamphlets calling for the creation of a Kurdish ‘beylik’ and commending the “blessedness of Russian rule”.⁷⁷ Initially, the government attached little importance to his activities considering them an attempt to extort “money from the government by intimidation”.⁷⁸ However, they soon learned that “he had been engaging in seditious propaganda amongst the frontier Kurds and that he had told them that in the event of their rising against the government they would have the support of Russia”. As a result, the government dispatched orders for Abdürrezzak Bey’s arrest to the Ottoman consulate in Urmiya. However, he avoided detention, taking refuge in the Russian consulate from where he was escorted by Russian Cossacks to Tabriz.⁷⁹ Still, while the Ottoman government’s efforts to capture Abdürrezzak Bey had failed, his flight from Urmiya temporarily put on hold his plans to raise a Kurdish rebellion.

From Tabriz, where he was hosted by Russian officials, Abdürrezzak Bey travelled to Tiflis and on to Paris where he met with Şerif Pasha as well as other representatives of the Ottoman ‘liberal’ opposition. Şerif Pasha and his confederates attempted to secure Abdürrezzak Bey’s support in their struggle against the Unionists. The opposition’s commitment to decentralisation proved to be a fruitful basis for discussions and an offer was made to guarantee Abdürrezzak Bey a supply of weapons. However, a sticking point was their insistence that Abdürrezzak Bey cut his relations with the Russians. Noting that without Russian assistance transporting weapons to Iran would be

⁷⁷ Manoug Somakian, *Empires in Conflict: Armenia and the Great Powers* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 51.

⁷⁸ PRO FO 195/2375, Van (22 May 1911).

⁷⁹ PRO FO 195/2375, Van (26 June 1911); Abdürrezzak Bey states that the Ottoman consul Sadullah Bey attempted to lure him to the consulate under false pretences and conspired with the local Iranian commander in order to secure his arrest. However, his friends in the town informed him of this plan, allowing him to avoid capture. Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya*, 27-29.

difficult, he refused this demand, bringing to an end his brief flirtation with the Ottoman opposition. During his stay in Paris, Abdürrezzak Bey also reported being approached by the government, who, through his friends and acquaintances, had promised him a host of official positions, including governorships, an appointment to the upper house of the Ottoman parliament and a role in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, according to his Russian contacts, such offers were merely a ruse as the Ottoman government was simultaneously seeking to secure his extradition. So, after a three months stay in Europe, he returned to Tiflis where the CUP attempted unsuccessfully to orchestrate his assassination.⁸⁰

Once back in the region, he immediately set about agitating for Kurdish self-rule, with the British Consul in Erzurum reporting in January 1912 that he had “declared independence [for] Kurdistan and himself ‘Shah’...”.⁸¹ It was later reported that Abdürrezzak Bey had crossed the Russian frontier and, after staying with the “notorious” Seyid Ali of Hizan, had “paid a secret visit to the town of Bitlis”.⁸² However, unlike his earlier attempt to ferment a Kurdish revolt, Abdürrezzak Bey now recognised the need to provide his movement with a firmer organisational base. In February 1912, with Russian support, he organised a congress in an effort to unify the Kurdish tribes. This first meeting proved unsuccessful, but in May a second meeting was held, resulting in the formation of a new revolutionary organisation, *İrşad* (Correct Guidance). The objective of this new organisation, headed by Abdürrezzak Bey, was to unite Kurdistan’s fractious tribal chieftains and sheikhs, establish a 70,000 strong militia and organise a general revolt directed at creating a “Kurdistan Beylik”. In order to achieve this, *İrşad* soon opened up secret branches in Van,

⁸⁰ Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya*, 29-31.

⁸¹ PRO 195/2405, Erzurum (25 January 1912).

⁸² PRO 195/2405, Erzurum (30 January 1912). Seyid Ali of Hizan was described as “notorious” due to his well-known anti-Christian proclivities.

Diyarbakır, Urfa and other Kurdish-inhabited districts. The members of the organisation were also keen to win Russian support for their planned insurrection. Indeed, one of their first acts was to dispatch Sheikh Abdüsselam Barzani to Tiflis in order to secure the assistance of the Russians.⁸³ In August 1912, Hayreddin Berazi, a former captain in the Ottoman gendarmerie and *İrşad*'s vice-president, also applied to Russia for backing. In a proposal submitted to the Russian Consul in Erzurum, Berazi proposed that Russia join with the Kurds and grant them a status within the Russian Empire similar to that enjoyed by the autonomous principalities of Germany.⁸⁴

The Russians, eager to undermine Ottoman rule in Eastern Anatolia, proved to be receptive to Kurdish requests and in late 1912 it was being reported that Abdürrezzak Bey and his allies had secured some 70,000 Russian rifles.⁸⁵ By spring 1913, the movement seemed to be gaining traction. In April, the British Vice-Consul in Diyarbakır reported that Abdürrezzak Bey had come to an understanding with the Russians on the issue of Kurdish independence, had succeeded in uniting the Kurds on the Ottoman-Iranian frontier and “as soon as the snow melts” he and his followers planned to “invade the whole area of land between Mosul, Bitlis and Van”.⁸⁶ A similar impression was given by the British Vice-Consul in Van who stated that Abdürrezzak Bey was working in conjunction with a number of powerful Kurdish notables, including İsmail Agha, better

⁸³ Suat Akgül, “Rusya’nın Yürüttüğü Doğu Anadolu Politikası İçinde İrşad ve Cihandani Cemiyetlerinin Rolü”, in *Prof. Abdurrahman Çaycı’ya Armağan* (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 1995), 28-29.

⁸⁴ Reynolds, *Shattering Empire*, 60.

⁸⁵ PRO FO 195/2405, Erzurum (5 November 1912).

⁸⁶ PRO FO 195/2449, Diyarbakır (22 April 1913).

known as Simko Şikak,⁸⁷ and Sheikh Taha of Şemdinli.⁸⁸ The Vice-Consul further noted that Abdürrezzak Bey's agents were active in spreading propaganda in Van and Hakkâri. In addition, it was reported that Seyid Ali had been holding "mysterious secret meetings", while a large gathering of sheikhs and other Kurds had taken place in Dohuk.⁸⁹ However, Abdürrezzak Bey's general revolt failed to materialise and in September 1913 *İrşad* suffered a major setback when Hayreddin Berazi was killed in a shoot out with the Ottoman authorities.⁹⁰ Subsequently, the organisation was dissolved and, with the onset of winter, Abdürrezzak Bey's plans to raise rebellion against the empire were again placed on hold.

Significantly, Abdürrezzak Bey's political activities were not restricted to efforts to ignite a general Kurdish uprising. As an educated and indeed 'westernised' individual, he was, like his counterparts in Istanbul and relatives in Cizre, keenly aware of his people's social, economic and educational backwardness. As he explained to Russian officials in 1913: "Up until now, the Kurds... have not had an opportunity to come into contact with European culture". This state of affairs, which had left the Kurds in poverty and at a primitive level of intellectual development, he

⁸⁷ Simko Şikak was the leader of the Iranian Kurdish Şikak confederation of Kotur. See Martin van Bruinessen, "Kurdish Tribes and the State of Iran: The Case of Simko's Revolt", in Richard Tapper (ed.) *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 364-400.

⁸⁸ Sheikh Taha was the nephew of Sheikh Abdülkadir and a member of the influential Sadat-ı Nehri family. During Sheikh Abdülkadir's exile from Kurdistan during the Hamidian era (see Chapter III), he had become the 'sheikh of Şemdinli'. Following the revolution, Sheikh Abdülkadir attempted to reassert his influence in the family by trying to secure the succession of his son to sheikhdom of Şemdinli. This resulted in violent confrontations between the followers of the two men. PRO FO 195/2375, Van (21 September 1911). In this regard, Sheikh Taha's alliance with the 'nationalists' may well be seen as a response to his conflict with his pro-government uncle.

⁸⁹ PRO FO 195/2449, Van (8 May 1913).

⁹⁰ Akgül, "Rusya'nın Yürüttüğü Doğu Anadolu Politikası İçinde İrşad ve Cihandani Cemiyetlerinin Rolü", 29; According to Abdürrezzak Bey, when Hayreddin Berazi was killed, a number of documents pertaining to the movement fell into the hands of the Ottoman government. Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya*, 35.

blamed on the tyranny of the Iranians and Turks noting that the former had no interest in education while the latter actively worked “to keep our people under the shadow of ignorance”.⁹¹ Consequently, in addition to his military adventures, Abdürrezzak Bey was also concerned with ‘enlightening’ his compatriots. With this in mind, in 1913, with the assistance of Simko Şikak, he founded a new Kurdish association. Based in the Russian occupied border town of Khoy, this new organisation, named *Gehandîn* (Upbringing/Deliverance), was dedicated to educational issues. *Gehandîn*’s promoters planned to build schools, publish newspapers and journals and work towards reforming the Kurdish alphabet.⁹² To support such activities, Simko Şikak began raising funds amongst the Kurdish tribes of both Iranian and Ottoman Kurdistan. The campaign proved to be a success and in October 1913 *Gehandîn* opened a Kurdish school in Khoy and, in a ceremony attended by local dignitaries and representatives of the Russian occupational forces, enrolled its first 29 students.⁹³ News of the school’s opening was greeted by the Ottoman government with deep suspicion as they regarded it as a vehicle for the spread of pro-Russian “ideas and sentiment (*efkar ve hissiyat*)” amongst the tribes.⁹⁴ This assertion was without doubt correct. While the medium of instruction was Kurdish, the school’s curriculum also included classes in the Russian language as well as on Russian culture, literature and law.⁹⁵ In this regard, the objectives of the school’s promoters were quite different from the promoters of Kurdish ‘enlightenment’ in Istanbul. Those in the capital certainly possessed a deep interest in the cultural improvement and material

⁹¹ Celîl, *Kürt Aydınlanması*, 120.

⁹² Akgül, “Rusya’nın Yürüttüğü Doğu Anadolu Politikası İçinde İrşad ve Cihandani Cemiyetlerinin Rolü”, 30.

⁹³ Celîlê Celîl, *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak* (Istanbul: Evrensel: 2008), 85-91.

⁹⁴ BOA MF.MKT 1187/63 (29 June 1913).

⁹⁵ Kamal Madhar Ahmad, *Kurdistan during the First World War* (London: Saqi Books, 1994), 61; Celîl, *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak*, 81-85; Celîl, *Kürt Aydınlanması*, 127-132; Reynolds, “Abdürrezzak Bedirhan”, 435-437.

advancement of their people. However, these objectives were regarded as being intimately linked to the cause of strengthening the Ottoman polity or, in the case of *Hêvî*, as being separate from political concerns. In contrast, for Abdürrezzak Bey, Kurdish education and enlightenment was an integral part of the quest for Kurdish liberation. In this respect, the school's Russian orientated curriculum was an attempt to weaken the Kurds' cultural ties to the 'Turkish' and 'Iranian' empires at the same time as bringing them into the modern world under the auspices of Russian civilisation.

On the Eve of War: The 'Molla Selim Revolt'

Despite the dissolution of *Îrşad*, Abdürrezzak Bey moved quickly to prepare the ground for a renewal of 'revolutionary' activities, publishing a pamphlet announcing the formation of a new 'Kurdish committee' in October 1913. In it he claimed that, following the Ottoman Empire's defeats in the Balkans and North Africa, the European Great Powers were now contemplating the partition of the empire's Asiatic territories. In order to avoid a full scale partition, the Ottoman government had, he asserted territorial concessions granted to various European powers, consented to British control over the empire's internal affairs and agreed to German command of the Ottoman military. Worse still, he informed readers, the Ottoman government had also accepted a European plan for the reorganisation of "six provinces" "under the name of Armenia" in which the Armenians would be granted "special privileges...". This, he asserted, showed that the Ottoman Empire had "no means of self-defence" and had "become like Morocco and Persia" being "compelled to prefer to undergo the protection of England and accept a privileged Armenia rather than be altogether ruined". Thus, he declared, the Ottoman state had abandoned Kurdistan and given "herself up to the wishes of Europe."

In response to this state of affairs, he called on Kurds to unite in order to establish "their rights and privileges", warning that, if they failed to do so, they would be disarmed and unable "to protect their

rights against the rich but immoral Armenians”. He continued by stating that, in order to avoid becoming “raya” to the Armenians, the “Seyids, Ulemas, Sheikhs, noblemen, learned people, statesmen, beys and aghas, rich and poor have formed a committee and have sworn to protect religion, nation and the fatherland with their blood”. Abdürrezzak Bey concluded by stating that this committee had adopted six resolutions:

- 1) To drive out “by force of arms” turn out all Ottoman officials from Kurdistan and “form a new Government to be governed by men elected by the nation”.
- 2) “To behave as brothers with the officers and the officials who join our fighting men, but to fight and kill those who act against us, looking upon them as traitors to religion, fatherland and nation”.
- 3) To kill and seize the property of those Kurds “who help the traitors...”
- 4) To invite a representative from “each tribe and neighbourhood” to the “principle revolutionary centre...”.
- 5) “To form a provisional Government to decide on our claims and, considering the situation of the country, to settle every question and to govern the nation”.
- 6) “To send a deputation to political circles and to the Council of Ambassadors in order to introduce the Great Powers to the temporary Government of Kurdistan”.⁹⁶

Again Abdürrezzak Bey and his supporters were able to secure Russian support. Indeed, the Ottoman authorities bitterly complained that the Russians were keeping the Kurds on the Iranian frontier “in a state of unrest” and encouraging them “to make raids into Turkish territory”. As evidence they pointed out that Simko Şikak and Abdürrezzak Bey had received “decorations and money from the Viceroy of the Caucasus” and that, as Russian troops were stationed in north western Iran, the Russian government “could have prevented the raids and attacks on the Turkish posts...”.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ PRO FO 195/2460, Erzurum (31 October 1913).

⁹⁷ PRO FO 195/2458, Van (14 February 1914). According to Ottoman documents, the Russians had ‘appointed’ Abdürrezzak Bey as “the leader of all Iranian tribes (*umum aşair-i İraniyat reisi*)” and granted him a stipend of 16,000 roubles. Erdal Aydoğan, *İttihat ve Terakkî'nin Doğu Politikası 1908-1918*, (Istanbul: Ötüken, 2005), 187.

By the spring of 1914, it seemed that preparations for a new insurrection were well underway. Indeed, a month after negotiations concerning reforms in the “six provinces” had been concluded, the British Consul in Erzurum reported that “propagandists” were again touring Kurdistan urging villagers to purchase arms and that in Hizan one Kurd, who had promised to purchase arms “but failed to do so because, he said, he could find no buyer for his stock to provide the necessary money”, had had his oxen shot by the propagandists “as a warning to other Kurds”. The same report also noted that the authorities in Bitlis had seized a cache of arms which had arrived on the western shores of Lake Van, arresting the Kurd in whose possession they had been found.⁹⁸ Although he refused to give his name or reveal the origins or destination of the weapons, the individual taken into custody was later revealed to be Molla Selim, a founding member of *İrşad* and follower of Seyid Ali of Hizan.⁹⁹

This seemingly minor event was to have significant implications and resulted in the most serious outbreak of anti-government violence to have occurred in Kurdistan since the 1880s. Following their seizure of Molla Selim, the gendarmerie attempted to bring their prisoner, along with the weapons cache, to Hizan. However, before they arrived, they were set upon by Seyid Ali’s supporters who liberated Molla Selim and took possession of the weapons he had been transporting. Subsequently Seyid Ali, Molla Selim and another influential Sufi mystic, Sheikh Şahabaddin, declared they “would not submit to being ruled by Christians” and began assembling their followers in preparation for an attack on the town of Bitlis.¹⁰⁰ However, despite their apparent

⁹⁸ PRO FO 195/2458, Erzurum (6 March 1914).

⁹⁹ On Molla Selim’s involvement in *İrşad* see Akgül, “Rusya’nın Yürüttüğü Doğu Anadolu Politikası İçinde İrşad ve Cihandani Cemiyetlerinin Rolü”, 29. Molla Selim, also known as Halife Selim, was a member of Seyid Ali’s *tarikât* and had been “the special Molla” to Seyid Ali’s father, Sheikh Celaleddin of Hizan. PRO FO 195/2458, Van (4 April 1914).

¹⁰⁰ PRO FO 195/2458, Van (22 March 1914).

fears of Christian domination and the tortured history of Kurdish-Armenian relations in the region, the revolt was primarily directed at the government. In fact, Molla Selim dispatched a letter to the Armenian community in Bitlis stating: “Our sacred revolution will begin. No harm will be done to your people. Command them to raise no opposition, secret or open, to our operations. You know our purpose”¹⁰¹

In response to the growing crisis in Bitlis, the government dismissed the governor, Mazher Bey, appointing the county governor of Siirt, Mustafa Abdülhalik Bey in his place and dispatching reinforcements to the town from Muş and Van. On 1st April, Ottoman troops marched out of Bitlis to disperse the rebels who had assembled two hours south of the town. However, the subsequent skirmish proved inconclusive and government forces were forced to retreat. A day later some 3,000 Kurdish rebels, led by Molla Selim and Sheikh Şahabaddin, entered the town, taking up positions in its eastern portion. This was followed by a day of intense fighting which ended in stalemate. However, this state of deadlock was broken by the arrival of government reinforcements from Van, who were armed with two mountain guns and four machine-guns. The fresh troops proved more than a match for the rebels, only 300 of whom possessed modern rifles, the remainder being armed with flintlocks, swords and clubs. After another brief round of fighting, the Kurds were put to flight, with Molla Selim taking refuge in the Russian consulate.¹⁰² In the subsequent three weeks government troops scoured the province in search of the remaining rebel leaders, with the result that both Seyid Ali and Sheikh Şahabaddin were taken into custody.¹⁰³ The rising in Bitlis had been crushed.

¹⁰¹ PRO FO 195/2458, Erzurum (25 March 1914).

¹⁰² PRO FO 195/2458, Van (4 April 1914); PRO FO 195/2458, Bitlis (16 April 1914).

¹⁰³ PRO FO 195/2458, Van (3 May 1914).

Ian Smith, the British Vice-Consul at Van, who visited Bitlis in the aftermath of the revolt, observed that in the authorities' view the "whole affair was a sudden and isolated outbreak" and, as it had been suppressed, there "was no danger of further disorders". However, he noted that it was more generally believed that:

[The] attack on Bitlis was only a premature outbreak of what was intended to be a more general rising of the Kurds in this province, the date of which was fixed for the beginning of May. The arrest of Molla Selim and his desire to get even with the Government caused the Kurds of Khizan to rise before the rest of the country was prepared and they were consequently unsupported.

Nevertheless, he rejected the idea that Abdürrezzak Bey and his confederates had been involved in the affair, suggesting that Molla Selim, who had apparently visited Istanbul several times, was most likely working in conjunction with anti-CUP factions in the capital.¹⁰⁴ While Smith's assertion that the Bitlis uprising had been intended to be part of a more general rising to take place a month later was correct, his view that Abdürrezzak Bey had not been involved was not. The Bitlis revolt had indeed been part of a plan orchestrated by Abdürrezzak Bey and his confederates. In fact, according to this plan, Molla Selim was not supposed to be the leader of the revolt, but rather Abdürrezzak Bey's cousin, Yusuf Kamil Bey. However, following his arrest, Molla Selim had taken it upon himself to lead the insurrection before all the elements were in place and, when news of the uprising reached Abdürrezzak Bey and his ally Sheikh Taha, they were in Russia and unable to do much to support the rebels.¹⁰⁵

While Abdürrezzak Bey's plans to provoke a Kurdish uprising had again been foiled, the root causes of Kurdish discontent remained. Indeed, they were exacerbated by actions taken by the

¹⁰⁴ PRO FO 195/2458, Bitlis (16 April 1914).

¹⁰⁵ Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 80.

government following the suppression of the Bitlis rising. More than 300 Kurds were taken into custody, many of whom were tortured in order to extract testimony.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the local authorities declared martial law in the province and placed the leaders of the rebellion in front of a military tribunal. 15 conspirators, including Seyid Ali and Sheikh Şahabaddin, were sentenced to death, while a further 87 were condemned to periods of imprisonment ranging from 1 to 100 years. Britain's Vice-Consul noted that the pro-CUP newspaper *Çaldıran*, published in Van, responded with the statement: "All faithful and religious subjects of the Empire rejoice at the sentences to which the law has condemned those who dared to revolt against the Khalifate and the Islamic Government." However, Smith went on to report that: "In reality the feeling amongst the Kurds is one of surprise and consternation at the severity of the punishment, and particularly at the fact that the Government has enforced the death sentence on men enjoying such veneration and respect as the Sheikhs".¹⁰⁷

As summer approached, Abdürrezzak Bey was again trying to rally his supporters. In May, *Çaldıran* reported that Abdürrezzak Bey, Simko Şikak, an agent for Sheikh Taha and a number of other lesser Kurdish tribal leaders had met in the Russian consulate in Khoy "for the purpose of discussing means to gain over the Ottoman Kurds and thus weaken the Turkish Empire, and they decided to form a band of insurgents and to send them into the country". The paper further noted that, with the support of Russian Consul Chirkov, Abdürrezzak Bey and Simko whose "only object is to work harm to their country and their nation" had "decided with regard to the recent events at Bitlis, to print and distribute letters in order to stir up the Kurds; also to raise bands and to arm them with 500 rifles which they had recently imported from abroad."¹⁰⁸ A report sent to Istanbul by

¹⁰⁶ PRO FO 195/2458, Erzurum (6 May 1914).

¹⁰⁷ PRO FO 195/2458, Van (16 May 1914).

¹⁰⁸ PRO FO 195/2458, Van (14 June 1914).

the governor of Van, Tahsin Bey, who was an advocate of taking strong measures against the Kurds,¹⁰⁹ made similar claims. He noted that on account of the execution of the sheikhs following the Bitlis rebellion, Abdürrezzak Bey and his supporters were attempting to “awaken feelings of revenge” amongst the Kurds in order to draw them into his movement.¹¹⁰ As 1914 progressed, it seemed that there was a real possibility of a renewal of hostilities between the government and the Kurds. However, in October, the Ottoman government made the fateful decision to enter the First World War on the side of Germany and her allies. Kurdistan thus became the frontline in the struggle with Russia, a struggle which would radically alter the political conditions which had evolved in the region between 1908 and 1914.

Conclusions: Nationhood and Resistance

Over the course of the six years between the 1908 Constitutional Revolution and the outbreak of the First World War, it seems clear that the ‘pro-autonomy’ and ‘separatist’ wings of the Kurdish movement gained ground, becoming increasingly organised and attracting the support of a number of important Kurdish notables. Nevertheless, despite growing discontent amongst the Kurdish population, especially those who felt their interests threatened by developments following the fall of the autocracy, the position of the ‘nationalists’ was far from hegemonic. Indeed, as the failure of the Bedirhans in Cizre in 1913 and the premature outbreak of the revolt in Bitlis in 1914

¹⁰⁹ Tahsin Bey organised a number of military campaigns against Kurdish bandits and rebels. See PRO FO 195/2458, Van (14 February 1914). He also advocated that “the ‘tekkes’ belonging to the Sheikhs should be taken over and administered by the Department of Vakufs [Ministry of Religious Endowments], and that detachments of gendarmes should be permanently posted in these places in order to destroy the influence of the Sheikhs with the Kurds.” See PRO FO 195/2458, Van (16 April 1914).

¹¹⁰ Aydoğan, *İttihat ve Terakkî'nin Doğu Politikası*, 187.

demonstrated, although many Kurds had come to despise the Ottoman government, organising Kurdistan's myriad of tribes into an effective military force remained a difficult task.

In certain respects, the political conditions which existed in the region between 1908 and 1914 resembled those which prevailed in the late 1870s and early 1880s and which had given rise to the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt. In both periods, the unrest in Kurdistan was brought about by a combination of factors, including discontent amongst Kurdish notables towards the process of administrative reform, fears of Christian ascendancy, and the apparent weakness of the Ottoman Empire coupled with its inability to protect 'Muslim' interests. However, unlike the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt, the anti-government movements which developed following the Constitutional Revolution possessed both a firmer organisational footing and a broader political basis. Sheikh Ubeydullah efforts to establish a unified Kurdish polity were more or less a spontaneous response to the state of affairs in Kurdistan following the end of the Ottoman-Russian War in 1878 and was primarily mobilised as a tool to legitimise his actions to outside actors. In contrast, in the years leading up to the First World War, the notion that the Kurds constituted a 'nation' and hence ought to organise along 'national' lines to protect their interests seems to have been internalised by not only 'westernised' elites but also a number of important provincial notables.

This is not to suggest that all elements of the Kurdish 'movement' possessed the same level of commitment to the 'national' cause. Some, such as the members of the Bedirhan family, evidently possessed a deep ideological and political commitment to the Kurdish movement, regarding the salvation of the Kurds as a matter of not only autonomy or independence but also of education and cultural transformation. Others may have joined the movement for opportunistic reasons as a response to growing government interference in their affairs. Indeed, many may well have

participated in the movement in the hope that it might result in the ‘restoration’ of the traditional forms of Kurdish autonomy which had existed prior to the *Tanzimat*. At the same time, some may have followed leaders such as Hüseyin Pasha or Abdürrezzak Bey, not because of the ‘nationality’ of these men but rather their ‘notable’ origins. Nevertheless, in the years between the revolution and the outbreak of the First World War the discourse of nationhood was becoming increasingly significant, serving as an ideology of ‘co-ordination’, a discursive framework “bringing together a set of diverse political interests into a single movement by providing them with a unity of values and purpose”.¹¹¹ In short, in the provincial context, the idiom of Kurdish nationhood had emerged as an ideology framing resistance to the Ottoman state.

¹¹¹ John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1993), 93.

Conclusions

This dissertation has argued that, in certain respects, the history of the Kurdish community and identity has deep historical roots. There seems little doubt that prior to the nineteenth century some elements of the population residing in the mountainous districts between Anatolia and Iran regarded themselves as ‘Kurds’ in some sense. Nevertheless, it was only in the nineteenth and early twentieth century that Kurds began to re-imagine their community as a ‘nation’ in the modern sense of the word, a trend manifest in the gradual growth of social, cultural and political activism pertaining to the advancement and development of the ‘national’ community. In a general sense, it is possible to account for the gradual proliferation of the ‘national’ idea in a number of ways linked to the impact of social, economic and political ‘modernisation’ in the late Ottoman period. However, while the scale and extent of Kurdish political activism increased significantly, especially in the aftermath of the 1908 Constitutional Revolution, the nature and political orientation of such activism remained diverse. In short, while a growing number of Kurds began to regard themselves as part of the same national community, the political implications of Kurdish ‘nationhood’ remained a controversial issue.

In this study this diversity has been accounted for by the differing interests of different elements of Kurdish society. Amongst the emergent elite of Kurdish intellectuals and professionals familiar with Western political ideologies such as nationalism, there was certainly growing intellectual and political interest in issues pertaining to the Kurdish community. Indeed, such elites were often at the vanguard of efforts to establish Kurdish publications and associations. Significantly, however, such elites tended to regard the Kurdish question as being primarily a question of economic, social and cultural development. In political terms, they generally sought to secure the advancement of

the Kurdish community within the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, for the publishers of *Kürdistan*, as well as the members of the KSMP and KSPE, the cause of Kurdish advancement was not only in complete harmony with their desire to maintain and defend the Ottoman polity but an integral part of it. Indeed, between 1912 and 1914 even *Hêvî*, which focused more exclusively on Kurdish issues than its predecessors, remained committed to working within the Ottoman political framework.

It has been argued here that the ‘accommodationist’ stance of many Kurdish intellectuals and professionals has largely been accounted for by their high level of integration into Ottoman society and politics. Although many such elites possessed ‘notable’ origins and links to Kurdistan’s tribal ‘aristocracy’, most received their education within the empire’s ‘westernised’ educational institutions and pursued careers within the reformed Ottoman bureaucracy. As a result, in addition to an attachment to the Kurdish community many possessed a deep sense of patriotism and duty towards the Ottoman political project. Indeed, even those who came into conflict with the Ottoman government often worked politically within the broader Ottoman opposition. During the Hamidian era (1876-1908) a number of individuals of Kurdish origin, including the founders of the newspaper *Kürdistan*, the Bedirhan brothers Mikdat Midhat and Abdurrahman, played an important role in the evolution of the constitutionalist movement. Similarly, in the post-revolutionary period (1908-1914), individuals such as Şerif Pasha, Lütfi Fikri and Mevlanzade Rifat were prominent in the Ottoman opposition to the growing authoritarianism of the CUP. Indeed, even those who sought to advance Kurdish rights through armed insurrection, such as Bedirhanzades Huseyin Pasha and Hasan Bey, demonstrated a willingness to reach an accommodation within the Ottoman political system. In this regard, Abdürrezzak Bey was somewhat of an isolated figure in Kurdish intellectual circles. His efforts to separate Kurdistan

from the Ottoman Empire and his willingness to work with the Ottoman Empire's old enemy Russia to achieve his objectives were regarded as too extreme by most of his compatriots and even members of his own family.¹¹²

However, while an accommodationist political outlook prevailed amongst the Kurdish intellectual and professional elite of the late Ottoman period, the Kurdish movement also contained a more radical side. In fact, the origins of modern Kurdish political identity can be traced back to the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt of the early 1880s. While the sheikh's tribal followers may not have been motivated by 'nationalistic' concerns, the revolt's leader attempted to present his movement to powerful outside actors in the vocabulary of modern 'nationalism'. Significantly, the 'nationalism' of Sheikh Ubeydullah was not a product of an extended period of 'national' revival, but a reaction to the weakened condition of the Ottoman Empire following the end of the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, combined with fears of an Armenian ascendancy. The link between growing Armenian assertiveness and the proliferation of nationalistic ideas amongst tribal elites is of particular importance. Following the shock of the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt, Sultan Abdülhamid II was able to reassert Ottoman authority over Kurdistan through the patronage of powerful Kurdish tribal interests, often at the expense of Ottoman Armenians. In the aftermath of the 1908 Constitutional Revolution, the new regime's efforts to roll back the privileges granted to tribal notables and deal more fairly with the Armenian community resulted in Kurdish resentment. Significantly, the initial wave of Kurdish political mobilisation in 1908 and 1909, manifest in the

¹¹² Indeed, In November 1914, following the outbreak of war, the newspaper *Tanin* carried an article signed by Bedirhanzades Abdurrahman, Murad Remzi, Emin Ali, Mehmed Ali and Hasan, condemning Abdürrezzak Bey's continued collaboration with Russia. See *Tanin* (22 November 1914), quoted in Erdal Aydoğan, *İttihat ve Terakkî'nin Doğu Politikası 1908-1918*, (Istanbul: Ötüken, 2005), 189. Abdürrezzak Bey was eventually captured and killed by Ottoman forces in 1918.

foundation of provincial ‘branches’ of the KSMP, although not ‘separatist’, did possess a subversive political orientation, becoming focal points for anti-constitutionalist activities. Subsequently, between 1910 and 1914, a combination of discontent at the constitutional regime’s attempt to rein in Kurdish tribesmen, political uncertainty brought about by the empire’s defeats in North Africa and the Balkans and fears that imperial weakness would pave the way for Armenian self-rule over Kurdish-inhabited districts brought a number of Kurdish tribal notables into cooperation with nationalist agitators such as Abdürrezzak Bey and Hayreddin Berazi. On the eve of the First World War, Abdürrezzak Bey and his associates were still far from establishing nationalist hegemony over the predominantly tribally organised Kurdish population. Nevertheless, in the years leading up to the First World War the ‘nationalist’ cause did win the support of some important tribal notables, including Simko Şikak, Sheikh Taha and Seyid Ali. Moreover, as the Molla Selim Revolt of spring 1914 demonstrated, nationalist agitation could have serious implications for regional security.

In many ways, the history of Kurdish national activism prior to 1914 followed a similar trajectory to activism amongst other predominantly Muslim peoples. Like their Turkish and Arab compatriots, most Kurdish activists remained committed to working within the framework of a multi-national Muslim Empire. Martin Strohmeier, Hakan Özoğlu and Azad Aslan’s recent monographs on the development of Kurdish ‘nationalism’ in the late Ottoman period are therefore quite corrected in questioning the assumption that all Kurdish activism demonstrated a deeply held desire to national independence. However, the alternative historical narrative in all these studies portray Kurdish ‘national consciousness’ as being ‘cultural’ and ‘apolitical’ in orientation prior to 1914 and Kurdish ‘nationalist-separatism’ is consequently presented as being a response to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War. In contrast, this study, which

has focused in developments before 1914, has endeavoured to highlight the diverse nature of Kurdish activism prior to the outbreak of the First World War. In doing so, it has contributed to gaining a firmer understanding of the origins of the Kurdish movement, a movement which even before 1914 contained within in it both ‘accommodationist’ and ‘separatist’ factions.

A detailed discussion of the history of the Kurdish movement in the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire’s entry into the First World War in October 1914 is beyond the scope of this study.¹¹³ Nonetheless, after 1914 the history of the Kurdish movement diverged significantly from that of Turkish and Arab nationalisms. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War, both Turkish and Arab nationalisms were institutionalised through the partition of Ottoman territories into discrete nation states.¹¹⁴ In contrast, the Kurds failed to achieve ‘statehood’. Indeed, the Kurdish-inhabited regions of the Ottoman Empire were partitioned between Turkey and the ‘Arab’ states of Iraq and Syria. Consequently, the question which had faced all national activists in the late Ottoman period, namely whether to advance the ‘national’ cause within the framework of existing political structures and international boundaries or to seek full national independence, has remained of great significance to Kurdish activists, associations and political parties, constituting an important element of continuity between Kurdish activism within the Ottoman Empire and in the post-Ottoman world.

¹¹³ There are a number of excellent studies focusing primarily on Kurdish political mobilisation in the post-Ottoman period. See David Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005).

¹¹⁴ It should be noted that, due to the influence of Britain and France on ‘redrawing’ the map of the Middle East following the end of the First World War, Arab statehood was realised in a fragmented fashion. For an account of the post-war settlement in the Middle East see David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (London: Phoenix, 2000).

Even though Kurdish organisations and political parties have gained a far greater degree of popular support over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, this has not resulted in the unchallenged victory of separatist political perspectives amongst the Kurds. In reality, the relative strengths of accommodationist and nationalist factions within the Kurdish movement have varied. For instance, in Turkey during the 1920s and 1930s, Kurdish political figures, many of whom had been active in the late Ottoman period, sought to raise a general Kurdish rebellion with the objective of establishing an independent Kurdish nation state.¹¹⁵ In contrast, during the 1950s and 1960s a new generation of Kurdish intellectuals and writers in Turkey focused on the socio-economic aspects of the Kurdish question, highlighting the social and economic disparities between Kurdistan and the remainder of the country.¹¹⁶ As a result, from the 1950s until the mid-1970s the primary division within Kurdish political circles was not between ‘accommodationists’ and ‘separatists’ but between those who attempted to advance the Kurdish cause through constitutional means and those who sought an alliance with the Turkish revolutionary left.¹¹⁷ In

¹¹⁵ The most significant uprisings were the Sheikh Said Revolt (1925) and the Ararat Revolt (1930-1931).

¹¹⁶ As the scholar Cengiz Güneş noted: “The discourse of the organic intellectuals focused mainly on the economic disparity between the Kurdish regions and the rest of Turkey and drew attention to the fact that the existence of widespread inequality meant that the East was widely accepted as a ‘zone of deprivation’ (*mahrumiyet bölgesi*).” Hence in attempting to remedy this state of affairs they looked to an alliance with Turkey’s progressive left, indicating a desire to secure “their rights and demands within a democratic Turkey” rather than a separate nation state. See Cengiz Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey: From Protest to Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2012), 54-57.

¹¹⁷ See Ahmet Alış, “The Process of the Politicization of Identity in Turkey: The Kurds and the Turkish Labor Party (1961-1971)” (MA diss., Boğaziçi University 2009). During the 1950s and 1960s, Kurdish activism in Iraq also possessed an accommodationist *élan*. Indeed, the response of Kurdish activists to the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958 was not unlike the response of their predecessors to the 1908 Constitutional Revolution. Kurdish publications and political organisations strongly identified with the new revolutionary government and expressed their hopes that the new republican regime would usher in a new era of Arabo-Kurdish fraternity. See Cecil J Edmonds, “The Kurds and the Revolution in Iraq”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1959), 1-10.

certain respects, the failure of both the ‘constitutionalist’ and ‘revolutionary’ wings of the Kurdish movement to achieve any significant gains on Kurdish rights within Turkey, either through the parliamentary process or revolutionary action, helps explain the emergence in the late 1970s of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), a political party which was founded with the objective of establishing a “united, independent and socialist” Kurdistan. Significantly, although from 1984 onwards the PKK was engaged in attacks against Turkish government targets, the maximalist nature of the party’s demands also brought it into conflict with Kurdish activists who sought a political accommodation for the Kurds within Turkey. Indeed, one of the PKK’s early targets was the pro-autonomy *Partiya Sosyalista Kurdistanê Tirkîyê* (Socialist Party of Kurdistan of Turkey) and the organisation has frequently attacked other elements of Kurdish society it deemed ‘collaborationists’.¹¹⁸

The question of whether or not Kurdish aspirations can be satisfied within existing international boundaries continues to be a hotly debated topic within Kurdish political circles today. For example, despite its initial commitment to maximalist objectives, since the early 1990s the PKK has moderated its demands. Indeed, it has even rejected the model of the nation state as a framework within which the Kurdish question can be resolved, advocating instead a mode of anarchist-inspired local autonomy.¹¹⁹ Meanwhile, despite widespread public support for Kurdish independence in Iraqi Kurdistan, political elites remain divided on whether to maintain links with a federalised Iraq or to chart out a path for independence. Analysts of the modern Kurdish

¹¹⁸ Martin van Bruinessen, “Between Guerrilla War and Political Murder: The Workers’ Party of Kurdistan”, *Middle East Report*, No. 153 (1988), 40-50.

¹¹⁹ See Abdullah Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism* (London: Transmedia, 2011). For a more detailed study of the historical evolution of the ideology of the PKK see Ali Kemal Özcan, *Turkey’s Kurds: A Theoretical Analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan* (London: Routledge, 2006).

movement have, quite correctly, looked to the immediate past to understand the actions and political orientation of the Kurdish movement today. Certainly social, economic and political developments in the post-Ottoman world have left a strong imprint on modern Kurdish activism. Nevertheless, it is possible to trace the origins of some of the major debates within the Kurdish movement back to its very inception in the late Ottoman period. Today, just as in the late Ottoman period, the nature and political orientation of Kurdish political mobilisation remains diverse. It is an appreciation of this diversity at its origins which will allow for the creation of a more nuanced political history of the Middle East's Kurdish population.

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Dahiliye Nezareti (Ministry of the Interior)

DH.MKT Dahiliye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemî
DH.MUİ Dahiliye Nezareti Muhaberat-ı İdaresi
DH.TMIK.M Dahiliye Nezareti Tesri-i Muamelat ve Islahat Komisyonu Mauamelat

İrade (Decrees)

İ.DUİT İrade Dosya Usulü İradeler Tasnifi
İ.MF İrade Maarif
İ.MTZ İrade Eyalet-i Mümtaze
İ.TAL İrade Taltifat

Maarif Nezareti (Ministry of Education)

MF.MKT Maarif Nezareti Mektubi Kalemî

Sadaret (Vizierate)

MKT.UM Sadaret Mektubi Kalemî Umum Vilayat Evrakı

Yıldız Palace

Y.EE Yıldız Esas Evrakı
Y.MTV Yıldız Mütenevvi Maruzat Evrakı
Y.PRK.EŞA Yıldız Perakende Elçilik ve Şehbenderlik Maruzatı
Y.PRK.ASK Yıldız Perakende Askeri Maruzat Evrakı
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