



“Nomads” and “Mountaineers”: A Historical Survey of Turk/Turkmen – Kurd Interrelations

Mustafa Onur Tetik*

Abstract

Following Turkey’s recent military operation in Syria (Operation Peace Spring), “Turks” and “Kurds” have widely been dichotomized by the Western media outlets and political circles. US President Donald Trump even claimed that “Turks” and “Kurds” have been fighting for hundreds of years, and that they are “natural enemies.” However, the complex historical relationship of “Turks” and “Kurds,” as a loosely connected social totality prior to the age of nationalism, refutes such sloppy and feeble contentions. This work presents an identity-driven historical survey of Turkish/Turkmen societies’ and polities’ interrelations with Kurdish collectivities until the emergence of modern nationhood and nationalism. In doing so, this article provides an ideational and narrational context feeding the Turkish government’s contemporary relationship with the Kurds of the Middle East. The major complication in journalistic and academic literature is rooted in the lack or omission of historical background informing current policy choices influenced by how relevant actors historically perceive each other. Today’s incidents and facts such as the “solution process,” “village guard system” or different Kurdish collectivities’ positions between Iran and Turkey are sometimes akin to precedent events in history. This work aims to make a holistic contribution to fill this gap and to provide a succinct historical overview of interrelations.

Keywords: Turkish-Kurdish Relations, Kurdish Identity, Turkish Nation-State, Historical Analysis, Ideational Context

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“Göçebeler” ve “Dağlılar”: Türk/ Türkmen – Kürt İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Bir İncelemesi

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Öz

Türkiye'nin Suriye'de YPG'ye karşı başlattığı Barış Pınarı Operasyonu'yla beraber “Türkler” ve “Kürtler,” Batı medyası ve siyasi çevreler tarafından yaygın bir şekilde ve söylemsel olarak iki karşıt grup olarak tasvir edildi. Amerikan Başkanı Donald Trump, “Türkler” ve “Kürtlerin” yüzyıllardır birbirleriyle savaştığını ve bundan dolayı “doğal düşmanlar” olduklarını bile iddia etti. Ancak milliyetçilik çağı öncesinde gevşek bağlarla bağlı birer sosyal bütünsellik olan “Türkler” ve “Kürtlerin” karmaşık tarihsel ilişkileri bu tarz temelsiz ve zayıf iddiaları çürütmektedir. Bu çalışma Türk/Türkmen toplum ve siyasi teşekküllerin Kürt toplulukları ile modern millet ve milliyetçiliğin doğuşuna kadar olan dönemdeki karşılıklı ilişkilerini kimlik temelli bir perspektiften tarihsel olarak incelemektedir. Böylece bu makale, Türk hükümetinin Türkiye'nin içerisindeki ve dışarısındaki Kürtler ile olan ilişkilerini besleyen fikri ve söylemsel bağlamı ortaya koymaktadır. Güncel basın ve akademik literatürdeki büyük problem, ilgili aktörlerin birbirlerini algılama biçimleri ile mevcut siyasi tercihlerini besleyen tarihsel arka plan bilgisinin göz ardı edilmesidir. “Çözüm süreci,” “koruculuk sistemi” ya da farklı Kürt grupların İran ve Türkiye arasında konumlanması gibi bugünün olgu ve olayları bazen tarihte daha önce gerçekleşmiş olaylara benzemektedir. Bu çalışma bahsedilen boşluğu doldurmaya bütüncül bir katkı için karşılıklı ilişkilerin tarihsel bir hülasasını ortaya koyacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk-Kürt İlişkileri, Kürt Kimliği, Türk Milli Devleti, Tarihsel Analiz, Düşünsel Bağlam

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1. Introduction

When Turkey launched military operation against YPG forces (Syrian offshoot of the PKK that is designated as terrorist organization by the US, the EU, Turkey and others) in Syria in October 2019, US President Donald Trump, claiming that Turks and Kurds as “natural enemies” have been fighting for hundreds of years, ordered the withdrawal of US troops and declared that the US did not have any desire to be involved in such a historical conflict. Although, this assertion was widely deemed false or distorted, the hegemonic narrative in the Western media has still kept dichotomizing Turks and Kurds as deadly enemies. When the lack of nuanced knowledge on Turkey’s historical relations with different Kurdish groups couples with the political anti-Trump wave and the US bureaucracy’s firm pro-Kurdish disposition, an oversimplified, hyperbolic and conflictive narrative dominates the media and political landscape throughout the world.

This work presents an identity-driven historical survey of Turkish/Turkmen societies’ and polities’¹ interrelations with Kurdish collectivities until the emergence of modern nationhood and nationalism. In doing so, this article provides an ideational and narrational context feeding Turkey’s contemporary relationship with the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq, Syrian Kurds and its own citizens of Kurdish descent. It also provides a historical background on the role played by Kurdish groups in rivalry between regional powers. The major complication in journalistic and academic literature regarding Turkey’s overall relations with Kurds is the lack or omission of historical background information about how relevant political actors historically perceive each other, which influences current policy choices. Today’s incidents and facts such as the “solution process”, “village guard system” (*korucu sistemi*) or different Kurdish collectivities’ positioning between Iran and Turkey are sometimes akin to precedent events in history. This work aims to be a holistic contribution to fill this gap by providing a succinct historical overview of interrelations.

¹ All pre-modern governing political entities are called “polities” throughout the article instead of state since they were not “states” as we understand the “state” in the modern form. The concept of “polity” is a broader term than the state and covers various forms of governing political entities.

David Campbell fairly argues that “identity is an inescapable dimension of being. Nobody could be without it”.² The main “inescapable” collective political identity which relates socio-political groups to one another has been national identity since the rise of nation-states. The historical events and interrelations preceded the modernization era and cannot be read through the framework of national identities and inter-“national” relations as we know them today. Such a reading disregards the historicity and contextuality of past phenomena and causes an anachronism problem. That being said, the parallels between phenomena of the past and present are not deniable. The historical trajectory and conditions of pre-national cultural groups which happened to be the nucleus of modern nations and their self-narratives still feed contemporary politics. The modern character or constructedness of nations and national identities does not mean that they were invented *ex nihilo*. The invented practices of national identity form a continuity with a constructed past compatible with present dynamics.³ Therefore, the article makes analogies between political developments of the past and present and demonstrates the examples of historiographical instrumentalizations in national identity narratives throughout the text.

One of the main problems with today’s analyses on Kurdish affairs in general is the surmise of a historically coherent Kurdish identity which is taken as a unitary actor. However, “most of these components of Kurdish national identity are deeply fragmented.”⁴ This fragmentation is not only related to competing Kurdish political organizations or bodies but also to cultural, linguistic and historical divergences. Having said that, the existence of Kurds as a sociological-ethnic totality that have been loosely tied to each other is historically undeniable albeit the modern Turkish nation-state’s ethnic and historical “blindness” towards them. Modern Turkish national identity is also not a static condition but a fluid image stemming from the universe of Turkey’s alternative identities.⁵ Turkey’s complicated historical relationship with Kurds is both an internal and external matter at the same

² David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 8.

³ Mehmet Karataş, *Modernlik Küreselleşme ve Türkiye’nin Kimlikler Evreni* (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2020), 174.

⁴ Jaffer Sheyholislami, *Kurdish Identity, Discourse, and New Media* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 47.

⁵ Karataş, *Modernlik Küreselleşme*.

time, thus the theoretical inside-outside border of international relations can hardly work for the case. Moreover, it is important to reiterate here that this work is not a sociological history of Turkmen and Kurdish peasants’ interrelations but an attempt of a historical/institutional analysis of Turkmen/Turkish polities’ interrelations with Kurdish collective groupings until the nation-state period, namely until the foundation of the Republic of Turkey.

2. The Early Encounter: Between Confrontation and Cooperation

Even though the ethno-genesis process of Kurds is dated thousands years back in the same geography where they still dominantly reside in our times, they failed to establish notable historical polities due to various geographical constrains. Accordingly, they lived in a close liaison with West Asian peoples and thus their history intermingled with the historical trajectory of neighboring peoples and polities.⁶ Nominal submission to Persian, Arab and Turkic dynasty ruled governmental bodies, alongside the assertion of local autonomy was the enduring pattern of Kurdish political life.⁷ Today, in parallel with these historical circumstances, Kurds mainly live under the legal authority of Arab, Persian and Turkish majority countries⁸ with various forms of cultural recognition or political autonomy. İsmail Beşikçi⁹ accounts for this contemporary disunited political condition of Kurdish population scattered between different Middle Eastern nation-states by claiming that “Kurdistan is an international colony.”¹⁰ This is roughly the common position of (especially the left-wing) today’s Kurdish ethno-nationalists.

Kurdish historiography and some scholars base the socio-political roots of Kurds on the ancient Median Empire and attribute Kurdishness to some

⁶ M.S. Lazarev and Ş. X. Mihoyan, *Kürdistan Tarihi* (İstanbul: Avesta, 2013), 9-11.

⁷ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 21.

⁸ Farideh Koohi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran: Pastoral Nationalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 27.

⁹ A Turkish scholar who defends an independent Kurdish ethno-national state and is considered as ‘Ziya Gökalp of the Kurds’ by the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan.

¹⁰ İsmail Beşikçi, *Uluslararası Sömürge Kürdistan* (İstanbul: İsmail Beşikçi Vakfı Yayınları, 2013).

medieval¹¹ polities like the Ayyubids or Marwanids whose proto-national characters are disputed. The Kurdistan Regional Government's history textbooks portray Kurdistan as an ancient country and claim that the supposed ancient Kurdish groups (e.g. Lulubis and Gutians) established the first Kurdish state more than 4,000 years ago.¹² In Kurdish ethno-nationalist narratives claiming ethnic purity of Kurds, they are deemed as the indigenous grandchildren of Aryan people whose history in today's Kurdish inhabited regions is stretched as far back as 60.000 years.¹³ Besides, some researchers regard Kurds as a Turani/Turkic/Asiatic ethnic group.¹⁴ Discovering supposed "Turkish roots" for the Kurds is welcomed by the Turkey's official establishment that fits well for the homogenous nation narrative of the Turkish nation.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the contemporary position of the Turkish nation-state has replaced this discourse with a more religiously dominated narrative. It does no longer maintain this ethno-cultural homogeneity narrative.¹⁶

There has been scarcity of traceable independent Kurdish polities in historical continuum. Kurds have overwhelmingly held a mountaineer, (semi-)nomadic and tribal socio-political form of life. This political form was generally a territorial and economic unit based on real or putative common descent and kinship.¹⁷ Hence, a researcher may unpack the interrelations of Kurds as a fragmented social totality with the historical polities that they have belonged to instead of analyzing it as a history of inter-state/polity relations. Likewise, Turkish Kurds' contemporary

¹¹ Sheyholishami, *Kurdish Identity*, 48; David Neil Mackenzie, "The Origins of Kurdish," *Transactions of the Philological Society* 60, (1961): 69.

¹² Sherko Kirmanj, "Kurdish History Textbooks: Building a Nation-State within a Nation-State," *Middle East Journal* 68, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 372.

¹³ Konrad Hirschler, "Defining the Nation: Kurdish Historiography in Turkey in the 1990s," *Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 3 (2001): 152.

¹⁴ Ali Tayyar Önder, *Türkiye'nin Etnik Yapısı: Halkımızın Kökenleri ve Gerçekler* (Ankara: Kripto Basın Yayın, 2011).

¹⁵ Christopher Houston, "'Set aside from the pen and cut off from the foot:' Imagining the Ottoman Empire and Kurdistan," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 2 (2007): 401.

¹⁶ Şener Aktürk, "One nation under Allah? Islamic multiculturalism, Muslim nationalism and Turkey's reforms for Kurds, Alevis, and non-Muslims," *Turkish Studies*, 19, No. 4 (2018).

¹⁷ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State* (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992), 51.

relations with the Republic of Turkey cannot be analyzed as an inter-polity affair but a sub-national matter. Kurdistan as a geographical term has never had clear-cut frontiers which has been used in accordance with the demographic mobility of the Kurds. The name of Kurdistan was used by the Seljuk-Turkmen/Oghuz dynasty in the 12th century for the first time in history. It used to be a signifier of a geographical area and a governmental unit¹⁸ without political connotations.¹⁹ Today, the usage of “Kurdistan” indicating any space on the political map of Turkey is a matter of political friction, censorship and a reason for political outrage from the Turkish nationalist perspective.

The Turkmen mercenaries/troops of the Arabic-Islamic caliphate quelled some Kurdish tribal rebellions in the 9th century. Some Turkmen/Oghuz warriors raided residential areas around Kurdish-inhabited lands before Turkmens massively began to flux into the Anatolian Peninsula.²⁰ The Abbasid caliphs sometimes used Kurdish tribes against Turkmen warriors’ political tutelage and autonomous noble families. When Seljuk Turkmens begun to spread their military presence within the territories of the Arabic-Islamic caliphate in the 11th century, some Kurdish tribes which were deployed as frontier guards on behalf of the caliphate clashed with Turkmens. An Arab-ruled state’s deployment of Kurdish irregulars against Turkmen/Turkish incursions as “frontier guards” can be traced presently in Hafez and Bashar Assad’s taking advantage of the PKK/YPG against the presumed “Turkish threat.”²¹ David MacDowall states that “it took over a century for Turkmen and Kurdish tribes to establish a *modus vivendi*.”²² Nevertheless, Seljuk Turkmens were mostly able to capture Kurdish populated areas and then, they started to recruit people among Kurdish tribes for their military campaigns.²³

¹⁸ Lazarev and Mihoyan, *Kürdistan Tarihi*, 31.; McDowall, *A Modern History*, 6.

¹⁹ Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 26-27.

²⁰ Mustafa Alican, “Selçuklu-Mervani İlişkileri,” *Turkish Studies - International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic* 8 no.11 (Fall 2013), 1-15.

²¹ Özlem Kayhan Pusane, “Türkiye’nin Kürt Sorunu: Arap Baharı ile Değişen Yurtiçi ve Bölgesel Dinamikler,” *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 11, no. 41 (2014), 124.

²² McDowall, *A Modern History*, 22.

²³ Lazarev and Mihoyan, *Kürdistan Tarihi*, 31, 45-49; McDowall, *A Modern History*, 22.

Such rebellions or fights are sometimes discursively employed as part of the historiography of the supposed eternal struggle of Kurds on their way to independence. The Kurdish “myth of resistance seeks to establish a narrative of eternal opposition to foreign rule. The struggle for national liberation and the future establishment of a nation-state is thereby represented as the result of a teleological historical development.”²⁴ Kurdish ethno-nationalist historiography emphasizes wars and sometimes promotes historical enmities against neighboring peoples in order to distinguish Kurds from them, which helps construct a separate national identity. However, it is necessary to note that neither Turkmen forces nor Kurdish tribes of the Arabic-Islamic caliphate era aimed “national” ends in these battles because “their identity was based on family ties, ethnic cultural tradition and Islam.”²⁵ Most Kurdish tribes ignored the name “Kurd” and affiliated themselves with their tribes.²⁶

Nomadic Turkmen warriors/dynasties and Kurdish tribes had also fought together against common rivals. Some Kurdish tribes joined the army of Ayyubids and Saladin, whose army were predominantly composed of Turkmen warriors, in their fight against the Crusaders.²⁷ The relations of Turkmens and Kurdish tribes had not always been troublesome under the Arabic-Islamic caliphate. Nomadic Turkmen warriors had harmonious relations with Kurdish tribes. Some Kurdish tribal battalions joined Seljuk Turkmen military campaign against the Byzantines in the 1071 Battle of Manzikert. Especially the Kurdish Marwanids helped Sultan Alparslan who led the Turkmens in the war.²⁸ The Battle of Manzikert and the fight against the Crusaders have been very instrumental for Islamic Turkish national identity narratives. These events are not portrayed as an only ethnic Turks/Turkmens’ victory or struggle in contemporary discourses, but they are also attributed to Kurds and other ethnicities constituting the Turkish nation to promote a sense of historical belonging to the Republic of Turkey.

²⁴ Hirschler, *Defining the Nation*, 153.

²⁵ McDowall, *A Modern History*, 23.

²⁶ Hassan Arfa, *The Kurds: An Historical and Political Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 7; Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables*, 27.

²⁷ Lazarev and Mihoyan, *Kürdistan Tarihi*, 64-67.

²⁸ Altan Tan, *Kürt Sorunu: Ya Tam Kardeşlik Ya Hep Birlikte Kölelik* (İstanbul: Timaş, 2015), 67-68.

This battle was a turning point in the history of Anatolia and Turkmen-Kurd relations. After this war, the irrevocable Turkmen influence and population flux have started to penetrate into the Anatolian peninsula and the Kurdish enclaves. Roughly a thousand-year sovereignty of Turkmen/Turkish origin polities over these territories with episodic disruptions like the Mongol and Crusader invasions, was established. The Manzikert Battle in 1071 also marked the end of the local autonomy of Kurdish tribes since Seljuk Turkmen administered Kurdish populated areas with Turkmen officers.²⁹ Seljuk-Turkmen control over Kurdish-populated areas established a relatively stable order and cooperation between Turkmen and Kurdish groups for the most part until the invasion of Mongols who they mostly fought. The military campaigns of Mongols during the 13th century wreaked havoc on the Kurdish tribal structure.³⁰ Turkmen and Kurdish warriors have played significant role in the spread of Seljuk-Turkmen sovereignty over the Anatolian peninsula in the 12th century.³¹ Starting by the end of the 11th century, the relatively small Turkmen polities/dynasties like the Artuqids, the Beylik of Dilmaç, the Inalids, Karakoyunlus and Akkoyunlus had also ruled and culturally influenced the lands (before and after infamous Mongol and Timurid incursions) where Kurds had traditionally lived.³²

3. The Ottoman Umbrella and Sunni Margraves

Starting in the 16th century, Kurdish tribes and their lands were partitioned between Sunni Ottoman Turkmen and Iranian-Azerbaijani Turkmen Shia Safavid dynasty and its successors. “Throughout history, Kurdish tribes had lived in the peripheries of strong empires such as the Sasanian and the Byzantine, and developed their skills in dealing with the surrounding states. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Ottoman-Safavid confrontation made the Kurds realize their importance for the two

²⁹ McDowall, *A Modern History*, 23.

³⁰ Hakan Özoğlu, “State-tribe relations: Kurdish tribalism in the 16th and 17th century Ottoman empire,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 1 (1996), 11.

³¹ Bekir Biçer, “Ortaçağda Kürtler ve Türkler,” *The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies* 6, no. 6 (2013), 231-261.

³² Metin Hepar, *The State and Kurds in Turkey The Question of Assimilation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 53; Tan, *Kürt Sorunu*, 68-70.

empires.”³³ After the fall of Akkoyunlu Turkmen-ruled polity, the Safavids had started to dominate Kurdish-populated lands until the Ottoman Turks shifted their attention to south and eastern borders. Even though a few Kurdish tribes and notable figures were affiliated with the Safavids, most of the Kurds, as Sunni Muslims, had fought against Shia Safavids alongside the Sunni Ottoman state.³⁴ Kurdish ideological or tribal groups’ political and military maneuvers between Turkey and Iran still have top priority in Turkish-Iranian relations.

The Battle of Chaldiran between the Ottomans and Safavids in 1514 was another pivotal event in the history of the relations of Kurdish tribes and Turkmen polities since most of the Kurdish population had started to become a part of the Ottoman Empire which is followed by the Republic in a continuum. Besides, there were also perpetual frontier-wars between Iranian polities and Ottomans over Kurdish inhabited lands until the foundation of the Republic of Turkey and occasional local rebellions of some Kurdish emirates. By seeking Ottoman protection, the twenty-five Kurdish chieftains had announced their loyalty to the Ottoman-Turkmen Sultan. They requested an Ottoman governor for the region to lead the Kurds in the military campaigns against Safavids instead of a local Kurdish figure. This was also to avoid a potential Kurdish inter-tribal conflict for leadership.³⁵ Nevertheless, even though most of the Kurdish tribes stayed loyal to Ottoman rule, sometimes, some of them switched their loyalty between the two medieval powers.³⁶ Today, we observe the partition of spheres of influence between Turkey and Iran over the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Recently, “while the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) received Turkish backing, the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) relied on Iran’s support.”³⁷ These cooperations are mainly enforced by geopolitical necessities which demonstrate historical continuity to some extent in the region.

³³ Özoğlu, *State-tribe relations*, 26.

³⁴ Michael Eppel, “The Demise of the Kurdish Emirates: The Impact of Ottoman Reforms and International Relations on Kurdistan during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 2 (2008), 239; Lazarev and Mihoyan, *Kürdistan Tarihi*, 81-89; McDowall, *A Modern History*, 23-32.

³⁵ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh*, 143; Heper, *The State and Kurds*, 42; Özoğlu, *State-tribe relations*, 14; Tan, *Kürt Sorunu*, 74.

³⁶ Özoğlu, *State-tribe relations*, 15.

³⁷ Hüseyin Alptekin, “Is the spring finally coming to the Turkey-PUK relations?,” *The New Turkey*, (January 14, 2019). Available at: <https://thenewturkey.org/is-the-spring-finally-coming-to-the-turkey-puk-relations>

This voluntary submission of Kurdish chieftains to the Ottoman Empire³⁸ is still a matter of controversy for Kurdish ethno-nationalism. On the one hand, according to some Kurdish ethno-nationalist accounts, this submission or agreement marks the beginning of supposed Turkish colonial rule in Kurdistan. They accuse Idris-i Bitlisi, a Kurdish scholar and mediator between the Ottoman Empire and Kurdish tribes in this agreement, of being a traitor of the Kurdish cause and collaborator of so-called Turkish colonialism. On the other hand, conservative Kurdish nationalists like Altan Tan defend Idris-i Bitlisi and this agreement. To him, the treaty and Ottoman-Kurdish cooperation prevented potential Turkification and Shiization of “Kurdistan” under the sovereignty of the Turkmen Safavid Empire.³⁹

The Ottoman Empire reorganized the land regime and provincial governance in the Kurdish-majority areas.⁴⁰ Unlikely to the Safavids and Akkoyunlus who eliminated many Kurdish chieftains and appointed their own men as governors,⁴¹ the Ottomans consolidated the traditional Kurdish ruling stratum in their attempt to re-establish their faded authority over the fragmented Kurdish tribes.⁴² Even some Kurdish tribes were created by the Ottoman state itself⁴³ which “eventually paved the way for the formation of stronger Kurdish leadership whose authority depended considerably upon the state’s patronage.”⁴⁴ The Ottomans’ policy towards the Kurds was to “revive, unite, and, to the extent feasible, let them rule themselves.”⁴⁵ The Empire ruled the region in cooperation with semi-autonomous local emirates instead of inflicting its centralist governance by creating a formalized quasi-feudal system, which occasionally caused conflicts of power-sharing between the central Ottoman government and Kurdish emirates.⁴⁶ The Empire had granted semi-autonomy and the right

³⁸ The 1514 Amasya Agreement: Şakir Epözdemir, *1514 Amasya Antlaşması: Kürt Osmanlı İttifakı ve Mevlana İdris-i Bitlisi*, (İstanbul: Peri Yayınları, 2005).

³⁹ Tan, *Kürt Sorunu*, 83-84.

⁴⁰ Lazarev and Mihoyan, *Kürdistan Tarihi*, 81-89; Tan, *Kürt Sorunu*, 80-82.

⁴¹ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh*, 140; Heper, *The State and Kurds*, 37.

⁴² Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables*, 53,64.

⁴³ Özoğlu, *State-tribe relations*, 19.

⁴⁴ Özoğlu, *State-tribe relations*, 24.

⁴⁵ Heper, *The State and Kurds*, 38.

⁴⁶ McDowall, *A Modern History*, 23-32.

of hereditary succession to Kurdish tribes.⁴⁷ It employed them as a sort of margraves along the Safavid border in order to isolate the ideological Shia influence over the Anatolian heterodox *Kizilbash* Turkmens. Famous Turkish traveler *Evliya Çelebi*, who lived in lands controlled by Ottomans in the 17th century, stated that it would have been easier for Iranians to invade Ottoman lands if there was not a “Kurdistan wall” that kept them away.⁴⁸ There was an open symbiotic relationship between Kurdish tribes and the Ottoman-Turkmen Empire. “Highly fragmented and vulnerable Kurdish tribes needed the Ottoman state as much as the Ottoman state needed them.”⁴⁹ Today, we observe that even though Turkey and Iran share the same interest of opposing a potential Kurdish independent state next to their borders, the Turkish state sometimes cooperates with the “Sunni” Kurdistan Region of Iraq to counterbalance Iranian influence over the “Shia” Iraqi central government.⁵⁰

The Kurdish emirates were confederacies of a number of tribes both nomadic and settled, and of nontribal groups who speak different dialects,⁵¹ which possessed many of the characteristics of a state,⁵² and thus were supra-tribal governmental units/semi-polities. The Turkmen-Ottoman dynasty had peacefully ruled Kurdish populated areas via its agreement with the local Kurdish emirates that sought Ottoman protection and recognition for their local authority. They were virtually free in their internal affairs.⁵³ This policy choice cemented the power of local ruling families. The administrative organization as it was introduced in 1515 was to remain in force, with only minor changes, until the beginning of the modernization era in the 19th century, along with rare and exceptional Kurdish discontents.⁵⁴ The semi-polities (they were “semi” because they

⁴⁷ Michael G. Lortz, “*Willing to Face Death: A History of Kurdish Military Forces - the Peshmerga - From the Ottoman Empire to Present-Day Iraq*” (MA Dissertation, The Florida State University, 2005), 3.

⁴⁸ Mehmet Akbaş, “Evliya Çelebi'nin Gözüyle Kürtler ve Kürdistan,” *Artuklu Akademi* 2, no. 1 (2015), 46.

⁴⁹ Özoğlu, *State-tribe relations*, 14.

⁵⁰ Ergin Güneş, “Şii Jeopolitiğinde Türkiye ve İran'ın Güç Mücadelesi,” *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi* 74, no. 1 (2019), 69-70.

⁵¹ Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables*, 46.

⁵² Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh*, 80.

⁵³ Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables*, 48-49.

⁵⁴ Tan, *Kürt Sorunu*, 85; Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh*, 144.

were also administrative units for the Ottoman imperial statecraft) of Kurdish emirates heavily depended on the Pax-Ottomana in the region in order to restore and maintain their authority over the tribes. This provided a buffer zone for centuries between the Ottoman and Iranian-Azerbaijani states in favour of Ottoman-Turkmen Empire.

4. Weakening Centre and Local Rebellions

In the beginning of the 19th century, the political power of the Ottoman-Turkmen state started to diminish. Western powers and the Russian Empire were weakening the Ottoman Empire with consecutive wars. The internal deterioration and external pressures prompted an authority vacuum within the Empire that has been a stimulus for local Kurdish emirates and chieftains to broaden their administrative autonomy because they believed that they had no need for an external sponsor.⁵⁵ Some Kurdish emirates had begun to establish political-military ties with external powers like Russia at the expense of the Ottoman state and politically benefited from Ottoman-Iran rivalry as a de facto buffer zone.⁵⁶ Mir Muhammed's Soran Emirate in Rewanduz and Bedirhan Bey's Cizre-Bohtan Emirate had commenced rebellions against Ottoman rule in different times during the first half of the 19th century and ephemerally subjugated certain areas held by other fellow Kurdish tribes.⁵⁷ Yezdansher, a Kurdish notable and an Ottoman local official, also initiated a rebellion against the Ottoman authority in 1855 with its Kurdish irregulars in cooperation with the Russian Empire,⁵⁸ which is quelled by Ottomans thanks to the help of the British Empire which was ally against the Russians then.

However, these feudal/tribal rebellions and pursuit of a greater autonomy had not displayed a national character yet.⁵⁹ They were reactions to modernizing and centralizing administrative reconfigurations of the Ottoman Empire like the declaration of Tanzimat reforms in 1839. There

⁵⁵ McDowall, *A Modern History*, 38.

⁵⁶ Fatih Ünal, “II. Meşrutiyet Ulusçuluk ve Kürt Ayrılıkçı Hareketi,” *Doğu Batı* 46, no. 2 (2008), 69-106; Eppel, *The Demise of the Kurdish Emirates*, 246; Lazarev and Mihoyan, *Kürdistan Tarihi*, 117-130; McDowall, *A Modern History*, 39.

⁵⁷ McDowall, *A Modern History*, 42-47.

⁵⁸ Candan Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)*, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 360-377.

⁵⁹ Lazarev and Mihoyan, *Kürdistan Tarihi*, 117-130.

was a power conflict between local notables and the modernizing imperial authority.⁶⁰ The modernization project breached the agreement and relative harmony between Kurdish emirates and the imperial centre, which was run by the traditional, mediaeval institutions, dated back to 1515.⁶¹ Ottoman elites had started to overhaul the Empire, which was crippled because of the power vacuum caused by the wholesale removal of local hereditary rulers.⁶² The Empire gradually, deliberately and militarily abolished and fully integrated the emirates into the Ottoman system⁶³ on the course of implementing administrative reforms⁶⁴ and turned Kurdish emirates into Ottoman provinces.⁶⁵ The elimination of Kurdish emirates wiped out potential polities that would have possibly become the nucleus of modern Kurdish nation-statehood, and perpetuated the traditional tribal social formation.⁶⁶

Some of the main root causes of dissidents among Kurdish emirates and tribes: (1) The military conscription for all Ottoman citizens. (2) Levying more taxes and sending them to the imperial bureaucratic center. (3) Corrupted government officials. (4) Reconfiguration of administrative structure in the region. (5) The establishment of local assemblies that enable non-Muslims (thus more non-Kurds) to participate in decision making. (6) Transferring the tax-collection warrant from local Kurdish notables to the central bureaucracy and thus reducing power of local notables and chieftains via modernization/centralization.⁶⁷ The Ottoman state enforced sedentarization of Kurdish tribes by coercion or mediation as part of centralization process since Western-type of modernization necessitated

⁶⁰ Cabir Doğan, *Cizre ve Botan Emiri Bedirhan Bey (1802-1869)* (PhD Thesis, Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi, 2010); Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean*, 362; Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh*, 94; Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables*, 60; Ahmet Vedat Koçal, "Osmanlı-Türkiye Modernleşmesinin Sosyo-Ekonomik Temelleri ve Aktörleri Bağlamında Türk-Kürt İkileminin Doğuşu ve Kaynakları," *Tarihte Türkler ve Kürtler Uluslar arası Sempozyumu* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), 7; Heper, *The State and Kurds*, 43; Hüseyin Yayman, *Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorunu Hafızası* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2011), 31.

⁶¹ Tan, *Kürt Sorunu*, 86-87.

⁶² McDowall, *A Modern History*, 41, 63.

⁶³ Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables*, 54.

⁶⁴ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh*, 133.

⁶⁵ Heper, *The State and Kurds*, 42.

⁶⁶ Eppel, *The Demise of the Kurdish Emirates*.

⁶⁷ Tan, *Kürt Sorunu*, 87; Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean*, 360-361; Sinan Hakan, *Osmanlı arşiv belgelerinde Kürtler ve Kürt direnişleri, 1817-1867* (İstanbul: Doz, 2007), 120-121.

“a shift from indirect to direct rule with the elimination and incorporation of local intermediaries.”⁶⁸ Besides, the treaty of Berlin (1878) signed by the Ottoman Empire, whereby European powers had specifically called for a protected status for the Armenian community, perceived by Kurdish local notables as a stepping stone towards the emergence of an independent Armenian state on Kurdish populated lands and thus as a threat against the Kurds, which was another motivation for the Kurdish dissidents.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, another failed rebellion led by Sheikh Ubeydullah,⁷⁰ which took advantage of the power vacuum caused by the Russo-Ottoman war in 1877-78, has been widely marked as the pioneer Kurdish nationalist insurrection and the birth of Kurdish nationalism.⁷¹ The emergence of religious figures like Sheikh Ubeydullah as political notables relied on the power vacuum caused by the eradication of the emirates system.⁷² The Iranian-Turkmen Qajar elites believed that Sheikh Ubeydullah enjoyed a tacit Ottoman approval for his incursion into their lands.⁷³ However, the aim and motives of Sheikh Ubeydullah and his comrades’ trans-tribal disobedience are still controversial since the movement did not have well-defined political goals⁷⁴ and seemed to strive according to Sheikh Ubeydullah’s demand for greater control in the region.⁷⁵ The evidence

⁶⁸ Yonca Köksal, “Coercion and Mediation: Centralization and Sedentarization of Tribes in the Ottoman Empire,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 1, (May 2006), 469.

⁶⁹ McDowall, *A Modern History*, 56-57.

⁷⁰ A religious man who uses religious networks and spiritual authority against the Ottoman and Qajar (A Turkic Iranian dynasty) states in 1880-1881 as a response to the imperial modernizing and centralizing reforms.

⁷¹ Kamal Soleimani, “Islamic revivalism and Kurdish nationalism in Sheikh Ubeydullah’s poetic oeuvre,” *Kurdish Studies* 4, no. 1 (2016); Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880–1925* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 1-7; Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables*, 76; Sabri Ateş, “In the name of Caliph and Nation: The Sheikh Ubeidullah Rebellion of 1880-1881,” *Iranian Studies* 47, no. 5 (2014), 735-798; Djene Rhys Bajalan, “Princes, Pashas, and Patriots: The Kurdish Intelligentsia, the Ottoman Empire and the National Question (1908-1914),” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 2 (2016), 140-157.

⁷² Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh*; Eppel, *The Demise of the Kurdish Emirates*.

⁷³ McDowall, *A Modern History*, 83.

⁷⁴ Hakan Özoğlu, “Nationalism and Kurdish Notables in the Late Ottoman and Early Republican Era,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 3 (2001), 387-392.

⁷⁵ Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables*, 76.

for a national struggle is hardly conclusive.⁷⁶ Even though the rebellion had some nationalist undertones, “nationalism was not the medium which brought the participants together.”⁷⁷ Moreover, these rebellions were mostly devoid of mass support and thus the Ottomans suppressed them with relative ease.⁷⁸

In the following years, the Ottoman Empire established the *Hamidiya Cavalries*, a Kurdish irregular military force authorized by Sultan Abdulhamid II. He furnished them partly with the tax-collection right in order to counterweight the emerging Armenian threat backed by Russian ambitions which was also perceived as a threat by Kurds and re-integrate them into the Ottoman system.⁷⁹ These were not cross-tribal forces but mostly were formed in accordance with tribal affiliations which reinforced military might and prestige of certain tribes over others.⁸⁰ Researchers generally underscored the parallelism between Hamidiya Cavalries and the Village Guard System (*Koruculuk Sistemi*) of the Republic of Turkey, which is still actively used against PKK’s violence.⁸¹ The system aims at forming mainly Kurdish civilian militias besides Turkish police forces and military to counterweight the PKK’s social influence and minimize its terrorist activities. Abdulhamid II also attempted to re-incorporate Kurdish notables to the Empire with educational means like *Ashiret Mektepleri* (imperial tribal schools) and Pan-Islamist official ideology.⁸² The present Kurdish ethno-nationalist perspective argues that there is a functional resemblance (supposed cultural assimilation of Kurds) between these schools and the contemporary Regional Boarding Schools (*Yatılı Bölge Okulları – YİBO*) of the Turkish Republic. Moreover, Islamic Turkish national identity

⁷⁶ McDowall, *A Modern History*, 53.

⁷⁷ Ateş, *In the name of Caliph*, 794.

⁷⁸ Heper, *The State and Kurds*, 43.

⁷⁹ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh*, 185-186; Lazarev and Mihoyan, *Kürdistan Tarihi*, 161; McDowall, *A Modern History*, 57-63.

⁸⁰ Lortz, *Willing to Face Death*, 6-7.

⁸¹ Metin Argunhan, *Hamidiye Alayları ile Koruculuk İlişkisi* (Masters Thesis, Gazi Üniversitesi, 2009); Evren Balta, Murat Yüksel and Yasemin Acar, *Geçici Köy Koruculuğu Sistemi ve Çözüm Süreci*, Süreç Araştırma Merkezi Raporu (2015); Mehmet Seyman Önder, *Korucular*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015).

⁸² Heper, *The State and Kurds*, 47-48; Lazarev and Mihoyan, *Kürdistan Tarihi*, 157-160; Yayman, *Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorunu*, 31.

discourses use the universal ideology of Islam a nationally unifying tool. This policy is deemed a pejorative and assimilationist approach by some Kurdish ethno-nationalist accounts including some Islamists.⁸³

Notwithstanding these developments, the abolishment of Kurdish tribal principalities was not reverted by Abdulhamid II. The Hamidiya Cavalries consisting of loyal Kurdish tribes rebranded as the *Ashiret Alaylari* (Tribal Regiments) by the Young Turks after the fall of Abdulhamid II and were deployed in different fronts and rebellions throughout the Empire.⁸⁴ Besides, the Ottoman Empire and Kurdish tribes did joint incursions into the cities of Qajars’ Iran like Urumiye, Sawj and Bulaq during the first decade of the 20th century. They held those places for a short span of time until British and Russian joint action to make the Ottomans withdraw troops in 1911-1912.⁸⁵ The Sunni Ottoman Empire cooperated with the Kurds of Iran/Azerbaijan against the Shi’a Qajar government.⁸⁶

5. The National Revival or Distribution of Power

The ethno-national self-awareness among educated and urbanized Kurdish elites and local notables had become conspicuous in the beginning of the 20th century.⁸⁷ The idea of a Kurdish homeland within or without the Empire had started to spread among the Kurds via journals, religious networks, associations and political parties. “Although between 1878 and 1913 Kurdish elites increasingly envisaged the Kurdish community as a ‘nation’”, “the Kurdish movement in the late Ottoman period was neither homogeneous in terms of its ideological outlook nor in an organizational sense.”⁸⁸ Some influential Kurdish political figures affiliated themselves with the Turkish national identity and took part in the process of building the sense of Turkishness as many other important Ottoman elites from

⁸³ MÜcahit Bilici, *Hamal Kürt: Türk İslamı ve Kürt Sorunu*, (İstanbul: Avesta Yayınları, 2017).

⁸⁴ McDowall, *A Modern History*, 57-63.

⁸⁵ McDowall, *A Modern History*, 83-84.

⁸⁶ Lazarev and Mihoyan, *Kürdistan Tarihi*, 165-170.

⁸⁷ Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables*, 77.

⁸⁸ Djene Rhys Bajalan, “Kurdish Responses to Imperial Decline: The Kurdish Movement and the End of Ottoman Rule in the Balkans (1878 to 1913),” *Kurdish Studies* 7, no. 1 (2019), 53.

different ethnic backgrounds immigrated from the Caucasus and Balkans to the Imperial centre. Likewise, today, a significant number of Kurds identify themselves with the Turkish national identity along with their self-awareness of ethnic Kurdishness. Contemporary Kurdish ethno-nationalisms in Turkey, despite the existence of ethnic self-awareness and some incoherent claims of various groups, has not developed a lucid set of political demands yet.⁸⁹

Many Kurdish nationalists “during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century also maintained a deep commitment to the continuation of the Ottoman state.”⁹⁰ The educated and urbanized strata of Kurds was mainly supporting the Young Turks in their pursuit of constitutional monarchy.⁹¹ However, ethno-nationalist Kurds were disturbed by the centralizing policies of the Young Turks after the fall of Abdulhamid II.⁹² “Kurdish revolts in the 19th century and the nationalist activities of Kurdish clubs in early 20th century cannot be labelled as nationalist movements but rather as representing a backlash of Kurds towards the Ottoman reforms.”⁹³

The restoration of the 1876 constitution and the re-opening of the imperial parliament with a multi-party system in 1908 pushed by the Committee of Union and Progress (also commonly referred to as the Young Turk movement) had sometimes exacerbated the conflict between the Ottoman Empire and Kurdish local notables. Kurdish local religious figures and semi-feudal chieftains were not happy with the modernization and further centralization due to allegedly “atheistic” and un-Islamic character of the new regime and losing their feudal privileges.⁹⁴ Kurdish religious orders and figures had been “vehicles of resistance against the centralization of the Ottoman state and means of identity formation” between 1878 and

⁸⁹ Karataş, *Modernlik Küreselleşme*, 193.

⁹⁰ Bajalan, *Kurdish Responses to Imperial Decline*, 60.

⁹¹ Janet Klein, Kurdish nationalists and non-nationalist Kurdistans: rethinking minority nationalism and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1909, *Nations and Nationalism* 13, no. 1 (2007), 135–153; Bajalan, *Kurdish Responses to Imperial Decline*, 61; Tan, *Kürt Sorunu*, 107.

⁹² Lazarev and Mihoyan, *Kürdistan Tarihi*, 171.

⁹³ Rahman Dağ, “Ottoman Reforms and Kurdish Reactions in the 19th Century,” *Nübihar Akademi* 1, No. 2, 52.

⁹⁴ Tan, *Kürt Sorunu*, 110–111.

1924.⁹⁵ Moreover, the conscription of non-Muslims and the good relations of the Young Turks with Armenians in the first years of their hegemony had intimidated Kurdish locals.⁹⁶ The imminent collapse of the Imperial center prompted some Kurdish notables to take precautions against the potential “Christian” Armenian dominance over their lands by the assistance of European powers.⁹⁷ Hence, some local sheikhs and tribes pushed for a greater regional autonomy for the Kurdish populated areas within the Empire during the first two decades of the 20th century, which were more or less successfully quelled by the Ottoman statecraft.⁹⁸

The Kurdish demand for a greater autonomy comprised more national tones than precedent discontents. In the beginning of the 20th century, there were demands for adopting the Kurdish language in official affairs and education and a vision for a Kurdish homeland which had apparent ethno-national aspirations along with strong religious leitmotifs.⁹⁹ Some dissident Kurdish tribes and political figures cooperated with Armenian groups and the Russian Empire to achieve such goals before the WWI. However, the Ottoman government and Kurdish irregulars mostly allied against Armenians and the Russian Empire during the Great War. Kurds provided a substantial manpower to the Ottoman army since the Muslim identity counted for many of Kurds¹⁰⁰ and “did not take the First World War as an opportunity to bolster nationalist feelings amongst their kinsmen vis-à-vis the Turks.”¹⁰¹ Moreover, the majority of Kurdish notables had been well aware of European Christian powers’ high possibility of allying with local Christians against Muslim Kurds.¹⁰² Their nationalism was a cultural one which remained Ottomanist politically.¹⁰³ “While some elements within Ottoman Kurdish society evidently regarded the collapse

⁹⁵ Hakan Yavuz, “Five stages of the construction of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 7, No. 3 (2001), 2.

⁹⁶ Lazarev and Mihoyan, *Kürdistan Tarihi*, 175-176.

⁹⁷ Bajalan, *Kurdish Responses to Imperial Decline*, 59-60.

⁹⁸ McDowall, *A Modern History*, 87-101.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 123-126.

¹⁰⁰ Fatih Ünal, *II. Meşrutiyet Ulusçuluk.*; McDowall, *A Modern History*.

¹⁰¹ Heper, *The State and Kurds*, 55.

¹⁰² Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh*, 229.

¹⁰³ Heper, *The State and Kurds*, 55.

of Ottoman control in Europe as being a potential opportunity for Kurdish emancipation from “Turkish” rule, others, including most significantly those at the forefront of the Kurdish movement, regarded the Kurds’ interests as being inextricably linked to the fate of the Ottoman polity as a whole.”¹⁰⁴ Presently, even the “separatist” PKK, ostensibly, refrains from demanding an independent Kurdish nation-state separated from Turkey¹⁰⁵ because the majority of the Kurdish public affiliates itself with the Republic of Turkey and does not desire a secession.

The secularist/modernist committee of Union and Progress, which had been holding the power in the imperial centre after 1908-1909, had to make concessions from the modernization program. The committee revived the old-fashion government-tribe/religious collaboration and played the Islamic fraternity card in order to prevent or minimize Kurdish discontent. By 1918, Kurdish and Turkmen populated areas of Iran and Azerbaijan were under the military control of the Ottoman state with the aid of some Kurdish irregulars even though the Turkish army withdrew after the declaration of the Armistice of Mudros (30 October 1918) and the defeat of the Central Powers became clear.¹⁰⁶ Yet the British occupation of today’s Iraq occasionally challenged by some Kurdish tribes put a significant number of Kurds under British control which culminated in the demarcation of the contemporary Turkey-Iraq border which divided the majority of Kurds into politically separate territories.¹⁰⁷ The Kurdish population’s scattered condition between different countries endures until today.

6. Conclusion

Nation and national identity are not ahistorical concepts. Employing concepts like “Kurds” and “Turks” might be a misnomer if these social totalities are referred to as a whole, especially for the events prior to the modern age. We can hardly speak of a historical coherent totality of the “Kurds” and “Turks/Turkmens” and their “fights” or “enmity” as if there

¹⁰⁴ Bajalan, *Kurdish Responses to Imperial Decline*, 68.

¹⁰⁵ Karataş, *Modernlik Küreselleşme*, 253.

¹⁰⁶ Lazarev and Mihoyan, *Kürdistan Tarihi*, 195-196.

¹⁰⁷ McDowall, *A Modern History*, 101-109.

have been institutionalized “inter-national relations” between the two sides. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that historical experiences and shared past nourished contemporary socio-political conditions. This historicity was not predicated on the consistent interrelations of two monolithic and sealed entities or identities. Kurdish and Turkmen social “groupings” and polities had a complex and intertwined past influencing and resembling contemporary developments as shown in this work. The article recapitulated these intricate interrelations and provided a historical overview in order to address the prevalent oversimplified narrations of these interrelations.

As Hakan Özoğlu argues,¹⁰⁸ we cannot talk about a general ethno-political disposition and nationalist designs among Kurds until the end of the Great War and the crystallization of the Ottoman Empire’s imminent demise. Likewise, predominantly, a national self-perception in an ethnic sense did not exist among Turkmens until the 20th century. During the Ottoman modernization era in the 19th century, Turkish elites (not necessarily ethnically Turkmen), which constitute the main demographic body of the Empire, preferred to construct a non-ethnic national identity like the cosmopolitan Ottoman or Islamic identity rather than an exclusive ethnic one. “The Ottomans did not make resort to ethnic management strategies towards the Kurds because of the absence of the very notion of ethnicity in their intellectual baggage but a religious one.”¹⁰⁹ Turkmen and Kurdish groups did have intra-ethnic disagreements as much as inter-ethnic conflicts and thus, ethnicity or national identity was not the medium of political relations of the time. Turkmen and Kurdish tribes had co-existed relatively in harmony for centuries under Turkmen-ruled polities, alongside occasional rivalries and conflicts.¹¹⁰

The Ottoman state culturally had a salient Turkish character, however, since it had defined itself as a Muslim polity, the main determinant of foreign policy choices did not rely on a Turkish national self-perception until the rise of modern nationalism, especially within the first decade of the 20th century. Since Turkmen-crown polities of the Seljuks and Ottomans sometimes had perceived the powerful Turkmen tribes as

¹⁰⁸ Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables*.

¹⁰⁹ Heper, *The State and Kurds*, 43.

¹¹⁰ Biçer, *Ortaçağda Kürtler*, 250.

dangerous for their reign, they appointed some Kurdish chieftains as local administrators.¹¹¹ However, even though the renown Turkologist Jean-Paul Roux argues that Turkmens and Kurds have been close to each other historically and culturally,¹¹² employing a national framework to apprehend and analyze the interrelations of Turkmen polities and Kurdish people would hardly work since the socio-political relations of the period were taken place within a tribal and inter-dynasty framework. Therefore, historiographical dichotomization of Turks and Kurds within a national narrative and discursively constructing them as arch-enemies to each other would not reflect historic facts. Instead, it could be a rhetorical arsenal for discursive Kurdish nation-building process in which Turks are situated as the constitutive “other” through third parties’ political and media platforms.

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¹¹¹ Heper, *The State and Kurds*, 22.

¹¹² Biçer, *Ortaçağda Kürtler*, 257.

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