Nationalistic Senses and Kurdish Politics in the Last Century*
Hestên Netewî û Siyaseta Kurdan di Sedsala Dawî de

Necat KESKİN**

ABSTRACT:

The Sykes-Picot Agreement, agreed privately by France and Britain and sub-sequently extended to include Russia, was eventually revealed or publicized as drawing boundaries in the Middle-East for the 20th century. The land in which Kurds were living was object of this division.

One of the reason why the Kurds did not fight for their own interests was the weakness of nationalistic feelings among them, while the other was lack of concensus among their leaders (*emirs* and *pashas*), which continued even after World War I and leading to the Kurds' exclusion from international agreements. Consequently, four distinct Kurdish societies emerged in four different "nation-states".

Nationalism is bound to the idea of a 'land' at first, and the people living in the same land are emotionally close to each other even though they do not know each other, which is determined as 'imagined community' by Benedict Anderson.

In this article the current situation of the Kurdish politics and their "nationalism" are going to be discussed by comparing them to the situation in which Sykes-Picot agreement occurred with the recent happenings such as "postponing national congress", "liberating Shingal", and "Kobane" fighting.

Keywords: Sykes-Picot, Kurds, nationalism, Kurdistan, Middle East.

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Peymana Sykes-Picot ya veşartî ku Frensî û Ingilîz li ser li hev hatibûn, û dûv re Rûs jî tevlî bûbûn bi awayekî li ser parvekirina xaka Rojhilata Navîn derketibû meydanê. Di vir de axa ku Kurd li ser dijîn jî mijara vê parvekirinê bû.

Sedemeke ku çima Kurd ji bo mafê xwe şer nekirin zeîfbûna hestên netewî bû, ligel ku ya din jî tunebûna lihevkirinekê di nav rêberên wan de (emîr û paşa) bû, ku piştî şerê cîhanê yê yekemîn jî dewam kir û bû sedema lidervemayîna Kurdan di peymanên navnetewî de. Di encamê de, di nav çar "netewe-dewlet"an de çar civakên Kurdan peyda bûn.

Netewebûn, berî her tiştî bi fikra 'ax'ê ve girêdayî ye û kesên li ser vê axê dijîn her çiqasî hevdu nasnekin jî bi heman hestan nêzîkî hev dibin ku Benedict Anderson ji vê yekê re dibêje "cemaatên xeyalkirî".

Di vê gotarê de rewşa siyaseta Kurdan û "netewperwerî" ya wan, ligel berawerdki-rina bi rewşa ku peymana Sykes-Picot derketiye, bi mînakên dawî wek "paşxistina kongreya netewî", "azadkirina Şengalê", û "şerê Kobanê" dê were niqaşkirin.

Bêjeyên sereke: Sykes-Picot, Kurd, netewe, Kurdistan, Rojhilata Navîn.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Middle East is again at the centre of conflict occupying the itnerests of diverse international players. The "process" which was named back then as Arab Spring started in Tunisia in 2010[1] and spread out to the entire region. With the Syrian War, it became a more complex conflict which many actors to look after their interests. Looking at the "Mosul operation" and discussion about "after capturing Mosul" clearly put forward this complexity. The Kurds, with their figthing agaitns ISIS, want to be a "political player" and gain political status. Their being a "player" afterwards depends on their political reactions, and this is also related to their relationships and cooperations with each other, in the first hand.

The Kurds, with a large number of their population[2] in the Middle East, are separated from each other both "geographically" (in terms of 'national' borders they live in) and politically, and are still in a struggle of gaining their "national" rights, for almost a hundred years. They are sometimes described as "the world's

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1   For a brief overwiew of Arab Spring: http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/09609.pdf Last Access: 29.09.2016

2   Since there is not any "official" census which includes all Kurds, the number of Kurds is controversial. According to Kurdish sources, the whole populatin of Kurds are between 36-45 million. See. http://www.institutkurde.org/en/info/the-kurdish-population-1232551004 last accessed: 10.10.2017

largest nation deprived of its own state" (Belçim Galip, 2015:1). Beside the policies of "great powers", especially the political "distance" between them, which is a disadvantage in the developing of "nationalistic senses", has been also a reason for not having gained their "national" rights.

This paper is going to discuss and try to make a comparision between the past and present situation of Kurdish nationalistic senses and Kurdish politics with regard to it in the frame of the hundredth anniversary of the secret agreement Sykes-Picot in 1916. This is going to be discussed in the frame of such concepts as nation, nationalism, an nationalistic senses with some current events.

2. NATION, NATIONALISM, AND NATIONALISTIC SENSES: A FRAMEWORK

The concepts of nation, national, nationalism are still interesting and basic subjects in social sciences. They also affect the daily life of "nations". As a social phenomenon they are dependant on the emergence of capitalism, and so related to "modernity" (Hobssbawm, 1992: 29).[3]

The idea 'nation', which emerges along with modernity, spreads steadily and influences its surrounding. Since then, nation, *as a political and social organisation, has been more precious than human's life since its emergence* (Özkırımlı, 2009:12). The thing, which is more valuable than life and which humans will die for, is mostly the 'land' where they live. This is the basis for 'nationalism' that *is a political process that aims to create a unified group consciousness for those who seek self-rule in a historical homeland* (Özoğlu, 2004:22). "Unified group consciousness" creates an "imagined community" which Anderson (2006:6) defines as:

> Nation (..) is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.

This image is also, according to Anderson, related to capitalism and its discursive formations. Communication and opportunities of communication bring people, who 'do not know' each other, closer and make them feel as a 'community' which in Shengal and Kobane brought Kurds also together.

On the other hand, nationalism, in terms of philosophy, *is a justificatory doctrine of rulership* (Weiler, 1994: 120). A Justification which supports political governance of men over men. In other words, "acceptance of someone else's goverment"

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3   For a brief and critical work on of theories of nationalism see. Özkırımlı 2009.

or sharing the power. So the question is whether Kurdish parties are ready to accept each others "governance" or "sharing" power.

3. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF KURDISH HISTORY IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

Kurds lived in "Kurdistan" as the independent *emirates*[4] from the beginning of the 16th century until the middle of the 19th century based on an agreement between Kurds and Ottomans, namely between Idris-î Bitlisî on behalf of Kurdish tribes and the Ottoman Sultan Selim I. Kurds fought together with the Ottomans against the Safavids of Iran and in exchange they lived in Kurdistan for 333 years under the dominion of Ottomans but as relatively independent emirates, starting with the Chaldiran War in 1514 and ending with the foundation of the "Kurdistan State (eyalet)" in 1847 (Hakan, 2007:253).

At the beginning of the 19th century, because of technological, military and also economic, political and cultural developments, the Ottoman Empire was heading for collapse and in order to avoid or stop this collapse some measures were taken that threatened the relative independence of the Kurdish emirates.

The Kurdish Emirates Baban, Bohtan and Hakkari, revolting against the central goverment in order not to lose their independence, failed one by one because of the lack of the nationalist sentiment among their population (particularly if compared to that among Greek and Serbian populations).

After the defeat of the Kurdish Emirates, the gap that came into existence in the governing was mostly filled by Nakshbandi Sheikhs who were the khalifa of Sheikh Khalid El-Kurdi (El-Şarezorî) and these religious figures started having an important role in the social life of Kurdish People. Sheikh Ubeydullah Nehri, the son of Sheikh Taha Nehrî, was one of these people whose movement (or revolt) is viewed as "nationalistic", even today. The scholars who view the movement of Sheikh Ubeydullah as "nationalistic", put forward a speech that they believe belongs to him as basis for their assesment. This speech takes place in the letter that Sheikh Ubeydullah wrote to American missionary Dr.Cochran. In this letter Sheikh Ubeydullah says:

> The Kurdish nation, consisting of more than 500,000 families, is a people apart. Their religion is different [from that of others], and their laws and customs distinct... We are also a nation apart. We want our affairs to be in our hands, so that in

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4   For the term of emirates and an overview of Kurdish Emirates look at: Bruinessen (1992:75 and 133-181).

the punishment of our own offenders we may be strong and independent, and have privileges like other nations.... This is our object [for the revolt].... 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 [Persian and Ottoman] governments (Özoğlu, 2004: 75; Jwaideh, 2004: 153-156; Celîl, 1998: 65).

But as Özoğlu says, even though it might comprise some national feelings inside, it still can not be directly viewed as a nationalistic revolt. Revolt as Bruinessen also says, it can more be viewed in the frame of proto-nationalism (Bruinessen 1992:250). Neverthless the struggles that arose after Sheikh Ubeydullah's revolt can be reviewed in this context.[5] Even though they use the names "Kurd, Kurdistan" as the names of their publications and organisation, neither the newspaper *'Kurdistan'* nor the other communities and associations belonging to Kurds directly refer to an 'independent homeland,' an idea that is essential to the feeling of nationalism. *Therefore, references to Kurds and Kurdistan in the examined Kurdish sources do not document the existence of Kurdish nationalism, but only the existence of Kurdish self-consciousness* (Özoğlu, 2004: 22).

That's why the intellectuals, *pashas* and leaders of Kurds viewed themselves within the Ottoman framework and under the umbrella of Caliphate at that time. M.Emin Bozarslan expresses this as follows;

> It is interesting that the usage of the words nationalism and patriotism in the newspaper 'Kurdistan' was not for the purpose of having an independent Kurdistan; in other words the purpose of nationalism and patriotism was not to liberalize the Kurdistan from Ottoman Empire and found an independent Kurdish state on the Kurdistan land (Bozarslan, 1991: 23).

It seems that "Kurdistan" or the leaders and the intellectuals of Kurds were then focusing on opposing Abdulhamid II rather than standing up for an independent Kurdistan. For example in the 16th edition of "Kurdistan" in his editorial Evdirehman Bedirxan (1899:1-2) states that;

> According to the Muslims the Ottoman Empire must continue. When we find out that there is something wrong with the state on the side of administration, we must heal this part and get rid of the problem. The State's health is ours and its death is ours, too.

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5   It should be noted that Sheikh Ubaydullah had fought together with Ottomans against Russians in the Ottoman-Russian war in 1877-78.

In the same writing Bedirxan goes on as;

> Our state is the Ottoman Empire; this is an era when the monarch administration is weak and powerless. If we, as the citizens of the country, do not find a solution for it, its downfall is inevitable.

It is obvious that Kurds were seeing themselves as a part of the Ottoman Empire and their first aim was to heal the illness of it and the illness was seen as Sultan Abdulhamit. This situation shows that the Kurdish intellectuals were influenced by 'Young Turks' who were against Sultan Abdulhamid.

On the other hand it seems that this idea has changed somewhat in the writings of the subsequent editions. For instance, in his editorial article "For Kurds" in the 27th edition (1901), Evdirehman Bedirxan speaks of Kurds and their land as;

> All these years you have served for Turks, what favor have you got from them? In spite of all the cruelty from the government when you receive a rank, you forget your grievances.(...) five centuries ago there were not any Turks in our motherland. All these Turks came to our homeland from Turan and they dominate us in our motherland.(...) Turks and Sultan shall get whatever name and rank they want; but the God did not create Kurds to serve for them. (...) This case and ignorance is enough; come to yourself. (...) Create a fine future together and altogether get rid of the Turks' cruelty. (...) Then with the God's help, I will rescue Kurds from the cruelty of Ottomans... (Bedirxan, 1901:2-3).

Although Evdirehman Bedirxan was writing his view in the newspaper *Kurdistan*, it seems that this idea was not common among Kurds. As the intellectuals of Kurds were on the side of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP; In Turkish: Ittihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti-ITC) at the beginning of the 20th century, they were acting with 'Young Turks' against Sultan Abdulhamit. Even as "Kurdishness" came to the fore, it will not be wrong to say that the idea of "Ottomanism" was common among many Kurdish intellectuals. Yet, their political purpose and goals were not clear, and there were numerous conflicts among them.

Conflicts between Kurdish *Pashas* and *Emirs* let the CUP close the associations and parties of Kurds, after the "Young Turks Revolution". In his memories, *Zinar Silopî*, Ekrem Cemilpaşa says that Kurdish leaders (*pashas* and *emirs*), whose salaries were paid by the Ottoman government, did not know what to do during the disturbances that Istanbul and Ottoman Empire were going through. *Zinar Silopi* (1969:23) expresses the case of shutting down the Kurdish Society for Development and Contribution (Kürt Terakki ve Teavün Cemiyeti) as;

> Unfortunately this society did not go on so long, the conflicts between pashas and emirs made their union break up easily. Because of not reconciling of the Bedirxanis and deceased Seyid Ebdilqadir, who thought of himself as the spiritual father of Kurdistan and the leader of cult's sheikhs, this society broke up.

This conflicts again showed up during the foundation of the *Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan* (SAK; in Turkish: Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti). It can be said that even though the idea of "Kurdishness" existed among the Kurdish intellectuals, it was not an idea of "nationalism" as was among other minorities in the Ottoman Empire such as Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians. So, the "imagination" that Anderson talks about for "nation" was rather towards their tribal relations among Kurds at that times. Kurdish "nationalism" emerged later, as a reaction to "Turkishness" around 1912 but did not spread among Kurds as the Great War broke out.

On the other hand, Jwaideh (2004:226) says that in spite of all efforts trials of Russian, Kurds fought on the side of Turks in the the World War I and one reason for this was boosting pan-islamism and call for jihad. Religious feeling was more important for Kurds, especially when it came to choosing sides. Most Kurdish sheikhs (religious scholars and spiritual leaders) and their followers supported the Ottoman Empire. Except some of Bedirxanis who had relations with Russians, most Kurdish religious leaders and landowners (*beys*) were on the side of the Ottoman Empire (Hakan, 2013:29). While Kurds were fighting among the Ottoman army with their governors, intellectuals and sheikhs, the discussions on sharing of the Ottoman land were going on among the major powers of that time France, England and Russia. The Sykes-Picot agreement, according to which the Middle East was to be divided among these powers, can be seen as the consequence of those discussions. Also Kurdish lands were subject to discussions about territorial division among those powers mostly because of Kurds' politics and their dispersed settlements.[6] Even though this agreement was revealed by Russia after the October Revolution, it has had an enduring impact on the division of Kurdistan land and the Kurds.

Kurds' attempts to get their rights according to principles of Wilson started again after the Great War and the collapsing of the Ottoman Empire, and "Kurdis-

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6   http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/sykes_pico.html last access: 30.01.2016.
     http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/sykes-picot-agreement-180957217/?no-ist
     30.01.2016
     http://www.britannica.com/event/Sykes-Picot-Agreement 30.01.2016
     For some documents of Sykes-Picot de look at: http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Main_Page
     last access: 20.09.2016

tan" got into the Kurds' agenda as "homeland". SAK and its informal newspaper *Jîn* became the pioneers of Kurdish nationalism in this area. This case is expressed in the pages of *Jîn* in Ewdirehim Rehmi's writing (1918) named *our current situation*;

> That's right, we Kurds haven't felt the need to get out from the Turkish administration till now, to say from the system of Ottomans. Now we see that Wilson says 'the places where there are no Turks will not be given to Ottomans'. Our place is called Kurdistan, aside from two-three officers who also came for offical job, there are no Turks. How about Armenians? The number of Armenians are five per cent of us (…). After that, there is no nation there but Kurds. So, Kurdistan is no one's right but Kurds.

But it seems again that these nationalistic senses and the idea of homeland stayed in Istanbul among the Kurdish intellectuals and did not spread to Kurdish cities. Cemil Paşa says that when they arrived at Diyarbekir the situation of Kurds and especially Diyarbekir was not as they hoped.

> Everything had turned upside-down. M[ustafa] Kemal and people around him were smart, cunning, and brave. They knew how easy they could deceive illiterate Kurds who were ready to sacrifice everything they had for their religion (Cemil Paşa, 1991: 56).

Cemil Paşa goes on saying that he and his nationalist friends roamed among tribes and around cities, but their propaganda, suggestions and advice were passing over people's head *because the imams, muftis and sheikhs that Nihat Pasha retained had poisoned their brains* (Cemil Paşa, 1991:57).

All of these show that even though Kurds existed in the ground they were not on the "table of agreement", and this was a consequence of the fact that they were seperate, without purposes and without politics. The English commander Noel says that although the opinion of leaders of Kurdish tribes changed during the war, the lack of correspondence or absence of common goals among Kurds cut off the way for a national union against the government (Noel, 2010; 51).

Since then Kurds have been fighting, struggling, carrying on political and military works in all four parts of Kurdistan to get their national rights, but still the influence of the consequences of World War I can be seen on Kurdish society. Kurds moved away from each other especially in terms of culture and also politics in between the four countries.

4. THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE KURDISH POLITICS

The current status of Kurds is connected to a significant degree of their unity and struggle or "mistakes" they made a century ago when the French, English and Russian came to an agreement on the secret Sykes-Picot agreement. Kurds were disorganized, did not have a common politics and they were not advanced in terms of "nationalism". They mostly fought on bealf of Islam and the Ottoman Empire or they were going to the direction where their tribal leader showed them. If we turno ur attention to the situation today, Is there a "sense of community" or "nation" among Kurds today? Can they be viewed as an "imagined community"? Which level have Kurds reached in terms of "nationalism" and "nationalistic senses" in the last one hundred years?

This case can be reviewed by general and local politics of Kurds. Looking at the Kurdish politics of today, two basic policies that influence their surrounding come to the forth: One emerged in "North" (or Turkish Kurdistan) and the one in "South" (or Iraqi Kurdistan).[7] Even though these policies are not homogenous by itself, they show up as the basic policies when looking at their influence around them.[8]

4.1. PKK and Politics of the "North"

The politics of Kurds in North faced massacres and got lost during and after the foundation of national Republic of Turkey, first in 1920-21 with the Koçgirî Revolt, then in 1925, the revolt of Sheiks Said (Şêx Seîd), then in 1930 with the revolt of Agirî (Ararat), and finally with the revolt of Dersîm in 1937-38 (See. Bruinessen, 1992: Romano, 2010: 53-65; White, 2012: 111-137). There was silence in politics of the Kurds in Turkey until 1960. Kurdish intellectuals raised their voice in politics slowly with the case of 49's and military coup in 1960, which on one hand created some opportunities for self-expression.[9] At the beginning they mostly expressed

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7   In Kurdish political discurse, the land of "Kurdistan" consists of four parts which labeled in Kurdish such as Bakur/North (for the part in Turkey; Başur/South (for the part in Iraq); Rojhilat/East (for the part in Iran) and Rojava/West (for the part in Syria). To make a clear analyses, the definition such as North/Bakur and South/ Başur, Rojava/ West, Rojhilat/East were preferred according to Kurdish political discurse, and they will be used in quotation mark only in headlines.

8   Here in this article, the politics of Rojhilat (or Iranian Kurdistan) is excluded, because of lack of enough information; because of that there is not a "mobilized" political movement compared to North, South, and Rojava, especially after Abdurrahman Gassemlu's killing in1989; and also because the Kurdish politics there is affected by both "North" and "South".

9   This process can be seen in the memories of the Kurdish intellectuals such as Musa Anter, and Şerafettin Elçi,. See. Musa Anter (1999); Interview with Şerafettin Elçi, Hasan Kaya (2012).

themselves in the Turkey Labor Party (TIP) and then in time, parties and organisations as PDK-T (Kurdistan Democrat Party of Turkey) and DDKO were founded. After 1970, until 1980, the associations, parties and publications increased and most of them were leftist (Bozarslan, 2013:13-42; Türkmen & Özmen, 2013).

The military coup on 12th September 1980 affected the Kurdish associations, organisations, and parties significantly. On one side the force and violence of the state, on the other side the social and political dispute, and on yet another side the rivalry among the Kurdish organisations strangled Kurdish politics. From those parties PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), which was founded in1978, reorganised and began its struggle (Bozarslan, 2013: 42-49).

The PKK's politics is the most effective one in the north of Kurdistan or Kurdistan in Turkey from 1980 until now. As it is known, PKK entered into the political sphere at the end of 1970s with the intention of founding *an independent, democratic and united Kurdistan* (See *The Road of the Revolution of Kurdistan-Manifesto*, in Türkmen & Özmen, 2013:445-528). After the military coup on 12th September its many members were arrested and the rest somehow went abroad with the leadership and relationships of Abdullah Öcalan, they began political struggle there and in 1984 they started armed struggle. Even though their aim was to found *an independent, united Kurdistan*, they were consumed with the north of Kurdistan. One reason for this may be because of the founders of the organization. The people remaining in the management since then, had studied or were studying in Turkey's universities, they had leftist ideas and were in relationship with leftists in Turkey.[10] The foundation of HDP (Halkların Demokratik Partisi- Peoples Democratic Party) was also based on this relationship.

The PKK's movement got organised among the society and spread out in time, it became a popular movement in the 90s and in the 2000s it increased and expanded its popularity both legally and illegally. On one side this process has strengthened national consciousness and senses among Kurds in Turkey and on the other side as an opposite consequence of this war it brought them closer to the system of Turkey, they entered into the system. On another side PKK's politics against the politics of South, against a nationalistic consciousness, created a pair of binoculars among the Kurds in the other parts.

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10   The changes of political aims of the PKK can be seen by comparing *The Road of the Kurdistan Revolution* first published in 1978 (it is available in Türkmen & Özmen-2013: 445-528) and Abdullah Öcalan's writing (2011, and 2012). For the PKK's emerging in Turkish leftist "tradition" see. Bozarslan (2013).

Today the politics of Kurds in North can be explained briefly in this way: *Democratic autonomy in a democratic Turkey*. On the other hand the same politics sees this idea as the solution for the Kurds living in other countries, too. The basis of this view was created by the leader of PKK, Abdullah Ocalan himself, after he was arrested. Ocalan generally objects to the idea nation-state and mostly judges it as the basic reason for the problems in Middle East. PKK, on the basis of Abdullah Ocalan's ideas, gave up the idea of *an independent and united Kurdistan* and searched for a solution in Turkey. "The Confederation of Middle East", "Democratic Republic" and lastly "Democratic Autonomy" showed up as the consequences of this search.[11]

The "Arab Spring", which reached Syria in 2011, and struggles of Kurds in Syria influenced the Kurds in the North. Both the start and the end of the "resolution process", later on the "ditches" process, and the declaration of war which went on in cities, were dependent on the "Rojava". "Democratic self-goverment", which was advocated by representatives of Kurdish politics in North, was also inspired by "Rojava Cantons", which were formed on the basis of "Democratic Autonomy". This can be seen in the "self-goverment declaration" of the Congress of Democratic Society (DTK) which was held on the 15 and 16th October, 2015.[12]

4.2. The "South" or Kurdistan Regional Goverment

The South of Kurdistan was dominated by England at the end of World War I, as France and England had agreed. Sheikh Mehmûd Berzenci revolts against the English government and he is arrested at the end and exiled to India. After the Iraq is founded by Winston Churchill in 1921 with the connection of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra, a dispute on Mosul comes out between Iraq and Turkey (Bruinessen 1992:274). English governers give way to return of Sheikh Mahmut in order to balance between these countries. Sheikh Mahmut comes back from India and settles in Suleymaniye, he recruits his viziers there, he coins money in his own name, he publishes a newspaper named Roji Kurdistan. He goes to war against the English in a short time again and at the end in 1927 he is arrested and exiled to Baghdad this time. He dies there in the year 1956 (Bruniessen, 1992; Jwaideh, 2004). According to Barth (2001:79-86) Sheikh is a 'charismatic' person.

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11   For Abdullah Ocalan's ideas on the subject see. Abdullah Ocalan (2012). Kürdistan Devrim Manifestosu, Kürt Sorunu ve Demokratik Ulus Çözümü.

12   https://www.evrensel.net/haber/268498/dtkden-14-maddelik-oz-yonetim-deklarasyonu   a - cessed on 12.10.2016

In 1932 Iraq becomes an 'independent' state, but when Kurds start a revolt in the Barzan region, the English help Iraqi government with their Imperial army and with their help this revolt is suppressed, Sheikh Ehmed Barzanî and his brother Mele Mistefa Barzanî are exiled to Suleymaniye. Mele Mistefa's escape from exile and his arrival to Barzan in 1934 starts a new point in the struggle of Kurds in the South and in Kurds' independence movement at the same time. At that time there were some other movements by Kurds and one of them was *Hîva* party - founded in 1935. According to Jwaideh (2004:464-468) the *Hîva* played an important role in the revolt by Mustefa Barzanî between 1943-45. In 1946 three parties, *Hêvî*, *Rizgarî*, and *Şoreş* unite and found the Kurdish Democratic Party (PDK). The party is named after PDK which was founded in Mehabad. Mele Mistefa Barzanî is chosen as its leader (Bilgin 1992: 84). After the defeat of the Republic of Mehabad, Mele Mistefa Barzanî returned to the Barzan region but he could not stay there, too, - so he set out for "the long walk" towards the Soviet Union where he spent 11 years then in 1958 he is invited by Abdulkerîm Qasim and returned back to Baghdad. These favorable relations did not continue for long and war broke out again between the Kurds and the Iraqi state. Either in war or in meetings this process goes on until 1975 and in that year Kurds face a hard defeat. At the end of that defeat the Kurdish movement in the South breaks into two parts. The impact of this break continues even up to the present: On one side PDK which is more powerful in the Bahdînan region, and YNK (unity) which is stronger in the Soran region on the other side. This duality goes on both during the war between Iraq and Iran in 1980-88, and during the process after the 'gulf war' until today.[13]

The international intervention in 2003 brought new opportunities for Kurds and after long discussions, in 2006 PDK and YNK make it up and they founded KRG (Kurdistan Regional Goverment)(Rogg & Rimscha, 2007:832) which still has civil strife and goes on with independence demand. This can be indicated as a social case in which any progress for Kurds in one part influences the other Kurds. As it is known the Republic of Mehabad and the foundation of PDK also influenced the other Kurds and at the end PDK-Iraq was founded. Mele Mistefa Barzanî's return and the movement of Kurds in South influenced the Kurds in Syria and the ones in Turkey and as a consequnce PDK-Syria and PDK-Turkey were founded. Thus, on one hand the foundation of Kurdistan Regional Goverment boosted Kurds' hope about independence, rights and getting a status and so widened 'nationalistic' senses among Kurds. On the other hand the disputes among Kurdish

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13   This duality got to "civil war" between two sides between 1994-98 and thousands from boths sides lost their life in this "war" (Inga Rogg and Hans Rimscha 2007:829).

parties and in their politics narrows down these 'national' senses and Kurds' getting at "being a nation". The situation of Kurds in Rojava can be viewed in terms of these relations.

4.3. PYD/YPG and "Rojava"

There are strong and close relations among the politics and parties of Kurds in Rojava and Kurds in the South and North. Those parties' works and politics and also their attitude towards Rojava influences both Kurds in Rojava and all the other Kurds.

After World War I, France, as agreed with the English in the Sykes-Picot agreement, occupied the area known as Syria today and founded its colonial government. Thus, also Kurdish area, known as *Rojava* today, was accepted within Syria (Temo, 2012:39).

The final version of the borders between Syria and Turkey was decided in 1939 and as a result the division of Kurds was confirmed. Syria was accepted as an independent country by the National Union in 1946. Since then the government of Syria had been changed many times by military coups until the year 1970. Hafız Esed took hold of the government via a military coup in 1970 and this government is still going on via his son Beshar Esed (Bedreddin, 2014).

Even though the borders were drawn after World War I, the relationships between Kurds in North and Rojava has continued without interruption. On one hand Rojava has become a shelter for Kurds from the North, on the other hand like *Xoybun* -a Kurdish political organization- it has become the base for Kurds who carry on political works in Turkey. People who escaped from Turkey because of revolt, disobedience, and exile, held on to Syria which was a colony of France. Not only for political affairs, but also for cultural and linguistic works Syria was an important place for Kurds then.[14]

But when the French left there, and Syria as the Arabic country was founded, the state of Kurds in Syria also changed. The same policies carried out in Iraq, Iran and Turkey were also conducted in Syria. These policies were on one hand exiles, on the other hand denegations and assimilations. Nevertheless Kurds' struggles, which began in the era of the French, went on even after the independence of Syria against the Arabic conscience. Occurences in South or in Iraqi Kurdistan

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14 The journal of *Hawar* and *Ronahi* are a good and influent examples. Many Kurdish intellect - als shared their ideas, known each other via these journals.

influenced the intellectuals and politicians of Kurds, too, and in 1957 made way for foundation of the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria.

Baath Party which took hold of the dominion via a military coup in 1963, carried out an extreme policy against Kurds. The project of construction of an "Arabic arch" was conducted in the following years.

Arabs were settled in traditionally Kurdish regions and locales, new villages were built and the names of Kurds' villages were changed within the framework of this project.[15] One of the basic aims of this project was cutting ties between Kurds in the South and North, the other one was the assimilation of Kurds.

The state and politics of Kurds in Syria changed after 2000s. The capture and surrendering of Abdullah Ocalan in 1999; loosening of PKK and Syria's relationship; the foundation of PYD (Democratic Union Party); the death of Hafız Esed and, the intervention by international forces to Iraq, the defeat of Seddam Huseyin and the construction of the Kurdistan region influenced the Kurds in Syria.

The events in Qamişlo in the year 2004 can be reviewed within this framework. On 12th March 2004, during the play between the football team Deyr-El Zor and Qamişlo's team El-Cîhad the fans of Deyr-El Zor attacked the fans of El-Cihad and then Syria's troops also got into the events and consequently 7 Kurds were killed. After those events in many other cities like Amudê, Dêrik, Hesekê, Serê Kaniyê and Damascus protests took place. Also at the end of these protests people were killed and some were wounded (Schmidinger, 2015: 92-98). The regime in Syria wanted to strangle the Kurds' movement before it get stronger, but in all protests including the massive ones in 2011 in Syria, the struggle between Kurds and the government of Syria went on. After the civil war, Kurds have taken advantage of opportunities arising and between 19-24th July 2012, under the leadership of PYD and its armed branches YPG/YPJ they seized power in Cezire, Kobane and Afrin. By the other Kurd organisations this case was reviewed as a collaboration with the regime in Syria. Schmidinger (2015:114) says that both sides claim opposite things and this case will be uncovered by historians and goes on as:

> It is true that the regime surrendered a big part of Rojava including Cezire, Afrin, and Kobane to Public Defense Troops (YPG) that had been organised by PYD and Syrian army left most of its armory and equipments behind and withdrew between the 19th-24th July in 2012, almost without a fight.

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15   For details of the project see. Temo 2012; For the number of Kurdish population in Syria see. Bedreddin (2014: 29) and also http://countrystudies.us/syria/23.htm 08.02.2016

In 2013 the social agreement (the Constitution of Rojava Cantons[16]) was prepared and at the beginning of 2014 first Cezire and then Kobane and Afrin were declared as cantons. In October 2015, the foundation of SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) of which YPG was a main part was declared. And in March, 2016 "Democratic Federation of Northern Syria-Rojava" was declared in Rimelan, Derik, and SDF was declared as a military unit of the "Federation".[17]

In spite of these processes, "a unite policy" cannot be mentioned among Kurds in Syria and there have been two sides in politics of Kurds in Rojava since 2012. One of them is TEV-DEM (Democratic Public Movement) which also includes PYD, and the other one is ENKS (Kurdish Home Committee in Syria) which includes PDK-S. While TEV-DEM is close to PKK and follows Abdullah Öcalan's ideas *'democratic independence'* or *'democratic confederacy'*, ENKS is close to PDK and KRG.

5. NATIONALISM AND KURDS POLITICS

As mentioned above Kurds separated because of the policies of great powers at the beginning of the 20th century and this seperation still goes on, despite some gains such as KRG and Cantons of Rojava. Still some questions come forth such as; How long will these gains go on? or how many of these gains will remain in Kurds' hands after the sunset? Do the Kurds imagine themselves as a community? How close are the attitude of the society and the policy of Kurdish parties? The answers of these questions are dependant on Kurds' policy, their "nationalistic" ideas and attempts. The "nationalistic" senses of Kurds and Kurdish politics will be reviewed via three examples, holding national congress, re-capturing Shengal, and Kobane issue, respectively.

Undoubtedly many other examples such as the Halabja massacre, which holds an important place in the collective memory of all Kurds, can be given; or digging ditches in Kurdish cities such as Nusaybin, Cizre, Silopi, Sur and so on, and its impact on the other Kurdish regions; also ditches dug up by Turkish State between North and Rojava and its impact, within the framework of nationalistic feelings of Kurds can be given as various examples, but these three examples will be enough for Kurds' nationalistic conscious and the policy of Kurdish parties.

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16   For the "constitution" see. Ç Mutlu Civiroglu "The Constitution of Rojava Cantons", http://civiroglu.net/the-constitution-of-the-rojava-cantons/ 09.02.2016

17   See. http://aranews.net/2016/07/syrian-kurds-declare-qamishli-capital-new-federal-system/ Last access: 24.10.2016; http://kurdishquestion.com/index.php/kurdistan/west-kurdistan/declaration-of-establishment-by-democratic-syria-forces/1179-declaration-of-establishment-by-democratic-syria-forces.html last access: 26.10.2016

5.1. Postponing National Congress

In the turmoil of civil war in Syria, the representatives of 39 groups and Kurdish parties came together in Erbil in order to organize the "National Congress" in summer of 2013. This advancement arouse enthusiasm in all Kurds' hearts and revived their hopes for 'union' one more time. A few days before the specified date for the organization of the Congress, the preparatory committee made a statement that the Congress had been postponed because of technical problems.

The truth behind 'technical problems' was political interests of parties, groups and organisations of Kurds and it was obvious that the Congress was not held for this reason. The Congress was postponed to another date for the second time and the last time it was postponed to an indefinite time (in effect, it was cancelled). Organizing such a congress was psychologically very important for all Kurds, and its cancellation dashed hopes about the future.

It also made it explicit that although the "nationalistic" consciousness has arisen among the Kurdish "community", the priority for the Kurdish parties is still their own "political" interests, and it also shows the Kurdish political parties' hesitation to share "power" with one another. This truth came to light once again in the problem of Shengal and Kobane.

5.2. "Who liberated Shengal?"

As noted briefly at the beginning, religion is an important phenomenon for Kurdish society and the religious or denominational differences forestall the "ethnical" or "national" identity many times. For this reason the events that took place in Shengal at the beginning of August in 2014 are very important for Kurdish society and for the comprehension of "national" identity. Both in the North and South, even in Rojava society's help to the Yezidi community, who were escaping from the attacks of armed forces of Islamic State/ISIS (most of them follow(ed) the Sunni denomination), showed up the change of Kurdish society, too. In spite of enmities and religious differences, sunni-shafii Kurds protected the Yezidis because of their "national" identity. It showed that circumctances were forming a "national" sense among the whole Kurds. Peshmerga, guerilla and YPG's fighting side by side against the "enemy" on the ground was another sign of this form. But what was seen in Kurdish media was something else, and media "groups" were broadcasting in accordance with the political party they were related to.

The rivalry and discrepancies in Kurdish politics went on even after the "liberation" of Shengal. As it is known, the leader of Kurdistan Region Mesud Barzani

made a statement to the press on the Mount Shengal on 13.11.2015. In this statement president Barzani says that;

> In Shengal, a history was written with the blood of peshmerga. We fulfilled our promise that we had made to our Yezidi sisters and brothers. Here, on the Mount Shengal, I am proclaiming the liberation of Shengal to my Yezidi sisters and brothers and to all Kurdistan community. We took our revenge.[18]

In spite of the statement and proclaim by the president Barzani, it is still not obvious *who* liberated Shengal.[19] Because still there are two powers of peshmerga in the South and it is also known that since the beginning of the Shengal event HPG guerillas are there, too. Again, the collaboration in the field becomes the subject of political interest arguments.

5.3. Helping Kobane!

The same thing can also be seen in Kobani. Kobani is one of the cantons, declared by PYD at the beginnig of 2014 (27th January-the end of December 2014) (Schmidinger 2014:132). After the Shengal events, in September 2014, ISIS militants attacked Kobani and thousands of settlers of the city crossed the Turkish border and stayed with Kurds in North as "visitors". PYD/YPG forces fought against ISIS militants for about five months and at the end Kurdish forces (PYD/YPG) repelled ISIS militants with the help of Peshmerga forces, who were sent from Kurdistan Region, and international air forces and on the 26th January 2015 Kobani was liberated.[20] The important thing here is the attitude of the society and Kurdish parties towards the siege and struggle of Kobani. As the siege of Kobani was harder, the nationalistic attitude of Kurds was stronger and this was called as Kurds' *growing sense of transnational identity*.[21] Along with increasing and spreading of "nationalistic" senses among Kurds, a worldwide sensibility arouse for the struggle of YPG forces against ISIS. After these developments and the struggle by the President of KRG Mesud Barzani, international forces supported Kobane insurgents with their

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18 http://www.rojevakurd.com/serok-barzani-mizginiya-azadkirina-singale-ragihand/   accessed: 14.02.2016

19 'Who liberated Shengal? was a subject of a program Rudaw tv broadcasting those days. For an argument on the Rudaw tv about the topic see. http://rudaw.net/kurmanci/onair/tv/episodes/episode/2ali_18112015 last seen: 14.10.2016

20 For a short story on the "Siege of Kobane" see: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29688108 last seen: 14.10.2016

21 http://time.com/4003737/kobani-isis-photos/ last seen: 12.10.2016

air forces and a month later peshmerga forces started off for Koban. In spite of all rivalries and enmities of Kurdish parties, Peshmerga forces' going for Kobane, the road they used for going, the attitude of Kurds in North towards peshmerga, who were going to Kobane, indicated the 'nationalistic' feelings of Kurds. On one hand, in spite of all the existing borders that were the remnants of the Sykes-Picot agreement, this case was viewed as a rejection of the same agreement[22] and the symbol of 'unity' and cooperation among Kurds.[23]Meanwhile, the statement of the politburo of YNK, (Kurdistan Homelands Union) in which it was claimed that "*the backup sent for YPG fighters was performed by YNK*",[24] reflected the 'nationalistic' attitude of Kurdish parties once again as together with PDK, YNK was the founder of KRG but it regarded this backup as a "party" support rather than a regional (or "national") one.

6. CONCLUSION

When World War I ended, international negotiations went on among the powerful forces of that time. The great Powers at that time were the French and English, and so the division of Middle East was undertaken according to their interests. Even though Kurds were in the field of battle, as they did not struggle as a 'nation' and their leaders and advisors did not cooperate as a union, they got away from the round table and as a consequence Kurds were disintegrated between three countries which were founded. After a century-old struggle they are trying to change their fate. In the South, the Kurdistan Regional Goverment, in the West Rojava Cantons, and in the North some cultural gains in Turkey seem as consequences of this struggle.

The physical disintegration of Kurds in a century has also affected their culture and manner. Although the debates in the world and Middle East effect Kurds and bring them closer emotionally, and the nationalistic senses, which let them imagine themselves as a community in four parts, make a progress, "unity" seems as a distant dream because of the mental disintegration and seperated politics, today.

22   Hiwa Ali (2014). "Yes, the Peshmerga broken Sykes-Picot", http://ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2014/11/state8632.htm last seen:14.10.2016

23   Isabel Coles (2014). "Kurds' battle for Syria's Kobani unites a people divided by borders", http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-kurds-idUSKBN0IK0DN20141031   last seen:15.10.2016;
      Necat Keskin (2014). "A Starting point towards 'unification' between Kurds: Peshmerga to Kobani", http://ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2014/10/syriakurd1628.htm last seen: 15.10.2016

24   For the YNK's statement see. http://www.pukmedia.com/EN/KK_Direje.aspx?Jimare=17283 and for a contradictory news: http://rudaw.net/turkish/Kurdistan/201020146 last seen: 15.10.2016

On one hand the "nationalistic" feelings among Kurds cross the drawn frontiers with the events such as Shengal and Kobane, on the other hand these feelings are reproduced within the same frontiers by Kurdish parties and organisations one more time. Enmity, rivalry and conflict between the Kurdish parties and leaders throw these nationalistic feelings of Kurds aside. In other words, while Kurdish society/(ies) act as "imagined community" beyond any "individual" interest, it is seen that Kurdish political organization still hesitate to accept "sharing power" among each other, and also accept each others "governance". The crisis in the Kurdistan Region (leadership, finance, referendum, the rivalry between Erbil and Suleymani) reflect this point, and also indicate the point of their "distance" from each other.

In conclusion, today as it was a century ago, there is a fight on the land where the Kurds live and the Kurds are in any case within this fight. However, being a "player" in the game and gaining a seat at the table seem to depend on political relationships and cooperation among the Kurdish political organizations, which represent the Kurds.

Authors note: As noted in the beginning, this article is based on a presentation in a conference held in May, 2016, taking into account the political circumstances of that time. There was neither a referandum nor happenings after the referandum which is also a worth case to work on. That's why there is no indication about the referandum, and its political outcomes here. But, even though it is a very "hot" and very recent topic to make a wide political analysis on, I have to say that what recently happening in Kerkuk province, rivallry, bilateral blaming of Kurdish political parties is compatible with the thesis defended in this article.

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