Administrative Legacies, Tribes, and the Kurdish Challenge to Nation-building in Turkey

Ebru Erdem

This article studies the political role of local authority structures and their impact on the success or failure of nationalist mobilization through a comparative analysis of the competing Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms under the Ottoman Empire and republican Turkey. Kurds have successfully resisted Ottoman centralization policies and republican nation-building projects. However, Kurdish nationalist movements have not been very successful in mobilizing large numbers of Kurds in the name of nationalism either. The paper argues that tribal social structure prevented the penetration of Ottoman or Turkish states and their centralizing or nationalist policies into the Kurdish society. Tribal structure also made it difficult for Kurdish nationalist movements to unify and mobilize members of numerous tribes under one banner; Kurdish nationalist attempts could gain significant support only after the tribal structure started to disintegrate since the 1960s. Utilizing the case of Kurds in Turkey, existing social authority structure is emphasized as a factor that determines the level of success of nation building projects by both states and ethno-nationalist movements.

Since the early years of its inception, Republic of Turkey faced a difficult challenge in administering the areas populated by the Kurds in eastern and southeastern Anatolia. The core of this challenge has been and remains to be the uneasy relationship between the state and the Kurdish society. The roots of the problematic state–Kurdish society relationships lie in the way the Ottoman Empire incorporated and administered the Kurds. Ottoman preference to administer the Kurds through the tribal leaders created a political culture with tribal authority at its center, and rendered the formal political institutions unable to penetrate the informal institutions built around the tribal structure. In what follows, I will first give a brief background about Kurdish

society and the central role of tribal organization. Then, I will present the impact of tribal

organization on Ottoman era centralization and direct rule attempts and early Kurdish nationalist

movements. After examining the development of political culture among the Kurds in both the

single party and the multiparty periods of the republican era and the factors that led to the rise of

the PKK, I conclude.

I.   Tribes in Kurdish Society

Kurds are the most populous non-Turkic group in Turkey, constituting an estimated range

of 5 to 20 per cent of Turkey's population and they are concentrated in southeastern Turkey.

Although political and economic incorporation of this region has been problematic since the

early years of the republic, the "Kurdish problem" has gained significant prominence in the

political agenda in Turkey in the past few decades. From 1984 until the capture of its leader

Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) carried out an armed insurgency in

the region, which cost 30,000 lives over 15 years and continues staging intermittent attacks from

their bases in Northern Iraq. Democratic People's Party (DEHAP), an explicitly pro-Kurdish

political party, won 4 provincial and 33 district municipalities in this region in the 2004 local

elections; its successor Democratic Society Party (DTP) currently has 20 deputies in the

parliament.[1] Only after 1980 has the Kurdish identity become a political identity over which

sizable numbers of Kurds engage in armed struggle or electoral competition in Turkey.

Despite variations in language, religion or economic life, Kurdish traditional society

shares tribal social organization and power of the *ağa*s (tribal chiefs) as common traits.

Although Kurds, who have traditionally been nomadic and semi-nomadic, have settled to a large

extent since the beginning of the 20th century, the social organization remained tribal. Kurdish

tribal system is based on kinship, both of blood and fictive. It is patriarchal and highly

hierarchical; different levels form bottom to top are family (*aile*), clan (*mal* or *sülale*), larger clan (*ocak* or *kabile*), tribe (*aşiret*), and tribal confederation (Yalçın-Heckmann 2002: Ch. 4, Bruinessen 1996: Ch.2).[2] Yalçın-Heckmann (2002: 136) contends that as the levels of observed hierarchy gets higher, importance of blood ties and ancestry decreases and importance of connection to the land increases.[3]

The tribe is both a social and an economic organization. Kurds traditionally engage in animal husbandry, as well as agriculture in the lowlands and plains. Common tribal ownership of pastures and sharecropping arrangements within the tribe and its function as a social security provider give the tribal organization economic significance, which in turn reinforces the power of the tribe. Besides being at the center of economic livelihood, the tribe also provides physical protection and plays an important role in resolution of conflicts, which may otherwise trigger blood feuds, escalate and result in many deaths from either side (Bruinessen 1996: 64-73). Small scale intra-tribal conflicts are resolved by encouraging the conflicting parties to put their differences aside for the good of the tribe. Larger conflicts are taken to the *ağa*, who mediates between the two parties, setting monetary punishments if necessary. In the case of conflicts with an outsider, tribe members can count on the protection and backing of their tribe. Inter-tribal conflicts tend to be more difficult to resolve because they are often by-products of ongoing inter-tribal rivalries. They are generally mediated by impartial religious leaders (*sheikh*s) or government officials who are acceptable to both parties.

The *ağa* has a dual role: he is the authority figure who both mediates conflicts within the tribe and represents the tribe in relations with the outsiders (Bruinessen 1996: 81-5). Whether the matter is a dispute with another tribe over pasture or communication with the government officials, the *ağa* is given the authority to carry out these functions. The *ağa* "owns" the village

and he is entitled to part of the yield of the tribesmen's agricultural or husbandry activities, which is a form of taxation. He can be considered a king in the small kingdom of the tribe, and these mini-kingdoms have constituted the social, economic and political reality for most Kurds. Needless to say, tribes have also been the organizations through which the Kurds were connected to the larger political system and the state.

Kurdish ethnic identity has not always been the politically salient identity for the Kurds in Turkey. Although the category "Kurdish" has existed for centuries and although "Kurdish nationalism" was promoted in intellectual circles since the late 19th century, Kurds have not engaged in politics on ethnic terms until late 1970s. Tribal identity has traditionally been the politically salient identity, because the Kurdish society was organized around and integrated to the state and the political system through tribes and tribal confederacies since the Ottomans conquered the Kurdish inhabited regions in the East. The following section investigates the historical development of the relationships between Turkish states and Kurdish society.

II. State-Kurdish Society Relationships

a. *The Ottoman Period*

Kurdish areas in modern-day Turkey and Iraq were conquered by the Ottomans in the early 16th century and stayed under Ottoman sovereignty until the end of the First World War. Incorporation of Kurdistan into the Ottoman Empire marks the beginning of eastward expansion of the Empire, and coincides with the expansion of the Empire beyond the Ottoman heartlands in Anatolia and the Balkans.[4] The heartland was administered through a very elaborate centralized system, named *tımar* or *dirlik* system.[5] In Kurdistan, however, a system of indirect rule was established through the superimposition of the *tımar* system onto the tribal social structure of the region. Under this indirect administrative system, land officially belonged to the Ottoman state

and was divided into villages (*tımar/dirlik)*, districts (*sancak/beylik)* and provinces (*vilayet)*. The provinces were governed by the governor (*beylerbeyi*) who was appointed by the central government as in the rest of the Empire. However, in Kurdistan there were three types of districts: ordinary districts, Kurdish districts (*Ekrad beyliği*) and Kurdish government (*Kürd hükümeti*).

Ordinary districts were governed by the *tımar* system, as in the Ottoman heartland; their governors (*sancakbeyi*s) were appointed by the central government. Kurdish districts were semi-autonomous units, governed by Kurdish notables; chiefs of tribal confederacies (*mir*s) became *sancakbeyi*s. As in the ordinary districts, the Kurdish *sancakbeyi*s were required to collect taxes and raise cavalrymen and were subjected to the authority of the provincial governor; however, unlike the administrators under the *tımar* system, the Kurdish *sancakbeyi*s were not rotated, they continued to rule the peasantry over whom they had their traditional authority. Moreover, the position of the *sancakbeyi* was hereditary, it remained within the family. Kurdish governments (*Kürd hükümeti*) were fully autonomous entities established in the inaccessible districts. They did not have to pay taxes or contribute to the provincial governor's army; their governors were chosen by locals, not the provincial governor (Özoğlu 2004: 53-9, Bruinessen 1996: 151-175, McDowall 2000: 28).

Incorporation of the Kurdish notables into the Ottoman administrative system through the creation semi-autonomous or fully-autonomous administrative entities was mutually beneficial. Ottomans needed tax revenues and a buffer against the Persian Empire, and the Kurdish district governors were loyal to the Empire, provided taxes to the central treasury and soldiers to the provincial governor's army. In return, the Istanbul government gave these notables the support and protection of an Empire, and allowed them to govern their districts independent of

interference from the center. That is, the Kurdish *sancakbeyi*s became Ottoman administrators who exerted traditional authority over local Kurds.

The autonomy in local government and the official political title bestowed by the central government resulted in the consolidation of the tribal authority. During this period of indirect rule, tribal territory was officially defined and traditional leaders established their undisputed authority under the patronage of the state. The Ottomans imposed an administrative hierarchy, which also structured the means of access to patronage. This hierarchical system restructured social stratification and social classes within the Kurdish society –while the tribe members (*aşiret*) gained power and prestige, Kurds or Christians who were not tribe members (*reaya*) were rendered a lower caste (Özoğlu 2004, Bruinessen 1996).

The semi-autonomy of the Kurdish emirates continued until the 19th century when the empire had reached the limits of its expansion. At this time, revenue from conquests had diminished, the periphery was under the influence of nationalist movements from Europe, and losses against the Russians in the war of 1806-1812 confirmed the perception in the periphery that the Empire was getting weaker.

In response to the need to find new revenue and in order to preempt any revolts in the periphery, a new Land Code was issued in 1858 (Macauley 2001: 345, Karpat 1972). According to the new Land Code, all land was to be registered at the land registry (*tapu*) office, which would then grant individuals the possession (but not ownership) rights to the land. The Code aimed at centralizing the administration of land and tax collection, and also at undermining the role of local notables by eliminating their role as intermediaries between the state and the individual. Sedentarization of semi-nomadic tribes and involuntary relocation of the tribal leaders were two immediate methods utilized towards centralization. However, the Land Code

was a failure in Kurdistan, because the tribal chiefs exploited the system by getting the land registries in their own names. Although the Land Code was intended to give possession rights of land to the individuals working the land, it resulted in the consolidation of the land in the tribal chiefs' hands (Karpat 1972: 273, Köksal 2006: 487).

In addition to the Land Code, the Ottoman government introduced administrative restructuring in Kurdistan. These administrative reforms, which aimed at increased centralization, curtailed the autonomy enjoyed by the local notables in the region. An imperial order of 1846 created the province of Kurdistan, which was to encompass the province of Diyarbakır, districts of Van, Muş, and Hakkari, and the sub-districts of Cizre, Botan, and Mardin.[6] The governor of this super-province was centrally appointed, as were the administrators who increasingly replaced the semi-autonomous Kurdish governors of the Kurdish districts and sub-districts. The military forces of the Kurdish tribes were integrated into a new militia (the Hamidiye militia), which was placed under the direct control of the state (Özoğlu 2004: 65-67, Bruinessen 1996: 175-189, McDowall 2000: Chs. 3 and 4, Aytar 1992: 53-85).

The new administrative system in Kurdistan had two consequences: First, the failure to carry out the Land Code as intended increased the power of the tribal chiefs over the people. While tribal chiefs turned into landlords, the peasants became sharecropping serfs. Second, those Kurdish notables who were replaced by centrally appointed administrators were mostly relocated to Istanbul. The descendants of these relocated Kurdish notables became the Kurdish intellectuals who pioneered Kurdish nationalism in the Young Turk era.

The Land Code and administrative centralization undermined the power of the notables, but could not achieve the intended results. This failure created a power vacuum that led to two

different revolts (Özoğlu 2004: 70-7, Bruinessen 1996: 177-180, Jwaideh 2004: 121-142, Ch. 4, McDowall 2000: 45, 53). These revolts are considered as the first Kurdish nationalist revolts; however, neither the objectives nor the means of mobilization were nationalist. Bedirhan Pasha of the Botan emirate revolted against the division of his territory among two different administrative units (1847) and Shaikh Ubeydullah of the Naqshibandi religious order revolted in 1880, in order to fill the vacuum of power created by the demise of the emirates. Bedirhan Pasha's revolt was strictly along tribal lines, he only claimed the territory of his tribe. Shaikh Ubeydullah's revolt drew support from various tribes; however, this cross-tribal alliance was possible only because the revolt was framed in religious terms.

Although these two revolts were *not* nationalist in their objectives, the descendents of the families of Bedirhan Pasha and Shaikh Ubeydullah were among the pioneers of the Kurdish organizations established in Istanbul in the second Constitutional (Young Turk) period (1908-1920).[7] By 1908, there was a sizable community of Kurdish intellectuals in Istanbul, mostly consisting of members of notable families who were relocated to Istanbul. They were well aware of the fact that the Empire was falling apart and that Armenians were fighting for independence, claiming also the northernmost territory of Kurdistan. These intellectuals established a few Kurdish organizations, such as the Society for the Rise and Progress of Kurdistan (*Kurdistan Ta'ali ve Terakki Cemiyeti*) and Hope Kurdish Student Society (*Hevi Kürt Talebe Cemiyeti*), which were the first modern political organizations based on Kurdish identity. Although they remained loyal to the Ottomanist ideology until the end, they developed the ideal of a Kurdish state to avoid Armenian or Turkish sovereignty over all or part of Kurdistan in case the empire fell apart (Bozarslan 2003: 166-7, Özoğlu 2004: 77-64, Klein 2007, Vedat 1980: Ch. 3, Malmisanij 2002). By the end of the Empire, there were yet no Kurdish nationalist movements,

but the ideological roots of Kurdish nationalism were sown among the Kurdish elites, especially in Istanbul.

b. Early Republican Period

The two-decade period from the establishment of the Republic to the Second World War was a period of reform and consolidation in Turkey. Under the presidency of Atatürk, many social, political and economic reforms were undertaken. In the Southeast, however, the agenda was integration rather than reform and consolidation. The government had to suppress Kurdish revolts, extend its administrative authority and promote Turkish nationalism in the region.

Between 1924 and 1937, twenty-one uprisings took place in the Southeast (Vedat 1980: 67-148). Most of them were revolts staged by a tribal chief or a group of tribal chiefs who opposed government policies. They revolted because they did not want to wear the hats introduced by the modernizing reforms (Pervari 1926), they feared relocation to the West (Haverki tribe, Mardin 1926), refused to pay taxes (Buban tribe, Mutki, 1934) or defended tribe members who were criminals (Zilan and Bekiran tribes, Siirt1928 and Siirt 1935). These were organized along tribal lines, and although they were anti-state, they were not nationalist.

The two nationalist uprisings in this era are those of Shaikh Said (1925) and Ihsan Nuri (1926), and they demonstrate how Kurdish nationalism failed because of the persistence of tribalism.[8] Shaikh Said revolt was an anti-state rebellion which had a nationalist ideology but a religious discourse. The ideological basis of this revolt was outlined by the clandestine Kurdish political party, *Azadi* (freedom). Shaikh Said, a religious leader of the Naqshbendi order who had significant following north of Diyarbakır, convinced the leaders of the party that the ideal of freedom should be put into action and Kurds ought to revolt against the Kemalists. The government had abolished the Caliphate (1924), started to relocate tribal and religious leaders to

the West and had been settling Turks in expropriated Kurdish lands. The organizers of the revolt used these grievances as well as religious rhetoric and tribal connections to generate following. The insurgency continued for two months but eventually failed because its support base was limited to Zaza tribes and because the urban Kurds did not join it (Entessar 1992: 84, Bruinessen 1996: Ch. 5, Mumcu 1998).

The second revolt started in 1926 in the Mount Ararat region and rebels were able to gain control over a large territory in eastern Turkey for four years. The revolt was led by a former officer, Ihsan Nuri Pasha, who organized and trained tribal militias. It was supported by the nationalist *Khoyboun* movement, which was established by exiled Kurdish intellectuals in Syria and Lebenon. With the tacit support of Shah Reza of Iran for this revolt, the insurgents could freely escape to Persian territory. The Turkish military suppressed the revolt once Turkey and Iran arrived at an agreement on territorial disputes and established friendly relations.

The revolts of the early Republican period show that mobilization was along tribal lines even if the movement had a nationalist ideology. The tribal structure in the Southeast facilitated a small-scale insurgency, but it also prevented successful nationalist insurgency as it proved difficult to unite a significant number of tribes under a nationalist banner. Besides the tribal divisions, the divide between rural and urban Kurds has impeded Kurdish unity. The insurgencies of the single-party period were pioneered by nationalist intellectuals or notables, and fell short of mobilizing a majority of Kurdish tribes or having equally strong urban and rural bases. Repeating the Ottoman policies of centralization, notable families of rebellious tribes were relocated to the West as a response to the revolts, but the heavy hand of the state was far from being able to fill the authority vacuum created by the relocations.

Tribal social organization presented a challenge to Kurdish unity and prevented the rise of a Kurdish nationalist movement. However, it also made it difficult for the state to exert its presence, institute direct, centralized patronage networks in the region, or to promote its own nationalist policies. Political participation in local and national level politics has been along tribal lines. Starting from the single party period, political parties have found it more effective to utilize these informal social organizations to garner support even if the official state ideology has been eradicating traditional loyalties along egalitarian and nationalist principles. While political parties have become the intermediaries between the citizen and the state in other parts of the country, in the Southeast tribal chiefs (*ağa*s) assumed this role. The state, the political parties and the citizens *needed* the *ağa* to be able to reach each other in the Southeast.

Under the single party period, similar patronage methods were used in all parts of the country. For the vast majority of people living in villages, the state meant the tax collector, the gendarmerie and conscription to the military. However, social and political integration of the East and the Southeast was lagging behind. Sayarı (1977: 110) pinpoints the factors that explain this lag:

> In the periphery of several provinces, state authority is only marginal and some of the functions which should normally be performed by the state (e.g. distribution of justice, maintenance of law and order) are carried out by tribal leaders and sheikhs. Several factors, such as (a) the absence of adequate communication facilities between villages and the outside world, (b) the extreme segmentation of society among numerous tribal groups and religious orders, and (c) the existence of a large Kurdish minority have all exacerbated the problem of integration.

As the single party, Republican People's Party (CHP), expanded its nationwide organization, it sought local party representatives. In the West, the representatives were either town merchants or landlords; in the East it was the *ağa* (Güneş-Ayata 1990, 1994, Özbudun

1981, Sayarı 1977, Stirling1965, Szyliowicz 1966).[9] That is, the single party reached out to the citizens through readily available local patronage networks, which was more effective because the citizens were alien to the center or suspicious of the major political and social reforms taking place at the center. The readily available local patronage network happened to be the tribe among the Kurdish population.

c. Multi-Party Period

Transition to the multi-party system marks the divergence of the paths of the East and the West in terms of political institutionalization in Turkey. The first competitive elections were held in 1946, but did not result in a change of government. The opposition to CHP, Democrat Party (DP), won the following the parliamentary elections in 1950. The democratization of the political system coincided with rapid economic and social change after the Second World War. However, modernization had different implications and consequences in the West and in the Kurdish populated Southeast.

The single party regime had introduced radical reforms in every aspect of life, from the political institutions to the alphabet, from secularism to head-wear. People of Turkey became citizens as opposed to being subjects of a Sultan or members of an Islamic community (*ummah*). These reforms were consolidated and carried further in the post-war era as governments conducted mass education campaigns and undertook infrastructural and industrial investments with the impetus given by the Marshall Plan aid. Industrialization and international trade resulted in the incorporation of the agricultural hinterland to the national economy, which was heavily controlled and directed by the state (Ahmad 1993).

The most significant result of transition from a single party regime to a multiparty regime was political competition. Economic reforms had started the "awakening" of the rural

population, which constituted about 80 per cent of the country's population at the time (Metz 1995). Through the integration of markets, villagers came to the understanding that they were part of a larger national entity. The changes and the prospects of the national market made the villagers pay more attention to the developments at the center. In this era of transformation that inspired Daniel Lerner's *The Passing of the Traditional Society*, integrated markets obliterated the perception of isolation while political competition gave those in the countryside the feeling of empowerment.

When the DP was expanding its national organization before the elections of 1946, they used exactly the same method as CHP: co-opting the local leader. Unsurprisingly, the local rival of the CHP representative became the DP representative, landlords and town merchants continued to be the links between Ankara and the people. Party competition often got enmeshed with local disputes or rivalries, kinship or lineage loyalties were extended to political parties (Stirling1965, Güneş-Ayata 1994). Güneş-Ayata (1994: 53) argues that "[t]he peasants, through the mediation of party notables, identified with political parties as with family loyalties. In this sense, "party" became a part of primary identity."

The change of government by popular vote for the first time in 1950, though, changed the role and the profile of these intermediaries. Empowered by their role as voters, people realized they had a say in national politics. In a time when the village economy was integrated to the national markets, they expected more than employment as sharecroppers or credit from their political representatives. They preferred to vote for individuals who had education, who "knew the ways of the government," and who had good connections in the local administration and the political parties. Voters chose the political party whose delegates served them better, which reduced the incentive for the political parties to sign up notables counting on their power to cater

votes. Gradually, traditional patrons, landlords and town merchants, were replaced by

professional patrons as political agents.[10] Heper and Keyman (1998: 261) single out the DP

period as the beginning of "the exercise of political patronage in return for votes," and the

transformation of both the orientation of the polity and the political elites (Also see Mardin 1973:

185).

In the West patronage relationships became more politicized, and traditional patrons were

replaced by professional politicians. However, in the Southeast a similar socioeconomic

transformation did not take place, leaving local dependency relationships and the role of

traditional patrons intact. While the social landscape changed with industrialization, integration

of markets, and education[11] in the West, emigration to urban centers was the only significant

change in the Southeast. National politics and its benefits continued to trickle down through the

*ağa*s.

In the Southeast, politics in the multi-party period still had to follow the tribal lines.[12]

Neither the state's administrative institutions nor the political parties could change the primacy

of the tribal order; quite the contrary, they reinforced it by allying with the tribal authorities. In

the West, the state had full authority even if it was alien to the people, but in the Southeast

establishing authority proved difficult and only possible by co-optation of the *ağa*s.[13] Multiparty

politics did not empower the people as in the West, it only made the *ağa*s more powerful. DP,

for example, brought the *ağa*s who were resettled in the West by the earlier CHP governments

back and used them as the DP agents in the region (McDowall 2000: 398-9). Political parties

competing for votes simply meant there were more opportunities for the *ağa*s to extract resources

from the center (Yalçın-Heckmann 1990: 307). Voters in the West could use their vote to

demand better services and more able local representatives from the political parties; however,

those in the Southeast were tribe members before they were citizens. Tribes voted "en bloc" for the *ağa*'s candidate, which in turn strengthened the *ağa*'s hand in his negotiations with the political parties.[14]

Bruinessen (1996: 75) discusses how party competition through the *ağa*s reinforced the historical tribal rivalries, boundaries, and thus tribal authority. He maintains:

> For ambitious chieftains the important dichotomy was not between "the rival tribe" and "my own tribe" but "the power resources my rivals are tapping" vs. "the power resources I might tap." From a very early date this environment included not only other tribes and powerful chieftains but also powerful states. The manipulation of the central state in order to get the upper hand in local, tribal conflict is a recurrent theme in Kurdish history.

One such case was in Hakkari, where the competition between the two historical tribal confederations, Pinyanish and Ertushi, became especially significant in parliamentary elections for the single representative of the province to the assembly. Opponents in inter and intra tribal rivalries attached themselves to competing political parties, and used the increased patronage provision during election years to gain the upper hand in the local power struggles.

The socioeconomic changes that were instrumental in the empowerment of voters in the West did not take place in the Southeast until the 1970s. The need for intermediaries between individuals and the state was more acute in the Southeast, because the people were less educated and because some Kurds could simply not communicate with the representatives of the state due to language barriers. However, they did not have any alternative local political leaders but the *ağa*s to turn to; those who had education or who had good connections left for the urban centers and never came back to challenge the *ağa* as professional politicians. Because the economic integration to the national markets did not take place, people of the region remained isolated; access to pasture land remained their priority in the absence of opportunities that could have

been provided by the integration. In this setting, tribe and the *ağa* were inalienable resources, because pasture lands belong to the tribes and are defended by the tribesmen. As a result, politics remained a tribal affair and competitive national elections became another arena to display inter-tribal rivalries.

As mentioned above, the most significant change within the Kurdish society in Turkey was immigration. Starting in late 1950s Kurds immigrated to the urban centers in the Southeast, especially Diyarbakır, and after mid-1960s increasingly to the West, primarily Istanbul and Ankara, for work and education. As opposed to the involuntary relocations of notable Kurdish families in the earlier eras, the new wave of migration was voluntary, increasingly larger in scale and by the tribesmen, not notables. Some of these, especially those who were university students, became active in the leftist movement[15] and in various Kurdish national movements splintering from the leftist movement. The urban Kurdish intellectuals published many nationalist newspapers and magazines such as Forward Country (*Ileri Yurt,* 1958), Tigris-Euphrates (*Dicle-Fırat,* 1962), Voice (*Deng,* 1962), Road to Liberty(*Riya Azadi/Özgürlük Yolu,* 1974), and Sun of the Homeland (*Roja Welat,* 1977), as well as establishing many nationalist movements and organizations such as Eastism (*Doğuculuk,* 1958), the conservative Democratic Party of Turkish Kurdistan (KDPT, 1965), Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearths (DDKO, 1969), and Socialist Party of Kurdistan (KSPT, 1975).[16] Kurdish movements were suppressed by the juntas of the 1960 and 1971 coups, but they were revived when the power was returned to the civilians. After the 1980 coup, though, only one Kurdish nationalist organization was able to show a notable presence within Turkey: the PKK.

Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan, PKK) was established by Abdullah (Apo) Öcalan and his friends in 1978 in Ankara, where they were university students

(Birand 1992). They had been active in Revolutionary Youth (Dev-Genç), a leftist organization, but decided to break away from the leftist movement all together. While the other Kurdish organizations either ceased to exist or continued their existence as intellectual movements operating outside Turkey after the 1980 coup, the PKK continued its activities in Turkey and started an insurgency 1984.

d. Post-1980 Period

The coup of 1980 was the beginning of a new era with radical changes in Turkish politics. Kurdish nationalism took a new turn after the coup as well. The PKK took up arms in 1984 and continued its armed struggle until 1999, when the leader of the organization was captured, tried and sentenced.[17] Until 1984, Kurdish identity had been the subject of intellectual debates and the basis of urban youth movements. After the coup of 1980, Kurdish identity became a politically salient issue countrywide, because the PKK took the struggle to the Southeast and challenged the establishment from the Kurdish regional base rather than from the urban centers of the West.

The military coup in September 1980 was different from the earlier coups of 1960 and 1971 in terms of the duration of military rule and the depth of its impact on the political system. The military junta held the government until 1983, and in the period until the return to civilian rule, they introduced a new constitution, amended many of the laws related to political activity, and established institutions aimed at institutionalizing the role of the military as a veto player.[18] Blaming the liberal 1960 Constitution for the political factionalism, social polarization and rampant terrorism in the 1970s, they put severe restrictions on political activity. Political activists and intelligentsia of both the left and right were either detained or had to flee the

country. Abdullah Öcalan and his friends were able to escape the heavy hand of the military regime, as they had left for Syria just before the coup (Birand 1992).

Leaders of the PKK had sought political power within the leftist movements through the 1970s. Failing to put the "Kurdish issue" high up on the leftist agenda, they had, as early as 1977, established an independent organization whose ideology combined a Marxist-Leninist class struggle and a Kurdish nationalist struggle. They identified their enemies as: "fascists (Greywolves and similar groups); agents of the state and those who supported them' the Turkish Left which subordinated the Kurdish question to the leftist revolution and finally the exploitative Kurdish landlord class" (McDowall 2000: 419; also see Birand 1992, Ballı 1993). They chose to carry out their activities in the Southeast before the coup, because that was where their "enemy" was. They targeted local *ağa*s, especially those who were agents of the state.[19] PKK's first terrorist activity was a failed assassination attempt on Mehmet Celal Bucak, a tribal leader and a deputy from Siverek, Şanlıurfa in 1979.

Support for the PKK initially came from urban working class Kurds with strong leftist ideology. PKK's stance against the local versions of exploitation, their attacks on the *ağa*s and the landlords won them the support of increasing numbers of rural Kurds. In the 1950s, the educated locals had professionalized local politics in western Turkey. These new elites got educated and accumulated wealth in the urban areas and they returned to replace the landlords and town merchants as political intermediaries. In the 1980s, the Kurds finally returned to their own towns to save the people from the *ağa*s, but they came as militants of the PKK, and they were saving the people by terrorist means.[20] Although their cruelty and atheism did not fare well with the people, they gained considerable voluntary support because of their resistance against the state and its local agents.[21] The ruthlessness of the state response strengthened the PKK

claim to be the savior of the Kurdish nation from exploitation of the state in the hearts and minds of the Kurdish people. However, this was not enough for the Kurdish nationalist ideas to succeed.

The state did not take the PKK seriously in its early years. Turgut Özal, the Prime Minister at the time, considered the PKK "a handful of bandits," so did high ranking military officers (Cemal 2003: 72). By 1985, however, the state was aware of the need to take special precautions to deal with the PKK, because it had acquired a large following and staged several terrorist attacks. By 1990s, the "Kurdish problem" had become a national issue. The PKK had grown stronger and it was visible both in the Southeast and the rest of the country that it had achieved to gain the support of a significant number of Kurds. It was said that in certain towns (for example, Cizre and Şırnak) the state controlled during the day, and PKK reigned through the night. Terrorism and secession became a major concern throughout the country; opinion polls showed people of Turkey were more concerned about "the Southeast" than the inflation rates of 80 per cent.

Since the legacy of administering the Kurds was inherited from the Ottoman predecessors, it should not be a surprise that the crisis management methods adopted to deal with the problem replicated those of the late Ottoman era: centralization and state-sponsored local militias. In April 1985, the Village Law was amended to create the village guards and in July 1987 The State of Emergency (OHAL) regional governorship was established. Over a century later, the Turkish State's solution for the centrifugal tendencies in the Southeast was, once again, establishing tribal militias and creating a special administrative unit encompassing the whole region. The village guard system was reminiscent of the *Hamidiye* militias and the OHAL

regional governorship was *Kürdistan Vilayeti* (province) resurrected (McDowall 2000: 421-3, Aytar 1992: Ch. 10).

The village guard system, which involved co-opting only some tribes in order to "divide and rule," prevented Kurds from unifying behind the PKK, but probably exacerbated the violence. Tribes that did not agree to join the system faced violent reprisals by the state; for example, some villages were burned. On the other hand, tribes that did agree to provide village guards became easy targets for the PKK. It was much easier for the PKK to raid on the guards' villages than to attack military posts. The "*caş*"[22] and their families, including the women and children, deserved death as per the PKK. The introduction of the village guard system gave the *ağa*s another resource to tap in their attempt to benefit from the rivalry between the state and the PKK. If a tribe became village guards, a rival tribe could harbor the PKK to inflict costs on their village guard rivals. Although the PKK had an anti-tribe discourse, it did not refrain from utilizing the tribes in practice. Tribes played the state and the PKK against each other, but they were also caught in the violence between both sides.

OHAL regional governorship was a supra-administrative unit that dealt with terrorism in the region. The Governor-General provided coordination among different security forces that fought the guerillas and had the authority to enable censorship and to restrict civil rights. The Governor-General could restrict the publication of news from the area in the national newspapers, even the PKK guerillas complained about this invisible informational curtain between the region and the rest of the country (Odabaşı 2001).[23] They were probably right in their complaints, because people living outside the Southeast got a skewed picture of the events in the region. The OHAL region was off limits to those who did not have relatives there because

it was dangerous and because of the discouraging effect of the heavy military controls in the region.

The centralization attempts also encompassed forced displacements, which aimed at accumulating dispersed rural settlements into accessible, more urban areas. Forced displacements are reminiscent of the Ottoman attempts to sedentarize the tribes; however, unlike sedentarization, displacements did succeed to a large extent, albeit at great humanitarian cost (Jongerden 2001). The gradual disintegration of the tribal authority since the late 1970s has probably expedited the displacements and was also accelerated by the process of displacements itself.

The success of these policies in abating PKK terrorism and integrating the Kurdish society into Turkey socially, economically and politically is debatable at best. Just like their counterpart policies Ottoman Empire adopted as it was losing its grip in the area, centralization through a regional government, sponsoring pro-state militias based on the tribal system, and forcibly changing residency patterns did not solve the administrative and identity related problems. In many cases, they were counterproductive; alienating the Kurdish population or strengthening the tribal authority. It is true that these policies, which reinforced the tribal identities and rivalries, prevented the unification of Kurds under the banner of Kurdish nationalism. However, they also represent a missed opportunity to reach the Kurds without intermediaries, and make them real citizens, and have Turkish nationalist policies have some resonance in the region.

III.   Discussion and Conclusions: Nation building theories and Kurds

This paper argues that there is considerable continuity in the ways Ottoman Empire and Republic of Turkey administered the Kurdish society which lived within their realm. Both of

them refrained from administering the Kurds directly, utilized the tribal authority of the traditional Kurdish social structure. Even though the political system changed from monarchy to republic, and even though political regime experienced gradual democratization, the tribal authority remained the intermediaries between the state and the Kurdish society. Turkish nationalism could penetrate the Kurdish society only as much as the tribal authority allowed it to, national identity could not trump the tribal identities.

Kurdish nationalism also had to compete with the tribal authority. Throughout history, tribal organization and the rivalries it unavoidably generates prevented a successful union of Kurds. Kurdish nationalist movements, including the PKK to a large extent, inevitably had to yield to the primacy of the tribe and instill nationalism through tribal authority.

Since the late 1970s, the tribal structure of the Kurds is disintegrating as a result of socioeconomic development, urbanization, and most importantly, massive emigration (Barkey and Fuller 1998: Ch. 3). Turkish state and political parties still insist on allying themselves with the tribes; however, they are increasingly finding that attempts to breathe life into the tribal structure will not bring them back. What the Ottoman Empire and the republican Turkey could not achieve through policies of centralization or divide and rule, these socioeconomic changes and development did. Kurds are finally getting integrated to the society and politics of Turkey, not as tribal subjects but as citizens; and successful electoral challenges of pro-Kurdish political parties are manifestations of this process of integration (Erdem 2006).

At times of crisis, both the empire and the republic adopted policies to weaken the tribal system and tribal authority in a top down fashion. Interestingly, the republican administrations did not learn from the Ottoman era failures; quite the contrary, they employed the same methods. Those methods continued to fail, until socioeconomic change penetrated into the Kurdish society

and changed it bottom-up. The Kurds, who were left to be subjects of *ağa*s by the center for

centuries, are becoming free; and their vote is still up for grabs to a large extent. The Kurdish

areas are strongholds for the pro-Kurdish parties not because the people have become Kurdish

nationalists, but because until recently they were the only political parties that tried to mobilize

the individual Kurds. It is not a surprise that the currently governing Justice and Development

Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) has been able to credibly challenge the pro-Kurdish

DTP; it has been attempting to reach the people through emphasizing their religious identity over

ethnic or tribal identities and providing patronage individually. If political parties of the center

give up the easy alliances with the *ağa*s and compete for Kurdish votes directly, the empowered

Kurdish population can finally be anchored to Ankara. This will not ensure a success for

Turkish nationalism or a failure of Kurdish nationalism; but it is likely to curb secessionism and

secessionist violence.

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[1] In the 2004 local (municipal) elections, DEHAP competed as a part of a coalition with minor

left parties. According to the 2002 general (parliamentary) election results, DEHAP had gained

more than 30 per cent of the votes in ten provinces, all of which are in the Southeast. The party

had won 6.2 per cent of the votes nationwide, but could not acquire seats in the parliament due to

the 10 per cent national threshold. The successor party DTP's candidates ran independently to

avoid the national threshold in the parliamentary elections of July 2007, and obtained seats in the

parliament despite the 5.2 per cent overall vote share of the independents.

[2] There is no local terminology for tribal confederations but tribal rivalries have caused tribes

group into confederations, they form wings (*kanat*) or sides (*taraf*).

[3] While the family is named after the ancestor (father), clans are named after either the ancestor or the territory, and tribes are named after the territory they reign (Yalçın-Heckmann 2002: 136).

[4] The word "Kurdistan" denotes the areas which were part of the "Kurdistan vilayeti," an administrative unit in the Ottoman Empire, and does not relay a political statement.

[5] This administrative system had been developed throughout the early expansion of the Empire and it was made official through the laws of Mehmet II (the Conqueror). When new land was conquered, it was surveyed and divided into administrative units such as *dirlik* (village), *sancak* (district) and *eyalet/beylerbeylik* (province), administered by *sipahi* (leader of cavalrymen), *sancakbeyi* (district governor, leader of the *sancak*) and *vali/beylerbeyi* (provincial governor) respectively. All of these administrators were military men. They were responsible for administrating the land assigned to them, and raising and maintaining soldiers with the taxes they collect from the peasants living on this land. In time of military expedition, all cavalrymen in the province joined the Ottoman army under the leadership of the *vali/beylerbeyi*. The land assignments to the administrators were made on a rotating basis, which ensured that the administrators did not become local strongmen but rather continued to owe their position and power to the central government. See İnalcık(2000: Ch. 13) and Barkey (1994) on the Ottoman administrative system.

[6] See Özoğlu (2004: 60-63) for details of the history of the province. The name of the province was changed to "Diyarbakir Province" in 1867.

[7] See Ülker (2005) for a discussion of Ottoman "Turkification" policies and their consequences in the Second Constitutional era.

[8] The "Dersim Revolt" of 1937 was a guerilla style rebellion led by three tribal chiefs, it did not have a nationalist agenda. However, it is significant because of its consequences. This was the

last revolt in the Southeast until the PKK insurgency. The government, probably to bring an end to these revolts, suppressed the Dersim revolt brutally and took suppressive measures in its aftermath. Because of the brutality of the state response, this revolt gained an important place in the contemporary Kurdish nationalist discourse (Entessar 1992: 86).

[9] The patron-client relationships in the West were mostly through sharecropping arrangements or credit opportunities.

[10] Güneş-Ayata (1990) studies CHP organization in two locales, one agricultural one industrializing. She observes this professionalization of local political agents in both.

[11] Especially significant is the role of those who get high education in the urban centers and go back to their towns, since the new professional political elite come from among them. See Güneş-Ayata (1990) for their role in CHP organization.

[12] Civic activism also followed the informal social organization. Bianchi (1984: 183, fn 31) demonstrates that provinces in East Central Anatolia, the regions inhabited by Alevis and Kurds, lag behind the Western provinces in terms of community associability. Bianchi argues that "[l]ow levels of community associability in these provinces do not necessarily indicate less communal solidarity among these minorities than exists for the dominant Turkish-speaking, Sunni majority. But the expression of that solidarity is far more likely to be informal rather than organized in groups that are required to register officially with the Ministry of Interior."

[13] Bruinessen has studied the effect of co-existing state and tribal authorities on resolution of conflicts. He informs that "[m]inor conflicts (e.g. on the demarcation of plots) are sometimes settled by the gendarmerie, but this also lacks the authority and credibility to play a conciliatory role in serious tribal conflicts." Within this "influence-vacuum" the differences between social organization and ideology in the region (tribal) and of the state and its representatives in the

region produced the result that "conflicts can go on endlessly, and at best peter out very slowly" (1996: 70). He also mentions a case where tribal leaders were eliminated by the state and the gendarmerie did not allow new chieftains to emerge. In this case, it was difficult to resolve conflicts in "either the traditional or the modern way" because although the traditional authority was eliminated, "[t]he modern authority of the state and its organs […] is not really accepted" (1996: 71).

[14] This is the reason behind the higher number of independent candidates from the region. Sayarı (1977: 110) and Özbudun (1981: 265-66) observe that the percentage of votes received by independent candidates in the East has been higher compared to other regions and votes swing from party to party each election. These indicate that traditional loyalties have not been superseded by party loyalties in the region.

[15] The ideological left-right cleavage was the most salient political cleavage starting in the 1960s. McDowall correctly states that this cleavage "constituted both a vehicle and camouflage for other contests: Turk versus Kurd, Sunni versus Alevi, Sunni versus secularist, artisan/trader class versus rural migrant and urban proletariat" (2000: 412). The social polarization along this cleavage caused many deaths and ended –interestingly overnight- after the 1980 military coup. See Birand (1987) for a detailed account of the events that led to the coup and the coup itself.

[16] See Ballı (1993: 48-9) for figure "Family Tree of Kurdish Organizations in Turkey," depicting the network of Kurdish organizations and their links with the leftist organizations in Turkey or Kurdish national organizations in Northern Iraq.

[17] During the summer of 2005, the PKK, under its newly adopted name KONGRA-GEL, performed attacks in the Southeast and bombings in tourist towns in the West. Although it has lost its strength and support base, the organization still continues its presence and activities.

[18] The changes in Political Parties Law (Law No. 2820), Law on Law on Meetings and Demonstration Marches (Law No. 2911), Law on Associations (Law No. 2908) restricted civic activism and severed the ties between civil society and the political parties. The military junta also established institutions for continued control over the government, the judiciary and the universities: National Security Council (MGK), State Security Courts (DGMs) and Higher Education Council (YOK), respectively.

[19] Öcalan, under the Marxist-Leninist rubric, has attacked tribalism for being backward in many of his writings, some of which are available at the Serxwebun webzine (in Turkish): http://www.serxwebun.com.

[20] Kadri Gürsel, a journalist kidnapped by the PKK, has observed that most of the guerillas in the mountains have been in the "West" and came back only to become terrorists (Gürsel 1996).

[21] White (2000: 157) reports Öcalan's response when he was asked about the social breakdown of PKK members. Öcalan confirms that in the beginning it was "mostly young people in the cities, intellectuals, the urban middle class" but by the 1990s the peasants became the major supporters.

[22] *Caş*, literally mule, is a Kurdish word for "collaborator, traitor", *işbirlikçi* in Turkish (pronounced "jash"). It originates from Kurds in Northern Iraq to refer to collaborators of the Saddam regime.

[23] The guerillas complained to Gürsel, the reporter they kidnapped, that the Turkish people would not keep silent if they knew what was really going on in the region (Gürsel 1999).

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