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## Introduction

Entering the twenty-first century, the problem of Kurdish nationalism remains one of the most explosive and critical predicaments in the Middle East. With an estimated population of 20–25 million Kurds living mostly in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, there is a little doubt that the Kurds constitute one of the largest ethnic groups in the world without a state of their own. In their efforts to establish their own state, Kurdish nationalist movements in the twentieth century were involved in many clashes with the governments of the states in which they resided. These confrontations claimed tens of thousands of lives, mainly those of civilians during the same period. In Turkey alone, the death toll for the most recent Kurdish uprising—that within the last decade and a half of the twentieth century—amounted to more than thirty thousand. At present, Kurdish nationalism is still regarded as a direct threat to the territorial integrity of the above-mentioned states by their respective governments; and the fear is not entirely unjustified. The Kurdish question is evidently transnational in the modern Middle East, but it is also international. Sizable Kurdish diaspora communities live and actively participate in nationalist politics in many European countries, most notably in Germany, France, and Norway. Hence, the nationalist aspirations of the Kurds are of keen interest to the greater international community.

Despite the pressing need to understand and explain the nature and origin of Kurdish nationalism, the subject regrettably remains poorly studied. There are several reasons for the lack of interest in studying Kurdish nationalism by mainstream scholarship in Middle Eastern Studies. The most visible one is political in nature. The politicization of Kurdish identity in the twentieth century is reflected in the polarization of the available scholarship, most of which has proven to be unreliable when subjected to vigorous academic scrutiny. Since Kurdish nationalism is regarded as a major threat to the territorial and political status quo in the Middle East, concerned states have discouraged scholars from directing their attention to the subject. In addition, because the access to primary sources has remained restricted and sporadic at best, scholars of the modern Middle East have turned their attention to more manageable topics with greater accessibility of source materials. With its international appeal, its

reachable reservoir of available information, and sufficient grants, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has emerged as the principal nationalist issue in the Middle East for the new generation of graduate students. The Palestinian issue has thus inescapably overshadowed Kurdish nationalism, becoming the de facto representative of the problem of Middle Eastern nationalism in the context of international politics.

In an ambitious attempt to free the study of Kurdish nationalism from its current marginal position and to bring it into mainstream scholarship in Middle Eastern Studies, this book examines the issue in the context of the Ottoman Empire. It focuses primarily on understanding the social, political, and historical forces behind the emergence and development of Kurdish nationalism in the Ottoman context out of which it was born. The Kurds became an indispensable part of this polyglot world empire in the sixteenth century, and after its breakup the majority of Kurds remained within the borders of its successor state, the Republic of Turkey. Therefore, interactions between the Ottoman state and the Kurds helped shape the political future of modern Turkey. Despite their significance, however, works on the Kurds also remain unjustifiably at the periphery of Turkish Studies, depriving the field of a major component of its subject matter. No doubt, Kurds are also an important part of the history of the Republic of Turkey. In any case, to understand the link between the Ottoman and the Republican periods, it is useful to look, albeit we can only do so very briefly, at the significance of the Kurdish issue in the emergence of the Republic of Turkey.

### **The Role of Kurdish Nationalism in the Emergence of the Turkish Republic**

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, concerns about the status of Kurdistan escalated and played a major role in the establishment of the emerging Turkish national state. For example, the Kurdish issue directly affected the drawing of Turkey's southeastern border. The Kemalists, in an attempt to draw their national boundaries, were not as tolerant of the idea of a separate Kurdistan as they were of the idea of separate Arab nations in Iraq and Syria. They were determined to keep Anatolia intact as the homeland of the new Turkish State. The idea of giving regional autonomy to Kurds might have been entertained, but to maintain the territorial integrity of the new state, secessionist Kurdish nationalism was never allowed.

Although the Misak-ı Milli (The National Pact), which determined the present boundaries of modern Turkey, was first ratified by the Ottoman Parliament, it was in fact the work of Mustafa Kemal and his friends, who, in the end, thought that the inclusion of Syria and Iraq in Turkey would be impossible to enforce.<sup>1</sup> However, the province of Mosul, with its large Kurdish population,

was included in the national boundaries stipulated by the Misak-ı Milli. Such a decision indicates, at least partly, that Kemalists made a distinction between the Arab and Kurdish populated territories of Iraq and relied on Kurds to side with them. The Kemalists' reluctance to allow the secession of the Kurds is further evident in the early Republican records. Prior to the opening of the Grand National Assembly (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi) on 23 April 1920, during the Erzurum and Sivas Congresses, a committee (namely the Heyeti Temsiliye or Counsel of Representatives) was established by the nationalists to investigate the issues facing a potential nationalist movement. Kurdish demands for the establishment of Kurdistan were briefly discussed, and the council concluded that even an autonomous Kurdish region would be dangerous for the future of the Turkish nationalist movement.<sup>2</sup>

However, ideas of a separate Kurdish state were circulating rapidly among the Kurdish leaders outside Anatolia. In Anatolia, several Kurdish revolts in the early Republican period made the Kemalists even more suspicious of the political loyalties of the Kurds. Although many local Kurdish tribal leaders, seeing the Kemalists as soldiers of Islam, supported the Anatolian resistance movement, there was substantial opposition to them as well. This Kurdish opposition, which constituted the backbone of early Kurdish nationalist leadership, sought alliances with the British and the Greeks, the sworn enemies of the Kemalist movement. Some Kurds in Istanbul, for example, were trying to establish a Kurdish state with the aid of British protection. Consequently, hard-line Turkish nationalists felt justified in their belief that Kurds were never to be trusted and that Kurdish nationalist aspirations had to be monitored carefully. The Republican period began with mistrust and suspicion of the Kurds and a well-founded fear of losing some of the remaining Ottoman territories, notably eastern Anatolia. As for the Kurds, an unfortunate period was about to begin, a period in which their political loyalties were always doubted. In the minds of some Turkish nationalists, any manifestation of Kurdish identity was and is a major threat to the indivisibility of the Republic of Turkey.

As indicated above, this book will discuss the development of Kurdish identity and its culmination to Kurdish nationalism; however, before discussing Kurdish nationalism, it is imperative to briefly review the scholarship on nationalism and to provide a working definition for the term. This will allow the reader to situate the present study within the theoretical spectrum of nationalism.

### **A Brief Discussion of Nationalism**

Nationalism has proven to be one of the most persistent and consequential political ideologies of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. A voluminous literature has been produced on the subject, yet scholars most often

take its meaning for granted. No doubt, the term provokes different meanings in different people's minds. Nationalism, like most social terms, proves to be very problematic. To date, there is no consensus among scholars as to what constitutes a nation and what defines nationalism. Hence, serious scholars—although amazed at the effects of nationalism on the human imagination—are challenged by the ambiguous nature of it.

It should be noted that shifting definitions of the term are also among the greatest assets of nationalism. This inadvertent flexibility provides nationalism with ideological compatibility. The term's variant meanings make nationalism seem to be compatible with even contradicting ideologies such as socialism, religion, secessionism, imperialism, anticolonialism, and fascism. Such a high degree of adaptability, unfortunately, does not allow a universal definition that both provides a scholarly ground for comparison and, at the same time, complies with indigenous variations.

Let us first look at selective works on nationalism and see how various thinkers have conceived of the term.

#### *Different Interpretations of Nationalism*

It is fair to say that students of nationalism can largely be distinguished by their adherence to two main schools of thought: the primordialist/essentialist and the constructionist. The primordialists or essentialists see nationalism as a pre-modern and persistent phenomenon. Nations, they believe, have existed since some distant point in history. Yet when they originated is not clear. Believing in the "essence" of a nation, the primordialists argue that humankind is "naturally" divided into distinct communities of history and culture called nations and that each nation is unique in its own nature. Nationalities, the chief agents of nationalism, distinguish themselves from one another by possessing certain objective characteristics such as common descent, shared culture, language, religion, and territory. This line of thinking finds its most ardent followers among romantic nationalists. Among the early-modern scholars, German idealists such as Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) and Johann G. Fichte (1762–1814) can be considered the early proponents of romantic nationalism. In his *Addresses to the German Nation*, Fichte preaches the unification of Germany, claiming it constitutes a distinct whole.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Herder also believed in the "national soul" of Germany. Herder stated (as paraphrased by Carleton H. Hayes) that:

An aggregate of human beings is first differentiated from another by peculiarities of geography and climate; then it develops distinctive historical traditions—an appropriate language, literature, education, manners, and customs; thereby it becomes a full-fledged nationality

possessed of a “folk-character,” a kind of “national soul,” and a truly national culture.<sup>4</sup>

Herder was an ardent believer in the essence of the German nation, and, his ideas constitute a good example of the early essentialist school. Nationalist views are more forcefully stated in the writings of Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–72), an Italian nationalist and political activist:

The nation is the God-appointed instrument for the welfare of the human race, and in this alone its moral essence lies. . . . Fatherlands are but workshops of humanity, [and] nationalism is what God had prescribed to each people in the work of humanity.<sup>5</sup>

Recent academic studies present more sophisticated arguments on the issue of a national essence. These studies argue that nations existed before the emergence of modern nationalism. Anthony D. Smith, a sociologist, proposes a variant of the primordialist argument and points out the continuity of nationalism through its agent *ethnie*. Smith claims that *ethnie* does not carry ethnic or racial connotations; it refers only to such dimensions as a common myth of descent, a shared history, a collective name, and a distinctive shared culture. Hence, nationalists are in fact “political archaeologists” trying to construct a nation by rediscovering and reinterpreting the past in order to reconstitute the community as a modern nation. Smith claims:

[The task of nationalists] is indeed selective—they forget as well as remember the past—but to succeed in their task they must meet certain criteria. Their interpretations must be consonant not only with the ideological demands of nationalism, but also scientific evidence, popular resonance and patterning of particular ethnohistories.<sup>6</sup>

Smith does not see the modern nation existing throughout history, yet he believes that the major ingredients, which paved the way to modern nationalisms, were present in history. In other words, perhaps not the whole essence of nation was present, but essential traits existed. Hence, the task of nationalists is nothing but to assemble these fragmentary essences into modern nations. Although Smith acknowledges the process of modernization and its role in the emergence of nationalism, placing him into this category is unavoidable, for he finds the origins of nations in the *ethnie*, a real entity embedded in history.

Geoff Eley and Ronald G. Suny, two prominent students of nationalism, see the influence of John Armstrong’s study *Nations before Nationalism*<sup>7</sup> on Smith. In his macrohistorical study, Armstrong argues that nationalities pre-date nationalism.<sup>8</sup> He does not deny that national identities are created, but

does argue that they existed before nationalism. It is this very point that also constitutes the core of Miroslav Hroch's categorization of nationalism. In his well-known theory, Hroch suggests three phases for nationalism to emerge. In "Phase A," a preexisting community comes to embrace its cultural and linguistic heritage. In "Phase B," a nationalist leadership emerges to set the stage for a nationalist struggle; and in "Phase C," mass support for the movement is created. This sophisticated theory has merit in understanding and explaining the development of nationalism, albeit it is not uncontroversial. The first phase is the one that interests us directly, for it assumes the existence of a community before nationalism. It is also this assumption that allows us to place Hroch's approach to nationalism in the essentialist rather than in the constructionist school.

On the other end of the intellectual spectrum from the essentialists are the constructionists who believe nationalism is a construction of recent developments in human history and indeed predates nationalities, not the other way around.<sup>9</sup> They argue that, such essentialist claims of nationalism are completely ahistorical, for the connection with the past is only an invention. This group can further be divided into two subgroups: (1) materialists, who suggest that nationalism and nations were created as a result of the need for capitalism's growth; and (2) culturalists, who emphasize the nonmaterialist constructions of nationalism.

The common point among the materialists is that they see nationalism as a product of industrialization. Ernest Gellner argues, for example, that nationalism is a characteristic of an industrial society and owes its existence mostly to forces of economy, political power, and bureaucratic government. According to Eric Hobsbawm, nationalism is something invented by the state to keep up with the needs of capitalism. Hobsbawm further maintains that political systems are moving into the "post-national" era, which is dictated by globalizing forces of transnational division of labor.<sup>10</sup>

One of the earliest proponents of the culturalist school, Ernest Renan, a nineteenth-century French scholar, takes into account cultural and social dimensions of nationalism. Renan, in his well-known lecture "What is a Nation," argues against essentialist claims of nationalism. According to him, common language, shared territory, religion, and so on, remain inadequate to define a nation. A nation, maintains Renan, is "a soul, a spiritual principle," the outcome of the profound complications of history.<sup>11</sup> The collective act of forgetting the past, according to Renan, is fundamental to the creation of nations. In effect, Renan paved the way to seeing nations as creations of human needs rather than as simply fixed entities.

It is this very point that later culturalists, such as Benedict Anderson, the key figure in the intellectual shift from the materialist to the cultural constructionist school of nationalism, picked up and developed into a comprehensive

theory. In his book *Imagined Communities*, Anderson suggests that nations are neither natural nor eternal, but modern constructions. Since the members of even the smallest nations cannot have face-to-face contact with all their fellow citizens, the feelings of group solidarity on a national scale has to be a projection in which people nurture the image of communion. Therefore, a nation, Anderson maintains, is an “imagined community.” Since a nation is imagined based on the changing needs of the present, no clear-cut definition of nationalism can be offered, nor can any objective social boundaries be drawn to those communities that regard themselves as “nations.”

It is important to note that capitalism, and specifically “print capitalism,” has a central place in Anderson’s theory. However, moving far beyond any simple reduction of nationalism to the needs of modernization, Anderson refuses to see nationalism as mere fabrication, and hence as “unreal.” He argues that “imagined” does not necessarily mean “unreal.” On the contrary, once “imagined”, nations and nationalism become real. This is the critical distinction between materialist and culturalist approaches.

The present book fits better into the context provided by the cultural constructionists, but further contends that the concept of ethnicity is deeply embedded in nationalism. Therefore, the crucial relationship between the ethnicity and nationalism must be addressed.

### **Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Development of Identity**

The term “ethnic” comes from the Greek word *ethnos*, which originally meant heathen or pagan. After the mid-nineteenth century the word gradually came to refer to racial characteristics.<sup>12</sup> As Thomas Eriksen, a Norwegian anthropologist, suggests, “Since the 1960s, ethnic groups and ethnicity have become household words in Anglophone social anthropology, although . . . few of those who use the terms bothered to define them. . . . [E]thnicity has something to do with the *classification of people and group relations* [emphasis in the original].”<sup>13</sup> Ethnicity classifies human groups on the basis of kinship. Hence, one can suggest that ethnicity seems to be the largest kinship group (real or fictive) after tribe and confederacy.

In an attempt to define ethnicity, Dru C. Gladney suggests a synthesis between primordial-based and interest-based ethnic identities and maintains that the answer “must involve a combination or dialectical interaction of the two aspects of ethnicity.”<sup>14</sup> In another study, Gladney employs the term “dialogic” (as opposed to “dialectic”) suggesting that “cultural identity and ethnogenesis in the modern nation-state are a process of dialogical interaction between self-perceived notions of identity and sociopolitical context, often defined by the state.”<sup>15</sup> Gladney further asserts that some ethnic identities are formed and

reformed based on the interaction between an ethnic group and a state as the controlling power. Pointing out the oppositional nature of thesis and antithesis, Gladney proposes that “dialogic” is a better term to define the interaction between the “self” (or a group) and the “other.”

The point is well taken; nevertheless, one should employ it cautiously, for the term “dialogic,” obviously a derivative of dialogue, invokes a sense of voluntary communication between the parties involved. This cannot be indiscriminately accepted as always occurring in the process of identity formation. In certain cases and stages of identity formation, the interaction is neither dialectic nor dialogic but “monologic,”—that is, the identity is imposed on a group by the “other” unidirectionally. Gladney very convincingly demonstrates that often the state embodies the “other” and interacts with the groups in configuring their identity; however, he seems to regard this interaction as voluntary by calling it dialogic.<sup>16</sup> The present book contends that in the long process of identity formation and the creation of “ethnic” identity, groups go through dialectical, dialogical, and monological stages. There are periods in this process when identity is imposed on a particular group and hence can be called “monological.” These stages do not necessarily follow an order or are clearly distinguishable. On the contrary, they most often overlap. Nevertheless, it seems that at its earliest stage, we see the indications of monological process.

The monological process suggests that the role of the “other” is greater in the process of “imagining” a group than that of the group itself. At this stage, it is essential to state, the outsider imagines a group not only as “other” to itself, but also as “homogenous,” thereby often ignoring the fragmentation within this imagined society. In turn, a very heterogeneous group inherits the idea of being a unified and distinct social entity and begins to shape and reshape its own identity. Up to this point we have looked at the process of ethnicity formation, now let us address the issue of interrelation between ethnicity and nationalism.

Some scholars argue that nationalism and ethnicity can coexist but are not related. Eric Hobsbawm, for example, ignores the tie between the two, arguing that nationalism and ethnicity are distinct and “noncomparable” entities.<sup>17</sup> Ethnicity might be present in nationalism, but there does not exist an obligatory relationship between the two concepts. A contrasting view is that of Walker Connor, who is credited with the term “ethnonationalism.” In his book *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding*, Connor utilizes the two terms, nationalism and ethnonationalism, as virtual synonyms, stating that “nation connotes a group of people who believe they are ancestrally related. . . . [Therefore] ethnonationalism has an inner redundancy.”<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, his invention of the term “ethnonationalism” warrants that other forms of nationalism have a legitimate intellectual base.

Other scholars more forthcomingly acknowledge the existence of both ethnic and nonethnic elements in the nation, albeit not together. They divide nation-

alism into two types: that which is ethnic-based and that which is civic-based or citizenship-based. In an earlier work Hans Kohn acknowledges the existence of the two lines of thinking. Dividing nationalism into two groups, "eastern" and "western," Kohn claims that compared to "organic" eastern nationalisms, western nationalism appears to be "civic." Western or civic nationalism, according to Kohn, is rational and based on citizenship, whereas eastern nationalism is stagnant and based mainly upon kinship (whether real or fictive).<sup>19</sup> Hence, Kohn believes that ethnicity represents only one kind of nationalism. This view can be criticized based on its conclusion that the "East" and the "West" constitute distinct entities, a position that has been challenged in many contexts in recent scholarship.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the proponents of citizenship-based nationalism have failed to distinguish it from patriotism, a sentiment that is loosely defined as a citizen's loyalty to a state—not necessarily the nation-state.

Ernest Gellner comes to the same conclusion as Eric Hobsbawm. Gellner rejects the idea of the ethnic requirement in nationalism, maintaining that, like nations, ethnicity can be invented. Hence, nationalism invents nations. This view clearly contradicts with that of Anthony Smith, who sees *ethnie*, another variation of ethnicity, as a prerequisite for nationalism to emerge. To Smith, as we have seen, nationalities predate nations. Among these different and irresolute approaches to nationalism, it is mandatory to carefully state the position of the present book. The present book takes an eclectic position and subscribes to several of different points of view put forward by these thinkers.

First of all, this study proposes that ethnicity must be present for nationalism to emerge. In this sense, it agrees partly with Smith's and Connor's position. However, it differs from the essentialist school in that it questions the uncreatedness of ethnicity; and it seems that it, too, can be produced. The present book also suggests that nationalism is the political movement of an ethnic group that coheres based upon common language, religion, kinship and territory. A movement becomes nationalist in character only when a group of people, who *believe* that they constitute a separate *ethnic entity*, are politically organized and struggle for a nation-state, or at least autonomy in a "historical homeland." In current scholarship, scholars attempt to reconfigure the term by introducing "civic" or "religious" nationalisms, and hence contribute to the inflation of definitions. This study, however, proposes that different forms of group solidarity should not be confused with nationalism. Labeling every political group as a nation contributes greatly to the confusion revolving around the definition of nationalism and nation-state. A distinction exists between state and nation; the latter requires ethnicity to cohere, however "imagined" or "constructed" it may be. Walker Connor confirms this point, stating that

The interrelationship between national identity and the identity which flows from citizenship in a state merits closer scrutiny since . . . the

two are often confused. Loyalty to the state and its institutions [should be] properly termed patriotism. . . .<sup>21</sup>

In ethnic nationalism, membership in a nation comes with the belief that members are territorially and ancestrally related, yet individual loyalty to a state brings only patriotism, not nationalism. This is not to deny that the majority of so-called nation states are ethnically heterogeneous. Nevertheless, it is not what a nation is but what people perceive it to be that creates national group solidarity. Hence, nationalism emerges when the members of a given group believe in their ethnic distinctness and act upon it to try to bring about independence or autonomy.

Also crucial in the process of identity/ethnicity formation is the *territory*. This book will argue that in order to manifest itself properly, nationalism requires a territory with which the members identify themselves. Ethnic groups identify themselves not only with a common language, past, and kinship, but—perhaps most importantly of all—with a territory. Territoriality is also critical in nationalist rhetoric, for the majority of nationalist movements strive for a territory in which members of a society can determine their political future. Territory has always been mentioned as a main component of group identity, but, its significance in the context of nationalism has rarely been demonstrated. Presently, an increasing number of scholars in Middle Eastern Studies concern themselves with the question of territory and its role in shaping group identity.<sup>22</sup> As will be seen in this book, territory provides Kurdish identity and nationalism with an essential element without which nationalists fail to properly legitimize their claims.

### *Nationalism in the Kurdish Case*

The definition of Kurdish nationalism is not immune to the confusion stemming from the vague nature of the term “nationalism.” Like other nationalisms, Kurdish nationalism is extremely difficult to define, since in people’s minds, it registers different meanings. However, as hard as it is to offer a satisfactory definition of Kurdish nationalism, this book is obliged at least to offer a working definition. It will be this: “Kurdish nationalism” refers to an intellectual and political movement that is based mainly (though not entirely) upon two premises—the belief in a consistent Kurdish identity, which is rooted in ancient history; and the conviction of an unalienable right for self-determination in a historic Kurdish homeland or territory.

Just one should be careful in defining Kurdish nationalism, one should be cautious in identifying Kurdish nationalists. The present work qualifies Kurdish leaders as nationalists based mainly upon their *active* involvement in the propagation of Kurdish identity and self-determination. In other words, Kurd-

ish nationalists are those who nurture the idea of an ethnically based unity and of a historical homeland, and who actively participate in Kurdish political movements. They do not necessarily strive for secession and are not necessarily anti-state. Clearly, not all Kurdish nationalists in the late Ottoman period were in favor of an independent Kurdistan.

Historically, most nationalist leaders belonged to the notable class, a class that was instrumental in the emergence and development of nationalist movements. Since this work will address the role of notables in the emergence of Kurdish nationalism, it is essential to understand who these notables were and the role they played in other Middle Eastern nationalist movements.

### **Nationalism and Notables in the Ottoman Empire**

It is a well-known fact that particularly after the eighteenth century the notable families of the Ottoman Empire became politically very active in determining the future of their regions. In earlier centuries local notables or *ayan* enjoyed only a limited power in the central and provincial administrations. The *ayan* became a significant political force particularly during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768–74 when the Ottoman state requested their service. “The Porte resorted [to *ayan*] in order to raise funds and recruits for the army; and in due course they were accorded official recognition as the chosen representatives of people vis-à-vis the government.”<sup>23</sup> In return, the notables were recognized and put in the payroll (*ayaniyye*) of provincial governments. In 1779, the right of appointing notables to the local *ayan* chamber was transferred from the provincial governor (*vali*) to the grand vizier because of allegations that the former had abused this right. Early in the nineteenth century, local notables seemed highly autonomous, “often defying the Porte for long periods and managing districts over which they had extended their control in virtual independence, although often providing contingents for the Ottoman army in time of war.”<sup>24</sup> In 1808 the notables pressured the sultan for a formal recognition of their rights and prerogatives. They became stipulated in a document known as the *Sened-i İttifak* (Deed of Alliance). Some Turkish scholars regarded this document as the Magna Carta of the Ottoman Empire,<sup>25</sup> giving the *ayan* in the empire a distinct social and political status. Other scholars have challenged the accuracy of this comparison, claiming that the resemblance was only in the form.<sup>26</sup> In any case, the grand vizier Alemdar Pasha was appointed by Sultan Mahmud II to undertake this task. Accordingly, on 7 October 1808, Alemdar summoned the *ayan* of Rumelia and Anatolia to Çağlayan Köşkü in Kağıthane, Istanbul and discussed the specifics of the agreement with the local notables. How many of the *ayan* responded to the invitation and came to Istanbul is not known, but the document was signed by four who seemingly represented the rest.<sup>27</sup> This agreement is important, for it documents the official

recognition of the *ayan* as a political power in the Ottoman administrative structure. It furthermore indicates that in the first decade of the nineteenth century the *ayan* were powerful enough to negotiate with the state and to assert their influence in the government, albeit on a very limited scale. We do not know how long this arrangement lasted, but in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, the *ayan*, perhaps unofficially, possessed at least some degree of political power.

The composition of notables differed from region to region. In the Arab provinces, the *ayan* were described as urban intermediaries between the government and the people. This group included the ulema (representing the religious class), local military leaders, and the traditional tribal leaders.<sup>28</sup> In the Kurdish provinces, notables came from among the Sufis, especially the Naqshbandis, from the Kurdish tribal nobility, and also from families whose leaders managed to secure local administrative positions. In some cases these categories overlapped. These groups took the lead in interpreting nationalism for the communities they represented and became nationalist leaders.

The interrelation between nationalism and notables and the origin of specific forms of nationalism are two issues with utmost significance for the Middle East; and the subject has been addressed in many different contexts. Studies on the role of notables in Arab nationalism provide us with a valuable comparative case. Therefore, to place the Kurds in a larger context, one should begin with looking briefly into the interrelation between nationalism and Arab notables.<sup>29</sup> In the case of Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, there exist several studies that document the political power of notables. Philip Khoury discusses the role of notable families in Damascus in the emergence of nationalism. Khoury claims that great notable families in Damascus, such as the Azm, played a significant role in the emergence and development of nationalist movements in Syria. Acknowledging the contributions of Islamic modernists and Christian secularists to the growth of Arabism, Khoury claims that it was the notables (particularly the absentee landowning class)—who attended Ottoman professional schools, served the state as civil servants, or served in the army—who translated the idea of Arabism into a protonationalist movements before World War I.<sup>30</sup> Not surprisingly, Khoury sees the “loss of privileged position in the Ottoman state” as the main motivation for the emergence of notables as nationalist leaders.

Another example that demonstrates the role of notables in the emergence of Arab nationalism comes from the Hijaz. The famous Arab revolt of 1916 that ended Ottoman sovereignty in most Arab lands was led by Hussein (the sharif of Mecca) and his two sons, Faysal and Abdallah. It was not a coincidence that the leaders of the revolt belonged to the Hashimite dynasty, which claimed direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad, a claim that gave them great legitimacy. This revolt soon spread outside the Hijaz and has been regarded as one of the cornerstones of Arab nationalism. Most historians agree that Arab nationalism was spawned in the Fertile Crescent among the urban notables who had

lost their privileges due to the centralization policies of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Ernest Dawn has demonstrated convincingly that Hussein was motivated by his disagreement with the ruling Committee of Union and Progress, which aimed at removing the sharif of Mecca from power. Instigated by the British, Sharif Hussein and his sons were looking for ways to consolidate their local power and eliminate the CUP's threat to their traditional authority over Arab society.<sup>32</sup> Nationalism, then, provided Arab notables with an ideology that help them articulate their dissatisfaction with central government. With their personal charisma and the ability to mobilize large groups, notables assumed leadership in the emergence of Arab nationalism.

Just as scholars debate the importance of the notables in the emergence of nationalism, they debate the timeframe of the origin of Arab nationalism. In recent scholarship there seems to be a consensus that Arab nationalism is a more recent phenomenon than previously thought.<sup>33</sup> Rashid Khalidi, a student of Arab nationalism, observes that "the term 'Arabism,' implying proto-nationalism rather than full-fledged nationalism with concomitant desire for separation of the Arabs from the Ottoman Empire, is now accepted as more appropriate to describe the pre-war movement."<sup>34</sup> Ernest Dawn pushes the time frame towards the end of the First World War, claiming that most Arabs remained Ottomanist until 1918 and that separatist anti-Ottoman movements remained insignificant until this time.<sup>35</sup> William Cleveland expresses similar views, stating that "the majority of the Arab elite sought survival within the framework of a strengthened Ottoman state, not in separation from it."<sup>36</sup> In contrast to earlier scholars, most historians now prefer to make a vital distinction between Arabism and Arab nationalism. Defining nationalism as a majority movement aiming at separation from the Ottoman state, students of Arab nationalism seem to agree that Arabism turned into Arab nationalism—or, in other words, proto-nationalism became nationalism—towards the end of the First World War after which the Ottoman Empire ceased to exist. Therefore, Arab nationalism emerged as the most viable (if not the only) political choice for local notables who wished to govern their regions, and it emerged just before the Ottoman state disintegrated. As this book will demonstrate, discussions on the emergence of nationalism among the members of the *umma* (or Islamic community) and the role of notables are also illustrative for Kurdish nationalism, which provides the field of Middle Eastern Studies with a comparative case.

### **Boundaries of the Research**

The boundaries of this study fall into three categories: geographical, chronological, and methodological. Geographically, it will focus chiefly on the Kurds who lived in the Ottoman Empire and it is further limited to the region

comprising the present Turkish Republic. This study is limited to Turkey for three reasons: (1) Currently two-thirds of the Kurdish population live in Turkey; (2) since the region was the core of the Ottoman Empire, the continuing intellectual and political relationship between the old imperial center and periphery can be observed; and (3) the largest collection of sources concerning the Kurds is located in Turkey.

Chronologically, the study concentrates on the period stretching from the late Ottoman and World War I era to the early years of the Turkish Republic, although frequent references to earlier periods have been made. This is a period when a large empire collapsed and smaller political entities were in the process of emerging. It was a period of great confusion, particularly in terms of re-defining groups' and individuals' political loyalties. Unless this era of chaos and disorder is carefully and systematically studied, the subsequent social and political developments cannot be properly understood.

Methodologically, this book is concerned mainly with the social and political history of Kurdish nationalism, Kurdish identity, and Ottoman administrative policies in Kurdistan, while acknowledging that other categories such as economic history and intellectual history indisputably overlap with other areas of concern. Although there are ample references to the intellectual activities of the Kurds, such as their involvement in publishing books and newspapers, this study does not claim to be an intellectual history. References to Kurdish intellectual activities are used only to support the points made in the context of social and political history.

Finally, this book is limited to a Kurdish political organization that was actively involved in defining and promoting Kurdish identity. To represent Kurdish nationalism, the Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti (Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan) is selected.<sup>37</sup> Although there existed earlier Kurdish political organizations, the SAK is chosen to represent the Kurdish nationalism of this era for two main reasons. First, the SAK was the best-organized Kurdish political organization and was actively involved in creating a uniform Kurdish identity and in disseminating its ideology. Second, its social composition was highly heterogeneous; it consisted of the representatives of different notable families claiming to represent the Kurdish intellectual and nationalist class. This heterogeneity has allowed this book to make more sober observations on early Kurdish nationalist leadership.

### **Organization and General Arguments of the Chapters**

This book is divided into six chapters, including the present introductory one. Although each chapter deals with different arguments and individually contributes to our understanding of the Kurds, the first four collectively pave

the way for the fifth chapter, which specifically discusses the role of Kurdish notables in the emergence of Kurdish nationalism.

The reader will find in the second chapter a discussion of the evolution of Kurdish identity. Examining the stages of Kurdish identity formation in *longue duree*, this chapter makes several arguments. First, it argues against essentialist scholarship on the Kurds, which tends to imply that an unchanging core or an essence of a group (whether Turk, Kurd, or Arab) has always existed and can be identified and recovered from very distant past. This chapter demonstrates that before arriving at its present manifestation, Kurdish identity went through dialectical, dialogical, and monological stages, interacting with and responding to its surroundings.

The second chapter argues that the word “Kurd” was a name given to the nomadic tribes living in and around a specific territory. It was most likely the work of outsiders to imagine and label a very heterogeneous group as Kurds. This argument brings us the second point, which deals specifically with the monological process whereby group identities above the level of a tribal confederacy are most often imposed on the group by outsiders. Here, the argument differs from that of Benedict Anderson, who suggests that nations (ethnic groups, in this case) imagine themselves. The chapter suggests that before they imagine themselves as a nation (or, more correctly, as a nationality), they are imagined as a community by outsiders. They are imagined not only as different from other ethnic groups but also as homogeneous. This concept of constituting a unique community was in turn adopted by the Kurds themselves in the later periods.

To escape narrow interpretations of identity formation, another comparison is useful. The fluid nature of group identity is by no means unique to the Kurds. There are many studies that challenge essentialist views on the origin of different modern societies. For example, in a comprehensive study on the history of the Turkic people, Peter Golden argues that these people are far from being a homogeneous society. He says that “the current demarcations of the Turkic peoples . . . are the result of both complex historical process and more immediate, specific political requirements.”<sup>38</sup> There is little doubt about the heterogeneous nature of most modern societies; however, can one speak of homogeneity even in the earliest known “ethnic” societies? In many instances, including the Turkic, we do not have conclusive evidence to suggest that earlier sociopolitical groups were of a homogenous origin, and hence share the common “essence.” Peter Golden persuasively argues that even in its earliest form, the ethnonym “Türk” referred to a political group as opposed to an “ethnic” one (possibly a tribal confederacy) which composed of diverse elements. Earlier nomadic tribes that later adopted the name “Türk” were highly mobile interacting with many local groups and assimilating them into their confederacy. For example, we know that the original clan that claimed political superiority to

other groups was called the *A-shih-na*. As the *A-shih-na* became prominent among the clans, it came to include many client tribes. Together they revolted against their Mongol overlords, the Jou-Jan, and formed the earliest Turkic state in 552 C.E. It is the rise of this first Turkic state (Qağanate) that brought the ethnonym “Türk” to the front. Golden suggests that “This was not only a very rapid rise, but it brought to the fore an ethnonym by which many of the Turkic peoples became known in the non-Turkic world.”<sup>39</sup> We do not know the relation between the *A-shih-na* and the word “Türk,” but we do have sufficient evidence to conclude that the present Turkic (or Turkish) identity originated from a tribal confederacy that was inherently cosmopolitan and naturally flexible.

Golden readily admits that locating the earliest mention of the ethnonym “Türk” is highly problematic; there are references to certain groups in antiquity whose names *could* be the original form of “Türk” such as Togarma, Turukha, Turukku and so on.<sup>40</sup> But the information gap is so substantial that we cannot firmly connect these ancient people to the modern Turks. Chinese and other sources from the mid-sixth century refer to a group of people who were a separate or independent branch of the Hsiung-nu, and originally lived on the right bank of the Aral or Caspian Sea.<sup>41</sup> It is not clear, however, whether or not the Chinese created the ethnonym “Türk” or borrowed it from elsewhere. Islamic sources are generally credited with introducing the term to the west of Central Asia. In any case, it seems that the term was accepted by the tribes as a political group as a result of an interaction between these tribes and outsiders. Hence, at its earliest stage, the process of Turkic identity formation was either monological or dialogical—that is, the label was either imposed on them or it was negotiated and accepted. I believe the former was the case.

In a study on Uighur (Uygur) identity, we can clearly see how the labeling of a group by outsiders was later adopted by the group itself. Dru C. Gladney convincingly argues that Uighur identity was a result of the interaction between the local people and Chinese and Russian states. He goes further and proposes that “The ethnonym ‘Uighur’ was most likely suggested to the Chinese nationality affairs officials by Soviet advisors in Xinjiang in 1930. . . .”<sup>42</sup> Gladney acknowledges that while a collection of nomadic people called “Uighur” have existed since before the eighth century, “this identity has changed and evolved through radically changing sociopolitical context. The ethnogenesis of Uighur is best understood as a gradual evolution through successive stages of interaction with the Chinese nation-state.”<sup>43</sup> The origin of the ethnonym “Uighur” is not very clear, and the etymology of the word cannot accurately be established; however, scholars agree that the term has never referred to a fixed identity. It was first used to denote a political rather than a tribal identity. Later it was used as a linguistic designation. Still later, the Chinese employed the term to mean Muslim. As a result of Chinese colonization in the twentieth century, the term finally arrived at its present denotation. Like Turkic

identity, Uighur identity too has never been rigid and stagnant, though the modern Uighur identity has been somewhat more responsive to the political pressure of surrounding states to define itself and to adopt an ethnic label. The formation of modern Uighur identity was also monological. The second chapter looks into the question of identity formation in the context of the Kurds.

The second chapter also analyzes the significance of a specific territory as the group's homeland. A sense of territoriality contributes greatly to Kurdish identity and nationalism, whereas the Kurdish language, with its several distinct dialects, does not allow the Kurds to think of themselves as a group primarily along linguistic lines. Kurds identify themselves and are identified with a specific territory, Kurdistan. However, the second chapter demonstrates that there has never been a *fixed* Kurdistan and Kurdish identity. The exact boundaries of Kurdistan have always been in flux; and the perceived identity of the Kurd constantly changes, corresponding partly to the changes in the boundaries of Kurdistan.

The third chapter examines the interplay between the Ottoman state and Kurdish tribes since the sixteenth century, a century in which a great number of Kurdish tribes accepted Ottoman sovereignty. This chapter, expanding on the argument made by Martin van Bruinessen in his seminal work *Agha, Shaikh, and State*,<sup>44</sup> focuses primarily on the administrative structuring of the Ottoman Empire in Kurdistan and its changes over time. It demonstrates the gradual process of Ottoman infiltration into semiautonomous Kurdish emirates or tribal confederacies. It will be shown that the Ottoman state as a dominant political and military power in the region influenced the internal dynamics of Kurdish tribal structure, reconfiguring their tribal perimeters. The Ottoman state did this by molding disparate and multiform Kurdish emirates into more uniform ones with the purpose of creating a more dependable and responsive Kurdish political environment and also of generating more tax income from Kurdistan.

The fourth chapter follows the chronological order established in the previous chapters and examines Kurdish identity and the emergence of Kurdish nationalism in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. This chapter has two main sections. The first section looks into two nineteenth century Kurdish revolts and investigates the nationalist dimensions of Kurdish militancy prior to the twentieth century. The second section provides the reader with information on Kurdish social and political organizations in the early twentieth centuries, such as the Kürdistan Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Society for the Mutual Aid and Progress of Kurdistan), and the Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti (Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan).

After 1908, the Kurds, along with other Ottoman subjects, enjoyed the liberal atmosphere created by the Young Turk Revolution, which reestablished the constitutional monarchy. The Young Turks and their political party, the Committee of Union and Progress, mostly ruled the empire for most of the

years up until the end of World War I in 1918, and they were blamed for the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. After the Balkan Wars of 1912–13, the CUP rule became more despotic, but in its earlier years in power the regime was welcomed by many different Ottoman communities, for it promoted equality, justice, and fraternity among all Ottoman subjects. As a result, many cultural and political organizations came into being. It is in this period that Kurdish societies were formed and legally functioned in the Ottoman Empire for the first time. These early Kurdish societies were, however, mainly cultural clubs for the Kurdish nobility. They were established and functioned exclusively in Istanbul, the imperial capital. As indicated in their constitutions, these Kurdish groups saw themselves as ethnically different but at the same time as an integral part of Ottoman society. These societies did not seek secession or even autonomy. Therefore, they can hardly be categorized as nationalist organizations. Rather they were the cornerstones of Kurdish enlightenment in which Kurds focused on their history, culture, language, and literature.

Towards the end of World War I, Kurds in Istanbul also formed political organizations. The first Kurdish society that pursued an open political agenda was the SAK. We can follow the activities of this society through articles in *Jin*, a newspaper published by the SAK; through memoirs of SAK members; through Ottoman and British archival sources; and through early Republican material. All these sources testify that the SAK followed an entirely different path from that of previous Kurdish organizations. Its aim was the establishment of a Kurdish state, and it was through the political activities of the SAK that protonationalism or Kurdism became Kurdish nationalism. Chapter 4 explores the membership, constitution, and political activities of the SAK and compares it to earlier Kurdish organizations. The primary aim of this chapter is to provide a timetable for the emergence of Kurdish nationalism.

The fifth chapter is a prosopographical study of the social, religious, and tribal background of the Kurdish leadership during the World War I era. Searching for patterns in the familial, social, and political backgrounds of early Kurdish nationalist leaders, it offers five principal conclusions that shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of Kurdish nationalism. (1) Kurdish nationalism emerged as a response to the collapsing Ottoman Empire during and after World War I. Therefore, it was not a cause of empire's disintegration, but rather the result of it. The political and military activities of Kurdish notables in the pre-World War I period were not nationalistic but reflected the desire of powerful Kurdish lineages to consolidate, expand, or recover their regional influence. (2) Kurdish leaders, largely of landed notable origin, were mostly higher members of the Ottoman bureaucracy and, as such, an integral part of the Ottoman state. Their well-being depended heavily upon the existence of the state. It was only after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire seemed unavoidable that they actively promoted nationalism. (3) In its infancy, Kurdish

nationalism was heavily affected by preexisting ties and rivalries. These ties were predetermined by the Kurds' own primordial ties and/or religious affiliations. Struggles among the most powerful Kurdish notables continued through opposing factions in Kurdish nationalist politics in the era immediately following World War I. The goals and tactics of these factions were also influenced by their leaders' religious commitment—or the lack of it. (4) Their understanding of and commitment to the idea of nationalism varied considerably. In the era under review, Kurdish nationalism emerged as a secessionist and autonomist movement simultaneously. (5) Finally, the fifth chapter shows that despite historic and contemporary enmities, the leaders of the opposing factions were united by one distinct emotion: their suspicion of and even hostility to Kemalist Turkish nationalism. Overall, this book shows that early Kurdish nationalist politics was highly factionalized and also analyzes the ways in which Kurdish nationalist leaders responded to the collapsing Ottoman state and the emerging Kemalist regime.

The final chapter attempts to place the work in the larger context of Middle Eastern history. Comparisons to Arab nationalism, and particularly to Palestinian nationalism, are made, albeit in a limited fashion. Also presented in this chapter is a synopsis of Kurdish movements in the Republican period. Hopefully, this information will help to point out some directions for future research that focuses entirely upon the Republican period. The Republican period is the link between the past and the present, and the treatment should help the reader to make sense out of Kurdish movements of the present time.