Echoes of Empire

Nationalism and Identity in the Late Ottoman Era (1898-1918)

By

Filippo Verre

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List of Abbreviations

- **AAKW**: Association for the Advancement of Kurdish Women (*Kürt Kadınları Teali Cemiyeti*)

- **CUP**: Committee of Union and Progress (İ*ttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti*)

- **IS**: Islamic State

- **KRG**: Kurdish Regional Government

- **DPK**: Democratic Party of Kurdistan (*Partiya Demokrat in Kurdistanê*)

- **KCS**: The Kurdish Constitutional School (*Kürd Me srutiyet Mektebi*)

- **KD**: Kurdish Day (*Roje Kurd*)

- **KS**: Kurdish Sun (*Hetave Kurd*)

- **KSHS**: The Kurdish Students "Hope" Society (*Kurd Telebe 'Hevı' Cemiyeti*)

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

- **OMPI**: Ottoman Minister of Public Instruction

- **PKK**: Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partîya Karkerén Kurdîstan*)

- **PO**: *Pax Osmanica*

- **PRP**: Progressive Republican Party (*Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Firkasi*)

- **PUK**: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (*Yekîtiya Nîştimanî ya Kurdistanê*)

- **RM**: Republic of Mahabad

- **RPP**: Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Firkasi*)

- **SKMAP**: Society for Kurdish Mutual Aid and Progress (*Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti*)

- **TH**: Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocaklan*)

- **U**: Unity (*Yekbun*)

- **YP**: Young Pens (*Genç kalemler*)

Introduction

1. Understanding Kurdish Nationalism: A Theoretical Framework Based on the Internalist and Externalist Dichotomy

Self-proclaimed nationalist movements have been active since the nineteenth century, the "golden era" of nationalism. During that dynamic century, many nationalist ideologies were established. As evidence of that, the history of several modern western nations can be traced back to the 1800s. The relevance of nationalism as a force in shaping the contemporary world seems undeniable, and as an idea, it continues to exhibit great intellectual fascination.

However, encapsulating nationalism with a generic notion has proved to be a difficult task. The formation of the ideology necessary to laying the foundation for an independentist or irredentist theory is challenging. These two terms are sometimes used as synonyms. Though, encompassing the ultimate nationalist goal, independentism and irredentism are two different concepts. According to the former, residents and population of an area, or some portion thereof, aim to exercise self-government, and usually sovereignty, over its territory. Often, the commemoration of the "Independence Day" of a country or nation celebrates when a country is free from all forms of foreign colonialism, implying a past of oppression and foreign sovereignty. On the other hand, irredentism is usually understood as a desire for one state to annex a neighbouring territory. This desire is motivated by ethnic reasons (because the territory's population is ethnically similar to the people of the parent state) or by historical reasons (because the region formed part of the parent state before)[1].

From a generic standpoint, nationalism can be defined as an ideology and movement according to which the nation should be identified with a state.

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[1] C. Tilly, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, pp. 6-7.

As a movement, nationalism tends to promote the interests of a particular "nation", considered as a group of individuals, especially to gain and maintain the nation's sovereignty (self-governance) over its homeland to establish a nation-state. According to this generic definition, nationalism aims to construct and maintain a single national identity based on a combination of shared social features such as geographic location, culture, traditions, ethnicity, language, politics (or the government), religion, and belief in a shared singular history, and to promote unity or solidarity[2].

However, despite its generic definition and subsequent wide intellectual diffusion, the concept of nationalism is not easy to define or explain on a concrete level. First, it rests on the problematical idea of "nation", a term that, like its derivative, is easier to identify when encountered than to define in the abstract. Secondly, there is the question of what nationalism truly is. While the first word can be explained theoretically, it is declined in different ways depending on the individual case studies. Essentially, we can identify the phenomenon, but how do we define it? How do we examine it in relation to the numerous external and internal factors that need to be taken into account to provide an extensive explanation? Is it a sentiment in its own right, an erupting force that is going to bend even the most robust political, social and economic structures? Or is it a contingent or temporary phenomenon, itself the product of more basic causes, such as modifications in the economy or in the ways in which local societies are shaped?

Providing an answer to the above questions is a challenging assignment. From a theoretical standpoint and concerning the single case under analysis, the questions that need to be answered are many and not easy to resolve. A valuable approach to the study of issues related to the genesis of a nationalist design is to take into consideration the so-called "internalist and externalist dichotomy", applied to the case subject of the investigation. Many factors - internal and external - come into play when a community approaches a nationalist ideology. First, it is worth referring to the reasons that drive a group of individuals to imagine a different future. Moreover,

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[2] A. N. Waldron, *Theories of Nationalism and Historical Explanation*, in "Cambridge University Press - World Politics", Vol 37 Issue 3, 1985, pp. 416 - 433

the sociocultural features of the "rebelling people" are also essential to understand the steps previously taken to develop a national aspiration. The strategies adopted to carry out the struggle, as well as the fundamental goals of the leading intelligentsia, are relevant to fully evaluate the feasibility of the nationalist project. Furthermore, it is crucial to study the counter strategy of the opposing entity, both from a cultural and political standpoint, to thwart the threat of degradation represented by the community envisioning a nationalist movement.

I. The Emergence of Nationalist Ideologies in Ottoman Politics: Separatism or Inclusivism?

The onset of nationalist ideologies in the Americas and Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries deeply impacted the Ottoman Empire. During the second segment of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, nationalism sprung amongst the predominantly Christian peoples of the Ottoman Balkans. This facilitated the region's transformation into a mosaic of nation-states. In this respect, Greece (1829), Serbia (1878), Montenegro (1878), Romania (1878), Bulgaria (1908) and Albania (1913) seceded successfully from the Porte. Essentially, by 1914, war and uprisings had reduced Istanbul's once-vast European imperium to irrelevant entities surrounding the Ottoman capital. The Asiatic portion of the empire fared better remaining largely intact until the catastrophic defeat in WWI in 1918, after the military operations. Yet, while nationalist assumptions first appeared amongst the Ottoman's Christian populations, from the final decades of the nineteenth century onwards, those claiming to speak in the name of the several Ottoman Muslim peoples - i.e. the Turks, Arabs, Albanians and Kurds - increasingly gained ground.

Classical historiography focused on the late Ottoman Empire adopted an implicit nationalistic ideology according to which the desire for national self-determination in the form of a nation-state was an inevitable result of a growing separatist consciousness. However, it would be inaccurate to assume the rise of the aforementioned consciousness directly intertwined with the growth of "full" separatism. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the complexity and often ambiguous nature of identities in the politics and society of the late Ottoman Empire. While it is feasible to identify the

growth and subsequent relevant spread of Kurdish national consciousness over the course of this period on a general perspective, it is not an easy task to place it in a static dimension as opposed to the Ottoman rule.

Regarding the study of Kurdish nationalism, in this work, I intend to analyse the main internal and external factors that prevented the formation of a particular type of nationalist ideology - cultural nationalism - from being successful. As will be examined in the following pages, the latter represents the first step to establishing the necessary social and cultural basis for the genesis of a potential homeland. During the last twenty years of the Porte's rule (1898-1918), the Kurds - one of the most ancient and variegated Ottoman minorities - were responsible for an unparalleled and vibrant period of cultural activism. Compared to other Ottoman minorities (i.e., the Armenians or the Arabs), the Kurds came considerably late in laying the foundations for the elaboration of a solid nationalist movement. However, often depicted as one of the most savage and ignorant Ottoman peoples, in a few years, the Kurds managed to generate valuable evidence of how the so-called *Kurdishness* was a distinctive feature within the broad and heterogeneous Ottoman universe. Ultimately, the significant cultural activism that occurred before the demise of the Ottoman Empire was not enough to establish the Kurdish nation-state as an official political entity generated after Istanbul's breakup. The purpose of this investigation is to comprehend how and why the Kurds could not create a homeland after finally engaging with an interesting and rather diversified nationalist dynamism.

During the period under analysis, the Kurds developed a fascinating and peculiar form of nationalism. Besides the already mentioned "cultural" aspect associated with their nationalist movement - at least during the first phase - the Kurds forged a type of nationalism that was strictly attached to the Ottoman state. Belonging to the vast "Ottoman family" was never questioned by the leading intellectuals of the nationalist movement that arose in 1898, at least until 1912, when the so-called "young generation" of activists came to power. This aspect is very relevant, as it implies that every nationalist movement has its own development, motivations and aspirations. For instance, the Arabs, the Greeks, and the Armenians - to remain within the Ottoman universe - had the explicit goal of seceding

from the Porte and establishing their own home nation distinctly separate from Istanbul's culture and society. On the other hand, the Kurds often explicitly proclaimed their adherence to the Ottoman state, showing a distinctive and unique teleological feature in relation to their nationalist goals. Because of this, it is relevant to consider that each of these nationalist movements - while generically encapsulated within the concept of "nationalist ideologies" - represented a very different story in which the internalist and externalist factors played a significant role.

II. The Internalist Factors of Kurdish Nationalism in the Late Ottoman Era

The first internalist factor that prevented the Kurdish people from obtaining a nation-state after the end of WWI and the subsequent dissolution of the Ottoman Empire is essentially linked with the fragmented society and leadership the Kurds had during - and not only - the 1898-1918 period. Fragmentation, division, lack of unity and teleological vision were the main internal obstacles to the Kurdish nationalist goal. Besides the tribal feature of Kurdish society, which highly contributed to the delay with which the Kurds elaborated a unitary nationalist vision, the lack of a common goal of the Kurdish leadership has been an insurmountable barrier. In this regard, in this work, I aim to study how the tribe leaders dwelling in eastern Anatolia had concretely different aspirations compared to the Kurdish cultural intelligentsia based in Istanbul. The former, whose main goal was to expand their local powers to the detriment of Armenian, Turkish and Greek communities, had nothing to gain in fighting for a more extensive plan linked with establishing Kurdistan as a cultural and political entity. On the other hand, the Kurdish intellectuals residing in Istanbul envisioned the formation of a nationalist Kurdish conscience based on a distinctive cultural and social feature that could potentially lay the foundation for the creation of a Kurdish homeland.

The second internalist factor worth of analysis is the lack of unitary vision among the Istanbul-based Kurdish intellectuals. The latter were the main responsible for the genesis of Kurdish cultural nationalism in 1898, following the publication of the first Kurdish journal in Ottoman cultural

history. However, as it will be examined in this work, after the first years of joint activity, the movement's intellectual leaders had several teleological contrasts on how carrying the battle against Istanbul's reaction to any centrifugal threats to the national integrity of the Ottoman state. The major discrepancies occurred between 1912 and 1914. In addition to an ideological clash between the various Kurdish leaders on how to proceed, i.e., whether to remain within the Ottoman family or undertake a secessionist path, the Kurds underwent a trans-generational crisis. As mentioned earlier, a new wave of young Kurdish activists came into action, more aggressive and eager to begin a fully secessionist path in line with the other minorities who aimed to break away from the collapsing Ottoman Empire. As known, the outbreak of WWI changed the course of history and interrupted the Kurdish nationalist movement to shape the destiny of the Kurdish people. Thus, from an internalist standpoint, a double obstacle occurred. In addition to the clashes between the peripheral leaders and those residing in the capital, after a few years of cultural struggle there were also intense contrasts between the Istanbul-based leaders. This, as well as the unpredictable result of war, impacted heavily on the result concerning the success of Kurdish aspirations.

Among the internalist factors, it is relevant to study the complex relationship between the Kurds and the Armenians, two neighbouring Ottoman minorities who had cohabited for many centuries under the Sultans' rule. Thanks to a subtle strategy from the Ottoman leadership that will be thoroughly evaluated in this work, the Kurds became the main persecutors of the several Armenian communities dwelling in Eastern Anatolia. These two people, whose destiny was, to a greater extent, intertwined, could have become solid allies against the Porte's rule during the last 20 years of Istanbul's institutional life. Instead, the Kurdish tribal leaders, instigated by the complacent Ottoman officers, inflicted severe damage and sufferings on the Armenians. During the Hamidian massacres (1894 - 1897) and the Armenian mass deportations, which culminated in the first genocide of the twentieth century (1915 - 1916), the Kurds were among the main ones responsible for the atrocities committed against the ancient Orthodox community.

III. The Externalist Factors of Kurdish Nationalism in the Late Ottoman Era

While the internalist approach implies that certain activities coming from the Kurds themselves impacted the final outcome of their nationalist struggle, externalism encompasses a series of events outside the Kurdish system. In this regard, in this work, I aim to focus on three major externalist factors that sensibly hindered the Kurds from establishing the cultural, ideological, and political foundations for their homeland. First, it is worth studying the reaction the Turkish intelligentsia arranged to thwart independentist movements during the Ottoman Empire's last troubled years. Kurdish nationalism, though not so well established as other ideologies, constituted a relevant threat to the adepts of Turkism. This ideology will be thoroughly examined in this work in contraposition to *Kurdism*. In this academic investigation, I intend to study two authors - Ziya Gökalp and Halide Edib - who elaborated a series of theories to emphasize the importance of being Turkish concerning the threats of separatism that came from the many Ottoman minorities eager to secede from the decaying Ottoman Empire. These two thinkers, regarded as intellectual leaders, were amongst the first Turkish ideologues in the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic and developed theories centered on Turkish nationalism. I aim to study their ideology in response to the rising Kurdish activism since I believe Gökalp's and Edib's nationalist theories represent an important externalist factor that impacted significantly on Kurdish final unsuccess.

The second externalist factor that I intend to explore concerns the impact of the First World War's outbreak on the development of Kurdish nationalism. The war changed the course of the Middle East, rapidly accelerating the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, which had been in dire straits for several decades. Undoubtedly, the dissolution of the Kurdish hopes of obtaining a state in the post-Ottoman phase was among the main consequences of the war, often not covered in depth by contemporary historiography. Indeed, the Kurdish demands concerning the establishment of a homeland were studied concerning the contraposition between the Treaty of Sevres (August 1920) and the Treaty of Lausanne (July 1923). According to the former, the Kurdish people was entitled to

have a nation-state. At the same time, the latter - following the Turkish victory in the so-called War of Independence - wiped out any possibility of envisioning a Kurdish state entity in eastern Anatolia. However, apart from this fascinating diplomatic examination of the war's results and the Kurdish people's false hopes, little space has been devoted to the impact that the outbreak of the war had on the fluid and dynamic Kurdish cultural nationalism. Following the outbreak of WWI, the Kurds became enemies of two opponents facing each other simultaneously. In fact, on the one hand, the Russians on the eastern Anatolian front identified the Kurds as rivals, often being in contact with them during war operations. On the other hand, the Kurds also became enemies of the Turks, who did not consider them reliable given their nascent separatist ideology. Concretely, the outbreak of the WWI can be regarded as an essential externalist factor since it dealt a decisive blow regarding the number of external enemies the Kurds had to face to achieve their goals.

The third externalist factor worth examining concerns the Muslim-based inclusion policies that were adopted by 'Abdül-Hamid II. The latter can be considered one of the principal architects of the delay with which the Kurds came to develop nationalist theories. The Islamic bond with the Turks, as well as the well-known fragmentation of Kurdish society divided into clans and tribes, was indirectly used by Hamid to envelop the tumultuous and rebellious Kurdish people within the Ottoman apparatus. The ignorance of the Kurdish leaders and the promises of ephemeral wealth to the detriment of the local Christian communities - often Armenian and Assyrian - guaranteed the sultan a double advantage. On the one hand, the Kurdish revolts that had characterized the Anatolian front for the entire first part of the nineteenth century no longer occurred. On the other hand, the Ottoman leadership gained an effective tool - the indomitable and savage Kurdish tribes - to carry out the most violent actions against the Armenian and Greek communities during the last troubled phases of the Ottoman Empire.

Therefore, in this book, six factors will be explored - three internal and three external - which have had a very significant influence on the unsuccess of Kurdish cultural nationalism. An approach based on the "internalist and externalist dichotomy" can produce an innovative interpretation concerning the study subject of this work. As underlined in the following

pages, international historiography has often focused on other moments in the history of Kurdish nationalism. Little space has been devoted to studying Kurdish nationalism during the last two decades of the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, during this period, other peoples and "nationalist journeys" attracted the attention of historians, academics, and scholars. For example, the Armenian question, Arab nationalism, and the irredentism of the Pontic Greeks were among the main topics of study by western and international scholars. As mentioned, the events related to Kurdish nationalism have attracted attention especially following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the question related to the "broken promises" of the European Great Powers after the non-compliance with the Treaty of Sevres. My work attempts to offer an innovative point of view with an interpretative approach of the early Kurdish nationalism during the last confused phase of the Sublime Porte. The main innovative feature of this academic investigation concerns identifying a different interpretation of the factors that have prevented the Kurds from accomplishing their objectives. A study based on analysing the internalist and externalist factors can shed new light on why and how the Kurds did not manage to obtain their own state. This was due to a complex interaction of historical, political, and cultural phenomena strictly intertwined with each other.

2. Structural Organization

Kurdish nationalism has gone through many stages in modern history. The first phase could be labelled as the "tribal stage". During the nineteenth century, numerous Kurdish local leaders in Eastern Anatolia arranged tribal riots against Ottoman authorities. These uprisings aimed to undermine Istanbul's rule over Kurdish territories and expand local realms. In this phase, the idea of a unitary nationalist vision aimed at seceding from the Sublime Porte had not been yet conceived. The leaders who led Kurdish revolts were primarily concerned with gaining more lands and powers for their tribe rather than laying the foundation for a shared vision focused on Kurdish nationalism.

From 1918 until 1992, the second phase can be considered the "suffering stage". The demise of the Ottoman Empire after the defeat in WWI was the beginning of such a difficult phase. The year 1992, on the other hand, can

be labelled as the end of the "suffering stage", as the Kurdistan Regional
Government (KRG), which is nowadays the official executive body of the
autonomous Kurdistan Region of northern Iraq, was established. KRG was
the first political semi-autonomous entity in Kurdish history. Its
establishment was an outstanding achievement for the Iraqi Kurds and, to
a greater extent, for the Kurdish people.

During most of the twentieth century, the Kurdish people became one of
the most significant stateless peoples in the world. About 40 million
individuals of Kurdish origins were divided and lived in 4 nations of the
Middle East: Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. In addition, approximately 1.7
million Kurds migrated to Europe - mainly in Germany and Scandinavia -
and generated the so-called "Kurdish Diaspora". In the 1918-1992 temporal
span, most Kurdish minorities straddling the Middle East went through
complicated times. The central authorities of Turkey and Iraq adopted a
harsh approach towards their Kurdish communities, imposing often
oppressive measures aimed at limiting the influence of Kurds in internal
affairs. In Iraq, the Kurdish community dwelling in northern areas was
mainly subject to a genocide attempt during the last years of the 1980s. In
Turkey, similarly, the Kurds suffered discrimination, cultural abuses, and
systematic social oppression from Ankara's authorities. In Syria and Iran,
local Kurdish minorities did not experience the harsh times the Turkish and
Iraqi Kurds had to suffer. However, both Damascus and Teheran adopted
oppressive policies aimed at suppressing Kurdish cultural identity.

The third phase, starting from 1992 to the present day, is the "consolidation
stage". After the approval of the 2005 new Iraqi constitution, the KRG
consolidated its powers in the administration of the autonomous region.
Bagdad remains the legal and political sovereign authority in northern Iraq;
however, Erbil - KRG's Kurdish capital - retains concrete economic and
diplomatic prerogatives. The "Iraqi experiment" was not the only Kurdish
state entity created in the Middle East in recent times. Following the Syrian
civil war outbreak in 2011, another Kurdish entity was established: the
Rojava. The latter is a semi-autonomous region in northern Syria where
Syrian Kurds exercise concrete administrative powers over a Kurdish
population. Damascus' lack of control over those territories due to the
outcome of the war, which in the northern regions had left a very slender

Syrian authority, allowed another Kurdish minority - in this case, the Syrian Kurdish minority - to lay the foundation for the genesis of a fascinating political experiment.

All these three nationalist phases, despite being very diverse from one another and belonging to different eras of Kurdish history, have something in common: the lack of a unitary approach aimed at creating a Kurdish homeland. In these three phases, the Kurdish people could not express a nationalist movement that shared a vision. During the "tribal period", in the "suffering phase", and in the last recent period called "consolidation", the Kurds have sought autonomy in a disorganised and erratic way. Such an approach was in line with the Kurdish fragmented and tribal society that still nowadays is a distinctive feature of this ancient people. Even during the last phase, in which, as mentioned, the Kurds have obtained a certain degree of autonomy in some areas of the Middle East, the struggle was regional and located in some districts rather than being spread across all Kurdish territories. The results obtained with the KRG and Rojava can be considered local forms of nationalism. This local nationalism was favoured by the institutional reforms and geopolitical downturns of Iraq and Syria.

The purpose of this work is to study the brief period of roughly twenty years between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (1898-1918) in which the Kurdish people expressed a vibrant nationalist activity with the intention to become a distinct community. As will be studied in this book, those complicated, agitated and fluid two decades represented an interesting experiment occurred in Kurdish history in which the intellectual and cultural premises for the creation of *Kurdistan* were laid. Several associations, research centres, journals and foundations were established by Istanbul-based Kurdish intelligentsia to provide the Kurds with all the political, cultural and institutional tools to create a homeland. From a cultural perspective, the 1898-1918 temporal span also represented a significant moment regarding vivacity and productivity. As many intellectual leaders in those years pointed out, the Kurdish masses dwelling in Anatolia necessitated a "cultural awakening", which, in time, would have led them toward the concretisation of their aspirations.

This work will be divided into two chapters. In the first one, I aim to study the early tribal uprisings that shaped Kurdish nationalism. As will be examined, the first revolts that took place were aimed at increasing the powers of local leaders rather than envisioning a unitary political fight for Kurdish independence. The fragmented and disorganised approach was primarily responsible for the Kurdish delay in elaborating a nationalist ideology. To thoroughly examine such delay, I will refer to 'Abdül-Hamid II's sultanate and the complicated relationship between the Kurdish and Armenian peoples. 'Abdül-Hamid II, the last Ottoman ruler fully in charge, had an important impact on the Kurdish issue. Throughout his sultanate (1876-1909), he controlled the Kurds by progressively including them in local Anatolian militias. In so doing, the sultan laid the foundation for a lasting respite between the Kurdish minority and the Ottoman government after decades of tribal uprisings. I argue that this strategic involvement in the Ottoman military administration significantly slowed down the process of the ideological formation of Kurdish nationalism. In addition, the tension and conflicts between the Kurds and the Armenians often destabilised relations between two peoples living in similar conditions. They both were ethnic minorities in a multi-ethnic empire. As pointed out in the third paragraph of the first chapter, the controversial relationship between Kurds and Armenians represented a "missed opportunity" that prevented both the Ottoman minorities to rely on each other in their pursue of nationalist paths.

In the second chapter of this work, I will focus on the elaboration of the first theories focused on Kurdish nationalism. For the first time in Kurdish history, several intellectual leaders laid the epistemological and political premises for the genesis of Kurdish nationalism. This remarkable achievement could be possible only thanks to the so-called "cultural awakening" the Kurdish masses residing in eastern Anatolia were going to experience. As a matter of fact, in 1898, *Kürdistan*, the first Kurdish journal, was created to spread the culture, tradition and language of the Kurds in every angle of the Empire, most notably in eastern Anatolia. It is important to note that the initial aim of Kurdish nationalism was intrinsically Ottomanist, as the ideological leaders of the Kurds did not openly sponsor a secession from the big Ottoman family in which they had participated for many centuries.

The proliferation of *Kurdism* and, to a greater extent, of several other nationalist theories from different ethnic minorities belonging to the Ottoman Empire prompted the spread of Turkish nationalism. In reaction to the centrifugal threats to the socio-political stability of the Sublime Porte, harsh intellectual theories animated by Turkish nationalism started to become relevant. For this academic work, I intend to examine the ideology and political thought of two of the most relevant Turkish thinkers whose theories have shaped Turkism. Ziya Gökalp and Halide Edib are considered the leading thinkers on whose ideological premises Turkism was forged. Both these intellectuals played a significant role in thwarting the spread of Kurdish nationalist theories in the Ottoman Empire's last phase and during the Turkish republic's first years.

The structure of this work follows a chronological trend. The theoretical framework based on the internalist and externalist dichotomy will be modelled on a chronological approach since I think it is important not to alter the historical strand of events. Therefore, the structure will follow an accordion-like pattern, in which the internalist and externalist factors will alternate according to the studied historical period. Concretely, the first externalist factor, represented by the sultanate of 'Abdül-Hamid II, will be studied in contraposition to the great Kurdish revolts that occurred across the nineteenth century. On the other hand, the latter represent the first internalist factor, as the Kurds, for many decades in the same century, were animated by local looting instead of laying the foundations for the much-needed cultural awakening. Subsequently, I will shed light on another internalist factor, namely the controversial relationship between Kurds and Armenians. The third internalist factor will follow; it will open the second chapter of this work, in which I analyze the great cultural and social vivacity that occurred in the Ottoman capital starting from 1898. In conclusion, the remaining two externalist factors - the Turkish ideological and intellectual reaction represented by Ziya Gökalp and Halide Edib and the effects of WWI's outbreak on Kurdish nationalism - will be evaluated.

3.   Literature Review: The 'Kurdish Issues'

Throughout recent history, many international scholars and geopolitical analysts have examined the Kurdish issue or, more accurately, the

"Kurdish issues". The use of the plural form is not a coincidence; the political and historical evolution of these people, in fact, featured by distinctive social developments in several different Middle Eastern countries, has led to the conclusion that studying the recent past of the Kurdish people as a whole is misleading. Instead, we should consider adopting a different approach to take into consideration the heterogeneous facets of recent Kurdish history. In essence, according to the current geopolitical scenarios, which are highly jagged and elaborate, we should adopt a micro-analytic approach rather than a macro one. In so doing, we would be able to gain an informed point of view regarding, for instance, the evolution of the Iraqi Kurds under the Hussein regime or the social discrimination taken place in Assad's Syria towards the Kurdish community living in the northern part of the country.

Therefore, considering the current geopolitical situation, the elaboration of a study regarding a generic entity of the "Kurdish people" could be inaccurate, if not intrinsically erroneous. In this regard, the assumption that about 40 million Kurds dwell in the Middle East is hugely misleading[3]. Not because this data is wrong. Approximately the number of Kurds across Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, along with at least 1.7 million of the Kurdish Diaspora residing in Europe, is correct. However, the epistemological consequence of this assumption is that about 40 million people with strong social, political, and historical ties with each other are still living without a homeland. This is only partially true. Indeed, if we can acknowledge that the Kurds have never had a sovereign and independent nation-state[4], It is

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[3] It is impossible to accurately establish the exact number of Kurds living in the Middle East. This is mainly because no reliable censuses could clarify the numbers. Notably, the central authorities of Turkey and Iraq have consistently underestimated their citizens with Kurdish origins to limit their potential influence on a political and social base. The Kurds in the Middle East are approximately 34-38 million, to whom we should add the ones of the Kurdish Diaspora, who escaped to Europe, mainly in Scandinavia, France, and Germany. S. M. Torelli, *Kurdistan, la nazione invisibile*, Milano, Mondadori, 2016, pp. 28-33.

[4] The only case in Kurdish history of a sort of nation-state is the Republic of Mahabad. The latter was a short-lived Kurdish self-governing unrecognised state in present-day Iran; it remained geopolitically alive from the 22nd of January to the 15th of December 1946. The capital of the Republic was the city of Mahabad, located in north-western Iran. The state encompassed a small territory, including Mahabad and the adjacent cities of Piranshahr and Naghadeh. It should be emphasised that the republic's

not so evident to consider them as a whole people. The socio-political evolution of the four Kurdish minorities in the countries mentioned above has been considerably different. For instance, the Iranian Kurds, despite the first years of moderate social and economic discrimination after the end of WWII, experienced physical persecution based on an ethnic base[5].

In addition, the Syrian Kurds, despite being considered intrinsically unreliable and potentially dangerous for the internal security of the Assad regime, have suffered moderate discrimination[6] on an ethnic base and no physical persecution. On the other hand, the Kurdish communities of Turkey and Iraq, especially since the beginning of the 1970s, have been under constant pressure exercised by the central authorities of Ankara and Bagdad to annihilate potential threats. Inevitably, this disparity regarding the evolution of the single Kurdish minorities residing in the Middle East has created enormous differences within the so-called "Kurdish people". In Iran, for instance, the Kurds have been positively included in the economic fabric, and because of that, there is no record of recent mass protests against the Persian leadership.

On the contrary, the Kurdish minority of Turkey, since 1978, has embarked on a sort of civil war against the government of Ankara under the leadership of Abdullah Ocalan, the ideological leader of Turkish Kurds and the founder of PKK (*Partîya Karkerén Kurdîstan*). Therefore, conceiving the Kurdish issue as a unitary case would be comprehensibly inaccurate. Since the Kurds are not a single and homogeneous people, it is impossible to elaborate a sole study that would encompass the various facets of its history and society.

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foundation and demise was a part of the Iranian crisis during the opening stages of the Cold War. See D. N. Wilber, *Iran, Past and Present: From Monarchy to the Islamic Republic*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 135-136.

[5] The Kurds have faced horrible oppression in Iran, including violence by the Shah's government and by the Islamic Republic. On this matter see S. Akbarzadeh S., *The Iranian Kurds' transnational links: impacts on mobilisation and political ambitions*, in "Ethnic and Racial Studies", Vol. 43, Issue 12, 2019, pp. 2275-2294.

[6] Especially if compared to what occurred to Iraqi and Turkish Kurds.

I. The Methodological Approaches of the Existing Literature

As previously stated, the literature on these thorny subjects is quite vast. To maintain a methodological organisation, I intend to classify the different approaches scholars and academics adopt regarding research on Kurdish matters. In this respect, I think that four different approaches can be traced; the first and most common is:

- "Generic historical studies". According to this research technique, in the last four centuries, the Kurdish people has played a significant role in shaping the politics of the Middle East. Primarily, under Ottoman rule, the Turks conceived of the Kurds as the guardians of the territorial cornerstone of the empire: Eastern Anatolia. Because of that, for a very long time, there was no real distinction between Turks and Kurds, either on an ethnic level or religious aspects[7]. In this regard, hundreds of Kurdish tribes flourished under the Sublime Porte on the slopes of Mount Ararat and the blurred areas that nowadays correspond to South-Eastern Turkey, Northern Syria, Northern Iraq, and North-Western Iran. Following the breakup of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of modern states, the Kurds gained regional influence not as independent and sovereign people but as distinguished socio-ethnic minorities located in four different Middle Eastern nations[8]. Therefore, in the second decade of the twentieth century, this people incurred a forced process of social annihilation caused by the nationalist leaderships of four different countries. In Turkey and Iraq, mainly, where the Kurdish communities were numerically relevant with ancient traditions, the assimilation process carried out by the central authorities was highly ruthless. On this matter, the Iraqi Kurds experienced an attempted genocide

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[7] For centuries, the two peoples shared a deep tie between each other. In this regard, it is important to highlight that the Kurds used to be considered as "the mountain Turks", meaning that the Kurdish people had several ethnic and religious features in common with the Turkish one. See M. Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, London, Zed Books, 1991, pp. 34-39.

[8] The Kurdish people spans mainly in the four aforementioned countries. However, thousands of Kurds still nowadays live also in Armenia (37.000) and Azerbaijan (6.000). See S. M. Torelli, *op cit.*, pp. 30-31.

from 1986 to 1989, which went down in history as the *Al-Anfal* campaign[9]; the latter was intended to suppress the most significant number of ethnic Kurdish individuals to achieve the total Arabization of northern Iraq.

In Turkey, the measures adopted by the governments have not caused systematic destruction of villages and human lives as in Iraq. However, Ankara deliberately prevented the economic development of Turkish Kurdistan by not investing public money in the region[10]. Although Eastern Anatolia (the Turkish Kurds' primary residence still) is one of the potentially wealthiest areas in the country[11], Ankara has knowingly avoided favouring the industrialisation of the territory. In so doing, Turkish authorities have forced the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Kurds from their native hometowns to the most prominent cities such as Istanbul, Mersin, Izmir, Gaziantep and Ankara.

Because of this complicated past, many scholars and academics interested in Kurdish matters have focused their research mainly on the tragic events of these ancient people. As mentioned, since the beginning of the twentieth century, the Kurds have been systematically discriminated against in four countries of the

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[9] The campaign's name derives from the eight Sura (*al-Anfal*) in the Qur'an, which was symbolically used as a code name by the former Iraqi Baathist Government led by Saddam Hussein for a series of systematic attacks against the Kurdish fighters in northern Iraq between 1986 and 1989. In those attacks were often used chemical weapons. *Al-Anfal* literally means the "spoils of war" and was conceived to describe the military campaign of extermination and looting carried out by the Iraqi regime against its most relevant ethnic minority. For further details on the matter, see C. Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp 323-334.

[10] The only notable exception is the Southeastern Anatolia project, an integrated project of dams and hydroelectric plants built in southeastern Anatolia since the early 1980s.

[11] The lack of industries, jobs and profitable activities forced several young Kurds to seek a brighter future in other parts of the country, where the social distribution of Kurdish individuals is less relevant. According to Galletti, Ankara deliberately prevented the development of the region in order to favour the migration and to "dilute" the concentration of Kurdish citizens in other parts of Turkey. For instance, despite the lakes and rivers of Turkish Kurdistan no actual hydroelectric power plant has been built in the area; only recently Turkey built water facilities. Moreover, no timber factory has been designed notwithstanding the forests present in the area. See, M. Galletti, *Storia dei curdi,* Milano, Jouvence, 2004, pp. 139-141.

Middle East[12]. With such a situation, many academics and intellectuals have decided to base their research on the historical analysis of the Kurdish people's problematic past and study the several revolts that took place in Turkey or Iraq. International and Italian authoritative scholars achieved remarkable works on this subject. Specifically, I am referring, for instance, to Professor Mirella Galetti, who wrote two books (*I Curdi nella storia*. Cuasso al Monte (VA), Vecchio Faggio, 1990 and *Storia dei Curdi*, Milano, Jouvence, 2004), and to the Kurdish-Turk scholar Cengiz Gunes. He wrote two monographies about the precarious Kurdish social conditions in Turkey (*The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey: from Protest to Resistance*. London, Routledge, 2012 and *The Kurdish Question in Turkey. New Perspectives on Violence, Representation and Reconciliation*", London, Routledge, 2013). In addition, regarding the historical approach, I would like to refer to MICHAEL M. GUNTER, *The Kurds: A Modern History*, Princeton (NJ), Markus Wiener Publishers, 2017, to H. HARFA, *Kurds: An Historical and Political Study*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966, to F. KOOHI-KAMALI, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran: Pastoral Nationalism*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004 and to S. MEISELAS, *Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008. Furthermore, in conclusion, a beneficial study using the research mentioned above technique has been produced by D. MCDOWALL, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, London, I.B. Tauris Editions (Revised ed.), 2009.

- The second methodological approach I would use to classify the broad literature on Kurdish matters relates to the "Kurdish fight against *Daesh*". Intuitively, the latter has flourished only recently, following the advent of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) in western Iraq and north-eastern Syria. The Kurds have drawn increasing geopolitical attention since 2014 due to the military counteroffensive against the terrorist forces of the IS. The studies

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[12] It should be emphasised that in Iran and Syria, the Kurds, despite being socially and politically discriminated against, have not experienced the same persecution that happened to the communities in Turkey and Iran.

on the matter are mostly concrete, pragmatic and aimed at analysing from a geopolitical perspective the Kurdish interactions. There is a general focus on the Kurds of Syria and Iraq, for obvious reasons, and a few references to the Turkish community.

On the other hand, the Kurds of Iran are seldom cited in these studies, which I consider to some extent useful but certainly not complete, especially regarding historical and sociological aspects. In this respect, I intend to cite H. ALLSOPP, *The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East*, London, I.B. Tauris Editions, 2014, H. ALLSOPP AND W. VAN WILGENBURG, T*he Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflicts*, London, I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2019, and O. SABIO, *Rojava: An Alternative to Imperialism, Nationalism, and Islamism in the Middle East*, Lulu Editors, 2015. Moreover, M. KNAPP, A. FLACH, E. AYBOGA, D. GRAEBER AND A. ABDULLAH, *Revolution in Rojava: Democratic Autonomy and Women's Liberation in the Syrian Kurdistan*, Pluto Press-Independent Editors, 2016, M. CARTIER, *Serkeftin: A Narrative of the Rojava Revolution*, London, Zero Books, 2019 and J. PALANI & L. WHYTE, *Freedom Fighter*, Holborn (London), Atlantic Books, 2019.

- The third approach regarding research technique on these matters is less academic but, in my opinion, still moderately valuable. It deals with the "studies about nostalgic Kurdish past", and it is often produced by scholars and authors of the Kurdish Diaspora. The educational value of these pieces of intellectual work is undoubtedly poor and not accurate enough; however, these intellectual works are fundamental to comprehending the social microcosm within the Kurdish minorities spread in the Middle East, Europe and Northern America. Some authors such as CECIL H. EDMONDS (*My Father's Paradise: A Son's Search for His Jewish Past in Kurdish Iraq*, Ams Pr Inc Publisher, 2008.) and JEAN SASSON (*Love in a Torn Land: Joanna of Kurdistan: The True Story of a Freedom Fighter's Escape from Iraqi Vengeance*, Turner Pub. Co. Editions, 2007) produced fascinating books about the structural problems and the hardships suffered by the Kurds throughout recent history. In my view, those publications can add an inside perspective which is

highly relevant in terms of connections and ideological parallelisms. In her work, Cecil H. Edmonds highlighted how, essentially, the living conditions of the Iraqi Kurds under the last period of Hussein's regime and the Jewish persecutions under the Nazis were quite similar from a teleological perspective[13]. The miserable conditions of the Iraqi Kurds during the second half of the 1980s created a special bond between Kurds and Jews. As proof of this, nowadays, the diplomatic relations between the KRG and the Israeli government are secure and continuously growing[14]. Referring to other authors who adopted this interpretative trend, I intend to cite J. BULLOCH AND H. MORRIS, *No Friends But The Mountains: The Tragic History Of The Kurds*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993 and N. AZIZ, *Kurdistan. Storia di un popolo e della sua lotta*, Roma, Manifesto Libri, 2000. The latter, mainly, is a refugee journalist in Germany who focused his research on the political figure of Abdullah Ocalan, founder of the PKK. He retraced the steps and events in the life of the historical leader, praising his progressive views and condemning the Turkish retaliation against him. It is an intriguing book in which the author describes the human aspect of Ocalan's fight against Turkish authorities.

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[13] During the *Al-Anfal* campaign, besides the genocide attempts and the several chemical bombings, the Iraqi regime arranged many detaining camps in which hundreds of Kurds, survivors of the attacks, were sent. Concrete and severe human rights violations have been committed against the Kurds the government had systematically targeted for years. Among the most relevant violations are mass summary executions and a mass disappearance of tens of thousands of non-combatants, including large numbers of women and children and sometimes the entire population of villages. Moreover, the wholesale destruction of some 2.000 villages was described in government documents as having been "purified" by the "evil" Kurdish presence. The regime ultimately killed between 50.000 and 100.000 people for racial purposes. For further details, see C. Hardi, *Gendered Experiences of Genocide: Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq*, London, Routledge, 2011, pp. 23-26.

[14] The relations between the Iraqi Kurds and the Israelis have been solid for over 50 years. Moreover, after the *Al-Anfal* tragedy, the Israelis supported the civil population of Iraqi Kurdistan with massive humanitarian aid. This bond became even more prominent after the autonomy obtained by Erbil from Bagdad in 2005, following the adoption of the new federal constitution.

- The last approach is the most academically captivating and potentially useful regarding the distinction between Kurdish minorities. It could be defined as "ethno-demographic Kurdish investigations" and is focused on comprehending the intrinsic disparities among the Kurdish communities. Unfortunately, the material is scarce. One of the principal authors of ethno-demographic studies on the Kurds is Martin Van Bruinessen. He wrote three very interesting monographies about the different social interactions based on clans and tribes among the several Kurdish communities in the Middle East. Concretely, I am referring to *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, London, Zed Books, 1991, to *Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism versus the Nation-Building States*, Piscataway (NJ), Gorgias Press, 2011 and *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins And Developments*, Syracuse University Press-New York, 2006 (with Wadie Jwaideh). In my opinion, the ethno-demographic approach applied to Kurdish studies is precious. It sheds light on the historical evolution of the single minorities, allowing other scholars to better comprehend the social interactions not only with the governmental authorities but also among the Kurdish communities. In this respect, it ought to be emphasised that there is no cohesion between the Kurds and that the latter have often fought each other with cruelty. For instance, the PKK is considered by the Iraqi Kurds more as a threat than potential support; this is primarily due to the aggressive attitude exercised by the PKK adherents towards other Kurdish political organisations to obtain a sort of ideological supremacy[15]. Moreover, even between the communities dwelling in the same state often, the relations are complicated[16].

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[15] The PKK, since its foundation occurred on the 27th of November 1978, has been considered in the Kurdish "universe" as the spiritual and ideological leader of the fight against the oppressors. Since 2005, when the Iraqi KRG became, to a greater extent, autonomous but not sovereign from Bagdad, the PKK lost some of its supremacy due to the presence on the scene of an actual Kurdish state entity located not in Turkey but Iraq.

[16] In December 1993, a bloody feud broke out between the two majority Iraqi Kurdish parties, the KDP and the PUK, which resulted in a real intra-Kurdish civil war (*birakuji* in Sorani, the Kurdish dialect spoken in Iraq). The war slowed the political renewal

Therefore, many authoritative scholars and academics have investigated Kurdish issues, encompassing several different aspects of the historical and social evolution of this ancient people. However, it seems that not much space has been dedicated to studying one precise moment in Kurdish history: the ideological and cultural genesis of Kurdish nationalism. Between 1910 and 1918, namely during the last tragic years of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurdish *intelligentsia* dwelling in Istanbul laid the foundations for the elaboration and the ensuing spread of sophisticated nationalist theories, which seldom have been examined. Several intellectuals of Kurdish origins forged a spiritual environment in which many ideas flourished, the majority of which formed a national conscience whose ultimate aim was the creation of a nation-state homeland for all the Kurds. As a result, following the emergence of such an intellectually vibrant atmosphere, several "Kurdish Societies" were formed by independent leaders. What was the premise on which Kurdish nationalists based their theories? Were the Kurds, especially at the origins of their nationalist movement, still within the Ottoman framework, or they opted for an independent approach? What was the reaction of the Young Turks to the genesis of a worrisome Kurdish nationalism? The research I intend to carry out aims to shed light on these matters.

4. Methodology

I. The Interpretative Historical Approach

With this academic investigation I attempt to provide an answer to other questions strictly intertwined with the ones just proposed: which of the two types of factors - internal and external ones - has had the most significant impact on the failure of the Kurdish nationalist project? Did internal factors prevail over external ones and vice-versa? If there was no prevalence of one

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process in the spring of 1992 after the first free elections were organised in Erbil. See J. Jongerden, *Governing Kurdistan: Self-Administration in the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq and the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria*, in "Ethnopolitics", Vol. 18, Issue 1, 2014, pp. 61-75.

over the other, how much did the combination of the two factors affect the final result? To answer these questions, I intend to conduct non-archival academic research. The latter, while providing a variety of aspects that are extremely valuable for academic investigation - especially concerning political science - might not provide an in-depth understanding and analysis for the purpose of this work. In this regard, primary sources often give a biased or opinionated insight. For instance, by adopting archival research involving the study of diplomatic sources, I could encounter the risk of relying on the personal opinions and sensations of the diplomats of the time who described the Ottoman society. Their comments were often made in the light of strategically drafted reports addressed to national chancelleries. On this respect, it is interesting to cite some valuable British archival sources addressing Kurdish matters that would not serve my research goal.

During the Cairo Conference (March 1921), Winston Churchill, the newly appointed Colonial Secretary, was very open to the wishes of the Kurdish people for a homeland on their own. The prospect of a sovereign and independent Kurdish state entity, acting as a "buffer zone" between a reborn Turkey and the newly independent Arab states, was an attractive idea for Churchill, who was concerned about British geopolitical interests. On the 15th of March 1921 he told the British political committee that:

> "It might be possible to subsidize a Kurdish chief and his more influential subordinates and to grant provisional trading facilities in consideration of an agreement that they would prevent the Turks from carrying out a policy in that adverse to British interests"[17].

> British primary sources show often that the primary intention when dealing with Kurdish issues was a matter of imperial strategic revenues. In addition to Churchill's strategies, it is worth referring to Arnold T. Wilson's response when Foreign Office in London and General Headquarters in Cairo proposed a total withdraw from the

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[17] C. Catherwood, Winston Folly. Imperialism and the creation of Modern Iraq, London, Constable & Robinson Ltd, 2004, pp. 135-136.

idea of establishing a Kurdish state and keeping only the Mesopotamian plain (12th September 1919):

"The whole basis of our action as regards Kurds should be in my opinion the assurance of a satisfactory boundary to Mesopotamia. Such a boundary cannot be secured, I imagine in the plains, but must be found in the Kurdish mountains ... [and that] entails a tribal policy"[18].

The "satisfactory boundary" mentioned by Wilson is in accordance with British imperial interests. Similarly, on 13th August 1920, a letter addressed to Sir Percy Cox, is read as follows:

"In regard to the areas of Southern Kurdistan which are at the present administrated from Baghdad, I would suggest a federation of Kurdish states by Kurdish chiefs with British president by their sides, and a Federal Council, possibly at [Suleymaniyya], over which for the present a British political officer should preside. [...] As member of Federal Council in addition to those [unread] locally, I would recommend Hamdi Bey Baban, a representative from Bedr Khan family, and an associate of the Kurdish Club at Constantinople[19]".

The reference to Hamdi Bey Baban, who will be extensively studied in the second chapter of this work regarding the genesis of the first Kurdish societies, was made exclusively in relation to the British imperial interests. Concretely, also in this case, the Kurdish issue was evaluated with a clear approach strategically focused on keeping British advantages in the Mesopotamian area following the breakup of Ottoman Empire.

The three archive citations relate to the years from 1919 to 1921, i.e. a historical period that goes beyond the analysis of this research. In fact, interest in Kurdish issues began to grow following the dissolution of the Sublime Porte. The creation of a Kurdish state in eastern Anatolia could have favoured British interests, establishing a "buffer zone" between the

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[18] FO 371/ 4192, 12 September 1919, C-in-Egypt to War Office and Wilson's response.
[19] GB 165-0309/ DS 799.K, 13 August 1920, Political Baghdad to Sir Percy Cox.

nascent republic of Turkey and Iraq, which was being created in those years. Before the end of WWI, the Kurdish people was among the least strategic issues concerning the numerous Ottoman minorities eager to find an independentist path. As will be mentioned in this book, the archival sources before the 1919-1921 period show a moderate presence of Kurdish reference only concerning the brutality of their actions against the Armenian communities during the Hamidian massacres (1894 - 1897) and the mass deportations which culminated in the genocide of 1915 - 1916. Apart from that, archival sources don't provide valuable material for this academic research, as the rise of Kurdish nationalism was not fully considered a relevant political event. Being a cultural form of nationalism embedded within the Ottoman system, it did not attract relevant interest from British and other European diplomacies, which were focused on other minorities more inclined to stand up against Istanbul's rule.

The three cases of archival sources I have mentioned represent a source system that is not useful for my research. My goal is to analyze the genesis of the Kurdish nationalist movement and understand why it was unsuccessful. In this regard, an approach based on the external strategic vision of the Kurdish movement - scarce and almost irrelevant for the period 1898-1918 - by British and European diplomacies won't serve my work. Similarly, the study of Turkish-Ottoman archival sources might not benefit the final result as well. Ottoman officials opposed the rise of any form of nationalism within the Sublime Porte system. This conservative approach limits the scope of analysis and gives a biased interpretation of the events as well. Portraying the Kurdish movement as an enemy of Ottoman integrity - as found in Ottoman archival sources - besides adding nothing new to the academic debate, undermines the importance that Kurdish nationalism has had from a cultural-historical standpoint. The cultural awakening of the Kurdish people - with nationalist ideologies - was much more than a "simple" independence movement embedded within the decadent Ottoman Empire. It was a spark of socio-cultural progress that characterized a people for centuries "in the dark" from a cultural standpoint. For the first time in its history, a minority considered among the most ignorant and savage in the Ottoman family, established a variegated microcosm of cultural development.