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1 The Kurds, the Kurdish Question in Turkey and Economic Development in ESA: An Exploration of the Central Theoretical Debates and Outline of the Methodological Resources

1.1 Defining the Kurds

Kurdish ancestry, ethno-genesis, native land and language are matters of persistent scholarly debate. Different theories exist concerning the ancestry of the Kurds. Certain scholars claim that they were the people of 'Gutium' in ancient Sumeria (Izady, 1988, 1992). The most prominent hypothesis, particularly among Kurds, is that the Kurds descended from the ancient Indo-European people, the Medes, who established the Median Empire (728–550 BC) in the current areas of south eastern Turkey, northern Iraq and western Iran (Wahby, 1982; Kendal, 1996). Another line of thought conceives that the modern Kurds, while possibly descending from some or all of these ancestries imputed to them, were formed as an amalgamation into a novel, ethnically distinct people (Bois, 1966). Other researchers, in the same vein as the aforementioned TKAE-affiliated Turkish nationalist scholars, vehemently dispute all of these views and instead maintain that the Kurds are a branch of the Turkic people, negating that the Kurds are a distinct people (Kırzıoğlu, 1963; Türkdoğan, 1997).

However, what may be the least controversial definition is the degree of consciousness among Kurds in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria that they constitute one people. They brand themselves Kurds, even with the dissimilarities in their economic activities, political and economic development and modern history. Kurds and most researchers attempting to define them approve of this postulation.

Nonetheless, the causality of this consciousness has been a source of controversy. Broadly speaking, there are two main streams of thought on this interminable debate: the primordialist or essentialist and the constructivist. The former argues that the nation is a natural and perennial entity that has existed since time immemorial and predates

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nationalism (Geertz, 1973; Armstrong, 1982). Thus according to the primordialist, the source of modern national awareness is the old and acutely felt ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural differences. In that vein, the Harvard academic of Kurdish origin Mehrad R. Izady posits that the period from the fifth century BC through to the sixth century AD 'marks the homogenization and consolidation of the modern Kurdish national identity. The ethnic designator Kurd is established finally, and applied to all segments of the nation' (1992: 23). The Kurdish linguist Jamal Nabaz postulates a classic example of the primordial conceptualisation of the Kurdish identity and nationalism. Nabaz contends that the '*Kurdayetî* [Kurdish nationalist] movement, as we see it, is not the construction of any class or group . . . *Kurdayetî* is a natural, dynamic, and perpetual movement' (Sheyholislami, 2011: 52). As Abbas Vali correctly observed, '[T]he mainstream Kurdish nationalist . . . is "primordialist." For him/her the Kurdish nation is a primordial entity, a natural formation rooted in the nature of every Kurd defining the identity of people and community history' (2003b: 59). Therefore, studies or individuals influenced by this dominant approach overlook the modern character of the Kurdish identity and the socially constructed nature of its features.

The constructivists argue that nations are relatively recent and contingent entities generated over the past two centuries by the development of modern economic, social and political conditions. Within constructivism, there is a wide range of different approaches. Ernest Gellner (1992) emphasises the importance of industrialisation and the shift from premodern village communities. Benedict Anderson (1983) stresses the development of print culture or 'print capitalism' and of people who are conscious of a common identity. Marxist writers like Eric Hobsbawm (1990) analyse the rise of national economies and social classes as the basis of nations and nationalism.

Anthony Smith, who highlights that the premodern basis of nations permits modernist change but on grounds of historic continuities, espouses a 'third way' stance between primordialist and constructivist approaches. Smith hypothesises that nation is the advanced version of ethnicity and the main difference between the two is that the latter does not have a common polity. Ethnic community or *ethnie*, according to Smith, is a historically specific segment of a country's population that shares the following six features: a collective name, a common myth of descent (or *mythomoteur*), a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an affiliation with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity (1986: 22–32).

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This study perceives the construction of Kurdish identity and nationalism from a constructivist perspective and recognises the vital role played by historical, international, socioeconomic and political factors in the construction of national identities and nationalist movements. As Fred Halliday cogently contends, the constructivist approach 'need not rest on a narrow, industrial-society model: rather, starting from the rise of modern industrial society in Europe and the USA, it seeks to show how the impact of this society was felt throughout the world, in economic change and industrialisation certainly, but also in the political, social and ideological changes that accompanied the subjugation to this model of the world, in the two centuries 1800–2000' (2006: 15). Relatedly, Halliday proposes a constructivist framework for studying the history of Kurdish nationalism and the basis of Kurdish identity formation, applying four extensive processes of modernism: 'war and conflict', 'nationalism and state building', 'ideology' and 'socio-economic transformation' (ibid.: 15–18).

The concepts of the nation and nationalism as the sole and supreme focus of one's loyalty are relatively new, having only commenced in the latter part of the eighteenth century and specifically during the 1789 French Revolution. After 1789, the nation became a way of legitimising the political domination of social classes of people by the new capitalist class – the bourgeoisie – and had fundamental ramifications for the process of state-building. Skirmishes for participation in the state occasioned confrontations between the feudal aristocracy and the bourgeoisie; the latter's interests were often represented by a parliament. The bourgeoisie claimed to be the advocates of 'the nation' and in opposition to the former insisted they were the true espousers and defenders of 'national liberties'.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, moreover, the concept acquired a cultural meaning, referring to a unique people with a distinct identity. This change in meaning was a result of the cultural understandings of community and power undergoing alterations following economic changes, social and scientific innovations and expansion of communication, initially in Western Europe and subsequently elsewhere, after the nineteenth century. In other words, the concurrent expansion of capitalism, means of communication (particularly print materials) and the development of vernacular languages beside Latin played a pivotal role in large groups of people perceiving themselves as distinct communities (Anderson, 1983). Hence, the idea of the nation came to denote a community of people shaped by common descent, culture, language, aspirations and history. Nationalism as both a modern ideology and a social or political

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movement aims at the formation and upkeep of self-government and/or the creation and reconstruction of collective cultural/national identity for a group who believes itself to be a nation or proto-nation.

The percolation of the concepts of nation and nationalism in the minds of the Kurds, when compared to European nations, is newer. As posited by Van Bruinessen (2000, 2003), H. Bozarslan (2003a) and Vali (2003a), the construction of Kurdish national identity and the birth of Kurdish nationalism are recent phenomena, dating back to the beginning of the past century. Van Bruinessen rightly observes that under Ottoman rule, Kurds, analogous to other people in the multi-religious and multiethnic Ottoman Empire, despite being aware of their Kurdishness, did not categorise themselves as an ethnic group or nation in the way they do today, because tribes were the main collective with which Kurds identified (2003: 43–5). Similarly, Denise Natali espouses the view that 'in both the Ottoman and Qajar [Persian] Empires the absence of an exclusive official nationalist project based on ethnicity prevented Kurdayetî from becoming salient or highly ethnicized' (2005: 24). In other words, in the pre-twentieth century, there were neither political nor socioeconomic prerequisites in Kurdistan for the existence of any notion of the nation. Despite the Ottoman Empire's centralisation policies and the infiltration of capitalism into Ottoman Anatolia after the 1830s arousing nationalist proclivities amidst Ottoman Kurds, most of the Kurdish movements were Ottomanist in outlook (H. Bozarslan, 2003a: 165–72) and this was a restricted process, encompassing exclusively the Kurdish elite (Van Bruinessen, 2003: 55–6).

The politicisation of the Kurdish identity and Kurdish national mobilisation was largely catalysed by four different factors. The first of these is the assimilationist policies stemming from Arab, Persian and Turkish official nationalisms (Van Bruinessen, 2000; Natali, 2005; Vali, 2006). That is to say, the exclusionary policies and monolithic understanding of society and state by the states that host Kurds impelled them to conserve their distinct identities, and thereby initiated a symbiotic development of Kurdish and Arab/Persian/ Turkish nationalisms.

The second factor that fostered Kurdish identity and nationalism is the uneven socioeconomic and political development commonly experienced by the Kurdish societies in the modern Middle East. As Tom Nairn rightly noted, nationalism has commonly 'arisen in societies confronting a dilemma of uneven development ... where a conscious, middle-class elite has sought massive popular mobilization to right the balance' (1977: 41–2). Michael Hechter also makes a similar and pertinent observation: 'to the extent that social stratification in the periphery is based on

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observable cultural difference, there exists the probability that the disadvantaged group will, in time, reactively assert its own culture as equal or superior to that of the relatively advantaged core. This may help it conceive of itself as a separate "nation" and seek independence' (1975: 10). As these valuable annotations highlight, nationalism neither emerges erratically in the history of a populace, nor is it a perennial or romantic phenomenon; it is a contingent phenomenon rooted in the socioeconomic actualities of the modern age.

The spread of war between the Kurdish armed organisations and the states that host the Kurds after 1960 – i.e. Iraq: intermittently from 1960 to 2003; Iran: intermittently from 1980 to present; Turkey: intermittently from 1984 to present – has amplified the shared socioeconomic and political problems experienced by Kurds, and thereby nurtured national awareness among Kurds, even with their territorial, linguistic and political fragmentations. These wars have engendered a constant movement of Kurdish populations – often to similar destinations, such as the metropolises of the hosting states or the megalopolises of Western Europe – enabling them to share experiences of struggle, displacement, poverty and homelessness.

The final and most contemporary factor empowering the politicisation of the Kurdish identity and the Kurdish national movement is imputable to sequential momentous events and transformations in the Kurdish-inhabited countries in the Middle East from 2010 on, namely the Arab uprisings after December 2010 and the rise of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) after 2014. The transformative impact of the former was employed by the people in the Middle East to develop a new discourse on changing the balances and political situations in the region. The stout desire for more democratic, pluralistic and decentralised governments and broader civil/political rights that appeared during the uprisings strengthened this discourse. Relatedly, the Arab uprisings have given a lot of momentum to the movements and struggles of the non-Arab indigenous peoples by holding out the hope of socioeconomic and political change via toppling or severely weakening oppressive regimes reviled by Kurds, as evinced in the case of Syria's Kurds.

On 19 July 2012, Syria's long repressed Kurds – largely under the leadership of the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, PYD), the PKK's sister organisation in Syria – took control of the local administration in major Kurdish-populated areas in Afrin, Jazira and Kobanê, now collectively designated as Rojava. This de facto Kurdish autonomy came on the back of government troops abruptly pulling out of the major Kurdish areas in an attempt to consolidate their increasingly

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desperate position in mid-July 2012. The autonomous structure in Rojava encouraged the Kurds, not only in other parts of Syria but also in Turkey, as showcased by declarations of autonomy in ESA towns, such as Cizre and Doğubeyazıt, by PKK-affiliated local political structures in the summer of 2015.

The genocidal campaign ISIL unleashed against Kurds in Iraq and Syria consolidated the political ties between Kurds, despite their differing political perspectives. This was deftly demonstrated with two successive events. The PKK militants from the Qandil Mountains in northern Iraq, the KRG Peshmerga and the PYD/PKK fighters from Rojava cooperated to save Yezidi Kurds threatened by ISIL in August 2014. And the Kurds across ESA – and all over the world – rose up in late 2014 against Turkey's indolent policy towards the then ISIL-besieged Kobanê. Consequently, Kobanê today is for Syria's Kurds and Turkey's Kurds what the Halabja chemical-weapons attack in 1988 was for Iraqi Kurds – a stepping-stone for national mobilisation – and it has immensely strengthened Kurdishness.

The emergence of the modern nation-state coincided with the rise of capitalism, a novel type of economic structure, ideology and political structure in contrast to that existing under feudalism.[1] Under feudalism in Europe, for instance, political domination had been legitimised by reference to the divine right of the kings to rule. Theoretically, under capitalism, notions of 'popular sovereignty' or 'common will' define the nature of political authority in the constitution of the nation-states. A chain of bourgeois revolutions gave an end to the feudal aristocracy's rule and gave birth to the nation-states. The classic example of this is the aforementioned French Revolution.

The existential and core principle of the nation-state is that all its citizens are members of a single political unit, regardless of their ideational dissimilarities. This principle habitually assumes an organic link between the dominant nation and the state. The construction of the nation-states in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, which began soon after the First World War, shared this ethos. Often, the cement of this unison is a form of national myth, which unites and defines the features specific to each nation. Put differently, most fellow-members of a nation will never know each other, but they will entertain the identical national myth.

[1] *Feudalism* in this book will denote a social and economic arrangement, characterised by an obligation laid on the producers by force and independently of their own volition to fulfil certain economic demands of an overlord, that is, the feudal superior, whether these demands take the form of services to be performed or of dues to be paid in money or in kind. This coercive force may be that of military strength, possessed by the feudal superior, or of custom backed by a juridical procedure or the imposition of law.

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Thus the nation has been perceived as an 'imagined community', since the 'image of their communion' is instilled in the minds of each member of any given nation (Anderson, 1983: 6), unlike in pre-capitalist or traditional societies, where most members of society know each other. Kurds have also employed appeals to 'imagined community' in mobilising nationalist sentiment.

The construction and deployment of a myth of origin tracing the origins of the Kurds to the first millennium BC to an ancient people, the Medes, and the Newroz myth[2] in the political discourse of the Kurdish national movement have been highly influential in the awareness by Kurds that they constitute one people (Gunes, 2012; D. Aydın, 2014). As McDowall asserts, these myths 'are valuable tools in nation building, however dubious historically, because they offer a common mystical identity, exclusive to the Kurdish people' (2000: 4). To sum up, real socioeconomic and political problems commonly experienced by Kurds in the modern Middle East combined with the fictitious or constructive factors have shaped the process of national identity formation among Kurds.

The amalgamation and culmination of the fictive and real factors at the turn of this century, as Van Bruinessen observed in the mid-1990s, 'have strengthened contact between the Kurds; there is now a stronger awareness of belonging together than there was in the past' (2000: 62). However, these developments do not implicate that Kurds have transformed into a unitary, collective actor with common purposes and resultantly done away with all divisions. There still exists diverse political agendas amidst Kurdish political actors, as exhibited with the two competing visions for Rojava offered by the PKK-affiliated and the Kurdistan Democratic Party–oriented (Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê, KDP) political formations in this region.[3] Yet what these contemporary political events germane to the Kurds accentuate is that, drawing on Miroslav Hroch's model of nation-building,[4] the majority of the Kurds

[2] The myth of Newroz narrates the toppling of the Assyrian King Dehak by a mass uprising led by Kawa the Blacksmith (Kawayi Hesinkar), who, on 21 March 612 BC, initiated an uprising by the Medes, defeated the Assyrian Empire, annihilated Dehak and liberated the Medes (the supposed ancestors of Kurds) from years of oppression and tyranny. Kurdish nationalists construct the myth of origin around the Newroz festival (traditionally celebrated across the Middle East on 21 March, which coincides with the spring equinox, as a New Year festival) as a national festival date.

[3] For a comprehensive analysis of the vying political visions for Rojava amidst Kurdish political actors, see Gunes and Lowe (2015).

[4] This model distinguishes between a maiden phase where activists commit themselves to erudite inquiry into the cultural, historical and linguistic features of their ethnic group; a penultimate stage where a new range of activists emerges, trying to gain the support of as many of their compatriots as feasible for the project of creating a nation; and a final period

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have reached the final phase of nation-building and national consciousness has become the concern of the majority of the Kurdish population.

Nevertheless, by virtue of multifarious and complex international, historical, political and economic factors explored in the subsequent sections of this study, and even with the recent Kurdish regimes[5] established by Kurds in the twenty-first century, they have been unable to institute an independent state. Accordingly, the Kurds claim the status of the largest nation without a state of its own.

Language

The Kurds speak an Indo-European language, Kurdish, which is a branch of the Iranian language family. There are a number of dialects and sub-dialects of the Kurdish language. Kurmanji is the most widely spoken dialect by northern Kurds (in Turkey) and by western Kurds (in Syria) as well as by Kurds in former Soviet Republics (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan). Kurds living in Iraq, or southern Kurds, mostly speak Sorani. Sub-dialects or local dialects include those mostly used by Kurdish-inhabited areas of Iran (eastern Kurds) of Kirmanshani, Gurani (Gorani) and Leki (Laki). A minority of northern Kurds also speak Zaza. There is disagreement however, about whether Zaza is actually a Kurdish language, because it is noticeably different from, though not completely dissimilar to, other Kurdish dialects, except Gurani (Gorani) (McDowall, 2000: 10). An additional problem is the different written scripts of the Kurdish language. It is written in the Arabic, the Latin and, in the case of Kurmanji in Armenia, Georgia and the Azerbaijan republics, in the Cyrillic alphabets.[6]

Religion

The Kurds are overwhelmingly Muslim. The majority of the Kurds are Sunni Muslims who are a part of the Shafi'i school of Islam, unlike their Arab and Turkish Sunni neighbours, who mainly adhere to the Hanafi school, and their Azeri and Persian neighbours, who are Shi'ites. Most of the eastern Kurds living in the provinces of Kermanshah and Ilam are

when the national consciousness becomes the concern of the majority of the population (Hroch, 1993: 3–20).

[5] The formalisation of the semi-independent Kurdish administrative unit in Iraq following the US-led invasion of this country in 2003, and in 2014 Kurds gaining control of the de facto autonomous region in northern and northeast Syria.

[6] For detailed and differing explorations of the Kurdish language, see Minorsky (1927: 1151–5); MacKenzie (1961: 68–86); and Kreyenbroek (1992: 68–83).

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Shi'ite. Other Kurds observe heterodox and syncretistic sects 'with beliefs and rituals that are clearly influenced by Islam but owe more to other religions, notably old Iranian religions' (Van Bruinessen, 1991: 7). Such sects include the Ahl-i Haqq ('People of Truth or the Kaka'is), the Alevis (otherwise known as the Qizilbash) and the Yezidis. There are small communities of Kurdish Baha'is, Christians and Jews.[7]

Land

It is generally agreed that the Kurds have lived in a geographical entity, namely, Kurdistan (literally, the land of the Kurds). However, owing to the various political, economic and social vicissitudes, the geographical extent of Kurdistan has varied significantly over the centuries and its territorial confines have been a matter of contention among its researchers. Indubitably, the following four core characteristics of Kurdistan have fuelled this debate (O'Shea, 2004):

(i) it is not, and never has been, recognised as an independent state;
(ii) it does not constitute an economically distinct area;
(iii) it is not, and at no time has it been, entirely ethnically, linguistically or religiously cohesive as a region;
(iv) it lies on the major overland trade routes between Asia, Europe, Russia and the Arab Middle East, as well as being home to rich oil and water resources, prompting outside powers to become involved in its fate.

The amalgamation of the aforementioned factors engendered the elasticity and the degeneration of the notion of Kurdistan over centuries.

In the eleventh century, the geographer Al Qashgari produced a stylised map of what he titled *States of the East*, which built in, along with all the 'races' acknowledged in the East, the land of the Kurds. This perhaps is the first map to include Kurdistan (O'Shea, 2004: 230). During the tenth and eleventh centuries, whilst part of the Arab Caliphate (seventh–eleventh centuries), a number of Kurdish dynasties – the Shaddadids (951–1174, Transcaucasia), Hasanwaydhids (959–1095, Dinawar), Marwanids (990–1096, Diyarbakir) and Annazids (991–1117, Hulwan) – took control of their local matters, but were wiped out by the invasions of the Seljuk Turks (eleventh–twelfth centuries) (Hassanpour, 1992: 50; McDowall, 2000: 21–4). In the year 1150, the Seljuk Sultan Sanjar

[7] For in-depth analysis of religion in Kurdistan, see Van Bruinessen (1991: 5–27) and Kreyenbroek (1996: 85–110; 1998: 163–84).

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created a province of Kurdistan, with the town of Bahar as its capital, and it comprised areas that are presently located in the predominantly Kurdish regions of contemporary Iraq and Iran, namely, the provinces of Dinawer, Kermanshah, Shahrazur and Sincar (Kendal, 1996: 10). Yet it was not until the sixteenth century that the geographical expression *Kurdistan* came into common usage to denote a system of Kurdish fiefs generally, and not merely the Seljuk-designated province.

The geographical extent of this definition grew immensely during the next three centuries owing to the instigation of a few interrelated processes from 1514 onwards: the incorporation of nearly all of the Kurdish principalities in or around eastern Asia Minor into the Ottoman Empire, and the migratory movements of the Kurds. The aggrandisement of the territorial scope of Ottoman Kurdistan becomes apparent when the investigations of nineteenth-century contemporaries on its territorial confines are surveyed. Probably the most detailed account of it is delineated in a little-known study of the Ottoman military scholar, Ahmed Cemal.

In 1895, Cemal, after having graduated from the Ottoman Imperial War Academy in 1892, with the blessing of the Council of Military Education (Meclis-i Maarif-i Askerriye) published a geography textbook titled *Ottoman Geography* (*Çoğrafya-yi Osmânî*) in an attempt to acquaint senior high school students with the topography of the empire. It was republished in 1900 and 1903, but in the ensuing years, possibly because of the political developments during and after the CUP period outlined in Chapter 4, its educational role and importance appears to have gradually diminished.

Çoğrafya-yi Osmânî divides Ottoman lands into three separate entities: Ottoman lands in Europe (*Avrupa-yı Osmânî*); Ottoman lands in Asia (*Asya-yı Osmânî*); and Ottoman lands in Africa (*Afrika-yı Osmânî*). Kurdistan, along with the Anatolian Peninsula, Arabian Peninsula, Yemen, Hejaz and the islands of Crete and Cyprus, is a constituent territory of *Asya-yı Osmânî*, and it consists of the provinces (*eyalets*), sub-provinces (*sancaks*) and judicial districts (*kazas*) displayed in Table 1.1. (Kürdoloji Çalışmaları Grubu, Kürt Tarihi Araştırmaları-I, Osmanlı Kürdistanı, 2011).

Cemal's demarcation of the geographical extent of Ottoman Kurdistan is in accord with the detailed map of Kurdistan produced by Britain's military attaché at Constantinople[8], Major F. R. Maunsell[9] (1894: 81–2).

[8] Maunsell remained in this post until 1905, and was responsible for the War Office's maps of the Middle East during the period prior to the First World War.
[9] For other investigations of Maunsell on Kurdistan, see F. R. Maunsell (1901: 121–41).

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