

**Turkish-Kurdish Conflict: An Ethno-Symbolist Exploration of Turks'  
and Kurds' Territorial Homeland Claims**

Banu Celik

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Dr. Edward Weisband

Dr. Timothy W. Luke

Dr. Laura Zanotti

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**(ABSTRACT)**

The conflict between ethnic minorities and nation-states has been subject to one of the most searching debates in the study of ethno-nationalism. The dominant approach among scholars is that ethnic conflicts stem from states' failure to recognize minority rights. Within the framework of this approach, it is assumed that ethnic conflicts occur due to the discriminatory policies on the part of the state. As a reaction to those policies, ethnic groups resist with rebellious elements. However this assimilation-resistance paradigm only considers the civic integration efforts of the state and fails to acknowledge the role of state's territorial integrity efforts and ethnic groups' demands to self-government in generating the conflict. Anchored in an ethno-symbolist framework, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the historical interpretational obstacles over the ownership of homeland between the states and ethnic groups when working towards a conflict resolution. Through a case study of Kurdish-Turkish conflict, this thesis addresses the different meanings of territory held by the state and the ethnic groups as one of the major causes of ethnic conflicts.

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*To my parents who inspired me in every moment of my life*

*To my dear and loving husband who has been always there for me*

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

The ethnic homeland is far more than territory. As evidenced by the near universal use of such emotionally charged terms as the motherland, the fatherland, the native land, the ancestral land, land where my fathers dies and, not least, the homeland, the territory so identified becomes imbued with an emotional, almost reverential dimension.

(Walker Connor 1986:16)

### **1.1. Statement of Purpose**

The conflict between ethnic minorities and nation-states has been subject to one of the most searching debates in the study of ethnicity and nationalism. Most of the scholars try to explain the nature of ethnic conflicts with assimilation-resistance paradigm (Kuyucu, 2005; Shain and Sherman, 1998; Pieterse, 1997; Stoddard, 2000). Within the framework of this paradigm, it is assumed that ethnic conflicts happen due to the discriminatory policies on the part of the state. As a reaction to those policies, ethnic groups resist with rebellious elements. However this paradigm only considers the civic integration efforts of the state and fails to acknowledge the state's territorial integrity efforts and ethnic groups' demands to self-government in generating the conflict.

This thesis seeks to contribute to an understanding of the debate concerning ethnic conflicts by advancing the argument that “nationalism is always a struggle for control of land; whatever else the nation may be, it is nothing if not a mode of constructing and interpreting social space” (Kaiser, 2004:231). In other words, understanding the nature of ethnic conflicts requires more than the assimilation-resistance paradigm suggests. It should be also considered that the struggle between the states and ethnic groups to maintain control over the territorial homeland is an important factor behind ethnic conflicts. Anchored in a theoretical framework,

the purpose of this thesis is to figure out the historical interpretational obstacles over the ownership of homeland between the states and ethnic groups that policy makers and theorists need to understand.

In my thesis, I have chosen to focus on Kurdish-Turkish conflict. Kurds and Turks have been claiming the same territory as their homeland for almost a century now. Considering the importance of homeland claims in generating the ethnic conflicts, we must take homeland claims seriously. I argue that understanding how the territorial claims of Turks and Kurds shaped the different perceptions of homeland is crucial to generate peaceful settlement solutions to conflicts.

## **1.2. Significance of the Study**

Scholars have been searching for answers to the question of “why some ethnic conflicts become violent and others do not” (Toft, 2003:2). For some scholars, violent conflicts result from deeply rooted emotions and ethno-nationalist feelings (Christie, 1998; Rudolph, 1977). For others, violent conflicts stem from states’ failure to recognize minority rights (Pieterse, 1997; Shain and Sherman, 1998). Whatever else it may be, preliminary research on ethnic conflict studies indicates that scholars tend to ignore the role of historical homelands for ethnic groups in generating the conflicts. Kaiser writes: “The processes of homeland making, the role of territory and territoriality in nationalization projects, and the relationship between exclusionary claims to places as homelands and interethnic conflict have been all ignored in the scholarly literature on nationalism” (Kaiser, 2004:230).

As Kaiser points out, the important role of *territory* for both ethnic groups and states is largely missing from ethno-nationalist debate among scholars. In other words, my topic of

interest does not seem to be covered well by the literature. For that reason, a careful look at how the states and ethnic groups interpret their shared history is needed to figure out the conditions that give rise to ethnic-nationalism.

This thesis will take a position akin to the ethno-symbolist view of nationalism to explain the Kurds' and Turks' territorial homeland claims. It is because ethno-symbolism is the only approach that incorporates the role of ethnicity and modernism in making the claims concerning territory.

### **1.3. A Case Study Approach**

In order to understand the Kurds' and Turks' ethno-symbolist homeland claims, it is necessary to understand something of the shared history of Kurdish and Turkish people. The following section will provide some brief information about the Kurds, their cultural characteristics, and the Turkish Governments' view with respect to the Kurdish issue.

#### **1.3.1. Who are the Kurds?**

The Kurds, native inhabitants of Kurdistan region, constitute the largest ethnic group in the world without a state of their own (Laciner and Bal, 2004:486). This region is located at the heart of Middle East and is divided between the borders of four states: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Since Kurdistan is not a political entity, it does not have the official boundaries that a state has. Instead, the borders of Kurdistan are loosely defined as the following: "...in the North by the Aras river in eastern Turkey and on the Iran-USSR border; in the West by the Kara-Su and upper Euphrates rivers in Turkey and Iraq, in the south by the border between mountain country and undulating plains in Iraq, approximately along a Mosul-Kirkuk-Khanaqin line; in the east by a line drawn from Hamadan to Lake Rezaiyeh and Maku, in Iran.

The area of Kurdistan thus defined would be c. 135,000 square miles” (Husain and Shumock, 2006:270).

According to Council of Europe’s 2006 report, the total number of Kurds range from 25 to 30 million. With respect to population distribution, approximately 55% of all Kurds live in Turkey, (17-18% of the population of Turkey), about 24 % in Iran, 16% in Iraq and 5% in Syria (Laciner and Bal, 2004:487).

Three important elements, Kurdish history, language and religion, unite the Kurds. As for the history, some scholars trace them back to the period of Ottoman and Persian empires. Some goes further and claim that Kurds have been in the historic arena since the tenth century. According to Kemal Burkay’s research on Kurds’ historical roots; “...the Kurds founded several important states during the Islamic epoch between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, such as Shaddadiden, Marvaniden and Ayyubiden - as well as in the distant past” (Burkay, 2007).<sup>1</sup> The Kurdish language is an Indo-European language of Persian branch.<sup>2</sup>

Although there are different types of dialects that Kurds speak, the name “Kurdish” is usually used to emphasize their ethnic affiliation to the Kurdish identity. Whereas the believers of Sunni Islam compromise the 75% of the all Kurdish population, Shi’i, Alevi, Christian, Jewish, and Yezidi faiths are shared by 25%.<sup>3</sup>

### **1.3.2. Kemalism: Turkey’s Official State Ideology**

I have included a brief discussion of the early history of Kurdish-Turkish relationship to provide a basis for understanding the sources of Turkish-Kurdish conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information: [http://www.kurdistan.nu/english/eng\\_kurdish\\_question.htm](http://www.kurdistan.nu/english/eng_kurdish_question.htm)

<sup>2</sup> For more information: <http://www.cogsci.ed.ac.uk/~siamakr/Kurdish/langtech.html>

<sup>3</sup> For more information: <http://www.everyculture.com/Africa-Middle-East/Kurds-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html>

In this section, I will provide some brief information about the official state ideology (Kemalism) and the place of minorities in this ideology.

As the modern Turkish nation-state born after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1923, creating a unified nation which is based on Turkish nationality became the ultimate goal of the state. The official state policy was that “the sovereign state must be exclusive to a particular nation” (Rae, 2004:8). The basic principles of state ideology were created by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of Turkish Republic.

Ataturk’s major political goal was to create a western oriented-homogenous nation-state. It is because “Ataturk saw Islam as the biggest obstacle to Turkey’s being westernized and modernized, so he created a nation without an official religion” (Mizell, 2007).<sup>4</sup> Here, it is important to note that Ataturk’s thoughts were highly influenced by European modern discourse, more specifically French civic model of nationhood. In order to catch up with modernized nations, he first eliminated the role of Islam as being the unifying element of the Turkish nation and replaced the Ottoman Millet system with Turkish nationalism.

Whereas the Ottoman millet system, which “aimed at grouping nationalities according to religion rather than ethnicity” (Thorpe, 2007:162), Kemalism was aimed at creating “a homogenous, centralized nation-state and a secular society” (Hakan and Ozcan, 2006:107).

As Hale notes: “With the establishment of an officially secular republic, any idea that Turkey should act primarily, or even partially, as a Muslim state was definitely abandoned.

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<sup>4</sup> Aland Mizell. 2007. [Are Islam and Kemalism Compatible? How two systems have impacted the Kurdish question?](http://www.kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=14301) KurdishMedia.com. <http://www.kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=14301>

Ataturk's clear aim was to establish Turkey as a respected nation state, on the Western model, with sufficient economic and military strength to sustain that role" (Hale, 2000:232).

Considering Islam as the only unifying element of Kurds and Turks for more than 500 years under the rule of Ottoman Empire, one can comprehend how the secularization of the state removed this unifying element and loosened the ties between the two groups. What is also important to note here is that "By stripping Turkey of its religious institutions, Mustafa Kemal now made enemies of the very Kurds who have helped Turkey survive the years of the trial, 1919-22. These were the religious minded, the shaykhs and the old Hamidiya aghas who had genuinely believed in the defence of the caliphate and Islam" (McDowall, 2004:192).

In other words, Ataturk's secularization and homogenization policies created a sense of *otherness* based on religion as well as ethnicity. Accordingly the Kurds began to complain that; "The Turks have themselves destroyed the last bond which remained between the Kurds and Turks, that of religion. Since the Khalifate has been cast of like a cracked water-pipe, all that remains is the feeling of Turkish oppression" (Natali, 2005:83).

### **1.3.3. The stages in the development of Turkification Process**

Turkey's defeat in the First World War I and Turkish government's concerns have very much affected the way in which Turkish nationalism was developed. After the defeat of Central Powers, the Allies started to concern themselves with creating new states, breaking up empires and granting independence to minorities. And the Kurdish community was no exception to that. According to American President Woodrow Wilson; "Non-Turkish minorities of the Ottoman Empire should be assured of an absolute, unmolested opportunity for autonomous development" (Balance, 1996:12). So for the first time in their history, Kurds

were promised an independent state in their ethnic homeland under the Treaty of Sevres of 1920. Although the Treaty was signed by the Allies and the Turkish government, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk “raised a revolt in Anatolia against the Treaty of Sevres, appealing for a Muslim unity and a Muslim fatherland” (Balance, 1996:14). After the revolt’s great success, “the Allies were forced to negotiate with Turkey once again, and holes were blown in the Treaty of Sevres” (Balance, 1996:14).

Working to build Turkey into a secular state, Ataturk and his followers had no intention to unify the Kurds as an ethnic community within the Turkish state. The government’s opinion on that issue was stated by Prime Minister Ismet Inonu as the following: “We are openly nationalists. Nationalism is the only cause that keeps us together. Besides the Turkish majority, none of the other (ethnic) elements shall have any impact. We shall, at any price, turkicize those who live in our country, and destroy those who rise up against Turks and the Turkdom”(Andreopoulos, 1994:151).

As Inonu made it clear, in order to prevent ethnic awareness and the possibility of the emergence of ethnic-nationalism in search of independence, it seemed to be necessary to establish a strong Turkish nationalism. As a result, Turkification (Türklestirme) of different ethnic groups became the official state ideology. As it is defined by Rifat N. Bali, “Turkification means the Turkish Republic’s project to create a state of citizens enjoying equal rights, who define themselves first and foremost as Turks, their religion being a private matter” (Bali, 2006:46). In other words, all ethnic groups had to be assimilated into Turkish culture.

The first condition to become a Turkish citizen was to speak Turkish. In 1924, the Turkish Constitution passed a law which banned the use of languages other than Turkish.

Accordingly receiving instructions in foreign languages (including Kurdish language) at schools has become forbidden. Other condition in Turkification process was to “Turkify names and surnames” (Bali, 2006:47). The Law of family names of 1934 aimed at preventing Kurds and other ethnic minorities from taking non-Turkish names. Following these events “Kurdish dress, Kurdish folklore and even the very word “Kurd” were banned”(Andreopoulos, 1997:151).

One of the breaking points in Turkification process was the Law of Resettlement of 1934 which basically addressed the problem of huge Kurdish population that lived in the eastern part of Turkey. In order to quicken the assimilation process and to prevent heavy population settlements, Kurds were deported from eastern Turkey and Turks were placed there. The idea was that “Turkish lands, according to Turkification, were the property of Turks and only Turks had the right to live on those lands” (Isyar, 2005:352). The reason was the ethnic interpretation of the territory.

#### **1.3.4. Current situation**

Since the majority of the Kurds refused to assimilate into the Turkish culture and seek recognition, they became “ethno-political movements that developed their own identity in opposition to the dominant (Turkish) culture” (Yavuz, 2005:233).

The rise of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) and this militant organization’s provocative attacks against Turkish military forces increased the tension between Kurds and Turkish governments since the 1980’s.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See [http://ilt.ilstu.edu/critique/Spring%202008/Eriten\\_and\\_Romine\\_2008.pdf](http://ilt.ilstu.edu/critique/Spring%202008/Eriten_and_Romine_2008.pdf) for more information.

Today, some of the restrictions on Kurds were removed and some policy changes have been made due to Turkey's desire to become a member of the European Union (EU). In 1993, the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly recommended that: "In the regions where they are in a majority the persons belonging to a national minority shall have the right to have at their disposal appropriate local or autonomous authorities or to have a special status, matching the specific historical and territorial situation and in accordance with the domestic legislation of the state" (Hannum, 2004:275). It was also noted that candidate states should consider "territorial arrangements where it would improve the opportunities of minorities to exercise authority over matters affecting them" (Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations, 1999: para.19).

Although some progress has been made, the issue became more problematic as the semi-autonomous Kurdish state emerged right on Turkey's south east border from the division of Iraq in 2003. Despite the fact that newly established Iraqi government, which is backed by the U.S., has promised to keep the unity of Iraq and prevent any separatist movements including the Kurds' demands for full independence, Turkey officials seemed not to be satisfied with this statement and expressed their concerns over the emergence of an independent Kurdish state. However, Massud Barzani, the president of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, reinforced Turkey's fear when he publicly announced that an independent Kurdish state is his ultimate goal.<sup>6</sup> According to conventional wisdom, an autonomous Kurdish state should be seen as a threat to the very existentiality of Turkish Republic.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael J. Totten, April 18, 2007. Where Kurdistan Meets the Red Zone. Middle East Journal. <http://www.michaeltotten.com/archives/001417.html>

This assumption stems from the fear that “if any one of the groups of Kurds in another country succeeds in seceding from their respective country of residence, other Kurds in their countries may attempt to follow suit” (Husain and Shumock, 2001:292). This phenomenon is known as *Kurdish snowball effect*.

Today, Turkish society is more polarized along ethnic lines than it was thirty years ago. Now, it is not only the Turkish nation-state that is confronting the Kurds but also the Turkish citizens and Kurds are confronting each other. Al Jazeera’s report confirms this tense situation between two groups. The report writes: “Daily images of crying mothers surrounded by hundreds of mourners at the funerals of soldiers killed by PKK rebels broadcast to millions of households have fanned tensions as Turkey mulls a full-scale invasion into Iraq. Hoping to stem public anger, the Supreme Board of Radio and Television (RTUK), Turkey's television watchdog, banned all broadcasts covering the deaths of the Turkish soldiers. ‘*We should just clean the south east of the country,*’ a young Turkish demonstrator, who refused to be named, said as his friends punched their fists in the air” (Al Jazeera, 2007).<sup>7</sup>

#### **1.4. Research Question**

As it has been argued in the beginning of this chapter, ethnic conflicts can not be fully explained by the assimilation-resistance paradigm. The importance of territorial homeland claims in generating ethnic conflicts should not be ignored.

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<sup>7</sup> Jody Sabral, November 1, 2007. [Nationalism soars in Turkey due to PKK terror.](http://www.turkses.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4221&Itemid=38)

It is because .the state and the ethnic groups often claim the same territory as their homeland. As for the Kurdish-Turkish conflict case, Kurdistan came to be seen by the Turks and Kurds as their historical homeland.

If this conflict is generated by the different meanings of territory held by the state and the ethnic groups; the question I seek to answer is: What are the ethno-symbolist territorial claims of the Turks and Kurds that shape the different perceptions of homeland?

### **1.5. Research Methodology**

I will employ qualitative approach as to study the role and the importance of homelands in the analysis of ethnic conflicts. The target groups for this study are the Kurds and Turks who have been contesting to maintain control over Kurdish region for over a century now.

This research will be an analytical study. I will utilize the following primary sources:

- Turkish and Kurdish newspapers and periodicals.
- Kurdish and Turkish oral histories, myths, legends, epics etc.
- Kurdish web pages.

I will also include the work of scholars as secondary sources of my thesis. This will include library sources such as books, journal articles and reviews.

### **1.6. Chapter Division**

After reviewing the theoretical approaches to the study of ethnic-nationalism in Chapter 2, my focus will be on Kurds' territorial homeland claims in Chapter 3. Consequently, Chapter 4 will discuss the Turks' homeland claims. In Chapter 5, I will present my research findings with respect to the role of territorial claims in generating conflicts.

### **1.7. Limitations of this study**

From a case study research methods point of view, it may be inappropriate to draw inferences about Kurdish communities in Iraq, Iran and Syria other than the Turkey's Kurds presented in this study. It is because different forms of Kurdish nationalism have evolved in Turkey, Iraq and Iran due to the differences of each state's political ideology. In the words of Natali, "Variations in political spaces have resulted in a semilegal, fractured, and changing ethnonationalist movement in Iraq; an illegal, highly ethnicized, urban-based leftist nationalist movement in Turkey; and a more adoptive form of Kurdish ethnonationalism in Iran represented by a secular, leftist Sunni nationalist elite" (Natali, 2005:160). However, it is my hope that my research can provide a framework in studying the ethnic conflicts.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Scholars have approached to the study of nationalism from three different perspectives: primordialism, modernism and ethno-symbolism. This chapter proposes that neither primordialist nor modernist arguments shed light on the processes that drive ethnic groups to form an ethno-nationalist movement. The problem is that these two approaches ignore “the continuity between pre-modern ethnic institutions and modern nations” (Conversi, 2004:12). Although scholars tend to label “modernism as the most dominant approach” to the study of nations and nationalism (Conversi, 2004:9), I will try to demonstrate that ethno-symbolist view of nationalism is the only approach that incorporates the role of ethnicity (pre-modernity) and the state power (modernity). For that reason the argument of this thesis takes a position akin to the ethno-symbolist view of nationalism to explain the Kurdish and Turkish ethno-nationalism and Kurds’ territorial claims.

Ethno-symbolism claims that “although ethno-nationalism is a modern ideology, successful nations are built upon pre-modern heritage and it is possible to recognize a nation before the onset of its modernity” (Conversi, 2004:3). Arguing that Kurdish ethno-nationalism is shaped by both Kurds’ pre-existing ties to the Kurdish land and the rise of Turkish nationalism.

Turkey, Iran, and Iraq are the three states where Kurdish ethno-nationalism is strong. Millions of Kurds aspire to autonomy in those states. However neither conditions within these states, nor the international conjuncture favors Kurdish self-determination in the sense of a state in all or part of Kurdistan. As of 2008, we see a slight easing in cultural and some

political controls in Turkey and a political opening heavily hemmed by Turkey in Iraq. As being the largest ethnic group on earth without a state of their own, it is obvious that Kurdish nationalism is a case that no theory of nationalism can ignore.

I will first review the theoretical approaches to the study of ethno-nationalism and critically survey their application to the Kurdish ethno-nationalism. In the second part of this chapter, I will try to demonstrate the need for more research on the issue of ethnic groups' territorial claims by examining the work of various scholars.

## **2.2. What is ethno-nationalism?**

Before moving on to the theoretical overview, I would like to offer a conceptual clarification of the term ethnonationalism. This clarification is crucial in differentiating ethnonationalism from nationalism since there are still many scholars who use these two terms interchangeably. Although ethnonationalism and nationalism hold similar meanings, they are not the same.

Nationalism began to emerge as far back as the twelfth century however it did not become an established phenomenon until much later. Political scientists usually regard 1648; the year in which the Treaty of Westphalia ended the Thirty Years' War (Philpott, 2000: 217). It was the time when the nation-state became the dominant institution in international relations. That treaty not only defined the rights of the various nation-states but also discussed national sovereignty and other aspects of nationalism. Since then, nationalism has become the most powerful ideology in the world (Anderson, 2000: 7).

Nationalism refers to the ideology of the nation-state. It is the theoretical basis for the organization of the world's people into states, each claiming to be sovereign. In that sense,

nationalism needs to be understood in the nation-state framework. Ethnonationalism, on the other hand, refers to the nationalism of stateless ethnic groups. In other words, ethnonationalism can be defined as “Ethnic groups’ claiming to be (or to possess) nations and states in the past or that have the potential of becoming (nations or states and) are now demanding and asserting these claims as (historic) rights to self determination for local autonomy or independence” (Gosh, 1991:31).

State is a political term that includes four elements: people, territory, government, sovereignty. There are several theories of the origin of the state that have had an important impact on nationalism as an ideology. Only the Social Contract Theory,<sup>8</sup> a major contributor to the ideology of nationalism, perceives the nation as the ultimate power of the state. However, the nation and state union tends to divide people along territorial lines, and people use it as a frame of reference for their own identity and as a yardstick by which to measure other people. In this sense, it can be argued that ethnonationalism was born as a reaction to the modern nation-states’ unification ideals. As Jerry Muller writes: “By creating a new and direct relationship between individuals and the government, the rise of the modern state weakened individuals’ traditional bonds to intermediate social units, such as the family, the clan, the guild, and the church. And by spurring social and geographic mobility and a self-help mentality, the rise of market-based economies did the same. The result was an emotional vacuum that was often filled by new forms of identification, often along ethnic lines” (Muller 2008, *Foreign Affairs*).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.iep.utm.edu/s/soc-cont.htm> for more information on Social Contract Theory.

<sup>9</sup> Jerry Z. Muller, March/ April 2008, *Us and Them: The Enduring Power of Ethnic Nationalism*. See <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20080301faessay87203/jerry-z-muller/us-and-them.html>

It can be argued that the major difference between nationalism and ethnonationalism is the people's attachment to the state. As Stanley Tambiah nicely puts "there are two models of nationalism that are in interaction and contention in many parts, one of these is 'ethnonationalism' and the other is 'nationalism of the nation state'" (Tambiah, 1996:124). An ethno-nationalist group can exist even though it is not contained within a particular state or served or accepted by a given government. An ethno-nationalist group can also exist when there is a union of people based on a linguistic pattern, an ethnic relationship, cultural similarities, or even geographic proximity.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will first take into account of the primordialist, modernist, and ethno-symbolist approaches to the study of ethnonationalism. After reviewing the literature, I will demonstrate the need for more research on ethno-nationalist territorial claims.

### **2.3. A Theoretical Overview**

Examining the literature on ethnonationalism, I found out that primordialist thought first developed in the writings of Shils and Geertz (Duling, 2008:3). These writers suggest that: "Ethnic groups are held together by 'natural affections.' These are bonds so compelling, so passionate, so 'coercive,' and so overpowering, that they are fixed, a priori, involuntary, ineffable, and even 'sacred.' These bonds are deeply rooted in family, territory, language, custom, and religion. They are the major foundation for group norms, values, and behavior. They are thus 'primordial'" (Duling, 2008:3).

Other primordialist writers explain nations as timeless occurrences (Horowitz, 1985:64; Smith, 1986:24). They argue that nations were existed in primordial times and will continue to prevail. Nations have a clear national identity based on language, custom and historic memory. Nations also have a clear 'national territory'. According to primordialists nations have a right to an independent nation-state. As such, this claim implies a history in which the self-awareness of an already existing nation awakens.

Turkish scholars Sedat Laciner and Ihsan Bal take a primordialist approach in examining the Kurdish ethnonationalism. They explore the reasons behind Kurdish ethnic nationalism's failure in the article called "Roots of the Kurdist Movement in Turkey". They assert that "the ethnic origin, history and demography did not provide a suitable environment for Kurdish ethnonationalism, particularly in the Anatolian territories" (Laciner and Bal, 2004:473). The authors suggest that linguistic differences among Kurdish tribes prevent them unifying as a nation. However the authors also suggest that Kurds "..... like any other ethno-nationalist groups, base their efforts to create a nation by using history for its political ends" (Laciner and Bal, 2004:477).

Although the primordialist argument is useful at explaining the potential of ethno-nationalism as a mobilizing power, it fails to explain the emergence of Kurdish ethnic nationalism as response to the modern Turkish nation-state and Turkish nationalism. In addition to that, this approach ignores the role of modernist constructions of national identity. In short, primordialist view is not sufficient in explaining the transformation of Kurdish ethnonationalism during the Turkification process of ethnic minorities

This account of nationalism is challenged by what it is broadly termed as the *modernist*

*approach*. Modernists argue that, in simplified terms, nations are recent and contingent creations, the product of the development of modern economic, social and political conditions. Territory is something claimed, but not necessarily precise in its borders or belonging to one people rather than to others. The modernist approach recognizes the relevance and ideological force of territorial claims but does not assume that these are somehow naturally given. They are part of politics.

According to modernist scholars (Michael Mann, 1995; Charles Tilly, 1975; John Breuilly, 1993; Anthony Giddens, 1985); “transition to modernity is characterized by military and administrative expansions, centralization of government, and a taxation system on the whole clearly bounded territory of the state” (Periwal, 1995:10). In Mann’s words “Nations and nationalism have primarily developed in response to the development of the modern state” (Mann, 1995:45). Whereas Breuilly focuses on “emerging conflictual interests between civic society and the state”, Giddens emphasizes “the alienation and the ontological insecurity of the population that has lost its traditions” (Periwal, 1995:10).

As for the transition from primordial societies to the modern ones, modernist scholar Anderson suggests that there are three processes that occurred during “the transition from pre-modern to modern societies” which made the emergence of nationalism possible; the process of secularization, standardization of the concept of time, and the invention of commercial print (Anderson, 1991:12). As he explains, these processes created the nation, “an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson, 1991:12). Anderson takes the modernist approach and argues that “nations developed as a necessary component of industrial society, though neither economic interest, Liberalism, nor

Enlightenment could, or did, create in themselves the kind, or shape, or imagined community” (Anderson, 1991:65). He emphasizes the role of capitalism in the development of nations and nationalism.

Ernest Geller’s modernization argument suggests that “nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent” (Geller, 1983:3). Again, he shares the same view with modernists and argues that “Nations were the result of pressures created by the demands of the industrial revolution. As soon as people from widely different backgrounds began to converge on cities, it was necessary to create some form of common identity for them”(Geller, 1983:5). Geller’s view of ethno-nationalism is not applicable to my study because a distinct Kurdish population was not created as a result of Industrial Revolution; it was a part of Turkish nation-building project.

Another scholar, Paul Brass takes a modernist view of nationalism and opposes to the primordialist approach. He argues that “Ethnicity and nationalism are not ‘givens,’ but are social and political constructions. They are creations of elites, who draw upon, distort, and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as for themselves. ....Ethnicity and nationalism are modern phenomena inseparably connected with the activities of the modern centralizing state” (Brass, 1991:8). According to Brass, ethnicity and nationality are “socially constructed, elites for and materialist reasons, and are ineluctably implicated in the modern state” (Brass, 1991:8). He defines ethnicity as “a sense of ethnic identity...consisting of the subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people...of any aspect of culture...in order to create internal

cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups” (Brass, 1991:9). One of the most interesting parts of his book is his explanation to the conditions of nationalism. He argues that “Nationalism is most likely to develop when new elites arise to challenge a system of ethnic stratification in the cities or an existing pattern of distribution of economic resources and political power between ethnically distinct urban and rural groups or ethnically diverse regions. One moment at which such challenges tend to arise most forcefully is when industrial development and political centralization have led to concentrations of job opportunities in key urban centers and to the need for trained personnel to fill the new positions. It is at this point also in pluralistic societies that the issue of language becomes critical because the choice of the official language and the medium of education determine which groups have favored access to the best jobs” (Brass, 1991:43-44).

Another prominent scholar Hobsbawm’s major contribution to the study of nationalism is his explanation of nationalism from a Marxist and modernist point of view. Hobsbawm defines nationalism as “primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent” (Hobsbawm, 1990:9). He argues that nations are socially constructed and “they are unchanging social entities”. He perceives the development of nations as “situated at the point of intersection of politics, technology and social transformation”. He places a special emphasis on class consciousness. He claims that this class consciousness “led to the development of the mass politics which made nations possible” (Hobsbawm, 1990:13).

There are two major critiques to the modernist approach. One is that it denies the relevance of historical continuity by locating the emergence of nations in a purely modern context. The other is that modernism can not explain the emergence of nationalism in relatively

underdeveloped, pre-industrial contexts as in the case of Kurdish nationalism. A distinct Kurdish language and people have existed for millennia; on the other hand Kurdistan has been largely isolated from modern socio-economic change. If we sketch a framework for a modernist account of Kurdish nation nationalism, it is obvious that modernism is not a conclusive answer.

The ethno-symbolic approach in the study of nationalism put forward by Anthony D. Smith differs from primordialist and modernist perspectives as “it gives more weight to subjective elements of memory, value, sentiment, myth and symbol and it thereby seeks to enter and understand the ‘inner worlds’ of ethnicity and nationalism” (Smith, 2001:57). This approach suggests that nations are “subjective and historically rooted”. The British sociologist Anthony D. Smith defines the concept of ethnicity in these terms: “Human beings have always felt themselves bounded by multiple identities. Even in prehistoric societies, the family, clan and settlement vied for their allegiance. By the time we meet historical societies with written records, to the familial and residential circles of identity must be added those of the city state, social stratum and what I shall call the ‘ethnic community’ or *ethnie*. The *ethnie* can be defined as a human group whose members share common myths of origin and descent, historical memories, cultural patterns and values, association with a particular territory, and a sense of solidarity, at least among the elites” (Smith, 2001:59).

Smith’s contribution is important because he considerably enlarges primordialist perspective but does not deny the role of modernist developments. Smith claims that “modern nations are based on a longer development than many scholars are willing to admit” (Smith, 2003:87). By doing so, he challenges to the modernist assumption that nations are modern

phenomenon.

Ronald Beiner contributes to the discussion of ethno-symbolism by suggesting that “nationalism exist at all times in less visible forms” (Beiner, 1999:82). He defines these forms as “banal nationalism” in his book called *Theorizing Nationalism*. Contrary to popular belief, he argues, sociological or economical crises are not the defining factors of nationalism. He views nationalism as powerful force that people never forget. In this sense, he takes a position akin to the ethno-symbolist view of nationalism. He argues that “it is very important to recognize the symbols such as flags and language which are imposed by media”(Beiner, 1999:85). It is because those symbols demonstrate the power of nationalism in the global world even if it is not known as nationalism.

With respect to the ethno-symbolic approach, Andreas Wimmer states that “nationalist and ethnic politics are not just a by-product of modern state formation or of industrialisation; rather, modernity itself rests on a basis of ethnic and nationalist principles” (Wimmer, 2002:14). He argues that nationalization of state goes through two processes. First one is state modernization and second one is the rise of civil society. His book focuses “on the shifting borders separating the included from the excluded, on the new ways of drawing dividing lines that the modern age has brought with it. Anthropology of the modern state thus looks at its subject from the sidelines, from where its shadow sides can be seen more clearly” (Wimmer, 2002:15). He also opposes to Anthony Smith who has argued that a single nation is needed to act as a cohesive unit. On the contrary, he claims that ethnic homogeneity is not required to achieve unity.

Craig Calhoun, a sociologist, argues that nationalism is a constructed phenomenon but

he rejects Eric Hobsbawm's assertion that "nationality is an invalid illusion" (Calhaun, 1997:8). Calhaun sides with Ernest Gellner and argues the necessity of modernism "for the creation of nations and nationalism". In the first chapter of his book, "Nationalism", he specifically notes that it is impossible to "define the commonalities of the diverse forms of nationalism by a single explanatory variable" (Calhaun, 1997:22). He argues that nationalism is a result of modernity. In this regard, he tries to explain the rise of nationalism in an ethno-symbolic context.

As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, I will employ an ethno-symbolic view of Kurdish nationalism. The usefulness of ethno-symbolic analysis for attending to the Kurdish nationalism is two-fold. Firstly, it acknowledges the importance of ties to the land, to Kurdish traditions and Islamic identities. Secondly, it uncovers the Kurdish nationalist inspirations (ethnic feelings-primordialism) during the Turkish nation-building process (modernity).

#### **2.4. The Gap in Ethno-Nationalist Studies**

A number of scholars have examined the various aspects of ethno-nationalist claims other than the theory. The focus is generally on the reactionary nature of ethnonationalism. For example, Horowitz suggests that most of the scholarly literature is centered on "certain unique socio-historical, economic, political, ideological, and cultural developments that led to the emergence and reemergence of ethnonationalism, especially since the Second World War" (Kourvetaris, 1996:3). Moving from his point, the aim of this section is to bring together a number of published works on the various aspects of ethnonationalism to demonstrate the need for more research on the issue of territorial claims.

Scholars have been searching for answers to the question of “why some ethnic conflicts become violent and others do not” (Toft, 2005:2). For some scholars, violent conflicts result from deeply rooted emotions and ethno-nationalist feelings (Christie, 1998; Rudolph, 1977). For others, violent conflicts stem from states’ failure to recognize minority rights (Pieterse, 1997; Shain and Sherman, 1998). Whatever else it may be, preliminary research on ethno-nationalism indicates that scholars tend to ignore the role of ethnic homelands in determining the nature of conflicts. Kaiser argues that “The processes of homeland making, the role of territory and territoriality in nationalization projects, and the relationship between exclusionary claims to places as homelands and interethnic conflict have been all ignored in the scholarly literature on nationalism” (Kaiser, 2004:230).

As Kaiser points out, the importance of controlling territory for ethnic groups is largely missing from ethnonationalist debate among scholars. Only a handful of scholars concern themselves with the questions of land, who owns it and who belongs on it or to it.

Walker Connor is one of the first scholars who points to the need for understanding the role of space and territory for ethnic communities. Connor defines ethnonationalism as “subnational movements for autonomy or independence organized along linguistic, ethnic, religious, or cultural lines” (quoted in Kourvetaris, 2008:1). He argues that ethno-nationalism means “both the loyalty to a nation deprived of its own state and the loyalty to an ethnic group embodied in a specific state, particularly where the latter is conceived as a ‘nation-state’” (quoted in Conversi, 2004:2). In other words, it refers to “particular strain of nationalism that is marked by the desire of an ethnic community to have absolute authority over its own political, economic and social affairs” (Halle, 2006:66).

Connor states that true nationhood based on ethnic homogeneity was only met in 9 per cent of the cases which he investigated in 1971 (Connor, 1994:96). He argues that “typical criteria used in defining the ethnic nationalism include religion, economic disparities and language but the literature on ethno-nationalism failed to show clear linkages between any of these criteria and ethnic feelings” (quoted in Haymes, 2004:544). Connor does not view religion as a determining factor of ethnicity and/or ethnic feelings. He goes on arguing that the religion only offers a secondary role in defining the “other”. As he explains “religion is a social label rather than a pre-condition” for ethnic conflicts (Connor, 1994:550).

The idea that economic disparities accelerate ethnic conflicts is also rejected by Connor. He opposes this argument by using the example of an economic comparison between Maine and Quebec. He argues that they have similar economic problems when compared to their respective countries. Quebec separatists, however, “use their relative economic position to justify their ethnically based demands on the national government in Ottawa” (quoted in Haymes, 2004:545).

The language is also not seen as a defining element of ethnic nationalism by Connor. He views this element as the defense of an ethnic language against a more dominant tongue. He argues that “national languages are almost always semi-artificial constructs and occasionally, like modern Hebrew, virtually invented” (Barreto, 1998:35).

My work has been influenced by Connor’s ideas. It is my belief that Connor’s findings may apply to the Kurdish ethnonationalist movement as well. It is because Kurds do not only base their efforts on gaining back their religious rights or emphasize economic disparities. Although the linguistic discrimination against Kurdish language might be considered as a

factor in strengthening their nationalist project, it is not the root of the perseverance of Kurdish ethnonationalism. Their major claim is to gain a right to self-determination and autonomy in Kurdistan, the eastern part of Turkey.

As for the Kurdish-Turkish conflict, Turkish scholar Kemal Kirisci argues that “a first step towards solution would be to grant cultural, educational and linguistic rights” to the Kurds. However this statement contradicts with Connor’s argument as I explained above. Connor argues that linguistic differences or other factors are not the determining or the defining factors of ethnic conflicts.

Soner Cagaptay’s research on Turkey’s immigration and naturalization laws shows “how ethno-religious discrimination created a hierarchy of desirable citizens ranging in preferential order from ethnic Turks to non-Turkish muslims, to Armenians, Jews and Kurds” (Thorpe, 2007:161). The problem often arises between native citizens and naturalized citizens when the native citizens looked down upon naturalized citizens as Hannah Arendt explains.

Ted Robert Gurr contributes to the discussion of ethnonationalism by suggesting that each ethnic group’s needs are unique and require different policy solutions. Gurr made a detailed research on ethno-nationalist movements by comparing them in different regions since 1945.<sup>11</sup> His findings reveal that “the differences between ethno-nationalist movements appear more striking than their similarities”.<sup>12</sup> This indicates that more research is needed to understand the different views held by different ethnic groups as regards to land, statehood, and independence.

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<sup>11, 12</sup> For more information: [http://www.carleton.ca/e-merge/docs\\_vol3/articles/Ethnonationalism.pdf](http://www.carleton.ca/e-merge/docs_vol3/articles/Ethnonationalism.pdf)

Thomas Hymes examines the major approaches to nationalism and ethno-nationalism in his article called "What is nationalism really?" He critiques realist theories and theorists of *International Relations* by arguing that "if you take away the centrality of the nation state from these viewpoints, they suddenly lack any useful structure" to deal with sub-national forces such as "ethnic conflict, crime, overpopulation etc" (Hymes, 1997:541). Hymes quotes Bernard Schechterman in his article and argues that "Ethnic-nationalism has been largely ignored by state-based or individual-based approaches to international relations" (Hymes, 1997:543). Hymes also proposes that ethnic nationalism is not understood well. As a result of this misunderstanding, he argues, ethnic movements and their impact on the international system have been inadequately investigated (Hymes, 1997:543). Robert J. Kaiser provides an insightful exploration of ethnic homelands and homeland making in his article called Homeland making and Territorialization (2004). He argues that "as actual places and localities become ever more blurred and indeterminate, ideas of culturally and ethnically distinct places become perhaps even more salient" (Kaiser, 2004:243). He suggest that nationalism is "a struggle for control of land; whatever else the nation may be, it is nothing if not a mode of constructing and interpreting social space" (Kaiser, 2004:244). I believe a closer look at the role played by a local sense of place in ethnonationalism is needed to reinforce his argument. And this is exactly what I am going to explore by writing Kurdish ethnonationalism and its territorial claims.

Michael Hechter's book Containing Nationalism explains why some ethno-nationalist movements result in violence and other not. He argues that "nationalism is the attempt of culturally distinct peoples to attain political self-determination" (Hechter, 2000:27). He goes

and claims that “nationalism arises from the imposition of direct rule in culturally heterogeneous societies. Direct rule stimulates national identity by making cultural distinctions more salient for individuals’ life chances” (Hechter, 2000:28).

## **2.5. Conclusion**

A modernist approach does not deny the legitimacy of ethnic groups’ to self-determination or the importance of ethnic homelands. But it raises the questions of which ethnic groups achieve independence, of whether or/and how the ethnonationalist movements emerge. After reviewing the work of various scholars in the second half of the chapter, I came to a conclusion that one of the weaknesses of nationalism debate is the tendency to ignore ethnonationalists’ territorial claims. What the summary observations in this chapter suggest is that despite the claims of primordialist historians on the one hand, and of a narrow industrializing conception of nationalism, on the other, it may be possible to write an ethno-symbolist account of Kurdish ethnonationalism and its self-autonomy aspirations.

### **CHAPTER 3: AN ETHNO-SYMBOLIC ACCOUNT OF THE KURDS' HOMELAND CLAIMS**

In the twentieth century, Turkish state's relations with its Kurdish origin citizens have at times been very problematic. Between the years of 1920 and 1938 alone, newly founded Turkish Republic faced 17 Kurdish rebellions, three of them, those of 1925, 1930, and 1937, being major ones (Barkey and Fuller, 1998: 9-11). Then, between 1984 and 1999, Turkey had been the scene of armed conflict between Kurdish rebels (Kurdistan Workers Party) and government forces. The estimated loss of life from both sides during second period was around 40.000 (Marcus, 2007:307-311).

Not surprisingly, there are several studies on the Turkish state and Kurds in Turkey. Yet, they have not been able to adequately explain the relations between the state and its ethnically Kurdish citizens. When it comes to ethnic conflict, the dominant view in the literature is informed by the *assimilation-resistance* paradigm (Heper, 2007:17). According to this paradigm, the Kurdish-Turkish conflict can be described as the following chain of events: (1) the founders of the Turkish Republic set for themselves the goal of developing a nation made up of only one ethnic community, and (2) in the process, they had denied the existence of Kurds and (3) Kurds had resisted to the assimilation policies with rebellious elements. Within the framework of this paradigm, it is assumed that ethnic conflicts happen due to the discriminatory policies on the part of the state. In respect to the Kurdish-Turkish conflict, this model fails to point out to the importance of territorial homeland claims in generating ethnic conflicts. It is because this paradigm only considers the civic integration efforts of the state and largely ignores the state's territorial integrity efforts and the Kurds homeland claims.

As it has been appropriately pointed out; “the resolution of the problem of ethnic conflict depends on the definition of the problem” (Horowitz, 1985:356). This chapter does not address itself to the resolution of the problem. Rather, this is an effort to find out the homeland claims of the Kurds in order to explain that the Kurdish-Turkish conflict is not all about the Turkish state’s denial of the existence of the Kurdish ethnicity. It is also about who controls which land.

### **3.1. Kurdish Ethno-Nationalists’ Territorial Homeland Claims**

The Kurds has three ethno-symbolist claims, a combination of primordialist and modernist claims, on Kurdish territory in the eastern part of Turkey. The following section will explore those claims.

#### **3.1.1. Primordialist Claim: The First Owners of Anatolia**

History shows that the term Kurdistan was first used during the reign of the Great Seljuk Sancar (1117-1157). Sultan Sancar gave the name Kurdistan to a state that had the Bahar Castle to the northeast of Hemedan as its center. This state covered the cities of Hemedan, Dinever and Kermanshah to the east of the Zagros Mountains and the cities of Sincar and Sehrizor to the west. This region was known as Cibal-ul Cezire (or Diyarbakir) until the Sultan Sancar period. The historical sources show that Hamdullah Mustafa Kazvini was the first to use the term Kurdistan. In his work entitled *Nuzhetu’ul Kulub* (14<sup>th</sup> century), he states that Kurdistan was formed of 16 towns. The geography called Kurdistan until the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the Ardelan region of Iran around Senandaj B. Nikitin (Cay, 2001:21-23).



**Figure 1: Map of the Kurdish Regions** (Map Designed by Mark Ellison Jr.)<sup>14</sup>

Kurdistan refers to the homeland of the Kurdish people.<sup>15</sup> “Kurdistan, which has since time immemorial been inhabited by the Kurds, has a territory of 500,000 square km, which is as large as that of France. In other words, the Kurds are not a minority in their country; they are the majority” (Burkay, 2001).<sup>16</sup> Burkay goes on and claims that “...the borders that divide Kurdistan are neither natural, economic, nor cultural borders. They are artificial borders that have been drawn against the will of the Kurdish people according to the interests of the forces that did the dividing and the balance of power” (Burkay, 2001) <sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Kurdish Human Rights Project <http://www.khrp.org/content/view/276/125/> (Map is used with permission of Grant Harris, Torske & Sterling Legal Marketing, 2008.)

<sup>15</sup> For more information, see <http://www.tamilnation.org/selfdetermination/nation/kurdish-diaspora.pdf>

<sup>16, 17</sup> Kemal Burkay, 2001. The Kurdish Question: Its History and Present Situation [http://www.kurdistan.nu/english/eng\\_kurdish\\_question.htm](http://www.kurdistan.nu/english/eng_kurdish_question.htm)

The separatists PKK and other separatist Kurdish groups argue that the Kurds are the first owners of the Anatolian territory and that many other nations followed in these territories. Recent PKK documents and other Kurdist publications argue that the Greek, Hittite, Lydia, Assyrian and many other Anatolian and Mesopotamia civilizations were originally Kurdish.<sup>18</sup>

A Kurdish web site states the same claim by arguing that the Turkish governments' have exploited the land for years which historically belonged to the Kurds without giving them any of their rights back. Here, I have included an excerpt from the web site to make to their argument more clear<sup>19</sup>

The same Kurdish web site also includes an article which refers the Kurds as the native inhabitants of Kurdistan territory. It argues that "The Kurdish people in Turkey are the indigenous people and lived and existed thousands of years before of the arrival of the Turks from Mongolia into Kurdistan. But now according to the Turkish government and the Turkish racist parties, the Kurds became strangers and named as Turkish mountain or Turkish Kurds".<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sedat Laciner and Ihsan Bal. October 15, 2004. The Ideological and Historical Roots Of Kurdist Movements In Turkey: Ethnicity Demography, Politics. <http://www.turkishweekly.net/articles.php?id=15>

<sup>19</sup> "Why does the Turkish Government have to control the Kurdish lands for that long without giving any rights to the Kurds, and other nationalities such as Armenians, Arabs, Greeks, and Jews. Despite occupying the Kurdish homeland and taking all the resources and using these resources against the wishes of these nationalities. The government uses our resources to buy army tools and explosions and use them against the people in order to abuse human rights and kill civilians in the villages and the towns of Kurdistan. Commonly identified with the ancient Corduene, which was inhabited by the Carduchi (mentioned in Xenophon), the Kurds were occupied by the Arabs in the 7th cent. The region was held by the Seljuk Turks in the 11th cent., by the Mongols from the 13th to 15th cent., and then by the Safavid and Ottoman Empires. Having been decimated by the Turks in the years between 1915 and 1918 and having struggled bitterly to free themselves from Ottoman rule, the Kurds were encouraged by the Turkish crush in World War I and by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's claim for autonomy for non-Turkish nationalities in the empire. The Kurds brought their claims for independence to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919." <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2007/7/turkeykurdistan1308.htm>

<sup>20</sup> For more information, visit <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2007/7/turkeykurdistan1308.htm>

In another web site called “Kurd Media”, the same claim is supported by an article which argues that the Kurdish land has been forcefully taken back from the Kurds by numerous states. The article goes on and blames those states, including the Turkish state, for ignoring the historical truth which is the fact that the Kurdish territory has always been belonged to the Kurds.<sup>21</sup>

The materials analyzed in this section show that the Kurds base their territorial claims on the historical fact that they have owned the land before the Turks occupied the Kurdistan region and they differ from other minority groups in Turkey since they were not comparatively the recent immigrants.<sup>22</sup> In short Kurds’ ideas on Kurdistan region shaped by the idea that Kurdistan belongs to Kurds because it was before.

### **3.1.2. Primordialist Claim: The Treaty of Sevres**

The Ottoman’s defeat in the First World War presented the Kurds with an opportunity to set up their own national state. The Treaty of Sevres (signed on August 10, 1920) anticipated an independent Kurdish state to cover a small portion of the former Ottoman Kurdistan.

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<sup>21</sup> For more information, see <http://www.kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=14230>

<sup>22</sup> “An acquaintance of mine asked me the other day, “Why are your people (the Kurds) invading Turkey? What have the Turks done to you to deserve this?” I was taken aback by this unusual question and I thought she was joking, for even the biased news media has generally been talking about a possible Turkish invasion of Kurdistan, not the other way around. I responded to my acquaintance by saying, “I think you got it all wrong. It is Turkey that is posing to invade Kurdistan. The Kurds have never in their entire history invaded anybody’s land but have been the victim of invasions by just about everybody.” But what these policy makers overlook is the undeniable fact that those “chunks of territory” have always belonged to the Kurds but have been taken from them by force and occupied by those countries; therefore, by creating an independent Kurdistan, you would not be “taking” territory from those countries but giving it back to its rightful owners. This simple truth is lost on those who decide the fate of nations. It isn’t that these policymakers and opinion-makers are ignorant of history; it is that because they are blinded by the perceived self-interest of the West, they side with lies rather than the truth, with the oppressor rather than the oppressed, and with the victimizer rather than the victim, and the result is the immoral policies that are being implemented today. Very few people who are in a position of influence have had the moral courage to speak the simple truth and say publicly that the Kurds throughout occupied Kurdistan are not the aggressors but victims of aggression.” <http://www.kurdishaspect.com/doc110607RK.html>

Britain and France divided former Ottoman territories and Kurdistan apportioned to the new states of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. Section III (Articles 62-64) dealt with Kurdistan and read as follows: (Chailand, 1993:34).

**Article 62**

A Commission, having its seat in Constantinople and made up of three members appointed by the Governments of Britain, France and Italy, will, during the six months following the implementation of the present treaty, prepare for local autonomy in those regions where the Kurdish element is preponderant lying east of the Euphrates, to the south of still-to-be established Armenian frontier and to the north of the frontier between Turkey, Syria and Mesopotamia, as established in Article 27 II (2 and 3).

Should agreement on any question not be unanimous, the members of the commission will refer it back to their respective Governments. The plan must provide complete guarantees as to the protection of the Assyro-Chaldeans and other ethnic or religious minorities in the area. To this end, a commission made up of British, French, Italian, Persian and Kurdish representatives will visit the area so as to determine what adjustments, if any, should be made to the Turkish frontier wherever it coincides with the Persian frontier as laid down in this treaty.

The Ottoman Government agrees as of now to accept and execute the decisions of the two commissions envisaged in Article 62 within three months of being notified of those decisions.

**Article 64**

If, after one year has elapsed since the implementation of the present treaty, the Kurdish population of the areas designated in the in Article 62 calls on the Council of the League of Nations and demonstrates that a majority of the population in these areas wishes to become independent of Turkey, and if the Council then estimates that the population in question is capable of such independence and recommends that it be granted, then Turkey agrees, as of now, to comply with this recommendation and to renounce all rights and titles to the area. The details of this renunciation will be the subject of a special convention between Turkey and the main Allied powers.

If and when the said renunciation is made, no objection shall be raised by the main Allied powers should the Kurds living in that part of Kurdistan at present included in the Vilayet of Mosul seek to become citizens of the newly independent Kurdish state.

Turkey's quick revival under Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) –ironically enough with considerable help from the Kurdish side in the name of Islamic unity altered the entire situation. The subsequent and definitive Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923 recognized the modern Republic of Turkey without any special provisions for the Turkish Kurds (Gunter, 1987:12).

The Treaty of Lausanne, signed by Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania, the Serbo-Croat-Slovene state and Turkey on July 24, 1923, gave international recognition to the Turkish state and carved up the national territory of the Kurdish people in four parts (Chailand, 1992:51). Before the World War I, “Kurdistan had been divided between Persia and the Ottoman Empire” (Chailand, 1992:50). After the Treaty of Lausanne, “it was split between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Most of the Kurdish territories were given over to Turkish sovereignty. The Treaty made no mention of whatsoever of the Kurds, and granted them no national rights. It contained a few stipulations concerning the ‘protection minorities’” (Chailand, 1992:50).

According to Yavuz, although the Treaty of Sevres was never been implemented, “both the Kurds and Turks remember it in their historical memory. For the Turks it represented the intention of the major powers for dismemberment of the state. For the Kurds, it was a dream unfulfilled” (Shatzmiller, 2005:57). A Kurdish scholar confirms Yavuz's argument by claiming that Kurds' right to have their own state was denied but never forgotten.

In American Kurdish Information Network, the Treaty of Lausanne is referred as a ‘political crime’. The argument reads as follows:

The partition of our land and people, concocted primarily by the European "great powers," sanctioned by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, and practiced

since with the most callous disregard for even the basic human and language rights recognized in that treaty, remains one of the gravest political crimes of all times and continues to stain the history of modern Europe and the U.S.A. Imagine cutting a living human being limb from limb. As Kurdish children of this blighted and merciless past, we are fighting to restore justice to our ancestral land, free the largest enslaved people of our times, and build a Kurdistan on the foundation of human, civil, and national rights for all the diverse peoples within it. We need lovers of humanity to HELP. We hope you are one of those individuals. We would love to hear from you.<sup>23</sup>

Dana Berziny, a Kurdish freelance writer, blames Turkish government for occupying the Kurdish land which was granted to the Kurds by the Treaty of Sevres. Berziny also claims that the Treaty of Lausanne is the only reason why there is a conflict between Kurds and Turks today.<sup>24</sup>

Overall it was with the Treaty of Sevres, which the Ottoman Empire's government was forced to sign and Ataturk and his associates rejected, that the first time the idea of an 'independent Kurdish state' had come to the political agenda. Although the treaty did not specify the boundaries of this new state and the setting up of that state was made conditional both on its acceptance by the Kurds and the decisions of the Treaty signatories about 'the Kurds' preparedness for independence' (Salamone, 1989:35), the historical memory of the Treaty is still fresh in the minds of the Kurdish people.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For more information, see American Kurdish Information Network <http://www.kurdistan.org/>

<sup>24, 25</sup> Dana Berzinjy. July 23, 2007. The Turkish Government Occupies The Kurdish Homeland in Southeastern Turkey, EKurd.net. "The Treaty of Sevres (1920), which liquidated the Ottoman Empire, granted to form an autonomous Kurdish state. Turkey's military reinforcement by Kemal Ataturk, and the creation of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which resulted the Treaty of Sevres to become powerless, and the new Treaty failed to mention the formation of a Kurdish state. The dictator Kemal Ataturk breached the treaty of Sevres (1920), and this treaty was replaced by betrayed treaty which was called Treaty of Lausanne (1923). Revolts led by the Kurds of Turkey in 1925 and 1930 were forcibly put to end by the Turkish Army. Later (1937-38) aerial bombardment, poison gas, and weaponry shelling of Kurdish strongholds by the government resulted in the murder of many thousands of Turkey's Kurds" <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2007/7/turkeykurdistan1308.htm>

### **3.1.3. Modernist Claim: Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism and their sense of nationhood without a state of their own**

The Kurds, who are believed to be number around 30 million, are widely believed to be the largest group of stateless people in the world. Despite this, they maintained a strong national consciousness. Although no dialect or language is common to all Kurds, the speakers of the various dialects and languages regard themselves as Kurds and are so regarded by each other. In addition to that, they believe themselves to have a common ancestry. With their own language, flag, and national anthem, they seek to have their own piece of land, Kurdistan, what they regard as their divided homeland from Turkey.

With respect to this issue, the assessment by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) states that Turkish governments' suppression policies have not been able to reduce the sense of Kurdish nationalism and their nationalist claims. It says: "The Kurds' sense of separate identity has not been significantly reduced by the Turkish government's attempts to co-opt or suppress them. The Kurdish language has flourished, and clandestinely published Kurdish literature is surreptitiously obtainable in Kurdish areas... In the past several years, several overt "cultural associations" and covert liberation groups have formed to promote the idea of Kurdish autonomy and independence" (Gunter, 1987:1). Arguing that the extension of Turkish governments' authority into the Kurdish land was awakened the Kurdish resistance and increased the passion of Kurdish nationalism. On the Turkish governments' repression policies on Kurds, Ismail Besikci, a Turkish sociologist who spent more than ten years in prison for his writings on the Turkish Kurds, writes: (quoted in Gunter, 1990: 48).

The official ideology in Turkey continues to maintain in an insistent and obstinate manner that there are no people known as Kurds and no language

known as Kurdish. ...University circles, political parties, unions, associations, mass media etc. never touch on the Kurdish question. The aim is to dismiss those who have an interest in the question of Kurdistan. And today, Kurdistan in the centre of Middle East is an international colony that has been divided and severed and whose national and democratic rights have been confiscated. The Kurdish people are a nation partitioned by barbed-wires and fields of mines with on-going efforts to completely cut off the parts from another. Under these conditions, the political status of the Kurdish people is even lower than that of a colony. Because, for example, in Turkey even their existence is not accepted. The Kurds in Turkey can have rights only to the extent of becoming Turks. The alternative is repression, cruelty and prison.

Arguing that the Turkish governments have been refusing to accept the Kurdish nation's existence. Kirsten S. Zaza, a Kurdish scholar, shares the same view with Besikci. According to Zaza, the Turkish government tried to justify its acts by claiming that Kurds constitute a branch of Turkish nationality. Her view on this issue is that "The Turkish government has ardently maintained that Kurdish people are ethnically Turkish and it has used domestic policy to prove this for decades....Turkish ethnographers began the task of proving that the Kurds were not of separate ethnic group at all, but were rather ethnic Turks who simply migrated into the mountains and back down again." <sup>26</sup>

Yet as it is pointed out in a Kurdish web site called *Kurdistanica*<sup>27</sup>, the suppression policies against Kurds made the opposite affect. According to that web site, Kurds have managed to develop a strong nationalism as opposed to the Turkish governments' suppression policies.

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<sup>26</sup> Kiersten S. Zaza. August 6, 2006. Forgetting Themselves: The Republic of Turkey's quest for the eradication of Kurdish Identity. [http://www.worldproutassembly.org/archives/2006/08/forgetting\\_them.html](http://www.worldproutassembly.org/archives/2006/08/forgetting_them.html)

<sup>27</sup> For more information, see <http://www.kurdistanica.com/?q=node/43>

An article with respect to this issue on Kurdish Aspect web site writes: “There is no doubt that every Kurd has dreamed of one thing above all others, and that one thing is to enjoy the fruitfulness of being an Independent country that offers us all the chance to live our lives to the fullest. It is time for our people to live in peace, it's time for us to free our souls from the cage of uneducated minds and start to live and fight for our nation and our recognition. It is time for our youth to stop any injustice before us and band together to bring strength, independence, rapture and so much more to our people with their knowledge and capabilities.”<sup>27</sup>

The materials analyzed for this chapter warrant the conclusions that the Kurds form a distinct nationality. Moreover, their national movement has deep roots in the convictions and aspirations arising from that nationality.

All in all, the Kurds share, like other nationalities that have been treated as minorities, the same aspirations for gaining freedom to determine their own political future. As being aware of their distinct nationality, they have their own national anthem and a manifesto.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Kurdish American Youth. <http://www.kurdyouth.org/articles/a0044.htm>

<sup>29</sup> “**Manifesto of the Kurdish People for the Creation of a Free, Independent and Unified Homeland 1996/** Justice dictates that all nations are inherently equal and entitled to the same natural rights. That some nations are under the involuntary dominance of others presents an unnatural state and a source of imbalance in the lives of people and nations. Inasmuch as voluntary unions are moral, legitimate and a source of prosperity and harmony, forced unions are immoral, illegitimate and harbingers of poverty and strife. Nations have the fundamental and natural right to determine the course of their own future. We, the Kurdish Nation, observing that all existing unions of the fragments of our Homeland with neighboring states are involuntary, and hence unnatural, immoral and illegitimate, declare them null and void in toto. Whereas no nation seeks nor needs external consent to exercise its fundamental and natural right to self determination, the Kurdish Nation likewise neither seeks nor needs any such alien consent in its exercise. For this and in order to preserve our pride and dignity, to revitalize and foster our customs and heritage, and to prevent the demise and dissolution of our identity, we the People of Kurdistan undertake to constitute an independent, unified and democratic state to include all of us within its body and to set us free to determine our own destiny. All Kurdish patriots as individuals, and the Nation as a whole, are to implement this right by severing the existing bonds of servitude under alien dominance. The free state of Kurdistan, formed on the basis of its Provisional Constitution, shall contain the entirety of the Nation's heritage and include by free choice every and all Kurds, their land, property and inheritance without exception or compromise. No part or parts of the Nation's patrimony, land or otherwise, shall ever be bartered through negotiation, boundary settlements or other expedients.” <http://www.kurdistanica.com/?q=node/86>

### **3.2. Conclusion**

As I have argued in the literature review, Kurdish nationalists' homeland claims is shaped by their pre-existing ties to the Kurdistan (primordialism), as well as the idea of nation and nationalism(modernism). In other words, Kurdish nationalists' autonomy aspirations are historically rooted and affected by the modernist developments after 1920s (the ethno-symbolist approach). In order to demonstrate this view, I explored three Kurdish territorial claims in this chapter. Those claims can be summarized as follows;

- Kurds are the first arrivers and the owners of the eastern part of Turkey
- The Treaty of Sevres, which granted an autonomous government to Kurds but never been implemented, should be in effect.
- Kurds constitute a nation and just like every other nation in the world; they have a right to an independent Kurdistan, a land of their own.

## **CHAPTER 4: AN ETHNO-SYMBOLIC ACCOUNT OF TURKS' HOMELAND CLAIMS**

This chapter will explore the Turkish nationalists' homeland claims in order to contribute an understanding of how the territorial claims of Turks and Kurds shaped the different perceptions of homeland. Like the Kurds, Turks' homeland claims are shaped by the historical linkages to the land (primordialism) and the idea of nationalism (modernism).

### **4.1. Turkish Nationalists' Territorial Homeland Claims**

As explained in the previous chapter, Kurdish nationalists possess three ownership claims over Kurdistan region in Turkey. The following section will include an ethno-symbolist account of the Turks' homeland claims as opposed to the Kurds' claims to show the contest to rule the Kurdish region.

#### **4.1.1. Primordialist Claim: Turks are the First Owners of Anatolia**

The oldest name of the geographical area of the Turkish Republic is Anatolia. The earliest sources about geographical names in Anatolia are Hitite documents. 28 terms are identified in these Hitite documents<sup>30</sup> that refer to the administrative and political structure of Anatolia. It is also known that these terms were used between 1800-1500 BC and were later replaced by other names. Amasyali Strabon (64-21 BC) describes pre-Byzantine Anatolia as Asia, Armenia and Mesopotamia<sup>31</sup>, and lists 28 geographical terms for Anatolia.

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<sup>30</sup> The geographical names in Hitite documents are : Wilusa, Arzawa, Lukka, Massa, Mira, Kuwaliye, Haralla, Walma, Pitassa, Hulaya, Dattassa, Ussa, Kizzuwadna, Sappa, Kassiya, Tumanna, Pala, Kaska, Azzi, Hayasa, Zuhma, Isuwa, Armanata, Tegarama, Kalasma, Arawanna, Mitanni, Alasya (See Baykara, 1988:13)

<sup>31</sup> The geographical names in Anatolia listed by Starbon are : Asia, Ailolis, Armenia, Bebrykia, Bithynia, Hellespontus, Galatia, Iberia, Ionia, Isauria, Kappadokia, Karia, Kataonia, Kilikia, Kolkhis, Lydia, Lykonian, Maionia, Marianynia, Myrllia, Mysia, Pamphlyia, Paphlagonia, Phrygia, Pisidia, Trakeia ( See Baykara, 1988:15)

There are also different terms for the Byzantine period. Apparently, the term Kurdistan, which did not exist during the Hitite, Roman or Byzantine periods, was used for the first time during Turkish rule.<sup>32</sup>

The names used for geographical definitions in Anatolia since the region became a Turkish land can be found in the administrative systems used by the governments, the memories of several travelers and the history and geography books of the time. In his work about the historical geography of Anatolia (Baykara, 1988:17), Tuncer Baykara analyzed all the aspects of this issue and reached important conclusions related to the period before the Republic. These conclusions are very clear. The term “Kurdistan” does not exist anywhere between the Hitite period and the Turkish conquest. During Seljuk period, the term ‘Kurdistan’ does not exist to define any geographical part of Anatolia. There is no region called ‘Kurdistan’ during the 500-year-long Ottoman period until the administrative changes of the Tanzimat-era.

The term ‘Turkhia’ was used by Byzantine sources in the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Kafesoglu, 1977:27). This word defined the region between the River Idil/Volga and Central Europe during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Khazar State in the Caucasus was called ‘Eastern Turkiye’ while the Hungarian State was founded by the Arpat dynasty was called ‘Western Turkiye’ (Kafesoglu, 1977:27). After the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the term ‘Turkiye’ started to be used for Anatolia (Turan, 1971: xxv). After the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Egypt, which was controlled by Turkish Mamluks, was called *ed-Devlet’ut-Turkiyye* (Danismend, 1976:150).

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<sup>32</sup> For further information see T. Baykara, 1988.

In other words, the term ‘Turkiye’ was used to refer the lands controlled by the Turks. The usage of this word as a reference to Anatolia since the 13<sup>th</sup> century indicates the true owner and the existing culture of this land.

Another word used to define Eastern Anatolia, especially to define Northeastern Anatolia (also called Ermen/Ermeniyye) is ‘Turkomenia’ which means ‘land of the Turkmens’.<sup>33</sup> As I have already explained, Turkish settlement in Eastern Anatolia occurred during the Ilhanli period. Eastern Anatolia served as a plateau for the Turkmens who spent winters in south. Specifically, the Karakoyunlu Turkmens were using the Mosul-Van region as their winter and summer residences, while the Akkoyunlu Turkmens were using the Diyarbakir-Erzincan region. Turkmen groups’ choice of Eastern Anatolia as their pastures is explained in the “Oghuz Khan Legend.” According to the legend, Oghuz Khan used the Altag and Agdi-Bori (Agri) Mountains as his pastures in the old times (Fazlullah, 1972:30-32).

Marco Polo was the first person to use the term Turkomenia (Pelliot, 1963:64). This word later found acceptance in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and European countries used it refer to Turkish groups they viewed as an alternative to the Ottoman Empire. The Akkoyunlu State and then the Safavid State, who emerged as rivals of the Ottoman Empire for the domination of the region, were natural allies for Europe.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, it can also be argue that the reason why the Ottomans were called ‘Turk’ was that their lifestyle was different form that of the Turkmens. While the Ottoman Empire represented settled populations, the Turkmens had a semi-nomadic culture.

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<sup>33</sup> Ovez Gundogduyev. Turkmen Historian’s Deliberations on the Deep Roots of Neutrality.  
<http://turkmeniya.tripod.com/id26.html>

<sup>34</sup> For more information, visit <http://www.turkishweekly.net/articles.php?id=71>

This dual naming of Anatolia continued until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup> The “Encyclopedie des Voyages”, one of the most important sources of the time, proves this argument by stating that “The other parts of Armenia are controlled by Turks and Turkmens who live in that land name this region... They came to this land; to western Armenia and to the Euphrates region and they named this country” (Grasset and Sauver, 1969:9).

The new political view of the Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought the need to define new terms instead of Turkiye and Turkomenia. The political aims of Europeans, along with the discontinuation of the former administrative system by Turkish rulers, caused new words to emerge. The changes brought by the Tanzimat reforms were tailored by European specialists. The new administrative system that was adopted in 1842 by Mustafa Resid Pasha defined new administrative terms in Turkish political life.<sup>36</sup> On December 13, 1847, the Takvim-i Vekayi (The first Turkish newspaper) newspaper described the establishment of the Kurdistan province as follows: “Its center was Ahlat; the provinces were the provinces of Diyarbakir, the sanjaks of Van, Mus and Hakkari, the towns of Cizre, Bohtan and Mardin” (Baykara, 1988:125).

It is clear that there is no geographical region called Kurdistan in Anatolian or Turkish history. The province of Kurdistan that appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a result of both of lack of understanding on the part of the Turkish administrators and also the Western pressure. In reality, Diyarbakir, which was the capital of this province, has never been associated with Kurdistan in history.

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<sup>35</sup> For more information, see: <http://www.transanatolie.com/English/Turkey/Anatolia/Chronology/chronology.htm>

<sup>36</sup> For more information, see: [http://web.mit.edu/cis/www/mitejmes/issues/200310/MITEJMES\\_Vol\\_3\\_Spring.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/cis/www/mitejmes/issues/200310/MITEJMES_Vol_3_Spring.pdf)

The word Kurdistan does not exist in ancient history or in the history of the Roman or Byzantine Empires as the Kurds argue. Nor did the Islamic period use the term Kurdistan. Therefore, it seems likely that the term Kurdistan appeared with Turkish dominance in the region.

As an administrative district, Kurdistan survived in Iran after the collapse of the Ilhanli Dynasty and its neighboring region within Ottoman territory is also called Kurdistan. On the other hand, the term Kurdistan in Ottoman sources has a relative meaning and it does not refer to a geographical region (Baykara, 1988: 93). This fact can not be falsified by the argument that Ottoman Sultans used the word Kurdistan in their decrees. A close examination of these *fermans* (The basic meaning of this word is “command”) indicates that many cities of the Kurdistan Province (Diyarbakir, Van, Hakkari, Mardin, Erzurum, Malatya, Elazig, etc.) are mentioned as administrative districts.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly the word Kurdistan does not refer to a specific region in his decrees. It is understood that it was used as a general term for the East. It was as relative as term as the Mediterranean Sea (known in Turkish as the “White”Sea) or the Black Sea.

A chronological view of these findings leads to the following points:

1. The term Kurdistan appeared for the first time during the Seljuk Sultan Sancar period in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The first time it was used or documented was in the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Kazvini.

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<sup>37</sup> “A decree of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, dated October 18, 1525: “Of the Ottoman Mediterranean, the Black Sea, Rumenli, Anatolia, Karaman, Rum, Vilayet-i Zulkadiriye, Diyarbakir, Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, Acem, Damascus, Aleppo and Egypt” (Baykara, 1988:96).

2. Documents from the 14<sup>th</sup> century indicate that there was no specific region in Anatolia named Kurdistan.

3. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there were two Turkmen countries in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, namely, the Akkoyunlu and Karakoyunlu states. There was no geographic region or administrative unit called Kurdistan in this period.

4. As Sultan Selim conquered Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia in the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, new administrative units in the region were founded. The first province in the region was the Diyarbakir Province. The first governor of this province was Biyikli Mehmed Pasha, who was appointed on November 4, 1515. The sanjaks of this province were: Kara Amid, Kemah, Harput, Ruha, Arabgir, Ergani, Ispir, Bayburt, Kigi, Cemiskezek, Hizo, Atak, Palu, Suleymanian, Birecik, Egil, Cermuk, Hisn-i Keyfa, Cere, Capakcur, Fusul, Hilvan, Bidlis, Sason, Cezire, Hizan, Siverek, Berdinc, Haytan, Zeriki, Mosul, Cungus, Posadi, Hacuk, Sincar ve Genc (Goyunc, 1969:23). In the following years, as the new provinces of Erzurum, Van and Mosul were formed, some sanjaks of the Diyarbakir province were assigned to these new provinces.

5. While there were 34 provinces and 320 districts composing Ottoman territory in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, none of them were called Kurdistan. The provinces in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia were Diyarbakir, Erzurum, Maras, Rakka, Van and Kars.

6. The provinces in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were: Maras, Diyarbakir, Sivas, Erzurum, Kars, Van, and Rakka. As before, there was no administrative unit or geographic area called Kurdistan.

7. As explained earlier, after the Tanzimat-reform, a province of Kurdistan was founded in 1842, in the same region as Mus, Van, Hakkari, Cizre, and Diyarbekir provinces. However, this province was abolished during the 1864-1867 restructuring program and the region was once again divided into provinces like Diyarbekir, Van, etc.

8. Following the invention of printing, geographical atlases in Europe began to name Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia as Turkmenia or Diyarbekir. The first edition of Encyclopedia Britannica, published in 1771, divided Turkey into three regions: Europe, Asia and Africa. The Asia region was divided into 5 districts: Natolia (Anatolia), Diyarbeck (Diyarbekir), Syria, Turkomenia, “Part of Georgia and Arabia” (Olsen, 1989:76).

Other publications that were printed during the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century described the Asian part of Turkey in three regions: Georgia, Turkomenia, and Diarbekr. It is not possible to find alternative representation in the geographical publications and encyclopedias of the period.<sup>38</sup>

#### **4.1.1.1. Kurdistan as a Political Term**

The Vienna defeat in 1683 was a turning point in the history of the Turkish State. This new period, in which the imperialist policies of European countries were formed, grew into a period of aggressive strategies after the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca in 1774.

It also witnessed new geographical terms beginning to be used for Christian and non-Turkish populations in the Ottoman Empire.

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<sup>38</sup> T. Baykara has researched each and every work published before the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and found out that no other name existed for Anatolia other than Turkiye and Turkmeniye and that no administrative or geographic part of Ottoman territory was called Kurdistan. For more information, see T. Baykara, 1988:145-149.

Regions such as Armenia, Iraq-i Arab, Iraq-i Acem, el-Cezire and Diyarbakir in Eastern Anatolia assumed new names like Kurdistan, Lazistan (The Black Sea region) and Pontus (after 1839) (Baykara,1988:149-155). Following the definition of these geographical and ethnic terms, separate countries of Armenia, Kurdistan, Syria and Lazistan would be founded.

The regions of Ardelan, Kermanshah, Hemedan and Lorestan which formed Kurdistan in the 14<sup>th</sup> century-when this term appeared-were ignored by Westerners in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They deliberately tried to locate imaginary countries of Armenia and Kurdistan in the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia regions of Ottoman territory. Western imperialists never thought of demanding the traditional land of Armenia or that of Kurdistan, which lies in fact in Iran. According to Messoud Fany, especially American and English missionaries played key roles in provoking Turkish-Armenian and Turkish-Kurdish disagreements (Fany, 1933:132-134). However the Treaty of Lausanne changed the destiny of Turkish nation completely.

What I have tried to explain in this section is that Kurdistan is a geographical space in the minds of the Kurdish people rather than a historical homeland. The next section will discuss how the Kurdish people were deluded by the homeland promise of the Treaty of Sevres and how they were tricked without knowing it.

#### **4.1.2. Primordialist Claim: The Treaty of Sevres is an affront to both Kurds and Turks**

“There could be no question of a peace conference until we had conquered Iraq and Syria” wrote Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister of the time, in his War Memoirs (Quoted in Lazarev, 1972:147). One of the key stages in this conquest was the occupation of Mosul (Iraqi Kurdistan) (Safrastian, 1948:.52). Britain had carried out many studies and

investigations in the Kurdish territory and was well aware that it was rich in oil (Schmidt, 1964:192).

On December 3, 1917 Soviet Russia had proclaimed that it did not recognize the agreements signed by the Czarist government concerning the carve up of Iran and the Ottoman Empire. As a result, the “Russian zone” was open to the other parties (Ghassemlou, 1993:104). Having contributed to the Allied victory, the Americans wanted their share of the spoils. The King Crane’s Commission’s report to the Peace Conference recommended the setting up of an Armenian state, a Turkish state with Istanbul as its capital in part of Anatolia, and a Kurdistan covering about a quarter of Kurdish territories. The report suggested that all these states be placed under U.S. mandate (Hassan, 1966:34).

As for the future of Kurdistan, many territories with an overwhelmingly Kurdish majority lying west of Euphrates, such as the districts of Adiyaman, Malatya, Elbistan, Darende and Divrik, were arbitrarily excluded. The Entente of August 10, 1920 between Britain, France and Italy stipulated that they were to become part of “the specifically French zone of interests” (Kenane, 1964:87). Article 27 (Section II, Clauses 2 and 3) allocated to the French Mandate of Syria not only the Kurdish Mountain area and that part of the Djasireh plain now under Syrian sovereignty, but also the towns of Kilis, Aintab, Biredjik, Urfa, Mardin, Nusaybin and Djaziret ibn Omar (Cizre) (Kenane, 1964:88). These two areas, which were to be incorporated to France, accounted for about a third of the territories of Ottoman Kurdistan.

As it can be easily seen, the ‘independent Kurdistan’ promised by the Treaty of Sevres was in fact, therefore, a country from which almost two-thirds of its territory had been cut off, including its fertile areas and traditional grazing grounds, not to mention Persian Kurdistan.

The chopped down state would have been left with the impoverished areas of Kharput, Dersin (Tunceli), Hakkari and Siirt, with Diyarbakir as its capital and the Vilayet of Mosul as its economic center. Britain would of course control the oil. If the Treaty of Sevres would have been implemented, the Kurdish territories would have been split into five parts, shared out between France in the west, Syria in the south, Persia in the east and Armenia in the north, leaving an independent Kurdistan only in the center. Given all these fact, it is somewhat surprising that Kurds have turned to this unjust Treaty and presented it as recognition of the Kurdish cause in the international arena.

It is clear that the Treaty of Sevres, which was aimed at carving up the Turkish territories was not only profoundly unjust and humiliating for the Turkish people, it was also an affront to the Kurds. The Treaty did not grant an independent Kurdish state, what it did grant was a carved up-puppet state whose oil and land could be easily exploited.

#### **4.1.3. Modernist Claim: Kurds do not form a unified nation**

The final claim made by Kurdish nationalists is that Kurds form a nation and like every other nation in the world, they have a right to a piece of land and a state of their own. At this point, I believe Van Bruinessen's views about Kurdish nation are worth mentioning. Van Bruinessen's answer to the question, "Is there a Kurdish nation?" is as follows: "In the beginning, being Kurdish was a very controversial concept. Based on the location and the caller, different groups and different clans used to be called Kurdish. This was done in order to differentiate these people from Turks and other Ottoman citizens...The term Kurd was used to address those who spoke the Kurmanc dialect, rather than those who spoke the Zaza or southern dialects...On the other hand, several clan chiefs (and sometimes the clan as a whole),

argued that their origins were Arab. These arguments were valid in some cases and invalid in others” (Bruinessen, 1992:358).

Van Bruinessen visits this issue in another article and argues that “Without doubt, the Kurds never constituted a homogenous group and this is still the case” (Bruinessen 1992, pp.358). The factors that led Bruinessen to these conclusions are as follows:

Villagers who do not belong to a tribe are either separated from their clans by pressure or else have different ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, it is wrong to view the clan members and these outsider villagers as identical. There was always some degree of transfer between these groups. Political and economic circumstances determined the intensity and direction of this transfer...Powerful tribes controlled some weaker tribe-like groups, just like dependent villagers. In tribal organization structures, social and military organizations are vital. In general, tribes were formed around a few influential families. On the other hand, new tribes appeared around successful leaders (Bruinessen 1992, pp.358-359).

Van Bruinessen demonstrates that the historical and political conditions of the region led to feudalism, which in turn created the ‘Kurdish’ groups. As nomads got weaker, they were forced by powerful tribes to settle and involve themselves in agriculture, so that in time they lost their own tribal organization. The leading families of these dependent groups would lose their political power and the formerly nomadic tribe would become independent on the dominant tribe. At that point, the ethnic background of the groups under control no longer mattered to the dominant tribe, since finding new military units was all they needed. This fact illustrates the heterogeneous structure of the Kurdish groups. Many tribal chiefs were either foreigners or controlling groups with different ethnic backgrounds. In fact, this social structure was a result of historical conditions that prevailed in the boundary regions. The pattern of “Kurdish-ization” was especially in effect during the First World War and its aftermath. Many Nestorian (The Nestorians, followers of Nestorius, are a Christian sect and had their centers in

Persia and Iraq) assimilated the Armenian Frodin group around Varto in the 1950s. The Hewerkans and Jacobite/Assyrian groups living in Tur Abdin Mountains totally mixed together. As Bruinessen put it, assimilated groups were aware that they were in fact Armenians, Nestorians or Jacobites (Bruinessen, 1992:147-150).

In other words, one can not speak of a Kurdish nation. This is nothing more than the cultural assimilation of Turkmen groups living in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia or “their becoming Kurdish”.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, Yusuf Mazhar Bey quotes an interview with a Turkish villager that was made after the Sheikh Sait Revolt. The dialog demonstrates the process of “becoming Kurdish”. (Mazhar 1925, Cumhuriyet Newspaper).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ali Kemali Bey illustrates the process of becoming Kurdish: “...Turks are Sunni and Hanefi, Kurds are Alevi (locally known as Kizilbas). The Kurds were promoting the idea that being an Alevi resembled being Kurdish. They managed to convert some Turkish villages to their religious sects and made the Kurds. Since this phenomenon is still taking place, the presence of Turkish culture in the future is questionable. In fact, there are very few Turkish villages without Kurdish residents. Furthermore, although some Turks were sent to Armenian villages such as Germilli, Mahmutlar, Kulluce and Hanciftligi, Kurds settled in these villages, too. Some wealthy people of Erzincan brought Kurdish groups from the Tercan, Bayburt and Dersim regions to their villages and contributed to Kurdish tribal settlement in the plains” (Kemali, 1932:213).

<sup>40</sup> “I asked the owner of the house, Do you own the land? Yes, Sir, but it’s far away. No water, but plenty of stones. It’s infertile. Therefore I serve as a ‘maraba’. Why is your land so far away and worthless? Sir, all these lands were formerly ours. When the grandfathers of these lords arrived, they took some land from our grandfathers by force. In time of drought, they gave us some food but took more land in return. They gave animals and seed to those who needed them; in return they captured more land. So eventually they seized all the fields. Now we only have the infertile land. Anyway, we thank God. The Kurds are in more desperate situation. The Kurdish servants were more profitable for the lords, because it was easier to take their possessions. The Kurds are very afraid of the lords. I said, “I understand you are not afraid, but what’s the difference?” Sir, if a lord bothers us too much, we cannot migrate elsewhere to earn money. We are not indebted to him. The Kurds, on the other hand, are. They are realizing now, though. Anyway, the plight of the Kurds is worse. They want to place Kurds among us, so that we can serve them better. If Kurds come to this village, it’ll be all over for us. Kurds accept whatever a lord feels like giving them. Then that lord will come over to us and start treating us the way he treats Kurds. Our grandfathers say that the village two hours away was Turkish. Now there remains not a single Turk in that village. The lord sent Kurds there and the Turks become Kurdish.” (Mazhar 1925-Cumhuriyet Newspaper)

Ismail Husrev Tokin proposed the following explanation for the process: “Since the Kurds were more apt to be controlled by superiors-this was a result of their traditions and religious practices-the feudal lords thought it was more profitable to exploit these people. Therefore, a feudal lord tries to make Turkish elements Kurdish. Today, the Turkish population in the Elazig and Malatya regions has become entirely Kurdish. The process is still in effect. In the East, many villagers cannot speak Turkish, although the names of the villages are Turkish” (Tokin, 1934:184-185).

Another point to emphasize is the fact that the region has assimilated arriving groups for the last 800-900 years. This explains inter-tribal differences with regard to various tribes’ cultural, social and political structures.

Messoud Fany, V. Minorsky, A. Bennigsen and B. Nikitin are other researchers who have investigated whether the groups known as the Kurds form a nation. M. Fany’s conclusions can be summarized as follows: “Almost all authors agree that the Kurds are not a separate group...They came to the region from many different places joined existing groups....Today this mix is so visible that it is very difficult to describe a typical Kurds. Some are mixed with Turks, Tatar Turks, while others are mixed with Iranians and Armenians”(Fany, 1933: 64-65). In short, M. Fany states that the racial origins of the Kurdish tribes are very different and emphasizes that the Kurdish groups have a heterogeneous structure.

W. Minorsky, who is known as the “father of Kurdology”, says the following about the Kurds’ origins: “At this moment, it is impossible to define a Kurdish type of anthropologically. Nations are very complex groups, consisting of various factors such as ethnicity, geography,

and immaterial values. From time to time, some of these factors may be more important than other factors. There are significant somatic differences among the Kurdish diaspora, especially in their lifestyles and languages” (Minorsky, 1938:145).

A. Bennigsen concludes his work by stating that, “Finally, we have to add the fact that there are significant differences between various sects of the Kurds” (Bennigsen 1960, pp.19-21). B. Nikitin’s view on this issue as follows: “If one considers the physiology of the Kurds, he will hardly find a better example. The idea of finding a common formula for the physiology of the Kurds is only a dream” (Nikitin, 1956:19-21).

Despite his intensive effort to demonstrate the existence of Kurdish nation, Mehrdad R. Izady, who is known to be Yazidi, had to admit the following points: “Like practically every other large nation, past or modern day, Kurds are the end product of the convergence and assimilation of many ethnic groups into one” (Izady, 1992:184).

Proponents of the necessity of realizing the Kurdish nation idea in Turkey may refer to the following comments of William Eagleton, Jr., who served as the Umriye Consulate General of the US during World War II: “In a modern sense it is sufficient to define a Kurd as a person who identifies himself as such. Looking back, however, it is not at all clear just who the Kurds were, whence they came, whether they were one race or several. Imaginative historians and collectors of Kurdish traditions continue to search among ancient lands and peoples for obscure kingdoms whose names can, with the change of a few letters, be transformed into, Kurd” (Eagleton, 1990:1).

## **4.2. Conclusion**

What I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter is that Kurdistan came to be seen by the Turks as their historical homeland. The Turks have claims over Kurdistan on the basis of attachment to the land (primordialism) as well as the efforts to ignore the existence of Kurdish nation. All the sources I have explored point to the direction that the Turks interpret their shared history with Kurds differently to re-create the history of Kurdistan and ignore the legitimacy of Kurds' homeland claims.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I addressed the Kurds' and Turks' territorial homeland claims which contribute to the conflict with specific references to their shared history and used the ethno-symbolic approach as my template for guidelines.

The dominant view in the ethnic conflict literature is informed by the *assimilation-resistance* paradigm. Within the framework of this paradigm, it is assumed that ethnic conflicts happen due to the discriminatory policies on the part of the state. In respect to the Kurdish-Turkish conflict, this model fails to explain the importance of territorial homeland claims in generating ethnic conflicts. It is because this paradigm only considers the civic integration efforts of the state and largely ignores the state's territorial integrity efforts.

My argument was that the struggle between the states and ethnic groups to gain control over what they define as their "historical homeland" is one of the major causes of ethnic conflicts. In other words, the different meanings of territory held by the state and the ethnic groups generate conflicts. In order to demonstrate this view, I explored how the Kurds and Turks interpret their shared history differently to create a social space for themselves. To find out that, I had to explore the Turks' and Kurds' territorial homeland claims. I found out that Kurdistan came to be seen as a territorial homeland-a physical expression of home- to the both sides involved due to the different interpretation of history. The resulting analysis led to the conclusion that homeland claims must be taken seriously in order to generate peaceful solutions to ethnic conflicts.

It was proposed in this thesis that the Turks' and Kurds' territorial homeland claims can be best illustrated by utilizing the ethno-symbolic approach. Whereas the primordialist

approach suggests that nations were existed in primordial times, modernists argue that nations are recent and contingent creations, the product of the development of modern economic, social and political conditions. In other words, these approaches ignore the historical connection between ethnic groups and nations.

Ethno-symbolic approach suggests that nations are neither recent creations nor merely primordial. Ethnic communities created the conditions for the emergence of the nation. And only the ethno-symbolic approach explain “the continuity between pre-modern ethnic institutions and modern nations” (Conversi, 2004:12).

According to ethno-symbolists, territory is a *symbolic* and historical representation of nationhood. For that reason, I considered territorial homeland claims as nationalist ones. Since the Kurdish and Turkish nations are not modern creations and existed before the modern nations were created, their territorial claims must have deep roots arising from their shared history and the modern idea of nationalism. That’s why I selected the ethno-symbolic approach to frame my analysis.

The ethno-symbolic approach, developed by Anthony D. Smith, “underlines the continuity between pre-modern and modern forms of social cohesion without overlooking the changes brought about by modernity” and maintains that “nations can not be understood without an exploration of the forms from which they have emerged” (Leoussi and Grosby:89). Smith emphasizes that it is not the blood connection that makes nationalism so strong, it is the shared historical memories and ethnic roots that make the nationalism so persistence. In my analysis, I framed the Kurds’ and Turks’ homeland claims as being ethno-symbolic-a combination of primordialist and modernist. Their first two claims regarding territory are

primordialist because they are about the historical attachment to the land. Their final claim is a modernist one since it is based on the modern idea of nationalism.

In this context, I first examined the Kurdish nationalists' territorial homeland claims in Chapter-2 and found out that they have three ethno-symbolist claims, a combination of primordialism and modernism, on Kurdish territory in the eastern part of Turkey. Their first claim is a primordialist one and is about the historical linkage between the Kurds and Kurdish territory. Kurds claim that they are 'the first owners' of that region and other countries have forcefully invaded their territory. Their second claim is again a primordialist one and can be called as 'the historical memory of the Treaty of Sevres' which granted the Kurds an independent state of their own. Although the treaty has never been implemented and replaced with the Treaty of Lausanne, the Kurds still live in the dream of that treaty. The Kurds even claim that they were the victims of the countries which signed the Treaty of Lausanne by giving the rights to the newly founded Turkish Republic to determine the future of Kurdistan. The third and the modernist claim made by Kurds is their strong national consciousness in opposition to the Turkish governments' assimilation policies. I refer this claim a modernist one because nationalism is a modern phenomenon. The Kurds argue that as a Kurdish nation which has a distinct identity and heritage, they have a right to a free state of Kurdistan, a homeland just like every other nation on earth.

The materials analyzed in Chapter-2 warrant the conclusions that the Kurds form a distinct nationality, that they have a strong consciousness of their Kurdish nationality, and that their homeland claims over Kurdistan region have deep roots in the convictions and aspirations arising from that nationality.

In Chapter-3, I explored the Turkish nationalists' ethno-symbolist territorial claims and found out that Turks hold a different perception of the Kurdish ethno-nationalism and Kurdish territory. Turks' first claim is a primordialist one and it is based on an effort to represent Kurdistan as a geographical space rather than the Kurds' historical homeland. Basically, the Turks claim that they are the first owners of Anatolia, not Kurds. The Turks' second claim is again a primordialist one since it is about the historical memory of the Treaty of Sevres. The Treaty did not become a reality for the Kurds since it was thrown away by the Turks. Turks explain the reason by claiming that the Treaty was unjust and humiliating to the Turks and was also an affront to the Kurds. The Turks' final claim is a modernist one since it is an effort to demonstrate the non-existence of the Kurdish nation.

The materials analyzed in Chapter-3 warrant the conclusions that the Turks base their efforts to re-create the history of Kurds to keep the nation unified as well as to bolster the legitimacy of the Turkish state's territory. In short, Kurdistan came to be seen by the Turks as their historical homeland. All the sources I have explored point to the direction that the Turks interpret their shared history with Kurds differently to re-create the history of Kurdistan and ignore the legitimacy of Kurds' homeland claims.

All in all, Kurds' aspiration for gaining the freedom to determine their own political future is one of the big problems confronting Turkey today. On this issue, Michael Gunter says: "Since its birth in the early 1920s, the Turkish Republic has perceived Kurdish national awareness as a mortal threat to its own territorial integrity. This position was set by the Republic's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.cs.utah.edu/~kagano/research.htm>

Then, the question becomes: what can be done? It is my belief that the solution to the Kurdish-Turkish conflict can only be achieved if it becomes the mutual aim of the Turkish government and the Kurds. Any adequate solution to the Kurdish problem must take Kurds' homeland claims into consideration. The Turkish state should manifest a greater sense of maturity and self-confidence. If the authorities now could bring themselves no longer to see Kurdish national consciousness as a threat to the existence of territorial integrity of Turkey and create a social space for Kurds to enjoy an administrative autonomy, it is likely that the disaffected Kurdish elements could learn to accept their role as loyal citizens.

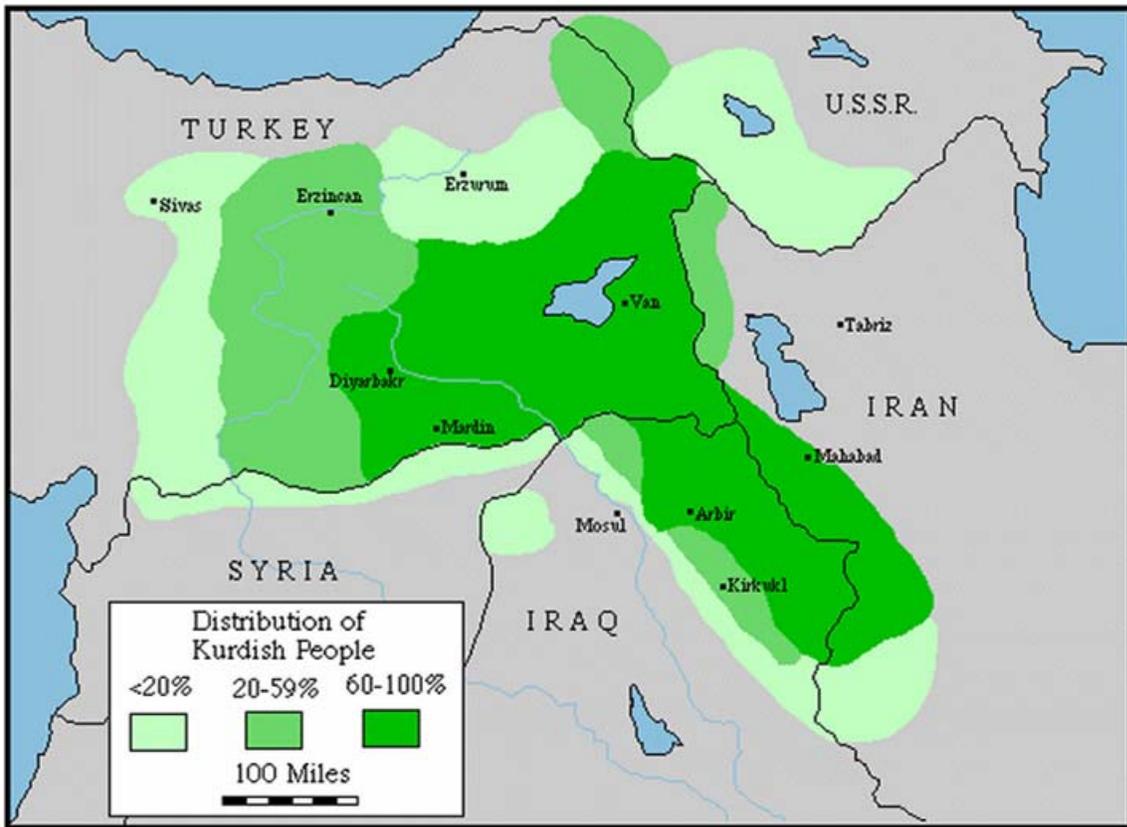
This study has attempted to connect the Kurds' demand to create an independent Kurdish state to the Turkish nationalists' opposing claims from an ethno-symbolist point of view within the context of Kurdish-Turkish conflict.



Figure 2: Map of Turkey<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Map Source: Google Maps / Accessed on 10/22/2008

[http://maps.google.com/maps?q=Turkey&utm\\_campaign=en&utm\\_medium=ha&utm\\_source=en-ha-na-us-sk-gm&utm\\_term=turkey%20map](http://maps.google.com/maps?q=Turkey&utm_campaign=en&utm_medium=ha&utm_source=en-ha-na-us-sk-gm&utm_term=turkey%20map)



**Figure 3 –Distribution of Kurdish People<sup>43</sup>**

<sup>43</sup>Map Source: Global Security Web Page / Accessed on 12/19/2007.  
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/images/dist-kurdish.gif>

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