

Ethnic Differentiation among the Kurds: Kurmancî, Kızılbaş and Zaza

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General

People described as ‘Kurds’ are generally written about in one of two ways. Western scholars virtually all acknowledge their existence as a distinct, subject nation, whose national territory has been cut into four parts — in the border regions of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria (or five, if one includes the fragment in former Soviet Armenia). On the other hand, political leaders and some scholars in the countries with territory claimed by Kurdish nationalists tend to deprecate the Kurds’ national distinctiveness, if not deny their existence out of hand.

Since the mid-1980s, however, a further dimension has been added — or rather restored — to the already complex picture of Kurdish nationalism, and Kurdish national identity. For it is from this time that two closely-related minorities in Anatolia began once again seriously to question even the ‘Kurdish’ identity which had been thrust upon them by Kurdish nationalists.

This article examines the effect of movements favouring ethnic differentiation from mainstream Kurdish (Kurmançî) nationalism by these two minorities — known as the so called ‘Alevi Kurds’, ‘Dersimlis’ or ‘Kizilbash’ [‘Kızılbaş’] and the so called ‘Zaza Kurds’. After examining the historical and cultural roots of what are shown to be ethnically distinct minorities, the paper explores the ethnic dimension of what are generally regarded as ‘Kurdish’ uprisings in Anatolia from the 1920s up until the present day. It is shown that these uprisings were, in fact, almost all uprisings by these two non-Kurmançî ethnic groups — even if certain circumstances compelled the insurgents in such cases to describe themselves as ‘Kurdish’ to the outside world. The reasons for such apparent self-denial are discussed and some of the important ramifications for the present-day Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey raised.

‘Alevi Kurds’

The mere existence of ethnic groups has frequently been a cause of social and political tension in human history. But how does one define such a grouping, in today’s world? Modern sociologists (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 1984: 83; Banton in Mann, 1984: 114 and Marshall, 1994: 157) define an ‘ethnic group’ as a segment of a country’s population which clearly comes from a specific culture and which shares common social institutions. Such a group is much broader than, and stands in contrast to, that demarcated merely by its racial characteristics. Persons belonging to a given ethnic group may be identifiable in terms of racial characteristics, however they may also share other cultural features such as language, religion, or politics.¹

In the Turkish part of Kurdistan there are sub-groups of Kurds adhering to Christianity and to various forms of Yazdânism — the ancient Cult of the Angels — such as Yezidiism — derived from Zoroastrianism and sometimes incorrectly considered a form of devil-worship (McDowall, 1992: 14-15 and Izady, 1992: 137).² There are also others generally regarded as Kurds who follow the Alevi religion, which is often asserted to be a branch of Shi’a Islam. Mainstream (Ithna’asheri or Twelver Shi’ite) Kurds are about half the populations of Malâtya, Adiyâman and Kahramanmaraş (Izady, 1992: 133).³ The Alevi religion (Aleviism) is also classified as an offshoot of Yazdânism by some. Small communities of Jewish and Christian Kurds have long lived in various parts of Kurdistan. Most of the former immigrated to Israel during the 1950s, however (McDowall, 1992:7).

Like the mainstream Shi’a, (the Iranian ‘Twelver’ Shi’a) the Alevis in the Turkish state claim some connection to the power struggle which erupted in early Islam upon the death of the Prophet Muhammad, between two rival leaders, ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib and Abu Bakr. The first of these two contenders was initially defeated in his quest for the role of leader. His supporters are called the Shi’a, or ‘partisans of ‘Ali’.

According to a growing number of scholars, however, the Alevis in the Turkish state are not really Shi’a, but *ghulat*, or an ‘extremist’ split from Shi’a Islam, which is heretical in its attribution of divine powers to certain humans: Muslim heresiographers define the *ghulat* as those Shi’ites who have exaggerated their veneration of the Imams, from ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib (d. AD 661) to Muhammad the Mahdi (believed to have miraculously disappeared in AD 874), by attributing to them qualities belonging to God. The *ghulat* are those Shi’ites who deify the Imam ‘Ali and the rest of the Imams (Moosa, 1987: xxiii).⁴

Unlike the mainstream Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, the *ghulat* Alevi sects only stand by one of the pillars of Islam — the shahadah or witness, a sort of Islamic credo. The remaining four central practices are ignored by the Alevis: prayer five times daily; annual fasting, during the holy month of Ramadan (Ramazan); pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once during one's lifetime and the payment of the zakat tax. Alevi women are free to participate in all religious ceremonies and not compelled to veil themselves (Trowbridge, 1909: 348 and 351).⁵

Ghulat as well as moderate or orthodox Shi'a believe that the twelve Imams were both infallible and incapable of sin, citing the Holy Qur'an to verify this (Moosa, 1987: xxi and The Holy Qur'an: 33: 33). The majority of contemporary *ghulat* 'live in an area stretching from Iran to Syria and Turkey. They are of varied ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Because they share many religious beliefs and traditions, some writers confuse one group with another' (Moosa, 1987: xxi).

Briefly, then, the *ghulat* appear to be an 'extreme' breakaway from Shi'a Islam, who have re-incorporated elements of ancient pre-Islamic religions such as Shamanism, Mithraism and Yazdânism (Izady, 1992: 137-45 and 150-53 and Moosa, 1987: passim). Observers also frequently comment on the Christian influences on Aleviism, which could have been the result of intermarriage with the Armenians (Hasluck, 1973: 1: 140, 151-52 and 154-58 and Moosa, 1987: passim).

The beliefs and practices of the Alevis are often the cause of friction with Anatolian Sunnis. Ziya Gökalp stated that 'The so called Kizilbash were regarded as the most heretical group of the heterodox Alevis' (Gökalp, 1959: footnote 14, p. 317). Some Sunni Muslims still accuse the Alevis of engaging in wild sex orgies, involving incest, pederasty and other scandalous practices, citing the Alevis' secrecy as evidence that the latter have something to hide (Hasluck, 1973: 153-54 and 159; Melikoff, 1969: 146-47 and Yalman, 1969: passim). A section of Sunnis in Turkey have a long history of despising and at times even persecuting Aleviism.⁶ The term 'Kızılbaş' (red heads), once simply a reference to the red bonnets of the first Alevis, is now often a term of abuse in Turkey. The Alevis' secrecy is quite innocently explained, therefore, as necessary to prevent the Sunnis from discovering that an Alevi religious ceremony is underway, lest the Sunnis disrupt it. Although some Western scholars accepted the Sunnis' accusations in the past,⁷ very few do these days (Hasluck, 1973: 153-54 and 159; Moosa, 1987: 136-38 and Yalman 1969: passim).

The most 'extreme' of the *ghulat* are the Nusayris or Alawites of Syria, who are quite different from the Anatolian Alevis, despite the similarity in name. For the Nusayris: 'Ali is the Almighty God who takes the place of the God of the Bible and the Qur'an. 'Ali is superior to the Prophet Muhammad, whom 'Ali created. To the Nusayris, God appeared seven times in seven cycles, manifesting Himself finally as 'Ali (Moosa, 1987: xxii).⁸

Dailam, Dailamites and Ethnicity

Anatolia is an excellent example of how complicated identifying ethnic groups can be. The so called 'Alevi Kurds', (Dersimlis or Kızılbaş) of Anatolia are arguably no more Kurdish than are another minority people in Anatolia to whom they are closely related, the so called 'Zaza Kurds'. This highlights a problem which has haunted scholars since ancient times. This is that there is no single, universally agreed-upon meaning for the term 'Kurd'. Discussing what he called the 'vague and indiscriminate use of the term', Vladimir Minorsky underlines the

extent of the confusion, by citing remarks by the tenth century Persian historian, Hamza Isfahani:

The Persians used to call Dailamites “the Kurds of Tabaristan”, as they used to call Arabs “the Kurds of Suristan”, i.e., of Iraq. Other Arab and Persian authors in the tenth century AD mean by Kurds any Iranian nomads of Western Persia, such as the tent-dwellers of Fars (Minorsky, 1982/1943: 75).

Another contemporary scholar has drawn attention to his own observation, during field research in Kurdish areas, that the word ‘Kurd’ may simply indicate the language one speaks. Thus: When I asked people in ethnically mixed areas whether they were Kurds of [*sic*] Turks or Persians I frequently got answers such as ‘I am Kurd as well as a Persian and a Turk’. When I insisted and asked what they originally were, some answered ‘my father speaks all three languages’ (van Bruinessen, 1978, Utrecht: footnote 102: 430).

As Minorsky also remarks, however, there is some discussion, even in ancient times, of the ancient region of Dailam, as a highly mountainous, crescent-shaped area in the north of present day Gilan province, in northern Iran. Dailam was bounded in the north by the Caspian sea (forming its south-west littoral) and in its south by the Alburz mountain range. Minorsky called this region ‘Daylam [Dailam] proper’, remarking that the Dailamites also occupied the northern slopes of the Alburz mountains (Minorsky in Lewis, 1965: 190).

Elsewhere, he expands on this geographical definition: In the tenth century, when the Buyids’ power was at its apogee, the term Dailam designated all the provinces of the southern coast of the Caspian; and the great geographer Muqaddasi (985 AD) in his zeal to reform geographical terminology, understood, under the rubric ‘Dailam’, the totality of the territories around the Caspian. However Dailam properly speaking, this true cradle of the Dailamites, was a specific mountainous region, forming a sort of antechamber of Gilan (Minorsky, 1964: 12).⁹ More specifically, he notes that the ‘valleys of the Shah-rud [Shah river] and its tributaries’ seems to have be ‘the cradle’ of the Dailamites (Minorsky in Lewis, 1965: 190).

The earliest origins of these people are unknown, although the Dailamites could be the descendants of such ancient peoples as the Δελυμιοι (Delumioi) and Καρδυχηοι (Kadousioi) mentioned by Ptolemy in 2 AD. Classical historians mention Dailamites, ‘Dolomites’ or other very similar names repeatedly. Minorsky gives several examples of this (in Lewis, 1965: 190).¹⁰ He adds that, ‘According to Procopius, the ‘Dolomites’ lived in inaccessible mountains’ ... (Minorsky in Lewis, 1965: 190). There can be no doubt that we are talking about an ethnically distinct people. The Dailamites clearly came from a specific culture (especially from the linguistic viewpoint) and shared common social institutions. In addition, non-cultural features distinguished them from their neighbours,¹¹ underlining the difference between the Dailamites and other peoples nearby. It seems that they were physically distinct from neighbouring peoples and lived in a geographically unique region.

The language of the Dailamites was distinguished from the Persian language by Istakhri, in the year 205 AD (Sahimi, circa-mid-1960s: 33). All the same, Minorsky concedes: ‘We know practically nothing of the dialect which was spoken in the original homes of the Dailamites ...’ (Minorsky, 1982/1943: 89). By the time of ‘the Muslim epoch’, however, most Dailamites had been so ‘Iranicised’ that they spoke a northern Iranian dialect, distinct from the southern Iranian languages Farsi and Kurmancî (the main Kurdish dialect in Turkey) (MacKenzie, 1961: 68-86; Minorsky, 1964: 13-14 and Izady, 1988: 23). One tenth century

scholar reportedly ‘established ... that the language of the Dailamites was “different from that of the Arab, the Persian and the Arranians [the people of Arran, in ancient Iran]”’ (Minorsky, 1964: 13-14).

The Arab scholar Muqaddasi reported that Dailam was ‘neither too big, nor too beautiful’. The Arab historians wrote that the Dailamites were:

a very strong and very numerous race, renowned for its extraordinary courage and its great endurance, and whose representatives had a good looking, commanding appearance [*une belle prestance*] and handsome beards. An Arab source calls the Dailamites *ashqar* ‘a rosy colour’. The long and disordered hair of the Dailamites has at all times produced fresh metaphors of the poets. These last mention a black skull cap just as much.¹²

The Dailamites guarded their independence from Arab Muslim invaders well, despite no less than seventeen expeditions against them from the time of Caliph ‘Umar I up to that of Caliph Ma’mun (Minorsky, 1965: 190).¹³ Nor were the Dailamites conquered — at least, ‘not in a solid manner’ (Minorsky, 1964: 14) — by the ancient Persian dynasties. By the sixth century in the Christian Era, however, the expanding hegemony of the Sassanid dynasty had already encroached seriously upon complete Dailamite independence, as Dailam now increasingly became more or less dependent on the Sassanids (Minorsky, 1964: 27). Even so, the Dailamites were no mere vassal people. They enlisted of their own accord as mercenaries in the ranks of Persians making war against the latter’s principal enemy at the time, the Byzantines (Minorsky, 1964: 14). Greek historians noted their appearance in the ranks of the Persian forces, with one writing that they were barbarians, but that they had never been subject to Persian kings (Minorsky, 1964: footnote 11: 27). Then, a group of imams which supported the Prophet Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law, ‘Ali Ibn Talib, sought refuge in Dailam from persecution by the more mainstream Muslim ‘Abbasids. They were welcomed by the Dailamites as potential future allies against this mutual enemy (Minorsky, 1964: 14).¹⁴ The first known such rebel was Yahya bin ‘Abd Allah, who sought refuge in Dailam in 791 AD (Minorsky, 1965: 191-92). This simple event was to have many powerful ramifications for the Dailamites. Over a long period of time, the Dailamites became significantly influenced by Zaidi Shi’ism.¹⁵ From mere mercenaries of the Shi’a, they became increasingly sympathetic to Shi’ism itself (Minorsky, 1965: 191-93) — or, more accurately to a *ghulat* or extremist variant of Shi’ism. The Arab historian Ibn al-Athir exclaimed of the Dailamites: ‘The Dailamites were Shi’ites and (in Shi’ism) did not recognise any limit.’ (Minorsky, 1964: footnote 63: 30)

From about 864, the imams who had fled to Dailam helped to make their refuge an independent centre for resistance not only to the ‘Abbasids, but also to the ambitious dynasties in Khorasan, in north central Iran (Minorsky, 1964: 15).¹⁶ The beginnings of Dailam’s emergence as an independent force was itself part of a larger process occurring throughout the Muslim world — the break-up of the ‘Abbasid empire into several warring mini-dynasties.

Increasingly imbued with Shi’a ideas, the Dailamites also became aware of their own strength in their military campaigns on behalf of the Shi’a. Together with the Shi’a, the Dailamites began to expand. Already, in 864, the Dailamites had declared Dailam independent of the ‘Abbasid caliph, forcing out the latter’s governor at the same time (Lapidus, 1989: 132):

In the early tenth century, a local Dailamite ruler named Mardawij Ibn Ziyar conquered most of western Iran. When he was killed in 937, his empire was inherited by the Dailamite mercenaries in his service, led by the Buwayhid brothers, who established their domination in the region (Lapidus, 1989: 132).

The Dailamite Buwayhid (Buyid) dynasty, which arose in 932 AD and controlled the caliphate in Baghdad for 109 years, held large swathes of Persian territory, relying heavily upon Dailamite forces. In the ‘shadow’ of the Buyids, states Minorsky, ‘a great number of local dynasties of Iranian origin (Dailamite and Kurdish) sprang up in the peripheral areas’ (Minorsky, 1965: 192-93),

The Dailamites began to disperse over a vast area, much of which they ruled, beginning in about 800 AD (Sykes, 1930: II: 24-26; Lapidus, 1989: 132ff; Minorsky, 1965: 192 and 1964: 16-26). Sometime during this period of great and small Dailamite empires, dynasties and emigrations — that is, sometime between 800 AD and 1000 AD — a westwards exodus into Anatolia apparently occurred by a large group of Dailamites (Hadank, in Mann and Hadank, 1930: II: 18-19; Hadank, in Mann and Hadank, 1932: IV: 4-6; Minorsky, 1928: 91, 105 and MacKenzie in Andrews, 1989: 252). This was not unusual at the time in the southern region, ‘and it is possible that whole tribes quitted [sic] their homes [which were then] to be occupied by other groups’ (Minorsky, 1982/1943: 89).¹⁷

Minorsky states that the Buyid dynasty Dailamite, ‘Adud al-Daula, ‘pacified all the country [that is, the Dailamite domain] as far as Amed (Diyarbakır)’, in 977 (Minorsky, 1964: 21). Minorsky adds, regarding Anatolia today: ‘The so called ‘Zaza’ living north of Diyarbakır up to Palu and Dersim and still speaking an Iranian language call themselves ‘Dimlä’, which name F. C. Andreas identified with Dailam’ (Minorsky, 1964: 21 and van Bruinessen, 1978, Utrecht: footnote 105: 431). He also cites the ancient historian Agathias, who wrote of Dilimnitai troops who gave their home as ‘on the middle course of the Tigris’. This would place the soldiers in the area inhabited by the Zaza today, if no mistake has been made (Minorsky, 1982/1943: 87), thus adding further weight to the proposition that the Zazas — and the ‘Alevi Kurds’ — are the descendants of ancient Dailamite migrants to Anatolia.

According to Hasluck, the term ‘Kizilbash has been associated from the beginning with both Persian nationality and Persian Shi’a religion, but has no ethnic significance whatsoever’ (Hasluck, 1973: 140); Moosa explains, however, that Hasluck is here referring to Persian Safavid Shi’ism. Moosa notes how other peoples, including Turkmen tribes and ‘many Kurdish tribes especially in the region of Dersim (Tunceli) ... became followers of the Safawi [Safavi or Safavid] order and were also known as Kizilbash.’ The ‘beliefs, rituals and traditions’ of the ‘Kurdish’ Kizilbash and the Turkmen Bektashi (Bektaşî) orders were identical, with the only difference being a political one of leadership (Moosa, 1987: 7).

Safavids and Kizilbash

It was under the leadership of Sheikh Haidar Ibn Junaid — a politically ambitious Safavid Sufi leader of apparently mixed Turkic and Persian background, with a substantial following in Anatolia (Moosa, 1987: 21ff and Petrushevsky, 1985: 315) — that the Sufi order he led began to be transformed into a vibrant political movement. Junaid was succeeded by his son, Haidar, who completed his work of forging it into a real political force, ‘whose rallying point was Ithna’asheri [Twelver] Shi’ism’ (Moosa, 1987: 32).

At the time, the term ‘Kizilbaş’ applied to both Bektashis and followers of the Persian Safavid Sufi order (Moosa, 1987: 33-35 and 36).

Within a few generations of their establishment the Kizilbash ... spread all over Turkey, but were mainly concentrated in the north-eastern part of the country, especially in the provinces of Sivas, Erzurum, Diyarbakır, and Harput... Among these Kizilbash were Kurds, known as the ‘western Kurdish Kizilbash’, who spoke a distinct Kurdish-Turkish dialect called Zaza, and who are thought to have a strong admixture of Armenian blood (Moosa, 1987: 36).

Impelled by several factors, including a severe economic crisis at the time, Alevi forces flocked into the ‘Qizilbash’ [Kizilbash] army of the Iranian monarch, Isma’il I. The sultan’s response was to launch a fierce campaign of repression — ‘the first campaign of repression of Qizilbash in Anatolia’ (Moosa, 1987: 36). Then, in 1511, resentment at this repression boiled over into an Alevi uprising. The wide-ranging revolt (Moosa, 1987: 36) involved ‘hordes of rebellious Turkmen’, but it would surely be inexplicable if their co-religionists the ‘Alevi Kurds’ were not involved as well (Madelung, in Jackson and Lockhart, 1987: 5, 6: 220).¹⁸

The new Ottoman sultan who ascended the throne in 1512, Selim I, resolved to deal with the Alevi threat. He instigated an ‘Inquisition’ against the Kizilbash, putting Yunus Pasha in charge of this bloody festival of torture and execution directed at ‘those who professed Shi’ism’. This is the background of events culminating in the Battle of Chaldiran two years later. Moosa adds: ‘It is even reported that Sultan Selim I had already killed forty-thousand followers of the Safawis [i.e., Kizilbash] during his march eastward to meet Shah Isma’il at Chaldiran’ (Moosa, 1987: 45 and Shaw, 1976: I: 67-68).

The Ottoman victory at Chaldiran placed the Alevis in an extremely uncomfortable — if not dangerous — situation. After Chaldiran, the Anatolian Kızılbaş were powerless to undo their formal status as Ottoman subjects. As their Ottoman overlords had already discovered, however, there can be a world of difference between formal authority and actual subjugation. Kızılbaş rebellions continued into the following century. While the Kurmancî Kurds were more or less pacified by the Ottoman military, ‘no attempt was made to enter the mountain fastnesses of Dersim, and its tribes remained wholly independent, paying no taxes or tribute and recognising in no way the Ottoman authority’ (Molyneux-Seel, 1914: 51). Until the mid-1930s, the people of Dersim lived in a situation of unrecognised independence. Each tribe had its own assembly (*meclis*). Altogether, those assemblies made up Dersim’s general assembly (*Dersim Genel Meclisi*). All the Kurdish tribes and armed units had to accept this general assembly’s decisions (Hasretyan, 1995: 261). The Dersimlis had not submitted even when Dersim was named a kaza (district) by the Ottomans in 1848 (Molyneux-Seel: 1914: 67). Determined to put an end to this state of affairs, in 1874-75 the Turks despatched a military expedition to Dersim. The troops failed completely to subjugate the tribesmen and suffered heavily, although Ottoman forts were built on the outskirts of the region, and the Dersimlis continued to defy the government. ‘They paid no taxes, contributed no soldiers, and plundered and pillaged as they liked’, Molyneux-Seel claims (Molyneux-Seel: 1914: 67).

It took a second expedition, in 1908, to subjugate the country. Once again, however, the Turks had to play a bloody toll. ‘The troops penetrated into the mountains simultaneously from Khozat [Hozat], Palumor [Palamur], and Kezel Kilisé [Kizil Kilise]. The Dersimlis, though they offered a stout resistance ... were in the end reduced to complete submission’.

The price of this resistance was also heavy for the Dersimlis. According to Molyneux-Seel: ‘Their villages were destroyed, their flocks seized, and they were left in a state of wretched poverty’ (Molyneux-Seel: 1914: 67).

Kemalism and the Alevi

Alevi, including the ‘Alevi Kurds’, actively supported Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) in his rise to power. A new dimension was opened with the onset of Atatürk’s secularisation campaign in the mid-1920s. Under Atatürk’s law number 677 of 30 November 1925, only ultra-zealous Alevi and Sunni were seriously repressed. Thus, mystical movements of either variety were prohibited; the *tekkes* (lodge houses of mystical Alevi orders) and *zaviyes* (Sunni mystical orders’ meeting places) were both closed, for instance — although these managed to survive underground. However, while the Sunni mosque (*cami*) was allowed to continue functioning, the Alevi devotional meeting, the *cem*, was outlawed (Meydan Larosse, ‘Tekke’, 1973, 12: 20).

As Bayart notes, Atatürk’s secularisation campaign did not benefit the Alevi, because it was directed at public religious manifestations, whereas the Alevi had always conducted their religious ceremonies in private. On the other hand, different Kemalist reforms such as measures to emancipate women, language reform and the promotion of ‘an Anatolian and specifically “Turkish” culture’ were generally regarded by most Alevi as meshing in well with ‘some aspects of the Alevi social system’ and favouring ‘their strategy of insertion in national society’. For this reason even ‘Alevi Kurds’ looked favourably on Atatürk’s Turkish nationalism initially, to a certain extent (Bayart, in Carré, 1982: 111-12).

The Dersim Kızılbaş (‘Dersimlis’) soon felt alienated from the new Turkish state. They rebelled many times in the pursuit of ethnic demands from the 1920s up to the late 1930s — as will be shown below, shortly. There were literally dozens of Kızılbaş uprisings in the 1920s and 1930s, led by Seyt Rıza. For their part, the Zaza rebelled once, led by Sheikh Said in 1925. Both the Kızılbaş and (to a lesser degree) the Zaza, have become increasingly re-energised over ethnic and even national demands since the mid-1980s. Specifically, these questions were first seriously and clearly raised by Seyfî Cengiz, when Kurdish nationalists attempted to deny that the Kırmanç and Zaza were distinct from Turkish Kurds. Due in large part to Cengiz’s pioneering work, the Kırmanç and Zaza questions have had a noticeable effect on politics throughout Anatolia of the past few years (White, May 1992).

Cengiz heads a movement today known as the Kürdistan Komünist Hareketi/Dersim Komünist Hareketi, which was formally established in January 1990, as the result of a split in a Kurdish organisation called Têkoşîn (variously translated as ‘Struggle’ and ‘Armed Struggle’). Têkoşîn had led the Kurdish guerrilla warfare against the Turkish military administration, until 1983.

However, a split from Têkoşîn occurred in 1984, led by its General Secretary, Seyfî Cengiz. All those leaving Têkoşîn to found the new tendency had previously been the leaders of Têkoşîn. Seyfî Cengiz is today the leader of the newer tendency, known as the Kurdistan Communist Movement (KCM). The KCM has published a magazine in Turkish, *Kürdistanli Marksist* and, since late 1991, a magazine called *Desmala Sure* (Red Flag). This is the journal of the Zaza and Kırmanç or Kızılbaş section of the same political tendency, which goes under the simple umbrella name of the Komünist Hareketi (Communist Movement) (White, May 1992).

Like the Kurmancî Kurdish national movement, the Kızılbaş and Zaza ethno-political movements have been the result of the conjuncture between a number of forces, especially the radical political upsurge of the late 1960s, the rise of working class militancy and a reborn sense of ethnic differentiation. Kızılbaş activism in recent decades has also been the consequence of a dynamic interaction with combative Alevi religio-political traditions.¹⁹

Kurds, Kızılbaş and Zazas

The overuse of the term ‘Kurd’ has already been noted. A further caution should also be made, at this point:

Ethnic terms generally tend to be applied imprecisely in Turkey; people often combine elements of religious and linguistic identification in assessments of ethnic identity (Nyrop et al, 1973: 99).

The Kızılbaş are not to be confused with ethnically Turkic Alevi sects, like the Bektashi [Bektaşî] and Taktajî [Tahtacı]). Likewise, the Zazas are not Kurds, but ethnically distinct, related to the Kızılbaş. Kurdish nationalists generally regard the Kızılbaş and Zazas as part of the Kurdish nation. However, as has already been indicated above, they both may well have had a common ancestor, in the Dailamites.²⁰ For reasons unknown, however — but possibly connected to their differing religious beliefs — the Dailamites divided in two, some time after moving to Anatolia. The Kızılbaş are adherents of the Alevi religion, while the Zazas are mostly orthodox Sunni Muslims, of the Shafî’î school of Islamic law.

The heartland of the Kızılbaş is the Dersim region, north-west of Lake Van — which covers the main city of the region, Tunceli (formerly also known as Dersim), Mazkirt and Nazmiye. In other words, they live primarily in the area between two rivers, the Murat and the Karasu, which are the main branches of the Firat (Euphrates) river. The Zaza call their dialect Zazakî. They live mainly north of Diyarbakır and Urfa, as far as Elazığ — in and around towns like Dicle, Çermik, and Siverek. People from Dersim with a sense of a sense of distinct Kızılbaş ethnicity generally describe themselves as Kırmanç, or by their language. Both peoples speak dialects of the same language, Dimli (literally ‘of Dailam’) (Hadank, in Mann and Hadank, 1930: II: 18-19; Hadank, in Mann and Hadank, 1932: IV: 4-6; Minorsky, 1928: 91, 105 and van Bruinessen, 1992, Zed: footnote 115: 130). The Kızılbaş dialect of Dimli is known as Kırmanckî or Kırmancî (not Kurmancî, which is the main Kurdish dialect) (White, May 1992).

Seyfî Cengiz, a former Kurdish guerrilla leader, relates an interesting personal experience, while trying to convince villagers in this region that they were Kurds. According to him, he was repeatedly told by them: ‘We are Kırmanç. You are saying we are Kurdish. We are not Kurdish’ (White, May 1992). The bluntly expressed distinctions between Kurds, Kızılbaş and Zazas is of extreme importance for clearly understanding the nature of the contemporary Kurdish national movement. These two minorities examined in this paper cannot, in fact, be seriously categorised as ethnically Kurdish. But that is not the end of the matter. For these minorities have also demonstrated a willingness and an ability this century to ‘Kurdify’ themselves, when political expedience demands it.

For one important fact was left out, when the Zaza rebellion of 1925 and the Kızılbaş rebellions of 1920-38 were briefly referred to above. This is that all of these rebellions called for an independent Kurdistan, in some way. This is hardly surprising, since with one

exception, all the ‘Kurdish’ nationalist uprisings this century in Turkey are actually better described as Kızılbaş or Zaza uprisings which were compelled by circumstances to fight for Kurdish nationalist goals. The one exception to this, the 1927 Agri uprising, was a Kurmancî uprising. This will become clear, if the history of ‘Kurdish’ uprisings in Turkey this century is briefly surveyed.

The Koçkiri Rebellion

The 1920 Koçkiri rebellion in the overwhelmingly Kızılbaş Dersim region, while waged by the Kızılbaş Koçkiri tribe, was masterminded by members of an organisation known as the Kürdistan Taâlî Cemiyeti (KTC) (van Bruinessen, Utrecht, 1978: footnote 35: 446 and Olson, 1989: 26-33). This particular rebellion failed for several reasons, most of which have something to do with its Kızılbaş character. The fact was that many Dersim tribal chiefs at this point still supported the Kemalists — regarding Mustafa Kemal as their ‘protector’ against the excesses of Sunni religious zealots, some of whom were Kurmancî Kurds. To most Kurmancî Kurds at the time, the uprising appeared to be merely an Alevi uprising — and thus not in their own interests (van Bruinessen, 1978, Utrecht: 374-75).

In the aftermath of the Koçkiri rebellion there was talk in the new Turkish Republic’s Grand National Assembly of some very limited forms of ‘Autonomous Administration’ by the Kurds in a Kurdish region centred on Kurdistan. All this disappeared in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, however. Bitterly disappointed, the Kurds turned again to armed struggle in 1925 — this time led by the Zaza cleric Sheikh Said, but organised by another, newer, Kurdish nationalist organisation, Azadî (Olson, 1989: 39-41).²¹

The Azadî was dominated by officers from the former Hamidiye, a Kurdish tribal militia established under the Ottomans to deal with the Armenians and sometimes even to keep the Kızılbaş under control. According to British intelligence reports, the Azadî officers had eleven grievances. Apart from inevitable Kurdish cultural demands and complaints of Turkish maltreatment, this list also detailed fears of imminent mass deportations of Kurds. They also registered annoyance that the name ‘Kurdistan’ did not appear on maps, at restrictions on the Kurdish language and on Kurdish education and objections to alleged Turkish economic exploitation of Kurdish areas, at the expense of Kurds Olson, 1989: 44 and van Bruinessen, 1978, Utrecht: 447).

Most interesting of all, however, it decried the Turkish policy of setting one Kurdish tribe continually against another to prevent racial unity and consequent power of resistance to government exactions (Olson, 1989: 44). This attitude is arguably indicative of ‘pure’ nationalism, reflecting as it does a clear understanding on the part of those advancing it of the necessity of a national — as opposed to tribal — vision. It was Sheikh Said, reportedly, who convinced Hamidiye commanders to support a fight for Kurdish independence. According to Olson, the Kurdish officers expressed their objectives in November 1924 as being: to deliver the Kurds from Turkish oppression; to give Kurds freedom and opportunity to develop their country; and to obtain British assistance, realising that Kurdistan could not stand alone (Olson, 1989: 45).

Sheikh Said appealed to all the Kurdish tribes to join in the rebellion being planned. The tribes which actually participated were mostly Zaza (Dimli) speaking Kurds. His call to jihad was unsuccessful in achieving the agreement of the ‘Kurdish Alevi’ Xormak and Lolan tribes to forgo their long-time hostility to the Cîbran tribe, which spoke Kurmancî, and had

dominated the Hamidiye militia (van Bruinessen, 1978, Utrecht: 384). Nor was this a passive opposition; the Xormak and Lolan were the most active and effective opponents of this rebellion. Mindful of the depredations of the Hamidiye against them (especially the Hamidiye commanded by Xalid Beg Cîbran), other Alevi tribes also refused to join the rebellion, considering themselves 'better off in a secular Turkey, nominally Sunni, than in a self-declared Sunni Kurdistan in which the Nakşibendî (Sunni) *tarikât* [mystical order] would assume a major role. The Alevi rejection of his [Sheikh Said's] overture greatly limited the potential area of the rebellion' (Olson, 1989: 94).

Once again, the same factors of tribalism and religious sectarianism helped to limit the extent and success of a Kurdish rebellion. It cannot be stressed enough how complicated this matter is; we should not jump to the conclusion that those joining the rebellion were all fully-formed nationalists:

Motivations for joining the revolt other than nationalism included the tendency of many of the tribesmen simply to follow their chiefs, sheikhs or *ağas* when ordered to do so. Some of the chiefs wanted to use the opportunity to settle old scores against other tribes and against government representatives (Olson, 1989: 97).

The main part of the uprising was over by the end of March, as the Turkish authorities crushed the rebellion with continual aerial bombardments and a massive concentration of forces (van Bruinessen, 1978, Utrecht: 389 and 391). The rebellion had been partly religious — or at least anti-secular. But it was clearly Kurdish nationalist, as well, for all that. This was quite clear at the trial of Said and other leaders of the rising. The president of the military tribunal which sentenced the rebels declared, on 28 June 1925:

Certain among you have taken as a pretext for revolt the abuse by the governmental administration, some others have invoked the defence of the Caliphate, but you are all united on one point: to create an independent Kurdistan (Viennot, 1974: 108).

The next revolt in the name of Kurdish nationalism was based around the only part of Turkey not yet under Ankara's control. This was the area around Mount Ararat [Mount Ağrı, or Ağrı Dağ]. On 11 June 1930 armed hostilities were initiated by the Turkish military against the Ağrı Dağ insurgents (Jwaideh, 1960: 622) Xoybûn, the Kurmancî Kurdish nationalist organisation co-ordinating this rebellion, urgently appealed for help from Kurds throughout Kurdistan, stating: 'Kurdish Brothers, you are worthy of becoming a great nation' (*Türkischer Post*, 29 July 1930, cited by Viennot, 1974: 109). This was a Kurdish rebellion by mostly Kurmancî Kurds. The Kurmancî Kurds far outnumbered the Kızılbaş — who were, moreover, concentrated in only one region, Dersim. This is why, much to the Turks' dismay, Xoybûn's appeal was answered on a wide front, by 'a counter-offensive at Tendruk, Igdır, Erdjiş, Sipan Dağ, Kağsımat, Şatak, Van, and Bitlis', forcing the Turks to temporarily abandon their offensive against Ağrı Dağ (Jwaideh, 1960: 622). All this support notwithstanding, however, the rebels were gradually crushed by the superior numbers of the Turkish military (Jwaideh, 1960: 623).

The Dersim Rebellion

The most important rebellion in the wake of all these defeats was in 1937-38, based around the Kızılbaş heartland of Dersim, which was itself part of a region marked for total evacuation by Ankara (Kendal in Chaliand, 1980: 67 and Beşikçi, 1991: passim). This

situation had a lengthy background. As already mentioned, even the Ottomans had been unable to make the Dersimlis pay taxes or recognise any authority other than their own. Atatürk and the new Turkish Republic was determined to solve this problem. As early as 1926, a report was made to the Turkish Parliament on behalf of the Interior Ministry. This said: ‘Dersim is an abscess on the Turkish Republic and it must be removed, for the sake of the country’s well-being’ (Beşikçi, 1991: 29). The report said it would be useless to try and win the allegiance of Dersimlis by building hospitals, factories and so forth in Dersim. Only stern measures would suffice (Beşikçi, 1991: 29).

Some ten years later, Atatürk’s speech at the opening of the Turkish Parliament on 1 November 1936, showed that the problem had only worsened, in the eyes of Turkey’s lawmakers. Atatürk said: Our most important interior problem is the Dersim problem. No matter what cost, we have to remove this abscess at its roots. To deal with this problem, we will give wider powers to the government (Hasretyan, 1995: 262).

The parliament resolved to be rid of this problem for good, and drafted a new law, containing extreme measures to achieve this goal. When this law (the *Munzur Vilâyeti Teşkilat ve İdaresi Hakkında Kanun*) was being introduced to the parliament, the Interior Minister, Şukru Kaya, complained that the troublesome province had its own civil law and jurisprudence system, and its own criminal code. It was even administering its own punishments itself (Beşikçi, 1991: 11-12). In different times in the past, there had been eleven military actions — but no lasting success. In his view, this was because the people were in poverty and they had guns. Instead of military action being a short-term solution, it had to finish this problem at once, and bring the Dersimlis under the law of the Turkish Republic (Beşikçi, 1991: 11-12).

Perhaps significantly, when debating the legislation to make this extraordinary military campaign possible, the Turkish parliament always referred to the proposed law as the ‘Tunceli Law’ — even before the new province of Tunceli was created on 4 January 1936. This, Beşikçi argues, shows the government’s intention to destroy Dersim all along — even new military positions were created for this new, ‘imaginary’ province (Beşikçi, 1991: 23). (Certainly, not every single man, woman and child in the region was either butchered or forcibly evacuated out of the region. However, there is evidence that very large numbers of Dersimlis were forcibly shipped out of the region. In fact, as will be shown below, this is the least damning interpretation of the government’s intentions.) Convinced by these events that the Kemalist government was preparing to at least deport them — if not massacre them — the Dersimlis unleashed what they considered to be a defensive revolt. The 1937-38 Dersim uprising can be seen as actually two separate uprisings, separated by a particularly hard winter. The first war went from late March 1937 to November 1937, while the second war began in April 1938 and lasted until December 1938. The Dersim rebellion was led by the local traditional Kızılbâş elites, at the head of whom stood Seyt Rıza, chief of the Abbasuşağı tribe (Bozarslan, 1986: 104 and Kendal in Chaliand, 1980: 67). Local intellectual cadres also played a role in the rising’s leadership, according to one source. The Alevi inhabitants of this region had not been part of the Hamidiye and had not been part of Sheikh Said’s rebellion (Franz, 1986: 141; Pelletiere, 1984: 83 and Kendal in Chaliand, 1980: 67) In contrast, important Kurmancî Kurdish nationalist dynasties such as the Bedirxans played no part in the Dersim revolt (Bozarslan, 1986: 106).

Seyt Rıza, Nûrî Dersimi and other Dersimli leaders had already drawn up a list of demands, including: orders for the arrest of the assassin of Seyt Rıza’s son;²² a halt to the massing of

the Turkish military guard in the region; a halt to the construction of bridges and of the creation of new districts; a halt to the collection of arms by Turkish authorities, and of the continuation of the payment of taxes on merchandise to Dersimlis (Bozarslan, 1986: 240-41 and *Le Temps*, 18 August 1937).

A letter sent by Dersim's tribal chiefs to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations in November 1937 details what it claimed were measures taken by Turkish authorities to: deprive Kurdish children even of a basic education in Turkish language schools; to prevent Kurds becoming officers in the Turkish army or becoming employed in civil posts 'in the Kurdish region'; to eliminate all references to 'Kurd' or 'Kurdistan' from scientific works; to force Kurds into slave labour in construction projects; to deport and disperse 'another part of the Kurds'; to 'uproot young Kurdish women and girls from their families and place them in illegal concubinage' and, 'Finally, to Turkify a part of the Kurdish nation and to exterminate the other part, through different means' (Dersimi, 1988: 299-303).

The heart-wrenching alleged 'tyrannies of the Turkish government against human rights', aside, what is notable here is the definition, in a letter by traditional Dersim tribal chieftains, to the plight of Dersim's inhabitants being a 'a part of the Kurdish nation'. The same sentiment is repeated more than once throughout the letter, in fact. This is a prime example of a Kurdish identity being assumed by members of these non-Kurmancî, (Kızılbaş and Zaza) minorities, when dealing with the outside world, which was ignorant of their existence as distinct ethnic identities on the one hand, but which had gone on record in favour of Kurdish self-determination, on the other. (Attempts by modern Kurmancî-Kurdish nationalists to arbitrarily thrust a Kurdish ethnic identity upon the Kızılbaş and Zaza will be discussed shortly.)

Despite the clear sense of difference between the Alevi Dimli-speaking Dersimlis and the Kurmancî and Turkish speaking Sunni Kurds, the former were apparently prepared to discount this, in the face of two very tangible facts. Firstly, the Dersimlis believed by this point (20 November 1937, when the chiefs' letter was written) that they faced complete extermination from the Turkish state, the common enemy of both themselves and the 'Kurmancî Kurds'. And, secondly, while the cause of the Dersim or so called 'Alevi Kurds' was nowhere recognised, let alone championed outside of Turkey, the cause of the 'Kurmancî Kurds' had at least been recognised by the Treaty of Sèvres imposed on defeated Ottoman Turkey by the victorious Allies in 1920 — even if this treaty's practical measures had been superseded by the Treaty of Lausanne, three years later. It must have been with such considerations in mind that the desperate Dersim chieftains pleaded with the League of Nations:

These tyrannies of the Turkish government against human rights and the Kurdish nation, of which the ethnic and national existence has been recognised by diplomatic conferences and by international conventions, are incompatible with the inner meaning and entirety of the sublime and liberating principles of your organisation, and we have great faith that this organisation will not remain indifferent before tyranny. In order that the League of Nations is able to take some proper measures to prevent the continuation of these tyrannies and the total extermination of the Kurdish nation, it needs, one would perhaps say, to penetrate the exactness of these tragedies. To that we will reply: it suffices to send onto our soil an international commission of inquiry.²³

But the Dersimlis were never to receive any outside assistance against the Kemalists' determined military onslaught. Finally, a top secret 4 May 1938 decision of the Turkish Cabinet resolved that Turkish military forces which had previously been massed in the area would attack Nazımiye, Keçiğezek (Aşağı bar) Sin and Karaoğlan very strongly, and:

This time all the people in the area will be collected and deported out of the area and this collection operation will attack the villages without warning and collect the people. To do this, we will collect the people as well as the arms they have. At the moment, we are ready to deport 2,000 people (*Türkiye Cumhuriyetinde Ayaklanmalar*: 491, Appendix 4, in Beşikçi, 1991: 80-81).

It was also resolved in this same decision to respond to any armed resistance by rendering such opposition 'incapable of movement on the spot and until the end', to destroy the houses of such resisters, and to deport the remainder of their families. Beşikçi asks why the decision does not read as an instruction to the military to simply deport all such rebel families. He concludes that this is because it is clear that the true meaning of the euphemism rendering the rebels 'incapable of movement' was to kill them. (*Türkiye Cumhuriyetinde Ayaklanmalar*: 491, Appendix 4, in Beşikçi, 1991: 80-81 and Beşikçi, 1991: 81).

The uprising is generally considered to have ended in 1938, but some scholars have pointed out that fighting continued into the following year.²⁴ The whole of Dersim was not occupied by the Kemalist military until the end of 1938. According to a document of the Turkish army, *Türkiye Cumhuriyetinde Ayaklanmalar*, no less than 7,954 Dersimlis were killed in only 17 days, during the second war — that is, between April and December 1938 (Beşikçi, 1991: 83).

The Turkish authorities made extensive use of warplanes, to bomb and strafe Dersimli targets. According to an Alevi participant in the uprising, after aircraft bombed villages, villagers ran out of the villages and were then frequently cut down by the Turkish military. One of many examples given by this source occurred in the Kozluca area, in mid-1937. The wife and extended family of Seyt Rıza were included in this group of mostly women and children fleeing Turkish warplanes. The soldiers surrounded the villagers and began putting them to death. About 1,000 defenceless villagers were killed (Dersimi, 1988: 287).

Another mass killing technique used against Dersimli civilians reported in the same Turkish army account cited earlier, was to throw dynamite in caves where villagers had fled. Beşikçi reports one such incident, in Demenan, where 216 Dersimlis were killed in this manner (Beşikçi, 1991: 83).

Seyt Rıza was himself captured by the Kemalists on 5 September 1937 and was hanged, together with ten of his lieutenants, on 18 November²⁵ (Franz, 1986: 142). Immediately before his death, Seyt Rıza made a speech, in Zazaki (Dimli): 'I am 75 years old, I am becoming a martyr, I am joining the Kurdistan martyrs. Kurdish youth will get revenge. Down with oppressors! Down with the fickle and liars!' (Dersimi, 1988: 299-303). Then, defiant to the end, Seyt Rıza put the noose on his own neck, pushed the executioner out of the way and executed himself.²⁶

This was the most devastating political defeat until that point for the Turkish Kurmancî Kurds — as well as for the ethnically different Zazas and Kızılbaş. The resistance movement of the latter was shattered for the next three decades. Retribution by Turkish forces claimed at

least 40,000 Dersimlis, who were deported and massacred following this defeat (Rambout, 1947: 39; Kinnane, 1964: 31; Khalil, 1990: 27; Kendal in Chaliand, 1980: 68 and Pelletiere, 1984: 83).²⁷ So great was the burden of opposition carried by these ‘Kurds of convenience’ that their military and political smashing meant that all particularist opposition to the Kemalist Turkish state was impossible without at least the beginning of the reconstitution of a Kızılbaş or Zaza reorganisation. It is not accidental that the first opposition journals which began appearing from the 1960s onwards evoked powerful Zaza/Kızılbaş symbols (such as the publication *Dicle-Fırat* (Tigris-Euphrates) or, later on, were even printed in both dialects of Dimli (Zaza and Kırmançî), as well as in Turkish, such as *Roja Nû* (New Day), *Rizgarî* (Liberation) and *Özgürlük Yolu* (Freedom Road).

Conclusion

Our brief survey of the major ‘Kurdish nationalist’ uprisings this century is now concluded. In each case, despite the clearly Kızılbaş identity of the insurgents — with the sole exception of the already Kurmançî Kurdish insurgents in the Agri Dag uprising — the rebels felt compelled to take on a Kurdish identity, when faced with defeat — if not extermination. Immediate events intruded repeatedly, to impose a different stamp on an ethnic movement than might otherwise be expected, had reality been less life-threatening. Faced with the terrible efficiency of Ankara’s regular forces, both Kızılbaş and Zaza insurgents were forced to take drastic political steps, in order to broaden their appeal. In other words, Kızılbaş and Zaza rebels felt obliged to brand themselves as Kurdish, in order to secure both broader support within Anatolia, not to mention from the great powers. Then, as now, the Kızılbaş and Zaza identities were little known outside of eastern Anatolia. It can plausibly be surmised that the Kurdish identity was the only one both known and accorded some weight in eastern Anatolia by the great powers, who had agreed after World War I, most significantly, that the Kurds had a right to their own homeland.²⁸

The distinctions between Kurds, Kızılbaş and Zazas continued to exist in reality, however, albeit in an at times somewhat subterranean manner. In the late 1970s throughout Turkey, animosities between Sunni and ‘Alevi Kurds’ in areas like Malâtya, Elazığ and Erzincan, where both Sunni Kurds and Kızılbaş live cheek-by-jowl, were violently underlined once more, when ‘Islamic fanaticism and fascist propaganda found a willing ear among the Sunni Kurds, to the extent that ... a virtual civil war between the Alevis (both Turks and Kurds: politically leftist) and Sunnis (both Turks and Kurds: politically of the extreme right)’ was touched off (van Bruinessen, 1978, Utrecht: 374). Since then, some Turkish Kurds have become involved in Kurdish Islamist organisations such as the loose guerrilla network formed by Sunni Kurdish and Turkish youth — the Islamic Liberation Army (İKO — İslam Kurtuluş Ordusu) which had some support in the Tatvan and Batman districts, in the later 1970s and early 1980s. The inspiration here seems to have been the 1979 Iranian ‘Islamic Revolution’ (Ahmad, 1991: 19).²⁹ In both Iran and in Turkish Kurdistan, ‘anti-imperialist’ aspirations seem to have played a role. This has now become a constant theme for the Refah Partisi, a mainstream Islamist Party which exists throughout Turkey, and one of the keys to the growth in its popularity in Turkish Kurdistan (Ahmad, 1991: 16-17). Both the RP and the İKO have a record of hostility towards the Kızılbaş.

By the mid-1980s, even conservative Kurdish Islamist students at the state-run schools for training religious instructors, the imam Hatip Liseleri, ‘increasingly emphasised their Kurdish identity in opposition to the Turkish military operations in Kurdistan’. At several places, in

fact, initially antagonistic relations between the Islamist groups and the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (PKK) 'became quite cordial' (van Bruinessen in *Kurdish Times*, 1991: 16-17).

More recently, a combination Islamist/Kurdish nationalist formation has emerged, the Islamic Party of Kurdistan (PIK, Partîya Îslamiya Kurdistan). This party's status as the principal Islamist current among Turkish Kurds may be due to the predominance of the nationalist side of its identity. (Apparently, 'its party organ, *Judi*, writes more about the Kurds than about Islam'.) Nevertheless the PIK appears currently unable to mobilise large numbers (van Bruinessen in *Kurdish Times*, 1991: 22-23).

Nevertheless, noticeable transformations in the attitudes of both Kurdish nationalists and Kurdish Islamists has occurred over the past decade or so:

While Muslim radicals of the early 1980s denied the relevance of ethnicity, most of the Kurdish Islamicists appear to have become nationalists as well. The nationalists, on the other hand, including the PKK, have given up their earlier arrogant attitude toward Islam, recognising it as an important, potentially progressive social force (van Bruinessen, Zed Press, 1992: 249).

Thus, the PKK issued the *Program* of a new front group, the Hereketa Îslamiya Kurdistanê (Islamic Movement of Kurdistan), in December 1993. It had earlier made much of its warm links with a 99 year-old Sunni cleric, Mele (Mullah) Abdurrahman.

As befits a populist nationalist organisation, of course, the PKK has a record of trying to be all things to all people. When interviewed by this author in mid-1992, for instance, the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan asserted that his party was open equally to Kurds from any religious or cultural background:

There are also Yezidis, Christians, Alevi, Sunnis, Zazas and also Kurmancî speakers and Sorani speakers who are minorities, We don't depend on a special religion, or a special dialect, or something like that. On this subject there is a wide equality and freedom. Nobody sees his religious or dialectal background as either an advantage or a disadvantage; it's all very normal, people have [mutual] respect (White, July 1992).

When asked about the increase of political and cultural activity by Alevi and Zazas in Turkey-Kurdistan and Turkey, however, Öcalan was not so magnanimous, asserting: 'The MÎT [Turkish political police] is behind this. They are doing this to stop the development of Kurdish national consciousness' (White, July 1992).

The same view was carried in PKK publications as well, until late 1993, when even the PKK felt compelled to bow to the weight of the growing particularist ethnic feeling among 'Alevi Kurds'. Beginning in April 1994, therefore, the PKK began publishing a new glossy colour magazine, *Zülfikar* (named after Imam 'Ali's sword), which attempts to recuperate the Alevilik movement among Kurds for itself. In a daring historical forgery, the PKK even goes to the extent of painting a headband in Kurdish national colours on the portrait of Seyt Rıza adorning the front cover of the first issue of this publication!

Even more recently, a glossy pamphlet by the PKK-inspired and dominated 'Parliament in Exile' to celebrate the first meeting of that body, has explicitly stated that not only the

victims of the March 1995 Gazi Osman Paşa (Istanbul) massacre of ‘Alevi Kurds’, and all ‘Alevi Kurds’ in Turkey are Kurds, but also that the Kurdish nationalist movement includes the Assyro-Chaldeans and the Armenians — both of which are clearly racially, culturally and ethnically distinct from the Kurmancî Kurds. All these peoples, the parliament decreed in its ‘Statute Number 1’, share the same ‘common homeland’ — Kurdistan! (Kurdistan Parliament in Exile, 1995: 5 and 16).³⁰

It is unlikely that the PKK — or any other non-Kızılbaş or non-Zaza force — can ever win over the ‘Alevi Kurds’ or the ‘Zaza Kurds’ with such attempts to square circles. For, as this article has shown, the whole history of ethnic differentiation among peoples generally classified as Turkey’s Kurds demonstrates that they are sufficiently aware of their own history — and the many wrongs inflicted on them in the course of it — to resist such crude attempts at incorporation.

That same history also shows, however, that collaboration by the Kızılbaş and Zaza minorities in eastern Anatolia with Kurmancî Kurdish nationalists such as the PKK cannot be completely ruled out. For that to occur, however, the PKK would have to overcome the image that it has obtained in the eyes of many ‘Alevi Kurds’ that it is a Sunni Kurdish movement, if not a base for anti-Kızılbaş pogroms, if it ever achieves success. And Zazas would need to be certain that their own specific identity would not be swallowed up by an all-pervasive Kurmancî nationalist culture. In any event, the distinctions between Kurds, Kızılbaş and Zazas will continue to be of extreme importance in contemporary Turkey as they were in the past.

Notes

1. The sociologists Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (1984: 83) reject any notion of defining a group of people on the basis of ‘their genetic constitution’: groups in sociological theory are more commonly defined by reference to shared culture such as language, customs and institutions. There is a difference between a group which claims ethnic distinctiveness and one which has distinctiveness imposed upon it by some politically superior group in a context of political struggle. Ethnicity may, therefore, become the basis either for national separatism or for political subordination. The ambiguity of the definition of ‘ethnic group’ thus reflects the political struggles in society around exclusive and inclusive group membership.
2. See also: ‘Kurds and Kurdistan: Facts and Figures’, note by Kurdish Studies Editorial Board (1992) *Kurdish Studies* (V: 1 & 2: 105) & Izady (1992: 137).
3. Izady estimates (1992: 137) that three-fifths of Kurds ‘are today at least nominally Sunni Muslims of the Shaf’i’ rite’.
4. For a solid discussion of the main ghulat sects, see also Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Karim Shahrastani, (1994: 149-63).
5. I have also confirmed this, in numerous conversations with both Turkish and ‘Kurdish’ Alevi. For accounts of Alevi rituals, basic beliefs and sacred books, consult Moosa (1987: 120-62) & Izady (1992: 137-45). Also useful, despite dealing immediately with the Turkic Bektashi rather than the specifically ‘Alevi Kurd’ variant of Aleviism, are Ismet Zeki Eyboğlu, (1991: passim) & Rıza Zelyut, (1991: passim). See also Ayse Kudat Sertel, ‘Ritual

Kinship in Eastern Turkey’, in the *Anthropological Quarterly* (44: 1), which actually deals with the Alevi version of circumcision rites, although the author seems unaware of this.

6. The well known mass killings of Kahramanmaraş (December 1978), Sivas (July 1993) and Gazi Osman Paşa (Istanbul — March 1995) are simply three of the most recent such episodes of Sunnis massacring Alevis in Turkey. Following the Gazi Osman Paşa outrage, Alevi demonstrations and riots raged for up to four days in several Turkish cities. Gazi Osman Paşa is a heavily ‘Alevi Kurd’ suburb of Istanbul. These events provide some evidence that even the so-called ‘Alevi Kurds’ still retain some sort of Alevi identity — even if the PKK tried to use these protests to push itself forward. For a succinct discussion of what appear to be deliberate anti-Alevi provocations in Turkey, see Hugh Pope, ‘Delaying Human Rights Reform’, in *Middle East International* (501 [misnumbered as edition number 500]: 13).

7. Even the normally restrained Molyneux-Seel stated in *The Geographical Journal* (1914, 44: 67): ‘The Keezelbash have not a very high standard of morals, though the worst vices of the Turks are not practised’.

8. For a succinct summary of Nusayri origins, relations to other religions and doctrines, see Alain Nimier, *Les Alawites, passim*. See also the entry ‘Nusairi’, in Gibb and Kramers (1953 453-56) and Shahrastani, (1984: 161-63).

9. Minorsky’s pioneering article ‘La Domination des Dailamites’ (1964) draws heavily on the works of medieval Arab and other historians.

10. Minorsky, (1964). See also Minorsky (1964: footnote 1: 26) , in which he remarks that ‘the true pronunciation’ of Dailam ‘was probably Dêlam or Dêlum.

11. One scholar has noted that the inhabitants of ancient Dailam, and other inhabitants of the Alburz mountains were both physically different from each other and from the Guilek of the lowlands of Gilan to their immediate south. These physical differences must have been quite marked, in the author’s opinion, for he adds: ‘Their physical differences cannot be attributed to the respective influences of their milieu’. See C. Sahimi (no date [mid-1960s]: 33).

12. Summary of historians’ accounts, by Minorsky (1964: 13). See also Bausani (1975: 73).

13. Minorsky adds that these exploits were discussed by the Arab poet Baladhuri.

14. The ‘Abbasids are sometimes labelled incorrectly as partisans of ‘Ali. In fact, they merely made use of certain ‘extremist Shi’ite’ movements (as well as many other different movements), to assist them in their own drive for the caliphate.

15. Zaydi or Zaydite Shi’a are those followers of Imam ‘Ali who recognise only four true imams: ‘Ali; Hasan; Hussein and finally, ‘Ali Zayn al-’Abdin. They were founded by Zayd Ibn ‘Ali, grandson of the third Imam. (See Minorsky (1965: 193)). Much later, of course, most of the Dailamites transferred their allegiance to the even more *ghulat* sect the Isma’ilis. This development followed a determined campaign by the founder and long-time leader of the Assassins, Hasan as-Sabbah. The Assassins were a highly controversial sub-group within the Isma’ilis. Consult: Willey (1963: 20-23); von Hammer-Purgstall (1965/1835 *passim*); Lewis (1967: 41ff. and 51ff.); Shahrastani (1984 : 167-70 and Zelyut (1991 : 42-7).

16. Minorsky adds (1964: 16): ‘In their turn, the imams Dailamicised themselves and embraced the cause of the local populations’.

17. Minorsky also states (1982/1943: 87, 89): ‘From ancient times the Caspian provinces had been a reservoir of human energy overflowing and spreading westwards’.

18. Roehmer (1986: 220), notes: The rebels belonged to the landless rural classes who had nothing to lose but who believed themselves to be assured of paradise if they were killed. The economic distress in Anatolia should not be ignored as a motivating factor in the uprising. This social aspect combined with Shi’i extremism is clearly discernible.

19. A product of this has been the emergence of political currents around such journals as *Bildirge* and *Desmala Sure*. Both these currents unified (under the rubric of *Desmala Sure*) in late 1993.

20. The continued existence of the ethnically similar Guran in parts of Iraqi Kurdistan is one of the main obstacles in the way of resolving the enigma of the ‘Alevi Kurds’. The Guran — who adopted another offshoot of Yazdânism, the Ahl-i Haqq religion — could also be of ancient Dailamite origin. Research to date by scholars has been insufficient to clearly determine this, unfortunately. However, it is known that the Guran language, Gurani, is linguistically closely related to Zaza/Dimli, and it is even suggested that the Guran differ in physiognomy from Kurmancî Kurds (Rich 1836: I, 81, 88; van Bruinessen, Zed: 110-15; Minorsky, 1928: passim; Minorsky, 1964/1920-21: passim; Minorsky 1982/1943: XV: 75-76 & 88). Minorsky also notes several connections between the ancient Guran and the Dailam-Gilan area on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea (Minorsky 1982/1943: XV: 80, 81 and 86-89), indicating that this people could have originated from there.

21. Olson, *Ibid*, pp. 39-41. ‘Azadî’ means ‘freedom’, in Kurmancî. The organisation’s full name was actually Ciwata Azadîya Kurd. It later changed its name to the Ciwata Xweseriya Kurd, but it is usually referred to as simply Azadî.

22. Seyt Rıza’s son had been murdered shortly before the rebellion began, possibly by a Kemalist ‘dirty tricks’ squad. Dersimi claims that the Turkish military leader, Abdullah Paşa, ordered Seyt Rıza’s son İbrahim to be murdered by the Turkish military’s intelligence commander and his troops (Dersimi, 1988: 272).

23. Letter of Dersim tribal leaders to the League of Nations, dated 20 November, 1937. Translated from: Dersimi (1988: 299-303).

24. The Tunceli Law (Decision No. 2884) was originally to last till 1 January 1940. In fact, the law remained in force until 1 January 1947. So it took eleven years to fully do the job that this legislation was designed for.

25. Pelletiere (1984: 83) gives 14 November 1937 as the date of both the trial and execution of Rıza and the other leaders of the rebellion.

26. This account was related to me in an interview with former ‘Alevi Kurdish’ guerrilla leader turned scholar Seyfi Cengiz. See also van Bruinessen (Utrecht, 1978: 332).

27. Musa Anter [*Hatıralarım*: 46-47], relates the account of a young Turkish officer, who stated:

During the cleaning operation, we had found a family in a grotto: the grandfather, the father, the mother, and a boy of 5-6 years. The adults were executed immediately, whereas the small boy was with us, for we wanted him to show us where to find others. He said nothing. We had given him some sweets to eat — he refused. At a given moment, one of our planes flew over us. The small boy stood up, took a stick, directing it towards our plane and chasing our plane with his stick. I was angry myself. I gave the order to execute him. They executed him and he was thrown from the top of the cliffs. We continued the cleaning operation.

28. The Armenian identity was less plausible and, more to the point, the Armenians were themselves thoroughly defeated by this time.

29. Ahmad states that the mainstream Islamist Refah Partisi fared well in Diyarbakır during the 1987 elections, after stressing ‘the struggle against feudalism, imperialism and fascism’ in its electoral material.

30. The Turkish-language edition of this brochure (*Parlamenta Kurdistane li Derveyi Welat*) contains the supposed Kırmanci language version of the oath taken by all members of the new parliament. (See ‘Destûra Parlamento Kurdistanê li Derveyî Welat’: 4) An examination of this ‘Kırmanci’ version shows that it is actually in Kurmancî, but spiced with five or six Kırmanci words. Needless to say, such acts only tend to confirm Kızılbaş suspicions.

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The above article in the *Journal of Arabic, Islamic & Middle Eastern Studies* sparked a debate in the *Kurdish Newsletter* (1995), published by the Kurdish Study Group at Deakin University, Melbourne. Both of the protagonists were at the time postgraduate students. Both contributions are reprinted below, in the order that they appeared.

Debate on the Identity of the Kizilbas, and Zaza — I Claim to originality but in deep confusion Ethnic Differentiation among the Kurds

Hussein Tahiri (1995)

I recently read an article entitled, 'Ethnic Differentiation among the Kurds: Kurmanci, Kizilbaş and Zaza' by Paul White.¹ The author was trying, in vain, to prove that the Kizilbaş and Zazas are distinct minorities from the Kurds. Of course, this is not a new idea, by which any academic by trying to do so, can claim to have created something 'original'. This view, as the author himself stated, has been around since the mid-1980s.

Why did this idea appear in the mid 1980s? Since the suppression of the Dersim revolt in late 1938, the Turkish state has been denying the existence of the Kurds in Turkey. It employed

academics² to achieve this aim. It called the Kurds 'mountain Turks'.³ Despite all attempts the Turkish state has not succeeded in assimilating the Kurds. From the 1960s onwards, Kurdish nationalism has been reviving. In the mid-1980s the Kurdistan Workers Party, PKK, staged an armed struggle against the Turkish government. As a result, the revival of the Kurdish identity was inevitable. The Turkish state, realising this fact, could not focus on denying the Kurdish identity any more. The best alternative was to divide and rule. So, it has been trying to exploit religion and dialect differentiation among the Kurds to prevent the development of Kurdish nationalism. That is where the idea of Kizilbaş and Zazas as separate ethnic minorities came into existence.

Let us, at the beginning, clarify some terms to avoid the confusion Mr. White has fallen into. He has distinguished between Kizilbaş and Zazas as two separate ethnic minorities. However, he thinks that they might have had common ancestors.⁴ Kizilbaş is a religious term and has nothing to do with race, language or nationhood of a minority. Kizilbaş, Qizilbash, in Turkish means red heads. They were called so because Alevis were supporting Shah Isma'il Safavi, the founder of the Safavid dynasty in Iran, and his army used to wear red head gear. Qizilbash is a phenomenon of 15th. century onwards.⁵ To separate Qizilbash from Kurds in general and Zazas in particular would be nothing but a historical fallacy. Separating a group of people from their nation on the basis of religion would be unrealistic. So far, as far as I am aware, no scholar has tried to do so. If Qizilbash are distinct from the Zaza Kurds so Ezidis⁶, Yazidis, should form a distinct minority group from the Kurds. They have a different religion from the majority of the Kurds. When one denies the Ezidis as Kurds so s(he) can claim Qizilbash are a distinct minority group. The question does not end here. What language does the Qizilbash speak, or what racial group or nation do they belong to? Is it something apart from Demili, Zaza, which Mr. White mentions but does not explain? Qizilbash are the Demili-speaking Kurds.

Demilis, Zazas, are a part of the Kurdish nation. Daylamites are believed to be ancestors of Demilis. Daylam is a geographical name located in the present day Gilan, Iran. The Daylamites began their expansion from Daylam in early Medieval times. This led some scholars to think that the Daylamites were located outside Kurdistan and they were not Kurds. Pre-Islamic history indicates that the Daylamites were living in Anatolia, where other Kurdish tribes were living. Both Bundahistan, the Zoroastrian holy book, and the Church archives of late classical Christian Arberal, Erbil, located the Daylamites at the headwaters of the Tigris river. Furthermore, although some Demilis are Alevis, they still hold some ancient Kurdish beliefs.⁷

From a linguistic point of view, Demili is a part of the Kurdish language. Kurdish is divided into two main dialects, Pahlawani and Kurmanji. Each of these dialects in turn is divided into different sub-dialects. The two main sub-dialects of Pahlawani are Gurani and Demili which are closely related but Guranis are located in the South and Demilis in the North of Kurdistan. Pahlawani was spoken throughout of much of Kurdistan before internal migration. From the 16th. century onwards, Kurmanji began to expand south and northwards from the Hakkari region and replaced Pahlawani. As a result, Pahlawani retreated more and more, the Demili toward the north and the Gurani toward the south.⁸

Mr. White maintains that by the time of the Islamic era, most Daylamites were so Iranicised that they spoke northern Iranian dialects distinct from the southern Iranian languages, Persian and Kurdish.⁹ One should ask which northern Iranian language group affected the Daylamites' language? This is a question which has not been answered by Mr. White. So, I

should stress that it is Kurdish which belongs to northern Iranian language group. Minorsky believes that Kurdish belongs to the north-west language groups.¹⁰ Whaby reinforces this by stating, 'The weight of evidence strongly indicates that the position of the Kurdish language is among the North-Western Iranian group'.¹¹

Mr. White continues his confusion into the 20th century. He describes the Kurdish insurgencies from the 1920s to 1930s, and categorises them as Qizilbash (Seyt Reza), Zaza (Sheikh Sa'id) and Kurmanji (Xoybun). For him the surprising thing is that all these insurgencies were conducted in the name of Kurdish nationalism while, except Xoybun, none of them were Kurdish. He reasons for this self-denial or 'self-deception' of Qizilbash and Zaza leaders in terms of the danger of extermination and non-recognition by the outside world. The Qizilbash and Zaza were in danger of extermination by the Turkish army. They shared a common enemy with the Kurmanji Kurds. The Kurds were better known to the outside world, so claiming Kurdish origin would make international bodies listen to their plight.¹²

One should ask why the Qizilbash and the Zazas would claim Kurdish origin if they were not really Kurds. If under any pressure they would change their identity, why did they not become Sunni Muslim when they were being persecuted by the Ottomans? Why did they not claim Turkish origin and avoid persecution, and even better become a part of the dominant nation? Why did they want to become poor Kurds and be subject to persecution indefinitely? To put it another way, Mr. White thinks that the Qizilbash and Zaza tribal leaders made fools of themselves and were killed for something they were not. To maintain this position would require an ignoring of plain historical fact. Amir Sharaf Khan Bidlisi put the Demilis (Dumbilis) among the Kurdish tribes 400 years ago.¹³ Therefore, it is not true to claim, as Mr. White does, that Kurdish nationalists have created a notion that the Demilis are Kurds. It is a historical fact.

To sum up, Qizilbash and Zazas are not two different and distinct minorities. Qizilbash is a religious, not a racial, term. It came into existence from the 15th. century. Both Qizilbash and Zazas are one people and a part of the Kurdish people. Trying to manipulate information to serve one's aim will only lead to confusion. This has been tried by the Turkish state long ago but proved ineffective. Therefore, the Qizilbash and Zazas are Demili-speaking Kurds.

Historical and linguistic evidence show that Demilis are part of the Kurdish people. Closing one's eyes to half the truth cannot serve any academic purpose. Mr. White has differentiated between Kurmanji and Kirmanji (Qizilbash dialect of Demili).¹⁴ Is there really any substantial difference between words Kirmanji and Kurmanji? According to what measures has it been differentiated? Mr. White is not aware that in the Iranian and Iraqi parts of Kurdistan what he calls Kurmanji is called Kirmanji.

Trying to show great historical insurgencies aimed at gaining self-determination as a wrongly perceived identity if not an insult to those people, is an unkindness. One can not assume that the Demili-speaking leaders were so ignorant of their identity. All insurgencies conducted in Dersim region were without exception aimed at creating an independent Kurdistan. If this is not the case why would the Demili-speaking Kurds be exterminated in the first place, and then try to show themselves as the Kurds to attract outside help?

Apart from historical evidence the Demilis regard themselves and feel themselves as Kurds.¹⁵ The Kurds have not had a state of their own to say that they have affected the

Demilis and Kurdified them. There is no indication that the Kurds have tried to assimilate them. So, why should the Demilis feel they are Kurds? Is it not that they really are? Trying to say otherwise is to say that the majority of the Demilis do not know who they are and their feelings are wrong. Only I a 'scholar' thousands of kilometre away, know who they are, and so I have produced something 'original'. If the Kurds have such friends, to be sure, they do not need any enemy.

Endnotes

1. This article was published in the *Journal of Arabic Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vo.2, No.2, 1995, pp. 67-90.
2. One of them is M. Fahrattin Kirzioğlu who wrote a book in Turkish entitled *Kurtlerin Koku, the Origin of the Kurds*, in 1963. In this text the author tries to establish that the Kurds are of Turkish origin.
3. Kendal, 'Kurdistan in Turkey', Gerard Chaliand (ed) *People Without a Country*, London, Zed Press, 1980, p.68.
4. Paul White, 'Ethnic Differentiation among the Kurds: Kurmanci, Kizilbas and Zaza', *Journal of Arabic Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vo.2, No.2, 1995, p.76.
5. Mehrdad Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook*, Washington, Taylor and Francis International Publishers, 1992, p.151.
6. Ezidi is an ancient Kurdish religion which has survived to the existing day. Ezidis are mainly living in Iraq and other former Soviet Union's Republics.
7. Mehrdad Izady, op cit, pp.43-45.
8. Ibid, pp.172-75.
9. Paul White, op cit, p.71.
10. Basile Nikitine, *The Kurds and Kurdistan*, Second Edition, Tehran, Niloofar Publishing, 1987, pp.46-47. (Persian translation by Mohammad Ghazi).
11. T. Wahby, *The Origin of the Kurds and Their Language*. This lecture was delivered by Wahby to the KSSE, UK Branch Conference on 22 December 1964. The written manuscript is an off-print from the Magazine *Kurdistan* of KSSE Nos IX and X, reprinted in Sweden 1982, p.16.
12. Paul White, op cit, pp.77-84.
13. Amir Sharaf Khan Bidlisi, *Sharafnameh*, Tehran, Elmi, 1994, p.399. (Persian)
14. Paul White, op cit, p.76.

15. Philip G. Kreyenbrook, 'On the Kurdish Language', Philip G. Kreyenbrook and Stefan Sperl eds. *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p.70.

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Debate on the Identity of the Kizilbas, and Zaza — II Trapped in the Nationalist Mêvanxane

Paul White (1995)

Hussein Tahiri has written what he no doubt believes is a solid critique of my article 'Ethnic Differentiation among the Kurds: Kurmancî, Kızılbaş and Zaza' (White, 1995, 2, 2: 67-90). As I will show in this reply, however, Hussein's article is confused, badly informed, and driven by an erroneous methodology. But first a note on how such discussions should take place in the Academy.

Criticise

Scholars should criticise each others' work — frequently and, if necessary, quite severely. But there is a way to do this. Disputes between scholars are not supposed to resemble verbal slanging matches between fans of rival football teams and critical articles are not supposed to look like the latest denunciation hot from the pages of some Kurdish nationalist publication. The sole purpose of such exchanges is to better elicit the facts, to improve scholars' understanding of phenomena. Nothing — absolutely nothing — is gained by alleging that the sole aim of the colleague one is criticising was to create something 'original'. Even less is the truth divined by sneering at a colleague, by placing quotation marks around the word 'scholar', when referring to him. And the mind positively boggles when confronted by the following description of the present author: 'If the Kurds have such friends, to be sure, they do not need any enemy'. If the truth be known, strictly speaking, academics are not expected to be the 'friends' of anything but truth. We are professional seekers of truth, and enemies of anything which obscures the truth.

Methodology

Hussein clearly has a quite different approach. His methodology is that my research should serve the mainstream Kurdish nationalist project — and that anything which does not is therefore wrong. Hussein requires all research to reach conclusions which dovetail neatly in with his starting-point: the needs of Kurdish nationalism. It works like this: sectors of the Turkish state try to use the Alevi issue for their own benefit. Paul White says that the Dersim Kızılbaş might well have different origins from the Kurmancî (Kurmanji) Kurds. My research is thus dangerous to the mainstream Kurdish nationalist project, and it therefore must be wrong.

This methodology and this string of argumentation makes absolutely no sense, as we shall see, but that is irrelevant for Hussein, unfortunately. Stuck in the Kurdish nationalist

mêvanxane (guest-house), he is determined to make the facts fit his purpose. Sadly, however, they just do not fit.

According to Hussein's topsy-turvy methodology, the Kızılbaş and Zazas do not exist as a distinct ethnic group; any serious distinguishing characteristics were simply invented by craven academics in the pay of Ankara — and he accuses this present writer of accepting that the 'idea' of distinct Kızılbaş and Zaza identities has only been around since the mid-1980s. In truth, I said no such thing, for it is nonsense.

For a start, I did not even say that the Kızılbaş and Zazas definitely had different racial ancestors from the Kurds, but simply that 'they both may well have had a common ancestor, in the Dailamites' (White, 1975, 2, 2: 76 & footnote 20: 86-87). I did say that my research showed they were ethnically different from the Kurds, but a plurality of ethnicity need not prevent a nation coalescing, if enough other factors can come together. Australia, for example, is clearly a nation, despite the existence of over two hundred and twenty ethnic groups!

My *JAIMES* article explains, in fact, the whole probable course of development of today's Kızılbaş and Zazas, from their probable forefathers the Dailamites onwards. I tried to show, in some detail, the sort of historical, economic and environmental forces which helped to shape their distinct identities.

I documented how the Dersimlis, especially, jealously guarded their own independence. Right up until the mid-1930s, therefore, as Molyneux-Seel (1914), Hasretyan (1995) and others observed, they lived in unrecognised independence, with each tribal assembly contributing delegates to a Dersim general assembly and with their own taxation system. It is easy to assert that 'All insurgencies conducted in Dersim region were without exception aimed at creating an independent Kurdistan'. But why did the Kurmancî Kurds repeatedly refuse to come to the aid of the insurgent Dersimlis? And why is it that the only eyewitness account of Seyt Rıza's hanging reports none of the Kurdish nationalist propaganda which Nuri Dersimi put in the Seyt's mouth (Dersimi, 1988, 299-303), and which I mistakenly repeated in my *JAIMES* article?

Furthermore, while I admit to one mistake in my article, this hardly makes Hussein's case any stronger. What Seyt Rıza actually said before he was hanged was simply: 'We are descendants of Kerbala. [A symbolic reference to Shi'a and Alevi martyrdom.] We have nothing to be ashamed of. It is shameful. It is oppression. It is murder' [Cılızoğlu: 7, 9]. These are hardly the words of a man who wanted to unite all the Kurds, given that Aleviism is a minority creed in Anatolia, or even among all the people whom Hussein regards as Kurds. It is, however, exactly what one expect from a man who fought for the freedom and independence, as he saw it, of the Dersimli Kızılbaş.

Religion

Hussein states:

Separating a group of people from their nation on the basis of religion would be unrealistic. So far, as far as I am aware, no scholar has tried to do so.

Really? Perhaps Hussein does not watch the evening news. In ex-Yugoslavia, for some years now, a very fierce war has been raging, in which one of the protagonists in this many-sided conflict is usually referred to as ‘Muslims’, even though the vast majority of these people are in reality not practicing Muslims at all. True, sometimes they are referred to as ‘Bosnians’, (just like the Kızıldaş are also called ‘Dersimlis’), but at the end of the day everyone prefers the tag ‘Muslims’. Why is this? Because loyalty to a purely secular entity known as ‘Bosnia’ or ‘Bosnia-Herzegovina’ is not possible, without the ‘Muslim’ identity. Being a land of persons of ‘Muslim’ birth is what gives the people in it their identity.

Hussein fears that accepting a community’s religion as a principal distinguishing feature would open the flood gates to all the non-Muslim background groups among those whom he regards as Kurds (such as the Yezidis). But Hussein has little to fear, for a distinct, separate (or separatist) community is clearly not one which is simply ‘different’, but one which feels its differences are so strong as to compel it to separate. If the Yezidis were to be subject to systematic persecution by other Kurds, thought of separation could arise. But that is not the case at present and there is no sign that it is likely to become so in the near future.

Language

It is generally accepted by most scholars that the Kurdish people speak an Indo-European language, Kurdish, which is part of the Iranian language group. There are a number of dialects and sub-dialects of the Kurdish language. Kurmancî is the most widely spoken dialect in the most populous sector of Kurdistan, in Turkey, as well as in the ex-USSR. Sorani (or Kurdi) is mostly spoken in Iraqi Kurdistan. Sub-dialects include the Iranian Kurdish dialects (some would say ‘languages’) of Kirmanshahi, Gorani and Leki (Laki). Zaza is also spoken in central Turkish Kurdistan (McDowall, 1989: 7). There is controversy, however — even among Kurds — about whether Zaza is actually a Kurdish language, as it is markedly different (although not completely dissimilar from) other Kurdish dialects, except Gurani and its derivatives.

Hussein enquires as to the language of the Kızıldaş: ‘Is it something apart from Demili [sic], Zaza, which Mr. White mentions but does not explain?’ Actually, this question received more than a mention in my article, but it is worth repeating some of what I said, without proceeding further (White, 1995, 2, 2: 76):

The Zaza call their dialect Zazaki. They live mainly north of Diyarbakır and Urfa, as far as Elazığ — in and around towns like Dicle, Çermik, and Siverek. People from Dersim with a sense of a sense of distinct Kızıldaş ethnicity generally describe themselves as Kırmanç, or by their language. Both peoples speak dialects of the same language, Dimli (literally ‘of Dailam’) (Hadank, in Mann and Hadank, 1930: II: 18-19; Hadank, in Mann and Hadank, 1932: IV: 4-6; Minorsky, 1928: 91, 105 and van Bruinessen, 1992a, footnote 115: 130). The Kızıldaş dialect of Dimli is known as Kırmancki or Kırmançi (not Kurmancî, which is the main Kurdish dialect) (White, May 1992).

Interestingly, Hussein does not question anything in the first half of the citation above, stating himself:

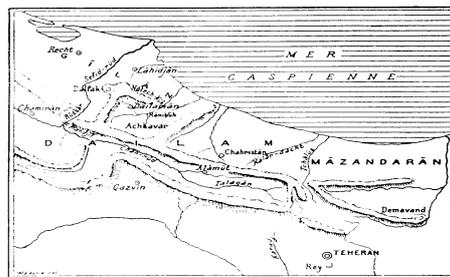
Demilis [sic], Zazas, are a part of the Kurdish nation. Daylamites are believed to be ancestors of Demilis. Daylam is a geographical name located in the present day

Gilan, Iran. The Daylamites began their expansion from Daylam in early Medieval times.

The reader should note this carefully: Hussein has absolutely no argument with those scholars who state that the Daylamite expansion began in Daylam, instead of ending there, as Izady alone asserts. Izady claims that the direction of migration was in the other direction — ‘from the regions of the **upper Tigris river basin** in Anatolia’ (1992: 91 emphasis added). (With many remaining behind, obviously.) I believe Mehrdad Izady, who is otherwise a scholar of considerable merit, is wrong on this. It is noteworthy that he is not able to present any proof for this astonishing assertion, or even to cite a similar view by earlier scholars. Izady’s view must therefore be considered as so far unproven.

If Izady’s theory of the Dailamites’ migration is correct and provable, it would certainly be a powerful argument that the Zaza and Kızılbaş had the same (that is, Kurdish) origins, contrary to what I argued in *JAIMES*. Unfortunately for Hussein, however, this theory is quite unproven. Izady aside, everyone who writes about this aspect of the problem agrees that the Kızılbaş originated in Dailam.

Hussein ducks this problem, because he wants to rely on Izady as an authority who considers the Zaza and Kızılbaş to be Kurds. But this is not good scholarship. Points must be proven; nothing is gained by simply appealing to authority. Hussein’s claim that the Daylamites were Kurds only makes sense if one either accepts Izady’s manifestly unproven theory about the direction of their migration, simply because it suits the Kurdish nationalist project — or if one ludicrously redraws the map of putative Kurdistan. Not a single scholar or even nationalist party claims that Daylam is in Kurdistan! (See Map 1, below; Daylam was on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, part of which can be seen on the map, literally hundreds of miles from Kurdistan!)



Minorsky: “Daylam [Dailam] proper”

Hussein also conveniently ignores one crucial point which Izady makes about the languages of the Zaza, Kızılbaş and Gurani. Hussein agrees with Izady and myself that Zaza, Kızılbaş and Gurani are closely related to each other, but so different from Kurmancî and Sorani that they are placed in different language groups. But Hussein should also tell us that Izady concludes that these two language groups are not simply convenient ways of categorising different dialects of the same language, but ‘like French and Italian’ utterly distinct, quite separate languages, ‘not dialects of the same language’. Izady continues (Izady, 1992: 170):

Their variations are far too great by any standard linguistic criteria to warrant classification as dialects of the same language (See also Izady 2, 2: 1988: 13-24).

Minorsky

According to Hussein, the great scholar Vladimir Minorsky agrees with him that ‘Minorsky believes that Kurdish belongs to the north-west language groups’. Once again, however, an authority cited by my critic says nothing of the sort, to put it mildly. Hussein appears terribly confused here. The authority cited by Hussein for Minorsky’s view is, if the reader cares to verify, actually Nikitine. In Nikitine’s book there is a section in chapter one on Minorsky’s view of the Kurds’ origins as a people. In this section, Nikitine (not Minorsky) states that the Kurdish language (he does not differentiate between dialects/alleged dialects) is part of the northwestern group of Iranian languages (Nikitine, 1956: 9). Minorsky himself, however, agrees with most linguists today, and the Kurdologists MacKenzie and Izady, that Kurmancî is actually a southern Iranian language (MacKenzie, 1961: 68-86; Minorsky, 1964: 13-14 and Izady, 1988: 23).

Identity

Despite the warnings in my *JAIMES* article that the Kırmanç-speaking Kızılbaş are both acutely aware of their distinct history and identity and extremely suspicious of attempts by either Turks or Kurds to deny this, Hussein exclaims:

Is there really any substantial difference between words Kirmanji and Kurmanji? According to what measures has it been differentiated? Mr. White is not aware that in the Iranian and Iraqi parts of Kurdistan what he calls Kurmanji is called Kirmanji.

Without, I am certain, wishing to, Hussein has here succeeded in insulting centuries of culturally-conscious Kızılbaş. The word ‘Kırmanç’ is certainly vastly different from the word ‘Kurmanji’ (Kurmancî). There is no such word as ‘Kirmanji’, in either Kurmancî or the Kızılbaş language, which the Dersimlis themselves call Dimili, Kırmancki or Kırmanci between themselves, or Zaza when speaking to Kurds or other outsiders (Izady, 1992: 170 and White, May 1992).

But did not Sharaf Khan Bitlisi put the Dimilis ‘among the Kurdish tribes 400 years ago’? Yes, it is indeed true that Bitlisi wrote thus, and I am certainly not going to call him an idiot. But Hussein should check the context of this reference properly. As van Bruinessen points out, however, in pre-sixteenth century texts:

the term ‘Kurd’ seems to refer to a particular type of pastoral nomads, not to all speakers of Kurdish (and Gurani and Zaza) (van Bruinessen, 1992b, emphasis in original: 219, footnote number 6).

Strictly speaking, of course, this does not apply to Bitlisi’s *Sharafnameh*, which appeared in the late sixteenth century. I would argue, however, that a clear definition of exactly who was — and who was not — a Kurd was still not settled by that time, either. The question is not settled even this century, with some Anatolians of identical background considering themselves to be ‘Alevi Kurds’, while others recoil from this term, and insist they are from a distinct ethnic group the Kızılbaş, or the Zaza-Kızılbaş. Scholars should resist trying to force one convenient category onto the Zaza and Kızılbaş. Those who consider that any of these categories fit them should be entitled to their choice, for there certainly are people in Anatolia corresponding to all these descriptions.

I am accused of making the Kızılbaş and Zaza leaders of twentieth century rebellions look like fools, for describing themselves to the world as ‘Kurds’, in an attempt to attract outside attention against such massacres as those in Dersim in the mid-1930s. I must think these leaders were fools, Hussein tells us, for letting themselves be ‘killed for something they were not’. Did I say this? Firstly, I have already clarified above that the leader of the Kızılbaş rebellion died as a Kızılbaş Alevi, not a Kurmancî-Kurdish nationalist. Secondly, these men were not fools, but they certainly were desperate. The modern military force unleashed against their communities was horrendous. Seeing no option but outside intervention, they appealed for this in the name of the only nearby community known to the outside world. Is this really so hard to believe? What Hussein should do, instead of distorting my words to make it look like I wish to abuse Seyt Rıza and his colleagues, is to document unambiguously and objectively how events contrary to this actually took place.

Finally, just before I am again abused, as a supposed ‘enemy’ of the Kurds, Hussein intimates that, as ‘a “scholar” thousands of miles away’ from Kurdistan, I cannot possibly understand this problem. As a Kurd himself, it is therefore implied, Hussein really knows that the Dimilis are truly Kurds. Any attempt by non-Kurdish scholars to question the mainstream Kurdish view (that is, the view disseminated by the dominant groups in Kurdish societies) is thereby denounced. The anti-intellectualism in this attack is obvious, as is its patent lack of logic. Has not virtually Hussein’s whole critique of my *JAIMES* article been based upon the work of Western scholars? Hussein can hardly imply that Western scholars have no place disagreeing with Kurdish scholars, and then turn around and rely upon precisely these same scholars!

Phillip G. Kreyenbrook is a Western scholar whose opinion Hussein cites, because he states that the Zaza, (Zaza-Kızılbaş) and Guran are entitled to regard themselves as Kurds. Naturally, as I have stated above and elsewhere, there can be no objection to any of these people regarding themselves as Kurdish, if they believe this describes their acculturation. But no-one has the right to impose any identity on a community. Perhaps Hussein should have told us what Kreyenbrook’s verdict is on the notion that the Zaza, Kızılbaş and Guran are Kurds: ‘From a purely historical and linguistic perspective, this is probably incorrect ... (Kreyenbrook, 1992: 70).

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