

# **KIRMANJKI (ZAZAKI) SPEAKING KURDS AND THEIR ETHNIC IDENTITY\***

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## **1. Introduction:**

Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds are living in the areas along Turkish State Boundaries namely, in northern Kurdistan. As like the population of all Kurds, because of suppressions and prohibitions there are no exact figures for the population of the Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking people. According to my opinion this group is ranging between 3 – 3.5 million.

The majority of Kirmanjki speaking Kurds live mainly in the provinces Çewlig(Bingöl) and Dersim(Tunceli) with smaller populations residing in the provinces Erzurum(Erzurum), Erzingan(Erzincan), Qers (Kars), Muş (Mush), Xarpet (Elaziğ), Diyarbakir, Ruha (Urfa), Semsur (Adiyaman), Bedlis (Bitlis), Sert (Siirt), Nigde, Kayseri, Gümüşhane and Sivas as well as in the central parts of Turkey. (1).

Only in Tunceli and Bingöl provinces the Kirmanjs (Zazas) are majority, in the other provinces they are minority.

## **2. Ethnic Origins of Naming**

Traditionally, Kirmanj (Zaza) Kurds do not call themselves by one common name. For example, the people living in the vicinity of Dersim, Erzingan (Erzincan) and Erzurum call themselves “Kirmanj” (as ethnic identity), “Kird” in the vicinity of Çewlig and “Zaza” in some areas around Elaziğ and ‘Dimili”, in Sewrege and Sêrt (Siirt). However, the majority are called Kirmanj and Kird.

There is no explanation for why the two factions of the populations speaking the same dialect use different names for their common language, neither is it possible to give a reason why people living in different areas, who use the same dialect, name this same dialect differently.

Kirmanj Kurds, give different names to their own dialect such as Kirmanjki, Kirdki, Zazaki and Dimlki.

Now, it is necessary to point out some peculiarities about these terms mentioned above:

## **2.1. Kirmanc**

Kurmanjî speaking Kurds are called “Kirdas” as ethnical identity and their dialect Kurmanji called „Kirdaskî“ by the Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds.

On the other hand, the term Kirmanj, the name used for the population at a great extent in the greater part of the area, does not only comprise Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking people. This term,

among Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Alevi Kurds in Eastern Dersim is used without any differentiation for either Alevi or Sunni Kurmanji speaking Kurds. Therefore, this term is used for the common identity of the people who use both dialects, namely Kirmanjki and Kurmanji. (2)

The only exception to the above statement can be found in the vicinity of western Dersim, Sivas and Kayseri. In these regions Alevi Kurds identify themselves as “Kirmanj”, but call Sunnis Turk (Tirk) without any distinction between Turk and Kurd. In some regions the term Alevism is accepted as being identical with the Kurdish identity, while Sunniism is accepted as Turkish identity. The term “Kirmanjiye” used in Dersim expresses Kurdish identity.

People in some areas of Kurdistan, for example, in the vicinity of Şirnak and Hakari, call themselves as “Kirmanj”, but the spoken dialect is Kurmanji.

Same situation applies to the considerable number of “Soran” Kurds living in those parts of Kurdistan that today are part of Iran and Iraq. These “Soran” Kurds call themselves Kirmanj and the name for their dialect is “Kirmanji”. Kurds in southern Kurdistan name the Kurmanji dialect “ Kirmanji seru (Northern Kirmanji dialect) and Sorani dialect is called “Kirmanji Xwaru” (Southern Kirmanji dialect). In addition, the term Kirmanj is used for Kurmanji speaking Kurds and the term “Kirmanji” is used for their own

dialect by the some of the Soran speaking Kurds. Of note is also that a group of people in the Behdinan region in Kurdistan (Iraq), where the dialect of Kirmanjki (Zazaki) does not prevail, call themselves “Zazayi”.

On the other hand, as an ethnic name “Kirmanj” is not a new term, we see it in some historical works hundreds of years ago. For example:

The well known Kurdish poet and thinker *Ahmede Khani* (1651-1707) uses the terms “Kurmanj” and “Kirmanj” in different places in his famous legend (epic) book, “Mem u Zin”, written at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In his book both terms mean “Kurdish”.

The famous female Kurdish poet and historian Mesture Xanima Erdelani (3), uses the term Kirmaç, instead of Kirmanj, in her book called “The History of Kurdistan”.

The researcher Kemal Badilli`s view on the same subject is as follows: “Zazas in Turkey name themselves Kird and regard themselves as true Kurds, and the name for Kurmanj Kurds (the ones outside of their group) is Kirdasi, which has negative connotations” (Badilli 1965: 6).

The term “Kirmanj” is used for a sociologically distinguishable group in some areas where the population do not use the titles chief, or tribal head or do not belong to a tribe at all. The Turkish

researcher Muzaffer Erdost describes the term “Kirmanj” as “those who do not belong to any tribal system,” in his investigation in Şemdinli region, which is a part of Hakkari province in Northern Kurdistan. According to Erdost society is formed from the people who left his tribe (Aşiret) and settled down within other tribes” (Erdost 1971: 166).

Dr. İsmail Beşikçi writes on this subject “*Kirmanj means Kurd. But Eastern feudal ruling classes do not accept themselves as Kirmanj and use this term for oppressed exploited and ill-treated Kurdish people*” (Besikci 1992: 191).

It is necessary here to point out that this claim by Dr. İsmail Beşikçi is not valid for all Kurds in Kurdistan. In some areas, for instance in Dersim and Erzingan, such division or discrimination between different classes in society does not exist; all call themselves Kirmanj whatever social status they may have.

## **2.2. Kird**

The term Kirmanj (Zaza), which as pointed out above is used by Kirmanj (Zaza) Kurds as a national identity, can be encountered in historical studies as well as recent ones in different ways and can be applied to places, people and social group.

It is appropriate here to point out further a few historical events.

The Greek writer Polybe (Polibio) in the 200s B.C. mentions the

name “*Cyrtii*”, Starbon talks about „*Kup Tioi*“ (read: „*Kirtii*“ which means „*kirtiis*“ -plural) and the Roman historian Tito Livio (B.C. 54 – M.S. 17) mentions the word “*Cirtei / Cirti*“ which is almost identical with the names such as „*Kird*“ or its plural form „*Kirdi*“ used by Dimili Kurds in some regions of Kurdistan.<sup>7</sup> (Malmisanij 1996: 9)

The poet *Ahmede Khasi (Xasi)* published a mevlit (the religious celebration held on the evening of the prophet Mohammed`s birth) named “*Mewlidi Kirdi*” in Kirmanjki (Zazaki) Kurdish dialect in 1899. As a patriot Xasi wrote his work in his mother tongue, which was not only very important for Xasi but it is also important for all Kurds to read and write freely in their mother tongue and have even a right to pray in Kurdish.

In the 1920s, the Turkish Sociologist Ziya Gökalp (He had Kurdish origin) points out this subject in his studies, “Zazas call themselves “Kirt and call Kurmanji speaking Kurds “Kürdasi or Kirdasi”. Turks uses the word “Kürt” (Kurdish) reserved for Kurmanji speaking Kurds (Gökalp 1975: 51).

### **2.3. Zaza**

There is a similarity with the above when one looks at the word “*Zaza*”. Kurdish writer Dr. M. Nuri Dersimi from Dersim comments

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on the word “Zaza” as follows: *“Dara the first (526 – 486 B.C.) talks about Bisitun inscriptions in Zuza vicinity, which reminds us of the name of today’s “Zozan” region in Kurdistan. Furthermore, there is a place with the same name in Cezire in Kurdistan”*. (M. Nuri Dersimi 1952: 73)

Kurdish writer M. Malmisanij draws attention to this subject with the following lines: “It is a fact that there is talk of a place named “Zuzana” near Babil, under Dara’s (Darius) rule between 526 – 486 B.C. The name “Zuzana” is mentioned thousands of years B.C. in some other sources. For instance, Discovery of Ninni – Zaza (Nini zaza) in one of the Sumer Temples in Mari in southern Mesopotamia, which is determined to originate from 3000 B.C.”.<sup>9</sup> (Malmisanij 1996: 68)

The Kirmanjî speaking people in Dersim and its surrounding areas, as an ethnic name do not use the term “Zaza” for themselves, because this term has a negative meaning. They use this name for their Muslim (Sunni) relatives.

Some historical sources show that the term “Zaza” did not emerge as an ethnic name, it was the name of a Kurdish tribe. For example, at the legend on Kuresh, a saint like person according to the Alevi-Kurds, we see “Qebile Zaza” (Zazab tribe).

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The famous explorer of 17<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire, *Evliya Çelebi* talks about kurds from Bingol Mountain as following;

*"...Inhabitants of Bingol Plateau consist of Zaza, Izol, Lolo, Halti, Çevkani, Şekaği, Kiki, Bisyani, Murki, Yezidi Kurdish tribes. They move with their several hundred thousands animals up to Bingol Mountain. For the right of using fresh life of plateau they give tax to Vezir of Erzurum. The most fertile of twenty-nine mountains on the fifth climate is this Bingol Mountain, which has variety of plants and herbs, including the ones that are used for medical purposes."*  
(Zillioglu, M, 1973: 119)

While mentioning Kurdish dialects *Evliya Çelebi* names Kirmanjki (Zazaki) in the first place.

Another noteworthy point on this subject is that the term Zaza used for both Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds in northern Kurdistan as well as for Kurds in southern and eastern Kurdistan, who speak Kurmanji (Kirdaski) dialect as mentioned in the written historical sources. For instance, *Muhammed Xal* uses Zaza dialect instead of Kurmanji dialect in his Kurdish Dictionary *Ferhengê Xal* published in the 1960s in Suleymaniya, in southern Kurdistan.

*Muhammed Teqi Ibrahimpur* uses at the beginning of his "Persian – Kurdish" dictionary Behdinan dialect (means Kurmanji Dialect),



which is even called Zaza among people. (Malmisanij 1996: 61)

## **2.4. Dimili**

Some foreign researchers like Oscar Mann, Karl Hadank and Arthur Christensen, who made studies on the Kurdish language, assume that “Dimilies and Gorans originally are not Kurds and assume that these people are “Deylems” and immigrants from southwest of the Caspian Sea. Christensen further assume that the term “Dimili” is merely a transformation of the word “Deylem”. But in my opinion, this point of view is weakly supported.

Defenders of this view base their thesis just on the word “Dimili” and excluding terms like “Kirmanj”, “Kird” and “Zaza”, the names which are widely used by Kirmanj (Zaza) speaking Kurds.

The writers of this view, who base their thesis just on the word “Dimili” do not take into account the almost 20 variants of the word “Dimili”, which can be seen in the historical and archaeological sources. As the Kurdish writer Malmisanij draws attention to this point, *“Defenders of this assertion assumed that Dimili originated from the term Deylem, but could not explain the term Dunbuli. In my opinion the word Dimili is a variant of the word Dunbuli or Dunbeli.”* (Malmisanij 1996: 34-35)

Defenders of this view do not take into account other sources of the word Dimili. There may be some connections with words like

„du“ (continuer) and “Mil, Milli, Milan”, which are the names for a Kurdish tribal confederation (Continuers of Milan).

An important shortcoming of this view is that there is no other convincing evidence to support their view while trying to establish a single connection between “Dimili and Deylem” and stating that Dimilis are the followers of Deylem. Furthermore, there is no mention of many other sources containing information or evidence of Dimilis being Kurds.

Another mistake made by some people is to postulate that language is the only criterion for being a nation. It is obvious from the contemporary examples that different nationalities may speak the same language in one country whereas in some cases members of the same nation could speak different languages as a result of certain historical conditions.

On the other hand, the term or word “Dimili” is the name for a faction of Kurds. In another way, it is necessary to point out the presence of many sources of evidence, which show that Dimilis are Kurds. Many sources of historical literature prove the existence of the name Dinbili in its various forms. It is useful here to mention a few of them.

One of the famous and oldest Arab historian, *Mesudi* (deceased: a.C. 956) as quoted by *Arshak Poladyan* talks about a Kurdish

tribe with the name ad- *Dababile* “*Dunbili*” tribe, who lives in Syria. (Poladyan 1996: 35)

Mecdeddin Yakub Firuzabadi (1329 – 1414), who lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, writes in his famous dictionary called “*El – Kamusu`l – Muhit*” (in Arabic) that the correct form of this word (the word of Dimili – M. C.) is “Dunbul” and is the name of a Kurdish tribe, who lived in the vicinity of Musul in Iraq. This information regarding the origin of this word ‘Dimili’ and being a name of a Kurdish tribe by Firuzabadi is very important. (Malmisanij 1996: 36)

Furthermore the famous Arab historian *Ibnul Esir* (A.C. 1160-1234) who mentions Kurds and Yaquti state that those speaking Dimiliki (Zazaki) are Kurds. *Yaquti* in his *Mu`cemu`l Buldan* which he wrote in 13<sup>th</sup> century states: “... *Their fortresses are strong. The fortresses Beshnewi, Bohti and Zewazan are interconnected. Kurds from Dimili tribes live on high mountainous areas.*” (Yaquti 2002 16/49)

The well-known Kurdologist *Basile Nikitine* argues in a section from one of his handwritten articles in Persian that “Dunbuli’s” (Donboli`s)” names originated from “*Dunbul (Donbol)*” *Castle and such famous castles in the name of Dunbul (Donbol) could be found in Diyarbakirs mountain area or on the shores of Euphrate or Karacahisar or any castle in the middle of Kurdistan* (Malmisanij 1996; 37-38)

Malmisaniy quotes a discloser from *Ali Ekber Dexuda* “*Dunbul is the name of a mountain in the vicinity of Diyarbekir*”. *Dunbuli` s Chieftains of Azerbaijan are originally from this area and are famous as Dummel/Zaza in Kurdistan.* (Malmisaniy 1996: 41)

The famous explorer of 17<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire, Evliya Çelebi talks about Kurds from Bingol Mountain as following;

Another noteworthy point on this subject is that the term Zaza used for both Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds in northern Kurdistan as well as for Kurds in southern and eastern Kurdistan, who speak Kurmanji (Kirdaski) dialect as mentioned in the written historical sources. For instance, Muhammed Xal uses Zaza dialect instead of Kurmanji dialect in his Kurdish Dictionary Xal published in the 1960s in Suleymaniya, in southern Kurdistan.

Muhammed Teqi Ibrahimpur uses at the beginning of his “Persian – Kurdish” dictionary Behdinan dialect (means Kurmanji Dialect), which is even called Zaza among people. (Malmisaniy 1996:61)

On the other hand, some foreign writers claim that “Zazas” are not Kurds and the spoken language “*Dimili*” is not Kurdish. However, Dimilis have never been interested in this postulation! Dimilis accept themselves as Kurds and their language as Kurdish, as it has been accepted by other Kurds as well. Dimili-Kurds have been participated in the struggle for the liberation of Kurdish

people for so long.

On the other hand, many Kurdish tribes are not homogenous with regard to the spoken dialect and religious beliefs. Let us try to explain this point with an example:

### **Tribes, Dialects and Religions**

<b><u>Tribes</u></b>	<b>Dialects</b>		<b>Religion</b>	
	<b><u>Kirmanjki</u></b>	<b><u>Kurmanji</u></b>	<b><u>Alevi</u></b>	<b><u>Sunni</u></b>
Kureshan	x	x	x	
Alan	x	x	x	x
Demenan	x	x	x	x
Haydaran	x	x	x	x
Khormekan	x	x	x	x
Lolan	x	x	x	x
Shadiyan		x	x	x
Xiran	x	x	x	
Izolan		x	x	x
Shekak (Shawaq)		x	x	x

Quvatan		x		x	x
Karsanan		x	x		x
Milan	x	x		x	x
Butkan	x	x		x	x

### **3. Why such a thesis, denying Kirmanjs (Zaza) as Kurds, has recently been updated?**

It is after the 1980 that widespread discussions bursted about Kirmanjs (Kurds/Zazas) not being Kurds and few Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds defended that position. Before that period among Kirmanjs (Zaza) Kurds there had been no such doubts or debates on their ethnic roots. Such late arrived theses and debates on this subject did not arise from any need or new findings on the origins of Kirmanjs(Kirds/Zazas). As a matter of fact, the advocates of such a claim have not yet found any strong (logical) basis to defend their claims or made any serious investigation or research on this matter. However, the supporters of this claim cannot succeed because the historical identity and struggle of Kirmanji(Zazaki) speaking Kurds have been so clear that there is no room for arguing otherwise.

In this case we have to look at circumstances, which created and brought about such claims in the 1980s.

In my opinion the most important cause of this abrupt change is the coup d'état of military junta in Turkey in 1980. It has been and is the aim of the Turkish state with intense effort to divide Kurds and to have them fight against each other and going even further to claim that Alevis and Kirmanj(Zaza) are not Kurds.

Intense oppression and terror, environment created by the military junta in 1980s suppressed the left and the democratic forces.

Naturally this environment not only caused moral destruction and hopelessness, but also further degraded and distanced many people from struggling for their rights. Furthermore, millions of people were uprooted from their villages and regions and forced to flee. These millions of uprooted people, who lost their homes and jobs, were forced to search for other avenues of survival. It is not surprising that denial of ethnicity, religion and basic human rights creates such trauma, such transformation, which is the peculiar sociological event. This backward trend would not surprise anybody when you take into consideration the difficulties for one to be a Kurd and live as a Kurd within the Turkish state boundaries.

In addition, it is necessary to point out some other outsiders (especially at the Armenian periphery), who are interested in this

subject. One of them is the Yerevan University lecturer, Armenian Garnik Asatrian who was a frequent visitor to European countries and arranged meetings on the issue. He is writing on the issue in Journal Piya (issue 14) as follows: *“It is not possible to separate Zaza people from Armenian people. Zazaistan and Armenian is our common motherland. (Struggle of) Zaza people, in the coming 10 – 15 years will become one of the most important political factors in the Middle East. But it is necessary to work very hard for this to happen”* (Asatrian, G. 1991).

Asatrian speaks as a scientist in appearance but what he says here is political which goes beyond the framework of academic studies. Asatrian and his colleagues even tried to establish “*A Zaza Cultural Centre*” where they could do scientific studies on Zaza people and even publish a Journal named “Dersim” in Yerevan in order to attract attention. It is a known fact that Zaza people do not live in Yerevan.

Since they focused on their political struggle against the Turkish colonialism, Kurdish organizations did not have any opportunity to neither study nor discuss the solutions for such internal problems such as differences between dialects and religious believes.

In my opinion it is not realistic to state that outsider powers are the only players on this matter while considering the causes of this subject. We are open to accept genuine facts on any issue under



discussion, as well as on this discussed subject and to be open to different thoughts and ideas without any internal or external influence. At the same time, the presence of different opinions is quite natural in a society where you are not allowed to study, analyze and improve your own language, culture and history as much as it is needed and where a research tradition is almost non-existent due to continuous state prohibition. Here, it is very important to differentiate between the state on one hand that, wants to exploit the subject politically for their ideas against the Kurdish identity and on the other hand the Kurdish people, who struggle for their survival.

The solution to this problem is to give a chance to genuine discussion with an open mind for the illumination of the subject matter and for the genuine facts without any prejudice or accusation.

The dialect and language, which has a considerable importance in the case of the thesis that “Kirmanjki(Zazaki) speaking people are not Kurds” is not treated in this article. My point of view on this dialect and language has been evident in previous articles and can be further discussed in a separate pamphlet / article if deemed necessary.

#### **4. One Unique Reality with Repeated Genetic Investigation**

Well known authorities in their fields, Leipzig Max-Blanc Institute in Germany, Science and Technology University in Norway and London HGI DNA Reference Laboratory, National Blood Service (HGI DNA Research Laboratory, National Blood Centrum), in corporation have done genetic investigation on different Kurdish groups and the findings published in the *“Annals of Human Genetics”* do not show any genetic difference between Kirmanj(Zaza) Kurds and other Kurdish groups.

An article written by Ivan Nasidze, Dominique Quinque, Murat Öztürk, Nina Bendukidze and Mark Stoneking titled, *“mtDNA and Y-Chromosome Variation in Kurdish groups”* states that *Kurmanji vs. Kirmanjki(Zazaki) speaking Kurds in Turkey do not differ genetically from Kurmanji speaking Kurds living in Georgia. As it is stated in the introduction summary of this study, presented findings point out that Kurdish groups are ethnically close to groups in western Asia, but far away from groups from Central Asia, in a comparison made between other Kurdish groups, Europeans, Caucasians and west Central Asians in both cases of mtDNA and Y-Chromosomes. These results do not support the “Thesis” that Kirmanjki(Zazaki) speaking groups are originated from northern Iran. On a large scale this group (Kirmanjki – Zazaki speaking Kurds.) genetically resembles other Kurdish groups.* (Nasidze I, Quinque D, Ozturk M, Bendukidze N, Stoneking M. 2005: 401-12)

As seen above, the findings of medical science in addition to sociological and historical facts disprove the two arguments. One of the thesis that “Kurds are essentially Turks” originated in 1923 with the establishment of the Turkish state. The Turkish state knowingly took up the false statement, which so far has been unable to convince anybody.

Once more these findings, as mentioned above, disprove strongly that Kurds are Turks. Further more, the above-mentioned scientific investigations prove that Kurds are not Turks, as Kurds are genetically distant from groups originating from Central Asia, where Turks originated. The second claim that Kirmanjs(Zazas) are not Kurds is also unfounded and not factual.

### **5. A Look into the History Past from a Different Angle!**

How long have Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds been living on the land they occupy today? We are in no position to give a definite answer to this question. However, it is the fact that this time goes back quite long in history. It is stated in a report entitled “Dersim Kurds” that in 1863 it was written in documents of *Russian Tsardoms Geographical Association* that “*it is not possible to determine the exact time of settlement of Kurds in this region, but it is assumed to be at a time when Armenia collapsed.*” (ZIRGO: 1863),

In the 18th Century tens of the visitors and searchers visited Minor Asia (Central of Anatolia and Northern Kurdistan) and had contact with the Kurmanji and Kirmanjki speaking people. In their reports and letters, they used only “Kurds” and “Kizilbash” as ethnic and religious names for them.

The well-known Kurdologists like Minorsky, Soane and Nikitine, in their works underlined that the Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking people are Kurds.

Another Kurdologist Prof. Dr. Martin Von Bruinessen, writes about Alevi Kurds and says; “*Before Republic (Republic of Turkey M. C.) I’ve not seen any other name of this group but Kurds and Kizilbash*” (M. v. Bruinessen 1999: 100).

It is a strong probability that the existence of Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds in Dersim stretches to the era of *Meds*, according to the researcher *Dr. Nuri Dersimi* who is also from Dersim.

According to Dr. Nuri Dersimi the famous Kurdish historian M. Emin Zeki writes in his book named “*Hulasatu Tarih El Kurd u Kurditan*” that 55 Kurdish tribes of “Milan Confederation” migrated from Dersim first during the Abbaside Dynasty and later during the Ottomans Sultan Selim time, and settled in the northern region of El Cezire (today’s Turkish –Iraqi border area). He also names one by one these 55 tribes. (M. Nuri Dersimi 1952: 72-73)

Sheref Khan (Xan) Bedlisi in his Kurdish history book

*“Sherefname”*, which was completed in 1597, writes that Dinbili`s who belonged to the Ezdi religion from the beginning emigrated from Cizra Botan region (in Turkey) to the Xoy region in Azerbaijan, where they forgot their language with time and replaced it with Turkish (Sherefhan 1998: 145).

On this subject Malmisanij gives a passage from Dr. O. Beau’s work *“Nachrichten Über Kurdische Stämme”* (Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Leipzig, Bd: 16(1862), S. 617 – 618): *“Kurdish Tribe Dunbuli who is counted as an association of Kizilbash group lives in Xoy province and all speak Turkish now”* (Malmisanij 1996: 44).

## **6. On Relations among Religious Groups, Tribes and Users of Different Dialects in Kurdistan**

Another aspect of this subject is to point out the close similarities between the Kirmanjki (Zazaki) dialect spoken in the northwest part of northern Kurdistan and *“Hawramani”* / *“Gorani”* dialect spoken in the south and south-east parts of southern Kurdistan. Hawraman, as it is known, is the name of a region southeast of the Suleymaniya province, which extends on both sides of the Iraq/Iran border and a homeland for Hawramani / Goran Kurds. A section of Hawraman / Goran Kurds are Moslem (Sunni) and another section belongs to a denomination called *“Ehli-Hak”* and called *“Kakayi”*, *Kakayiti”*. They live in a region scattered along

Musul – Kerkuk into Iran in southern Kurdistan. It is noteworthy to mention the present strong resemblances in beliefs, tradition and customs between these Ehli-hak believers and the Alevi Kurds living in the northwest of northern Kurdistan (Turkish Kurdistan). It is also remarkable that the Hawramani dialect is very close, perhaps the dialect closest to Avesta, according to some.

Noteworthy are also the present similarities in beliefs, customs, traditions, etc., between Ezdi Kurds living in southern Kurdistan (Iraq) and Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Alevi Kurds in Turkey. In spite of these common characteristics mentioned, many Kurdish tribes are not homogenous with regard to the spoken dialect and religious beliefs. Let us try to explain this point with an example: Demenan and Alan tribes living in Dersim area speak kirmanjki (Zazaki) dialect and belong to the Alevi sect. The same Alan tribe living in Piran region in northern Diyarbakir speaks kirmanjki (Zazaki) dialect but belongs to the Sunni sect. In spite of this, the same tribes living in the Van & Agri region use Kurmanji dialect and are Sunni. Again the Heyderan / Haydaran tribes in Dersim uses kirmanjki (Zazaki) dialect and are Alevi. But the same tribes living in the northern part of Diyarbakir speak kirmanjki (Zazaki) dialect but are Sunni. At the same time, the same tribes living in the Van & Hakkari region speak Kurmanji dialect but are Sunni. Kurds living in the Hewler (Erbil) region in southern Kurdistan are Soran and Sunni. Still, it is not clear if there is a tribal connection

between the Haydaran tribe in the Hewler region and the Haydaran tribes in other regions. However, these similarities may be of some importance in this case.

There are numerous variations in dialects and religious beliefs between the Lolan tribe in Dersim and in the surrounding areas and the Lolan tribe living in a region called Lolan on the Iran /Iraq border, south of the Turkish border. The Karsan tribe in Dersim is Kirmanj and Alevi but the same tribe in the Kigi district of the Cewlig (Bingöl) province is Kurmanj and Alevi. A similar situation exists between the Milan tribe in Dersim – Erzincan areas and the Butkan tribe in Dersim – Erzincan, Erzurum, Maras and in surrounding areas. The Sekak tribe (Savak in Turkish) in Dersim uses Kurmanji dialect but is divided into two groups, namely Alevi and Sunni. Furthermore, it is also a probability that this Sekak tribe may have some connection with the Kurmanji speaking Shikak tribe living in the northern regions of Kurdistan in Iran. One section of the Xormek (Hormek) tribe living in the northern regions of northern Kurdistan (Turkey) speaks Kirmanjki (Zaza) dialect and is Alevi, while the other section speaks Kurmanji and is Sunni. Most of the Kuresan tribe in Dersim speaks Kirmanjki but members of the tribe living in the Semsur (Adiyaman), Cewlig (Bingöl) and Antep areas use only Kurmanja dialect. There is also an Ezdi Kurdish tribe named “Dimili” with Kurmanji dialect in the Duhok region of Kurdistan in Iraq.

It is obvious from the above-mentioned examples that Kurdish society is not static and homogenous but instead is a dynamic society with considerable differences in relation to dialect and religious beliefs. Kurds have been on the move, in the past and present, in their own country as well as outside Kurdistan. The mentioned “moves” were not voluntary ones. Forced deportation, massacres and policies and decrees of imperial powers were the most important causes of these movements.

One of the biggest migration waves of Kurds (including Kirmanj speakings) took place during the Arabic Abbasian time in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. After widespread massacres by Abbasians towards non-Muslim people, hundred thousands of people migrated (A.C. 833) from South Kurdistan to Byzantium controlled the northwestern Kurdistan and Cappadocia (Maras, Malatya, Nigde, Sivas, Tokat, etc.).

According to some documents, another wave took place at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Turkish writer and historian Ishak Sunguroglu, writes as follows: *“... all Kurds living in the surrounding areas of the Dinbilli tribe started fleeing westward and settled down in Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakir, Harput and the surrounding mountainous areas, when Sah Ismail made disciplining raids on his subject Dinbilli tribe for assurance and security of the conquered land. Some of these groups moved to Dersim and*



*settled down in an area of steep mountains without any road or passage and covered with wild oak forest” (Sunguroglu 1958: 134-135).*

Melkishi (Cemisgezek) Principality was ruling Dersim at that time. Dersim is densely populated by Kirmanjki speaking Kurds today. In a chapter on this subject by Sheref Khan (Xan) it is written:

*“Melkishs with its three sections, has a big reputation in Kurdistan with extensive servants, followers and its dependants, and the Melkish name became synonymous with ‘Kurdistan’ for everyone, because of the extent and importance of their country. You remember only this important province Melkish (Cemisgezek) when the name Kurdistan is mentioned among Kurds and in certificates, decrees and in other Sultanate documents.” (Sheref Khan 1998: 145).*

The explorer of 17<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire Katip Chelebi stresses the same point and says that this region was named as Kurdistan.

The inhabitants were generally divided into Moslem and non-Moslems during the Ottoman Empire. However, this does not mean that the ethnic identity was not documented. In addition to its assimilationist politics the Ottoman Empire had a more

progressive and tolerant policy than today's Turkish state. For example religious beliefs, name of the race or the name of country was not forbidden under the Ottoman rule. Therefore, it was not forbidden using of the terms Kurds and Kurdistan. And these terms have been registered in documents under the Ottoman rules.

The Ottoman citizen Albanian Semseddin Sami, in his "Kamus`ul – Alâm", which is the first Turkish Encyclopaedia published in 1889 – 1898, describes Kurdistan`s northern borders as "*Large section of Musul Province, namely areas laying west of Tigris, Provinces of Van, Diyarbakir, a section of Mamuretulaziz (Elazig M.C.) and sub – province Dersim considered as Kurdistan in the Ottoman Empire*" (Bozarlan 2001: 45)

The Turkish general Kâzim Karabekir in his report to the head of general staff on the 4<sup>th</sup> June 1923 suggests necessary measures with regard to the Kurdish question as follows: "*Provocation of Kurdish nationalism, in our today's weak situation is a ruin for us as well as for Kurds. Therefore, Kurdistan should be divided into three sections with two important Turkish Channels and a few lines should be drawn up;*

(1) *A line from North to South via Hasankale-Malazgirt-Bitlis-Siirt-Cizre,*

(2) *Erzincan-Pulumur-Nazmiye-Palu-Ergani-Diyarbakir-Mardin,*

(3) *A line from East to West via Karaköse- Malazgirt-Mush-Genc-Palu,*

(4) *Siirt-Diyarbakir, namely longitudinally Tigris.*

*It requires installment of strong Turkish villages alongside these lines and the most important of these is the area lying between Malazgirt and Nazimiye” (Karabekir 2004: 48).*

As it is seen here, according to Kazim Karabekir the northern border of Kurdistan including Dersim starts from Erzincan. The Malazgirt – Dersim region is very dangerous according to him and therefore draws special attention.

Kurds, whatever dialect they may speak, are named as “Ekrad” in the Ottoman documents. “*Ekrad*” means Kurds in Arabic language. For instance, Prof. Dr. Mehmet Ali Unal, who studied *tahrir* records (5) of 16<sup>th</sup> century, mentions the names of 17 Kurdish groups in these entries and counts some of these names. He mentions two groups named “*Ekradi Dimili*” and “*Ekradi Disimlu*” among these groups (Ünal 1999: 85). “*Ekradi Dimili*” means Dimili Kurds and Ekradi Disimlu, Kurds in Dersim in today’s Turkish language. There is no tribe or group that is named “*Dimili*” in Dersim today. The name “*Dimili*” is used by Kurmanj Kurds for Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds. It is possible that in

the 16<sup>th</sup> century Kurds with this name (Dimili) might have immigrated afterwards. It is a common belief, at least among some Kirmanj people in Siverek region, that some of these Kirmanj Kurds immigrated from Dersim. The village, where the famous film director Yılmaz Güney was born, lies on the region and its name is Dersim.

People living in eastern Dersim are named by their tribe, which is numbered 12. Therefore these tribes are called “*12 ashire Desimi*” (12 tribes of Dersim) or *Desmiyan, Desiman, Desmiji* (People of Dersim) in Kirmanjki. It shows that pronunciation differs from region to region. A punishment decree by the Sultan dated 29 January 1782 cites the name of the punished Kurds as “*Ekradi shey Hasanlu, Dersimlu, Guvenlu, etc.*” (Özcan 2002: 76). They “Hesanlu” is the name of the tribal confederation in western Dersim. This tribe, like the Desimlu group, has Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking members.

Names such as “Desmiyan/Desmiji and Shixhesenan and or Shixhesen and Desim” are used widely to separate sections of the people named above and even such separations are echoed in the folk songs in the area. As mentioned before a report in the Russian Czerdom archives under the heading “Dersim`s Kurds”, classified five groups:

1. Dersimli ,
2. Balabanli ,
3. Çarakli,
4. Shey Hasanli ,
5. Kureshli.

(Munzur 2005: No: 22)

These named groups are Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurdish tribes or groups. It has to be pointed out that the “*li*” suffix at the end of these tribe names is not in Kurdish, but written in Turkish. Kurdish names generally end with “*an*” as a plural form. Such suffixes like “*u/un*” and “*o/on*” may appear at the end of the tribe names in Dersim. The example for the suffixes of these five tribes’ original names: Dersiman, Balaban/Bolevan, Charekan, Shex / Sheikh Hasanan, Kureshan.

As mentioned previously “Dersimli” and “Shixhasanli”, namely Desiman (Dersiman) and Shixhesenanlar are not one tribe but instead comprising more than one tribe. Today Dersim (Desim) tribes are living in the eastern part and Shixhesenanlar in the western part of Dersim.

One of the important points to bear in mind while studying the Kurdish ethnicity: Kurds refer to their ethnic roots and dialects by many different names (Kirmanj, Kird, Zaza, Dimili, Soran, Goran, Kakayi, Germiyan, etc.); but when it comes to intellectual studies and political language, they give up those local names and calls himself/herself “Kurd”, which represents the common ethnic identity. Therefore, the common name “Kurd” replaces the above mentioned regional names when this subject is discussed with foreign researchers as well as in the studies published in foreign

languages by the Kurds abroad.

## **7. The Patriotic Struggle By the Kirmanjki(Zazaki) Speaking Kurds In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

It is important to present the role of these Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking people in their struggle for freedom in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

To begin with, we must mention that Kurdish struggle for liberation entered a new era in some extents from the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Kurdish intellectuals gathered and formed modern organisations which have nationalist character.

Differences in religious beliefs did not avoid their common work in this area.

This was a big leap forward in the full sense of the word, in comparison with the rules and regulations, traditions and organizations of the old Kurdish society. For the first time Kurds started participate actively and successfully in reading and writing and publishing newspapers, which they did not or could not do before. Kurdish intellectuals tried their best at every available opportunity to get their people to read and write. Because of such work, the period between the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and 1923 (i.e. from beginning of the century to the Mustafa Kemal's era) can be considered as a renaissance, which augmented the consciousness of Kurdish nationalism and created a movement

toward this end.

The poet *Ahmede Khasi (Xasi)* published a mevlit (the religious celebration held on the evening of the prophet Mohammed`s birth) named “*Mewlidi Kirdi*” in Kirmanjki (Zazaki) Kurdish dialect in 1899. As a patriot Xasi wrote his work in his mother tongue, which was not only very important for Xasi but it is also important for all Kurds to read and write freely in their mother tongue and have even a right to pray in Kurdish.

“*Kurdish Azmi Kavi Society*” was established at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Istanbul with *Kurdizade Ahmed Ramiz*, a Kirmanj (Zaza) Kurd from the *Lice* district of *Diyarbakir* being one of the founders of this society. According to some sources *Kurdizade Ahmed Ramiz* was also one of the founders of another Kurdish organization called “*Kurt Teavun ve Terakkii society*” founded in the same era (1908). Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds were quite active in a Kurdish student society called “*Kurt Talebe Hevi Cemiyeti*”, which was founded in 1912. *Dr. Fuat, Teyyib Ali* and *Shadiye Paloyi* were among the founders of this society. However they were hanged in Diyarbakir following the *Sheh Seid`s* Kurdish national resistance in 1925.

Another Kurdish society, “*Kurdistan Muhiban cemiyeti*” is also one of these societies founded at the same time in Istanbul. The Dersimian (from Dersim) Kurdish writer *M. Nuri Dersimi*, whose

name was mentioned earlier in this text, was one of the founders and administrators of the “*Kurdistan Muhiban Society*”. Those he names as founders and administrators of this society are Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds from Dersim and surrounding areas. According to M. Nuri Dersimi, *Mile Xidir (Mile Hidir)* from Dersim was the most influential founder and the leader of this society. Others names were *Miralay (Colonel) Halil Bey, His brother Hasan, Ali Pasha, Sey Ibrahim*, all from Dersim. According to his statement M.Nuri Dersimi was the secretary of this society (M. Nuri Dersimi 1986: 28).

M. Nuri Dersimi speaks of sergeant *Suleyman Chavush* from the Kureshan Tribe (4) in Dersim, who was the leader of 1200 workers at Balya mine, while talking about his work among Dersimian (from Dersim) patriots. M. Nuri Dersimi writes that he smuggled weapons to Suleyman Chavush to be distributed to the Kurdish workers in order to help Kurdish patriots in the case of any need. M. N. Dersimi also speaks of the support given by workers of Kurdish descent from the USA and Istanbul. This shows that patriotism did not only exist among Kurdish intellectuals but also among the common Kurdish people.

Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds outnumber Kurmanji speaking Kurds in Dersim.

The many skirmishes between the people of Dersim and the



Ottoman Empire created problems for the state at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These skirmishes depending on the situation often spread from a restricted area to the whole of a region. For instance, the Ottoman army started an operation in 1907 and intense clashes took place in Dersim. This was the continuation of earlier operations. The *Qozan (Qocan)*, *Semikan*, *Resikan* Kurdish tribes at “*Ali Bogazi*” (Ali Mountain pass), southwest of Dersim, stopped the Ottoman army from reaching its goal by putting up strong resistance. These three tribes are Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds. This intense resistance prevented the invaders from succeeding that time, but this did not stop them from the wars in the following years. The following attack came in 1908 with an army 4 - 5 times the size of the one in 1907. The *Xozat (Hozat)*, *Chemishgezek*, *Pulur (Ovacik)*, *Qizil Kilise (Nazimiye)* and *Pertage (Pertek)* Districts in Dersim became de facto battlefields. The military movement in 1907 took place in a limited area where Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking people lived, while the military movement in 1908 took place in much wider area involving Kirmanjki (Zazaki) and Kurmanji speaking people in Dersim. Together and without any consideration of dialect differences Kirmanjki (Zazaki) and Kurmanji speaking people opposed the invading army.

Another national resistance was taking place in Bitlis in Kurdistan at the beginning of the First World War. *Chief Consul Chirkov*, at

the Russian consulate in Bitlis, in his “July 1912 report” about the situation of the Kurdish people writes,

*“There is a national aspiration and awakening and this awakening becomes more and more widespread among all the inhabitants, as time goes by. Kurds in Bitlis and in other town and cities want to be free from foreign power. Therefore, Kurds in Siirt city, Kharzan (Garzan) and; in Bitlis, Hizan and Mutki, in Diyarbakir city; Mardin, Nusaybin, Midyat, Cizre, in Silvan; in Musul city, Zaho, Suleymaniye and Kerkuk; in Van city, Bashkale, Dishbilkin and Gurcan, want to rise for a statehood, seize weapons and grain stock, and want to set up a Kurdish Government...” (M. Nuri Dersimi 1952: 34)”.*

This expected revolt took place in 1914. The leader of this revolt in that region was Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurd Mela Selim. But the revolt was realized jointly by the Kirmanjki (Zazaki) ve Kurmanji speaking people in northern Kurdistan.

The relationship between Kurds in Dersim and Russians is particularly interesting during the first the world war. People in Dersim resisted Russians weapon in hand, who had already occupied Erzurum and Erzingan (Erzincan), but at the same time were in dialogue with the Russians for a settlement. Dersimians wanted to get rid of the Ottoman administration and even asked for help to set up a Kurdish administration. For instance, it is

known that a meeting between the Russian commander and Aliye Gaxi(Gakh) from the Kureshan tribe took place in *Plemuriye* (Pulumur) and between them they reached an agreement and the following has been cited:

Aliye Gaxi(Gakh) to the Russian commander, *“Do not enter Dersim. We are Kurds not Turks. We do not want to fight with you. We are in dispute and in a state of conflicts with Turks. We will and can fight the Turks for our genuine rights if you provide us weapon”*. (Munzur Chem (Çem) 1999: 167).

The pressure of war in Dersim lessens after this agreement between Russians and Dersimians. Shortly after having reached this agreement with the backing of most of the Eastern Dersimians, started a campaign toward Kizilkilise (Nazmiye), Pertege (Pertek), Mazgerd (Mazgirt) and Charsancak and police stations and government departments in these regions were seized. At the same time similar campaigns took place in Chemishgezek region in western Dersim in alliance with Aliye Gaxi by the people living around Ali Bogazi (Ali mountain pass). Dersimians raided and scattered the 36<sup>th</sup> division of the Ottoman army in Plemuriye (Pulumur) and seized their weapons.

It is also known that a telegraph sent by some progressive Dersimians from Erzincan to the Czar (Tsar) of Russian demanding help in order to be able to replace Turkish

administration with Kurdish government. At that time the Turkish General Kazim Karabekir who was commissioned in Kurdistan was observing these developments at a close range. He mentions the name of seven tribal leaders from western Dersim, who asked for help from Csar (Tsar). These were:

1. Idare Ibrahim, the leader of Koch Ushagi (correct name: Qozan or Qocan, M.C).
2. Mustafa, one of the Maksud tribe leaders (correct name: Mexsudan, M.C.)
3. Polis, one of the Maksudan tribe leaders (correct name: Mizuro Polis, M.C.).
4. Kasimoglu Munzur, one of the Maksud tribe leaders (Mizure Qasimi), who was not the leader of the Mexsudan tribe, but the leader of Beytan tribe (M.C.)
5. Zeynel, leader of Belit tribe (There was no such tribal name in the region. It should be Beytan tribe (M.C.)
6. Bera, one of the Bizgâr tribe leaders (The correct name should be Pezgewran tribe and the name Bera is not right either and it should be Bira, M.C.).
7. Seyid Aga, Kankiros`lu (Gangiras, M.C.) (Karabekir 2004: 79-103).

All of these above named tribal leaders were Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds. Aliye Gaxi, the leader of the Kureshan tribe, was not the only one who preferred agreement with Russians in the eastern Dersim. According to Karabekir there were others as well. For instance, he adds more people to this category when he talks about Suleyman Aga (Silemane Aliye Gulavi), the leader of the Hormek (Xormekan) tribe:

*“Suleyman Aga (Aga=Chief), leader of the Hormikli (Xormekan, in Kurdish. M.C.), from Civrek (Civrak, M.C.) in alliance with Ali Kah (Aliye Gaxi, M.C.), Ali Chavush (Dewresh Ali from Nazmiye, M.C.), Bertal, Timur Aga (One of the Suran tribe leaders, M.C.), Yusuf (leader of the Arezan tribe in Nazmiye, M.C.), Seyid Ali Aga and Mustafa Bey (Bey=Sir) together went to Erzincan and visited Nikola Nikolaevic, the Commander of the Russian Army, after the seizure of Erzurum and Erzincan by the Russians and said in the presence of Nikola Nikolaevic ‘We have been waiting for the last 33 years for this occasion to receive the Russian Governments Justice” (Karabekir 2004: 98-99).*

It is quite natural that Karabekir names these tribal leaders in west Dersim because they were asking the Russians for help to get away from Turkish (Ottoman) rule. It is also quite natural for Karabekir to name other tribal leaders in west Dersim and east Dersim, because they were also in alliance with the above named

tribal leaders and asking for the same help to get rid of the Ottoman rule. One of the interesting citations by Karabekir when he talks about the answer he got from one of the well known Arezan (Karabekir cites as “Erilli”, (Arezan, M.C.) Hasan Aga, the director of the subdistrict Danzinik (Danzige, M.C.) is:

*“We do not know Turkish law, we know just Kurdish law and we act according to Kurdish law’ and making such agitation among many people under a raid on the enemy (The Russian Army, M.C.)”* (Karabekir 2004: 10)

However, this does not mean that the relations and dialogue between Ottomans and Kurds broke down completely. There were Agas (Chiefs) and tribe leaders who did not want to depart from Ottoman rule, but at the same time they were demanding rights for local administration. Most of these chiefs and chieftains were coming from the Erzincan province, which was under full control of the Ottoman state even after the seizure of this province by the Russians. These Chiefs thought that Russian occupation would not last and although they never denied their Kurdish identity and therefore they too were demanding basic rights for their local sovereignty.

For instance, some Kurdish Chiefs and tribal leaders in the Erzincan region consulted French and English representatives on February 22, 1920 by telegraph which stated that Sherif Pasha did

not represent Kurds and Kurds were represented by the Ottoman state.

Sherif Pasha was working in Paris for the rights of Kurdish people at that time.

However, it is not wrong to state that this above statement by the Chiefs to foreign diplomats was a scenario-tailored arrangement administered by the civilian and military administrators of the Ottoman state. Otherwise, representation by Sherif Pasha would never cross these Chiefs and Chieftains mind for fear of reprisals by the Ottomans.

Various thinkers and writers in the sphere of the official opinion claim that Alevi Kurds living in the vicinity of Dersim and Kocgiri (in Sivas) gave considerable support to Mustafa Kemal during his work to establish parliament in Ankara in 1920. In reality, the situation was the complete opposite as Mustafa Kemal received the least support in these regions compared to other Kurdish regions. The statement that there is substantial evidence for the above mentioned support to Ankara can be refuted as the evidence shows that the situation between these regions and the administration in Ankara was contradictory at that time.

For example, none of the most powerful leaders in the region accepted to go to Ankara as a M.P. (Deputy). Those who went to

Ankara had no impact on Dersimians. In general, Dersimians even refused to provide soldiers to the Ankara government. Furthermore, western Dersim not only refused to provide soldiers, in addition they even prevented the surrounding regions to accept military service. *Ali Kemal*, governor of Erzincan gives similar information in his book on the Dersim Kurds. Kemal, Ali, 1932: 154)

Demands for national rights were getting momentum among Kurds in the region of Dersim, Erzincan and *Kochgiri (Qochgiri)*, when the authority of the Ottoman Empire was nearing zero. The members of Kurdish Teali Cemiyeti (Society) with its headquarters in Istanbul were active in the region. Demands for national rights were gaining momentum among Kurds in the vicinity of Dersim, Erzincan and Kochgiri when the authority of Ottoman Empire was almost diminishing to zero. The branches of the society started to be inaugurated one after the other, its official news paper "*JIN*" was distributed, meetings, lively debates and discussions were taking place spontaneously on the issue of "how to obtain the legitimate rights for the Kurdish people". The goal, without any doubt, was the establishment of a Free Kurdistan.

The Turkish Colonel Nazmi Sevgen, who was closely acquainted with Dersim, made the following comments on this subject:

*"The Kurds are setting their hopes on a paragraph in the Sevre*



*Treaty, which states that autonomy should be given to areas where Kurds are in majority. In these days Haydar Bey (Sir), the son of Mustafa Pasha from Kochgiri, travelled to Istanbul and became a member of the Kurdistan Teali Society and formed a branch of this society in Umraniye on his return to Kochgiri. Haydar Bey, as the leader of this branch of the Society, registered prominent persons and tribe leaders in Dersim and Kochgiri as members and distributed the Society's official news paper JIN (life) as well as other publications on Kurdish ambitions in the region. At this point it should be mentioned that Haydar Bey is not the appropriate person to achieve these ambitions and ideals. There is an actual, industrious and steering person behind the scenes. This person his Alisher! We see him in his genuine political identity already in March 1920 with Pasha Bey, Shadilli tribe leader from Refahiye and his other friends, arranging meetings, lectures and discussions in Ovacik and Hozat districts in order to create the mass movement. Alisher`s authority is coming from Abdulkadir, the president of Kurdistan Teali Society” (M. Nuri Dersimi 1992: 229-230).*

It needs to be said that most of Kurds in the Kochgiri region were speaking Kurmanji dialect, which is contrary to the situation in Dersim. However, a small group of people in Kochgiri were speaking Kirmanjki (Zazaki). The above named Haydar Bey, Alisher and Pasha Bey were speaking Kurmanji dialect.

M. Nuri Dersimi, who was actively involved in political activities, writes about these political activities and the aim of the Kurdish movement in his time, as follows:

*"Our program first of all was to declare Kurdistan`s independence in Dersim and unfurl the Kurdish flag in Hozat. At the same time Kurdish national forces should be directed toward Sivas through Erzincan, Elazig and Malatya in order to be able to have the government of Ankara to accept our official independence demand. The reason for this being that this demand of independence cannot be accepted by the Turks if our demands are not backed by our national forces"* (M. Nuri Dersimi 1932: 130).

There was indeed an active political environment in Kochgiri at the beginning of the 1920`s. There were no differences at all between Kurmanji and Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds and they were united firmly in the region of Dersim and Kochgiri. These activists were sending letters and telegraphs to the parliament in Ankara while preparing for the armed resistance. The resistance forces were raiding military and police stations of the Turkish state in the districts of the region and freeing the land step by step. This following telegraph from the Kurds in Dersim and Kochgiri to Ankara government at the end of the 1920`s is an example for the climate of the time:

*„To the President of the Parliament, Ankara*

*Via Elazig Province.*

*The Sevres agreement gives the right to independence of Kurdistan covering Diyarbakir, Elazig, Van and Bitlis Provinces. Therefore, we demand the sovereignty in these areas. Otherwise we would be forced to use military force.*

*25 Teshrini Sani 1336 (November 1920 M.C.)*

*Garbi Dersim Ashair Ruesari (The leaders of tribes in West)” (M. Nuri Dersimi 1952: 129)*

Ali Kemal, the governor of Erzincan, while writing on this issue in his book “Erzincan” mentions “an advice delegation to Dersim from Elazig and the answer given to this delegation by Dersimians. His given quotation regarding the answer given by Dersimians during this meeting is identical to the telegraph mentioned above (Ali Kemali, 1932: 154).

At the beginning of 1921 the government in Ankara sent military forces to the Kochgiri region and skirmishes spread as the time went on. The Turkish administration applying the usual methods started directly to massacre the civilians, when they realised that it was not easy to cope with Kurdish resistance. By massacring civilians they achieved the result they were waiting for.

As one of the most prominent politicians in Turkey who served as minister, prime minister and president of the Turkish republic,

Celal Bayar's remarks on the Kochgiri resistance are in agreement with M. Nuri Dersimi's version:

*"...The Kurdish revolt is completely a sign of political inclination. They are not anarchists or anything else. What they demand is straight forward, "an independent Kurdistan". The most idealist Kurds, civilians as well as their military force, from Dersim gathered in Kochgiri and formed organisations. This place became an important centre of power and as a result, revolt started in Kochgiri.(...) This revolt in Kochgiri was the most important of all revolts, as far as I know. Therefore, we had to take such measures as needed against them, as we did against the Greeks. Therefore, we formed the same organisation in Kochgiri, as we did against the Greeks. An army centre formed in Kochgiri. Nurettin Pasha was appointed as a commander of this army. Important battles took place there and caused large casualties on both sides. Nurettin Pasha, the commander of the centre, took control and started the massacre operations, after the incident"* (Tercuman: 10.09.1986).

## **8. After The Lausanne Treaty**

A treaty was signed on the 24th July 1923 in Lausanne, Switzerland. All national rights as demanded for Greeks, Armenians and the other nationalities with Sevres treaty were abolished with the Lausanne treaty. The land and the national

rights of these nationals were handed over to the colonialist Turkish state on a golden platter. Once again a dark era started in the history of Kurds and Kurdistan when this treaty, which was unethical, non-judicial and without any political respect for Kurds, was signed in Lausanne.

Kurdistan for the first time was divided into two parts between Ottoman Empire and Iran with Kasri Shirin pact in. The part of Kurdistan inside the Ottoman Empire was again divided into three parts with the Lausanne treaty. So, the land of Kurdish people was pieced into four in the end.

After this division Mustafa Kemal's administration installed a political system which became the ideal model for the Nazis in Germany ten years later. As a matter of fact the ideologists on both sides, Germany and Turkey, expressed often the similarity between their ideologies as time went on and Hitler personally pointed out how much he had learned from Mustafa Kemal.

One of the Kemalist regime's ideologues Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, who was also Minister of Justice during Mustafa Kemal's rule, was praising Ataturk saying "Hitler, he always said what he had learned from Ataturk. Bozkurt continues with his comparison to say:

*"One of present time German historian mentions that both national*

*socialism and fascism are not anything else than a somehow changed form of Mustafa Kemal's regime. Very true. A very accurate opinion ..."* (Baskaya 1991: 92).

Before the Lausanne treaty, Mustafa Kemal promised equal rights and respect for brotherhood for all nationalities (such as Turks, Kurds, Laz, Cherkez (Circassian), Arab, and other ethnic groups) in the country.

Moreover in order to get backing from the Kurds, he passed a resolution for autonomy for Kurdistan in the parliament in Ankara before the Lausanne treaty. Ankara Parliament, on the 10 February 1922 discussed "Law for Autonomous Kurdistan

Unfortunately, all these resolutions and promises about equality for all nationalities in the country and autonomy for Kurdistan became forgotten issues as soon as the Lausanne treaty was signed. Instead, Kemalists created a model foundation on "one language, one flag, one nation, one country" in a country of different nationalities, different languages, cultures, religions, etc.

They declared "Turks" as a superior race and the pioneers in the creation and distribution of all civilizations in the history of mankind. Furthermore they argued that all languages in the world emerged from Turkish language which is known as "Sun-Language Theory" (Günes Dil Teorisi, in 1930s).

Therefore, all citizens living within the borders of the Turkish state must identify themselves as Turks, call themselves a Turk, all languages other than Turkish became prohibited.

*"Kurdish language was banned, even if no more than %3 or %4 of Kurdish population could speak another language. Outside official areas, in order to ensure compliance with this prohibition, government officials were in charge in Kurdish urban centers. Kurdish villagers, who entered such centers in order to sell their limited products, could not escape from being detected by "control officers". (Baskaya 1991: 92???)*

In his report on Kurds, dated September 14th, 1925, the President of Turkish National Assembly A.Haluk Renda states that Kurds have the same rights with Turks, but don't have the chance to live together. Then he mentions "therefore, in my opinion, it is essential that Turkish power and population should dominate in all the country".

Prime Minister Ismet Inonu also said "*...In this country only Turks has the right to demand ethnic and national rights,*" Milliyet, 12.08.1930) while he explained the government policy.

In the same period, the Minister of Justice M. Esat Bozkurt , participated to the discussions and said: "*...The Turks are the sole master and owner to this country. Those not descending from*

*genuine Turkish race, have one single right: the right to be a slave, the right to be servant...”* (Milliyet 19.9.1930)

Naturally, this suppressive environment met by Kurds with reaction and resistance. The Kemalist administration permanently used oppressive techniques and terror in order to crush the resistance. Such oppressive policy has been in use up to this day.

## **9. About the Role Of Kirmanjki (Zazaki) Kurds**

Now, I would like to take a look at the role played by the Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds in the struggle for freedom since 1925 with a view to the official ideology and politics in Turkey.

A group of patriotic Kurds formed a secret organization named “*Civata Xweseriya Kurd*” (*Kurdish Independence Organisation*) and “*Kurt Istiklal Cemiyeti*”, defined in short “Azadi”(freedom).

According to some sources, this group gathered for the first time at the beginning of 1925, when Sheh Said was appointed as their leader. Immediate attention was paid to the following three urgent issues:

- 1) formation of an armed force for the liberation of the land,
- 2) formation of a Kurdish government,
- 3) mobilisation of all available resources and opportunities for the development of Kurdistan.



But it is a pity that this work was stopped at a very early stage of preparations by the Ankara government's arranged provocations. The government became informed of these activities at early stages of this organization. Kirmanjki (Zazaki) and Kurmanji speaking Kurds were united during 1925 as it was the case in the Kochgiri resistance but the majority of these were Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds. The leader of this resistance Sheikh Said was also a Kirmanjki (Zaza) speaking Kurd.

The Turkish government undertook large-scale massacres among the civilian population and deported thousands of people to other parts of Turkey after defeating the resistance movement. Many Kurdish intellectuals and patriots took refuge in the neighbouring countries.

The resistance of 1925 was in vain, with the question of Kurds and Kurdistan still awaiting a solution. At the same time, the Turkish state on a large-scale started to strike against other targets in Kurdistan with its military power. Dersim was chosen as one of the main targets at that time. Initially the intention of the state administrators was to occupy all of Dersim after a large scale attack. However, in the end they chose a prolonged strike plan.

Therefore, the state chose „*Ali Bogazi*” in the southwest of Dersim as the first stage target. The selection of this region is not without

reason since the patriotic tribes in this region were Kozan/Qocan, Shemikan and Reshikan, who had fought against the Ottomans and did not support Mustafa Kemal's administration. They also participated in the resistance in Kochgiri.

Because of this reason Mustafa Muglali, the commander of Turkish army, who besieged Ali Bogazi in 1926, writes about Qocan tribe "undefeatable and national hero of Dersim", in his broadcasted communiqué. In another communiqué on 1 October, 1926, the same commander said "*it is decided definitely to chastise (discipline) and getting rid of the Kochushagi tribe that is the symbol of on going act of cursed savagery and banditry*". (General Staff 1972: 176)

Fierce clashes took place between the Turkish army and Kurdish forces those belong to this Qocan/Qozan tribe towards the end of autumn. Due to approaching winter conditions, the military forces withdrew from the area after three months and Kurdish fighters returned to their abandoned villages. The language of this tribe was (is) also Kirmanjki (Zazaki).

In 1930s, the Erzincan – Plemuriye region (the northern Dersim) became the new target. It is very interesting to clarify the government's justification of this attack.

Marshal Fevzi Cakmak, the Chairmen of the General Staff, on his

way back from Agiri/Ararat vicinity, where another Kurdish resistance was going on, stays for a while in Erzingan (Erzincan) and prepares a few reports for the Prime Minister Ismet İnönü on the status of the region, on the 18th September, 1930. He writes in one of these reports:

*“My inspection about the situation in Erzincan province shows that it is compulsory to chastise and get rid of Ashkirik, Gurk, Dagbey and Haryi villages who are the major cause of the trouble and considerable degree of economical damage in this province. (...). For this reason, the administration of this province should demand tax, soldiers and surrender of weapons from the villagers in the region.*

*(...)*

*In order to establish sovereignty of the state and its power, it is my opinion that it is necessary to ask these villages to give tax and troops to government and register their weapons. In the case of negative response, I think it is necessary to destroy these villages by an air raid, which will be accomplished by air forces allocated in Erzincan.*

*There are 10,000 Kurds in the central district of Erzincan. These Kurds are trying to succeed Kurdification of the present Turkish villagers with the use of Alevi belief and Kurdish language. It is*

*feared that the Kurdification of Erzincan may be a reality in the matter of a few years. Customarily Turkish Alevi villagers in the region think that Alevism represents Kurdish-ness and therefore, speaking Kurdish instead of their mother tongue Turkish. It is necessary to take concrete measures like deportation of some villages such as Ruseray, Mitini, Sincigi, Kurtkendi and Kelarik, which are the leading forces in such wickedness by harbouring criminals and participating in criminal activities, to Trakya (European region of Turkey) and get some of the leaders in the region to be settled in the centre of the province under police control. It is fundamentally needed to forbid the use of the Kurdish language in the whole region and take the steps needed to spread and develop Turkish language. It is known that some civil servants in the province centre are Kurds. For example, Shevki Efendi (title given to literate people), interrogation judge in Erzincan, is a Kurd from Pulumurs protecting Kurds and having Kurds gathering in his residence. Therefore, it is very urgent to transfer this person and alike civil servants to new posts in another region". (General Staff 1972: 351-352)*

Fevzi Cakmak, in another report on the same subject, dated the 20th September 1930, writes: *"Kurds are settling down regularly in Turkish villages for the purpose of Kurdification of the region and at the same time they are harbouring bandits. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the most effective action against such families*

*and separate such families to settle down in Turkish villages and deport such families to Trakya (Trachea) ....”.*

*„... Such unavoidable serious issues should be determined immediately by Pulumur District, Erzincan and Erzurum Provinces and the action of chastisement (disciplining) against some regions should be taken before the advancement of the winter season”.*  
*(General Staff 1972: 351-352)*

Turkish military units conducted the act of so called, *”discipline and intimidation”* as proposed by Fevzi Cakmak (Chakmak), in the region of Pulemuriye (Pulumur), in the fall of 1930, after the approval of this act by the prime minister Ismet Inönü. Turkish military units attacked settlements with cannons and machine guns, set settlements on fire and massacred any civilian they found on their way. Dersimians answered to this assault with harsh resistance and the casualties were very high on the both sides. The Turkish military withdrew with the advancement of winter season. Again, the Kurds of this region were Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds.

Finally, the entire Dersim became a target of ripe, just seven years after the assault of 1930. It is my sincere belief that there is no need for a detailed or full lengthy explanation about what has happened in Dersim between the years of 1937 and 1938. What happened was that an all out assault was made on Dersim. The

administration of the Turkish state used intense propaganda to deceive the national and international public during and after this genocide. They tried to present the massacre as a simple ordinary security problem. For example, Dersim was a land of looters and bandits and the state was just trying to reform the situation and fighting against an unlawful feudal system, reactionaries, opportunists, exploiters, etc., according to Turkish administration. These unlawful and exploiting elements of this society were the cause of these events according to the official information of the Turkish government. But information in the state's confidential documents is contradicting such statements. In these confidential documents it is stated that that the question is not a security problem, rather than a piece of Kurdish question. Again, it is obvious from the documents containing demands of the people of Dersim for freedom that it was the plan of the Turkish state to strangle, intimidate and to do away with Kurdish people and their demand for freedom.

For example, Sey Riza, being part of the leadership in Dersim, in his letter dated 30 July 1937, did not treat the question of Dersim and its surrounding area and our peoples struggle separately from the Kurdistan question, but rather as a fragment of Kurds and Kurdistan question<sup>50</sup> (British FO 371/20864/E5529).

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Again, another letter, dated 20 November and signed by the tribes of Dersim, submitted to General Secretary of International Assembly, presents the problem within the framework of Kurdistan (M. Nuri Dersimi 1952: 299)

Celal Bayar, who was Prime Minister in 1938 and later President of Turkish State, writes about the Kurdish resistance in his memoirs: *“Sheikh Sait wanted to built a Kurdish State (...). The Dersim revolt is completely the reflection of their political ideology; these are not anarchists or anything else. They are straightforward demanding to build a Kurdish Government”* (Tercuman: 10.09.1986)

The resistance of Pulumur in 1930 took place in the area of Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds, whereas the 1937 – 1938 movement targeted the whole population in Dersim and in its region, comprising both Kirmanjki (Zazaki) and Kirmanjki speaking Kurds.

The resistance of 1937 – 1938 in Dersim was the last Kurdish resistance during Mustafa Kemal’s era. In era between 1938 and 1950 the Kurdish patriotic movement came to a standstill. But the Kurds got back on their feet and raised their voice gradually with the beginning of the 1950s.

For example, 49 Kurdish youngsters were arrested in 1959 and

tried with capital punishment, accused of Kurdish nationalistic propaganda. Kirmanjki (Zazaki) and Kirmanjki speaking Kurdish youngsters were on trial together. There were two illegal Kurdish parties, "*KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party)*" and "*TKDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party in Turkey)*". The general secretaries of this party were *Sait Elchi* and *Faik Bucak*. *Sait Kirmizitoprak (Dr. Shivan)* was general secretary of *TKDP*. As it is known, Sait Elchi is from Cevlig (Bingöl), Sait Kirmizitoprak from Dersim, Faik Bucak from Sewrege (Siverek) and these three were Kirmanjki (Zazaki) speaking Kurds.

We cannot find any political differences between Kurdish students studying at universities who formed revolutionary The Revolutionary Cultural Centre of East (Devrimci Dogu Kultur Ocaklari – DDKO) at the end of the 1960s. These patriotic members of the Kurdish youth, without any difference in religion or dialect, joined together under auspices of this Cultural Centre functioned, struggled together and they were tortured, interrogated and punished heavily together.

## **10. A New Period for the Kurdish Patriotic Movement**

The Kurdish Patriotic Movement took new and very important steps at the beginning of 1974. Examples of those were formation of democratic and cultural associations, publication of journals and books, working in the labour organisations and other mass



organisations, carrying out cultural activities and taking part in the elections, etc. These were very important for the presentation of Kurdish struggle for their rights to the international community.

Again, it was in this period of time that Kurds in Europe became active in the field of democratic, cultural and political issues and did very important work in the introduction of the Kurdish question to the international public opinion.

I guess the facts presented here within the limits of this article would be sufficient to decline the speculations made about the ethnic identity of Kirmanji (Zazaki) speaking Kurds. On the other hand those arguing the opposite are not forming a homogenous group. Their reasons and aims differ. In addition we should not neglect the role of the Turkish state which following the policy of “divide and rule” against the Kurds. Even it is possible to assume the state having the primary role in spreading such views.

However Kurdish people can not be easily deceived any more. In addition the Kurds are rapidly becoming conscious, changing and making progress. For that reason despite these ill intentioned efforts the majority of Kurds are aware of the fact that it is very important for them to act united ignoring their tribal, religious and language differences. They struggle for liberation in harmony.

## NOTES

- 1) Form within parenthesis are translated (modified) into Turkish.
- 2) Alevi Kurds are not just composed of Kirmancca (Zazaca) speaking Kurds. There are Alevi Kurds within Kurmancca speaking people. More over, Kurmancca speaking Kurds are in majority within Alevi Kurds.
- 3) A poet and historian Kurdish woman who is belong to noble Erdelan family in eastern Kurdistan in Iran. Born in 1804 or 1805 and died in 1848.
- 4) A tribe, believed to originate from an Alevi Saint Kuresh. It is believed that members of this lineage are holy able to make miracles and have Priesthoods titles like “Pîr” and “Rehber” and forms the majority of priesthood profession among Alevi Kurds.
- 5) Cadastral survey records of Ottoman Empire.

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