

**Envisioning a Nation: Establishing Modern Standard Kurmanji in the French Levant,**

**1932-1945**

By

Mansur Elicin

Submitted to  
Central European University  
Department of History

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Supervisor: Assistant Prof. Brett Wilson

Second Reader: Dr. Yektan Turkyilmaz

Vienna, Austria

2024

Mansur Elicin

Copyright in the text of this thesis rests with the Author. Copies by any process, either in full or part, may be made only in accordance with the instructions given by the Author and lodged in the Central European Library. Details may be obtained from the librarian. This page must form a part of any such copies made. Further copies made in accordance with such instructions may not be made without the written permission of the Author.

## Abstract

The main purpose of this thesis is to evaluate the development of Modern Standard Kurmanji as a national language, with a focus on the social political context of the French Levant from 1932 to 1945. The study investigates how Kurdish intellectuals and leaders used language standardization to promote national identity and unity during a tough time. This period is significant because it includes the publication of *Hawar*, the first Latin-based Kurdish journal, and coincides with the end of French rule. This thesis challenges previous studies that see Kurmanji language standardization through a narrow nationalist lens. Additionally, in this thesis, I argue that there is no single Kurdish language. I use the term "Languages of Kurds" to recognize the diverse linguistic landscape of the Kurdish community. Overall, this thesis offers a deeper insight into the role of language in Kurdish identity politics and provides a detailed overview of the historical processes that shaped the Kurdish linguistic and national identity.

## **Acknowledgments**

I am deeply grateful to my parents and siblings for their love, encouragement, and sacrifices. My supervisors, Brett Wilson and Yektan Turkyilmaz, deserve special mention for their invaluable guidance and support. Finally, I extend my appreciation to all friends.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

A.	Introduction .....	7
1.	Ontology and Epistemology .....	7
2.	Methodology and Challenges .....	11
3.	Concepts and Definitions .....	14
B.	Situating Kurds and Kurmanji.....	18
1.	People, Homeland, and Language .....	18
2.	Attempts to Standardize the Language.....	23
C.	Language and Nation in Exile: French-Mandate Syria.....	27
1.	Escape to the Levant .....	27
2.	The Banner-Bearers of Kurmanji: Authors, Activists, and Soldiers in Exile .....	31
3.	Language as an Actor.....	40
D.	Hawar Journal, 1932-1943 .....	43
1.	Latinization and Hawar.....	43
2.	Imagined Kurmanji for the Kurds.....	51
3.	Imagined Kurds: Making of a People on Pages of <i>Hawar</i> .....	54
E.	Times of War .....	60
1.	<i>Ronahi</i> and <i>Roja Nu</i> in Perspective .....	60
2.	Political Situation in the Levant and the Kurds.....	64
F.	Concluding Remarks .....	66

## A Note to Reader

### i. ethnographic research

Throughout the research and writing phases of this thesis, I relied on oral accounts and interviews. While there is no dedicated section for these accounts, it is important to note that their importance is not overlooked. On the contrary, they were instrumental in expanding my understanding and contextualizing my arguments. I am especially grateful to Joyce Blau and Yektan Turkeyilmaz for their invaluable contributions in this regard.

### ii. primary sources

The primary sources for this thesis are mainly Kurmanji newspapers and journals from the first half of the twentieth century. These include publications like *Roji Kurd*, *Hawar*, *Ronahi*, and *Roja Nû*. It is critical for the reader to understand that the archival research for these primary sources was conducted entirely at the Kurdish Institute of Paris. This reveals the scope of this research.

### iii. use of the word Kurdish

In my thesis, I argue that there is not a singular Kurdish language. Instead, I use the term "Languages of Kurds" to cover the various languages spoken by Kurds, regardless of linguistic categorizations or nationalist viewpoints. It is important for the reader to understand that when I use the term "Kurdish," it primarily functions as an adjective. For instance, when I mention "Kurdish literature," it does not mean literature written in the Kurdish language, as there is not a unified Kurdish language. Instead, it refers to literature associated with the Kurds.

## A. INTRODUCTION

### 1. ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

In 1930, Turkey defeated Kurdish Ararat Revolt. A cartoon in the Turkish daily *Milliyet* celebrated Turkish army's victory. It depicted a grave on Mount Ararat with the inscription, "Here lies the imagined Kurdistan," indicating the failure of Kurdish aspirations for an independent Kurdistan.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this situation serves as an ironic reminder that nations are fundamentally imaginary constructs, whether they succeed or fail in their formation or functioning. Nations are first formed in the imagination before they are established on the ground or buried, in this instance. While it was believed that hopes for freedom had been extinguished, Kurdish refugees, intellectuals, leaders, politicians, and ex-soldiers had imagined their own nation with its people in the French Levant in exile. Naturally, they also had plans for their national language, which is the focus of this thesis.

Kurds, a people without their own state, inhabit the Near East in a region historically known as Kurdistan. Spread across Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, with historical communities in neighboring countries like Armenia, Georgia, Lebanon, and Jordan, they form a significant diaspora, with around one million living in Germany. Lacking a nation-state, they do not have a state-language of their own. Roughly called Kurdish, their language sparks ongoing debate and disagreement. What is called Kurdish indeed includes various languages, mainly divided into Northern (Kurmanji), Central (Sorani), and Southern based on geographical location in Kurdistan.<sup>2</sup> While Kurmanji and Sorani are somewhat standardized, what is called Southern Kurdish, spoken by 'Shia

---

<sup>1</sup> *Milliyet*, September 19, 1930.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Rubin, "Who Are the Kurds?" in *Kurdistan Rising? Considerations for Kurds, Their Neighbors, and the Region* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2016), 2.

Kurds<sup>3</sup> in Iran, presents definitional challenges, encompassing languages and dialects distinct from Kurmanji and Sorani. Additionally, some groups historically identifying as Kurd, like the Zaza people in Turkey, speak languages not typically classified as Kurdish, despite historical associations.<sup>4</sup> Even within languages classified as Kurdish, mutual intelligibility is not guaranteed; for example, speakers of Kurmanji and Sorani with no formal education in grammar struggle to understand each other due to linguistic differences, such as gender distinctions that do not exist in Sorani but exist in Kurmanji. Scholarly debate continues, with some linguists viewing Kurdish as a continuum of dialects and languages rather than a singular entity. In this context, I use the term "Languages of Kurds" to encompass all languages spoken by Kurds, emphasizing their linguistic diversity. Recognizing Kurdish as an umbrella term for various languages of Kurds is vital, dispelling the misconception that Kurdish equals a certain standard language and acknowledging the linguistic diversity of the Kurds.

Accordingly, this thesis focuses on constructing Modern Standard Kurmanji as a national language for the Kurdish people. Focusing on the historical context of the Levant during the French Mandate era, the purpose is to see the efforts of Kurdish intellectuals, linguists, and community leaders within this socio-political setting to bid and shape the language. Geographically, the study takes the Greater Syria under French control as pivotal focal point since the region unprecedentedly provided the Kurds with the opportunity and institutional means to influence the evolution of the language during the post-Ottoman Middle East. Periodically, the timespan from 1932 to 1945 has

---

<sup>3</sup> Kurds in Iranian Kurdistan and Western Azerbaijan are mostly Sunni, yet those in Khorasan, Kermanshah, and Ilam are followers of Shia Islam. Akbarzadeh, Shahram, Zahid Shahab Ahmed, Costas Laoutides, and William Gourlay, "The Kurds in Iran: Balancing National and Ethnic Identity in a Securitised Environment," *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 6 (2019): 1145–62.

<sup>4</sup> Mehmed S. Kaya, *The Zaza Kurds of Turkey: A Middle Eastern Minority in a Globalized Society* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

been chosen due to its significance for Kurmanji. 1932 marks a milestone as being the birth-year of *Hawar*, the initiatory Latin-based Kurdish journal published in Damascus, Syria. On the other hand, 1945 signifies both endings and beginnings. It signifies the conclusion of World War II, heralding the conclusion of French rule and the establishment of the Syrian Arab Republic, consequently delimiting the Kurdish movement in the region.

Several studies have been conducted on the language aspect, one notable example being Onen's thesis, which explores how Kurdish nationalist elites utilized language for political ends and its role in shaping Kurdish national identity.<sup>5</sup> Focused on the journal *Hawar* during the period of 1932-1943 in Syria, under French rule, Onen investigates the motivations behind the emphasis placed on language by Kurdish elites, viewing it as a means of unification and resistance against oppression. The aim is to understand the impact of language activism on Kurdish identity and politics. Where my thesis diverges from Onen's work on several grounds. First, I argue against the notion of a singular Kurdish language, contrary to previous studies on the topic, including Onen's thesis. Mainstream research primarily rotates around narratives of pure nationalism. I do not confine myself to studying *Hawar* alone but also include other significant media outlets, such as *Ronahi* and *Roja Nu*. Moreover, my thesis encompasses a broader range of figures, including community leaders, offering a more diverse perspective. Importantly, the argumentation in my thesis extends beyond simply describing the standardization of Kurmanji. It is noteworthy that limited scholarly attention has been directed toward the systematic investigation of Kurmanji language development from a non-nationalistic perspective. My project has the objection to go beyond these narratives and instead focus on the politically motivated journey undertaken by the

---

<sup>5</sup> Ronayi Onen, "The Role of Language in the Discursive Construction of the Kurdish Nation: A Case Study on the Kurdish Periodical *Hawar* (1932-1943)" (PhD thesis, Istanbul Bilgi University, 2012).

Kurds to standardize Kurmanji for the sake of unifying the people. In essence, while existing literature for the mentioned timespan centers on the survival and evolution of Kurmanji as a non-state language, this attempts to introduce a new perspective. By emphasizing the formation of Modern Kurmanji as the Kurdish national language, the aim is to delve deeper into the envisaged nationhood, Kurdish identity, and the concept of a land, Kurdistan, itself thanks to the means of language unification process. Furthermore, this investigation has the potential to shed light on language planning and its twisted interaction with Kurdish politics. As acknowledged above, there exists no consensus on standardization and classification. Nevertheless, this thesis takes the stance that Kurdish is an umbrella concept, encompassing several languages and dialects. In this thesis, individuals and people historically identifying with Kurdish identity are categorized and acknowledged under this umbrella term, regardless of linguistic classifications. However, it is crucial to state that the scope of this study is solely limited to the Kurmanji language, also known as Northern Kurdish.

This project attempts to take on socio-political setting of French-mandate in the Levant as a case study with the goal of addressing some interrelated questions: Firstly, what philosophical, linguistic, and political references and influences guided the endeavors of Kurdish intellectuals in French Levant as they embarked on shaping Kurmanji as the language of their nation-to-be? How did the imagination of shared, standardized, a unified language connect and/or shape Kurdish nation-building trajectories? How did these trajectories differ in their communal imaginations and in territorial references of belonging. Lastly, how did the intellectuals of the era navigate the complexities of political, cultural, and geographic boundaries within and among different Kurdish groups? It is reasonable to maintain that addressing these inquires is vital for a comprehensive grasp of the development of Kurmanji as a national language of Kurds.

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND CHALLENGES

When considering the selection of primary sources, my approach involved a thorough survey of available materials, including newspapers, journals, educational texts, and personal writings of prominent figures within the Kurdish community of that era. The majority of these are housed at The Kurdish Institute of Paris, a valuable archive offering a wealth of relevant historical materials. As I explored through diverse archives, it became clear that the utilization of primary sources necessitates an analytical approach. It should be noted that the intellectual landscape of the Kurdish community was remarkably shaped by the consequences of the WW I and following events. The educational and intellectual context was somehow outcome of the mixture of late-Ottoman modernization ideals along. I exercised caution while studying these sources, as they were frequently allowed to be produced and circulated in line with the French interests with the specific aim of counterbalancing Arab nationalism within in the region. Overall, it is notable to keep in mind that these sources were published to advance French Imperial and Colonial propaganda. This enables me to employ methodical exploration of the concept of 'nation' as understood through the lens of French ideals, as well. A fascinating opportunity lies in seeing the extent to which the French ideology impacted the intellectuals, and whether their innate ethnic consciousness prevailed over this ideological context. The exploration of how the French principle of "civil nationalism" functioned as either a steppingstone or a triggering tool for these intellectuals presents an interesting research direction for future research endeavors.

Additionally, diving into the roots of Kurdish intellectual circles in the Levant reveals a fascinating junction of factors that contributed to its genesis. Conversely, the *Hawar* school situated in Greater Syria found itself strictly under the influence and control of the French mandate, with all its publications subject to the scrutiny and approval of French authorities. Briefly, Kurdish propaganda was limited to the extent to which the French rule over the Levant could keep the

balance. This is to say, to the French, the Kurdish nationalism was to be used for balancing rising Arab nationalism in the region.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Kurdish card was useful against to maintain French imperial interests against Turkey.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, as the intellectuals and community leaders were predominantly former Ottoman citizens, their mindset bore traces of the late-Ottoman political climate. The imprint of their struggle against the Kemalist-Turkish ideology and their subsequent difficulties could be regarded a noteworthy backdrop. So, my engagement with primary sources demanded a nuanced assessment. All in all, writing these lines, I do bear in mind the entangled influences of diverse ideologies, including French colonialism, and Turkish nationalism. In parallel, my research benefits from secondary sources that center on the Kurmanji language, which provide crucial insights into nationalism considering the linguistic side. Methodologically, my work adopts a multilayered approach, containing archival research, library analysis, and ethnographic techniques. The archive and library component requires a survey of primary sources including newspapers, periodicals, memoirs, schoolbooks, autobiographies, and political propaganda texts. Additionally, personal documents belonging to leading names in this narrative, such as the Bedirkhan brothers, add another layer to my research. On the ethnographic front, I engaged in an extensive interview with Joyce Blau, leading name in Kurdish Studies. While this interview does not form a dedicated section in my thesis, her oral accounts enrich my

---

<sup>6</sup> S. Altuğ argues that the French wanted to counterbalance rising Arab nationalism in the Levant with the Kurds. See Seda Altuğ, "The Turkish Syrian Border and Politics of Difference in Turkey and Syria (1921–1939)," in *Syria: Borders, Boundaries, and the State*, ed. Springer International Publishing (2020).

<sup>7</sup> See Philip Shukry Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Jordi Tejel, "States of Rumors: Politics of Information Along the Turkish-Syrian Border, 1925–1945," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 37, no. 1 (2022): 95-113; Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, "The Great Depression and the Making of the Turkish-Syrian Border, 1921-1939," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 2 (2022): 311-326; Seda Altuğ, "The Turkish Syrian Border and Politics of Difference in Turkey and Syria (1921–1939)," in *Syria: Borders, Boundaries, and the State* (Springer International Publishing, 2020).

comprehension of the subject matter, aiding in the formulation and contextualization of arguments.<sup>8</sup> However, on the one hand, it is evident that this source necessitates a cautious stance, given the potential biased interviews. On the other hand, regarding all sources, to penetrate beyond layers of nationalist rhetoric, a deliberative approach is vital. For me, challenges related to lack of language proficiency, particularly in French, remain pertinent. However, Kurmanji is the focal language of this research, as it forms the core of my investigation into the standardization of Kurmanji itself.

Central to my aim is the narrative of modern Kurmanji's evolution and the key figures associated with it. Rather than limiting my approach to a singular theoretical or analytical framework, I aim to embark on a journey that examines French Levant as a case study. While comparisons of different cities and sub-regions are inevitable, the essence lies in determining the most suitable approach for this project. It is worth noting that the thesis refrains from adopting a transnational perspective, instead focusing on the boundaries of nation-states. This approach enables an exploration of the mindset of intellectuals, leaders, and linguists within these margins, thereby explaining the interactions that emerged from within the Levantine Kurds.

---

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Joyce Blau. By Mansur Elicin. Paris, August 10, 2022; In an interview I conducted with Joyce Blau on August 10, 2022, in Paris, Blau reflected on her initial contact with the Kurds through Kamuran Bedirkhan in 1959, who had provided her with extensive information about the Kurds. Blau described the limited academic and intellectual focus on Kurdish issues in the West during that time, with only a few notable figures, such as Bedirkhan in France. She recounted how political circumstances, especially the need to inform the French about the Kurdish situation in Iraq, had influenced her early interest in Kurds and their languages. Blau began her formal study of languages of Kurds in 1962 amidst a scarcity of resources. She highlighted ongoing challenges in Kurdish language studies, particularly regarding standardization and the lack of awareness. She emphasized the importance of multilingualism and drew comparisons with Switzerland and India. She acknowledged the significant contributions of Kurdish studies in Soviet Armenia and the impact of political and ideological influences from various powers on Kurdish language development. Finally, Blau reflected on her own work with Kurdish languages and dialects, in her own words, and her efforts to engage with Kurdish intellectuals across different regions, providing a comprehensive view of the historical, political, and personal dimensions of Kurdish language studies.

### 3. CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

#### 3.1. Borders

In the aftermath of WW I, imperial borders underwent a transformation marked by their disappearance. The Turkey-Syria border, drawn by the French, symbolizes the shift towards new border regimes shaped by nation-state ideologies. For people in Syria who used to be part of the Ottoman Empire, the border with Turkey reminded them of their old empire but now had a new nationalist meaning.<sup>9</sup> The delineation of the border, influenced by a railway traversing the region, allowed the Kurds to traverse and transcend these artificial lines. However, the border, established by the 1921 Treaty of Ankara between France and the Ankara Government, did not align with the social and demographic realities on the ground.<sup>10</sup> At times, the border cut through towns, dividing them based on the railway, with one part falling under Turkish rule and the other under the French mandate. This mismatch between geographical and political characteristics and the actual social dynamics created a complex landscape. Consequently, Syria, with its relatively small Kurdish population, became a peripheral battleground for the Kurdish struggle against Turkey. The

---

<sup>9</sup> Seda Altuğ, "The Turkish-Syrian Border and Politics of Difference in Turkey and Syria (1921–1939)," in *Syria: Borders, Boundaries, and the State*, ed. M. Cimino (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 50.

<sup>10</sup> To read more into the issue see Jordi Tejel, "States of Rumors: Politics of Information Along the Turkish-Syrian Border, 1925–1945," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 37, no. 1 (2022): 95-113; Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, "The Great Depression and the Making of the Turkish-Syrian Border, 1921-1939," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 2 (2022): 311-326; Seda Altuğ, "The Turkish-Syrian Border and Politics of Difference in Turkey and Syria (1921–1939)," in *Syria: Borders, Boundaries, and the State*, edited by M. Cimino (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

aftermath of the Sheikh Said Rebellion in 1925 witnessed a peak in the flow of Kurds into the Levant region.

### 3.2. Kurdish Resistance Movements, 1925-1938

The Kurds of the Ottoman Empire, mainly lived under the semi-autonomous Kurdish emirates. This period lasted from 16<sup>th</sup> century to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The modernization and centralization policies of Istanbul-based empire brought the Kurdish autonomy to an end. Even though there were plenty of Kurdish rebellions on the eve and in the aftermath of this termination, arguably one cannot speak of sole nationalist aspirations behind those uprisings. However, it is mostly believed that the 1881 rebellion of Sheikh Ubeydullah was first of its kind, because of having a nationalist discourse.<sup>11</sup> Especially, Istanbul in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed rise of Kurdish nationalism. The leading names were mostly from interrelated groups: members of former Kurdish ruling families, Naqshbandi and Qadri sheikhs, and secular/intellectual Ottoman Kurds. However, WW I and the Kemalist movement vanished the Kurdish nationalist aspirations. The declaration of the republic and the single party autocracy in Turkey sought to erase the Kurdish political and cultural existence for the sake of making a Turkified country.

During the early republican era, three major Kurdish uprisings occurred: Sheikh Said of 1925, Ararat between 1927 and 1931, and finally, Dersim of 1938. It is still today quite controversial whether Sheikh Said rebellion was more of a nationalist than a religious one. Martin Van Bruinessen believes that it was "neither a purely religious nor a purely nationalist" uprising.<sup>12</sup> On

---

<sup>11</sup> Avni Kilic, "The Purpose of the Sheikh Ubeydullah Nehrî Revolt," *The Scientific Journal of Ciban University- Sulaimaniya* 6, no. 3 (2022): 1.

<sup>12</sup> Maarten van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: On the Social and Political Organization of Kurdistan*, PhD diss. (Utrecht: Rijksuniversiteit, 1978), 404-5.

the other hand, Turkish discourse around the uprising has been usually stressing that it was an Islamist reactionary incident against the secularism and the republican ideals.<sup>13</sup> Asking for the reinstatement of the caliphate and being led by a Naqshbandi sheikh, the rebellion for sure had religious motives. However, the fact that it was heavily supported by the Kurdish liberatory movement the *Azadi* organization demonstrates that the rebellion was also of nationalist aspirations. After all, the Azadi leader Cibranli Halid Beg (1882-1925) was brother-in-law of Sheikh Said. It can also be argued that the rebellion was used as an excuse by Ankara to introduce the 1925 Report for Reform in the East. By the report, the government aimed at banning speaking Kurdish and declaring Inspectorate General in Kurdish-inhabited areas ruled by martial laws. Additionally, resettlement of the Kurds was also among the goals.

The Ararat uprising of 1927-1931 was led by General Ihsan Nuri Pasha (1892-1976).<sup>14</sup> Graduating from the Military Academy in Istanbul, he served in the Ottoman army during the WW I. After the defeat of the empire, he joined the Kurdish nationalist ranks. The rebels self-declared the Ararat Republic based in *Kurdava* village. Ibrahim Heski (?-1931) became the President of the republic. The mountainous geography challenged Turkey to defeat the rebellion. That is why it lasted for more than three years. For preventing the movement of Kurdish rebels between Turkey and Iran, both countries signed an agreement through which they swapped lands and fixed the border. Accordingly, Turkey assured the total control over the Lesser Ararat Mountain. Noteworthy, After the Ararat rebellion, the Turkish daily *Milliyet* published a cartoon celebrating the Turkish army's triumph. The cartoon depicts a gravestone on Mount Ararat with the inscription, "Here lies the imagined Kurdistan," symbolizing the perceived defeat of Kurdish aspirations for an independent homeland. This illustration reflected the government's stance on

---

<sup>13</sup> See, Ugur Mumcu, *Kurt-Islam Ayaklanması, 1919-1925* (Ankara: Tekin Yayınevi, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> See, Rohat Alakom, *Hoybân Örgütü ve Ağrı Ayaklanması* (Istanbul: Avesta Yayınları, 1998).

suppressing movements seeking Kurdish autonomy and reinforced the narrative of a unified Turkish state.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the Dersim Rebellion presented a more localized conflict, distinguished by its Kurdish-Alevi character.<sup>16</sup> Led by Seyit Riza (1863-1938), this uprising was influenced, in part, by the Turkish Resettlement Law of 1934, which aimed to relocate Kurds within Turkish territories. Prior to the rebellion's outbreak in 1936, the Turkish government changed the name of Dersim to Tunceli.<sup>17</sup> The official Turkish narrative depicted the region as under the control of Kurdish feudal-minded aghas and sheikhs, framing the government's objective as the civilizing of the area.

### 3.3. Mandate System

The League of Nations established the mandate system in the aftermath of World War I. The victorious powers were given governance responsibilities for former German and Ottoman territories, with the goal of developing each mandate towards eventual independence.<sup>18</sup> The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 were critical in determining the

---

<sup>15</sup> *Milliyet*, September 19, 1930.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Olson, "The Kurdish Rebellions of Sheikh Said (1925), Mt. Ararat (1930), and Dersim (1937-8): Their Impact on the Development of the Turkish Air Force and on Kurdish and Turkish Nationalism," *Die Welt des Islams* 40, no. 1 (2000): 67-94; Nicole Watts, "Relocating Dersim: Turkish State-Building and Kurdish Resistance, 1931–1938," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 23 (2000): 5–30.

<sup>17</sup> Resmi Gazete. (1936, January). <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/3197.pdf>; *Dersim Massacre, 1937-1938*; Sciences Po Mass Violence and Resistance - Research Network. (2011, July 27). <https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/dersim-massacre-1937-1938.html>

<sup>18</sup> Denys P. Myers, "The Mandate System of the League of Nations," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 96 (1921): 74–77; Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia, "Mandate," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 13, 2021.

division of Ottoman territories between France and Britain in the Middle East.<sup>19</sup> The League of Nations approved specific mandates, each with a designated mandatory power responsible for governance. However, the mandate system encountered difficulties and controversies because of conflicting promises and agreements, resulting in varying outcomes across regions. The French Mandate of Syria and Lebanon, approved in 1922, is an example of this situation. In brief, the mandate system aimed to maintain equilibrium between the geopolitical interests of the Allied powers as a post-World War I governance framework.<sup>20</sup>

## B. SITUATING KURDS AND KURMANJI

### 1. PEOPLE, HOMELAND, AND LANGUAGE

The Kurds are an ethnic group mainly dwelling in the geography roughly known as Kurdistan, a geo-cultural region spanning across Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. The modern history of the Kurds has been shaped by years of struggle to exercise their right to self-determination. The complicated history of the Kurdish fight for self-determination is indivisible from the nature of Kurdish nationalism.

---

<sup>19</sup> Itamar Rabinovich, Robbie Sabel, and Oded Eran, "A Century since the Sykes-Picot Agreement: Current Challenges," *Institute for National Security Studies* (2016), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Pitman B. Potter, "Origin of the System of Mandates under the League of Nations," *The American Political Science Review* 16, no. 4 (1922): 563–83; Herbert Adams Gibbons, "The Defects of the System of Mandates," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 96 (1921): 84–90; Selcuk Aydin, *State Formations, Nations and Kurdish Movements: A Comparative Analysis from the Late Ottoman Empire to Republican People's Party in Turkey (1923-1945), British Mandate Regime in Iraq (1920-1932), and French Mandate Regime in Syria (1923-1946)* (London: King's College London, 2020); Nelida Fuccaro and Abbas Vali, "Kurds and Kurdish Nationalism in Mandatory Syria: Politics, Culture and Identity," in *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, eds. N. Fuccaro and A. Vali (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2002), 191-217.

From the early modern period onwards, the homeland of the Kurds found itself divided between the rule of the Ottoman and Iranian Empires, including the Safavid, Zand, and Qajar.<sup>21</sup> By the 19th century, the northern part of Kurdistan came under rule of the Russian Empire.<sup>22</sup> During the Ottoman reign, the Kurds mainly lived under the autonomous Kurdish emirates, a period that lasted from the 16th century until the mid-19th century. Nonetheless, the Ottoman modernization and centralization policies caused termination of these Kurdish emirates.<sup>23</sup> This was followed by the execution or exile of the Kurdish rulers. Some, opting to collaborate with the imperial center, landed high-ranking positions within the newly structured centralized administration. This was also the case in Qajar Iran, from 1830s onwards, as Kurdish emirates in Iran were dissolved and integrated into the centralized administration as part of modernization policies taking place in the empire.<sup>24</sup>

To search through the characteristics of Kurmanji language unification process, it is also crucial to touch upon the emergence, rise, and defeat of Kurdish nationalism in and post-Ottoman era. This will enable one to grasp the story of how language became an agent as well. Historical roots provide insights into the origins of Kurdish nationalism, even though it initially lacked a cohesive structure

---

<sup>21</sup> Akihiko Yamaguchi, "The Kurdish Frontier under the Safavids," in *The Safavid World*, ed. Rudi Matthee (New York: Routledge, 2021), 556–571; Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004), 47–49.

<sup>22</sup> With the incorporation of southern Caucasus, some Kurdish tribes came under Russian rule, in 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Eppel, "The Demise of the Kurdish Emirates: The Impact of Ottoman Reforms and International Relations on Kurdistan during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 2 (2008): 237–58.

<sup>24</sup> To read on the demise of Kurdish autonomy in 19<sup>th</sup> century see, Michael Eppel, "The Demise of the Kurdish Emirates in the Nineteenth Century," in *A People Without a State: The Kurds from the Rise of Islam to the Dawn of Nationalism* (New York: University of Texas Press, 2016), 45–64.

and can be referred to as latecomer and pseudo-nationalism. Nonetheless, it laid the groundwork for the struggle for independence, driven by three key factors. Firstly, exiled leaders and influential Kurdish families, dispersed in places like Cairo, Istanbul, Damascus, and various European cities, such as Geneva, were deeply engaged in the Kurdish cause, notably exemplified by Mikdad Midhat Bedirkhan (1858-1915), who published the first Kurdish newspaper, 'Kurdistan,' in Cairo in 1898.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, a political vacuum emerged in the remote, mountainous regions of Kurdistan due to the absence of Kurdish rulers, which religious groups filled.<sup>26</sup> Thirdly, as the Ottoman Empire tried to modernize and control influential families by setting up the Imperial Tribal School, they accidentally introduced students to European ideas.

This sparked a strong interest in Kurdish nationalism among the students.<sup>27</sup> This growing nationalism and recognition of their unique identity led to the formation of groups dedicated to advancing Kurdish nationalism, such as the Society for the Rise of Kurdistan (SRK). This clandestine society, founded in 1918 during the Ottoman Empire's collapse after World War I, comprised Kurdish intellectuals committed to addressing political and social challenges, promoting Kurdish culture and language, safeguarding Kurdish rights, and advocating for an independent Kurdish state. Despite facing challenges from the Ottoman Empire, the SRK expanded its network

---

<sup>25</sup> Murat Issı, "Kürt Basını ve Kürdistan Gazetesi (1898-1902)," *Şarkiyat* 9 (April 2013): 127-147.

<sup>26</sup> This is one of the key arguments of M. v. Bruinessen in his "Agha, Shaikh, and State". See, Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> The Tribal School, established in 1892 by Abdulhamid II, aimed to integrate tribes into the Ottoman Empire through education focused on religion and the Ottoman Turkish language. Graduates were expected to advance to the Imperial High School and then to the School of Civil Administration to prepare for service in their local areas. Most of the students at the Tribal School were Arabs, Albanians, and Kurds. See, "Aşiret Mektebi," *Türk Maarif Ansiklopedisi*, accessed 11.01.2023, <https://turkmaarifansiklopedisi.org.tr/asiret-mektebi>.

across Kurdish regions, establishing schools, publishing Kurdish materials, and organizing political protests.<sup>28</sup>

In the following, I specifically embark on an in-depth exploration of Kurdish nationalism, with a particular focus on the pivotal role played by the press and media. Nevertheless, it is vital to have a look at the entire global landscape and understand the role of the press in sparking the nationalist sentiment, reaching its peak in the collapse of colonial empires by the mid-20th century.<sup>29</sup> Utilizing various mediums like newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets, the press disseminated nationalist ideals, influenced public opinion, and garnered support. It served to connect geographically disconnected populations, enabling the exchange of information, ideas, and stories that reinforced nationalist narratives. Newspapers became essential for sharing the struggles, triumphs, and sacrifices of fellow nationalists, fostering a profound sense of solidarity. In cultivating national

---

<sup>28</sup> On Kurdish nationalism in Ottoman Empire, also see, David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 3rd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004); Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004); Hakan Özoğlu, "Nationalism' and Kurdish Notables in the Late Ottoman–Early Republican Era," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 3 (2001): 383–409 ; Mehmed Şükrü Hanioglu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi* (Istanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1981).

<sup>29</sup> Benedict Anderson, in his seminal work "Imagined Communities," and Eric Hobsbawm, in "Nations and Nationalism Since 1780," provide us with deep understanding of the genesis of nationalism during this climax. Anderson meticulously dissects how the press functioned as a keystone in bidding national identities and growing a sense of belonging among heterogeneous populations. In contrast, Hobsbawm delves into the intricate relationship between nationalism and decolonization, underscoring the way nationalist movements motivated colonized populations against their imperial rulers. See, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

consciousness and identity, the press carefully curated and promoted cultural symbols, languages, and historical narratives, contributing to a common understanding of nationhood.<sup>30</sup>

The role of the press in the Kurdish nationalist movement during the late 19th and early 20th centuries was multilayered and significant. It played a crucial role in energizing intellectuals, rallying support, and molding the discourse surrounding Kurdish nationalism. However, the reach and impact of the Kurdish press varied considerably due to a complex interplay of political, social, and historical factors. It should be mentioned that the influence of the Kurdish press was often limited due to some reasons such as high illiteracy rates, geographical constraints, and systematic political repression. During this era, most of the Kurdish population lived in rural areas and had limited access to education, effectively restricting the readership of Kurdish newspapers primarily to urban centers and the educated elite.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the constraints, emergence of Kurdish press bolstered the nationalist sentiments. The spark, as abovementioned, was the establishment of the newspaper "*Kurdistan*" in 1898 by Miqdat Bedirkhan, a prominent figure in the Kurdish nationalist movement.<sup>32</sup> "*Kurdistan*" was a powerful platform for Kurdish intellectuals and activists to articulate their demands for increased autonomy, cultural preservation, and self-determination. Despite periodic censorship and repression, it played an instrumental role in nurturing a sense of Kurdish identity and unity among its readers. Another

---

<sup>30</sup> On the role of the media in Kurdish Nationalism see, Deniz Ekinçi, *Kurdish Identity, Islamism, and Ottomanism: The Making of a Nation in Kurdish Journalistic Discourse, 1898-1914* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022).

<sup>31</sup> David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 3rd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Deniz Ekinçi, *Kurdish Identity, Islamism, and Ottomanism: The Making of a Nation in Kurdish Journalistic Discourse, 1898-1914* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022).

milestone in the Kurdish press's history was the advent of "*Serbesti*," marking the inception of the first daily newspaper, serving the Kurdish cause, in the aftermath of the Second Constitutional Monarchy's proclamation. Mevlanzâde Rifat, the founder and editor-in-chief, with a multifaceted identity encompassing journalism, publishing, writing, and politics, also emerged as a pioneering force in the early 20th-century Kurdish nationalist movement.<sup>33</sup>

## 2. ATTEMPTS TO STANDARDIZE THE LANGUAGE

The attempts to adopt Kurmanji as the Kurdish national language played a vital role in asserting cultural identity and challenging marginalization. Kurmanji was envisioned as a symbol of national identity, allowing Kurds from diverse regions and dialects to communicate and organize. Kurdish intellectuals and writers used Kurmanji to create literature that celebrated Kurdish identity, critiqued oppressive state policies, and promoted culture and history. The topic of language standardization has a historical background that stretches back to the late Ottoman period and intersects with the Kurdish nationalist movement. During this era, even though early Kurdish organizations and media outlets sought to highlight Kurdish identity within the framework of the Ottoman identity, it was the advent of *Roî Kurd* that marked the definitive shift towards reshaping Kurdish identity. In 1912, *Roî Kurd*, established by Kurdish youth in Istanbul through the *Hevî* student society, emerged as a pivotal medium.<sup>34</sup> This magazine, representing a significant

---

<sup>33</sup> Rifat was an Ottoman-Kurdish Journalist and Poet. Being a descended of Khâlid-i Baghdâdî, he was from a powerful family. Rifat was an opponent of Abdul Hamid II and a member of the Young Turk. Later becoming a Kurdish nationalist, he advocated for Kurdistan. Served as the spokesperson the SRK. See, Barbara Henning, *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts: Continuities and Changes* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2018), 394; Murat Issı, "Hürriyet Âşığı Bir Osmanlı-Kürt Aydını Mevlanzâde Rıf'at Bey," *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 196 (April 2010): 72-80.

<sup>34</sup> Deniz Ekinci, *Kurdish Identity, Islamism, and Ottomanism: The Making of a Nation in Kurdish Journalistic Discourse, 1898-1914* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022).

milestone, openly emphasized Kurdish nationhood, and aimed to construct a unified Kurdish identity grounded in history and a shared language. The magazine's creators, intellectuals, and community leaders, fueled by a desire to reclaim the power that waned since the fall of the last Kurdish principality of Botan in the mid-19th century, regarded language as a foundational element for their envisioned future. Members of the *Hewî* society predominantly held pro-Kurdish and Kurdistan views, and the editorial team devised a Kurdish language integral to their identity-building pursuits.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, the founding declaration of the society stated its aims as follows:

- To connect Kurdish students with each other to enable collaborative work.
- To promote the study and appreciation of the Kurdish language and literature.
- To establish schools and religious centers, and to construct mosques throughout Kurdistan.
- To offer education to impoverished Kurdish children in religious schools, equip them with various skills and arts, and provide them with financial assistance.
- Essentially, to endeavor for the well-being and prosperity of the Kurdish people.<sup>36</sup>

The publication also initiated discussions on the need for a new alphabet. Various perspectives emerged, ranging from advocating for Romanization to concerns about deviating from the sacred Arabic script. Notably, Mevlanzade Rifat suggested adopting the Urartian script, positing it as the

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. pp. 152-155.

<sup>36</sup> "The Founding Declaration of Kurdish Students-Hope Society [Kürt Telebe-Hêvî Cemiyeti'nin Beyannamesidir]," *Hetawî Kurd*, no. 4-5 (May 10, 1914): 1-4, in Malmîsanij, *Kürt Talebe-Hêvî Cemiyeti*, 257-261.

archaic script shared by Kurds and Armenians.<sup>37</sup> However, these aspirations were cut short by the tumultuous events of World War I, followed by the rise of the Kemalist movement in Turkey. In the aftermath of the declaration of the Turkish Republic, leading Kurds found themselves presented with limited options, including assimilation, exile, and execution. Perhaps, biography of Kurdish politician Nuri Dersimi is the clearest demonstration of this tough transitional period.<sup>38</sup> This historical background sets the stage for the emergence of French-Syria as a refuge for Kurds post-Ottoman era. The French mandate in Syria became a haven for Kurdish intellectuals and leaders who fled Turkey. Within this circle of thinkers, the Bedirkhan brothers, hailing from a prominent aristocratic family, stand out. Educated at an imperial French-medium high school in Istanbul and later pursuing higher education in European cities, the brothers possessed advanced

---

<sup>37</sup> Mevlanazade Rifat, 'Muhterem *Hetawi Kurd* Gazetesi Muessislerine' [To the Honorable Founders of *Hetawi Kurd* Journal], *Hetawi Kurd*, No. 2, pp. 2–3, December 3, 1913, in Malmîsanij, *Kürt Talebe-Hêvî Cemiyeti*.

<sup>38</sup> Nuri Dersimi (1893-1973) comes from a Kurdish tribal background in Dersim. Initially attending a military school but later switching to regular education due to his dislike of the military atmosphere. Dersimi embraced Kurdish nationalism under the influence of his friends. Despite objections from his father, he pursued veterinary studies in Istanbul, where he encountered notable figures like Abdullah Cevdet and the Bedirkhan brothers. In Istanbul, Dersimi witnessed key Ottoman events like the Balkan Wars, the conflict with Italy in Libya, and the rule of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), noting the rise of aggressive Turkish nationalism and its impact on Kurdish identity. During World War I, he served as a veterinarian in Erzincan, striving to prevent Kurdish tribes from clashing with Russia. Later, he attempted to gather Kurdish support for an independent Kurdistan in Sivas. Declined an offer from Mustafa Kemal to join the Anatolian independence movement, he was arrested for a while. Following the failed Kocgiri Kurdish Rebellion, Dersimi sought refuge in Dersim under Seyit Riza's protection before deciding to leave Turkey shortly before the Dersim Rebellion in 1937. Facing rejection for asylum in French Mandate Syria, he fled to the Sanjak of Alexandretta and eventually settled in Aleppo, where he became a Syrian citizen in 1939. Despite not actively engaging in Kurdish literary pursuits in the Levant, Dersimi's life represents the journey of a Kurdish intellectual from the late Ottoman era to the post-Ottoman era. Dersimi's life exemplifies the challenges faced by Kurdish intellectuals amidst the rise of Turkish nationalism. His refusal to assimilate and active involvement in Kurdish movements demonstrate the resilience of Kurdish identity during the period. See, Nuri Dersimi. *Kürdistan Tarihinde Dersim*. Istanbul: Doz Yayınları, September 2004.

knowledge of both Western and Eastern languages, thus aligning with the trajectory of Ottoman modernization. Their legacy culminated in the publication of the inaugural issue of "Hawar" in 1932 in Damascus. This marked a turning point as the magazine introduced the Latin alphabet for Kurdish, which remains in use for Kurmanji to this day. Furthermore, Celadet Bedirkhan, in 1942, launched *Ronahi* as a pictorial supplement to *Hawar*. Kamuran Bedirkhan published *Roja Nu* in Beirut in 1943. Both *Roja Nu* and *Ronahi* shared a common theme of circulating anti-Axis propaganda, underpinned by the belief that an Allied victory would pave the way for an independent Kurdistan. The Bedirkhan brothers sought support from France for their cause.<sup>39</sup>

This strategic alignment with the French was not coincidental. The presence of the French mandate in Greater Syria explains the collaboration with Kurdish intellectuals. On the other hand, the establishment of the Khoybun organization in Beirut, a revolutionary group founded by Kurds escaping Kemalist Turkey, exemplifies the connections fostered by the Soviets. The Khoybun played a role in promoting the Ararat Rebellion, with the Armenian revolutionary federation supporting their efforts financially.<sup>40</sup> The pages of *Roja Nu* and *Ronahi* also featured pro-Soviet propaganda, a reflection of admiration for the Soviet nationalities policy, rather than strict adherence to communist ideology.<sup>41</sup>

To sum up, this thesis explores the challenges of establishing Modern Standard Kurmanji as the national language of the Kurdish people, focusing on historical contexts in French-mandate in the

---

<sup>39</sup> See, A. S. Aktürk, *Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria: Finding a Nation in Exile* (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2013); Barbara Henning, *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts: Continuities and Changes* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> Tejel Gorgas, Jordi. "SSCB ile İlk Karşılaşmalar: Suriye ve Lübnan'daki Milliyetçi Kürt Hareket, 1927-1946." *Kürt Tarihi* no. 41 (2020): 11-15.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Levant. It examines the efforts of Kurdish intellectuals and community leaders from 1932 to 1945, considering the socio-political factors influencing language development. By redefining Kurdish as a broad concept, the study offers a fresh perspective and challenges prevailing narratives. It employs diverse research methods including archival study, library analysis, and ethnography.

The research highlights key milestones in Kurmanji standardization, such as the founding of *Rojo Kurd* in 1912 and the adoption of the Latin alphabet by *Hawar* in 1932. It discusses strategic alliances with the French, exploring their geopolitical impact on collaboration with Kurdish intellectuals. Overall, the study deepens our understanding of Kurmanji language development by unraveling the complex interplay of historical, political, and cultural factors in the Levant.

The next chapter examines Kurmanji standardization in French Syria, addressing topics such as Kurdish migration to Greater Syria, the quest for a new alphabet, and the role of language analysis in the social and political landscape. It also explores the importance of journals like *Hawar*, and the alliances formed through publications like *Ronabi* and *Roja Nu*. These discussions illuminate the complex connections between politics, language, and identity in the Kurmanji language journey in French Syria.

### C. LANGUAGE AND NATION IN EXILE: FRENCH-MANDATE SYRIA

#### 1. ESCAPE TO THE LEVANT

After the foundation of the Turkish Republic and the defeat of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Asia Minor and Kurdistan, most of the Kurdish leaders and intellectuals fled to French-mandated Syria. This movement was primarily not by free choice. Assimilation policies and the Turkish nationalist character of the new regime, which can be described violently secular, left the leading actors with three options: taking refuge in another country, avoiding the Kurdish quest or execution. Some would opt to stay and struggle against the Kemalist regime till the absolute defeat

of the rebellions of 1925 and 1930. Those who were not killed on the battlefield were later sentenced to death by the Ankara Government's Independence Tribunals. On the other hand, some, the majority of whom will be mentioned later in this chapter, would flee to the Levant to start a new nationalist wave in exile. Given the turbulent and bloody nature of the imperial collapse and the formation of Turkish identity on the post-Ottoman lands, Kurdish nationalists' survival chance depended on their escape to safer zones. As part of Kurdish national development and identity building, Greater Syria quickly became a center for Kurmanji language formation. Meanwhile, publishing and speaking in their languages for Kurds was prohibited in Turkey, which was home to most of the Kurdish population. The 1924 constitution ended the idea of the decentralized rule proposed in the 1921 constitution and introduced unitarity, recognizing all citizens as ethnically Turkish.<sup>42</sup>

This process was accompanied by the disappearance of imperial borders. The rising circulation of ideas, goods, and, most importantly, people through the borders arguably gave the borders a sort of agency. As Turkey struggled to make new frontiers, for the sake of preventing any kind of influence over its own Kurds, borderlanders, intellectuals, and local leaders developed more and more transborder perspectives against the consolidation of border regimes by the state. Linking up with this thesis, I will keep in mind the issue of to what extent borderlands played a role in the formation of Kurmanji throughout this chapter. The fact the newly drawn Turkish-Syrian border was primarily based on the railway passing through the region to some extent enabled the Kurds to transcend and go beyond the lines. To be precise, the geographical and political characteristics of the borderland created by the Treaty of Ankara signed by France and the Ankara Government

---

<sup>42</sup> Anayasa Mahkemesi. "1921 Anayasası | Anayasa Mahkemesi." 1921 Anayasası | Anayasa Mahkemesi. Accessed November 27, 2022.

in 1921 did not match the social and demographic realities.<sup>43</sup> The border at some points was drawn to divide certain towns into two parts, depending on the railway. In this case, one part of the same town would be ruled by Turkey while the other was to be under the French mandate. The presence of a new regime in Syria created a safe sanctuary for Kurds, allowing them to flee easily if necessary. To put it another way, Syria, with its small Kurdish population, became a peripheral setting in which to fight for a national cause against Turkey. The flow of Kurds into the Levant region peaked following the defeat of the Sheikh Said Rebellion in 1925. This time, tribal people joined the men of power in fleeing to Syria. Even though there had been some Kurdish enclaves in northern and inner Syria since the rule of the Kurdish Ayyubids in the 13th century, this movement would significantly increase the Kurdish population in the region.

The conversion of the Syrian desert into a Kurdish-populated region paved the way for collaboration with Armenian revolutionaries in the Levant. New types of daily interactions and alliances were about to be formed to liberate “Northern Kurdistan” and “Western Armenia.” The Kurdish National League, Khoybun, founded in Beirut by Kurdish émigrés, was the pinnacle of the Kurdish-Armenian alliance in post-Ottoman space.<sup>44</sup> Headquartered in Beirut, the organization established branches in Damascus, Aleppo, Mardin, Diyarbakır, Siirt, and Silvan, as well as in Paris, London, and Detroit.<sup>45</sup> The organization, which included both intellectual and religious/tribal

---

<sup>43</sup> Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, “The Great Depression and the Making of Turkish-Syrian Border, 1921-1939,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 311-326.

<sup>44</sup> Khoybun/Xoybûn, meaning “being yourself” in Kurdish, see Jordi Tejel Gorgos. *Kürt Milli Cemiyeti Xoybûn*. Istanbul: Avesta, 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Nelida Fuccaro, “Kurds and Kurdish Nationalism in Mandatory Syria: Politics, Culture and Identity” in *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, ed. Abbas Vali, USA: Mazda Publishers, 1980, p.197.

leaders, aimed to launch an armed resistance against the Turkish Republic.<sup>46</sup> This would be realized by the Ararat Rebellion, which lasted from 1927 to 1931.<sup>47</sup> The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) also promoted and reinforced the uprising, which broke out on the border between Turkey and Soviet Armenia. Particularly, the ARF lacking the manpower had the financial and political means to provide for the Kurds.

During the mandate rule, the French authorities were in line with the Turkish government. They used Kurdish presence in the Levant to satisfy negotiate with Turkey over political disputes, including the fate of Sanjak of Alexandretta in 1930s.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, allowing the Kurdish nationalist movement to seep into the region, the French tried to counterbalance the rise of Arab nationalism in Syria.<sup>49</sup> Arab nationalists generally viewed the Kurds in the Levant with suspicion due to their strong ties to the former Ottoman administration. Consequently, the Kurdish

---

<sup>46</sup> The founding members of the group included Celadet Bedirkhan, Memduh Selim, Mehmed Sukru Sekban, Haco Agha, Ramanlı Emin, Ali Rıza, Mustafa Sahin, Bozan Sahin, Kerim Bey, Tefik Bey, Kamil Bey, Bedreddin Agha, and Liceli Fehmi. Celadet was chosen as the leader of the society. See, Rohat Alakom, *Xoybun Orgutu ve Agri Ayaklanması*, Istanbul: Avesta, 2011, p.36.

<sup>47</sup> For the memories of Ihsan Nuri Pasha, leader of the rebellion, on the Ararat see, for example, Ihsan Nuri, *Agri Dagı Iyany*. Istanbul: MED, 1992.

<sup>48</sup> An autonomous sajak under Syrian Mandate rule. On 2nd of September 1938, the assembly of régime spécial declared the independence as Hatay State. In the following year the state became Hatay province of Turkey. This annexation would cause some Kurds to relocate to Syria's interior.

<sup>49</sup> A. S. Aktürk, *Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria: Finding a Nation in Exile* (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2013), 66; Jordi Tejel. *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society*. Routledge, 2009, pp. 4, 17-19, 144; Jordi Tejel. *La Ligue Nationale Kurde en Syrie*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001, pp. 5-11, 35-37; David McDowall. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. I.B. Tauris, 2004, pp. 202-203; Wadie Jwaideh. *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*. Syracuse University Press, 2006, pp. 143-146.

communities in the area generally greeted French mandate with open arms.<sup>50</sup> Despite this, the French imperial discourse in which Kurdish intellectuals lived would shape how they dealt with the issue of nationalism and how they sought the rights lost with the Ottoman Empire's fall. After all, Kurds were no strangers to French discourse. Simply put, most of the leading Kurdish names studied at French-speaking schools beginning in the late nineteenth century. With a good command of the language, some would travel to Paris, Geneva, Lausanne, and other European cities for higher education, which was a common path for late Ottoman modernist youth. Overall, the French acceptance of the Kurdish movement under its mandate would result in significant pro-French favoritism within the movement itself.

## 2. THE BANNER-BEARERS OF KURMANJI: AUTHORS, ACTIVISTS, AND SOLDIERS IN EXILE

It is important to examine the post-Ottoman Kurdish elites in the region and understand who the prominent figures in Kurdish intellectual and political spheres were, as well as what factors led to their unity. In the Levant, the Kurdish movement involved intellectuals, politicians, tribal leaders, and religious figures, all rallying for the basic rights of Kurds. Many of them were former Ottoman subjects who did not opt to become Turkish citizens after the republic was established. This was also true for those advocating language issues, all of whom were men with backgrounds in the Ottoman Empire. Born, educated, and worked within the Ottoman Empire, they eventually concluded that armed conflict with Turkey was not feasible after Kurdish rebellions against Kemalist Turkey. Consequently, they shifted their focus to cultural preservation, using their pens

---

<sup>50</sup> Nelida Fuccaro, "Kurds and Kurdish Nationalism in Mandatory Syria: Politics, Culture and Identity" in *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, ed. Abbas Vali, USA: Mazda Publishers, 1980, p.197.

as weapons. While military efforts were unsuccessful, they hoped cultural activism would ensure the survival of their people and language. Notable figures within this circle include the Bedirkhan brothers, Celadet (1893-1951) and Kamuran (1898-1978), whose contributions are significant for a deeper understanding.

### 2.1. Bedirkhan Brothers: Celadet (1893-1951) and Kamuran (1898-1978)

Celadet (1893-1951) and Kamuran (1898-1978) were born to Emin Bedirkhan (1851-1926) in Istanbul.<sup>51</sup> Their grandfather was the last emir of Emirate of Bohtan, Bedir Khan Beg (1803-1868). Ruling the emirate between 1821 and 1847, Bedir Khan Beg revolted against the Ottoman Empire's centralization and modernization policies. Being defeated, the emirate was dissolved, and the member of the ruling family were sent into exile in Crete.<sup>52</sup> The brothers' father, Emin Bedirkhan, was born in Heraklion, Crete, where the family was in exile. Being pardoned years later, the members of the family took official administrative positions. Emin Bedirkhan was a member of Kurdish Society for Cooperation and Progress and the Society for the Elevation of Kurdistan.<sup>53</sup> These banner-bearers of Kurmanji were educated at the imperial French-speaking high school in Istanbul and received higher education in European cities. Both Celadet and Kamuran worked for various Kurdish journals in the Ottoman realm and Europe, despite coming from a powerful

---

<sup>51</sup> See, Kone Res, *Celadet Bedirxan. Jiyan u Ramanen Wi* [Celadet Bedirkhan, His Life and Ideas]. Stockholm: Jina Nu Press, 1997; A. S. Aktürk, *Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria: Finding a Nation in Exile* (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2013); Barbara Henning, *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts: Continuities and Changes*. University of Bamberg Press, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Cabir Doğan, *Cizre ve Bohtan Emiri Bedirhan Bey* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Afyonkarahisar, 2010), p 206.

<sup>53</sup> Djene Rhys Bajalan. "Princes, Pashas and Patriots: The Kurdish Intelligentsia, the Ottoman Empire and the National Question (1908–1914)." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 2 (2016): 140–57.

Ottoman-Kurdish aristocratic family. They had advanced knowledge of both western and eastern languages, as well as a progressive mindset. They were an integral part of the late Ottoman modernization process. The brothers left the empire just as it was crumbling. The political story leading up to their departure is an excellent example of the brothers' role in the Kurdish movement following World War.

The British Major Edward William Charles Noel (1886-1974) was traveling through Kurdish-populated areas near Damascus and Malatya while Mustafa Kemal was active in Anatolia for the Turkish Independence movement against Allied powers. Celadet and Kamuran went with Major Noel to look into the possibility of an independent Kurdistan.<sup>54</sup> Ali Galip, the governor of the adjoining province, gave the mayor of Malatya the order to stop the Sivas Congress just before the mission party arrived there.<sup>55</sup> Major Noel and the brothers were forced to depart for Syria since the governor's attack plan was unsuccessful and Mustafa Kemal thought they were involved in the scheme.<sup>56</sup> It does not follow that the mission had no long-lasting effects just because it was not politically very successful. Surprisingly, the brothers' reactions to the inquiry visit would influence them intellectually for the rest of their lives. Celadet gathered Kurdish folk songs and tales when visiting his family's hometown for the first time. Some of these works would subsequently be published in Syria's *Hawar* periodical. In addition, it was after this trip that the concept of using Latin letters for Kurdish languages emerged, which will be covered in detail in this chapter. The

---

<sup>54</sup> Officially having modest objectives, Noel was personally remarkably eager about the Kurdish independence. See, E. W. Noel, *Kürdistan 1919: Kürdistan'da özel görevde bulunan binbaş Noel'in günlüğü*. Istanbul: Avesta Yayınları, 1999.

<sup>55</sup> A. S. Aktürk, *Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria: Finding a Nation in Exile* (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2013), 49-50; Andrew Mango. "Ataturk and the Kurds." *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4, 1999, pp. 5-6.

<sup>56</sup> The incident is mentioned by Mustafa Kemal twice in his victorious speech of 1927. Atatürk, *Nutuk* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1995).

brothers departed the empire in 1922 after spending some time in Istanbul and Damascus attempting to win the Allied countries' support for the Kurdish cause.

They arrived in Munich in the same year to pursue higher education in law at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität. The reason behind this was that there were already some family members, including two younger brothers at the same university. Celadet worked as a gardener, waiter, house painter, and typesetter in a publishing company. When he lived in Damascus years later, he used the knowledge he gained from the latter occupation to print and publish *Hawar*.<sup>57</sup> After living in Germany for five years Celadet, in 1925, moved to Egypt, where his eldest brother Sureyya was living. In 1927, he moved to Syria, where he would lead the language formation and standardization of Kurmanji with Kamuran. Celadet's presidency of the *Khoybun* was the milestone of this journey.

## 2.2. Cegerxwin, 1903-1984

*Cegerxwin*, was born as Schmus Hasan in 1903 in the town of Hisar in the Gercus district of today's Batman, Turkey. In 1914, due to the outbreak of World War I, he and his family were compelled to migrate to Amude, Syria.<sup>58</sup> During his youth, he worked as a shepherd and agricultural laborer. At 18, he went to Diyarbakir, where he received religious education in madrassas and was introduced to Kurdish culture and literature. In 1925, he took part in the Sheikh Said Rebellion.<sup>59</sup> Subsequently, he settled in Amude, Syria. In 1928, he started writing poetry and published poems

---

<sup>57</sup> Ronayi Onen, "The Role of Language in the Discursive Construction of the Kurdish Nation: A Case Study on the Kurdish Periodical *Hawar* (1932-1943)" (master's thesis, Istanbul Bilgi University, 2012).p.110.

<sup>58</sup>Cegerxwin 1903 - 1984, <http://www.saradistribution.com/cegerxwin.htm>.

<sup>59</sup> Cegerxwin, *Hayat Hikayem* (Istanbul: Evrensel Basım, 2003), 183-184.

under the pseudonym *Cegerxwin*, meaning "Bloody Heart".<sup>60</sup> He later joined the Khoybun organization (1937).<sup>61</sup> In 1946, he relocated to Qamishli and continued his political work. In the same year, he assumed leadership of the political organization *Civata Azadi u Yekitiya Kurd* (Kurdish Assembly for Freedom and Union). In 1948, he became a member of the Syrian Communist Party. *Cegerxwin*, an influential Kurdish thinker of the 20th century, wrote stories and poetry. He explored Kurdish history, language, and folk literature, creating notable works in these areas. Writing poetry in the Kurmanji dialect was challenging due to the lack of legal recognition for the language, political tensions, and the dominance of classical poetry. However, 1930s opened new opportunities for literary growth, impacting *Cegerxwin's* work. His poems were published in journals like *Hawar*, *Ronahi*, and *Roja Nu* during this time, with *Hawar*, founded in Damascus in 1932 by Bedirkhan brothers, being particularly influential. Despite his religious background, he embraced Marxist ideas, which can be seen in his poetry.<sup>62</sup>

*Cegerxwin's* early poems focus on nature's beauty and love, while also addressing societal issues and norms. Influenced by the aftermath of World War I and Kurdish uprisings like the Sheikh Said Rebellion, he embraced nationalist ideas, reflecting them in his poetry to raise public awareness. His poems were deeply shaped by both Marxist and nationalist beliefs, opposing feudal systems and advocating for equality. He envisioned a socialist society where borders dissolve and ethnic identities coexist freely. *Cegerxwin's* approach to tradition, infused with nationalist sentiments,

---

<sup>60</sup> Cegerxwin literally translates to bloody liver in Kurmanji.

<sup>61</sup> Pirtukgeh Kitaplik. "Cigerxwin." June 2, 2014. <https://www.academia.edu/5431943/Cigerxwin>.

<sup>62</sup> Cemal Umit. "*Emekcilerin Sairi Cigerxwin (Cigerhun / Yuregi Yaralı), Şeyhmus Hasan'ın Hayatı.*" insanokur, May 14, 2014.

transformed classical poetry's mystical elements into depictions of the material world.<sup>63</sup> He pioneered a realistic approach in Kurdish poetry, moving away from classical forms and incorporating folk imagery.<sup>64</sup> By prioritizing the Kurdish language to uphold Kurdish identity, he avoided using Arabic, Persian, and Turkish vocabulary, making his poetry accessible and relatable to the people. This approach contributed to the widespread popularity of his poems, especially after 70s.

### 2.3. Osman Sabri, 1905- 1993

Osman Sabri was born in 1905 in Malatya, Ottoman Empire.<sup>65</sup> Since childhood, he was deeply influenced by the cultural and political environment, shaped by the struggle for Kurdish recognition and self-rule. Witnessing the Sheikh Said revolt in 1925, Sabri's family actively participated in the revolt. The defeat and the execution of Sheikh Said reinforced his dedication to Kurdish identity and the power of writing in political movements. However, his views led to his imprisonment in 1928.<sup>66</sup>

After his release, Sabri sought refuge in French Syria and later British Iraq, escaping the Kemalist regime in Turkey. In Syria, he joined forces with other Kurdish intellectuals and activists, contributing to the growing Kurdish political scene in the region. The formation of Khoybun in 1927 was a significant moment in Kurdish politics, providing Sabri and other leading figures a

---

<sup>63</sup> See, Omer Faruk Yekdes. “*Naşım Hikmet ve Cegerxwin’de Ask Şiirinin İdeolojisi.*” Master Thesis, August 06, 2018. <https://acikbilim.yok.gov.tr/handle/20.500.12812/38482>; O. Celil. *Cegerxwin’in Yasam ve Siir Anlayış.* (İstanbul: Evrensel Basım Yayın, 2004).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 88.

<sup>65</sup> Bianet. “*Osman Sebrî Tarihe Tanıklık Ederken.*” October 30, 2013.

<sup>66</sup> Osman Sabri (1905-1993), [https://kurdishacademy.org/?page\\_id=698](https://kurdishacademy.org/?page_id=698).

platform to struggle for Kurdish rights in Syrian Jazira and Turkey. Despite his efforts to join the revolt in Mount Ararat, travelling through Iraq, Sabri was caught and arrested by British authorities in Mosul. Detained for a year by the British, Sabri was sent into exile in Madagascar.<sup>67</sup> Later moved to Lebanon in 1937, Sabri continued his advocacy through writing and publications in Beirut. Collaborated with Bedirkhan brothers on Kurmanji and education in this language, he supported their efforts for introducing Latin-based Kurdish alphabet.<sup>68</sup> He was among the first poets to publish in Hawar journal. Sabri also penned eight stories in the journal, marking him amongst the most productive contributors of his circle.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, understanding the importance of journalism in advocating for Kurdish rights, he became one of the pioneering Kurdish journalists, in post-WW II era.

Sabri persisted in promoting Kurdish literacy and culture, advocating for widespread adoption of the Kurdish Latin alphabet. Despite numerous challenges, he remained dedicated to his cause of promoting Latin-based Kurmanji. His life overall exemplifies the transformative power of language in the pursuit of national freedom.

#### 2.4. Nuredin Zaza, 1919-1988

Nureddin Zaza, originally named Yusuf Ziya, was born in 1919 in the Maden district of Elazığ.<sup>70</sup> His life took a significant turn after the Sheikh Said rebellion, during which his father and an older

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Emin Bozan, *Ciroka Kurmanci ya Modern di Kovara Haware de* (master's thesis, University of Kurdistan, 2015), 53-57.

<sup>70</sup> Dilaver Doger. *Bejera Neteweparez Di Kovara Haware De* (master's thesis, 2017), 89.

brother were detained. Later, he and his elder brother sought refuge in French Syria.<sup>71</sup> Zaza's education started in Damascus, where he attended French schools. Later, he pursued higher education, graduating with a degree in political science from the French University of St. Joseph in Beirut, Lebanon. Following the end of World War II, he moved to Switzerland, where he studied at the University of Lausanne.<sup>72</sup>

Throughout his time in Syria, Zaza actively engaged with the Kurdish community in the Levant. In 1938, he played a crucial role in establishing the Kurdish Youth Club (*Klûba Civanên Kurd*) alongside fellow intellectuals such as Cegerxwin, Qedrican, Osman Sabri, and Celadet Bedirkhan.<sup>73</sup> He contributed articles and short stories to publications like *Hawar* and *Ronahi*. Celadet Bedirkhan provided Zaza with support and encouragement, even calling him the Kurdish Chekhov.<sup>74</sup> His literary contributions went beyond original works, including translations and adaptations. Zaza translated or adapted the works of several renowned authors into Kurmanji, including De Lamenneais, D'Alphonse Daudet, Frank Stockten, and Maurice Bouchor.<sup>75</sup> Themes of knowledge, patriotism, and education dominate his storytelling. His narratives frequently highlight the importance of these values for Kurdish people.

---

<sup>71</sup>“Institut Kurde de Paris – Bulletin de Liaison et d’information,” 1988, p.3.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Nureddin Zaza, accessed May 2, 2024, <http://kaynakca.hacettepe.edu.tr/kisi/5477520/nureddin-zaza>

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Emin Bozan. *Ciroka Kurmanci ya Modern di Kovara Haware de*. (master's thesis, 2015), pp. 35-36.

## 2.5. Qedrican, 1911-1972

Qedrican, originally known as Abdulkadir Can, was born in 1911 in the Derik district of Mardin, Ottoman Empire. He pursued his primary education in Derik and later attended Konya Teachers' High School. Following the 1925 Sheikh Said uprising, he fled to Sanjak of Alexandretta and eventually settled in Damascus, Syria. Qedrican's literary contributions, including poetry and short stories, were published in Kurdish intellectual publications such as *Hawar* and *Ronahi*. He in total published seven stories in *Hawar*.<sup>76</sup> He heavily relies on personal memories within his narratives. The elements of his own life are evident in his all stories. However, his storytelling often falls short in terms of language and imaginative flair. Regarding his poetry, he earned recognition as a key figure in modern Kurmanji. His writings covered themes of internationalism and Kurdish national consciousness.

Analyzing the life stories of Celadet, Kamuran, Cegerxwin, Osman Sabri, and Nureddin Zaza reveals their pivotal roles in the Kurdish intellectual and nationalist movements during the post-Ottoman period. Despite their varied backgrounds, they shared common threads that shed light on the Kurdish quest for identity. Celadet and Kamuran were instrumental in the making and modernization of late Ottoman Kurdishness, using their education and progressive outlook to lead Kurdish causes. Their efforts, such as advocating for an independent Kurdistan and standardizing the Kurmanji language, show their dedication. Cegerxwin's contributions to Kurdish literature and culture shaped the trajectory of Kurdish nationalism through his poetry and advocacy for Kurdish language and identity, blending Marxist and nationalist ideologies. Osman Sabri's commitment to

---

<sup>76</sup> Emin Bozan. *Ciroka Kurmanci ya Modern di Kovara Haware de*. (master's thesis, 2015), pp. 35-36.

Kurdish rights, expressed through his writing and journalism, demonstrates the transformative role of language in the pursuit of national freedom, despite facing persecution and exile. Nureddin Zaza's literary endeavors and engagement with the Kurdish community across borders exemplify the interconnectedness of Kurdish intellectuals. His emphasis on knowledge and education reflects a shared aspiration for Kurdish empowerment. Qedrican's literary works remain invaluable for Kurmanji as they reflect personal memories and contribute to Kurdish cultural heritage.

In sum, biographies of these men provide valuable insights into the nature of the Kurdish nationalist movement in the Levant. It is crucial to see that all these men were once Ottoman-subjects who had to relocate to the region to escape the Kemalist regime. Their collective efforts to preserve their language have left a lasting impact on what Kurmanji today is. It is worth noting that the Bedirkhan brothers maintained significant power in the Kurdish community based in the Levant, with intellectuals, politicians, and community leaders all looking to them for guidance. Additionally, the brothers controlled the movement's primary media platforms as owners and editors. As this study delves into language issues, it emphasises the brothers' roles as representatives of this community.

### 3. LANGUAGE AS AN ACTOR

Language is among the essential components of the making of a nation. This is why many nation-building processes have been through some sort of language standardization. Creating a unified, mutually understandable, and standard language for a nation, that is being imaged, is vital. In the case of Kurds, this formation remains unaccomplished.<sup>77</sup> The issue of classification and definition

---

<sup>77</sup> There are historically plenty of different discussions on the issue of nation-formation. I mainly, for this section, benefit from one book in this regard. See, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso Books, 2016).

of the languages of Kurds remains open to further discussion. It is still controversial what Kurds and Kurdish stand for. As this thesis only deals with Kurmanji, I will not be concerned with those discussions. Accordingly, I focus on Kurdish intellectual efforts to create a new alphabet. This is since forming/or selecting an alphabet is the first step in standardizing a language. I believe that attempts to create an alphabet that encompassed all languages and dialects of Kurds failed. Although the Kurdish leaders and thinkers in the Levant envisioned a unified Kurdish with a single alphabet, they were potentially aware that their endeavors were limited to Kurmanji and Turkey-centric by nature. I will unpack and discuss this argument throughout the section.

Language standardization was not a concern for late-Ottoman Kurdish urban intellectuals. What mattered most to Ottoman Kurdish thinkers was to create their own platforms within the broader modernist circles of the empire. This is to say, they struggled to be a part of a larger intellectual scene desiring modernity and civilization within the imperial realm. Turkish, French, and Persian were all used by Kurds who spoke a variety of languages and dialects during the Ottoman Empire. The issue of language only emerged as an integral and essential symbol of national liberation among Kurds during the interwar period. With the emergence and rise of Kurdish nationalism from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, a unified national language became necessary for nationalist claims.<sup>78</sup> National language and literature were the first steps toward establishing a national territorial entity. In the era of rising repression of Kurds in Kemalist Turkey, language politics emerged as a battleground in French Syria. In Turkey, Kurdish use and publication were all prohibited in 1924. The Kurds were considered backward and uncivilized mountain people by the Turkish government. As a result, rather than national claims, the Kurdish rebellions of 1925, 1927, and 1937 were associated with backwardness and religious reactionaries against the secular character

---

<sup>78</sup> The issue of emergence and rise of Kurdish nationalism is discussed elsewhere in this thesis.

of the new regime by Turkey.<sup>79</sup> In this context, language took center stage in the Kurdish movement. The strategy involved standardizing the language and emphasizing its richness and historical depth as a counteraction to Turkish propaganda.<sup>80</sup> Celadet in his open letter to Turkey's Mustafa Kemal Atatürk would compare Kurmanji and Turkish to claim that Kurmanji is older and more copious than the Turkish language.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, on one hand, seeking sole military actions against Turkey would not be welcome by the French rule in the Levant. On another hand, the problem of low literacy among the Kurds was already part of ongoing discussions since the late 19th century. Education through language was considered a way of national awakening. Arguably, this concern was not irrelevant as the Kurdish national struggle had been limited to small intellectual circles spreading all over the region and Europe. Going beyond the physical and mental frontiers, forming a unified language was vital. This situation necessitated a new alphabet, which was introduced in the Hawar journal.

---

<sup>79</sup> Three significant Kurdish Uprisings occurred in early Republican Turkey: Sheikh Said in 1925, Ararat in 1927–1931, and Dersim in 1937. Allegedly all were related to Kurdish movement in French Syria. Thousands of people were reportedly slain and forcibly transferred, according to several accounts. Some cities were razed to the ground, while others were built for assimilation. Kurds were forbidden from speaking, teaching, and circulating in their own languages, and Kurdish geographic names were replaced. In 1991, the prohibition against speaking Kurdish was repealed. See, Andrew Mango. “Atatürk and the Kurds.” *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4, 1999, pp. 1–25.

<sup>80</sup> Barbara Henning, *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts: Continuities and Changes* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2018), 567-568.

<sup>81</sup> Celadet Ali Bedirhan, *Mustafa Kemal'e Mektup*, 1933 (Istanbul: Avesta, 2020).

## D. HAWAR JOURNAL, 1932-1943

### 1. LATINIZATION AND HAWAR

*Hawar* is the voice of knowledge, which means being aware of oneself.  
It is the first step toward salvation and grace. [...] First and foremost, our *Hawar* will introduce our language as language is the first condition of existence.<sup>82</sup>

In late 1931, Celadet Bedir Khan received permission of establishing a journal from the French authorities in the Levant. This bi-monthly journal was titled *Hawar*, meaning call for help in Kurmanji. The oratory issue of *Hawar* was published on the 15th of May 1932, in Damascus. Being the first Kurdish literary magazine in the Levant, overall, 57 issues were published between 1932 and 1943. The distinctive feature of *Hawar* is to be the primary Kurdish journal in Latin script. Still today the Romanized alphabet introduced in this journal is used for Kurmanji. However, the first 23 issues were published both in Arab and Latin scripts. It was from the 24th issue onward that only the Latin alphabet was used. The editorials by doing so aimed at easing the transition for the readers. The journal did stick to the mandate's interests in the region and beyond. That is why some of the articles and news were also published in French along with Kurmanji. Evidently, the French authorities allowed the publication since it was non-political.

“We founded our journal, *Hawar*, exclusively for scientific and literary purposes. It will therefore aim at filling a big gap existing in the Kurdish nation. The journal will in no way deal with politics.”<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> “Hawar dengê zanîne ye. Zanîn xwe nasîn e. Xwe nasîn ji me re rêya felat û xwesiyê vedike. Her kesê ku xwe nas dike; dikare xwe bide nas kirin. Hawara me berî her tistî heyîna zimanê me dê bide nas kirin. Lewma ku ziman şerta heyîne a pêşîn e.” For more see, *Hawar*, issue 1, May 15, 1932.

<sup>83</sup> *Hawar*, issue 1, 1932.

As stated in the first issue, the editors make clear that they would not get involved in politics. Although the French government financially supported Hawar and French institutions were the journal's primary subscribers, the scope of the support was not unlimited. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the French did not want to upset Turkey over the appearance of Kurds in the region. Moreover, the Kurdish community in the Levant was relatively small and lacked strength when contrasted with other ethnic groups, particularly the Arabs. Due to the ethnoreligious nature of French policies in the area, the situation of the Kurds was somewhat ambiguous. The French, in dividing the Levant into various states and regions, primarily considered religion as their guiding principle. This approach is evident in the establishment of a separate Druze state at one point. Administratively, the Kurdish population was affiliated with the Sunni areas of Aleppo and Jazira. The French rule is best described as “a heterogeneous assemblage of diverse, incomplete and overlapping regimes of practices.”<sup>84</sup> Namely, Muslim Kurds did not fit into the framework of mandate rule, which was based on religious divisions. As a result, the Kurds were unable to gain any political rights in the Levant. All they could achieve was limited recognition for cultural activities that were completely in line with French interests and desires. The French authorities permitted private cultural endeavors within the Kurdish community. However, despite this tolerance, they did not establish any state-funded Kurdish schools in the region.

---

<sup>84</sup> Daniel Neep, *Occupying Syria under the French Mandate. Insurgency, Space and State Formation* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), p. 34.



grammar book on Kurmanji, this bilingual guide was published in Rome in 1787.<sup>90</sup> The use of Arabic script for Kurmanji was not challenged till the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Armenian alphabet was suggested by some to be adopted.<sup>91</sup> The first Kurmanji textbook in Armenian letters came out in the 1860's Istanbul.<sup>92</sup> Its main aim was to teach Kurmanji-speaking Armenian children the basics of the Armenian language. Indeed, this was part of the broader picture in which this alphabet gained some popularity among the Ottoman intellectuals for Turkish as well. Additionally, in one of the Kurdish magazines of the 1910s, as part of the debates over a new alphabet, Armenian script was again promoted by some along with Latin. Dr. Abdullah Cevdet, among the founder of the Committee of Union and Progress, led the discussion concerning the romanization of letters.<sup>93</sup> As per him, the Arabic script in use was insufficient and hard to learn.<sup>94</sup> Although this desire was not realized, in 1928, Arab Shamilov and Dr. Marogulov, formed a Kurdish alphabet based on Latin letters in Soviet Armenia.<sup>95</sup> In 1930, T. Wahbi also created his version of Latinized Kurdish

---

<sup>90</sup> First Kurmanji grammar guided was written in late 17th century by Eli Teremaxi. See, Michiel Leezenberg. "Eli Teremaxî and the Vernacularization of Medrese Learning in Kurdistan." *Iranian Studies* 47, no. 5 (2014): 713–33.

<sup>91</sup> The Armenian alphabet was kind of popular among some of the Ottoman intellectuals during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Due to linguistic and phonetic challenges the Arabic script was considered by Ottoman Turks insufficient to show the vowels in the Turkish. The Kurds of empire mostly argued for this alphabet because of political and historical reasons: Claiming that Kurds and Armenians are of the same origins. See, Kevork Pamukciyan, *Ermeni Harfli Türkçe Metinler* (Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 2022).

<sup>92</sup> Mgrdich Dikranian. 1860. *Aypenaran Kourderen yev Hayeren*. Istanbul: Hovannes Mouhendisian.

<sup>93</sup> Read more into A. Cevdet's life and ideological stance, Mehmed Şükrü Hanioglu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi* (Istanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1981).

<sup>94</sup> *Roji Kurd*, Issue 1, 1913.

<sup>95</sup> Dzhaliil Dzhaliile, *Kürt Halk Taribinden 13 İlginç Yaprak* (İstanbul: Evrensel Basım, 2007); "Rya T'eze and the Kurds in Armenia | Special Collections," September 7, 2021. <https://specialcollections.exeter.ac.uk/2021/09/07/rya-teze-and-the-kurds-in-armenia/>.

alphabet in Baghdad. Evidently, the idea of romanization was not totally new to the Kurds. It did have its origins in the Ottoman and Russian imperial eras as part and parcel of modernization and reform. Perhaps, in this case, the question to be raised is why the Bedirkhan Brothers prevailed in the process but no other actors.

Some historians, including J. Tejel, think that the brothers somehow wanted to present themselves and their family as experts on Kurdishness.<sup>96</sup> This was the motive behind why Celadet proposed to cast the dialect of his ancestors' homeland as the standard. By doing so, they also kept the monopoly in the field.<sup>97</sup> Keeping in mind that none of the early efforts are publicly recalled and commemorated, the argument gains wide currency. Particularly, Celadet is considered the father and savior of Kurmanji in Kurdish nationalist historiography as the 15<sup>th</sup> of May marks the Kurdish Language Day when Hawar first came out. Worthy of note, the fact that the brothers were members of the Bedirkhan family should be highlighted. The Bedirkhans ruled the autonomous Botan principality between 1338 and 1855.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, the brothers' uncle Miqdad Mithat was the founder of the first Kurmanji newspaper named *Kurdistan*, first published in 1898' s Cairo.<sup>99</sup> Overall, the brothers represented the powerful days of the Kurds. For many, they were the experts of Kurmanji even though they were lawyers by education. Being among the last descendants of the Ottoman- Kurdish ruling elites, they were the symbol of the national struggle initiated by their

---

<sup>96</sup> See, Jordi Tejel Gorgas. *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil*, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Peter Lang Verlag, 2021) accessed Nov 27, 2022.

<sup>97</sup> Barbara Henning, *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts: Continuities and Changes* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2018), 568.

<sup>98</sup> Ahmet Serdar Aktürk. "Family, Empire, and Nation: Kurdish Bedirkhanis and the Politics of Origins in a Changing Era." *Journal of Global South Studies* 35, no. 2 (2018): 390-423.

<sup>99</sup> Deniz Ekinçi, *Kurdish Identity, Islamism, and Ottomanism: The Making of a Nation in Kurdish Journalistic Discourse (1898-1914)* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022), 26.

grandfather in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in Ottoman Kurdistan. I think this all explains why the Hawar alphabet, despite its shortcomings, is still the one in use for Kurmanji. Celadet believed that the adoption of the Latin-based Kurdish alphabet was urgent. He stated what follows:

"We started to publish '*Hawar*', and we introduced our own alphabet to both Kurds and others. We now have an achievement at hand, an alphabet, and a magazine. For me, the most appropriate thing for the time being would be to do our best to advance this alphabet until such a day that circumstances leave us no choice but to modify it. Having said that, I must reiterate that we are always eager to achieve unity, and the aim of our endeavor is exactly that. We are advancing with steadfast steps towards our aim, and we will not stop. As our initiative has already been delayed, we can no longer afford to wait any longer."<sup>100</sup>

To speak of the scope, the new alphabet was founded on the assumption that what is called Kurdish is a single language. Indeed, it is rather an umbrella term to address all languages spoken by those historically referred to as Kurds.<sup>101</sup> As I for this project argue that Kurmanji is by itself a language rather than a dialect, I do not use the term Kurdish language(s). However, aiming at making a unified nation, Hawar's editors came up with the traditional idea of a single Kurdish with three main dialects: the north, the south, and the northwest. The first stands for Kurmanji and

---

<sup>100</sup> Ronayi Onen, "The Role of Language in the Discursive Construction of the Kurdish Nation: A Case Study on the Kurdish Periodical Hawar (1932-1943)" (master's thesis, Istanbul Bilgi University, 2012). ["ji lew re me dest bi derxistina Hawarê kir û alfabeya xwe ji Kurd û biyaniya re daznin. Îro di meydanê de tiştekî çêkirî heye. Kovarek û alfabeyek. Tek dilê min ji bona îro ya çêtir û rastir ev e ku em hêla xwe bidin û vê alfabeyê heta hengî ku muhceta 'edilandinê bikvêt pêşjyê û rêl ime bigrit pêşve bibin. Digel vê hindê divêt ez careke di jî bêjim ku em her gav mildarî yekîtiyê ne û armanca xebata me yekîtiyê. Em bigavên bi vîn û hişek berb armanca xwe ve diçin û nasekinin. Ji berk u destpêkirina me ji xwe bi derengî ketiye. Em nema dikarin di hêviyê de bisekinin."]

<sup>101</sup> To learn more on the history of "Kurdish" see, Encyclopedia Iranica Foundation, "Kurdish Language i. History of the Kurdish Language," RSS, accessed November 27, 2022.

according to the journal, the northern dialect is spoken by Kurds in Turkish-occupied Kurdistan, the Caucasus, the Republic of Erivan, Syria, northernmost Iraq, and Urmia of Persia.<sup>102</sup> In line with the goals of the journal, the term Kur(d)manji was used instead of Kurmanji. They preferred calling it in such a way because they believed that there was no difference between the terms Kurd and Kurmanji. Additionally, it is worthy of note, what is considered Kurdish in this journal is different than today's consensus. To illustrate, although the Kurds in Iran's Kermanshah and Lorestan regions consider their language as part of Kurdish, Hawar does not mention them. This might be because of the difficulty of categorizing and analyzing the plenty of subdialects existing there. Regardless, the editors were Kurmanji-focused, which they thought of being the prime language of the Kurds. So, promoting unified Kurdish meant promoting Kurmanji, I would argue. Moreover, the new alphabet was designed to be as like the Turkish one as possible. In 1928, Turkey, as part of Kemalist reforms, introduced a Latinized alphabet for modern Turkish. By taking it as a reference point, Celadet wanted to make it easier for Turkey's Kurds to learn the Hawar alphabet in the future.<sup>103</sup> As Kurds in the north would be familiar with Turkish letters, this motivation is understandable. However, it still demonstrates that the alphabet efforts were Turkey-centric.

Celadet and Kamuran believed that politically the Kurds were in jail. The Ottoman Empire, which represented the patriarch figure, was no longer present. It was then necessary for the Kurds to receive their share in the empire's heritage. This is to say that other components, such as Albanians, Arabs, Greeks, Armenians, and others, all established independent countries. Only Kurds were barred from doing so. Overall, the Romanized alphabet was arguably part of the agenda to modernize the Kurds for making a unified nation. It would make it possible for Europeans to

---

<sup>102</sup> Hawar, issue 2, 1932.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Joyce Blau. By Mansur Elicin. Paris, August 10, 2022.

follow the Kurds and the other way around. The concept of a unified Kurdish was the key to the prison in which the Kurds were assimilated and executed, argues the issue marking the first anniversary of Hawar's publication.<sup>104</sup> All things considered, one may ask if it is possible to claim that alphabet attempts were successful.

On the one hand, it is critical to consider that Kurmanji still has no official status anywhere. Despite being the mother tongue of approximately 20 million people, it has no official status in Turkey.<sup>105</sup> Kurmanji is also used in the North and East Syria Administration. However, the two cases are too complicated and problematic to be discussed in this project. As a result, there was no historical institution to improve the new alphabet. Until the early 1980s, the alphabet was only used in a limited way by a few intellectuals. Kurmanji, to be specific, was not an institutionalized language of education, publication, television, and the press. It was a language spoken by millions on the streets and at home. On the other hand, the formation of the Hawar alphabet as mentioned earlier was also challenging. Financially, the efforts were dependent on French and Armenian support. By the end of French rule and the foundation of the Syrian Arab Republic in 1946, all the endeavors came to an end, as it was not possible to maintain the movement anymore.<sup>106</sup> That is why the alphabet, which was created without institutional support, did not spread widely.

---

<sup>104</sup> Hawar, 1933. See, A. S. Aktürk, *Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria: Finding a Nation in Exile* (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2013).

<sup>105</sup> See, Mesut Yegen, "'Prospective-Turks' or 'Pseudo-Citizens': Kurds in Turkey," *Middle East Journal* 63, no. 4 (2009): 597–615, accessed June 28, 2024; Mehmet Şerif Derince, "A Break or Continuity? Turkey's Politics of Kurdish Language in the New Millennium," *Dialectical Anthropology* 37, no. 1 (2013): 145–152, accessed June 28, 2024.

<sup>106</sup> The foundation of independent Syria as an exclusively Arab republic ceased the Kurdish cultural progress achieved under the mandate system. Pan-Arabist character prevailing in newly founded country sought to assimilate the Kurds through Arabification of Syrian Kurdistan.

To sum up, the purpose of this chapter is to provide the audience with a brief overview of the formation of a new alphabet in French Syria. Even though the Bedirkhan brothers would argue otherwise, I believe the alphabet was limited to Kurmanji. It was created for Kurmanji, but not for all languages of the Kurds. The brothers' unfulfilled attempt was motivated by the desire for a unified Kurdish language. The alphabet represented the wish to form a nation out of the Kurds scattered throughout the region. In other words, an independent Kurdistan was envisioned throughout the Kurdish lands of French Syria, British Iraq, Turkey, Persia, and Armenia. However, the Kurds in the north were the focus. The fact that the alphabet was designed in accordance with Turkish proves the movement's Turkey-centricity.<sup>107</sup> This Turkey-centric character of the Kurdish movement, evident in both linguistic and political dimensions, highlights the interplay between regional geopolitics and the pursuit of Kurdish autonomy and identity.

## 2. IMAGINED KURMANJI FOR THE KURDS

As previously mentioned, the *Hawar* school advocated for the unity of the Kurdish language(s). Kurdish elites in the Levant contended that there was a singular Kurdish language, *Kurdî*.<sup>108</sup> Since the focus of this study does not include language classification, there won't be an in-depth analysis

---

<sup>107</sup> In her thesis, Ronayi Onen mentions Celadet's experiences described in *Hawar* journal when he traveled with Major Noel to Kurdish cities. During their visit to the Rewan tribe in the mountains of Malatya, Celadet conceived the idea of a Latin alphabet for Kurds. Major Noel, who spoke Sorani and Kurmanji, was collecting words. Meanwhile, Celadet was gathering folk songs, stories, and other folklore materials. Celadet noticed during their journey that Major Noel could read his notes more easily than he could himself. This realization convinced Celadet that reading in the Latin script was easier in Kurmanji. He struggled with distinguishing certain letters in his handwriting, while Major Noel, accustomed to Latin letters, had no such difficulty. This led Celadet to decide to create a Latin-based alphabet for Kurds, which he later realized via *Hawar*, in 1932.

<sup>108</sup> The term "*Kurdî*" translates literally to "Kurdish," whether it refers to the Kurdish as language or denotes something associated with or characteristic of the Kurds.

of the various languages and dialects spoken by Kurds. Instead, the aim is to acknowledge that Kurds comprise a diverse linguistic group, with Kurmanji being one of the languages within this diversity. Furthermore, the modernization of the Kurdish language was predominantly limited to Kurmanji, primarily because the elites were Kurmanji speakers. Consequently, this section seeks to examine how Kurmanji is portrayed and envisioned by the contributors of the *Hawar* journal., I will also touch upon their linguistic stances in relation to Sorani language, which Hawar argues is a Kurdish dialect.

Introducing the Latin-based alphabet, Celadet published diverse articles addressing language, grammar, and lexicon issues. He made considerable efforts not only to standardize Kurmanji but also to shape a new and modern language. Consequently, *Hawar* often included a glossary section aimed at promoting new words. Despite the discussions within the pages of *Hawar*, the term "Kurdish" typically referred to Kurmanji. Kurmanji, in a way, served as the lingua franca among the intellectuals associated with the journal. The Bedirkhan brothers, Osman Sabri (1905–1993), Qedrican (1911–1972), N. Zaza (1919- 1988), and Cegerxwin (1903-1983) all wrote in Kurmanji. There were only a few pieces in Sorani, authored by individuals from Iraqi Kurdistan. Therefore, the language being developed and envisioned was primarily Kurmanji. Perhaps the intellectuals envisioned Kurmanji as the foundational language for a unified Kurdish language. However, simultaneously, Sorani was undergoing a distinct standardization process. Under Iraqi-British rule, Sorani followed a separate trajectory, still being written in Arabic script. *Ronabi* Onen illustrates that despite the divergence in standardization processes between Kurmanji and Sorani, the idea of uniting both remained a significant focus of discussion within the pages of *Hawar*.<sup>109</sup> Accordingly,

---

<sup>109</sup> Ronayi Onen, "The Role of Language in the Discursive Construction of the Kurdish Nation: A Case Study on the Kurdish Periodical *Hawar* (1932-1943)" (master's thesis, Istanbul Bilgi University, 2012), 156.

Osman Sabri and Cegerxwin were prominent figures advocating for the unification of the languages of Kurds. Sabri proposed the establishment of a committee comprising members from various regions of Kurdistan. The committee's purpose would be to work towards bridging the differences among the spoken languages and dialects over time.<sup>110</sup> On the other hand, Cegerxwin took a more radical approach to the issue. He proposed to eliminate some languages and dialects:

- 1- A council of knowledgeable Kurds, proficient in all Kurdish dialects from across Kurdistan, should convene.
- 2- A soft, pleasant dialect, commonly spoken by most Kurds, should be selected as the standard. Other dialects should be phased out. If necessary, essential words can be borrowed from the phased-out dialects.<sup>111</sup>

“By adopting this approach, only around 2 million Kurds will be affected negatively. Conversely, if we attempt to amalgamate all dialects into one, it will suffer approximately 9-10 million Kurds. This strategy shows the practices of other nations, who have typically favored one of the more "pleasant" dialects and phased out the others.”<sup>112</sup>

Reading through the pages of *Hawar* reveals that intellectuals were firm in their belief in the existence of a single Kurdish language, while acknowledging the presence of different dialects and sub-dialects. Some among them aimed to bring these dialects closer together through merging efforts. However, it is evident today that they failed in doing so. This failure can be attributed to several factors, including the fact that Kurds reside in different nation-states and lack the necessary

---

<sup>110</sup> Osman Sabri, “Sehiti Le bo Zimanî Kurdi-3”, *Hawar*, issue 22, pp.1-2.

<sup>111</sup> Cegerxwin, “Sehiti Le bo Zimanî Kurdi-4”, *Hawar*, issue 23, p.6.

<sup>112</sup> Cegerxwin, “Sehiti Le bo Zimani Kurdi-4”, *Hawar*, issue 23, p.6.

resources for such endeavors. Especially during the interwar period, interactions among different Kurdish communities were extremely limited. Today, among the languages spoken by Kurds, Kurmanji and Sorani are the only standardized languages. Southern Kurdish, an umbrella term for referring to any language or dialect spoken by Kurds in Southwestern Iran, remains far from standardization. Similarly, the *Zaza* language faces similar challenges in terms of standardization. Regarding the pursuit of language unification within the context of *Hawar*, bidialectal attitude was not unprecedented to Kurdish intellectuals.<sup>113</sup> As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, there were Kurdish publications in the Late Ottoman Empire that were being published in both Kurmanji and Sorani. This historical context underscores the long-standing recognition and acceptance of the linguistic diversity within the Kurdish community, while *Hawar*'s stance reflects efforts towards linguistic unity through publications.

### 3. IMAGINED KURDS: MAKING OF A PEOPLE ON PAGES OF *HAWAR*

“A Nation that lacks awareness of its past or future cannot truly claim ownership of itself. Nations or individuals devoid of self-awareness are destined to be enslaved, belonging to others.”<sup>114</sup>

In his 1912 oratory article in *Roju Kurd*, Abdullah Cevdet (1869 –1932) contends that a developing nation requires a documented history. He further asserted that such a nation must recognize the significance of its historical narrative for shaping future aspirations or ideals. Kurdish intellectuals in the Levant shared a similar trajectory, influenced by figures like Abdullah Cevdet and other Ottoman Kurds. The *Hawar* journal, led by Bedirkhan brothers, engaged with defining Kurdish

---

<sup>113</sup> Ronayi Onen, "The Role of Language in the Discursive Construction of the Kurdish Nation: A Case Study on the Kurdish Periodical *Hawar* (1932-1943)" (master's thesis, Istanbul Bilgi University, 2012), 156.

<sup>114</sup> Abdullah Cevdet, "Bir Hitab", *Roju Kurd*, issue 1.

identity, establishing linguistic boundaries, and envisioning future ideals. Encouraging people, particularly the youth, to act was also a prominent theme.

### 3.1. The Past: History and Kurds

The earliest account of Kurdish history, authored by a Kurd, is Sharafkhan Bidlisi's (1543 – 1603/04), *Sarafnama* dating back to 1597. This work delves into the narratives of Kurdish dynasties and states, tracing their trajectory from the 10th century onward. It was actively circulated by Kurdish intellectuals of the late Ottoman period, aiming to construct a coherent narrative of Kurdish history. Abdullah Cevdet in his same article expressed strong criticism of this situation.<sup>115</sup> According to him, relying solely on such an account was insufficient for Kurds to fully grasp their own past and envision their future. He believed that any emerging nation must actively engage in shaping its own history. From a nationalist standpoint, establishing a shared historical narrative is as crucial as developing a standardized written language. Hobsbawm similarly argues that a nation's identity is deeply rooted in its past; what distinguishes one nation from another is its historical narrative, which is crafted and perpetuated by historians.<sup>116</sup> The intellectuals in the Levant were conscious of this reality. Hence, they actively penned works on topics related to history. In their endeavor, they explored various sources that could shed light on Kurdish history. Nevertheless, Kurdish intellectuals understood this undertaking was no simple task. Regrettably, they faced a scarcity of available sources on Kurdish history. Of course, *Sarafnama* was among the suggested sources. Kamuran Bedirkhan recommended the readers to consult Evliya Celebi's (1611 – 1682)

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> E.J Hobsbawm, 'Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today', in *Mapping the Nation*, G. Balakrishnan (ed.), London: Verso, 1996, pp. 255-66. P.255.

*Seyahatname* (book of travels).<sup>117</sup> Evliya Celebi, who lived in the 17th century, spent a considerable amount of time in Ottoman Kurdistan, during which he documented his observations and experiences regarding the Kurds. Among contemporaries, *A Short History of the Kurds, and Kurdistan* by Muhammad Amin Zaki (1880-1948) was also highlighted in the pages of the *Havar* journal. Like many other Kurdish-Ottoman elites, Zaki studied at the Imperial Military Academy in Istanbul and later served in various ministerial roles in Iraq.<sup>118</sup> Published in 1931, this book has remained a significant reference point to this day. Kurdish intellectuals also romanticized the illustrious past and longed for the authority that was relinquished after the demise of the last Kurdish emirate of Botan in the mid-19th century, a loss further intensified by the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The Bedirkhan family embodied this aspiration, as Celadet and Kamuran came from the ruling lineage of the Botan emirate. As a result, they represented the majesty and entitlement to self-determination for the Kurds. The fact that the brothers referred to themselves as princes further underscores this belief. Apart from that, some historical figures were also covered on the pages of *Havar*. Saladin (1137-1193), arguably the most prominent historical figure covered in *Havar*, holds significant importance for the Kurds. By founding the Ayyubid Dynasty and ruling over regions such as Egypt, Upper Mesopotamia, and Hijaz, Saladin left a mark on Kurdish history. His role in bringing an end to the Crusader rule in Jerusalem has earned him respect among Muslims. As a result, Saladin served as a reference for Kurdish intellectuals in the Levant who sought to demonstrate that Kurds also possessed a rich and glorious history. In one of his articles, Celadet poses the question: "Was Saladin a Kurd? Is not that sufficient to affirm the

---

<sup>117</sup> Kamuran Bedirkhan, "Berê Çawan bû, Çend Rûpelên Dîrokî", *Havar*, issue 16, pp. 2-4.

<sup>118</sup> Transport minister (1925-1927), Education minister (1927-1928), Defence minister (1929), and Economics and finance minister (1931).

greatness of a nation?"<sup>119</sup> Indeed, the question itself underscores the significance attributed to Saladin. His establishment of an empire was often cited to demonstrate that the Kurdish people were not only capable of ruling emirates or tribal confederations but also of governing vast territories. Interestingly, in an article by B. Segman,<sup>120</sup> in *Hawar*, Saladin was criticized for leaving no distinct signs of his Kurdish identity. Instead, he was portrayed as having established a Muslim empire rather than a specifically Kurdish one.

### 3.2. The Present: Territorial Aspirations

In the context of territoriality, the *Hawar* school endeavored to delineate the borders of Kurdistan, a region they envisioned and actively strived for. Osman Sabri (1905–1993), drew the border of Northern Kurdistan to include areas such as Bayezid, Erzurum, Erzincan, Van, Hakkari, Siirt, Mardin, Diyarbakir, Bidlis, Mus, Elazig, Dersim, Malatya, Maras, Antep, Kilis, and Urfa.<sup>121</sup> It is remarkable that these provinces encompass not only Kurmanji-speaking regions but also Zaza-speaking areas like Dersim and Elazig. This inclusion stems from the historical connection of Zaza-speaking people to the Kurdish community, evidenced by their classification as Kurdish tribes by European missionaries and the Ottoman administration. Additionally, it is essential to acknowledge that both the Sheik Said and Dersim rebellions were primarily led by Zaza-speaking Kurds, further highlighting their integral role within the Kurdish historical narrative in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the contrary, it is noteworthy that some of the provinces mentioned are home to

---

<sup>119</sup> Bisare Segman, "Ciroka Tarixi: Selahedin u Richarde Serdil (Saladin and the lion hearth Richard)", *Hawar*, issue 51, p.3.

<sup>120</sup> B. Segman was a penname of Celadet says R. Onen. See, Ronayi Onen, "The Role of Language in the Discursive Construction of the Kurdish Nation: A Case Study on the Kurdish Periodical Hawar (1932-1943)" (master's thesis, Istanbul Bilgi University, 2012), 197.

<sup>121</sup> Osman Sabri, "Tarixa Kurd u Kurdistan", *Hawar*, issue 30, pp. 9-10.

relatively small Kurdish communities, which are far from being central or core areas. This observation suggests that the territorial claims extended beyond the actual demographic reality. This approach may have been aimed at emphasizing the idea that Kurds are a widespread population inhabiting a vast region, thereby reinforcing the notion of a substantial homeland and the significance of Kurdish presence across various territories. As mentioned earlier, the journal primarily addressed Kurmanji-related issues. Therefore, to understand how the movement formulated a vision of Kurdistan and territorial boundaries, it is essential to also keep in mind their discussions on the languages of Kurds, including Kurmanji, Sorani, and Zaza. These discussions likely shed light on their perspectives regarding linguistic diversity within the Kurdish community and its implications for Kurdish identity and territorial aspirations. While Celadet briefly mentions Kurds in Iran in one issue, there is not much detailed discussion on this topic.<sup>122</sup> Apart from recognizing the Iranian roots of Kurds, there is a notable absence of comprehensive examination concerning Kurds in Iran, particularly regarding their linguistic circumstances. Moreover, *Hawar* did not provide a list of regions or a map for Sorani-speaking areas, further indicating the Kurmanji-centric focus of the Kurdish intellectual movement in the Levant. Their primary attention was on Kurds in Turkey, likely influenced by their Ottoman Kurdish roots. The imagined Kurdistan for these intellectuals was mostly limited to Turkey, their homeland, and Syria, where many of them lived in exile.

---

<sup>122</sup> Hawar, issue 35, p.10.

### 3.3. The Future: Next Generations

“*Hawar* is a recently born infant, our very own, belonging to the Kurdish community. Like any other child, she thrives within the embrace of his parents, siblings, and extended family members.”<sup>123</sup>

In launching *Hawar*, the intellectuals placed their trust in contributions from the Kurdish community to enrich the journal. Therefore, in the first issue, editorial of the publication asked individuals to submit their writings for publication. This call also reflects the intellectuals' vision for the future they envisioned. In the post-Ottoman era, Kurds primarily relied on political and institutional channels in the Levant. As the primary outlet for Kurds in this region, *Hawar* held a unique and vulnerable position. Therefore, describing it as an infant to be embraced underscores its significance and fragility within the Kurdish community. The editorial expressed expectations from the youth in the region, which likely motivated the inclusion of a dedicated section for students in the journal. From its very first issue, students were encouraged to pose questions on various topics. Celadet, in announcing the journal's launch, recalled a moment in 1930 when a group of madrasa students, all allegedly familiar with Latin letters, approached him to allocate a column specifically for the youth.<sup>124</sup> This anecdote highlights the importance attributed to the younger generation's involvement and engagement with the publication.

Additionally, alongside the section for students, there also existed a section dedicated to children in the journal. This section predominantly featured children's poems, often with strong nationalist themes. Interestingly, some of these poems were not entirely suitable for children, as they depicted violent or disturbing imagery, such as descriptions of Kurds being killed. This suggests that the

---

<sup>123</sup> *Hawar*, issue 1, p. 2.

<sup>124</sup> *Hawar*, issue 1, p.4.

editorial team prioritized fostering a nationalist pedagogy. Overall, children were viewed as both inheritors tasked with enlightening the next generation and as future defenders of the nation. This ambivalence is exemplified in the following poem:

“I must pursue education, knowledge.  
As I mature, wisdom will be my guide.  
...  
With a gun and rifle in hand,  
I shall seek justice, champion your cause.”<sup>125</sup>

Overall, the editorial team aimed to provide a platform for young students, intending to integrate the upcoming generation into the movement. While the reliability of Celadet's anecdote remains doubtful, it is evident that Kurdish intellectuals in the Levant sought to enlist the support of the youth. Children were also deemed significant, as in nationalist pursuits, they symbolize the future, holding the potential to either sustain the status quo or challenge it. In the case of *Hawar*, their involvement was crucial to perpetuate the Kurdish struggle.

## E. TIMES OF WAR

### 1. *RONAHI* AND *ROJANU* IN PERSPECTIVE

The Kurdish media in the Levant served more than just a platform for preserving their language in exile. Intellectuals wore multiple hats as linguists, politicians, soldiers, diplomats, and ideologues. Despite *Hawar's* initial declaration of avoiding politics, in practice, this stance was not entirely upheld. The *Hawar* circle, led by the Bedirkhan brothers, actively engaged in lobbying efforts for the Kurdish cause. The years leading up to World War II, as well as the wartime period itself, forced intellectuals to explore alternatives for survival. Even securing paper for publishing became a challenge. Furthermore, the intellectuals faced unease as their primary sponsor, France, was

---

<sup>125</sup> *Hawar*, issue 2, p.2.

under Nazi Germany's invasion, leading to an increased British presence in the Levant. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union attracted Marxist Kurdish intellectuals, offering a comparatively promising situation for Kurds in Soviet Armenia.<sup>126</sup> Given these uncertainties, forming alliances became crucial. In the context of World War II and Kurdish nation-building endeavors, I briefly speak of *Ronahi* and *Roja Nu*, both published by the same circle of intellectuals. In this thesis, these publications are situated within the broader landscape of wartime challenges and the Kurdish quest for nationhood through language-formation.

Besides *Hawar*, the Kurdish intellectuals in the Levant produced three more journals: *Ronahi*, *Roja Nu*, and *Ster*. My focus will be on the first two, while *Ster* will be omitted due to its limited impact,

---

<sup>126</sup> On the pages of *Roja Nu* and *Ronahi*, pro-Soviet propaganda was part of the editorial agenda. However, the sole reason behind that was not the trust in communist ideology. Evidently, none of the mentioned Kurdish intellectuals was indeed a solely communist. There were some as Cegerxwin who communist but first Kurdish nationalist were. They were mainly amazed by the Soviet nationalities policy. Kamuran Bedirkhan in one of the issues of *Roja Nu* mentions the *Rya Teze* newspaper and Kurdish-medium schools in Armenia. During the interwar period, Soviet Armenia was another setting where the Kurds had access to institutional and organizational means. Armenia, particularly Yerevan, was the place where the cultural and intellectual activities of the Kurds centered. Kurds in the Caucasus are mostly Yezidi some of whom had to flee to the Russian Empire during the Armenian genocide of 1915. Thanks to the Soviet nationalities policies, the small Kurdish population enjoyed a certain degree of cultural revival. The main component of this revival was no doubt Kurmanji as the Soviet nationalities policy was language minded. The rapid political integration of the Yezidi Kurds allowed them to attain a meaningful degree of power to form their national identity. To briefly illustrate, after a campaign predicted to rise in the schooling rate among the Kurds in the 1920s, the almost whole Kurdish population was literate after 1930. To some estimations, in 1932, there were 40 Kurmanji-medium schools with around two thousand students in total. In 1928, Erebe Semo formed the first Romanized alphabet for Kurmanji. A few years later, he published the first Kurdish novel written with these new letters. Before, the Semo-Marogulov alphabet was used to publish the first Latin-based Kurdish newspaper *Rya Teze*. This weekly newspaper played a crucial role in spurring Kurdish journalism, translation, literature, and intellectual life. As the media outlet of the Armenian Communist Party in Kurmanji, the newspaper undoubtedly was full of propaganda. Furthermore, in 1934 Armenia hosted the first Kurdology conference on literature and the first movies and documentaries on the Kurds. Overall, the atmosphere in Armenia was kind of what the Kurdish intellectuals in French Syria dreamt of.

with only four issues published. As previously mentioned, *Hawar* was primarily focused on introducing a new alphabet for the Kurds. However, I contend that the Bedirkhan brothers' other publications, particularly *Ronabi* and *Roja Nu*, not only reflected the complex geopolitical circumstances of the wartime era but also played crucial roles in protecting and advancing Kurdish identity, culture, and history during rapid global changes.

### 1.1. *Ronabi*, 1942-1945

*Ronabi*, meaning “luminous” in Kurmanji, was a periodically published complimentary supplement to *Hawar*. It holds a distinct place in Kurdish press history. *Ronabi* unique standing lies in being the first-ever illustrated periodical in Kurmanji.<sup>127</sup> The publication, in Kurmanji using the Latin alphabet, maintained a monthly publication schedule, spanning twenty-eight issues from 1942 to 1945. The subscription fee was 5 Syrian Liras.<sup>128</sup> During the backdrop of World War II, widespread press censorship was enforced across the Arab world, propelled by efforts from the British and French to suppress any pro-Nazi propaganda.<sup>129</sup> The beginning of the war, along with the increasing British influence in the Levant, created favorable conditions for pro-Allied publications.<sup>130</sup> This included Kurdish periodicals. Significantly, British authorities not only

---

<sup>127</sup> Argued by Akturk in his dissertation. However, to my knowledge, *Roja Kurd* of 1913 was also illustrated.

<sup>128</sup> Xwediye Haware, “Kiryariye Haware”, *Hawar*, issue 43, pp. 8-9.

<sup>129</sup> Ami Ayalon. *Reading Palestine: Printing and Literacy, 1900-1948*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004, pp. 104-106.

<sup>130</sup> For British influence in the Levant see, Nicholas Tamkin. “Britain, the Middle East, and the ‘Northern Front’, 1941–1942.” *War in History* 15, no. 3 (2008): 314–36.

permitted the ongoing Kurdish cultural activities but also aided Celadet Bedirxan by supplying the expensive newsprint.<sup>131</sup>

Throughout the World War II, *Ronahi* predominantly featured news from various battlefronts in Europe, Africa, and Asia, alongside updates on war technology and commendations for Allied soldiers and leaders. Encompassing articles on Kurdish society, culture, and literature, the periodical dominantly embraced a "Kurdish" identity in content. This transformation involved a delicate balance between war-related news and Kurdish folkloric and literary pieces, articles on Kurdistan, and updates from the Kurdish Jazira region.<sup>132</sup>

### 1.2. *Roja Nu*, 1943-1946

Founded by Kamuran Bedirxan, *Roja Nu*, meaning ‘new day’ in Kurmanji, had a French counterpart called *Le Jour Nouveau*. Being published from 1943 to 1946, the weekly journal totaled 73 issues. The main offices of the *Roja Nû* journal and Kamuran Bedirxan's office were in the Immeuble Tabet, which is now situated in the vicinity of Riyad as-Solh Square in downtown Beirut.<sup>133</sup> *Roja Nu* mainly offered comprehensive coverage of global and regional WW II developments. Differentiating itself from literary and cultural counterparts, *Roja Nu*, an illustrated newspaper, sourced many of its photos from the Beirut-based French language newspaper, *Le*

---

<sup>131</sup> A. S. Aktürk, *Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria: Finding a Nation in Exile* (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2013), 105.

<sup>132</sup> A. S. Aktürk, *Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria: Finding a Nation in Exile* (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2013), 105.

<sup>133</sup> Barbara Henning, *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts: Continuities and Changes* (University of Bamberg Press, 2018), 548.

*Miroir D'Orient*.<sup>134</sup> *Roja Nu* went beyond politics, exploring Kurdish folklore through stories, songs, and history, with a dedicated reporter. In summary, the newspaper served as a tool for educating audiences about the conflict and the cultural heritage of the Kurdish people.

Overall, the publication of *Ronahi* and *Roja Nu* was part of a strategic agenda to discover opportunities and maintain a balance with the powers at play. It also reflects the adaptability of Kurdish intellectuals in the Levant in struggling with the complexities of geopolitics. These publications not only covered Kurdish-related issues but also addressed developments related to the war, highlighting the intersection between political discourse and nationalist struggles. An in-depth analysis of these publications could provide valuable insights for future studies. For the scope of this thesis, my aim is to explore and demonstrate the political situation of Levantine Kurds in relation to nation-building processes. Given that these publications were supplements and sister outlets of the *Hawar* journal, they are integral to the efforts to sustain the situation in which the formation of a standard Kurmanji was possible.

## 2. POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE LEVANT AND THE KURDS

In the late 1930s, as French rule in the Levant faced mounting criticism from Arab nationalists,<sup>135</sup> the Kurds, including the Bedirkhan brothers, faced a complex political landscape. As Europe approached war, Germany emerged as potential allies for those opposing French rule. The

---

<sup>134</sup> A. S. Aktürk, *Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria: Finding a Nation in Exile* (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2013), 106.

<sup>135</sup> S. Altug argues that the French wanted to counterbalance rising Arab nationalism in the Levant with the Kurds. See, Seda Altuğ, “The Turkish- Syrian Border and Politics of Difference in Turkey and Syria (1921–1939),” in *Syria: Borders, Boundaries, and the State*. Springer International Publishing, 2020.

Bedirxhans' political standing was precarious, with financial impropriety. As mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, the brothers financially relied on the French to maintain their activities. During WW II the British would replace the French in this regard.

Kamuran Bedirkhan, particularly active, sought attention for the Kurdish cause and established cultural connections with Germans. The Bedirxhans' engagement with racist discourse, influenced by Nazi ideology, played a role in their defense of the Kurdish cause.<sup>136</sup> During the 1930s, Kurdish intellectuals and nationalists notably underscored the Indo-European origins of the Kurdish people, asserting their Aryan ancestry.<sup>137</sup> In the early issues of *Hawar*, references to Zarathustra were abundant, aiming to highlight Kurds' historical connection to an Iranic religion of their own.<sup>138</sup> This emphasis served dual purposes: seeking acknowledgment from Europe and countering Turkish narratives. Particularly since the 1930s, official Turkish historiography had denied Kurdish history, asserting Turks as an ancient people. This discourse even suggested Turkic origins for the Sumerians and claimed that all languages stemmed from proto-Turkish. Kurdish intellectuals' arguments regarding Kurdish history, language, and religion thus served as counterarguments to the Turkish arguments.

Additionally, it is crucial to note that, prior to relocating to Syria, the Bedirkhan brothers had pursued studies in Germany, being fluent in German. This academic background was

---

<sup>136</sup> Barbara Henning, *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts: Continuities and Changes* (University of Bamberg Press, 2018), 504-505.

<sup>137</sup> A. S. Aktürk, *Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria: Finding a Nation in Exile* (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2013), 166.

<sup>138</sup> Kamuran Bedirkhan, "Zerdest u Reya Zerdest", *Hawar*, issue 26, pp. 9-10.

complemented by their associations with German scholars and orientalists.<sup>139</sup> This contributed to their arguments over the Aryan heritage of the Kurds.<sup>140</sup> However, this situation was short-lived. Despite temporarily engaging with the prevalent racist discourse that permeated the globe during that era, Kurdish intellectuals predominantly maintained their support for French rule in the mandate territories.

#### F. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this thesis, I tried to tell the story development of Modern Standard Kurmanji as a national language for the Kurds, focusing on the period of the French Mandate in the Levant from 1932 to 1945. I investigate the role of Kurdish intellectuals, linguists, and leaders in the sociopolitical environment of Greater Syria—then under French control—to develop Kurmanji during a critical time in Middle Eastern history. This timeframe begins with the publication of *Hawar*, the first Latin-based Kurdish journal in 1932 in Damascus, and concludes with the end of World War II in 1945, heralding the end of French authority in the region and the establishment of the Syrian Arab Republic.

I aim to expand on previous research on the topic, which mainly address the political use of language and the influence of *Hawar*, by including a wider number of media outlets and a broader selection of Kurdish intellectuals. Unlike earlier studies that treated Kurdish as a single language,

---

<sup>139</sup> The German Orientalist and specialist on Iranian languages Karl Hadank (1882–1945) visited Damascus in 1932 where he spent time with Celadet.

<sup>140</sup> Barbara Henning. *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts: Continuities and Changes* (University of Bamberg Press, 2018), 505.

this thesis recognizes Kurdish as an umbrella term for various dialects and languages, thus acknowledging the diverse linguistic identities within the Kurdish community. For this purpose, I use the term “Languages of Kurds”.

This thesis addresses several interconnected questions: Firstly, what philosophical, linguistic, and political references and influences guided the endeavors of Kurdish intellectuals in French Levant as they embarked on shaping Kurmanji as the language of their nation-to-be? How did the imagination of shared, standardized, a unified language connect and/or shape Kurdish nation-building trajectories? How did these trajectories differ in their communal imaginations and in territorial references of belonging. Lastly, how did the intellectuals of the era navigate the complexities of political, cultural, and geographic boundaries within and among different Kurdish groups? By exploring these questions through historical narratives, this study seeks to deepen the understanding of Kurdish nationhood, identity, and the role of language in uniting Kurds and fostering a sense of national belonging during the post-Ottoman era.

Methodologically, I employed a comprehensive examination and survey of primary sources, including newspapers, journals, and personal writings from key Kurdish figures of the time, mainly archived at The Kurdish Institute of Paris. These sources were essential for understanding the intellectual and educational shifts within the Kurdish community, shaped by post-World War I dynamics and late-Ottoman modernization. I carefully analyzed these sources, recognizing their production under French mandates aimed at promoting French colonial interests and countering Arab nationalism. This shaped my analysis of how Kurdish intellectuals interpreted and articulated the concept of nationhood under the influence of the French.

The research methodology was diverse, combining archival work with library research and ethnographic methods. I reviewed a variety of documents and conducted few unformal interviews, including with Kurdish Studies expert Joyce Blau, to deepen my understanding and contextualize my findings. Despite challenges like language barriers, particularly in French, my focus remained on Kurmanji. The thesis avoids a transnational perspective, instead exploring possible impacts of French colonial and Turkish nationalistic ideologies on the Kurdish intellectual community within the Levantine context. This approach allowed a comprehensive examination of the evolution of Modern Standard Kurmanji and the critical role of Kurdish intellectuals and leaders in this process.

Emergence, rise, and semi- defeat of Kurdish nationalism is key to understand the very focus of this thesis. This happened during the Ottoman period, when Kurds lived under autonomous emirates until Ottoman modernization policies in the mid-19th century ceased the autonomy. This transition integrated Kurds into central Ottoman administration, affecting their political and cultural dynamics. Following that, the arrival of Kurdish press and organizations paved the way to the belated Kurdish modernization in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It was no coincidence that the period also witnessed the early attempts to standardize Kurmanji as the national language of Kurds. The establishment of *Rojo Kurd* in 1912 by the *Hevi* student society in Istanbul marked a shift towards highlighting Kurdish nationhood and a unified identity through language. This journal became a peculiar platform for Kurdish intellectuals to shape their language and identity, discussing ideas such as switching to a new alphabet. These discussions were interrupted by World War I, which brought an end to the Ottoman Empire as well. During post-Ottoman era, the French mandate in Syria became a refuge for Kurds.

In 1931, Bedirkhan brother received permission from French authorities in the Levant to publish a bi-monthly journal titled *Hawar*, meaning "call for help" in Kurmanji. First issued in Damascus in May 1932, *Hawar* became the first Kurdish journal in the Levant, using Latin alphabet that remains in use for Kurmanji today. Initially, the journal was published in both Arabic and Latin scripts. Later, it transitioned to solely Latin script from the 24th issue to facilitate reader adaptation.

*Hawar* positioned itself as a non-political publication focusing on scientific and literary purposes, largely aligning with French mandate interests. The journal's role was complex. While it promoted Kurdish language and culture, it also conformed to French strategies in the region. This cautious approach mirrored broader French policy in the Levant, which often used ethnic and religious divisions for administrative purposes, leaving Kurds with limited political rights but some cultural recognition to counterbalance the Arabs in the region.

Although the Bedirkhan brothers intended to create a unified Kurdish alphabet, it was primarily designed for Kurmanji and did not cover all "Languages of Kurds". They aimed to unify Kurds across various regions into a single nation, particularly in areas like French Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Persia, and Armenia. However, they only focused on Kurds in the north. This is clear when it comes to the issue of alphabet reform. The Latin-based *Hawar* alphabet was purposefully designed to resemble the Turkish alphabet as closely as possible. In 1928, as part of Kemalist reforms, Turkey adopted a Latinized alphabet. The Bedirkhans used this as a reference to ease the learning process for Kurds in Turkey when adopting the *Hawar* alphabet. The alphabet's design, influenced by Turkish, reveals that the movement was Turkey-centric. This approach reflects how socio-political environment influenced the Kurds' attempts to form their own identity and autonomy.

Although *Hawar* generally equated Kurdish with Kurmanji, there were occasional contributions in Sorani from Iraqi Kurdistan. While Kurmanji was the focus, there were discussions about unifying it with Sorani, which was undergoing its own standardization process in Arabic script under British-Iraqi rule. Notable intellectuals like Osman Sabri and Cegerxwin advocated for a unified Kurdish language, with proposals ranging from forming a committee to merge different dialects to more radical ideas like selecting one dialect as standard and phasing out others. However, these efforts faced challenges because of the geopolitical division of Kurds and limited resources. Today, Kurmanji and Sorani remain the only standardized ones among the “Languages of Kurds”, while others are far from standardization.

The *Hawar* journal focused on defining Kurdish identity, establishing linguistic standards, and envisioning future aspirations. This included promoting action, particularly among the youth. Drawing on historical narratives like Sharafkhan Bidlisi's "*Sarafnama*" from 1597, Kurdish intellectuals sought to form a coherent historical narrative to bolster national consciousness. *Hawar* also covered territorial aspirations, outlining an envisioned Kurdistan that included both Kurmanji and Zaza-speaking regions, showing a broader view of Kurdish identity that spanned significant areas of Turkey. This ambitious act of drawing lines generally extended beyond demographic realities on the ground, emphasizing a desire to demonstrate Kurds' widespread cross-regional presence.

Looking to the future, *Hawar* positioned itself as a foundational platform, asking for contributions from the Kurds. It aimed to integrate younger generations into the nationalist movement, emphasizing education and participation in the journal. This effort was shown in sections dedicated to students and children, featuring content that nurtured nationalist sentiments. Overall,

*Hawar* represented a critical medium through which Kurdish intellectuals sought to foster a collective Kurdish identity and mobilize support for the future.

*Hawar* was not the sole publication of the Kurdish circle in the Levant. During World War II, Kurdish intellectuals published *Ronahi*, *Roja Nu*, and *Ster*. They utilized their media platforms not only to maintain Kurmanji and culture but also to navigate the complex geopolitics of the time. These journals went beyond cultural preservation, engaging in political discourse and exploring alliances, reflecting the Kurds' strategic adjustments to wartime realities.

*Ronahi*, starting in 1942, balanced war-related news with folklore and literature, aiming to fortify a Kurdish identity during the wartimes. *Roja Nu* initiated by Kamuran Bedirkhan in 1943, was a weekly that provided extensive coverage of World War II events alongside Kurdish folklore and history. It aimed at educating and culturally enriching the readership. These publications were part of a broader Kurdish effort to assert identity and maintain relevance in the Middle Eastern politics during turbulent times. They illustrate how Kurdish intellectuals adapted their strategies to the changing dynamics, using media to support their nation-building efforts.

Lastly, making of Modern Standard Kurmanji was a challenging task. Kurdish intellectuals, soldiers, and community leaders who were largely exiled in the French Levant faced significant obstacles due to limited financial and institutional support. Despite their grand ambitions, they managed to achieve only a fraction of their goals. They were unable to develop a unified Kurdish for all. However, they succeeded in establishing the rules and grammar for Kurmanji. The Latin script they introduced in *Hawar* remains the standard for Kurmanji today. Intellectuals also endeavored to define the boundaries of Kurdish identity within its territorial context. *Hawar* was positioned as a link between the past, present, and future: encompassing children, youth, and the

elderly. The envisioned nation in exile was gradually taking shape through the pages of *Hawar*, one could say. *Ronahi* and *Roja Nu* served as the platforms through which they navigated the challenges of wartime.

## Bibliography

### i. Periodicals

"Hawar, issue 1." 1932.

"Hawar, issue 2." 1932.

"Hawar, issue 26." 1932.

"Hawar, issue 30." 1932.

"Hawar, issue 35." 1932.

"Hawar, issue 43." 1932.

"Milliyet." September 19, 1930.

"Roja Nu, issue 1." 1943.

"Roji Kurd, issue 1." 1912.

"Ronahi, issue 28." 1943.

"Rya Teze, issue 1." 1928.

"Serbesti, issue 1." 1908.

"Ster, issue 3." 1945.

"Vakit." August 17, 1930.

## ii. References

Abdullah, Cevdet. "Bir Hitab." *Roj-î Kurd*, issue 1.

Akturk, A.S. *Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria: Finding a Nation in Exile*. The University of Arkansas, 2013.

Akbarzadeh, Shahram, Zahid Ahmed Shahab, Costas Laoutides, and William Gourlay. "The Kurds in Iran: Balancing National and Ethnic Identity in a Securitised Environment." *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 6 (2019): 1145–62.

Alakom, Rohat. *Xoybun Orgutu ve Agrı Ayaklanması*. Istanbul: Avesta, 2011.

Altuğ, Seda. "The Turkish-Syrian Border and Politics of Difference in Turkey and Syria (1921–1939)." In *Syria: Borders, Boundaries, and the State*. Springer International Publishing, 2020.

Ayalon, Ami. *Reading Palestine: Printing and Literacy, 1900-1948*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991.

Anayasa Mahkemesi. "1921 Anayasası." Accessed November 27, 2022. <https://anayasa.gov.tr/tr/1921-anayasasi/>.

Atatürk, Mustafa Kemal. *Nutuk*. Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1995.

Aydın, Selcuk. *State Formations, Nations, and Kurdish Movements: A Comparative Analysis from the Late Ottoman Empire to Republican People's Party in Turkey (1923-1945), British Mandate Regime in Iraq (1920-1932), and French Mandate Regime in Syria (1923-1946)*. London: King's College London, 2020.

Bajalan, Djene Rhys. "Princes, Pashas and Patriots: The Kurdish Intelligentsia, the Ottoman Empire and the National Question (1908–1914)." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 2 (2016): 140–57.

Bedirhan, Celadet Ali. *Mustafa Kemal'e Mektup*. Avesta, 2020.

Bedirxan, Kamuran. "Berê Çawan bû, Çend Rûpelên Dîrokî." *Hawar*, issue 16.

- Bianet. "Osman Sebrî Tarihe Tanıklık Ederken!," October 30, 2013. <https://bianet.org/yazi/osman-sebri-tarihe-taniklik-ederken-139444>.
- Bisare, Segman. "Ciroka Tarixi: Selahedin u Richarde Serdil (Saladin and the lion hearth Richard)." Hawar, issue 51.
- Bozan, Emin. *Ciroka Kurmanci ya Modern di Kovara Haware de*. Master's thesis, 2015.
- Cegerxwin. *Hayat Hikayem*. Istanbul: Evrensel Basım, 2003.
- Cegerxwin. "Sehiti Le bo Zimani Kurdi-4." Hawar, issue 23.
- David McDowall. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. 3rd ed. London: I.B. Tauris, 2004.
- Derince, Mehmet Şerif. "A Break or Continuity? Turkey's Politics of Kurdish Language in the New Millennium." *Dialectical Anthropology* 37, no. 1 (2013): 145–52.
- Dersimi, Nuri. *Kürdistan Tarihinde Dersim*. Istanbul: Doz Yayınları, September 2004.
- Dikranian, Mgrdich. *Aypenaran Kourderen yev Hayeren*. Istanbul: Hovannes Mouhendisian, 1860.
- Doğan, Cabir. *Cizre ve Bohtan Emiri Bedirhan Bey*. Doktora tezi, Afyonkarahisar, 2010.
- Doger, Dilaver. *Bejera Neteweparez Di Kovara Haware De*. Master's thesis, 2017.
- Dzhalile, Dzhalil, *Kürt Halk Taribinden 13 İlginç Yaprak*. İstanbul: Evrensel Basım, 2007.
- Ekinci, Deniz. *Kurdish Identity, Islamism, and Ottomanism: The Making of a Nation in Kurdish Journalistic Discourse, 1898-1914*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022.
- Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Mandate." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 13, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mandate>.
- Eppel, Michael. "The Demise of the Kurdish Emirates: The Impact of Ottoman Reforms and International Relations on Kurdistan during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century." *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 2 (2008): 237–58.
- Eppel, Michael. "The Demise of the Kurdish Emirates in the Nineteenth Century." In *A People Without a State: The Kurds from the Rise of Islam to the Dawn of Nationalism*, 45-64. New York: University of Texas Press, 2016.

- Fuccaro, Nelida. "Kurds and Kurdish Nationalism in Mandatory Syria: Politics, Culture and Identity." In *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, edited by Abbas Vali, 197. Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1980.
- Garzoni, Maurizio. "Grammatica e Vocabolario Della Lingua Kurda." Accessed November 27, 2022. <https://bnk.institutkurde.org/catalogue/detail.php?pirtuk=21>.
- Gibbons, Herbert Adams. "The Defects of the System of Mandates." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 96 (1921): 84–90.
- Gorgas, Jordi Tejel. "SSCB ile İlk Karşılaşmalar: Suriye ve Lübnan'daki Milliyetçi Kürt Hareket, 1927-1946." *Kürt Tarihi* no. 41 (2020): 11-15.
- Gorgas, Jordi Tejel. *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society*. London: Routledge, 2009.
- Gorgas, Jordi Tejel. *La Ligue Nationale Kurde en Syrie*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001.
- Gorgas, Jordi Tejel. *Kürt Milli Cemiyeti Xoybûn*. Istanbul: Avesta, 2020.
- Gorgas, Jordi Tejel. "States of Rumors: Politics of Information Along the Turkish-Syrian Border, 1925–1945." *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 37, no. 1 (2022): 95-113.
- Gorgas, Jordi Tejel. *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil*. Lausanne, Switzerland: Peter Lang Verlag, 2021. <https://www.peterlang.com/document/1100684>.
- Hanioglu, Mehmed Şükrü. *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet Ve Dönemi*. Istanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1981.
- Henning, Barbara. *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts: Continuities and Changes*. Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2018.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. "Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today." In *Mapping the Nation*, edited by G. Balakrishnan, 255-66. London: Verso, 1996.
- Issı, Murat. "Kürt Basını ve Kürdistan Gazetesi (1898-1902)." *Şarkiyat* 9 (April 2013): 127-147.
- Issı, Murat. "Hürriyet Âşığı Bir Osmanlı-Kürt Aydını Mevlanzâde Rıfat Bey." *Toplumsal Tarih*, April 2010, no. 196, 72-80.

Kaya, Mehmed S. *The Zaza Kurds of Turkey: A Middle Eastern Minority in a Globalized Society*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2011.

Kilic, Avni. "The Purpose of the Sheikh Ubeydullah Nehrî Revolt." *The Scientific Journal of Cihan University– Sulaimaniya* 6, no. 3 (2022): 1-15.

Khoury, Philip S. *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Kurdish Academy of Language. "Osman Sabri (1905-1993)." April 6, 2009. [https://kurdishacademy.org/?page\\_id=698](https://kurdishacademy.org/?page_id=698).

Kurdish Diaspora. Institut Kurde de Paris. Accessed May 9, 2024. <https://www.institutkurde.org/en/info/kurdish-diaspora-1232550988>.

Leezenberg, Michiel. "Elî Teremaxî and the Vernacularization of Medrese Learning in Kurdistan." *Iranian Studies* 47, no. 5 (2014): 713–33.

Maarif Ansiklopedisi. "AŞİRET MEKTEBİ." Accessed November 27, 2022. <https://turkmaarifansiklopedisi.org.tr/asiret-mektebi>.

Mango, Andrew. "Ataturk and the Kurds." *Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 4 (1999): 5-6.

McDowall, David. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. 3rd ed. London: I.B. Tauris, 2004.

Mumcu, Ugur. *Kurt-Islam Ayaklanmast*. Ankara: Tekin Yayınevi, 1992.

Myers, Denys P. "The Mandate System of the League of Nations." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 96 (1921): 74–77.

Neep, Daniel. *Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Noel, E. W. *Kürdistan 1919: Kürdistan'da özel görevde bulunan binbaş Noel'in günlüğü*. Istanbul: Avesta Yayınları, 1999.

"Nureddin Zaza, 1919, Maden | 07. 10. 1988." Accessed [02.05.2024]. <https://www.saradistribution.com/nuredinzaza.htm>.

Nuri, Ihsan. *Ağrı Dağı İsyanı*. Istanbul: MED Yayıncılık, 1992.

- Olsen, Robert. "The Kurdish Rebellions of Sheikh Said (1925), Mt. Ararat (1930), and Dersim (1937-8): Their Impact on the Development of the Turkish Air Force and on Kurdish and Turkish Nationalism." *Die Welt des Islams* 40, no. 1 (2000): 67-94.
- Onen, Ronayi. "The Role of Language in the Discursive Construction of the Kurdish Nation: A Case Study on the Kurdish Periodical Hawar (1932-1943)." Master's thesis, Istanbul Bilgi University, 2012.
- Özoğlu, Hakan. *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2004.
- Öztan, Ramazan Hakkı. "The Great Depression and the Making of Turkish-Syrian Border, 1921-1939." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 2 (1984): 311-326.
- Pamukciyan, Kevork. *Ermeni Harfli Türkçe Metinler*. Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 2022.
- Res, Kone. *Celadet Bedirxan. Jiyan u Ramanen Wi [Celadet Bedirkhan, His Life and Ideas]*. Stockholm: Jina Nu, 1997.
- Pirtukgeh Kitaplik. "Cigerxwin." June 2, 2014. <https://www.academia.edu/5431943/Cigerxwin>.
- Potter, Pitman B. "Origin of the System of Mandates under the League of Nations." *The American Political Science Review* 16, no. 4 (1922): 563-83.
- Rabinovich, Itamar, Robbie Sabel, and Oded Eran. "A Century since the Sykes-Picot Agreement: Current Challenges." Institute for National Security Studies, 2016.
- Resmi Gazete. January 1936. <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/3197.pdf>.
- Rubin, Michael. "Who Are the Kurds?" In *Kurdistan Rising? Considerations for Kurds, Their Neighbors, and the Region*, 1-2. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2016.
- Sabri, Osman. "Sehiti Le bo Zimanê Kurdi-3." *Hawar*, issue 22, pp.1-2.
- Sabri, Osman, "Tarixia Kurd u Kurdistan", *Hawar*, issue 30, pp. 9-10.
- Scalbert-Yücel, Clémence. *L'élaboration de la langue kurde en Turquie (1898-1943): d'un simple outil d'éveil national au pivot de la définition identitaire*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006.

Tamkin, Nicholas. "Britain, the Middle East, and the 'Northern Front', 1941–1942." *War in History* 15, no. 3 (2008): 314–36.

The Founding Declaration of Kurdish Students-Hope Society [Kürt Telebe- Hêvî Cemiyeti'nin Beyannamesidir]. *Hetawî Kurd*, No. 4–5, pp. 1–4, May 10, 1914. 69.

Umit, Cemal. "Emekcilerin Sairi Cigerxwin (Cigerhun / Yuregi Yaralı), Şeyhmus Hasan'ın Hayatı." *insanokur*, May 14, 2014. <https://www.insanokur.org/iscilerin-sairi-cigerxwin-cigerhun-cigeri-kanli-seyhmus-hasinin-hayati/>.

Van Bruinessen, Maarten. *Agha, Shaikh, and State: On the Social and Political Organization of Kurdistan*. PhD diss., Utrecht: Ryks universiteit, 1978.

Watts, Nicole. "Relocating Dersim: Turkish State-Building and Kurdish Resistance, 1931–1938." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 23 (2000): 5–30.

Xwediye Haware, "Kiryariye Haware", *Hawar*, issue 43, pp. 8-9.

Yekdes, Omer Faruk. "Nazım Hikmet ve Cegerxwin'de Ask Şiirinin Ideolojisi." Master's Thesis, August 06, 2018. <https://acikbilim.yok.gov.tr/handle/20.500.12812/38482>.

Yegen, Mesut. "'Prospective-Turks' or 'Pseudo-Citizens:' Kurds in Turkey." *Middle East Journal* 63, no. 4 (2009): 597–615.

Yamaguchi, Akihiko. "The Kurdish Frontier under the Safavids." In *The Safavid World*, edited by Rudi Mathee, 556–571. London: Routledge, 2021.