

CHAPTER II

THE DYNAMIC OF KURDS IN MIDDLE EAST

A big nation was born from a great civilization. That is an anonym proverb that describes about the existence of nation seen on their history. In this chapter, the writer will elaborate the dynamic history of Kurds nation in Middle East. The history of a biggest nation that have no sovereign state to be ruled until today, who are living separately around the world and boxed from the ideas of political movements and states border.

A. History of Kurds and Its Nationalism

A lot of sources write about the genesis of Kurds or Kurdish. Historians believe that Kurds origin came from family of Indo-European races who lived and concentrated from Taurus Mountain in Turkey to Zagros Mountain in Iran, called as Kurdistan today, and settled among the inhabitants who were Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian.¹ The fate of the Kurds, who called as ‘*Karduchoi*’ by Greek historians, remain to have link with other populations of the empires which succeeded one another on the Persian dynasty protection.² While another source noted that Xenophon and Strabo writings recorded ‘*Carduchii*’ as the origin of Kurd terms.³ For Kurdish people themselves, they

¹ Kendal Nezan, ‘A brief survey of The History of the Kurds’ on web http://www.institutkurde.org/en/institute/who_are_the_kurds.php, consulted on 25 March 2015.

² Ibid.

³ John A. Shoup, *Ethnic Groups of Africa and the Middle East: An Encyclopedia*, ABC-LIO, California, 2011, p. 159.

believe that they were ancestry of Medes who came from north in the second and first millennium BCE.⁴

Kurds is one of majority native ethnics in Middle East besides majority Arabs, Persians, Turks, and minority Azeri. Kurds have their own culture and language that make them different from other ethnics in Middle East. However, some historians said that the ancestors of Kurds and Persian were coming from one same tribe that was Cyrtian. So, these historians categorize Kurds having close contact with Persian compared to other Middle East ethnics.⁵

Most actual records of Kurdish history can be mentioned in the presence of Ayyubid Dynasty (1169-1260) that was founded by Saladin or Salah al-Din.⁶ He was the biggest name of Kurds history that had ever lived. A leader warrior of dynasty who has proud of Kurdish people today. It means, Kurdish is not a myth, but their existence is real. In the rest of time, Kurds nation were protected under the reign of Turkish Empire or Persian Dynasty successively. Supported by the conditions that Kurds had never been invaded or conquered by Western power; they live in the mountain which do not give them much interactions with other nations; and Kurds inhabit in different powers for long times then, all of these things create one formula for Kurds which they have no one political entity for a long period in their own land, Kurdistan, to be struggled and won.

⁴ Hassan Arfa, *The Kurds: An Historical and Political Study*, Oxford University Press, London, 1966, p. 2.

⁵ Vahid Rashidvash, *Iranian People: Iranian Ethic Groups*, International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, Volume 3, No. 14, August 2013, p. 219.

⁶ Hasan Arfa, Op. Cit.,

Until the end of 19th century, idea of self-rule Kurdistan and Kurds nationalism emerged and it was pioneered by well-educated Kurds along with sheikh and chieftain to against Turks Ottoman Empire and Persian Qajar Dynasty. They asked for freedom to rule Kurdistan as their will. A declaration of Sheik Ubaydullah as King of Kurdistan in southeast region, led the demand for Kurds by gaining insurgency ended on the arrested of Sheik and went to exile, he failed to declare Kurdistan independence from foreign regimes. For Kurds, his brave action was failed, but the idea of Kurdistan independence still remained in the mind of Kurds.

In the phase to complete the mission of establishing concept of Kurdistan, a Kurdish who came from Shakak tribe name Simko Shikak led the Kurdish movement in Iran region for years against Iranian regime that led by Reza Shah. As second largest Kurdish organization in Iran, Shakak tribe established an autonomous Kurdish government in Urmia, a city in northwestern Iran today since 1918 to 1922.⁷ During the leadership of Simko, Kurds under his protection found an enjoyment, especially they who came from Shakak tribe and colony, but it did not happen for a long time. Simko leadership lack of political ideology and organization, and his tribal style of leadership supported the condition of their group were vulnerable to split from external factor. The struggle of Simko to defense Kurdistan in his authority was ended by the victory of Iranian army under Reza Shah against Simko's army.

⁷ Farideh Koohi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran Pastoral Nationalism*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 74-75.

Sponsored by United Kingdom's (U.K.) pledge to support Kurdish independence, wave of Kurdish nationalism who asked and found for independence from Ottoman authority continued aftermath World War I. Their effort seemed to meet success. Treaty of Sevres was signed between winner and loser parties of World War I, European countries represented by U.K. agreed and supported the independence of Kurdish in their land Kurdistan that mentioned on Article 62 and 64 in the treaty, as the result of Ottoman Empire lost in the war. This treaty is a series of partition plan that was done by Europe countries toward their occupied lands in Middle East.

Notwithstanding the treaty has been signed, but the implementation of the treaty were never be reality because Ottoman authority never ratified this treaty. Kemal Ataturk continued to lead the resistance against U.K. power as the answer of Ottoman did not want to ratify Treaty of Sevres. Then, this situation created domino effects for Kurds which they dreamt on Kurdistan independence should be postponed. As the result of Ottoman resistance, Kemal successfully pushed U.K. and its allies to sign new treaty. In the new peace conference, Turks delegation stated to other delegations that Kurds were same of Turks nation in their customs and religion which meant Kurds were part of Turks. Conviction of Allies at that time finally produced Treaty of Lausanne that signed on 24 July 1923 to supersede Sevres treaty, or three years after first treaty. This new treaty intentionally ignored the rights existence of Kurdistan that mentioned before in previous treaty.⁸ Later, after new treaty was signed, Turkey also

⁸ Farideh Koohi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran: Pastoral Nationalism*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

produced policy toward their 'brother' nation which forbid Kurds language and traditional custom to be worn and in the end, Kurdistan independence did not get support from any countries anymore. Annexation of Kurdistan land and Kurds was automatically under the separate regime based on the new partition.

The struggle of Kurds to gain their nationalism and sovereign land had not finished yet. Kingdom of Kurdistan established in 1922 to 1924 in Iraq territory today and unrecognized state- Republic of Ararat that got support from U.K. could exist for three years in Turkey from 1927 to 1930 before Ankara authority eliminated them in an attack. Dream of Kurds in Middle East seemed never finding the end even failure was always close to them. Every time they tried to struggle harder, at the end, they will always find defeat and failure.

The most remembrance of Kurds political struggle was in 1945 when Soviet Union assisted the creation of Republic of Mahabad in Iran. A short-lived Kurdish state in Iran that led by Qazi Muhammad gave the inspirational impact to other Kurds in the region. Later, the political parties for Kurds gained more organized and had clear vision to establish Kurdish self-determination government.

Today, in their new modern history, Kurdistan are divided into four different countries or territories, Turkey in North, Syria in West, Iran in East, and Iraq in South. Especially in Iran and Iraq, their central government consecutively give Kurdistan as name of province in northwest Iran and name for autonomous region in northeast Iraq. In the end, people will and still remain that Kurdistan as a non-governmental region.

B. Ethnic Identity

As a divergent ethnics in the Middle East, Kurds who came from different background and origin compared to Arabs, Persians, or Turks exist as a distinct people have their own identity. Kurds' language, culture, religion, until social structure Kurds are different from others. Identically, Kurds are known as people who waste their life to live in the mountain by keeping nomadic custom as their lifestyle identity, moving from one place to another place corresponding to weather or season changing.

Like any other tribes in Central Asia, pastoral activity also takes place in Kurds choice to life. Especially, it takes place primarily in areas that are not suitable for agriculture. For instance, herding the sheep and goats are the important activities of Kurds to survive. One should be noted, pastoral activities were once nomadic, but now covered only lands within a few days of permanent dwellings. As a result some lands that were traditionally grazed are no longer used.⁹

Time by time, almost all of Kurds identities on nomadic as their tribal lifestyle are taken by government policies that even do not know who they are for real. Sedentary lifestyle is adopted and it changes their identity for some aspects of life, especially their social structure.

1. Language

⁹ Steven Argue, 'Kurdish Culture, Repression, Women's Rights, and Resistance' on web <https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2007/06/12/18426957.php>, consulted on 8 March 2015.

Kurds have their own language that is called generally as Kurdish. Kurdish is a branch of Indo-European languages and Western Iranian branch dialectically. Approximately there are 26-30 million people speak Kurdish in Kurdistan, Lebanon, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan.¹⁰ Kurdish language is an independent language which has its own historical development and grammatical system. Kurdish dialects is divided into three main categories. First is Northern Kurdish dialects group which called as *Kurmanji* and *Badinani*. Second, Central and South Kurdish dialects group, *Sorani* and the last is the Southern Kurdish dialects group named as *Pehlewani*.¹¹

However for much of their history, the Kurds have preferred to use Arabic, Persian or Turkish for their literary works. Kurdish language could be written in Arabic alphabet, Cyrillic alphabet and Latin alphabet.¹² Kurdish also has a masterpiece of its development by producing some literatures, poems and poetry. For instance, in 1596, Sharaf Khan, Kurds Emir from Bitlis, composed *Sharafnama*, a writing of Kurds history in Persian. Then, in 1695, a great national epic called the *Memozin* was written in Kurdish by Ahmed Khani.¹³

2. Religion

¹⁰ Kurdish, <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/kurdish.htm>, consulted on 8 March 2015.

¹¹ Kurdish Language, <http://www.kurdishacademy.org/?q=node/41>, consulted on 8 March 2015.

¹² Steven Argue, Op. Cit.

¹³ Kurds, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Tajikistan-to-Zimbabwe/Kurds.html>, consulted on 8 March 2015.

In term of religion, majority of Kurds believe to embrace Islam. Islam has influenced Kurds socially and culturally. Moreover Islam can put their identity differently to other Muslim in Middle East. Most of Kurds are Sunni Muslim with *Shafi'i* school of thought while other Muslim in Middle East are in *Hanafi* school of thought. While the rest Kurds Muslim are Shi'ite who mostly can be found in Iran. Another Kurds believe on religious sects or movements which shoot-off Shi'ism and Sunni no longer considered as Islam such as *Alavis*, *Ahl-i-Haqq* (People of Truth), and *Yazidi*.

Sufism is also a choice for Kurds in Kurdistan. Qadiri and Naqshbandi are the Sufism sects that thrive among Kurds. Besides being a Muslim, Kurds belong to few number of Jews and Christians. Syrian Kurds and Iranian Kurds are dominated Christian and Jew minority.

3. Social Structure

In a traditional Kurds society, their social structure is tribe and they are family oriented. Top level of social structure is generally led by Sheikh or Aga (Leader). Sheikh or Aga is responsible to the social order of society. Tribal society in the middle of traditional Kurds create them dependent to Aga and family structure, because they live in the organization of patrilineal clans. In term of marriage, Kurds males usually marry at age 20 and females at age 12.

Then, one family typically consists of father, mother, and children. Marriage within the clan is recommended.¹⁴

Kurds society have some festival celebrations with music and dance. One interesting thing is they do it without gender segregation. Kurdish men and women are equal in Kurds social structure. Men and women traditionally have same rights to be active in public life, education and employment opportunities.

C. Economic and Natural Resources

Kurdistan can be seen as the fertile land for farming generally. For a long period in Kurdistan, agriculture and animal husbandry are two main economic wheels to get income before government policies banned them to conserve their nomadic life. Traditional lifestyle is also practiced in many rural areas of Kurdistan agriculture, for example the application to use ox or donkey drawn wooden. Excluding agriculture and pastoral economic life, oil also found and extracted in Kurdistan, the regions of Kirkuk and Khanaqin in Iraq, Kermanshah in Iran, and Siirt in Turkey are the natural source of oil but unfortunately they cannot enjoy some benefits of oil exploration in their land.¹⁵ One main reason, due to discrimination, the petroleum and mining operations in Kurdish areas rarely hire Kurds for them to participate on the exploration. This

¹⁴ Kurd: People, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/325191/Kurd>, consulted on 8 March 2015.

¹⁵ Steven Argue, 'Kurdish Culture, Repression, Women's Rights, and Resistance' on web <https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2007/06/12/18426957.php>, consulted on 8 March 2015.

contributes to Kurdish poverty in regions that are rich in natural resources and then, it fuels resentment and separatist desires.

In general, Kurds' economic who lives in Kurdistan can be divided into three segments of life based on their geographical differences. First is they who live in mountain with tribal-nomad lifestyle, they live by being herdsman. Number of Kurds who keep going in this lifestyle seem to decrease year by year. Migration of nomad from mountain to plain eliminate their traditional culture slowly. The second is Kurds who live in plain or village. Kurds villagers trend to be farmer and do activities in agriculture, for instance by farming wheat, nut, barley, fodder, tobacco, sugar, and rice as their main plants. Then the last, they who geographically live in the city. Adopting modern life in the city the economic life they become teacher, civil servant, traders, and shopkeeper.¹⁶ In their evolution of economic life, a merchant class of Kurds came to adapt sedentary lifestyle. Many rural Kurds also seasonally participate in construction labor in the cities, bringing additional income to family.

D. City of Kurds

Number of 25 to 30 million¹⁷ live and concentrate in Kurdistan. Those total amount of Kurds make up about 10% of the population in Syria, 18% of the population of Turkey, 15-20% of the population of Iraq, and nearly 10% of Iran.¹⁸ Apart of Kurdistan,

¹⁶ Farideh Koochi-Kamali, Op. Cit.

¹⁷ Kurdish People Fast Facts on CNN Library, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/18/world/kurdish-people-fast-facts/>, consulted on 25 March 2015.

¹⁸ Ibid.

there are a lot of distribution places of Kurds in the world. Other Kurds are living in Europe, North America, and other Asian countries.

In Iran, majority of Kurds are living in, at least, four provinces like *Kurdistan*, *West Azerbaijan*, *Kermanshah*, and *Khorasan* province. In Turkey, because of their population represents major of minority ethnic then, Kurds in Turkey live in all of province of country. However, Kurds are more populated in east and southeast of country. Referring to Encyclopaedic Ethnography of Middle-East and Central Asia, Turkish Kurdistan covers at least in 18 provinces, they are *Erzincan*, *Erzurum*, *Kars*, *Batman*, *Malatya*, *Tunceli*, *Elazig*, *Bingol*, *Mus*, *Agri*, *Adiyaman*, *Diyarbakir*, *Siirt*, *Bitlis*, *Van*, *Sanliurfa*, *Mardin* and *Hakkari*.

While in Iraq, city of Kurds is named officially as Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) which part of four provinces *Arbil*, *Dohuk*, *Halabja*, and *Sulaymaniyah*. Another cities of Kurds inhabited are *Baghdad*, *Kirkuk*, and *Nineveh*. Small number of Syrian Kurds today are living in *Efrin*, *Kobani*, and *Rojava* regions. Spreading of Kurds outside Kurdistan are in western Armenia. In Georgia they are living mostly in the capital city, and in Europe they can be found in country such as Germany, France, Sweden, Belgium and Netherlands. Then, in North America Kurds immigrate to Canada and U.S.¹⁹

E. Kurdish National Political Movements

¹⁹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdish_population, consulted on 7 March 2015.

Since the Treaty of Sevres was never ratified by Ottoman authority, Kurdish political movements appeared to show and fight for Kurds identity, nationalism, and land of Kurdistan. Kurdish political movements brought new platform of Kurdish ideology, because the identity of Kurdish parties were various and a lot of them applied left-ideology. PDKI in 1945 could be the first modern political movement for Kurds in Kurdistan. Overall, in Kurdistan today, Kurds had a lot of political movements from the biggest one until smallest one, and legal to illegal parties banned by central government. Simply, to describe the existence of Kurds political movements, the writer would like to deliver table which represent most influential political movements in four different countries among dozens of Kurdish parties that exist today.

<i>Iran</i>	<i>Iraq</i>	<i>Turkey</i>	<i>Syria</i>
PDKI	KDP	PKK	KDP-S
PJAK	PUK	BDP	KDPP
Komala	Chance (Gorran)	KADEP	PYD
	KDSP	HAKPAR	

Table 2.1 Kurdish National Political Movements

In Iran, PDKI appeared as first party that represented will of Kurds since 1946. Led by Qazi Muhammad, later in the next year after the collapse of Republic of Mahabad, this party did some rebel and repressive action toward Tehran regime. PDKI was the only Iranian Kurds political party admitted by Unrepresented Nations and

People Organization (UNPO), an international organization that accommodated marginalized nations in the world, since 2007. Komala existed in 1969 by bringing Marxist ideology and in the early of party establishment, Komala actively did clandestine campaign against Tehran regime. Traditionally, PDKI dominated the Kurds in north and central area while Komala strongly influenced Kurds in south part. Today, both PDKI and Komala had ended their military operation against Iran authority even, their military wings still exist in Iraqi Kurdistan. Then, there is Party for Freedom and Life in Kurdistan or *Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê* (PJAK) founded in 2004. This party is an affiliate party of Turkish Kurdistan party, PKK, in Iran and their movement remain as only Kurds party that use hard power to get their goals.

Some reasons and facts that explain on how PJAK's presence can be accepted among Iranian Kurds society. In the middle of conservative Kurdish parties step back from their movement but PJAK took Kurds' attention and it made them look different from their successor. Stated by many observers, PJAK is the most influential and active Kurds political movement in Iran which can bring the voice of Sunni and Shi'ite Muslim together to fight for Kurds rights. Inside the organization, PJAK share equal position and number on the composition of men and women member.²⁰ Moreover, this party's presence was supported by a large number of young Iranian Kurdish who were

²⁰ <http://www.rubincenter.org/2013/08/the-main-kurdish-political-parties-in-iran-iraq-syria-and-turkey-a-research-guide/>, consulted on 10 April 2015.

disappointed with PDKI's and Komala's movement that could not create any progressive movement to bring the idea of Kurdistan back to track.²¹

Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) formed in 1946 and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)—a splinter faction of KDP that established in 1975 are two main Kurdish parties in Iraq. They play significant and vital role toward the establishment of KRG. The competition between them to take majority voice of Iraqi Kurds did not prevent them to govern and control KRG. PUK Leader, Jalal Talabani, had ever been Prime Minister of Iraq in period of U.S. invasion. While the founder of KPD, Mustafa Barzani, had ever connected with Qazi Muhammad when the foundation of Republic of Mahabad. Another Kurdish party in Iraq which is now becoming a real treat for duo PUK and KDP is Chance or Gorran party. Movement for Chance, a complete name of Gorran, is a split party from PUK.

Among nineteen Kurdish political movements in Turkey,²² PKK is most inspirational and powerful party that was established in 1978 by their charismatic leader Abdullah Ocalan. Two years later, PKK launched attack and started armed conflict against Turkish authority. In 1999, Ocalan arrested under jail for years after the cancelation of death sentence. In the end, PKK made a deal with Turkey authority to talk about peace agreement.²³

²¹ Alexandra Di Stefano Pironti, 'Iranian Repression of Kurds Behind Rise of Militant PJAK', 23 January 2014, <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iran/23012014>, consulted on 8 March 2015.

²² <https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2007/06/12/18426957.php>, consulted on 8 April 2015.

²³ Dorian Jones, 'Turkey-PKK Peace Deal Gains Momentum With Regional Implications', 01 April 2013, <http://www.voanews.com/content/turkey-pkk-peace-deal-gains-momentum-with-regional-implications/1632720.html>, consulted on 10 April 2015.

In Syria, Kurdish political movements do not fight as strong as another Kurdish parties in another Kurdistan regions. Assad and Ba'ath regime is too powerful for them to do resistance, until Arab Spring came to Syria and weakened Assad power as head of state. Unfortunately, Kurdish political movements in Syria like another Kurdish parties cannot unite into one single party. Kurdistan Democratic Party - Syria (KDP-S) as an Iraqi KDP off-shoot and Democratic Union Party or *Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat* (PYD) which affiliate with PKK is an opposite against Assad regime. This condition makes the voice and will of Syrian Kurds cannot be accommodated well.

Out of big number of Kurdistan parties, there is international organization that embodies Kurds aspirations. Kurdistan National Congress or *Kongra Netawiya Kurdistan* (KNK) is a coalition organizations across Europe and Kurdistan to promote and lobby peaceful political solution for Kurdish questions.²⁴ KNK consists almost all of Kurdish political movement established in Kurdistan and an association of Kurds in Europe. Some intellectual Kurds who live in North America also can participate in KNK that have headquarter in Brussels, Belgium.

²⁴ Michael M. Gunter, *From A to Z of the Kurds, 2009*, Plymouth, The Scarecrow Press, p. 110.