

BOOK REVIEW

(KİTAP TAHLİLİ)

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**(“THE KURDISH MOVEMENT OF TURKEY IN EXILE:
CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES IN KURDISH
NATIONALISM DURING THE FRENCH MANDATE IN
SYRIA AND LEBANON (1925-1946)”)**

**(“TÜRKiYE’NİN SÜRGÜNDEKİ KÜRT HAREKETİ:
SURİYE VE LÜBNAN’DAKİ FRANSIZ MANDASI
SIRASINDAKİ KÜRT MİLLİYETÇİLİĞİNDE DEVAMLILIKLAR
VE KOPUKLUKLAR (1925-1946)”)**

Author: Jordis Tejel Gorgas

Title: *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil: continuités et discontinuités du nationalisme kurde sous le mandat français en Syrie et au Liban (1925-1946)*

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Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil: continuités et discontinuités du nationalisme kurde sous le mandat français en Syrie et au Liban (1925-1946) (En. *The Kurdish Movement of Turkey in Exile: Continuities and Discontinuities in Kurdish Nationalism during the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon (1925-1946)*), written by historian and sociologist Jordis Tejel Gorgas, was published in 2007. In the book, the author analyzes the ties between Khoyboun Union, an organization with Kurdish ethnic nationalist ideology that was active in Syria and Lebanon under the French Mandate, and the Armenian Dashnak Party between the years 1925 and 1946.

As Jordis Tejel Gorgas mentions in his book, the Kurdish ethnic nationalist Khoyboun Union was established in Bhamdoun, Lebanon, on 29 October 1927, with the aim of uniting all Kurds under a single roof regardless of their religion, language, or social status. The most distinctive feature of Khoyboun was the importance it attached to diplomatic relations with various countries (Iran, France, United Kingdom, Italy, and the Soviet Union) and foreign organizations such as the Dashnak Party. Although it would be a far-fetched claim to say that this Kurdish organization originated from an Armenian initiative, due to its close relations with the Dashnak Party, the Khoyboun Union is presented as being the result of the efforts of Armenian groups.¹ Gorgas, through the sources he provides, confirms that the meetings between nationalist Kurdish and Armenian groups began in 1926 in Marseille with the initiative of the Dashnak Party. The symbol of this closeness and the one who acted virtually as a bridge between the two organizations was Vahan Papazian, a Dashnak Party official who was a former deputy of Van in the Ottoman Empire. Papazian attended the founding congress of the Khoyboun Union and later took part in the cadres of the organization. Later Khoyboun congresses also saw participations from the Dashnak Party. Together with Papazian, a leading Dashnak Party member Ador Levonian also participated in the congress that took place on 29 March 1928 in Aleppo.² It should be indicated that the names of Dashnak Party members, such as Rifat Menlazande and also Vahan Papazian, have been frequently mentioned among the cadres of the Khoyboun Union.

How does Gorgas explain the rapprochement between the Dashnak and the Khoyboun organizations?

According to the author, the main aim of the cooperation between the two organizations was to establish a Kurdish-Armenian confederation in Southeast Turkey via an insurrection in 1927. The preparations for this cooperation between the two organizations had begun in the 1920s. The nationalist Kurdish historical narrative denies the Kurdish responsibility for the massacres the Armenians were subjected to, and shifts the blame on the Ottoman government and the Turks. The massacres in 1894, 1895, 1915, and 1916 against the Armenians have become a taboo in the nationalist Kurdish historical narrative, and this narrative that puts the blame on others has become unquestionable. Meanwhile, the Dashnak Party, which always held the Turks responsible for everything negative that has happened to Armenians, has facilitated this process

1 Jordis Tejel Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil: continuités et discontinuités du nationalisme kurde sous le mandat français en Syrie et au Liban (1925-1946)* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 121.

2 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 138.

and propagated that while the Turks were “Christian-killers” and “barbarians”, the Kurds were “victimized” and “civilized” people.³

According to the sources pointed out by Gorgas, via an agreement signed between the Dashnak and the Khoyboun organizations in 1927, the Dashnak Party informed the Khoyboun Union that it would provide monetary assistance to support the insurrection to be launched at Ağrı Mountain. Vahan Papazian was involved in significant efforts within the context of the cooperation between the two organizations. During the first days of cooperation between the organizations, Papazian provided a monetary assistance of about 20,000 dollars (a serious amount considering the inflation throughout the years),⁴ and ensured additional significant amounts of money from the Italian government to support the publication of nationalist Kurdish journals. Again, through Papazian, the American Armenian Red Cross Society provided an aid of 7,000 dollars to Khoyboun Union.⁵ Furthermore, Papazian promised that further monetary aid from many governments would be available if nationalist Kurdish leaders and intellectuals put an end to their disagreements. Papazian was also active in France. Upon a call from Şerif Pasha, the Khoyboun representative in France, Papazian sent an amount of 500,000 francs that had he collected from wealthy Armenians in Nice for the provision of arms and ammunition for the Kurds.⁶ Papazian, who was blamed for the murder of Hunchak Party member Sarkis Kaderian Dikhrouni in 1929, with all the things he had done up until then, had shown how important he was for the cooperation between the Khoyboun and the Dashnak organizations. Following Papazian’s arrest, no money transfer took place between the two organizations for a couple of months.

In the book, besides the monetary aid given by the Dashnak Party to the Khoyboun Union, Gorgas also mentions the features of the military cooperation between the two organizations. The Dashnak Party requested Armenians living in Europe and the US to support the “Kurdish-Armenian cause”. Within this context, in 1930, the Dashnak organization located in US provided the Khoyboun Union with 125,000 rifles, 4 million bullets, and 50,000 grenades. The transfer of these arms and ammunitions was done through the Persian Gulf in a period of three months. Furthermore, the French branch of the Dashnak organization sent 30,000 rifles via small Greek cargo ships.⁷

3 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 183. In this respect, Dr. Dargus Kurdistani, in his article published in the *Raja Nû* journal, stated that the Armenian press witnessed the Kurdish-Armenian friendship that was formed within the last twenty years.

4 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 225.

5 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 225.

6 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 225.

7 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 226.

Due to the ending of the 1936 agreement foreseeing the withdrawal of the French from Syria with the establishment of the Vichy regime, as well as the agreement between Turkey, Britain, and France, nationalist Kurdish groups started to approach Germany.

According to British Major Elphinstone's report, which is presented in Gorgas' book, German officials contacted Kurdish groups at the beginning of the war. German officials offered Kurds to follow the policy of the Axis Powers, underlining that the Kurds would not benefit from an alliance with the Allied Powers due to Turks being allied with the French and the British. With the surrender of France to Germany, the German Commission in Syria, presided over by W.O. von Hentig, contacted Khalil ibn Ibrahim Pasha, who was a Syrian deputy and a close friend of Baron Max Oppenheim, and requested a new alliance between Kurds and Armenians.⁸ Within this context, at clandestine gatherings with the Kurdish and Armenian nationalists, von Hentig and Rudolf A. Roser requested them to incite riots and revolts in Turkey. In return, if Germany emerged victorious in the war, the German Commission promised that Germany would assure the "independence of Kurdistan and Armenia". According to the P. de Rudden, the head of the German mission in Al-Jazira, for the Kurds and Bedouins, the Allied powers represented Christianity, while the Nazis represented irreligiosity. In this regard, according to de Rudden, the Nazis were the most suitable ally against the common enemy, the Christians.⁹ Meanwhile, for the oriental elites, Nazism was the ideal form of nationalism, therefore, a political model that should be achieved.

No official agreements between nationalist Kurds and Germans has been found. However, according to French intelligence, nationalist Kurdish and Armenian representatives such as Djeladet Bekir Khan and Hratch Papazian came to terms with the Germans and planned to incite revolts in Turkey in 1942.¹⁰ While the sources presented in the book confirm the authenticity of these information, they also indicate that it was verified by the French intelligence that the Germans made contacts with Şerif Pasha who was in France at the time.¹¹

The Dashnak Party also tried to get support from Iran in order to carry out the insurrection in Ağrı Mountain. Within this context, in order to avoid damaging possible "diplomatic" relations with Iran, the Dashnak Party and the Khoyboun

8 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 153.

9 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 154.

10 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 154.

11 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 154.

Union took the decision to not act against Iran.¹² Iran, which sought to avoid any direct confrontation with Turkey, stipulated conditions to the Khoyboun Union. With the support of the Dashnak organization members in Iran, Djeladet Bekir Khan traveled to Tehran to establish contacts with Iran. Nationalist Kurds and Armenians, as part of their “Aryan Race”¹³ principle, tried to recruit Iran to their cause.

Gorgas states that the idea that Kurds and Armenians descended from the “Aryan Race” had been addressed in the past.¹⁴ However, the intention or idea to establish a political union between the two groups as part of a common ideology was a first in history. The end goal of these efforts was to ensure the founding of an “Aryan Confederation” consisting of Kurds and Armenians. Iran was offered to lead and protect this union. However, this project was never made official; Iranian officials told Djeladet Bekir Khan that this project was “interesting, but unrealistic”.¹⁵ The strategic aim of this association between the Dashnak Party and the Khoyboun Union was to provide the insurrectionists in Ağrı Mountain with the support of an influential foreign state. In any case, Iran, which deemed an Aryan Confederation that included Iran as unrealistic, allowed members of the Dashnak Party and the Khoyboun Union to establish contacts with the insurrectionists in Ağrı Mountain. Iran’s relations with Turkey was harmed due to Iran sending representatives to Ağrı Mountain until the 1930s. According to Nader Entessar, in that period, the Shah of Iran used the “Kurdish card” to put pressure on the Turkish government in its border issues with Turkey.

As stated by Gorgas, although ties between the Dashnak Party and the Khoyboun Union was later broken off, both sides continued to argue that they descended from the “Aryan Race”. In the Khoyboun Union, the Bedir Khan Brothers propagated in the brochures of the organization that, unlike “the Mongol or the Tatar Turks”, the Kurds were “Aryan”.¹⁶ In parallel with this, in the Dashnak Party, Roupén Ter Minassian defended the “Aryan Union” principle and the “Kurdish cause” in the party’s official journal.¹⁷

12 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 227.

13 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 227. In their statement on 5 April 1925 towards the League of Nations and the Western countries requesting the “independence of the Kurdish state”, nationalist Kurds indicated that the “Aryan” Kurds had absolutely no common features (language, ethnic origin, culture) with the “Mongolian” Turks.

14 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 227.

15 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 228.

16 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 228.

17 Gorgas, *Le mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil...*, p. 228.

Today, despite tensions between them, Kurdish ethnic nationalist movements and several Armenian groups that demand reparations and territories from Turkey, seeing Turkey as a common enemy, have formed an alliance of sorts. Trying to put aside past conflicts and the blood spilt between Armenians and Kurds, and trying to blame Turks for all past negative events, these groups seek to find ways to act together against Turkey. The importance of Jordis Tejel Gorgas' book manifests itself at this juncture: the book concretely puts down the fact that a similar alliance had already formed and was active in the early period of the Republic of Turkey.