



HAL
open science

The Repression of the Koçgiri Rebellion, 1920-1921

Elise Massicard

► **To cite this version:**

Elise Massicard. The Repression of the Koçgiri Rebellion, 1920-1921. Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence , 2009. hal-03570167

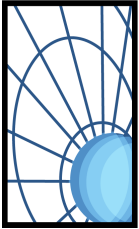
HAL Id: hal-03570167

<https://hal-sciencespo.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03570167>

Submitted on 13 Feb 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



The Repression of the Koçgiri Rebellion, 1920-1921

Massicard, Elise

Monday 28 September 2009

[Stable URL: http://www.massviolence.org/Article?id_article=236](http://www.massviolence.org/Article?id_article=236)

[PDF version: http://www.massviolence.org/PdfVersion?id_article=236](http://www.massviolence.org/PdfVersion?id_article=236)

PDF

Context

The Koçgiri rebellion took place in a time of extreme political uncertainty. It began shortly after the end of the First World War, a few months after the armistice was signed between the Allies and the Ottomans on October 31, 1918. Between the first initiatives and the resulting repression of the rebellion the political context changed a lot: the Sivas Congress, an Assembly of the Turkish resistance movement organized by Mustafa Kemal, took place (September, 1919); Istanbul was occupied by the Allies and the Ottoman Assembly was dissolved (March 16, 1920); the Sèvres Treaty was concluded (August 10, 1920); and the first Grand National Assembly of Turkey was launched in Ankara (April 23, 1920). Therefore, the Koçgiri events took place when there were competing political centers of power: the first signs of unrest appeared when the Istanbul government was still in place, and the uprising grew during the consolidation of the resistance movement. Istanbul was very quickly replaced by Ankara as the centre of power and the addressee of the rebels' claims, and finally the repression was organized from Ankara.

Political change and unrest was linked to international developments. President Woodrow Wilson's 14 points in 1918 gave recognition to the idea of a new international order based on the principle of self-determination. Point 12 stated that «the Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development». This statement had serious consequences for the Eastern provinces of the Empire, which were claimed simultaneously by Turks, Armenians, and Kurds. Armenian nationalist organizations claimed an independent Armenian state encompassing six Ottoman provinces (Sivas, Bitlis, Van, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Erzurum), the British wanted even more. Finally, the Sèvres Treaty signed in 1920 recognized Armenia as a «free and independent state» in Northeastern Anatolia, including the provinces of Trabzon, Kars, Ardahan, Erzurum, Van and Bitlis, also inhabited by Kurds (Articles 88 to 94). It foresaw a «local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas» in Southeastern Anatolia (articles 62 to 64). It even foresaw that «if within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas.»

However, not all Kurdish dignitaries supported this project. First, Mustafa Kemal strongly appealed to the Kurds for support against the foreign occupiers with notable success. Most Sunni Kurdish dignitaries, motivated by religious solidarity, supported the Kemalist resistance movement, organized from mid-1919 in Eastern Anatolia, which promised fraternity between Turks and Kurds, the liberation of the Caliph in Istanbul from the infidel occupiers, and the liberation of Mossul province from British rule. However, this call did not really appeal to the heterodox Alevis, who were less attached to the Caliphate. The attitude of the Alevi religious hierarchy during the War of Independence, although it remains debated, overall seems to have been supportive of the Kemalist movement, at least at its conception (Küçük, 2002; [Fliche and Massicard, 2006](#)). However, the attachment of some Kurdish groups – especially those of Dersim, a very rural and poor region situated east of Koçgiri, only formally integrated into the Empire, and which had recently gained autonomy during the War – to this religious hierarchy seems to have been quite loose.

On the other hand, the end of WWI marked a resurgence in Kurdish nationalist activity. Kurdish nationalist groups based in Istanbul mounted competing claims on the territories formally constituting Armenia according to the Treaty of Sèvres. The Kürt Terakki ve Teavün Cemiyeti (Kurdish Society for Progress and

Mutual Aid) founded in 1908, was resurrected in 1918 as the Kürdistan Taâlî Cemiyeti (KTC, Society for the Rise of Kurdistan). This organization was based in Istanbul and gathered a few hundred members influenced by nationalist ideas, mainly from important Kurdish families integrated into the State apparatus, Kurdish intellectuals, the urban middle class, officers and some members from the tribes (van Bruinessen, 1992: 275, 278).

This time of political change and uncertainty was marked by great political unrest. Between 1919 and late 1921, many initiatives were started against the resistance movement and later against the Ankara government's effort to centralize authority on what would become the whole country. Apak (1964) counts 24 such events, and four in the areas populated by Kurds—three of them involving Kurdish tribes and clans among which Koçgiri appears as the most serious.

Two figures among the members of the Kürdistan Taâlî Cemiyeti were directly involved in the Koçgiri uprising: first, Haydar, a student in Istanbul at the time, the son of Mustafa Pa_a, the leader of the Koçgiri tribe—the term Koçgiri designated at the same time a confederation of Kurdish (kurmançî)-speaking Alevi tribes, including tens of thousands of people settled in more than one hundred villages; the region to the east of Sivas where these tribes lived; and an administrative district in the midst of that region. The second person involved both in the KTC and the Koçgiri events, was Baytar Nuri, later known as [Nuri Dersimi](#). After studying veterinary medicine in Istanbul, he was appointed as a vet to Sivas, probably with the help of the KTC, in order to set up the organization there. After he and Haydar arrived in 1918 or 1919, Ali_er, Mustafa Pa_a's secretary, was also involved in the local organization of the Society for the Rise of Kurdistan that worked to spread nationalist propaganda. However, even if the KTC was influential at the beginning of the unrest, it then turned out to be totally cut off from the movement, and lost any influence it once held, mainly due to internal tensions, particularly between autonomists and people fighting for independence.

However, not only those associated with the KTC were involved in the unrest, where local dynamics were probably predominant. Other tribal leaders should also be mentioned, especially Ali_an, Haydar's brother, who was at the time district vice-governor in Refahiye. The Koçgiri tribal leader, Mustafa, had enjoyed the high administrative title of Pa_a for a few decades, and many members of his family were local administrative officials. Little is known about what happened during the war in the region. It was not occupied during WWI; however, it witnessed the deportation and massacre of numerous Armenians. There was a kind of modus vivendi between several Dersim tribes and Armenians in Harput, the latter having been reportedly sheltered, rescued and escorted by some tribes to Russian-occupied Erzincan (Kieser, 1998). In July 1915, rumors spread around Dersim that the Ottoman government would destroy the Kurds right after their anti-Armenian campaign.

Decision-Makers, Organizers and Actors

[Nuri Dersimi](#) took advantage of his appointment in Sivas to organize local tribes and to foster cooperation with some tribes in west Dersim, using his father, who provided contact with [Seyyit Rıza](#), an important religious leader. Mustafa Kemal, learning about these initiatives after the Erzurum Congress—an assembly of the Turkish resistance movement that took place in July-August 1919—arranged a meeting with Koçgiri tribal leaders. Ali_an met him and explained their concerns about the future of the region. Mustafa Kemal argued that the Ottoman government would not be able to fulfill the conditions of the Sèvres Treaty or the self-determination of Kurdistan and insisted that they should cooperate with his resistance movement instead, arguing that it was also in favor of the Kurds. Consequently, he proposed himself and [Nuri Dersimi](#) as candidates for a seat in the National Assembly. At first Ali_an accepted, but under the influence of [Nuri Dersimi](#), declined in the end.

In the following months, several meetings were organized in the region. In February 1920, different Kurdish Alevi tribes from the region gathered in an Alevi Dervish lodge near Kangal. According to Dersimi, this is where the decision was made to take up arms in order to create an independent Kurdistan, including the regions of Diyarbakır, Van, Bitlis, Elazığ and Dersim-Koçgiri (Dersimi, 1997 [1952]: 139). Following this meeting, a period of tension and limited military troubles began and guerilla actions against civilians and villages intensified. In the summer, the rebels also began to target officials, especially police and gendarmerie stations and military convoys, seizing their munitions.

On November 15, following a meeting between the main leaders of the movement and some tribes from western Dersim, the first memorandum was sent to the new Ankara government. It demanded clarifications about the official position regarding promises of Kurdish autonomy and requested less state penetration and coercion in the region. The Ankara government then sent a commission that promised that these demands would be accepted and tried to convince the rebels to cooperate with the government to liberate the country from the occupying forces; however, it was driven out of the region (Dersimi, 1997 [1952]: 142). A few days later, the rebels sent a telegraph to the Ankara National Assembly claiming Kurdish independence. There is no known written answer. According to Olson however, Ankara responded that it was in agreement with the demands (1989: 30). During the following months, a constant process of claims-making, commission-sending, bargaining with local notables and tribal leaders about the surrender of the rebels and weapons, promises about the future of the region and amnesties took place, while unrest continued to grow.

The armed confrontation proper began in December 1920, when a local director of a post office was assassinated; new troops were sent to the area. The gendarmerie battalion was attacked by rebels en route, who took control of its arms and supplies. In January 1921, a colonel was sent to Sivas to recover the lost arms and to arrest deserters or rebels, especially the leader of the attack, whom the villagers were not willing to hand over. The regiment was attacked and defeated by the rebels, who began to capture villages and towns like Ümraniye and Kemah, and to arrest some officials and influential people. The colonel and some soldiers were killed, others were released. Encouraged by this success, new groups, mostly Alevi Kurds, joined the rebellion, although some tribes from more distant regions that had declared their support finally withdrew. The rebels captured other towns like Kuruçay and Bolucan, and arrested civil and military officers. However, they did encounter resistance in some villages; official sources claim that they plundered Turkish villages (Apak, 1964: 268), which is not mentioned in Kurdish nationalist accounts.

Martial law was declared in the region in the first half of March 1921. The general staff considered what was going on as «the beginning of a new and important rebellion» (Apak, 1964: 264); it attempted to send military units that had «gained experience and success in [dealing with] internal dangers» (ibid.). [Nurettin Paşa](#), the Commander of the Central Army, one of the main units of the Turkish Army newly reformed, received the order to repress the uprising. The government sent important troops from neighboring provinces. The Giresun corps headed by the militia commander [Topal Osman](#) was also placed in the service of the Central Army, although the methods he had previously used, especially in the repression of the Pontus uprisings (from 1919, involving massacres, plundering and the appropriation of goods) were contested. Multiple dynamics resulting in coercion can thus be observed: a quasi-centralized State in its formative stage that had no real control over its army; an autonomous commander; and a paramilitary force which acts as the State's official organ. It is therefore a case of the co-existence of centrally commanded and non-centrally commanded forms of violence, engendering their own autonomous effects.

Official sources estimate governmental forces to number 3,161 men and 1,350 animals (Apak, 1964: 271) against about 3,000 rebels. Dersimi however argues that governmental forces encompassed about 6,000 cavalymen, 25,000 infantrymen, plus some militias and gendarmerie forces, and evaluates the number of fighting rebels to be 6,185, including about 2,000 from Koçgiri, 2,000 from Dersim, and 2,000 from other

tribes. The region's governor's demand for a peaceful solution, including an amnesty for the rebels, was rejected by the government. The counteroffensive took place in two stages: the first stage, beginning on April 11, lasted about ten days and was mobile, whereas the second period, more directed towards «cleansing», lasted for about two months (April 23 - June 17).

Victims

[Nurettin Paşa](#) ordered that the violence be directed against the organizers and instigators of the uprising. The belongings of the leaders were to be confiscated and their houses burned and destroyed. If they were not isolated individuals but the inhabitants of the same village, this was to be enacted on the whole village. He further insisted that the targets of repression were not to be the citizens themselves, but those who manipulated and provoked them and were the cause of the troubles. The Army was supposed to inform the people about the situation, hand over the rebels and demand the peoples' obedience. If they did not obey, they were to be treated as rebels themselves. He recommended that neighboring villages and tribes that were loyal to the government should not be punished, to make a good impression on the people, gain their trust and convince them that the government protected their belongings, lives, and honor, and respected the rights of all citizens without considering religious differences (Apak, 1964: 265).

At the beginning of April, [Nurettin Paşa](#) ordered his units: «Depending on the result of repressive operations, it will be ordered either to reduce the Koçgiri tribe to a state where it can't rebel anymore, or to divide it and deport it from the territory where it has been living until now» (Apak, 1964: 271). In order to prevent such an event from happening again, [Nurettin Paşa](#) decided to «disperse the insurgent villages and scatter them to other parts of Anatolia, among Turks» (Apak, 1964: 281). In June, 1921, several hundred people were exiled to western parts of the country. At the end of May, [Nurettin Paşa](#) declared in a telegraph to have killed 272 people, including tribal leaders and bandits, and to have captured 56 people (Tepeyran, 1982: 75-76). On May 24, [Nurettin Paşa](#) stated in a telegraph to the General Staff that «until now we have cleansed the region lying between the Euphrates, Erzincan and Ümraniye, and killed almost 500 rebels» (Apak, 1964: 280).

However, the repression seems to have been even more extensive and violent than merely targeting instigators. The very first day, two villages were burned and the Çengerli region «cleansed» (Apak, 1964: 272). Dersimi mentions that the Army destroyed villages, killed young men, evacuated old people to the west, and burned forests (Dersimi, 1997 [1952]: 163, 165).

Civil officials reported the use of disproportionate violence and recommended a change in the methods employed. The repression was strongly criticized by Tepeyran, the Sivas governor from May 31, 1921. He reported that 132 villages were burned and devastated, hundreds of people killed, their goods and livestock plundered, and that many villagers, frightened by the repression took refuge in the mountains, where they died of starvation and misery. Tepeyran harshly criticized the killing of numerous people, including innocents. He further criticized the fact that [Nurettin Paşa](#) refused to reconstruct 76 destroyed villages and instead proposed to regroup their people in 16 new villages (Tepeyran, 1982: 75, 77), a proposal that was eventually rejected by the MPs. Tepeyran asked for a parliamentary commission to investigate the events.

The debates at the time question the relevance of the very term «repression» to describe the events. The term is deployed in Kemalist discourse as a natural consequence of rebellion and is contested: to what extent can the violence be considered as the mere consequence of revolt? It can also be seen as the sign of a will to punish a group refusing to support the Kemalist movement and not fitting into the homogenization policy first developed by the Young Turk Central Committee and later continued by the Kemalists. At this

time, Anatolia was being defined as the stronghold of «Turkishness» or of «Islam» the categories were then interchangeable whose defense required the use of massive internal violence. This period was also characterized by the banalization of mass violence throughout Anatolia, of course in the context of international war, but also domestically, be it in the form of serial executions ordered by the Independence Tribunals, the repression of uprisings (Pontus), or the mass massacres of some groups of the population (Armenians).

The National Assembly discussed the campaign behind closed doors in October 1921. The sessions were held in secret because some MPs did not want the foreign powers and especially the Allies to be informed about what went on. Many MPs were embarrassed about the «atrocities» (mezalim) and abuse of military power; they debated their own responsibility, since the repression had been carried out in the name of the nation they represented.

Most MPs considered what happened as a mere «event» (olay , hadise). Some MPs asked for a general amnesty from which the rebels would benefit too. Some strongly criticized the disproportionate violence of the repression: «These atrocities haven t been made even to the Armenians» (TBMM, 1980: 270). An Erzincan MP, Emin Bey, complained «we qualify them as rebels and we send military forces on them» (TBMM, 1980: 269), he also emphasized the excessive use of force and injustice of the repression. He was very critical about the repression: «The people from Dersim, witnessing that the so-called punishment implemented in Ümraniye reached a degree that would not be accepted even by Barbarians in Africa, began to be afraid». Mustafa bey, a Dersim MP, argued that repression was not limited to the Koçgiri, giving examples of Turkish families having been subject to injury (TBMM, 1980: 270). Emin Bey also related the treatment of a Turk from Refahiye, whose possessions were plundered, whose wife was kidnapped and who was tortured and killed because he was Alevi. Hüseyin Avni argued that [Nurettin Paşa](#) had abused his function and should be punished, which would prove the Assembly s authority. Emin Bey accused the forces led by [Topal Osman](#) of using excessive violence and especially criticized the fact that they were not answerable to Parliament. Because of the pressure of the MPs, Mustafa Kemal had to recall [Nurettin Paşa](#) from the direction of the Central Army. However, he still protected him when the Assembly asked for sanctions.

Witnesses

There were hardly any external witnesses of the Koçgiri rebellion. All missionaries remaining in the eastern provinces had been expelled by the Ankara government before the military campaign (Kieser, 2002). The main witness, from the rebels side, is [Nuri Dersimi](#). His two books give detailed accounts of the revolt and repression from the rebels point of view. However, they were written long after the events, and because of the Kurdish nationalist orientation of their author, cannot be taken at face value. They also do not give any reliable indications as to his role in the Koçgiri revolt. The fact that his two books constitute one of the main sources on the revolt may well lead to an overestimation of his own role. However, he is not mentioned anywhere else except by Kemali, who describes him as a second-rate commander. [Nuri Dersimi](#) records [Nurettin Paşa](#) saying: «We have destroyed those saying zo [the Armenians], I will also clean completely those who say lo [the Kurds]» (1997 [1952]: 169). Therefore, he argues that the violence of the repression was motivated by the will to exterminate a people, and draws a parallel between the extermination of the Armenians, which was implemented on a much larger scale, and the repression of the Koçgiri events. However, no reliable source can be found for this quotation.

On the official side, the main witness is Ebubekir Hazim Tepeyran (1864-1947). He was a high Ottoman bureaucrat who continued his career during the interregnum and the Republic. During the armistice, he was appointed twice as Minister of Interior Affairs. Because he helped the resistance movement, he was

condemned to death by the Allied occupying forces, but escaped to Anatolia. His first appointment by the Ankara government was as Governor of Sivas – he had held this position before, at the very beginning of the century. He learned about what was going on when he entered this post on May 31, 1921, as the repression of the Koçgiri uprising was about to finish. He immediately opposed the campaign. According to his account, the rebellion was instigated by some ill-intentioned Kurdish conspirators who manipulated the tribes, and without the consent of many tribal leaders. When [Nurettin Paşa](#) came to Sivas, a peaceful solution had been found through a commission of tribal leaders who agreed to give back the goods that had been taken from the battalion and to fight the «bandits» (Tepeyran, 1982: 70). According to Tepeyran, [Nurettin Paşa](#) exaggerated the incidents caused by the unrest because he wanted to implement the repression, which meant causing «blood to flow uselessly, just for fun» (1982: 73). He openly accused [Nurettin Paşa](#) of abusing the powers given to him and of causing «the death of so many people not during skirmishes, but in the form of a massacre» (1982: 76). Because he opposed [Nurettin Paşa](#), he was dismissed as early as August 1921, and appointed as Governor of Trabzon. Another official witness is Ali Kemali, the Governor of Erzincan from August 1930 to May 1932. However, although he had privileged access to official sources, he cannot be considered as an eyewitness of the event, since he was appointed a few years after the revolt.

Finally, on the perpetrators' side, there are hardly any witnesses. However, in an interview given to a famous journalist in 1922, [Topal Osman](#) confessed that he had not killed only rebel Kurds, but also Armenians and Greeks in Su_ahri, Koyulhisar, Re_adiye, Niksar and Erbaa. However, he probably meant the campaign he conducted on the Pontus rebels just after Koçgiri and further north.

Memories

Official institutions have tried to erase these events from the collective memory; no memorial to these events has ever been created. The very name of the town Ümraniye – one of the most important places of the rebellion, the first town captured by the rebels, where a Kurdish flag is said to have been raised – was renamed Omranlı in 1948. The renaming of places is a common tactic used by nation-states seeking to increase their hold over contested territories. This power technique was widely used by the early Turkish Republic, and recalls the way institutions dealt with Dersim, changing the name of the department to Tunceli in 1936, as part of a broader program of «modernization» of the region that gave birth to the rebellion in 1937-1938. The name Ümraniye that disappeared from official accounts was taken by migrants from the region who settled in a suburb of Istanbul in the 1950s.

Despite this official erasure, social institutions have retained a long-lasting memory of the Koçgiri events. First, official history accepts the rebellion as the first initiative of separatist Kurds. Although unrest stopped for decades in the Koçgiri region after the repression, and although Koçgiris didn't support the later Kurdish uprisings (most notably the Sheikh Said uprising in 1925, even Dersim in 1937-1938), some people from the Koçgiri tribe claimed that, due to the insurrection, the use of the tribe's name «Koçgiri» in public risked criminal persecution, this remained the case until the end of the 1990s (Seufert, 1997: 161). In the 1950s, a leader of the Koçgiri tribe attempted to stand as an MP for the right-wing Democratic Party (Demokrat Partisi), the main challenger of the statist, Kemalist, Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi). Although enjoying sufficient social support to get nominated and even elected, he was impeded because of the reputation of his family as leaders of the rebellion. This exclusion however has lessened with time. While tribesmen who dominated the local administration until the early 1920s were purged after the uprising, they were able to regain these positions a few decades afterwards. In the same way, in the 1970s members of the family could actively engage in politics again; in the 1990s, Ziya Halis, a grandson of Ali_an, was elected MP for the leftist SHP (Sosyaldemokrat Halkç1 Partisi, Social Democratic Populist Party) and even became a minister twice.

The vividness of the memory of the Koçgiri events is also linked to the fact that other memories of the Koçgiri revolt and its repression have been actively kept and reactivated by oppositional circles, mainly Kurdish nationalists, but also by leftists. Kurdish nationalist memories tend to over-emphasize the reach of the events. This was most obvious in the early 1990s, when the PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan , Kurdistan Workers Party) was active in the region in its strategy of moving north. One PKK militant, a great-grandson of Ali_an and a nephew of the MP mentioned above took as a codename «Ali_er Koçgiri». Following his joining the PKK, the organization created a new regional section, called Koçgiri, and gave him responsibility for it. In July, 1993, what is commonly known as «the Sivas event» or the «Sivas massacre» occurred: 37 leftist intellectuals participating in a cultural festival organized by an Alevi organization in Sivas the main city near the Koçgiri region were killed when a mob of Islamists set fire to the hotel where they had assembled. Two days later, some PKK militants killed 32 people in a Turkish Sunni village isolated among Alevi settlements. It was not any village, but the first one that had been attacked by the Koçgiri rebels in 1921. Çiçek, a Kurdish nationalist, argues that the repression of the Koçgiri upheaval and that of the PKK in the same region in the 1990s were very similar: the PKK reportedly looked for and enjoyed support chiefly among Alevi villages (both Kurdish and Turkish) and attacked Sunni villages, whereas governmental forces distributed arms and enjoyed support mainly from Sunni settlements. Moreover, in the mid-1990s, many villages were emptied, probably by the security forces. Alevi villagers complained that they were considered by officials as «potentially suspect», especially because of the «reputation» of the region based on the Koçgiri events. Çiçek, relating memories not from direct witnesses of the events, but of some rebels and victims descendants, qualifies the repression of the Koçgiri uprising as «genocide» (1999: 165-217). A sociological study done in the 1990s on Koçgiri migrants in Istanbul showed that they tended to see themselves in the context of both a religious and tribal history as existing in a more or less «natural» tension with the political centre, be it the Ottoman Empire or the Republic (Seufert, 1997: 162). Therefore, the memory of the events has shaped the construction of the image of the region, and especially of some of its inhabitants, as «dangerous» and potential rebels; it has shaped the identity construction of the people from Koçgiri as well. However, it is difficult to make more precise statements, as direct witnesses can hardly be found. Öz claims to have used oral memories, although in a limited fashion, since he could not find any direct witnesses of the events (1999: 12).

General and Legal Interpretations of the Facts

There has hardly been any legal debate on the Koçgiri revolt or its repression. In 1921, 400 imprisoned rebels were judged by the Sivas Martial Court. The leaders of the revolt and 95 persons were condemned to death; other rebels were condemned to prison terms ranging from 5 to 15 years. Only 110 people out of 400 were judged to be innocent («irresponsible»), but even they were condemned to exile (Dersimi, 1997 [1952]: 168, 173). These punishments provoked many requests and complaints, especially by some of the region's MPs. In 1922, the Sivas Martial Court was dissolved and most people condemned for having participated in the rebellion, even those condemned to death, were granted amnesty by Mustafa Kemal. Ali_er and [Nuri Dersimi](#) were excluded from this amnesty. However, having taken refuge in Dersim like many rebels, they were beyond the reach of the courts. Some leaders were put under house arrest and Ali_an and Haydar were forbidden from returning to the Koçgiri region. A later amnesty included Ali_an and his followers. In 1931 they were allowed to go back to the region.

On the official side, none of the repressors were subject to inquiry. Only [Nurettin Paşa](#) was punished because his violent methods were harshly condemned, especially in the Assembly. He was removed from command of the Central Army in November, 1921. The Assembly decided he should be judged, but Mustafa Kemal opposed this and vetoed this decision; as early as 1922, [Nurettin Paşa](#) was appointed as the Commander of the First Army, and in 1924, only three years after the repression of the Koçgiri

rebellion, he was elected as an independent MP during a by-election.

From a scholarly point of view, the Koçgiri revolt has been studied mainly under three different frameworks: first, the events are considered in the broader context of the Turkish War of Independence, especially by official sources and historiography. Official and military writings tend to consider the repression as normal in a context of civil war. Even Tepeyran (1982), who harshly criticizes the repression, explains it as an abuse of power by military leaders and, implicitly, by the importation of military methods in dealing with internal protests. Many scholarly histories of modern Turkey, apparently not considering this event as significant, do not even mention it, or deal with it only cursorily. The second, broader interpretation is to contextualize Koçgiri in the Turkish nation formation process in the long 19th century. Koçgiri then appears as one massacre in a long line of mass murders (Armenians 1915, Pontus 1921, Ararat 1930, Dersim 1937-38, etc.) of the Young Turk and Kemalist regimes. In this interpretation again, Koçgiri is not considered as very significant, being less documented, and probably less massive, than other episodes. The third framework in which the Koçgiri event has been studied is the Kurdish national movement and its interaction with the authorities. This framework gives the event a much more significant place and deals with it more extensively. Official writings and later official history actually also consider the Koçgiri revolt as having a nationalist Kurdish character, even if they also widely consider the rebels as «bandits», and even if this is often a posteriori (Kemali, 1932; Apak 1964). Therefore, there is somehow a consensus on the nationalist character of the revolt. Consequently, Koçgiri is almost always studied as an important step in a broader process of Kurdish nationalist claims and revolts, and in their repression by the Turkish State. «The way Ankara suppressed militarily the Koçgiri movement (&) shaped the governmental behavior toward all Alevi and Kurdish autonomy claims during the 20th century: massive coercion and violence, deportation, and complete absence of political negotiation» (Kieser, 2002). In this framework, Koçgiri is given special significance because it is widely considered as the first expressly Kurdish nationalist rebellion in the emerging Turkish Republic (van Bruinessen, 1997; Kieser, 2002), and because it marked an alliance between Kurmanci-speakers (Koçgiris) and Zaza-speakers (Dersimis), which proved to be very rare during the following Kurdish nationalist revolts.

In this framework, the revolt also has a special place because it was supported almost exclusively by Alevis. Therefore, Koçgiri has mainly been studied together with the only other Kurdish nationalist rebellion supported by Alevis, Dersim (1937-1938), while all other Kurdish revolts were supported by Sunnis. Another reason for this parallel is that some supporters (some western Dersim tribes) and leaders of both revolts were in part the same: Ali_er and [Nuri Dersimi](#) were leaders of the Dersim revolt. But the fact that Dersimi's writings, which are posterior to both revolts, are very important sources for both events may lead to overestimations both of his own importance especially in the Koçgiri rebellion and the continuity between the two. Moreover, much more attention has been devoted to the Dersim rebellion: first, because it was much more important in terms of numbers and the violence of the repression, whereas Koçgiri is often lost in the wider movements and oppositions of the national struggle; second, because many more sources are available relating to Dersim. Moreover, Dersim has become a cause and a symbol, and has been studied as such. The perverse effect is that the Koçgiri revolt and its repression are often considered in retrospect and in relationship with the Dersim events, as a kind of «pre-Dersim». This perspective is confusing, because in 1920-1921 the Army did not even enter Dersim, and the role of Dersim was limited to sending supporters and providing a safe haven.

The religious character of the revolt has been underestimated in the main historiographies. Officials and Kurdish nationalists hardly mention the Alevi dimension (Apak, 1964); Dersimi only mentions «Kurds», «Turks» and «tribes». Most scholarly works on Kurdish nationalism actually don't stress this dimension: the fact that the first Kurdish rebellion against Mustafa Kemal was organized by Alevis does not fit well in a Kurdish nationalist movement widely dominated by Sunnis. Only academic writings have dealt with this dimension. Van Bruinessen (1992) considers this, along with the tribal dimension, as one reason why the generalization of the revolt failed. Kieser ([1993](#); 1998) was the first to focus on the Alevi dimension of the

revolt, at least as a framework of mobilization. He also questioned possible religious motives behind both the feelings of exclusion and the fear of Koçgiris as giving birth to the rebellion, and to the violence of the repression.

Alevi historiography itself has hardly paid attention to this revolt. It often considers that Alevis have always supported Mustafa Kemal. The main work devoted to this event in this framework argues that the Koçgiris were not real Kurds but Turkish Alevis who had been Kurdicized during the Ottoman period (Öz, 1999). They had no nationalist motivations, but were manipulated into rebelling by Kurdish nationalists who were actually Sunnis and by «feudal» tribal leaders, linked to the Sultan, who were afraid of Mustafa Kemal's policies against notables and tribes.

Finally, leftist literature has given more significance to Koçgiri, which is considered as a rebellion against a centralizing, authoritarian, and repressive state, emphasizing the repressive dimension. The way Komal (1975), a group of leftists and Kurdish nationalists, analyzes the Koçgiri events shows that Kemalism was not anti-imperialist or anti-colonialist even during the War of Independence, but that it began massacring oppressed people right from its inception.

Bibliography

APAK, Hüseyin Rahmi, 1964, *Türk Östiklâl Harbi 0ç ayaklanmalar: 1919-1921*, vol. VI, Ankara: Genel Kurmay Ba_kanl1 1 Harb Tarihi Resmi Yay1nlar1

BALCIOGLU, Mustafa, 2000, *0ki isyan (Pontus, Koçgiri), bir Pa_a (Nurettin Pa_a)*, Istanbul: Nobel.

ÇOÇEK, Evin Aydar, 1999, *Koçgiri Ulusal Kurtulu_ Hareketi*, Stockholm: Apec.

DERSIMI, Nuri, 1997 [1952], *Kürdistan Tarihinde Dersim*, Istanbul: Doz.

DERSIMI, Nuri, 1997 [1986], *Hatirat1m*, Istanbul: Doz.

FLICHE Benoit, MASSICARD Elise, 2006, «L'oncle et le député: circuits de ressources et usages de la parenté dans un lignage sacré en Turquie», *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, Thematic Issue N°4, The social practices of kinship. A comparative perspective, URL : <http://www.ejts.org/document627.html>

KEMALI, Ali, 1992 [1932], *Erzincan: Tarihi, co rafi, toplumsal, etnografi, idari, ohsai inceleme ara_t1rma tecrübesi*, Istanbul: Kaynak.

KIESER, Hans-Lukas, 1993, «Les Kurdes alévis face au nationalisme turc kémaliste. L'alévité de Dersim et son rôle dans le premier soulèvement kurde contre Mustapha Kemal (Koçgiri, 1919-1921)», *Occasional Paper 18*., MERA (Middle East Research Associates), Amsterdam, URL : <http://www.hist.net/kieser/pu/Kocgiri.html>.

KIESER, Hans-Lukas, 1998, «Les Kurdes Alévis et la question identitaire: le soulèvement du Koçgiri-Dersim (1919-1921)», *Les Annales de l'autre Islam «L'islam des Kurdes»*, 5, pp. 279-316.

KIESER, Hans-Lukas, 2002, «Some Remarks on Alevi Responses to the Missionaries in Eastern Anatolia (19th-20th cc.)», in: Tejirian, Eleanor H., and Spector Simon, Reeva (eds.), *Altruism and Imperialism. Western Cultural and Religious Missions to the Middle East (19th-20th cc.)*, New York: Columbia

University, pp. 120-142.

KOMAL, 1975, Koçgiri halk hareketi 1919-1921 , Ankara: Komal.

KÜÇÜK, Hülya, 2002, The Role of Bektashis in Turkey s National Struggle , Brill: Leiden.

ÖZ, Baki, 1999, Belgelerle Koçgiri Olayı , İstanbul: Can.

SEUFERT, Günter, «Between Religion and Ethnicity: a Kurdish-Alevi tribe in globalizing Istanbul», in ÖNCÜ Ayşe, WEILAND Petra (eds.), 1997, Space, Culture and Power , London: Zed Books, pp. 157-177.

SEVGİN, Nazmi, 1950, «Koçgirili Ali_er», Tarih dünyası , 1:9,

URL: <http://www.dersim.biz/html/tmp9a.htm>

Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi,1980, TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları ,2:, Ankara: TBMM basımevi.

TEPEYRAN, Ebubekir Hazım,1982, Belgelerle Kurtuluş Savaşı Anıları , İstanbul: Çağdaş.

VAN BRUINESSEN, Martin, 1992, Agha, Sheikh and State , London: Zed Books.

VAN BRUINESSEN, Martin, «Aslında inkâr eden haramzâdedir! The debate on the ethnic identity of the Alevi Kurds», in KEHL-BODROGI, Krisztina, KELLNER-HEINKELE, Barbara and OTTER-BEAUJEAN, Anke (eds.), 1997, Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East , Leiden: Brill, pp. 1-23.