

University of Szeged  
Doctoral School of History  
Doctoral Program in Contemporary and Comparative History

**FROM INTEGRATION TO ALIENATION**  
**Diverging Perceptions of the Kurdish Question in**  
**the Turkish Modernization**

Islam Sargi

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Doctoral (Ph.D.) dissertation

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## **Dedication**

To Petrovics Józsefné and her beloved sons, Tamás, György, and József.

And to all mothers and children of war.



## **Acknowledgments**

This dissertation is written by someone who has no language. Although my mother tongue is Kurdish, my entire education was in Turkish. I have never had an official education in Kurdish. I have also learned English. However, in Turkish and English still have some difficulties with their proper accent and writing. Being my mother tongue, I have no problem with the proper Kurdish accent, but I cannot easily read or write it. As someone who grew up in the middle of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, I never asked, thought, or spoke about the Kurds. I have unconsciously believed that the better I speak Turkish, the more Turkish I become and the more I will be accepted in society.

The day I left my hometown for the university, my mother's last sentence was: "Don't say you are Kurdish in Ankara". On my way to Ankara—a twenty-hour journey by bus—I kept asking myself: "Who are the people in Ankara? What will they do if I say I am Kurdish? Why did my mother not tell me to be careful, eat properly, and not get cold but, instead, told me not to say I am Kurdish?" However, I understood what she meant after I arrived in Ankara. I was constantly asked what I thought about the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party). "Do you use a fork and a knife when you eat? How many mothers do you have?" And sometimes, after meeting one for the first time and they learn the name of my hometown, they just stopped talking to me. Everyday life, racism, and sometimes insults pushed me to learn more about the Kurds. The more I read, the more I got scared. My decision to write my doctoral thesis on the Kurdish movement seems to be a tactic to end such an ugly cycle. In 2016, I left my doctoral study in Istanbul and came to the University of Szeged. Professors at my department have supported me from the first day of my study in Hungary. They were always there for me whenever I needed their help. I will always consider myself lucky and privileged to have been their student.

Then I met my supervisor, Dr. Melinda Kalmar, who taught me how to be objective, do science, and push my limits. She spent countless hours and days reading my drafts with patience, corrected them, and guided me through her detailed feedback. She taught me how to think, write, and listen to the two sides of any conflict. She has always been there, as my lodestar, guiding me all through this voyage of discovery. I cannot thank her enough for her help during this long journey. She once told me: "If you want to be someone, stop the following someone!" I do not know if I can be someone after all these years, but one thing is sure, I have learned not to follow someone, thanks to her. In short, I feel privileged and proud to be her student for the rest of my life.

I thank Prof. Dr. Béla Tomka, Prof. Dr. Sándor Papp, Dr. Péter Bencsik, Dr. Linda Margittai, Dr. Péter Vukman, and Dr. Tamás Ágnes for their support, what they taught me about science and for believing in me. I lost my belief several times, but their encouragement helped me find my way in the academic world. I sincerely thank Dr. Eva Kincses-Nagy for her kindness and support during my study in Szeged. I also feel the urge to express my gratitude and respect for Turkish sociologist Dr. Ismail Besikci who inspired me and gave me strength through his academic works on the Kurds.

My gratitude also goes to my dear friend, Ozgur Andac, for being with me whenever I needed him, listening to my long and tedious discussions for hours, and constantly motivating me during this journey. I will always feel privileged and happy to have had him as a friend in my life.

I also cannot thank enough my Hungarian family, whom I met in Szeged during the most challenging time of my life. They are proof that people can be together and share life in moments of joy and pain without the discriminatory consciousness of what identity anyone bears. We are, first of all, humans before our races, religions and ethnicities. Some people have more than one family; they are the lucky ones, and I am one of them. While my Kurdish mother gave me life and raised me, my Hungarian mother taught me resistance and stoicism to fight and never give up, no matter what. I am sincerely grateful for everything they taught me, for not letting me lose faith in myself, and for always being by my side.

### **List of Abbreviations**

- AKP Justice and Development Party (Turkish: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)
- CHP Republican Peoples Party (Turkish: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)
- HDP Peoples Democratic Party (Turkish: Halkın Demokratik Partisi)
- HEP Peoples Labor Party (Turkish: Halkın Emek Partisi)
- ISIS Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
- KCK Kurdistan Communities' Union (Kurdish: Koma Civakên Kurdistan)
- KDP Kurdistan Democratic Party (Kurdish: Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê)
- MHP Nationalist Movement Party (Turkish: Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi)
- NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- PJAK Kurdistan Free Life Party (Kurdish: Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê)
- PKK Kurdistan Workers Party (Kurdish: Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê)
- PYD Democratic Union Party (Kurdish: Partîya Yekîtiya Demokrat)
- TIP Workers Party of Turkey (Turkish: Türkiye İşçi Partisi)
- YPG People's Protection Units (Kurdish: Yekîneyên Parastina Gel)
- YPJ Women Protection Units (Kurdish: Yekîneyên Parastina Jin)
- WWI World War I
- WWII World War II

**PART I**  
**INTRODUCTION**

**Historical Writings and Academia**

**Chapter 1**  
**Historical Writings**

The Kurds, who divided at the beginning of the twentieth century, became one of the central historical and political debates in social sciences in Turkey and the Middle East. The shift from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic replaced the relationship between the Kurds and the Turks from a religious, territorial-based relationship to an identity-based relationship. Unlike the Ottoman period, the Kurds were not only a Muslim society, but a people subjected to nationalization and nation-building in Turkey. As the largest stateless nation, the Kurds have experienced the dramatic consequences of not having one's state in a nation-state-dominated political order. The Turks aimed at complete nationalization, Westernization, and Turkification in this new climate, but the Kurds repeatedly reacted to such top-to-bottom nation-building through several rebellions during the last century. Such a mutually fed relationship later became the Kurdish problem. The history-writing of such a deep, multilayered, and constantly changing cycle of repression-reaction-repression provides a toolbox to diagnose the changes and beyond durabilities of significant shifts in the contemporary history of the Kurds.

It is always a great challenge to scientifically study a socio-political issue on which quite different views coexist, from complete denial to existential threat. In addition, there is also a wide range of ways that different social groups can interpret a historical phenomenon for themselves. In such cases, finding points of reference that focus primarily on professional aspects without ignoring critical moral assumptions is not easy.

The dissertation focuses on transforming the Kurds' sense of identity in the twentieth century and analyzing the factors influencing the transformation of the movement from a historical standing. The research lists the geopolitical and political factors that can be interpreted more broadly and narrowly, which have led to conflicts between Kurds and other peoples but, above all, the Turkish state, which is difficult to resolve. In the review, we will see how the extremely complex history of conflict, geopolitical constraints, inevitable dynamics of modernization, historical perceptual logics, and identity issues intersect.

The starting point for the evaluation is the post-imperial stress that characterized the people who sought to redefine their place in the region in the area of the disintegrating Ottoman Empire. The First World War and subsequent peace treaties radically changed political structures and rearranged religious and ethnic relations. Among several factors, the Ottoman Empire was abolished, and the foundations of the Turkish nation-state were laid in what is also known as Anatolia today. The peace agreements following WWI could not solve the post-imperial stress at all; moreover, the later Turkish state was only able to settle its regional position somewhat in a way that was acceptable to it after another war of revision and another peace treaty. Moreover, as a result, the Turkish state, Turkey, was born and carried new political, social, ethnic, and religious stressors that formed in different aspects of contemporary Turkish politics, society, and identity.

We argued that the first stress factor was the subjugation of the tens of millions of Kurds previously under Persian and Ottoman rule to four different state formations, the largest of which was the Kurdish ethnic group that got to Turkey. The need and commitment of Kurds at any time to self-determination and ethnic/religious identity was complex because they lived as diasporas in ethnically and religiously divided countries. The dissertation briefly discusses how the identities, integration practices, and ideologies of the Kurdish population of the four countries interact.

Beyond the interaction and demonstration effect, the frustration of the divisions was greatly exacerbated by the fact that while the 1920 peace treaty in Sevres recognized the right of the Kurds and Armenians to autonomy, the final peace in Lausanne made no mention of this at all and was a clear step backward. Together, the promise and the setback caused long-term internal tensions within the fresh state formation and became a baseline for the Kurdish issue as a conflict by “invitation”.

The subsequent stress factor was the urgency to modernize, created by new geopolitical factors, which the newly formed republican leadership saw as an urgent and inevitable task. The modernization process involved restructuring the entire state bureaucracy, creating a new integration ideology and identity framework that they thought would be the umbrella over its population. Above all, the theocratic Muslim Empire was replaced by a secular, modernizing formation that followed the path of the nation-state and, consequently, was based on an ethnically based integrative ideology. The Turkish state underwent a radical change regarding identity. The former religious territorial-based Muslim Ottoman population turned into Turkish Muslims. From the Kurdish point of view, belonging to a religious and ethnic minority at this time received a completely different light

in this new so-called integrating structure. Previously, the Islamic state was integrated on a religious and non-ethnic basis. For them, the formerly religious-based Muslim imperial integration seemed more favorable to the later, seemingly secular one (subordinating religion to state goals), in which Islam was now clearly associated with Turkey in an identification formation in which neither ethnicity nor religion had any chance of autonomy. The newly built Turkish state was much more discriminatory in ethnic terms than before. Modernization, therefore, put an ethnically relevant minority in a special position: it has lost the social and fundamentally religious foundations of its cohesion so far. In reaction to such deep conversion of politics and identity, the Kurdish movements or rebellions in the early republican era were not organized on an ethnic basis, as we will discuss later, but primarily with religious nostalgia for the structure of the former Islamic Muslim state.

Therefore, the development of Kurdish identity within the Turkish state in the twentieth century is distinguished by the fact that it was initially formed on a religious rather than an ethnic basis. And even in the later second phase, not on an ethnic basis but mainly on a social basis. The peculiarity of the first modernization era led by Atatürk was that it received significant help from the Soviet Union, which was still considered an ally. Therefore, Atatürk's system took many ideas from Soviet-type operations, and Soviet ideologies and modified Marxism flowed southward, making lower social groups class-conscious while experiencing major social crises. It is also crucial to underline that the Kurds not only perceived religious disadvantages in the great transformation but generally belonged to the poorer sections of the population. The emerging (partly Kurdish) left has thus generally interpreted the Kurdish problem as a social issue and, as we will discuss it, cited as the main reason that the chances of the eastern and western parts of the country were not the same.

Regarding the perception of modernization, Kurds felt that the former Islamic Muslim state formation was more favorable to them because it did not make them targets of discrimination in ethnic terms. Therefore, left-wing ideologies have slowly radicalized the Kurds simultaneously on religious, social, and now partly ethnic grounds. As Kurds socially became marginalized, they became "losers" of modernization, and religious, ethnic, and social tensions later strengthened each other. In this context, we claim that one of the tensions in Turkish modernization is that Turkey's largest ethnic minority, the largest, or one of the largest populations in the world living in the diaspora, is increasingly embroiled in multiple identity crises.

However, this mixture gradually evolved into a genuinely militant ideology and practice. It was, in particular, when the country had already moved beyond the first Atatürk (Soviet-friendly) phase of transformation and more clearly turned to Western modernization patterns and Western countries, the new allies. The dynamics of the compulsion to modernize at this stage was that education had to be made not only possible but also compulsory for ever larger groups of the population at ever higher levels, from primary school to university. Furthermore, since education can be an ideological apparatus, the Kurdish population could not be left out of this. As a necessary consequence, the intelligentsia of the Kurdish population slowly developed, able to articulate more and more the tensions that neither the official state strategy nor the Kurds themselves were able to resolve in a reassuring, peaceful way in post-imperial Turkey.

The dissertation additionally points out that the post-imperial stress among the Kurdish and Turkish populations was also fueled by the paranoid nature of the post-imperial state formation (post-trauma). The primary motivation for this was that after the peace treaty, the possibility arose that Turkey might also lose a lot of Anatolia. In this framework, the Turkish political and military bureaucracy sought to build a robust and integrative identity in its ideology and culture, which excluded those social groups that could be destabilizing in any way, especially those who did not profess to be Turkish and Sunni. This endeavor created a paranoid state, indicating that paranoia can manifest at the state level and create its ideologies and institutional systems. However, the integrator's ideology, based on Turkishness and Sunni Islam, was a priori opposed to Kurdish identity. As we will see, this radically integrating Turkification of the former Ottoman population in Anatolia strengthened and led to alienation. To do this, the state often creates images of enemies reflected in education, the media, and other institutional systems.

In the line of thought of the thesis, we will see that after the Second World War, especially under American influence, educational levels among the Kurds also rose slowly, in which universities played a particularly important role, extracting a very thin layer of intellectuals. This layer had already covered social elements of the Kurdish question in press, but this was followed by political retaliation.

The fundamental social perception of the Kurdish question has been strengthened by the fact that, since the 1960s, the Kurdish intelligentsia has largely joined the highly educated left in education. Later, however, there was a growing perception among them that social differences meant no longer just a territorial problem but also an ethnic one closely related to the Kurdish problem. That is, the government assessed the accelerated Turkish

modernization as deliberately under-developing the Kurdish territories, treating them as quasi-service areas designated to support the rise of the ethnically Turkish population.

As indicated above, the perception of the Kurdish question can be extremely divergent, including a position where the problem is completely denied. The internal division of perceptions is spectacular within Turkish society: there are official state, indifferent, resistant, and other (political, military, civilian) interpretations, and their cross-sections.

The elaboration and perception of the Kurdish question within academia are similarly divided; obviously, the political risks of elaborating on the subject cannot be underestimated. Furthermore, a systematic review of the situation may be an important task, and the author makes no secret of the hope that any such attempt could help reduce tensions and support a political and cultural solution acceptable to all parties.

## **1.1 Historical Background**

Until the ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) emerged in Iraq and Syria during the Syrian civil war and captured the cities and raised the black flags, the Kurds, the Kurdish movement, and its ideology gained a considerable attention from historians, sociologists, and several other scholars. With the rise of the ISIS and its attempt to capture Kobane, the international community witnessed the resistance of the Kurdish female fighters, who gained massive attention. They have become the symbol of the struggle against patriarchal order, nationalism, and nation-state. As a modern protest to the century-long nation-state, the Rojava revolution has introduced a new paradigm which is later discussed in detail. The new agenda aims not to build an independent nation-state but to downsize it by focusing on more locality and dysfunctionalities of the nation-state, at least in the region. For those who recently became familiar with the Kurds, the history of the Kurdish movement can be traced to the late twentieth century. Further, what is known as democratic confederalism is the last stage of the Kurdish movement, which the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party, Kurdish: Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê) has represented.

After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the Kurdish issue became a name of local and regional conflict, which has been one of the most dominant research fields across disciplines. The Kurds, the Kurdish movement, and its armed struggle with the Turkish state have been an academic subject and a reference discussion in daily politics



within Turkey for decades. By passing through several stages, the Kurdish problem or the problems of the Kurds have kept their urgency and importance until today. As a new nation-state, the Republic followed a massive Westernization, modernization, and nationalization policy to keep its place in the international arena and create a homogenous Turkish nation. Such policy was implemented to integrate non-Turkish ethnic and religious minorities and carried out primarily by force rather than consent.

During the Republic's first years, the eagerness to build a Turkish nation in Anatolia eventually put the Kurds in the center of the state due to their population size, geographic consolidation, and distinct ethnolinguistic features. The republican break from the Ottoman traditions, the nationalization, and the centralization of bureaucracy was reacted by the Kurds through several rebellions. From Kocgiri to Ararat and Sheikh Said to Dersim, all these revolts were quickly eliminated, and the leaders were punished. The fight against the Kurdish rebellions was relatively easy in the Ataturk area. The Kurdish rebellions in this period were mainly local and had no ideological agenda.

After the Dersim rebellion in 1938, the Kurds went into a silent phase until the second half of the century. The reawakening seems to be recorded among the Kurdish youth who went to big cities for university and mobilized within the Turkish left. The break from the Turkish left and the foundation of the PKK was the most ideological and social rebellion comparing to the early Kurdish rebellions against the Turkish state. The rise of armed conflict with the Turkish army, which intensified after the coup in 1980, opened a new page in the modern history of the Kurds and Turkey. The accelerated state pressure over the Kurds, the state of emergency in the east and southeast, the prohibition of the Kurdish language, and the intense armed battle between the sides caused the death of thousands and displacement of millions of Kurds during the 1990s.

The initial aim of the PKK was to free Kurdistan from the “colonial” Turkish state, later translated into the idea of democratic confederalism that reached fame during the recent Syrian civil war. This new program aimed not to have an independent Kurdistan, basically a nation-state, but to downsize the centralized nation state and focus on more a local government through social ecology, and direct democracy.

The history of the Kurdish rebels against the Turkish state goes back to the beginning of the last century. The literature of the long-lasting Kurdish-Turkish conflict and the Kurdish movement has been at the center of enormous research. From Kurdish nationalism to ethnic rights and from regional aspects to the potential solution for the dispute. The history writing of the subject has evolved to international fame that, on the one

hand, brought new insight into the field; on the other hand, it created an ambiguous debate on how to write the history of the subject.

Understandably, such a long history requires a comprehensive perspective that should depend on some fundamental questions. In the following paragraphs, some topic-related queries are discussed that will help to draw a research map. Where might one start to write the history of this long-lasting conflict? What do the Kurds want, and what are their demands? Why and how did the Kurds choose the armed struggle against the Turks, and what are the ideological bases of such strategic decisions? The researchers who are eager to find answers to these questions and, more basically, study the Kurdish movement seem to face a complex dichotomy formulated as follows. Is the Kurdish-Turkish conflict or the PKK the result of the unfulfilled Kurdish ethnic rights and the state's ideology, or is the conflict arising from the declaration of the PKK and its armed fight? As I will debate in the related chapters, two approaches dominate these questions. The first approach suggests that the PKK and the Kurdish-Turkish conflict is the outcome of the oppression of the Kurds and the state ideology based on the assimilation of the Kurds. This approach will be categorized as the citizen approach, which is more liberal and believes that more democracy will eventually end the conflict. Contrary to this group of researchers who believe that there is no Turkish-Kurdish conflict, the state's fight against "separatist terrorists" is more aggressive regarding the approach to the dispute.

Similarly, what the Kurds want has received massive attention from ordinary citizens, politicians, and researchers. Much of the debate in scholarship is centered on ethnic rights and the Kurdish desire for equality with the Turks. However, the reluctance of the Turks regarding the share of political power and recognition of the Kurdish demands and the reasons behind such hesitation have received less attention. Undoubtedly proposing the answer of what the Kurds want is equally challenging with the question of what the Turks do not want. For instance, do the Kurds in Iraq, Syria, and Iran share the same goals as the ones who live in Turkey? Why did the PKK mobilize and emerge in Turkey but not in the other three countries? As we will present the potential answers to this question later, it might be claimed that the early modernization of Turkey, its independence, and its early nationalization are the basis of these questions.

Putting this aside, from the establishment of the Republic till recent times, the Turkish governments hesitated to share the hegemonic position in politics and the fear of losing the last remaining land of the Ottoman Empire that failed to be saved. The paranoia of a potential division and the disappointment of ruling elites in saving the Empire led them

to follow the strict assimilation of non-Turkish minorities through education, public politics, and the military. Such a mindset has become the fundamental principle of the politics and policymaking of the Turkish state. We leave this debate to the relevant chapter, where we discuss social cleavages. However, contrary to the existing literature, the fear of losing power and land and the state ideology has raised two fundamental cleavages: the Turks and the Kurds, pro-conflict and pro-democracy.

Considering these questions, the ultimate answers rely on the certain way of modernization and its practices, the form of the state/the state's particular way of being, and its ideology that both created the base of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict and shaped the mobilization of the Kurdish movement. While the Kurdish movement is convinced that the state is a colonial power that refuses to fulfill the Kurds' identity-based claims, on the other side, the state approaches the movement from a militarist point of view that defines its fight as the war against terrorism. It is crucial to keep in mind that the attitudes, tools, and interpretations of both sides of the conflict have been moved and changed in time. While the state, in the beginning, aimed to "civilize" the Kurds and assimilate them into the Turkishness, after the declaration of the PKK its aims moved to the fight against "terrorism" and the "protection" of the Kurds from the PKK. The PKK, on the other hand, unlike the former local Kurdish rebellions against the state, had an ideological agenda that aimed to free Kurdistan by publicizing the act of violence.

The transformation and transition in agenda and the politics of the actors have been formulated here as *transcriptions*, processes, in which not only different narratives but also different codes of action and transmission are created. In addition, these transcripts typically form different eras from one another, and we will follow its logic in periodization for a while. Due to the complex nature of the subject, instead of focusing on one research question, I tried to process the interrelated requirements that helped me follow the topic's history writing and derive a map of how to redefine/re-discuss this long-lasting conflict. In the brief introduction, I aimed to center on some of the fundamental questions to outline the focal arguments of this research. In the following pages, I will discuss the research's structure, methodology, and aim.

## 1.2 Who are The Kurds: A Brief Overview

What is known as Kurdistan is mostly surrendered and divided by the Zagreb mountains from northwest to southeast of Iran, to the northwest mountains, stretching to the Anatolian Plato.<sup>1</sup> For centuries, the geography of Kurdistan has been a battleground between empires, the Ottomans and the Safavid. Kurdistan, a politically charged territory throughout history, especially during the Empire's dominance, was a checkpoint and geopolitical arena between the Ottomans and the Safavid. Then in the twentieth century, division tore it into a place of assimilation and oppression. The topographic features of the territory did not only bring division to the Kurds but also became a “shield” against the attack of the nation-states and made the pure standardization and assimilation of the Kurds almost impossible.

Later in the twentieth century, it became a land where four nation-states: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, have been practicing some form of assimilation and oppression over the Kurds. The significance of the twentieth century came from the climate in which Kurdistan was divided among these four states. Thus, it became the border between these multiethnic and linguistic nation-states. Besides being a checkpoint among nations, Kurdistan meant a kind of a transcription for the outside world as a symbol of oil and gas, especially after the Second World War. The oil resources in Rumaylan (Syria), Batman and Silvan (Turkey), and Kirkuk (Iraq) have been some of the reasons for these nations did/do not accept the autonomy of the Kurds within defined borders.<sup>2</sup>

Today, Kurdistan consists of approximately 190 000 square miles, which represents 43 percent (Turkey), 31 percent (Iran), 18 percent (Iraq), 6 percent (Syria), and lastly, 2 percent of the former Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> The Kurds who live in these regions speak the Kurdish language, which is a member of the Indo-European family and is unrelated to the Turkish and Arabic languages. What is significant here is the fact that the Kurds speak different dialects, which provides an excuse very often-among others, for the Turkish state not to consider any freedom of language use beyond the fundamental refusal of the very existence of the minorities ‘languages. For instance, in a court file in 1981, the judge claimed there was no Kurdish language, and in fact, it was made up of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian, and Durmus, in response to the claim, said: We understand each other very well. Here you bring

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<sup>1</sup> David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 6.

<sup>2</sup> McDowall, *A Modern*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Lokman Meho, *The Kurds and Kurdistan: A Selective and Annotated Bibliography*, (Greenwood, 1997), 1.

people from thousand km to understand us, and they can understand each other very well despite the aim of destroying the language.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike the Turks and Arabs (who adhere mainly to the Hanafi school), the Kurds are followers of the Shafi school. In addition, there are Christian, Jewish, and Yezidi Kurds who have lived in what we call Kurdistan for thousands of years.<sup>5</sup>

Before our detailed argumentation, it is worth noting, however, that while researching the history of the Kurds and especially the Kurdish movement, authors tend not to use the name Kurdistan due to fear of being persecuted for the crime of propagandizing terrorism or/and separatism. Thus, studies on the subject prefer to use geographic indicators like east and southeast rather than Kurdistan. Likewise, by typing the word Kurdistan, a program without memory, ideology, and personality, the Turkish-based Microsoft underlines the word in red; when we click on the word, it warns us that the existence of such geography is problematic and 'politically charged.' Even if one leaves people, politicians, and ideologies aside, this example demonstrates and, in fact, warns the author about the possible difficulty of inscribing about the Kurds, the Kurdish issue, and Kurdistan from the very beginning. Furthermore, it also shows that studying these topics carries massive objectivity problems concerning the causes and outcomes of the Kurdish question. This simple yet meaningful example reflects all difficulties and stages of this work and how difficult it is for both the author and readers to conceptualize and elaborate on the Kurdish question.

In this work, I will use East and Southeast as a special region to indicate the special regions in Turkey; however, the name of Kurdistan will be used preferably to refer to the geographical-historical land where a group of people, the Kurds, live and share historical, cultural, and linguistic resemblances.

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework: The Concept of Transcription as a Way of Periodization in History Writing**

Transcription is one of the main phrases used in this research, reminding us of the periodization of the subject. Transcription, borrowed from biology, refers to the first phase

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<sup>4</sup>Hayri Durmuş, "Defense at Court." Saradistribution (June 14, 1982) [http://www.saradistribution.com/hayri\\_durmus\\_savunma.htm](http://www.saradistribution.com/hayri_durmus_savunma.htm) accessed May 10, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Meho, *The Kurds*, 5.

of gene expression and the process in which information is rewritten. Performed by enzymes, transcription is somewhat overwriting the originally coded DNA information.<sup>6</sup> Apart from biological meaning in daily life, transcription might be exemplified by writing a voice message or *rewriting* the notes that we take in a class or meeting. In this sense, transcription holds the central theme of an expression or/and writing, *reformulating a given text in a new shape*, as cultural and historical memory usually does. History stands on transcriptions as an activity of rewriting and re-interpretation of sources. Taken from biology in our research, we use transcription also as a means of periodization of the subject to identify how and to what extent the sides of the conflict, Turkish state, and the Kurdish movement, interpret it in giving periods. In this sense, transcription is a mean to demonstrate how the actors have changed their means, goals, and narratives in approaching the topic. In this respect, the transcription points to a consistent – partly intentional, partly coded – interpretation and re-interpretation of the subject.

As a critical tool, periodization, especially in history, helps the author disassemble a more extensive picture into small pieces and then re-integrate it to reach an interpretation. It also helps them to show the relation, differences, similarities, and changes between those pieces. By going beyond the dictionary meaning of the word transcription used to interpret the changes in the Kurdish movement and the contemporary Turkish-Kurdish conflict. The thesis explores how the Kurdish movement was born and evolved as a conflict by invitation and how the Turkish state reacted to it in different interlinked periods. Four principal transcriptions: divide and control (*divide et impera*) the *post-empire*, *the great enlightenment*, and the *radical democracy*, help us to show how the Turkish-Kurdish conflict altered and converted by considering the local, regional, and global politics, their views regarding the issue, the tool actors used and their aims in using given tools.

The first transcription of *divide and control* marks the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the division of the Kurds among four states, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. In this phase, shaped by the results of WWI, the Kurdish population was subjected to the different politics of assimilation in given territories. The Kurds became vulnerable, and a “loser” of the newly established world order controlled by the nation-states. This stage also signifies the seeds of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, and the existence of the non-Turkish-

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<sup>6</sup> “Transcription and mRNA Processing,” Khan Academy, Accessed January 12, 2023, <https://www.khanacademy.org/science/ap-biology/gene-expression-and-regulation/transcription-and-rna-processing/v/transcription-and-mrna-processing>.

speaking Muslim ethnic groups in Anatolia is interpreted as a matter of assimilation into Turkishness.

Following the division of the Kurds, *the post-empire stress period* was shaped by the Turkish nation-building built on modernization, secularization, and Turkification. We see in this mostly stress-shaped era that the founding elites of the Turkish state had a significant fear of losing the remaining territory, leading them to have a paranoid state of mind that influenced both society and political conduct.

The third transcription represents *the great enlightenment*, the mobilization of the Kurdish youth in universities alongside the Turkish left during the 1960s and 1970s. The division of the Kurds and the Ataturk's top-down nation-building praxis had direct effect on the next Kurdish generation. The Kurdish students who were influenced by the Marxist-Leninist ideology through higher education aimed to build an independent Kurdistan. In contrast to the early Kurdish rebellions, they were not reactionist but aimed to build a free Kurdistan. Another turn in this phase became after the foundation of the PKK, when the Turkish side re-interpreted its state ideology and official standing regarding the Kurds. In this new interpretation, the aim was not only to Turkify the Kurds but also to protect Turkishness and Ataturk's project against the PKK.

In the latest transcription of the battle by invitation, the PKK re-interpreted its goals and moved from an independent Kurdistan to democratic confederalism, radical democracy at the beginning of the new millennium. Considering the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union, this phase was influenced by Abdullah Ocalan's idea of *democratic confederalism* and the new global order.

As briefly argued, the Kurdish movement, the Turkish-Kurdish dispute formed by the state-building process via modernization, secularization, and Turkification, did not follow a single linear line; it followed four stages named by me transcriptions, and we will see that each transcription reveals an interpretation and re-interpretation of the conflict by both the Kurdish movement and the Turkish state.

First of all, it is worth emphasizing, that beyond changing the way politics was conducted, the shift from empires to nation-states profoundly influenced the essence of the subject of power. This thesis aims to show how and to what extent the shifts in Turkey's modern history have shaped historical writings of the Kurdish problem in Turkey and also the dynamics of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict based on four principal transcriptions. Relevant to the subject matter, such transcriptions provide a new way of interpretation to the literature that considers the Turkish-Kurdish conflict to be an unchanged issue. This

research finds that inter-relationships, as a dynamic process, have shaped the conditions between the two sides of the conflict. Their perceptions, actions, and agendas have been transformed or reshaped in each transcription. By reading the mechanism of the transcription from a historical angle, it is interpreted as a period, the perceptions of the sides, the Turks, and the Kurds, toward each other, and the approaches of the dispute. By applying the process-tracing approach to the case study, this research argues that four milestones have profoundly shaped the historical writings and the dynamics of the conflict between the Turks and the Kurds.

Armed conflicts are both raptures between sides and relationships, -like every relationship- they change, transit, and transform according to both sides' given time, period, needs, and attitudes. Most of the studies on the Kurdish conflict tend to take the Turkish-Kurdish war for granted and believe that the aim should be to analyze such a phenomenon. Contrary to the existing literature that widely approached the Turkish -Kurdish battle from a linear standing, this research is based on the claim that the history of the case has been translated to different grounds that shaped the actor's attitude towards each other, their self-undersetting and the tools that have been used against one another. In this context, transcription might be understood in two folds: the toolbox applied to gain the given aim and the national and international period of history that became the field of the conflict. In these two folds, the transcription also refers to the “language”, which is being constructed, and used in describing both the dispute and the actors' approach. In other words, it is argued that the formulation and description of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict have evolved on both sides as it has been translated from one language to another.

The periodization of the Kurdish movement and the Turkish-Kurdish conflict in this study was understood as a transcribing from one crisis to another, affected by the mindsets of both parties and the social-political shifts at each point. Hamit Bozarslan argues that some events, shifts, and periods significantly from the interpretation of conflicts and eventually change the meaning of the act and means of action.<sup>7</sup> For him, the twentieth-century history in the Middle East went through four main periods (1919-1948, 1948-1979, 1979-1990, and 1990-2001) that refer to a moment of crisis.<sup>8</sup> In his argumentation, these periods change the power relations, re-interpretation of meaning, and the act of political and social actors. His periodization in the contemporary history of the Middle East addresses the

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<sup>7</sup> Hamit Bozarslan, “Coercion and Violence in the Middle East,” in *The Cambridge World History of Violence*, ed. Louise Edwards, Nigel Penn, and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 120.

<sup>8</sup> Bozarslan, “Coercion,” 75.



main alterations at the regional and local levels; however, it seems that in the case of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, four phases have been named transcriptions.

Based on such periodization, the first transcription represents the collapse of the Ottoman and the Kurds' divisions among Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey at different times. It also deals with modernization, the foundation of the Republic, and how the division shaped Turkish- Kurdish relations. Following it, the second transcription- post-empire stress, symbolizes the post-Ottoman period, the building of the Turkish nation-state, its ideology, and how these aspects created new social cleavages and personal and institutional paranoia. The great enlightenment indicates the reawakening of Kurdish politics, the impact of higher education, and the ideologization of the Kurds who founded the PKK in 1978. In the last period, radical democracy refers to the change in the PKKs philosophy and aim regarding the movement's goal. Contrary to the great enlightenment in which the PKK aimed to free Kurdistan in this phase, the goal shifted towards democratic confederalism that offered a roadmap not only for Kurds but several ethnic and religious groups in the region. In this framework, going back to the opening statements, these transcriptions can also be the conversion of a conflict by invitation, the Kurdish issue, and how it is transcribed differently.

#### **1.4 The Dilemma of Objectivity**

The research fields such as the Kurdish question, the Armenian genocide, and Ataturk's era have massive potential to be criticized for not being objective. The organic relationship between the state and the social sciences, the deep ideological division among the people, and the sanctity of the state put researchers in positions that seem to make them vulnerable to criticisms of being biased, even if their claims are based on solid scientific evidence. Most studies on the Kurdish issues are adjudged to have sided with the state or the Kurds. Such accusations do not only come from the Turks but also the Kurds. To illustrate this, the usage of Kurdistan in this text might be critiqued by those who believe that there is no place called Kurdistan and accuse the author of terror propaganda by the Turkish side. In the same manner, labeling some acts of the PKK as terror may generate criticisms that the author is being anti-Kurdish or pro-state by the Kurds. Consequently, as mentioned earlier, the research has always been on the edge of accusations from both sides.

Although this thesis might be condemned as biased since it starts mainly from the Kurdish angle, it seeks to deal with the problem of objectivity by looking at the concerns and attitudes of the Kurds and the Turks. Furthermore, I would argue that approaching the topic from one angle does not necessarily create a weakness. Providing open questions can enrich the works of literature on the Kurdish movement. In carrying out this research work, I looked at both sides of the conflict, without ignoring any of them, and tried to hear, understand, interpret, and convey the voice of the Turks and the Kurds. Keeping in mind that objectivity regarding the research topic relies on the sources and claims raised and how others see us, my goal is not to take a side but to understand them from a historical point of view.

## **1.5 Methodology and Structure**

The answer to the question of why it is important to research the Kurdish issue depends not only on its significance to the country and the acrimonious character of the war but also on its status as a symbol of changes in the global paradigm. At the local level, modernization, the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and Turkey's strange experiences with democracy have all affected the issue. The Kurdish issue has followed the cycle of repression, reaction, and repression for almost a century. In this study, we shall see how such a cycle was born and changed within its historicity from the era of empires to the establishment of the Republic. At the global level, the problem and its studies reveal vital tools for diagnosing the problem of nation-states and democracy as a global phenomenon. The analysis of the Kurdish problem and Turkish politics leads us to understand the nature of the conflict. Most importantly, it allows us to propose a new paradigm, democratic confederalism, which I will discuss as a veritable tool that can be used to understand different cases in this age of politics with people.

Each study on the Middle East can potentially face the risk of writing sentences that are not welcomed or reaching conclusions that might cause severe ex-communication from society and academia. To illustrate this, the risk in the case of the Middle East - which has been dominated by Islam and patriarchal traditions, divided by the great powers, and oppressed by the nation-states - is why researchers often hesitate to go beyond the existing power 's narrative or social borders.

This belief forms the underpinnings of this research writing, i.e., the author believes this research can give readers a historical perspective of the subject matter and help readers challenge themselves on their knowledge of the Kurdish movement and contemporary Turkish politics. Having laid out the foundational arguments in this chapter, I intend to attack the subject matter in-depth, including performing analytical operations, to clarify how the Kurdish movement has been translated into four stages.

The two main approaches this study applies are process tracing and case study. Process tracing in this research is applied to articulate new hypotheses on the Kurdish movement and build new causal claims regarding the Turkish-Kurdish conflict to diagnose and distinguish political and social phenomena from a historical perspective.<sup>9</sup> The complexity of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict forces us to seek answers by investigating the diverse primary and secondary sources and synthesizing the Turkish and Kurdish interpretations of the conflict regarding its causes and results.<sup>10</sup>

This research also seeks to compare different sources to interpret one of the most delicate and controversial topics in contemporary history in Turkey and the Middle East. To drive a broader picture of the research topic, I aim to see how using diverse sources, and examining them from different angles, would introduce novel outcomes to the literature on the Kurdish movement and the PKK. Archival sources, press (both pro-state and PKKs newspapers), official statements, diaries, court defenses, and works of literature from diverse social science fields deal with the complexity of the topic. I aim to analyze these sources with a close connection to the Kurdish question, the logic of historical events and periods, and how these periods shaped and reflected on the Turkish and the Kurdish sides.

To reach an inclusive conclusion, I will use process tracing, widely used in history, to underline the significant shifts in historical writings on the Kurdish movement and the PKK. By doing so, I will attempt to compress the stages mentioned above to differentiate the transcriptions of historical writings. The data I will use to conclude was collected from the International Institute of Social History in the Netherlands, the PKK 's documents, court files, the newspapers, and the Turkish parliament's online archive. Furthermore, I will use the mixed method of analysis, content, and discourse to analyze the content and discuss my findings in the relevant chapters, all in a bid to answer the questions the research seeks.

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<sup>9</sup> Arend Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," *The American Political Science Review* 65, no. 3 (1971): 682—693, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1955513>.

<sup>10</sup> David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing," *Political Science & Politics* 44, no. 4 (2011): 823—830, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096511001429>.

Besides, since the Kurdish movement and the Turkish-Kurdish conflict have massive potential due to their ideological implications to researchers, the primary sources of the PKK, Turkish official documents, and newspapers of both sides will be compared to ensure an impartial conclusion.

This dissertation will be divided into five parts, excluding the introduction and conclusion. Since the study focuses on finding and analyzing the transcriptions of historical writings on the Kurdish movement, each part will focus on one major shift in historical writings. Putting this aside, I will attempt to give a critical review of how academia interprets the Kurdish problem and move to show how and in which context historical writings have changed and/or continued through time.

## **1.6 Concluding Remarks**

The Kurds, known as the biggest nation without her state, are the focus of this thesis. However, their division among the four countries caused different assimilations and unique struggles. A widescale study of the Kurds in these countries is beyond the scope of this research. For this study, the Kurds and the Kurdish movement in Turkey were selected as an example of transcriptions of historical writings. In this case study, by applying the mixed method, I will seek to answer how and to what extent the transcriptions, as mentioned earlier, have shaped both the historical writings of the Kurdish movement, the PKK, and the dynamics of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. In this sense, the Kurdish-Turkish conflict might be understood as an invitation with several layers and translated from one “language” to another, from the division to the idea of the radical democracy. Thus, the dissertation regards the subject or/and the dispute from various disciplines to build the backbones of the study.

In the following chapters, I will present how most of the academics have studied the Kurdish movement by categorizing performances in three interlinked ways of historical writings on the issue.

## **Chapter 2**

### **How Does Academia Interpret the Kurdish Movement?**

#### **Impact and the Risk Factor**

The changes in the literature on the Kurdish problem or Kurdish movement have not been shaped only by scientific and theoretical developments which started in 1990. This work of literature discloses that social science has been directly or indirectly shaped by political changes and the state's attitudes. It seems that from the foundation of the new Turkish state, there have been three main periods that have produced three main intellectual activities and performance concerning the Kurdish problem: nation-building (1920-1980), security (the 1980s-2000s), and identity (the 2000s). The academic or intellectual performance in the first period was built upon the idea of the nation-state, and the state's politics were based on the Turkification of the different groups within the country. In this period, the social sciences were used as an ideological apparatus to prove the Kurds did not exist or to demonstrate the greatness of the Turkish identity. What we call academic inquiry mainly was conducted by former politicians and retired officers or soldiers especially until the foundation of the PKK in 1978.

With the start of armed conflict between the state and PKK in the second period, it moved from the first – the politicians' – performance, to the "soldiers' performance," which is the militarist base of discussion. The soldiers' performance of intellectual activity put the focus on terrorism, unity of the state and justification of the state's violence over the Kurdish regions. Shaped by such mentality, the studies on the Kurdish problem could be described as the protection of the ideology and unity beyond being a nation-building ideological apparatus. After the arrest of Abdullah Ocalan in 1999, the identity aspect of the problem started to garner attention. In this period, academic activities took the form of "citizens' performance". It means that the discussion emphasized the group's identity and rights within a unified country. Citizen performance does not necessarily imply a clear-cut difference between this and the previous periods. They were interdependent and reshaped each other depending on the circumstances of the given period. The very nature of the process of how the social sciences were constructed and used by the power led to the argument that an academic inquiry cannot be framed without concentration on the base of the relationship between political power and science.

Though the mainstream literature review on a specific discipline is based on the demonstration of theoretical and analytical changes, errors, and development of ideas,

methods, and tools in a society of uniforms, the literature of a political movement should be based on the idea of the risk factor which states that with a high probability power drives the border of literature, not academic conducts. Based on this articulation, in this chapter, I aim to not only give the intellectual transition of the literature on the Kurdish movement but also show how the state itself has shaped the historical line of the studies on the Kurdish movement in terms of content and the terminologies used. By doing so, I will formulate the relationship between power and the Kurdish studies in three analytical steps: through *the performance of the politician, the soldiers, and the citizens* to demonstrate the dialectical interaction between the subjects and objects and show how these three performances shaped what has been written about the Kurdish problem.

## **2.1 1923 - 1980: The Performance of Politicians**

What has been known as the Kurdish problem is not only one of the longer-lasting armed conflicts in modern history between a nation-state and a group of guerrillas but also the representation of the question of nationalism, nation-building, and assimilation in the Middle East. Studying the Kurdish-Turkish conflict is vital because it exposes one of the core disputes in modern Turkish history and the Kurdish issue, as well as the interpretation of it at social and political levels. It has to be pointed out that the nature of scholarship in Kurdish studies has a complete disagreement and contradictory approaches that have caused a relative scarcity of literature on the subject matter. This scarcity of literature is not only the nature of the social sciences but also the consequence of the risk and impact factors at play in intellectual activities.

Any researcher who aims to deal with topics related to the Kurds and the PKK has a strong possibility of being labeled as an enemy or terrorist or might have significant gains if they follow and justify the ruling state's hegemony. In the case of the Kurds, a careful examination of the literature on the Kurdish problem or Kurdish movements shows that the field has been shaped by both the scientific and theoretical developments that began in 1990 and some prevalent political changes, as well as the state's attitudes toward the Kurdish problem. Shaped by its geopolitical location, Turkish domestic and regional politics played with the fear of the possible division of the country. This fear has put the Kurdish problem in a security-driven framework by the Turkish state. Strengthened by the fear of separation, both historians and ruling elites, on the one hand, aim to prove how "old and magnificent"

Turkish history is and demonstrate every available scientific “evidence” that the Kurds have never existed. Such ideological agenda and the militaristic past of the ruling elites show that social science has been mostly in the hands of ex-soldiers or politicians.

From the beginning of the 1920s, academic studies on the Kurds in Turkey mostly aimed to prove that the Kurds were not a different ethnic and linguistic group but a mixture of different groups or the “mountain Turks”. It is not surprising that science has been used as an ideological apparatus in the hand of the nation-state to not only create a pure nation but also prove the greatness of the given nation. With the Turkification of politics and society, the social sciences and history have been appropriated as justifying or falsifying agents in the case of the Kurdish problem. Until the 1960s, the works of literature on the Kurds were mainly shaped and performed as a politically biased and state-driven propaganda machine. The organic intellectuals that created and recreated the state’s ideology have been some of the main reasons that broke the academic evaluation of Kurdish studies in Turkey. Ismail Besikci’s Ph.D. dissertation in the 1960s on a Kurdish tribe might be considered the first academic study on Kurds that did not reformulate the state’s policies.<sup>11</sup> Except for Ismail Besikci, the political agenda of the nation-state directly shaped the focus of studies on the Kurds from the beginning of the Republic until the 1990s. The Kurds were placed in the center, and their relationship to the Turks in terms of language, history, and ethnicity became the main topic of discourse. Further, the agenda that sponsored the denial of the Kurds championed the reconstruction of the Turkish identity and studies on the Armenian genocide, holocaust, and Greek displacement.

As a result of the usage of social science as a nation-building and nation-destruction tool, the people who worked on the Kurdish problem and Kurds, in general, were mostly military retirees, state officers who had been to the region, and the Kurds who defined themselves as more Turkish than Kurdish.<sup>12</sup> Bruinessen claimed, in the 1970s, that the people who worked to provide scientific evidence on the Kurds mainly were affiliated with the Turkish Far-Right Nationalist Party (MHP). They took the Turkish history thesis for granted to either support or explain their arguments to prove the non-existence of the

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<sup>11</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, “Ismail Beşikçi: Turkish Sociologist, Critic of Kemalism, and Kurdologist,” *The Journal of Kurdish Studies* V, no. 2 (2003):19—34. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/27703083\\_Ismail\\_Besikci\\_Turkish\\_sociologist\\_critic\\_of\\_Kemalism\\_and\\_kurdologist](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/27703083_Ismail_Besikci_Turkish_sociologist_critic_of_Kemalism_and_kurdologist).

<sup>12</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "The Kurds as Objects and Subjects of Historiography: Turkish and Kurdish Nationalists Struggling Over Identity," in *Identity, Ethnicity, and Nationalism in Kurdistan*, ed. Fabian Richter (Lit Verlag, 2016), 13—61.

Kurds.<sup>13</sup> Another aspect of those so-called scientific works was to show that the Kurds, like other groups such as the Armenians and Arabs, have been first used to weaken the Ottomans and later Republican Turkey by some external powers.

In this climate, the Kurdish problem has been a critical feature of academic freedom in Turkey. From the left to the far right, the definition of the problem and the solutions presented have determined the limits of academic writing in the country. The studies on the Kurdish movement, besides being part of an academic inquiry, have been, in fact, the determiner of the boundaries in scientific works. The state's ideology, which I will present later, depends on Turkishness, the cult of the state, and Sunni Islam, has been using academia as a tool of propaganda to impose a superior identity on society. Further, the people who willingly played such a role were not concerned about academic freedom. It is evident that the ideology of the state, which centered on the denial and refusal of the existence of the Kurds, has been using science not only for refusal but also for justification. In his introduction to a book, Cemal Gürsel, the Turkish president in 1961, wrote: "Reading this work by all Turkish intellectuals will provide great benefits. Because this work once again proves our citizens living in Eastern Anatolia, who speak a different language from Turkish, and who consider themselves separate from the Turks. Moreover, who we think so because of our ignorance are Turkish with undeniable scientific facts".<sup>14</sup> One of the scientific facts he refers to was presented by the book's author: "These mountainous Turkish brothers, who are qualified as the Kurds, are contemporary Turks".<sup>15</sup>

## 2.2 1980-2000s: The Performance of Soldiers

Following the "scientific" denial of Kurdish identity with the foundation of the PKK in 1978 and the beginning of the armed conflict between the Turkish army and the guerrillas, the academic standing shifted from politicians' performance, which was populist and state-supported activity, to the soldiers' performers. The soldiers' approach suggests that since the state defined the issue from a security angle, the academics considered the problem to not be from academic research and historical perspective but rather a military-based strategy that was particularly result-oriented and needed the intellectuals to give the state actors

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<sup>13</sup> Bruinessen, "The Kurds," 13.

<sup>14</sup> Mehmet Şerif Fırat, *Doğu İlleri ve Varto Tarihi* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1961), 3—4.

<sup>15</sup> Fuat Keyman, "Etnik Çatışmayı Önlemek," *Acik Radyo*, September 11, 2005, <https://acikradyo.com.tr/arsiv-icerigi/etnik-catismayi-onlemek>.



advice on how to end the PKK. For this group, the Kurdish problem is not an identity-based social issue anymore, but a terrorist act against the unified Turkish state and its authority. Furthermore, just as the politicians' performance, this group presented their findings not with intellectual concerns but as handbooks to the state in terms of how to end terrorism, how to win the war, and how the PKK worked as a "terrorist group".

This characteristic standing of academics has been alive in Turkey. Even today, as I write, it is still held by soldiers, strategists, and journalists. For this group of researchers, the problem should be defined and dealt with in terms of war. That is why most of these texts present their findings with the terminologies of war studies. A close reading of this tradition shows that in most cases, the writers make suggestions for the Turkish army and use a language laden with hatred and anger.

Ultranationalist Turkish academics, who are mostly members of the Turkish Nationalist Party or former security advisers and soldiers, do not formulate the Kurdish problem but mostly tend to justify the state's policy or prove how dangerous the Kurdish movement both within Turkey and in the region is. In his book, Nazmi Çora starts with the traditional sentence, "How happy to say I am Turkish," and claims that by saying this, one should not be defined as a racist.<sup>16</sup> For him, while Kurdism is an example of pure separatism, that act of terrorism has been supported by external powers, and the Kurdish movement has been doing nothing but serving these powers.<sup>17</sup> From his introduction to the conclusion, it is evident that instead of theoretical and academic analysis, he paints a picture that might be considered a section of a party program. In his argument, the short-lived peace process between the AKP (Justice and Development Party, Turkish: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) and the PKK is a "betrayal to the Turkish nation and Turkishness".<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, he uses more aggressive language that cannot be considered either academic or human by suggesting that the state should start with a "bloodbath" to solve the problem.<sup>19</sup>

Although it might seem like the attitude of a politician from the twentieth century, the book was written by an academic with a doctorate in 2015. Such argumentation is not exclusive. On the contrary, it reveals the mindset of the exclusive nationalist approach to the subject. It must be stressed that like the politician performers; this group believes that one cannot separate the government's policies from the official policies concerning the Kurdish problem.

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<sup>16</sup> Ali Nazmi Çora, *Ayrılkçı Kürt Sorunu* (Ankara: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 23.

<sup>17</sup> Çora, *Ayrılkçı*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Çora, *Ayrılkçı*, 426.

<sup>19</sup> Çora, *Ayrılkçı*, 427.

### 2.3 1990-2000s: The Performances of Citizens

Influenced directly by the political agenda of the new state, the Kurdish studies have not evolved only by previous research results; it has instead been extended, narrowed, and evolved by the politics of the nation-state, and that is why I would argue what we refer to as Kurdish studies have, matter-of-factly, been state-driven literature. After the 1990s, the literature was mainly shaped by the changing environment between the EU and the Turkish state. Further, the beginning of the new millennium until 2009 marks the period AKP introduced a democratization phase and peace process with the Kurds. During this phase, literature has witnessed a new approach based on ethnicity, human rights, and democratization. In this period, academics had more opportunities and less risk to research the topic. With the collapse of the so-called peace process, the topic once again turned into a “risk” study. Such a straightforward interpretation is fundamentally crucial to realize that the literature of Kurdish studies in Turkey has been a politics-driven area, and there has been a time gap in it in terms of narrative, methodology, and content.

Starting from the 1990s, with the influences of global and national changes besides the soldier’s performance, a new interpretation wave began. This new phase which I refer to as “citizens’ performance,” indicated a new agenda in the field. Contrary to the earlier understanding, human rights, identity, and democratization ideas started to be used repeatedly in the texts. Although these terms have been used in most cases, it is evident that the researchers who formulated the problem from the Kurdish/ethnic perspective mostly held a liberal view.<sup>20</sup> Such standing argues that the Kurdish population is an ethnic group with identity-based claims and so mobilized and the 1990s till partially the end of the polarized world between the USA and USSR and partly Turkish relations with the EU and the rise of neoliberal politics in Turkey, the number of studies on Kurds and Armenians have increased.<sup>21</sup>

The armed conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK and the formulation of the topic in the context of “security” created some impressions that most of the studies on the Kurds were the studies on the PKK. On the one hand, the Turkish media constantly presented the so-called PKK’s violence. On the other hand, intellectuals presented such

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<sup>20</sup> Simin Fadaee and Camilla Brancolini, "From National Liberation to Radical Democracy: Exploring the Shift in the Kurdish Liberation Movement in Turkey," *Ethnicities* 19, no. 5 (2019): 858—875, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796819826146>.

<sup>21</sup> Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden, "Understanding Today’s Kurdish Movement: Leftist Heritage, Martyrdom, Democracy and Gender," *European Journal of Turkish Studies, Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey* 14, (2012): 3, <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.4656>.

violence from the state-centered point of view. In this soldier's performance, Kurdish studies were mostly "criminal" studies rather than sociological, political, or historical.<sup>22</sup> What is important here is that in the literature on the Kurdish problem, by the end of the Cold War, armed groups or "terrorist organizations" had replaced the focus of Western powers from the major ideological entities such as the USSR with ethnic and religious radical groups. From Afghanistan to Africa, the armed groups took huge attention, and as a member of NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Turkey's fight with the Kurdish guerillas followed the same patterns in the literature. Shaped by the change of global and national sources of fear, academics were led to interpret and analyze the PKK with different examples from several geographies.<sup>23</sup>

Yeğen argued that before the Republican and early Republic periods, there was an accepted position that the Kurds in Turkey would be given ethnic rights; however, after the 1924 constitution, a phase included assimilation and considered the Kurdish problem as backwardness due to lack of modernization. According to him, this phase was contrary to the earlier period of denial.<sup>24</sup> The Republican stance regarding the Kurds was, as Yeğen put it, "a categorical denial".<sup>25</sup> Unlike the Ottomans, who did not hesitate to accept the Kurds, the Republican cadres openly refused them as an ethnic, linguistic people.<sup>26</sup> Such categorical denial, as Bora described it, was grounded on cultural and national magnificence that Turkishness was universal for everyone and had a racial aspect. Hence, the Kurds were forced to fit in Turkishness, and their existence was considered a subject of security and order.<sup>27</sup> During this phase, the assimilation and the denial of Kurdish identity pushed the Kurdish movement underground and made them more radical. It should be underlined that while assimilation or denial excludes at least one group within a given society, it is not one-sided. Nation-building in Turkey by assimilation and denial has built the Kurdish identity not only as an ethnic group but also as a political group. In this sense, Maya Arakon approaches the problem from an ethnicity-based agenda and argues that the formation of "Turkishness directly shapes the formation of Kurdish national identity". She suggests that

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<sup>22</sup> Mitchel P. Roth, and Murat Sever, "The Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) as Criminal Syndicate: Funding Terrorism through Organized Crime, a Case Study," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 10 (2007): 901–920, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100701558620>.

<sup>23</sup> Vera Eccarius-Kelly, "Surreptitious Lifelines: A Structural Analysis of the FARC and the PKK," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 2 (2012): 235–258, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2011.651182>.

<sup>24</sup> Mesut Yeğen, *Devlet Söyleminde Kürt Sorunu* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 2006), 79-80.

<sup>25</sup> Yeğen, *Devlet Söyleminde*, 110–111.

<sup>26</sup> Yeğen, *Devlet Söyleminde*, 110–111.

<sup>27</sup> Tanıl Bora, *Türk Sağının Uç Hali: Milliyetçilik, Muhafazaklık ve İslamcılık* (Istanbul: Birikim Yayınları, 2008), 37.

the state's response in the form of militarism has done more to radicalize the Kurdish movement from the beginning of the 1980s.<sup>28</sup>

Another significant shift in the intellectual interpretation of the Kurdish problem in the 2000s was the PKK's reinterpretation. In this new approach, unlike in the 1980s and 1990s, the PKK was referred to as a social agent, not as a terrorist organization. With Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's "democratic" discourse, the intellectuals started to debate that a possible solution to the Kurdish problem should also include the PKK. Rusen Çakır, in his essay, wrote that "All of Turkey wants peace, but most people in the Southeast do not want this peace "despite the PKK" but with "the PKK's consent and participation".<sup>29</sup> In this period, directly or indirectly, the relationship between the PKK and the Kurdish population was acknowledged, and the solution suggested was not merely militaristic but sociological as well. The extension of the approach on the Kurds also built on a more theoretical debate. Saracoglu suggests that even though the Kurdish problem is identity-based, capitalism is at the core of it.<sup>30</sup>

Contrary to Turkish academics, western academics, since they do not feel the risk, as mentioned earlier, tend to analyze the issue from a broader angle. What is also important is that the conflict has been centered on a regional and global stage for western academics. It might be argued that western academics studied the Kurdish conflict in the context of Middle Eastern geopolitics, violence, or natural resources like oil and gas. With the First and Second Gulf Wars, the existence of Iraqi Kurdistan and the vital impact of the oils led the westerners to consider the question from a regional and global political point of view.

It is almost certain that the academic studies on the Kurds in Turkey, which started from the debate about the Ottomans' social and political mindset, lasted for centuries in several geographies. Such a stance suggests that under the rule of Ottomans, there was no identity and forceful assimilation and the absence of hegemony of one identity over others. In his book, one of the Western scholars, Heper discusses the Ottoman policy regarding the differences among the population of integration rather than assimilation, which he termed "hybridism". For him, the Ottomans lacked an ethnic core for centuries.<sup>31</sup> In this less forceful integration, the Kurds had a so-called tribal autonomy that, for Heper, could be

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<sup>28</sup> Maya Arakon, "Ayrılıkçı Kürt Hareketinin Tarihsel Dinamiklerine Kısa Bir Bakış," *Alternatif Politika* 2, no. 2 (2010): 175, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270645894\\_I](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270645894_I)

<sup>29</sup> Ruşen Çakır, *Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorunu* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2004), 119.

<sup>30</sup> Cenk Saraçoğlu, "Türkiye ve Irak'taki Kürt Hareketinin Evrimi Üzerine Tarihsel Karşılaştırmalı Bir Tartışma Çerçevesi," *Praksis* 14, (2006): 237—263, <http://www.praksis.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/014-Saracoglu.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Metin Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation Basingstoke* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 177.

formulated as “revive, unite, and let them rule themselves to the extent feasible”.<sup>32</sup> The life the Turks and the Kurds shared for centuries, according to him, created a community in which the Kurds did not need to be considered as a different group to be given rights by the state. He claimed that the Republic was a state-nation rather than a nation-state.<sup>33</sup> He concluded that with the formation of the state without an ethnic core, the Jacobine state-nation led to the lack of ethnic hegemony. Shaped by this argumentation, he saw the root of the Kurdish problem: poverty and lack of modernization in the Kurdish territories.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, well-known academics from Europe and North America have focused on radicalization, identity, nationalism, and the history of the Kurds in the Middle East and Turkey.

Contrary to this denial that the Turks do not have any agenda to assimilate the Kurds forcefully, another Western scholar, Michael Gunther began to emphasize that the official ideology of the Turkish state is based on the denial of the very existence of the Kurdish population, and it also applies several tools to assimilate them forcefully.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, for Bruinessen, the Kemalist ideology and the denial of the Kurds involves the ruling elites of the Republic making the people believe that they are in a unified, homogenous nation, and any act to bring disunity is considered a vital threat.<sup>36</sup> For one of the leading western scholars on the Kurdish problem, Robert Olson, the Kurdish problem or conflict is one of the inter-nationalism conflicts, and the Turkish state rejects Kurdish nationalism.<sup>37</sup> The mainstream approach of the ruling elites and the state itself tends to externalize the Kurdish problem as expressed in words like “only in Iraq and Iran”.<sup>38</sup> Hugh Poulton has also predicted that the state’s repression of the Kurdish population triggered what he calls “Kurdish consciousness”.<sup>39</sup> Such state ideology and forced assimilation approach has also been a common viewpoint taken among Turkish academics. Yavuz, who discussed the stages of Kurdish nationalism and the Kurdish problem, claimed that the Turkish nation-state’s project, based on the homogeneity of the population, employed several tools to

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<sup>32</sup> Heper, *The State*, 178.

<sup>33</sup> Heper, *The state*, 178.

<sup>34</sup> Heper, *The state*, 178.

<sup>35</sup> Heper, *The state*, 187.

<sup>36</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, “*Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism versus Nation-Building States: Collected Articles*,” (NJ: Gorjias Press, 2011), 90.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism, and the Sheikh Said Rebellion 1880-1925* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 161.

<sup>38</sup> Anthony Hyman, *Elusive Kurdistan: The Struggle for Recognition* (London: Center for Security and Conflict Studies, 1988), 8.

<sup>39</sup> Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat Grey Wolf and Crescent Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic Hurst and Company* (London: Center for Security and Conflict Studies, 1997), 316.

dismantle the differences between the Kurds.<sup>40</sup> It is also essential to argue that in the 90s, the Kurds attracted more attention from the media than from the academics in Turkey.<sup>41</sup>

While Turkish journalists tend to interpret the PKK in the context of the revolutionary left, in her book, Marcus analyzed the PKK's evolution from a historical perspective related to social construction. For Marcus, the PKK's recruitment goes beyond getting more force; it is an act of social interaction and construction.<sup>42</sup> It is worth noting that for Turkey journalists and academics, the tendency to face pressure and punishment is high. The gain in formulating the Kurdish question in the name of the state's ideology has a determinative impact on the research conducted on the Kurdish movement. It is why while foreign academics and journalists approach the problem from a more historical and sociological angle, Turkish academics and journalists, on the other hand, mostly write from the perspective of security and terrorism. Before the arrest of Abdullah Ocalan, there was no master's or Ph.D. dissertation done primarily on the Kurdish movement. Nihat Ali Ozcan's Ph.D. dissertation, *PKK (Kurdistan İsci Partisi: tarihi, ideolojisi, ve yöntemi, 1999)* was the first major study on the PKK in a Turkish university. Following his publication, another well-known journalist, Fikret Bila, published *Hangi PKK?* in 2004, in which he elaborated on the Kurdish movement regarding ideology, democracy, and gender.

Though this approach proposes a civil method to solve the problem, on the other hand, they put the PKK in a security framework. For instance, one of the leading academics on human rights, Kemal Kirisci, with his colleague, suggests that although the conflict is a matter of human rights and democratization, the PKK is a matter of a struggle against terrorism.<sup>43</sup> Though they propose an agenda and their possible outcomes, from separation to multiculturalism and more democracy, their approach seems to be based on the fear of disturbance of the Turkish nationalists. Still, while they put the problem in a human rights framework, they write the concept of legitimate rights in quotation marks.<sup>44</sup> Further, what should be criticized is that they indirectly follow the pattern that the PKK and the Kurdish problem are different things, which is why they should be dealt with differently.

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<sup>40</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, "Five Stages of the Construction of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 7, no. 3 (2001): 1—24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537110108428635>.

<sup>41</sup> Mehmet Ali Brand, APO and PKK 1992, and İsmet İmset in the PKK: a report on separatist violence in Turkey (1973—1992) were the two most predominant works on the Kurdish movement.

<sup>42</sup> Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Beliefs; The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 15—34.

<sup>43</sup> Kemal Kirişçi and Gareth M. Winrow, *Kürt Sorunu: Kökeni ve Gelişimi* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1997), 4.

<sup>44</sup> Kirişçi- Gareth, *Kürt Sorunu*, 141.

Although it is true that the PKK is an armed guerilla group identifying itself as a Kurdish group and can be viewed as a matter for the military, the Kurdish problem is a civil one. However, the main question here, as to how one can give an exit agenda to the PKK's guerrillas, is yet to be answered. In addition, the organic relationship between the Kurdish population and the PKK needs to be considered if the search for the solution to the problem is "genuine".

From the beginning of the first period of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's regime in 2002-2007, the democratic discourse and practice of the country and the excitement about the possibility of EU membership discussions in the literature on the Kurdish in fact dispute in Turkey have moved to a more sociological and identity perspective. Although, in this period, nationalist institutions and academics followed the same discourse of terrorism, the liberal research in the so-called democratization politics of Erdogan conducted more research, not only about the Kurds but also about the Alevites and Armenian genocide.

#### **2.4 How the New Risk Factor Works in Academic Career?**

The evaluation of the last phase of the literature, the citizens' performance, might raise hope for the readers at first sight. However, data obtained from the Higher Education Institute (YOK) Thesis Center reveals that despite the relative increase in awareness of the ethnic and identity aspects of the problem, the risk factor is, in fact, still at work. To demonstrate and support my argument, I will first give specific attention to Ismail Besikci's works and then look at the master's and doctoral dissertations submitted to the center to show how the risk factor still plays a significant role in Turkish academia.

The standing of politicians' performers was shaped by the production and dissemination of the state's ideology and was well influenced by the very idea of science and the methodology used in the knowledge process. In soldiers' and politicians' standings, science methodology mostly relied on the fragmented and sometimes misused documents and data which aimed to cover the essence, replacing the knowledge with another knowledge or denying the existential value of knowledge. For Beşikçi, it was the way of doing science by the pro-state academics. Also, the Marxist academics fell into the trap of what he considered the misuse of science. Based on the investigation of primary sources about the forced displacement of the Kurds, he concluded that contrary to the Marxist researchers who claimed the Kurdish problem was because of regional inequalities or lack

of development, the forced displacement – which occurred over decades caused the lack of development.<sup>45</sup>

Besides his years in research on Kurds in Turkey, Besikci's importance comes from his findings cited by almost all Kurdish studies. Secondly, it seems the value of his research is drawn from how he formulates the understanding of science and its relationship with the state's ideology. In his argumentation before the foundation of the PKK, the studies on Kurds are shaped by a political approach. He claims that science in Turkey is under the control of official ideology, which shows how the state's ideology works and what it covers.<sup>46</sup> He elaborates that the official ideology in Turkey concerning the Kurdish problem has two sides: domestic and international. The former claims that the Kurds and the Kurdish language do not exist. They are either a mix of different languages or mountain Turks. With the implication of subjective argument, the latter claims that the outsider should formulate and understand that the Kurds do not exist.<sup>47</sup> For him, such an approach or mentality was invented by the state during the early period of the Republic. Considering the time he wrote his book; he demonstrated his findings from a citizen's perspective in the 1960s and 1970s. He harshly criticizes the idea suggested by Kemalism – national independence ideology. For him, Kemalism was based on the refusal of the Kurds to help the imperialist French and Britain to control Kurds.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, in his criticism of the Turkish left, he claims that the Turkish socialist intellectuals never considered the rights of Kurds or the people who speak about the Kurds.<sup>49</sup> Besides, he describes Kurdistan as an interstate colony, and not surprisingly, this definition has been used by the Kurdish movement and most of the Kurds even today.

By applying colonialism studies and Franz Fanon specifically, Besikci conceptualizes Kurdistan as a geographical location where “imperialists” fought one another. Even though there were several military conflicts between the French, Britain, and Ottomans, in the end, they chose to agree on the division and the control of Kurdistan.<sup>50</sup> Besikci claims that the Kurds were a card of anti-Arabism in the Middle East for the French and British due to mineral resources such as gas and oil. According to him, the geostrategic

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<sup>45</sup> İsmail Beşikçi, *Bilim Yöntemi Türkiye'deki Uygulama, Kürtlerin Mecburi İskanı* (İstanbul: Komal Yayınları, 1977), 245.

<sup>46</sup> Beşikçi, *Bilim*, 133.

<sup>47</sup> Beşikçi, *Bilim*, 9.

<sup>48</sup> Beşikçi, *Bilim*, 249.

<sup>49</sup> Beşikçi, *Bilim*, 249.

<sup>50</sup> İsmail Beşikçi, *Devletlerarası Sömürge Kürdistan* (Ankara: Karton Kapak, 1991), 13.



importance of the resources made the imperialists support the Kurds if necessary.<sup>51</sup> He also criticizes, however, the idea that communist and socialist states had different understandings of Kurds and Kurdistan. He suggests that it is hard to find a difference between the capitalist and socialist-communist states when it comes to Kurdistan and resources.<sup>52</sup> In his several studies, contrary to the Turkish academics, he argues that the Kurds are not a minority; they did not come from somewhere else, but live in their own lands.<sup>53</sup> He repeatedly elaborates that the root of the Kurdish problem is the denial of Kurdish identity and the right of self-determination by the colonization of their lands.

Further, Besikci claimed that the policy towards the Kurds in Turkey is a racist approach. In his opinion, one cannot understand racism by only looking at the USA and Africa and the discrimination in daily life. In the Kurdish case, racism works through denial and assimilation. For him, such “state terrorism” on the Kurds is more destructive than any other type of racism because it acts against a population and aims to eradicate the Kurdish population's identity.<sup>54</sup>

Considering his interpretation of the Kurdish problem and the state’s ideology in Turkey, Besikci took a huge risk that cost him almost two decades in prison at different times. His intellectual standing in a country where uniforms and power have priority over science opened a huge door for the next generations of academics who would work on the Kurdish problem. As a Turkish, he was persecuted and jailed-sadly, even the most liberal universities never gave him an office. He has been known as “Sari Hodja” and “mamoste” the teacher among the Kurds. His importance as a researcher came from his valuable works. I would suggest that he opened a climate of opinions for the research not to follow only the existing ideology but to risk forging new frontier knowledge about the Kurdish problem.

The risk factor cost him some time in prison and alienation. This risk factor, however, after the 1990s, moved to a different level. Although there might be a risk of ending up in prison or suffering unemployment, the new shape of it played a more indirect role. In this new environment, the message from those in power was, “Yes, you can work on any topic; however, some of these fields might cost you a price”. Including the research of Kürt Sorunu on the Kurdish problem, per the Higher Education Institution (YÖK), between

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<sup>51</sup> Beşikçi, *Devletlerarası*, 14.

<sup>52</sup> Beşikçi, *Devletlerarası*, 14.

<sup>53</sup> Beşikçi, *Devletlerarası*, 16.

<sup>54</sup> Beşikçi, *Devletlerarası*, 17.

2000 and 2020, five Ph.D. and 21 master's theses were submitted.<sup>55</sup> Before 2013, the theses mostly focused on the Kurdish problem from ministry, democratization, and the EU using a softer language. After 2013, the question has been framed in the context of regional politics. Similarly, with the search of the PKK, we see an overwhelming number of master's and doctoral theses, 125 in total. There are 13 Ph.D. dissertations out of the 125, and most of these studies defined the PKK as a terrorist organization. The research under this name interprets the PKK from financial support to ethnic violence and from comparison to ETA to drugs.

Such comparison reveals two crucial aspects of academic interpretations of the problem: the separation of the Kurdish population and the PKK and the risk factor of the Kurdish issue. In 2019, thirteen dissertations that focused on terrorism and the PKK were submitted to several institutions. This data shows that if the researcher stays in the comfort zone of the state's ideology, they do not face any risk. It also demonstrates that despite the main shift from the soldiers' to the citizens' perspective, the young generation and the Turkish universities still tend to separate the Kurds from the PKK. It is also important to suggest that Ph.D. dissertations have been considered the first and main step of an individual's academic carrier.

In a country where academia and academic studies are under the direct control of the state, the young generation mostly chooses not to take risks or interact with the academic world concerning their carrier. Discussing the academic studies on the Turkish-Kurdish conflict tend to avoid the risk and consider the "impact factor" in the eyes of both scientific authorities and the Turkish state.

## **2.5 Concluding Remarks**

The questions of "What do we know? What has been told? What are the errors, ifs, and changes?" are the central focus in most of the literature reviews and historiographies. However, as I showed, they take linear progress and development for granted to formulate the progress and evaluation of each scholarship. Although I appreciate the value of citing works to follow a scientific way of academic investigation, I would claim such an approach may not give the "perfect" picture of a field. The formulation of shifts and developments in

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<sup>55</sup> "To the Attention of the Researchers," Tez Merkezi, accessed January 16, 2021, <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>.

Kurdish studies cannot be argued without specific attention to the relationship between the nation-state and social sciences and academic freedom and academic formulations. Based on this analysis, it seems that the Kurdish studies have followed three interlinked patterns, that of the politicians', the soldiers', and the citizens' performances.

In the first case, literature was shaped mainly by the political and ideological agenda of the Turkish state, and the people who worked on the Kurdish problem acted as party members more than as academics. Later, with the start of the armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state, literature on the Kurdish movement turned into a militaristic and strategic-based agenda that conceptualized the Kurdish movement as a terrorist organization that must be defeated. Lastly, in the final stage, with the direct influence of the end of the Cold War, the rise of neo-liberal politics, and the EU process, Turkish and western academics started to devise the terminology of human rights and democratization alongside the soldiers and political evaluations. The critical review I planned to show above also shows that although there has been no direct legal indication on the academic field by the state, there are indirect messages that make researching and writing about the Kurdish movement risky, as succinctly put viz.: "You can work, but it is better if you do not or work in the defined border of academic freedom".

This review demonstrates how the subject has been studied and how the researchers failed to diagnose the changes and continuations in the dynamics of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. To fill such gaps in the following parts, I will evaluate the history-writing and the dynamics of the Kurdish movement cannot be taken for granted but should be split into four main transcriptions that shaped the history of the movement and the conflict.

## **PART II**

### **DIVIDE AND CONTROL**

#### **Chapter 1**

#### **The Kurds at the Age of Peace**

This chapter aims to provide a *historical perspective* on the Ottoman Empire's "Millet system," the Kurds within it, and how the Kurds have functioned as a tool against one another in the geopolitics of one of the two most predominant empires, Safavid and Ottomans. In the second chapter, I will discuss the two treaties that profoundly shaped the modern Middle Eastern history, focusing on the Kurds. The main argument of this chapter is that under the rules of empires, the Kurds – due to their geographic consolidation and place between Safadi and Ottomans – provided societal unity and immunity. However, by the division that came after WWI, such unity was "spoiled" the self-defense character of the Kurds as a society.

#### **1.1 Under Empires**

Due to the diversity of the ruled population in terms of religion and ethnicity, the relationship between the people and the power was mostly shaped by taxation and religious differences. Furthermore, the reason for such controlled harmony was the Millet system based on the authority of the Ottomans and the religious differences between the Muslims and non-Muslims rather than Turkishness. The Kurds in this period were part of the Millet system as the Muslims. However, in terms of regional politics, due to their geographic location, they were one of the parts of Ottoman geopolitics and their policy toward the Safavid Empire.

For centuries, the Kurds, like any other ethnic and religious communities, lived within horizontal societies based on religious differentiation. Thus, considering the so-called danger referred not to the inner but mainly to the external enemy, a great external power, Safavids. The Kurds who lived on both sides of the Ottoman and Persian borders were not just under the influences of those two empires but also were used by one against the other in this geopolitical competition. Considering the Kurd's religious orientation, Sunni Islam,

they had autonomy at the local level without any sense of threat of linguistic and cultural pressures. However, such religion-based “comfort” worked differently in the regional hegemonic competition between the Ottomans and the Safavids.

Located on the borders of these two empires, for the Ottomans, the Kurdish existence in the region was a wall against the invasion of the Safavids and the expansion of their interpretation of Islam. For the Safavids, however, the Kurdish territory was a wall to stop the Ottoman expansion toward the south and the east. Being a key between these two kinds of irredentism allowed the Kurds to be an autonomous part of the Millet system and gain from both empires. The historical analysis of such self-governing and regional politics has been considered within the idea of local dependency. I would argue that both the Millet system and the territorial location of the Kurds created and formed a more free-tendency-character population. The character of Kurds, both in society and politics, might be conceptualized as that of self-defense. They smartly took advantage of their territory and local existence to enable them to control their so-called autonomy far longer than other non-Turkish groups under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. The autonomy they had was, however, with the Ottoman rulers' loss of power and lands systematically narrowed and reduced. In addition to this, the Kurds, who lived politically in the form of feudal entities and sociologically in the shape of tribes, were influenced by both empires, and the results of the long-lasting conflict between them mostly shaped the Kurdish autonomy.

## **1.2 Within the Ottoman Empire**

Many of the debates among the Kurds are based on the idea that their national identity has been denied and dismantled. In this context, the twentieth century greatest content of academic works on the Kurds centered on understanding the Kurdish nationality and nationalism in different aspects. Regarding the fluidity of identity, some argue that the Kurdish identity is neither static nor uniform during the Ottoman Empire and later in the Middle East.<sup>56</sup>

From the sixteenth century, the Kurds had a so-called mutual agreement with the Ottomans. While the Kurdish geography and mountains became a checkpoint for the Ottomans against the Safavid Dynasty, the Kurds were granted local autonomy. Since

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<sup>56</sup> Mathias Vogl, Peter Webinger, Thomas Schrott, and Sebastian Bauer, *The Kurds: History-Religion-Language-Politics* (Austria: Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2015), 8.

sheiks and aghas mostly owned the Kurdish land, the given gains mostly went to the Kurdish ruling class.<sup>57</sup> The battle over the Kurdistan and the class gap between the Kurdish peasants and the villagers and the aghas and sheiks have been some of the reasons that slowed down the formation of Kurdish independence in the modern sense. As a survival strategy, the Kurds, like people who live in conflict zones and borders, had developed negotiation habits between powers for centuries.<sup>58</sup> The geographical size of the Ottoman territory and the Kurdish geography shaped by mountains was a severe obstacle for the Ottomans to build a strong authority over Kurdistan.

In the nineteenth century, the Ottomans changed their relationship with the Kurds due to the threat of Russia. In this century, alongside the sheiks and aghas, another dimension was attached to their relationship, which was an armed military unit. Hamidiye Regiment was established as a small local militia group against the Russian threat. However, some argue that the main reason was to prevent Armenian nationalism, the “internal enemy,” in the region.<sup>59</sup> The Kurds who became soldiers of Ottomans in the east and southeast of Anatolia against the Armenians were trained, mobilized, and armed by the Sultan against the rise of Armenian separatist movements. Abdelhamid the Second founded a military wing named “Hamidiye Regiments”, populated mainly by the paid Kurds. With the Hamidiye Regiments, the danger shifted from the outside (the Persians) to the inside (the Armenians), and the division between Armenian and Muslims became more evident than ever in Ottoman history. This policy of the Ottomans in the late century was not just an aggressive strategy of the sultanate; it was also internalized by the Kurdish elites from a slightly different angle. Some Kurdish elites considered the Kurdistan and the Kurds part of the Ottomans, while the Armenians were planning to take Kurdistan from the Ottomans. In 1990, Abdurrahman Bedirhan claimed that the Kurds should not trust the sultanate's policies because, for him, it wanted to feed a Kurdish and Armenian dispute.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Abdullah Cevdet also believed that the sultanate was paving the way for a Kurdish-Armenian conflict by spreading rumors about Armenians.<sup>61</sup> Although there was a cold approach between the Kurds and the Armenians, that was because Turkish nationalism considered both the Kurds

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<sup>57</sup> Mathias Vogl et al., *The Kurds*, 8.

<sup>58</sup> Mathias Vogl et al., *The Kurds*, 10.

<sup>59</sup> Mathias Vogl et al., *The Kurds*, 12.

<sup>60</sup> Mathias Vogl et al., *The Kurds*, 16—17.

<sup>61</sup> Mathias Vogl et al., *The Kurds*, 17.

and Armenians as “other”.<sup>62</sup> In this sense, to understand the concept of the “other”, it seems necessary to look at how the Ottomans Millet system worked as regards the Kurds.

After the seizure of Istanbul, the Ottomans turned it into an empire, and as such naturally has two fundamental aspects: imperialist ideology and diversity in the population.<sup>63</sup> As a Muslim power, the external politics and the act and imperialism formulated “jihad and conquest” and the extension of the Islamic belief.<sup>64</sup> Accordingly, the motivated Islamic expansion inherently meant they had to be able to manage the different populations and control their religious diversities. In this context, the system known as the Millet is the practice of Ottomans’ expansion, geographically and sociologically. That is to argue that the construction of the Millet system was not only a welcoming attitude but also imperative for an empire. Likewise, it is argued that the expansion of Ottomans in Serbian, Bulgarian, and Byzantine territories, by its nature, added the Serbians, Albanians, and Greeks to its population. Moreover, the expansion in geography naturally expanded its subjects as well.<sup>65</sup> Although the majority accepted the conquest of Istanbul as the seed of the Millet system, some claimed that it was rather a practice of the nineteenth century.<sup>66</sup>

Another vital debate on the Millet system was on its legal grounds. Some claimed that it was based on Islamic law and its practice named “zimmi”, while others argued that it was the pragmatic use of Islamic law.<sup>67</sup> In their typical use of power, the Ottomans controlled a landmass that incorporated massive diversities of religion, ethnicity, and language for centuries. The narrative and practice kept the Ottoman population together for centuries. The Millet system, therefore, was not a result of their “acceptance” of the different groups; it was instead a way of keeping the dozens of distinct identities under their rule. In this framework, the Millet system was an apparatus of the rulers to maintain and strengthen their control, not to create harmony among the different peoples.

The Millet system was based on the division of Muslims and non-Muslims. It created local relative autonomy for the non-Muslim population. The non-Muslims had the right to wear their traditional and religious clothes, celebrate their holy days, or, most importantly, practice their beliefs. On the other hand, it was also a supra-identity among different traditions in Islam. Such a hierarchical system was based on the idea that each

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<sup>62</sup> Mathias Vogl et al., *The Kurds*, 12.

<sup>63</sup> Nuri Adıyeke, “Osmanlı Millet Sistemine Dair Tartışmalar Ve Siyasal Bir Uzlaşma Modeli Olarak Millet Sistemi,” in *Osmanlı Ansiklopedisi, Cilt 4*, ed. Güler Eren (Ankara: Türkiye Yayınları, 2014), 345—346.

<sup>64</sup> Adıyeke, “Osmanlı Millet,” 352—353.

<sup>65</sup> Adıyeke, “Osmanlı Millet,” 355.

<sup>66</sup> Adıyeke, “Osmanlı Millet,” 356.

<sup>67</sup> Adıyeke, “Osmanlı Millet,” 358.

religious group lived according to their religious orientation. The Millet system established by Fatih Sultan Mehmed after the occupation of Constantia, Istanbul, was a legal and social system based on religious differences according to the local circumstances and needs.

Lewis argued that while Muslimhood existed in the Millet system, not Turks, Arabs, etc., identities like Armenian or Jews were not ethnic or linguistic but rather religious-oriented definitions.<sup>68</sup> The system, which was initially taken from Islamic history, created the so-called “cosmopolitan era” that started to decline in the 18th and 19th centuries. In an international context, the outcome of the modernization and colonization, which turned French and Great Britain into the major powers in military technology and industrialization, weakened the Ottoman’s hegemony in international politics. Similarly, internally, with the rise of nationalism, Muslims and non-Muslims turned into Turks, Arabs, Armenians, and Kurds.<sup>69</sup> In the nineteenth century, the Millet system and the Millet itself started to be used as the synonym for a nation.<sup>70</sup> During the Ottoman period, the Millet system relied on varying religious inclinations; with the rise of nationalism, it started to be used as Muslim, then translated to Turkish Muslim in Anatolia.

Since most Kurds defined themselves as Muslims during peacetime, or as presented above within the Millet system, the Kurd's relationship with the empire was not shaped by ethnic or religious identities but, most specifically, by the geopolitics of the given time. The most prominent players in the Kurdish-populated area were the Ottomans and Safavids during the fifteenth century and later Persians. The Kurds who lived both on the borders of Ottomans and Persians were not just under the influences of those two empires; they were also used by one against the other. In addition to this, the Kurdish feudal system and tribes gave them some measure of autonomy or power, depending on the winner of the game between the two empires. The Kurds, who stood astride the two major powers and took advantage of both, had no chance to strengthen their autonomy and gain their independence as a state. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans reduced Kurdish autonomy and systemically ended it.

The cold and real wars between the Safavids and the Ottomans lasted for centuries on Kurd territory until the sixteenth century. Contrary to the religious identity of Ottomans’ Sunni Islam, the Safavids’ orientation was Shia Islam. Besides the geopolitical interest, the

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<sup>68</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 321.

<sup>69</sup> Yavuz Çilliler, "Modern Milliyetçilik Kuramları Açısından 19. Yüzyıl Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Fikir Akımları," *Akademik İncelemeler Dergisi* 10, no. 2 (2015): 45—65, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17550/aid.76834>.

<sup>70</sup> Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 122.



differences between Persian and Ottoman interpretations of Islam resulted in a long-lasting geopolitical game and war between the two empires. The Safavids against the Sunni Ottoman irredentism aimed at expanding its influence towards the north, and the Kurds, as a Sunni population on the way, supported Ottoman in the Caldiran War. The war resulted in the Kasr-i-Sirin agreement of 1639, which created the border between the Persian and Ottoman Empires.<sup>71</sup>

Under Ottoman rule, the Kurds had twenty different districts (sancak), and Istanbul made appointments to those districts among the local feudally elected people. The win-win politics between the central power and the Kurdish feudal system continued until the nineteenth century. Even though there had been several rebellions against the local and central power, those were mostly related to taxation and military service during the war. After the first Great War in 1914, the peace period, this Millet system was replaced with the paranoid time both at the regional and the global levels.

### **1.3 Concluding Remarks**

For centuries, the Kurds, like any other ethnic and religious community, lived within a horizontal society mainly based on religious affiliations. Based on the religious orientation of Sunni Islam, the Kurds were closer to the Ottomans, and, in fact, before the nineteenth century, Islam had been the main character of the Kurdish community. However, the geographical location of the Kurds made it convenient for both empires to use the Kurdish existence against each other. On the one hand, the geopolitical competition between the Safavids and Ottomans created a self-defense character for the Kurds. On the other hand, the Kurds smartly used their territorial existence to gain some autonomy from the Ottoman Empire. In the following chapter, I will present how the geography-based self-defense character under the rule of empires was followed by the collapse of the peace period, which put them under three-fold assimilation and oppression and introduced the ethnic and linguistic consciousness in the Kurds in the twentieth century.

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<sup>71</sup> Ayşe Pul, "Yavuz Sultan Selim'in Güney Siyasetinin Doğu Akdeniz Ticaretine Etkisi Hakkında Bazı Düşünceler," *Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (2014): 236—289, <https://doi.org/10.21563/sutad.187095>.

## Chapter 2

### Divide and Control

Modern Kurdish history has been shaped directly by the results of the initial problem of the WWI peace deals/treaties. Thus, primarily we will seek to examine the so-called peace treaties that have shaped not just the Kurds but also Middle Eastern politics and societies. In the first section, we will argue how Sykes-Picot and the Sevres have shifted Middle Eastern history in two different but equally determinative ways in the long run. The Sykes-Picot Agreement, named after British and French diplomats, was initially a secret treaty between the UK, France, Russia, and Italy based on the objective of defining the territories of the Ottoman Empire. The belief was that the Triple Entente would eventually achieve in defeating the Ottomans during WWI and divide the remaining parts.<sup>72</sup> The former divided several societies without any consideration of ethnic and religious differences. Meanwhile, it put the Kurds under the control of the four states: Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. One of the unintentional consequences of the peace treaties was that while it divided the nation, it also created a unification of the Kurds in these four countries later in the twentieth century.<sup>73</sup> The treaty of Sevres, however, directly impacted the Turkish Republic's modern history and politics. Furthermore, the Sevres both created a paranoia of division and loss of power among Turkish elites and, almost simultaneously, the idea of free Kurdistan for Kurdish elites.

In the second part of the chapter, I will evaluate how the division of the Middle East, specifically the Kurds of this region, built the history of Turkification, Arabization, and Persianization and put the Kurds under denial and conflict, and oppression of regional nation-states.

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<sup>72</sup> David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York, 1989), 286—288.

<sup>73</sup>Baskin Oran, "National Sovereignty Concept: Turkey and its Internal Minorities," *CEMOTI*, 36, no. 1 (2003): 33—62, <https://doi.org/10.4000/cemoti.1490>.

## 1.1 Sykes-Picot

Two years after WWI started, the British and French governments agreed to shape the Middle East's contemporary history. By that agreement, two histories started to be written in the region: the history of great powers—first French, then British, and later the US, and the history of the people of the Middle East. Without considering the historical constraints shaping different traditional identities, the region and its people were divided on artificial grounds, causing deep intergroup conflicts for almost a century. The underground resources of the region (gas and oil) had garnered massive attention from the Western powers. The French and the British had named “area A and area B” the geography of dozens of ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups who had lived for centuries. The article of the agreement reached how to divide the Middle East under the rule of the two Western powers. The aim was to build an Arab State or the Confederation of Arab States.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, the agreement included 15 articles, and the region was divided mainly into two parts: area A, France, and area B, Great Britain, signed by blue and red. While the agreement indicated the Arab as the chief in the administration, it also warned that the two governments had the authority to intervene directly.<sup>75</sup> According to the agreement, the French would take the ports of Acre and Haifa and supply water from Tigris to the Euphrates. By the agreement, Mosul, the coasts of Syria, some parts of the southeast of Turkey, and the eastern Mediterranean would be under French authority. Meanwhile, an international commission was to be appointed to Palestine. Additionally, the eastern part of the black sea and a part of the east of Turkey were to be given to Russia.<sup>76</sup>

## 1.2 The Treaty of Sevres

A century ago, on August 10, 1920, one of the most significant powers of the time, the Ottoman Empire, faced a situation where they had to devise a map of the regions surrendered by the European powers. In 1915, the same year the Armenian genocide occurred, the British army prepared to march on Istanbul through the Gallipoli peninsula.

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<sup>74</sup> Sir Edward Grey, “Sykes-Picot Agreement,” *WWI*, 15 and 16 May 1916, [https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Sykes-Picot\\_Agreement](https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Sykes-Picot_Agreement)

<sup>75</sup> Grey, “Sykes-Picot Agreement.”

<sup>76</sup> Grey, “Sykes-Picot Agreement.”

They thought the Ottomans would not be strong enough to fight back; however, the victory at Gallipoli became one of the few victorious events during WWI. Despite the “victory”, the Britain troops headed for Istanbul, and the Empire became a surrendered power for Europeans.<sup>77</sup>

After the war and the military and political collapse of the Empire, the European powers did not discuss how to fight the Ottomans but rather how to carve up the Ottoman ashes. In the Paris suburb of Sevres, the treaty of Sevres was signed. The Sevres treaty included several articles, for example, the internationalizing of Istanbul and Bosphorus, dividing Anatolia among Greeks, Kurds, Armenians.<sup>78</sup> A year after, the Turkish independence war led by Ataturk turned the Sevres into a dead-born treaty. In 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed. The European powers, which aimed to carve up the Empire, had to recognize Turkey as an independent country and grant all their demands concerning the territory. Although the independence war of Anatolia reshaped the imagined map, ever since then, it has been forgotten in Europe, and the Sevres agreement has become a name used in each discussion on Turkey and the Middle East.

The Treaty of Sevres had created a paranoia of division, which later, in 1978, with the foundation of PKK, reached its highest level and became one of the common words used by the Turkish nationalist and the Turkish state regarding the Kurdish problem.<sup>79</sup> Although the agreement named several ethnic groups like Armenians, Greeks, etc., the Kurds, aided by their slowly developed ideological mobilization and guerrilla groups, were alive in the discussion on Turkey and the Kurds. Though there was a mixed approach that the Kurdish movement had been dreaming about the Sevres, as I will discuss, the leader of PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, repeatedly wrote that the solution should not be expected from others.

A close look at the articles regarding the Kurds might show what Kurds were given. Section 3, articles 62-64, indicated how Kurdistan would be established. Article 62 defined how to draft the Kurdistan commission appointed by the British, French, and Italians to draft a scheme and ensure all other ethnic and religious minorities were protected in Kurdish-populated areas. Nevertheless, it also aimed to appoint a Kurdish representative as well. In addition, the article indicated that the group of Persians, Kurdish, French, British, and Italians who would visit the Kurdish was to decide what sort of rectifications should be

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<sup>77</sup> Nick Danforth, “Forget Sykes-Picot It’s the Treaty of Sevres That Explains the Modern Middle East,” *Foreign Policy*, August 10, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/10/sykes-picot-treaty-of-sevres-modern-turkey-middle-east-borders-turkey/>.

<sup>78</sup> Danforth, “Forget Sykes-Picot.”

<sup>79</sup> Danforth, “Forget Sykes-Picot.”

made. Besides, articles 63 and 64 reference article 62 and argue that within a year, following the commission's decisions, Kurds would have the chance to decide to be free from Turkey.<sup>80</sup>

What is important here is that while in Sevres, Kurds were defined as a minority who lived in a defined territory, in the Treaty of Lausanne, however, Turkey objected to accepting Kurds as a minority. The idea behind that position by Turkey was to eliminate any accusation of violating religious rights.<sup>81</sup>

The above-presented two agreements have a distinct similarity concerning the motive behind them. The Sykes-Picot aimed to divide the region into small pieces under the control of the French and British governments. The Sevres was the division of Anatolia. Sykes-Picot has an impact on the contemporary history of the Middle East in both global and regional politics. Sevres has created a historical remark that has shaped Turkish politics, considering that the minorities and the Kurds and a societal memory cost a second state, which I will analyze in the following chapters. The Sevres has become a “fear” for the Turkish state in its policy towards minorities due to its potential for separation, especially in the case of the Kurds.

### **1.3 Concluding Remarks**

The first transcription of the region's history has two folds in this period: the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the division of the Kurds among four nation-states. Due to the nature of Ottoman politics, where societies relied on the Millet system, the Kurds did not have identity problems. For centuries, both the Kurds and Kurdistan were a special regional checks and balances entity of geopolitics (in a military, defending sense) between the Safavids and the Ottomans. In this phase, the contra-irredentism between these two empires created relative immunity and free act for the Kurds, it also laid an order to keep the Kurdish unity. However, by the fall of the Ottomans, the Agreement of Syces-Picot after the war defeat not only divided the Kurds but also prepared the ground for massive assimilation by the nation-states, and it has been alive till today. Moreover, the first transcription and shifts in regional and global paradigms directly replaced the relationship between the Kurds

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<sup>80</sup> “The Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Turkey,” WWI Document Archive, accessed February 21, 2020 [https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Section\\_I\\_Articles\\_1\\_-\\_260](https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Section_I_Articles_1_-_260).

<sup>81</sup> Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 40.

and Empires from a geopolitical entity to more local relations, the state, and citizens. As I will discuss in the following part, a such replacement has occasioned post-empire stress and dramatically changed the dynamics of the Kurdish and Turkish conflict and relationship.

Like individuals, societies also need existential unity and integrity to keep them “healthy” and ensure their existence. Regarding the Kurds, the deprivation or lack of such unity put them in a cycle of repression-reaction. During the rule of the empires, the Kurds had relative immunity from the direct control of the Sultanate against Safavids, and the Millet system based on the diversity between the Muslims and non-Muslims was the main pillar that maintained the Kurdish sense of unity. However, by the end of the Ottomans, the Kurds were first divided between four countries and then subjected to Arabization, Persianization, and, more severely, Turkification. The division and assimilations ended the unity of the Kurds as a nation in the modern sense of the word and started the cycle of repression-reaction. Shaped by regional and global shifts, the first transcription represents the end of the self-defense mechanism among the Kurds and assimilations by the Arabs, Turks, and Persians.

## **PART III**

### **THE POST- EMPIRE STRESS**

#### **Chapter 1**

##### **Short History of the Modern Kurds in the Flow of the Turkish Modernization**

As a continuation of the first transcription, firstly, I will outline the modern history of the Kurds and how they have been subjected to different assimilations. Even though the second transcription represents a general trend of modernization and nationalization, my primary focus will be on the Turkish case regarding the Kurds. By doing so, this part will show how different and similar the history of modern Kurds in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey is and how the shift from empire to nation-state first created post-empire stress, which caused paranoia and replaced traditional Ottoman cleavages to the new types of cleavages in modern Turkey. This transcription has fundamentally impacted the dynamics of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict and the baseline of what is known as the Kurdish movement and or the PKK.

#### **1.1 Kurdistan: A Politically Charged Land**

Both Kurdistan and the Kurds are the politically charged entities of the modern history of the Middle East that, by the end of the peace period, faced dramatic consequences that profoundly shaped the self-defense character of the Kurdish population. However, as a name of geography, Kurdistan turned into an ideology after the foundation of the Turkish Republic and war by the declaration of the PKK. The geography of Kurdistan, which was the wall of irredentism between the Ottomans and Safavids after the WWI reformulation of the region, put both the Kurds and the Kurdistan under the rule of four despotic nation-states that planned to create pure Arabs, Persians, and Turks. Further, Kurdistan, on the one hand, became the basis of denying the existence of the Kurds. Much later, using the word Kurdistan itself became a representative of an ideology that was considered anti-Turkish, leftist, and Kurdish.

While the division still applied the powers as a checks and balances “card”, it also ended the Kurds' usage of the geopolitical importance of Kurdistan. In the age of empires, Kurdistan was an opportunity; however, with the rise of the biggest anomaly of human history, the nation-state and the geography of Kurdistan have turned into the source of the

agony of the Kurds. Unlike the geography-based self-defense before WWI, the political character of the Kurds has translated to an ethnic, linguistic character.

## 1.2 Kurds in Iran

As presented, the empires used the Kurds against one another for centuries. The successor of the Safavid Empire, Iran, has been one of the key players both in the Ottoman period and modern Mideastern politics. It also has historical importance for both the Kurdish movement and the Kurds in general due to the foundation of the short-lived Republic of Mehabad, with the support of the Soviet Union in 1946.

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Iranian control over the Kurdish population became stronger than ever. The Kurds in Iran cover 7% of the Iranian population, and contrary to the Kurds in Turkey, they have been under pressure not only for their ethnicity but also for their religion.<sup>82</sup> As a primarily Sunni group, the Kurds have been a source of “danger” for the Iranian state, which practices a state religion, Sia. Considering the importance of religion in its ideological discourse, being Sunni understandably invites the attention and oppression of the Iranian state. On the other side, like the other three nations having Kurds, the most significant threat for the majority society and the Iranian state is the possibility of facing the strengthening Kurdish movement and its party represented by the PKK.

The history of the Kurdish movement in Iran goes back to the 1940s. Komaley JK, founded in 1942, was an underground Kurdish party. Although it took excellent support from Kurds in 1945, they changed their name to the Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party to be able to function legally. The main goal of the party was to gain ethnic rights with its Sunni-oriented leadership. When Britain and the Soviet Union occupied Iran, they found an opportunity to establish the Republic of Mehabad in 1946, which existed for eleven months.<sup>83</sup> The existence of the Soviet Union in Iran considerably impacted the Kurdish movements and shortly after the establishment the Republic of Mehabad collapsed.

During the Reza Shah regime, the Kurdish party, Komaley, enjoyed long-lasting silence until the 1970s. Then, during the turmoil in the Middle East, the party after the Islamic revolution intensified its activities, and the tension between the Shia revolution and

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<sup>82</sup> “The World Factbook, Iran,” CIA, accessed March 30, 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iran/>.

<sup>83</sup> Hakkı Uygur, “Iran ve PKK Sorunu,” *IRAM*, March 27, 2019, <https://iramcenter.org/iran-ve-pkk-sorunu/>.



Sunni Kurds became more and more political and violent. The leader of the party, Abdurrahman Kasımlı, was assassinated in Vienna in 1989, and later, in 1993, his follower, Sadık Serefkedni, was killed as well.<sup>84</sup> Besides the IKDP Party, there have been several parties from different scales, armed and unarmed. The most known armed party is PJACK, Kurdistan Free Life Party, which claims to be the Iranian PKK and is designated a “terrorist organization” by the Iranian and Turkish governments.<sup>85</sup>

Unlike the pattern of modern Kurdish history in Iraq and Syria formed by ethnic Arabization in Iran, the Islamic orientation of the Kurds has been one of the main driving forces of oppression of Kurds.

### 1.3 Kurds in Iraq

The history of Iraqi Kurds goes back to ancient times, although their origin is still controversial among historians. The Kurds in Iraq mostly populated the northern part called the Mosul province for centuries. The Iraqi Kurds speak various dialects of the Kurdish language; however, the Kurmanci dialect is the most common one.<sup>86</sup>

After centuries of the rule of the Ottoman Empire, the French and British discussed the future of Iraqi territory in the San Remo Conference on 18-26 of 1920. Although their first aim was to divide the Middle East so the French mandate would control Syria and Lebanon and the British Empire would control Iraq and Palestine, both actors did not consider the division and the diversity of the geography in terms of ethnicity, religion, and language. The conference was, in fact, a justification and updated version of the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916.<sup>87</sup> Nonetheless, the diverse feature of the Iraqi population and geography remained the same. These were among the reasons the Ottomans could not build a central, persuasive administrative authority and prevented Iraq from becoming a nation-state for a long time under the British mandate.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Mehmet Koç, “Iran’ın Kürt Politikasında Yeni arayışlar,” *Dünya Bülteni*, July 19, 2019, <https://www.dunyabulteni.net/aa-analizleri/iranin-kurt-politikasinda-yeni-arayislar-h445463.html>.

<sup>85</sup>“About Us,” JAK, accessed May 2021, <https://archive.vn/20120910151712/http://www.pjak.org/eng/about.php>.

<sup>86</sup> İhsan Şerif Kaymaz, "Arap-Kürt Karşıtlığı Temelinde Irak'ın Parçalanmasına Giden Yol ve Türkiye," *Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi* 1, no. 01 (2005): 14, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/guvenlikstrtrj/issue/7542/99254>.

<sup>87</sup> İsmail Şahin, Cemile Şahin and Samet Yüce, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sonrası İngiltere'nin Irak'ta Devlet Kurma Çabaları," *Gazi Akademik Bakış* 8, no. 15 (2014): 8, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/gav/issue/6517/86391>.

<sup>88</sup> Şahin et al., “Birinci Dünya,” 13.

Since the Sevres treaty promised Kurds that eventually they would be able to come together in four territories (Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey) and create Kurdistan, Mullah Mustafa Barzani (leader of Kurdish elites in Iraq) did not contradict the central British administration.<sup>89</sup> After the independence war of Turkey, these hopes disappeared. In the late 1920s, under the British administration, Sheikh Mahmud Berzenci was eliminated, and the instated Barzani tribe increased its impact in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The British mandate officially ended in 1932; however, Great Britain kept its influence on Iraqi politics for decades. Thus, the Kurdish rebellion, led by Mustafa Barzani, was smashed with the help of the British army, and the Mullah was arrested. On the way to the Second World War, especially when Rashid Ali agreed with the Germans and British, the latter's influence came into Iraq again, leading to the rise of the anti-British movement.<sup>90</sup>

During the Second World War, the Soviet Union and British armies invaded Iranian and Iraqi territories. The invasion provided some room to maneuver for the Kurds to establish their party. With the help of the Russians, the Iranian Kurds declared the Republic of Mehabad in Iran. Similarly, Mullah Mustafa Barzani, with the support of the Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party, founded the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in 1946.<sup>91</sup> After the fall of the Republic of Mehabad, its leader, Mustafa Barzani, escaped to the Soviet Union for asylum.

During the Cold War in the Middle East, US-backed military coups took place in countries like Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. On November 14, 1958, the Iraqi people witnessed a coup led by General Kasim for the first time in their history. Since General Kasim's government had a close relationship with the Soviet Union, Mustafa Barzani had the chance to return to Iraq after decades. In 1961, he led another uprising against the new Republic of Iraq, now, with the support of the USA. While the Republic of Iraq failed to end the second rebellion in 1968, the Baath Party came to power and stayed in power until the Iraqi invasion in 2003.<sup>92</sup>

Under the party-state of Baath, the Kurds were given autonomy in Arbil, Dohuk, and Sulaymaniyah, and in the end, the Kurdish Autonomous Region was established with Peshmerga.<sup>93</sup> Once again, oil was significant as it always plays a role in Middle East politics, and here it played a distinct role in the relationship between the Baath party and

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<sup>89</sup> Kaymaz, "Arap-Kürt," 15.

<sup>90</sup> Şahin et al., "Birinci Dünya," 15.

<sup>91</sup> Şahin et al., "Birinci Dünya," 18.

<sup>92</sup> Şahin et al., "Birinci Dünya," 18—19.

<sup>93</sup> Those Who Face Death.

Kurdish autonomy. When the Baath government decided to nationalize Iraqi oil with close ties with Russia, the USA and Iran increased their support to the Iraqi Kurds. The Kurdish uprising (under the leadership of Barzani) forced the Baath party to reach an agreement with Iran. According to the agreement, Iran would take back the support from Kurds, and the Baath party would accept the Iranian request on the Shatt al Arab waterway. With the loss of support, the Kurdish uprising was ruthlessly crushed by the Baath, and in the end, Barzani first escaped to Iran and then to America, where he died in 1979.<sup>94</sup>

After his death, the Ayatollah Islamic revolution in Iran dramatically changed the Iraq-Iran bilateral relationship. The eight-year war between the two countries did not just shape Middle Eastern politics, but it also directly affected the Kurds in Iraq. The Islamic revolution that firmly backed the Kurds against Saddam Hussein now faced the tragic consequence of supporting Iran. Using chemical weapons in Halabja cost more than five thousand people's death.<sup>95</sup>

The First Gulf War, which started with the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein in 1990, led to the USA's first military action in the Middle East. In 1991, the USA attacked Iraq with NATO members. The US-led military action did not just cripple Saddam's government but also gave the Kurds another opportunity to rebel against him. Kurdish in Iraq repeatedly fell into this trap. They believed an external and more powerful actor would help them to get what they dreamed of. However, in 1930 and 1988, the USA did not support the Barzani- and Talabani-led rebellions. What happened next was the attack of the Iraqi army on the Kurds. Moreover, more than two million Kurds were forced to flee to the Turkish borders because of the attacks. In the same period, the Turks who faced severe discrimination in Bulgaria were welcomed by the Turkish government into the country.<sup>96</sup>

On April 5, 1991, the Turkish and the US governments agreed to create a safe zone. With the establishment of a safe zone, most Kurds returned to their country; however, the relationship between Iraq and the USA, step-by-step, led to the formation of North Iraqi Kurdistan after the second war against Saddam.<sup>97</sup>

The above-given history of Iraq and the Kurds might be chronicled in four ways. Firstly, the history of Kurds and Iraq is mostly written by outside powers. The division of the Middle East by the French and British: this did not just divide the people, regardless of their ethnic and religious diversity, but it also put the future of these people into the hands of

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<sup>94</sup> Nadar Entessar, *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East* (USA: Lexington Books, 2009), 56—59.

<sup>95</sup> Kaymaz, "Arap-Kürt," 23.

<sup>96</sup> Baskin Oran, *Kalkık Horoz: Çekiş Güç ve Kürt Devleti* (Bilgi: Karton Kapak, 1996), 140—155.

<sup>97</sup> Oran, *Kalkık Horoz*, 140—155.

states like the USA, Soviet Union, Turkey, and Iran by creating an environment to use one against the other, when it was needed. Secondly, the Iraqi Kurds have sought opportunities in almost every regional and global conflict in the twentieth century. Furthermore, even though in most cases, they face tragic ends like Halabja,<sup>98</sup> the Kurds also sought to take advantage of the regional crises, especially the one between Iran and Iraq.<sup>99</sup> Thirdly, unlike the PKK, the Kurdish movement in Iraq has not been shaped by strong ideological and historical arguments; instead, it has always been elite Kurds like Barzani and Talabani. Ultimately, while the Iraqi Kurdish movement aimed at actualizing their autonomy on the territory, especially in oil management, the Kurdish movement in Turkey started with Marxist Leninist ideology, then it shifted to a stateless democracy and “democratic confederalism” in Syria.

#### 1.4 Kurds in Syria

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the British and French became the dominant powers in the Middle East, specifically in the Kurdish-populated regions in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. According to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the French were granted control of Syria according to the League of Nations Agreement.

As with the history of Iraqi Kurds, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire is a milestone in both the history of Syria and the Kurds. With the rule of the French mandate, Syria and Kurds became a playground between Turkey and the French. The rebellions against Ataturk's Republic forced thousands of Kurds to go to Syria or Iraq. The Kurds who went to Syria played the most vital role in introducing nationalism and the Kurdish identity. Later after the independence of Syria, the country was targeted by the USA and the Soviet Union. With Arab nationalism, Syria became a “public prison” for the Kurds during the Cold War.

Like the Kurds in Iraq, the Kurdish society was predominantly tribal and politically divided. Hence, the Kurds in Anatolia in Khoybun tried to reform the divided Kurds in Syria by introducing nationalist approaches. Such attempts of mobilization were, in fact, reflexes against the newly founded ideological Republic of Turkey. In 1927, the Khoybun League

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<sup>98</sup> “Remembering the Halabja Massacre,” Voice of America, Editorial, accessed March 15, 2018, <https://editorials.voa.gov/a/remembering-halabja-massacre/4298678.html>.

<sup>99</sup> Haval Azad Mohialden, “Geçmişten Günümüze İran’ın Irak Kürtleriyle İlişkileri ve Bağımsızlık Referandumuna Yaklaşımı,” *Bölgesel Araştırmalar Dergisi* 3, no. 2 (2019): 162—188, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/903401>.

was established, which served as an umbrella covering several intellectuals, tribe leaders, religious authorities, and Kurdish intellectuals from Istanbul.<sup>100</sup> It is notable that after the smashed rebellions against the Turkish Republic, refugees were the biggest supporters of the League. The geographic closeness of Syria and Turkey became an escape point for the Kurds after their unsuccessful rebellions against Ataturk's Republic. Among several intellectuals, the Bedir Khan brothers played a significant role in the construction of Kurdish identity in Syria by propagating the publication of Kurdish journals and newspapers in Kurdish.<sup>101</sup>

After the agreement between Syria and the French in 1936, the Arabs in Syria gained a dominant position in Syrian politics. Like the British policy in Iraq, the French mandate used the diversity of the Syrian population of Arabs against Kurds – the rural dwellers against the urban. As a result of such a “divide et impera” policy, there has never been any peace among different groups in Syria.

Shortly after the Second World War, Syria became independent, and other groups except Arabs faced severe alienation by the Syrian government. However, as I have stated before, the faith of the divided countries has been shaped directly by global politics. With the establishment of the state of Israel and the Cold War, the Syrian government became the “apostle” of Arab nationalism. When Syria became a member of the United Arab Republic (UAR) with Egypt, Syria became a danger to the US. One year after the coup in Turkey, a military coup took place in Syria in reaction to the domination of Egypt in the UAR. The US, by the coup, achieved what it wanted by taking Syria from the League. Shortly after, the UAR collapsed.

The attempt to unify Kurds in Syria with the influence of the Soviet Union became the Syrian Communist Party.<sup>102</sup> With the foundation of the Democratic Party of Kurds in Syria, Kurds eventually achieved their unity, at least on paper.<sup>103</sup> The fake Kurdish spring in Syria faced aggressive oppression from the Syrian government with increased Arabization.<sup>104</sup> In 1962, according to the Syrian constitution, 120, 000 Kurds, almost 20 percent of Syrian Kurds, were deprived of citizenship.<sup>105</sup> The main intention was to force

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<sup>100</sup> Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds. History, Politics and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 17.

<sup>101</sup> Kerim Yıldız, *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 29.

<sup>102</sup> Yıldız, *The Kurds*, 472.

<sup>103</sup> Anne S. Schøtt, "The Kurds of Syria. From the Forgotten People to World-Stage Actors," *Copenhagen: Royal Danish Defence College* (2017): 7, <https://research.fak.dk/esploro/outputs/workingPaper/The-Kurds-of-Syria-From-the-Forgotten-People-to-World-Stage-Actors/991815788003741>.

<sup>104</sup> Schøtt, "The Kurds," 7.

<sup>105</sup> Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, 19.

the Kurds to prove their territorial originality. The Syrian government claimed that those Kurds were not Syrians, yet Turkey's Kurds escaped Turkey's oppression.

Meanwhile, the Baath Party came to power in 1963 after another overthrow, a week after the coup in Iraq. Unlike Arabism, the Baath party (founded by Michel Aflaq and Salah-al-Din al-Bitar in 1947) was more secular, and despite secularism, the party did not end the oppression of Kurds. On the contrary, it named the Kurds “the enemy”.<sup>106</sup> Similar to the Turkish policy, which was anchored on systematically replacing the Kurdish population, the Baath Party also aimed at creating an “Arab belt”. Thus, they expelled the Kurds on the Turkish border to the north. The „ al-hilal „ plan introduced a particular lifestyle to the Kurds with no education and no job.<sup>107</sup> According to the International Crisis Group, between the 1960s and 1980s, the Arabization and alienation of the Kurds in Syria included prohibiting the Kurdish language in schools and public places and deleting the Kurdish names and history from schoolbooks.<sup>108</sup> The Kurds' Arabization process ended with the Hama massacre in 1982 under the rule of Hafez al Assad.

The history of the Kurds in Syria changed with the formation of the PKK in Turkey in 1978. With a strong ideology, mobilized armed guerillas, and the influence of Abdullah Ocalan's leadership, the PKK started to write a different history for the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

It is important to mention, that the historical territory and water resources played a key role between Syria and Turkey in regional and bilateral relations. After the military overthrow in 1980 in Turkey, the Syrian government offered asylum opportunities to the leadership of the PKK. The Syrian government did not consider the PKK a danger to its authority if the PKK only targeted the Turkish state. The existence of Ocalan's and PKK's camps in Syria ended with the Turkish direct armed war threat against Syria in 1998, which became the reason for Ocalan to leave Syria.

As we shall discuss later, what the PKK did was not merely rebel against an oppressor; it unified all the claims and demands of Kurds in four countries. It was a well-described ideological and systematic agenda besides military action. The PKK's capacity not only made it the main actor in Kurdish politics but also meant independence from any external force. While PKK received weapons from several countries, it never put its future

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<sup>106</sup> Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, 60.

<sup>107</sup> Schøtt, "The Kurds of Syria," 9.

<sup>108</sup> “Syria's Metastasizing Conflicts,” International Crisis Group, accessed June 27, 2019 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/syria-s-metastasizing-conflicts>

in the hands of any state. It is one of the reasons I would later conclude that the future of the Rojava revolution is bleak.

After the death of his father, Bashar al-Assad came to power. Unlike his father, he developed a relationship with the EU and Turkey and started favoring democracy. The beginning of the 2000s saw dramatic events in Syria: the Damascus Spring and the Qamishlo revolt. The Yekiti Party led the former. The latter was more collective and opened for the young generation to speak out against the Syrian government.<sup>109</sup> According to Schott, the Kurdish protest was quelled by the Syrian government, and it resulted in the arrest of thousands in 2003. The Democratic Union Party (PYD), however, established ties with the PKK. PYD later, with the Arab Spring and Syrian civil war, became one of the most public entities and key players in the Syrian civil war.

In the wake of the formation of the PKK, the Syrian-Turkish geopolitical conflicts rose to prevent the indoctrination of Turkey's Kurds, but they remained lenient towards the indoctrination of Syrian Kurds. The Arab Spring and the civil war brought a broader and more significant opportunity to build a stateless democracy and get global publicity for their fight against the Islamic state.

## **1.5 The Kurds in Turkey**

It is a mistake to suppose that the founding cadre of the Republic from the beginning was against the Kurds. During the Independence War, the Kurds as Muslims were considered an important strategy in fighting against the French, British, and Greek armies. In this period of the sultanate, Islam was the priority of Ataturk and his friends in saving Anatolia from the invaders. Although Ataturk aimed to build a secular, western Turkish nation during the Independence War, the religious orientation among society was considered a source of unity. In this sense, since the Kurds were Muslims, the relationship between the Turks and Kurds was built on their religious similarity and the fact that they had a common enemy who was interested in ending the caliphate, sultanate, and occupying Anatolia. During this period, Ataturk, in his letters, repeatedly addressed the unity of the Kurds and Turks. In one of his telegraphs, he wrote, "The central government, the sultanate is under a strong military

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<sup>109</sup> Schott, "The Kurds of Syria," 12.

occupation that needs the unity of the nation, millets, to fight. For this reason, I aim to bring the Kurds together in this fight”.<sup>110</sup>

The Kurds and Kurdistan were openly used in official texts, telegraph, and newspapers during the Independence War. By the end of the war, however, the mission of the nation-state, which was to prepare the ground for the Turkification of the population, made the Kurds and the Kurdistan the “other,” the Kurds. The Millet system, which left the Kurds without ethnic claims, intensified in the nineteenth century the idea of nationhood and nationalism. Among the Kurdish elites, it was not a question of identity, however, it had some ideological impact. The political, economic, and military problems in the nineteenth century made Ottomans adopt a more centralized bureaucratic system, which the Kurds kicked against. The broken relationship between the Ottomans and Kurdish aghas and sheiks, with the foundation of the Republic, turned into the exclusion of the Kurds from the system in lines of identity. Since the Kurds were representatives of the archaic Ottomans’ values for the Republicans, they were considered backward. Although the Independence War was more of the government of Anatolia, the building of the Turkish nation-state relied on including everyone in the Turkish agenda and excluding those who would remain defiant.

Since the Armenians, Pontus, and Greeks were “eliminated,” the biggest non-Turkish Muslim group was the Kurds. The totality of the new Turkish state in terms of identity brought about the nation's unity and reconciled it with the state.<sup>111</sup> Such synonymity between the nation and the state spurred the founders of the republic and, later, the governments to believe that if some were not Turkish or did not accept to become Turkish, invariably, they had also rejected the state. The Treaty of Lausanne described everyone as Turkish, gave minority status to the non-Muslims, and officially denied the Kurds the same status.<sup>112</sup>

The founding cadres and early Republican elites believed that the Turks and the Kurds were the same and shared the same identity. Hence, there was no need to specify the Kurds, per se.<sup>113</sup> Such mentality and bureaucratic approach, on the one hand, were inclusive in terms of citizenship and state authority, but, on the other hand, it was exclusive regarding

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<sup>110</sup> Ali Tuna, *Atatürk'ün Tamim, Telgraf ve Beyannameleri* (Ankara Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi yayınları, 1991), 37.

<sup>111</sup> Muharrem Sevil, *Türkiye'de Modernleşme ve Modernleştiriciler* (İstanbul: Vadi Yayınları, 1999), 113—114.

<sup>112</sup> Mazhar Bağlı, Ertan Ozensel, *Çok Kültürlü Vatandaşlık, Kanadalı Türkler'in Aidiyet Çabaları ve Değer Yapıları* (Konya: Cizgi, 2013), 44—45.

<sup>113</sup> Ziya Gökalp, *Kürt Aşiretleri Hakkında Sosyolojik Tetkikler* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1992), 119—120.



the refusal of ethnic and linguistic diversity in Anatolia.<sup>114</sup> Though more than half of the Kurdish population lived within the borders of Turkey, they had diverse political ideologies. Some wanted to live in Turkey in an equal and democratic order, while those in the PKK were more separation orientated.<sup>115</sup>

From early Ottoman history to the formation of the Republic, the Kurds were accepted as a non-Turkish group that did not have identity claims. However, shortly after the Sheikh Said Rebellion in 1925, the new Turkish state changed its policy towards the Kurds and started a strict policy of denial.<sup>116</sup> For Gunter, the denial policy of the Turkish state failed in the 1970s.<sup>117</sup> Such denial for Yavuz is the initial stage of Kurdish nationalism.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, for Bozarlsan, the formation of the Turkish Republic was the end of the Ottoman tacit contact between the center and peripheries, which set the baseline of the subsequent Kurdish revolts.<sup>119</sup>

After the Independence War, with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, a massive Turkification period started in Turkey. The Kurds, as the biggest ethnic group, were subjected to an intensive assimilation program. The young Republic banned all Kurdish education institutions, associations, publications in the Kurdish language, and any form of cultural and ethnic expression in politics and social life.<sup>120</sup> The Turkish myth based on Turkishness, Sunni Islam, and territory resulted in vertically designed politics and social life. The Kurds, who believed they were alienated and harshly oppressed, rebelled against the Turkish state several times in the 1920s and 1930s.

Ataturk's revolution to build a western, secular, and Turkish state shortly after the formation of the Republic abolished the caliphate and centralized the bureaucracy. The feudal and conservative Kurds reacted to such a new way of politics in 1925 with the Sheikh Said Piran rebellion.<sup>121</sup> The Turkish army ended the first major reaction by the Kurds, and all the rebels were hanged by the Tribunals of Independence.<sup>122</sup> About five years later, the

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<sup>114</sup> Leyla Neyzi, "*Ben Kimim?*" *Türkiye'de Sözlü Tarih ve Öznellik*, Transl.: Hande Özkan, (Istanbul:İletişim Yayınları, 2004), 23.

<sup>115</sup> Michael A. Gunter, *The Kurds: A Divided Nation in Search of a State* (New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publisher, Princeton, 2019), 25.

<sup>116</sup> Gunter, *The Kurds*, 25.

<sup>117</sup> Gunter, *The Kurds*, 26.

<sup>118</sup> Yavuz, "Five Stages," 1—24.

<sup>119</sup> Hamit Bozarlsan, "Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey: From Tacit Contract to Rebellion (1919-1923)," in *Essay of the Origin of Kurdish Nationalism*, ed. Vali Abbas (Costa Mesa: CA: Mazda Publishers, 2013), 165.

<sup>120</sup> Meho, *The Kurds, and Kurdistan*, 9.

<sup>121</sup> Thomas Bois, *The Kurds* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), 146.

<sup>122</sup> Bois, *The Kurds*, 147—148.

Agri Dagh (Ararat) rebellions took place in 1930, and the Turkish army led by Salih Pasha suppressed the revolt. Some say that thousands, including women and children, were killed.

After the Ararat rebellion, new legislation named “Law of Displacement” was introduced, and it forced the Kurds to relocate to western Kurdistan for “cultural, educational and security reasons”.<sup>123</sup> Ararat rebellion and the law of displacement signified that the Kurds were no longer in existence. Thus, they turned to mountain Turks. The shift also represented the Kurds breaking away from the state. The last, the Dersim rebellion before the PKK took place in 1937. Sheikh Riza led it. It was also suppressed by the Turkish army, leading to the decimation of 10 thousand souls or more. For decades, the Kurds in Turkey did not have any rebellious acts until the 1960s and 1970s. It was believed that Kurdish nationalism or Kurdish political existence was over.<sup>124</sup> However, with the formation of the PKK, it became clearer that such belief was fake or a misinterpretation of the silence of the Kurds.

Among the various rebellions, three revolts, 1925, 1930, and 1938 have been discussed predominantly in modern Turkish history. The interpretations, however, are substantially divergent. While for the state and the prostate academic writing, the actors of these uprisings were mainly British-backed separatist terrorists, for the Kurds and pro-Kurdish movement, they were the result of Turkification and the severe control of the state over Kurds in terms of ethnicity and geography. Nezan described the 1925-1938 events: “During these thirteen years of repression, struggle, revolt, and deportation... more than one and a half million Kurds were deported [or] massacred... The entire area beyond the Euphrates ... was declared out of bounds to foreigners until 1965 and was kept under a permanent state of siege till 1950. The use of the Kurdish language was banned. The very words 'Kurd' and 'Kurdistan' were crossed out of the dictionaries and history books. The Kurds were never even referred to except as 'Mountain Turks’”.<sup>125</sup>

After the Dersim massacre in 1937-1938, which resulted in the deaths of 13, 000 Kurds, the Kurds went into a long-term societal and political depression in which no one dared to speak and act as Kurds. With the impacts of the Second World War and the rise of communism, Turkey attempted to “liberalize” its economy and political system after the war. Partly forced by the US and of its own volition, the country's modernization led to a considerable migration from the east to the west. Under the fastened modernization, the

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<sup>123</sup> Bois, *The Kurds*, 147—148.

<sup>124</sup> Bois, *The Kurds*, 147—148.

<sup>125</sup> Meho, *The Kurds and Kurdistan*, 9—10.

Kurds who migrated either for work or study to the big cities became activists under the roof of the Turkish left since they were not allowed to establish any political party openly related to the Kurds.

Following the coup in 1960 with the liberal aspect of the new constitution, the Kurds organized several political initiatives, from eastern rallies to the Revolutionary Eastern Hearts with the help of the Turkish left. Although in the 50s and 60s, the Kurds considered the Kurdish problem as the eastern problem, they were, in fact, aware of the differences regarding ethnic and cultural features with the Turks, especially with the impact of the Barzani movement in Iraq.

After the coup in 1970 ended, the so-called liberal environment led to the persecution and imprisonment of the Turkish and the Kurdish leftist activists. Within the fragmented left, the most radical voices, like Ocalan, regarded “the eastern problem” as the question of Kurdistan, and, with a group of students, they declared the PKK in 1978.

After the coup in 1980, the Turkish state policy started a period that eliminated and wiped out the Kurdish identity from political and social life.<sup>126</sup> After the first 1984-armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army, violence spread in the Kurdish regions. By 1990, it had turned into societal violence. Despite the several ceasefires, the oppression of Kurds by the Turkish state continued, including the invasion of the Kurdish towns, imprisonment of Kurdish politicians and activists, mass killing, and closure of the Kurdish political parties until 2019.

During the Syrian civil war from 2011, the Kurds, politically affiliated with the PKK and Ocalan, organized an armed group against ISIS. Later, they implemented the theory of democratic confederalism in Rojava. By the Rojava revolution, the Kurdish conflict with the nation-states, especially Iran, Syria, and Turkey, had become more evident and public than ever.

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<sup>126</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya, , "Kürt hareketinin örgütlenme süreci olarak 1970'ler," *Toplum ve Bilim* 127, (2013): 2—26, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/55897194.pdf>.

## **1.6 Concluding Remarks**

Both Kurdistan and the Kurds, as the politically charged entities of the modern history of the Middle East after the end of the age of peace, faced dramatic consequences that profoundly shaped the self-defense character of the Kurdish population. The first word of the sentence, “The Kurdish history is the history of denial, oppression, and violence,” was written by the great powers of the time after the end of the peace period. The geography of Kurdistan naturally made them a bridge between empires after WWI was divided between four despotic nation-states that aimed to create pure Arabs, Persians, and Turks. Since assimilation was anchored on different agendas in these four countries, the reactions of the Kurds were also diverse. Kurds in Iraq had more institutional reactions, and after the First and Second Gulf Wars, they built an autonomous administration within the country. Because of state pressure, the Kurds in Syria and Iran mostly followed a passivist pattern. The Kurds in Turkey, however, through the activism and mobilization within the Turkish left, were more active and ideological.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Kurds in the Flow of the Turkish Modernization**

Modernization and nationalization have been the two phenomena and processes that fed, created, and re-created each other. Compared to the empires, the nation-state as a form of governance had more diverse tools and a more comprehensive agenda based on creating identities and citizens from the subjects of the former empires and kingdoms. Although demonstrating an inclusive debate on modernization is hardly under the scope of this thesis, it is crucial to discuss how and to what extent both Ottoman and the new Turkish elites formulated modernization and used it for the given purposes.

The early Republic's modernization, nationalization, and Turkification policies formed the second (type and period of) transcriptions. The new-born Republic, on the one hand, more or less troubleshooted the failed receipts of all the attempts to save the Empire, which had witnessed the replacement of the cleavages in Anatolia, and, on the other hand, it put the most significant non-Turkish minority, the Kurds, at the center of the post-empire stress.

#### **2.1 The Modernization and the Kurds**

In daily conversations, someone might say: “My mother is a very modern woman,” and when asked what they meant, the answer mostly might be, “because she does not wear a headscarf”. Such a daily used sentence reveals two fundamental aspects of Turkish modernization. It contradicts religion and is practical but not a philosophical evaluation built on two related principles: secularism and nationalism, with all their characteristic ambivalences in the region.

The crucial hypothesis here is that the modernization process substantially impacted the Turkish-Kurdish relationship and, more closely, the emergence of the Kurdish movements. In this part, we can track the main lines of modernization from the Ottoman period to the Republican state of Turkey. To drive an analytical framework of the relationship between modernization and the Kurdish conflict, it is fundamentally vital to focus on the different angles of the modernization process that shaped modernization, secularization/laicism, and nationalism.

Although the Kurdish conflict has been defined as a contemporary nation-building outcome, the history of the Kurdish conflict – as it was seen earlier – is rooted in the late Ottomans and early Republican changes and continuations. As the successors of the Ottomans, the Turkish elites inherited the conceptualization and the practices from the Ottomans concerning modernization, policymaking, and their mindset to solve the problems. Like the idea of nationalism, modernization was born outside of Ottoman-controlled territory in the west. However, unlike western modernization, which was the result of long-lived massive economic, political, and social transformations, in the Ottomans' world, it followed a more rapid pattern within the area of military and diplomacy to save the empire or at least to postpone the possibility of collapse as much as possible. Modernization for the Ottoman elites was understood and employed as a tool to catch the West in terms of military technology and fill the gap between the Empire and its rivals. Hence, as a pragmatic approach, modernization had the same meaning and goal: to advance their weapons in a war.

Starting from the 1700s, the Sultanate and the elites realized that the power and supremacy they had in terms of politics and military were not enough to leave the war zone with victory. Sending students to Europe, the establishment of military engineering schools, and the bureaucratic adjustments created an idea that the modernization they advanced was not a historical transformation of the economy, politics, and society but a practical tool to get “better”. In the eighteenth century, when the Ottomans lost their power in international politics, the ruling elites started to debate possible ways to recover the Ottomans from militaristic backwardness against the Western powers.<sup>127</sup> For historian Hanioglu, the encounter with the Western powers created a breaking point in Ottoman history.<sup>128</sup> The confrontation showed that the Ottoman-type of governance and military failed, and there was a need to find a new recipe to re-introduce the empire.

From this point of view, in the 18<sup>th</sup>, the Nizam-ı Djedid<sup>129</sup>(new order), the implementations of western type militaristic engineering and bureaucratic adjustments, and

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<sup>127</sup> Mesut Yeğen, *Devlet Söyleminde*, 41.

<sup>128</sup> Mehmed Şükrü Hanioglu,, *Bir siyasal örgüt olarak Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Jön Türklük: Cilt I: (1889-1902)*, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları 1989), 16.

<sup>129</sup> Nizam-I Djedid was a series of reforms that was initiated by the Sultan Selim III starting from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The idea behind these reforms was to catch up with the Western powers in terms of military and politics. However, it was the early attempt of the Ottoman modernization that later formed the Republican modernization. The system was ended after the so-called rebellion of the Ottoman army, Janissary (Yaycioglu, 2016, 40), (Hanioglu 2008, 45—50)

later Tanzimat Fermanı (reorganization)<sup>130</sup> and Islahat Fermanı (restructuring)<sup>131</sup> were introduced to rebuild and, in fact, to save the damaged prestige of the Empire. Contrary to Haniouglu's claim, the realization of the gap between the Empire and its rivals was not only a breaking point in terms of backwardness, but it was also the change of Ottoman mentality based on the supremacy of the Islamic religion and the Empire's power in global politics. The Sultanate, believed to be above the European powers, realized such supremacy was no longer in existence. The problem, however, did not occur against the outsiders; it was within its controlled territory. As a result of defeats in war zones, the Empire lost its former authority over the population and sometimes its bureaucracy. The dismissal of the Janissary, (Yeniceri in Turkish) and the signing of Sened-i Ittifak with local powers showed that the Ottomans had difficulties controlling their army and local powers.

Shaped by this fundamental but mostly ignored pattern, the Ottomans bequeathed this sense of modernization to their successor, the Republican elites. Unlike the Ottomans, who interpreted modernization as a practical tool to save the image of the empire, for Republicans, however, it was a building tool that aimed at creating modern states and societies and transforming these societies in terms of their identities.

The Ottoman and Turkish elites believed the modernization of society and politics were obligatory to either catch up with Europe or secure its existence within the profound shifts in national and global politics. It seems that such an approach lacked the philosophical and intellectual history, which successfully accompanied the modernization in the West. Although the general view of Turkish history writing emphasizes the "outlook feature" of Atatürk's revolution, I will show later that this modernization has never changed from the seventeenth century to the 2000s. The introduction of modernization was not quite a new trend in this region. From the beginning of the seventeenth century, with the loss of land and political power against European civilization, the Ottomans entered a reformation process with its contradictions.

Nevertheless, while modernization stemmed from an organic intellectual, philosophical, and political process in the West, the Ottomans mostly and mainly focused on

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<sup>130</sup> In the eighteenth century, the Ottomans faced several nationalist uprisings in its territory. To prevent such acts, the western intervention, they built a social integrity for the non-Muslim population by recognizing religious freedom. However, the central reason that led to those reforms was to save Ottomans from the damage of lack of military development and loss of political prestige (Celik 1986, 35—40).

<sup>131</sup> As a result of the Crimean War between Ottomans and Russians (1853-1856), the Ottomans, both in favor of French and British support during the war and to forestall any further interventions from outside, introduced it as a continuation of the Tanzimat in 1856. By this reform, the right for voting to the non-Muslim population and equality in education and governments were taken under the Empire's guarantee. Further, some argue that it was the first attempt at democratization for the Empire (Johann 2010, 20—52).

the spheres of military, technology, and the “outlook”. Ottomans applied several ways to catch up with the West, like reformation of the military, the health sector, etc., but not so much in educating society under the Islamic belief. Only a few, mainly from the high profiles, were sent to Europe to learn more about European progress.<sup>132</sup> In the nineteenth century, with the conquest of the Ottoman in several wars, the reformation of the judiciary started. First, Tanzimat (re-organizaiton) 1839 and Islahat (reform) 1856 were mostly related to the right of the non-Muslim population. For Feroz Ahmad, Tanziamat was the starting point of the laicization of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>133</sup> Of course, the students sent to Europe were influenced by the ideas of nationalism. When they returned, they established the first Young Ottomans, Genç Osmanlılar, later Jonturk, under the rule of Abdelhamid.<sup>134</sup> Jon Turks then turned into Ittihat ve Teraki with a grand opposition of sultan Abdelhamid.

With the fall of the Ottoman Empire in WWI, the soldiers from Ittihat Teraki, including Ataturk, declared the Independence War, and later in 1922, Ataturk abolished the Sultanate and caliphate in 1924. The end of the Caliphate led Turkey to lose its ties with the Islamic world. With the regulation of “tevhid-i tedrisat”, all educational units in the country were unified under the control of the state.

## 2.2 Nationalization, Ottomanism, Turkism, and Islamism

The practical usage of modernization to save the Empire by the end of WWI turned into a tool for nation-building based on the characterization of people. As Istvan Bibó asserted, nation-building, a process of the possession of newly established nations, is linked to mass feelings. This transition started early in the fifteenth century in Europe. For him, such changes did not take place on the same scale, and while in some countries, it was smooth, in some places, it ended up with what he called „social catastrophes.”<sup>135</sup> Similarly, the transition led some nations to increase in wealth and morality while it caused conflict and damaged development in others.<sup>136</sup> The birth of modern democratic nationalism was not efficient enough for all of the territories under empires like Hapsburgs and Ottomans, which failed to fill the power structures and make them inclined towards wealth and stability. The

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<sup>132</sup> Niyazi Berkes, *Türkiye’de Çağdaşlaşma* (Istanbul: Yapi Kredi, 2019), 86.

<sup>133</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *Bir Kimlik Peşinde Türkiye* (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2014), 33.

<sup>134</sup> Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türkler’in Siyasi Fikileri 1895-1908* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005), 96.

<sup>135</sup> István Bibó and Iván Zoltán Dénes, *The Art of Peacemaking: Political Essays by István Bibó*. (London: Yale University Press, 2015), 133.

<sup>136</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 130.



transformation was not deep-rooted; it was fragmented in some territories.<sup>137</sup> For example, he claimed that the Ottoman Empire failed to improve social structures in its controlled territories because of its conquering nature and cultural strangeness.<sup>138</sup>

As mentioned above – in the absence of a previous national structure – national movements mostly aimed at eradicating the old order to build a new one.<sup>139</sup> It is a fact that there is a close relationship between nation and language. For Bibó, the concept of nation was political, and with the democratized mass feelings, people started to take control and possession of their language.<sup>140</sup> In the case of Central-Eastern Europe, for instance, nations that lived in the regions where people related in terms of language, who did not have what he called historical borders, began to work toward achieving unified linguistic borders. Nevertheless, the nations that had historical borders and different language-speaking groups within them aimed at building single-language nation-states.<sup>141</sup>

No doubt, the operation of nation-building and nationalization included redefining and reshaping several aspects of the social and political life of the people. This reality demonstrated itself numerous times throughout the twentieth century. Giving credence to Bibó's work, defining and finding the characteristic features of Hungarian, which was a „process of standardization,” served to advance political claims.<sup>142</sup> In the Hungarian case, such standardization resulted from past failures, intellectual development, and social values.<sup>143</sup> It has been a subject of debate that the primary reason behind the disasters was to be interrelated, influenced by something that naturally contradicted the un-Hungarian and Hungarian inner selves.<sup>144</sup> In his investigation, un-Hungariness occurred in three ways: foreign rule, foreign assimilation, and foreign influence.<sup>145</sup> He also suggested that Hungarian society failed to produce leaders who could act in critically important periods like 1914-1920 and 1938-1944.<sup>146</sup> The absence of a rising leader ended up missing the fundamental problem of society.<sup>147</sup> It is crucial to underline that from his point of view, it

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<sup>137</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 134.

<sup>138</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 135.

<sup>139</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 135.

<sup>140</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 136.

<sup>141</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 137.

<sup>142</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 137.

<sup>143</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 199.

<sup>144</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 199.

<sup>145</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 199.

<sup>146</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 199.

<sup>147</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 201.

was believed that the revolution of 1918 would solve the problems of Hungarian society; however, it was followed by the shock of the intelligentsia.<sup>148</sup>

With the counterrevolutionary period, race became a blanket of problems that resulted from the Hungarianization of other nationalities.<sup>149</sup> The main characteristic of the standardization was not to explain and interpret things based on reason and result chain but suppositions and expectations and the absence of objective correctness of actions.<sup>150</sup> It is believed that there is a similarity between individuals and communities. According to him, individuals are the only ones with a psyche, consciousness, and fears and act or regularly; the same system works at societal levels.<sup>151</sup> He argued that our failed actions might lead us to get more aggressive. It would be a mistake to think that he did not differentiate between individuals and communities. He indicated that just because the same sequence occurred at the community level, it did not necessarily mean it occurred to the same degree in each case.<sup>152</sup>

It is pertinent to point out that at the individual level, reactions could come into existence with possibilities and combinations, while at the community level, they could come in the shape of intention, conventions, and objectives. In addition, the same psychological precedent might result in different ways at individual and communal levels. “Piece de resistance”, for Bibó, is a healthy sense of reality. Looking at the Hungarian case, he averred that healthy responsiveness can always find a balance between dichotomies, like ancient-modern, traditionalism-revolutionism.<sup>153</sup> In his work, he submitted that there was no correlation between the attempts to understand the characteristics of Hungarian society and the attempts to renew and reshape the given community, Hungarian.<sup>154</sup> Regarding his enlightening explanation, it is vital to assert that the self demonstrates itself through responsiveness, the perception of reality, and healthiness, which eventually manifests itself in politics, which is the coexistence of the works of politicians and the process of filing the community's tasks.<sup>155</sup>

Based on Bibó's arguments, it seems that in the Turkish case, the new modernization trends –as I mentioned earlier– totally restructured the previous integration ideologies. For Ottomans, society was divided fundamentally into Muslims and non-Muslims. Thus, being

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<sup>148</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 201.

<sup>149</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 207.

<sup>150</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 219.

<sup>151</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 221.

<sup>152</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 228.

<sup>153</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 232.

<sup>154</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 232.

<sup>155</sup> Bibó, *The Art*, 232.

Kurd, Turk, or Arab was not a defining feature of Ottoman society. The Tanzimat (reorganization) and Islahat (reform) concentrated on the non-Muslim position of Russia, French, and British impact. Through these reforms, Ottomans clarified the differences, not by the “Millet system” in society, but by high politics. Because the French revolution and nationalism had shaped the relationship between the non-Muslim territories like Serbia and Albania for Ottomans, it was necessary to create an environment within the remaining territories to stop more independence. Within the chaos of division and loss, the Ottoman intellectuals suggested new receipts to save the Empire, such as Ottomanism, Turkism, and Islamism. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the reason for saving the Empire was to unify and stay under the idea of Ottomanism, which was predominant until 1876, the “first mesruiyet”. However, with the loss of its territories and reforms, it lost its dominant position to Islamism.

For Islamism, the main reason for the loss of power was not to follow Islam compared to the past. With the rule of Abdelhamid, Islamism became the most powerful framework for saving the Empire. Consequently, with the loss of lands in North Africa and the Balkans and the mobilization of Ittihat Teraki with the leadership of Enver Pasha, the main actor of the Armenian genocide, Turkism became the dominant character from the beginning of the twentieth century. With Turkism, the group established numerous unions and publications with the name of Turk, such as Turk Derneği, Türk Yurdu, Türk Ocakları, etc.<sup>156</sup> With the declaration of the Republic, the Kemalist government turned the name of the publications into the state’s policy in nation-building with the Turkish Language Association (Turk Dil Kurumu), Turkish History Association (Turk Tarih Kurumu), and Sun Language Theory (Güneş Dil Teorisi).

With the Turkification of the country concerning the Kurdish problem, speaking Turkish became obligatory. With the 1924 Iskan Kanunu’s (Resettlement Law) replacement of the population, particularly the Kurdish population, it became a state policy against Greeks and Kurds till the new government of Erdogan.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Seyfettin Aslan, and Mehmet Alkış, "Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyete Geçişte Türkiye'nin Modernleşme Süreci: Laikleşme ve Ulusal Kimlik İnşası," *Akademik Yaklaşımlar Dergisi* 6, no. 1 (2015): 28, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/ayd/issue/3333/46201>.

<sup>157</sup> Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is a Turk?* (Routledge, 2006), 155.

### 2.3 Ideology

Ideology has been one of the fundamental phenomena that social sciences constantly define as a mechanism based on infostructure and superstructure. The means of production and power relations represent the infostructure; ideology, law, religion, and education, symbolize the superstructure of a given society. Superstructures are the tools of justification of the former one. The state's ideology in this context might be defined as the ideology imposed on a controlled society through several bureaucratic tools, including education in both categories by the state. From political parties and unions, the state provides the opportunity to transmit the ideology of the state to the people. In the Weberian approach, the state as an organism holds the monopoly of violence that works in two different ways in modern times. While on the one hand, it protects the power itself; on the other hand, it weakens the people using it.

The two types in Besikci's definition, "tools of force and tools of ideology," are, in fact, the different interpretations and implementation of the same tool.<sup>158</sup> The state's ideology has been a characteristic feature of Turkey's relationship between the people and the state. The acceptance of an ideology gives freedom of science, speech, and self-expression, while the refusal of it is a danger as it is considered a threat to the powers that be. The state's ideology, which was built upon Turkishness, Sunni Islam, and Misaki Milli, was kept alive for almost a century, and Erdogan has introduced its last version as "one state, one nation, one religion, and one language".

What is significant here is that the acceptance or refusal of the state's ideology or official ideology is one of the key determiners of the cleavages I will discuss as pro-conflict and pro-democratic later. While the former covers the different segments of the state's ideology, the latter refers to the refusal of such a totality.<sup>159</sup> For Besikci, the refusal of the state's ideology by the Kurds, who did not want to lose their cultural and ethnic identity under the roof of Turkishness, earned them alienation from the center. Subsequently and consequently, they were subjected to mass displacement and mass killing.<sup>160</sup> The ideology of the Turkish state has been concentrated on practicality rather than the philosophical roots of modernization. The interpretation of modernization, even though it changed during nation-building as a mentality, has not changed. Unlike the Ottomans' approach to

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<sup>158</sup> Beşikçi, *Bilim Yöntem*, 47.

<sup>159</sup> Beşikçi, *Bilim Yöntem*, 48.

<sup>160</sup> Beşikçi, *Bilim Yöntem*, 51.

modernization, during the republican period, modernization was based on the ideological agenda of creating a pure Turkish nation and catching up with the western world.

## **2.4 Secularization**

To evaluate the role of religion in the modernization of the Turkish Republic, it is pertinent to look at the relationship between religion and politics in the Ottoman Empire and the post-empire period. As I discussed in the “Millet system,” the Ottomans were Muslims more than Turkish. Moreover, religious differences were the baseline of society and politics. Politics naturally refers to real-life gains and strategies, and, according to Mardin, Ottomans were both religious and secular in this sense.<sup>161</sup> Islam has been both a political entity and a socialization tool in Muslim societies. Later, religion as socialization with the Ataturk's “top to bottom” revolution made it a tool of state control.

During the Independence War, Islam was the glue in the mobilization of people against the Western powers, and it was believed that Anatolia and religion were under attack. After the War of Independence, however, religion and its former institutions in Ottoman times closed, and it became an obstacle to modernization for the founding elites.

Thus, analyzing the context of religion and ethnicism on the path of modernism, we can say that laicism and secularism were important pillars of modernization. While the former signifies the separation of religion, religious authority, and politics, the latter refers to the laicization of individuals in their social life. Laicism, initially a European idea, brought a new definition of the church and the state by eliminating the church's authority on education and politics. Originally, this elimination opened people's minds to philosophy, art, and secularization.

## **2.5 Concluding Remarks**

As a result of the points discussed above, I suggest making some conclusions on the special relationship of the three decisive elements of our topics: Turkish modernization, Islam, and the emerging Kurdish movement in this historical transition of Turkey. While under the rule of Ottomans, the state fit into religion, in contrast to Ataturk's revolution, where religion was under the control of the state. This shift created a gap first between the Islamic

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<sup>161</sup> Serif Mardin, *Türkiye'de Din ve Siyaset* (Istanbul: İletim Yayıncılık, 2004), 352.

population and the state authority. In addition, the Empire period's basic difference between Muslims and non-Muslims was replaced with the "state's Islam" and "society's Islam". The former defined religious life as being under the strict control of the state and a supporting factor when it needed to be used for Turkification or the construction of cults of leadership and political patronage. Societal Islam is people's traditional religious belief and practice.

In the related chapter, I argued that the Kurdish uprisings in the pre-PKK period were mostly religious and tax oriented. For instance, the Sheikh Said uprising in 1925 was against centralizing power and the "damage" given to Islamic belief. After the suppression of the rebellion, religious socialization and education institutions were shut down. The closure, on the one hand, strengthened the control of the state; on the other hand, it pushed the religious groups underground. What changed was that the religious groups that believed "their Islam" damaged created small groups. With the change of the alphabet, the Turkification of the call to prayer, ezan, created "underground Islam" and stoked conflict between the religious people and the state.

Kurdish modernization has been a byproduct of Turkish modernization. While for the Turks, it has been a tool to either save the empire or build the nation, the Kurds, on the other hand, approached this process from an ideological point of view. Besides, one of the main differences between these two types of modernization is that the former relies more on industrialization and Westernization, while Kurdish modernization was based on the criticism of capitalism and ideology.

For both the Ottomans and the Republicans, modernization has been a practical tool. For the Ottomans, it was a strategic measure to save the Empire's prestige; for the founders of the new state, it was a tool to reach the Western level of development and build a less diverse society. The pragmatist interpretation of modernization by the Turkish elites has been the main anomaly of Turkish modernization that shaped both elites and individuals, as I established in the beginning.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Post-Empire Stress**

#### **The State as a Condition and as a Formation**

This chapter, with direct relation to the previous sections, aims to explore the paranoia directly connected to the transition from the Empire to the nation-state of Turkey. The transformation of politics and society through modernization, nationalization, and the creation of the Turkish nation created a gap between power and society with its representation of two types of new cleavages. Significantly, all debate on the transition is causally related to the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The collapse of it put both elites and society under significant stress that started with the Treaty of Sevres. What might be called the post-empire stress points to confusion among elites and the public? Since the nineteenth century, the elites sought to find a recipe to save the Empire; hence, Islamism, Ottomanism, and Turkism, however, the first two “isms” failed, only the last one remained as a possible tool. With the foundation of Republic Turkism and Turkish identity as the title of the politics, society put it into practice. What was created from the collapse of power and the impact of the Sevres agreement made the Turkish ruling elites, with the guide of nationalist ideology, hold the belief that they might lose Anatolia.

Unlike the Ottomans, who put Muslim identity before the idea of Turkishness, the Republican elite sought the opposite—to make everything Turkish, even Islam. The elites who, after centuries, became Turkish suppressed any opposed idea, identity, and communities against the Turkish myth, mainly the Kurds. Similarly, society had fallen into long-lasting depression and identity crises, and some, like Kurds, rebelled against the state to keep the traditional Ottoman horizontal life. While the post-empire stress affected the whole society and the state, the power, with its systemic nationalization and the fear of losing a superior Turkish position created a paranoid state. Kurds, as the geographically contrasted ethnic group first with the tax-religion-oriented rebellions later in an ideologically Marxist-Leninist agenda, strengthened the state's and society's paranoia and subjected them to the devastating outcomes of the general distrust of the state.

In the following pages, I will give a literature review of paranoia as a psychiatric disorder and as a political and historical outcome to analyze the stages and practices of the paranoid state in Turkey. Then, I will criticize the primary approach among Turkish

academia. To demonstrate how paranoid states work in politics and social life, I will pull a few historical and current examples of the paranoid state of Turkey by the data collected from news and speeches to discuss how such a paranoid state is not only an instrument for the ruling elites as argued by several studies but also a way of thinking from top to down. Following, I will examine some interpretations of conspiracies and paranoid ways of politics in Turkey. Lastly, I will assert the causes of the second/paranoid state.

### **3.1 What Is Post-Empire Stress?**

Mainstream history writing holds that changes and transitions in society and politics do not happen in a short period, but they take a long time. As researchers, we most of the time realize the significance of the given changes long after they have occurred. During the peace period, the Ottomans put the Westerners and Russians in the center of the danger felt, and not surprisingly, the collapse of its power in global politics and its territory did not start from inside. It was borne out of its relationship with the great competing powers. Courtesy of the defeat in wars, the Ottoman elites realized there was a gap between its competitors and its army. Such a realization led the Ottoman elites to modernize their army and education to catch up with the great contestants. Thus, they introduced Ottomanism, Turkism, and Islamism to save the empire's prestige.<sup>162</sup> By trial and error, they could keep the empire until the beginning of the twentieth century.

After WWI, the peace period translated into the age of paranoia not only in Anatolia but in several geographies in the form of the nation-state and its practices. In this new paradigm, unlike during the peaceful period, the center of danger shifted from outsiders to insiders, i.e., the population. The loss of land in the Balkans and the Middle East caused massive immigration of Muslims to Anatolia. The failure of Ottomanism to save the Empire, Turkism, made Atatürk and his friends push Turkism aside and follow a mix of Islamism and Ottomanism during the Independence War. After the war, the main agenda was to save Anatolia from the invasion of Westerners, and in the first period of the Republic (1919-1923), there was no indication of Turkish supremacy. During the war of “life and death”, for ruling elites and the soldiers, Islamism and its institutions such as the caliphates were practical tools to keep the population together and survive the war. The traumatic end of the Empire, which created a central spirit, made up of the fear of losing the last piece of

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<sup>162</sup> Yusuf Akçura, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (Istanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat AŞ, 1976), 73.



land, Anatolia, later caused a political depression. Quite understandably, the glue kept the Ottomans alive for centuries. However, tools such as religion and the Ottomans' ruling policies failed to mobilize and hold the people together. Arabs, Albanians, and Armenians claimed their own country, and most of them seceded. The post-empire/Ottoman stress caused by the disappointment of Ottomanism and Islamism in saving power created disillusionment among the ruling elites. Since most of the remaining population was Turkish, the only way to form the Republic and protect the population from the danger of secession and Turkishness became the roof of the new society and politics.

As one of the main characteristic features of the new paradigm, the politics in the Sultanate's hands failed to save the Empire both in territorial and global politics. Consequently, an agenda was pushed to replace the Sultanate. Through indoctrination of politics at the global level, the former Ottoman soldiers and elites boosted the modernization that the Ottomans started to have a place in global politics. However, indoctrination and modernization also required a massive population transformation based on Turkishness and Sunni Islam. Following a massive nationalization, Atatürk aimed to build a society that would both protect Anatolia from more loss of territories and build a Turkish society to catch up with the European standard.

It became imperative to adjust to the new paradigm to create a new society and a political structure to integrate all the different groups under the singularity of modern nationhood. Unlike the peace period, the age of empires, in which the main target of politics and power was the outsider, the ideology transited from the center towards the population in the new paradigm. The ruling elites knew that the Muslim spirit, which kept the Ottomans alive for centuries, did not save the empire. This acceptance and the new paradigm in world politics led them to build a modern solution from a secular point of view and find a proper position with an ideology based on a less diverse society. When the Republic, as a post-empire formation, tried to find its proper position in a significantly less diverse society, the Kurds, the biggest Muslim minority, became the biggest challenge in building a common identity. The geographic consolidation of the Kurds and the language and cultural differences between the Turks and the Kurds became one of the biggest tests for Atatürk in building a Turkish nation-state.

The Kurds, who lived under a relatively autonomous rule for centuries, were not forced to migrate out of Anatolia, unlike the Greeks and Armenians. Thus, they became a major threat to the security of the Turkish territories and to building a Turkish nation-state through massive, nationalized modernization. Understandably, the Kurds, as the biggest

ethnic minority due to their geographic consolidation, put them at the new epicenter of the danger concerning the fear of losing territories and building a common identity. The fear and supposition of any act against the hegemonic Turkish identity's authority generated historical hysteria at both societal and political levels in contemporary Turkish history. In the flowing pages, I will seek to demonstrate how the illusion of fear fanned the conflict between the Kurds and the Turkish state and caused the lack of a healthy response to the tension.

### **3.2 Institutional and Personal Paranoia**

Anne McClintock, in her study in which she analyzes the motive behind the torture in Guatemala and Abu Garib and the USA's foreign policy, indicates that the USA has become dominated by two dangerous hallucinations: American globalization and a permanent threat of terror.<sup>163</sup> Contrary to President Bush's words, she argues that the war on terror is not a real war but a “consensual hallucination”.<sup>164</sup> She inquires if it is possible to understand imperial violence, then one should apply paranoia, a defining feature of our time. She believes paranoia inherently contradicts power. Moreover, power is a double-sided fantasy, delirium, and threat.<sup>165</sup> She argues that nations do not have psyches; only people do. She claims that a social entity such as states and empires might be defined as paranoid if the dominant group coheres as a collective community around contradictory cultural narratives, selves, mythologies, and practices.<sup>166</sup> Paranoia is an analytical strategic concept to understand contradictions within the power or a way of making them visible. According to McClintock, paranoia is a phenomenon articulated between the ordinary person and society, psychodynamics, and social and political history. Furthermore, she argues that paranoia is a dialectical process. For her, humiliating and aggrandizing rituals of schools and militaries, where individuals are broken to fit into a large body, are seen as constructed paranoia.<sup>167</sup>

Further, advanced surveillance technology and diversified power tools enhanced the popularity of conspiracy and became a new research interest. Harper, in his analysis, opines that the approaches toward the concept of paranoia are dualistic. He goes further to say that

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<sup>163</sup>Anne McClintock, "Paranoid Empire: Specters from Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 13, no. 1 (2009): 51, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/07990537-2008-006>.

<sup>164</sup> McClintock, "Paranoid Empire," 51.

<sup>165</sup> McClintock, "Paranoid Empire," 54.

<sup>166</sup> McClintock, "Paranoid Empire," 54.

<sup>167</sup> McClintock, "Paranoid Empire," 54.

while some view paranoia as a personal or intra-psychic conditional level, others consider it from a societal angle.<sup>168</sup> Even though these two leveled approaches provide clues to examine the concept, they also have limits. For him, cultural pronunciation may produce paranoia, and others might label individuals and societies as paranoid.<sup>169</sup> While the author links the concept with the surveillance society, he asserts that paranoia is a connection between surveillance and conspiracy theory in a surveillance society.<sup>170</sup> He concludes by offering solutions to eliminate the methodological difficulties in the field. Thus, he suggests the use of discourse analysis and positioning theory.<sup>171</sup>

### 3.3 Paranoia on the Personal Level

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-V, defines a paranoid personality disorder as “pervasive distrust and suspiciousness of others such that their motives are interpreted as malevolent, beginning by early adulthood and present in various contexts”. In any given diagnosis, the patient does not have to have the whole symptoms listed by DSM-V; if any patient shows at least four symptoms of the disorder, it is enough to diagnose someone with a paranoid personality disorder.<sup>172</sup>

It is indicated that people with this personality disorder, which is developed in early adulthood, have a strong sense of being harmed or deceived by others, even if there is no evidence of such an attack. Additionally, people with this problem have a constant fear of distrust without any objective evidence.<sup>173</sup> One of the key symptoms of this illness is to have the perception that people, friends, family, and partners might be disloyal to them.<sup>174</sup> Besides, people with paranoid personality disorder have a strong sense of reading the so-called hidden meanings. It is demonstrated that “an individual with this disorder may misinterpret an honest mistake by a store clerk as a deliberate attempt to short-change or view a casual, humorous remark by a co-worker as a serious character attack”.<sup>175</sup> Another

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<sup>168</sup>David Harper, "The Politics of Paranoia: Paranoid Positioning and Conspiratorial Narratives in the Surveillance Society," *Surveillance & Society* 5, no. 1 (2008): 1—23, <https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v5i1.3437>.

<sup>169</sup> Harper, "The Politics of Paranoia," 1.

<sup>170</sup> Harper, "The Politics of Paranoia," 23.

<sup>171</sup> Harper, "The Politics of Paranoia," 23.

<sup>172</sup>American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed, (Washington, 2013), 647.

<sup>173</sup> APA, *Diagnostic*, 650.

<sup>174</sup> APA, *Diagnostic*, 650.

<sup>175</sup> APA, *Diagnostic*, 649.

aspect of this mental illness is to be harsh against criticisms. Criticism is a sign of disloyalty, danger, or sometimes hatred for these patients.<sup>176</sup> They believe others constantly threaten their reputation, positions, or what they have. What is interesting in examining paranoid personality disorder are its causes and development. It is argued that paranoid personality disorder mostly appears in early childhood and adolescence with “solitariness, poor peer relationships, social anxiety, underachievement in school, hypersensitivity, peculiar thoughts and language, and idiosyncratic fantasies. This disorder appears to be more commonly diagnosed in males in clinical samples”.<sup>177</sup>

The term paranoia implies a state of disorganized thought and delirium. In a broader context, paranoia is a type of social alienation which goes beyond the sense of disconnection. Their article focused on the relationship between paranoia and socio-demographic variables and concluded that social positions demonstrated by powerlessness and victimization might produce paranoia.<sup>178</sup> In his study, Lemert alleges that paranoia exists among people who depend on one another to achieve a given goal.<sup>179</sup> It might be argued that people or actors who have a suspicious way of thinking tend to trust themselves more and mistrust others. Thus, people in this state seem to have few friends and a closed social environment.<sup>180</sup>

In his article in 1964, Richard Hofstadter defines political paranoia as a style of mind and paranoid style, which for him, is the only way to show the sense of exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial thinking.<sup>181</sup> For him, paranoia or paranoid style has a pejorative meaning, which indicates “bad” more than “good”.<sup>182</sup> He debates that certain religious beliefs, social structures, national memories, and historical catastrophes may create “psychic energies” or a state that might be used for a movement or political party.<sup>183</sup> In the case of political paranoia, the lack of access to political interest might be a cause of a paranoid style of thinking.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> APA, *Diagnostic*, 649.

<sup>177</sup> APA, *Diagnostic*, 650.

<sup>178</sup> John Mirowsky, and Catherine E. Ross, "Paranoia and the Structure of Powerlessness," *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 2 (1983): 228, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095107>.

<sup>179</sup> Edwin M Lemert, "Paranoia and the Dynamics of Exclusion," *Sociometry* 25, no. 1 (1962): 2—20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2786032>.

<sup>180</sup> Mirowsky and Catherine, "Paranoia," 237.

<sup>181</sup> Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's Magazine*, (November 1964): 51—86 <https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/>.

<sup>182</sup> Hofstadter, "The Paranoid," 76.

<sup>183</sup> Hofstadter, "The Paranoid," 77.

<sup>184</sup> Hofstadter, "The Paranoid," 86.

It is found that castigating a political arena on account of its mental incapacitation is a constantly used element.<sup>185</sup> By referring to the mental capability of a group, party, and leader, it is aimed to discredit given groups to make a difference between personal and political paranoia. While the former characterizes personality traits, political paranoia implies a reaction to “events, facts or how individuals see it”.<sup>186</sup> The main argument of political paranoia is not to analyze politics and politicians from a psychological point of view. Conversely, it looks at political paranoia, searching for enemies and irrational justification.<sup>187</sup> They refer to the concept of mirror reflection in discussing individual approaches to politicians by believing that they are abnormal, and they hold the idea that “we are good, they are bad”.<sup>188</sup> Political paranoid perpetually look for enemies; if they do not have them, they create one through social engineering methods such as media and education.<sup>189</sup>

In political and historical contexts, paranoia is a byproduct of disappointment, the fear of losing a given position, and, more importantly, control over power. Thus, it seems paranoia has infested the Turkish political mindset since the fall of the Empire and the collective memory of the Independence War led by Atatürk. The possibility of losing the remnant of the Ottoman territory created paranoia during the post-empire period at an institutional level. Then, the elites’ mindset through education and media translated the paranoia into a glue among the population in Anatolia. The personalization and culturalization of the institutional paranoia in the case of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict created a deadlock in achieving possible solutions. This was consequent upon the idea that the rights of the Kurds might cost them the loss of some territories, which western influence might occasion. The Kurdish rebellions against the Turkish state for decades to free Kurdistan paradoxically fed such paranoia. Standing upon these argumentations, in the following section, I will demonstrate some examples from media to politicians’ speeches from the early period of the Turkish Republic to show how a socialized conspiracy way of thinking demonstrates itself and ends up with a social trap.

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<sup>185</sup> Agnieszka Kasińska-Metryka and Rafał Miernik, "Political Paranoia: A Rule or a Chance?" *Polish Political Science Yearbook* 42 (2013): 139, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15804/psy2013009>.

<sup>186</sup> Kasińska-Miernik, “Political Paranoia,” 139.

<sup>187</sup> Kasińska-Miernik, “Political Paranoia,” 139.

<sup>188</sup> Kasińska-Miernik, “Political Paranoia,” 140.

<sup>189</sup> Kasińska-Miernik, “Political Paranoia,” 141.

### 3.4 Sampling the Paranoid State

The social trap became a field of study for sociologists and psychiatrists in the second half of the twentieth century. One of the founding fathers of the field, John Platt, defines social trap as “situations in society that contain traps formally like fish traps, where men or organizations or whole societies get themselves started in some direction or some set of relationships that later prove to be unpleasant or lethal, and they see no easy way to back out of or to avoid them”.<sup>190</sup>

The main argument of the concept of social trap is that individual’s pursuit of personal benefit may collectively damage the whole group, which might be called a “generalized trap”.<sup>191</sup> For Platt, the generalized trap is, in fact, a “counter trap,” which indicates that what we do to gain as individuals might prevent us from a collative good eventually named as a social fence.<sup>192</sup> What is significant for both social trap and fence is that there is a dialectical relationship between organism and environment.<sup>193</sup> In addition, looking at the social traps from the dialectal point of view shows that the trap relies on the difference between short-term individual and long-term collective outcomes.<sup>194</sup> The concept of social trap suggests that although our actions might strengthen our well beings and togetherness in some way, they also might lead to destructive results for both sides. In the Turkish case, the wellness and synergy of “us” are based on Turkishness, Sunni Islam. Hence, the destructiveness of the social trap is mostly on not external enemies like “westerners” as discussed but on others: Turkey Alevi, Kurds, Armenians, and Turkish society. As I seek to demonstrate some historical and current examples from media and politicians' speeches, the paranoid state is constantly reproduced, strengthening the mindset, which points to one of the most well-known symptoms of paranoid thinking. Moreover, it might be argued that the nested trap in Turkey is not the reason for the paranoid state but also the outcome of it.

From the very beginning of the Turkish Republic, education has been one of the major concerns of the Turkish ruling elites. As discussed, the state applied several reforms to spread the teaching institutions across the country and rebuild higher education based on the state’s ideology. Village Institutes were founded in 1940 to raise primarily teachers who

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<sup>190</sup>John Platt, “Social Traps,” *American Psychologist Research* 28, no. 8 (1973): 641, <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/h0035723>.

<sup>191</sup> Platt, “Social,” 641.

<sup>192</sup> Platt, “Social,” 641.

<sup>193</sup> Platt, “Social,” 642.

<sup>194</sup> Platt, “Social,” 643.

might not just teach but also help to spread the state's ideology to rural areas in Anatolia.<sup>195</sup> Shortly after the foundation of the Village Institutions, coeducation, curriculum, and books became a significant disturbance in the public and among politicians. Republican parliamentarian Emin Sazak said, "If we do not destroy these institutes, we are done for" in 1943.<sup>196</sup> Two fundamental features of these institutions show how a paranoid state works.

Furthermore, the example might provide evidence to prove that religion and ideology might directly create and strengthen a paranoid state. Coeducation (male and female students taking the same courses) in a religious society was in considerable danger. Ironically, though the Turkish state defined itself as secular later, the Village Institutions were called "infidel schools". Ideologically, Turkey had always feared communism might come to Turkey. Ideologically it was a fear of ruling elites to reading Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy in these institutions.<sup>197</sup>

Unlike the twentieth century, in which fear and its representation were in the hands of politicians, this dissemination of fear has been centered on media in the last decades. Recently, the advance in media technology and its role in shaping mass gave us a huge opportunity to find out how fear and illusion have been presented through media agents. Daily life and politics made media a new way of politics. In 2014 when ISIS attacked Kobane in Syria, and Turkish governments chose to stay silent, a major uprising took place in Kurdish cities in Turkey. The Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said: "We must think very clearly on this: there is probably another logic which set this trap. I do not think PYD's mentality is strong enough to set such a thing. Probably a mastermind. You need to think about it".<sup>198</sup>

Reading these examples reveals how paranoia works at institutional and individual levels. It also shows that politicians not only base their discourse on a constant feeling of danger but also share fear among their followers.

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<sup>195</sup>Yahya Kemal Kaya, *Insan Yetiştirme Düzenimiz: Politika, Eğitim, Kalkınma* (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal ve İdari Bilimler, 1984), 311.

<sup>196</sup> Kamal, *Insan Yetiştirme*, 315.

<sup>197</sup> Server Tanilli, *Nasıl Bir Eğitim İstiyoruz*, (İstanbul: Amaç Yayıncılık, 1989), 53.

<sup>198</sup> "Erdogan: There is a 'Superior' Mind in PYD'S Kobani Plots," *Daily Sabah*, October 26, 2014, accessed Jun 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2014/10/26/erdogan-there-is-a-superior-mind-in-pyds-kobani-plots>.

### 3.5 Zero-sum Game or Social Trap?

There is the hegemony of the paranoid mindset on the political culture, structure, and perception of society on the world and events in Turkey. Therewithal, it might be claimed that there are conspiracies and paranoia, but there are no studies on what manifests itself in each aspect of life. In a country where paranoia works not just in the form of the state as an organization but also as a mindset from top to down, there is a necessity to raise complicated questions as follows: Why is there a stunning absence of academic inquiries dealing with the conspiracy and cultural-political paranoia in a country like Turkey? Where has conspiracy been used as an instrument of political patronage? Answering such profoundly complicated questions is challenging beyond this paper's content. Putting this task aside, for now, two reasons need to be mentioned.

Firstly, as discussed, there is common sense among academics that working on paranoia is a psychiatrist's profession and inadequate to comprehend society's political processes and structures. This approach seems to be a reductionist way of thinking and comes from the "strict differentiation" among disciplines. Benefiting from opportunities of different disciplines is not a "luxury" but a forcing factor of the complexity of human-created structures. I would argue that professionalization is knowing something in detail and the capability of handling "things" from diversified angles. Secondly, by looking at literature on political paranoia and hysteria, it might be argued that these approaches might lead to a provocative and nominative explanation of "things" and eventually be excommunicated by academia, the public, and politicians. It has been argued that such a hysterical interpretation of politics is due to the idea of the zero-sum game inherited from the Ottomans.

Although such an argument seems quite appealing, it requires a clear explanation of what is understood from the idea of a zero-sum game. The first one is related to the main rule in the zero-sum game. A zero-sum game is based on the idea that one's gain is another's loss. Looking at the Turkish case shows there is only one gainer who wants to take the votes and later hold power. To suggest the conspiracy mindset of the Turkish state is a zero-sum game, one should provide the evidence and indicate the loss of others, which is not discussed in the article. It also needs to be underlined that the zero-sum game requires a rational and strategic way of thinking, which is far from what the author understands from the zero-sum game and the paranoid way of thinking. Besides, paranoid people might justify



their fear and mistrust, but it does not mean they reach such a conclusion through a rational and strategic approach. The second one is the role of education in producing the conspiracy perspective. Education is an ideological apparatus with the power to shape the mind of new generations. Lastly, I would argue that the concept of a “social trap” is a more practical approach than a zero-sum game in understanding the Turkish case.

### **3.6 Dimensions of the Paranoid State**

Society is a multilayered faculty of human history created and made up of human beings with feelings, anger, fear, and goals. One cannot fully comprehend the mindset of a given society without enhancing different disciplines of science. David Harper underlines that instead of regarding paranoia as a static pathological identity, one should approach it from a more fluid and dynamic manner to examine it in a specific context and time for several diverse causes.<sup>199</sup> By applying the psychiatric terminology to analyze the paranoid state in Turkey, it seems that there are four causes or aspects worth being examined of the paranoid state in Turkey: religion, geography, political culture, and ideology.

#### **3.6.1 Religion**

Constructing an argument based on the religious orientation of Turkish society is far beyond the content of this writing. Notwithstanding, I would argue that one of the most evident reasons which create and re-create the paranoid state is the nature of Islam. For Marx, religion is the heart of a heartless world and is the opium of the people. It is essential to indicate that many think that religion is a “scam”. It is not used only by the ruling class to control the people; it is a scam for people to keep themselves on the surface of events. In addition, criticizing religion eventually leads to a total critique of the world. When people realize religion is a scam, they may seek a chance to free themselves from it.

According to Mardin, the structural and reinforcing nature of the Islamic faith lead people with different beliefs to be excommunicated because each religious group might create a new state.<sup>200</sup> I would claim religion is one of the most prominent structures of our

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<sup>199</sup> Harper, "The Politics of Paranoia," 23.

<sup>200</sup> Serif Mardin, *Türkiye’de Din ve Siyaset* (Istanbul: İletim Yayıncılık, 2004), 359.

paranoia, “being burned in hell”. It is well known that Islam and Muslims believe that Islam is the “last and true” one; however, believing it eventually causes Muslims to see themselves as superior to others: non-believers, Alevi, or Westerners.

It has been argued that Turkish elites believe they are so important, but what needs to be discussed here is the belief itself and the religious pride, which is why the paranoid approach has alienated others. It is worth mentioning in the literature that there is a lack of academic research that focuses on the relationship between paranoia, conspiracy, and religion in Turkey and questions like, “Is a religious society more likely to believe conspiracy and be paranoid? How do religious differences affect the belief in the conspiracy?” These and the likes need further investigation.

### **3.6.2 Geography**

Following the impact of religion, geography is the second reason that created the Turkish mindset. Where we live directly affects the way we live. Turkey has been one of the most comprehensive regions between the Middle East, Europe, and Asia throughout history. The geographic location has affected not only the internal politics but also the population's mindset. Several studies have demonstrated that Turkey is both an Eastern and Western society, and it might be argued that such geography creates a harmony of different nationalities and cultures. Changing the angle might create confusion, which, in the end, leads to fear and paranoia.

Thirdly, by saying political culture, I refer to the perception of the society on the state, the cult of leadership, and political structure. The state is known in public as the papa state that does the best and thinks the best in Anatolia. Besides, the state is regarded in a generative framework, which suggests that it is durable and capable of protection and leadership. It has been found that masculinity and the image of the state directly influence the organization of political parties, which are controlled mostly by men and top-down working. These features of the state, as mentioned above, are related to religion, remembering that prophets are always men, and they are leaders. They played a significant role in the construction of the cult of leadership from Sultans to Atatürk and Erdogan.

### 3.6.3 Ideology

Lastly, ideology creates paranoia. Turkish sociologist, Serif Mardin, classifies ideology as hard and soft ideologies. The former is defined by elites based on theoretical arguments that are systematically constructed, while the latter is described as the amorphous beliefs and cognitive systems of the masses.<sup>201</sup> In addition, he argues that ideologies are “the map” to lead people. For him, there is psychological conformity between religion and ideology. He argues that ideology may create a religious function by saying we might understand an act of an ordinary person, but if we put it in a framework of totality, we might find accordance.<sup>202</sup>

Nation-building, by its nature, is based on similarities and differences, what Istvan Bibo calls standardization. From the beginning of the Republic, the papa state systemically has been producing ideologies geared towards standardization at the level of Turkishness and Sunni Islam. The Turkish state's ideology caused and strengthened the self-harming process. While the standardizing helped to strengthen the superior position of Turks and Sunni Muslims, it wounded the others who refused to fill in the picture. It is crucial to discuss education, media, military, and state institutions; however, they should be excluded for the reasons I have mentioned before. Therefore, I enunciate that the power uses these tools to spread and strengthen its rule by manipulating minds, not the “germinative conditions” of the paranoid state.

### 3.7 Concluding Remarks

The failure of the Ottoman elites in saving the Empire lies in a hybrid identity, Ottoman-Muslim. The new Turkish elites tried to find an ideological identity, nationalization, modernization, and singularity of society. The memory of the separation of the nation in the Balkan region made it so that in the Middle East, the founders of the new state had the fear that the remaining minorities would seek the same separation and independence. Moreover, since the Armenian and Greeks were displaced or massacred, and the Arabs helped the British and French by betraying the Turks, the Kurds were left as a different group within Anatolia.

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<sup>201</sup>Mardin, *Türkiye'de Din*, 64.

<sup>202</sup> Mardin, *Türkiye'de Din*, 65.

The Kurds were the biggest different ethnic group that lived in a geographically consolidated area with a different languages and cultural codes. Their modernization and integration into the new identity based on Turkish became the main source of the fear of losing more territories. The post-empire/Ottoman stress refers to such local and global changes that created an illusion of an enemy among the ruling elites. The memory of the late Ottomans and the early Republic was fed directly from the chaos of transition from empire to nation-state. The stress caused by such paranoia of division of power and territory has been a glue for Turkish politics concerning the existence of Kurds as a “possible threat” until today. Shaped by such a vision, the Kurds have been subjected to assimilation, mass displacement, and mass killing for almost a century.

Contrary to this state's policy, the Kurdish rebellions and resistance against the singularity of politics and society caused the state to straighten its force over the Kurds and created a collective political identity among the Kurds that turned into the PKK in 1978.

## **Chapter 4**

### **From Horizontal Politics to the Vertical Conflict: A Re-interpretation of the State and the Cleavages**

The separation of the Kurdish population in four different countries has not just put them under the three similar assimilation patterns –Arabization, Turkification, and Persianization – but more critically changed the structure of these societies and politics around them from the horizontal cleavages to vertical cleavages by secularization and nationalization. In the social sciences, cleavages have been one of the primary keys to understanding how societal-level definitions shape high politics in each country.

In this chapter, my goal is to give the literature review of the notion of cleavages with particular attention to its tie with the nationalization of Turkey. To reach an exclusive conclusion, I will pull data from the national and international index, surveys, and statistics that might be considered primary sources. The main statement of the chapter is that Serif Mardin’s “center-periphery” approach can be crucial to understanding Ottoman society and politics. Nevertheless, it fails to diagnose and address the changes done by Ataturk’s “top to bottom” revolution and Turkey as a modern nation-state. Therefore, I will propose some new differentiation and keys to analyze Turkey. Since the Kurdish movement is at the center of this study, the main arguments will be Kurdish centered.

#### **4.1 The Literature About the Social Cleavages**

Cleavage is not an independent existence from human beings. It comprises individuals who create it and have their own identity, ideology, culture, and moral values. It is why instead of looking at the cleavages from the electoral point of view, one should analyze it as a human-made identity, symbol, and ideology in which power and its distribution area are at the core.

The concept of cleavage has been wildly used, but at the same time, it remains rather loose. While some analysts allege that cleavage might be apprehended as political behaviors related to social structure, others insinuate that the concept refers to social classification and stratification. Bartolini locates it between social stratification and its impacts on the

institutions and their impacts on the social structure.<sup>203</sup> Therefore, in his book, Bartolini holds that the concept has three dimensions: one empirical “which identifies the empirical referent of the concept and which we can define in socio-structural terms”, another is a normative element, “the set of values and beliefs that provide a sense of identity and role to the empirical element and reflect the self-awareness of the social groups involved”, and finally, an organizational behavioral element, “the set of individual interactions, institutions, and organizations, such as political parties, that develop as part of the cleavage”.<sup>204</sup> It is crucial to point out that while he defines cleavages as a form of “closure of social relationships,” Bartolini demonstrates the differences between ethnic groups and ethnolinguistic cleavages of religious groups and religion-based cleavages.

In his study, it is indicated that there are at least three differences between such divisions. The first one that marks social structure is the reference to cleavages, which are the outcomes of different historical phenomena. While the former is a product of state and nation formation, capitalism, and industrialization, the latter is the outcome of politicization, mobilization, and democratization.<sup>205</sup> The second difference, social basis, which represents social relationships, is more fluid than those created and strengthened by cleavage. The last difference, as he argues, is the “institutional nature of the class cleavage, in terms of both its social membership and its organizational form, is historical and country-specific precisely because it does not depend exclusively on social class”.<sup>206</sup>

It is well known that Şerif Mardin does one of the main classifications of Turkish cleavages as “center and periphery”. Turkish academics have continuously used his classification to analyze social structure and politics in Turkey. The center-periphery division in this sense was first defined by Edward Shils, who argues that the center area in any given society has a sacred aspect. Such a central area is represented and protected by societal symbols, values, and beliefs.<sup>207</sup> The center is also the arena of roles, status, and political structure in such an interpretation. It might be suggested that the field in this approach is, in fact, unity and the values which create consensus in a given society.<sup>208</sup> Shils proposes that the center itself does not necessarily require the belief and commitment of

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<sup>203</sup> Stefano Bartolini, *The Political Mobilization of the European Left, 1860-1980: The Class Cleavage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16.

<sup>204</sup> Bartolini, *The Political*, 16.

<sup>205</sup> Bartolini, *The Political*, 18.

<sup>206</sup> Bartolini, *The Political*, 22.

<sup>207</sup> Edward Shils "Merkez ve Çevre," *Türkiye Günlüğü* 70, (2002): 86.

<sup>208</sup> Shils "Merkez," 87.

each segment of society since the center is the arena that holds both the source of security and the aim of controlling the periphery.<sup>209</sup>

One might argue that what Shils defines as the center is indeed the state as a form of organization. From this standpoint, the center or state aims to control all the symbols and critical positions, and strengthen/confirm its centrality, while it might punish the divergent and award believers of it.<sup>210</sup> Like Bartolini, Shils also argues that center-periphery is an outcome of modernization. With modernization and industrialization, society and power have undergone a massive transformation. While the connection between different segments of society has moved to a more mixed level, the state, with the help of ideological tools (like education, military, and media), strengthens its authority over the periphery and society in general.

By referring to Shils's work, Mardin claimed that from the foundation of the Ottoman Empire to Republican Turkey, the center-periphery might be defined as the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. In the Ottoman Empire, the center was the central bureaucracy that held the society together, and the periphery was the segment that was out of the control of the center, culturally and economically.<sup>211</sup> He argued further, comparing the western and the eastern worlds: in the former, the conflict and peace between the church and the state resulted in cooperation.<sup>212</sup> The battle between these two sides was also seen in society, and in the end, the conflicts were some of the main reasons behind Western development. However, there has never been a conflict between religion and the state or classes in the Turkish case. For him, the center-periphery is key to understanding such a puzzle.

As discussed, it is acknowledged that the modern sense of cleavages is related to industrialization, modernization, and the rise of nationhood. In the eighteenth century, with the French Revolution, although there had been a sense of group identity, the nation became a feature of politics for the first time. The Revolution directly and dramatically changed the face of multinational politics and prepared the end of empires like the Austria-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. From the very beginning of the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire entered a period in which it lost its hegemonic position. To catch the western civilization, Ottoman elites introduced a technocrat idea, which, according to him, was

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<sup>209</sup> Shils "Merkez," 88.

<sup>210</sup> Shils "Merkez," 89.

<sup>211</sup> Serif Mardin, *Türkiye'de Toplum ve Siyaset* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları 2006), 75.

<sup>212</sup> Mardin, *Türkiye'de Toplum*, 37.

“Cameratism”.<sup>213</sup> Cameralists believe that a stable state should have a robust middle class, and such a state is supposed to encourage its population with education and trade to turn them into producers.

Furthermore, the state needed to reorganize its tax order and bureaucracy to achieve it. With the center's support, students were sent to Europe to learn about western “magic” and bring the system to the Empire. With cameralism, elites aimed to reorganize the tax and take the sources out of the Empire's control.<sup>214</sup> Beyond this, the symbolic conflict in the center was replaced with a positive bureaucratic mindset. To make it clear, Mardin argues that Islam was replaced with positivism.<sup>215</sup> Following the first chance, the rise of the role of bureaucracy took place in the center, which created a conflict among the elites. The last step which shaped both the center and the periphery was the declaration of “Tanzimat Fermanı,” re-organizaition, in 1839 which extended the rights of the public and, for him, strengthened the bureaucracy.<sup>216</sup>

Modernization had two significant impacts on Ottoman society. It changed the face of the classic Empire to a semi-modern state; on the other hand, it deepened the gap between the inner-social center and the periphery, culturally, economically, and ideologically. While the elites had a modern way of life and were wealthy and arrogant, the periphery still had Islamic roots.<sup>217</sup>

From the formation of the Republic of Turkey until the end of the Second World War, the gap between the social/political/cultural center and the periphery remained still. The elites, mostly soldiers, who ruled the first period of the Republic were former Ottoman elites who were educated by the late Ottoman schools and students who had been to Europe. One of the central debates in modern Turkish academia has been the change and continuity between the Ottomans and the Republicans. There are mainly two viewpoints. One suggests the Republic has nothing to do with the Ottomans. At the vanguard of this school of thought is an Indian professor who lives in Turkey, Feroz Ahmad. The second group argues that although there are differences between the Ottoman and the Republic, there are similarities and continuity. This position is championed by a Dutch historian, Erik Jan Zürcher. Since history and society do not work in a clear-cut line, it might be argued that the second argument is more convenient by looking at the profile of elites who founded the Republic

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<sup>213</sup>Mardin, *Türkiye’de Toplum*, 83.

<sup>214</sup> Mardin, *Türkiye’de Toplum*, 83.

<sup>215</sup>Mardin, *Türkiye’de Toplum*, 183.

<sup>216</sup> Mardin, *Türkiye’de Toplum*, 183.

<sup>217</sup> Mardin, *Türkiye’de Toplum*, 132.



and the society, which still has almost some mindset with the Ottoman public regarding religion and culture. It also needs to be discussed that although Mardin's argument brought a systematic approach to understanding the dynamics of Turkey, it is missing that he did not show the color of the center and the periphery.

In the following section, first, I will demonstrate the face of the cleavages in Turkey by looking at data from statistics, reports, and election results and argue that when we put all these data, there are not two sides, as Mardin mentioned. However, there are three cleavages regarding religion, ethnicity, and ideology. With the help of redefining the notion of cleavages, I will propose that instead of the center-periphery type of cleavages, we should consider the possibilities of the pro-conflict and pro-democratic types.

As I had discussed before in another chapter, although the geography of Turkey is considered a source that creates harmony, it has resulted in conflict between cleavages. What needs to be discussed is not the concept itself, but how we manage harmony, and the method of control might be the reason for conflicts. If a cleavage, or a class, becomes superior to others, it produces conflict, and Turkey is an excellent instance of it. What we call society is hierarchically segmented by its nature. Thus, the question is not the segmentation itself, but the new type of it, the modern type. To fully understand Turkish society and politics, one should look at the data to make differentiation and discuss the gap between cleavages. Based on statistics, it seems that five central aspects of Turkish politics and society help us comprehend the Turkish modern type of cleavage.

## **4.2 An Alternative Approach**

The literature cited above shows that while scholars mostly focused on political parties, even though it refers fundamentally to ethnic and racial differences, what is missing from this theory is the comprehension of cleavages with identity. Unlike Mardin and the literature in general, I aim to show how identity and ideology can change the classification of cleavages/fractures in the Turkish case. This study's argument aims to suggest an alternative aspect in defining the main branches of the possible cleavages. The general emphasis of history writing is based on the power-related position of the cleavages, arguing that the most straightforward approach is that all that cleavages aim at is to seize power. Thus, accepting that there are seculars/conservatives, Turks/Kurds, and Sunnis/Alevis. When we put, however, the Kurdish question in the center, it seems there are two other cleavages.

Let us look at the following possible clustering:

*Pro-conflict cleavages*

- a) They aim to take or control power.
- b) The goal is the position.
- c) Even though sometimes they act progressively, they are conservative regarding who controls power.
- d) They tend to stay within the frame of the considerably essential/electoral democracy.
- e) Though they might turn into a political party, they lose their potential of being a movement by becoming a political party.
- f) They control the symbolic and central values and protect them.
- g) To prevent an attack on the positions, they act together against pro-democratic cleavages.
- h) The differences among these cleavages tend to end with coups, resignations, or significant crises.
- i) They are past/nostalgia oriented.

*Pro-democratic cleavages*

- a) They aim to change the way power is exercised.
- b) The goal is to replace political and social norms and rules.
- c) They are progressive (meaning they force social and political changes).
- d) They tend to bring a liberal type of democracy.
- e) They might become a political party, as in the Kurdish case, but they also have more potential to become a social/political movement.
- f) They intend to replace the existing values.
- g) They are future oriented.

The alternative classification I propose does not assume these two groups hold conflict tendencies or are “in love” with democracy by their nature. Naming them pro-conflict and pro-democracy refers to their relationship with each other and their political system. The pro-conflict group aims to maintain the status quo, preserve power, and keep its dominant position, and by doing so, it prepares the ground for possible conflict. By opposing the first group, the pro-democracy group aims to change the status quo and the

dominant position, a democracy-type system. Since a minority group, oppressed, or out-system individuals can live and exist only in a democratic system, being a democrat is not only about their ideology but also a necessity for them. In this context, my argument is not that the Kurds are inherently democrats or that the Turks are pro-conflict. Unlike the Turks, who are unwilling to share their superior position in terms of identity and political power, the Kurds aim to share the superior position of the Turks and change the traditional Turkish political system that refuses the Kurdish ethnic rights. That is to argue that the Kurds can live as Kurds only in a democratic system.

### 4.3 Distant Society

To understand the real content of the cleavages in Turkish society, we should examine the theories and the practices of social distances within this framework. Social distance is vital in analyzing the level of closeness and acceptance in each society.<sup>218</sup> Before we consider some arguments about the definition, it is worth looking at a survey on the political attitude of the Turkish social strata. A survey conducted in 2010 on the political identities in Turkey found 93% of participants define themselves mainly as patriots, 75.6% as secular, 73.3% as democrats, 63.9% as nationalists, 46.7% as conservatives, 35% as rightists, 15% as Ulkücü, and 20.8% as leftists. The same research found that people who define themselves as religious are also rightists and conservatives.<sup>219</sup> The most shared identity is patriotism, followed by Kemalist, secular, and democrats. Although the survey did not explain why being a democrat is the last one, it might be argued that the memory of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and precisely what I call the paranoid state in another chapter, might be the reason for the high level of patriotism. According to the result of the elections, the right party's voters, like, AKP, MHP, and SP, have the highest percentage of conservative, rightist, and nationalist electorates, while the Kurdish party has the lowest interest in nationalism.<sup>220</sup> Similarly, while 93% of the participants define themselves as patriots, the rate is under 70% among Kurds. One of the most exciting results of the survey is from the

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<sup>218</sup>“Social Distance,” Sociology Guide, accessed July 20, 2021, <https://www.sociologyguide.com/basic-concepts/Social-Distance.php>.

<sup>219</sup>“Siyasal Kimlikler,” KONDA, accessed July 20, 2021, <https://konda.com.tr/tr/rapor/siyasal-kimlikler/>.

<sup>220</sup> KONDA, “Siyasal Kimlikler” 16.

Kemalists, who identify themselves as leftists and democrats, an identification that is more about the Kurdish language than nationalism.<sup>221</sup>

A similar survey on polarization in Turkey found that 43.4% percent of participants feel close to AKP, 21.5% CHP, 9.3% HDP, 11.3% MHP, and 4.4% İyi Party. Making the math shows that almost 70% percent of the population is conservative and rightist.<sup>222</sup> The Kurdish party, in all these statistics, plays a defining role. While all parties have strict competition before, during, and after elections, they share the same view regarding the Kurdish problem. For instance, when asked, 52.7% of the participants gave HDP the Kurdish party as the most distant party.<sup>223</sup>

About the survey, the two most significant events/situations that shaped the societal memory were the July 2016 coup attempt with 42.4% and the Kurdish problem with 34.9%.<sup>224</sup> When they were asked about social trust, the institution they trusted most, 74.2% of them said the military, presidency 57.2%, government 56%, courts 52.2%, religious institution 52.1%, parliament 50.5%, political parties 34.7%, media 18.3%, European Union 15.0%, and NATO 13.4%.<sup>225</sup> On the other hand, concerning their everyday life, 69.6% did not want to have a different party voter as a neighbor, 68.4% did not want their children to have friends from another party's voters, 78.7% were against marrying a supporter of another party, and lastly, 73% of them did not want to do business with other parties' supporters.<sup>226</sup> Additionally, regarding societal values, 55.2% of the participants said that religion was always right even if religion contradicted science. When they asked about the European Union, Kurdish Party's voters had the highest rate (48.9%) among those who said they would vote for joining the EU if there were a referendum.<sup>227</sup>

It might be argued that these results are about high politics, which is the election; as discussed before, the differences negatively affect interpersonal and group trust at the societal level. The dynamics of social distances are not linear. Originally, the literature applied the concept primarily to racial groups, even though it has several other dimensions. Karakayali explains that it has three substantial features: social normative interactive and

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<sup>221</sup> KONDA, "Siyasal Kimlikler" 18.

<sup>222</sup> Emre Erdoğan and Pınar Uyan Semerci, *Fanusta Diyaloglar: Türkiye'de Kutuplaşmanın Boyutlar* (İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2018), 6.

<sup>223</sup> Erdoğan-Semerci, *Fanusta*, 8.

<sup>224</sup> Erdoğan-Semerci, *Fanusta*, 43.

<sup>225</sup> Erdoğan-Semerci, *Fanusta*, 39.

<sup>226</sup> Erdoğan-Semerci, *Fanusta*, 12.

<sup>227</sup> Erdoğan-Semerci, *Fanusta*, 63.

cultural and habitual distances.<sup>228</sup> The initial/default/sufficient distance, the social one, depends on mutual sympathy and affectivities. It also means less sympathy makes it fair enough or inherently subjective, and vice versa.<sup>229</sup>

Social distance is a normative phenomenon about consciously expressed norms and objectively observable quantity.<sup>230</sup> As for the interactive distance, the focus is on how two groups interact, and Karakayali argues that interactive distance is the degree of actual interaction without the need for a normative prescriptive match.<sup>231</sup> Lastly, as cultural is a habitual distance, it depends on Bourdieu's terminology in modern literature, which argues that social classes could be understood from the multidimensional social space and social capital they belong to or possess.<sup>232</sup>

### **4.3.1 Dimensions of the Distances in Society**

#### **4.3.1.1 Religion and Conservatism**

Religion has been one of society's most fundamental historical, cultural, and political aspects, not just in Turkey but in the Middle East. The main difference between religion and politics is that while the former focuses on life hereafter, the latter is centered principally on the real-world control of society. It has been discussed that most Middle Eastern societies relate it not to the real world but to the hereafter. Besides saying Turkish society is one of the world's most religious, it must be remembered that the religion is the Sunni-interpreted type of Islam. Nevertheless, what is interesting in this case is that religion is not cleavage; it is a shared value between clefts.

To illustrate, although most of the Kurdish population votes for Kurdish parties, (other) Kurds also vote for religiously oriented parties in elections. That is why religious parties and Kurdish parties are the biggest competitors in Turkey's east and southeast, which Kurds primarily populate. Religion is one of the glues that keep the agreement between the owners and tenants of the soil. With its relation to religion, looking at conservatism in Turkey shows that even though there is a distinction between seculars or non-seculars

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<sup>228</sup> Nedim Karakayali, "Social Distance and Affective Orientations," *Sociological Forum Research* 24, no. 3 (2009): 540—542, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2009.01119.x>.

<sup>229</sup> Karakayali, "Social," 541.

<sup>230</sup> Karakayali, "Social," 541.

<sup>231</sup> Karakayali, "Social," 542.

<sup>232</sup> Karakayali, "Social," 542.

regarding the role of religion in politics, when it comes to civil liberties, women's rights, free rights, family, and nationalism. both are mostly conservative.

It might be also argued that although the gap between the two cleavages (secularism and conservatism) exists, when it comes to Kurds and their existence, they act together rather than separately. Hence, the state in Turkey is secular but supported by the conservative and rightist mindset regarding the national border and ideology if we put the Kurds in the center. Such a description is also a fundamental feature of pro-conflict cleavages, which aim at controlling the state and leading to dissension rather than negotiation.

#### **4.3.1.2 Ideology and Nationalism**

Making a difference between political parties and the state's ideologies is important. From the far right to the far left, each party has a particular mindset towards the government, society, and related problems; however, the state's ideology has hegemony over them. It suggests Sunni Islam, Turkishness, and the national border as fundamental pillars of Turkey's existence, which is above all disagreement. Furthermore, the Kurdish case is the litmus of this hegemony and mindset. Consequently, religious-nationalist parties like the AKP or MHP and even the Kemalist parties (who define themselves as progressive, secular, and democrat) stand together when the Kurds and anything related to Kurds come to the table.

#### **4.3.1.3 Inter-Personal Trust and Stranger(s) in the Distant Society**

In the twenty first century, especially with the rise of populist parties, profound questions on the democratic way of governance might solve the problems bedeviling our political parties or the constitution and reshape societies to have fewer enemies and strangers. The existing literature looks at the distance between people, and it is accepted that there are gaps in society; however, as I will demonstrate, this approach may not be the fact in each given case. The Turkish case shows that society might not be the side of the distance but a set of organized relations that arise and live within the distance. To put it in another way, I would argue that the Turkish case shows society is the distance itself, not the sides of it.

Like all societies “distant society” refers to an organized, interrelated set of cultural, political, and economic institutions based on shared territories and the state as a form of organization. However, if a society has inner enemies and or a high level of social distance, which is based on the lack of interpersonal and group trust, and if the conflict between pro-conflict and pro-democratic cleavages is present, it means that the society has a battle between nostalgia and presence. Based on the debate, as mentioned earlier, it might give us a reason to call Turkish society (as a whole) a distant society. Looking at the world value index, it seems that Turkey is one of the countries with the lowest degree of interpersonal trust. According to some research, this has not changed since 1990. (1 in 10 says they can usually trust people. Lowest: Western Anatolia 7%; highest: Central Anatolia 16%).<sup>233</sup>

The above presented empirical data is substantial to understanding the mindset within the country and the perspective of the Turks as a hegemonic identity on and over the Kurds. Since the Kurdish problem has been an ethnicity-based territorial conflict between the Turks and the Kurds, the idea and meaning of land and differences among people have a massive influence over the politics in Turkey. Based on this elaboration, the Turks, who hold the dominant identity within the country, seem to consider themselves as the owner of the soil, while the Kurds have been interpreted as stranger who is supposed to adjust and obey such an owner-and-stranger relationship. Georg Simmel writes, in his essay, “The stranger, spatial relations are conditions, and they are the symbol of human relations”.<sup>234</sup> For him, being a stranger requires a specific form of interaction, and he is like an “inner enemy,” which is a natural element of the group itself.<sup>235</sup> According to him, all kinds of human relations are determined by the circumstances which have specific characteristics among the individuals, and individual differences either influence the relationship or remain outside of it.<sup>236</sup> Simmel says the stranger is not the owner of the soil, not in the physical existence sense, but in the figurative, symbolic understanding. However, not being the owner of the soil gives objectivity to the stranger since he is not committed to the groups who are the owner of the soil. He exemplifies such objectivity in Italian cities where the judges are called from the outside.

Simmel approaches the stranger from a positive angle; however, in his text, he also argues that the stranger has a negative meaning. To this, he cites the case of Greeks and

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<sup>233</sup> Yılmaz Eser, “Türkiye Değerler Atlası,” *Bahçeşehir Üniversitesi İstanbul*, September 3, 2012, [http://content.bahcesehir.edu.tr/public/files/files/ATLAS%20SUNUM%202\\_10\\_2012%20\(2\).pdf](http://content.bahcesehir.edu.tr/public/files/files/ATLAS%20SUNUM%202_10_2012%20(2).pdf).

<sup>234</sup> Georg Simmel, *The Stranger, in the Sociology of Georg Simmel*, Transl. Kurt Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), 402—408.

<sup>235</sup> Simmel, *The Stranger*, 402—408.

<sup>236</sup> Simmel, *The Stranger*, 402—408.

Barbarians. In this sense, the stranger is non-relational, not a part of the group, but rather a symbol of commonality and equity.<sup>237</sup> Considering Simmel's argument, one might argue that ethnic, national, or cleavage differences in the form of the stranger help us to not look at the individuals but focus on shared commonness among the strangers or the stranger himself. Taking advantage of the idea in the following paragraphs, I will argue that Kurds are not just a group of people but also symbolic inhabitants who are the tenants, the strangers of the soil in the Turkish ideological perception.

#### 4.3.1.4 The Interpretation of Data

The data I presented above to show the fragmentation of the population in terms of religion and ethnicity can help us to reach an interposition that fits the scope of the research. Since the data does not speak for itself and those who speak for it differ from individual to individual, it seems that the statistics' main outcome is a hidden conflict among groups rather than harmony.

What needs to be underlined, however, is that the existence of different religious, ethnic, and linguistic groups itself does not necessarily cause a conflict, but the execution shapes the nature of the conflict. Additionally, it cannot justify the fear of division and the loss of power unless the power pushes or manipulates such a division. The existence of the differences turned into conflict, not because of the identities but the interpretation of them by elites and politicians in the game of cleavages. The interpreters of things and concepts are mostly elites, not ordinary people, and the public is the source and the target of politics based on different identities. Based on this argumentation, it might be argued that the definition of identities might result in two folds: competitor and compatible identities.<sup>238</sup> The former suggests that two or more identities are against each other and cannot be accepted by different groups.

Conversely, the latter refers to the commodity among identities that creates a sense of belonging.<sup>239</sup> In mainstream academic research, it would be argued that the religious, geographical, and historical associations among Turks and Kurds might help to build a compatible identity to solve the Kurdish problem. However, such an idealist approach

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<sup>237</sup> Simmel, *The Stranger*, 402—408.

<sup>238</sup> Murat Somer, *Milada Dönüş: Ulus-Devletten Devlet-Ulusa Türk ve Kürt Meselesinin Üç İkilemi* (Istanbul: KOÇ Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015), 89.

<sup>239</sup> Somer, *Milada Dönüş*, 90.



presumes the identities in each society are shaped by the people, not the elites, and ignores the fact that what we call the Kurdish identity is built by the Kurdish movement, the PKK, and without including the PKK, it would be hardly possible to build so-called compatible identities or sense of belonging within the country.

Furthermore, the fragmentation among Turkey's population and the group's feelings for one another show that it is possible to argue that the differences became the identity via the representation of the identities by the elites. Another failed aspect of the idealist approach is that the politicians and elites naturally seek to solve the problem. However, by looking at contemporary Turkish history, I would argue that the Kurdish problem and the existence of it have been used to gain or keep the political power. While before the elections, parties might promise to solve the issue, when they have seized power, they might use security concerns and the threat of "terrorism" to stay in power.

#### **4.4 Kurds: The Strangers?**

It is a fact that although almost 15 percent of Turkey's population is Kurdish, only 4.4% have a different ethnic group member in their family, and only 2.3 % of Kurds have a Turkish member in their family.<sup>240</sup> There is a big difference between Turks and Kurds in terms of self-definition. For instance, while 40.9% of Turks prioritize Turkish citizenship among Turks, the rate decreases to 13% among Kurds.<sup>241</sup> More importantly, 59.4% of Turks believe they can live and present their identity, while just 15.8% of Kurds feel the same.<sup>242</sup> At the social level, half of the Turkish population refuse to have a Kurdish wife or bride, and 70.1% non-Muslim; as business partners, 47.2% refuse to do business with Kurds, and 61.9% non-Muslims; 41.4% refuse to have Kurds as neighbors and 56.4% non-Muslim.<sup>243</sup> Conversely, 26.4% of Kurds refuse to have a different ethnic wife or bride, 24.8% refuse to have business with them, and 22.1% refuse to have a different ethnic member as a neighbor.<sup>244</sup>

Despite such fragmentation, when the participants are asked what keeps them together, nearly 70% percent answer human relations, shared religious beliefs, and just

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<sup>240</sup> KONDA, *Kürt Meselesinde Algı ve Beklentiler Araştırması* (KONDA: İletişim Yayınları , 2011), 21.

<sup>241</sup> KONDA, *Kürt Meselesinde*, 39.

<sup>242</sup> KONDA, *Kürt Meselesinde*, 43.

<sup>243</sup> KONDA, *Kürt Meselesinde*, 45.

<sup>244</sup> KONDA, *Kürt Meselesinde*, 46.

being together.<sup>245</sup> Understandably, nearly 70% of the participants believe that the reasons for the Kurdish problem are backwardness, separatism, terror, PKK, and external influence, while just 10% believe the reasons are discrimination and identity itself.<sup>246</sup> For the Kurds, half of the participants consider the reasons as discrimination and state politics.<sup>247</sup>

Looking at Simmel's categories/description of strangers and all the statistics and documents I analyzed in other chapters; it is not an exaggeration to write that Kurds have never been accepted as the owner of the soil but only as tenants who disturb the owner of the land and do not receive their hegemony. For example: for decades, on each street wall of Kurdish cities and mountains, there was a sentence with capital letters and white paint: "LOVE OR LEAVE". It was a direct message to each person, and in fact, it was saying Kurds are not the owner and are not equal, but if they accept the superiority of Turks, they can stay. Of course, not as equal citizens but as tenants. Since the social and political identity of the country is built upon Turkishness, the Kurds or those who claim not to be Turkish are considered a potential danger to Turkishness.

#### **4.5 Concluding Remarks**

The horizontal cleavages that shaped political and societal life until the Republic's formation fit into the Empire's diversity. In horizontal cleavages, identity in its underlying meaning did not play a definitive role in politics. Populations in given territories were divided not on ethnicity but rather religious and tax-based relationship between the authority and the locality. The dialect of the center and the periphery, which Mardin defines, are class-based, and it seems that his approach might explain Ottoman society and class politics.

However, with the declaration of the Republic, the traditional horizontal cleavages in the remaining Ottoman territory, Anatolia, turned into a vertical society. The modernization and miss-modernization, including the nation-building processes, created the belief that Turkish "greatness" changed the horizontal society and politics into an ethnic-based vertical community. In the Ottomans' period, in the horizontal disparity, someone did not have to be even Muslim to hold a dominant bureaucratic position, and if he had power, he would become a member of the center.

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<sup>245</sup>KONDA, *Kürt Meselesinde*, 54.

<sup>246</sup> KONDA, *Kürt Meselesinde*, 63.

<sup>247</sup> KONDA, *Kürt Meselesinde*, 63.

It might be argued that in Mardin's approach, the periphery was not based necessarily on identity but was economical. Under Turkish nationhood, on the contrary, for someone to be in the center, one must declare that one is a Sunni Muslim, Turk, and a "true believer" of Turkishness. Atatürk's vertically designed society produced two main cleavages – pro-conflict and pro-democratic – economic and mostly identity-based. With the transition, what Mardin calls the center became Sunni, Turk, and true believers of the myth that the periphery was replaced with the Kurds, Armenians, Alawites, or non-Muslims. Thus, before the formation of the PKK, the Kurds' rebellions against the Republic were mostly reactionist against the transition from Ottoman to modern Turkey. Within the flow of modernization and massive nationalization, their claims shifted towards a Marxist program in the first phase, then later towards democratic confederalism. Mardin's method seems critical to understanding the traditional Ottomans' politics and society, yet it fails to address the transformation of economy-based center-periphery to identity-based cleavages. Like Marx, Mardin ignored the idea of identity by putting the economy at the center of his argumentation.

The shift from the empire to the nation-state replaced the former Kurdish identity from geography-based self-defense to an ethnic, linguistic character, and they essentially became a minority. The second aspect of this milestone is that it was shaped by modernization, nationalization, and Atatürk's project to create a less diverse society. That is why they applied modernization to strengthen 'Turkishness' among the citizens to catch up with the western world. The idea of modernization and the Turkification schemes altered the former horizontal cleavages to the vertical cleavages, leading to the conflict between the Turks and the Kurds.

In contrast to Turkish modernization, which aimed to build a unified Turkish society, Kurdish modernization, as a byproduct of such a process, was opposed to the new political order in Anatolia. The conflict between the new Turkish agenda and the traditional Kurdish way of life regarding the centralization of power, the separation of religion from politics, as well as the attempts at consolidating power by the Turkish elites created a massive paranoid mindset that has been fueling the Turkish-Kurdish conflict for almost a century. To conclude this part, I would claim that although the first and the second transcriptions were, for this paper, inherently different, they fed each other: the former divided the Kurds, made them strangers, and provided the backdrop for their assimilation and repression, the latter symbolized the period of the cycle of repression, reaction, and repression which was built and kept alive.

## **PART IV**

### **THE GREAT ENLIGHTENMENT: Mobilization and Radicalization**

#### **Chapter 1**

##### **The 1940s-1950s and the Entrepreneur Kurds**

In this chapter, my goal is to show how national and international politics shaped the early mobilization of the Kurdish movement. Turkey, specifically from the beginning of the Second World War, desperately looked for a seat in the western supra-national organizations. With the Cold War, Turkey became a member of NATO after the Korean War, and with Truman and Marshall's aid, anti-communism started, built systematically by the state's elites. The USA considered Turkey a "checkpoint" against the USSR in the Middle East, and the Mediterranean and Cold War propaganda created the image of "dangerous communists" among the Turkish population.

#### **1.1 The 1940s-1950s**

What has been known as the Kurdish movement is not a mobilization that started in the 1960s and 1970s; it is the latest stage of long-term political activism. After the 1937-38 Dersim massacre, the Kurds went into a "great silence" for almost two decades. However, with the impact of the Village Institutes and the industrialization of agriculture, a massive migration occurred from rural areas to centers such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Diyarbakir. Between 1938 and 1960, Kurdish students and intellectuals who studied in new universities and stayed in newly built dormitories were not Kurds (not in their dominant worldview at least), but rather "communists": Mainly because, as I will discuss later, communist Kurds put the Kurdish problem into class-based regional economic inequality. However, it has been argued that the reason for this was the considerable impact of communist ideology among the Kurds and the Turkish left by creating a supposed alternative against the long-settled political unrest within the country.

The territory where the Kurds live, the east and southeast of Turkey, historically has been under the direct attention of the Turkish state for two reasons: the consolidation of the Kurdish population and its location, being on the border between Turkey and the Middle East. Firstly, contrary to the other minorities within the country, the Kurds, who have a

distinct ethnicity and tradition, live mainly in these regions, and the PKK's camps are a few miles from the city centers. Hence, the Turkish army is located in this region. Secondly, the closeness of the Kurdish region to Iran, Iraq, and Syria, where the PKK also has camps, causes the Turkish state's massive militaristic and bureaucratic existence. In this context, today's Kurdistan, born after WWI, has been the reason for the oppression of the Kurds in these countries. It has also been a common ground of understanding in Kurdish politics.

With this standing, the contemporary history of the Kurds is shaped by the division of land from the top and the unification of the Kurds from the bottom as regards political mobilizations. To elaborate on such demonstrative relations among the Kurds, I will analyze the "49'lar Olayı" or "trials of the 49s" to show how Kurds in Iraq and Turkey embarked on early mobilization in Turkey.

## 1.2 The 49s Trail (49lar Davası)

The last rebellion against the Ataturk regime, Dersim 1938, which caused 13 thousand of deaths of Kurds, created fear and silence among the Kurds in Turkey regarding political activism and intellectual enterprise that can also be interpreted as an activism as well. For almost twenty years, no one dared to say anything about the Kurdish or even use the words: Kurds and Kurdistan.

Although Kurdish politics was forbidden in Turkey, the Kurds in Iraq and their attempted rebellions had a demonstrative effect on the Kurds in Turkey. The acts of Iraqi Kurds encouraged Kurdish intellectuals to speak about the Kurds again. That is to argue that the fundamental milestone in the Kurdish movement at the entrepreneur phase was mostly shaped by not the Kurdish acts in Turkey but Iraq.

The rebellion against the Iraqi state leader, Abdelkarim Kasim, took place under the leadership of Sevaf, who was an Arab nationalist, and the rebellion ended up with the right to autonomy for Kurds in Iraq during 1950s and 1960s. Mullah Mustafa Barzani Kasim's army suppressed the rebellion, and several Turkmen were killed during the conflict; the death of Turkmen created tension among Turkish politicians and the government.<sup>248</sup> One of the Peoples Republican Party members said, "Shall we not respond the same?" It took the

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<sup>248</sup>"Irak'ta Bir Isyan Çikti," *Milliyet* 1959, accessed September 10, 2018, <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/Arsiv/1959/07/22>.

tension to another level.<sup>249</sup> Although Iraq was an independent country, and Barzani was the representative of Iraqi Kurds, the Turkish general did not say who would be the target. However, it is not difficult to argue that his targets were most probably the Kurdish intellectuals in Turkey who supported Iraqi Kurds. The demonstrative effect of the Barzani movement and its importance on the early Kurdish movement was described by Acar as “Then the Kurdish problem in Turkey was not politics or current. Due to state policy and pressures, it was not easy to find a place in the press. Nevertheless, Barzani's return was reflected in the newspapers, albeit limited. So, we could watch it. This is the beginning of our involvement with the Kurdish issue, and the event makes Kurdish students tied to politics”.<sup>250</sup>

YÖN magazine which the Kurdish intellectuals and students published texts on the Turkish politics and the Kurdish problem, published a report on Turkish intelligence. “If we destroy a thousand people from all the intellectual Kurds, the Kurdish problem goes back at least thirty-forty years. We should only choose those thousand people, so we do not encounter great reactions. Second, let us not have a family tribe; let us call them communists,”<sup>251</sup> read a magazine section.

Shortly before the incident on 6-7 September 1955<sup>252</sup>, there was an outrage against the Greek and non-Muslim population in Istanbul, which generated a tragic memory for the population and inflamed critiques against the Turkish government. Back in time, the Turkish foreign minister, Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, said, “We have been subjected to a lot of criticism in the world due to the events of September 6-7; we have lost credibility. Let us not add anything”.<sup>253</sup>

The help of modernization across the country by the USA's support turned Turkey into a vital NATO member against Russia. The membership impacted the Turk and Turkish governments and created a massive opportunity for Kurdish intellectuals regarding

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<sup>249</sup>Avni Özgürel, “Kürt Sorununda Kavsak: 49'lar Davası,” *Radikal*, 2010, accessed september 6, 2022, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/avni-ozgurel/kurt-sorununda-kavsak-49lar-davasi-972402/>

<sup>250</sup> Selahattin Çelik, “Dönemin Tanığı: 49'lar ve Barzani Etkisi,” *RUDAW*, October 26, 2016, accessed September 10, 2016, <https://www.rudaw.net/turkish/interview/261020161>.

<sup>251</sup> Yavuz Çamlıbel, *49' Davası* (Ankara: Algi Yayıncılık, 2007), 216-217.

<sup>252</sup> Starting from the 1940s, the government introduced the “wealth tax” which indicated that the non-Muslim population had to pay a defined percentage of their capital to the state, and whoever failed to pay those amounts was sent to the working camp in eastern Turkey. Zaven Biberyen novel (Babam Askaleye Gitmedi), My Father Did Not Go to Askale, is a literal example of this camp. In the following years, the anti-Muslim attitude and policy did not change and on 6-7 September 1955, a group of nationalist Turkish men attacked the streets of Greeks, Armenians, and looted their stores. Due to the act of vandalism and hatred, the pogrom caused 30 Greeks and Armenians' death (Ergil, 2007, The Dark Side of Nationalism, September 6-7 Incidents, Today's Zaman).

<sup>253</sup> Özgürel, “Kürt Sorununda Kavsak.”

publication and mobilization. One of the prisoners among the 49s Ziya Acar said, “The 49s as an event and a process began in 1959 and continued in 1960. I have been in Istanbul since 1957. I started studying in 1958. Fifty-seven years ago, Istanbul was a big city. However, there were very few higher education institutions, not hundreds as there are today. There were two universities in Ankara and one in Izmir, and two in Istanbul”.<sup>254</sup>

The impact of higher education is that by creating “favorable and unfavorable capitals,” the USA’s support of Turkish modernization and industrialization allowed the Kurdish youth to access the difference in terms of ethnicity and language, and finally set an environment of political and ideological shift. Also, Acar said, “Human beings began to seek relations with their hometowns and statuses, in short, with Kurds. These new relationships were not political or ideological. Politics had not yet spread to higher education youth”.<sup>255</sup>

A Kurdish intellectual, Musa Anter published a Kurdish poem in a newspaper in Diyarbakir to criticize the Turkish government. His poem created a massive debate among Turkish politicians and pro-government intellectuals. As reported in a pro-government newspaper, it gave the headline, “Who gives papers to these?” while the government was planning to forcefully move three thousand Kurds from the east to the west.<sup>256</sup> To support Anter, several Kurds, including engineers, doctors, journalists, and young people, declared they were with Anter and were detained. Some argue that it was not a planned reaction, but the fact is that some of them were planning to establish a political party.<sup>257</sup>

By order of the military persecutor in Ankara, the group was sent to Istanbul to put cells in a building, which is currently the Military Museum in Harbiye. The name of the trial in history has been known as the 49s trials, and reason is the defender, Mehmet Emin Batu, died from stomach bleeding in the cell, and the 49 remained prisoners. After 14 months of detention, the Kurds who were replaced after the Turkish intelligence report had to wait in detention for 14 months to have a trial. However, the coup of May 27, 1960, changed the essence of the case and made a showcase of them. With the military junta, the aim was to create a showcase by sentencing them to death; however, the persecutors did not have enough evidence to complete the case. Besides, the “sensitivity” of the trial and the fear of a military coup were obstacles to finding lawyers for the 49s.

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<sup>254</sup> Çelik, “Dönemin Tanığı: 49lar.”

<sup>255</sup> Çelik, “Dönemin Tanığı: 49lar.”

<sup>256</sup> Özgürel, “Kürt Sorununda Kavsak.”

<sup>257</sup> Özgürel, “Kürt Sorununda Kavsak.”

On January 3, 1961, finally, the trial started. The court decided to release 25 because there was insufficient evidence for their trial and persecution. However, the other 24 defendants were charged with separatism. The 24 were prosecuted under Article 125 of the Turkish penal code, which “punishes the person who commits an act to put all or part of the territory of the state under the domination of a foreign state or to disrupt the unity of the state or to separate part of the territory under the control of the state from the state administration”.<sup>258</sup>

After four years of trial, in 1965, ten were released, while the rest prisoners were sentenced to exile, according to Articles 141 and 142 of the Turkish Penal Code, “namely, for destroying and weakening national feelings through the negotiation of foreign states, they were sentenced to 16 months in prison and five months and ten days in exile”.<sup>259</sup>

### **1.3 Concluding Remarks**

What is significant in the 1950s concerning the Kurdish problem and the state’s policy is that the Turkish state was stuck between two leading actors of the Cold War: the USA and the USSR. By choosing the American side, Turkey became a “checkpoint” against communist Russia. With the help of the USA, Turkish modernization was facilitated by the new industrial centers, the road between urban and rural areas, and an increase in education. Among these developments, the increase in higher education had a transportive impact on the early Kurdish mobilization. As a result of Turkish modernization in terms of transportation technology, the increase in the number of higher education institutes allowed the Kurds to access education in big cities. The young Kurdish generation, in contrast to the former Kurdish elites who were villagers, uneducated and more traditionalists, lived in modern cities and had access to higher education and politics.

After WWII and the Dersim massacre, the impact of higher education, modernization, and the rapid changes in Iraq put the Turkish state in a more challenging position concerning dealing with the Kurds. The Kurdish politics in Iraq showed the Turkish state that the Kurds were not only in its territory but also that the Kurds in other countries might politicize the population within its border.

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<sup>258</sup>Ozgürel, “Kürt Sorununda Kavsak.”

<sup>259</sup>Ozgürel, “Kürt Sorununda Kavsak.”



From the beginning of the Republic, the state aimed to build a less diverse society based on Turkification and modernization to ensure that the state was more capable of controlling the Kurds and smashing any political activity against its hegemony in the rural Kurdish areas. In this period, bureaucratic control and militarist capability made it easier to defeat any Kurdish rebellions. The profile of the Kurdish elites, however, changed through higher education, and intellectual publications shifted the state's attitude towards them.

After WWII, the state did not have to eliminate thousands of Kurds with massive military operations in the east and southeast of the country; the target was small but quite challenging to deal with. The demonstrative effect of the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, with the help of industrialization and increased Kurdish intellectual capacity, directly shaped the Kurdish mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s.

## Chapter 2

### In the 1960s and the Activist Kurds

The 1960s have been a reference period in contemporary Turkey's politics for two reasons: the military coup in 1960 and the rise of the left. The first elected government, Democrat Party, Demokrat Parti in Turkish, was overthrown with a military coup in 1960, and the committee that took control of the government introduced a new constitution. Though it was the first coup in contemporary Turkish history, the constitution has been regarded as social-democrat legislation due to its instruction on civil liberties. Given the rights in the new constitution, such as the right to strike and unionize, alongside the impact of the 68<sup>th</sup> generation, the leftist ideology was raised among the university students and society.<sup>260</sup>

Like several geographies, this period demonstrated a new way of politics shaped by the Cold War, decolonization and national salvation movements, civil rights movements, and the critics of modernization. In the Turkish case, between 1960 and 1980 was a "historical disunity" from traditional Turkish politics. Contrary to the early Republican period in which politics was in the hands of elites, mostly retired soldiers, and members of high society, the young students discussed the social-political and economic problems. Additionally, politics became a public field where not just a group of politicians and soldiers worked but more generally, people from rural areas, like Kurds, participated in it.

The Kurdish movement within such historical disunity in the 60s acted alongside the Turkish left. After the coup in 1971, both the state's pressure and ideological conflicts ended with the formation of the PKK. The purpose of this section is to discuss that while the transition from an empire to a nation-state represents the historical disunity of the nation, the 60s and 70s represent the disunities of the people from the state in Turkey.

In this chapter, I intend to discuss three main stages in both Turkish lefts concerning the Kurdish problem. Even though we might call it the Kurdish movement, in this period, the formation of Kurdish intellectuals was not independent of the Turkish left per se. To interpret the 60s with a particular focus on Kurds or the eastern problem at that time, I will look at three main stages: Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearths (Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları), Eastern Party Rally (Doğu Mitingleri), and the Turkish Workers Party (Türkiye İşçi Partisi).

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<sup>260</sup> Demet Lüküslü, *Türkiye'nin 68'i: Bir Kuşağın Analizi* (Istanbul: Dipnot Yayinlari, 2015), 15—17.

## 2.1 Eastern Rallies

By the beginning of the Cold War, Turkey positioned itself with the US-led world. The win-win relationship between the US and Turkey shaped Turkish foreign policy and impacted its national policy, as well. Unlike the state's anti-communism approach, the Turkish left and the Kurdish activists were deeply influenced by the communist ideology. With the formation of the Turkish Workers Party, *Türkiye İşçi Partisi* (TIP) (1961-1971) within the so-called liberal environment of the constitution in the 1960s, the popularity of leftist ideology increased, and the left became the main opposition tool in the hand of the activists.<sup>261</sup> Until its closure after the coup in 1971, the TIP changed the leftist ideology from a discussion among the public to a highly organized, legal political party.

With the formation of the TIP and the relatively free politics, the Kurdish politicians and intellectuals sought an alternative approach to formulate the social-economic inequalities between the east and the west of the country. Consequently, they founded Kurdistan Democratic Party in 1965.<sup>262</sup> The Kurds who separated themselves from the TIP organized Eastern Rallies, *Doğu Mitingler*, in several cities in Istanbul, Ankara, and Diyarbakir. The rallies took place mostly in Kurdish-populated cities and lasted from September 1967 to 1969.<sup>263</sup>

Eastern rallies have been one of the key debates in the Turkish left and the history of Kurdish mobilization. This debate shows that from the beginning of Republican Turkey, the state, on the one hand, put modernization and nation-building at the center of its agenda, and on the other hand, it systemically kept the Kurdish cities not only through security services but also massive systematic backwardness. The slight changes in education and industrialization in the east and the southeast of Turkey brought a capital, which I will later name as negative capital regarding the state's interest in Turkish students and intellectuals.

As discussed before, the Turkish left systematically defined the Kurdish problem based on the social-economic inequalities between regions, and for them, the identity problem could be postponed if the people had better social and economic standards. It should be argued that the Turkish Workers Party, the pioneer of the organized leftist political organization, and the Turkish left, in general, hesitated in using the words Kurds and Kurdistan. Two fundamental reasons for such unwillingness were the common sense of

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<sup>261</sup> Lüküslü, *Türkiye'nin 68'i*, 15—17.

<sup>262</sup>Mustafa Dođanođlu, "Devrimci Dođu Kültür Ocakları (DDKO) ve Siyasal Ayrışma," *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi* 71, no. 3 (2016): 949, [https://doi.org/10.1501/SBFder\\_0000002417](https://doi.org/10.1501/SBFder_0000002417).

<sup>263</sup> Dođanođlu, "Devrimci Dođu," 951.

the unity of the country among the Turkish left and society and the belief that if class differences regarding the economic gap were fixed, Turkey would be a better country. The party's election manifesto in 1965 used east and southeast six times and portrayed the difference between these regions and the west as "shameful" in all usage. They promised that more bridges, hospitals, and roads should be built.<sup>264</sup>

Even though such an approach might be considered as the manipulation of the problem, it was not based on an empty discussion. In his studies on the Kurds, Ismail Beşikçi, one of the field's pioneers, showed the massive imbalance between the east and the west of Turkey regarding investment, education, and policy. According to his study, the literacy rate was 63.5% in mostly Kurdish-populated areas, whereas the same rate was 24.3% in the western part of the country. Similarly, the number of public vehicles was 80,695 in the west, against the east, where the number was 6,500.<sup>265</sup> The regional gap was also evident in most fundamental services like education and health. For instance, the number of doctors in Istanbul was 2995, Hakkari 0, Agri 1, and Bingöl 1.<sup>266</sup>

In addition to this, Besikci presented a paper at the university entrance exam at Ankara University, where he received his Ph.D. The students were mostly from the west or Turkish-populated cities. The reason was not that the Kurdish students were "stupid," Rather, it was related to the number of high schools and the lack of teachers in the Kurdish-populated regions.<sup>267</sup> One might rightfully argue that the reason behind such a gap was related to the economic capability of the state in a given period. However, the differences between the eastern and western parts of the country in terms of education and health services have been the state's policy which assumed that the more the Kurdish population lived in need, the easier it was to keep them under control. For instance, decades after Ismail Besikci's work under the rule of the Islamist nationalist government of Erdogan, who promised to modernize and transform the country from the early government's ashes by building roads and hospitals across the country, systematic inequality did not change. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, the numbers of doctors in Kurdish cities were way below the country's average, such as Agri 515, Bingöl 295, Hakkari 252, and Sırnak 238.<sup>268</sup> The systematic policy of the state towards the Kurdish cities demonstrated itself in

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<sup>264</sup> Türkiye İşçi Partisi Seçim Bildirgesi, (Istanbul: Yenilik Basımevi, 1965), 8.

<sup>265</sup> Ismail Beşikçi, *Doğu Mitingleri Analizi* (Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1967), 21.

<sup>266</sup> Beşikçi, *Doğu*, 22.

<sup>267</sup> Beşikçi, *Doğu*, 22.

<sup>268</sup> "Türkiye'de İllere Göre Doktor Sayıları," Blogarti , accessed October 4, 2018, <https://www.blogarti.com/turkiyede-illere-gore-doktor-sayilari.html>

the number of institutions.<sup>269</sup> An example of such a state's policy has been clearly defined in the Obligatory Service Regulation. According to the Obligatory Service Regulation, Turkey is divided into three regions. The first and second regions are the west, north south, which means Turkish cities; on the other hand, all the Kurdish cities are defined as the "third region". In addition to such classification, the Kurdish-populated regions have been designated as binding service regions for professionals like teachers, doctors, police officers, civil servants, and several other occupations.<sup>270</sup>

The Eastern rallies particularly centered on the regional social-economic differences and claimed the state intentionally ignored the Kurdish cities regarding education, health, economy, and other social services. Additionally, by the comparison between the east and the west, the participants mostly and commonly focused on social justice, feudalism, education, and social relations without mentioning words like Kurds, ethnicity, or Kurdistan. For instance, on a banner during the rallies, it was written: "National income: Manisa 2350, Agri 500, Aydin 2500, Hakkari 250" to demonstrate the income gap between the regions.<sup>271</sup>

What needs to be suggested here is that despite the state's criticism and focus on the Kurdish-populated regions, the rallies were "regionalized" approach regarding ethnicity. As I will examine reports submitted by government officers of a given time and political parties, high politics, political parties, and governments traditionally ignored the ethnic and democratic aspects of the "eastern problem". Nevertheless, considering the lack of political opportunities accessible to the Kurds and the state's policy, the rallies became a milestone in the history of the Kurdish movement.

## 2.2 Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearths (Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları)

Besides criticism, the unifying effect of the rallies created a sphere for four hundred Kurdish intellectuals who were former residents of the Dicle Student Dormitory, Dicle Talebe Yurdu, founded in 1939 in Istanbul and Ankara.<sup>272</sup> Most of the graduates returned to their hometowns, which showed that they "were aware of the problem and the importance of

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<sup>269</sup> "Türkiye'de İllere Göre Doktor Sayıları." Blogarti.

<sup>270</sup> "Mecburi Hizmet Kanun Metni," Tusem, accessed October 16, 2019, [http://tusem.com.tr/infobank/mecburi\\_hizmet\\_kanun\\_metni.asp](http://tusem.com.tr/infobank/mecburi_hizmet_kanun_metni.asp).

<sup>271</sup> Beşikçi, *Doğu Mitingleri*, 24—25.

<sup>272</sup> Ruşen Arslan, *Ömrü Kısa Etkisi Büyük Kürt Örgütlenmesi Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları DDKO* (Roni Basın Yayın Tanıtım Dış. Tic. Ltd. Şti, 2020), 62.

leadership”.<sup>273</sup> Lastly and more importantly, eastern political activism played a key role in the formation of Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearths (Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları) DDKO, which was one of the pioneers of the Kurdish mobilization.<sup>274</sup> DDKO was funded by the Kurds who actively participated in TIP, the Turkish Workers Party. In 1967, a group of Kurdish members called Doğulular, Easterners in English, left the TIP. Their reason was the TIP’s failure to express the “eastern problem”.<sup>275</sup> Even though the formation of DDKO represented a milestone in the fragmentation of the Turkish left, it later became a pioneer stage in the mobilization of the Kurdish movement.<sup>276</sup>

The main difference between the Eastern Rallies and the DDKO lies in the formulation of the issues. While the former could be defined as the “Eastern,” the latter was more overtly “Kurdish”. Later, both were criticized by the PKK as being reformists.

The rise of the 68 generations, national salvation movements, and the black movement in the USA showed a demonstrative effect on the mobilization of the Kurdish activists and the leftist ideology in Turkey. However, the unstable economy, political crises, repeated military coups, and the state’s pressure on leftist activism resulted in the closure of the DDKO shortly after the coup on March 12, 1971. The Kurdish entrepreneurism that started in the 1940s became a more reformist and soft struggle by publications and journalism like *Komala* in 1974, the *Freedom Trail* in 1975, and continued through 1976 *Kawa*.<sup>277</sup> Their activism, in terms of the formulation of the “eastern problem,” created a common ground for mobilization and politicization among the students and Kurdish intellectuals, and as such, it might be considered a “success”.

Looking at the slogans and banners distributed during the rallies shows how the Kurds formulated the eastern situation in the 1960s and how the state looked from the Kurdish side. Below-presented sentences are the English transcriptions of some banners that show how the problem was put in the context of the regional social-economic inequalities.

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<sup>273</sup> Arslan, *Ömrü Kisa*, 63.

<sup>274</sup> Dođanođlu, *Devrimci*, 952–954.

<sup>275</sup> Dođanođlu, *Devrimci*, 953.

<sup>276</sup> Umit Fırat, “Devrimci Dođu Kültür Ocakları,” *BIANET*, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/208947-ddko-50-yasinda>.

<sup>277</sup> İsmet Yüce, “Kürt Aydınlanması ve 68 Kültürü,” *Rudaw*, accessed March 9, 2019, <https://www.rudaw.net/turkish/opinion/09032019>.

“We want the teacher, not the gendarmerie.  
We want the school, not the outpost.  
West reconstruction in the west, violating in the east.  
East is not a detention colony.  
Civilization to the west, ignorance to the east. Why?  
We aim to realize brotherhood, equality, and happiness.  
A five-year plan, all lying, wakes up the eastern.  
Stop talking; look at the east”.<sup>278</sup>

In the 1960s, with the Eastern Rallies and the Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearths, Kurds became aware of the problem within the Turkish left; still, they formulated the case within the economic underdevelopment of the region. The Kurds who founded the basis of long-term Kurdish mobilization were more entrepreneurial in interpreting the East within a national context. Then the Kurds in the 60s and early 70s not only re-formulate the regional differences, but more importantly, they started activism which became a fundamental step in the foundation of the PKK.

### **2.3 Concluding Remarks**

After the coup in 1960, a new constitution was introduced, directly linked to the mobilization of the Turkish left and, later, the Kurdish movement. Civic rights were defined by the new regulation, such as the right to start a political party and the right to syndication, and the strike created a “free” environment for the activists to mobilize.

The activists and intellectuals who took advantage of the new constitution with the impacts of the 68 generations formulated the social-economic problems of the country from a leftist point of view. The Kurds and the Turks who organized as the Turkish left in this period did not only discuss the problems like the 1950s but, more importantly, named it the “eastern problem”. The Kurds in the 50s had become the “activist Kurds” in public, and as I will present, they turned to “radical Kurds” in the 70s. The importance of the 1960s rallies lies in the contradiction between the state, anti-communism, and the activist’s pro-communism. Both the Turkish left and especially the Kurdish activists formulated the national inequalities in terms of lack of industrialization and regional inequalities.

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<sup>278</sup> Beşikçi, *Doğu Mitingleri*, 24—25.

The above discussion shows that the lack of enough freedom for the Kurds to act more autonomously from the Turkish left and the pressure of the state's anticommunism led to the ignorance of the ethnic aspects of the so-called eastern problem. The main difference between the Kurds and the Turkish left lies in the differences in their claims. While the Turkish left centered its position on economy and anti-imperialism, the Kurds put ethnicity and Kurdishness at the core of their interpretations of politics.

Unlike the Turkish left, who were pro-working class, the Kurds were not simply working-class but Kurdish as an ethnic group. Following the 60s and later in the 70s, the main goal of the Kurds was to re-formulate the East and turn the "poor Eastern" into the "poor Kurdish". The re-writing of the poor Kurdish was a breaking point regarding the representation of the failure of the Turkish left in diagnosing the ethnicity of the east and the separation of the Kurds from the Turkish left.



### Chapter 3

#### Universities and the Kurdish Movement

This chapter evaluates the role of higher education in the history of the mobilization of the Kurdish movement to suggest that while the university created an opportunity for mobilization, it shaped Turkish and Kurdish students in distinct ways, favorably and unfavorably. Education, especially the university, was the fundamental basis of Kemalist modernization. At the same time or/and later, they were also crucial in the formation of the Turkish (including the Kurdish) left and, consequently, the Kurdish movement. Thus, it is worth analyzing the status, the official function, and the real-life of these institutions in more detail.

Historically, university, especially after the Industrial Revolution, became a crucial social and political institution where knowledge production, transmission, and dissemination took place.<sup>279</sup> In this sense, education served both the state and society. Besides the mentioned functions, the university also played a vital role in cultivating democratic action and public accountability.<sup>280</sup> These democratic actions suggested that the university could also be defined as a place where ideologies, beliefs, social relations, and values were produced and reproduced to serve society's and the state's needs. Even though the university's history goes centuries back, its latest form of mass education for the need of the nation-state and society became to exist only from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>281</sup> It is why it might be argued that the nation-state and the university went hand in hand, at least for the last two centuries.

Based on such definition for this chapter, I will discuss the relationship between the state and the university in Anatolia, focusing on the Cold War period. This chapter conceptualizes the historically fundamental transition in three stages: the nationalization (the 1920s–1940s), massification (the 1950s), and polarization (the 1960s–1970s) of the university. The main statement of this section is that the university, as a place of mobilization and ideologization, gave the Kurds an “ideological identity”. The last stage of the university-state relationship refers to an ideological and class-based polarization among politicians, students, universities, and the people during the 1960s and 1970s. This period

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<sup>279</sup> Yusef Waghit, “The Public Role of the University Reconsidered,” *Perspective in Education* 26, no. 1 (2008): 19, <file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/76423-Article%20Text-175067-1-10-20120514.pdf>.

<sup>280</sup> Steven Friedman and Omano Edigheji, “Eternal (and Internal) Tensions? Conceptualizing Public Accountability in South African Higher Education,” *Council on Higher Education, Research* 2, (2016): 1–4, [file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/CHE HEIAAF No.2 Dec2006 0.pdf](file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/CHE_HEIAAF_No.2_Dec2006_0.pdf).

<sup>281</sup> Waghit, “The Public Role,” 19.

began in 1960, was interrupted in 1971, and ended in 1980 with a military coup, while the polarization was fed by the first two stages and the Cold War environment. These stages were not independent, rather, they shaped, fed, and caused each other.

The university as a modern institution became the leak of the state's hegemony in Turkey and Europe, America, and Asia during the 1960s and 1970s. After the Second World War, the fast capitalization of societies raised questions about ideology, freedom, and human rights. While in western countries, for instance, the main rhetoric of the 68 generations was the critique of capitalism and freedom. In Turkey, it was based on more industrialization and investment.<sup>282</sup> This rhetoric theorized about the Kurdish mobilization in the 70s under the light of Marxism, and these theorized discourses were used in protestation and activism, which I call “street ideology”.

The difference between the *book ideology* and the *street ideology* lies in practicality. While the former relies on the theorization of the problems, the latter depends on the practice of politics. What the Kurdish movement achieved in the 1970s was the transformation of the book ideology, Marxism, to the street ideology by defining it as the practice and the solution for the masses and independent Kurdistan. Such differentiation reveals not only the role of the university in the mobilization of the Kurdish movement but, more importantly, guides us to formulate the relationship between the state and the university as nationalization, massification in the 1950s, and the polarization in the 1970s among ideologists and students.<sup>283</sup>

In the Turkish case, the university had two impacts on the students: favorable and unfavorable capital. For the state, the youth who got access to higher education would internalize Ataturk's principles, serve society and be ready for the capitalist world order. These expectations were mostly of Turkish students. The “harmony” between the state's aim and Turkish students created what I name the positive capital from the point of view of the state expectations. Contrary to such a positive correlation between the state's aim and Turkish students, the Kurds who came from the east and southeast of Turkey faced a cultural and class-based shock which later followed the pattern of the states with ideological differences and similarities. With the impact of such an influence, the Kurds built an ethnic and political identity and, through university, created an opposite capital, a negative capital.

Both negative and positive capitals suggested a direct relationship between what the state aimed and expected from higher education and what the different Turkish and Kurdish

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<sup>282</sup> Lüküslü, *Türkiye'nin 68'i*, 85.

<sup>283</sup> Lüküslü, *Türkiye'nin 68'i*, 85—87.

youths understood and responded to. In a mostly Turkish-populated environment, universities became where the Kurds met with the Turks, with their differences and similarities. Under the light of the leftist ideology, the Kurdish students theorized those similarities and differences in terms of education, economy, and identity. Hence, one could argue that for Kurdish students, the universities were the places of ideologization, mobilization, and practices of Marxism. The influence of the university on the Kurdish students turned into a direct contradiction with the state's agenda. For the Kurdish, higher education became an intellectual and mobilizable weapon; it was the negative capital in terms of the fundamental aims of the higher education.

Before the massive influence of higher education, the Kurds who rebelled against the state several times were mostly religion-oriented, uneducated, and ignorant of any ideology. However, by the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, the Kurds, who were going to declare the most politicalized war against the state in Turkish history, unlike their predecessors, were well educated by the university. Under the influence of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, they realized what power was and how it worked. While the memory of the early Republican period, which gave political character to the Kurds, was shaped mainly by rebellions and deep assimilation, the university, on the other hand, gave an ideological character that was directly shaped by the notion of freedom in broad sense. Thus, by investigating the relationship between the state and the university in Anatolia, the main statement of this section is that the university, as a place of mobilization and ideologization, gave the Kurds an "ideological identity".

### **3.1 Nationalization of the University and the Ideological Base of Turkish Higher Education**

Post-Turkey's Independence War lasted from 1919–1922. Atatürk relied on six pillars: revolutionism, republicanism, nationalism, populism, and statism, to build the new nation-state.<sup>284</sup> In a nutshell, these six principles could be categorized as modernization and nationalism. For Atatürk, modernization was theorized as moving away from a religious and traditional society to a secular one in what was a deviation from the ideology of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>285</sup> However, for the success of this transition and transformation to the Turkish Republic, it was passionate to unite the citizens, and although the reforms might

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<sup>284</sup> Munis Tekinalp, *Türk Ruhu* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1944), 255.

<sup>285</sup> İsmail Kaplan, *Millî Eğitim İdeolojisi* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2013), 305.

have been successful, they also caused social chaos. In effect, the reforms gave rise to a society that oscillated between the past and the present.

By government decree, the thousand years old traditional ways of life underwent rapid changes, and the population of Turkey stumbled. The state attempted to spread Atatürk's principles throughout society, in addition to new judicial reforms. Bureaucracy was an essential tool in controlling society at different levels and spreading reforms. Since the aim was to control and transform society, the state prioritized education, especially tertiary education. According to Turkish Republican elites, the university was the best place to produce more young Republican elites. As such, it was an apparatus with which to transform society.<sup>286</sup> The nouveau nation-state was built on a sense of Turkish national identity, which was a Sunni interpretation of Islam and modernization/Westernization at the time. In this context, education became a potent tool for spreading the ideology needed for attaining the new nation-state as ideologized by Atatürk. In the early 1920s, intellectuals focused on education and its practice. For Ziya Gökalp, education is a two-sided institution: it can unite, divide, or even resolve divisions.<sup>287</sup>

Atatürk believed education was essential for rebuilding Turkey, which the bloody WWI and Independence War ravaged. Further, he spoke about resisting external forces and opposing ideas.<sup>288</sup> İsmet İnönü supported an education system that was nationalist in ideology instead of being religious or externally influenced.<sup>289</sup> Yücel agreed with Atatürk and İnönü and remarked: "Everything outside of Kemalist and Atatürk's principles is dangerous for us, and we will not allow the dangerous ideas in our education and our nation".<sup>290</sup>

### 3.2 1933 University Reform

The reaction of the Darülfünun, higher education institution in the late Ottoman era, today is Istanbul University, to the Turkish Revolution was one of the major concerns of the Turkish state. In 1924, Darülfünun was granted autonomy as an institution; however, it was not considered independent from the state's control. The undeniable rapid transformation of the

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<sup>286</sup> Metin Heper, *Bürokratik Yönetim Geleneği* (Ankara: ODTU Yayınlar, 1974), 99.

<sup>287</sup> İlhan Başgöz and Howard E. Wilson, *Educational Problems in Turkey 1920-1940* (USA: Indiana University Press, 1968), 15-16.

<sup>288</sup> Hasan Ali Yücel, *Türkiye'de Orta Öğretim* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1994), 20.

<sup>289</sup> Kaplan, *Milli*, 315.

<sup>290</sup> Hasan Ali Yücel, *Söylev ve Demeçler* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1993), 235.

former Ottoman bureaucracy into a western-style nationalism-based system created a reaction from the teacher at Darülfünun.

The abolition of the Arabic alphabet was central to higher education and state relations. In the Turkish History Congress of 1932, the scholars of Darülfünun disagreed on the Turkish history thesis. Considering the importance of history and language in building the Turkish nation, this disagreement was significant as it opposed the state's position.<sup>291</sup> The Grand National Assembly voted to abolish the Darülfünun and rename it a "university". However, the nominal transition to university from Darülfünun was complex. It went beyond a simple rebranding: it highlighted another deviation from the Ottoman legacy and the gradual defeat of religious education.<sup>292</sup>

Regardless, the reform did not deliver on its promises as it did not bring freedom to the university. Instead, what was witnessed was the reclaiming of the university's so-called autonomy, which was given in 1919 by the Turkish state.<sup>293</sup> Over 50 percent of the existing lecturers were sacked and replaced by their European counterparts who agreed with the Turkish history thesis.<sup>294</sup> Furthermore, the dean was appointed by the head of the government on the recommendation of the Ministry of Education. New development under the same law was the adoption of Turkish written in Latin script as the language of instruction at the university.<sup>295</sup>

Putting an end to the divergence between the Darülfünun and the state was one of the primary objectives of the university reform. The staff members of the Darülfünun were more suspicious of the state's modernization agenda.<sup>296</sup> Hence, the suspicious liberal standing of the Darülfünun was one of the main reasons for the reform. Per Zeki Mesut, the Darülfünun lost its relevance as the body to champion reform and spread its ideology to society.<sup>297</sup> However, per Ismail Husrev, academics could not afford to sit on the fence: their job depended on being on the state's side.<sup>298</sup> It can be deduced, therefore, that the post-1933 purge of academics had more to do with the separation and cleansing of those who did not believe in the Turkish Republic's principles rather than academic merit.

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<sup>291</sup> Kaplan, *Milli*, 178.

<sup>292</sup> Burhan Asaf, "Arkada Kalan Darulfunu'un Başına Gelenler," *Kadro*: 18, (1933): 252.

<sup>293</sup> Nurgun Oktik, "Restructuring Turkish Higher Education, 1981, the Higher Education Law and Its Effects." (Doctoral Thesis, *Durham University*, 1995) 129.

<sup>294</sup> Kaplan, *Milli*, 45.

<sup>295</sup> Asaf, "Arkada Kalan," 253.

<sup>296</sup> Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *Tek Adam*, (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1969), 6.

<sup>297</sup> Milliyet, "Hakimiyet-I," 1932.

<sup>298</sup> Murat Ergin, *Is the Turk a White Man? Race and Modernity in the Making of Turkish Identity* (Netherland: Brill, 2017), 167.

The reform put higher education under the strict control of the state; the government decided who could teach and what could be taught. Unsurprisingly, the university and higher education generally became tools in the hands of the new Turkish regime, and criticism was not allowed.

### **3.3 Massification of the University: The Multi-Party System and Universities**

Changes in Turkey between the 1940s and 1950s could be understood within the framework of the international conjuncture, which had a fundamental impact on Turkish economic and political life. The Marshall Aid plan availed the Democratic Party the opportunity to bring new farming equipment and to launch small industries across Turkey.<sup>299</sup> The construction of roads and the mechanization of agriculture meant villagers could interact with the city dwellers more quickly. It also led to a decrease in the need for human resources. Technology made life more comfortable for villagers but simultaneously robbed them of leaving their villages on the same new roads.<sup>300</sup>

Eventually, the rapid increase in the population of cities, fueled by the populist policies of the Democratic Party during the 1950s, and the suburbs became visible around the towns. Nonetheless, national and international political developments increased the number of students and universities after the Second World War. Besides the predominant universities of Ankara and Istanbul, new universities were founded in different provinces of Turkey. For example, Hacettepe University and Middle East Technical University (METU) were opened in the capital.<sup>301</sup> METU was founded in 1945, with significant contributions by the United Nations organizations. The aim was to educate architects and engineers to rebuild and modernize the Middle East, beginning in Turkey.<sup>302</sup> This highlight how the West related with Turkey regarding social, political, and economic transformations. In this environment, the number of students increased, and the Grand National Assembly passed a new Higher Education Law in 1946.<sup>303</sup> The primary objective of the new law was to

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<sup>299</sup> Geoffrey Lewis, *Modern Turkey* (London: Praeger, 1974), 138.

<sup>300</sup> Lewis, *Modern*, 138—141.

<sup>301</sup> Oktik, "Restructuring," 142.

<sup>302</sup> Joseph S. Szyliowicz, *Education and Modernization in the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 38.

<sup>303</sup> Himmet Umunc, "In Search of Improvement: The Reorganization of Higher Education in Turkey," *Minerva* 24, no. 4 (1986): 445.

increase the universities' productivity and resolve any existing challenges concerning the ideological differences between academics and the government.<sup>304</sup>

Officially, the universities were autonomous. Nonetheless, the understanding and definition of their autonomy remained rooted in the nation-state's interests. Per the new law's provisions, the nation-state's interests (based on Kemalist principles) were superior to those of the university. The students who were educated at the university were supposed to be loyal to republican reforms. Universities were also expected to work to eliminate patriarchal mindsets and undertake research to help develop and advance the young republicans.<sup>305</sup> Three features of the regulation mapped the boundaries of university autonomy: autonomy was defined by the state, the Ministry of Education was the head of the universities, and the university was supposed to educate students to be loyal to Kemalist principles.

This increase in the number of students and universities is what I refer to as the massification of the university. The highlight of such massification refers to the numerically expanding numbers of universities and students, yet it also refers to a deep expansion in political activism. As discussed before, until the introduction of the multi-party system, politics was in the hands of former soldiers and the bourgeois. Whereas starting in the 50s, the children of peasants had a chance to participate in politics in the newly opened universities. Such bipolar massification demonstrated its impact on the university's place within politics.

Between 1950 and 1960, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes's conservative and pro-American politics caused riots in Turkish universities, particularly in Ankara and Istanbul.<sup>306</sup> In the wake of the new constitution in 1961, universities became more politicized. Students demanded civil liberties and defined themselves as anti-American. By the 1960s, the university was a battleground for the ideological conflict between left and right ideologists.<sup>307</sup> Students studying in the new buildings started to believe politics was no longer the preserve of republican elites; their voices needed to be heard, too. The involvement of students was also one facet of what I earlier described as the massification of politics.

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<sup>304</sup> Umunç, "In Search," 445.

<sup>305</sup> Umunç, "In Search," 445—447.

<sup>306</sup> Clement Henry Dodd, *Crisis of Turkish Democracy* (Humanities Press, 1983), 13.

<sup>307</sup> Dodd, *Crisis*, 13.

### 3.4 Polarization of the University: The 1961 Constitution

The rule of the Democratic Party lasted for a decade and culminated in the first coup in modern Turkish history on May 27, 1960. Due to its pro-American and conservative policies, the academics and students supported the military by organizing several rallies against the government. After the coup, the military council passed a new constitution that saw some social freedoms, including the freedom of citizens to unionize. Article 120 of the new constitution states: “The universities may be founded only by the Turkish state. The universities [will be] supervised and administered by a group of academics. Any other force will not dismiss the executive trustees but the universities themselves. The academics have [the] right to join a political party, but they cannot hold any executive duties.”<sup>308</sup>

In this so-called liberal climate, the 1960s saw the rise of the leftist ideology due to challenges associated with urbanization, citizens' right to unionize, and the effects of Village Institutes. Backed by academics, intellectuals, the proletariat, and graduates of Village Institutions, the Turkish Labor Party, founded in 1965, won fifteen seats in the parliament barely four years after it was founded. Such institutionalization of the leftist ideology led to the foundation of the Revolutionary Trades Unions in 1967.<sup>309</sup>

Now, contrary to the left, the state and its nationalistic ideology backed the right wing. The chief objective of the students' movements in the left wing was economic development and a better future in terms of equality between classes. The ideological battle between the left and right culminated in another coup, with the eventual arrests of thousands of leftist academics, writers, and students.<sup>310</sup>

### 3.5 The 1973 University Law and the Anti-left Seventies

The conflict between the rightist and leftist ideologies, the strength of leftism, and the universities becoming one of the conflict centers created an atmosphere where all sides blamed one another for the disturbance among the young generations. Eren Omay wrote, “The university is the brain of our society,” and argued that the state and university should

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<sup>308</sup> Lewis, *Modern Turkey*, 165.

<sup>309</sup> Lüküslü, *Türkiye'nin 68'i*, 25—30.

<sup>310</sup> Lüküslü, *Türkiye'nin 68'i*, 165—166.



collaborate to strengthen the brain.<sup>311</sup> Since the university was considered as the source of intelligence regarding Atatürk's principles and the idea of service, especially since the university was both a place where these principles were disseminated through the young generation and a place that strengthened the capitalist development of the country. For the conservatives, the conflicts in the universities were a strategy of communists' and capitalists' powers. In 1968, it was remarked that "the enemies of our nation link our universities to their preserve ideologies".<sup>312</sup>

The ultra-nationalist approach to the university regarding the rise of leftist ideology in support of the state's ideology believed that they were in a war like the Independence War and that all Turkish youth should be aware of the danger. For this group, the external powers aimed to turn students to the enemy of their nation.<sup>313</sup> For this group, the university was a "watch house," and for the Turkish youth, the goal was supposed to be service to the great nation, Turkey.<sup>314</sup> In the same document, socialism was described as a threat and a Kurdish movement or that Kurdishnes had co-opted the ideology against the Turks. Moreover, although the ultra-nationalist groups prepared the document on universities, it ended with a sentence about the indivisible integrity of the state and nation.<sup>315</sup>

On 12 March 1971, a second coup took place in Turkey. Nihat Erim's government revised the university law and took the administrative autonomy of the universities but left its academic autonomy.<sup>316</sup> Though it seemed a strange approach, it implied that the universities were free to choose their curriculums; however, the government reserved the right to send the police to the universities to conduct any investigation. Additionally, per the new constitution's provisions, academics could be fired at will by the state with senate approval. Based on the rights given to the political authority, the government launched the Higher Education Council headed by the Ministry of National Education, with membership divided equally between the universities and the government's representatives. According to the legislation, each university was supposed to choose a professor as a representative for two years.<sup>317</sup> Even though the council was formed in the template of a ministry, it was still

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<sup>311</sup> Eren Omay, "Üniversitenin Toplum Yapısındaki Yeri," *Yükseköğretimde Sorunlar ve Çözümler*, İstanbul: Üniversite Öğretim Üyeleri Derneği Yayınları 1, (1991): 29.

<sup>312</sup> Yılmaz Karaoglu, *Türkiye'de Komünist Strateji ve Üniversite Hadiseleri* (İstanbul: Milli Mücadele Birliği Sancağı, 1968), 36.

<sup>313</sup> Ulkü Ocakları Birliği, *Milletler Mücadelesi ve Üniversite* (Ankara: Ulusoglu Matbaası, 1971), 2.

<sup>314</sup> Ulkü Ocakları Birliği, *Milletler Mücadelesi*, 3—4.

<sup>315</sup> Ulkü Ocakları Birliği, *Milletler Mücadelesi*, 15.

<sup>316</sup> Oktik, "Restructuring," 147.

<sup>317</sup> Yahya Akyüz, "Türk Eğitim Tarihi: Başlangıçtan 1985'e Kadar" *Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi Dergisi* Ankara: 1985: 334—336.

subordinate to another ministry, underscoring the fact that a lack of institutional trust marked the relationship between the state and the university.

The main objectives of this law were both instrumental and administrative. The instrumental objective was to produce and reproduce citizens based on Kemalist principles and to educate students to become the new Republican generations who would carry Ataturk's principles. Hence, all universities taught Ataturk's principles, Turkish history, and language as mandatory courses. The administrative objective gave universities the responsibility of setting rules on the duration of studies and tuition fees. Academics were, however, responsible for electing the university's senate and were given the right to develop their own unique administrative policies.

Turkish socio-political life reached its peak of violence and polarization in 1979. People started to talk about a military coup; a military coup was desired and seen as a means of salvation from such a violent climate. However, some politicians were against military control and refused martial law over some problematic cities.<sup>318</sup> During the 70s, universities were once again one of the battlegrounds of the conflict between ideological wings. The turmoil ended with the 12 September coup in 1980, which took the disturbance into a new phase by deepening the economic and social problems.

### **3.6 University and the Kurdish Left**

The critical transition from empire to nation-state did not only change the way societies were designed and worked, but it also redefined the institutions and the university or education in general. While for the Turkish state, the universities were one of the main tools to strengthen its ideology and raise the young generations with the Turkish, Sunni superior mindset, the aim was to educate the true believers of the Turkish collective greatness. Furthermore, the Kurds, who came from totally different historical and cultural baggage, had to formulate the differences between the Turkish West and Kurdistan and interpret their state within the country. This double "task" created anger and, as Ocalan called it, a "diseased personality" among Kurdish students and the Kurds. The function of the education system was to deny and ignore the differences among societies in language, culture, and ethnicity, which created confusion among the Kurdish students. Abdullah

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<sup>318</sup> *Cumhuriyet* 2020, September 14, 2020.

Ocalan said, “With the official ideology taught in schools, I could not find as much as needed. Even if you fully accept Turkishness, as the old Kurdish tradition enters the family, it says, 'I exist in all local areas, and we are certain to be Kurdish’”.<sup>319</sup>

The country's modernization and/or miss-modernization developed and evolved not with the people but against the Kurds because it aimed at building a less diverse society. However, for the Kurdish students, the modernization and industrialization of the country created an opportunity for them to attain higher education. With the increase in the number of universities, the Kurds, the poorest and illiterate members of Turkey, had the opportunity to study in big cities like Ankara, Istanbul, and Diyarbakir. In his trial, a former member of the PKK, Kemal Pir, said, “I was born to a low-income family. On 12 March, revolutionaries were killed in Turkey. There was strong pressure on people. I was a student in 1972. I wanted to know the reasons for all of these. I have seen inequality in Turkey; the proletariats were under pressure. New poor ghettos and bourgeoisie neighborhoods had great differences and inequalities’”.<sup>320</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s, most of the Kurdish students who wanted to be lawyers, teachers, or doctors learned pure aspects of their choice courses and, more importantly, faced the massive gap between the regions they came from and the west of the country in terms of language and lifestyle. The Kurdish students understood and formulated the gap between the regions throughout the century. A former member of the PKK's Central Committee, Hayri Durmus, said in his trial in 1982, “All the things from the building and direction of the way of investment of capital aim to take our resources. Looking closely at the road slab, you will see the reason. For instance, while Hakkari has no road, in Cizre, there are several...Besides, all these people from this region were forced to migrate to Ankara, Istanbul, and even Germany, since even the land is under feudal control. There are hundreds of thousands’”.<sup>321</sup>

Beyond how he conceptualized the problem, he also met the Marxist-Leninist ideology at the university in Ankara, like all founders of the PKK. Like his several friends, Durmuş's participation in the movement was not an accident. He started high school by reading Marxist classics and understanding them at Ankara, Hacettepe University, between

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<sup>319</sup> Abdullah Ocalan, “Unpublished,” (2004), 211.

<sup>320</sup> Kemal Pir, “Defense Speech at Court,” *Saradistribution*, 1981, <http://www.saradistribution.com/kemalpir.htm>.

<sup>321</sup> Hayri Durmuş, “Defense at Court,” *Saradistribution*, June 14, 1982, [http://www.saradistribution.com/hayri\\_durmus\\_savunma.htm](http://www.saradistribution.com/hayri_durmus_savunma.htm).

1974 and 1975. Moreover, like Pir, he visited ADYOD Ankara Demokratik Yüksek Öğrenim Derneği, Ankara Democratic higher Education Association, regularly, where he met other members of the movement. Besides, the problem he realized was not as simple as the reformist believed in fact to solve the problem of the system. There was a need for a revolution, which became the reason for him to attend the Kurdish movement. The Kurdish students who were intentionally raised by their parents, who faced Republican oppression in the 20s, 30s, and 40s not to be “political” in the 50s and 60s, had met not just the Turks but also started to understand why they were taught not to be political.

Besides the education on the subject, they also met with rising leftist movements in Turkey. During the 60s, the Kurdish students tried to find a recipe to define the massive gap they had seen and become activists under the roof of the Turkish left. Pir, in his defense, said, “...there was the importance and impact of national independence movements, and revolutionary movements in the world led me to know more, and in the end, with Marxism, I started to believe the problems caused by capitalism and Marxism can end inequality and save the oppressed. Still, knowledge was not enough for me”.<sup>322</sup> Most of the Kurdish activists in this period had the opportunity to meet at the university or in the dormitories to discuss global topical issues. Later, in the 70s, at the age of “great enlightenment,” they became the founders of the PKK.

Higher education in the 60s and the 70s was the way the production of the unfavorable capital described before. Without exception, Dogan, just like others, met the idea of revolution when he studied in Eskisehir and Diyarbakir. The university became a network in which they did not just start understanding more about the leftist ideology, but it was also the first stage in building the Kurdish movement. Dogan, in his trial, said, “A friend introduced me to Haki at SBF dormitory or garden of faculty of law; I do not remember. We started to talk. He told me his thoughts about the problem of the nation. I liked it”.<sup>323</sup>

In Paulo Freire’s theory, a university is a place that produces a graduate who thinks critically and engages with mutable issues.<sup>324</sup> According to another analyst, Delanty, if this happens, the university will become a primary agent in the public sphere, initiating social change and serving many rather than a single class.<sup>325</sup> Iris Marion Young claims that social

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<sup>322</sup>Pir, “Defense Speech at Court.”

<sup>323</sup> Mazlum Doğan, “Mazlum Doğan’ın Sahte Ve Sözde Türk Mahkemelerinde Siyasi Savunması,” *Saradistribution* June 18, 1981, [http://www.saradistribution.com/mazlum\\_dogan\\_savunma.htm](http://www.saradistribution.com/mazlum_dogan_savunma.htm).

<sup>324</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Myra Bergman Ramos, Continuum, 2005), 87—95.

<sup>325</sup> Gerard Delanty, *Community* (Routledge, 2003), 81.

justice requires dismantling structures of dominations that show themselves in marginalization, powerlessness, violence, and cultural imperialism.<sup>326</sup> It is evident to her that university graduates are supposed to pay attention to dealing with the dismantling of the social structures that sustain oppression. That is to claim that higher education must be charged with expanding opportunities for its students, not only for jobs but also for cultural status, including the political power to deal with inequalities.<sup>327</sup> Supporting this approach, Norbert Ricken claims that “the university is to be deliberate in the sense of intentional, conscious, fully considerate in the sense of thinking carefully in deliberation with others”.<sup>328</sup>

### 3.7 Concluding Remarks

In summary, the three stages – nationalization, massification, and polarization – are the changes in the relationship between the state and universities in Turkey. The short periods that could be perceived as changes have been tactics of the state. When the state feels threatened or weak, it uses tactics such as investigations, arrests, and dismissal, which do not show the strength of the state but illustrates the state's weakness. Looking at the continuity, the three stages are not independent; nationalization remains at the core of higher education, while the other stages form the basis of the conflict between the youth and the state. Such continuity is the state's strategy, spreading its ideology, building, shaping, and controlling the youth. Though the university was given autonomy, in practice, it has been used as an instrument of the state. The relationship between the state and the university is one of the hegemonic apparatuses.

For Kurdish students, however, education from primary school to university has worked in three ways: shock, confusion, and mobilization. Firstly, forced Turkification via education has shocked Kurdish youth by putting them in a double mentality, culture, and identity. Furthermore, while in their daily life, they eat, speak, and play as Kurds, at formal education institutions, they are forced to know about the “world and things” by speaking and playing like Turks.

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<sup>326</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton University Press, 1990), 76—78.

<sup>327</sup> Nancy Eisenberg, Richard Fabes, and Tracy Spinrad, “Prosocial Development,” in *Handbook of child psychology: Social, emotional, and personality development* (John Wiley and Sons, 2007), 13.

<sup>328</sup> Norbert Ricken, “The Deliberate University: Remarks on the ‘Idea of the University’ from the Perspective of Knowledge,” *Study in Philosophy and Education* 26, no. 5 (2007): 496, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11217-007-9057-z>.

Secondly, the confusion phase mainly occurred when the young Kurdish generation went to the big cities in the 50s and 60s. At this level, the source of confusion for them was the regional gap in education and lifestyle; with the rise of the leftist ideology and higher education, they became activists. In the last phase, which started after the coup in 1971, the university became a place in which they did not only learn about revolutionary ideas and framed the former “easterner’s claims” with a Marxist-Leninist ideology but also through campuses and dormitories, they met and mobilized the Kurdish students to translate the easterner to Kurds who later founded the PKK.

## Chapter 4

### The 1970s: The Great Enlightenment and the Radicalization

The 60s, as Bozarslan described it, became the period in which the Kurdish movement and the Kurdish left reached synonymity.<sup>329</sup> The activist Kurds who were a part of the Turkish left, especially during the 1970s, turned into the representation of the Kurdish movement. Though with the declaration of the PKK, the Kurdish left was considered a radical guerrilla movement. Several Kurdish groups held different approaches regarding the Kurd's situation, politics, and strategies.<sup>330</sup> However, due to the scope of this research, the PKK will be the focal point of discussion.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and historicize the foundation of the PKK by data pulled from the primary sources of the party. To explore the foundation of the party there is necessary to first look at the 70s to follow the chronology of the research. Following this, a separate chapter will focus on the first attack of the PKK and the analysis of the PKK's newspaper compared with a pro-state newspaper in the 1980s.

This chapter argues that the shift from empire to the nation-state or horizontally structured society to the vertically designed society created two cleavages: pro-conflict and pro-democratic. The Kurds in Turkey, because of Turkification, not only dissociated from the state like religious groups but also because of their geographically consolidated existence on the border of Turkey, putting them under massive economic, militaristic, and ideological stress. The domestic and international changes, with the significant impact of the modernization of higher education, the Kurds, in contrast with the early rebels, put the "poor-eastern" problem under the name of "colonized Kurds" in the 70s. With the paranoid state, the pro-conflict cleavages refused the ethnic demands for decades, and the formation of the PKK for Kurds became not an option but a must.

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<sup>329</sup> Hamit Bozarslan, "Türkiye'de Kürt Sol Hareketi," *Murat Gültekinil (der.) Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce* 8, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007), 1196.

<sup>330</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya, "Kürt Hareketinin Örgütlenme Süreci Olarak 1970'ler," *Toplum ve Bilim* 127, (2013), 2, <http://hdl.handle.net/1854/LU-4109742>.

#### **4.1 Type(s) of the PKK**

Defining the PKK is a constant fight. The titles and the adjectives have been used to present the interpretation of the movement. The scale and chaos in the definition of the PKK have created a border between the delineative argumentations and the core of the movement. It seems that the history writing of the PKK has stuck in adjectives and determinative assumptions. Within the chaos of performances described before, it seems that the only way to eliminate the confusion regarding the interpretation of the PKK is to focus on the primary source of the party rather than the literature that describes it from basically secondary sources.

Based on this critique, in the following paragraphs, the confusion, division, and fallacy of naming the Kurdish movement and its images will be shown by analyzing the mainstream approaches to this question and classifying them from an analytical approach.

In the new social movement scholarship, the definition and analysis of a given movement differ from research to research; however, looking at the image, goal, and war (IGW) of the PKK might provide a chance to not only evaluate the PKK but also analyze it without using only secondary literature.

Firstly, the image has two-fold implications: “self-image and identified image.” Self-image mostly depends on how a movement shapes its ideology, agenda, and tactics, places itself in a given climate, and the outcome that will be reached in the end. Although all movements have a self-image, from green to radical movements, how the self-image is built differs for each movement. Self-image is shaped by a given time and several tools such as ideology, religion, culture, or sometimes gender, but the totality and the strength of the self-image depend upon the beginning of the movement. Still, it mostly occurs at the theoretical and later mobilization phases.

The identified image is what society, politicians, and states think about the given movement, and although it is different from the self-image, it is causally related to it. While self-image might form the identified image, it also happens oppositely. Based on such differentiation of images, it seems that the Kurdish movement has two models constructed by four so-called powers: the state’s PKK, societal PKK, academic PKK, and lastly, what is named in this study as the doctrinal PKK.

The first three conceptualizations of the state’s, societal, and academic PKK are mostly identified images shaped through paranoid phases, the discourse of the pro-conflict



cleavages, and Turkish history writing. These three images might have a clue about what PKK is and the problem, especially in the academic type. Shared names, phrases, and labels (ethnic rights, terrorism, equality, separatism, and Kurdish nationalism) were given to PKK, which became the baseline of the identified image. The state's image of PKK as a terrorist, separatist group, and atheist affected societal PKK. It is noteworthy that the practical differences among governments regarding how to solve the dispute over Kurdish rights and deal with the PKK were not the state's policy but individual attempts, which mostly ended up returning to the official approach.

Regarding academic definition of the PKK, there are two main branches: Western academics and Turkish academics. The lack of language and the belief in everything that happens in the eastern part of the world can be explained from the west by the Western concepts and methods with some exceptions. Interpreting the issue, Western academics mostly use the sources produced or published by Turks, who never succeeded in naming the Kurdish movement, with some exceptions. While most of the members of these groups admire the Kurdish movement, what they do is fall into the nation-state's trap which is, in other words, the position of the nation-state and its security and sovereignty. As I saw in the document of PKK, the Westerners seem to claim that the PKK is a nationalist, separatist movement by ignoring the reality. Hence, the Kurdish-Turkish conflict is one of the outcomes of Turkification, assimilation, and oppression by the Turkish Republic, to name the movement, one should not use the problem itself.

Lastly, the doctrinal identification of the PKK is the self-image of the Kurdish movement, which can be understood from their words and sources. Their self-image depends on history as a collective memory and is also built around the Marxist ideology, which seeks to be practiced in Kurdish regions. During the 1970s and 1980s, Kurdish nationalism not, as it was believed, Kurdish salvation or national salvation; it was a tool to bring socialism to the region until the beginning of the new millennium. The salvation, in their understanding, had nothing to do with ethnicity, even though they stuck to "Kurdishness." In fact, salvation is saving a colony from the colonizer. For the doctrinal PKK, the oppressors that have been using practical tools, such as religion, education, and the army, to keep their colony under control should be eliminated. In the doctrinal PKK, gender inequality, religion and its archaic implications, and nationalism must be fought against. Since the state, the colonizer has every opportunity to destroy the PKK, in the self-image, they have seen and defined themselves as warriors with the right to self-defense. That is to say that the PKK's self-image is not just ideological but is also historical. It is

built on the act of the state against Kurds, the death of its members, and its relationship with Kurdish civilians.

In this chapter, I aim to focus on the PKK's firsthand sources to demonstrate the ideology, the agenda, and the mobilization of the PKK and argue that what the literature shows fails to use the primary sources in the history writing of the PKK.

## **4.2 The 1970s: The Great Enlightenment**

As described, the 60s was a crucial period in the history of the Kurdish movement after the first military coup in modern Turkish history in 1960. Although it was an undemocratic step, the military council passed a new constitution, known as the „most democratic constitution” in Turkey, regarding social rights and unionization. In liberalism, the Kurdish students, intellectuals, and elites could be organized within constitutional freedom. In the second half of the 1960s, with the impact of 68 generations like dozens of countries, the students' movement took place in Turkey as a profoundly radical critique of capitalism and imperialism. However, the rise of the leftist ideology and economic crisis slowly led to another coup in 1971. As opposed to the coup of 1960, this was not against a corrupt populist government but the leftist ideology.

After the coup, the state arrested and put in jail thousands of activists, university professors, journalists, and students to prevent „more communism” within the NATO ally country. Shortly after the coup, the umbrella of leftist activism, the Turkish Workers Party, was shut down, and more importantly, Kurdish activism was destroyed. Anti-communism that had started with the Cold War, got into an intensive phase again, and was imposed systematically on Turkish society. With the coup of 1971, the state decided to eliminate the communist threat by supporting Turkish nationalist youth. The ideological and armed conflict between the leftist and rightist groups occurred not only on the streets of big cities but also in the universities in Ankara and Istanbul.

Since leftist activism was put in a communism-centered discourse rather than ethnicity and identity, the rightist activism considered as a permanent solution for the government. The failure of the leftist to diagnose the ethnic aspect of the Kurdish problem in the 1960s, fractioned the Turkish left in the 1970s. While a former activist who participated in Eastern Rallies and members of the Turkish Workers Party argued that the problem of democracy and equality, especially the eastern problem, would be solved under

the roof of the Republic with reforms. Students like Abdullah Ocalan claimed, however, that Kurdistan was the colony of the Republic. It was not just an economic but also an ethnic problem that required self-defense and revolution.

For Ocalan, the 70s is „the great enlightenment,” not only for the Kurdish movement but also for the world's people. For him, the capitalist modernization and the practice of the nation-state are against human dignity. The 68 generations also introduced the requisite intellectual capacities to propose new solutions to the modern world. Based on my understanding, the “activist Kurds” in the 50s and “mobilized Kurds” in the 60s were not mature enough to create independent activism from the Turkish left. It was not an intentional decision but the consequences of the memory of the massacres in the 1920s and 1930s, the disadvantages of the Kurds who were economically and ideologically oppressed by the pro-conflict classes within the vertical society. Nevertheless, with the coup in 1970 and the increase in higher education, Kurdish students reformulated the eastern problem from a Marxist-Leninist approach. What needs to be underlined is that the disunity of the nation, which was followed by the disunity of the people in the 70s, resulted in the secession of the Kurdish leftism from the Turkish left. The breakaway of the Kurdish left from the Turkish left has not stayed only in intellectual discussions and leftist nostalgia but has created a long-lasting armed conflict with the Turkish state. With the formation of the PKK, the pro-democratic cleavage within society and politics occurred with a considerable difference from the past, saving the “colonialized” Kurdistan from the Turkish state.

### **4.3 Foundation of the PKK**

What is called Turkey's Kurdish policy was based on the total denial of the Kurds, which was mostly militarily executed. Since the founding cadres of the republic were soldiers and the ruling politicians were mainly former soldiers, Kurdish politics was run with a militaristic strategic aspect strategy. After the Dersim in 1938, the administration of the Kurdish region was managed by the military bureaucracy, which silenced the Kurds from disturbing the state again. A bureaucrat, Ferit Melen, in his interview, described both the state's approach and militarist practices of the Turkish army in the region as follows:

The revolts were suppressed in blood. Till the 1950s, there was a long and massive pressure. The gendarmerie was the main authority in the region. Southeastern Anatolia was a forbidden zone where nobody could leave or

enter. There was a big mistake in education. Fevzi Çakmak, regarding education, said that the education we have could not deal with the illiterate ones. How does it intend to deal with the educated? The Kurds were not allowed to be rich, educated, or get high-level jobs. Our biggest mistake was focusing only on how to silence them. Exiles, improvements, oppression, beating, deaths...<sup>331</sup>

This quote reveals some of the main arguments that this research claims regarding the impact of education on the Kurdish youth, the state's policy, and the historical baggage of Kurdish history, which became the baseline of the PKK. Reading the above sentence shows that the state's policy was based on the denial of the Kurds, and it was implemented in a deliberate measure that brought poverty, lack of education, and militaristic oppression over the Kurds. Unlike the political parties' reports, which will be analyzed later, the economic gap between the east and the west of Turkey was not the destiny of the Kurds; it was the outcome of the state's policy. Such intentional acts of oppression became the baseline of the foundation of the PKK. The "illiterate Kurds" described in the quotes got enlightened through higher education, and they put the living conditions in the Kurdish region in the form of a Marxist revolution. The PKK, which nationalized the Kurds and declared the last Kurdish rebellion against the Turkish state, was built upon the legacy of the previous revolts as continuity in Kurdish history, but by its ideological capacity, it was a break in history.

After the coup in 1971, the embryo of the Kurdish movement was shaped by the organizations, and the activism under the Turkish left was suppressed by persecution and imprisonment. Ocalan was an active member of DDKO. He was influenced by the discussions held by THKP/C, Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi, (the People's Liberation Party Front-Turkey), leaders like Mahir Cayan, who has been one of the most famous figures in the revolutionary movements in Turkey. While Ocalan was studying law at the University of Ankara, he and his friends were imprisoned because of „slogans” and „for distributing brochures.” The prison in the 70s became a place where he met radical leftists and where he started to build the idea of revolution. Shortly after he was released, in a small district in Ankara called “Cubuk”, he and his friends had a long meeting about revolution and change. Then on March 21, 1973, the foundational discussion on establishing a party took place at the ADYOD, with the participation of several students in 1974.

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<sup>331</sup> Ahmet Kahraman, *Kürt İsyanlari: Tedip Ve Tenkil* (Istanbul: Evrensel Basim, 2004),398—399.

In the beginning, there was confusion in the party concerning the formation, ideology, and tactics. However, the students were sure it would be based on the idea of the “Kurdistan revolution”. During this preparation period, the group known as the “Apocular”, the group that followed Ocalan” held the most attendance. After they published the manifesto titled “Kurdistan Devriminin Yolu”, the way of revolution of Kurdistan” in 1976, the group decided to send some members to the east and southeast of Turkey to introduce the ideology of the party and revolution named “Ulkeye Dönüş” (back to the country) to the people of the region. The group that went to the southeast included the leading commanders of the PKK, and the Turkish police and soldiers followed them. In one of the attacks, Haki Karel was killed, and the death of Karel created a wave of massive anger and a long-lasting drama among Kurdish guerrillas. Decades after the incident, one of the leaders of the PKK guerrillas, Cemil Bayik, said, “When the Turkish police killed my closest friend, I felt incredible pain. I did not know what to do. Ultimately, I realized the only thing I could do was manage the pain. Therefore, when we founded the PKK, I was one of the first ones who killed the Turkish soldiers in 1984.”<sup>332</sup>

Besides the attacks of the Turkish security forces in the southeast of the country, in the west, the conflict between leftist and rightist groups, the pressure of the state over leftist activism, and lastly, the fragmented Turkish left pushed Ocalan and his friends to choose a different path. In 1978, the group, Apocular, decided to establish the party, and in the same year, in the district of Diyarbakir, Lice, the PKK was founded, and Ocalan was appointed as the leader. What is important here is that even though the foundation of the PKK was a strategic decision for self-defense, it was also because of the force of the demands that the Turkish state failed to respond to. By this, Ocalan said, “Life does not depend on the theory, but the theory should relay and reflex on life.”<sup>333</sup> It seems evident that the „life” he mentioned had been shaped by the geography, history, and the nation-state's policy, which had been witnessing a massive gap between the cleavages. He formulated the foundation of the PKK not as a decision but as destiny, and he said, „The roads bifurcated in the 1970s were absent in military or political terms. The resistance was like fate.”<sup>334</sup> The he founders of the PKK were convinced that the foundation of the PKK was a demonstration and

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<sup>332</sup> “KCK Eş Başkanı Cemil Bayık: Kürtler Eski Kürtler Değil,” BBC NEWS TÜRKÇE, accessed October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdluYzYGHRw>.

<sup>333</sup> Abdullah Ocalan, Bir Halkı Savunmak, HPG BIM, *Unpublished* (2004), 213, <https://docplayer.biz.tr/35882416-Abdullah-ocalan-bir-halki-savunmak-hpg-bim.html>.

<sup>334</sup> Ocalan, *Bir Halkı Savunmak*, 213.

symbolization of the self-defense of a community led by a group of students against the nation-state policy that targeted the Kurd's social-cultural and political existence.

#### **4.4 The PKK's Ideology**

Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan, Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), has been one of the most comprehensive entities in modern Turkish history. Even though we refer to one group of people by saying PKK, there are four PKKs. The state-constructed PKK, the terrorists; the societal PKK was the Kurdish-supported movement; the academic PKK was built by the academia by looking at the first two types of PKK; the PKK as a doctrine (which determines the results of the studies) most generally become the demonstration of glory or evil side of the party. Making such a division is crucial, not just for understanding the movement but also for identifying the nature of the armed conflict between PKK and the Turkish state. In this chapter, I will focus on the last type of PKK-interpretation, which I call is the PKK doctrine. The primary documents might show what PKK ideologues and members think and believe about their ideologies, strategies, and tactics. The PKK's manifesto indicates three main goals: building an independent, unified Kurdistan Democratic People's Dictatorship, freeing Kurdistan from imperialism, and building a classless society. These goals were repeatedly and systematically described in their first announcement not only in a domestic ethnic frame but also from an international and historical perspective. They wrote: "PKK was founded and developed at the age of proletarian revolutions.<sup>335</sup> PKK believes colonization is the primary source behind racism, and to be free from it, imperialism needs to vanish."<sup>336</sup> For the PKK, the division of Kurdistan into four pieces and the assimilation of its values were caused by colonization and imperialism.<sup>337</sup> They believed there was a "time gap" in the twentieth century when the Kurdish society was intentionally kept backward by these nation-states. Additionally, colonization and imperialism of the Turkish state kept Kurdish society from being part of the century.<sup>338</sup>

Since they claimed that the Turkish state was a colonial power, they did not accept the agreement between Great Britain and Turkey, signed shortly after WWI. Those agreements were deemed as not based on the will of Kurds, and, therefore, they were

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<sup>335</sup> Kuruluş Bildirisi, Call Number IISG Bro 4063/4, (1978), 55.

<sup>336</sup> Kuruluş Bildirisi 55.

<sup>337</sup> Kuruluş Bildirisi, 55.

<sup>338</sup> Kuruluş Bildirisi, 55

illegal.<sup>339</sup> According to them, PKK was the result and expression of self-defense by the revolutionary force against mass killing, assimilation, and colonization.<sup>340</sup> They described the problem as a matter of violence, and PKK was the only force that could fight and destroy the state's ideology and hegemony, which caused the Kurdish people to betray their values. In the document, they argued that what PKK was doing was not an act of persuasion. They were using revolutionary terror against civilians and the official police and their supporters as their way of fighting back.<sup>341</sup> In PKK's ideology, in a colonized country like Kurdistan, to survive politically, culturally, and socially the only way was to fight for them.<sup>342</sup> They made a comparison between peace and war; for them, peace diminished Kurds daily; the only option might be rebirth in the war.<sup>343</sup>

In their study, the "Kurdish problem" has been described as the "eastern problem," and the PKK, in the same document, argued sarcastically and claimed that what Turkish national bourgeois called the „eastern problem" would end their existence.<sup>344</sup> In order to achieve their goals, the PKK strongly indicated Marxism-Leninism and the world's socialist revolutions, such as Vietnam, Cuba, Guinea, and Mozambique, as their inspiration.<sup>345</sup> For the party, ending the imperialism of the Turkish state was not impossible, and they wrote: "Victory is possible, but it takes courage".<sup>346</sup>

It is important to argue that PKK, since its foundation, aimed to "socialize" the movement, the future of Kurdistan was not considered as the responsibility of PKK but the Kurds. They wrote: "Kurds who are displaced from their own country, forced to be underdogs, workers of Kurdistan to come and unify behind the leadership of PKK".<sup>347</sup> Such a claim demonstrated that the party presented itself not only as a political organization but as a representation of the Kurdish people. Hence, their manifesto and ideology presented several tactics and aimed not like an armed group but as a mainstream legal party.

In their document, they classified the duties of members and their followers' concerning politics, economy, and culture and how to achieve them. Looking at the following duties could show that their aim was not just to free Kurdistan but also to build a society based on socialism and Kurdishness. Moreover, their description of duties showed

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<sup>339</sup> Kuruluş Bildirisi, 55.

<sup>340</sup> Kuruluş Bildirisi, 56.

<sup>341</sup> Kuruluş Bildirisi, 56.

<sup>342</sup> Kuruluş Bildirisi, 56.

<sup>343</sup> Kuruluş Bildirisi, 56.

<sup>344</sup> Kuruluş Bildirisi, 60.

<sup>345</sup> Kuruluş Bildirisi, 60.

<sup>346</sup> Kuruluş Bildirisi, 60.

<sup>347</sup> Kuruluş Bildirisi, 61.

that Marxism-Leninism was not just a discourse but the fundamental baseline of their movement. According to the PKK's party program, the duties of the Kurdistan revolution are the following:

“End the Turkish colonization over Kurdistan and its control to accomplish it.

Build a nationally unified front which includes workers, villagers, intellectuals, and another patriot class. Organize the public and create a people's army, which is necessary to fight against colonization. We are ending regionalism and bourgeois nationalism. Eliminate ideas like territorial salvation and autonomy, which aim to cooperate with the colonization”.<sup>348</sup>

#### *For economy*

“Take the land from the agrarian elites and give it to the villagers. To cure the damages of colonization over the people and take responsibility for education, the economy, and politics. Building a democratic people's dictatorship: the aims of this dictatorship: Build an independent economic and credit system and destroy the economic system of the colonizer. Take over the rich underground resources and goods and put them under the control of the people. We are not giving any privilege to a foreign country to build military bases in Kurdistan. Delete the debts of poor villagers from the banks. To erase any control and pressure over women and build equality in any aspect of politics and societal life. To finish all sorts of pressure over religious and ethnic minorities. Create an independent economy. Centralize economy. Take transportation, banking, and communication under people's control. Agrarian reform and support villagers to create cooperatives”.<sup>349</sup>

#### *For culture*

“Instead of colonizer education and culture, create a national education support for the research of Kurdish history, literature, and language. Support the unified Kurdistan: Each revolution in Kurdistan needs to be a victory for the local people. To fight against the idea of autonomy and self-determination in Kurdistan. Build close cooperation and communication within Kurdistan.

The essence of revolution requires the will of the people. Following proletarian internationalism in international relations: Believe each revolution is under the responsibility of given revolutionaries. Not taking part in any association is not the result of

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<sup>348</sup> PKK, “Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê PKK: Program, Call Number IISG Bro 31 19/5.” 35—38.

<sup>349</sup> PKK, “Partiya,” 35—38.



the people's will. Support socialist countries, national salvation movements, and stay in touch with proletarian movements and democratic trends worldwide”.<sup>350</sup>

In contrast to what the mainstream PKK’s interpretations claim that “PKK is only an armed group behind the Ocalan’s leadership”, what the above-presented aims and duties demonstrate is that the party does not seek only a small-scale armed conflict. It has strong attachment to both traditional and neo-Marxism and left-wing ideas and practices in general and it holds a massive political, economic, and cultural agenda to not only free the Kurdish region but also to transform it structurally.

#### **4.5 The Objectification of the PKK**

Assuming that a group of people randomly came together and built the PKK would be a considerable oversimplification. In their documents, they systematically argue on the context which creates the revolution known as the „political opportunities”. Analyzing PKK's primary documents shows that the foundation of the PKK, or Kurdistan Revolutionary Movement, is associated with three main stages in them: colonization, modernization, and historicity.<sup>351</sup> These three phases shape what they call the objective and subjective requirements of the revolution. They argue that in each colonized country, imperialism and the development of revolution create the development of objective requirements. In the imperialist phase, the country becomes an entity of it, ending with the birth of class and strata.<sup>352</sup> Imperialism, as a world system, creates objective requirements, and there is a necessity to make a differentiation between developed and underdeveloped imperialism. For the most known colonialist countries like France and England, creating capitalism was crucial to keep their benefits alive. The PKK ideologues believes that these countries, by developing capitalism, also create objective requirements.

Such an argument about capitalism seems ironic since the PKK repeatedly criticizes capitalist imperialism. For them, it might be argued that the French and English types of capitalism are excellent examples, while the Portuguese and Turkish types of colonialism are the „bad” ones. They argue that since these two countries have depended on the

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<sup>350</sup> PKK, “Partiya,” 37—39.

<sup>351</sup> Abdullah Ocalan, *Kürdistan Devriminin Yolu (Manifesto)*, Call Number IISG 1983/2872, (1978), 117.

<sup>352</sup> Ocalan, *Kürdistan*, 117.

economy, both countries have systematically weakened the capitalist development in their colonies.<sup>353</sup>

During my archival research on the documents of the PKK, I found out that the party repeatedly described the Kurdish regions as a “colonized land,” and that was why the methodology they applied was not what mainstream social movements used but rather a broader framework that included social, cultural, and economic transformation and a new life. For Ocalan, the capitalist development of Kurdistan was threatened for a long time, first by Ottoman rule and later by the Turkish Kemalist bourgeoisie until the 1940s. They argued that at the beginning of the 1950s, with the spread of American capitalism across the country, the class that wanted to take advantage of it forced the spread of capitalism in Kurdistan.<sup>354</sup> According to the PKK, the objective requirement was the balance of militarist control with the economic colonization in Kurdistan.<sup>355</sup> For the possibility of working and organizing in colonized countries, the revolutionists needed to use different militarist, ideological, economic, and political tools of struggle to protect themselves and organize the public. If a country has a relatively advanced capitalist order, the subjective requirements of revolution are the proper level of organization and the class consciousness that can gain from the revolution. With objective and subjective requirements present, the last step of revolution is war.<sup>356</sup> In this stage, if the colonized country displays subjective opportunities and does not apply armed struggle, it either fails or becomes an „intellectual tea club”.

Following the logic of these arguments, it might be suggested that for the Kurdish revolutionary movement, the use of violence is not only the expression of the needs – political, ethnic, and economic – but also an obligatory way to put into practice their theoretical standing.<sup>357</sup> It also might be claimed that Ocalan sees a direct relationship between capitalism and mobilization that includes not agreement but conflict. As we will see, related to the idea of democratic confederalism, although the PKK changed its aim from an independent Kurdistan to democratic confederalism, capitalism and its hegemony over society are still considered a significant issue that requires a multidimensional solution.

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<sup>353</sup> Ocalan, *Kürdistan*, 117.

<sup>354</sup> Ocalan, *Kürdistan*, 117.

<sup>355</sup> Ocalan, *Kürdistan*, 119.

<sup>356</sup> Ocalan, *Kürdistan*, 120.

<sup>357</sup> Ocalan, *Kürdistan*, 120.

## 4.6 Methods of the PKK

The PKK has been deemed a “terrorist” organization by the Turkish state, the EU, and the UN. The PKK’s violence against Turkish security forces has been the main basis of the definition of it. Since Turkey has been a reliable ally of the West, it is not surprising that the party has been classified as a terrorist group. The specificity of the situation is indicated by the fact that West, on the one hand, harshly present the party as a terrorist organization, but on the other hand, it has also been reporting on Turkish oppression, the violence of human rights, systemic discrimination, and, as Chomsky puts it, the “barbarism”.

Putting this aside and the state-centered definition of terrorism, analyzing the PKK’s documents reveals that for the PKK, force and violence are the expression and necessity of their theory, which is directly shaped by the stages like colonization, imperialism, and assimilation. As they systematically refer to history, they believe force has played two roles. The first one is the revolutionist or progressive force, which aims to free the people from foreign control and the control of means of production. The second one is the reactionary force, which aims to control the means of production and colonize people. Moreover, regarding the target, there are again two types of forces. The first is an internal force that aims to solve the conflict between the process force and production relations, and the second is the external force, which targets the people and nations. When the internal force destroys the obstacles in front of the development of production, it might be revolutionary or progressive.<sup>358</sup> However, external force, most generally, is a tool in the hands of the colonizer. There is a correlation between the external-internal force and reactionary-progressive force. If the level of reactionary force is high, the revolutionary force is also high.

In the PKKs perception of the history, all organizations based on force vanished by another force. For the PKK, colonizers’ forces do not seem to disappear in the air. Kurdistan’s reality creates a right, creative, and revolutionary force. For the Kurdish political movement, the „Kurdistan revolution” is a revolution of a country where the national pressure never decreases; in fact, it systematically increases. Ending the suppression by the colonizer country is the first step to solving the following problems. This is why the Kurdistan revolution, which they define as the national democratic revolution, aims to destroy the agents and spies of the Turkish colonizers. To build an independent

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<sup>358</sup> Ocalan, *Kürdistan*, 122—129.

Kurdistan, they take out every kind of colonization, cultural, political, economic, and national. For the PKK to build a democratic Kurdistan requires a party, an army, and people.<sup>359</sup>

It is a well-known fact that each social and political movement seeks support from society. According to PKK's primary sources, the main sources of the Kurdistan revolution are villagers and the "proletariat". By classifying primary and secondary forces related to the regional and international levels, Ocalan claims that intellectuals and the youth come first, while the small bourgeoisie is second.<sup>360</sup> Villages are also the primary source of the Kurdish nation and movement. One cannot think about one without mentioning the other. The denial of the urban class puts the Kurdish reality in the villagers' perspective. Villagers live in the darkness of the Middle Ages, but with national salvation, they will be free from pressure and brutality. It is crucial here that villagers cannot build an independent ideological entity; it must be linked to the proletariat.<sup>361</sup>

For the Ocalan ideology three circles should make the secondary alliance: the revolutionary forces in other parts of Kurdistan, the democratic forces of colonizer and socialist countries, and the geographies where the movements succeed the revolution.<sup>362</sup> Looking at the secondary alliance gives us a chance to interpret the policy of the PKK attitude towards the Middle East and the world. For them, the Middle East map driven by imperialism, colonialism, and feudalism stays on three pillars: Zionism, Kemalism, and sectarianism.<sup>363</sup> In the Ocalan interpretation, the reason behind the slow struggle against imperialism is the strength of the ideology of the nation-state encouraged by the USA in the region. Even though the PKK is known as a local attempt, its practice and ideology put the "Kurdish problem" in a local and global framework. Ocalan wrote: "PKK Kurdistan is the Gordian of the Middle East". He argues that the Kurdistan revolution might end the control of the oppressors in the Middle East and eventually will help defeat imperialism. For him, Kurdistan "is the Vietnam of the Middle East, and the way war in Vietnam changed the environment in Chile and India, the success of the Kurdish revolution will have a similar impact on the Middle East".<sup>364</sup>

It should be underlined that the Kurdish political movement, the PKK, was not the only group that resisted the power structure and the regime in Turkey; however, some of the

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<sup>359</sup> Ocalan, *Kürdistan*, 129.

<sup>360</sup> Ocalan, *Kürdistan*, 122—125.

<sup>361</sup> Ocalan, *Kürdistan*, 122—125.

<sup>362</sup> Ocalan, *Kürdistan*, 122—125.

<sup>363</sup> Ocalan, *Kürdistan*, 122—125.

<sup>364</sup> Ocalan, *Kürdistan*, 122—129.

groups had a close link to the PKK. For instance, after the coup in 1980, the Turkish communist party and the PKK announced a joint declaration. In the declaration, they claimed Turkey and Kurdistan revolutionary movements reached another stage after the coup in 1980. For them, the period after the coup made it necessary to criticize and revisit the bureaucracy and the movement's history and develop a new policy to adjust to the new environment.<sup>365</sup> One of the main questions they discussed was whether they should follow a revolutionary resistance, including violence, or accept the rules of fascist dictatorship, which meant being less Kurdish.

Like the PKK, the answer of the Turkish Communist Party was radical. Turkish Communist Party leader Ibrahim Seven, and the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, after their meeting, announced that the unity of resistance and democratic parties and organization was crucial to achieving the socialist revolution. For them, the unity of different parties and organizations was not a program but a step in the way of a revolution.<sup>366</sup> In the announcement, they claimed there was no housekeeper or guest, and the door was open to everyone who fought against the fascist dictatorship.<sup>367</sup> The main argument of the joint declaration was that the coup in 1980 aimed to strengthen imperialism in the Middle East and smash Kurdish and democratic revolutionary movements, making the poor pay the price for the economic crisis.<sup>368</sup> As a result of the struggle, they wrote: „We have not reached democracy yet, but small holes open in the darkness, and in time, these holes will be bigger and bigger”.<sup>369</sup> They claim that even before the words like Kurd, Kurdistan, and Kurdish were forbidden to use after the coup, these words had started to appear in journals and newspapers.

As mentioned before, the Kurdish movement was always linked to the idea of the “Turkish revolution” and the “Kurdish revolution”. To achieve both, they claimed in the declaration that there was a need to combine different struggles against fascism to focus on power.<sup>370</sup> In the notes of the second PKK Congress, it is written that especially after September 12, 1980, the main conflict would be between revolutionaries and contra-revolutionaries, and Kurdistan was one of the new centers of resistance.<sup>371</sup> For them, since Kurds were to face poverty and assimilation rather than vanishing, there were no options but

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<sup>365</sup> Devrimci Birlik Belgeleri, *Call Number IISG Bro 3184/3*, (1989), 3.

<sup>366</sup> Devrimci Birlik Belgeleri, 4.

<sup>367</sup> Devrimci Birlik Belgeleri, 4.

<sup>368</sup> Devrimci Birlik Belgeleri, 7.

<sup>369</sup> Devrimci Birlik Belgeleri, 8.

<sup>370</sup> Devrimci Birlik Belgeleri, 8.

<sup>371</sup> Devrimci Birlik Belgeleri, 10.

resistance, which included armed struggle.<sup>372</sup> According to the declaration, the coup did not just put people under cruelty; it forced them to rethink the meaning of revolution and its importance of it.<sup>373</sup> As they always referred to history, they claimed that Anatolia and Mesopotamia had been the center of civilizations and a mosaic of different peoples from the beginning of history. Despite the Ottoman despotism, Kemalism and coup d'état could not destroy the mosaic and build Turkishness.<sup>374</sup> For them, history changes through the dichotomy to surrender or resist, determining destiny as social development.<sup>375</sup>

What is significant here is that even though the PKK defined itself as the leader of the Kurdish society and gave importance, particularly to guerrilla warfare, it did not ignore the necessity of wider societal support for imagined freedom. In this chapter which also will deal with the presentation of violence in newspapers, I will show how death and violence have been a source of recruitment due to societal anger. Furthermore, I will specify that after the first attack on the Turkish army, the aim of the PKK became the intensive socialization of the party's ideology.

#### **4.7 The First Bullet and Collective Memory**

Shortly after the coup d'état in 1980, Kurdish elites, who founded the PKK, started to debate the ways to fight back against the militarist regime in Turkey. In 1982, PKK's second party congress decided to start an insurgency, and the first significant attack of the PKK took place in August 1984 in Eruh. As mentioned earlier, the PKK prepared and went through different stages, such as ideological, theoretical, and practical. The attack in 1984 was the last phase of them. On 15 August, one soldier and three civilians died, and eight soldiers were injured. At first, the government did not take the attack seriously, and it did not come to the media's attention. The first news about the attack was seen three days after it in a daily newspaper.<sup>376</sup> One month later, the PKK attacked two police officers again in Hakkari. These two attacks were the breaking point of the armed conflict between the PKK and the state. Between 1984 and 1991, deaths reached more than seventeen thousand. Consequently, the militarist control over the east and southeast of Turkey was intensified.

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<sup>372</sup> Çalışma Raporu; 1984, PKK II. Kongresine Sunulan PKK-MK, Call Number IISG 1983/2942, 9.

<sup>373</sup> Çalışma Raporu, 11.

<sup>374</sup> Çalışma Raporu, 11.

<sup>375</sup> Çalışma Raporu, 12.

<sup>376</sup> *Milliyet*, May 16, 1985.

Mahsum Korkmaz, in his report in 1984, wrote:

“After our recon, we found targeted institutions and places were close to each other around a small unit of Turkish soldiers. The only way to propagate and raise public awareness was to take over the troops in the region. The first target was the soldier, and the second one was the lodging building of soldiers, and then we distributed leaflets and hung banners. Lastly, we aimed to make a public speech via the mosque's loudspeaker. We were 30 people. Everything worked as planned.”<sup>377</sup>

This attack was the first bullet of “revolution”, yet more importantly, it created trauma for the state. To illustrate such trauma, it is crucial to look at the acts of the state after the attack. The leader of the group who organized the attack was Mahsum Korkmaz, known by the name Agit. After the attack, the name Agit was forbidden until 2011.<sup>378</sup> For years, no one could use the name or give it to their children. The attack showed the real weakness of the state. Despite the belief that the Turkish state was powerful and unbreakable, it turned out that an inexpertly trained group of people could damage the power. For the PKK, on the other hand, 1984 was a day to remember, and they built a cult of the heroic leadership of Mahsum Korkmaz or Agit.

#### 4.8 Concluding Remarks

Analyzing the Kurdish ideas, we can see that from the Kurdish point of view the transition from an empire to a nation-state has changed the territorial-based self-defense to an ethnic-oriented defense mechanism. All this considered, the vertically societal and political life, and the hegemony of pro-conflict cleavages excommunicated any reactions from those who hesitated to be true believers of the Turkish collective greatness. As a result of the paranoid age, the Turkish state has ignored the fact that each society has a self-defensive character against one another. The failure of the state to recognize the needs of the Kurdish community has made the state reformulate the structure of politics and society.

The mobilization of the Kurdish movement during the 1950s and 1970s was systematically interrupted by the dominant classes and activists under the roof of the Turkish left. Within the climate of post-empire stress, which produced conflict among

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<sup>377</sup> Mahsum Korkmaz, *Komutan Agit'in Günlüğünden* (Köln: Mezopotamya Yayınları, 1997), 55.

<sup>378</sup> “Tanıkların Anlatımıyla Eruh Baskını,” Yüksekova Haber, *Politika*, August 16, 2015, accessed March 12, 2019, <http://www.politikagazetesi.org/?q=content/tan%C4%B1klar%C4%B1n-anlat%C4%B1m%C4%B1-ile-eruh-bask%C4%B1n%C4%B1>.

cleavages, the formation of the PKK became the most significant threat to the pro-conflict cleavages. The modernization started in the late empire and was strengthened by Ataturk's top-to-bottom revolution, which came to exist in the form of a less diverse society built on Turkish supremacy. The fear and the anxiety that they might lose power and the remaining territory generated a level of ignorance and denial toward its biggest minority, the Kurds. Like any other creatures whose identity, culture, and territorial control were threatened and destroyed by another society, the Kurds fell into a reactionary-revolutionary cycle. In contrast to the mainstream beliefs, I would claim that the formation of the PKK and the radicalization of the movement were the result of the collapse of the sense of self-defense in the Kurdish population. Hence, while the PKK represented the end of sui-protection, the Rojava revolution and the "democratic confederalism", as I will discuss, became the symbols of the reconstruction of the sense of self-defense of the Kurdish community.

The third transcription in our narratives represents the period of interpretation and the re-interpretation of the challenge both in the historical writing of the Kurdish movement and the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. Compared to the first two shifts in which the Kurds were in a more passive position, starting from the 1960s through their years of higher education, the impact of Marxist-Leninist ideology and mobilization under the roof of the Turkish left, the Kurds in Turkey started a new phase in which they were more active and more "dangerous" to the Republic.

Unlike their ancestors, the young Kurds in the second half of the twentieth century were more educated, mobilized, and politicized. The 60s and 70s witnessed dramatic changes in political movements and policymaking, signifying a breaking point from the traditional politics we knew. Similarly, for the Kurds, this period was the phase in which, in their quest for independence, they took up armed guerrilla tactics through the formation of the PKK, a group that came to embody the Kurdish aspect of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict.

Directly shaped by the first and the second transcriptions, this phase is not simply a period of mobilization and radicalization; it is also an expression of the collapse of the self-defense mechanism. Based on my understanding, I would argue that the formation of the PKK in this transcription was not because of the Kurdish conflict; rather, it marked the "end" or dissolution of the sense of the societal self-defense mechanism of the Kurds.



**PART V**  
**DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM**

**Chapter 1**  
**The Idea of Radical Democracy**

Although the Turkish state, as I stated earlier, has been insisting on solving the problem with more army and oppression, many think that more democracy could be a solution to the Turkish-Kurdish anomaly. Nevertheless, people who claim „more democracy” fail to explain how much more democracy and what kind of democracy is needed to reach an agreement between the state and the Kurds. Most of the existing literature on the Kurdish conflict claims the only way to end the dispute is more democracy; however, they neglect specific relevant questions: “What type of democracy?” “How much democracy?” and most importantly, “What would be the PKK’s place in the given democracy?” The new Kurdish arguments says, however, that the reason behind such a neglect is the belief that the nation-state is the only possible form of governance, and a wave of peace would be reached if the Kurds accepted the Turkish state as the main power. In contrast to these widely accepted theories, the Kurdish ideas frequently cite Murray Bookchin’s philosophy and its implications, and recently also on the Kurdish experience in Rojava, the democratic way of life that instead of repetition in the same framework, showed that there is a way for re-writing the history.

Unlike traditional Marxist theory, which puts class politics at its core, the current idea of the Kurdish theoretical framework is radical democracy focusing particularly on identity politics. As a socialist strategy, radical democracy stands on two fundamental pillars: the critics of the revolutionary subject in Marxism and radical democracy.<sup>379</sup> Contrary to the mainstream interpretation of democracy, radical democracy has been affiliated with non-traditional and radical movements. This theory says: since we cannot explain the new demands of the new social movements from a universal approach theory, we should widen the spectrum and redefine the subject category.<sup>380</sup> Based on the continual reflections and criticism on freedom, equality, and liberty, radical democracy seems to be centered on extending these aspects of democracy in terms of depth and length. It is argued

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<sup>379</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mauffe, *Hegemonya ve Sosyalist Strateji*, trans. A. Kardan, Ş. Dönmez (Istanbul: Birikim Yayınları, 1992), 7—11.

<sup>380</sup> Laclau and Mauffe, *Hegemonya*, 10.

that radical democracy has three approaches: deliberative, agnostic, and autonomist, regarding the difference in criticism and reaction to the traditional idea of democracy.<sup>381</sup>

The deliberative approach is mostly affiliated to well-known theories. It is led by Habermas, who claims that to solve the chaos of a political problem within a system, people should come together and build consensus through deliberation, and much deliberation comes to exist through institutions.<sup>382</sup> Laclau and Mouffe (1985) in their book articulated that the social movement that aims to create social and political change in given circumstances needs a systematic and broader strategy to fight against the neoliberal and neoconservative definitions of democracy regarding its core elements – freedom, equality, and liberty – to build a more inclusive system.<sup>383</sup> They articulated that both liberal and deliberative systems of democracy are built upon the oppression of people in terms of race, gender, and class to achieve a consensus.<sup>384</sup> In contrast with the rational individuals-centered deliberative stand and agnostic approach, the autonomists put community and commonality at the core of radical democracy. With this standing, the autonomist approach seemed to put the plurality of people in a broad social sense, contrary to the traditional Marxist approach, based on the working class.<sup>385</sup>

The ideological transformation of the Kurdish movement from a traditional Marxist-Leninist to radical democracy, and democratic confederalism, was based on the realization of the failures of the liberal democracy and the criticism of the nation-state. Ocalan argued that the class-based society and capitalist modernity damaged and later destroyed the Kurds, eventually making the PKK the last representative of such destruction.<sup>386</sup> In this sense, radical democracy, both as self-criticism and a new agenda for Ocalan, depended on three pillars: a democratic republic, democratic autonomy, and democratic confederalism that represented the reinterpretation of the Kurdish movement's aims and means.<sup>387</sup> The Ocalan idea emphasizes that unlike the nation-state that worked from top to bottom, with the formation of KCK, the Association of Communities in Kurdistan, and Koma Civaken Kurdistan, the Kurdish movement aimed to build a way of governance from bottom to

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<sup>381</sup> Lincoln Dahlberg and Eugenia Siapera, "Introduction: Tracing Radical Democracy and the Internet," in *Radical Democracy and the Internet* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2007), 1–16.

<sup>382</sup> Kevin Olson, "Deliberative Democracy," in *Jürgen Habermas: Key Concepts* (Slough: Acumen Publishing, 2011), 140.

<sup>383</sup> Dahlberg and Siapera, "Introduction," 2.

<sup>384</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 17–20.

<sup>385</sup> Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (London: Routledge 2008), 48.

<sup>386</sup> Ahmed Hamdi Akkaya and Joost Jongerden, "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 14, no. 14, (2012), <http://dx.doi.org/10.4000/ejts.4615>.

<sup>387</sup> Akkaya and Jongerden, "Reassembling," 5–6.

top.<sup>388</sup> As defined in the PKK's document, KCK is a movement that seeks to build its democratic order, despite the nation-state type structures.<sup>389</sup>

It is vital to underline that with the implementation of radical democracy and democratic confederalism, the Kurdish movement did not seek acceptance and legitimacy from the state; on the contrary, it depended on human free will. As a complex reinterpretation of radical democracy, what the Kurds achieved was that they turned or tried to turn the theory into practice, especially in the Rojava revolution, although in a particular and extreme circumstances.

The formation of the idea of radical democracy, the last transcription of the history writing of the Kurdish movement, may represent as the re-building of the self-defense of the Kurdish society in these theories. In this stage, the dynamics of the Kurdish movement have been shaped by the PKK's long-lasting armed struggle and Marxist leftist ideology. It refers to a dramatic alteration regarding the movement's main goal from the foundation of Kurdistan to the stateless democracy. The purpose of this part is to argue that the division of Kurdistan and the assimilation they have faced, as formed within the post-WWI democratic confederalism, were also born within another conflict, the Syrian civil war.

### **1.1 Syrian Kurds: A Brief History of Subordination**

Unlike in the 80s and 90s, the Syrian Kurds became a more ideological and mobilized entity in Syria and in the Kurdish movement. What is known as the Arab Spring, which started in Tunisia with its demonstrative effect, reached Syria. After a Friday prayer, a group of protesters in the city of Deraa walked against corruption and unemployment in 2011. Weeks later, the small protest and the government's pressure caused an armed conflict which led to a modern Muslim civil war. In this war, the pro and anti-government forces and regional and international powers played a significant role besides the Islamic state and a new version of Kurdish politics in Syria.

Like the Kurds in Turkey, the Syrian Kurds have also experienced a severe pattern of assimilation and the state's pressure for decades. Western Kurdistan, Rojava, or in its literal meaning, "where the sun sets," during the civil war became a symbol of Kurdish collective identity as a part of greater Kurdistan, which includes Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.

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<sup>388</sup> Akkaya and Jongerden, "Reassembling," 5—6.

<sup>389</sup> PKK, *Partiya Karkeran Kurdistan PKK Yenidedn İnşa Kongre Belgeleri*, (Istanbul: Çetin Yayinlari, 2005), 175.

Accepted as the home of Arab nationalism, Syria, shortly after the French mandate, systematically aimed to Arabize the Kurds within its border. The Kurds in Syria did not have any civil liberty regarding ethnic, political, and economic statuses.<sup>390</sup> The history of denial and oppression had created a wave of anger, which led to the Kurdish protest in Qamişlo in 2004. The Syrian government smashed the protest, killing 30 protesters, then prohibited any cultural festival and symbolic days of the Kurdish society in the region.<sup>391</sup>

As history repeatedly proved, when the people's symbolic, cultural, and identical needs are not satisfied, they tend to not only protest but also mobilize and become more politicized. For example, the most prominent Syrian Kurd' party, Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat, Democratic Union Party, PYD, was established in 2004. The PYD has been regarded as the sister of the PKK in terms of its ideology both by the PKK and the PYD itself.<sup>392</sup> The role of the PKK in the mobilization and radicalization of the Syrian Kurds also caused the Syrian government to consider the PYD as a “potential enemy”.

## 1.2 Democratic Confederalism and the Bookchin Effect

The PKK, founded initially on the Marxist-Leninist ideology, aimed to free Kurdistan for almost three decades. The rise of the national salvation movements, the impact of 68 generations, and the hegemony of the Turkish left among activists in Turkey altogether pushed the Kurds to the Marxist-Leninist mindset. Initially, the movement aimed to free Kurdistan and the Kurds from a “colonizer state”, like the revolutionary acts in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. In the twentieth century, these acts of mobilization of the oppressed made their dream to have their state against another hegemonic state. The Kurdish movement believed freedom was in the nation-state's-controlled world order and the only way to participate and achieve liberation was to have another state. However, the question of whether building a nation-state would be enough to end the economy-based inequalities and provide freedom and gender equality to the people remained unsolved.

It seems that for the leftist, salvation movements, and the PKK, the state was the first aim, and the problem of democracy, economy, and equality was something that should be postponed till independence or revolution. However, the belief that having their state and

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<sup>390</sup> Harriet Allsopp and Wladimir van Wilgenburg, *The Kurds of Northern Syrian: Governance, Diversity and Conflict* (London, 2019), 59—64.

<sup>391</sup>“Syria Report,” Human Rights Watch, accessed May 2 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2009/country-chapters/syria>

<sup>392</sup> Allsopp and Wilgenburg, *The Kurds of the North*, 89—90.

ending the rule of the Turkish state would solve all the inequalities in society – distracted them from paying attention to the state-centered issues. Understandably, such an approach was not only the result of wish for an independent Kurdistan but also one of the outcomes of the Marxist ideology and the hegemony of the nation-state by being the policymakers at local and global levels. Theories are based on the premise that after Westphalia and specifically after WWI, the central entity of global politics was formed by nation-states. Only the power formed in a unified nation with defined borders had the right to take place in the UN, IMF, and the EU. Even though the such historical formation of politics is still the mainstream way of politics, after the end of the Cold War, the extension of the EU and the rise of neoliberal economic policies demonstrated that human beings do not only seek independence, but they are also subject to the state-originated dilemmas in everyday life and politics.

In the 1990s and 2000s, however, we witnessed an outburst of grassroots movements across the globe, and unlike the movements in the twentieth century, these movements have not only fought for independence but have also demanded transparency, ecology, and human rights. Such realization shifted the Kurdish approach to the political system from an independence and class-based angle to identity-based politics for the Kurds and the whole society. Shaped directly by local and global changes, the Kurdish movement had a massive transition from a Marxist ideology-based Kurdistan to democratic confederalism focused on the state and its problems. After his imprisonment in 1999, in 2004, Abdullah Ocalan built a theory based on the work of Foucault, Bookchin, and Gotham, and he proposed a new theoretical and practical roadmap named democratic confederalism.

From the ideas mentioned above, Murray Bookchin's theory had a unique place regarding democratic confederalism, which came into practice in Rojava during the Syrian civil war.

### **1.3 Meeting with Bookchin**

The Kurdish mobilization and fight against the radical Islamic group called ISIS, not only the Kurds but also Murray Bookchin, became a matter of discussion in newspapers and a subject of TV shows. Beforehand, however, the American philosopher and historian were one of the scholars whose ideas stuck into an exceedingly small intellectual circle. Even though Bookchin wrote twenty-four books and hundreds of articles, his anarchist

interpretation of politics and society has stuck among liberal and anarchist readers and researchers. The reasons for the lack of fame might change from person to person, but I would argue in his case that there could be two main reasons for it: activism and capitalism. Bookchin wrote to Ocalan in his letter: “I have been active in the American left since the 70s”.<sup>393</sup> His activism showed him as an activist, not a philosopher, and the capitalist-hierarchical academia kept its distance from anarchism. Such an attitude placed Bookchin in a small exclusive circle of activists and radical revolutionaries. His harsh critiques of capitalist-designed politics and society made his ideas strange and divergent from the mainstream intellectual world.

Shortly after his imprisonment, Ocalan started to read Bookchin’s work and interpreted the idea of social ecology in the context of the Kurdish movement. Later, in 2004, Ocalan sent a letter to Bookchin where he specifically expressed how he evaluated the women's movement. The mediatory of his letter wrote: “Ocalan believes the women’s movement in the twentieth century is the most important revolutionary development”.<sup>394</sup> Bookchin evaluated the Kurdish movement as a women's movement from the 1980s and asked if Bookchin’s wife would be interested in the discussion on the Kurdish women’s movement, at least in principles.<sup>395</sup> In his response, Bookchin stressed the American ignorance of Kurds, and he answered: “Like most Americans, I know too little about the PKK and Ocalan... because of narrow-minded American media, we do not know much about the Kurds”.<sup>396</sup>

In his letter on May 5, 2004, Ocalan described himself as Bookchin’s student and wrote: “My favorite authors are you and Immanuel Wallenstein”.<sup>397</sup> In the same letter, he stated that he had been working on Bookchin’s ideas and was trying to introduce the idea of eco-democracy to the Middle East.

Before illustrating the idea of democratic confederalism, it is pertinent to give an overview of Bookchin’s theories and how they influenced Abdullah Ocalan and the Kurdish movement. Although it is hardly possible to give a detailed analysis of Murray Bookchin’s works in this research, we can fundamentally outline his ideas to reach a framework where we can elaborate on the theory of democratic confederalism. Based on such methodological

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<sup>393</sup> “Ocalan ile Unlü Yazar Murray Bookchin Arasındaki Yazışmalar,” Demokrathaber, February 15, 2016, accessed June 10 2021, <https://www.demokrathaber.org/guncel/ocalan-ile-unlu-yazar-murray-bookchin-arasindaki-yazismalar-h62488.html>.

<sup>394</sup> “Ocalan ile Unlü Yazar Murray Bookchin Arasındaki Yazışmalar.”

<sup>395</sup> “Ocalan ile Unlü Yazar Murray Bookchin Arasındaki Yazışmalar.”

<sup>396</sup> “Ocalan ile Unlü Yazar Murray Bookchin Arasındaki Yazışmalar.”

<sup>397</sup> “Ocalan ile Unlü Yazar Murray Bookchin Arasındaki Yazışmalar.”

necessity, in the following paragraphs, I will present Bookchin's ideas which Ocalan directly or indirectly implemented in constructing the idea of democratic confederalism.

For even an amateur Bookchin reader, it would not be challenging to realize that the capitalist world, its politics, social relations, economy, and the issues that arise from them have been the keys of Bookchin's philosophy. What he sees as the problem for him is not only a base in which we might understand the nature of the problem but is also the area where we might find the solution. In this sense, without realizing the capitalist order, people eager to offer solutions to contemporary human beings mostly end up with a cliché: "more neoliberalism, and there is no alternative".<sup>398</sup> Even though Marxism was the most comprehensive methodological guide to address capitalism, he thought it failed to diagnose those modern ecological and civic forces that lead humanity toward a "revolutionary social change".<sup>399</sup> Bookchin argues that communalism does not necessarily carry the historical legacy of Marxism, but it refers to the possibility to "recover and advance the development of the city in a form that accords with its greatest potentialities and historical traditions".<sup>400</sup> Though the notion of a city might drive our attention to the modern city, for him, the city is a carrier/agent of the bourgeois nation-state and cannot be understood as the city in his idea of communalism. Unlike capitalist cities, which shape the local authorities and capitalist relations, communalism seeks to reconstruct democratic local assemblies at the level of neighbors and even the middle class.<sup>401</sup>

As a straightforward philosophical approach, communalism does not only rely on the idea of participation and face-to-face democracy. It also refers to the economic relation built upon social ecology. From the economic point of view, he argues that communalism does not seek to nationalize the economy or end the private sector but aims to municipalize it. In this context, the means of production should refer to the societal needs decided by the local assemblies to fill the citizens' "desires and needs".<sup>402</sup>

For Bookchin the municipalization of the economy indicates a direct link between life and work and suggests that even though individuals attend the assemblies to decide on their economic interests, they should not be there as workers but as citizens to reach for the common good.<sup>403</sup> Such an interlinked way of life would create a transformative social

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<sup>398</sup> Murray Bookchin, *The Next Revolution and the Promises of Direct Democracy: Essays by Murray Bookchin* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), 10.

<sup>399</sup> Bookchin, *The Next*, 22.

<sup>400</sup> Bookchin, *The Next*, 27.

<sup>401</sup> Bookchin, *The Next*, 27.

<sup>402</sup> Bookchin, *The Next*, 28.

<sup>403</sup> Bookchin, *The Next*, 29.

effect, “save the realm of public action and discourse and reduce it to the meaningless engagements”.<sup>404</sup> Even though Bookchin sees massive potential in human beings in terms of intelligence, he is still concerned about whether humans are rational enough to create communalism.<sup>405</sup> He defines it as “a fluid and ever-developing kind of social metabolism in which the identity of an ecological society is preserved through its differences and under its potential for ever-greater differentiation”.<sup>406</sup>

For Bookchin, being criticized as “utopian” reflects the idea that “we live in a complex society and world, and to advance society and solve the problems, we need to focus on how to eliminate the systemic problems”.<sup>407</sup> According to his ideas, the opportunity to enrich self-sustainability increases an individual’s sense of “selfhood and competence” because, in life designed by capitalism, the many bureaucratic hierarchies reduce the chance for individuals to live in an ecological way of life.<sup>408</sup> In this sense, the confederalist approach makes a strict distinction between the execution of the policies and policymaking that work not from top to bottom but from bottom to top. Unlike policymaking, which is the practice of the community, assemblies hold the practice of face-to-face democracy. The execution of the policies is the responsibility of councils formed by villages, towns, and cities to transmit to the confederates.<sup>409</sup> What is important here is that a confederalism is a form of social organization based on the idea that local production should control the economy. It might be stressed that the idea of a confederated economy reduces the control of central power over local life and creates an environment where individuals fulfill their needs and goals.<sup>410</sup>

In Bookchin’s approach, communalism and confederalism are not just a form of governance but a way of social, political, and economic relations. These also open an area for individuals to not be passive citizens in centralized capitalist societies but active individuals who directly take roles in their life. In his formulation, confederalism includes dialectical development, consciously formed independence, and participant democracy. Unlike writers who suggest that the world has seen the victory of capitalism, Bookchin believes that, by the approach mentioned above, it is possible to write an eco-social history instead of declaring its end.

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<sup>404</sup>Bookchin, *The Next*, 35.

<sup>405</sup> Bookchin, *The Next*, 36.

<sup>406</sup> Bookchin, *The Next*, 71.

<sup>407</sup> Bookchin, *The Next*, 65.

<sup>408</sup> Bookchin, *The Next*, 67.

<sup>409</sup> Bookchin, *The Next*, 69.

<sup>410</sup> Bookchin, *The Next*, 71.



In Bookchin's evaluation, communal, direct democracy also includes the idea of social ecology. For him, modernity can break the dialectic relationship between nature and humans and between humans, which is also an indication that it can build social ecology and fix these broken relations.<sup>411</sup> It can be said that the organizational tools of technology that have been used to deconstruct might be used to reconstruct the fundamental relationship between humans and nature.<sup>412</sup> In this context, social ecology is not understood only as a plan for the future but also as a scientific discipline. For Bookchin, ecology, which Ernst Haeckel first used to define the interaction and interrelationship between plants, animals, and humans, indicates not only nature and humans but also cities, industries, and the environment. This idea caused a reductionist and holistic evaluation.<sup>413</sup> It says that there is a clear distinction between environment and ecology. The former indicates the system of nature-human formulation, while the latter puts society at the center of the formulation. The importance of such differentiation lies in the idea that ecology is not just a definition but also a balm that heals the split between nature and humans.<sup>414</sup>

Even though social ecology and communal life seem to be distinct terms, according to Bookchin, they form a system that links them into a reconstructed way of life. The ecology/ecosystem based on a food chain rather than a pyramid creates a network that helps to reduce centralized bureaucracy and connect local economies. Bookchin claims that the long human history has been one-sided evolution, and even though we developed the technology, we mostly destroyed it. Furthermore, that is why in our time, human beings should open a new all-sided ecology to reconstruct the relationship between humans, society, and nature.<sup>415</sup>

These briefly outlined ideas causally relate to the Kurdish movements' experiment in Rojava, whose main drives were communalism, confederalism, and social ecology. They also show that Bookchin does not separate his perception of different faculties of human life and politics; he links them to each other. What is important here is that, unlike Marx, who specifically focused on the power of the means of production, Bookchin puts ecology and societal needs at the center of his philosophy. Such concentration on the harmony of economy, ecology, and governance may give us a chance to understand the Rojava

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<sup>411</sup>Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto: Chesire Books, 1982), 19.

<sup>412</sup> Bookchin, *The Ecology*, 19.

<sup>413</sup> Bookchin, *The Ecology*, 20.

<sup>414</sup> Bookchin, *The Ecology*, 21.

<sup>415</sup> Bookchin, *The Ecology*, 34.

experiment, and beyond that, it may offer a unique set of tools to discuss the possibility of solving the Kurdish conflict.

#### **1.4 Concluding Remarks**

The theory of democratic confederalism was put into practice in northern Syria within the vacuum created by the withdrawal of Assad's government. The absence of the state's authority in the region and the rise of the Islamic State turned into an opportunity to practice radical democracy through democratic confederalism.

Unlike the traditional Marxist approach that reads politics from a class-based angle, radical democracy re-interprets it and puts identity at the center of such reading. The PKK, which was initially founded on the Marxist-Leninist theory, aimed to build a free Kurdistan; however, with the realization that Kurds are not the only ethnic, linguistic, and religious group living in Kurdistan arose the need to find a broader umbrella that can cover the whole society. In this context, the new umbrella, democratic confederalism, is not considered a free Kurdistan but a system that is an alternative to the nation-state. In the following chapter, I will discuss the essence of the idea of this alternative, its theory and practice, and set a projector regarding its future.

## Chapter 2

### The Idea of Democratic Confederalism

History, both as an academic field and memory, has been apprehended as a tool for understanding and making predictions about a given society's present and future; at least, it is in public opinion. Although contemporary history readers would generally accept such a mainstream approach, and yet it has a fundamental fallacy. It does not present alternatives; it rather constructs and reconstructs the history of ideas, systems, and sometimes also academic beliefs. Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a hidden trend within the several disciplines of social science that the nation-state and Western type of democracy are the most suitable ways of life and politics for humans. For decades, most of the fields have proposed how to strengthen democracy, how to expand human rights, and how to support the people against authorities. It seems that social scientists have been taking for granted democracy and nation-state as the ultimate shape of “perfection”. Although we have problems regarding human rights and civil liberties, it is because some countries still have a way of reaching the “perfection” that modern liberal democracy promises us.

#### 2.1 What Is Democratic Confederalism?

The theory of democratic confederalism, debated among different movements and academics, is defined by Ocalan as “a non-state political administration or a democracy without a state”.<sup>416</sup> From a historical point of view, in Ocalan’s approach, society has been exploited for centuries and ripped off its essence based on coming together and sharing joint ambitions about life.<sup>417</sup> Both the state and society are historical concepts for him. The first one is relatively new, around five hundred years, while democracy is as old as society. In such an argument, it might be said that Ocalan believes that society, in its nature, is a democratic structure by its ability to organize different faculties of human society.<sup>418</sup>

In this theory the relationship between society and the state is built upon a state's connection to its types of modernity (capitalist and democratic). Capitalist modernity is the process and the result of capitalism, which puts the nation-state at its center, while

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<sup>416</sup>Abdullah Ocalan, *Democratic Confederalism* (London: Transmedia Publishing Ltd, 2011), 21.

<sup>417</sup>Ocalan, *The Political Thought*, 9—10.

<sup>418</sup>Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum Manifestosu*, Abdullah Ocalan Sosyal Bilimler Akademisi, unpublished (2001), 9.

democratic modernity holds society at its core. The key features of capitalism are nation-states, profits, and conflicts, for Ocalan; however, democratic modernity deals with and is based on democratic society, democratic confederalism, and eco-society.<sup>419</sup> In his view, there is an apparent conflict and opposed standing between these two types, and democratic modernity is proposed as an alternative to the capitalist type of modernity which exploits the population and strengthens the power.<sup>420</sup> The hierarchy between power and people and among class-based institutions is the reason not to call democracy, as he calls it, a „characteristic component of the state.”<sup>421</sup>

This theory obviously follows leftist ideas and shows anarchistic and utopian elements, as well. It has significantly influenced, however, an existing system in Rojava, which is a highly tolerant and progressive economic, social, political, and cultural formation. It is particularly interesting when we take into account that this formation's most influential theoretical founder is precisely Ocalan, whose influence is being associated chiefly with Kurdish political violence.

Some of the main features of democratic confederalism and modernity for Ocalan are reflected in methodology and objectives that offer a new approach about how to deal with state-caused problems such as capitalism, patriarchy, and defense. While capitalist modernity sees and seeks to strengthen the control of the state, democratic modernity, on the contrary, is universal, progressive, and plural, causally related to feminism and ecology. Furthermore, the former relies on the static control of the nation-state, while the latter is flexible. This feature can offer an opportunity for different linguistic, cultural, and ethnic groups to coexist in harmony.<sup>422</sup> Such interpretation arises from Ocalan's books that claim that since the Kurds are not the only people who live in Kurdistan, democratic confederalism is the only way to enhance diversity and build consensus.

Throughout history, what he calls an institutionalized class system has turned into a nation-state, which has used military might, ideologies, and political structures to dominate societies. It seems that for him, one might replace the state with power by considering that the state itself never changes, but its “masks” do.<sup>423</sup> Ocalan argues that the state is principally an institution against society and democracy. Moreover, from an anarchist point of view, from the justice system to politics and from faith to beliefs, everything has been

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<sup>419</sup> Ocalan, *The Political*, 9—10.

<sup>420</sup> Ocalan, *The Political*, 9—10.

<sup>421</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik*, 14—15.

<sup>422</sup> Ocalan, *The Political*, 21—22.

<sup>423</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum Manifestosu*, 35.

used as a tool to strengthen the control of the power over society, and such habits have made the latest version of power, the nation-state, nothing but “the mass organization of power.”<sup>424</sup> He sees a similarity between democracy and a naturally organized society, and the state, for thousands of years, has been working against it.

The main argument in Ocalan’s theory regarding the Kurds is that they have been struggling not only against the nation-states but also with feudalist structures in society. Since the nation-state and its way of politics and hegemony over the people are chains, having an independent Kurdistan would not change anything but replace it with another chain.<sup>425</sup> In his theory, the main difference between democratic confederalism and the state as a “traditional” structure is the way of administration and the consensus. It is argued that while a nation-state is based on hierarchies and refers to the administration, democratic confederalism relies on governing through consensus.<sup>426</sup> For him, unlike the nation-state, confederalism is more flexible, consensus-oriented, and based on ecology and feminism. It puts society at its core.<sup>427</sup>

For Ocalan, the desire for independent nation-states is, in fact, the call of the bourgeois rather than society, and without the struggle against capitalist modernity, a nation-state cannot be an option. For this reason, the focal point of democratic confederalism is to push back capitalist modernity, its carrier, the nation-state, and free the people.<sup>428</sup> The project for him is designed to free the Kurds and, considering the geopolitics of Kurdistan, freeing people might bring peace to the Middle East.<sup>429</sup> Unlike the nation-state based on homogenization, exploitation of women, and centralization of power, democratic confederalism refers to the opposite and is named democracy without a state.<sup>430</sup>

## 2.2 Ocalan’s Interpretation of Democracy

The ideological representative of the Kurdish movement, Ocalan, and his friends who founded the PKK focused more on an independent Kurdistan for decades rather than the political system that would be implemented in Kurdistan. However, at the beginning of the

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<sup>424</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik*, 13.

<sup>425</sup> Ocalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 19.

<sup>426</sup> Ocalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 21.

<sup>427</sup> Ocalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 21.

<sup>428</sup> Ocalan, *The Political Thought of Abdullah Ocalan: Kurdistan, Woman’s Revolution and Democratic Confederalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 39.

<sup>429</sup> Ocalan, *The Political Thought*, 39.

<sup>430</sup> Ocalan, *The Political Thought*, 41.

new millennium, the focus shifted to a system that might resolve the democratic order based on ecology, community, and grassroots political participation.

As it is well known, democracy as a political system mainly discusses in the literature human rights, elections, and the everyday life of the former people of the empires and the latest state-nations. Ocalan defines democracy: “We can say that democracy is society's ability to form its own life and administration, and to establish the institutions to maintain and develop its existence.”<sup>431</sup> In this society and the practical meaning of democracy, the history of society for Ocalan is itself the proof of democracy by its ability to organize and administrate different agents among people. For him, even the institutionalized ideological, political, and economic structure, known as the state itself, results from a democratic society. Beyond a simplistic way of being governed, for Ocalan, democracy results from constructed values-based societal inheritance. He criticizes the liberal and positivist stands by arguing that these approaches apply a methodology that accepts civilization at the beginning and ends up with an overlook of thousands of years of societal labor and democratic accumulation. In his theory, the legitimatization of these approaches by calling them scientific is ethnically and politically mistreated.<sup>432</sup>

Such methodology, which liberal and positivist approaches apply, fails to solve the problem between state and democracy or, in his term, “state and society.” Proffering a solution to the problem, he gives reference to the current Middle East, which he calls the “place of third world war.”<sup>433</sup> In his theory, societies have been living in conflicts for centuries in the Middle East, and with the intervention of external powers, the chaos has been strengthened alongside religious fundamentalism, nationalism, and state fascism in the region. Following the regional analysis, he suggests that the current European-based capitalist modernity is decisive by mostly analyzing religious fundamentalism but not giving enough attention to democratic modernity. He argues that what happens in the Middle East does not stay in the region but reaches the doors of European civilization. Moreover, for him, the biggest question is not only pointing to the fallacy of the system but, more fundamentally, finding an answer to the question of “what to do?”<sup>434</sup>

As mentioned above, according to Ocalan, democracy is as old as human society. It is its synonym. The crisis of the region and the world, in general, is an “illness,” and the treatment should be found “where it was lost,” which is Mesopotamia's natural society or

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<sup>431</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum Manifestosu*, 26.

<sup>432</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 18.

<sup>433</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 23.

<sup>434</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 18.

history.<sup>435</sup> He believes that the peace between the Middle East and the world is directly related, and without peace in the region, there will not be peace in other parts of the world.<sup>436</sup> By the great powers' intervention, he underlines that the war over the region has destabilized the harmony of humanity. Thus, to re-stabilize the harmony in the region, he offers "radical democracy" as the solution.<sup>437</sup> It seems that with radical democracy, the correlation between democracy and the state will change, and a more institutionalized democracy will create a less powerful state. With the formation of institutionalized democracy, he believes the "weakness and mask" of the state will be more apparent. By such an approach, radical democracy will be visible, and then democratic confederalism will be established.<sup>438</sup>

The question of what to do for him might be answered by analyzing capitalist modernity's historical and societal problems. Democratic confederalism is not just an administrative title or tool but also the reconstruction and reorganization of every aspect of daily life, from economy to gender relations and diplomacy to security. Ocalan conceptualizes it as a "unity of mentality."<sup>439</sup> In accordance with the literature on the nation-state, which argues that the nation-state aims to create a singularity among people in terms of language, identity, and market, Ocalan contends that the nation-state deploys sexism, religion, and scientism in its construction.<sup>440</sup> By creating a virtual reality as is played out in a democratic state, the nation and individuals become the servant of the powerful state. As a result of modernization and change in international politics, the shape of power, which is a nation-state for him, has not provided any solution to the problems of capitalism and a singularity-based way of life.<sup>441</sup>

Contrary to the nation-state, Ocalan asserts that the only solution is democratic confederalism, which is based on reorganizing and reconstructing each agent of societal and individual life by bringing universal and local cultures together.<sup>442</sup> What it seems from his work is that the system he suggests is the politicization, organization, and participation of all different ethnic, religious, gender, and linguistic individuals and groups. By doing so, for him, each of these agents and individuals would have a chance to organize their autonomy and express themselves as political entities.

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<sup>435</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 32.

<sup>436</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 32.

<sup>437</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 31.

<sup>438</sup> Ocalan, *The Political Thought*, 30.

<sup>439</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum Manifestosu*, 15.

<sup>440</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 15.

<sup>441</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 23.

<sup>442</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 32—33.

### 2.2.1 Democratic Politics and Self-Administration

Ocalan claims that the democratic society is political, and, in this regard, politics is the act of imaginatively planning the essential works of society, while ethics defines it as the formulation of societal principles. For any society, especially in the case of a democratic society, these two features are inseparable. For him, with the lack of ethics, societies face destruction, and without politics, societies are unsustainable.<sup>443</sup>

The politics in his approach is, quite understandably, the democratic one, which goes hand in hand with self-administration. In a period in which societies are shaped, controlled, and suppressed by the power of the nation-state, democratic confederalism and grassroots politicization, for Ocalan, create harmony. He believes that if society is not met with suppression and external influence, every problem might be solved through discussion in a peaceful atmosphere by believing the natural society is based on harmony. However, to achieve such a peaceful solution, he suggests that all ethnic, gender, religious, and linguistic groups, both at the local and central level, should politically participate in the discussion.<sup>444</sup> Without suppression, elite institutions, and hegemonic control, people might express themselves without fear, and this, for him, is “unity in diversity and diversity in unity.”<sup>445</sup>

### 2.2.2 Economic Autonomy

The human being is not just a political but an economic being. For this reason, the society in which individuals come together is also evidently economic. Although the economy's meaning and structure have changed over the centuries, it has been used as a tool to enslave society by the hegemonic elites. Ocalan translates his approach from Marxism to a half-anarchist yet maintains that economic colonialism is the most dangerous form of societal exploitation for any society. Furthermore, he holds that if a society is incapable of controlling and governing its economy, it not only loses the means of production but, more importantly, will always be in the hands of the elites. In his theory, the coexistence of economic and political dependence, called colonialism, has put society in a vulnerable position, which can be ended with democratic economic autonomy.

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<sup>443</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 24.

<sup>444</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 37.

<sup>445</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 37.



By comparing the capitalist economy with democratic confederalism, he suggests that the former is based on profit and corruption, and a profit-based economy cannot exist in a democratic confederal economy.<sup>446</sup> In his argument, ecology plays a central role in creating economic autonomy for society. He wrote, “Economic autonomy is neither based on private nor state capitalism. It is based on an environmental industry, and a communal economy is virtually a democracy implemented in the economy. The limits placed on industry, development, technology, business, and property are the boundaries of being an ecological and democratic society.”<sup>447</sup> The economy is not a field in which profiteering, and capital accumulation can operate. Economic autonomy is a model in which exploitation and capital accumulation are brought down to a minimum. In his theory, economic autonomy does not dogmatically reject the market, trade, product variety, and competition, but it is against the sovereignty of capital accumulation.<sup>448</sup>

### 2.2.3 Social and Cultural Life

With a close reading of his theory, it seems that he finds a “natural evil” side in the nation-state and the life organized and controlled by it. Ocalan believes that capitalist modernity, the nation-state, has created centers and urban structures where unemployment and inequality exist and consume and industrialize societal values and the social aspect of daily life. By neglecting societal history and natural values, for him, the nation-state has created an atmosphere in which individuals push to follow the so-called popular culture.<sup>449</sup> Similarly, Ocalan debates that among those individuals, women are the most visible subjects that have been put at the bottom of the pile in its “human factor” by presenting the woman’s body as a market value.<sup>450</sup>

In such an environment, education and health have become an industry in which human beings have been pushed to become the most “antisocial creatures.”<sup>451</sup> Contrary to the nation-state or capitalist modernity, democratic modernity and confederalism aim to re-introduce the values of humanity by taking both local and universal aspects of it. Such an

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<sup>446</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 37-38.

<sup>447</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 38.

<sup>448</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Toplum*, 38.

<sup>449</sup> Abdullah Ocalan, *Demokratik Uygarlık Manifestosu: Maskeli Tanrılar ve Orgütlü Krallar Çağı*, (Azadi Matbaası: Akademisi Yayınları, 2013), 191.

<sup>450</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Uygarlık*, 191.

<sup>451</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Uygarlık*, 134.

approach, which he calls the “re-socialization of humanity,” aims to turn the individual and society into their reality, which might be interpreted as the “natural society.”<sup>452</sup>

#### **2.2.4 The Women’s Liberation Ideology**

For Ocalan, without the autonomy and freedom of women, nothing can change; in fact, democratic confederalism is impossible.<sup>453</sup> Democratic confederalism aims to change not just the perception of women but the way they participate in everyday life and politics from a fundamental point of view. Since, for Ocalan and the Kurdish movement, women are the oldest and the most exploited segment of society, democratic confederalism provides and promotes the organization of women through autonomous representation that is institutionalized at each level and scale of political and social life.<sup>454</sup>

As a driving force of the Kurdish movement, women have been one of the main political and armed struggle agents. Hence, the ideology of the Kurdish mobilization is based on women's freedom against patriarchal values and society. In a male-dominated world and society, women have been systematically subjected to male supremacy and society and culture that reproduce such softened slavery in everyday life. Ocalan argues that although women have been experiencing oppression in every society at different levels, women in the Middle East, especially Kurdish women, have been living in it in unique ways through the lack of education, honor killing, and religious oppression.<sup>455</sup>

Traditionally, women have been centered in the PKK’s and Ocalan’s ideologies by even putting in their slogans: Jin, Jian, Azadi (women, life, and freedom). In such a motto, women are not just seen in the center of life but also the key players in the fight for freedom for the Kurds and Ocalan. In the Kurdish movement, revolution and women’s liberation are not separable. The state of women in daily life, politics, and the revolution have been among the central pillars of the PKK’s ideology and democratic confederalism. “Jineology,” the science of women, is based on the idea that everything and everyone is alive and does not necessarily fall into the dichotomy of material versus immaterial. The main principles of women’s liberation ideology, such as the rejection of assimilation and colonialism imposed on women’s free thought, autonomous women’s organizations, struggle for change, and

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<sup>452</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Uygurlik*, 10.

<sup>453</sup> Ocalan, *The Political Thought*, 14.

<sup>454</sup> Ocalan, *The Political Thought*, 15.

<sup>455</sup> Ocalan, *The Political Thought*, 40.

aesthetics and ethics.<sup>456</sup> All these principles had a specific role in the Rojava revolution that can be a topic of its research. However, the core interpretation of these pillars is to take women from the control of patriarchy and a subject of the beauty market and give the fight for freedom to women.

Ocalan wrote, “The question of women’s freedom has intrigued me throughout my life. While I initially viewed the enslavement of women in the Middle East and in general as the result of feudal backwardness, after many years of revolutionary practice and research, I concluded that the problem goes much deeper”.<sup>457</sup> This quest shows that for the Kurdish movement, women's freedom from patriarchy is the end of their exploitation. Although women's freedom seems to be a modern debate, according to Ocalan, sexism has not always existed. It has historicity shaped by upper changes in the economy and politics.<sup>458</sup>

The belief based on the politicization of everything has shaped both Ocalan’s idea about women's freedom and the Kurdish movement. He proposes that the Kurdish women who have been living an oppressed life cannot be separated from the subordination of the Kurds as a nation.<sup>459</sup> The region's people, including Arabs, Turkmens, Kurds, and Persians, have displaced the male-dominated mindset which follows the pattern of “housewife-cation” of women and disconnects them from politics. Within such argumentation from the beginning of the 80s and particularly the 90s, women have become more active in politics and the armed fight against the Turkish army. During the Cold War, the PKK established the first female organization within the PKK, Patriotic Women Union of Kurdistan, YJWK (YEKİTİYA Jinan Welatparezen Kurdistan) in 1987.<sup>460</sup> Further, within the “socialization” of the PKK’s armed struggle, YJWK was reorganized under the name of TAJK (Free Women’s Movement) within the umbrella of the PKK. After the first National Women Congress in 1995, the union was renamed YJAK (Union of the Free Women of Kurdistan), which later turned into “Autonomous Women, Unite!” after the second National Congress of Women in 1999 under the name PJKK.<sup>461</sup>

Despite this constant renaming, women and their problem of freedom and equality, referred to as “genealogy,” had been at the core of the Kurdish movement’s agenda long before the Kurdish women struggled against ISIS. The women's movement expanded with

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<sup>456</sup> Marcel Cartier, *Serkeftin: A Narrative of the Rojava Revolution* (UK: Zero Books, 2019), 59—60.

<sup>457</sup> Ocalan, *The Political Thought*, 57.

<sup>458</sup> Ocalan, *The Political Thought*, 61.

<sup>459</sup> Ocalan, *The Political Thought*, 40.

<sup>460</sup> Katarina Pavičić-Ivelja, "The Rojava Revolution: Women’s Liberation as an Answer to the Kurdish Question," *West Croatian History Journal* 11, (2017): 139, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/196080>.

<sup>461</sup> Pavičić-Ivelja, “The Rojava,” 139.

the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Syrian civil war. For this cause, the women had a united front and were involved in guerrilla warfare and activism on a scale that included housewives, the older generation, and even teenage girls in the region.

Besides, in the North Syrian democratic constitution, a woman was defined as the leading actor in the problem concerning women. For instance, acts of violence, abuse, rape, and discrimination against women are a criminal code. The role given to women, contrary to the male-dominated systems, is not a passive room but rather a more active one both in the constitution and social-political life. According to the constitution's chapter concerning women and their problems, it was agreed upon and written by the women. Furthermore, a crime against women is judged by female judges.<sup>462</sup> In democratic confederalism, women should not be protected by a system based on male supremacy. Instead, they are the system's builders both at the frontline of the war and in daily life.

### **2.2.5 Self-defense As a Pacifying Factor**

The nation-state for Ocalan is a militarily structured system based on warfare either at the foundation or later for militarization of the society.<sup>463</sup> The alternative to such militarist power is the confederal networks, the only way to oppose the nation-state's domination.<sup>464</sup> Unlike the nation-state that uses military forces in decision-making and its implementation through a few persons, in democratic confederalism, such decisions are taken through the direct participation of everyone at each level in society.<sup>465</sup> Although the word of self-defense, generally gives the feeling of mainly security and military, for Ocalan, it is a "natural state" that suggests human beings should defend not only their biological existence but also their societal state.<sup>466</sup> In stateless democracy, self-defense is a system that must be understood and applied politically, culturally, economically, and militarily.<sup>467</sup> It may be surprising, but, Ocalan hardly uses militaristic self-defensive references in his book. Instead, he instead interprets it from a political and societal point of view. He argues that the Kurds have been subjected to physical and societal attacks for centuries, and because of them, they

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<sup>462</sup> "Charter of the Social Contract," Peace in Kurdistan, January 29, 2014, accessed March 8 2020, <https://www.peaceinkurdistancampaign.com/charter-of-the-social-contract/>.

<sup>463</sup> Ocalan, *The Political*, 28.

<sup>464</sup> Ocalan, *The Political*, 28.

<sup>465</sup> Ocalan, *The Political*, 29.

<sup>466</sup> Ocalan, *The Political*, 28.

<sup>467</sup> Ocalan, *The Political*, 28—29.

should build a self-defense system in every aspect of the daily life of society that is beyond the military.<sup>468</sup>

This point of the argument is closely related to the theory of women's liberation. The political and cultural strategy covering the whole of life wants to involve the broadest layers of society in the action. From the foundation of the PKK, women have been at the center of the ideology and armed struggle. In the fight against the ISIS, however, self-defense came into public discussion across the globe not as the protection of women and society by any group but more specifically by women themselves. Western Kurdistan, or most famously Rojava, is not just a political entity but also a center of such a self-defense. The Rojava army mainly depends on People's Protection Units, in Kurdish Yekîneyên Parastina Gel or simply, YPG. The YPG includes fifty thousand men and women. Like the PKK, the fighters know and can use weapons and are also historically, politically, and ideologically trained. In the women's protection units in Kurdish Yekîneyên Parastina Jin (YPJ), the volunteer fighters were between 18 and 40. The YPJ essentially concurred with the headlines in Europe and America with their long-lasting fight against Islamic State in Kobane in 2015.

Several studies on the presentation of media and the international community are criticized for being mostly visual and representing women with the adjective of femininity and beauty. Şimşek and Jongerden, in their studies, argue that the struggle of women in Syria has been disconnected from their ideological base and aim but mostly presented as a beauty that covers the importance of the ideology in the regions.<sup>469</sup> Similarly, mainstream public opinion seems surprised to see female fighters in a bloody civil war even though female fighters in human history and especially in the Kurdish movement, are not something new. The leader of the Kurdish movement, Ocalan, claims that to transform society, the transformation of women is necessary. For him, the extent of women's freedom determines the extent of freedom of society in general.

What needs to be underlined is that most people assume Kurdish women's fight against only ISIS or jihadists in Syria. In any given society, women fight in any term, not just against the male-dominated life but also the society's social, political, and economic structure. Moreover, Kurdish women are the most significant examples. This is why it can be said that in Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, where Kurds have been fighting for freedom, women are the ones who pay the most significant price. While male fighters might fight for

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<sup>468</sup> Ocalan, *The Political*, 29—30.

<sup>469</sup> Bahar Şimşek and Joost Jongerden, "Gender Revolution in Rojava: The Voices Beyond Tabloid Geopolitics," *Geopolitics* 27, no. 4 (2018): 1—23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1531283>.

the ideology and the world they aim to build, women, on the other hand, fight for freedom both as women and as Kurds.

The idea of democratic confederalism seems to be a social-political and economical way of self-administration through individuals' grassroots politicization of society. Contrary to the mainstream interpretation of the nation-state stance on a strictly hierarchal centralization of the power in democratic confederalism, politics is a practice carried by the people at each level, such as women and youth. Similarly, while the modern idea of power puts the monopoly of defense and security under the control of the state's authority, in a democratically formed confederalism, people have the right and the mechanism to defend themselves.<sup>470</sup>

## 2.2.6 Democratic Law

Law and the judicial system have been the symbol of the saying, "Who is the boss in the city?" and suggests that the law itself, with the rise of the nation-state, has been used as an ideological apparatus to not only "protect" individuals but also protect the power itself from society and the people. In addition, the judicial system aims to create singularity among people and strengthen the control of social life. From a Weberian approach, Ocalan argues that the law gives the legitimization of existence and the control of the nation-state. The construction of law, in this sense, works in favor of the nation-state, not what Ocalan calls the "natural society."<sup>471</sup> By breaking the traditional approach in democratic confederalism, it is suggested that the law does not require any detailed formulation because of the characteristic ethical society. For him, if societal ethics works appropriately in such a system, there will be no need for a written legal system because free societies solve their problems by historical and ethical characteristics.<sup>472</sup> Ocalan formulates the main principle and implementation of democratic confederalism as participation of every societal segment, equal representation of genders and minorities, and localities based on autonomy and self-defense.<sup>473</sup>

These suggestions show that democratic confederalism is a supra-society system like a mainstream liberal democracy that aims to turn each aspect of life into an arena where youth and women can participate in politics from villages to big cities. In this context, the

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<sup>470</sup> Ocalan, *The Political*, 28—30.

<sup>471</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Uygarlık*, 23—24.

<sup>472</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Uygarlık*, 31.

<sup>473</sup> Ocalan, *Demokratik Uygarlık*, 26—31.

law and the judicial system are not an elite-built system of rules from top to down, but locally constructed consensus and diverse participation in decision-making down to top.

### 2.2.7 Social Contract

In Jean-Jacques Rousseau's terminology, the social contract is based on the idea that people sacrifice some of their rights and create an authority that controls the safety of the people. However, in the social contract of Rojava, the people use the administration as a tool of participation in radical democracy. In Rojava's social contract, as against the mainstream approach, some do politics for and on behalf of the people.<sup>474</sup> Politics and administration are done with the people.

In their study, Radpey and Roes argued that the Syrian civil war might be an opportunity for the Syrian Kurds to create a chance for self-rule for the first time, not in Syria but in Kurdish history. The constitution was declared on July 21, 2013, called the social contract by PYD. Following democratic confederalism, the PYD first established people's committees in northern Syria, which were appointed for primary central administrative functions under Central Corridor Committee Centers.<sup>475</sup> The multicultural, linguistic, and religious diversities were represented in the committee by 24 members from Arab to Kurds and from Yezidis to Armenians. While in the constitution, the system was defined as democratic federalism, which was directly shaped by Ocalan's theory, later the PYD established the People's Counsels of western Kurdistan or Rojava, which had 320 members.<sup>476</sup>

Even though in the works of journalists and academics, the declaration is entitled "The Social Contract of Rojava Cantons in Syria" to specify its decentralized community-based model of governing, which is a democratic society.<sup>477</sup> Though it is not referencing Rousseau's social contract, one might rightfully link it to the idea behind the formation of a state, which willingly appoints a structure for the service of people's needs. However, what is unusual in the Kurdish case is that, as mentioned above, the structure is not just formed by the people but also strictly shaped and controlled by the people.

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<sup>474</sup>"Peace in Kurdistan." Charter of the Social Contract, <https://www.peaceinkurdistancampaign.com/charter-of-the-social-contract/>, accessed March 15, 2021.

<sup>475</sup> Charter of the Social Contract, "Peace in Kurdistan."

<sup>476</sup> Charter of the Social Contract, "Peace in Kurdistan."

<sup>477</sup>"The Social Contract of Rojava Cantons in Syria."

Looking at the declaration, it might be claimed that it indicates and defines the diversity of the population in terms of religion, ethnicity, and gender, which makes it an arena of conflict rather than harmony in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In this contract, people are not powerless and passive agents of their lives because every aspect and problem of society is discussed, and the decisions are made in consensus.

Considering the legal history of the Middle East, where the constitutions mostly have been shaped by nationalization and the supremacy of religious or ethnic identity, the social contract of Rojava is a milestone that shows for the first time that the administrative structure of governance specifies and names the diversity of the region. Besides, in the Middle Eastern cultures and politics, where the state is considered a sacred entity, the theory and the practice of social contract are ending the state's secrecy by putting human will before the state. The configuration of the state from the papa state to the social contract and the idea of democratic confederalism has made the figure of the father a genderless, egalitarian tool. Lastly, in the region, especially in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, the state working to serve a small group of elites has ended both symbolically and practically in Rojava.

### **2.3.8. Concluding Remarks: The Bookchin Effect**

Why has Bookchin's theory but not the Marxist ideology come to exist in Syria? Does the change from a Marxist agenda to Bookchin's ecological society represent a pure shift in the movement? Before the main conclusion of the research here, I will seek to present some possible answers to these fundamental but, at the same time, challenging questions, and I will argue that the shift from an independent state to democratic confederalism is not a theoretical but practical move that might be formulated as the Bookchin effect.

The Kurdish students who mobilized and established an armed guerilla group under the leadership of Marx against the NATO member country, Turkey, practiced revolution with Bookchin. Even though it has been fighting precisely against the Turkish army, its revolutionary experiment was born in Syria throughout and during the war. The Middle East, where the hegemony of the nation-state shapes every aspect of social and political life, produces and reproduces the cult of the "papa state," armed or unarmed movements that face substantial difficulty concerning the possibility of its achievement. The regional states,



compacted one way or another with the global economic and political order, hold the main seat in both local and regional levels of politics. The organic relationship with the great powers and their gains led them to support the sustainability of the nation-state in the region. The nation-state, based on a capitalist, conservative, and male-dominated structure, has never been willing to share its authority with civil society and people, even in most democratic countries. In the capitalist world order, the idea of a Marxist-Leninist independent Kurdistan would have to adjust the order requirements either or give up on people's authority over the economy and politics. The changes in the Kurdish movement based on the above local and global orders resulted in the realization that the state was not the solution but the problem. For example, there were several states in the region and the world, but society and humans still suffered from the lack of democratic, gender, and economic equality.

The second reason for this shift was the region's complexity concerning religious and ethnic diversities. Since Marx put control of the means of production at the center of his theory, the question was how identity-based differences would live together in the Middle East. Against Marx's postulation, Bookchin offered an alternative to a postmodern world that considered economic and human identities. Based on the idea that the state was its own major challenge, Abdullah Ocalan introduced a road map that would put humans and ecology at the center of the politics for Kurds and the region.

What is significant here is that the Kurdish movement did not refuse the state but formulated the state within the hands of the people. Hence, it could be argued that the transition from Marxist-Leninist Kurdistan to democratic confederalism did not mean a pure break in their ideology. It was a representation of a practical problem. It seemed that the Kurdish movement still had the idea and impact of Marxism, but in practice, they focused on independence and people's will.

The above discussion might be formulated as the Bookchin effect, which holds that a theory exists if only the climate is suitable for its practices. Secondly, it implies that conflicts, wars, and chaos might also give an appropriate climate for the practice of a theory. Though Ocalan wrote his booklet on democratic confederalism in 2004, the theory was practiced not in Turkey, Iraq, or Iran but in the Syrian civil war, where the central government and regional and global powers failed to defeat a barbaric religious fundamentalist group, the ISIS.

### Chapter 3

#### Violence or Self-defense?

After the first attack of the PKK in 1984, the Turkish authorities strengthened their military presence over the regions, believing that the PKK was a small group of terrorists backed by external powers. The definition of the PKK and its interpretation of the state was and has been result-centered. That is to argue that for the ruling authority of the PKK, like all the Kurdish rebellions in history, it was an act of violence and needed to be eliminated without focusing on the environment and the history that prepared its formation. An official remarked, “We came to this situation because of these mistakes. The Kurds want to be treated like human beings, not to beat and share the cake. We created the Kurdish problem, and now we cannot solve it”.<sup>478</sup>

The traditional Turkish politics toward the Kurds (through a security framework) was put as an act that was carried against the early Kurdish rebellions in strict measures, such as mass displacement, imprisonment, and violent suppression, which intensified the armed conflict. While the PKK learned from the history of oppression for decades, the state carried on the former and traditional policy in dealing with the Kurds.

In this sense, it might be claimed that, for the state, violence was a policy that was built upon the denial of the social, political, and identity aspects of the Kurds' demands. In an extreme interpretation, I would argue that the state's violence against the Kurds could not be put as if “the state hates the Kurds”. Since the internalized and later paranoid state's mindset that the country was under a constant threat of division and collapse due to the failure of the Ottomans and the Independence War, the military has been the policy-making entity and not just a legitimate force of the sovereign state. The soldiers' role in politics became historical evidence for the state that violence was the only way to fight the Kurds because it worked in all Kurdish rebellions before the PKK. The power of military bureaucracy created an environment in which Kurdish politics was deemed as an enemy that should be defeated by violence. Shaped by such a mindset, the legal arena for the Kurds narrowed, and it became a security threat to speak about the Kurds. Even being a Kurd became a matter of anarchy and terrorism. The insistence of bureaucracy to see Kurdish politics only as a matter of security and the lack of opportunities to do politics in the legal arena fed each other and pushed the Kurds to see violence as politics, not only as a Marxist

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<sup>478</sup> Ahmet Kahraman, *Kürt İsyanları: Tedip Ve Tenkil* (Evrensel Basım Yayın, 2015), 402.

revolutionary tactic but also as an act of defense. The interpretation of these two sides became a deadlock in resolving the Kurdish-Turkish conflict.

In the following pages, I will discuss how the PKK and Ocalan define self-defense in the context of violence. By doing so, we will intentionally follow an argument of a possible Kurdish approach to see a counter-position to the prevailing official view. It seems that from the Kurdish angle/interpretation, if a nation's identity, language, culture, and very existence are challenged and denied by any organized system, the oppressed come together and take the responsibility of forcing the oppressor to at least admit their doing. While in the beginning, the act of the few is considered divergent, it becomes a reality in time. According to this, the few have two main challenges to reaching the goals: teach the group they represent the necessity of the fight and defeat the oppressors, which create a nation with mass education, military, and media. The oppressed, on the other hand, must find value in building a national identity. In the first case, the force is implanted to spread the so-called idea of nationhood; in the latter, the force works as a self-defense mechanism, relying on ethnicity and class identity.

What is significant here is that self-defense does not necessarily and naturally refer to an armed conflict or violence. Human beings as social, political, cultural, and historical creatures naturally tend not just to protect their "living sides" but also defend the socio-political aspects around the living bodies. In the Kurdish case, the historical hegemony of the Turkish state and its ideology with the standardization of society in a vertical form failed to respond to the demons of the Kurds. That is why I would claim that what had been written or said about the PKK mostly failed to point out that the guerilla fight was the outcome of the self-defense of the Kurdish population.

### **3.1 The Idea of Self-protection in Kurdish Approach**

History, as argued, created a political character for human beings and societies. In modern times' geography of the transcriptions of empires and nation-states, Kurdistan was constantly under attack. While in the age of empires, one empire was used against the other, in modern times, with the rise of nation-states, the Kurds faced severe nationalization and assimilation in terms of language, culture, and identity. What Bibo called the "standardization" in Anatolia did not work as "sameness." Instead, it created differences within the vertically designed society. As discussed, the first Kurdish rebellions were

religiously orientated and had no other ideological agenda. The aim, in general, was to protect themselves from the newly attempted top-to-bottom Turkish revolution based on Turkification and centralization of bureaucracy. The eastern problem, especially in the 60s and 70s, was considered and discussed within the economic “backwardness” framework; however, the PKK believed the Kurds had to protect their existence against what they called “colonialist power”. For Ocalan, this “destiny” of the Kurds throughout history as “slaughter culture” has been carried by empires and nation-states in modern times.<sup>479</sup> That is to argue that the political charter of the Kurds has not been rebellious but rather a system of self-defense shaped by the division of Kurdistan, assimilation, and the lack of democratic tools accessible to the Kurds in the region.

Even though self-defense has been one of the critical features of the ideology of the PKK, the term reached popularity in the recent Syrian civil war against ISIS and the Turkish state. The level of self-defense in the war showed that a community does not just naturally defend itself as a group but also fights to protect its social-cultural existence. Ocalan argues that in the twentieth century, with the rise of national salvation movements, real socialism went into the methodology to use “force” for the aimed future.<sup>480</sup> He thought the idea that violence was a legitimate way for socialism and progressiveness put these movements into severe “degeneration”; because violence should not be the character of the oppressed and workers.<sup>481</sup> In his terminology, there is an analytical and political meaning of self-defense to use force for change. Besides, it is formulated as “the right to legitimate defense, and on the other hand, as the right and the sacred act of preserving its existence and ensuring its freedom, regardless of the circumstances, as long as it is unjustly directed towards vital values at all levels and at all times”.<sup>482</sup>

While the right of self-defense is a natural right of societies, it cannot be applied randomly except in historical and revolutionary periods. Ocalan wrote: “The right to use force in legitimate defense arises only when the attack on the material and ideological elements of the social being is compelled by forces which want to forcibly prevent developments in the periods of free development, especially in moments of qualitative transformation, in periods of revolutionary birth; the use of force becomes legitimate and mandatory within this framework”.<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Ocalan, *Meşru Savunma Uzerine*, 7.

<sup>480</sup> Ocalan, *Meşru*, 6.

<sup>481</sup> Ocalan, *Meşru*, 6.

<sup>482</sup> Ocalan, *Meşru*, 6.

<sup>483</sup> Ocalan, *Meşru*, 7.

Remembering that the four nation-states where the Kurds live had a record of despotic tendencies toward minorities, or any opposition questions the superiority of the ruling cleavages. Under the Islamic hegemony, non-believers were smashed. Besides, the Kurds have been subjected to violence in the modern history of these four countries; they were abused violently, not as a group who rebelled but as an ethnic-historical community, and the worst was the assimilation policy. In the context of the history of the Kurdish movement, in the 1960s and 1970s, the left, who “raised their head,” was suppressed by the brutal violence and ignorance of the Turkish state. For Ocalan, the state was killing the “language of democracy,” the legal protests.<sup>484</sup> The failure of the authoritarian states to listen and respond to the language of democracy created an avenue for using force as a legitimate right for the Kurds and any group abused by the power.<sup>485</sup>

### **3.2 A Criticism of Ocalan’s Approach**

Regarding the debate on violence, especially in the PKK, it seems that the dispute is not centrally over the legitimization of violence but the confusion to which PKK is referred. Like the classification of the types of PKK, I would propose a linked categorization in considering PKK and violence. Thus, it might suggest the differentiation of the formation of the PKK as a political movement, its aims and the reasons for its emergence, the armed conflict between the Turkish military forces and the PKK’s guerillas, and lastly, the PKK’s acts affecting civilians.

Firstly, the Kurds after WWI were divided among four countries and then subjected to systematic assimilation, mass displacements, and mass killings. During the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the lack of democratic tools accessible to the Kurds, the denial of their fundamental human rights, and their existence caused them to mobilize and later radicalize. Further, in a democratic system, all segments of society are free to establish a party through which they can participate in politics and decision-making through elections. In this regard, PKK’s violence resulted from “social and economic imbalances” within Turkey.<sup>486</sup> However, from the beginning of the Republic, the Kurds and Kurdish politicians have never been granted official freedom to act in legal terms. The lack of legal tools, a free climate,

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<sup>484</sup> Ocalan, *Meşru*, 7.

<sup>485</sup> Ocalan, *Meşru*, 7.

<sup>486</sup> Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 585.

and acceptance of the Kurds as a distinct ethnic-linguistic minority led to the formation of the PKK.

Kai Nielsen says that violence needs a specific justification. He distinguishes between „dramatic violence” and „theatrical terrorism.”<sup>487</sup> According to him, as in the “just war theory,” violence can be “legitimized” when there is evidence to assume that without violence, a situation cannot be changed and when we have good reasons to say that the result of violence will bring better circumstances.<sup>488</sup> To justify violence in this context, we need to speak about a democratic country.<sup>489</sup> He claims that there are three central requirements to justify violence: a notable number of people living in poverty, the idea that it cannot be changed without violence, and lastly, the possibility that a better political order and life might come as the outcome of the political violence.<sup>490</sup> In support of Nielsen's approach, it might be seen for the Kurdish political leaders that the inequality between the Turks and the Kurds in terms of ethnic and linguistic rights had created hopelessness among the Kurdish students who founded the PKK. Hence, they thought the only way to free Kurdistan was through armed resistance. Since in a democratic and open system, establishing a party based on claims is not a sign of violence and terror on its own, we should look at the second and the third aspects of the debate, the armed conflict with the Turkish army and the acts of the PKK that were harmful to civilians.

Secondly, considering the armed conflict between the Turkish army and the PKK's guerillas, we see the war environment strictly shaped by the survival and the struggle of both sides rather than terrorism. Thirdly, related exclusively to the PKK's acts, harming civilians outside armed conflict might be regarded as an act of terror. Putting the PKK in the center of the debate without a strict consideration of the acts and politics of the Turkish side would fail to point out the multilayered character of the political violence. As in Arendt's approach, there might be a cause of violence, but it cannot be legalized. She says that instead of making a difference between the „use of force” and „violence,” one must make a dichotomy between „abuse of force” and „use of force”. Besides, when one of the sides takes the dominant position, the other one disappears; when the power weakens, violence occurs, and violence might end the power, but it cannot create it.<sup>491</sup> From the point of view of the history of the armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state shows that while

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<sup>487</sup> Kai Nielsen, “Political Violence and Ideological Mystification,” *Journal of Social Philosophy, Research* 13, no. 2 (1982): 25—26, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.1982.tb00547.x>.

<sup>488</sup> Nielsen, “Political Violence,” 25—26.

<sup>489</sup> Nielsen, “Political Violence,” 25—26.

<sup>490</sup> Nielsen, “Political Violence,” 26.

<sup>491</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Şiddet Uzerine*, trans: Bulent Acar (Istanbul, 1997), 87—88.

the former might be interpreted as the idea of using force to save Kurdistan and free the Kurds, the acts of the Turkish side could be regarded as the abuse of force.

### **3.3 Concluding Remarks**

The failure of the nation-states to respond to the demands of the Kurds pushed the Kurd's self-defensive character, which undertook armed rebellion, especially through the formation of the PKK.

Kurdish society is a society whose mechanism of self-defense has collapsed. The division of the land, the assimilation, and the oppression of the nation-state triggered the collapse. The transcriptions of historical writings on the Kurdish movement and the PKK suggest the PKK was neither the reason nor was it borne because of the Kurdish conflict. The PKK is an "end" of the Kurdish community's self-defense mechanism. Besides, with the collapse of the self-defense mechanism, the Kurdish community has been confused, and the PKK is the expression of such confusion. Thus, democratic confederalism is not just the re-ideologization of the PKK; it is the reintroduction of the collapsed mechanism of self-defense.

From an evolutionist point of view, self-defense refers to the historical, societal tendencies to defend itself against a "danger". It is also a critique of the idea of the nation-state. Hobbes' tradition gave the state the right and duty to protect the people from chaos. In Weberian terminology, it was given the monopoly of violence and security within society. The idea of self-defense, however, aims to break this monopoly and give people the right and mechanism to protect their existence, not only in terms of security but also identity and culture.

It seems that the violence in the case of the Kurdish movement has been an „attached feature” by the failure of the Turkish state to stop targeting the Kurds as an ethnic-linguistic group and to listen to the language of democracy. In the following chapter, by looking at the PKK's newspaper with a comparison to the pro-Turkish state, I will seek to evaluate how armed conflict has taken place and how both sides present it.

Further, both Ocalan's and the PKK's approaches believe that it is permissible to fight to protect oneself without such distinction, which leads them to formulate violence from an over-generalization. In contrast, from the Turkish point of view, any action against unity and the state's power should be eliminated at any cost.

## PART VI

### READING the TRANSCRIPTION in the PRIMARY SOURCES

#### Chapter 1

#### The PKK and “Socialization” of Violence

The Kurds in Turkey, because of their population, geographic consolidation, and ethnic-linguistic dissimilarities, have been the main obstacle in the Turkification of the former Ottoman subjects. Ataturk’s top-to-bottom revolution, which relied on Turkishness, centralization of power, and territorial unity, caused dramatic societal damage to the Kurds. Moreover, the Turkification project also led to Kurdish rebellions against the Republic. At this point in Turkish history, the Kurds were referred to as “mountain Turks” who needed to be turned into “real Turks” in line with the objectives of the Turkification project.

Before the PKK's formation, the Kurds' very existence was denied. All evidence from the reports analyzed above shows that decades after the formation of the PKK, most of the official reports present the Kurdish problem from the angle of economic inequality and hesitate to identify the ethnic and identity aspects of the conflict, which might be considered as the continuity in these four transcriptions. Similarly, both reports and the newspapers indicate that the state and the majority of society tend to differentiate the Kurds from the PKK and deny any sociological ties between them. The analysis of primary sources reveals that though the PKK has never achieved its goal of freeing Kurdistan, it has challenged the traditional state’s discourse from the Turkification of the Kurds to the matter of security. Although the state’s agenda has been kept alive for a century, what the PKK has achieved is the creation of national identity among Kurds, who have been active participants in the Kurdish struggle, in a departure from the passivity of the early subjects of the assimilation.

Not much research refers to the PKK’s primary sources, such as party documents and PKK’s newspapers. The reason for such an “attitude” is mostly the belief that citing party sources might legitimize the PKK. The unwillingness to investigate the PKK’s sources narrows the scope and scale of the research and causes generalization regarding the party’s ideology, its existence, and armed conflict with the Turkish state. To fill such a gap, my aim in this chapter is to discuss how and to what extent the PKK went into armed conflict and how it interprets the casualties in the fight against the state. By analyzing the PKK’s newspaper, I will show how the party demonstrated the death and how later in 1990, it “socialized” violence among the Kurds in Turkey.



Then by comparing the events before and after the PKK in the pro-state newspapers and official reports, my goal is to show how the Turkish side justified the violence and how the PKK shifted the representation of the conflict in its interpretation.

### **1.1 The PKK's Revolutionary Violence and Its Interpretation**

As discussed, long before the first attack of the PKK, there was a civil conflict between the leftist and rightist wings in major cities. During the 70s, the fragmentation among the left and the reluctance to address the Kurd's demands led the Kurdish students to find the PKK. After the military coup in 1980 and the oppression on the left, the PKK's members went to the Kurdish region to mobilize the Kurds and teach them about their party. Leaving the cities in the west signified a major shift in the Turkish and Kurdish conflict. In the seventies, the civil unrest among the leftists and the rightists took place in universities and on the streets of Istanbul and Ankara, but the Turkish authority made light of it, thinking it was much easier to control and arrest the groups. Before the declaration of the PKK, the conflict took place within an environment under the state's control. However, when the PKK left Ankara and Istanbul and went to the east and southeast of the country, it took the opportunity from the state in terms of its capability to follow, arrest, and punish the Kurdish leftists. Being a strategic tactic to weaken the state's authority and teach the Kurds about the party and revolution, it caused the Turkish authority to tighten its oppression over the local population for decades. Even though the state was weakened in its capability to fight against the PKK, the existence of the PKK in the Kurdish region ushered in the declaration of a state of emergency, military control, and persecution. Thus, it systematically "socialized"/extended the state's violence to the broader society in the region. The shift from major cities to the Kurdish region put the Kurds under two-fold socialization of violence; the state's violence against Kurds and PKK's propaganda to socialize the struggle for independence among the Kurds.

Since, for the PKK, the Turkish state is a "fascist colonizer," the fight against it is not only the task of the PKK but also the duty of all oppressed Kurds. As a Marxist-Leninist movement of proletariat leadership, support of society is fundamental in the PKK's ideology. In this sense, the spread of the party's values among society and the leadership of warriors are repeatedly demonstrated in the party's newspaper. The construction of

“heroes,” the interpretation of death, seems to be the core of the party’s approach regarding violence and death in the fight against the Turks.

During my research, I found that almost all volumes of the front pages are predominantly presented with photos of the PKK’s guerillas who died in the conflict. By presenting death with agitation and anger to construct the image of heroes, Ocalan’s words, “a nation needs heroes,” are constantly presented.<sup>492</sup> For Ocalan, there has been an awakening in Kurdistan concerning the need for “miracle and sacred” heroes born in exceptional times.<sup>493</sup> About “special times,” he argued that when the PKK was founded, it faced the terror of the state and its massacres, but the PKK survived, thanks to its martyrs.<sup>494</sup> Seeing the glorification of death in the fight, a PKK guerrilla who died in 1986 wrote: “Being people’s fighter is an honor”.<sup>495</sup>

The language in the description of death is systematically implied to keep the PKK’s members together and, more importantly, due to death, to build a link between the Kurdish families and the party. For the PKK, the necessity and legitimization of violence at any cost, criticized before, resulted from the Turkish state’s oppression and their right to self-defense. Accordingly, it is claimed that dying in such war is the “highest level someone can reach”.<sup>496</sup> We see that death in the fight is interpreted as a requirement to be a human, which is why a PKK guerilla should never surrender, even if it costs their death.<sup>497</sup>

## 1.2 Serxwebûn

Even though PKK’s first attack on the Turkish army became some news in 1984, reading the newspaper, Serxwebun<sup>498</sup>, showed that even in 1981 and 1982, several attacks took place. For instance, the death of some party members was reported on the front page of the volume with the following words: “The colonizer’s security force killed the combatants”.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> “Ulusal Direniş Kahramanlarımızı Saygıyla Anıyoruz.”, Special vol. 9, *Serxwebûn*, May 1986, 7. <http://serxwebun.org/arsiv/53/>.

<sup>493</sup> “PKK Genel Sekreteri Abdullah Ocalan ile Roportaj.” *Serxwebûn*, February 1982, 8. <http://www.serxwebun.org/arsiv/02/files/assets/basic-html/page1.html>.

<sup>494</sup> *Serxwebûn*, “PKK Genel Sekreteri,” 9.

<sup>495</sup> “Kürdistan Devrim Şehitleri Olumsuzdur.” *Serxwebûn*, March 1982, 1. <http://www.serxwebun.org/arsiv/03/files/assets/basic-html/page2.html>.

<sup>496</sup> *Serxwebun*, “Kürdistan Devrim Şehitleri,” 2.

<sup>497</sup> *Serxwebun*, “Kürdistan Devrim Şehitleri,” 2.

<sup>498</sup> It is the PKK’s newspaper based in Germany and the name Serxwebun might be translated as “independence” or in some cases “freedom.”

<sup>499</sup> “On Devrimci Militan Katledildi.” *Serxwebûn*, December 3, 1982, 1. <http://serxwebun.org/arsiv/11/>.

With almost no exception, the photos of the guerrillas were presented with a short biography, emphasizing how their deaths strengthened the party's struggle. Besides, the tone of the language was that of pride, anger, and vengeance rather than sadness. Since the newspaper was a propaganda tool to reach society for the party, words were intentionally chosen like "massacre" instead of "killed". The reason for such a deliberate decision was to show the state as brutal as possible and create a sense of vengeance and anger among its members and Kurdish society. To illustrate this, the presentation of death news mostly included the name of the city where the guerilla was killed. Baki Kahraman's death was reported by the following words, "The people of Karakocan, a name of a town, lost one of their revolutionary boys".

Moreover, the link between the Kurdish society and the party remarked, "The Kurds will avenge the death".<sup>500</sup> What we also see from the volume is the difference in language in describing the deaths of the opponents, the Turkish soldiers. Unlike the PKK's guerillas' deaths accompanied by the word "martyred," the deaths of Turkish soldiers were presented as simply as possible as "a soldier died"<sup>501</sup>

Citing heroes and building an image mostly require an exaggeration regarding human capacity. Image-making is mainly done through storytelling. In February 1980, a volume published a photo and short text describing how Zeki Yıldız died. The volume said: "Zeki Yıldız fought against a whole army on his own" and although it is beyond reason's imagination, such a story plays a major role in creating heroes and memory among its members and the Kurds.<sup>502</sup>

By defining itself as a continuation of the Bolshevik revolution, the PKK related itself with other independent movements in different regions like Palestine. Such an approach led the newspaper to present the deaths of Palestinians in the fight against Israel in the same manner as its losses. After a Palestinian commander who had been to the PKK's camps to teach military tactics to the guerillas died, the newspaper reported, "Long live the brotherhood of peoples. The commander martyred".<sup>503</sup>

From another angle, it seemed that, for the PKK, fighting against the Turkish state did not necessarily occur in the mountains but also cities, universities, prisons, and courtrooms. After the military coup, the central authority intensified its violence against the

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<sup>500</sup> *Serxwebun*, "On Devrimci Militan Katledildi." 1.

<sup>501</sup> "Dökülen Her Şehit Anı Düşmanı Boğan Bir Intikam Seli Olacaktır," Special vol. 7, *Serxwebûn*, May 1985, 1. <http://serxwebun.org/arsiv/41/>.

<sup>502</sup> "On Devrimci Militan Katledildi." *Serxwebûn*, February 1982, 3. <http://serxwebun.org/arsiv/11/>.

<sup>503</sup> Partimizin Enternosyonalist Dayanışmasının Sembolu Olan Direniş Şehitlerimizi Saygıyla Anıyoruz." Special vol. 6, *Serxwebûn*, June 1984. <http://serxwebun.org/arsiv/30/>.

leftists, especially the Kurdish revolutionaries, in prisons, and most of them were subjected to torture and the death penalty. For the PKK, one should be Kurdish to be a hero. Being anti-state in any way was considered a value. A news story presented a photo of three people in a courtroom alongside the words, “Fascist junta massacred three revolutionaries by sentencing them to death” and “your revenge will be taken just like other revolutionaries”.<sup>504</sup>

The anger against the Turkish state and glorifying the death of PKK’s members were not a simple feature of being “radical” and “in love with death”. Looking at the party’s primary sources revealed that such anger strengthened the group, especially after the coup in 1980 due to the systematic torture in prisons and death penalties.

Understandably, it is beyond the limits of this study to cover the whole picture of state violence against Kurdish prisoners in 1980. However, it is pertinent to mention that the Diyarbakir prison became a milestone in creating anger against the Turkish authorities. The systematic torture, severe human rights violations, and abuse caused unknown deaths and stoked anger against the Turkish state among the Kurds and the PKK. On radio, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs remarked: “The events are partly true, but the deaths are the result of suicide and sickness”.<sup>505</sup> For the PKK, however, it is argued that “the torture is the act of Hitler and the likes of him.... Suicide is not an act of a revolutionary”.<sup>506</sup> It might be argued that the military regime at the beginning of the 80s caused a deadlock in a possible solution for Turkish-Kurdish conflict and pushed people who were released from the prisons to end up on mountains.

### **1.3 The Post-Mortem Ideology and the “Socialization” of Violence**

The use of force by the PKK and the abuse of force by the Turkish government fed the war in the Kurdish regions and caused severe casualties on both sides. The Turkish side, as in most cases, used its legitimate reasons, being a state, to prevent and end the PKK. However, from what we saw on the PKK’s side, the deaths did not weaken the party as expected but strengthened the anger and will for revenge among its members. The question of why the

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<sup>504</sup>“Şehitlere Yemin Ettim,” *Serxwebûn*, January 1987,14. <http://serxwebun.org/arsiv/301/>.

<sup>505</sup>“Diyarbakır Cezaevide Baskı Ve Katliama Ragmen Direniş Devam Ediyor.” *Serxwebûn*, September May 1982, 13. <http://serxwebun.org/arsiv/09/>.

<sup>506</sup> “Dökülen Her Şehit Anı Düşmanı Boğan Bir Intikam Seli Olacaktır,” Special vol. 7, *Serxwebûn*, May 1985, 14. <http://serxwebun.org/arsiv/41/>.

second biggest army in NATO has not been able to end the PKK lies in the fact that the PKK has developed a strong relationship with the Kurdish society and the memory of the death of its members. Reading the newspapers revealed that thousands of deaths created a cult of death in the party and Kurdish population, and death itself became a funeral part of its ideology conceptualized as post-mortem ideology. Unlike the mainstream understanding of ideology which focuses on a given problem and solution, the formulation of these two in post-mortem ideology conceptualizes a recipe, and death becomes a tool in constructing the ideology. This is particularly interesting because it is not a religion-based death cult, but a feature of a secular political movement, as opposed to the more typical religious-based war heroism in the region.

For the Kurds, at some point, death turned into something not to be sad about. Unlike radical Islamist groups, such as alcaide and ISIS, who claim to fight for the will of Allah and death is something to be proud of, a gift of heaven; for the PKK, death belongs to the real world, and it is a part of being revolutionary. Although not much attention has been given to this aspect of the Kurdish fighters, in the recent Syrian civil war, they started to not cry at the funerals of the Kurdish fighters. Some YPG fighters left letters to their families and asked them not to cry at their funerals but to be happy and dance. Again, contrary to the religion-oriented armed group, they did not die for the sake of Allah and Islam. They died in an honorable way. For instance, in Rojava, at some funerals of the killed Kurdish fighters, their families danced and celebrated not the death but the honor. The question is how a society can turn to such an unimaginable and, as a matter of fact, shocking mindset. This needs further research. However, looking at the newspaper shows that this sociological understanding of death is a result of constant pressure on the Kurds and the lack of room for a possible solution to the conflict.

To reflect on such a “bold” argument, I have analyzed Serxwebûn’s sixteen different volumes categorized as “special volumes,” mostly centered on the presentation of the deaths of party members at different times. Reading these volumes revealed a persistent link between memory and martyrdom. Further, both memory and martyrdom were employed to say that the struggle would never end. The first was from 1982, on the cover page with a big-size photo of Mazloun Dogan, who died on a hunger strike, accompanied by the following sentence, “The memory of comrade Mazlum is a continuous torch which lightens our way”.<sup>507</sup> In another volume, the PKK’s central committee member Mehmet Karasungur’s and a guerrilla Ibrahim Bilgin’s photos were on the page with a short sentence

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<sup>507</sup> “Mazlum Yoldaşın Anısı Yolumuzu Aydınlatan Sürekli Bir Meşaledir.” *Serxwebûn*, May Vol. 1, 1982,1.

in capital letters: “Their memories will live in our struggle”.<sup>508</sup> These two examples show that martyrdom is interpreted as a boost to the struggle. In this sense, it can be argued that more martyrdom means more struggle and vice versa. Furthermore, the party seems to assume victory is only possible with martyrs. For instance, in 1983, the cover page of the newspaper read: “The commitment to the memories of the martyrs of resistance is possible with the creation of victory in the revolution”.<sup>509</sup>

The relationship between death, memory, and struggle seems common in all the special volumes. Based on such an interlinked approach, death seems to be the first step, followed by memory, and they finally boost and fire the struggle. The clearest example of such an approach was found in 1985, with a picture depicting blood on the floor and a flower rising from it onto a cracked wall. It seems that while the blood represents the martyrs, the flower is a demonstration of the struggle and the new deaths.<sup>510</sup>

In all the volumes I read, the word enemy appeared in the headlines in 1985. Although it was not certain what or whom the word referred to, in the most probability, the Turkish state was seen as an enemy.<sup>511</sup> Due to the intensified armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army after the attack in 1984, the newspaper seemed to be more precise in addressing the targets. As shown before, in the first major attacks, the newspaper mostly used words such as “fight” and “struggle”; however, starting from 1985, a more explicit language was employed, it started using the word enemy.

The second significant shift in the language I came across was in the particular volume of 1990, where instead of photos of dead guerillas, Kurdish men, women, and children surrendered by military tanks were captured on the cover page.<sup>512</sup> That significant change reflected a shift in the understanding of the struggle for the PKK. Unlike pre-1990, when PKK seemed to put itself at the center of the fight, starting from 1990, the party also seemed to put civilian Kurds there. Such an expansion also showed how the PKK changed the struggle from party-oriented to society-oriented and based more on “socialized” violence. The transition from a guerilla-centered language to a social base was reflected in phrases like “We as people”. It might imply that death had become a typical price for the PKK’s guerillas and the Kurds as a community.

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<sup>508</sup> *Serxwebun*, July 1983, Vol. 1, 2.

<sup>509</sup> *Serxwebun*, July 1983, Vol. 1, 6.

<sup>510</sup> *Serxwebun*, September 1983, Vol. 4, 1.

<sup>511</sup> *Serxwebun*, May 1985, Vol. 11, 4.

<sup>512</sup> *Serxwebun*, March 1990, Vol. 16, 12.

The start of the war between the PKK and the Turkish army, as discussed, put the Kurdish regions under the state's focus, especially in the 1990s. It was a time when the Kurdish regions witnessed forced migration, village gourd, JITEM, Hezbollah, and murders by unknown assailants.<sup>513</sup> For the state, the Kurds were a potential source of the PKK, and if they controlled the Kurds, they would also control the PKK's human resources. Meanwhile, PKK members and the arrested ones went on a hunger strike, attacked Turkish soldiers, and sought to recruit new members among the young Kurds. The Kurdish civilians faced a massive wave of violence from the state and the PKK.

Given the changes in the interpretation of the PKK regarding violence, one cannot simply assume it was purely due to the party's "unhuman mentality". Hence, we must look at how the Turkish government applied types of acts and policies in the given period. The coup of September 12, 1980, which was followed by a military regime, which banned all political parties, paid specific "attention" to the Kurds in Anatolia.<sup>514</sup> According to the legislation which targeted the Kurds, speaking the Kurdish language in public places, including streets and, in some cases, private accommodations, was forbidden. Listening to Kurdish music, giving Kurdish names to the children, and calling oneself Kurd were criminal acts.<sup>515</sup> Besides, thousands of Kurds, regardless of gender, occupation, or age, were systemically tortured in prisons, killed, or kidnapped, and their bodies were never found.<sup>516</sup> This strict policy showed that the state had already put the Kurds in a semi-open prison even before the PKK socialized violence. In such an environment, the Kurds faced the abuse of force by the state, while thousands of others, especially youth, died in the fight.

#### 1.4 Concluding Remarks

The armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state caused thousands of deaths. While both sides glorified martyrdom, the Kurds were subjected to two types of violence orchestrated by the PKK and the Turkish state. The primary sources presented above reveal that the declaration of the PKK caused strict legislation in the region through constant military control and violation of human rights for decades.

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<sup>513</sup> Adnan Çelik, "Kurdistan Yerellerinde 90'ların Savaş Konfigürasyonu: Baskı, Şiddet Ve Direniş," in: *90'ların Trükiye'sine bakmak*, ed. Ayşen Uysal (Ankara: Dipnot Yayınları, 2016), 71.

<sup>514</sup> "Güneydoğu'da Yeni Dönem," *Milliyet* (1987): 6.

<sup>515</sup> Senem Aslan, *Nation Building in Turkey and Morocco* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 134—136.

<sup>516</sup> Erdinc Akyunlu, "Türk: 12 Eylül Olmasaydı PKK bu Kadar Büyümezdi," June 22, 2014.

Unlike the Turkish policy regarding the Kurds, the PKK created a cult of death and perpetrated martyrdom as a tool to build a bridge between itself and the Kurdish society. Before 1984, news stories were mainly centered on the relationship between death, memory, and struggle. Starting in 1985, the language changed and conveyed enmity due to the state's policies in the region, and the Turkish state was clearly presented as the enemy. As a result of the Turkish military control over the Kurdish society, PKK socialized violence and death and pictured its total fight with the Kurds against the state.

Starting from the early 80s, each death of the PKK members was seen as a source of victory, memory, and anger. Besides, since the Kurds populated the PKK, it was not a challenging task to “socialize” the sense of revenge among its members and the civilian Kurds. At some point, death itself became a part of its ideological stance. Hence, I named it the post-mortem ideology. Contrary to the religious fundamentalists, death and martyrdom were not perceived as a gateway to heaven; they were considered part of being a Kurd and a guerilla. The post-mortem ideology refers to a time in the party's history when the Kurds did not cry or feel sorrow at the death of their members but celebrated it. I have indicated that it is worth being a subject of further research.



## Chapter 2

### The Turkish Approach to Violence: “Civilizing” and Criminalizing

The formation of the PKK led to a significant but mostly ignored shift in the official standing of the Turkish state regarding the Kurds. Reading official documents and pro-state newspapers, unlike the pre-PKK, the Kurds were not depicted as Kurds or easterners but as Kurds and terrorists. The newspapers and official documents from the early Republic revealed that they did not hesitate to portray the Kurds as “backward and primitive”. Further, it seems that both in the discourse of the press and officials, the Kurds were pictured as a group of people who needed to be “civilized” by the state. When the armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army started, the language was replaced with a new discourse in which “anarchists, terrorists, and the Kurds” were used separately.

This chapter, by looking at some news from the early Republic and after the declaration of the PKK, aims to show how and to what extent the PKK changed the discourse regarding how the Kurds were portrayed.

#### 2.1 “Civilizing” the Kurds and the Early Republic

From the beginning of the Republic, there were several local rebellions against the new Turkish government, and without exception, all the rebellions were smashed by the Turkish army. Although they were poorly organized and equipped with small groups of Kurds, the state and the media presented these acts not as rebellious or anarchist but as the Kurds who were uneducated and uncivilized. With the declaration of the PKK, the danger was not the Kurds but “terrorists” and “anarchists”. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Kurds were considered the danger. One of the long-lasting Turkish daily newspapers, *Cumhuriyet*, after the Ararat rebellion in 1930, presented the Kurds in the following sentences: “The way their senses and minds work shows how they are simple and rude like animals. These people who mix raw meat with bulgur and eat are no different from cannibals and savages in Africa”.<sup>517</sup>

Such description showed that it was not the rebels but the Kurds as a community who were identified in the mind of the Turkish state, and elites formulated the problem from a modernization point of view by picturing the Kurds as an uncivilized group of people. Similarly, Yusuf Mazhar, a journalist who published a series of short reports after he visited

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<sup>517</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, July 16, 1930.

the regions of rebellions, profiled the Kurds by writing: "...they lack feeling and civilians' inclinations... they have been a plague for our race for centuries" and he believed the "dark spirited Kurds" would revolt again.<sup>518</sup>

Since the Kurds were not "humans" and not considered part of Anatolia, the Turks represented the "civilized nation". Hence, they did not hesitate to publicly massacre the Kurds and tell the whole nation in a noticeably clear and "justified" way. The brutality of the genocidal acts of the state before the operations of Ararat Mountain was captured by *Cumhuriyet*, who gave information on what happened before the operation and how "successful" the Turkish army was, and what was for the Kurds. He wrote:

"There have been about 15,000 rebels on the hill of Ararat. Our aircraft has been bombarding them very fiercely. Ararat Mountain is under constant fire, and the Turkish iron eagles are cleaning the disobedient children. The villages where they went were completely burned, and in the Zilan operation, around 15,000 people were killed. The river of Zilan is full of corpses. The Ararat operation starts this week under the control of the Salih Pasha, and their chances of escaping from the operation are unthinkable".<sup>519</sup>

During the Agri Rebellions, the Turkish civil and military officers were given immunity with the Amnesty Law, *Af kanunu* in Turkish, in 1928, which stated that those military officers in the regions could not be held responsible for their acts.<sup>520</sup> The legitimacy given to the local authorities also gave them the liberty to take any necessary actions to fight against the rebels and the civilians. Such legitimate support to the military officers in the region created a dark space in the Kurdish region, where the acts were not binding with legal consequences. However, every action was considered right in the fight against separatism, anarchy, and later terrorism. During the early Republic, loyalty and respect for the state were constantly presented in official documents and the media. For example, the general inspector, Ibrahim Tali Bey, in an interview, said, "All people are loyal to the Republic".<sup>521</sup> The message aimed to give the impression that not all the people, but a group of rebels were revolting.

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<sup>518</sup> Yusuf Mazhar, "Ararat Eteklerinde," *Cumhuriyet*, August 18, 1930, 3.

<sup>519</sup> "Ağrı Dağı Operesyanou bu Hafta Başlıyor," *Cumhuriyet*, July 16, 1930.

<sup>520</sup> Emin Karaca, *Agri Eteklerinde Isyan*, (Istanbul: Karakutu Yayinlari, 2003), 23.

<sup>521</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, August 10, 1930, 4.

The above example from the early Republic indicates that the existence of the Kurds was a problem to the Turkification and assimilation policies, and they had to be solved by the military.

## 2.2 The “Gangsters” of Society

The formation of the PKK and its attack on the Turkish army shocked Turkish society and state officials. For decades, the official agenda of the Turks was based on strengthening and disseminating Atatürk’s principles in Anatolia through media, education, and bureaucracy. The Turkish army pounced on those who were against the Turkification project to protect the nation's unity. The Turkish army suppressed all the Kurdish rebellions against such a project. However, with its ideological capacity, organization, and ties with the Kurdish society, the PKK made it more difficult for the Turkish army to end it as it did in the early Republic period. The belief among the Turkish politicians’ bureaucracy that the Turkish project was successful and would live forever was shaken by the attack of the PKK. Alongside the army, the media has been used to both legitimize the act of state regarding the Kurds and demonize the Kurdish movement among the public. As discussed, the language used to portray the Kurds was significantly moved to a supposedly softer tone.

To back my argument, I have analyzed another pro-state daily newspaper, *Milliyet*, between 01.12.1980 and 01.12.1982 to show how the discourse changed since the PKK was founded in 1978. I aimed to find the closest dates to the declaration of the PKK. I found out that in this period, 22 news articles talked about the Kurds and the conflict.

The first news published in 1981 remarked, “The 223 suspects were killed, and security forces arrested 219 people in operation called ‘implosion terror’”.<sup>522</sup> Throughout the entire page, there was no mention of Kurds or the PKK. They were rather depicted as suspects and terrorists. However, before 1981, I did not find the use of terror in the newspapers. Following the news a couple of weeks later, another news was published: “25 suspected terrorists have been arrested for killing 17 people”.<sup>523</sup> Unlike early Republican newspapers, the newspaper did not use the Kurds with derogatory adjectives of being

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<sup>522</sup> “Adana’da 219 Kişiyi Öldürmekten Sanık 223 Kişi Yakalandı Hücre Evlerindeki Aramalarda 41 Tabanca,17 Otomatik Silah Ve 1389 Mermi Ele Geçirildi Adana’da Güvenlik Güçlerinin Düzenlediği Terörü Çökertme,” *Milliyet*, January 18, 1981, 6. <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/Arsiv/1981/07/18>.

<sup>523</sup> “İltica Hakkı İsteyen İranlı Albay, Sorgusu İçin Ankara’ya Getirildi Ankara, Özel Ran Hava Kuvvetleri’ne Ait Bir Uçağı Silah Zoruyla Van’a İndiren ve Türkiye’den Geçici İltica Hakkı İsteyen Tranlı Alba.” *Milliyet*, March 19, 1981, 7. <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/Arsiv/1981/07/19>.

primitive and barbaric. Further, on several occasions, the PKK was depicted as a group that tortured the local people and put pressure on them.

Unlike the pre-PKK period, the focus was not on presenting the Turkish army's strength but on the PKK's terror. In another news, it was reported that “What the Apocular has done is brigandage under the cover of ideology. One of the examples: the Apocular has been putting pressure on the region’s people...they cut the ears of people who do not want to attend them”.<sup>524</sup> The media did not proudly demonstrate how the Turkish army finished the anarchists and rebels but how the PKK was dangerous and inhuman. Moreover, it seemed the actions of the PKK had been presented in a sense that the state protected the people from the PKK. At a different time, it wrote, “Apocular took four lives in Yetkin’s family, besides forcing the family’s son, a PKK member, to kill his mother and brother. Necmettin Yetkin: the Apocular brother killed my mother and brother without batting an eyelid”.<sup>525</sup>

What we see here is the demonization of the PKK with exaggerated language but also the absence of the Turkish army. As presented above, during the rebellions in the 1920s and 1930s, the focus was on portraying the power of the Turkish army and how it was successful. However, since the PKK was formed, it seemed that the media centered more on the PKK's terror, besides the PKK's acts and its demand down to the local level. In a sense, its existence was presented as a matter of security in the Kurdish region, not against the authority of the Turkish state. The reason for such an approach was twofold. First, to separate the Kurds from the PKK and not accept that the PKK was Kurdish. Secondly, it aimed to take the Kurdish aspect out and show it as an illegal party with no relationship with the Kurdish population. For instance, in related news, it was described thus: “Security forces found that Apocular killed 243 people and hundreds are lost”.<sup>526</sup>

A significant result of the examination of this period is related to how the PKK was depicted before other nations and the messages given to society. The news after certain trials showed that most of the arrested PKK members or sympathizers were either sentenced to death or life sentence. In most cases, the news articles were written in capital letters, such as

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<sup>524</sup> “Apocuların İdeoloji Kilifi Arkasında Yaptıkları Tam Anlami İle Eşkiyalikti. Apocuların Gazabına Uğradılar Apocuların bölge halkı üzerinde uyguladığı baskı yöntemlerine birkaç örnek vermek istiyoruz.” *Milliyet*, July 19, 1981, 7. <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/Arsiv/1981/07/19>.

<sup>525</sup> “Apocular, Yetkin Ailesinden 4 Can Almışlar,Hem de Ailenin Militan Oğluna Anasını ve Kardeşini Öldürterek Necmettin Yetkin «Apocu kardeşim,anamı ve ağabeyimi gözünü kırpmadan öldürdü.” *Milliyet*, July 16, 1981, <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/Arsiv/1981/07/16>.

<sup>526</sup> “Güvenlik Güçleri Apocular'ın 243 Kişiyi Öldürdüklerini Saptadı.Yüzlerce de Kayıp Ve Kimliği Belirsiz Ceset var. Apocular,Türk Bayrağı Çekenleri o güvenlik Kuvvetlerince Saptandığı Kadarıyla 243 Kişiyi öldürdü.” *Milliyet*, July 18, 1981, 9. <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/Arsiv/1981/07/18>.

Armenian, terrorist, and the death penalty. “The death penalty was wanted for 97 Apoculars, including teachers, parliament members, doctors, and police officers”.<sup>527</sup> Then on another date, it was remarked, “Levan Ekmekçiyen sentenced to death. The Armenian terrorist who attacked the airport was punished with the death penalty”.<sup>528</sup> In these two news articles, the words Armenian and terrorist were written in capital letters. Such a language showed that the name Armenian was used pejoratively, and the message to society was that anyone who dared to challenge the state would face the death penalty.

### 2.3 Concluding Remarks

A brief comparison between two pro-state newspapers might confirm that the formation of the PKK changed the discourse in media regarding the presentation of the conflict and the Kurds. In the example of Cumhuriyet, the Kurds were presented as backward, illiterate, and dangerous to the Republic. The rebellions in the early Republic made the Kurds as a community to be seen as a threat that had to be eliminated. Similarly, the Turkish army and its capability to end these “backward people” were glorified as much as possible. In this period, the Kurds and the terror or rebellion were not considered distinct but the same. Accordingly, the military oppression of the Turkish state mainly was combined with the “civilizing” aim in the subtext.

The synonymy of the words Kurds and rebellions or Kurds and backwardness after the establishment of the PKK translated to the dichotomy between the Kurds and “terrorists”. In this period, derogatory words were sparingly used as the focus was more on the difference between the Kurds and the PKK. Furthermore, the PKK has not been related to the Kurds but to Armenians and a group of gangsters and terrorists. Unlike the civilizing mission of the early Republic, in this period, the state was committed to protecting the Kurds and the unity of the country from the PKK.

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<sup>527</sup> “Türkeş, Savcıya Hakaret Suçlamasını Reddedti...Ekim 1981 Günü Yapılan Mün' Sih MHP Ve Yan Kuruluşlarıyla İlgili Davada İddia Makamına Hakaret Ettitri Gerekeçesiyle Hakkında Dava Acıldı.” *Milliyet*, December 12, 1981, 6 <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/Arsiv/1981/12/12>.

<sup>528</sup> “Levan Ekmekçiyen İdama Mahkom Oldu Senboga Havaalanı baskınını gerçekleştiren Ermeni terörist Levan Ekmekçiyen Sıkıyönetim Askeri Mahkemesi'nce ölüm cezasına çarptırılmıştır.” *Milliyet*, September 8, 1982, 9 <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/Arsiv/1982/09/08>.

### Chapter 3

#### **An Analysis of Official Reports and Party Programs on the Kurds**

Due to their geographical consolidation and ethnic-linguistic difference, the Kurds in Turkey have been a major “concern” for almost a century. Atatürk’s revolution, which aimed to build a less-diverse nation based on Turkishness, provoked the reactions of the Kurds through local rebellions. As the major obstacle in the process of “full Turkishness,” the Turkish political elites and governments promised to either end the Kurdish conflict or make recommendations on how to deal with the Kurds.

The political and official reports presented to the given governments or the public in different periods were mainly centralized on economic inequalities between the southeast of Turkey and the west. During the early Republican period, the aim was more militaristic, and most reports offered suggestions for assimilating the Kurds. However, after the declaration of the PKK, although they did not exclusively present ethnic rights yet, the tone of their language changed. The main difference between the pre- and post-PKK periods was that, unlike the early Republican reports, which aimed to suggest how to assimilate the Kurds and strengthen the Turkish agenda, the post-PKK was more on protecting the Republican values and their very existence.

Much of the literature on the long-lasting conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army focused on nationalism and violence. However, demonstrating the changes and continuity in the official Turkish approach regarding the Kurds was mostly put aside. Party programs and reports on the Kurds written and submitted in different periods reveal that the common approach, regardless of their ideological stance, interpreted the Kurdish conflict in the context of regional economic inequalities. Additionally, after the PKK, these reports and party programs separated the Kurds from the PKK and claimed that the leading cause of the dispute was terrorism. As discussed, a comparison between pre- and post-PKK showed that even though the official perspective did not change after the declaration of the PKK, they started to refer to the Kurds and ethnicity in their texts slightly. Besides, before the PKK, the official standing was on assimilating the Kurds and strengthening Atatürk’s principles, then with the PKK, the language changed to how to protect the Republic and the country's unity from the PKK.

### 3.1 Ismet Inonu's Report of East Reform (*Şark Islahat Raporu*)

Ismet Inonu became president and later prime minister and was one of the dominant political figures in early modern Turkish history from establishment of the Republic until his death. His report was written during his visits to several Kurdish cities in the early 1930s. The report, which became one of the reference works among pro-state politicians, is fundamental in showing the early Republican perception of the Kurds and its policy. The most apparent features of his report are its militaristic approach and the disparaging language he uses when referring to the Kurds. As a former general in the Turkish army, he believed the military represented the Republic and was a central problem-solving unit. During his visit to Elazig, he came across a shabbily dressed soldier and wrote: "... the center and army should work harder. The image of the army, which represents the prestige of the Republic, might deepen our political problems".<sup>529</sup>

The uniform, as one of the symbols of central authority, represents the given power. The outfit, its color, shape, and the quality of its material induce fear in and secures the respect of the civilians, showing the nobility of the power. For Inonu, the rebellions against the Turkish state before his journey made him conclude that the soldiers' uniforms were fatal to the political problems and specifically to the Kurds, for which he did not provide any details. Similarly, in Diyarbakir, called Amed by Kurds, he remarked: "Diyarbakir is good enough to build a strong center of Turkishness".<sup>530</sup> Since Diyarbakir was the most advanced city in the Kurdish region, especially in infrastructures such as schools, public houses, and military presence, he believed the city would be a center where Turkishness would be demonstrated and disseminated among the Kurds. Showing the Republican power in the region as strong as possible was a key concern in his report. Thus, he said: "Today's situation is far from the state's glory and politics".<sup>531</sup>

Further, the replacement of the Kurds with the Turks and the closing of the borders with French Syrians to dissolve the Kurdish consolidation regarding geography and ethnicity were other crucial insights of his report. Mardin was located on the border of French Syria and was populated mainly by Armenians and Arabs, who, for him, was passive. The real danger was the Kurdish leaders. He believed that the manipulated French groups crossed the border, and to stop it, the Republic was supposed to replace the Kurds

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<sup>529</sup> Ismet Inonu, *Şark Islahat Raporu*, (Ankara, 1935), 8.

<sup>530</sup> Inonu, *Şark*, 7.

<sup>531</sup> Inonu, *Şark*, 8.

with the more “trustable” population and, in his word, “annihilate” the ones who crossed the border.<sup>532</sup> In his perspective, the state should be more precise in dealing with the Kurds and, if necessary, replace the population of the Kurdish cities with others. In his sentences, “Siirt needs to be transferred to the east. The city is purely Kurdish, so our army, officers, and buildings need to be stronger”.<sup>533</sup> For him, strict assimilation policies were fundamental for the state to deal with the Kurds, who were the “problems” that needed an immediate solution. “We need to go inside the people as soon as possible” i.e., to assimilate the Kurds”.<sup>534</sup> In his report, we also see the acceptance of the Armenian genocide and the encapsulation of the Kurds’ and Armenians’ tragedies in a rather mean language: “Armenian homes are empty, and some of them taken by people. They told me not to lead them to leave the houses, and I reported that I agreed with them”.<sup>535</sup>

The state’s policy to build strong Turkish nationhood at all costs was elaborated in his report, where he believed the “Armenian case” was a success. He said: “After Hamidiye troops and our policy, people here began to respect us, and they are passive”.<sup>536</sup> Although he did not point it out in his report, I would argue that he believed the same acts carried against the Armenians should be meted out to the Kurds regarding displacement, evacuation of the cities, and mass killing. Further, we could also feel their anger about why the Kurds were not passive like Armenians. For him and the Republican politicians, “respect” for the state’s authority had been a fundamental requirement to being accepted as eligible citizens. Thus, his words were geared toward building respect among the Kurds. In this sense, it might be claimed that the Kurdish rebellions against the Turkish state were disrespectful to the Turkish authority, an act that reached its peak with the formation of the PKK.

Another significant result of reading his report was how he made coloration between Turkishness and happiness. For him, being Turkish or having Turkish tendencies made people happy. He wrote, “People of Agri are Kurds, but they are close to Turkishness. They are happy but poor”.<sup>537</sup> It seemed that for him, Turkishness did not necessarily come from birth. “It is something that can be built”. The forceful resettlement of the population, building of bridges and schools, and strengthening of the military service were valuable tools for making people’s identities closer to Turkishness. Among several tools in the Turkification process, he found a significant role in obligatory military service. Inonu wrote,

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<sup>532</sup> Inonu, *Şark*, 8.

<sup>533</sup> Inonu, *Şark*, 8.

<sup>534</sup> Inonu, *Şark*, 9.

<sup>535</sup> Inonu, *Şark*, 11.

<sup>536</sup> Inonu, *Şark*, 12.

<sup>537</sup> Inonu, *Şark*, 14.



“I came across some man who came from the military. They seemed to me to be closer to Turkishness”.<sup>538</sup> In the second part of the report, he focused on the state’s preventive measures in terms of the settlement, security, economy, education, and health, with a particular focus on Dersim, which, three years later, was going to endure one of the most extensive mass killings in modern Turkish history.

As in the military service, education had been a tool in spreading the state’s ideology and strengthening its hegemony over society, especially among Kurds. From the beginning of the Turkish Republic, education at each time was based on national values. In Inonu’s report on education and the steps, he suggested that the state should highlight the ideology behind education and how it had been used to assimilate the Kurds. He wrote, “While there are not enough schools in Turkish cities to discuss if we should educate Kurds, it is a useless discussion”.<sup>539</sup> Therefore, according to him, Turks should be prioritized in terms of education, which gives credibility to my previous argument that the Kurds were considered strangers and tenants of Turkey. However, despite his priority to Turks, he noted the significance of primary education and recommended it start with “Turkified Kurds”. Furthermore, he stated, “However, if there will be applicable from Kurds for middle school, we should not refuse it”.<sup>540</sup> While the education of the Turks was considered the state's responsibility, for Kurds, it was based on their willingness.<sup>541</sup>

### **3.2 Social Democratic People’s Party Central Commission (Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti, SHP)**

The declaration of the PKK and its armed conflict with the Turkish army changed the political party’s approach to the Kurdish conflict. They kept their distance from the early Republican stance. The SHP central commission indicates that the lack of democracy and social and economic inequalities are the core problems within the country.<sup>542</sup> For the committee, although such inequalities are shared in every region, the east and southeast have a place priority due to violation of human rights, terror, unemployment, and identity

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<sup>538</sup> Inonu, *Şark*, 17.

<sup>539</sup> Inonu, *Şark*, 19.

<sup>540</sup> Inonu, *Şark*, 18.

<sup>541</sup> Inonu, *Şark*, 17.

<sup>542</sup> Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Partinin Doğu ve Güneydoğu Sorunlarına Bakış Acısı ve Çözüm Önerileri (Ankara: Merkez Yürütme Kurulu, 1990), 5.

depression. As also stated in other reports, it seems that the conceptualization of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict is based on economy and terror rather than Kurdish ethnic rights.

In the report, one could see the repeated use of Kurds with secondary words like rooted or Kurdish rooted. After calculating, I found out that the word Kurds was written fewer times than terror, five times versus twenty-three. The committee continuously used ambiguous and soft language to describe the Kurdish regions' social, political, and economic problems. To illustrate this, the forced migration of the Kurds was described in these words: "... recently because of economic and political reasons; there has been an intense migration from the East and Southeast of Anatolia".<sup>543</sup> The lack of classification of what kind of economic and political reasons caused such a move also raises the following unanswered questions: Who are these refugees? What sort of political and economic reasons caused the migration? Was there any similar migration in the Turkish regions as well? Lastly, in which period did the Kurds move to the west? Not answering such vital questions regarding the Kurdish displacement from the east to the west leaves one thinking that the committee seems uninterested in explaining the situation but covering it.

By using "migration" rather than "evacuation" and "move" instead of "forced," the report seems to underestimate the real causes and consequences of such a major move from the east to the west of Turkey. According to non-government human rights organizations' reports in 1995, between 1993 and 1995, almost three thousand Kurdish villages were evacuated by the Turkish security forces, and the number of people who were forcefully displaced was more than three million.<sup>544</sup> It is also reported by several human rights organizations and academic studies that the main reasons for such violations of human rights are the allegation that the civilian Kurds helped the PKK, the conflict between the Turkish army and the PKK, and lastly, the food embargo imposed on the Kurdish population in the east and southeast of the country.<sup>545</sup> The same report found that the Kurds who were forced to move to the west faced racism, unemployment, and health problems physically and psychologically.<sup>546</sup>

It is unsurprising that the committee does not accept the Kurds as an ethnic group and goes further by claiming that "Kurdish-rooted people did not face any problem because

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<sup>543</sup> Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı, *Doğu*, 28.

<sup>544</sup> Mazlum-DER, "Göç Raporu: Doğu ve Güneydoğu'da iç Göç Neden ve Sonuçları," November, 1995, accessed April 22, 2020, <https://istanbul.mazlumder.org/tr/main/yayinlar/yurt-ici-raporlar/3/mazlumder-goc-raporu-dogu-vegunesdoguda-ic-g/1125>.

<sup>545</sup> Mazlum-DER, "Göç Raporu."

<sup>546</sup> Mazlum-DER, "Göç Raporu."

of their ethnic identity in the regions they migrated to”.<sup>547</sup> However, every available fact shows that the Kurds who moved to the west and mostly Turkish-populated cities faced severe unemployment, discrimination, and isolation due to their ethnicity. Firstly, the Kurdish, whose economy was primarily based on agriculture and animal breeding, had two choices in the cities they migrated to – unemployment and manual labor. Although there is no empirical research on the percentage of the Kurds who worked in low-level positions, the daily reality shows that the Kurds, since they did not have access to education, most likely took manual labor that required physical power. Secondly, most Turks do not speak the Kurdish language, especially the older Kurdish generation who moved to the Turkish cities and lived in an isolated world, which understandably caused them major depression.

Similarly, the younger Kurdish generation suffers discrimination due to their ethnicity and accent in speaking Turkish. Being unable to secure any jobs, most of them fell into illegal businesses such as robbery, drugs, and mafia in their bid to alleviate themselves from abysmal poverty. It has been reported in academic research works and official reports that most of the Kurds moved to the west during the 1990s. In this sense, considering the relationship between poverty and ethnic identity, one might argue that while to the Turkish villager, the government was responsible for their suffering, to the Kurdish villager, his poverty was traceable to his ethnicity.

Putting this argument aside, the report argued that separatist “terrorist” groups and the state’s “misunderstanding” led to economic backwardness in southeast Anatolia. Glorifying the state’s ideology suggested that “racial differences are not the obstacle but the richness of the politics of the Republic and Anatolia”.<sup>548</sup> The constant denial and refusal to mention that the pre-1980 committee put the military coups at the center of conflicts and regional gaps in terms of economy. Further, they claimed that unlike the pre-coup period, September 12, 1980, the Republic used “cultural, sociological, and economic tools” after the coup to put the military at the heart of its politics.<sup>549</sup>

Putting national unity at the core of their recommendations, the committee believed that it was not the state but “wrong policies” that caused the conflicts. They wrote, “The problem is not Anatolian people’s racism but wrong political regulations”.<sup>550</sup> For the committee, the ethnicity-based ideology and primitive traditions were the challenges that needed to be fought. Without mentioning the PKK, they remarked, “Within the national

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<sup>547</sup> Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti, *Doğu*, 8.

<sup>548</sup> Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti, *Doğu*, 29.

<sup>549</sup> Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti, *Doğu*, 30.

<sup>550</sup> Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti, *Doğu*, 40.

unity, we need to be against the ethnicity-based ideology and leave the primitive tradition”.<sup>551</sup> In their perspective, the Kurds and the PKK should be differentiated, and the state should protect the Kurdish population from terrorists.<sup>552</sup> Like Inonu’s report, the committee also chose “respect” in offering solutions to the conflict. They wrote, “End the state of emergency, build love and respect among the citizens and build security on democracy”.<sup>553</sup> Furthermore, the report stated that the Turkish language must be the only official language, and to spread it, and it must be made the language of instruction to build a common culture with love and respect.<sup>554</sup>

The primary significance of this report comes from its recognition of the Kurds as an ethnic group whose existence has been denied for decades. It remarked, “A big proportion of our citizens who live in the east and southeast are ethnically Kurdish.”<sup>555</sup> Even though the report caused a major debate among the public and politicians, it was rejected by Prime Minister Yıldırım Akbulut. He criticized the report for giving the impression that nothing was being done in those regions. For him, the focus on regional differences was an abuse of regionalism. Thus, he claimed, “Everyone who lives in these regions is Turkish, not Kurdish”.<sup>556</sup>

### **3.3 Peoples Labor Party (Halkın Emek Partisi, HEP)**

Founded in 1990, the Peoples Labor Party, Halkın Emek Partisi (HEP), is Turkey's first legal Kurdish political party. On October 21, 1991, the party went to parliament with the coalition.

HEP argued that the democratization of the institutions with its active theoretical approaches was the key to solving the Kurdish dispute, and by saying so, they seemed to consider all groups in the country needed to discuss at an equal position. Among all reports and programs analyzed<sup>557</sup> in this section, HEP was the only group that mentioned the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Helsinki documents and argued that a solution could be attained through peaceful

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<sup>551</sup> Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti, *Doğu*, 44.

<sup>552</sup> Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti, *Doğu*, 42.

<sup>553</sup> Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti, *Doğu*, 43.

<sup>554</sup> Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti, *Doğu*, 45.

<sup>555</sup> Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti, *Doğu*, 28.

<sup>556</sup> <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/yayinlarimiz/ayintarihi/1990/temmuz1990.htm>

<sup>557</sup> Halkın Emek Partisi, *Program*, (Ankara, 1990), 18.

dialogue.<sup>558</sup> It was indicated, however that during this period, there was no enabling environment for a fair discussion of the issue as the Turkish constitution forbade the acceptance of Kurds and the Kurdish language. From its inception, the party argued that if the Kurds – an integral part of society – were not allowed to participate in the discussion, no solution would be forthcoming.<sup>559</sup> Therefore, the first step was to remove all constitutional and institutional obstacles that had prevented a discussion of the Kurdish-Turkish dispute.

Even though they did not use the Kurdish movement in their report, they wrote that a resistance movement is an “act of self-defense”. Unlike the other reports, they believed that the force would stall development and unity. HEP saw and named the danger a civil war. It has been argued that pro-conflict cleavages hold power, and correspondingly, the party argues that monopolization of the power in the hands of a group will lead it to employ terror to protect this power. For HEP, the solution to the problem lies in the democratization of the state by implementing voluntary participation instead of force and terror. The party indicated its aim was “total equality among race, gender, religious, and ethnic groups in the country”.<sup>560</sup>

### **3.4 The Republican Peoples Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP)**

As the oldest political party in Turkey, the Republican Peoples Party, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP), in 1999, stated that the “region suffers under terror, pressure, poverty, and a solid inequality”.<sup>561</sup>

Like the SHP, it also articulated how the whole country faced economic, social, and political issues and emphasized that east and southeast Turkey suffered more than the others.<sup>562</sup> In terms of lack of economic development, the rule of law, human rights, and social status, it was argued that the failure of the state to fight terrorism and the lack of democracy had put Turkey in crisis. Like the other reports mentioned in this chapter, this report specifically focused on the 1990s and named the situation a “crisis”.<sup>563</sup> or CHP, the terror of the separatist was the primary and the most significant cause of it, as much as domestic and foreign support. The regional gap in unemployment, education, violation of

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<sup>558</sup> Halkın Emek Partisi, *Program*, 16.

<sup>559</sup> Halkın Emek Partisi, *Program*, 16.

<sup>560</sup> Halkın Emek Partisi, *Program*, 22.

<sup>561</sup> Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Raporu*, (1999): 2.

<sup>562</sup> Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, *Doğu*, 2.

<sup>563</sup> Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, *Doğu*, 3.

human rights, and security regulations had become the region's fate without clarifying the problem's ideological and ethnic aspects of the problem.<sup>564</sup>

Considering the demographic statistics of the region, this report argued that the economy was about to collapse in the aforementioned areas. Additionally, immigration and the feudal traditions in the regions were defined as “the cause,” which intensified the conflict.<sup>565</sup> From the party’s point of view, national movements and political movements in which people across the globe declared their ethnic, religious, and sexual rights were outdated.<sup>566</sup> In this sense, the report saw a similarity between the region and what they called a “terrorist” group, the PKK. They said that the group was established based on the same feudal values.<sup>567</sup> Although the PKK’s documents were considered propaganda and crime, the commission voluntarily did not mention any sources. As discussed previously, PKK defined its aim as a free Kurdish-inhabited region independent of the Turkish state and free from religious and feudal traditions. PKK’s declaration was based on “total equality” between classes, genders, and nations.

Reading the report reveals how the official ideology interprets the Kurdish conflict and how it presents it. Holding the mainstream approach that the PKK and the Kurds are different highlights that the former needs to be addressed by the new security policy while the former should be approached with democratization, though its details are not well explained.

As the representative of the Turkish Republic and its ideological carrier, CHP has been one of the main political entities of contemporary Turkish history. The party’s report reveals three linked aspects of the party’s stance regarding the Kurds. Firstly, as the carrier of the official ideology, CHP is one of the most paranoid political agencies. The fear of division and loss of territory caused CHP to internalize the institutional paranoia that I discussed earlier. Defining itself as a party of social democrats, it is also the bearer of the official discourse based on the denial of the Kurds. Secondly, CHP is built on the republican approach that directly or indirectly supports the government. Recently, in the bill for the removal of parliamentary immunity, which was explicitly designed for the Kurdish parliament members, CHP supported the AKP’s legislation, saying, “It is against the

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<sup>564</sup> Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, *Doğu*, 4.

<sup>565</sup> Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, *Doğu*, 50—51.

<sup>566</sup> Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, *Doğu*, 43.

<sup>567</sup> Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, *Doğu*, 43.

constitution, but we will say yes”.<sup>568</sup> Likewise, it has also backed the Turkish military operations in northern Syria against the Kurds.<sup>569</sup>

Lastly, the party seems stuck in the traditional Turkish leftist discourse that economy and regional gaps are the core of any political and social problems concerning the Kurds. It is also noteworthy that the party’s stance in the Kurdish case seems to be an evident example of the pro-conflict cleavages proposed before. Its official standing, ideological identity, and approach to the Kurds and their ethnic demands all contribute to the conflict and play a vital role in narrowing the Kurdish conflict to the economic and security framework that, not surprisingly, becomes an obstacle in resolving the Turkish-Kurdish conflict.

### 3.5 The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP)

In the AKP’s first program in 2003, the Kurdish issue was titled “east and southeast” and defined as one of the central questions in the country.<sup>570</sup> Like the reports discussed above, the focus was on national unity and the centrality of the Turkish language. The report wrote, “We will solve it from scratch, the terror which threatens our national unity”.<sup>571</sup> The report replaced the Kurdish ethnicity-based demands and the conflict with “cultural differences”. There was no mention of “Kurdish”.

For AKP, the cultural differences were accepted as “cultural enrichment”; however, “the different identities would be allowed to speak their language if Turkish stayed as the only official language”.<sup>572</sup> It seems that identity and cultural differences were comprehended in the most uncomplicated manner, and the reader might feel that the problem was just “acceptance” and not “acceptance of enrichment”. The text also revealed that the cause of the conflict was not the people, but the “terror” backed by some external powers.<sup>573</sup> This approach led the party to claim, by referring to the Kurds as “our people,”

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<sup>568</sup> “Kılıçdaroğlu: AKP’nin Dokunulmazlık Teklifi Anayasaya Aykırı Ama Evet Diyeceğiz,” *Diken*, April, 4, 2016), accessed April 25 2021, <http://www.diken.com.tr/kilicdaroglu-akpnin-dokunulmazlik-teklifi-anayasaya-aykiri-ama-evet-diyecegiz/>.

<sup>569</sup> Mahmut Lıcalı, “Kılıçdaroğlu Açıkladı: CHP Tezkereye Neden Evet Dedi,” *Cumhuriyet*, November 2, 2019, accessed April 25 2021, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/kilicdaroglu-acikladi-chp-tezkereye-neden-evet-dedi-1573116>.

<sup>570</sup> Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, *Kalkınma ve Demokratikleşme Program* (Ankara, 2003), 28—30.

<sup>571</sup> Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, *Kalkınma*, 29.

<sup>572</sup> Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, *Kalkınma*, 29.

<sup>573</sup> Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, *Kalkınma*, 30.

that the state of emergency, mass killing, and forced displacement were the results of the terror and sometimes the state's "unintentional acts".<sup>574</sup>

In possessive language, the party, on the one hand, was unwilling to use the word Kurd. On the other hand, it showed how the Turks and the official ideology saw the Kurds as a group that might be "owned". The supremacist approach of the party and the state was based on respect from the people, the Kurds. Similarly, the text wrote, "The government should protect the innocent with compassion".<sup>575</sup>

The AKP and Saadet Party, which initially put conservative Islamic values in their interpretations of politics, tend to suggest that there is no racial supremacy among people in Islam. However, it seems that the political race suppresses such a belief. Since the Turks and the Kurds are Muslims, they are equal in Islam. However, in real politics and daily practice, the Turks hold leadership positions in the government. Christopher Houston elaborates on the Kurdish question and its ties with the nation-state, Islam, and republican ideology. Both have distanced their values from Islam for decades and created a gap between the conservatives and the Turkish state.<sup>576</sup> As an alienated entity, the Islamic movement for Houston is a "failure" in not bringing their Islamic values to their approach to the Kurdish conflict.<sup>577</sup> Regarding the Islamists' stance in the Kurdish case and their demands, it seems that this group believes that they are equal in the eyes of Allah and the Koran; however, in politics and the constitution, they put Turkishness and its ruling position above equality with the Kurds.

The Turkish-Kurdish conflict that caused severe damage to the country economically, politically, and militarily has been mostly stuck in political parties' electoral propaganda or their reports. The AKP, which came to power in 2002, promised to build a democratic and free country.<sup>578</sup> As a core issue in reaching such a dream country, the Kurds and their demands were some of the central projects of the AKP's first period of governance. They put the Kurds in their party program to resolve the conflict. In his rally in Diyarbakir in 2005, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Prime Minister, declared the process named *demokratik açılım/milli birlik projesi* in Turkish (democratic opening and national unity

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<sup>574</sup> Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, *Kalkınma*, 30.

<sup>575</sup> Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, *Kalkınma*, 30.

<sup>576</sup> Christopher Houston, *Islam, Kurds and the Turkish Nation State* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2001), 144—145.

<sup>577</sup> Houston, *Islam*, 144—145.

<sup>578</sup> Ulkü Doganay, "AKP'nin Demokrasi Söylemi ve Muhafazakarlık: Muhafazakar Demokrasiye Eleştirel Bir Bakış," *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi, Research* 62, no. 2 (2007): 65—80, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/36056>.



project) and said, “The Kurdish problem is my problem”.<sup>579</sup> Erdogan’s project was anchored on three pillars: strengthening democracy, recognizing cultural rights, and ending prevalent economic inequalities. The project also rejected regional, religious, and ethnic nationalism. The declaration was not tantamount to a refusal to fight terrorism; it was meant to transform the social, political, and economic conditions that fed and sustained the violence. Shortly after the declaration, the “peace process” started between 2012 and 2015.<sup>580</sup>

During the peace process, the negotiation with Ocalan, PKK’s withdrawal from Turkey, and the ceasefire between the Turkish army and the PKK became a “promise” of an end to the conflict. After the two /three-year-long peace process, the election of 2014, in which the Kurdish party, HDP, won several seats in the parliament and Erdogan lost, became another bloody conflict in the southeast of Turkey, a massive wave of oppression against the Kurdish parliament members and Kurds in general.<sup>581</sup> In the first period of Erdogan’s government, his projects for a democratic system and the peace processes were a break from the traditional Turkish state’s discourse regarding the Kurds. Unlike pre-AKP, when the state’s policy denied the Kurdish issue and regarded it as a security threat, during the first years of the Erdogan administration, the Kurds, their demands, and the state’s policy were democratic, equitable, and free. However, these positive changes were lost with Erdogan’s loss in the elections.

### 3.6 The Independent Republican Party (Bağımsız Cumhuriyet Partisi, BCP)

Bağımsız Cumhuriyetçi Party leader Mumtaz Sosyal, in the party program, argues that imperialists have used the ethnic differences within the country to control Turkey and that ethnicity-based organizations will create the federation.<sup>582</sup> In his interpretation, the Kurdish bourgeoisie, which for him lives under Kurdish identity and is used by the imperialists to build a small Middle East Kurdish federation, serves the gain of external powers.<sup>583</sup> In the same manner, he systematically avoids using the word Kurd and asserts that the struggle for rights and freedom for any ethnic group, mainly Kurds, has nothing to give them.<sup>584</sup> It

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<sup>579</sup>“Kürt Sorunu Benim Sorunum.” *Hurriyet*, August 12, 2005, accessed November 18, 2019, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/kurt-sorunu-benim-sorunum-341847>

<sup>580</sup>“Kürt Sorunu Benim Sorunum.” *Hurriyet*,

<sup>581</sup> Hüseyin Yayman, *Şark Meselesinden Demokratik Açılıma, Türkiye’nin Kürt Sorunu Hafızası* (Ankara: SETA, 2001), 18.

<sup>582</sup> Bağımsız Cumhuriyetçi Parti, *Durum ve Çözüm* (Ankara, 2007), 13.

<sup>583</sup> Bağımsız Cumhuriyetçi Parti, *Durum*, 13—14.

<sup>584</sup> Bağımsız Cumhuriyetçi Parti, *Durum*, 13.

seems his leftist tendency as a politician leads him to conceptualize the conflict from an anti-imperialist angle, and he fails to point out that the core of the Turkish-Kurdish dispute lies in ethnicity and share of power.

The Kurdish question for him is not different. It is a shared issue born out of class-based struggles and gaps, and to overcome such gaps, one needs to be anti-imperialist rather than Kurdish or Turkish.<sup>585</sup> As elaborated, though the politics and population are diverse in several aspects in Turkey, when it comes to the ethnic rights and Kurdish demands from the ultranationalists to the socialists, there is a consensus over the unity of the country and the denial of Kurdish rights. Lastly, the lack of democracy, as has been reported by several international organizations, is a common issue within the country, yet the understanding of unemployment and inequality differs among the Turks and the Kurds. While it can be said that a Turkish citizen does not conceptualize the problem of violation of his rights from an ethnic perspective, a Kurdish citizen might.

### **3.7 The Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi, SP)**

Religious similarity among the citizens of Turkey has been systematically implemented in various situations to solve or, most time, hide the real problem. The Saadet Party, one of the descendants of the Milli Görüş, besides AKP, believes that the Islamic brotherhood and Ummah of Islam might be the solution to the Kurdish dispute. All the parties' reports on Kurdish or southeast issues systemically use words such as "economic development, brotherhood, unity, and terror".<sup>586</sup> Besides, their report also argues a third dimension which is terrorism supported by domestic and foreign powers.

Not for the Saadet Party, but most politicians and the state tend to differentiate between the Kurds living in Turkey and the PKK. It is noteworthy that while all Kurds do not support the PKK, the PKK's guerrillas are predominantly Kurdish. It might be argued that while Kurdish sons and daughters live in the mountains, their mothers, fathers, and little siblings are the country's citizens. The trap which not just the Turkish state but also all political entities are falling into is the ignorance that PKK was formed by, and its members are the Kurds, and the Kurds are a part of the country. It has been established that the Kurds

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<sup>585</sup> Bağımsız Cumhuriyetçi Parti, *Durum*, 14.

<sup>586</sup> Saadet Partisi, *Güneydoğu Raporu* (Ankara, 2013), 12.

do not want to leave the country, and people are trapped between terrorists and the state by believing that Kurds want their identity to be accepted.

Unlike secular political parties, Saadet claims that the state might approve religious authority in the region to establish contact with the people by suggesting Islam is the key to the problem.<sup>587</sup> Putting a political issue that needs to be solved by legislative tools in a frame of the uncertainty of religion and the lack of knowledge about the religious orientation of the Kurdish people would deepen the conflict. Moreover, the second critique I may raise is that the report states: “laics, secular, and independent Kurdistan will turn Muslim Kurds into slaves”.<sup>588</sup> While the sentence emphasizes the word Muslim before the national identity, there is a hidden assumption that although the Kurds might have their state, they cannot be free, and eventually, the future of Kurds will be under the rule of the Turks.

Looking at the Islamic-conservative point of view, there is a three-fold approach to the Kurdish conflict. Firstly, religious parties held that abolishing the caliphate created confusion and a lack of authority among Muslims, which eventually caused disputes. Secondly, the rise of nation-states and modernization, Westernization, has damaged the Islamic “soul” and caused diffusion in the country. Lastly, the Marxist and socialist ideology of the Kurds, which, against Islamic belief, is not only a reason for conflict but also against Islamic traditions. Apparently, for conservative and religious parties to resolve the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, the Turkish state and the Kurds need to re-adapt and follow the principles of Islam and the Koran.

### **3.8 Concluding Remarks**

Ismet İnönü’s report showed that before the PKK, the problem was referred to as the eastern and south-eastern. The common agenda was the assimilation of the Kurds, the replacement of her population with Turks, and infrastructural developments to strengthen the power of one region over the others. These reports revealed individuals' perceptions and the state’s politics.

In contrast with the extensive literature on the change and differentiation concerning the Kurdish problem, I would argue that there had been relative changes not in the state’s

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<sup>587</sup> Saadet Partisi, *Güneydoğu*, 14.

<sup>588</sup> Saadet Partisi, *Güneydoğu*, 13.

policies but government's policies with the influence of national and international dynamics.

The second finding is that the reports put the Kurdish existence in their approach and considered it the real threat. One of the essential findings from the reports was that there was a policy transition regarding how to deal with the Kurds from government to government. Military service and education were given priority in the reports as tools of Turkification and the spread of the state's ideology. The main aim was to weaken the generational ties between the old and the young and dissolve society. The outcomes of the education of the Kurdish students, however, had different results from what the state expected. The students who went to big cities and universities mobilized in time and founded the PKK.

The first attack shifted the state's policy which subsequently emphasized unity and human rights. Reports submitted after the formation of the PKK showed a significant transformation regarding the tone compared to the earlier releases. All reports seemed to agree on national unity, Turkish as the only official language, and ties to keep the population together. I could not find any mention of the PKK in all the reports. It seemed that during the pre-PKK era, they talked about Kurds without mentioning them; after the PKK, they discussed PKK without mentioning it.

Reading the documents made me conclude that the PKK forced politicians to accept that there were Kurds who had not been assimilated "enough". The PKK was able to interrupt the nation-building process of the Turkish state and push the state to act more aggressively. Before the PKK, the existence of the Kurdish population was presented within the context of assimilation into Turkishness, but after the PKK, it shifted to protecting Turkishness.

## **PART VII**

### **CONCLUSION**

The shift from Empire to a nation-state profoundly altered the relationship between authority and the people in given geographies. In this new period, identities, political ideologies, and visions regarding a nation's future have become the key for international and national political players. At the beginning of the twentieth century, one of the most dramatic shifts occurred in Anatolia and the Middle East, where the six-century Ottoman Empire failed to survive. The Turkish Republic was established with the baggage of the Empire's collapse; the fear of losing power and territory again has deployed a massive state's ideology. The anger and disappointment of not saving the Empire, post-empire stress, was institutionalized and became the state's character for decades.

The state's ideology is based on the Westernization and Turkification of its people by holding the dream that everyone should be Turkish or at least look Turkish and, with this identity, reach up with the Western world. Although Turkey had fought the War of Independence against European states, the abovementioned modernization, industrialization, and Westernization mentioned above were mainly supported by the Soviet Union in the first phase. The assistance of the Soviet Union in Westernizing Turkey demonstrates a dichotomy. The Turkish Republic aimed at Westernization and modernization by exemplifying the European states in which it received assistance from the Soviet Union during this long process. Westernization in this sense means the most necessary economic and cultural modernization of politics and society. The anger and disappointment of not saving the Empire, post-empire stress, was institutionalized and became the state's character for decades.

I aimed to discuss the historical transition and process of the Kurds, the Kurdish movement, and the dynamics of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict in four transcriptions. This research began by claiming that the history writing of the Kurdish movement in Turkey has flowed through four transcriptions, different interpretations, or exegeses of four periods, that introduce the alternative narrative of the subject. As presented, the Kurdish movement appears, and the Kurdish issue has been directly defined and redefined in these four transcriptions. Therefore, to clarify the debate on the subject, I have suggested that focusing on these transcriptions and periods regarding the dynamics, local and regional impacts, and

tools used by the sides of the Kurdish question helps us also rethink the evolution of the history of the subject.

I also highlighted how the Turkish and Kurdish sides narrate it. Relayed on the data and theoretical approaches from diverse fields, I argued how the conflict took place in each period, how the language of the sides altered, and what tools they used against one another within the national and international contexts of each political transcription. By doing so, instead of explaining the dispute and the movement from a generalized wholesale description, I found that what is known as the Kurdish problem, the Kurdish movement, and its connection with the Turkish state can be broken into four historical periods in which they had distinct meanings of implication. As we went through each of these phases, we discussed how and to what extent modernization, higher education, and the change from Empire to a nation-state shifted the ideology, strategy, and aim of both sides, the Turkish state and the Kurds. To demonstrate how these four periods shaped the movement and the state, modernization, the building of the Turkish nation, and the Kurds' reaction were placed at the center of the research.

The pivot of the first transcription period is the first adaptive phase, which was the multilayered division formed after the Ottoman Empire's collapse. This division separated the Kurds from four different states in the region. During the rule of the Ottoman Empire, in which the Kurds had relative autonomy due to their geographic consolidation on the east border of the Empire, they were a monitoring point against the Persians. Secondly, they were internally used as agents in the quest to maintain the dominance of Sunni Islam. As a result of their division, the Kurds lost their relative freedom and, most severely, lost their sense of unity as a people.

The second transcription represents the post-empire stress, which was a direct consequence of the failure of the elites to save the Empire. In this phase, the Kurds were subjected to three different but, at the same time, severe politics of denial, assimilation, and state violence through Arabization, Persianization, and Turkification. It must be noted that the failure of the Empire worked in an interconnected manner. For the Turkish elites, post-empire stress created paranoia over a possible loss of power and more territory. This led to replacing the former Ottoman Empire's center-periphery or Muslim-non-Muslim dialect with a new type of social cleavage, pro-conflict and pro-democratic. The former represents the instinct to maintain power and prevent changes in democracy and progress. The latter signifies the goal of change toward acknowledging ethnic and religious minority groups both within society and politics. Although such an alternative approach requires further

research, I proposed that while the Turks followed the pattern of keeping the status quo, the Kurdish side was mainly interested in its change.

The third transcription, the great enlightenment, might be between the 1960s and 1980s. It was the period of mobilization and radicalization of the Kurdish elites and the university youth. Detailed investigation of the PKKs sources and secondary literature demonstrates that due to the fear of communism, and the state's failure to fulfill the Kurdish demands, the Kurdish youth led by Ocalan declared the PKK. This period also generally represents the break from the Turkish left and the state. Contrary to the pre-PKK Kurdish uprising, the PKK moved to the mountain and ideologized the Kurdish population.

I have argued throughout this research that the Turkish-Kurdish conflict emerged during the early republican period and then intensified in the 1970s through the declaration of the PKK and the rise of armed conflict with the Turkish state. What made the political constellation of the 1970s unique or significantly different was that contrary to the pre-PKK rebellions, which were more local and lacked the ideological base, from this period, the PKK represented a mass movement with Marxist-Leninist ideology. Specifically, I discussed that due to the rapid modernization adjusting process, access to higher education increased, and here the Kurdish youth met with different ideologies. Moreover, due to the unstable political and social environment in which the state failed to respond to their demands, this generation found that the only solution may be violence. The long-lasting ideological oppression of Kurds and the criminalization of the leftist movements led the PKK founders to seize the opportunity and carry the leftist ideology to the east and southeast of the country.

Unlike the mainstream studies on the topic that considered the conflict as the invariable problem itself, which is more or less the same in the whole twentieth century, I claimed that it was a constantly changing relationship between two sides that altered according to both parties' time, place, needs, and attitudes. The crux of the matter is not the PKK, or the Turkish state's policy, as many studies on this subject have held the conflict. Still, the core of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict is the existence of Kurds as an ethnic and linguistic population that the Turkish state tends to deny. The PKK, armed conflicts, and the state police are the results of the refusal of the exist as it is in the new circumstances of the post-empire nation-state-based structure. Asserting the PKK as an expression of a break from the Turkish state has made the author claim that the PKK is neither the cause nor the result of the conflict, and it is an armed ideological expression of the collapse of the Kurdish self-defense mechanism as a society.

The result of the last transcription of the Turkish-Kurdish relationship was the idea of the radical democracy that implies three fundamental aspects of the problem: the shift in PKK's goal, the internationalization of the Kurdish movement, and the rebuilding of the self-defense mechanism of the Kurds (which collapsed in the first adaptation period) through democratic confederalism. As demonstrated, most of the pioneer's texts on Rojava and democratic confederalism eagerly believe that the shift from the ideology of an independent Kurdistan to democratic confederalism represents a more sustainable future for the PKK. In contrast to this approach, I argued that the shift is a flashback to the pre-nation states period in which identity and ideology did not have influence as much as it has in contemporary times.

Furthermore, the shift symbolizes a failure in the movement's goal. Since the region and the global order are strictly controlled by the nation-state, it seems that the Kurds' future depends not only on their dream future but also on the reaction of the nation-states in the region. Therefore, democratic confederalism becomes a strategic response to the challenge of building an independent Kurdistan for the Kurdish movement. In this newly reconstructed goal, the movement's goal as a flashback has become a roadmap to build a political and institutional environment in which Kurds and several ethnic and religious groups in Kurdistan can live together.

I explored how and to what extent academia has discussed the conflict. I argued that the literature on the subject is mainly divided into three: related to mainly politicians, soldiers, and citizens, to evaluate the academic approach from the republican period. The main reason for such division is to argue that the literature on the subject has been directly influenced by the political environment of the given time, and not only the theoretical discussion has shaped the understanding of the conflict and how the state approaches it.

While reading both the primary sources and the secondary literature, I realized that studying the Kurdish movement, the Kurdish issue, and the Kurdish region, in general, has become an ideological manifestation, especially in Turkey. In this sense, researchers who use words such as “movement, and human rights” hold a relatively more liberal discourse in discussing the conflict. On the contrary, people who use ‘terrorists, separatism’ are more pro-state and mostly see themselves primarily on the right side of the ideology scale. The distinction over the subject shapes the field's borders and directly influences its history writing. Such a division creates an obstacle for intellectual activities that might find a basis for a democratic discussion rather than manifesting the ideologies.



This research, which was carried out using different sources and theories from various fields of social science, claims that the foundation of the PKK and its armed conflict with the Turkish army led the state to strengthen its security-based policy towards Kurds. The PKK also created a sense of nationhood among the Kurds. Likewise, through examining primary sources, I found that the declaration of the PKK shifted the republicans' previous view of the Kurds. Before the PKK, the state openly and officially denied the existence of Kurds as an ethnic group; when the PKK started its armed struggle, the state followed a more indirect way in denying the existence of Kurds as an ethnic group. However, the PKK and its armed fight against the Turkish state also became a deadlock in resolving the conflict. That is to argue that, unlike the pre-PKK period in which the state had more chances to solve the Kurdish question more quickly, since the 1980s, a potential solution became impossible without a seat for the PKK at the peace table.

I found that while the Turkish state, by modernization and education, aimed to catch up with the Western world, the Kurds implied and interpreted higher education as an environment of political awareness and radicalization. What was enlightening about this finding was the change, like the conflict. The move of the PKK to the mountains created a base in which the state had more difficulty fighting against the party; in contrast, the pre-PKK rebellions, which were easily eliminated due to their locality with the PKK, were "socialized" meaning that it reached civilians to a much greater extent.

I also found that the state regarded the „eastern problem” as interdependent questions of modernization, Turkification, and assimilation during the pre-PKK period. The change in discourse forced the official state policy to formulate the eastern problem within a security framework. In particular, the declaration of the PKK forced the state to accept its existence and gave the Kurdish people the idea of nationhood and identity with it.

The Kurds stuck between the PKK, and the Turkish army faced two sides of pressure and violence. Although the Turkish authorities have blamed them for supporting the PKK and have mainly punished them through displacement and imprisonment, they also faced the violence carried to the region by the PKK.

The Republican elites used education, modernization, the military, and each tool of bureaucracy to create the Millet Turks and catch up with the West. Since Armenians, Greeks, and several other minorities were not significant concerns, Kurds were the biggest non-Turkish minority. The republican goal was a solid Turkish nation, while the Kurdish dream was equal citizens or an independent state like other regions. These two groups of people who had never had direct conflict in their previous history concerning demands and

reactions to them moved towards a new history that included armed conflict, displacement, and death for decades. During this research, one of the main questions in my mind was why the Turkish-Kurdish conflict has not turned into a civil war. I am interested also in the question approached from the opposite angle: Was there a way to make peace between these two identity-based agendas? Although further research is needed to answer these questions, it seems that since the Kurds and the Turks know each other's demands, they might find a way to combine their identities and establish harmony instead of hegemony over one another. Understanding how and why Kurds have decided to go to the mountains to realize their goals may help policymakers and societies find a way to invite the PKK back to cities. That is to claim that more research might focus on potential ways to help the state and the PKK find a condition in the cities.

The Kurdish issue and the Kurdish movement emerged from rapid modernization, the quickly formed nation-state construction, nationalization, and the oppressive centralization of bureaucracy and political authority. These ideological pillars of the Republic have shaped the Kurd's relationship with the state and the dynamics of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict through sociological and political processes. While the state pursued the policy to make the nation Turkish and better Turkish by its ideological tools, in contrast, it led the Kurds to be Kurdish and more Kurdish.

Regarding modernization as a means of Westernization and alienation from the Ottomans and the Islamic way of politics, Turkification has become the state's ideology. The republican belief that more centralization and Turkification would create better Turks and a unified Turkish nation invited the Kurdish-Turkish conflict. As an invited battle, the Kurdish dispute, on the one hand, led the state to keep its funding ideology of power; on the other hand, it became the deadlock in the democratization of the country. In such an invited conflict, the Turkish request an unconditional acceptance of its authority and hegemony, and the Kurds, on the other side, demand equality and share of authority by being legally recognized.

In the battle, by invitation, the Turks were on constant alert for the protection of the power, and the Kurds decided to go to the mountains. It is unclear whether it will translate into the phase in which both sides are tired of fighting and celebrating the peace. However, we should remember that the mountain symbolizes an abnormality in human history. History and civilizations flow into cities. That is why a mountain is a flashback. I have tried to demonstrate and discuss how a group of people ended up in the mountains as a way of struggle and write the process of this break and return. While some went into the mountains,

like the author, and some lived “in the mountains in cities”. Every spoken and unspoken word of this story exists as much as those on the mountain and those in cities could hear one another. Many novels, stories, songs, and movies about war, violence, and sadness carry the hope that the future will be better, and there is always hope. Hope is always sought in the future; however, maybe what we seek is in the past, or the future is in the past. Perhaps one day, the history of returning from the mountains to the cities can be written, and the people of the mountains and in the cities speak in a dignified human tone rather than shouting at each other.

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