

# KURDS IN TURKEY

**Ethnographies of  
Heterogeneous Experiences**



**EDITED BY  
Lucie Drechselová  
AND Adnan Çelik**

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# Kurds in Turkey

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# Introduction

The present volume, *Kurds in Turkey—Ethnographies of Heterogeneous Experiences*, comprises ethnographic studies that all pertain to Kurds in Turkey. Amid the main focus on Northern Kurdistan some of the contributions reflect the transnational character of the Kurdish issue. They all share a micro-level focus and are informed by extensive field research.

## THE RATIONALE BEHIND THIS VOLUME

When we first considered the publication of this volume, in 2016, Turkish Kurdistan was in war. Several cities were under curfews, and heavy military operations were underway. Then, the attempted military coup took place in Turkey which paved the way for the declaration of the state of emergency. In the aftermath, almost all mayors of the Kurdish political party elected in 2014 were dismissed, and many are still in prison as of January 2019. Appointed governmental trustees took over municipalities and introduced political and symbolical changes that were mostly directed toward erasing the legacy of Kurdish municipalism. These added to the physical destruction of many cities in the southeast.

We assembled this volume as an attempt to academic contribution to the preservation of the spatial, political, social, and cultural memory of the region. Our research often deals with contemporary period, but the rapid political and military evolutions in the Turkish Kurdistan made it a historical account rather than an analysis of contemporary era. In and of itself, the published research stands against forced forgetting of the recent years. All of the authors pursued and accomplished their research amid the complicated conditions in the field. They were themselves affected by the war in the Turkey's Kurdistan, and their domains of research underwent profound

transformations as well. They publish here, most of them for the first time, the results of their ethnographic work.

Most of the authors are recent PhD graduates, and for some, it is the first time that their doctoral research gets published at its most advanced stage. It was one of our aims as co-editors to feature new research by young scholars and to make it accessible to the English-speaking audience. The biographies of the contributors to this volume reveal the great variety that animates the field of Kurdish studies. They also testify of its “internationalization.” Not only scholars who are not themselves originally from the region find academic interest in it. The “internationalization” of Kurdish studies is more complicated. It often means collaboration between “foreign” and “native” scholars and common production of knowledge. It also means that “foreign” scholars spend consequent periods of time in the Kurdish areas and are sometimes affiliated to research institutions in Turkey. On the other hand, Kurdish scholars extensively conduct their research based in universities in Europe and in the United States. The multi-positionality of the authors allows for cross-fertilizing analyses and, as we are convinced, is one of the factors of the dynamism within the Kurdish studies.

## IN DIALOGUE AS WELL AS DEPARTING FROM THE EXISTING LITERATURE

A quick look at the recently published works about Kurds and their territories reveals the extent to which the production of knowledge is impacted by the political, social, and security situation in the whole Middle East. For its relative stability, Iraqi Kurdistan has been the primary focus of the books that appeared after 2014, rather than a war-torn Syria or quickly eroding Turkish-Kurdish peace process. We have seen that the recent and most of the forthcoming studies about current situation of the Kurds in Turkey focus on macro issues mainly through geopolitical lenses (Tugdar and Al 2017; Unver 2017). In this volume, we wanted to depart from the dominant macro-perspective in Kurdish studies in order to focus on micro-level analyses.

Since 2015, the impact of the renewed warfare in the southeast of Turkey has been at least two-fold. On the one hand, the ethnographical research became scarce due to difficult conditions on the ground. The slip toward the authoritarian regime put the brakes on the rather dynamic production of the sociological and anthropological studies. On the other hand, the state politics aimed particularly at dismantling of the Kurdish actors’ visibility in the public realm as well as at the undoing of the Kurdish municipal experience. The first steps of the technocrats appointed instead of the dismissed pro-Kurdish mayors were to close down cultural and women centers and to remove the memory sites and multilingual signs. Our book seeks to address both issues.

Even before 2015, the research about the Kurds in Turkey was dominated by the macro-level studies. We consider that even though these works are telling about larger tendencies and geopolitics, they underscore the existing variety of local structures and experiences. Thus, the focus on the micro-level aims to demonstrate that Kurdish society is not a homogeneous entity; on the contrary, it is shaped by specific configurations and power relations in each locality. We believe that micro-level studies that build upon interviews, oral history techniques, participatory observation or observatory participation, not neglecting the archival work, allow us to broaden our understanding of the social tissue as well as political configurations in the North of Kurdistan, southeast Turkey.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE VOLUME

In this volume, we assembled studies under four main headings: *Women's Participation*, *Paramilitary*, *Infrapolitics of Resistance*, and *Space*. The chapters are clustered together by twos. This organization is meant to overcome the “tokenistic” logic that often applies to collective volumes which means that according to the logic of “one chapter for one topic,” we are unlikely to find more than one chapter on women or more than one chapter on spatial issues. While offering multiple chapters on one theme, we adopted a “complementarity” approach. Each tandem addresses the wider topic from a different angle and completes each other.

Even though high levels of female political participation in Kurdish politics are notorious, surprisingly, *Women's Participation* is excluded from a significant amount of research. In this volume, we offer its analysis in both the political-civilian space and within the armed struggle.

Isabel Käser builds upon the biographical discourse of actors and analysis of their actions embedded in situations. Her chapter explores the gendered process of becoming a freedom fighter within the Kurdistan Liberation Movement. She asks why women join the guerrillas but also what keeps them in the mountains: How do they become “free” and how do they gain *irade*, the will to resist? Her work complicates some of the dominant images of Kurdish female fighters, which often brush over complex histories of violence and resistance. She tells a more nuanced story of the everydayness of training and living in the Kurdish mountains, in this instance within the ranks of Kurdish guerrilla, the women's branch of the Kurdistan Liberation Movement that is active in Western Iran (Rojhelat). She argues that the identity-establishing ideology and its history hold great emancipatory power but also set out a clear framework of what liberation should look like.

While Isabel Käser looks into the military wing of the Kurdish movement, Lucie Drechselová mobilizes the feminist neo-institutionalist perspec-

tive and extensive observation in the city of Diyarbakır to account for the changes that women's political organizing underwent since the 2000s. In her contribution, Lucie Drechselová argues that on the one hand, the often disregarded institutions can enable or on the contrary hinder women's entries into politics, while on the other hand, women taking part in the institutional design and reform contribute to craft and shape the environment in which they exercise their political agency. Institutions are simultaneously part of the "structure," objects of women's reformist agenda and means to enhance their careers. For this reason, her contribution focuses on the missing piece in the Kurdish women's studies: the institutional evolution. It does so by observing in action and interviewing women actively involved in these institutions. Through the experience of Kurdish women's movement, partisan institutions emerge as a dynamic environment and as spaces for action. Their nonlinear evolution allows us to observe the adaptation strategies and subversive practices that female politicians put into place to secure their political existence.

The *Paramilitary* axis of the present volume uncovers the complex set of paramilitary groups operating in the Kurdistan of Turkey as well as their relationship with the state. To our knowledge, this area has not been object of a serious research so far (with the exception of Söyler 2015, contribution on deep state in Turkey). Ayhan Işık brings valuable insights in the panorama of the paramilitary forces in Turkey. His paper focuses on the emergence of paramilitary groups (JITEM, Special Police Team and Village Guards, Hizbullah) constituted by the Turkish state during the armed conflict between the state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, PKK) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. On the basis of secondary literature, interviews with relatives of victims of paramilitary violence, memoirs, and court documents Işık suggests that these paramilitary organizations have been established because of three main causes: the construction of the "threat" to the security of the state, the weakness of institutional capacity of the state, and plausible deniability due to violence to be implemented against civilians during conflicts.

Yeşim Yaprak Yıldız also addresses the 1990s through the lenses of the confessions. More precisely, Yıldız's article aims to discuss the public confessions of members of JITEM on state violence against Kurds during the 1990s. Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terror (JITEM) is an extra-legal gendarmerie unit in Turkey which is at the center of atrocities committed against Kurdish civilians. By analyzing the rhetorical strategies in the heroic and patriotic confessional performances by higher-ranking JITEM officials, and remorseful confessions by lower-ranking officers, Yıldız aims to demonstrate the inner workings of power in confessions which works toward concealment of responsibility. Through the selected case studies, she argues that, confessions, while acknowledging the wrongdoing committed and in

some instances admitting guilt and responsibility, simultaneously efface guilt and responsibility.

The *Space* axis features ethnographic field works *par excellence* (among the important works that have already been published see Gambetti and Jongerden 2015). This is an emerging area within which fascinating studies are freshly accomplished. Its raising importance is also related to the already mentioned dismantling of the Kurdish municipal presence.

Suna Yılmaz returns to the urban policies of the pro-Kurdish political parties since 1999 in Diyarbakır. Yılmaz's study shows how the "accumulation by dispossession" is the constituent element of capitalism. It is not a one-time occasion; it develops justifications on the basis of ethnicity politics both in the construction of nation-state, which is the ideal of capitalism, and in overcoming its crises. The sort of steps taken by Kurdish political movement and the reasons for the failure of some of these attempts, especially throughout its local government experience since 1999, are analyzed in Diyarbakır, where the phenomenon of war, as the sole expression of the relationality between capitalism and ethnicity, is dominant. Her analysis also aims at examining from a critical perspective the urbanization politics developed by Kurdish political movement in Diyarbakır especially regarding the capitalist organization of the urban space.

Throughout her extensive ethnographic research, Mino Koefoed observes the practices of what she terms as "constructive resistance" of the members of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. In 2005 the Kurdish movement in Turkey's Kurdish region officially abandoned its previous demands for an independent Kurdish nation-state in favor of what activists termed democratic autonomy—what has been framed as an organizational and ideological internal movement transformation. Based on ethnographic field research in Turkey's Kurdish region, Koefoed's chapter offers informed perspectives on the subjective understandings of autonomy among activists within the Kurdish movement, and it analyzes some of the ways in which discourses of autonomy relate to current Kurdish practices of resistance. By taking the concepts of autonomy, autonomous geographies, and resistance as analytical starting points, her chapter illustrates how the Kurdish movement's turn toward democratic autonomy has strengthened its practices of what could be seen as constructive resistance. If the previous themes featured mostly complementary contributions, the tandem of Yılmaz and Koefoed's chapters reveal distinctive perspectives within the field of spatial analysis. As such, they underline the necessity of academic dialogue among various approaches.

Finally, the chapters by Adnan Çelik and Davut Yeşilmen both address a phenomenon of the *Infrapolitics of Resistance* through different lenses.

Adnan Çelik demonstrates in his article how despite the military victory of the Turkish state over Kurdish revolts in the 1920s and 1930s, these latter

continued to exercise different forms of resistance—what James C. Scott calls “infrapolitics.” He examines a phenomenon that has played a decisive role in the social life of the Kurdish regions since 1930s, namely *qaçaxçîti* or “smuggling,” trying to demonstrate how it constitutes a form of infra-politics for the Kurds during “the years of silence.” He considers *qaçaxçîti* as a “spatial friction” against the state, particularly in Lice, a subdistrict of Diyarbakir, and emphasizes the intermingling of this phenomenon with the dynamics of larger social transformations that shake the traditional structures in their foundations. Finally, he shows how in the 1970s the networks and *ethos* formed by the practices of infra-politics over four preceding decades are reoriented toward *para-politics*, or an open and massive political confrontation.

Davut Yeşilmen’s chapter *deals* with Kurmandji literature after the 2000, and he shows the political development of Kurdish literature, mainly novels, and does so by drawing on close readings of several Kurdish-Kurmanji novels published within in the last twenty years in Turkish Kurdistan, adopting a perspective of “resistance literature.” He stresses that while analyzing the growing importance of the Kurdish novel, the historic perspective of exile and encounter with western literatures must not be forgotten. But besides these social transformations and movements within the Kurdish society, Yeşilmen calls for close consideration of the growing interest in alternative forms of historiography (“history from below”). He argues that only in this context can it be understood just why the novel has become a place of resistance; a space to deal with social traumas and catastrophes, in brief; an important cultural practice of remembering.

*Kurds in Turkey: Ethnographies of Heterogeneous Experiences* is a collective volume which allows readers to reflect on a specific theme from various perspectives. Each tandem of chapters in the four thematic sections of the book offers complementary as well as differential analysis. It features in-depth research from social scientists at the beginning of their academic career who offer new and fresh regard within the field of Kurdish studies. They address topics that remained understudied in the context of the Turkish Kurdistan.

One of the main contributions of this volume is the recognition of agency of the non-state actors and the capacity of the authors to localize the non-state actors within the multiple power relations (not only) toward the state. Finally, none of the chapters was produced while mobilizing only the official registers and archives. On the contrary, the authors used an ethnographic approach, inquired into local dynamics and mobilized oral history techniques. Their works confirm that living memory has a central place in the academic writings about the present and recent past.

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Lucie Drechselová and Adnan Çelik, co-editors  
January 2019, Paris

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*Part I*

# **Women's Participation**



## Chapter One

# “Mountain Life Is Difficult but Beautiful!”

### *The Gendered Process of Becoming “Free” in PKK Education*

Isabel Käser<sup>1</sup>

“Can you defend yourself?” asks Eyrehan, the commander of the Women’s Defence Force (HPJ, *Hezên Parastina Jin*). “Not really,” I reply and jokingly add: “but I can run really fast!” Eyrehan shakes her head in disapproval; “women who run away are only half women, women who know how to defend themselves are real women!” We were standing outside the communal tent (*manga*) at the base camp of HPJ waiting for lunch, when Eyrehan told me about the importance of self-defense for women. At this camp on the Iranian-Iraqi border young women from across the Kurdish Middle East were training to become guerrillas, some of whom would later go and fight for the liberation of Kurds in Rojhelat, or Iranian Kurdistan.<sup>2</sup> I had come here at the end of my PhD fieldwork, after I had observed how *Democratic Confederalism*, the Kurdistan Liberation Movement’s liberation ideology,<sup>3</sup> had been put into practice in Bakur (Turkish Kurdistan), Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan), and Başur (Iraqi Kurdistan).<sup>4</sup> The mountains are different though, I had been told on numerous occasions, “mountain life is difficult but beautiful!”

Kurdish female fighters caught the media and scholarly gaze with the defense of Kobanî (Syria) and Şengal (Iraq) in 2014. Often depicting smiling and attractive young women with Kalashnikovs, the female fighters of the Women’s Protection Unit (YPJ, *Yekîneyên Parastina Jin*), became the antithesis to the barbaric other: the so-called Islamic State (IS, or *daesh*), the many jihadi groups fighting in Syria, the Syrian regime, and the Turkish state. However, this representation of the female fighters has often been essential-

izing, objectifying, and sexualizing, brushing over the complex history that enabled women to now stand at the many forefronts of the Kurdistan Liberation Movement's struggle for a gender-equal, multi-ethnic and multi-religious Middle East (Dirik 2015; Shahvisi 2018). My goal was to gain a more nuanced understanding of how the women "got there" and what enables them to stand these contested grounds so firmly. In order to do that, I spent two weeks in different guerrilla education camps, where apart from participant observation I conducted fifteen interviews with trainee guerrillas and their commanders, asking a simple set of questions about personal trajectories, everyday routines, and gendered visions of the future. Instead of asking why women join the movement, this chapter shifts the focus onto aspects of the everyday; the gendered process of living, learning, and transforming within the movement, looking at the tools and mechanisms that enable them in the process of becoming a female freedom fighter. I was particularly interested in how meaning and longevity are given to the continuum of violence and resistance the Kurdistan Women's Liberation Movement (KWLM) operates in across the Kurdish Middle East.<sup>5</sup> Conceptually, this research moves away from the binary of victimization (women as pawns in a masculine order) and emancipation (idealization of Kurdish female fighters) and instead analyzes how the movement itself defines freedom, empowerment, and the role of women within the larger quest of liberation. In order to become "free," women have to overcome the old ways of life and learn the new, a process that can be understood as "the radical remaking of the decolonized personhood in dual acts of 'unbecoming' and 'becoming'" (Duzel 2018, 3). I explore how this process of "becoming free" initially happens in party education and argue that it is crucial to analyze how this process is gendered, in order to understand what makes the female ranks of this movement so resilient.

## CONCEPTUALIZING THE PROCESS OF BECOMING

Historically and cross-culturally revolutionary and post-colonial liberation movements have recruited women in large numbers, promising profound social transformation, including that of gender norms and relations (Alison 2003; Lanzona 2009; Moghadam 1994; Parashar 2014; Viterna 2013; Yuval-Davis 1997). Yet, as observed in many post-colonial settings, such as Eritrea (Hale 2001), Palestine (Hasso 2005), Sri Lanka (Alison 2003) and Algeria (Turshen 2002), women who actively participated in armed liberation movements faced varying degrees of male backlash and were often pushed back into the private sphere post-liberation (Al-Ali & Tas 2018, 2). Cynthia Enloe considers violence in war and conflict as a continuation of masculine orders: "Once the war was over, women were demobilized as quickly as possible.

Any Amazons were pushed back across the frontier of social imagination. The world was put right once more. War and peace were portrayed as distinct—war abnormal, peace normal. In ‘normal’ times women do not soldier” (Enloe 1988, 123). Enloe’s quote sums up the master narrative about women and armed conflict: women engaged in paramilitary or guerrilla activity are seen as exceptional and temporal, despite women having historically played key roles in national liberation wars. (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015). The KWLM argues to be different not only because it claims sustainability during and “post”-war, but also because women do not fight in a men’s war. Instead, they have created their own epistemology and autonomous ranks in the armed and political spheres, while building a new gender-equal system in those societies it seeks to revolutionize.

Existing literature on nationalism and feminism has shown that women often serve as markers of the (post-)colonial nation state, having been assigned clear roles and symbols to represent the “modern” nation (Jayawardena 1986; Kandiyoti 1991; Yuval-Davis & Anthias 1989, 1997). However, nationalism as a project emerging from masculinist hope, memory, or humiliation (Enloe 1990) and feminism are not mutually exclusive per se; instead, nationalist movements simultaneously open spaces for women (Al-Ali & Pratt 2011) and women use these spaces to change the movements from within (O’Keefe 2013). To understand the potential of these spaces it is crucial to ask what kind of feminism and what kind of nationalism are being practiced, to examine at what point nationalist or liberation struggles open spaces for women and for which women, how those spaces are used, and how claims of gender-based equality and justice are articulated. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to tell the history of the KWLM that emerged alongside the wider movement and how that fraught relationship between nationalism and feminism played out in this particular context. But it is important to note that women were involved in the PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, Kurdistan Workers’ Party) from its founding days in 1978 and have joined the party in significant numbers since the early 1990s. While more women were fighting, many were also dying, some of them committing spectacular acts of resistance. Those who left a particularly important mark in the early years were Bêrîvan,<sup>6</sup> Bêrîtan,<sup>7</sup> and Zîlan,<sup>8</sup> each of them marking a new era of female mobilization. The resistance of Bêrîvan sparked the uprisings in Cizre in 1989, and Bêrîtan’s death leap in 1992 pushed Abdullah Öcalan to initiate a separate women’s army in 1993. This was only a promise in the beginning, but autonomous structures started to take shape with the preparation for the first women’s congress in 1995. In March 1998, Öcalan published the “Ideology of Women’s Liberation,” which made women’s importance in the larger struggle for Kurdistan’s freedom official, and simultaneously laid the grounds for the first women’s party within the PKK; the Kurdistan Women’s Workers’ Party (PJKK: *Partiya Jinên Karkerên Kurdis-*

tanê), which was to be formed during the party congress in 1998/1999. However, during that congress Öcalan was arrested. This not only created a grave crisis for the party but also meant that the women lost the direct support of the leadership and were left to their own devices for a few years. Women who experienced the 1990s and the years following Öcalan's arrest describe women's work as a constant struggle against "male mentality" within the party, while wanting to contribute to the struggle for the liberation of Kurdistan. In prison, Öcalan abandoned the goal to establish an independent Kurdistan and introduced *Democratic Confederalism* instead. The announcement of *Democratic Confederalism* in 2005 formalized women's centrality in the struggle for a democratic, ecological, anti-capitalist and gender-equal confederation, a bottom up system of self-government (Jongerden & Akayya 2013, 171–178).

This rich history of female involvement in the movement, which I am only very briefly sketching out here, is one of the reasons why women play such key roles in the political and armed struggles across the Kurdish Middle East today. Learning about this history is central to the party education, which will be further discussed below. But how does one become a revolutionary who then goes off to commit spectacular acts of resistance and self-defense at the many frontlines of the Kurdish Middle East? I argue that this particular women's movement demands us to steer away from the binary of structure and agency and develop a more grounded and nuanced framework of analysis that does justice to both the militarized framework these women operate in and the emancipatory power this party holds. Creating what Foucault calls "docile bodies," formed by specific modes of discipline is certainly part of it, as the Kurdistan Liberation Movement, among other things, needs subjected and practiced bodies it can mobilize and deploy (Foucault 1991, 138). However, this process entails much more than merely becoming a soldier and expands far beyond the battlefield. In party education recruits learn to obtain what is called *irade*, the will to resist, part of which is learning the art of self-control (*oto-kontrol*). In her analysis of piety and ethical self-making, the late Saba Mahmood calls this *habitus*: "the conscious effort at reorienting desires, brought about by the concordance of inward motives, outward actions, inclinations, and emotional states through the repeated practice of virtuous deeds" (Mahmood 2001, 215). This process of disciplining the mind and the body through education leads to the subject formation and subordination to the leadership and party hierarchy. Yet rather than thinking of the women in the movement as only acted upon, it is exactly this subordination that Mahmood, building on Judith Butler's notion of *subjectivation*, calls agency: the process in which a subject becomes self-conscious agent by subordinating herself. "Such a conceptualization of power and subject formation also encourages us to understand agency not simply as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that specific

relations of subordination create and enable” (ibid., 210). However, Lois McNay argues that the Foucauldian theory of subjectivity (which influenced Mahmood) fails to recognize generative human agency because, from its perspective, “the process of subjectification is understood as a dialectic of freedom and constraint” (McNay 2000, 2). Thus, the making of selfhood remains negative, passive, linked to discursive practices and agency, and is seen as limited. “The idea that the individual emerges from constraint does not offer a broad enough understanding of the dynamics of subjectification and, as a consequence, offers an etiolated understanding of agency” (ibid., 3). Building on McNay, among others, Sertaç Sehlíkoglu urges feminist ethnographers not to limit their quest to locating agency to visible forms of “ethical self-making” within clearly defined power structures, but instead shift the scholarly gaze to unpack moments of pleasure, desire, joy and ordinary daily life (Sehlíkoglu 2018; Joseph 2005). Given that the KWLM needs to operate in war and conflict and is embedded in a hierarchical military structure, this chapter is an attempt to do both: to highlight how the disciplined process of “subjectivation” unfolds in education, and how that process is filled with moments of compassion, silliness, and joy, but also with loss, pain, and hardship.

#### LEARNING TO BE FREE IN EDUCATION: BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

We arrived at the *Academiya Şehid Şirin Elemholî* in the Asos mountains on a hot August afternoon. Around twenty young guerrillas were undergoing the four-month training at this academy, which was located on a mountain slope; the *mangas* were well camouflaged with branches or hidden under trees. As we arrived, the guerrillas were just coming back from their daily endurance training on the nearby plateau. After I greeted everyone, I was led to the commander *manga* where the two female commanders of the Academy and I discussed politics over dinner and tea. Both commanders had previously been working in Bakur and were tasked with running this Academy for a few months. A guerrilla’s day ends when the sun goes down and starts at 4.30 a.m. with the morning ritual and an hour of morning exercise. Some of the recruits running and stretching in the morning light were young girls with barely any body awareness at all, while others had battle experience and already were strong and disciplined. “A part of what we are trying to teach them here is to get to know and like their bodies. Many of them have never done sports in their life, and see their bodies as shameful,” Commander Eyrehan told me later. We ate breakfast at 6 a.m., bread, cream cheese mixed with oil and dried herbs, and natural chewing gum they had cooked the night before, which helps the digestive system. Shortly after breakfast (eating is a

quick affair here; “we are soldiers” after all), we packed the weapons and the teapot, and off we hiked to the training ground. Here they put down their ammunition and stood in line for their exercises, set up the radio station to communicate (in code) and listened in on inter-party radio, and prepared the sniper training spot. For the next three hours the guerrillas repeated different positions with their Kalashnikovs, including pulling the trigger, over and over again. The more experienced ones, who were training on the big weapons to become snipers or rocket launchers, were called one by one to practice on the other side of the slope. I sat on a stone, observing the training, and after a while I started my interviews a few meters away. The commanders left it to the trainees themselves as to whether they wanted to talk to me; those who did come over told me their age, where they came from, what brought them there, how they saw their roles as revolutionaries, and what they wanted to do for Rojhelat.

Most fighters I spoke to were in their late teens and came from a strictly patriarchal family or violent political context. Many of those coming from Rojhelat had been married off to an older man at a young age, one bearing scars of self-immolation all over her body. More than one had left her child with her family to join the struggle. One fighter had been a university student in Iran and worked as a chemist before she realized that the “system life” was not for her. Two others stated that they were poor villagers before but having seen how Iranian soldiers treated the bodies of HPJ martyrs (they brought a mutilated corpse to the village), they learned about the work of the party and joined. Two came from Rojava and had previously fought in the ranks of the YPJ, two others hailed from Bakur, one from Maxmur, and one from Erbil.

Instead of a common pattern as to why women joined the party, I recorded as many different traumatic and violent stories of state and family oppression as women I talked to. People in the Kurdish Middle East (and others in the region) are embedded in a continuum of violence (Cockburn 2004) that fluctuates in scale and location depending on time and space; from massacres to domestic violence, and political repression to genocide. I found that it was rather the rupture points in this continuum, such as heightened (state) violence against the Kurds, and the accumulation of these rupture points that eventually led my interviewees to join the party. The rupture points differ from generation to generation. Witnessing the attack of the so-called Islamic State (*daesh*) on Şengal and Kobanî in 2014, and seeing female fighters resisting in both those places were important rupture points for the younger fighters. For the older generation it was the uprisings in the early 1990s (*Serhildan*), and the resistance of famous martyrs such as Berîtan and Zilan. Across the decades it was the accumulation of witnessing state brutality, losing loved ones in the struggle, the treatment of martyrs, or personal experiences of police brutality and racism against Kurds that motivated many to join. There are also many different stories of how the young recruits heard



and learned about the Kurdistan Liberation Movement. Some grew up in a sympathizer family, some got hold of one of Öcalan's books or tapes, others heard about the struggle from party members who were recruiting in the villages, others again watched Öcalan's arrest or the Kobani resistance on television. For many, joining the party was an option at the back of their mind for a while before they actually did. What I found is that deciding to join this armed struggle, leaving your life behind and living the harsh life of a guerrilla in the mountains can be a snap decision, a gradual process, or what feels to some women as the most natural trajectory.

While some studies suggest that women's motivations to join an armed movement are specific to their gender (Gonzales-Perez 2006; Kampwirth 2002; Viterna 2006) others have argued that women participate in armed groups for similar reasons as men: nationalist desires, economic and political suffering and injustice, and desires for revenge (Flach 2007; Mazurana 2013, 148). Dara Kay Cohen argues that women not only join armed groups for similar reasons as men but also have similar experiences during the conflict and commit the same violent acts as men do. She refutes the notion of the peace-loving women and the fighting men, showing that women are just as capable of committing spectacular acts of violence during times of conflict (Cohen 2013, 388). My data suggest that women join the PKK, or its sister parties across the region for a multitude of reasons, some similar to those motivating men and others unique to women. Similar reasons include nationalist fervor, an adherence to Öcalan's liberation ideology, and the need to defend and protect their land and family and wanting to avenge (state) violence inflicted on their community. Female specific reasons are fear of or anger about sexual or state violence and repression, and the struggle for the emancipation of women such as equal opportunities, education, or escaping the sphere of patriarchal control (Alison 2003; Enloe 1988; Flach 2007; Mazurana 2013).

My data supports Pinar Tank's argument, that women's reasons to join the PKK or its regional branches can be divided into roughly five categories; social (e.g., urban migration, poverty), personal (e.g., forced marriage, domestic violence), ideological (e.g., national liberation, women's emancipation), key event (e.g., experience of state violence, racism) and revenge (Tank 2017, 418). However, my findings suggest that it is rarely just one of these factors that push a woman to join the party but a culmination thereof. In contrast to existing work on women in guerrilla war, I argue that while analyzing the different forms of violence that impact women's lives in all parts of Kurdistan and understanding patterns of mobilization are important, it is just as analytically fruitful to pay attention to what happens to women once they join the party, what they do in the party structures in the everyday and what keeps them engaged in the many armed, socio-political, and intellectual struggles the party is fighting. What became obvious to me is that the

PKK, or in this instance the East Kurdistan Free Women's Society (KJAR, *Komelgaya Jinên Azad ên Rojhilatê Kurdistanê*) and its armed wing HPJ, offers an alternative for women. Not only as a physical or geographical escape, but also an ideological, political, and intellectual alternative to narratives, realities, and systems lived in all parts of Kurdistan. This alternative and its appeal cuts across gender, class, religion, rural/urban, and other power structures. Rather than trying to determine exact patterns of mobilization, I will discuss and unpack this alternative. While stories of life before the party, and journeys to the mountains are rich and telling about the respective context, I found it more revealing to ask what women find in Abdullah Öcalan's liberation ideology that keeps them there and gives them the will and strength to resist. It is important to note that even though everyone has to learn and internalize the liberation ideology, not all fighters are equally militant, nor do they all become the "same." All members carry personal histories and specific characteristics into the party, but after joining and going through education they learn to perform and live by the parameters set out by the "militant personality" (Flach 2007, 86). "Militant" (*militan*) has a specific meaning in the party and describes part of the identity that every member obtains through education and practice. This gender-neutral concept is a signifier for those who follow the party leader Abdullah Öcalan and his ideology, and through the internalizing of his teachings become "PKK'cized" (*PKK'leşme*). In party literature militants are further described with adjectives such as honest, dedicated, steadfast, principled, abstinent, communal, sincere, self-critical, loyal, and prepared to dedicate their lives and deaths to the struggle, freedom, humanity, people, and the leadership (Öcalan n.d., Serxwebûn 2015).

Upon joining the PKK, the party members leave behind their old societal ties and cut all contact with their family. Instead, all mothers of Kurdistan are their mothers, and they gain thousands of new brothers and sisters in the party comrades (Interview Berîtan Rojhelat and Zemyan, 1.8.2016). From now on, they are subjects of the party, which decides who trains and works where and for how long, who is sent to war and who works behind the front lines. Most of the party cadres I spoke to did not know for how much longer they would be working in their current position or where they would go after, "The party knows" they simply said. The PKK sees itself as an educational party, which transforms each member into a militant who then has the capacity to fight for revolutionary change (Özcan 2006; Westrheim 2010). Kariane Westrheim quotes a cadre who described the process as follows:

The life of a guerrilla is like a re-birth. You have to give up everything for the love of the struggle. Attending [PKK] means forgetting the past, struggle means struggling with yourself. You have to change your personality totally. It is impossible to describe this process when you don't live there, when you are

not a part of it. The guerrillas have a different life than others and it affects you deeply. All these difficulties change your life and you become a new person. (A. quoted in Westrheim 2010, 115)

This process of being reborn, of obtaining a “militant personality” is a long and ongoing process that starts off with an initial three-months of “new fighter” (*şervanê nu*) training, where the recruits cover basic weapons and physical training, receive the first ideological lessons and learn about the importance of friendship (*hevalî*) and communal life. Most young women came to *Academiya Şehid Şirin Elemholî* after having finished that first training. Others came from Rojava where they only had one-month training before being sent to the frontline. Apart from being physically disciplined during this first education period, the recruits learn about Abdullah Öcalan’s concept of freedom and how struggling for that vision of freedom makes you free. This educational process is gendered insofar as that the female recruits learn that in order to fight, they first have to learn to believe in themselves, in their strength as women, and in a better world, according to Apoism.<sup>9</sup> There is a clearly laid-out curriculum for the four months at the Academy, which structures education in ideological, theoretical and practical lessons. The ideological lessons cover topics such as the history of Kurdistan, the history of women and *jineoloji*,<sup>10</sup> and how to build a democratic nation. The theoretical lessons discuss the history and experience of war in Kurdistan, the PKK as a revolutionary force, and the role of female commanders and guerrillas in the PKK. The practical lessons include discussions on methods and tactics of the enemy, as well as the methods and principles of guerrilla warfare (curriculum *Academiya Şehid Şirin Elemholî* 2016).

This curriculum shows that the female fighters are trained as revolutionaries, as guerrillas; they are soldiers first and foremost. Women’s positions are part of every lesson, but this education does not go into intellectual depth. However, the key aspects of the party’s self-understanding as a women’s liberation movement are covered. Analyzing this curriculum, the building blocks of a guerrilla’s identity become apparent: knowing one’s history of oppression but also the tools of resistance; gaining a voice to talk about this oppression; a belief in yourself; and self-confidence in your practice through education. Another aspect of this identity construct was added in my interview with Eyrehan: “We are people first and foremost. To build a new society we have to strengthen each person’s good side and weaken their bad side, one person is never just one or the other.” This strengthening and weakening is achieved through adhering to strict rules of communal living, close observation of each other and the regular criticism and self-criticism sessions (Duzel 2018; Flach 2007; Grojean 2014). All these methods are tools to create the desired subjects who adhere to the specific ideal of the “militant personality.” I concur with Westrheim who observed that the party

encourages a respectful and kind behavior and personality that can inspire social change and potentially encourages others to join (Westrheim 2010, 118).

At the camp, every day after lunch there was an educational activity, in the library-classroom tent. The first day the female commander read out a statement written by KJAR, the women's umbrella structure working on Rojhelat. The statement was an eight-page-long summary about a meeting held recently, assessing the current local, regional, and international situation, positioning the work of the party within that, and condemning Öcalan's solitary confinement. The title of that particular document read: "In line with the free women's resistance we are leading a radical fight, to realize a meeting with our leader Apo in freedom." As always, women's work and demands were tied to the freedom of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader who helped enshrine women's centrality in the movement's ideology. During another afternoon session, one cadre translated three letters from Turkish to Kurdish, written by new martyrs, who had sacrificed themselves in the fight against the Turkish state a few weeks earlier, as part of the PKK's intensified struggle against the Turkish army after the attempted coup on July 15, 2016. Those who plan and carry out these attacks and know that they are very likely going to die, write down their life story, motivations, convictions, and hopes for the future before they undertake the operation. These statements are then distributed among the camps and serve as an ideological and educational tool, to talk through shared notions of commitment and sacrifice. Everything ends with "*Bijî Serok Apo!*," long live the leader Apo!

During both afternoon sessions, the trainee guerrillas were sitting in the boiling mid-day heat, listening to what felt like hours of lectures. The classroom procedures are an organized and hierarchal affair: when the commander, as teacher, enters the tent, all students spring up and stand at attention. There is a certain sequence of slogans they shout before and after studying, those who want to say something stand up before speaking and they only speak if spoken to. During this particular session, we were all suffering from the extreme summer heat. I tried to learn from their discipline and not pant too much or look too weak. Instead I sat there and observed how some of the trainees completely switched off while pretending to listen, doodling in their notebooks during these extended lessons. However, as soon as the lesson was over, they were back to their ritualized standing at attention and shouting the slogans. I was struck by how they switched between normal bored teenagers and always at the ready soldiers. At one point I crossed my legs and was instantly scolded by a young guerrilla: "We guerrillas, we never sit like that!" she hissed.

## GETTING DOWN TO WORK

Once the new guerrillas have that will to resist (*irade*), officially they can do anything: control their body (*oto-kontrol*); go on dangerous operations; kill the enemy; and endure pain, loss, physical strain, and the cold harsh winters or the excruciatingly hot summers. I say “officially” because unofficially, of course, the reality is different, and the fighters suffer greatly from losing their friends, witnessing violence, or leaving behind their families and children. Many young recruits cannot sleep, have bad dreams, miss their mothers and children, and show sudden outbursts of emotions. One of the trainees at the camp developed a stutter after her brother was martyred. Shedding the “system life” and becoming a subject of the party can be both liberating and painful, especially for those who struggle to live up to the expectations of women as goddesses, which part of the subject becoming foresees (Cağlayan 2012; Duzel 2018).<sup>11</sup> The difficulties and contradictions that emerge in this process of becoming a revolutionary are dealt with during the regular criticism and self-criticism platforms, where the progress of achieving the militant personality is discussed, and eventual faults (e.g., bourgeoisie behavior, capitalist mindsets) are critiqued (*Licht am Horizont*, n.d.; Herausgeberinnkollektiv 2012, 322–328).

Upon completing training and obtaining these physical, mental, and social skills (after six to twelve months of education),<sup>12</sup> the female commanders decide where their recruits will be sent to next: either to one of the many frontlines in the Kurdish Middle East, or in the case of Rojhelat, some of them go back to society and organize their fellow citizens. The party has cadres in certain cities and villages in Rojhelat, who under great danger go to people’s houses and hold education courses, for women, men, adolescents, and children. Education is gendered in the sense that they try to organize women in particular but not exclusively. Refusing to work with “Western feminist” organizational tools as they call it, meaning only focusing on women, everyone is addressed. Meetings are held for everyone but always with a “women’s perspective.” This means making people aware that women are those most oppressed by the state and patriarchy as a whole, but also the bearers of the old knowledge and culture, the backbone of society. Freeing them means freeing everyone (Interview Eyrehan, 2.8.2016). The goal is to mobilize as many people to join the party as possible, to go for education in the mountains and then return again to organize. Not everyone working for the party does so as a guerrilla in uniform; just as many people are needed in the civilian sphere to build the political base, so that when the political opportunity arises, the party would have a social base to activate, similar to what happened in Rojava in 2012. The Eastern Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Movement (KODAR, *Komalgeya Demokratîk û Azad a Rojhilatê Kurdistanê*), the umbrella organization for all political and armed branches

working in Rojhelat, currently wants to find a diplomatic solution for the problems in Iran and is not interested in a fully fledged confrontation with the Iranian regime. If attacked in this process, or to take revenge for previously fallen guerrillas, the YRK and HPJ fighters will engage in “legitimate self-defense” as the movement calls it. There are reoccurring clashes between them and the Iranian regime, and many guerrillas fall, but at this stage a mutually agreed ceasefire is still in place. The protests that took place across Iran in December 2017 and January 2018, suggest that the time for activating that base has not yet come. Despite repeated calls for a widespread uprising,<sup>13</sup> protests in Rojhelat remained small. During the renewed wave of protests during the summer of 2018, KODAR positioned itself as the only opposition force with the necessary military power and a feasible political plan to stabilize and democratize Iran. In a declaration published in August 2018, they proposed *Democratic Confederalism* as a viable alternative for the whole of Iran, highlighting the importance of women’s liberation in the democratization process.<sup>14</sup>

Rojhelat is different from other parts of the Kurdish Middle East, such as Bakur, Rojava or Başur, but the movement’s ideology remains the same and so does its strategy to mobilize and educate people. Convinced that the women’s liberation ideology can also work for women in Rojhelat, Leyla, the commander of KJAR, the women’s umbrella uniting the political and armed branches of Rojhelat told me:

For me it doesn’t matter where I work. Today I am working on Rojhelat, tomorrow Başur, the day after tomorrow Rojava, and after Bakur, it is unclear. What is important for me is that wherever we are we can develop women’s work, we can advance our revolutionary work. I have been in the organisation for twenty-four years and women’s work is my first priority (Interview Leyla, 25.8.2015).

When asked about the specifics of the Rojhelat context, compared to other Kurdish regions, the women I interviewed emphasized its rich and longstanding culture, but also the acute pressure to assimilate to the dominant Persian culture. I was told that Rojhelat is kept impoverished and drugs to the area flow freely, in order to diminish people’s aspirations to organize and demand rights of self-determination. The state targets women especially, including Persian women, being worried about their potential to challenge the Islamic Republic. In return, the regime is especially wary of this movement’s ability to give women and therefore wider society hope, when it is trying to create a sense of hopelessness in Rojhelat. Each guerrilla I spoke to about why they are fighting for Rojhelat also emphasized the disproportionately high numbers of child marriages and self-immolation. Commander Viyan stressed that Öcalan’s ideology is applicable to all four parts of Kurdistan, but that women in Rojhelat are especially oppressed due to the nature of the Islamic Republic.

lic, putting great pressure on both women and Kurds. “They have this ideology that women cannot do anything, that they should just stay in the house. We teach them about their history and their power” (Interview Viyan, 1.8.2016).

## LIFE AND DEATH, OR HOW DEATH CONSTITUTES LIFE

Life in the camps was hard work and tough training but also a lot of laughter and genuine fun. The fine line between life and death, however, between sadness and laughter, destruction and beauty were omnipresent in encounters, stories, or activities. One afternoon, the guerrillas trained with balloons as targets. Dozens of colorful balloons were inflated and hung in the trees. This brought much joy and laughter to the training, especially when later on the balloons were arranged as a *parcours*: they had to shoot from afar, then run and roll to the next target, shoot sitting down, crawl onward, and shoot the last one standing up. The group cheered every time someone hit a target and ran on. The rest of the group sat under a tree, playing with the remaining balloons, or writing Öcalan’s name with gunpowder and lighting it on fire. At the end of the day, the tally of who hit how many targets was read out, and the feedback session (*tekmil*) was held. In the evening the group held a *moral session*, in this instance an hour of singing and dancing. As the sun went down behind the mountains, the guerrillas sang their sad songs of far away and brave friends, of loved ones who will never return. At the end, they danced a battle dance, of horses and eagles, with music blasting from a small portable radio.

Another day, during a tea break under a tree, Zemyan, a young cadre, was invited to share the story of her first operation in Rojhelat with the new trainees. She was telling it like an adventure story and we were hanging on her every word, laughing as she insulted the Iranian soldiers for their cowardliness. Suddenly though, as she started talking about her friends dying (four of them went, two survived) and her getting lost for many days, she started crying, jumped to her feet, and disappeared for a few minutes to regain her composure. One of her friends ran to console her, and when they came back a while later she finished her story. These two episodes demonstrate two things: first, daily guerrilla life entails much joy and consideration for one another. Second, the heroic packaging of a guerrilla life also includes many layers of suffering and hardship. Emotions and controlling or redirecting them are very much part of a young fighter’s education. “Losing your friends never gets easier,” an older commander told me, “but you learn to deal with it.”

One key aspect of a guerrilla's identity, lust for life, and indifference toward their own death is the martyr (*şehid*) culture. I was told many adventurous battle stories, recounting the heroic deeds of the guerrillas or the martyrs. About how six guerrillas could stop an army of Iranian soldiers for hours, how the Iranian soldiers are cowardly and dirty, how many enemy soldiers were taken out by Şehid Zilan, who bravely sacrificed herself using her and her friends' hand grenades, after being fatally wounded. These battle stories are used as educational tools but also as a form of oral history to remember fallen friends. "My heart hurts every time I lose a friend. But remembering their bravery and strength helps me to be a better person, also for them" (Interview Zemyan, 2.8.2016). What struck me most about the martyr culture is its position between life and death and its meaning-giving power. From the moment they entered the party these young women became revolutionaries (*şoreşker*) and therewith agreed to live, fight, and die for the movement. Death becomes a permanent possibility and presence in a guerrilla's life, which manifests itself in many different physical and metaphysical ways, most strikingly so in people's behavior toward themselves and each other. If a good friend falls in battle, they mourn them but only within a set time-frame. A mechanism is immediately switched on of diverting the sadness into strength. Of course, the sadness comes back over the months and years, but the same mechanisms apply: remember what they stood for, remember what they died for, and promise to continue their struggle. Loss and hardship are made bearable through ritualization: the preserving of photos, the telling of stories, the taking on of their best abilities, and the annual remembrance ceremonies. These memories are written in journals kept by most guerrillas and are shared around the fire, over tea, or during the *moral* sessions, when songs remind everyone of their comrades. Guerrillas also carried with them, among their sparse personal belongings, some laminated martyr photos, usually in their uniform chest pocket or in the back of a notebook. Sometimes they pulled them out and told their story, "Did you know *şehid* so and so? We were there and there together!" Or over tea they would share anecdotes: "Do you remember how much sugar Şehid Zilan put in her tea? With every sip she took a sugar cube!" Zemyan showed me a small note she kept from the famous Zilan, a hand-written change of night guard itinerary. "The possibility of death is great for us, we never know what will happen tomorrow, so we try to be the best version of ourselves today, and our *şehid* help us with this," she told me. This is a party slogan, just like many things they told me. However, ideology gives meaning to the continuum of violence these women find themselves on and the ideology offers some of the main tools of resistance.

Martyrdom is deemed a necessity by those who resist oppression in the cause of the nation; it is seen as the only route to a meaningful life. Laleh Khalili shows in the context of Palestine that this link of loving life, wanting



to live a worthy life and thus being prepared to sacrifice one's life has been evoked by many post-colonial liberation movements such as the Palestinians, Hizbollah in Lebanon, the Cuban Revolution, and the Black Panthers in the United States (Khalili 2007, 19–20). Both Hisyar Ozsoy (2010) and Khalili write about “hyper-masculine heroism” that is being celebrated at martyr memorials, valuing virtues considered masculine: courage, violence, self-sacrifice. However, based on my observations at the many martyr funerals and memorials I attended across the Kurdish Middle East, men and women get equal celebratory rituals and because women have such a long history of contributing to and dying for the party and its liberatory quest, these supposedly male characteristics have become gender-neutral. However, every time a woman falls in the struggle, it is emphasized that she was fighting not only for the liberation of Kurdistan and a democratic and confederal future but also for the liberation of women in Kurdistan, the whole region, and potentially the whole world. Dead bodies carry a high political value (Weiss 2014) and are treated and remembered “as powerful, affective, and symbolic forces that shape power, identities and struggles” (Ozsoy 2010, 30). As such, the martyr culture is a key location where a sense of victimhood and sacrifice but also of belonging, resistance, and a vision for a future democratic confederation are imagined and negotiated.

## CONCLUSION

The Kurdistan Liberation Movement, or in this instance KJAR and its armed wing HPJ, offers an alternative for women, not only as a physical or geographical escape but also an ideological, political, and intellectual alternative to dominant narratives, realities, and systems lived in all parts of Kurdistan, the wider region, as well as globally. I have argued that while stories of life before the party and journeys to the mountains are rich and telling about the respective contexts, it is more revealing to ask what women find in Abdullah Öcalan's liberation ideology and life in the party that gives them the will and strength to resist. I have demonstrated that once women go through education, it is the recognition and meaning-giving that keeps them there. They learn how to defend themselves against *Capitalist Modernity* and its many tools of oppression and obtain an identity built on the rediscovery of women's history, power, and knowledge. In education, the recruits learn to be self-controlled and determined revolutionaries. This process of becoming also entails much disciplining of each individual body: learning *oto-kontrol* and how to curb physical urges such as hunger, tiredness, and sexual desires is a key prerequisite in a revolutionary's life. Certain individual character traits, especially artistic or practical skills, are valued and appreciated. Unwanted or unsuitable behavior, traumatizing experiences of violence, or the

lack of physical strength are shaped into one form of militancy, using the tools of education, practice, communal living, and criticism and self-criticism. As such the framework of liberation sets clear parameters of who the militants are or ought to be. If successfully learned, performed, and internalized it also lays out the path ahead: to go and fight, and through fighting being free, liberating others, and making sure the female structures endure.

It is too early to speak about post-liberation in Kurdistan, as the project of *Democratic Confederalism* is under sustained attack from all sides. However, the separate women's structures and the ideology that promises a long road to freedom are indicators that this liberation movement does have a different approach. Yet despite the KWLM's claim of difference from previous revolutionary struggles and sustainability in terms of women's centrality, the liberation ideology remains deeply gendered, with the "free women" being a progressive but disciplined, policed, and essentialised marker of the aspired "non-state nation." Together with Abdullah Öcalan, over the past forty years the women of the KWLM have created and are living and implementing a hegemonic femininity: a clearly set-out blueprint of how women have to become and what they have to do in order to liberate themselves and others. The learning and living of this femininity are tightly linked to party education, where women learn of their oppression, how to overcome it and contribute to the new non-state nation, either as armed fighters, or politicians and activists. This is not to say that the women of the Kurdistan Liberation Movement are used and abused by a masculinist invention. Much rather, the women have used the spaces provided by the movement, over the course of their struggle have transformed it from within by establishing autonomous female structures in all spheres of party activity, and are in fact the driving force behind the Kurdistan Liberation Movement as a whole. The movement would not be where it is today were it not for its women who have simultaneously been struggling for the liberation of the land and of women, I was often assured. Party education marks the starting point where the new recruits learn to follow in the footsteps of the leader, the martyrs, and the revolutionary women who came before them.

## NOTES

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2. The pro-PKK parties working in Rojhelat are organised under the East Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Society (KODAR, *Komalgeya Demokratik û Azad a Rojhilatê Kurdistanê*), which has a parallel women's structure called East Kurdistan Free Women's Society (KJAR: *Komelgeya Jinên Azad ên Rojhilatê Kurdistanê*). PJAK is the ideological party (Kurdistan Free Life Party: *Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê*), and there are two armed wings: the Women's Defence Forces (HPJ, *Hezên Parastina Jin*), and the mixed East Kurdistan Defence

Units (YRK, *Yekîneyên Parastina Rojhilatê Kurdistanê*). All parties are working toward implementing Democratic Confederalism in Rojhelat and are under the direct control of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK, *Koma Civakên Kurdistan*), to which I more broadly refer to as the Kurdistan Liberation Movement, the movement, the PKK, or the party.

3. *Democratic Confederalism*, *Democratic Autonomy*, and *Democratic Nation* are three interrelated political concepts coined by Abdullah Öcalan. *Democratic Confederalism* is the council-political form, based on radical democracy, sustainable ecological, gender-equality and self-defense. It foresees a collaboration between different regional assembly and self-governance structures, the smallest entity being the commune. *Democratic Autonomy* is the political principle of self-determination. It refers to the practices in which people produce the necessary conditions for collaboration with one another. *Democratic Nation* (instead of states) can accommodate ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences. Ideally, *Democratic Nations* organized along the parameters of *Democratic Autonomy* would form *Democratic Confederations*, surpassing ethnic, religious, linguistic, and state boundaries. In practice these concepts are still new and are often conflated or used interchangeably (Jongerden & Akayya 2013, 171; Ayboğa 2018; Gunser 2018; Öcalan 2016).

4. I use the terms Bakur, Rojhelat, Başur, and Rojava to refer to the four parts of Kurdistan. In Kurdish language they refer to north, east, south, and west and are usually used with “Kurdistan” e.g., Bakurê Kurdistanê.

5. I chose to translate *Tevgera Azadiya Jinên Kurdistanê* as Kurdistan Women’s Liberation Movement. *Azadi* means both freedom and liberation, but liberation better signifies the process toward freedom the women find themselves in. Similarly, I decided to translate the name of whole movement (*Tevgera Azadiya Kurdistanê*) as the Kurdistan Liberation Movement. Furthermore, terms like the “Middle East” need to be problematized because there are no set boundaries to that imagined and diverse entity. The questions whether countries like Turkey, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are part of the Middle East and how analytically fruitful it is to refer to this geography as the Middle East remain open (Bozarlsan 2015, 15–17). I therefore refer to the “Kurdish Middle East,” which includes Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, whereas many Kurds live in the Balkan countries, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and the European diaspora.

6. Bêrîvan was active as a “city cadre” in Cizre; organizing and educating women, building women’s committees and militias. In January 1989, Turkish police forces surrounded her house, and legend has it that she answered calls to surrender with slogans of resistance and fought to the last bullet in order to free her trapped comrades, before being murdered. Her heroic death, its commemoration a year later, and the brutal state response, were factors that sparked the uprisings (*Serhildan*) that continued and spread across eastern Turkey until 1993, mobilizing large numbers of women to join the guerrilla force (Herausgeberinnenkollektiv 2012, 19, 533).

7. Bêrîtan fought during the *Southern War* against an alliance of Turkish government and KDP/PUK allies. While fighting, she was trapped on a mountain cliff by *peşmerga* forces. To escape capture, Bêrîtan jumped off the cliff and became the symbol of the women’s army that was initiated in 1993 (ibid., 535).

8. Zilan died on July 30, 1996, when she detonated a bomb in the middle of a military parade in Dersim (ibid., 541). These three women were all seen as the pinnacle of female steadfastness and devotion to the cause.

9. Apoism is how the movement calls its ideology, the paradigm laid out by their leader Abdullah Öcalan. His ideas are collected in over a hundred books, many of which he wrote since his capture in 1999. His *Democratic Civilization Manifesto*, which consists of five books and was written between 2008–2012, is the core pillar of education both in the mountains and the cities.

10. *Jineoloji* translates to women’s science, a form of dominance proposed by Öcalan in 2008, which seeks to challenge male dominance in all aspects of life. Since 2010 the KWLM is increasingly developing *jineoloji* in all parts of Kurdistan and Europe, by offering *jineoloji* education courses, publishing books and magazines on *jineoloji*, and holding conferences on the topic.

11. Zilan died on July 30, 1996, when she detonated a bomb in the middle of a military parade in Dersim. Her act became a symbol of female strength and determination and Öcalan

named her the modern day Îştar (Mesopotamian deity of war, love and power), linking the power of female revolutionaries to a forgotten heritage of sacred female power. Today, all female recruits are tasked with rediscovering their inner goddess and becoming like Zilan: fearless, dedicated, and full of love for the people and the struggle (Garzan 2015, 122).

12. The amount of education each person undergoes varies. The basic training lasts three months, then follows another four to six months of consolidation training. Every few years the cadres are called back to do more education.

13. “KJAR calls upon women to join protests in Iran” (ANF 2018).

14. “KJAR proposal for women in Iran and Eastern Kurdistan” (ANF 2018), see also “The Developments in Iran and the Importance of the PJAK Project” (ANF 2018).

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## Chapter Two

# The Kurdish Women's Political Organizing from the Feminist Neo-Institutionalist Perspective

Lucie Drechselová

### THE “KURDISH EXCEPTION” IN TURKISH POLITICS<sup>1</sup>

In March 2014, Turkey's “democratizing package” allowed political parties to be chaired jointly by a man and a woman.<sup>2</sup> This legislative measure came about after being *de facto* practiced for nine years by the pro-Kurdish parties.<sup>3</sup> Back in 2005, the introduction of co-chairing system was one of the major achievements of the Kurdish women's movement. Within the pro-Kurdish party, opponents of the project argued that the existence of the co-chairing system would serve to state prosecutors as a pretext for the closure of the party. The closure eventually happened, but the co-chairing system was applied also to the following political parties and was finally legalized in 2014. In March 2014 as well, municipal elections took place in which the pro-Kurdish parties introduced the co-chairing system to local governments. The party nominated male and female co-mayors to almost all of its 100 municipalities in the southeast region. Even though the co-mayoral system represents an extension of the newly legal co-chairing system in political parties, it has faced severe negative response from the state and has largely been dismantled in the following years with numerous co-mayors arrested.

Pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey distinguish themselves from other political forces by significantly higher proportions of women represented on their lists as well as in the party decision-making structures. Besides the co-chairing system, there is a 40 percent gender quota, and women hold a quasi-monopoly on the selection of female candidates. In a country where the women's representation reached 17 percent in the Parliament in 2018

(Tahaoglu and Hikmet 2018) and slightly overcame the 10 percent in local governments in 2014 (Kadın Koalisyonu 2014), the pro-Kurdish political parties are not only exceptional but can also have a contagion effect on other political actors.<sup>4</sup> For example, it has become much more common for political parties to nominate a woman as their deputy leader since the pro-Kurdish party did so for the first time in Turkish history in 2007 (Kışanak, Al-Ali, and Taş 2016). Similarly, the implementation of quota and the co-chairing system inspired women from other parties to voice comparable demands.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, in provinces where the pro-Kurdish party presented female candidates, other parties, including the governing conservative AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, Justice and Development Party), tend to present women as well.

The opening story of the co-chairing system spells out the main puzzle around which this paper revolves: how to explain the feminization of pro-Kurdish political parties? The feminist neo-institutionalist approach helps to elucidate this point by focusing on the evolution of women's political organizing and the positive action measures within the pro-Kurdish parties in Turkey. This perspective reveals the contours of the changing morphology of the pro-Kurdish women's movement. Kenny suggests that single case studies are particularly relevant as they allow capturing "the complex ways in which gender plays out in different institutional sites" (Kenny 2014, 681). This is also the objective of this paper which builds upon my doctoral research focusing on the entry points of women into local politics in Turkey. It mainly draws on non-participant observation and fifty interviews carried out between 2015 and 2017 in Diyarbakır, Mardin, Siirt as well as the HDP and DBP offices in Izmir and Ankara, coupled with several interviews in Paris and London.<sup>6</sup>

Feminist neo-institutionalist scholarship provides a useful framework for the study of the institutional change of women's structures within the Kurdish movement. It recognizes that institutions are profoundly gendered and inquires into how gender is embedded not only in formal rules but also in the norms and informal rules (Lovenduski 2011, 2; Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010; Kenny 2014; Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016). Specifically, the literature dealing with political parties' candidate selection mechanisms is helpful in revealing "the secret garden" of these institutions from the gendered perspective (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015; Kenny and Verge 2016). Institutional design and change often pertain to the "hidden life of institutions" because the political parties are often unwilling to share their internal proceedings with outsiders. The interviews realized for this research try to bridge this information and trust gap and try to capture how institutional design can enable some and constraint other involved actors (Chappell and Waylen 2013). In this paper as well, political parties are conceived as dynamic environments, products of "negotiation, conflict and contestation" (Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010, 575). Organized women within them face chal-



lenges and at times overt obstructions from their fellow male partisans. The reversibility and unpredictability of institutional designs can be convincingly captured by what Deniz Kandiyoti termed as “masculinist restauration” (Kandiyoti 2013). This notion recognizes instances of patriarchy’s adaptation in different contexts and point out to the instances of its backlash. Finally, explanations of change require to “take into account agency and to refine understandings of both exogenous and endogenously generated change and their interconnections” (Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010, 582). That is what this paper aims for while looking into the case of Kurdish women’s political organizing.

### CONTEXTUALIZATION: PRO-KURDISH POLITICAL PARTIES GAINING GROUND

Kurdish women’s movement has been the main actor of increase in women’s representation and contributed overtime to broaden the representational “gender gap” between the pro-Kurdish political parties and the other political forces in Turkey. However, studies about women’s political participation in pro-Kurdish politics often fall short of contextualizing. With some notable exceptions (see Çağlayan 2007, 2012b; Bozgan 2011), the crucial period around the year 2000 is often dealt with very briefly (such as in Ersanlı and Göksü Özdoğan 2011; Basch-Harod 2014; Bengio 2016; Şahin-Mencütek 2016; Al-Ali and Taş 2018b, 2018a). In the following analysis, I intend to give more detailed, though non-exhaustive, account of the period articulated around three main elements: firstly, the events of the year 1999; secondly, the ideological transformation propelled within the Kurdish movement since then; and thirdly, the raising legitimacy of the political and social involvement of women within the pro-Kurdish parties.

#### **The Critical Year 1999 and the Kurdish Movement**

The year 1999 was marked by several crucial events in Turkey (Gambetti 2004, 5). Abdullah Öcalan, founder and leader of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party), an organization waging a war against Turkish state since 1984, was arrested.<sup>7</sup> During the trial, Öcalan used his defenses as a platform to outline ideological transformation of the PKK, abandoning the aim of establishing the separate Kurdish state for the sake of democratic autonomy and communalism in the Middle East. Soon after that, the PKK declared a cease-fire and asked for peace negotiations with Turkey (Güneş 2012, 137). At the same time, in 1999 for the first time, the pro-Kurdish political party, HADEP (*Halkın Demokrasi Partisi*, People’s Democracy Party), took part in local elections and won thirty-seven municipalities,<sup>8</sup> including three where the party nominated female mayors. Still in the same year, the legal impediments

that prevented Turkey's parties from creating women's branches were lifted and these branches were again established.<sup>9</sup> At the same period, the instable governments and economic crisis paved the way for the 2002 electoral victory of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan,<sup>10</sup> who managed to establish himself as a dominant actor in Turkey's politics, and of his AKP, the refurbished version of the Islamic Refah Party and central right-wing parties of the 1960s and 1970s. It is also worth mentioning that in December 1999, European Council recognized Turkey's candidacy to the European Union (Ersanlı and Göksü Özdoğan 2011, 69). Turkey's bid for the membership speeded up several legislative amendments recognizing the Kurdish cultural rights (Bozgan 2011, 765). All these elements had repercussions on women's involvement in pro-Kurdish parties.

Before analyzing in greater detail the salience of these factors for women's political organizing, a closer look on some of the involved actors—Kurdish movement, pro-Kurdish parties, and Kurdish women's movement—is necessary. Kurdish movement is the most encompassing of the three. It is a network of interconnected actors, involving the pro-Kurdish political parties, the PKK, associations, women's organizations, and the media. Watts and Dorronsoro consider it as a “value community,” which none of the actors controls completely (Dorronsoro and Watts 2013, 101). The power relations among the actors are impacted by the political situation and the peaks of suppression of Kurdish politicians (such as in 2009 and in 2015) mark the strengthening of the armed wing of the Kurdish movement.

Pro-Kurdish political parties are a significant component of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. The designation “pro-Kurdish” adopted in this paper has for purpose to de-ethnicize the notion as not all Kurds support the pro-Kurdish parties and not all supporters of those parties are Kurdish. Even though the major grievance of the parties is to end the state politics of forced assimilation of the Kurds, their programs also stand for the rights of minorities, gender equality and environmental protection (HDP 2014; DBP n.d.). Since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been a series of pro-Kurdish legal parties, the majority of which has been closed by the Turkish Constitutional Court.<sup>11</sup> Currently, there are two parties that co-exist: on the one hand, the HDP (Democratic Peoples' Party) is an umbrella organization that represents the pro-Kurdish parties in the Parliament as well as in the provinces outside the southeast region. It is a coalition of actors, involving the Kurdish political party (DBP), leftist organizations, feminist associations, and some trade unions. On the other hand, the DBP (Party of Democratic Regions) is concentrated mostly in the southeast and is in charge of municipalities. It spearheads the local implementation of the democratic autonomy principles embraced by the Kurdish movement.

These multiple levels should be taken into account in the analysis of women's political organizing. Where do women's organizations stand with

regards to the Kurdish movement? Women's structures embedded within pro-Kurdish political parties exist since the 1990s. Currently, both the DBP and the HDP have women's assemblies. But importantly, Kurdish women's movement extends its being beyond the political party, as the members of the umbrella organization Free Women Congress (KJA) put it, they are "nobody's branch" (*kimsenin kolu değiliz*).<sup>12</sup>

## Ideological Transformation

I argue, together with Handan Çağlayan, that there is a mutual interaction between the Kurdish movement's ideology and women's political involvement (Çağlayan 2012b, 2). That is why the ideological transformation that the Kurdish movement underwent since the late 1990s is of utmost importance. Sponsored by Abdullah Öcalan, it is depicted as "profound transformation" (Akkaya and Jongerden 2012, 1) or "radical shift" (Al-Ali and Taş 2018a, 6) in the PKK's course. Instead of separatism, it offered a project of self-rule and radical participatory democracy for the whole Middle East without altering existing state borders.<sup>13</sup> Gender equality was to hold a central place of this new paradigm. Even though the PKK eventually accepted Öcalan's proposals, the shift opened a way for different factions to compete over the power within the PKK (Akkaya and Jongerden 2012, 5) and it was not until 2004 that the democratic autonomy became an officially pursued goal (Üstündağ, Interview by Güney Yıldız 2019, 160). Three years later, in 2007 the pro-Kurdish party also officially embraced the democratic autonomy as its programmatic priority (Toplum ve Kuram 2010, 168). Upon its creation, the HDP became the embodiment of this new ideological course.

Öcalan build mostly upon the Murray Bookchin's project of libertarian municipalism (Akkaya and Jongerden 2012, 6). Among his other sources of inspirations are Emma Goldman, Immanuel Wallerstein, Fernand Braudel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and the Zapatistas (Yarkın 2011, 76; Al-Ali and Taş 2018a, 13). Women were urged by Öcalan to become the architects of the democratic confederalism: "I am calling upon all sectors of society, in particular all women and the youth, to set up their own democratic organizations and to govern themselves," he writes.<sup>14</sup> His thoughts on gender issues evolved significantly over the course of years.<sup>15</sup> His early writings are paramount of ambiguous approach to gender issues and inequalities (Al-Ali and Taş 2018a, 13). It can be said that Öcalan's thought as well as Kurdish movement's gender ideology evolved in relation with women joining the ranks of the PKK,<sup>16</sup> while women joining the guerrilla organization in turn propelled women to join the political parties. In Öcalan's ideology, women moved from being seen as a trap for men into a condition of everybody's liberation: "Unless women emancipate themselves first, it is rather unlikely that even those men considering themselves as most progressive will make

any proper contribution to liberation of the classes, of the nation, of society, culture and so forth” (Öcalan 2003, 77). Patriarchy gained its place among the three ills of the modern society (alongside the nation-state, capitalism) (Üstündağ 2016, 198). In practice, Öcalan’s writings provide women with a tool to push for reform and positive action measures as Ayla Akat Ata, the founding speaker of the Free Women Congress (KJA), stated: “Mr. Öcalan’s support of the women’s issue gives us huge power. He has also put the freedom of women before any national freedom. This perspective has helped us to make radical changes in a short time period” (Akat, Al-Ali, and Taş 2016). The aim of the next section is to demonstrate that for the radical changes to happen, women’s mobilization was key and that without it, these writings would remain on paper.

### **Rising Importance of Political and Social Struggle**

Increasing women’s participation corresponded to the broader shift toward civilian organizing that the Kurdish movement in Turkey was experiencing since the end of 1990s. In his writings, Öcalan put accent on the “third domain,” the associational and civilian field. He considered that: “because women and the youth are in most urgent need for peace and freedom, multi-faceted women’s and youth unions are among the backbone institutions of civil society” (Öcalan 2003, 25). This call on women’s organizing contributed to more women joining existing human rights organizations as well as establishing women’s associations (Şahin-Mencütek 2016, 481). Ever since, women were presented as exemplars of mobilization according to the new party line (Güneş 2012, 120).

For the Kurdish movement, associations occupy a very privileged place; they are influential in candidate selection process as well as in education of party members. According to Watts and Dorronsoro, “the nature and impact of associational political involvement changed after 1999 with the thickening, diversification, and expansion of the political field” (Dorronsoro and Watts 2013, 104). For instance, all women’s associations registered in Diyarbakır were created after 2004.<sup>17</sup> Compared to pro-Kurdish political parties, associations were less frequently targeted by state bans; in this regard, they represent a form of continuity of women’s organizing while the parties were periodically closed down. The two areas (political and associational) are closely interconnected, not to say embedded. This becomes clear while looking at female political candidates out of whom an important proportion entered politics on the basis of their associational involvement. Having a background in civil society organization increases the likelihood of a candidate to be selected on the party’s electoral list.

Finally, the PKK-sponsored cease-fire in 1999 contributed to the increase in legitimacy of political parties, and with it, to the increase in women’s

political involvement. "It is not a coincidence," Bozgan remarks, "that women's organizing flourished in the period between 1999 and 2004" (Bozgan 2011, 780), following cease-fires declared by the PKK and the lifting of the emergency rule by the AKP in 2002. Crucially, the Kurdish movement used the periods of diminished levels of violence to build its local participatory structures and to root itself in the local governments. The peace process, as noted by Nazan Üstündağ, did not represent a "diplomatic endeavor" but a means to pursue the struggle on social and political grounds (Üstündağ, Interview by Güney Yıldız 2019, 164). Municipalities became laboratories for pro-Kurdish policies in which women had key role: they were bringing into life local municipal projects in line with Kurdish movement's ideology (Ersanlı and Göksü Özdoğan 2011, 85). Thanks to these contextual shifts, progressively, the political parties became a "legitimate option" for women willing to be politically active and who in the 1990s may have been left with joining the guerrilla struggle. Women's civic involvement throughout the 1990s also produced a generation of women eager to enter politics: women were present at the *Newroz* (New Year) manifestations (especially 1990, 1991 and 1992), in street demonstrations and *Serhildans* (mass protests) (Çağlayan 2012b, 13; Al-Ali and Taş 2018a, 11).

It should be noted that if the legitimacy of the political wing of the Kurdish movement increased, it doesn't mean that the legitimacy of the PKK decreased. Tezcür showed that at least 60 percent of PKK's university recruits had a history of political activism and that almost all urban recruits who joined after 1999 (23 out of 25) had a history of prior political activism (Tezcür 2016, 259). Even though this paper is concerned with the political parties, Tezcür's findings remind us that the interconnections and crossing points between politics and the armed struggle should be considered especially in a study of individual pathways of the activists.

### CHANGING WOMEN'S STRUCTURES: EXPLAINING INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN IN THE 2000S

The 1990s marked the entering of women into the public sphere, the appearance of first Kurdish women's associations as well as women's magazines. These activities gave rise to a consciousness of "marginalization of women within the wider political movement" which in turn contributed to women's collective mobilization in the following years (Al-Ali and Taş 2018a, 12). In this section, after a quick look at the 1990s, I offer a chronology of women's political organizing. This chronology is articulated around multiple critical junctures: the establishment of women's branches and significant alterations in political parties' programs around the year 2000, the withdrawal of the women's quota in 2004 municipal elections, the introduction of co-chairing

system in 2005, the dissolution of women's branches before the creation of women's assemblies in 2005, the implementation of gender quota in the 2007 general election, and the road toward the introduction of co-chairing system in municipalities in 2014. This chronology purposely cumulates elements in order to show the non-linearity in the progression of Kurdish women's organizing as well as the striking pace with which the "ups and downs" alternate. In this way, it is possible to catch a glimpse of the tensions and ubiquitous negotiations of women within the Kurdish movement.

### **Raising Feminist Consciousness throughout the 1990s**

When women started joining the guerrilla in greater numbers, their struggle had a major impact on women involved in civilian political field.<sup>18</sup> Female fighters were pioneers in many regards, notably in setting up independent non-mixed structures (for more see Guillemet 2017). Şahin-Mencütek links the creation of women's commissions in the first pro-Kurdish parties in the 1990s to the establishment of the women's units in the PKK (Şahin-Mencütek 2016, 480–81). Similarly, Bozgan suggests that the creation of the PKK's Free Women's Party (PJA) in 1999 represented a template for women's branches within political parties (Bozgan 2011, 779).

Feminist consciousness was built progressively. Women actively involved in the period, such as Gültan Kışanak, former co-mayor of Diyarbakır, acknowledge that "in the 1970s and 1980s women's rights were sacrificed for the sake of general political and national aims. The slogan was to first have a revolution and then make some improvements in women's rights and gender equality" (Kışanak, Al-Ali, and Taş 2016). In addition, the political parties didn't adopt significant gender equality provisions until the late 1990s.

In the 1990s, women's activities were mostly oriented to the social problems that women faced in the southeast region (bride prices, domestic violence) and in consequence of forced migration. First association, Patriotic Women's Association (*Yurtsever Kadın Derneği*), was short-lived.<sup>19</sup> However, among its members, several female candidates were recruited for the 1999 elections. Women also published several magazines featuring some ideological plurality.<sup>20</sup> These publications had a great impact mostly thanks to the awareness raising efforts of women's commissions of the political party. Emine Ayna, former MP and co-chair of the DBP, recalled how they operated: "as members of women's commission, we took our magazine [*Özgür Kadın Dergisi*] and organized women's debate groups. We did that three or four days a week. We were selling the magazine to gain support for our activities, we also read from it out loud and discussed it" (Toplum ve Kuram 2010, 141). These publication efforts and debates stimulated women's consciousness of gender inequalities within the Kurdish movement. If Kurdish

women were “first politicized under the umbrella of Kurdish nationalism,” over time, they developed a critique of prevalent sexism in the movement as well as in the society (Yüksel 2006, 780). The legacy of the 1990s resides mostly in women’s consciousness raising.

### Establishment of Women’s Branches

The post–2000 period can be characterized by the multiplication of women’s spaces within the Kurdish movement as well as political parties. As Ayla Akat Ata, who in 2015 became the speaker of Free Women Congress (KJA), stated: “In 2000, many different women’s organizations came together to discuss what more they could do, what kind of platform they can create to make women’s rights one of the main political aims in Kurdistan and Turkey” (Akat, Al-Ali, and Taş 2016). On the civil society level, women took active part in trade unions, human rights organizations and sponsored the creation of women’s associations which then established several women’s platforms. Şeyda, one of the municipal councilors I interviewed, was among the founders of the Diyarbakır Women’s Platform.<sup>21</sup> The fact that she was later elected municipal councilor confirms the salience of the “associational capital” for the political career of female activists. Democratic Free Women’s Movement (DÖKH) was established in 2003 as an umbrella structure for women’s associational and political organizing (Dorrnsoro and Watts 2013, 105). For over ten years, this platform sponsored civil society projects, organized demonstrations and coordinated activities of women’s groups close to the Kurdish movement. DÖKH commanded a network of actors that was broader than the political parties.

The establishment of women’s branches (*kadın kolları*) was enabled by a 1999 change in Turkey’s legal system. In the pro-Kurdish political parties, contrary to all major parties in Turkey, women’s branches became “equal structures” to the party’s principal organization (*ana kademe*). Growing women’s organization had also an impact on the place that was devoted to gender equality in official party documents. Progressively, women’s liberation became one of the central chapters. In 2000, HADEP put in place 25 percent gender quota on internal decision-making organs and electoral lists. Its successor DEHAP increased it to 35 percent in 2003 (Çağlayan 2007, 134, 137). Handan Çağlayan recalled that before introducing the quota into party statutes, women from the party collaborated with Turkish feminists in order to draft the proposal.<sup>22</sup> In the beginning of 2000s, the number of women’s candidates increased significantly. In 2002 general election, DEHAP didn’t get over the 10 percent electoral threshold, but women were at the top of the list in 25 provinces (Bozgan 2011, 779).

Women’s platforms were instrumental in putting into practice party’s new gender policy. Women elected to municipalities contributed to the prioritiza-

tion of gender equal measures and were quick to establish institutions tasked with their implementation. In 2001, DIKASUM (Women's Issues Research and Implementation Centre of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality) was created (Bulut 2001). Municipalities supported the creation of women's centers such as *Kardelen Kadın Merkezi* in Diyarbakır or *Gulşılav Kadın Evi* in Nusaybin. Special focus has been on the creation of women's cooperatives with the aim of providing some level of income to women: *Bağlar Kadın Kooperatifi*, *Doğubeyazit Kadın Kooperatifi*, and *Kızıltepe Kadın Kooperatifi* were among the first ones, remarkably, all established in municipalities with female mayors (Bozgan 2011, 787).

By the year 2004, women's organizations proliferated in all areas of the Kurdish movement, in associations, trade unions and above all, political parties (Tokdoğan 2013, 42). It was an era when institutionalization was clearly a priority. As stated by Ayla Akat Ata: "Our aim, with the help of a range of new organizations, is to create institutions which empower women. [ . . . ] It was, and is, necessary to have a strong committee, with institutions dealing with women's issues on a daily basis" (Akat, Al-Ali, and Taş 2016). It became quickly clear that the introduction of positive action measures, such as the quota and women's branches' budget, doesn't automatically translate into practice.

### Withdrawal of Women's Quota in 2004

Women's quota has been accepted as part of pro-Kurdish parties' program, but its implementation on the eve of 2004 local elections exposed the vested interests of existing man-dominated clientelist networks. While the intra-party selection process was already underway, women's movement announced a list of districts (around 25 percent of areas where the pro-Kurdish party expected to win) in which only women's candidates were going to be considered. Envoys from the party headquarters traveled throughout the southeast explaining that men should withdraw their application, which created disarray in concerned districts. Arvin, who was a member of party's local direction at that time, recalled that in his district, all men but one withdrew their applications and pushed women from their extended family to apply (much like their proxies). Not satisfied with the selection process development and under heavy intra-party pressure, the women's movement agreed not to pursue the implementation of gender quota in the 2004 election. Ironically, the decision came about late enough to not to enable other men's applications in Arvin's district and the only remaining male candidate (the one who refused to withdraw his application) was selected to run for the mayor's office.<sup>23</sup>

DEHAP and its coalition of associated leftist parties won fifty-seven municipalities in 2004 (Radikal 2009). Out of these, nine had female mayors, an



amount that corresponds to slightly more than 15 percent ratio. If this score is significantly below the aimed quota level, the nine elected women mayors represent 50 percent of all elected mayors in Turkey that year (Aslan 2009, 71–72). Among them, for the first time in country's history a woman, Songül Abdil Erol, became the head of a province (Tunceli) (Çağlayan 2012a, 145). However, party's score was below the 2002 general election and Bozgan recounts that women and the youth were blamed for this drop (Bozgan 2011, 767). This accusation gives a sense of opposition women were facing while trying to implement the quota.

What happened in 2004 that made women's movement concede to the pressure of party's general headquarters and to abandon the quota? My interviewees were often silent on this point and provided very few elements. Literature on Kurdish women's mobilizing is also mostly oblivious toward this point. However, Emine Ayna's account in her 2011 interview in the magazine *Toplum ve Kuram* yields some precious information. Describing the 2002 and 2004 period Ayna stated:

“That time is the period when the biggest breaks happened and also a period when women withdrew from their activities. It was a period of intense debates, most often about women and society issues. [ . . . ] Within the PKK, the process of “purge”<sup>24</sup> was taking place. It was a period when Osman Öcalan and thousands of guerrilla fighters left the movement. [ . . . ] If I was to speak about myself, I went home and sit there for four years. We were mobilizing women but what was happening around had too much of a negative impact.” (Toplum ve Kuram 2010, 146)

Internal problems within the PKK had a direct negative impact on women's capacity to push for their agenda. While the evolutions in the PKK during this period were widely documented,<sup>25</sup> the concrete repercussions on women's political organizing are still to be uncovered.

There are also specificities of local politics which make it a difficult terrain to conquer. As one of Bozgan's interviewees remarked, people tend to focus more on the doings and public appearances of the mayor than to those of deputies, due to proximity bias (Bozgan 2011, 784). In 2002, there was little hope for the pro-Kurdish party to overcome the 10 percent threshold and enter the Parliament. On the contrary, the stakes were high in municipalities. My interviewee, Tuğba, aged forty-five, was elected mayor in 2009, and her experience reveals the tensions that accompany women's election to this influential local office. After the election, she was the only woman in the municipal hall building with no female councilor or employee. In office during her pregnancy, she had the hard task of heading a municipality that the pro-Kurdish party won for the first time and had to deal with sabotages from state institutions. During this time, Tuğba was also physically assaulted. She explained the assault not as an attack of “political opposition” but as a

sexist hate crime of those unable to bear that they lost political power at the municipality to a woman.<sup>26</sup> As reiterated by Bozgan's interviewee: "when we entered politics, we didn't clash with the state system, but with the men" (Bozgan 2011, 791; similar assessment in Kışanak 2018).

If Öcalan's writings were instrumental in pushing for changes in party statutes, the existence of positive action measures in these statutes enabled women to push for their application. In line with the feminist institutionalist scholarship, it appears crucial to consider inner opposition and sabotage practices manifested not openly, but informally and in a disguised manner. Even though the implementation of gender quota was postponed, in 2004 election women got a glimpse of the scale of intra-party opposition. At the same period, the foundations of a new principle were laid down. Tara, former journalist and DÖKH activist, recalled that it was precisely in 2002–2004 that women started to gain competence over the selection of female candidates.<sup>27</sup> This prerogative will acquire even bigger importance with the establishment of co-mayorship in 2014.

### **Introducing Co-chairing: Women's Coup to Men?**

A year after the municipal elections in which the women's quota was withdrawn, in November 2005, the co-chairing system and the increase of women's quota were introduced to the statutes of the newly created Democratic Society Party (DTP). What allowed for this rather radical evolution? In this case, the answer, more than in the exogenous explanations, lies in women's organizing and strategy. The opposition toward the implementation of co-chairing system was not voiced in ideological terms because it was proposed by Abdullah Öcalan, whose authority proscribes overt criticism within the movement. Instead, women were told that the timing was not right. The fragmentation inside the PKK that served as a deterrent for women's quota in 2004 was still recent. There were fears that such a major change as the introduction of co-chairing could alienate party's conservative voters and weaken it (Toplum ve Kuram 2010, 145). In addition, women were told that the co-chairing is illegal in Turkish legal system and that they may speed up the closure of yet another pro-Kurdish party. Tara, journalist and member of DÖKH, was among those who actively contributed to the final stage of the institutionalization of co-chairing. I transcribe her account at length:

With the introduction of co-chairing, women did a kind of putsch to men. Abdullah Öcalan in his defenses suggested that co-presidency should be implemented. Women took his propositions as a serious matter for discussion. DÖKH coordinated those discussions. But men objected by the timing and by the illegality of the measure. They threatened us that we will entail the party's ban. We, women, replied that if we don't act as pioneers, the situation will never improve. At one of DÖKH's meetings in Diyarbakır, we decided to

implement the co-chairing by creating a *de facto* situation. We brainstormed ten names of women who could be our female co-president and finally, Aysel Tuğluk was selected. Other than us, no one knew. A day before party's congress, we assembled all women delegates who accounted for 30 percent of all delegates at the time. We presented them with our plan and they assured us of their support. The day of the congress we published in the daily newspaper *Özgür Gündem* a feature interview with Aysel Tuğluk with the headline "Women's co-presidential candidate." That is how men learnt about the situation and it was too late to organize an opposition. By principle they couldn't object because everything was justified by Öcalan's texts.<sup>28</sup>

The implementation of co-chairing system was not without difficulties but it has remained in place ever since. Gültan Kışanak acknowledged that competence-sharing among the co-presidents was often problematic with women being sidelined or seen as assistants to elected male president (Kışanak 2018). Nevertheless, with the co-chairing system women's mobilization marked a symbolical and practical achievement.

### **Dismantling Women's Structures: Men's Coup to Women**

Contrary to other pro-Kurdish parties, DEHAP was not banned but dissolved itself to open the way for the new legal representative of the Kurdish movement, the DTP. This "period of reconstruction" (Bozgan 2011, 788) had paradoxically negative repercussions on women's movement. Many of the experienced women were not involved in the new structures. The message of renewal was sent calling for the "olds" not to seek offices and to leave the room for the "new." Women appeared to obey this instruction much more systematically than men. It seems that the "search for new organizational structures" was actually an attempt to break the wings (Bozgan 2011, 789) of the women's movement which became too influential over time. It is again Tara who provided more details:

Around the year 2006, men did a putsch to women. They dissolved women's branches. Women stayed in a void before the women's assembly was created. Around the women's branches, there was a group of 600 mobilized women. These women were partially dispersed. Some partook in the efforts to establish new women's assembly, but it was lengthy and energy-consuming process and it weakened them. However, there was one thing that couldn't be dissipated—women's consciousness.<sup>29</sup>

These circumstances point to the fact that the transformation toward women's assemblies was not a change initiated by women. From the institutionalist perspective, it is interesting to note that while the transformation from women's commission to women's branches in 1999 was mainly sponsored by women and enabled by exogenous legislative modification, the

impulse to create women's assemblies didn't come from women's movement and weakened it for some time. This shows that institutional change can be pushed for by the concerned actors and in a span of several years, it can be imposed on them.

## 2007 General Election and Women's Quota

The electoral quota on women's representation has been agreed upon since the year 2000, and it has been increased twice. However, its first electoral application dates back to 2007. Out of twenty-six elected DTP deputies, eight were women (Kışanak, Al-Ali, and Taş 2016). By 2007, women's assemblies, the new form of women's organizing within the pro-Kurdish party were settled and resumed active lobbying for women's rights. In the same year, PKK issued a quota of 40 percent for the ratio of its women commanders (Basch-Harod 2014, 184). Although these elements may have facilitated women's bid for quota implementation, the organized women's effort seemed to play a crucial role. Gültan Kışanak's account gives an idea about the scale of difficulties women went through to secure the quota application:

It might be difficult to believe but when I look back at my own experience and story, the hardest time for me as a woman was not in prison. It was not my time at university or when I was working as a journalist. But it was the struggle we had to fight in order to get a women's quota for MPs. (Kışanak, Al-Ali, and Taş 2016)

Women's candidacies were systematically an object of postponement. Excuses were voiced within the pro-Kurdish party such as that high women's ratio will alienate conservative voters. As Gültan Kışanak put it, the electoral score of the DTP in 2007 challenged the idea that women were not able to succeed as well as the one that society was not ready (Kışanak 2018). With Kurdish women's entry into the Parliament, the issue of gender equality in politics gained national visibility.

The principle according to which women select their own candidates was further institutionally strengthened in 2007 as women created women's electoral committees. The control over the selection mechanism helps to fight against using women as proxies of influential men. Praising the 2007 women's electoral success, Gültan Kışanak considered that the biggest challenge was the sustainability of the gender-equal representation (Kışanak 2018). Seven years of consolidation and negotiations have passed until another major innovation of pro-Kurdish political parties was introduced to the Turkish political landscape: the co-chairing system for municipalities.

## POSITIVE ACTION MEASURES: ROAD TO CO-MAYORSHIP

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the “local” has become the focus of the Kurdish movement encouraged by the shifts in ideology as well as sustained success of the parties in municipal elections. If party’s votes were fluctuating (less votes in 2004 than in 1999, less votes in 2014 than in 2009), women’s political representation has been on the rise. In 2009 local election, fourteen out of ninety-nine party’s mayors were women (around 20 percent) (Ersanlı and Göksü Özdoğan 2011, 80). Women represented sixteen percent of elected municipal councillors (Bozgan 2011, 793). In 2014, twenty-three women out of the total of thirty-seven female mayors in Turkey were officially elected from the pro-Kurdish party (BDP). To that number we can add sixty-eight women who hold the office of the mayor “unofficially” within the realm of the co-mayorship system (Kadın Koalisyonu 2014).

The years spanning from the implementation of women’s quota in 2007 and the introduction of co-mayorship in 2014 are marked by multiple dynamics. Several new participatory structures were established, such as, in 2007, the Democratic Society Congress (DTK) (Üstündağ, Interview by Güney Yıldız 2019, 164). In 2013–2014, political representation was “divided” between HDP and DBP. The former became the “national roof,” present in the Parliament and western provinces, while the later was in charge of municipalities in the southeast. Women’s movement has been affected by this multiplication of institutionalized actors. In 2015, new institution of women’s organizing was created: the Free Women Congress (KJA). It evolved from DÖKH, sharing its federating aim. Ayla Akat Ata, the first speaker of the KJA, noted that it was established to improve the communication with different actors, also outside the Kurdish movement and outside Turkey (Akat, Al-Ali, and Taş 2016). KJA built upon the twenty-five-year tradition of women’s organizing. It was also illustrative of the relentless search for new organizing structures (Aksoy 2015), general feature of the Kurdish movement.

### **Troubles with the Quota**

In 2004, only three women managed to access the metropolitan council in Diyarbakır (9.4 percent), even though they accounted for 18.1 percent of district councilors (Arıkboğa 2009, 37). In 2014, however, 25 women represented 36.6 percent of DBP’s councilors in the metropolitan hall.<sup>30</sup> This shift shows not only the increase in numbers of women on electoral lists, but most importantly, their ranking on the lists. Only a certain proportion of district councilors are co-opted to metropolitan council and this means that in 2014 women were on average better positioned than in 2009. This is due to the scrupulous attention of the women’s electoral committee devoted to the lists.

My interviewees were adamant on the fact that women are the ones who decide about the selection of female candidates which represents a crucial achievement since the beginning of the 2000s. The head of KJA's diplomacy department, Payız, whom I met in Diyarbakır in 2015, described the selection process as following:

Women are generally too modest. If a woman thinks she could get an elected office, she would above all concentrate her efforts to shine in her daily party or associational activities. She will be seen and her colleagues will suggest her name to the party. After this, we step in and encourage this woman to apply for candidacy.<sup>31</sup>

However, women do not exercise a complete monopoly over the selection process. In several of Diyarbakır's peripheral districts, prior to the 2014 election, places reserved for women were subjected to strategic considerations. This seems to be the case in Kulp, where the DBP elected among its municipal councilors daughter of a former AKP mayor. One could suspect that the support of the extended family was at stake from the point of view of the party. Women were also, more often than men, made to "represent" a whole set of identity marks in order to "live up" to party's promise of diversity. Often times, the co-president or co-mayor was an older Kurdish man while female co-president was a young Kurd or Turk, Alevite, close to feminist movement or trade unions. This was the case in very different constituencies. In Karşıyaka (district in Izmir), a young female co-president without prior history of political involvement shared the party's presidency with an experienced older co-president from the Kurdish movement. In the metropolitan municipality of Mardin, twenty-seven-year-old Assyrian female co-mayor, Februniye Akyol, was sharing the office with a legend-like seventy-six-year-old Kurdish politician, Ahmet Türk. In Kulp district in Diyarbakır, a Yezidi female co-mayor, Sadiye Sür Baran, shared the office with a Kurdish Sunni co-mayor. Among Diyarbakır's female co-mayors and councilors, many were Kurdish Alevi. This shows that in some cases, women were at the same time the youth, while in other cases, women were at the same time members of a religious minority. Supporting a multiplicity of identity markers may obey to party's image and program but it has also concrete repercussions on the exercise of power. It appeared that women were conceived more in their "representative" role and less as leaders. Being young and coming from religious minority may have contributed to their election in the first place but complicated their exercise of the mandate. In such scenarios, the support that could yield Kurdish women's movement appeared to be instrumental for those women to remain in office. Notably, in areas where the pro-Kurdish parties don't have significant local presence, the lesser implantation of women's movement was strongly felt by the female politicians.

In 2014, women selectors faced another difficulty—they were searching for candidates who could fill in the quota places in several districts that the party was about to win for the first time. In some districts of Elazığ or Ağrı, it seemed that the criteria for a female candidate inclusion of the list, other than family background, was also some level of education and “biographical availability”<sup>32</sup>: being young and single was “enough.” This approach of the selectors in context of a shortage of female candidates points to the certain degree to their “interchangeability.” As show the circumstances of entry into politics of my interviewee Rojhat:

Before the election, friends from the party came to see me. They insisted that I am in the village without doing anything after completing my high school. They encouraged me to apply for local council. I did so but I was frankly hoping it will not work out. A week later I learnt that I was on the list. After the elections, I even had to ask where the municipal hall was because I have never been there before.<sup>33</sup>

In 2016, arrests of HDP parliamentarians and the DBP’s councilors and co-mayors increased significantly. In this context, missing female politicians sometimes had to be replaced by *ad hoc* decisions. At one of these occasions, prosecuted female co-mayor was to be replaced by one of the councilors whom I happened to interview earlier that day. The decision has landed on a “candidate” who was rather unwilling to take this office but ended up accepting. This shows the influence exerted by the party selectors who are able to convince young and little experienced newcomer to accept a relatively pressured and high-risk position in a time of crisis. It is remarkable that women maintained their prerogative to select female candidates also in this context and didn’t let the “extraordinary circumstances” to encroach over their selection monopoly.

However, the female quota was sidelined not only in cases of scarcity of female candidates but also when political stakes were high. Izmir is an illustrative example. The city is divided into two constituencies and in June 2015 general election, in the first constituency men occupied the first two places on the list; while in the second constituency, a man headed the list followed by a woman. Only two men, both heads of the list, were elected (Haberler 2015). Women HDP politicians in Izmir criticized this distribution of offices among men. In the subsequent election in November 2015, even though the two men were elected again (Habertürk 2015), women got to occupy the second place in both constituencies: the zipper system was implemented but was insufficient to secure women’s election. The fact that in June 2018 general election, Serpil Kemalbay, former HDP co-president, got elected from the first place in Izmir may be also the result of women’s pressure in that province.

Furthermore, it has become clear that the “acceptance” of quota can also be a matter of “patriarchal adaptation.” Several of my interviewees, such as Roza from women’s academy, bemoaned that the logic of quota has been twisted with the 40 percent becoming the maximum of possible women’s representation in any given party organ or elective position.<sup>34</sup> Avşın, elected councilor in 2009 and who became co-mayor in 2014 in her peripheral district in Mardin, showed that the “quota mentality” pervaded into all domains of political activity:

With colleagues from the municipality we were about to attend a funeral. In total, we had four cars. Men got into three of them. I wanted to bring three women with me but they asked me to only bring two and one man in my car. I asked why. They said: because we are more. I answered: it doesn’t give you the right to decide who will go in my car. Then, they said: But comrade, there is the 40 percent quota! This would apparently mean that they have the right to determine how many women attend. I refused and bought three other women with me.<sup>35</sup>

In this concrete situation, women-only car was subjected to “quota” which was twisted to secure additional male participation. Retrospectively, I was wondering what would happen if Avşın also pushed for the scrupulous interpretation of quota and asked for 40 percent women’s participation in all cars.

These examples point to the fact that women within the pro-Kurdish parties not only face difficulties but also that they are burdened with the task of ensuring the application of gender equal principles. In addition, women often have multiple roles within the Kurdish movement. Avşın and Tuğba were simultaneously co-mayors, members of the Free Women Congress (KJA) and exercised other intra-party functions. Women politicians are also active within women’s assemblies who act as resolving mechanism for women. Assemblies serve not only as an instigator and implementer of party’s program and positive action measures but also as the main controller of their application. In reality, if women’s movement doesn’t stand up against the non-respect of the quota, it is unlikely that anyone else does.

## **Introduction of the Co-mayorship System**

The period before the 2014 municipal election was a period of consolidation of women’s achievements but also a period of constant negotiation of their place within the party and the movement. The co-mayorship system was first tested in 2009 in Diyarbakır, where one of the female councilors became “unofficially” co-mayor to Osman Baydemir. The system was generalized in 2014 for 100 of the pro-Kurdish municipalities. Throughout my interviews, I was able to gather very few elements about the negotiation process of the co-



mayorship, but I have participated, in 2016, in a party seminar for co-mayors in which the system was evaluated. Several male co-mayors questioned the timing of the measure considering that it was too soon for its introduction and estimated that the preparation for the co-mayorship was too poor. These were familiar ideas that were already voiced prior to the implementation of the co-presidency in the party and prior to the electoral quota. Retrospectively, they give a hint of the type of arguments women faced before the co-mayorship was put into practice.

The seminar for co-chairs also revealed real discrepancies in co-mayorship practices. In some municipalities, the female co-mayor was responsible for women citizens coming to the town hall. This arrangement was praised because women felt confident voicing their pleas in the otherwise male-dominated institution. In order areas, the same arrangement was avoided not to enclose women strictly into “women’s issues.” Some municipalities were criticized for the seating arrangement with the male co-mayor occupying the table at the center of the room while female co-mayor was relegated to the side. The practice of calling man as “mayor” and woman as a “co-mayor,” giving a sense of her being “added” to the system, was criticized. In that meeting, women were more systematically criticized than their male colleagues. Open misogynist criticism was strikingly absent. Women were never attacked for their womanhood but for lack of capacities or political experience. However, these critiques were mostly directed toward women, showing that the criticism had a gendered character. It seemed, that for some, women’s leadership can only be a matter of exception as pointed out the ex-co-mayor of Diyarbakır, Gültan Kışanak (Kışanak, Al-Ali, and Taş 2016). My interviewee, Tuğba, who experienced great difficulties in establishing herself as a mayor in 2009, was re-elected in 2014 and shared the office within the co-mayorship system. She witnessed how her political opponents rushed to support new male co-mayor in an attempt to erode her power.<sup>36</sup> In one sense, the co-mayorship system generalized women’s presence at the top of the municipal hierarchy. In the other sense, however, it also consolidated men’s presence in every municipality. Before 2014, roughly 30 percent of mayoral seats were reserved to women, which meant that men were not eligible for these seats. After 2014, men could run everywhere. It has been, I argue, out of great strategic caution that Kurdish women’s movement ensured that 30 percent of the “officially” elected mayors were women.

## CONCLUSION: WOMEN’S DOUBLE RESISTANCE

This paper looked into the intricacies of the feminization of Kurdish politics in Turkey. It put institutions to the center of analysis while systematically considering women’s individual and collective agency. Firstly, it made the

claim that it is necessary not to oversimplify contextualization. It went beyond simple listing of crucial events and stressed the impact of the events specifically on women's organizing and political representation. Secondly, the paper attempted to overcome the descriptive accounts of institutional evolution within the pro-Kurdish parties by providing a dynamic and detailed chronology of the development of women's structures and of the enactment of the positive action measures. This allowed me to stress the permanence of negotiations and tensions around women's demands as well as the nonlinearity of the institutional evolution.

The overview of Kurdish women's mobilization not only confirms that complex processes of change can yield unintended effects (Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010, 574). It also shows the centrality of formal rules that serve eventually as resources for increasing women's political representation (Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010, 581). In parallel, though, the informal institutions that remain characterized by clientelist networks and men's "homosocial capital" (Bjarnegård 2013) continue to play a critical role. That is why women invested tremendous efforts into institutional design and introduction of new positive action measures. They managed to bring the gender equality struggle to the forefront of Kurdish movement's agenda. How did that happen? I argue that it was possible thanks to women's collective consciousness raising actions. That is how women from the pro-Kurdish parties managed to enlarge the "horizon of thinkable possibilities" (Fretel 2010, 211) within the whole Kurdish movement. They pushed the limits of what was conceivable.

Thirdly, the paper looked into the evolutions in the period between the implementation of quota in 2007 and the next major innovation—the introduction of the co-mayorship system in 2014. It was clear that the implementation of the gender equality measures was not always coherent and that practice can differ from one district to another. These conclusions inspire two strands of further research: firstly, geographical comparison of gendered party practices. This could reveal the tremendous role that women's mobilization plays in this process and yield some knowledge about geographical learning in organizations. Secondly, because several years have passed since the first implementation of positive action measures, I suggest that the opening up of the political space for women also contributed to developments in the profiles of female politicians. This new generation, the "generation of positive action measures," should be uncovered, notably through the sociological analysis of political pathways.

In this chapter, the conflict between the Kurdish movement and the "state" was often implicitly mentioned but only the Kurdish movement was analyzed in some plasticity. On the contrary, the "state" remained rather abstract and unitary. However, the state involves multiple actors (army, government, local bureaucrats, judges) who do not always act in accordance

(Watts 2009). For instance, the attitude toward co-mayorship differed significantly. In some provinces, the co-mayors were investigated by the police on governor's wish. In other places, public institutions delayed official writings with municipalities if those contained the signature of both co-mayors. More recently, detentions of both co-mayors took place which could be interpreted as a paradoxical acknowledgement by the state of the existence of the co-mayorship system. It is difficult to set up a balance sheet of the co-mayorship given the escalation and transformation of the conflict: since 2015, the democratic autonomy initiatives in the southeast have undergone a significant shift from a nonviolent reorganization of social and political life to a militant movement of self-defense (Üstündağ, Interview by Güney Yıldız 2019, 163). With the spread of clashes, military operations and mass detentions, the year 2015 appears as a new turning point in the history of the conflict. Arrests of co-mayors, a major blow to the co-mayorship system (AleviNet 2017), can be interpreted on gendered terms as a backsliding in women's visibility and presence in local politics. It is also noteworthy that all the technocrats (*kayyum*) appointed to southeast municipalities at the place of the removed mayors were men.

State repression appears to help patriarchy in many ways. The state closes and dismantles women's organizations: in November 2016, Free Women Congress (KJA) was closed down by a governmental decree. Its successor, Free Women Movement (Tevgera Jinên Azad, TJA), was created and continues to operate in difficult circumstances. Conceptually, this reveals the significant variations in the circumstances in which the institutional design takes place: the passage from women's commissions to women's branches was enabled by legislative change and motivated by women's search of stronger standing within the party. The transformation of women's branches into women's assemblies was far from smooth, and it seems it was also meant to destabilize women's institutions becoming too powerful. The establishment of the KJA happened in line with Kurdish movement's push for assemblies and congresses as a privileged institutional form. However, the creation of TJA was an imposed necessity because of the abrupt closure of KJA, its predecessor.

Destabilizing women's structures within the Kurdish movement jeopardizes their capacity of intervention against forms of misogyny and patriarchy within the party. The fact that male politicians are also often arrested or sent to another province complicates the educational efforts of the women's movement. Due to the state repression, the entirety of the Kurdish institutionalized political space is devoid of the "luxury" of introspection. Instead of discussing institutional reform in party congresses, the political structures are maintained in disarray due to forced closures and mass detentions of their cadres. Women's appearance in the media close to the Kurdish movement has been weakened by the closure of significant newspapers and TV stations.

Hampering the educational and publication efforts of women's movement means narrowing the main communication channels through which the gender equality principles are spread toward the parties' constituencies.

The warfare diminishes the weight of political parties and those of women's demands. As a mirror analogy of the peace which favored political involvement, warfare leads to the marginalization of gender-based claims (Al-Ali and Taş 2018b, 18). State repression also further weakened women's institutions by imposing another agenda. As a result of massive urban destruction, organized women had to shift their priorities toward urgent needs of displaced population, focusing less on the violence against women and more on housing issues (Kışanak, Al-Ali, and Taş 2016). Finally, the state targeting women's organizations may have weakened the Kurdish movement as a whole but it created a bigger platform for male voices to be heard within it. In this regard, the state acted as an agent of patriarchal restoration not only from outside but also from within the Kurdish movement.

## NOTES

1. I would like to thank Adnan Çelik for his comments on this chapter.
2. The same bill also allowed education in Kurdish in private schools under conditions, authorized electoral campaigns in multiple languages, and instigated state financial contribution to parties achieving at least 3 percent of votes (CNN Türk 2014).
3. There are currently two "pro-Kurdish political parties": HDP (*Halkların Demokrasi Partisi*, Democratic Peoples' Party), which is represented in the Parliament and in Western provinces, and DBP (*Demokratik Bölgeler Partisi*, Party of Democratic Regions), mostly present at the municipalities in the south-eastern region. In the municipal election in March 2019, it was decided that the HDP will run in all the country, including the south-eastern provinces. However, during the writing of this chapter, both parties were equally active, be it in different territories.
4. Matland and Studlar explored the contagion effect in politics (Matland and Studlar 1996).
5. In 2015 and 2016, my interviews at the opposition Republican Peoples' Party's (CHP) women's branches headquarters as well as within the party's Istanbul branch revealed the existing support of some CHP members to the co-chairing system.
6. All the names of my respondents have been changed. Only the names of publicly quotes figures remained unchanged, such as former Diyarbakır mayor Gültan Kışanak whose interviews are referenced in the text.
7. With the abolishment of the capital punishment, Öcalan's sentence was changed to life imprisonment.
8. In 1994, the pro-Kurdish party decided not to take part in local elections due to the levels of state repression to which its members were exposed, with several of them killed as the election approached. ("1990'dan Bugüne, HEP'ten DTP'ye Kürtlerin Zorlu Siyaset Mücadelesi" 2009).
9. Women's branches of political parties existed before the September 12, 1980 military coup, were subsequently banned and were only authorized in 1999.
10. Technically, R.T. Erdoğan was elected in 2003, not in 2002, after the Parliament changed a law to allow then-banned AKP leader to stand in an election. He was elected in the by-election in Siirt, city of origin of his wife and also, symbolically, a city where he pronounced a poem in the 1990s that earned him a court conviction and the ban from politics.

11. The overview of pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey (years correspond to periods when they were active in politics) is taken from my published conference paper: 1990–1993 HEP (People's Labour Party), 1993–1994 DEP (Democracy Party), 1994–2003 HADEP (People's Democracy Party), 2003–2005 DEHAP (Democratic People's Party), 2005–2009 DTP (Democratic Society Party), 2009–2014 BDP (Peace and Democracy Party), 2014– HDP (Democratic Peoples' Party) and DBP (Party of Democratic Regions) (Drechselová 2017, 78).

12. I interviewed Estêr, in charge of diplomacy at KJA, on 25.5.2015 in Diyarbakır.

13. Üstündağ identifies the beginning of the Kurdish movement's ideological transformation already in the mid-1990, the chronology could thus go further in the past to understand Öcalan's call for democratic autonomy (Üstündağ, Interview by Güney Yıldız 2019, 155).

14. Öcalan quoted by Biehl (Biehl 2012, 9).

15. Handan Çağlayan analyses this transformation in great detail in her article (Çağlayan 2012b).

16. It is estimated that in the late 1990s, women accounted for 30 percent of the PKK's 17,000 members (Basch-Harod 2014, 183).

17. Out of 537 associations in Diyarbakır city in the same period, fifteen are identified by the authors as "women's associations" (Dorronsoro and Watts 2013, 104).

18. Women's organizing in the guerrilla encountered tremendous opposition which is beyond the scope of this paper. One can get a sense of these difficulties from testimonies of former women guerrillas collected by Berivan Bingöl. A comprehensive account, however, is still to be written (Bingöl 2016).

19. The association was closed few months after its establishment (Toplum ve Kuram 2010, 140).

20. Necla Açık analysed the magazines of Roza, Jujin, Jin û Jiyan, and Yaşamda Özgür Kadın (Açık 2002).

21. Şeyda, interviewed on 6.5.2015, municipal councillor, Diyarbakır.

22. Interview with Handan Çağlayan on 25.5.2016 in Ankara.

23. Interview with Arvin on 26.2.2017 took place in London.

24. "Tasfiye," term used in Turkish means also elimination, clearance, liquidation.

25. Akkaya and Jongerden consider that Kurdish movement suffered "a kind of limbo" and that it went through a period of "impasse and reconstruction" at that time ("Kürt Hareketinin Kronolojisi, 1999–2011" 2011, 32) (Akkaya and Jongerden 2012, 8–9).

26. Interview in Diyarbakır on 28.9.2016, even though Tuğba was elected outside of Diyarbakır.

27. Tara, journalist and former DÖKH member, interview on 24.5.2017 in London.

28. Tara, journalist and former DÖKH member, interview on 24.5.2017 in London.

29. Tara, journalist and former DÖKH member, interview on 24.5.2017 in London.

30. However, in Diyarbakır's metropolitan municipality, women's representation was only of 27.7 percent of all metropolitan councillors due to the absence of elected women among the AKP members of the council. ("Diyarbakır Büyükşehir Belediyesi Meclis Üyeleri" 2014).

31. Payız, member of KJA's headquarters, interview on 25.5.2015 in Diyarbakır.

32. For more on the concept of biographical availability see (Beyerlein and Bergstrand 2013).

33. Rojhat, aged twenty-eight, district councillor from outside of Diyarbakır, was interviewed on the 29.2.2016 in Diyarbakır.

34. Roza, member of Women's Academy, based in Diyarbakır, interviewed on 8.5.2015.

35. Avşın, co-mayor in a district outside of Diyarbakır, interviewed on 2.3.2016.

36. Interview in Diyarbakır on 28.9.2016 even though Tuğba was elected in another province.

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*Part II*

**Paramilitary**



## *Chapter Three*

# **The Emergence of Paramilitary Groups in Turkey in the 1980s**

Ayhan Işık

This chapter focuses on the establishment of paramilitary organizations formed and used by the Turkish state during the armed conflict between the state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, PKK) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In August 1984 the PKK launched an armed struggle against the Turkish state leading to a full-blown war throughout the 1990s. During the conflict, the state established some new institutions, with many of them having a paramilitary characteristic. In this period three organizations were created: in the late 1980s in the Kurdish provinces the Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism (Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele, Jitem), which included the Repentants (defected members of the PKK); the Special Operations Police Units (Polis Özel Harekat Timleri) established in 1982, reorganized 1993; the Village Guards (Köy Korucuları) established in 1924, reorganized in 1985 and 1991 in the Kurdish provinces. In addition to these paramilitary units, the radical Islamist Hizbullah organization that was started in early 1980 in a Kurdish province, Batman, was used against the PKK, especially against Kurdish civilians, between 1991–1995. I argue that the role of these groups during the conflicts of the 1990s was as follows: The first three groups were paramilitary forces and the Hizbullah was the “subcontractor force.” On the basis of secondary literature and interviews with relatives of victims of paramilitary violence on the creation of paramilitary forces, I'll suggest that these paramilitary organizations have been established because of three main causes: the “threatening” of the national security of the state, the weakness of the irregular warfare military and institutional capacity of the state, and plausible deniability of the violence to be implemented against civilians during conflicts. Moreover, I'll

also argue that the paramilitary groups emerged in political conditions marked by the political demands of the Kurds, the state's military and party politics and tribal politics of the state.

### LITERATURE ON PARAMILITARISM

How are paramilitary forces defined in the literature? Scholars (Alvarez, 2006; Auyero, 2007; Campbell, 2002; Kalyvas, 2006; Kowalewski, 1991; Mason & Krane, 1989; Mazzei, 2009; Warren, 2000) are using different concepts (vigilante, paramilitarism, militia, death squad) when they try to define or explain the paramilitary groups. Alvarez explains the connection of the terms: "These paramilitary organizations, often referred to as militias or sometimes as death squads, are frequently implicated in the worst excesses of the regimes" and Kalyvas discusses the same approach to these different kinds of the paramilitary forces (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 107). At the same time, Alvarez separates paramilitary forces from the regular military units by four criteria, together contributing to definition of paramilitaries: "First, modern military organizations tend to be rigidly organized along regimental lines while paramilitaries are usually less formally organized with a looser structure (. . .) Second, militaries are composed of professionals whereas paramilitaries are made up of amateurs (. . .) Third, the military also clearly and overtly acts on the authority of the state, while the connection between paramilitaries and the government tends to be much more obscured (. . .) Fourth and last, paramilitary groups often act for personal gain and profit, while members of the military and police do not generally profit personally from their activities (Alvarez, 2006, pp. 5–6). In addition, Böhmelt and Clayton separate armed groups as pro-government militias (auxiliaries), and paramilitary forces through their links, functions, and autonomies with the governments. "Auxiliaries are armed groups somewhat aligned with the state to perform specific security roles, but they are not part of the regular (i.e., army, navy, and air force) military's command-and-control chain. (. . .) We understand paramilitaries as militarized security units, equipped with (light) military weapons and/or military vehicles, trained and organized under the central government to support or replace regular military forces" (Böhmelt & Clayton, 2018, pp. 203–204).

Another way to define paramilitaries follows in the footsteps of Campbell's description of death squads: "Death squads are clandestine and usually irregular organizations, often paramilitary in nature, which carry out extrajudicial executions and other violent acts (torture, rape, arson, bombing, etc.) against clearly defined individuals or groups of people. Murder is their primary or even sole activity (. . .) Death squads may be a part of a government strategy of state terrorism (. . .) Moreover, death squads exist to act outside of

the law: by definition, their ‘job’ is to commit extrajudicial murder” (Campbell, 2002, pp. 1–6). According to Campbell, death squads are particular type of paramilitary forces and they have for function to exert extrajudicial and deadly violence during conflicts. These irregular forces are paramilitary organizations, but they are used for violent acts. Another term to describe paramilitarism is vigilantism. This notion is used to define a larger social group that has a paramilitary character. Campbell compares the difference between death squads and vigilantism: “The differences between death squads and vigilantism lie in the fact that death squads directly involve the state in addition to other actors, while vigilantism comes primarily at the initiative of private (civil) interests and therefore involves a greater degree of spontaneity!” (Campbell, 2002, p. 2). The definition of Kowalewski gives further detail about state and vigilantism: “Vigilantes, social formations of private citizens to suppress deviance, are commonly employed by political regimes (. . .) Vigilantes arise out of a generalized public unease about disruption. They represent a spontaneous rising of the masses, which in turn is legitimated and given organizational coherence by regimes” (Kowalewski, 1991, pp. 127–128).

Paramilitary forces ranging from the small group—death squads—to larger groups—vigilante—are used mostly by the state as a tool for murder due to their potential invisibility and the fact that they can operate outside of the law<sup>1</sup> (Campbell, 2002, p. 17). Because these organizations are unlawful and mercenary, have flexible “jobs,” states can often deny their massacres and claim that they are uncontrolled groups with which they do not have a connection. Kalyvas argues that “militias are primarily a political rather than a military institution (. . .) the primary purpose of militias is ‘population control’ in the conflict area” (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 107). In addition, Mason and Krane analyze death squad violence sanctioned by the state, as follows: “‘Death squad violence’ is repressive violence intended to induce compliance through fear. It may be employed reactively or proactively. Its most critical distinguishing feature is that it is a violence sanctioned by the regime, either explicitly through policy pronouncements or implicitly through lack of effort to curtail such acts” (Mason & Krane, 1989, p. 178).

Paramilitary groups are mostly affiliated with governments; however, they are not the same as the army (dealing with the external security of the country), gendarmerie, and/or police (which are responsible for internal security). According to above definitions, there is a structural difference between paramilitary forces and the state official military institutions. Paramilitaries are very important; they might be deployed in unexpected places, times, and manners, because they hold a mobile and switchable position (Alvarez, 2006, pp. 4–6).

The paramilitary forces were mainly positioned against civilians who support opposition organizations during the internal conflicts. In addition, the

unrest of a social group can also be organized by the state as a paramilitary force. For instance, there was unrest within the Turkish right wing groups against the left and the Kurdish opposition between 1970s and 1990s. The Turkish state then organized these nationalist young groups as paramilitary forces (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014). In the same way, some Kurdish tribes who had problems with the PKK were also included into paramilitary groups. However, the history of the establishment and use of paramilitary groups against the opposition groups and Kurds in Turkey is very old.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TURKISH PARAMILITARY FORCES

The historical development of paramilitarism can be divided into three distinct periods. Firstly, the Hamidian and Committee of Union and Progress—CUP periods during the late Ottoman empire (1890–1918), secondly, the republic/Kemalist period (1923–1950), and finally, the multi-party period (1950s–1980s). The late Ottoman Empire can be divided into two distinct sub-periods in terms of the origin of paramilitary forces. The first sub-period comprises the reign of Abdulhamid II (1876–1908); the best-known paramilitary group during this period was the Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments (Hamidiye Hafif Süvari Alayları) founded in 1891 (Klein, 2011). The second sub-period began in 1914 during the reign of the the CUP period, (1908–1918), when the well-known paramilitary group Special Organization (Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa) was founded (Denker, 1997, p. 32). Other Ottoman paramilitary youth organizations that had connections with Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa also existed at this time (Ateş, 2012; Sarısan, 2000, pp. 439–501). In addition, there were other local armed paramilitary forces that also had links with the Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa: including Al-Khamsin (Gaunt, Beş-Şawoçe, & Donef, 2006, p. 314), Bejik (Çelik & Dinç, 2015, pp. 121–137), and some other bandits based in the Diyarbakır province. These two armed paramilitary forces were established by Abdulhamid II and the CUP. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War in 1918, the CUP (along with Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa) abolished itself, and afterward former members of the CUP organized a new paramilitary force replacing the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa; the Karakol Cemiyeti (Outpost Society) was one of them (Erik J. Zürcher, 2004, p. 135; Shaw & Shaw, 2002, p. 340). Topal (Lame) Osman, the leader of the notorious local band, was an active paramilitary force during the Ankara government (Şener, 2004, p. 49). He had an important role in suppressing the resistance and in committing political killings in the east and the north east of the empire. After the Koçgiri resistance, he and his gang had a prominent role in the suppression of the Pontus resistance and carried out

similar massacres against non-Muslim, especially Greek civilians in 1921 (Yerasimos, 2010, pp. 345–417).

The establishment of the Republic of Turkey was ideologically, economically and politically linked to the paramilitary policies of the late Ottoman period. Almost all of the principles (including ideology, economy and policy) of the new republic had been discussed by the Ottoman intellectuals before and during the CUP reign (Hanioğlu, 1981; Mardin, 1999). The ideology of the state elites after the Balkan War transformed dramatically into Pan-Turkism. The idea of Pan-Turkism between the CUP elites and Turkish intellectuals began to be expressed very clearly (F. Dündar, 2008, pp. 59–60). This idea would also be the source of the ideology of the people who founded the republic. Genocide and massacres of non-Muslim people between 1913–1922 were a result of the homogeneous society idea of the authorities of the Empire and the paramilitary forces were actively used to realize this ideology. The transitional government (in *Ankara hükümeti* between 1920–1923) consisted of former members of the CUP and the government continued the paramilitary activities and legacies of the Empire. Thus, there were cultural, political, economic, and military continuities between these periods regarding the cadres, institutions, and ideology (Erik Jan Zürcher, 1987). When Zürcher describes the periodization of Modern Turkey he also emphasizes this continuity; “despite the break-up of the Empire in 1918 and the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, politically, ideologically and economically, there is a great deal of continuity” (Erik J. Zürcher, 2004, pp. 3–4). From the establishment of the Republic to 1950, Mustafa Kemal and then İsmet İnönü, the first two leaders of the Republic, governed the state as a single-party dictatorship (Üngör, 2011, p. 253). The paramilitary policy of the single-party dictatorship period (Republican People’s Party, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi-CHP, 1923–1950) was a little different from the previous period. Nevertheless, the CHP followed the paramilitary policy of the earlier period. The paramilitary policy of the new state included similar paramilitary forces, informers and local collaborations (some bandits and members and leaders of local tribes) for intelligence purposes (*Genelkurmay Belgelerinde Kürt İsyanları I*, 1992, pp. 289–310). In addition, some of the tribal regiments, village guard system, local gangs, paramilitary youth organizations were also involved. And these groups were used by the state during the Kurdish revolts in the early Republican period (*Genelkurmay Belgelerinde Kürt İsyanları I*, 1992, pp. 237–262).

It could be argued that the single-party dictatorship regime bequeathed its paramilitary policy to the next era. In addition, the main characteristics of the paramilitary forces were usually associated with the regular army, the National Intelligence Organization (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, MİT), and NATO, specifically the bureaucracy during the multi-party period. The state took part in the Western Block from the beginning of the Cold War, and became

part of NATO, an international military alliance of the Western Bloc. NATO also established a new secret military institution in Turkey, and it was the Tactical Mobilization Group (Seferberlik Tetkik Kurulu, STK, later named the Special Warfare Department [Özel Harp Dairesi, ÖHD]) in 1952 (Ganser, 2005, p. 226). This institution was funded by the United States of America, in order to protect the regime against the Soviet Union/Communism or Eastern Bloc during the Cold War (Söyler, 2013, p. 316). However, the state did not use this institution against only the communists and their supporters, it was also active against many other people living in Turkey, apart from the Turks/Muslims. Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı, TMT (Turkish Resistance Organization) was another important paramilitary force that was founded by the Rauf Denktaş and two friends against Enosis (union with Greece) in Cyprus in 1957 (E. Yalçın, 2016, p. 285). Cyprus had thus become a base for the training of Turkish paramilitaries (Parlar, 2005, p. 244).

Another of the most important paramilitary and vigilante group was the Idealist Youth (Ülkücü Gençlik) organization of the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP in the post-1960s) (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014, pp. 158–159). The leader of the MHP Alparslan Türkeş and his friends organized commando training camps for members of the youth organizations in 28 different places in the country between 1968 and 1970 (*Ülkücü komando kampları*, 1997). According to Türkeş, these camps were established to fight communists (S. Yalçın & Yurdakul, 2004, p. 25). There were generally three kinds of training in the camp: ideological education (predominantly rules of Islam and Turkish nationalism), fight training (such as karate, judo), and military training (preventing rallies and use of weapons). Approximately 2000 young people were trained by retired extreme right-wing officers in these camps, who were usually members of the MHP or were close associates of Alparslan Türkeş (*Ülkücü komando kampları*, 1997). These training camps were later transformed into Idealist Hearths (Ülkü Ocakları). There were many other Turkish-Islamic right wing student paramilitary and vigilante organizations in existence, particularly between 1960 and 1980. Some of them were the Association for Fighting Communism in Turkey, (Türkiye Komünizmle Mücadele Derneği, TKMD) (Meşe, 2013); The National Turkish Students Union (Milli Türk Talebe Birliği, MTTB, 1916–1980) (Okutan, 2004); and Association of Incursionists (Akıncılar Derneği), (Bulut, 1997, pp. 384–385; Çakır, 1990, pp. 169–170; Çiçek, 2017).

The state military, paramilitary institutions, and youth organizations of the right-wing parties mostly moved together against the threats perceived by the state. The right wing extremist and radical Islamic youth paramilitary and vigilante groups had a prominent role in the rise of violent acts (for example, individual assassinations, massacres, pogroms) especially during the 1970s (Bora & Can, 1991, pp. 51–100; Aydın & Taşkın, 2014, pp. 175–321; Özgür Açılım, 2011). In the 1970s, leftist groups, trade unions, Kurdish organiza-



tions, and the Alevi community provided significant progress in terms of organizing. The 1970s were one of the most intense periods of modern Turkey history in terms of the use of paramilitary groups. The responsibility for thousands of murders between 1975 and 1980 has not yet been solved. The generation trained in the commando camps of the MHP became an important instrument in increasing the violence since the 1970s. After the military coup of September 12, 1980, the paramilitary youth group was used in Europe against Armenian organizations and the PKK (C. Dündar & Kazdağlı, 2013, p. 29). Many of them became involved in organized crime and part of the mafia during the 1980s. These ultranationalist paramilitaries were included in special police teams against the PKK after the 1980s (C. Dündar & Kazdağlı, 2013, p. 32). Paramilitary groups associated with right-wing nationalist parties, some tribes in the village guard system were also dealing with the mafia, and were seen as responsible for the many organized crimes. Importantly, the pro-government Kurdish tribes had been inactive since the early republic period were reactivated by the state against the Kurdish opposition in the late 1970s. These tribes would be a very powerful paramilitary force in the 1990s, especially under the village guards.

#### EMERGENCE OF PARAMILITARY FORCES IN TURKEY IN THE 1980S AND 1990S

The topic of this section is the establishment of paramilitary forces in Turkey in the 1980s. In this period four important organizations were established: in the late 1980s in the Kurdish provinces the Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism (Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele, Jitem), which included the Repentants (İtirafçılar); the Special Police Team (Polis Özel Harekat Timleri) (1982, reorganized 1993); the Village guards (1924, reorganized in 1985 and 1991 in the Kurdish provinces); and Hizbullah<sup>2</sup> (early 1980 in Batman, according to several sources Hizbullah was not established by the state (Çakır, 2011; M. Kurt, 2015), but during the 1990s it fought against the PKK). The question I will answer is how and why these paramilitary organizations were established?

I suggest that these paramilitary organizations have been established because of three main above-mentioned causes: first, the “threat perception” of national security of Turkish state; second, weakness of the state and lack of the irregular warfare capacity of state institutions; third, plausible deniability of the actions to be used against civilians during conflicts. In what follows, I will use the concept of state rather than regime or government. I have argued that the role of governments in the state administration was not determinant in the Turkish state because of the network of hidden relations called “deep state.” Distinguishing between causes and conditions, firstly I will try to

explain the reasons why the paramilitaries were actually set up. Then, I will analyze the conditions of the political, military, and economic environment that feed them, and I will argue that several conditions were the priority. These conditions resulted in both small scale informal groups and large-scale hierarchically ordered organizations. Some of these organizations were an extension of the secret services, others of the army and of organized crime; they were active in different regions and the nature of their main actions varied from vigilantes to death squads. First of all, I will examine the causes for the emergence of paramilitary organizations in the literature and then I will discuss the conditions of ethnic conflict, nationalist politics of the state, tribal politics and organized crime. Afterward, I will discuss the similarities and differences between Jitem (including the Repentants), the Special Action Police Units, the Village guards and Hizbullah as paramilitary organizations.

### DISCUSSIONS ON THE EMERGENCE OF PARAMILITARY GROUPS

Why and how did paramilitary organizations emerge? There is a considerable literature on the establishment of paramilitary groups from different conflict and war zones in the world. They display a variety of reasons for the establishment of paramilitary forces. But there are three recurrent explanations; the paramilitary groups are said to be established in support of the official armed forces in their struggle against internal enemies (Campbell, 2002; Kowalewski, 1991; Mazzei, 2009); the paramilitary groups are said to emerge when the capacity of core institution is too limited to sustain the continued existence of the state (Jentzsch et al., 2015; Mason & Krane, 1989; Mazzei, 2009); and, one of the reasons for the formation of the paramilitary groups is related to plausible deniability (Carey & Mitchell, 2017; Ron, 2002). These three reasons will enable us to explain the formation of paramilitary groups in Turkey.

Paramilitary groups are usually established when opposition movements rise, however, these groups are largely used against civilians who support opposition movements. Several authors (Alpkaya, Altıntaş, Sevdiren, & Ataktürk Sevimli, 2014; Campbell, 2002; G. Kurt, 2014) argue that an important reason for the establishment of the paramilitary forces is the threats to the national security by armed opposition forces. What exactly do threats mean? The rise of armed and unarmed opposition groups in the country is considered to be perceived as threats to the national security by the state. The rise of guerrilla warfare of the PKK in Turkey and the response of the state constitute an important example: The Turkish National Security Council (Milli Güvenlik Kurulu, MGK, in English: NSC) redefines periodically the organizations, ethnic and religious groups that threaten national security

(Bezci & Öztan, 2016, p. 165; Bozarlan, 2014, pp. 152–155). The NSC defines its internal and external threats in the National Security Policy Document (Milli Güvenlik Siyaset Belgesi) known as “The Red Book” and sets policies accordingly (Bayramoğlu, 2004, pp. 89–92). Therefore, according to the NSC, the internal threat to the security of the state is that the class, ethnic or religious armed and unarmed groups do not accept state authority in the state-controlled lands. It can be said that this institution, in which officers were predominant, played an important role in the administration of the state in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup>

According to Jentzsch, Kalyvas, and Schubiger: “pro-government militias, which only constitute a subset of this type of armed group, were present in 81 percent of all country-years affected by civil war between 1981 and 2007” (Jentzsch et al., 2015, p. 756). Also, Campbell argues that although some states maintain the monopoly of violence, they establish death squads as subcontractors to which the use of violence is delegated in order to suppress armed opposition movements, without the liability of being accused of war crimes or human right violations (Campbell, 2002, p. 17). Moreover, according to Tilly, the relationship between the state authorities and the bandits and pirates was very important during the formation of modern states. The bureaucrats of modern states have benefited from these groups either in wars or in times of internal problems. Therefore, this relationship played an important role in the emergence of modern states, which were later organized as nation states (Tilly, 1985). Both modern Western states and the Ottoman Empire (kings and sultans) cooperated with the bandit and local gangs when rebels against their authority appeared (Barkey, 1994; Klein, 2011). Today, opposition movements’ rebellions against the governments are identified as “threat to national security.” When opposition movements arise, two kinds of relations appear between unofficial armed groups and state institutions: when the threats against “the national security” begin, on the one side, the states cooperate with existing state-sponsored armed groups, on the other side, they create new groups of similar characteristics. In the case of Turkey, both apply. Therefore, it can be said that in situations where internal oppositions have risen, the state has established paramilitaries as an important deterrent instrument.

Another discussion point regarding the emergence of paramilitary organizations is the weakness of the state. According to Hironaka, the lack of an autonomous, rationalized bureaucratic structure; of military capability; of territorial control, and of cohesion and organization of the opposition are the characteristic features of the weak state (Hironaka, 2009, pp. 69–80). In this case, paramilitary groups can be formed to respond to civilians who support the insurgency against the state, and to compensate for the lack of military means. Besides, the use of paramilitary groups compensates for the lack of economic means of the state. In comparison to regular armed forces militias

[are] cheap instruments for the projection of state power (Jentzsch et al., 2015, p. 764). While discussing the reasons for the establishment of global paramilitary forces, Jasmin Hristov emphasizes two points about the relationship between the weakness of the state and the emergence of paramilitary powers: “1) the paramilitary as a logical outcome of a weak state; 2) the paramilitary as a criminal actor that is a product of a weak state” (Hristov, 2014, p. 46). Consequently, due to the weakness of the democratic capacity of state institutions, the weak state has significant internal conflict potential (the weakness of the state’s democratic capacity was the preventing of the parliamentary works frequently due to the military coups; the inability to represent social differences in the parliament; the obstruction of the work of non-governmental organizations, etc.). Weak states, especially because of the lack of the military capacity, can establish and use paramilitary groups. However, the discussion of “weak state” can only partly explain the emergence of paramilitary groups because this debate cannot sufficiently analyze the establishment and use of paramilitary groups by “strong states.” The fundamental flaw of this approach lies precisely here.

Plausible deniability is one of the basic concepts in discussions about the emergence of the paramilitary groups. Carey and Mitchell argue that pro-government militias have usually two categories: semi-official and informal (Carey & Mitchell, 2017, p. 130). The fact that paramilitary groups have semi-formal or informal relations with the state increases the deniability of the consequences of their actions. “One way to establish deniability is to have the killing organized and done by people who are not formally or officially associated with the state” said Campbell (Campbell, 2002, p. 6). Moreover, according to Wolpin, states establish death squads against the leftist and ethnic opposition movements, and one of the most important features of these forces is deniability (Wolpin, 1992). Therefore, the denial of the actions of paramilitary groups is used as an important tool to eliminate opponents without modifying the legal boundaries of the state.

### DISCUSSIONS ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PARAMILITARY GROUPS IN TURKEY

The origin of paramilitary groups active in Turkey in the 1990s is generally traced to the 1970s. There are different reasons for the establishment of these groups. As mentioned above, I would argue that the causes of the emergence of the paramilitary groups are also explanatory points for the example of Turkey: it can be said that one of the main reasons is the security policy/ ideology of the state, in other words, the threats to the state: and both external (Soviet or communist threat), and internal (communist movements and Kurdish leftist and nationalist movements) (Özar, Uçarlar, & Aytar, 2013). These

threats were ideologically and politically determined by the NSC. Communism was perceived as a “threat” due to NATO membership and ideological reasons, while Kurdish movements were perceived as threat due to ideological and political reasons. Another important reason is the weakness of the state or shortcomings of the military and state’s irregular warfare capacity. Although there are many factors that led to the establishment of paramilitary groups in Turkey, particularly toward the 1990s, internal threats to the state, weakness of the state, and plausible deniability can be expressed as the most important of these.

As mentioned above in the historical background, the paramilitary groups in the late Ottoman and the republican periods have been largely established by the state during the emergence of internal opposition movements. Similar conditions exist for groups established during the republic and particularly after the 1970s. According to Aydın and Taşkın the extreme nationalist right-wing paramilitary youth groups founded in the 1970s had been actively mobilized to protect the state from the dissident movements next to the official armed forces (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014, p. 284). This nationalist youth groups were connected with the intelligence and paramilitary groups affiliated to the government and military. In the 1970s, the leftist movements were the priority in terms of threats against the state, thereby, they became the primary target of paramilitaries: “political violence reached unprecedented levels in the late 1970s, as the MHP developed into a paramilitary organization with its ‘modern bandits’ recruited from the Grey Wolves and the massacres as well as unknown assailant murders by the ÖHD and MİT rose dramatically” said Söyler (Söyler, 2015, p. 200). Afterward, the state’s internal threat perception changed because of the launched guerrilla warfare of the PKK, and since 1984, the NSC began seeing the PKK as the biggest ethnic internal “threat.” However, high-ranking officers have much discussed the lack of the military capacity of security forces against the guerrilla warfare in the interviews and their memoirs (Bilâ, 2007; Kışlalı, 1996; Kundakçı, 2004). Because Turkish army was a conventional army, the military institutional capacity of the state was updated in terms of non-conventional warfare, and this restructuring process continued from 1991 to 1993. The new concept of the war was expressed as a ‘low-intensity war’ doctrine and many formal and informal paramilitary groups reorganized and emerged during this period (Balta Paker & Akça, 2013, pp. 16–17).

The rise of opposition groups against the state was also very important in terms of appearance of the military, bureaucratic and democratic capacity of the state. In Turkey, especially in the Kurdistan, one of the most important reasons for the emergence of paramilitary groups was the weak state structure alongside a threat-perception by the state. Here, the weakness of the state is not a global definition. It is used to define the lack of Turkey’s political and military capabilities and to emphasize its role in the emergence

of paramilitaries. The weak state in the case of Turkey (particularly in the Kurdish provinces) also means the fragmentation of state institutions that materializes with the lack of economic and political capacity and the autonomous structure of the military (Aknur, 2012; Cizre Sakallıoğlu, 1997; Heper & Keyman, 2012). The weakness of the state was also related to its fragmentation in the institutional aspect. In 1950, Turkey was evolving from a single-party to a multi-party system (Karpas, 2015; Vanderlippe, 2006). However, the army continued to dominate politics until the 2000s (Cizre Sakallıoğlu, 1997). Hence, this fragmented and double-headed administration prevented the development of the democratic capacity of the state. According to Aknur, “the regime changes that have taken place every ten years as a result of military interventions, and the shocking levels of political corruption, coupled with poor economic performance throughout the 1970s and 1990s, have also contributed to Turkey’s weak state structure” (Aknur, 2012, p. 421). This was also a process that prevented the consolidation of the democracy, civil society and the multi-party system. In addition, Balta Paker and Akça argue that the establishment of the paramilitary groups (especially village guards) in Turkey was caused by the internal threat to the state; although paramilitary groups were established due to threats to the state, the local micro power relations were also very important. According to the authors, “central capacity and decisions of the state may not always be parallel with its local capacity and practices” (Balta Paker & Akça, 2013, p. 9); the Turkish state is not a monolith, especially in the Kurdish issue, and should be analyzed through different central and local political actors (Kurdish tribes may also be included in these local powers). Hence, the weakness of the state and the lack of its military capacity led to the formation of paramilitary groups jointly with pro-state local micro-power networks in the Kurdish provinces.

Deniability can also be regarded as a very important reason for the Turkish state to establish paramilitary groups (Biner, 2006; Söyler, 2015). The most well-known death squad used by the state in Kurdish provinces was the Jitem in the 1990s (Göral, Işık, & Kaya, 2013; Özar et al., 2013; van Bruinessen, 1996). In addition, the actions of this state-affiliated group were discussed in many parliamentary research commissions and cases (Işık, 2014; *Ülkemizin Çeşitli Yörelerinde İşlenmiş Faili Meçhul Siyasal Cinayetler Konusunda Meclis Araştırma Komisyonu*, 1995). But government officials still denied this death squad (Söyler, 2015, p. 166). Denial of the existence of the Jitem led to impunity for their actions. In addition to these causes, which help to explain the advent of paramilitary forces, other factors also played an important role. We can list these elements as follows: the government’s response to the political demands of the Kurds, the state’s military and party politics, the state’s tribal politics, and the state-affiliated criminal organizations.

## CONDITIONS OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PARAMILITARY ORGANIZATIONS IN TURKEY

Ethnic demands of Kurds provided an important political atmosphere for the establishment and use of paramilitary groups by the state elites. Ethnic conflicts increased globally in the post-Cold War era. Although the ideological framework of the national struggle of the Kurdish political movements emerged during the early republic, it began to be apparent in the late 1960s (Akkaya, 2014). At the same time, ethnic conflict in Turkey was also relevant to the ideological and political transformation of the global context. The ethnicization of political violence was also related to the changing perception of threats (from communism to ethnic conflicts, from class movements to nationalist movements) (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998, p. 424). The conflicts between the Turkish state and the Kurds arose because of the national demands of the Kurds. But the successive Turkish governments did not accept the claim of a different nations and ethnic groups within the Turkish nation state. Especially after 1980, Kurdish people became more ethnically discriminated. Therefore, they initiated an armed struggle and became the main target of the state. Hence the Kurds have begun to be seen as the greatest threat to the state (Dinç, 2008). The state's internal threat perception changed because of the launched guerrilla warfare of the PKK, and the NSC began seeing the PKK as the biggest ethnic internal "threat" (Balta Paker & Akça, 2013, pp. 16–17). On the other hand, according to the NSC or the military, Western powers supported the PKK and therefore the NSC emphasized that the PKK was an external-backed domestic threat (Uzgel, 2004). Thus, the redefinition of the enemy/threat and the atmosphere of conflict have played an important role in the emergence of several new paramilitary organizations.

One of the most fundamental condition in the emergence of paramilitary groups in Turkey was the nationalist policy of the state institutions. Two different institutions that promoted this nationalist policy of the state must be mentioned: First and foremost, the Turkish military; second, the Turkish nationalist parties with different characteristics (Kemalist, right-wing, Islamist, and ultranationalist), those are parties who usually formed government after 1950 (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014). However, in the era of 1960–2000, the army undisputedly dominated the governments and state institutions (Bayramoğlu, 2004). The army was active and autonomous in the state administration and it had created a pressure mechanism for the realization of state politics through military coups and nationalist ideology (Bora, 2004; Bayramoğlu, 2004). The army was at the same time seen as a main actor of the "deep state" network, which includes some members of the nationalist parties, police, paramilitaries and organized crime. The reason for this illegal network to exist was the lack of the democratic capacity of state institutions

(Söyler, 2015; Ünver, 2009). On the other side, the army also showed the political will and preference of the other members of the “deep state” network. The emergence of paramilitary groups was related to the fragmented structure of the state institutions and a multiplicity of power elites. In addition, although the military dominated Turkish politics, some youth groups—Idealist Youth (Ülkücü Gençlik) and Akıncılar—affiliated with The Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) and The National Salvation Party (Millî Selâmet Partisi, MSP) were formed as paramilitary groups (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014, p. 177; Bulut & Faraç, 1999, pp. 50–51). Most of the members of these paramilitary youth groups were positioned in Special Operations Police Units and Hizbullah during the 1990s conflicts. Both, the army and the political parties’ nationalist ideologies were among the main enablers of the emergence of paramilitary organizations from the 1970s to the 1990s.

What was the role of pro-state Kurdish tribes in the formation of paramilitary groups? After the 1980s, the relations established by state institutions with Kurdish tribes played an important role in the emergence of paramilitary organizations in Turkey. The use of pro-state tribes against the threats to the state was not a new policy; during the late Ottoman and Republican period, the state was armed and used some loyal Kurdish tribes against the non-Muslim communities and the non-pro-state Kurdish population (Klein, 2013; *Genelkurmay Belgelerinde Kürt İsyanları I*, 1992, pp. 237–310). It is necessary to define pro-state tribes: what I mean are not all members of the tribes, but their leaders and some specific families. The collaboration was a win-win policy, because the pro-state tribes, in exchange, were accepted by the state as political actors. Amid its modernist ideal, the Turkish state played an important role in the reestablishment of traditional relations among the Kurds for pragmatic reasons. The relationship between the different actors in the state authorities and the loyal tribes was one of the important conditions in terms of paramilitary organizations that emerged after 1980. This relationship, which was established with the Kurdish tribes loyal to the state, then continued under the village guard system from the middle of the 1980s.

Organized crime is an influential phenomenon in Turkey and Kurdistan: types of organized crime between 1970–2000 were smuggling (especially weapons trafficking), drug trafficking, illegal gambling, racketeering, prostitution and large-scale theft (Bovenkerk & Yeşilgöz, 2000, pp. 223–303). After the 1970s, organized crime and state authorities’ relations have dramatically risen in Turkey for several reasons. One of them, the businessmen who were supporters of the right-wing parties and some units of the police and intelligence agencies, began to economically and militarily support the extreme right gangs against the opposition movements (Gingeras, 2014, p. 218; Bovenkerk & Yeşilgöz, 2000, pp. 242–243). And this situation was legitimizing the right-wing gangs in the eye of government institutions, because



they were fighting against common threats. The other reason was the birth of Turkish mafia and the increase in the importance of Turkey in drug trafficking that created enormous economic profits (Gingeras, 2014, pp. 205–238). When the fragmentation of state institutions and the weaknesses of institutional capacities were added to these reasons, some units of the army, members of the political parties and the bureaucracy became part of the organized crime network because of these huge economic benefits and threats of opposition movements. The relations of criminal organizations with state institutions, especially during the conflicts with the PKK, were often discussed. The Susurluk scandal was a turning point in disclosing the relations between criminal organizations and the state (Berberoğlu, 1998; Savaş, 1997).

## DISCUSSION

Since the mid-1980s, the PKK or the political demands of the Kurds was regarded as the most important “threat to the state,” because it had initiated an armed struggle against the Turkish state. But the state’s security forces did not have a capacity to resist guerrilla movements, because the guerrilla consisted of small-scale units, while the Turkish army still used conventional methods of warfare. About seven years after the PKK began its armed struggle, the Turkish army was reorganized in the context of a low-intensity conflict doctrine. Between 1984 and 1991, the government agencies tried to resolve the lack of capacity of the state institutions by creating various paramilitary forces. Government agencies considered several criteria when they established these paramilitary groups. On the one hand, they created new irregular units in the police and gendarmerie from the ultra-nationalist former members of the Grey Wolves out of whom many were related to organized crime networks. On the other hand, the government established a huge paramilitary organization like the village guards through mostly loyal Kurdish population/tribes. The government agencies aimed to raise the local capacity of the army and police with the first group and to provide the control of the war zone with the second group. The above-mentioned conditions not only prepared the political and military environment for the emergence of paramilitary groups in the 1980s but also determined the type of irregular groups that emerged.

Throughout this section, I tried to argue that in the beginning of the conflict in 1984, paramilitary organizations with different characteristics were formed as a result of various conditions. I would argue that the reasons for the emergence of these organizations were the threats of the opposition movements to the state and the weakness of the local capacity of the state institutions and deniability. I also discussed the political, ideological, social, and criminal conditions that contributed to the emergence of these groups in

the case of Turkey: First, ethnic polarization, demands and conflict were perceived as the greatest threats to the security of the state, and thus, they were some of the most important conditions for the emergence of paramilitary forces. Second, the politics of Turkish nationalism also played a role. The state implements Turkish nationalism as an official ideology through the army and government. This strategy revealed the weakness of the institutional and democratic capacity of the state, deepened social discrimination and led to the emergence of irregular armed groups. Third, when internal threats to the state arose, the loyal Kurdish tribes were used by the state as a local power, due to the weakness of the state's institutional capacity in Kurdistan. This was the case for more than a century. Fourth, criminal organizations, including some members of the state bureaucracy, politicians and the army could be transformed into the subcontractor organizations that the state used for acts when threats arise.

As a result of these conditions, different types of the paramilitary organizations were formed, ranging from the death squads to the auxiliary forces in the second part of the 1980s and early 1990s (Jitem—included the Repentants—the Special Police Team, the Village guards, and Hizbullah). The formation of some of these paramilitary organizations can be explained with the top-down relation process: The state created or reorganized paramilitary groups when faced with the internal threats. It was existing in the state's memory (archives) and traditions. The Jitem, the Special Police Team, the Village guards can be evaluated in this framework because the state created similar organizations in previous periods. But it may be more illustrative to look at the bottom-up process to understand the relationship between Hizbullah and the state. Hizbullah was not similar to the previous period's paramilitary groups, which the state had established or benefited from. The information that the state accumulated about Hizbullah was formed over time and in a bottom-up manner. But in general, I would still argue that the formation or activation of paramilitary groups has taken place as a top-down process. Therefore, the paramilitary forces were especially established as the first intervention force against the PKK due to the inadequacy of the institutional capacity of the Turkish army and the lack of irregular warfare capabilities. Although the Turkish army changed its conventional structure in 1993 with a low-intensity conflict doctrine, these paramilitary groups did not deactivate during the 1990s. On the contrary, despite these groups were established in the 1980s, they were specially developed and strengthened in the first half of the 1990s. Two paramilitary groups (village guards and special action police unites) are established by law, and the other two (Jitem and Hizbullah) are not legal. These concepts of semi-legal and illegal are used here according to the status of these groups in the Turkish law. Finally, besides the above-mentioned organizations, it can be said that several informal gangs/organizations appeared because of the fight against the PKK and pro-PKK civilians;

the government agencies (army, police, intelligence organization, governorships, etc.) have established many illegal organizations, small and large, in the name of fighting “terrorism” (Akçura, 2010, p. 139; Şarman, 2007, pp. 41–55).

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I tried to argue that at the beginning of the conflict in 1984, paramilitary organizations with different characteristics were formed as a result of various conditions. I argued that the reasons for the emergence of these paramilitary formations were the perception that national security of the state is threatened by opposition movements, the weakness of the local military and political capacity of the state institutions, and deniability of the actions implemented against civilians during conflicts. I also discussed the political, ideological, social, and criminal conditions in which these groups have emerged at several moments in the Turkish history.

Considering both the discussions in the literature and the characteristics of the Turkish paramilitary formations, a few points can be emphasized to define the case of Turkey: First, the paramilitary forces appear as hierarchically flexible. Although these armed groups were under the control of the military and police forces, their hierarchy was more flexible. Second, the legal definitions of groups were unclear and complicated. Their legal positions were usually semi-formal or informal. Third, the group members consisted of officers, former militants, and well-trained village guards. Although the members of these groups were hierarchically flexible and amateur, most of them were better-trained than the security forces of the state (particularly members of the Jitem and the Police Special Operations Police Units). Fourth, the origin of the members of the paramilitary forces comprised of two separate ideological and political groups: pro-state Kurdish tribes, peasants and artisans, and extreme Turkish nationalist groups. Fifth, deniability is one of the most important characteristics of these groups. A paramilitary group (Jitem) and their many acts are still denied by state institutions. Sixth, the paramilitary groups in Turkey can be classified as having three functions: one was a large informant network, the other was an auxiliary force, and the third was death squads that organized as small gangs. Seventh, the members of the paramilitary groups gained a serious economic income from the war economy, which was provided by the state’s salary and fringe benefits, as well as by the blackmail, threat, and smuggling networks they created at the local area. Last and most important, these groups were used particularly against Kurdish civilians. Consequently, the state preferred to set up these groups as paramilitary units that were deeply trusted. They were usually semi-formal and informal groups with different characteristics from the regu-

lar police and the military institutions; these units were also related to criminal organizations on different levels. These groups that were not independent, but autonomous under the Turkish state control had emerged as the irresponsible, unlawful, and dark face of the state used against the opposition during the conflicts. As a result, paramilitary groups are the most important unlawful military instruments used by modern states especially during civil wars.

## NOTES

1. “Modern states have a habit of subcontracting. In certain crisis situations (and here the literature on state violence in general is still very useful), this subcontracting can occur even at the risk of diminishing the states’ legitimacy by violating the law, or by compromising its monopoly on the use of violence.” Campbell, 2002, p. 17.

2. Hüseyin Velioglu who took part in radical Islamic youth organizations in the second part of the 1970s established an organization for the religious and Islamic purposes in Batman and Diyarbakır. The meeting places of this organization were the bookstores (such as İlim Kitabevi). Velioglu and his friends went to Iran several times for training. Later, the group would be called Hizbullah. The organization launched a war against the PKK between 1991 and 1995. It is completely different from Hezbollah in Lebanon, only their names are the same.

3. “The number and weight of senior commanders participating in the NSC also increased at the expense of civilian members. (. . .) The concrete decisions of the council cover an unprecedented spectrum: determining the curriculum in schools; regulating television stations’ broadcasting hours; abolishing the penal immunity of members of parliament from the (Kurdish) Democracy Party; closing down certain prisons and television stations; making bureaucratic appointments of the ministry of public works in the southeast; postponing the termination date of military service for current conscripts; suggesting the formation of electoral alignments between political parties before the March 27, 1994, local election; stating the substance of the laws on terror and capital punishment; and offering Arabic as an elective subject in secondary schools.” (Cizre Sakallioğlu, 1997, pp. 157–158).

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## *Chapter Four*

# **Confession as Disavowal**

### *JITEM Officers Confessing to Atrocities against Kurds during the 1990s*

Yeşim Yaprak Yıldız

Contrary to the common narrative in Turkey that information on the atrocities against Kurds during the 1990s were highly limited or lacking at the time, parliamentary debates and inquiry commissions, media reports, domestic and international human rights reports, court cases, and the first-person narratives on the conflict show that there was abundant information to the inquiring eyes and ears. Despite the official denial of atrocities, criminalization and suppression of the opposition, media censorship, and widespread impunity, speech on state violence has proliferated during the 1990s and its aftermath as indicated by the increasing number of books and extremely popular factual TV shows and series on the “deep state”—the term referring to the extra-legal activities of the state. What happened was not complete silencing of speech but rather its control and regulation. The restrictions on certain forms of speech went hand in hand with new rules and new forms of control over the speech “determining who can say what and in what limits” and “which type of discourse is authorized or which form of discretion is required in either case.”<sup>1</sup> While activists, politicians, and journalists spreading the news of violence committed by the state security forces were suppressed and the language describing the conflict was strictly regulated by criminalizing the use of certain words such as “Kurdistan” or “guerrilla,” the discourses framing the conflict within the context of counterterrorism and national security have multiplied. Among these proliferating forms of speech were confessions of perpetrators of state violence.

From the early 1990s, mainstream and opposition media featured confessions and revelations by the state actors who were directly involved in state violence against Kurds. In addition to the numerous anonymous confessions, several lower- and higher-ranking state actors made public confessions revealing crucial information on extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances and the state's involvement in illegal acts during the conflict such as drugs and arms trafficking during the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Confessional performances marked with expressed feelings of remorse are rare in Turkey, in contrast to the widespread and banal accounts marked with justifications and rationalizations. The confessions I focus on in this article include both, that is, heroic and patriotic confessional performances by higher-ranking JİTEM officers, and remorseful confessions by lower-ranking officers. Although these confessions revealed crucial information on dozens of forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings and resulted in a number of judicial investigations and prosecutions, they have neither ignited a lasting public debate nor led to truth and justice for the families of the victims. This failure, I argue, is not external to confessional form of truth-telling but rather internal to it. Public confessions of perpetrators exemplify how speech on state violence “carries its own techniques of subjugation” and it does not necessarily break silence (Brown, 1997). While acknowledging the wrongdoing committed and in some instances admitting guilt and responsibility, confession simultaneously effaces guilt and responsibility through various rhetorical and performative strategies. As I will demonstrate below through my case studies, *public confession of state crime functions simultaneously as an avowal and a disavowal<sup>3</sup> of the wrongdoing confessed.*

In what follows, I will examine the public confessions of three members of Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter Terror (JİTEM), a secret and extra-legal unit within the gendarmerie, namely JİTEM commanders Cem Ersever and Arif Doğan and former PKK member turned JİTEM officer Abdülkadir Aygan. I will provide a close analysis of their memoirs and media interviews regarding the atrocities they committed during the 1990s in the context of the conflict between Turkish Armed Forces and the Kurdish armed group Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan—PKK). In addition to their public confessions, they have also made statements to parliamentary inquiry commissions and to the courts. It is often difficult to separate public confessions from these more structured confessions taking place in institutionalized settings. In many cases the parliamentary commissions or ongoing court cases encouraged and enabled confessions, while in others public confessions paved the way for the formation of inquiry commissions and the launch of judicial investigations and prosecutions. In this article, I will exclusively focus on their confessions in the public domain through their books or media interviews. I will examine the rhetorical and performative strategies they employed in their confessions, and the wider effects of their confessional

performances on guilt and responsibility for state crimes. Rather than the primary causes or motivations of perpetrators to confess and truth value of confessions, I aim to understand the processes of confessional speech acts and their effects in specific social, political, and historical contexts and how confessional speech acts construct the truth.

## SETTING THE CONTEXT

Confession is considered as the most authentic form of truth-telling, and one of the most highly valued ones in addition to the testimony of witnesses and the learned methods of observation and demonstration (Foucault, 1978). Heavy reliance on confessions in legal mechanisms and transitional justice processes, not only in the West but across the world<sup>4</sup> show that it continues to be considered crucial for the functioning of the social and penal regimes. The continued reliance on confession, voluntary or forced, does not necessarily arise from its truth content, but from the broader performative effects of confession including reintegration of the wrongdoer into the society, reconciliation and the legitimization of social and legal order via the accused's submission to it by telling the truth (Hepworth and Turner, 1982; Foucault, 2014). Despite the history of confession which is closely linked with violence, force, and obligation, there is now a widespread belief in modern societies in the therapeutic and cathartic functions of confession. Confessional performances, presenting the act as an authentic, sincere, truthful act governed by a remorseful subject, contribute to the cathartic understanding of confession (Taylor, 2009). The meaning of a confession would depend on both the elements of its performance, that is, the confessing subject, his acting, his narrative, the timing of his confession and the audiences (Payne, 2008), and its performativity, that is, both the immediate and consequential effects of confessional speech acts on the confessing subject, the meaning of his utterance and the audiences. While the presumed performative effects have come to be regarded as establishing truth and responsibility and enabling reconciliation, in this chapter I aim to show that confession results in other performative effects that might preclude these effects.

In its most general terms, confession can be defined as verbal acknowledgment of one's acts, thoughts, feelings, or desires which are considered as shameful, wrong, or guiltworthy in a specific social, legal, and moral context.<sup>5</sup> Unlike testimony, which is bearing witness to wrongdoing perpetrated by another, confession concerns the wrongdoing perpetrated by the self and the self himself. Going beyond a simple acknowledgement, it is a detailed explanation of one's inner thoughts. Further, what makes the difference between a statement and a confession is the context and expressed or tacit accusatory demand, following which guilt and responsibility all immediately

enter the frame (Docherty, 2012). Even in cases when the person does not express remorse for his actions, confession is entangled with self-justificatory explanations. While it is possible to agree on certain common features of confession originating from its long and eventful history in religion, law, psychoanalysis, and politics, it must be emphasized that confession is a relational and historically situated speech act. Hence, an analysis of confession needs to be situated in a specific social, political, and historical context. Despite the absence of confessional practices in Islam, confessional practices have been widespread in judicial, social, and cultural spheres in Turkey. The strong media and public interest in confessional discourses even led to a tendency to sensationalize any revelation of hidden information by perpetrators naming it “confession.”

The confessional accounts I will examine in this article are concerned with state violence against Kurds during the 1990s, when the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state was at a peak. The 1990s in the Kurdish region of Turkey is characterized with more than a decade of unaccounted and systematic state violence, when torture, arbitrary detention and prosecution, forced disappearances, political killings, and forced displacement have been part of everyday life.<sup>6</sup> The daily reality of the Kurds defined by such forms of state violence as well as curfews, embargoes, arbitrary identity checks and road controls and humiliation constituted a stark opposition to the rest of the country. As part of its “special war” against the PKK, the Turkish state mobilized its whole security apparatus, complementing it with paramilitary and extra-legal units such as JITEM, Hizbullah,<sup>7</sup> and the far-right mafia. In addition to the former PKK defectors and a network of local informants, the state also initiated the village guard system under which villagers were recruited to fight against the PKK.<sup>8</sup> Formed by the state, endowed with extraordinary powers and full resources, death squads were conveniently located outside the state inflicting fear and violence in the local population. Despite the gravity of the acts committed, there has been no mechanism to confront and account for state crimes during the 1990s, apart from the initiatives by victims’ associations and human rights organizations. Criminal cases, few in number, remained futile spreading over two decades with no consequence<sup>9</sup> and reducing the crime to an individual act with no account of wider mechanisms of responsibility. The emergence of public confessions of perpetrators as early as 1990 with no effective judicial or social response is another face of impunity in Turkey.

Following the Cold War and the beginning of the investigation into Gladio in Europe, particularly with the Italian prime minister’s acknowledgment of Gladio’s existence in Italy and its role in the violence against left-wing activists, there has been increased media attention to the Turkish Gladio. In November 1990, *Yüzyıl* magazine published a series of articles on Special Warfare Department in Turkey and the activities of the *kontrgerilla*, which

included the confessions of a military officer.<sup>10</sup> Yet these early confessions are anonymous confessions, claimed to be made by JİTEM officers or Special Operations teams, often via telephone calls to left-wing dailies and magazines. Although they have been part of the debate on *kontrgerilla* in Turkey, the impact of these confessions has rather been limited, mainly due to their anonymity. The confessions of Doğan, Ersever, and Aygan, which I will analyze in this article, have not only revealed crucial information but also received widespread media and public attention. The specific political and historical context in which their confessions took place, that is at the time of Susurluk and Ergenekon trials,<sup>11</sup> which both led to a debate on the extra-legal activities of the state, is among the reasons for the increased public and media attention.

### TEVİL YOLUYLA IKRAR: HEROIC CONFESSIONS BY JİTEM COMMANDERS

Since the start of the “special war” with the PKK, there have been revelations from several military officers about the extra-legal methods used during the war and atrocities against civilians.<sup>12</sup> The earliest example is the confessions of Major Cem Ersever, who was one of the founders of JİTEM and the head of Diyarbakır JİTEM Command. During his time in the Kurdish region for more than ten years between 1974 and 1992,<sup>13</sup> his name was associated with grave atrocities against Kurds including torture, forced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings. Following his retirement in 1993 in an act of protest of the government’s “soft” policy on the PKK, he made revelations to several journalists in *Aydınlık*, *Tempo*, *Tercüman*, and *Turkish Daily News* either in his own name or with a nickname. Ersever’s in-depth interviews with Soner Yalçın from *Aydınlık* were later published as a book titled *Major Ersever’s Confessions*, which was reprinted over thirty-five times.

Like Ersever, Colonel Arif Doğan has also started his military career in the Kurdish region and retired from his position in gendarmerie intelligence within the Gendarmerie General Command. He was a well-known figure in the human rights community due to his role in atrocities committed by JİTEM. Doğan’s public confessions started following his prosecution under the Ergenekon trial, which prompted a debate on past state crimes as dozens of defendants were associated with grave human rights violations against Kurds—albeit the indictment concerned alleged plots to overthrow the Justice and Development Party government and state violence against Kurds was only mentioned as the background of the case. It was during this time that Doğan’s telephone conversations containing revelations on JİTEM were leaked to the media. The second indictment of the Ergenekon trial, which is based on Doğan’s confessions to the Prosecutor and the JİTEM archive and

ammunition found in his house,<sup>14</sup> specifies that Doğan is the founder of JİTEM, and he then transferred his role to Veli Küçük, challenging the constant denials by the Gendarmerie and the general staff.<sup>15</sup> Following his prosecution, Doğan made frequent media appearances on both TV (*A Haber*, *TRT Haber*, *32 Gün*) and print media and published a book titled *JİTEM'i ben kurdum* ' [I founded JİTEM].

The confessions of both Ersever and Doğan lie between denial and acknowledgment. In his initial interviews, Ersever denies the existence of JİTEM, state-sponsored killings, village evacuations, and any violence against civilians in the region (Yalçın, 2008: 61, 69). He evades the questions on disappearances and extrajudicial killings and links them to the insufficiency of the state's military strategy and interpersonal and intertribal conflict in the region which have increased with the instability and insecurity brought by the war. "In such an atmosphere, certain power groups emerge; it is not certain who is killing who. Everyone from 7 to 77 has a gun" (Yalçın, 2008: 55). During his secret interviews with Yalçın, which were later published in the book, Ersever moves from denial of state violence, to partial acknowledgment of disappearances and extrajudicial killings, this time attributing them to certain factions within the military and ultranationalist non-state actors who went to Kurdistan to kill the PKK militants and sympathisers. Despite his outright denial in the beginning that "the state does not commit killings" (Ağaç, 1998: 76–77), he later stated "Do you think the Gendarmerie General Command is not aware of the extrajudicial killings in the region? Doesn't Ministry of Interior or MİT know about them? They know everything. People know as well. Actually, everyone in the region knows who is killing who (Yalçın, 2008: 144). Atrocities denied blatantly turn into "open secrets" that everyone knows.

Doğan, unlike Ersever, proudly admits having founded JİTEM, yet denies having any knowledge on its atrocities against civilians. Following the media coverage about Veli Küçük as the founder of JİTEM and Küçük's denial, Doğan rushed to the scene with his confessions to reclaim it from Küçük, as the title of his book indicates. He said, 'Veli Küçük played a hero when he was arrested about two years ago. He said "I founded JİTEM." Then accusations about JİTEM started and he entered into a denialist attitude. He did not talk about JİTEM. Then I said, "I founded JİTEM." Because I was JİTEM (Doğan, 2011: 153). What he revealed was a glorified and sterilized image of JİTEM, which he argued was established to gather intelligence of PKK militants in rural areas. This sterile picture, however, is complicated with his statements that in addition to the PKK repentants and village guards, JİTEM included civilians gathered from across Turkey to work in the eastern and south-eastern Turkey (Doğan, 2011: 25). In his book, his interviews as well as in his court statement, he stated that there were 10,000 agents and infor-

mants working for JİTEM including some teachers working in the region and they distributed thousands of unlicensed arms to them (Doğan, 2011: 21).<sup>16</sup>

Neither Ersever nor Doğan talk about the cases attributed to them. Putting the blame on the “ultranationalist hitmen” who were mobilized in the Kurdish region during the 1990s and certain factions within the police and the military who facilitate such acts, Ersever said “There are around 100 such people in the region. Most them are hitmen. Their only aim is to fight the PKK. Their arms, bullets and money are provided by the state. They are in a way illegal guards. They kill people without blinking an eye. They call themselves ‘Turkish Revenge Brigade’ or ‘Ottoman Turkish Revenge Brigade. They compete with each other. (. . .) The strongest and the most dangerous among them is *Sakallı* aka *Yeşil*” (Yalçın, 2008: 138–140). Despite managing the village guards and PKK repentants working for JİTEM, he blamed them for abusing their power for private gain including drug and arms trafficking and extorting money from local people. Doğan, similarly, denies JİTEM’s involvement in cases of torture, forced disappearances or killings and argues that all the cases of violence attributed to JİTEM took place after his time. Disavowing the period after his change of duty, he names the JİTEM associated with the atrocities as GÖTEM<sup>17</sup> and states that “I don’t know what happened after me (. . .) Officers, repentants, PKK members all were involved in this using the name of JİTEM” (Doğan, 2011: 52).

Ersever’s and Doğan’s references to these actors in the region present a mystified picture of state violence. The main actor that Ersever referred, Yeşil,<sup>18</sup> an ultranationalist hitman working for different security and intelligence units since the 1970s, known as Ahmet Demir or Mahmut Yıldırım, is such a mystified figure in Turkey. Every now and then, the public agenda is occupied with a debate about whether he is still alive or not. While giving the details of the atrocities committed by Yeşil or the PKK repentants, Ersever resorted to silence and evasions on his own atrocities and denied having any knowledge of the cases well-known to the human rights community. Regarding the killing of Vedat Aydın,<sup>19</sup> the head of HEP Diyarbakır branch, he said, “It is a very complicated case. I could not comprehend it fully either. . . Everyone made statements about that case. But I don’t know anything. I would not talk about any case about which I have no information” (Yalçın, 2008: 155). Doğan further blurs the picture and diffuses responsibility saying that “There have been various incidents in the region. But there is not just one unit there. There are various operational and intelligence units. And there is a diverse population. (. . .) Regarding the unsolved murders, as I said before, there are GÖTEM units formed by those who left JİTEM, who acted outside of JİTEM. These units are formed by the local people or repentants in the operation units. They were settling accounts with others for financial or moral reasons. . . . They kill people because of internal conflicts, and claim

that JİTEM killed them. . . . When they find an opportunity, they deceive people showing off themselves” (Doğan, 2011: 39–40, 90). With regard to the most apparent cases in which JİTEM’s involvement is known, Doğan either makes confusing statements amounting to fantasy or he attributes them to rogue individuals or groups or the PKK.

Assuming a sacred responsibility in counterterrorism and through the narratives of national unity and security, both Ersever and Doğan normalized the extra-legal acts of the state and gross atrocities against civilians. Although Ersever was silent on the atrocities he committed, he engaged in a self-righteous rhetoric defending extra-legal and non-conventional war methods against the PKK, including his plans to form civilian counterterrorism units. Likewise, JİTEM, known with its atrocities and illegal activities, appear as a patriotic unit in Doğan’s confessional narrative, that he relentlessly owns and defends. Confessional narratives of Ersever and Doğan, in that sense, constitute examples of a trend in Turkey. Various high-ranked military officials made statements about their acts during the war with the PKK, which constitute crimes according to both domestic and international law.<sup>20</sup> The military and state officials who made confessions, including Ersever and Doğan, have neither faced social reprisals nor judicial sanctions. Both died before any of the cases against them have been concluded and a military funeral was organized for them despite their involvement in gross human rights violations.<sup>21</sup> Unlike similar heroic confessions in Chile, Argentina, or South Africa (Payne, 2008), their confessions have neither provoked debate nor shocked the public. The audiences in Turkey have hardly questioned the legality and the legitimacy of these acts, on the contrary these officials regularly appeared in prime-time TV shows as experts on terrorism and their books sold thousands of copies. Except human rights groups, some left-wing groups and victims’ associations, there has not been any counterresponse. What engaged the public were instead the conspiracies, secrets, and puzzles in their statements or their books.

The confessions of higher ranking state officials often emerged following a power struggle that side-lined them or after they faced investigations. Hence feelings of anger and betrayal dominate their performances. Ersever, who was given a more passive role due to internal criticisms of his attempts to build his own power base, decided to retire and make confessions out of feelings of anger against the state which he believed was failing in the fight against the PKK. By revealing the atrocities committed by other units, he argued that he enlightened the public. The timing of Doğan’s confessions, which is after the Ergenekon trial, similarly, indicates his anger with his prosecution. Besides, his proud and boasting statements on his role in JİTEM were an attempt to reclaim it from Küçük who denied Doğan’s role.

Confessional narratives of the high-ranking military officials can be defined as *tevil yoluyla ikrar*, which denotes implicit or indirect confessions.<sup>22</sup>



Their narratives often oscillate between denial of their involvement in state crime and normalization of such criminal acts as legitimate forms of self-defense and necessary acts for national security. Like the heroic and denial confessions analyzed by Payne (2008: 170), military officers making these revelations admit to varying degrees of violence but not to wrongdoing. Violence, often argued to be against the PKK militants rather than civilians, is justified as necessary and patriotic acts for the sake of national unity and security. They dismissed allegations of the human rights community arguing that they aim to harm the military that fought relentlessly against the PKK. By narrating or showing the images of the violence allegedly committed by the PKK or by addressing them as non-believers, they produced a political fantasy which played a crucial role in rationalizing state violence against the Kurds (Aretxaga, 2000).

When they admit atrocities, which are too obvious to deny, they deny their own responsibility as Ersever and Doğan did. They often shift the blame to the PKK, internal struggles within the security units, rogue individuals, and the Kurdish elements of the security and military units, that is, PKK repentants and village guards. The dominant leitmotif in their books or interviews is their arrogant display of omnipotence and blatant moral indifference in the face of the consequences of their acts, their masculine militaristic pride, and feeling of entitlement. Official line needs to be adjusted and reinforced when challenged by inevitable and uncontrollable revelations, evidences or testimonies. Confessions of high-ranked officials, individualizing the atrocities, putting the blame on rogue individuals or the PKK, justifying them in the name of national unity and security, mainly served to sustain the official and dominant version of the past through enactments of power, including through affirmation (affirming existing patterns of domination), concealment (concealing any imperfections), euphemisation (obscuring negatively valued or embarrassing details), and stigmatization (stigmatising critics) (Payne, 2008; Scott, 1990).

### SAD TALES: CONFESSIONS OF İTİRAFÇI ABDÜLKADİR AYGAN

*İtirafçı* which literally means “confessant” refers to the PKK defectors, that is the former PKK militants captured by or surrendered to the Turkish army and started working for the security or military forces. Since they are often forced to make confessions upon their apprehension and benefit from repentance laws, they are referred as *itirafçı* in Turkey. I prefer to use the term “repentant” instead of “confessant” as it better illustrates their position. Being a repentant is attached to their identity, it does not only refer to their “jobs” but determines their social and political position. The term *itirafçı*,

which was used for former members of political groups making confessions upon their arrest, gained a specific meaning in the context of the war with the PKK as many of them were used in death squads and other extra-legal and illegal acts of the state during the 1990s (Kılıç, 2009: 81; Şahan and Balık, 2004: 17; Duvaklı, 2010: 93).

Since the Susurluk scandal in 1996, several PKK repentants made confessions about the atrocities they were involved with.<sup>23</sup> Abdülkadir Aygan is one of the most well-known PKK repentants as his confessions revealed crucial information on the structure and functioning of JİTEM, and he gave specific information about around thirty cases of forced disappearance and political killings. Following his surrender to the Turkish army in 1985, Aygan was given a new identity card under the name of Aziz Turan, was recruited as a “civil servant” in the military and started working for JİTEM. His employment with JİTEM ended in 2000 after which he was appointed to a passive civil servant post in Burdur Provincial Regimental Command. He left this position after the trial into the torture of the villagers in Burdur for theft of livestock, which included Aygan as a defendant. Feeling abandoned by the state, lost his employment rights, struggling with financial difficulties and having nowhere to go, Aygan made confessions in March 2004 to *Ülkede Özgür Gündem*, which was later made into a book. Following the initial silence<sup>24</sup> there has been a renewed interest in Aygan’s confessions when the body of Murat Aslan, who was forcibly disappeared in 1992, was found in the village Aygan mentioned.<sup>25</sup> In 2005, a judicial investigation was launched into Aygan’s confessions for ill-treating and killing eight persons.<sup>26</sup> Aygan’s reappearance in the mainstream media with more coverage has been after the Ergenekon trial in 2007 and the arrest of army generals associated with JİTEM. In addition to the 2004 book, several other books have been published and Aygan appeared in several documentaries and prime-time TV shows. Whilst the human rights groups and opposition media mostly focused on the concrete revelations that Aygan made in relation to the killings, forced disappearances and other JİTEM activities, mainstream media mostly focused on Aygan’s biography, his criticisms of the PKK, and the intricate relations within the state.

Aygan starts his confessions with a detailed personal trajectory of his childhood, his early political activities, and how and why he joined the PKK, in which both his participation to the PKK and then to JİTEM become inevitable consequences. Although he constructs his decision to make confessions as a willful act, he rationalizes his ten-year work with JİTEM arguing that he would be killed by the PKK if he left. “I was a *former terrorist*” according to the state and an “*agent, traitor, and confessant*” according to the PKK. Even if I try to stay with my relatives, even my brother would not protect me because of the fear from the Organization. Only those who share the same fate with me would understand this truth” (Çiçek, 2009b: 123).

Aygan appears remorseful and regretful in his confessions, with his occasional sobbing, weary look, and silences further consolidating that message. When he is asked the reasons for his confessions, he refers to both his betrayal by the military and his conscience. Despite the apparent conflict between these two reasons, he often uses both arguments together, like the other PKK repentants. “One’s past does not leave him in peace. Although I have been in a peaceful place for these last three years, every day I dream what I have done with JİTEM. . . One needs to examine his conscience. . . I am calling upon all the *repentants*. A fault confessed is half redressed. Continuing is not logical. It is not humane. I have experienced all these. Repentants are thrown away by the state after a certain point. They are thrown away after being used.” (Çiçek, 2009a: 176–177). A common leitmotif in the confessions of the PKK repentants is their normalization of their actions both prior to and after JİTEM by providing a detailed trajectory of their biographies. While their politicization and participation in the PKK are narrated in a causal and linear way, often following their experience of or witnessing state violence, their collaboration with the Turkish state appears as a necessity and the only choice available to them at the time. These “sad tales” in Goffman’s sense in which they construct their acts as inevitable consequences of their personal trajectories help them to disavow any personal responsibility.

Aygan gave specific information about thirty cases of forced disappearances who have been abducted or detained, tortured, and killed by JİTEM, giving details on how they were killed and where their bodies are. He also revealed the list of military officers, PKK repentants, local informants and village guards working for JİTEM and higher-ranking state officials who were directly involved. Despite confessing torture, disappearances, killings, he conceals his role through the use of euphemisms and ambiguous descriptions. In contrast to the gruesome details of the cases described by the testimonies of the victims’ families and the human rights organizations, his narratives drew a sterile picture with no mention of torture or violence. One case which shows how Aygan conceals the level of torture and his involvement is Abdülkadir Çelikkbilek case. With regard to the torture and killing of Celikkbilek, Aygan says, “I, Kemal Emlük, Sergeant Abdülkadir Uğur with the code name Apo, Sergeant Uğur Yüksel with the code name Şehmuz took Abdülkadir Çelikkbilek to JİTEM with a Toros car near the post office in Diyarbakır based on the charges that he helps the PKK, is involved in smuggling and finances the PKK. During his interrogation, we realized he did not have any money, he was a poor man, so we got suspicious; but we had already taken him. When JİTEM takes someone, it does not leave them alive. Şehmuz Sergeant killed him by strangling. His body was put in the back of a white station car” (Şahan and Balık, 2004: 58). Yet, when we look at the testimony of the family, the forensic reports and the ECHR case documents,

it can be seen that Celikbilek's body was severely tortured, his nails were removed, and plastic was melted and cigarettes were burnt on his body. The family's submissions to the ECHR stated that "Marks of torture could be seen all over his body. It looked as if the skin on the soles of his feet had been pulled off with pincers. His arms, legs and head looked as if they had been skewered on a thick skewer. His whole body was black and blue, and there were marks on his throat."<sup>27</sup> Aygan's expression of regret for an act that he fails to explain and his reconstruction of the meaning of the act contributes to the deniability of his responsibility for the actual act.

The subject positions in the confessional narratives of the PKK repentants are often quite volatile. They deny any agency, intent, autonomy, or choice in relation to the crimes they committed or got involved, arguing that they had to, they were only following orders, or they did not have any other chance. In line with this, Aygan often positions himself as a witness and as an aide, distancing himself from the act and downgrading his responsibility. When the journalist Neşe Düzel asks him how many persons he killed during the time he worked in JITEM, Aygan responds: "If you ask me how many killings I witnessed. . . I witnessed approximately thirty cases."<sup>28</sup> He often refers to himself as a "civil servant" and gives detailed explanation of his administrative duties in stark contrast with his role as an interrogator, torturer and hitman. "We were recruited as civil servants, but they used us as interrogators, they made us do everything."<sup>29</sup> Although in his interviews with Kurdish journalists Şahan and Balık, Aygan argues that he was complicit in the acts of JITEM, and that he either witnessed or was directly involved in those acts (Şahan and Balık, 2004: 71), in his later interviews he often emphasizes chain of command and his submissive and passive role not assuming responsibility for the acts he committed. Arguing that "No civil servant or subordinate would do something like that without the instruction of their superiors,"<sup>30</sup> he highlights the impunity of the higher-ranking officials. "The courts put the repentants in the dock, not the actual guilty. My brother! These people were not in the 'repentant' status when these crimes were committed. . . They were the official civil servants of the state. We have registration numbers. We served the state for ten years. We worked under the command of the generals you appointed. Where are those generals? I am declaring their names one by one from the top to the bottom. . . Who is guilty? Those at the bottom or at the top? If the courts will crack down on this seriously and sincerely, they have to start from the top. . . If they cannot start from the top, then start from the middle. If they cannot prosecute majors and generals, then start from lieutenants."<sup>31</sup>

Confessional narratives often include references to self-punishing and self-victimizing acts (Payne, 2008; Moon, 2008; Foster et al, 2005). The exposure itself is a punishment, and this is consolidated with narratives on how they also suffered and how their lives were unbearable. Aygan explains

how he was depressed for what he “witnessed,”<sup>32</sup> how he started smoking heavily, drinking every day to forget everything, how his wife received psychological treatment for four years, and his family life was ruined (Çiçek, 2009a: 186; Şahan and Balık, 2004: 70). He says, “I was put in a criminal position by the state against my own people. This damaged my conscience. While I hated alcohol before, I started drinking two three times a week” (Çiçek, 2009b: 145). Narratives of self-transformation, self-victimization, or narratives establishing the act of wrongdoing as an exception create a gap between the subject of the deed and subject of enunciation and help perpetrators to disclaim their pasts.

The reasons that Aygan gives for his confessions oscillate between remorse, betrayal, and revenge. The contradictions in his expressions about his motivations to confess often damage his performance. In all of his confessions, he refers to remorse, revenge, and betrayal simultaneously. He says “It is normal for an ordinary person not to trust me. But I am betraying those who betrayed me. Why would someone speak out? One feels remorse and speaks out. And also one speaks out when he is betrayed. When he understands that he was deceived, used, cheated and when he sees that he is thrown away like a napkin when they are finished with you. This leads to a feeling of revenge. Healthy people want to take revenge of that. Both the Organization and the Gendarmerie betrayed me.”<sup>33</sup> Performances of Aygan and other PKK repentants demonstrate these conflicting feelings. Their performances as remorseful, decent, and well-behaved people clash with their evasions when confronted and their minimizations of the cases they narrate.

A crucial distinguishing factor of the PKK repentants’ confessional narratives from the confessions by the Turkish state actors is the reactions which often aim at undermining them as unreliable. The officials who spoke claimed that they did not have a crucial role in the military intelligence or operations, making it seem like they are bolstering about their roles. The media questioned their motives. It was their Kurdish identity and their betrayal of their people which separated them from other repentants. As Fanon writes about the colonized, the colonized subject, regardless of the fact that they collaborate with the state or not, appear as incapable of truth. Their values are always contingent on the presence of the Other, says Fanon. “Whenever he comes into contact with someone else, the question of value, of merit, arises” (Fanon 2008: 163). Aygan, like other PKK repentants, presented the fact that he split from both the PKK and JITEM by making confessions as what gives the truth power to their confessions, the reception of his confessions, however, was shaped by his past and his Kurdish identity.

## EFFACEMENT OF GUILT AND RESPONSIBILITY

What we have in these confessional performances is an avowal of wrongdoing, namely the cases of arbitrary detentions, abductions, torture, forced disappearances, and summary killings of Kurdish civilians. Their avowal however is not a simple acknowledgment of the acts they committed but rather a detailed explanation of their motives, intentions, and feelings. Dominated with various forms of self-excuse and self-justification, the act of confession immediately retracts what is uttered. Foucault, in *Lives of Infamous Men* says that “a ritual of confession in which the one speaking is at the same the one spoken about; an effacement of the thing said by its very utterance, but also with an augmentation of the confession itself, which must remain secret, and not leave any other trace behind it but repentance and acts of contrition” (Foucault, 2000: 166). This linear idea of confession as a revelation of a wrongdoing ending in absolution is dominant in political confessions. Derrida (2002: 95) makes a similar point in his discussion of Paul de Man’s commentary on Rousseau’s *Confessions*, in which extreme self-accusation and shame go hand in hand with self-excuse and lack of guilt. He argues that Rousseau’s *Confessions* “both accuses and charges him, condemns him all the more but clears him of guilt by the same token, automatically. One can no longer decide between the two gestures: accusation and excuse.” This is an aspect which is visible in all confessional performances, as a confessional account often follows an accusatory demand, either external or internalized.

The effacement of guilt and responsibility in the confessional narratives I analyzed took place through different strategies. The lines of demarcations lie on racial and power lines. By appealing to obedience and necessity distancing himself from the wrongdoings he committed, Aygan often resorts to denial of agency, intent, or choice<sup>34</sup> regarding his acts. His act of confession constructs the wrongdoing in a linear and causal process, in which it becomes an inevitable consequence of the events he narrated. Such “dehistoricized abstractions” divorces the event of its historical and political character and naturalizes the wrongdoings (Tell, 2008). The actual events and the motives led to those events are generalized and normalized as a human condition. It is not the speaking subject confessing anymore. The wrongdoing confessed becomes an act that anyone would commit under the same circumstances.

Denial of agency, intent, and choice is further supported through narratives splitting their selves into different states. As we can see in the self-victimizing narratives of Aygan, he creates a “gray zone” in Primo Levi’s words, reversing roles with the victims, and recounting the physical or psychological effects of their violence on their lives such as drug or alcohol addiction, insomnia, anxiety, depression, or other scars of a tormented past. Besides, by positioning themselves as victims of circumstances, war, or their working conditions, perpetrators suggest that they cannot be held responsible

for the violent acts they committed when they were also victimized by those acts” (Payne, 2008: 18). Presenting the act as an inevitable consequence, the confessed act is naturalized and dehistoricised. This does not only function to absolve them of any guilt but also invites the audience to share the guilt. What is being said is “anyone in my position would do the same thing.” While listening to Aygan, for example, one cannot help but think that he had no other choice than getting involved in the state’s killing mechanism. One cannot stop but put oneself in his shoes.

Peter Brooks addresses this point in relation to Rousseau’s *Confessions* and Albert Camus’s *The Fall*, arguing that the protagonists in these works naturalize guilt and implicate others as equally guilty of their shameful acts (Brooks, 2000: 73). While they accuse themselves, they invite the other to do the same. The confessing subject demands counterconfession. The audience is implied and made complicit through the objectification of guilt. Jean Baptiste Clamence, the penitent judge in Camus’s *The Fall* says “Most often, on the other hand, we confess to those who are like us and who share our weaknesses. Hence we don’t want to improve ourselves or be bettered, for we should first be bound to be judged in default. We merely wish to be pitied and encouraged in the course we have chosen. In short, we should like, at the same time, to cease being guilty and yet not to make the effort of cleansing ourselves. Not enough cynicism and not enough virtue” (Camus, 1991). Confession turns into an invitation of empathy. The audience approximates to the confessing subject at every explanation that confession provides. The implication of shared guilt and collective responsibility in confessions objectify and universalize guilt as a human condition and led to a *banality of guilt*, in Peter Brooks’s words. An artist and activist who interviewed Aygan, explains how his opinion of him changed after the confession as follows: “I told this both to Aygan and in my media interviews. When I went to meet him, I was not even sure whether I would even shake his hand. But what I encountered was a genuine and a sincere person. Confession was not only a way of purifying himself but also to make an effort for a future he is longing for. . . . Contrary to the objective distance I was required to maintain, I shook his hand without hesitation when the recording ended.”<sup>35</sup>

Effacement of responsibility also takes place at the level of language. Aygan frequently uses distancing devices and euphemisms to minimize and distance his acts. When it comes to the cases of torture or acts that might be found reprehensible, he constructs the sentence in passive format or uses collective pronouns. Such impersonal constructions distance the doer from the deed. Another common trait in remorseful performances is splitting technique, in which the confessants split their wrongdoing selves from their conscientious selves or their confessing selves, with references to their good deeds and their transformation. Their narratives effacing their agency, however, are often present together with agency claiming narratives. The display

of their agency is mostly related to their feelings and their actions against a wrongdoing or for a deed that can be considered as good. As a common pattern with remorseful confessions of perpetrators in other contexts (Foster et al., 2005; Payne, 2008; and Huggins et al., 2002), they claim agency when they refer to their jobs, professionalism, their beliefs, ideals, and of ideologies, while disclaiming it in their narratives of wrongdoings.

The confessional narratives of Ersever and Doğan, on the other hand, included both literal denials and justifications. While they narrate the extra-legal and illegal acts they committed in a patriotic way and with a blatant indifference to the consequences of their acts and their victims, they provided justifications by contextualizing their acts as heroic and necessary as part of counterterrorism and national security policies. Proud of their achievements, successes, and important role in their organization, they present themselves as self-righteous and entitled. Wrongdoings against civilians are dismissed and those who were abused are presented as “terrorists” whose lives are not grievable. The identity of the killed (PKK member, militia, or sympathizer) immediately justifies the act itself serving as another rationalization. Violent episodes appear as reactive violence against a violent enemy. When the evidences are too obvious to deny, they blame the victims or individualize the wrongdoings in question by putting the blame on certain factions within the security or the military units who were acting in their own personal interests. In the case of patriotic confessions of Ersever and Doğan, they efface guilt by either reconstructing the act as necessary and inevitable or by denying the wrongfulness of the act. Presenting the act as an inevitable consequence or as a justified act, they absolve themselves of any guilt. While remorseful performances of the PKK repentants led to a banality of guilt, patriotic confessions led to a banality of violence, as they justified the acts of violence they committed by presenting them as necessary and inevitable. The simultaneity of their literal denials and justifications did not only contribute to the disavowal of their personal responsibility but also proved crucial for official and bystander rhetoric (See Cohen, 2001).

Sensationalist media coverage and the public and media interest in perpetrators themselves rather than their acts and victims, have shown that confession is hardly about the other or the act committed, it rather focuses on one’s own feelings. Brooks (2005: 71) put this as follows: “the need to confess speaks *of* guilt, certainly, but it does not necessarily speak *the* guilt, does not locate that which most needs discovery and healing.” While the past deed is confessed, the focus is on the immediate situation of the perpetrator, his psychology, his performance, and his narrative of the circumstances around the deed. In the case of the confessions of atrocities, the crucial information perpetrators might have and the media sensationalism over confessions often give the perpetrators undue power over the victims and the wider public.<sup>36</sup> They gain priority over the deeds they confessed, and their knowledge of the



past becomes their power. Aygan and Doğan, along with other state actors who made confessions, all appeared in flagship TV programs attracting large audiences. Their books or the books written about them sold thousands of copies. These perpetrators have also been positioned as political analysts rather than state officials or security officers who committed wrongdoings, by being invited to TV debates to comment on the current affairs. Aygan, who received relatively more media attention, owing to the scale of his confessions, was even featured in a mainstream magazine including his images with his family and from his everyday life in Sweden where he sought asylum.<sup>37</sup> While none of these perpetrators have been convicted for the crimes they committed, their blatant confessions on the TV, boasting about their acts, have added insult to injury for the victims. The brother of Tahsin Sevim, who was abducted, tortured, and killed in 1993 in Silopi by JITEM officers including Arif Doğan, stated that “How can they be so unscrupulous? I cannot stand seeing my brother’s murderer on the TV anymore. Has the human dignity ever been trampled upon, as much as it has been now?”<sup>38</sup>

Perpetrators who make remorseful confessions such as Aygan in Turkey often limit their contribution to justice with their confessions, while resisting the legal implications of their confessions despite the gravity of the acts they confessed. Their avoidance of legal guilt while assuming moral guilt is an indication of the widespread substitution between legal and moral guilt. In *Remnants in Auschwitz*, Agamben (1999) argues that it is becoming common, especially in the public sphere, for confession of wrongdoing to supplant admission to legal guilt: “the contrite assumption of moral responsibilities is invoked at every occasion as an exemption from the responsibilities demanded by law.” He contends that while before the assumption of political or moral responsibility without the assumption of the corresponding legal consequences has always characterized the arrogance of the mighty, today it has been reversed. Modern appropriation of the concept of guilt made it seemingly ethically nobler than to assume any legal guilt. The origins of this substitution do not lie in religion but in secular ethics and confusing between the fields of law ethics and secular ethics, argues Agamben. Agamben’s diagnosis of the supplant of legal guilt with moral guilt is evident in the case of perpetrators’ confessions as well. In Aygan’s case, for example, the acknowledgment of wrongdoing has not necessarily translated into a readiness to bear its consequences. On the one hand, he exposed himself to the whole world through his confessions, on the other hand he escaped from legal consequences of his confessions. With regard to the prosecutions Aygan says “There are ten, fifteen thousand unsolved killings. Everyone knows. There are lists. Bodies and bones come out. They don’t ask “Is it just three-five pitiful repentants who did that? Is it just village guards, and sergeants?” As we can see in Aygan’s simultaneous feelings of regret, remorse, and feelings of being used, the guilt is moralized only to be effaced soon after. While

acknowledging his regret and guilt, he immediately effaces them reminding his role as a lower-ranking civil servant. When asked what he is feeling for having killed his own people, he says “Whatever the worst mood and the worst regret is in the world, that’s what I feel” which is immediately followed by “I feel like having been used.”<sup>39</sup> His acknowledgment of guilt does not necessarily mean his acknowledgment of legal responsibility.

## CONCLUSION

The confessions of Turkish state actors on state violence against Kurds, particularly on forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings during the 1990s have been circulated by the Turkish media as “shocking,” “bomb-like” statements, or as “statements that will shake Turkey.” The opposition media, on the other hand, presented the confessions as crucial revelations shedding a light on the darkness of the past. Yet they were bombs that never exploded and statements that never shocked or shook the country. Although some of the confessions revealed crucial information on several cases of killings and disappearances, mass graves were found and investigations and prosecutions were brought against state officials, neither the full scale of the atrocities was revealed nor any state actor has been brought to account. The knowledge of the sufferings of the Kurds as revealed by the human rights and parliamentary inquiry reports, media reports, and victim testimonies, which have further been confirmed by perpetrators’ confessions, has not led to its acknowledgment by the wider public.

Even one of the “most authentic forms of truth-telling,” that is, the confessions of state actors who committed crimes against civilians, failed to challenge Turkish society’s silence and indifference on state violence and hate crimes against Kurds and to create a strong public demand to account for the past in Turkey. While it was not just the lack of knowledge of the Kurds’ sufferings which led to the wider society’s silence and indifference, their silence and indifference created a fruitful atmosphere for the emergence of perpetrators’ confessions. Regarding the photographs of torture of the captured Vietcong rebels that appeared in the British and American press, Amery (1980: 23) states that the admission of torture, the boldness of coming forward with such photos is explicable “only if it is assumed that a revolt of public conscience is no longer to be feared.” The bold admission of atrocities by its very perpetrators in the case of Turkey and the complicit media’s sensationalist coverage similarly indicated the assumption that there would be no revolt of public conscience. It did not take long for those who believed in the power of truth in leading to political change, including the Kurds and the left liberal groups, to fall into cynicism. The reasons for the silence, indifference, and denial of the wider Turkish public in the face of gross

human rights violations against Kurds are manifold, which should include an analysis of the denial of previous gross atrocities that formed the basis of the Turkish Republic. My concern in this article was to demonstrate why the confessional narratives failed to break this silence and how they contributed to it.

In an atmosphere of taboo and silence on state violence, speech and silence are put in opposition to each other and the mere fact that one is speaking about it appears as a deliberate confrontation of that repression. A dualistic relationship is established between the lies and secrecy of the past repressive regime and truth and justice in the present (Daly, 2008). Besides, by its very nature, when a speech act is circulated as a confession it implies that something secret or hidden, something that has long resisted speech is being revealed (Brooks, 2005: 74). These attributes give confessional speech acts even more power. This is based on the long-standing idea that truth is associated with exposure and revelation of secrets (Bratich, 2006; Docherty, 2012). Wendy Brown (1996: 186) also reminds us that breaking silence, which has been regarded as a tool of emancipation, “carries its own techniques of subjugation,” as in the case of confessional discourse. Challenging this binary between speech and silence, and confession and secrecy through an analysis of public confessions of JİTEM officers, this article argued that confessions do not always reveal but also conceal. Perpetrators’ confessions did not necessarily reveal what happened, but concealed mechanisms of responsibility and served to further mystification of “open secrets.”

This article sought to demonstrate the rhetorical strategies that JİTEM officers use to redefine their acts and their subjectivities resulting in effacement of their guilt and responsibility. Characterized with guilt, shame and difficulty, confession appears as an acknowledgment of responsibility for a wrongdoing. Yet I argued that rhetorical and performative strategies employed by perpetrators turn confession into simultaneously an avowal and a disavowal of a wrongdoing. Confession appearing as acknowledgment of responsibility concurrently reduces the responsibility for the act to the individual hiding the historicity of the act and divorcing the wider structures or the state of responsibility, only after to efface the wrongdoing and responsibility attached to it through the act of confession and the narratives of excuse, justification, evasion, and denial.

## NOTES

1. See Foucault’s discussion on the proliferation of discourses on sexuality along with its repression in the *History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1978: 18, 27).

2. Perpetrators’ confessions start as early as 1990. For example see, “Kontrgerilla’da subaydım,” *Yüzyıl*, 25 November 1990, No: 17. In 1992, a major and a sergeant in the military made confessions to the *2000’e Doğru* magazine confessing violence against Kurdish civilians. See ‘Operasyona katılan yüzbaşı anlatıyor: “Devletin Newroz Provokasyonu,” *2000’e Doğru*,

17 May 1992, No. 20, p. 18–19 and ‘Hilal Belediye Başkanı’nın ölümünde yeni gelişme: “Yakup Kara Cinayeti Tabur’da planlandı,” 24 May 1992, 2000’e Doğru, No. 21, p. 14–15.

3. I use the notion of disavowal to refer to the simultaneous processes of denial and acknowledgment in confessions. I mostly draw upon Stanley Cohen’s definition of denial which includes both conscious and unconscious processes of denial.

4. Forced televised confessions are common in both Iran and China. For a study on forced confessions in Iran see Abrahamian (1999) and for China see Amnesty International (2015).

5. According to its dictionary definition, a confession could mean a formal statement admitting that one is guilty of a crime; an acknowledgment that one has done something about which one is ashamed or embarrassed; a formal admission of one’s sins with repentance and desire of absolution, especially privately to a priest as a religious duty; and intimate personal revelations, depending on its context. The term “confession” is also used in the sense of confession of faith, that is, a statement setting out essential religious doctrine. See *Confession* entry in Oxford Dictionaries: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/confession>.

6. See Human Rights Watch (2012), Time for Justice: Ending Impunity for Killings and Disappearances in the 1990s Turkey, retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/09/03/time-justice/ending-impunity-killings-and-disappearances-1990s-turkey>.

7. Hizbullah is an Islamist paramilitary organization in Turkey which committed many abductions, torture and murder cases, and executions in the Kurdish region against left-wing and Kurdish activists. See Göral et al. (2013).

8. In March 1987, there were reportedly 6,000 village guards; by 1994 that figure had jumped to around 45,000 (HRW, 1994: 27).

9. See Alp kaya et al. (2013) Enforced Disappearances and the Conduct of the Judiciary, Truth Justice Memory Center available at <http://hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/kaynak/enforced-disappearances-and-the-conduct-of-the-judiciary/> [retrieved on 10 April 2018]; Also see Human Rights Watch, 2012.

10. “Kontrgerilla’da subaydım,” *Yeni Yüzyıl*, 25 November 1990.

11. For studies on the “deep state” in Turkey in the context of Susurluk and Ergenekon trials, see Park (2008) and Ünver (2009).

12. See Yalçın, 2008 p. 34 for the news titled “Jitem’de görevli astsubay açıklıyor: uyuşturucu kaçakçılığı yapan subaylar,” 2000’e Doğru, 21 June 1992.

13. The only time he was not employed in the Kurdish region was when an investigation was opened against him for opening fire to a group of people protesting him. He was appointed to another city tasked with investigation of drug trafficking.

14. “Ergenekon’da yeni iddialar yeni gözaltılar,” *Cumhuriyet*, 15 August 2008.

15. Ergenekon Indictment: Republic of Turkey, Istanbul Office of the Chief Public Prosecutor, Investigation no: 2007/1536, Case no:2008/968, Indictment no:2008/623, retrieved from: [https://tr.wikisource.org/wiki/2.\\_Ergenekon\\_%C4%B0ddianamesi/V.\\_B%C3%96L%C3%9CM\\_%C5%9E%C3%9CPHEL%C4%B0LER%C4%B0N\\_B%C4%B0REYSEL\\_DURUMLARI\\_35-%C5%9E%C3%BCpheli\\_Arif\\_Do%C4%9Fan](https://tr.wikisource.org/wiki/2._Ergenekon_%C4%B0ddianamesi/V._B%C3%96L%C3%9CM_%C5%9E%C3%9CPHEL%C4%B0LER%C4%B0N_B%C4%B0REYSEL_DURUMLARI_35-%C5%9E%C3%BCpheli_Arif_Do%C4%9Fan).

16. Also see “Arif Doğan: JİTEM’in 10 bin elemanı var,” *Cumhuriyet*, 15 November 2013.

17. *G ö t* means ass in Turkish and GÖTEM is a pejorative reference Doğan uses to separate the JİTEM he established from the JİTEM associated with the atrocities.

18. During the war with the PKK, Yeşil has been active in JİTEM in Tunceli, Bingöl, Elazığ, Malatya, Muş (Kılıç, 2009: 123). There have been numerous complaints to the Parliamentary Human Rights Commission about the atrocities he has committed against civilians. Following the increase in complaints, the Commission formed a sub-commission to investigate the allegations of human rights violations by Yeşil. As a result of a fact-finding mission on April 14–15, 1991, the sub-commission concluded that Yeşil was used as an informant by the gendarmerie but following the complaints about him, he was dismissed on April 25, 1991 (Yalçın, 2008: 169–170).

19. Aydın was unofficially detained on July 5, 1991, and his tortured body was found on 7 July 1991. Following his killing, there has been a considerable increase in forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and bombings in Kurdish towns. Tens of thousands of people attended Aydın’s funeral during which the security officers opened fire to the crowds killing seven people and injuring hundreds.

20. One such example is the confessions of Lieutenant General Altay Tokat, a retired commander who became the central executive council member of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP). In an interview with *Yeni Aktüel* in 2006, Tokat said, "In my time, I also had them throw a few bombs to some critical points. These were empty places. My aim was to give a message. Civil servants, judges that come from the West [of Turkey] don't understand the seriousness of the situation . . . when things became calmer, they started to take this business not seriously . . . Thus, I had [bombs] thrown at two places close to their houses. After that they understood that they needed to be careful. One [act of] disaster is better than a thousand words of advice. This way I educated them." See *Yeni Aktüel*, 27 July 2006. Also see "Jurists Demand Inquiry for General Tokat," *Bianet*, 31 July 2006, retrieved from <https://bianet.org/english/print/83036-jurists-demand-inquiry-for-general-tokat>.

21. Military funeral can be held only for colonels and officials with higher ranks. CHP MP Sezgin Tanrikulu submitted a written question to the National Defence Minister İsmet Yılmaz questioning the military funeral organised for Doğan despite the prison sentence he received as part of the Ergenekon trial and gravity of the allegations against him. The written question can be found at the following link: <http://www2.tbmm.gov.tr/d24/7/7-54502s.pdf>.

22. "Tevil yoluyla ikrar" is used to refer to implicit or indirect confessions in Turkish criminal legislation.

23. The other PKK repentants who made confessions include İbrahim Babat, who sent a letter to the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission on Susurluk in 1996; Kahraman Bilgiç, who made confessions to prosecutors and wrote his confessional memoir while in prison in 1997; Murat Demir and Murat İpek, who made confessions to the media after the Susurluk scandal in 1997.

24. Perihan Mağden, "Adaletin Bu mu TC?," *Radikal*, 10 March 2004; Can Dündar, "Fazla Fişiniz Var mı?," *Milliyet*, 13 March 2004; "Jitem itirafçısının anlattıklarına böyle durup bakacak mıyız?," *Yeni Şafak*, 16 March 2004; "Jitem'i belgeleyen bordrolar," *Evrinsel*, 27 April 2004; Yıldız Polat, "Jitem'cinin itirafları incelemeye alınmalıdır," *Evrinsel*, 10 May 2004; Mehmet Altan, "Çiğlik," *Gazetemnet*, 15 March 2004.

25. While it was published on the front page in *Radikal* with the title of "Acı bir Susurluk Öyküsü," the other three newspapers covered it as a short article. "On yıl önce kaçırılan oğlunun kemiklerini buldu," *Hürriyet*, 3 February 2005; Özgür Cebe, "Jitem'e infaz suçlaması," *Milliyet*, 3 February 2005; Mithat Nebi, "Jitem'ciden tüyler ürperten itiraflar," *Zaman*, 5 February 2005, <http://www.zorlakaybetmeler.org/download.php?id=HAH/doc/564>.

26. An ECHR case (Osmanoğlu and Turkey, Application no. 48804/99) reveals the government's reasoning for the initial lack of judicial response to Aygan's confessions as "the allegations had been abstract and unsubstantiated." This was despite the concrete details Aygan gave in relation to the killing and the location of the body. Besides as the ECHR stated that "a decision not to carry out an investigation into those allegations on the ground that they were "unsubstantiated" reveals an illogical decision-making process, as allegations cannot be found to be unsubstantiated unless they are investigated first." Please see [caselaw.echr.globe24h.com/0/0/turkey/2008/01/24/case-of-osmanoğlu-v-turkey-84667-48804-99.shtml](http://caselaw.echr.globe24h.com/0/0/turkey/2008/01/24/case-of-osmanoğlu-v-turkey-84667-48804-99.shtml).

27. ECHR, Case of Celikbilek and Turkey, Application no. 27693/95, May 31, 2005.

28. "JİTEM itirafçısı Abdülkadir Aygan anlatıyor," Pazartesi Konuşmaları, Neşe Düzal, 29.01.2009.

29. "Gerçekler bilinsin yeter: Üç ayrı kimliğiyle Abdülkadir Aygan'ın ya da Türkiye'nin karanlık 22 yılının portresi," Hakan Akçura, Stockholm, June 2008.

30. Ibid.

31. Abdülkadir Aygan: "Yeşil, Musa Anter'i öldürmeyecek, Sakık'lar gibi ajan yapacaktı," Dilek Yaraş, Haber Ajanda, November 2012, retrieved from <http://cdn.haberajanda.com.tr/contents/files/dergiler/Kasim2012/files/assets/basic-html/page1.html>.

32. "JİTEM itirafçısı Abdülkadir Aygan anlatıyor," Pazartesi Konuşmaları, Neşe Düzal, 29.01.2009.

33. Ibid.

34. In my analysis, I benefit from the techniques of neutralization developed by Sykes and Matza (1957), which was then applied to state crimes by Stanley Cohen (2001). I discussed the

different neutralization techniques JİTEM perpetrators employed in their confessional narratives to reconstruct their acts and subjectivities.

35. “Gerçekler bilinsin yeter: Üç ayrı kimliğiyle Abdülkadir Aygan’ın ya da Türkiye’nin karanlık 22 yılının portresi,” Hakan Akçura, Stockholm, June 2008, retrieved from <http://openflux.blogspot.com/2008/06/gerekler-bilinsin-yeter-ayr-kimliyle.html>.

36. For similar examples of sensationalist media coverage of perpetrators’ confessions, see Payne, 2008, Lazzara, 2016 and Bird and Garda (1997).

37. “Abdülkadir Aygan: ‘Yeşil, Musa Anter’i öldürmeyecek, Sakık’lar gibi ajan yapacaktı,” Dilek Yaraş, Haber Ajanda, November 2012, retrieved from <http://cdn.haberajanda.com.tr/contents/files/dergiler/Kasim2012/files/assets/basic-html/page1.html>.

38. “Babam, kellesini aldıklarının arasında mı?,” Tanju Özkaya, 7 February 2011, retrieved from <http://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/704617-babam-kellesini-aldiklarinin-arasinda-mi>.

39. “JİTEM itirafçısı Abdülkadir Aygan anlatıyor,” Pazartesi Konuşmaları, Neşe Düzel, 29 January 2009.

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*Part III*

**Space**



## *Chapter Five*

# **Accumulation by Dispossession as a Common Point in Urbanization Politics in Diyarbakir**

Suna Yılmaz

### ABOUT THE METHODOLOGICAL RESORTS OF THE STUDY

Throughout my PhD study that began in 2010, as an individual involved in social movement while generating scientific knowledge, I was mainly intending to offer contributions in this specific area. When choosing the topic and area of study, I wanted to make a contribution to the social struggle by the production of scientific knowledge. For this reason, Diyarbakir became the center of my area of study, both because of my living experience and because of it being a symbol of Kurdish political movement, which is in turn the most significant social movement of Turkey. Studies on Kurdish political movement and Diyarbakir are generally focused on political history. While browsing the literature, two poles came to my attention. Kurdish political movement is evaluated either over capitalism and the concept of ethnicity is being left out or political history is examined over ethnicity/identities and Kurdish political movement and geography is designated as an area exempt from capitalism.<sup>1</sup> This is disrupting for the production of social and scientific knowledge and hinders one's capacity to get an integral view on the area. For this reason, throughout my doctorate study, I endeavored to address these two concepts and the Kurdish geography from a historical perspective and as the subjects of a complex network of interrelations that do not exclude one another. Moreover, in addition to political historiography, although there are numerous studies focused on Kurdish women's movement, there is a limited number of studies within urban/urbanization studies adopting a critical ap-

proach to the local government experience of Kurdish political movement and covering a longer period of time.

One of the main questions in my thesis is what kind of policies are put into practice regarding Diyarbakir, the city where the heart of the Kurdish political movement beats, where an alternative discourse against capitalism has been developed, and where the movement built its political line. The route of my main questions in my thesis could be identified as follows. Is accumulation by dispossession functional only in the development phase of capitalism or is it the vital condition for its existence? What kind of opportunities does accumulation by dispossession provide in the formation of the modern nation state as the ideal state for capitalism regarding ethnic politics? In geographies where different ethnic and religious groups remain together, what kind of experiences do ethnic politics reveal regarding war<sup>2</sup> notion in term of the formation of the capitalist modern nation state and its continuity? In line with the capitalism-modern nation state-ethnic politics and war link, my last question is how urban politics are formed and implemented in terms of both the Turkish state and Kurdish political movement.

In addition to all of these intentions, there were challenges studying this area: First of all, in Turkey, carrying out studies in such areas is not academically well-received in general. Secondly, it requires accepting exclusion in an environment where the political agenda changes continuously. Thirdly, in a geography marked by the conditions of war, on the one hand, it was difficult to exist as a researcher and on the other hand, the existing concepts/theories/techniques in our tool box had an obvious incompatibility with the area. Under these circumstances, conducting the entire study from a critical perspective brought along numerous problems. In addition to all these challenges, the necessity to direct the critical approach to the researcher made the situation more complicated. At this point, Bourdieu, both as a researcher and an activist, came to rescue.

Pierre Bourdieu's quote "the concepts are born out of struggle and they should return to it" is significant in the way that it abates the tension above (Gülsoy 2014, 103). Reflecting on the ontology of the research, especially in a geography dominated by war, is possible by questioning the dead-ends in the hegemonic urban studies area. Bourdieu's Algerian experience and the transformative influence of this experience on him resulted in the emergence of the concept of "reflexivity."<sup>3</sup> This concept is decisive in the way that it clarifies the debate on the positionality of the researcher. Making a research about Diyarbakir prompts the researchers to reflect on the ontological entrapment as well as on themselves. Two elements are constitutive of such reflections: Firstly, the war that dominates the geographies that are incompatible with the nation state construct creates the effect of rabbit in the headlights about the area that is excluded by the hegemonic discourses in social sciences. Secondly, similar to Bourdieu's Algerian experience, it offers oppor-

tunities for finding and trying what is new to the research formulation. And lastly, it increases our options for the formation of opportunities for establishing a new politics of truth.

The research I carried out in Diyarbakir between the years of 2013 and 2016 sometimes made me look frightfully through these doors as well as leading me audaciously into these doors as “a militant researcher” with reference to Bourdieu (Ökten 2002, 96). Endeavoring to get into contact with all constituents of Kurdish political movement and especially rushing from pillar to post in the area was one of the assertions of the research. However, the escalation of the war and its expansion toward other cities necessitated a withdrawal from the area, both for the positionality of the researcher and for professional ethics. However, this new situation became the means for the inclusion of various resources into the research area.<sup>4</sup> The dynamism of the area and the relationality between the researcher and the area has been very effective in transforming the research and the researcher. This research was initially claiming to include the phenomenon of war in the construction of discourse about the Kurdish region, criticizing the exclusion war from the social sciences literature and later on it was indeed a testimony to the hot war. Therefore, as war makes most words meaningless, this study was a product of an effort that adopted the approach that the concepts should eventually turn into struggle.

When the limitations of the article—as subject, scope, and page count—and the points mentioned above are taken into account, accumulation by dispossession notion will be at the center of the theoretical framework. I will examine the trajectory of the ethnicity politics on the basis of the accumulation by dispossession notion acting jointly with the war notion at the formation phase of the modern nation state that is the ideal form of capitalism. I will analyze how this route occurred and was experienced in Diyarbakir by arguing urbanization/urban literature in this big picture specifically. In my thesis, in order to address the urbanization policies of the Kurdish political movement historically, I tried to analyze the accumulation by dispossession path in Kurdish geography by underlining the breaking points of the Ottoman Empire-Turkish Republic.

#### DISCUSSING THE CONCEPTS OF CAPITALISM AND ETHNICITY OVER URBANIZATION POLICIES

Relationally, reflecting on the concepts of capitalism, ethnicity, and urbanization altogether in a region that has been dominated by war for centuries entails a critical perspective on the literature of social sciences. It would also turn out to be quite problematic to consider the urbanization experience of Kurdish region merely from the perspective of the ethnicity policies of the

Republic of Turkey or the policies of capitalist accumulation. The building of cities by starting it all over again throughout the early republican period as an indicative of the struggle for founding a new state and a new nation is an important source of reference for reflecting on these three concepts together. The clustering of the general inspectorship inherited from the Ottoman era, especially in the Kurdish region, is an example to this. Similarly, the formation of policies envisaging the continuity of nation-building within the scope of the post-1950 development plans and the upgrading of each of the following five-year development plans over this perspective resulted in a distinctive experience of urbanization in the region. The founding of the nation-state, which is the ideal of capitalism and its ever-lasting construction, brought about a “conditional capitalist modernization for Kurdish region.” Being a Turk and speaking Turkish became the prerequisite for having a share of the modernization policies and therefore it also became the code for the century-long destiny of this region.

One of the main assertions of this study is the fact that, considered from the viewpoint of Kurdish region, conditions for the construction of capitalism and capitalism sustaining itself depends on the facilitating mission of ethnicity policies in establishing a justification ground. From this perspective, it is necessary to reflect on the concepts that seem to be in opposite directions altogether and also to examine the conflict in the region. The key concept for this study is the concept, which was initially defined by Marx as “primitive accumulation” termed by Harvey in 1970s as “accumulation by seizure” or later on, again by Harvey, as “accumulation by dispossession.”

Marx identifies the concept of “primitive accumulation”<sup>5</sup> as the “original sin,” during the formation of the preconditions for the transition from feudalism into capitalism (2007, 1:677). The promise that capitalism, “once it is established” can be deleted from the memories became a ground for justification for the violence and oppression practiced in this period. The deprivation of the producer from the means of production and their proletarianization and the seizure of social livelihoods and their transformation into capital is the prerequisite for capitalism. Marx asserts that this is primitively observable as the capital and its peculiar way of production corresponds to the prehistorical era (*ibid.*, 679). Here, the destination is projected to be the capitalist system where privatization of the common areas results in the burning down of villages, homes and the crops on fields and the extermination of those who resist. The fact that there was no penal compensation for these results in their consideration as “one-time-only” practices specific to the prehistorical era (*ibid.*, 694). In this process of primitive accumulation, Marx underlines that violence was an element of this process and was implemented by the state in a planned manner and consequently, compulsion itself became an economic power (*ibid.*, 716). This economic power corresponds not only to the form of production but also to the construction of a new society.

The critique that Luxemburg developed toward Marx's thought about the organization of the capitalist system suggests that this process is not unique to one time, and that pre-historic practices such as compulsion are the capitalist conditions of existence (1984, 36). It explains the fact that capitalist accumulation depends on means of production that were not established through capitalist methods with slave labor (*ibid.*, 36). Luxemburg argues that capitalism exists not only in the creation of a market but also in non-capitalist methods, both during periods of crisis and during periods of full maturity (*ibid.*, 45).

The debate on primitive accumulation and capitalism driven by the theorists of the School of Modernization and the School of Dependence was brought to the agenda of the 1970s, particularly with the leadership of David Harvey by turning their eyes to their own countries as a solution to the crisis experienced by the early capitalist countries. It is now the territory of the Western capitalist countries itself that is clearly the target of the capitalist strategy of expansionism and seizure by dispossession. Harvey<sup>6</sup> (2010) asks the following question: "Since the first accumulation in capitalism and then into maturation, have these savage processes become insignificant and have they lost their importance for the functioning of capitalism?" He utters the question during the reconstruction of capitalism, in the face of the transformation into a system that facilitated the accumulation of capital by the capitalists through flexible production, the privatization of public property, the opening of the urban space once again for the use of capital with the use of urban transformation. Focusing both on the capital and on the role of the state in this period, Harvey creates a more comprehensive framework of analysis over Marx's writings on the subject of primitive accumulation.

He argues that in theft, plundering, violence and compulsion, which lie in the historical origins of capitalism, and in the abuse of power, the state is a significant means and that the state plays its primary role by making regulations to facilitate the process of capital accumulation for bourgeoisie (*ibid.*). He expresses that this process is inherent to capitalism and in today's capitalist dynamics, the primitive accumulation process is alive and continuing and the existence of the system also depends on this (*ibid.*, 325).

The most important contribution of Harvey to the debate on the functioning of capitalism is that this process necessarily entails spatial regulation and geographical expansion (2008, 40; 2012, 292). He underlines that in this spatial regulation and geographical expansion issue, the way the social structure is formed should also be examined and the mediatory influence of the political, ideological, military and other structures, which need to be regulated to become compatible with the path of capitalist accumulation but which are not alone determined by it, must also be considered (Harvey 2008, 52). Accumulation by dispossession is a primary method, but the founding of the new capitalist nation-state and society also necessitates the combining of

other structures. He stresses that the projection of a single nation, which legitimizes that the state is founded on a single land, the concentration of property, and the political rise of the bourgeois class with the concepts of national interests, territories, and so on. is the ideal of capitalism (Harvey 2004).

In a geographical region like Diyarbakir, where Armenians, Kurds, Nestorians, Turks, Assyrians, Caucasians, and many other peoples live together, the establishment of capitalist modern nation-state contains all of the violent practices of accumulation by dispossession whereas the politics of assimilation are also implemented in parallel to that. Therefore, although such policies as exile, annihilation, seizure of property, and compulsory Turkish speaking are part of accumulation by dispossession process, these practices are not confined to a single period. Fuat Dündar, who analyses the last period of the Ottoman State and the foundation of the Republic of Turkey conceptualizes all of these policies generally as “ethnicity engineering.” This process, supported by the ideology of nationalism and supported by statistics, provides for the application of engineering studies to society for the construction of a homogeneous, unified structure. He expresses that all of these policies, from settlement policies to the policies in the areas of education, health, and so on. that make assimilation possible, are implemented with engineering calculations. Therefore, at a time when these policies are underway, the state in the process of primitive accumulation becomes free to use violence and this process is legitimized by various ideological discourses.

Another point in Harvey’s discussion of primitive accumulation is that primitive accumulation cannot be accounted for by the expansionist logic of capitalism alone. As we have already mentioned in the above paragraph, capitalism can create new fields for accumulation through other means within its borders besides expanding. Through urban transformation policies, privatizations, and so on, in a sense, he tries to focus on how the historical geography of capitalism is shaped (Harvey 2004).

The historical geography of capitalism, is actualized, in a way, through the establishment of nationalist ideology and the modern state, which make the nation state, its ideal, possible. Foucault<sup>7</sup> states that the ability of the nation to exist with the ability to form a state on a land is the most important characteristic of modern times (2002, 231). Contributing to Foucault’s thought, Geller (2008) states that a nation state can be established as a result of “political unit and national unit overlap.” If the nation-state, which is the ideal of capitalism, in a geographical region where different peoples live together, is realized through the nationalization of a single people and the nationalization of this nation, the destiny of other peoples will not be an option other than war. For the power, war becomes the premise for primitive accumulation for overcoming a crisis, whereas it also becomes a means of justification during the re-establishment of power. With the genocide, massa-



cre, exile, forced settlement, and assimilation policies being part of the conditions of “war,” how is urbanization experienced in the same region, under the conditions put forth above? After quite a long discussion of being able to reflect on capitalism and ethnicity together, adding urbanization into it will require giving an ear to Lefebvre. Although cities are the subjects of capitalist accumulation, they also stand out in the way that they are also markers of the nation state. Lefebvre asserts that urban planning is ideological and shares Foucault’s idea that the state regulates the urban space and thus controls the population. Therefore, capitalism tries to overcome its political and accumulation crises by “settling into the space and producing the space” (Lefebvre 2014). The space has a double meaning here: the place of the establishment of the nation state and the guarantor of the capitalist system.

When we think of Harvey and Lefebvre together, the chief actor of the investment for the city is the capitalist system, while its deputy is the planner. Lefebvre refers to the power of the state and political power on urban space, underlining that planning is ideological (Kurtuluş 2010, 187). It designs the abstract space through planning and produces the concrete space at the point of application. The transformation in tangible space also leads to the shaping of social relations. Therefore, the conflict between tangible space and abstract space forms the center of social transformation (*ibid.*, 188). Lefebvre briefly summarizes the basic rationale of the work (2014, 87), as follows: “changing the life, changing the society, that does not mean anything unless suitable space is produced” (2014, 87).

#### URBANIZATION POLICIES OF KURDISH POLITICAL MOVEMENT IN DIYARBAKIR AND ACCUMULATION BY DISPOSSESSION

Based on the archaeological data and the period up to the foundation of the republic, the experience of urbanization in Diyarbakir is shaped by its being an intersection of trade routes and a settlement area close to boundaries. These two facts make the city one of the important centers of many civilizations, also making it a place where historically war is not missing. The phenomenon of war causes a constant change in the ruling powers and also results in the city being reshaped again and again by reconstruction activities, in the way that is the symbol of the power of each power-holder.

The sixteenth-century marks significant turning points about the history of Kurds and especially of Diyarbakir. Before Çaldıran War of 1514, a deal between Kurds and the Ottoman Sultan Yavuz Selim officializes their status in the region (Jwaideh 2009, 33–34). Another reason why it is a turning point is that the region was divided into two practical sub-regions between İnan and Ottoman Empire until the Kasr-ı Şirin Pact of 1639, and that the war became

perpetual after the pact, because Diyarbakir became a border city. The Kurdish Sheikh İdris was convinced to fight against the Shah of Iran because of his political, financial and denominational interests and entered the war on the side of the Ottoman State. Thus, the political and economic order of Kurds was relatively secured in the region (Burkay 1992, 173–75; Zeki 1992, 83). The position of Kurds and Armenians, which were two of the most populous peoples of the region, was also ascertained with this deal. The Ottoman State intended to make Kurds take the control of Christian Armenians, Nestorians, and Jews and make the Kurdish emirates controllable through this deal (Kevorkian 2013, 53; Nikitin 1976, 1:140).

Aside from the political position of the region, especially Diyarbakir is the center of trade (land and river) as well as being the centre of craftsmanship, agriculture and animal breeding. The urban structure in Diyarbakir is no different in terms of the urban functions in the eighteenth-century than the preceding centuries. (Aydiner 2006, 125–26).

In the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire, while the capitalism winds blow, Diyarbakir takes its share. It is the main aim of the reforms (Tanzimat) to attract the influence of European capitalism to a controllable level and to centralize the empire within the framework of the nation-state model without being dispersed in these conditions. The intention to centralize the state brought along the removal of the yurts and country estates in 1819 and the shift into provincial order from the state court system in 1863, the forced settlement of tribes, the imperial edict of Gülhane in 1839, the Land Code of 1858, the establishment of Hamidiye Regiments in 1890, the Armenian massacres of 1894–1895 and Armenian Genocide of 1915. Additionally, the geographical discoveries and the shift in the trade routes also literally disturbed the historical balance of the region.

Starting from 1890, the engineering for the ethnic structure continued in Diyarbakir after the declaration of the republic. In the Kurdish region, while the transfer and settlement policies within the scope of ethnic engineering continued, massacres were taking place against the Kurdish riots. The Armenians were replaced by Kurds and the cities became the construction sites of modern nation-state both spatially and socio-culturally. Ankara is the symbol of the newly founded nation state whereas Diyarbakir is designated as the city where the inheritance of history is ignored and the power and potency of Turkishness and the state is to be put into practice.

Until the 1950, Diyarbakir, as the center of one of the general inspectorates, also experienced war marked by the discourse of “security.” The property of Armenians was seized by the state and was made the resource for the formation of Turkish bourgeoisie and the buildings that belonged to Armenians (houses, churches etc.) were also transformed according to the public building needs of the new nation-state (Çağlayan 2014, 125). The partnership with Kurds during the Ottoman period over religion resulted in their identifi-

cation as a threatening element in terms of security during the establishment of the new nation-state. Within the scope of the policies of seizure of property and transfer and settlement, the mobilization of the population and the formulation of the city according to the new nation-state marked the period. The urbanization policies of the early republican period were also given shape according to the military requirements due to the conditions of war and the construction of the modern city.

Between 1930 and 1935, the legislative order brought the obligation to plan cities of a certain size, and in this direction, industrial buildings, educational buildings, health facilities, railway stations, post office buildings, and social dwellings in Diyarbakir are primarily aimed at transforming the city from the first hand (Dalkılıç and Halifeoğlu 2011, 74). In addition, considering the large number of military and administrative personnel, the existence of the corps and inspectorate centers and the construction of administrative and military buildings in line with the needs of military and administrative personnel are also included in the urbanization policies (S. Öztürk 2012, 20).

Yenişehir, which emerged with new administrative buildings, public buildings, and residences around it, becomes a symbol of the republic in Diyarbakir. In the 1930s, the administration was in the Inner Castle before the administration moved to Yenişehir. In 1930, it was decided for the walls to be taken down in order to provide air flow to the city and to allow for the development of the city outside the city walls. However, the idea arose much opposition and was abandoned (Dalkılıç and Halifeoğlu 2011, 75). Yenişehir was a construction site until the 1950s. In the historical city center, roads are widened, houses around historical buildings were demolished, modern houses were built and new gates were open on castle walls (Kejanlı and Dinçer 2011, 100). While the physical structure of the city was regulated by the modern nation-city fusion, the social structure was also shaped according to this new situation. First, languages other than Turkish were banned, and those who spoke were imposed fines. Those who didn't speak Turkish were forbidden to be merchants, fabricators, officers, doctors, midwives, or lawyers (Çağaptay 2003, 169, Yardımcı and Aslan 2008, 144). Therefore, in the early republican period, literally a "conditional capitalist modernization" can be asserted to have taken place.

Between the years of 1950 and 1980, for the Kurdish region and especially for Diyarbakir, urbanization policies were implemented through development plans. In short, although the plan envisaged during the early republican period was attempted to be implemented, due to unforeseen situations (such as squatting), the policies of urbanization began to focus on finding solutions for urban problems, rather than creating a city from the start. In the city, which is attempted to be made a symbol of nation-state, factories were opened in accordance with the industrial plans and heavy migration from rural to urban areas further complicated urban problems. Additionally, ac-

ording to the development plans, grants offered over the property regime caused increase in rural poverty and became another factor that maintained migration. The social actors in the region, especially the tribal chiefs and the landlords were no longer a problem for the modern nation-state and became active actors of the political structure. The new conditions after 1950s cause a whole new difference on the social and economic structure in the city.

In the period after 1970, the left-wing wave in the local governments in Turkey also influenced Diyarbakir. Mehdi Zana was elected mayor in the elections of 1978, and until the military coup of 1980, he was known as “the pro-Kurdish communist mayor.” The idea of “being left backward intentionally” that became explicit with Zana continued until our day and constituted the backbone of the urban services. Instead of policies specially designated for urbanization, activities responding to the general political conditions stood out whereas urban services against the idea of “being left backward intentionally” were created. Thus, larger-scale projects for making a change in the system of Turkey dominated the perspective of Mehdi Zana and the political movement in the city, whereas the urban services generally focused on the scope of technical works, which was a reaction against being left backward.

The main dynamics of urbanization in Diyarbakir in the post-1980 period were determined by the GAP (Southeastern Anatolian Project), forced settlement of the nomadic tribes, the war and the forced migration caused by the war. These four phenomena developed in the region according to the post-1970s capitalist strategy of overcoming its global crisis. It can be observed that the strategy of accumulation by dispossession of capitalism is not temporary or “momentary,” by looking into the policies implemented in the region in the period after 1980s. Dispossession through expropriation marked the period extensively whereas the modernization of the social structure was aimed through GAP. The tribal chiefs and landlords were exempt from the process of land expropriation whereas class solidarity was being formed in the region through grants. Two hundred thousand people were forced to migrate because of the hydroelectricity plant projects. GAP, which was aiming at clearing out regional inequalities created new and multiplied inequalities for the region. The region’s cities were positioned within the scope of the development plans. In this positioning, Diyarbakir is made the target as the “center of attraction.” The “center of attraction” claim also caused forced settlement of the nomadic tribes.

After the 1980s, when the state planned things this way, the conditions of war again became dominant with the establishment of the PKK in 1978. Since 1985, as the village guards were taken into legal protection, the actions of village demolition, incineration, and evacuation increased rapidly after 1990, resulting in an unplanned and mass migration especially from rural to urban areas. Rural properties were often confiscated by the village guards.

We can say that about four million people were forced to migrate throughout this process, with different figures uttered as to the migrating population. TMMOB's statistics are important in terms of clarifying the volume of forced migration to Diyarbakir, which was both a station and a destination. In the survey conducted by TMMOB in 1996, the population of the city center was found to be 381,144 in 1990, whereas it was 822,837 in 1996 (1996, 63). The housing problem caused an increase in the number of squatters in the city; for example, the population of Sur had been 45,000 in 1945; whereas it reached 109,000 in 1990s. As the buildings in Sur were demolished and multi-story buildings were built, structures described as "apartment squats" emerged in Bağlar (Arslan 1999, 100). In the city, in addition to the problem of housing, the forced Kurdish immigration caused problems of health and education, as well as multiplied problem of poverty.

#### URBANIZATION POLICIES OF KURDISH POLITICAL MOVEMENT AFTER 1999 AND ACCUMULATION BY DISPOSSESSION

Between 1999 and 2016, a few important points will be highlighted in this section on the urbanization policies of the Kurdish political movement in Diyarbakir: The first one is the persistence of an approach of "our boys"<sup>8</sup> despite its decline; the second one is the centrality of the idea of "being left backward deliberately" in both urban and general policy formation; the third is the efforts of Kurdish politicians for proving themselves against being left backward and the focus on physical urban structure in the policies. In the post-1980 period, especially in Diyarbakir, the capitalist policies developed by the state in the "development" rhetoric were also adopted by Kurdish political movement on the local level. This meant that the movement also shared with the state some views on the implementation of policies, which enabled the instrumentalization of the concept of "modernization in haste."<sup>9</sup> The fourth is the reflection of PKK's change of paradigm on the general and local policy making and the last one is the war being one of the most fundamental phenomena, despite short-term ceasefires.

By 2000s, the population of Diyarbakir reached 1,362,708, of which 60 percent lived in urban areas and 40 percent in rural areas (Turkish Statistical Institution 2002, 25). Poverty was one of the most fundamental problems of people who were subjected to compulsory mobility in the city with the forced Kurdish migration in the 1990s. Besides this, the problem of housing became one of the chronic problems despite the twenty years that had passed and some of the solutions such as slums, barracks, and apartment squatters had been produced. In addition to these problems, urban problems made life even more unbearable: In a city where sewage water flowed on the streets because

of deficient infrastructure, shortage of clean drinking water and power cuts became a daily routine, Kurdish political movement, which won the local elections was faced especially with the obligation of meeting the demands of people who arrived at the city as part of the forced Kurdish migration and constituted its electoral base. In terms of urban services, Feridun Çelik was in charge of a challenging process after taking over a city that was in ruins. However, the one-sided ceasefire made this endeavor more likely to succeed. Even if these appear to be a period of infancy, the nature of the intercourse with capitalism did not change. The discourse of “being left backward deliberately” and the “capitalist modernization being spared from the region” was partially powered by the theories of colonialism and entailed a positive approach toward the intercourse with capitalism. From 1999 onward, the discourse of “modernization and development” clearly shows that an alternative development and modernization approach to capitalist relations could not be developed, even if it was the basic policy. Whereas the state clearly identified its targets in the region and Diyarbakir in line with GAP and national development plans, the question of the class stance of Kurdish political movement in a period when capitalist production intercourses are to be deepened is significant in the way that it puts forth the main resource of the urban policies that are central to this study. The question of who and which class will benefit from the policies that emerge within the scope of the development discourse is one of the central questions of the class debate that is tried to be hidden. Hence, capitalism and its chief actor, as Lefebvre said, the state as “establishing itself in space and producing space” (Gottdiener 2001, 253) is more clearly seen after 2000, and it is of utmost importance to analyze where the Kurdish political movement is located on this scene.

Together with the crisis of 2001, the fact that the region and especially Diyarbakir were defined as the area of accumulation by dispossession and cheap labor brought along a total invasion with the discourse of “removing the inequality among regions and the development of the region.” Kurdish political movement composed its policies both over the democratic republic idea of PKK and this new discourse of the state.

In all of the four periods, the intercourse with capitalism was positive and/or problematic and at the core, capitalist modernization was taken as the basis. The squatters, shanties and squatter apartments developed for the resolution of the housing problem as a result of the forced migration of Kurds were defined as “unlicensed construction” and for the last four periods of local government, the urbanization model comprising of these buildings is described as “urban sprawl” and it is frequently brought up by the actors of local politics that such unguided urbanization should be cleared from the “occupiers.” Another point is the fact that the relations of capitalist production are accepted in their given form and the local policies were formed on the basis of the property relations on which capitalism was built up. This

situation does no better than putting a plaster on the problems caused by the capitalist nation state.

Important infrastructure works have been realized at the point of producing urban services after 1999. In fact, these developments and infrastructure works correspond to more than 60 percent of the budget of the municipality every electoral period. But we can say that the planning of the urban planning over the property relations led to the formation of a Robin Hoodian approach, which also constitutes an important basis for disguising the intercourse with capitalism. Besides being an architect, Pirinççioğlu is one of the actors of the Kurdish political movement who emphasized that the important thing is to transfer politics toward the poor, and he notes that Diyarbakir Municipality was not successful in doing that (D.C. Öztürk 2013).

Cebbar Leygara exemplifies the subject discussed here with the case of Bağlar: In order to address the issues of population density and housing in Bağlar, settlement plans were prepared in coordination with TMMOB (the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects). On the area that is now called Yeni (New) Bağlar, roads were opened, infrastructure was offered, and the area became a new settlement with the occupancy permits. Leygara explains that this was the right step for three reasons: The first reason was the urgency created by the population density and the need for housing in Bağlar; the second was the fact that the city is developing and therefore urban land production is compulsory, and finally, the municipal budget was made with the taxation of the “wealthy” in this new settlement area and that these taxes are to be returned to the poor as services (D. C. Öztürk 2013, 303) The following mayor, Yurdusev Özökmenler, regarding the fact that the municipality collects taxes in order to compose budgets for services and that this was problematic in Bağlar, said the following: “The primary source of income of municipalities is the real estate tax. Nevertheless, as most of the buildings in Bağlar are illegal, we fail to collect real estate tax” (Gözke 2004).

The fact that the existence of middle class plays a buffer role for capitalism was also a significant priority for the local Kurdish politicians. Aktan (2010) states that the creation of the middle class is also the basis of urban policies and that professional-status rise is possible through the creation of spatial areas. The mayor of Kayapınar in that period, Mehmet Can Tekin, noted that the shopping center which will be built on the 80,000 m2 municipal land in Kayapınar will cost 30 million dollars, and it will include an artificial pond, open and closed car park for 500 cars, food store of 6,000 m2, a theater hall for 500 people, 200 shops, a bowling hall, four cinemas, and an artificial pond at the entrance (“Giant Shopping Centre for Diyarbakir” 2002). Kayapınar was thus tried to be put on the forefront for four periods of local government as the symbol of modern city inhabited by modern city dwellers. Social housing schemes, meanwhile, were being pushed a few steps

back due to budgetary problems and the social policies in general did not move beyond “aids.”

The period of Osman Baydemir (2004–2014) is important for us to observe because the accumulation by dispossession works clearly and obviously over the urban space. As the state implemented its policies regarding the region and Diyarbakir one after the other, Kurdish political movement preferred to become a stakeholder in the implementation of these plans. In the year 2002, a new regional classification was made and both social and economic policies were developed for the removal of “regional inequalities.” Within the scope of the incentive laws in 2004, new regulations were made. However, it is remarkable that the first five of the twenty-six regions in Level II had 55.5 percent of share whereas the last five regions—including the six regions where Diyarbakir is positioned—had 4.4 percent of share (State Planning Organization 2013, 119). One of the largest-scale regulations for the transformation and profitability of urban space, the Metropolitan Municipality Law No 5216, was passed in 2004, and Diyarbakir gained metropolitan status. The most important aspect of the new regulation is that the municipality gained the competence and duty to prepare strategic plans and to do master planning. Furthermore, the authorities are also subjected to the Law No. 775 on Squatters. With the establishment of Development Agencies in 2006, and the definition of districts within the municipality in 2008 (Law No. 5747), Sur, Bağlar, Yenişehir and Kayapınar gained the administrative district status. The urban transformation policies that were partially expressed in the eighth and ninth National Development Plans and openly announced in the tenth National Development Plan were sustained by all of the municipalities. Also after the Law No. 6360 was passed in 2012, the municipal borders were made the province borders and thus the service areas of municipalities were expanded. And with most prominent regulation to have central impact on the urbanization policies, the Disaster Law No. 6360 that was passed after the earthquake in Van in 2011, the concept of “risk zone” became the most important weapon in the war.

In the light of all of the above, the practices of Kurdish political movement within the scope of the policies of urbanization during the period of Osman Baydemir can firstly be discussed over the preparation of the master plan. In the year 2004, with a team of experts including Tarık Şengül, the studies were initiated for the master development plan with scale of 1/25,000. It can be asserted that Diyarbakir, which is to become a center of attraction and a city of tourism according to global trends, is imagined as a Diyarbakir that was purified from the urban sprawl and its occupiers’ shanties, barracks, and squatter buildings and the idea of Kayapınar, the symbol of the modern city, with a “planned” urban view, is to be expanded to the entire city. This was solidified with the master plan and continued especially with the Dicle Valley Project. This reveals that planning is a significant way



of concealing the capitalist strategies. In his article in 2010, Şengül explained that planning is constructed through the “property” relations and excludes the poor/property-less and expresses that in Diyarbakir neither the central government nor the local government took any steps in prevention of this.

With the master development plan, the urban transformation practices, named as urban regeneration starting in 2007 in the Lalabey, Alipaşa, and Cevatbey neighborhoods of Sur, the initiation of the older Dicle Valley Project as of 2006 and the Fiskaya Falls that was opened for development within the scope of the project as “public area” and lastly, the development plans for Kırklar Mountain are the significant examples of accumulation by dispossession within the urban sphere. The rediscovery of urban center by capitalism and the dream of becoming the sole owner of profit-making contributed to the dispersion of the inhabitants of the urban center of Diyarbakir, who were the base of the Kurdish political movement which also prevented their mobilization. According to the protocols of 2009, in the neighborhoods of Lalebey, Alipaşa and Cevatpaşa, demolishing started within the scope of the urban regeneration/transformation project. The reason why the project started “seamlessly” was the fact that the poor people living in these areas approved of these urban transformation projects with the confidence given by the idea that the projects are carried on by “our children.” On the area of 30.372 square meters, which was planned to be “cleared” as a whole, “from the Cevatpaşa-Fatihpaşa neighbourhoods, 231 property owners and 63 tenants, from Alipaşa-Lalebey neighbourhoods, 287 property owners and 144 tenants were allocated the houses built by TOKİ (Housing Development Administration of Turkey) houses in Çölgüzeli, through the drawing of lots. Despite this general outlook, there were those who refused the deal and did not leave their houses. In 2012 after confrontations against the demolishing, TOKİ could not complete the demolishing process in the neighborhood and was obliged to halt its project in Sur” (S. Aslan et al. 2016, 8).

In a forum held in Istanbul in 2016, the mukhtars of Sur's Lalebey and Ali Paşa neighborhoods stated that the project was stopped because it did not result in favor of the poor. They emphasized that poor people, who do not have fixed incomes, used to live in these areas, and the money paid for housing did not correspond to the TOKI housing costs, and they could not afford heating, food, and transportation costs and that they sublet their houses for rent, sold them, or the houses were seized by TOKİ. They also expressed that the living in these houses made people unhappy. The interview notes in the study conducted by Arslan et al. clearly summarizes the situation:

Those who first arrived stayed here for a couple of months and then could not pay the costs. Afterwards, the poor started leaving where the better-off started coming instead. Some of them sublet their houses and tried to pay the install-

ments with the rent and went back to their old place but to more peripheral spots. And now, they live there in huts, here and there. And if they don't die, their installments are fully paid. (2016: 12)

This experience is important in revealing once again that the urban transformation projects are implemented without taking into account the urban sociology, based merely on profiting for property. The fact that the dwellers of the area resisted against the expectations, resulted in Sur's being declared as a risk zone in 2012, according to Law No 6306.

Dicle Valley Project is literally a project of dispossession including many phases. It can be said that a two-phase plan was prepared for the city. The first one is the problem-free implementation of the urban transformation/regeneration projects on Sur Protection Strip, and the second one is the development of the fertile agricultural land around and the surrounding areas with the claims of creating "public spaces." The process, which was gradually developed by the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization was ultimately concluded with the seizure of 90 percent of agricultural land.

In the groundbreaking ceremony for the Fiskaya Waterfall project in 2011, Baydemir expressed that it was a historic day and said, "I hope that this will be a new ground for Dicle River. We bring together Diyarbakir, our city, which brings us to a different time in every corner, with Dicle River which gives fertility to the geography of Mesopotamia and the spirit of this civilization" ("Dicle'yi Diyarbakir'la Buluşturacak Fiskaya Şelalesi için Start Verildi" 2011). Karacadağ Development Agency and Diyarbakir Chamber of Commerce and Industry supported the project, which was widely used for saying that it was going to be constructed as a "public space." Twelve projects and especially the Fiskaya Falls Project, which was among the projects developed by the state over the tourism plans for the region, were supported. "During the promotion of Fiskaya Project, it included landscaping regulation project on total area of 12,000 square meters with two lakes with 974 square meters of area, a building and urban terrace. The project was supported by Karacadağ Development Agency with funds worth 858 thousand liras. Hence, Fiskaya Projesi was granted 858 thousand liras of support within the scope of 2010 Tourism Infrastructure Financial Support Program" ("Altı 'Big Chefs' Üstü 'Kent Terası': Tarihi Fiskaya Şelalesi'nin Canına Okundu!" 2014). Azize Aslan (2014), in her article "Yıkılan Big Chef!" ("May You Get Brought Down, Big Chef!"), asserted that the subjects that were previously whispered are now spoken out loud and capitalism began living in Kurdish region with Fiskaya Falls Project, with the help of the municipality and expressed that this is not peculiar to Diyarbakir but was also similarly implemented in other local governments of BDP (Pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party). These tensions expressed by Aslan reflect a minor example of class distinction within the urban space.

In the year 2012, the state and the government, in order to guarantee the projects, declared 187 hectares of area in Sur district as a risk zone. The resolution was then made more flexible as a result of the lawsuits against it. In the year 2013, Dicle Valley was declared as the reserve structure. In 2014, in line with the demand from the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, Diyarbakir Province Soil Protection Commission declared 7,517,732 square meters from the 8,629,499 square meters of area in Hevsel Gardens as “recreational” area by removing its status as an area to be agriculturally protected. The Commission decided that the remaining 1,111,767 square meters of area would remain within the status as an area to be agriculturally protected.” (“Hevsel Bahçeleri Talan Edilecek: Dicle Vadisi Tarım Arazisi Olmaktan Çıkarıldı!” 2014–)Hevsel Gardens to be Plundered: Dicle Valley to Be Left out of Agricultural Scope!”). This process of plundering and seizing, which continued step by step was also guaranteed through legal regulations. Marx expresses that during the primitive accumulation period, where capitalism emerged, bourgeoisie takes itself under guarantee through laws, and it is possible to assert that despite a century afterward, the same practices also took place within the capitalist period. Thus, it could be seen as a point on which capitalism builds itself, rather than a one-time occasion.

Lastly, we can also mention the zoning of Kırklar Mountain for construction. This is an example where a full split between classes took place. Within the scope of the project that was approved in 201, “aside from 200 houses, a shopping mall and 27-storey luxury hotel and 200 million dollars of sales cost and in the recent months (the months before December 2014) an entrepreneur made an application to the Ministry of Culture and tourism for a convention center for 5 thousand people” made the occasion climb on top of the agenda (Demir 2014). Another reason why Kırklar Mountain project drew so much reaction is the fact that “Kırklardağı Tourism” and “Anadolu Aslanı” companies involved in the project were owned by the retired air pilot Colonel Ufuk Eser Subaşı. The story that is known by everyone is as follows: “The Retired Colonel Subaşı, when he was in charge in the army, flew over Kırklar Mountain and dreamed of building a house here” (Sütlaş 2011). Kırklar Mountain, which used to belong to Assyrians and changed owner in 1915, consists of about 251 thousand square meters. The process for its opening for construction took place as follows: “The last owner of the land is the family of Diken. Apart from 20 acres of this land located in the savings of businessman Ramiz Diken, the remaining part was sold to people like Namık Kemal Avşar, retired Colonel Ufuk Eser Subaşı and Fatma Kuyucu. Kuyucu was later involved in the DTK (Democratic Social Congress). One of the investors in the field is Prof. Dr. Doğu Ergil. 20 acres were left to the savings of Ramiz Diken for “hotel construction” (“Profiting and Victimisation in Kırklar Mountain” 2014).

The Kırklar Mountain project is important for two reasons: Firstly, the dream of the retired lieutenant colonel is realized by the BDP municipalities; the second is the housing ownership of the municipal employees there, as discussed extensively. Retired Lieutenant Colonel Subaşı stated that “Abdullah Demirbas has given 43 apartments on request, he has built eight condolence houses, and the municipal government has donated work machines” (Kardaş and Boyraz 2014). One of the employees I saw on the Bağlar municipality stated that they had left the association without knowing the morals after gaining the knowledge of the apartments. The other interviewer I mentioned in the study pointed out that this was a massacre and not only these projects but also the rapid enrichment of the administrators and their families at that time should be investigated. As a result of the discussions, DTK Co-Chair Selma Irmak presented the self-criticism and founded a commission to investigate these allegations. First, the demolishing of this construction project located in the protected area was discussed. Then it was claimed that demolishing would be costly and would victimize the right owners. However, on March 9, 2018, the construction on Kırklar Mountain was demolished despite many resolutions for halting.

The mayorship period of Osman Baydemir was spent partially under the shadow of the war, although it was also a period when hopes were rising for peace. However, the resolution process that started in 2013 experienced failures in 2014. The war that broke out in Syria in 2011 started to become influential on a broader area. In the local elections of March 30, 2014, the BDP became the first party with its ratio of 55.1 percent, and Gültan Kışanak was elected the mayor. In general, it was still unclear how the prevailing problems would be taken into account despite a general discourse about the social policies toward the poor would come to the forefront. The “Democratic Economy Conference Preparatory Workshop” which took place in Diyarbakir on September 12–14, 2014 was a ground where serious criticisms about the class attitude of the Kurdish political movement were expressed. The workshop covered the subjects of seasonal labor, the fact that the profits in urban space increased class confrontations, and other factors, such as cooperativism, which the Kurdish political movement was experiencing and failing. It also debated over its causes and how to make it more fruitful, and democratic autonomy in the field of law, health, and education. It was expressed that the struggle with poverty did not go beyond “aids,” which also feeds the often-mentioned charity cult. Despite continuing similar discussions in the conference held in Van after this workshop, democratic autonomy is considered to be the tamed capitalism rather than an alternative system to capitalism at the point of establishment of the economic aspect of democratic autonomy.

In recent times, the Kurdish political movement in local power in the shadow of war created camps in the cities of the regions encountering with

peoples fleeing the massacres of ISIS. In Diyarbakir there were also camps for Ezidis. The pace of the war and the end of the ceasefire in July 2015, the Suruç massacre on July 20, and the subsequent developments are the harbingers that the war was to continue in the cities. In the process of starting with the Temporary Private Security Zone declarations and continuing with the curfews, everything in the parliamentary question submitted in the Parliament by Alican Önlü about the Implosion Plan began to take place one after the other.<sup>10</sup>

After the clashes in Sur ended on March 25, 2016, almost the entire district of Sur was confiscated with “urgent expropriation” resolution. Thousands of people were subjected to forced migration, whereas there are still people living in Sur today. The state demolished the buildings in the neighborhood in the conflict zone by reason of expropriation and the following pictures show the destruction in Sur as of February 7, 2019 (Google Earth 2019).

## CONCLUSION

One of the most important crossroads of human history, Diyarbakir has become the center of war in history. When the history of the Kurds enters a new twist with the sixteenth century, capitalist nation-state fiction makes the war phenomenon more stable in this geography since the nineteenth century. Diyarbakir is a place where every dominant power in the settlement area shows its own power. For this reason, it is a city dominated by continuous development activities. In the nineteenth century, the ideal of nation-state fed by nationalism, resulted in genocide, massacres, and forced migration. For two hundred years, capitalism has been operating a strategy of forcibly confiscating everything for the sake of its existence. Therefore, the regions and cities that are “problematic” for the ideal of the nation-state have become the addressees of war for two centuries. The modernization policies that capitalism envisages are conditioned upon war.

Under such circumstances, it is revealed in this study that a political and identity-based movement that claims to have the vision for a better world against capitalism and nation-state construct, in consideration of the areas on which urbanization policies are supported and implemented, peculiarly in Diyarbakir, failed to establish a world alternative to capitalism. Despite steps were taken for the taming of capitalism through the designation of social policies, the policies, including those of participation within the scope of democratic autonomy, are not merely peculiar to Kurdish municipalities, as Jongerden and Akkaya suggests, but may as well be seen in practice with the case of Çanakkale Municipality since the Habitat process (Jongerden and Akkaya 2014, 81). Today, Nilüfer Municipality in Bursa, Kadıköy Municipality



**Figure 5.1. Destruction in Sur**

**Source:** Google Earth.2019.Diyarbakir, Sur, 7 February 2019. <https://earth.google.com/web/@37.91105364,40.23667601,671.46694176a,2387.68397193d,35y,359.99999879h,0t,0r>

pality in Istanbul can also be regarded as models, and Ovacık Municipality in Tunceli can be named as the best practice.

Aside from this, the reflex of proving oneself against “being left backward deliberately” resulted in the expenditure of 60 percent of the municipal budget especially on development activities. And this situation also necessitated modernization in haste, after becoming the symbols of a modern city and urban people. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Diyarbakir should have stood up as the area with the highest potential for the actualization of the vision for a better world against capitalism—because of its local political potential and the potential of local people acting together—the general outlook turned out to become not anything more than a modern capitalist urbanization model. Additionally, the Kurdish movement also became a stakeholder in some of the cases discussed above, for the strategy of forced dispossession by capitalism, upon which it builds itself.

Eventually, this study, as mentioned in the beginning, was carried out with a social sciences perspective that is based on the idea that concepts

should turn into struggle. Considering the identifications of this study and its clear and open questions, the current situation of the city of Diyarbakir could be the subject of other further studies. Moreover, in consideration of the current reality faced by Kurdish political movement, whose almost all actors are imprisoned today, these general circumstances also necessitate the construction of policies that, in its reflections, brings together ethnicity, nation-state and capitalism's relations, and the urban sphere, where the heart of such relations beat.

## NOTES

1. I use the concept of "Kurdish geography" with a naming from today toward the past. The geography that is called the Southeastern Anatolia and Eastern Anatolia region of Turkey is a place where historically many peoples coexisted. It would be challenging, in our day, to properly name a region where in the Ottoman State times, especially Armenians and Kurds as well as Assyrians, Nestorians, Turks, and Jews lived together. The historical and time period covered by the study is the recent past and therefore, it would be more explanatory to make use of this naming. As in all other descriptions, drawing boundaries might lead to certain problems, although I will call these areas the Kurdish geography and Kurdish cities.

2. In Kurdish cities curfews were declared frequently when the peace negotiations ran into a troubled phase. Conditions of warfare dominated the Kurdish cities along with the increase in private security zones and curfews. They dug ditches to defend the right of people to live differentiated the extent of the war in the city. The cities were razed to the ground by tanks; people were killed in the middle of the streets. All that's been through shows that "Çöktürme Plan" uncovered by Alican Önlü was implemented one by one.

3. Algeria experience of Bourdieu brought along the notion of thinking about and questioning himself as a French social scientist. What he had been through in Algeria in conditions of warfare led to his tough critics as a social scientist and political actor about France and Algeria. Consequently under threat his working conditions in the field were restricted. He continued his research by use of different techniques. He developed different methods not to put the interviewees into danger. A photo, conversations at street corners vb. This discussion could be reached from the source as follows: Bourdieu, P. (2004). *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*. Paris: Raisons d'agir. Page limitations of this article could not allow me to debate over this experience, but in my thesis I examined it in detail.

4. I tried to conduct interviews in Diyarbakir approximately every month for five to seven days since 2014 with all the components of the Kurdish political movement. By way of my personal contacts, I had conversations with so many people, whether they are political actors or not, about the Kurdish political movement and capitalism link in terms of urbanization experience in Diyarbakir. I attended to the meetings of neighbourhood councils. I participated in every conference, panel, workshop, and meeting being held in Diyarbakir relevant to my thesis. I conducted archival research in all archives of the municipalities (strategic plans, activity reports, activities, meeting notes, visuals, and so on.) I made archival research in all nongovernmental organisations, associations, research centers and so on. Everytime I went to the city I allow myself to make an observation for long hours and regularly put all my observations down on paper. After the war started in 2015, I retreated from the research field. Even if my interviews had not finished, I attended to lots of activities in Istanbul about Diyarbakir and interviewed with lots of people coming from Diyarbakir. In addition to the organization process for the data collected in 1.5 year, I made newspaper archival research and started to examine the literary work about Diyarbakir and region cities. I read all the biographies, autobiographies, novels, stories I could reach and took explanatory notes. I watched lots of films regarding Diyarbakir or cities in the region. Trying to cope with the methodological war-generated

problems enabled me to push my limits in terms of my both researcher and political identities and to consider new methodological ideas.

5. The word *primitive* indicates here the fact that it happens for the first time.

6. Harvey addresses capitalism by periodizing. However he states in his discussion that accumulation by dispossession being the vital condition for capitalism has been continuous in all periods. Likewise I tried to form a relational basis in my thesis within the context of capitalism, modern nation state and ethnic politics rather than periodizing the trajectory of capitalism in Turkey and focused on the urbanization experience through the warfare.

7. The contribution that Foucault made to our debate, being sparked on accumulation by dispossession through Marx, Luxemburg, and Harvey, about “the competence of the nation for establishing a state” regarding the formation of the modern-nation state being the ideal form of capitalism is stimulating. It is an important emphasis on the nation possessing the competence of establishing a state in terms of the historicity of dispossession through the modern nation-state. The door that Foucault opened into the accumulation by dispossession notion is important to understand this experience in this geography. Later on this theoretical debate and on the urban edge of the accumulation by dispossession, the discussion of Lefebvre on capitalism, the production of space comes the forefront.

8. The incident that Şeyhmus Diken testified while on a tour around the city with journalists in 1999 after the Kurdish political movement won the local elections is the most concrete indicator of this approach: “Look, brother journalist, you think that we will say that we are pleased with this municipality just because they paved these roads for us. It’s nothing like that. Even when they won’t do that or do any services! They are our children! They just can sit there and it is sufficient for us even to be able to say that the municipality is ours”(Diken 2013). Feridun Çelik, in an interview in 2014, noted that the discourse of “our children” weakened because of the policies of the municipalities, causing a decline in the votes in local elections (Konuksever 2014).

9. We can consider the modernization in haste as a reaction to the feeling of being left backward, especially in urban policies for establishing a city with a modern view and thus investing in development and coding this as an area of proving oneself. The idea of being left backward is the infrastructure of the idea of creating the western, modern capitalist city. Hence, the activities of modernization in haste against the feudal society perception and being left backward intentionally are especially focused on development activities. At this point, the steps including social housing that could be shown as cases of social policies are not prioritized. Modernization in haste was a driving force particularly in the formation of capitalist urbanization policies after 2004 and caused an increase in the profit sharing inequality among classes in the generation of urban lands. And this creates a negative outlook on the side of the characteristics of Kurdish movement’s urban policies, which claims to adopt social municipal administration.

10. The Implosion Plan was revealed to have been prepared in 2014 with the uncovering of the war simulation and with the parliamentary question of Alican Önlü, its details were inquired but the response was that no such plan existed. Considering what has been experienced in Kurdish geography since 2015, it can be observed that all of the schemes in this plan were implemented one after the other. Please see, for detailed information: <http://www2.tbmm.gov.tr/d26/7/7-2638s.pdf>.

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## Chapter Six

# Autonomous Spaces and Constructive Resistance in Northern Kurdistan

### *The Kurdish Movement and Its Experiments with Democratic Autonomy*

Minoo Koefoed

In the small village of Fis, right outside Diyarbakir, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) was established in 1978 as a clandestine political party, led by Abdullah Öcalan, soon to be known under his *nom de guerre* "Apo" (see Marcus, 2007; Yegen, 2016). Based on an ideological framework that mixes Marxist-Leninism with what critics have portrayed as a Stalinist-like personal cult around Öcalan (see Marcus, 2007), the PKK aimed to establish an independent, socialist, and democratic Kurdish Nation-State, incorporating the Kurdish inhabited areas of Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq. Formulating "the Kurdish question as one of colonialism" (Yegen, 2016: 370), the PKK saw their demand for independence as a way to put an end to Turkish colonialism. In this struggle, armed guerilla warfare was seen as the main means to reach that goal (see Yegen, 2016). Nicole Watts points out that in the history of the Turkish-Kurdish relationship, due to Turkish repression of Kurdish party politics, Kurds have, to a large extent, been forced to forge their political struggle through extra-parliamentarian channels (Watts, 2011). This is in line with the proposition of Joost Jongerden and Hamdi Akkaya, who suggest that one of the underlying reasons for the PKK to adopt armed guerilla resistance was because 'there was no alternative (legally permitted) avenue of genuine political expression' (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2012: 4).

From the mid-1990s, and in the wake of the imprisonment of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, the PKK went through what scholars refer to as an ideological and organizational "transformation" (see Akkaya & Jongerden, 2012,

2013; Saeed, 2016; Yarkin, 2015; Yegen, 2016). Here the PKK is understood to have reinvented itself toward broader civil structures (Saeed, 2016). From his prison cell on the island of Imrali, Abdullah Öcalan, inspired by the ideological writings of the eco-anarchist thinker Murray Bookchin (see e.g., Bookchin, 1982, 1992, 1993, 1996), formulated an alternative political vision for the future of the Kurdish struggle (see Öcalan, 2007, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Öcalan, 2017). These ideas have been characterized as “a post-Marxist and en-gendered political discourse” (Casier & Jongerden, 2012a: 1).

Öcalan’s writings, combined with the PKK’s reorganization toward civil structures, resulted in what Kurdish-movement activists refer to as “a new ideological paradigm” known as democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism, respectively. Central to this bottom-up political system is a focus on communalism, social ecology, the emancipation of women, a critique against the nation-state, and a system of interconnected Democratic People’s Councils as an attempt to enact radical democracy. From 2005 this became the official ideology of both the PKK and the broader Kurdish movement. As this chapter will highlight, a consequence of this change was a change in the Kurdish movement’s resistance strategies with a more explicit focus on building up self-organized structures and alternative institutions as means to oppose the dominance of the Turkish state.

Some valuable works have been written on this transformation. For instance, Saeed (2016) offers a constructive account on the organizational reconstruction of the PKK toward broader civil structures; Akkaya and Jongerden (2012, 2013) discuss the PKK’s ideological turn; Yarkin (2016) illuminates economic aspects of the transformation; and some of the practical experiments with building up self-organized Kurdish institutions parallel to the Turkish state has also briefly been discussed (Tatort Kurdistan, 2013).

Nevertheless, despite what Ali Balci (2015:73) frames as an “explosion of scholarly interest in Turkey’s Kurdish issue” during the last two decades (see e.g., Akin Unver, 2015; Casier & Jongerden, 2012a, 2012b; Casier, Jongerden, & Walker, 2011; Grabolle-Çeliker, 2015; Gunes, 2011; Gunes & Zeydanlioglu, 2013; Marcus, 2007; Romano, 2006; Watts, 2011), the existing literature is characterized by limitations in terms of ethnographic and empirically informed accounts relevant to understanding the current civil structures and unarmed resistance practices of the Kurdish movement in Turkey (Watts, 2011: xv). While much research focuses on the outlawed Kurdish Worker’s Party (PKK) and the violent conflict with the Turkish State (see e.g., Akin Unver, 2015; Kayhan Pusane, 2015; Marcus, 2007; Ozkahraman, 2017), the civil components of the movement and its unarmed resistance practices in the context of democratic confederalism and democratic autonomy are left largely untouched (see White, 2015). Limited attention has been dedicated to understanding, describing, or analyze the ways in which the ideological transformation of the Kurdish movement influences, or is reflected in, the

ongoing resistance practices and political work of the Kurdish movement. Nor are ethnographic accounts on how Kurdish-movement activists subjectively reflect around this new ideological position covered in the existing literature. Akkaya and Jongerden (2012:1) confirm this proposition, identifying a gap in the literature by suggesting that little attention has been “devoted to the role of the Kurdish agency itself, and in particular the PKK.”

This chapter adds to the literature by investigating some of the subjective meanings of autonomy amongst Kurdish-movement activists in the light of this transformation. Analyzed according to a theoretical framework mixing a three-fold understanding of autonomy with the concepts of "autonomous spaces," "resistance" in general, and "constructive resistance" in particular, this article demonstrates how the ideological transformation of the Kurdish movement has led to increased applications of constructive resistance practices. Three different perspectives on autonomy as encountered in the discourses of Kurdish-movement activists will be explored. Three empirical examples of constructive resistance emerging in the wake of this transformation will also be addressed. I will begin with a short note on the research methods applied in this project, before embarking on the theoretical framework upon which the subsequent empirical analysis of this chapter will be based.

## ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK IN NORTHERN KURDISTAN

This research is rooted in an ethnographic fieldwork of seven months conducted in Turkey's Kurdish region between May 2015 and January 2016. My main areas of research were Amed (Diyarbakir), Wan (Van), and Gewer (Yüksekova). The fieldwork included semi-structured interviews with representatives and people affiliated with different departments of the Democratic People's Party (HDP), the Democratic Region's Party (DBP), the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), the Women's Society Congress (KJA), the Mesopotamian Ecology Council, and the Democratic Youth (Dem-Genc), as well as with Kurdish activists from the syndicate Eğitim-Sen, journalists and former journalists from the pro-Kurdish news agencies Azadîya Welat, Özgür Gündem, and Jinha, as well as with teachers and students at the Kurdish Institute (*Kurdî-Der*), the movement's political academies, and at a women's academy.

In addition to interviews, the fieldwork also consisted of participant observation with the movement. My participant observation included regular participation in different political movement events such as demonstrations, protest marches, martyr's funerals and other ceremonies for the martyrs, political movie screenings, concerts, Kurdish dance performances, political theatre plays, and public meetings of the KJA and the DBP in Wan. Through

extensive socializing with Kurdish-movement activists, I also visited multiple Kurdish graveyards and interviewed and socialized with individuals engaged in protecting these from attacks by the Turkish police. I also carried out informal talks with a small number of former and current guerrilla soldiers from the PKK, former political prisoners from different branches of the movement, including the guerrillas, as well as with youth activists affiliated with the Kurdish urban youth militia, the YDG-H. In the city of Wan, I became a subscriber of the SMS-list of the Kurdish party DBP, which gave me information about all calls-for-action that any branch of the movement organized on short or long notice. Furthermore, I also participated in the everyday work of a democratic people's council (*demokratik halk meclîs*) in a particular neighborhood in Wan over a period of three months, as well as at meetings of the coordination committee of the Mesopotamian Ecology Council in the same city over a period of several months. During the two presidential elections in June and November 2015, I was also a member of a team of electoral observers for the Kurdish party, the HDP, collaborating with the Norwegian solidarity organization called *Solidaritet med Kurdistan*. I also participated in Kurdish language courses at the *Kurdi-Der* for six months and volunteered for some time as an English teacher at a Kurdish self-organized educational organization in a district in Wan.

Most of my communication and informal interviews during the last three months of fieldwork were conducted in Kurdish, with some assistance from English-speaking members of the movement. During the first months of fieldwork in Amed, the interviews were done with informal translation of movement people. Due to security considerations, I did not record talks and interviews, but took extensive and detailed field notes on a daily basis. All names and identities of individuals quoted in this article have been changed due to security and anonymity concerns. The main challenges I faced during fieldwork were, amongst other things, security, access, and language. It took several months before I managed to access some of the self-organized resistance practices that I will address later in this chapter.

Below I will discuss how resistance in general and constructive resistance in particular will be understood in this chapter. This will be followed by a three-fold discussion of the concept of autonomy.

## FROM RESISTANCE AS OPPOSITION TO CONSTRUCTIVE RESISTANCE

In the resistance research the concept of resistance has, if defined at all (see e.g., Kastrinou-Theodoropoulou, 2009; Seymour, 2006), often been understood in broad and oppositional terms simply as “acts” constituting some kind of “opposition” (see Hollander and Einwohner, 2004). In line with this

tradition is the work of Uday Chandra, who defines resistance generally “as negation” (2015:x–xi). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who understand resistance as “being-against” (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 569), and Stephen Duncombe who defines resistance as “to act against” (Duncombe, 2007: 490). By approaching resistance in this way as somewhat synonymous with *opposition*, *negation*, or *being against*, I suggest that the concept risks losing its usefulness as an analytical category, as basically any articulation, expression, or experience of discontent in that way could be taken as evidence of resistance. Furthermore, I argue, it also becomes unclear how resistance differs from protest. Baaz, Lilja, and Vinthagen made a similar reflection, problematizing how “[a]ll kinds of acts in which power is opposed become resistance, even the exercise of power against power” (Baaz, et al, 2016:141). Furthermore, with its exclusive focus on *opposition*, *negations*, and *being or acting against*, this definition nevertheless serves to conceal those forms of resistance wherein structures of oppression are challenged through enacted alternatives, what I have elsewhere termed “constructive resistance” (Koefoed, 2017). Is there space in this definition for resistance practices that might (or that aims to) transcend the negative in “being-against” into something positive, thereby enacting in practice the visions the resisting subjects have of how the world should otherwise be?

Resistance has also been discussed in the context of poststructuralism, following the logic in Foucault’s proposition that “[w]here there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1998:95). Poststructuralist-inspired resistance literature (see e.g., AbuLughod, 1990; Baaz et al., 2017; Juris, Jeffrey & Sitrin, 2016; Kastrinou-Theodoropoulou, 2009; Ortner, 1995; Scott, 1985, 1990) offers, I argue, more complex understandings of the notion of resistance. This relates, among other things, to the tradition of framing resistance as deeply entangled with the concept of power (see Sharp, 2000).

In this chapter I will follow this tradition by applying a general definition of resistance inspired by Michael Baaz, Mona Lilja, Michael Schultz, and Stellan Vinthagen, illuminating additional insights to the conceptual understanding of resistance, defined as “*a response to power from below—a subaltern practice that could challenge, negotiate, and undermine power*” (Baaz et al., 2016:142). However, because I think it is more fruitful to understand resistance in intentional terms, my understanding of the concept of resistance replaces “could” with “aims to.”<sup>1</sup> When I propose that resistance has to come from a subaltern position, I understand subalternity in line with Ranajit Guha’s thinking, indicating the presence of a hierarchy, where the subaltern could be understood as those representing some form of inferior rank in such hierarchies (Guha, 1988). More precisely, subalternity reads as “the general attribution of subordination (. . .) whether this is expressed in terms of class, cast, age, gender and office or in any other way” (Guha, 1988:35). Research demonstrates that Kurdish ethnic identity has, since the establishment of the

Turkish Republic in 1923, in the official Turkish state discourse (see Yeğen, 1996) been subjected to a colonial and Orientalist-like type of representation as inferior to that of “Turkishness,” and therefore in need of “civilization,” “modernization,” and thereby also “Turkification” (see e.g., Yadirgi, 2017; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008, 2012). Therefore, I argue that in the context of the Kurdish-Turkish relationship, ethnicity should also be added to the list of examples of subaltern identities as discussed by Guha (1988).

Instead of juxtaposing the resistance-opposition/protest equation with the general resistance definition developed by Baaz, Lilja, Schultz, and Vinthagen, as mentioned above, I propose, rather, that it is more fruitful to understand “protest resistance” as one particular way that resistance can be articulated. Protest resistance could, for instance, refer to those particular acts of resistance that do not reach further than articulations of opposition or protest, or in other words, protest resistance as a subaltern politics of negation. One example in context of the Kurdish movement could be the demonstration that occurred in Kurdish cities in Turkey on November 28, 2015, after Tahir Elçi, a Kurdish human rights lawyer and head of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, was assassinated at a press conference advocating for an end to political violence, and thousands of Kurdish-movement activists took to the streets in response to express their resistance against what they perceived as the increasing political violence conducted by the Turkish state.

Also, the general definition of resistance proposed above is itself insufficient to fruitfully investigate those cases in which resistance not only expresses what the activists are against but enacts what they are for. The emerging concept of constructive resistance to some extent comes to terms with this deficit, highlighting a specific form of resistance where power is undermined through enacted alternatives (Vinthagen, S. [2005] *En Social praktik av Motstånd och Konstruktion*, Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, PhD thesis; Koefoed 2017a). Hence, I argue, constructive resistance could be seen as another particular type of resistance. I define constructive resistance as a subaltern practice that, through enactments or constructions of alternatives, aims to challenge, negotiate, and undermine power (see Koefoed, 2017a).

It is important to clarify that the concept of constructive resistance in itself could be perceived as problematic as one may assume it indicates a view on other forms of resistance as destructive, and therefore normatively undesirable. Constructive in this sense should therefore not be confused with useful, welcomed, desirable, or better resistance, nor does it refer to empirical practices of resistance where the outcome is understood to have been particularly successful. Rather, the word *constructive* in constructive resistance should be understood as signaling attempts to build up, enact, or experiment with “alternatives.”

With these understandings of resistance in mind, below I investigate a three-fold understanding of autonomy, which I think could be particularly



useful for a deepened understanding of the Kurdish movement and its quest for democratic autonomy and its subsequent resistance practices.

## AUTONOMY AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

The word “autonomy” is a contested concept with a variety of definitions, usages, and meanings. Etymologically, the word has its origins in law, stemming from the two Greek words *autos* meaning “self” and *nomos* meaning “law” or “legal rule” (Hannikainen, 1998:79). Since the Kurdish-Turkish relation tends to be characterized as an ethnic conflict, I will here begin the exploration of the meaning of autonomy by departing from international law (see e.g., Hannum & Lillich, 1980). Within International Law, the concept of autonomy has traditionally been applied in contexts concerning either ethno-nationalist minorities fighting for statehood, national sovereignty, or independence (see Suksi, 2013), or in struggles of indigenous peoples demanding the right to self-government or self-determination (see e.g., Blaser et al., 2010; Keal, 2003; Prakash, 2007; Hannikainen, 1998: 79). As I will show later, the relationship between the Kurds and the Turkish state shares certain characteristics with experiences many indigenous peoples have to their nation-states. This concerns, for instance, experiences of being colonized and its associated consequences, such as being subjected to forceful cultural and linguistic assimilation, negative stereotyping and racialization, the denial of claims to land, as well as other manifestations of cultural domination. Therefore, although the Kurds in Turkey tend to be seen as an ethnic minority rather than as an indigenous people, I argue that international law perspectives offer valuable insights that are useful to deepening our understanding of the claims to autonomy by the Kurdish movement in a broader context.

As “indigenous movements very rarely demand secession or full independence from their state” (Wilson, 2012: 67), the concept of autonomy is, in indigenous contexts, more often adopted in struggles demanding the right “to live their own lives on their own terms” (Banerjee & Kumar Das, 2007: xix). Such demands for autonomy as cultural self-determination could be seen as related to the deep-rooted historical practice of European colonial powers and nation-states to restrict the rights of indigenous peoples to live according to their own traditions and wants (see e.g., Keal, 2003), by, for instance, subjecting them to forceful displacement and disposition (Howitt, 2001); cultural and linguistic assimilation (Minde, 2003); denial of mother-tongue education (Minde, 2003); enforced sterilization (Pegoraro, 2015); kidnappings of indigenous children (Krieken, 1999), and other forms of human rights abuses.

On the other hand, in the case of ethno-nationalist minority groups, autonomy often refers to “regions of a State usually possessing some ethnic or

cultural distinctiveness, which have been granted separate powers of international administration, to whatever degree, without being detached from the State of which they are a part” (Crawford, 2007: 323–327). As a contrast to the case of indigenous peoples, minority claims to regional autonomy are sometimes understood as initial phases on the path toward demanding full independence (Suksi, 2013). As pointed out by Yoram Dinstein, “an autonomy regime has an intermediate status between “a non-self-governing territory and an independent state”” (Dinstein, 2011: 436). One such example could be the case of Kosovo, which began with a struggle for regional autonomy within the borders of the Serbian state, eventually leading to a declaration of full independence in 2008 (see Vidmar, 2009). Also in cases of indigenous-movement struggles, have “nation-states, particularly colonial settler states (. . .) consistently viewed indigenous demands as a destabilizing threat to the state” (see Suksi, 2013). Hence, this association between “autonomy” and “independence” could perhaps partly explain why the Turkish state continues to frame the activities of the Kurdish movement as separatist despite the movement’s explicit critique of the nation-state as an undesirable future solution in the Kurdish struggle.

International law perspectives on autonomy both in relation to minorities and indigenous peoples could, as a synthesis, be understood as concerning collectives rather than individuals, with demands, claims, or cultural connections related to a particular geographical territoriality in a colonial or minority context. Demands for autonomy in both contexts could be understood to derive from positions of subalternity because these demands implicitly point toward experiences of being deprived from rights, resources, or opportunities, which often could be taken as self-evident for the ethnic majority population. Furthermore, since the concept of autonomy in both contexts also is applied as a legal tool in struggles aiming to reduce the subordination of such subaltern groups, autonomy as it is applied in international law could also be understood as a useful tool for resistance.

### Autonomy in Moral Philosophy

As a contrast to these international law perspectives, in the field of moral philosophy the concept of autonomy, associated with the works of Immanuel Kant, is conceived of in individualistic terms as the free will and *abilities* of humans to make rational, moral, and independent choices: “moral autonomy” (see Sensen, 2013). In Kant’s “morality as autonomy” or “morality as self-governance,” autonomy concerns the *individual* as an acting, rational subject (Schneewind, 1998).

Jerome Schneewind understands Kant’s idea of moral autonomy as our capacity as human beings “to direct our own actions without” (Schneewind, 1998: 3–5). Furthermore, Kant’s idea of moral autonomy was framed as an

alternative to the conception of his time of morality as obedience, where what was considered moral was defined by (external) rules, for instance by the Church (i.e., “the Will of God”).

Although the concept of autonomy as applied within the field of moral philosophy at first glance may come across as radically different from the application of the term in the context of international law, I argue that, especially in colonial contexts, Kant may offer a perspective that could be useful in further illuminating our understanding of subaltern groups’ struggles for autonomy, as well as the paternalism inherent in colonial discourses framing the colonial “other” in derogatory terms.

Welat Zeydanlioğlu points out that the “Kemalist discourse constructed Kurdistan, the hidden and invisible Orient’ of Turkey, as a region of dissent and banditry, ruled by superstition and in need of a heavy dose of civilization” (2008:8). Compared to the paternalism found in Rudyard Kipling’s *The White Man’s Burden*, the Kemalist ideology upon which the Turkish state was founded approached the Kurdish minority in derogatory terms as uncivilized, barbaric, inferior, and in need of modernization and development (Zeydanlioğlu, 2008). This discourse could, to some extent, be understood to have served to justify the state’s aggressive assimilation policies against the Kurds.

If we accept the proposition by Kant that all people have the capacity to make rational, good, and moral choices independently from the Church, the state, or others who present themselves as better by default, we get a useful tool to illuminate the emptiness of the colonial paternalism implicit in the Turkish state discourse that represented the Kurds as inferior, and therefore in need of becoming more like Turks. Whereas the Turkish state discourse on Kurdishness could, by extension, be understood to have served, to some extent, to deprive the Kurds of their right to cultural self-determination, Kant’s notion of moral autonomy in this context becomes a useful tool for resistance. As a contrast to colonial paternalism, the idea of the right of all peoples to cultural self-determination rests upon the assumption that no group is incapable of making good moral decisions. Therefore, if we accept Kant’s notion of moral autonomy, no claims to the right to rule over others based on the assumption of their inherent moral inferiority could be justified.

### **Autonomy in Anarchism**

Although the concept of autonomy is widely used in anarchist circles and organizations (see Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006), anarchist political philosophy does not offer systematic examinations of the different currents reflecting on how the notion of autonomy has been approached within anarchist thinking. However, dating back to the First International, an anarchist approach to autonomy could be understood as concerning the rejection of repre-

sentation and political intermediaries. In the split between the communists and the anarchists, the anarchists refused the domination of the Communist Party by instead advocating for direct action, self-management, and later direct democracy. Anarchist notions of autonomy could be understood as reflected in aspirations for horizontally organized communal structures rooted in self-organization, what Marina Sitrin terms “horizontalism” (Sitrin, 2006). The Zapatista notion of autonomy is also in line with this political logic (see Forbis, 2016).

In his anarchist critique of Kant’s conceptualization of moral autonomy, Robert Paul Wolff points out that “[t]he obligation to take responsibility for one’s actions does not derive from man’s freedom of will alone, for more is required in taking responsibility than freedom of choice” (Wolff, 2009: 326). Hence, to possess a *capacity* is not the same as to proactively exercise that capacity in practice. Or in other words, moral capacity is not the same as moral responsibility.

Referring to Kant, he elaborates that “men can forfeit their autonomy at will. That is to say, a man can decide to obey the commands of another without making any attempt to determine for himself whether what is commanded is good or wise” (Wolff, 2009: 327). This proposition relates to the anarchist rejection of political representation, as mentioned above, whereby individuals are understood to designate their decision-making abilities to others seen to act on their behalf. An anarchist conception of autonomy, then, adds to Kant’s moral autonomy an obligation of “man” to “make himself the author of his decisions” (Wolff, 2009: 327).

In light of this understanding, it could perhaps be fruitful to go as far as to argue that an anarchist conceptualization of autonomy would be in line with the practice of civil disobedience (see e.g., Thoreau, 1849), defined as the (moral) refusal to obey unjust laws set by others, or, in other words, civil disobedience as a form of proactive self-law. This leads us to the concept of “autonomous geographies,” which, I argue, to some extent serves to bridge the discourse of autonomy with the discussion of constructive resistance, as explored above.

## AUTONOMOUS GEOGRAPHIES AND CONSTRUCTIVE RESISTANCE

Within the field of critical geography, the term “autonomous spaces” has come to define the entanglement between resistance and creation. In Susan Mayhew’s (2015) *Dictionary of Geography* she defines autonomous spaces and “autonomous geographies” interchangeably as “(s)elf-managed spaces”; those spaces where there is a desire to constitute “non-capitalist, collective forms of politics, identity, and citizenship, which are created through a com-

bination of resistance and creation, and the questioning and challenging of dominant laws and social norms.” In this sense the concept of autonomy is applied as an entry point to understanding the relationship between resistance and creation, making the concept particularly relevant to deepening our understanding of constructive resistance practices. As Paul Chatterton notes,

The idea of autonomy is a hallmark of numerous social movements embracing direct action, ecological and social justice networks such as Earth First! Reclaim the Streets, and Dissent!, the Disobedients of Italy, Peoples Global Action, indigenous struggles such as the Zapatistas in the Chiapas state of Mexico, the Landless Peasant Movement in Brazil and the unemployed workers in Argentina. (2005:546)

Jenny Pickerill and Paul Chatterton note that the concept of autonomy is widely linked to political groups associated with “autonomous Marxism, social anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, regional separatism, (. . .) anarcho-primitivism, Zapatismo, ecologism and anti-capitalism” (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006: 732). This view is also in line with George Katsiaficas who argues that,

(i)n contrast to centralized decisions and hierarchical authority structures of modern institutions autonomous social movements involve people directly in decisions affecting their everyday lives and to help individuals breaking free of political structures and behavior patterns imposed from the outside. (Katsiaficas, 2006: 6)

I think it becomes useful to understand the Kurdish movement after its ideological and organizational transformation in line with the traditions of these types of movements. Amongst practical examples of such autonomous spaces, Jenny Pickerill and Paul Chatterton mention “social centers, eco-villages, alternative currencies, food production, housing cooperatives and self-education,” in addition to “experiments in non-hierarchical organization and consensus-based decision-making” (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006: 731).

Having addressed the theoretical propositions that will be used in the analysis of the empirical material in this chapter, I now provide a short historical backdrop concerning the quest for Kurdish autonomy in the context of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict.

#### AUTONOMY IN THE KURDISH CONTEXT: A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKDROP

According to Mesut Yegen, “[t]he origins of what we now call the Kurdish question are rooted in the mid-nineteenth century with the attempt made by the Ottoman state to end the 300 years of ‘autonomy’ that had been granted

to the Kurdish principalities in Kurdistan” (Yegen, 2016b: 366). Under the Ottoman Empire, where certain minorities enjoyed some degree of internal autonomy and political self-administration, “much of Kurdistan was under the rule of independent and autonomous Kurdish principalities” (Hassanpour, 1994:3). With the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in 1923 after the Treaty of Lausanne, in that same year, a large multicultural, multiethnic, and multi-religious geographical territory, including the former Kurdish principalities, were incorporated into one unified Turkish nation-state. In this period, David Romano notes, “Kurdish elites, mainly tribal chiefs, nobles, and religious sheikhs, considered their options and in many cases openly pushed for a Kurdish state or autonomous region” (Romano, 2006: 26), but for various reasons failed in these attempts.

The Kemalists attempted to create a modern, secular, Westernized, and unified Turkish nation-state that would allow them to “thereby leave behind their ‘Oriental’ Ottoman past” (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2012:100). As a result, strong assimilation policies were imposed on non-Turkish communities as part of the effort to unify the nation (see Hassanpour, Sheyholislami, & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008, 2012). Examples were “the surname law,” enforcing all people within the republic to adopt Turkish surnames and the establishment of Turkish as the national *lingua franca*, followed by a formal ban of using languages other than Turkish in public and private spaces.

Zeydanlıoğlu notes that “(i)n Turkey, this ‘self-Orientalisation’ (. . .) articulated itself in the attempt to launch a full-scale ‘civilizational shift,’ a modernizing revolution against the ‘old order,’ which was to be carried out in all aspects of life through far-reaching radical reforms in areas ranging from politics, education, and law to attire, music, literature, architecture, arts, et-cetera” (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2012: 102). The Kurdish areas of southern and eastern Anatolia have for these reasons been termed an “internal colony” of Turkey (Yadirgi, 2017). The imaginary of Kurdish autonomy as well as statehood has deep historical roots in the Kurdish movement in Turkey.

Against this brief historical contextualization, I will in the subsequent section discuss three different framings of autonomy that I encountered amongst Kurdish movement activists during the period of my fieldwork.

### **Autonomy as Cultural Self-Determination**

In the context of the Kurdish movement, the word *xweserî*, which in Kurmanji literally means “autonomy,” is sometimes used interchangeably with the word *azadî*, meaning “freedom.” However, the term was rarely applied in line with the tradition of ethno-nationalist movements elsewhere in the sense of geographical and political sovereignty. Rather, the word is used in line

with the indigenous tradition of applying the discourse of autonomy as some form of cultural self-determination, as discussed above. Illustrative of this framing is the quote below from my friend “Heval,” which expresses the following ideas in a broader discussion on the Kurdish movement and its current quest for democratic autonomy. Heval comes from a family of PKK militants, sympathizes with the PKK, and considers himself a movement affiliate, but is not actively participating in the movement’s grassroots resistance practices himself:

Freedom is my language, it is my village, it is my land,<sup>2</sup> and it is my right to do what I wish to do according to my values and what I think is better. Not having someone else, Turkey or Erdogan, the Ottomans or the Arabs or somebody else to decide for me how I should live, how we should organize our communities, our villages, our land. (Heval, September 2015)

This perception of autonomy was widespread, especially among the less militant branches of the Kurdish movement. A focus on Kurdish cultural self-determination may appear contradictory in the context of democratic autonomy, as the ideological paradigm departs from a critique against the nationalism of statehood, considering that such Kurdish aspirations for cultural self-determination rest on the idea of a distinct cultural “Kurdishness.” However, viewed in the broader context of the long-rooted tradition of forceful cultural and linguistic assimilation imposed by the Turkish state, a Kurdish demand for cultural self-determination in line with the tradition of indigenous communities is at the same time highly understandable.

#### MILITANT AUTONOMY: MICRO TERRITORIAL AUTONOMOUS SPACES THROUGH SELF-DEFENSE

On July 20, 2015 in the Kurdish-inhabited Turkish city of Suruç bordering Rojava, the Kurdish region of Syria, a pro-Kurdish activist delegation on its way to the Kurdish city of Kobanê and carrying emergency supplies suffered attacks by two suicide bombers at a press conference, which resulted in the death of thirty-three activists. Kurdish movement activists believed that the Turkish state was behind the attacks, implying a break of the peace negotiations between the Turkish state and the PKK, which had been in place since 2013. Although it is clear that democratic autonomy had been the official ideological line of both the PKK and the broader Kurdish movement since 2005, the Suruç events led to what I think could fruitfully be seen as an acceleration of the Kurdish movement’s project of democratic autonomy.

Shortly after the attack, a wave of public declarations emerged from the grassroots of Kurdish towns and neighborhood, announcing “democratic autonomy” and “democratic confederalism” in their respective locations (see

Koefoed, 2017b). As a response to this escalated violence from the Turkish state, many of these declarations of autonomy were framed from the position that Turkish institutions were no longer viewed as legitimate. Activists from the Democratic People's Councils (which I will discuss in depth later in this chapter) often took a leading role in these declarations. In the months that followed, many new Kurdish self-organized projects were initiated in the name of democratic autonomy following the logic that Turkish institutions were perceived as illegitimate.

A central component of the declarations of democratic autonomy was the role of the militant urban youth group formerly known as the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H). This group took a leading role in what they saw as self-defense activities. These were Kurdish militant activist youth who barricaded their neighborhoods with sacs of concrete, rubber tires, steel gallon containers filled with stones, or trenches in the streets in attempts to prevent the Turkish police and military to enter. In case they did come, large groups of Kurdish militant youth activists were mobilized quickly to fight back. In the most militant autonomous neighborhoods, these self-defense committees were equipped with slingshots, Molotov cocktails, or sometimes even light arms. The YDG-H appeared to have developed tighter and more direct connections to the PKK guerillas during this period. In certain places, night-watch committees were established to protect the entrances of the neighborhoods from infiltration by the police. For the self-defense committees and the YDG-H and for the former PKK guerillas with whom I communicated during fieldwork, the concept of *autonomy* was, according to this logic, approached in micro-geographical terms as zones where representatives of the state were banned. In my understanding, it seemed that for those among the Kurdish movement who were the driving force behind this self-defense, the absence of Turkish authorities was perceived as a goal in itself. The sentiment of anger, distrust, and disapproval of the grassroots at that time is reflected in the following quote by "Abdulla," a Kurdish-movement activist from one of these autonomous neighborhoods:

The Turkish state is killing and arresting, thus, we are building up these barricades (. . .) to protect our neighborhood, we do not accept the laws of the state, their laws permit killings, violence, and torture, so why would we accept them? (Abdullah, winter 2016)

The degree to which the Kurdish autonomous neighborhoods succeeded in keeping the Turkish police and military out varied substantially between neighborhoods. In certain areas, like the Sur and Silopi neighborhoods in Diyarbakir, the Kurdish self-defense committees were active for months, with street fighting every night, daily arrests, and casualties on both sides. The state responded with attempts to smash down the resistance by imposing



long-term curfews, which in some places lasted for months. In the Sur neighborhood in the Old City of Diyarbakir, the curfews led, for instance, to the internal displacement of roughly 24,000 inhabitants, constituting nearly half of the neighborhood's total population (see Amnesty International, 2016).

Not all Kurdish residents or branches of the Kurdish movement saw the self-defense activities of the YDG-H as a positive supplement to the broader Kurdish struggle for democratic autonomy. In some autonomous neighborhoods, interlocutors complained about the practical difficulties that emerged from the presence of the trenches and the barricades built by the youth because they also caused problems for Kurdish small-scale businesses, which, as a consequence of the barricades, were unable to drive cars with supplies within their own neighborhoods. Others complained about the noise, disturbances, and discomforts stemming from the ongoing clashes between the youth activists and the Turkish police, including the teargas and the constant fear of violence when needing to leave home. The Kurdish-movement peace group known as the Peace Mothers, therefore, sometimes actively went out in the streets to prevent the youth from fighting. After the Turkish state began to impose curfews, the disagreements within the different Kurdish communities as to whether the self-defense activities should continue were also strengthened in some places. Others saw the self-defense activities as a necessary means to protect their neighborhoods from what they feared could have otherwise developed into a situation characterized by total control and everyday harassment by Turkish police. It was also clear that the self-defense activities of the militant Kurdish youth were supported and encouraged by the PKK guerillas, which in some areas assisted the self-defense committees with light arms, walkie-talkies, and other equipment understood to be useful for the fighting. This development was viewed with mixed feelings among the less militant branches of the Kurdish movement, as well as among people who did not identify as affiliated with the movement.

According to my observations, the way the concept of autonomy was used in this context could nevertheless be seen as a form of autonomous geographical space in micro-territorial terms. This way of conceiving of it could perhaps also be said to align with Hakim Bay's idea of Temporary Autonomous Zones, or TAZ (see Bay, 2003). This militant approach to autonomy as found in the discourse of the YDG-H, the former PKK guerillas, and other participants in the self-defense committees, therefore, resembles claims to autonomy in the tradition of ethno-nationalist minorities in the context of international law previously discussed, but at a much smaller scale. Here, the focus was to ensure that a clearly defined geographical area was "freed" from interference from the state, thereby to some extent resembling the logic of separatism.

## AUTONOMY AS OPPOSITIONAL COMMUNAL COLLECTIVES

The concept of autonomy as employed by Kurdish-movement activists was often closely associated with the concept of *xwerêveberîye*, literally meaning “self-management” or “self-administration.” Unlike the concept of “freedom” and “autonomy,” mentioned above, the concept of “self-administration” was often used in the context of Democratic Confederalism, rooted in interconnected Democratic People’s Councils as an experiment with radical democracy. Autonomy in this sense was thereby framed as an oppositional alternative to the Turkish state structures. Illustrative of this approach is, for instance, the following quote by “Evîna,” a Kurdish women’s movement activist and delegate of the Women’s Council in the town of Gewer, who sets out the reasoning around the movement’s current ideological paradigm of democratic autonomy in the following way:

Now we are building up something new, which is different from the old structures. In Kurdistan people are killed, imprisoned, and tortured by the state. Now we are changing the society so that we will be the ones making the decisions, so that we can speak our language and practice our culture. (Evîna, December 2015)

Kurdish-movement activists communicated mistrust, resentment, and skepticism toward Turkish political institutions, representatives, and political actions in a multitude of ways during my fieldwork. This discourse was performed, not only through everyday conversations, but was also reflected in everyday activities and choices among single individuals. One example of this comes from the Kurdish teenager “Mem,” whom I met in Diyarbakir, who insisted on smoking what he called “*kaçak cixarra*” (smugglers cigarettes) rather than what he saw as “*devlet cixarra*” (state cigarettes), explaining that “five liras for a package of *devlet cixarra* means one lira to the Turkish state, but three liras for the *kaçak cixarra* means two liras to the PKK” (Mem, July 2015). ‘Mamoste,’ a man in his mid-fifties and former member of the Gewer District Council, expressed the following:

The state doesn’t know what is best for each village. For example, they don’t know anything about the resources or capacities that exist, neither do they know the needs or wants of the people living here. Normally, the only thing the state is interested in when it comes to the villages is searching for resources, places to build up new hotels, shopping malls or super markets, projects that strengthen the capitalist system. (Mamoste, December 2015)

The discourse of the Kurdish movement's struggle for autonomy in the context of the ideological paradigm of democratic autonomy was therefore often presented as an alternative to the Turkish state:

The main idea behind the village councils is that each village governs itself outside the state system, both in terms of economy, politics, health, agriculture, education, and so forth. It is also to enable the voice and will of the smaller communities to be heard in the higher levels of the organization. As a part of this system we are also building up an autonomous economy, for instance through cooperatives, and an autonomous educational structure. ("Baran" co-speaker of a neighborhood council outside Gewer, 7 December 2015)

Although I have now presented three distinct approaches to autonomy in line with views I encountered during my fieldwork, it is important to mention that in practice there were rarely such clear-cut distinctions between different approaches. According to my observations, many Kurdish-movement activists would subscribe to all three approaches discussed above. For instance, some of the YDG-H militants involved in the self-defense committees with whom I communicated were also actively working to establish the Democratic People's Councils. These activists would also argue for the importance of establishing autonomous Kurdish institutions as a means of enacting Democratic Autonomy, in addition to these autonomous "free zones" that Turkish police ideally would be unable to enter. This was also the case with the former PKK guerillas that for different reasons had left the mountains to engage in the work of the civil structures of the movement. According to my observations, they often applied what I think could be understood as militant self-discipline and a willingness to expose themselves to great risks in the fighting and organization of the self-defense against the Turkish police in the autonomous neighborhoods, while simultaneously showing extreme devotion to the work of developing direct-democratic grassroots structures such as the councils. Furthermore, my friend "Haron," who emphasized cultural self-determinism when explaining what autonomy or "freedom" meant to him, also supported the micro-territorial autonomous spaces created through the self-defense committees as discussed above. Furthermore, I did not encounter anyone, regardless of movement role or affiliation, that would argue that the right to speak Kurdish, dress Kurdish, be educated in Kurdish, and organize Kurdish villages and neighborhoods according to the wish of the local communities themselves was not a part of their understanding of autonomy.

Nevertheless, during my fieldwork I also encountered activists within the Kurdish movement who dismissed Öcalan's proposition for Democratic Autonomy in favor of a Kurdish independent nation-state. One Kurdish interlocutor who held this position explained that in the context of a movement meeting, she would never express this view out loud for fear that she would

be met with suspicion and potentially seen as “a traitor.” Given that she was an extremely devoted Kurdish activist, she let me know that such a scenario would be both hurtful and emotionally devastating. Any context in which conformity is expected—to the extent that deviating opinions are hindered from flowing freely—would give reason to worry. I nevertheless argue that this tendency, at least when the deviation deals with separatism, could also be seen as understandable in the context of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict. That is because state infiltrators and informers are known to be a widespread problem, and because the separatist logic of the earlier PKK continues to be used by the Turkish state as a reason to repress current movement structures. Furthermore, there are also political and highly visible Kurdish outbreak groups, like, for instance, the Kurdish Freedom Falcons (TAK), which consists of former PKK guerillas who broke with the PKK precisely because of Öcalan’s turn away from a demand for Kurdish separatism. At the same time, the overwhelming majority of Kurdish activists I communicated and spent time with during my time in the region stated their clear support for the movement’s new ideological paradigm. Further research is needed to investigate the extent to which deviating political and ideological opinions are welcomed and encouraged within, for instance, the system of Democratic People’s Councils given that the movement states that the expressed aim of this system is to experiment with direct democracy.

I now turn the discussion to a short empirical description of three examples of some of the ways in which resistance is enacted amongst activists within the Kurdish movement in the context of the Democratic Autonomy project. These examples are the council system, the Kurdish primary schools, and the Kurdish parallel legal system in Gewer. As I will argue, all these practices could be understood as examples of constructive resistance.

### **Autonomous Kurdish Primary Schools**

As I discuss in depth in another article, the Turkish state constitutionally bans educational structures wherein subjects are taught in mother languages other than Turkish (Koefoed, 2017a). After pressure from the European Union (EU) in connection with Turkey’s application for membership, in 2012 the Turkish government decided to ease restrictions on the Kurdish language. This was done primarily by allowing what euphemistically was referred to as “living languages and dialects” to be taught as electives in primary schools throughout Turkey, a reform which came to be known as the “4+4+4” reform (see Kaya, 2015).

Already in 2013, one year before the reform was officially meant to be implemented, Kurdish-movement actors seized the opportunity to establish several Kurdish primary schools in Turkey’s Kurdish region. In these schools, Kurmanji was not merely taught as a single elective language course

among other subjects taught in Turkish. Rather, in the movement's primary schools, all subjects were taught in Kurmanji, thereby bypassing the constitutional ban on mother-tongue education, which was in conflict with Erdogan's original idea of the reform. While the Kurdish movement's primary schools were, in this way, *de facto* illegal according to Turkish law, the Turkish state avoided interfering in them for some time, tacitly allowing them to exist, fearing that a crackdown would decrease the chances of a Turkish accession to the EU.

Those taking the lead in organizing these schools were from the Kurdish movement's own language school for adults, the *Kurdî-Der*, the Kurdish Educational Support House, and the educational branch of the syndicate the *Eğitim-Sen*. While the *Eğitim-Sen* generally is not considered part of the Kurdish movement per se, I observed that many of its members and subgroups collaborated with Kurdish-movement actors in some cities in Turkey's Southeast region on certain projects.

In 2014, the first five primary schools were opened in different neighborhoods of Diyarbakir as a Kurdish-movement pilot project. The first to open was the Ferzand Kemanger primary school. The school was named after a Kurdish primary school teacher from Iran who was sentenced to death in 2008 and assassinated in 2010 by the Iranian government for allegedly being a member of the outlawed Kurdish political organization, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) (Amnesty International, 2008). For an understanding of the symbolic politics in this initial school, it should be mentioned that the PJAK in Iran generally is understood to be affiliated with the PKK in Turkey, which means that the school was indirectly named after a Kurdish-movement "martyr."

The reform came into practice in 2014, but was met with much resistance, anger, and direct and indirect opposition from Turkish principals, teachers, and parents who were angered by kids learning Kurdish in Turkish schools (Kaya, 2015). In the wake of the break in the peace negotiations between the PKK and the Turkish state in the summer 2015, most of the movement's schools were closed because the Turkish police considered them illegal.

This Kurdish-movement project of establishing autonomous primary schools reflects both a view of autonomy as cultural self-determination as well as a view of autonomy that is in line with the new ideological paradigm of the movement as self-organized, locally anchored collectives.

## **The People's Democratic Councils**

At the core of the practical experiments with democratic autonomy is the system of so-called Democratic People's Councils, which is at the center of Öcalan's writings on democratic confederalism. The idea and aim of this system is that people in small geographical areas—such as a neighborhood in

a city or a small village in a rural area—will organize themselves into local councils where people will make decisions and solve their problems communally and collectively. In a fully developed democratic confederal system, there would be a democratic people's council in every village and every neighborhood in all cities. Two individuals would be elected as spokespersons by the council members—one man and one woman, according to the movement principle of the so-called “co-chair” system. When issues could not be solved at the neighborhood level of the councils, delegates would bring to the fore the issue at hand to the next level of the council structure: the level of the district. In the district councils, delegates from all the neighborhood councils in a respective district would meet on a regular basis and take decisions collectively on cases where issues could not be solved at the neighborhood level. Delegates would bring propositions back from the district council to the respective neighborhood council, where they would again be voted upon—for or against. In theory, the movement tends to stress that these are delegates and not representatives. However, in practice, it seemed to me that those who communicate between councils on the neighborhood level and the district level either work as representatives or delegates. The next level of the council structure would be the province or city level. In the council I attended in Wan, there were different working committees that anyone could sign up to. Anyone who chose to could also establish new working committees in addition to those already in place.

In our council there was a policy that the council should always be open during the daytime, seven days a week. Therefore, a roster was organized in order for there always to be at least one person in place. Meetings were held regularly and irregularly, depending on needs. The council I attended was newly opened, so an important part of the work of the active members was to inform other blocks in the neighborhood about the work of the council so as to include more people in its structure. This was done through what were called the *Komîn*-meetings where the council would go from door to door in an attempt to organize more *Komîns*, which could include active members in a single housing unit who would be represented in the neighborhood councils. The investigations I conducted during my field research indicated that there was great diversity in how widespread, active, and well-developed the council structures were in different districts, towns, and cities. In Gewer, I came across council meetings where I counted more than hundred participating individuals (but only four women), whereas the council meetings in certain neighborhoods in Diyarbakir only counted a handful. In interviews with more established Kurdish institutions like the DTK, the BDP, and the KJA, the scope of the council system was often exaggerated.

## **Autonomous Kurdish Legal System**

One of the working committees within the system of the Democratic People's Councils is the so-called "peace committee," also sometimes referred to as the "legal committee" in certain areas. Movement participants often mentioned that they considered the aim of the legal committees to be preventing blood feuds and the cycles of violence that could emerge from such feuds. Blood feuds were generally understood to have a destructive and splitting effect on the Kurdish communities. The aim of these committees is also to solve disputes between individuals and families on the local level where they actually emerged, and thereby to prevent the conflicts escalating. These legal committees represent the first and smallest level of the Kurdish movement's parallel legal system.

Disputes and illegal activities concerning issues related to women in particular, such as forced marriage, child marriage, domestic violence, rape, and so forth, are never addressed in the legal commissions of the Democratic People's Councils, as these consist of both women and men. Rather, they are solved through the women's committees of the KJA, the Kurdish women's movement. The logic here is that men should never be put in a position to influence, judge, or evaluate right and wrong in cases where women have been subjected to injustice, wrongdoings, or abuse by men. This is in line with the focus of emancipation of women, which constitutes a crucial aspect of the democratic autonomy paradigm. The KJA is one among several sub-movements within the broader Kurdish movement. I did communicate with individuals who had taken active part in informal KJA "trials" where only women were present. In their perception, attempts were made to avoid using Turkish legal structures, which were seen as untrustworthy and rooted in Turkish chauvinism.

The local branches of the Kurdish political party, the DBP, which runs most of Kurdish formal politics on the municipal level in Turkey's Kurdish region, also always has a "peace committee" or a "legal committee." My impression is that in cases where the disputes cannot be solved through the local legal committees of Democratic People's Councils on the neighborhood level themselves, the members of the legal committee of that respective council (the parties of a conflict themselves cannot sit as delegates in the legal committee that works on his/her case) can bring the case to the fore in the DBP legal committee, where a larger number of elected individuals become involved.

Both the family representing the accuser and the family representing the accused must accept a proposition for a solution to the dispute before the "case" can be considered closed. According to movement participants in Gewer, the movement's legal processes are therefore normally lengthy and time consuming. The structure of the system itself prevents quick decisions

from being made, as all involved parties have to come to an agreement about the outcome. In particularly serious cases in which, for instance, violence has been involved, both the family of the victim, the victim her/himself, as well as the family of the accused, have to agree on any potential punishment. Generally, attempts are made to avoid punishment.

In the particular council in which I participated in Wan, there was also a legal committee. However, since the disputes were often of a private nature concerning particular families rather than the general public, I was never in a position to observe how the commission worked in a practical case.

## CONCLUSION

Further research is needed in order to adequately answer whether grassroots activists within the Kurdish movement who are engaged in enacting democratic autonomy in practice do so predominantly because they are opposed to Turkish domination or because they are opposed to the idea and practice of centralized state authority and political representation. This is a crucial question as its answer may indicate certain potential future pathways in the political development of the movement. Assuming that activists agree with Öcalan's ideological writings in all or most aspects would be to reproduce those same colonial, patriarchal, and hierarchical discourses that the democratic autonomy project is framed as being in opposition to. Likewise, to assume that those who disagree without obstacles would advocate for alternatives, would similarly be to fail to consider the complexities of the potential workings of power within a movement itself, also when the movement strives to fight for—and from the standpoint of—emancipatory and egalitarian principles.

Three main approaches to autonomy common among members of the Kurdish movement have been identified in this chapter. These were a view of autonomy as micro-territorial autonomous geographies where Turkish police were not able to interfere, autonomy as cultural self-determination, and autonomy as enacted communal alternatives. Constructive resistance practices—such as the council system, the autonomous Kurdish primary schools, and the autonomous legal system—are practices rooted in this logic of autonomy that interact with the movement's ideological paradigm of democratic autonomy.

The autonomous Kurdish primary schools, the council system, as an attempt to establish radical democracy, and the parallel Kurdish legal system could all be seen as “constructive resistance” practices. That is because these practices stand out as alternatives, enacted from below by a subaltern group with the aim of undermining the power of Turkish state dominance through the alternatives they represent.



## NOTES

1. When I, in a resistance studies context, refer to the concept of power, I mean some form of domination or coercion, what Mark Haugaard and others broadly have framed as “power over” (Haugaard, 2012; Lukes, 2005; Pansardi, 2012). Due to the lack of space, I will in the subsequent analysis exclude poststructuralist notions of power.

2. I translated the Kurdish word *ax* to “land” here, referring to agricultural land, not land as in country.

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*Part IV*

**Infrapolitics of Resistance**



## Chapter Seven

# Challenging State Borders

### *Smuggling as Kurdish Infra-Politics During “The Years of Silence”*

Adnan Çelik<sup>1</sup>

After the period of violence and harsh repressions from 1921 to 1938, the Kurds of Turkey retracted, and for decades did not take any initiative to openly challenge or confront the state. Defeated by the Turkish state on battlefields, their struggle was expressed in various forms over the subsequent decades. New forms of daily practices turned into a nest of a more-or-less secret and fragmented resistance. In my doctoral dissertation, I showed that these practices range from smuggling to attending traditional Kurdish *madrassa* turned clandestine, some forms of banditry as well as the transmission of oral culture by the *dengbêj* or the consumption of forbidden radio stations (Çelik 2018a).

In this article,<sup>2</sup> I demonstrate how despite the military victory of the Turkish state over Kurdish revolts, these latter continued to exercise different forms of resistance—what James C. Scott calls “infrapolitics.” I will examine a phenomenon that has played a decisive role in the social life of the Kurdish regions since 1930s, namely *qaçaxçîtî*<sup>3</sup> or “smuggling,” trying to demonstrate how it constitutes a form of infrapolitics for the Kurds during “the years of silence.” I will consider *qaçaxçîtî* as a “spatial friction” against the state, particularly in Lice, a district of Diyarbakir province, and emphasize the intermingling of this phenomenon with the dynamics of larger social transformations that shake the traditional structures in their foundations. Finally, I will show how in the 1970s the networks and *ethos* formed by the practices of infrapolitics over four preceding decades are reoriented toward *parapolitics* or an open and massive political confrontation.

## THE NESTS OF KURDISH RESISTANCE UNDER STATE OPPRESSION

Developing the idea of “infrapolitics” by the subalterns, Scott explains the choice of this term that “seems an appropriate shorthand to convey the idea that we are dealing with an unobtrusive realm of political struggle” (Scott 1990, 183). For him, until recently, “much of the active political life of subordinate groups has been ignored because it takes place at a level we rarely recognize as political.” He adds: “To emphasize the enormity of what has been, by and large, disregarded, I want to distinguish between the open, declared forms of resistance, which attract most attention, and the disguised, low-profile, undeclared resistance that constitutes the domain of infrapolitics” (Scott 1990, 198). According to Scott, “when the rare civilities of open political life are curtailed or destroyed, as they so often are, the elementary forms of infrapolitics remain as a defense in depth of the powerless” (Scott 1990, 201). He shows “how each realm of open resistance to domination is shadowed by an infrapolitical twin sister who aims at the same strategic goals but whose low profile is better adapted to resisting an opponent who could probably win any open confrontation” (Scott 1990, 184). As Scott insists, the infrapolitic “is essentially the strategic form that the resistance of subjects must assume under conditions of great peril” (Scott 1990, 199).

The penetration of the Turkish state as a “despotic power” (see Mann 1988) into the Kurdish regions can be considered as having created the ideal and typical conditions for the development of these forms of underground resistance, especially from the late 1930s onward during the massacres of Dersim. The failure of the revolts and the brutality of repression, which targets open forms of resistance and indiscriminately covers “potential dangers,” for a long time deterred organized collective action. At the same time, during this period, the state’s “infrastructural power” (see Mann 1988) was virtually absent from most of the Kurdish territories of Turkey, further encouraging the development of Kurdish infrapolitics at different levels. But as Scott points out, it is more accurate to see the “*hidden transcripts*” that built these infrapolitics not as inheritors of open resistance practices, but as their conditions of possibility (Scott 2009, 208). Illegal border crossings, the survival in clandestine of *madrasas* and their role in the dissemination of a competing system of education and law, practices such as banditry, and all these forms of infrapolitics can be considered as prerequisites for the “public transcript” that appears starting from the 1960s. Each of these forms of disguised resistance is the “silent component” of the forms of public resistance that would manifest themselves loudly first in the *Doğu Mitingleri*<sup>4</sup> then in the appearance of political factions preceding the return of armed resistance. To pay exclusive attention to the declared and overt resistance, as done in the majority of the existing literature, does not allow us to “under-



stand the process by which new political forces and demands germinate before they burst on the scene” (Scott 2009, 216).

## SMUGGLING: A CHALLENGE TO STATE BORDERS

It is known that the process of nation-state formation is at the same time a process of fortifying borders. In his work on the history of passport, John Torpey shows that the modern state wants to monopolize the sovereignty over legitimate circulation within or between borders as much as legal violence (Torpey 2010).

The Ottoman Empire disintegrated in the wake of the First World War. The maps appearing in the following years figured two, then three new states: Turkey and Iraq, and then Syria, separated by international borders none of which had ever existed before. The repercussions of this significant change had been widely studied at the administrative and political sphere (see Beşikçi 1970; Tejel Gorgas 2007), but we know little of its economic and social consequences. These borders separated populations which were united by all sorts of social and economic interdependencies.

The borders of the new nation-states of the Middle East administratively divided these regions, ending in tearing apart their social, historical, religious, geographical, and environmental fabric. Faced with their permeability and persistent crossings that undermined the state’s cultural and territorial homogenization, the states over the time reinforced the borders by using “security” technology which rendered their crossing difficult and mortal. Against the perceptions of the geography and the ideological fictions imposed by the nation-states in-construction, the existence and the persistence of memories, perceptions of space and locally anchored practices represent a form of challenge (Aras 2014, 16).

As Jordi Gorgas Tejel emphasized the economic integration of Kurdistan, that had already started under the Ottoman administration, enters into a new phase with the creation of “national borders” and, in consequence, new “national markets.” During the Ottoman period, the traditional centers of Kurdish economic activity were cities like Aleppo, Damascus, and Baghdad. With the demarcation of new borders, these centers became inaccessible and the Turkish government made the west of the country a substitution center toward where the Kurdish populations in Turkey would orient themselves. But the state’s initiative to reorient the Kurdish regional economy has only partly been successful, as the regions along the borders continue to turn to their traditional economic circuits. What the state names as *kaçakçılık* (“smuggling,” we shall return to this term) becomes thus a very important economic activity in the Kurdish periphery (Tejel Gorgas 2007, 67–68). In fact, paradoxically, the transformation of the transborder trade into smuggling, its

criminalization along with the obstacles and the increasing dangers that the *kaçakçıs* go through not only failed to prevent the preservation of the previous trade circuits but they also led to the intensification of this activity which, due to new national borders and the difference between their economies, represented new possibilities of profit. Finally, as aptly summarized by Mesut Yeğen, it is the creation of new borders between Turkey, Iraq, and Syria that transformed the “normal” economic activity of the Kurds into “smuggling,” that is, into illegal activity. Economic interactions with the other side of the “national” borders was maintained, constituting “a real challenge for the nation building project.” Yeğen specifies: “The interpretation of smuggling as resistance to the Turkification of economic space, instead of the desire to establish a Kurdish national economy, is of great significance in locating the practice of centralization in its rightful place. Smuggling may not be considered as a proper indicator of a confrontation between two nationalist (Turkish and Kurdish) projects, but it does represent the resistance of the Kurds to the imposition of a national project (Turkish) on a territorial space, the politics of which was conditioned by an a-national logic” (Yeğen 1996, 223). Although it would clearly be unjust, as Yeğen insists, to relate the phenomenon of *kaçakçılık* to a nationalist consciousness or project, it can on the other hand more easily be linked to a conscious refusal of the state authority that tries to impose itself (one of the multiple strategies under *the art of not being governed*, to take up James Scott’s terms).

Martin van Bruinessen assesses that during all the Kemalist period, the smuggling remained, along with agriculture and stockbreeding, the most important sector of economy in the Kurdish regions (Bruinessen, 1992: 190).

Hamit Bozarslan pointed out that apart from the revolts which by now occupy a central place in Kurdish historiography, the border dynamics gave rise to an armed dissidence that is not very structured but diffuse and constant. In fact, the 1920s saw the implementation of new territorial and political engineering that changed the very definition of space and the border. Up until the beginning of the twentieth century, the borders separating the Ottoman, Persian, and Russian states did not forbid, beyond exceptions, neither population movements nor informal economic transactions nor dual citizenship and, in some cases, the “non-citizenship” of “the subjects of the empires.” Military control of borders and sanitary measures, such as the establishment of quarantine areas, were common but limited in duration. However, the First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the Sovietization of the Caucasus in the early 1920s, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and the creation of Syria and Iraq resulted in both the proliferation of borders and their almost total militarization. From a rather symbolic line with the time of empires, the borders were transformed into symbols of state power, at the limits of “national economy” and their integrity as “the honor of the nation.” They do not only divide the Kurds (and elsewhere, other

ethnicities) as a group, but severely set apart closer entities such as tribes and families by making their communication difficult, if not impossible. Crossing the borders becomes synonymous with smuggling, a practice that is equated to “treason to the nation” (Bozarslan 2016).

We will now analyze the evolution of the modes of understanding and reacting to smuggling by state authorities before entering into the details of what this phenomenon represented to the Kurds, for whom smuggling remains an essential theme in oral history (E. Yıldırım 2013), cinema (Akad 1966; Aksoy 1979; Gören 1987; Arıç 1992; Ghobadi 2000; Güney and Gören 1982; Çetin 1999; Şavata 2001), literature (Yıldız 1975; Fatah 2015; Abdulla 2015), memoirs (Serdi 1993; Pêrîşan 2006; Ekinci 2010), and music.

### **Historical Background of Smuggling and State Policy**

Having subdued the Sheikh Said revolt of 1925, the Turkish army led a campaign of repression against the Kurdish populations of the regions where the insurgents had benefited from the complicity of the inhabitants. In the same vein, the Turkish government decided to displace some Kurdish chiefs along with the members of their tribes to the west of the country. As it was mentioned above, many of them decided to escape to the other side of the border in Syria, which was at the time under French mandate. According to the official figures of the French authorities, in 1939 the Upper Jazirah comprised a total population of 158,550 inhabitants, of which 81,450 were Muslim Kurds and 2,150 Yezidi Kurds. While before 1927 there were barely forty-five Kurdish villages in this region, in 1939, between 700 to 800 Kurdish-majority localities could be counted. Kurdish immigration in the 1920s and 1930s had thus important consequences on the human geography of the region as it made the Kurds the majority group in Upper Jazirah (Tejel Gorgas 2007, 130).

The nationalist discourse of the new Kemalist regime about these migrant populations in Syria varied slightly throughout the 1920s and 1930s. For Turkey, it was directly related to the Armenian and Kurdish issues. Syria, especially the city and region of Aleppo, was home to many Armenian refugees, survivors of massacres and deportations in Anatolia during the war and those fleeing post-war Republican persecutions. Throughout this period, the Turkish nationalist discourse insists on their “revanchist ambitions.” The same goes for the Kurds who took refuge in Syria during the insurgencies of the period from 1925 to 1938. In a way, they were considered an even greater threat for Turkish nationalism, since the Kurds were still numerous in the territory of the Republic and that the latter sought to incorporate them, whereas the Armenians had been eliminated there (Altuğ and White 2009, 93–94).

This dimension of the demographic changes in 1920s and 1930s is of essential importance. In the three localities considered in our research, after the defeat of the Sheikh Said rebellion but especially after the military operation on Lice in 1927, the great majority of the insurgents from Lice joined in the processions of people seeking refuge in Syria. While some of them returned after the amnesty of 1928, the others settled there (Serdí 1993; Pêrişan 2006). Since 1915, but also after 1925, many Armenians and Syrians of the towns of Kulp, Lice, and Silvan took part among these emigrants forced to leave toward Syria (Tachjian 2004; Altuğ 2011).

### The Transformation of Trade into “Smuggling”

Donnan and Wilson, in their work on the border, draw our attention to the trap that would represent for the researcher to adopt the state terminology that has criminalized (and renamed it after this criminalization) certain practices of exchange of goods, in this case “smuggling”: with its meaning that combines illegality and illegitimacy, it encompasses a totally different meaning than for ordinary people, for whom these practices are completely legitimate. (See Donnan and Wilson 1999). In the same vein, Ayşe Yıldırım, based on her ethnographic research in the border region of Nusaybin (Turkey) and Qamişlo (Syria), states that it is problematic to define the cross-border commercial activities practiced by her interlocutors as *kaçakçılık*, since they do not use this term to describe such activities, but most often the expression *lêxistina sînor/hidûd* (literally “striking the border”<sup>5</sup>). For her too, the use of the word “smuggling” is related to a statist perspective (E. Yıldırım 2013, 464). In my own field research in Kulp, Lice and Silvan, although the expression *lêxistina sînor/hidûd* is also sometimes used, the most frequently used term is *kaçakçılık*, or its Kurdish equivalent *qaçaxçîî*. However, the activity itself is by no means perceived as illegitimate. (Ramazan Aras, who works on the Turkish-Syrian border on the side of Mardin, shares this same observation. [Aras 2015, 87.] One of the most remarkable points regarding the memory of the border between Turkey and Syria is the use of the terms “serxet” and “binxet” for referring to the north and south, respectively. In Kurmanji, *serxet* literally means “above the line” while *binxet* stands for “under the line.” These terms are composed with reference not to the line of the border but that of the railway, which was constructed by French companies at the end of the Ottoman period. This is found in the *kilams* of the dengbêj (see Hamelink and Barış 2014), in Kurdish literature (Berekat 2014), as well as in the testimonies collected indistinctively in various Kurdish cities (Altuğ 2011; A. Yıldırım 2013; E. Yıldırım 2013; Özgen 2005b; Şenoğuz 2014; Aras 2015, 79). During my fieldwork trips in 2013 and 2014, all the *qaçaxçîî* that I interviewed, as well as others, kept employing “serxet” and “binxet” as geographical designations.<sup>6</sup>

Smuggling and the violation of the borders was initially perceived as a problem relating to tribes, but the state rapidly started to consider it as a much larger problem. The fact that the city of Aleppo remained as the center of cross-border trade with the Kurdish regions of Turkey led the Turkish state to project an efficient policy for bringing it to an end and creating a real national economy. To do this, the Turkish state commissioned its agents in 1930s to prepare reports on the nature of the exchanged goods and the profile of the smugglers. In 1931, Şükrü Kaya, the minister of interior affairs is sent to Antep for sketching an assessment of the situation in this domain. İsmet İnönü, the prime minister, is so eager to receive its fruits that he demands Şükrü Kaya to send him provisional reports instead of waiting for the final report.<sup>7</sup>

In the twenty-eight-page long report from December 5, 1931, in which Şükrü Kaya presents his conclusions in much more detail than preceding works, we see for the first time the expression “*kaçakçılık sorunu*” (the problem/question of smuggling) which is considered to be quite worrying especially on the Syrian border.<sup>8</sup> His first observation concerns the central role of the city of Aleppo in Kurdish economy, that is, for all of the *vilayets* of the south of the country up to Siirt and Muş. He complains that although the construction of the railway between Fevzi Paşa and Malatya, between Malatya and Elaziz [Elazığ], and the part of the line in construction toward Diyarbakir allowed to partly “save” these cities, Aleppo remained clearly dominant at the level of the region.<sup>9</sup> He writes that the smuggling from Aleppo, stretching from Cizre to Payas, in all of the small towns and villages that stretch along the railway line that separates the two countries, is mostly exercised by the Armenians and to a smaller degree by the Syriac traders. He specifies that among the smugglers there are also the “citizens of our country” who left to settle there and who receive the support of the government in Syria. They rely on their familiarity with the geography and the language of this region.<sup>10</sup> In this report that points to diverse forms of smuggling on the southern border, Kaya indicates that the most common one takes place on the parts of border with no protection by transporting on the back of men and by loading animals. The economically most important form of smuggling emerged in 1929 and it consisted of convoys of twenty to fifty persons, that were armed and referred to by their cities of origin (Sivas, Erzurum, etc.).<sup>11</sup>

One of the points he insists on in his report is obviously the lack of staff appointed for the protection and the control of borders: for 900 kilometers between Cizre and Cerablus, only 400 private soldiers and 396 cavalry soldiers, that is fewer than 800 persons distributed on only twelve border posts.<sup>12</sup> These figures clearly show the weakness of the infrastructural power of the young Turkish Republic in Kurdish regions around a dozen years after its foundation.

While we can consider Kaya's report of 1931 as the founding text in the construction of smuggling as "national problem," it is the notes of the general inspectors in 1936 that give us most of details about the state policy on the struggle against *kaçakçılık*, which is one of its primary topics. Here are some of the reasons, provided by the general commander for the protection of customs Seyfi Düzgören, explaining the birth of smuggling:

- The easiness of crossing a border so long as that of the south (750 km) and in a flat region without natural obstacles.
- Family ties and old proximity between the inhabitants of the two sides of the border.
- Protection and encouragement to smuggling by the French border forces under the management of the French intelligence services.
- Certain restrictive rules of Turkish trade policy incite the population to resort to smuggling for obtaining certain goods or obtaining them for affordable prices.
- The inadequacy of the [Turkish] local production, for example, when it comes to fabric and clothes, to the taste and habits of the population in the east ("the Armenians master the art of selling goods, they order in smuggling according to the colours and motifs preferred by the men and women of each *vilayet*"). (Varlık 2010, 237–38)

In both of the reports mention is made about the existence, near the border on Syrian side, of large sheds of goods where the smugglers could directly provide for themselves; it is stated there that the provision stocks of the *kaçakçı* from Lice and Silvan are located in Amûdê and Qamiso (BCA 030.01.68.432.10 and Varlık 2010, 235–36).

In order to be able to fight smuggling, the general inspectors ask for border protection measures such as cavalry units, lighthouses, and modern weapons that will gradually render the border impassable. They propose to increase the price of tobacco and cigarettes, which the state has monopole over and that it usually buys for low price. As for goods such as textile, the state should produce and sell for a very low price, a task that could be undertaken by Sümerbank<sup>13</sup> (Varlık 2010).

İsmet İnönü does not consider the border security a simple question of security but as integral to a larger political, economic and geographic perspective. He sees the question with its geopolitical and ethnic components, considering for instance that as the "French make use of the Kurds," the Turks should entertain good relations with Arabs (Öztürk 2008, 46).

From 1931 onward, each year the state institutions gather statistics on the evolution of the practices in the domain of smuggling. Unfortunately only those of 1931–1932 and 1955–1957 are free to access at Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet archives (Republican archives). According to the general Seyfi

Düzgören, between 1932 and 1936, 87,000 *kaçakçı* were arrested, 207 were killed, and 130 wounded, while nine soldiers were killed in those operations (Varlık 2010, 202). Below are the figures drawn from Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet archives for the years from 1955 to 1957 (they concern the months from January to October, the figures of the months from November to December being lacking for the three years).

Although limited, the figures of this table, that concern only three years, allow us to see clearly that on one hand the number of “incidents” has decreased, while on the other hand the number of incidents ending in the death of the *kaçakçı* increased remarkably. To make sense of these figures, it should be noted that the security measures asked for by the general inspectors went beyond the expectations of 1930s, since in 1956, the Turkish government proceeded to mining its border with Syria. (Another important motivation of this mining has to do with the rise of tension between the two blocs in cold war, the Soviet Union being on the side of Syria while Turkey had become a NATO member in 1952. Özgen 2007; E. Yıldırım 2013; A. Yıldırım 2013; Aras 2015). The Turkish state indeed placed between 900,000 to 935,000 antipersonnel mines on 256,104,743 hectares of nationalized border territory, 615,419 hectares of which being on the Turkish-Syrian border between 1956 and 1959 (E. Yıldırım 2013, 490; Şenoğuz 2014). Moreover, the rise of the Kurdish nationalist movement around Mullah Mustafa Barzani in Iraq from the end of the 1950s led to a strict intransigence of the Turkish state toward irregular border crossings. We do not have access to the statistics of the following years, but we know from newspapers, testimonies and literature of the 1960s–1970s that the number of deaths on the borders kept increasing. During the large demonstrations of the East in 1967–1969, there appear numerous slogans condemning the death of the *kaçakçı* (see Gündoğan 2005).

With the mines, the border became even “thicker” and reinforced. Gendarmerie stations (*karakol*) and control and observation towers were built. Barbed wire was installed. The security and the administration of the border

**Table 7.1.**

<b>Incidents linked to <i>kaçakçılık</i> in 1955, 1957, 1958<sup>1</sup></b>			
	<b>1955</b>	<b>1956</b>	<b>1957</b>
<b>Number of incidents</b>	2.661	2.152	1.975
<b><i>Kaçakçı</i> s arrested alive</b>	2.161	1.333	1.263
<b><i>Kaçakçı</i> s arrested dead (sic!)</b>	28	49	96
<b><i>Kaçakçı</i> s arrested wounded</b>	18	14	26

<sup>1</sup>BCA 030.01.68.432.10

were left to mobile gendarmerie. Two garrisons were installed in the border cities of Mardin and Antep (E. Yıldırım 2013, 490; Şenoğuz 2014).

The state would not stop increasing its efforts for reinforcing the border. Routes were built to connect two border *karakols* and the height of the barbed wire was increased. 1975 is an important year in this domain, from then on one soldier was positioned at each fifty meters along the border line (E. Yıldırım 2013, 474).

Regardless of the actual reinforcements of the border, the 1970s were the golden age of smuggling. Border cities like Nusaybin and Kilis had closed markets devoted to selling the goods brought by the *kaçakçı*. These markets were rather active in cities such as Idil, Silopi, Lice. According to an estimation, in 1975, some 60,000 people were actively involved in smuggling in Turkey (E. Yıldırım 2013, 470).

On the other hand, in 1980s, exceptions aside, the smuggling on the Syrian border was to a large extent finished. The principal reason was the abolition of custom fees by Turgut Özal, which marked the entry into a new period. The products that used to be brought in by the *kaçakçı* were now widely accessible and low priced, the interest in exercising smuggling had thus *grosso modo* disappeared (Özgen 2005a; E. Yıldırım 2013).

Contrary to the Syrian border, it was not easy to reinforce the borders with Iraq and Iran. Situated in mountainous and steep territory, these border lines remained difficult, even impossible, to put under control. Whereas the Syrian border was to a large extent under control by the beginning of the 1980s, the mountainous regions of the border with Iraq and Iran were still equally porous. (Özgen 2005a, 474; for this phenomenon on the Iranian-Turkish border in 1970s see the ethnographic work by Beşikci 1970). As much as the Iranian border is concerned, though, it was also mined in 1983–1984 (E. Yıldırım 2013, 553).

The few studies that have been done on the borders or on the question of *kaçakçılık* in Turkey focus on the cities or districts located on border zones (See Özgen 2007; A. Yıldırım 2013; E. Yıldırım 2013; Şenoğuz 2015; Aras 2015; Bozçalı 2014). As such, our study focusing on the phenomenon of *kaçakçılık* in Lice, allow us to reveal entirely different dimensions of the issue. Whereas Lice is more than 300 kilometers from Syrian-Iraqi borders, and almost 200 kilometers from the Iranian border, the witnesses interviewed by Ayse Yıldırım in Nusaybin and Amûdê (Syrian side), by Eslîxan Yıldırım on the border with Iran, Iraq, and Syria, and by Ramazan Aras in Mardin make numerous references to the “*kaçakçıs* on horseback from Lice” (E. Yıldırım 2013, 500–600; A. Yıldırım 2013; Aras 2015, 100).

The position of Lice in resisting to integrate to the national economy of the Turkish Republic should be studied in linking its state of an old transit city on the commercial routes in Ottoman times. The *kaçakçı* of Lice could do smuggling on the three fronts, which is a unique case compared to all



other cities of Turkey. Actually, when conditions of movement or political circumstances rendered a particular trade difficult, they would align themselves toward other goods and other destinations.

We can try to trace the evolution of the forms of commercial exchanges exercised by the people from Lice over a long period and thus see how the changes in geo-socio-political conditions transformed the *merkepçi* (“the muleteers”) who were a type of *kaçakçı*. We can distinguish three stages. First, in the Ottoman period the Lice-Bingöl route was one of the major trade routes. The people of Lice would run caravans linking Aleppo from the south up to Erzurum in the north. Tobacco and leather would be transported from Lice toward Aleppo and cigarette papers, fabric, rifle, and ammunition would be carried from there to Lice (Tîgrîs 2008, 54; Ekinci 2010, 125). Baghdad and Mosul cities were part of this trade as well as, albeit to a more limited extent, border cities of Persian Empire. Second, after the creation of new nation-states and the banning of border crossings, these same routes continued to be taken for transporting from one state to another goods that could be sold for profit, but this trade got at that point stigmatized as smuggling. This mode of trade continued after 1925, the year when after the Sheikh Said revolt it was transformed into *kaçakçılık* by way of banning. But it became even more common starting from 1950s and until 1970s, parallel to the border, especially because the dangers of border crossing had rendered the price of the sale more expensive. Third, starting from the second half of 1970s, the smuggling of weapons and heroin became widespread, with more intensive trade with Iraq and Iran, while the exchanges with Syria decreased. In terms of nature, origin and destination of the goods, the selling of weapons in Iraq, and the purchase of heroin in Iran became widespread. In that period, smuggling was no more an individual initiative or exercised in small groups but it became the work of most powerful and better organized networks, often involving also some sectors of the state.

The crossborder mobility of the inhabitants of Lice, retained despite the creation of borders, had multiple effects on the economic, social, and political trajectory of the district. On the political ground, for instance, the *kaçakçıs* of Lice, well beyond their economic role, became in the new context but especially starting from 1950s the levers of the propagation of Kurdish national consciousness in construction. Being the principal vectors of communication between the four parts of Kurdistan, they contributed to making the conditions of the Kurds in respective parts known to each other, a type of knowledge that got politicised in time. This was illustrated most significantly in the episode of the Mahabad Republic (Iranian Kurdistan, 1946) when the *kaçaxçi* of Lice were informing the Kurds of Turkey on the ongoing political developments in Iran. In the same vein, when the movement led by Barzani started to fight against the Iraqi state (in the 1960s), it was the *kaçakçı* who disseminated the news in Turkey. Circulating and col-

lecting the news of the four parts, witnesses of the conditions of the Kurds under four oppressive regimes, the *kaçakçıs* allowed also the diffusion of books and audio cassettes that were banned in Turkey. They were at the heart of the process—while the Kurdish movement in Turkey had entered into its “years of silence” following the Dersim suppression—of establishing the Turkey branch of the PDK (Kurdistan Democratic Party, led by Barzani), namely PDK-T (Democratic Party of Kurdistan—Turkey), a process spearheaded by the people from Lice. Although *kaçakçılık* played an undeniable role in the construction of Kurdish national consciousness, it cannot be reduced to this reading alone, since as we will see in the testimonies, the image of the *kaçakçı* is encircled with a prestige and positive imagery stemming from his challenging of the state authority, whose strategies he continuously thwarts in order to exercise his “profession.” Just as there are codes of behaviour and honour proper to tribal membership, there emerged an “*ethos of kaçakçı*” with its own norms.

### The Construction of an “Ethos of Kaçakçı” in Lice

The methods in oral history allow for hearing the voice of the subalterns who are rendered silent by the dominant history (Neyzi 2010). The interviews that I conducted in this perspective in Lice show the existence of a strong memory about the issue of *qaçaxçîî*. We could say that my interlocutors refer to the period from 1950s to 1980s as *dema qaçaxî* (“the time of smuggling”), which is an oft-used expression. The majority of my interlocutors who had been involved in smuggling were proud of it. For them *qaçaxçîî*, being a form of challenge to the state, was considered as an act of *mêrxasî* (virility, honour, heroism). They describe it as a powerful network of relations founded on courage, confidence and complicity, friendship, and risk-taking. The *qaçaxçîî* is a particular experience that relies on special norms of communal work. The ethos of *qaçaxçî* that is constructed around this experience is empowered within the traditional networks of solidarity represented by family and necessity of a network organized in clandestine.

The transportation of the goods that was, in Ottoman times, handled by caravans pulled by mules (*merkepçilik* and *kervancılık*) and which continued under the Republican period in the form of *kaçakçılık* to bordering countries, as well as the equivalent of these practices within the country or region (*çerçilik*<sup>14</sup>), evolved after 1970s into smuggling of weapons and heroin by means of the inter-city transportation companies (bus companies) or in large trucks. This evolution of *qaçaxçîî* should be assessed against the background, on one hand, of the accumulation of the capital of *qaçaxçî* and, on the other hand, of the urge to adapt to the new conditions for continuing their activity.

The successive passage from *kervancilik* to trafficking heroin through the central stage of *qaçaxçîtî* is really at the same time about constructing a network, both a network of connections toward outside and an internal network connecting all of the actors of this trade. This network starts with the family but extends with the connections of collaboration, confidence, comradery, solidarity, and adventures experienced together through these practices. Due to such facts as the illegality of the trade, mortal risk taken while crossing a border with mines and soldiers, the necessity of crossing as soon as possible and at night, and finding means for transporting clandestinely the goods bought and sold, shared norms emerged which were imposed on all members entering the network. In certain cases, and in the case of Lice almost systematically, the practice of *qaçaxçîtî* was transferred from father to sons, and also to grandsons, facilitating the knowledge and the appropriation of this ethos right from childhood.

Among the essential rules and norms of behavior that would regulate the completion of the work of the *qaçaxçî* and form the basic principles (or the ideal type) of this ethos, one can consider: (1) not betraying—denouncing is obviously prohibited, just as obtaining personal benefits that run against the initial agreement, and in case of getting arrested one never gives the name of his comrade. (2) In case of the death or wounding of a comrade by soldiers during a border crossing, one never leaves behind the corpse of the death or the wounded comrade. (3) In case of an accident happening to the mule of one of them, the others should help to cover the material loss. (4) In case of the death or imprisonment of a *qaçaxçî*, the others should take care of the members of his family. (5) Total respect is shown to the hosts receiving them to stay the night or allowing them to hide in their place, no “bad eye” (implicit reference to the interdiction of annoying or trying to seduce the women and girls of the house) (Tigrîs 2008, 55).

More concretely, following are some elements of the practice of *qaçaxçîtî* in Lice (regarding especially the years 1950–1970): a back-and-forth trip from Lice to Binxet took fifteen days. The *qaçaxçî* took the trip in groups. The itinerary was precise. The accommodation (the houses of the friends’ families) was chosen a bit far apart from main routes, the *qaçaxçî* walked at night and rested there at daytime. They took gifts to their hosts. From Lice to Binxet, they took particularly tobacco, rifles, and bullets. From there they would bring tea, roll paper, briquets, knives, jackets, trousers, fabric, and so on. Toward the Iraqi Kurdistan, especially during the Barzani’s revolt, the *qaçaxçî* from Lice ensured the transportation of rifles and ammunitions.

The *qaçaxçîtî* is not an individual activity, taking a procedure from the beginning to the end requires setting an organized group. This network is formed out of multiple actors among whom runs a division of labor that creates certain characteristic profiles (A. Yıldırım 2013, 143; Aras 2015, 95). (1) The *sırtçı* (“the one who carries on his back”): this is the simplest, oldest

and most widespread form until the 1950s. One can do it individually and on his own account. It consists in taking a large bag on one's back and carrying out on his own the buying, transportation and selling the goods on the other side of the border. This form disappeared mid 1950s with the reinforcement of the border. It was not really relevant for the *qaçaxçî* from Lice but rather preferred by the inhabitants living close to border lines. (2) The *hamal* ("porter") succeeded the *sirtçi*. It is the same work except that in this one the work is done for a third party, generally for an *agha* or a new trader; the transportation of the goods is paid by task, and the *hamal* obviously does not receive anything from the profits. (A. Yıldırım 2013, 143–44) The borders having been more difficult to cross, the work is usually done through bribes (*rüşvet*) given to soldiers and customs officers, for which only the notables have the (financial and relational) means to do (A. Yıldırım 2013, 143). (3) Horse owner, who works sometimes for himself, sometimes for traders, in which case the amount of his payment is determined according to the quantity of goods and the distance to be taken. In case of arrestation and the seizure of the goods, he is taken responsible for the loss before the owner who entrusted them to him. Due to the distance separating them from the three borders, all of the *qaçaxçî* of Lice belonged to this category. *Hespên Licê* ("The horses of Lice") are reputed all through Kurdistan for their speed, endurance, strength, and ability to move discretely, which implies that a tradition of horse training linked directly to the importance of *qaçaxçîti* emerged in this district. (4) The *rêzan* ("guide"), sometimes also called *kaçakçîbaşı* ("head of the *qaçaxçî*"): this is the one who knows about the region, its obstacles, and its paths. He accompanies the *qaçaxçî* and points to them paths to safe passages. He knows where the mines are or where to risk at the opening of the path, he is in the know of the border stations, and the hours of the patrol of the guards while he is sometimes in contact with soldiers and officers. Most of them are capable of spotting and defusing antipersonnel mines (E. Yıldırım 2013, 502), (which they usually learn during their military service). The *rêzan* attained primary importance in the 1950s and became heroic figures in *qaçaxçîti*. There were *rêzans* in Lice but sometimes they needed local *rêzans*, for instance in Nusaybin region (A. Yıldırım 2013, 147).

Sedat, born in Lice in 1950, talks about this admiration for the *rêzan*:

We would go to Binxet, I would go up to Aleppo, we would go to Qamişlo passing through Nusaybin, it was always the same itinerary: Iraq on our left side and the route to Binxet on the right. Nusaybin was the border, Qamişli was just facing us. We had a *rêzan* who would cut the barbed wire. The border was mined, so he would spread hay on the route to show the path to follow. The *rêzan* were very fast. Our *rêzan* was from Kızıltepe. I never saw someone so courageous as him. Once we were passing a flock, a ram was left way behind us. By the time we arrived in a safe point, the ram was no more there.

The *rêzan* swore “if I do not save this ram from the hands of Turkish soldiers, I am not the father of Lalo!” He was called Xelef. With my three cousins we told him not to do this, but he repeated “I will take the ram back.” With our three cousins we agreed among us that in case something happens to him, we would shoot at the soldiers. When he arrived in *karakol*, he saw the ram tied in its leg, he took it on his back with his *Resas* [a type of kalachnikov often used by the *kaçakçı*] at hand. He carried the ram that was twice as his size. Finally he arrived and told me “go ahead and slaughter this ram, we will eat it.”<sup>15</sup>

Nezir, born in Dêrçam, a village of Lice, in 1956 tells about *qaçaxçîtî*:

All those previous events created an atmosphere of revolt in Lice. This was true for the whole of society. Behçet Canturk is also an old *qaçaxçî*. In our village, Cemil, the father of the wife of my uncle, was *qaçaxçî*. They were very rich, possessing rifles, weapons and horses. They would go to Binxet to take things. They would go to Serhad. Back then we used the word *mêrxas* [“powerful man,” “heroic”] for the *qaçaxçî*. At the same time, these were generous people. They would help the people around them. We all knew that they were illegal.<sup>16</sup>

Menav, born in 1930 at the center of Lice:

Before there was smuggling. We would go to Iran, to Iraq. At the beginning we carried the things on our back. We would go to Amûde in Binxet. We would not take anything with us from here but there we would take shirts, scarves. . . We would carry our load for seven nights. We would sleep during the day and walk at night. At the beginning we did not have horses but later on we would go to Iran and Iraq on horseback. We would take pistols to sell in Iraq. We would sell them to Kurds, who sold them to Arabs. I was exercising *qaçaxçîtî* from 1960 to 1975. We would load 100 kilos on the back of a horse. We would take the route Ercis-Ahlat to go to Iran. We had friends there but we also knew the route. Once at the border, we would stay at a house and they would bring us the goods. We had a *rêzan* who would take things for us from Iran. “Eskerê turko” [pejorative term referring to Turkish soldiers] would receive bribes. To go to Iran we would take the route from Lice to Muş. There was a bridge that was called Pira Sekiz. Once, one of my relatives was wounded by the shooting of soldiers. This was an ambush. We returned leaving everything on the spot. He was wounded, when it was day the soldiers came and imprisoned him. [ . . . ] I would go there with my brother, in groups of 4 or 5 up to 20 persons. Often I was the *rêzan*. At the beginning we went to Binxet as *sirtçi*, than to Iraq and Iran on horses. My horse was called *Kumeyt*. In our neighbourhood there were 10 or 15 horses. Back then one needed 2000 lira for renting a horse. In Lice there were at least 10 or 15 families that were exercising *qaçaxçîtî* in each neighbourhood. As we were doing *qaçaxçîtî* the state would never appoint us as functionary, that was in our files.<sup>17</sup>

Born in 1950 in Lice, having for long time been involved in *qaçaxçîtî*, Sedat thus starts relating this experience:

I exercised *qaçaxçîî* with horses for 14 years. I lost 4 members of my family in that business. One died here in Aligor in the direction of Siverek. Members of the Bucak tribe [a famous Kurdish *aşiret* around Siverek, Urfa] denounced him. A cousin of mine died, another was wounded. An uncle of mine was killed while returning from Iraq. He was told that he should not take that route, but upon approaching the karakol he was attacked by soldiers. They killed him near Kercews. Another of my cousins was killed by soldiers in the village of Tayê. As the people of Lice, we are known to be headstrong since long time. The villagers told him “there are soldiers in that direction, you should not go there,” but ours would not listen. The soldiers of night were afraid of attacking, they waited for the morning. Abdurrezak was caught wounded than he died. The state prosecutor of Erçis asked the soldiers “why did you killed him? This man has four livers [Kurdish expression expressing enormous courage]!” We would go to Iran too, sometimes with 35 to 45 people while some other times only four to five, but we always came back all together. Outside our region there were not many people exercising *qaçaxçîî*. Jackets, shirts, dresses, shawls . . . we would buy in Binxet.<sup>18</sup>

Another dimension of smuggling was the impossibility for the *kaçakçı* to lead a routine daily life, and the anxiety of their families. They had to constantly beware of the raids, patrols, robbers and informers. The women were always worried when their sons or their husbands crossed the border because “everything could happen” (Van Schendel 1993, 203).

Emin, born in 1930 in Aqro, a village in Lice, is proud of his work of *qaçaxçî* during dozens of years and starts his story with the following sentence: “My children, I swear, were not raised with the bread of Turkey. They were raised with the bread of Iraq, Iran and Syria.” After losing his father when he was young he became responsible for his family and started to do *çerçilik* between Lice, Muş and Erzurum.

I started working when I was 10 years old. The people of Lice would buy stuff and exchange them in the north of Lice. We would sell in spring, afterwards we would collect butter around Muş, we would melt it in a container, we would close it with aluminium and take it to Diyarbakir to sell. The money of one day was one *paknot* [in Turkish *banknot*, that is paper money]. In two years, I became quite talented. We would melt 200 containers-full of butter. I was able to prepare a hundred containers on myself. We would load 4 containers on the back of an ass. In Diyarbakir there was Borsa Hani [place name]. We sold them there.<sup>19</sup>

After working for some years as *çerçi*, Emin left to do his military service; upon his return he started to do *kaçakçılık*.

There was a village in the plain called Miterî. From there we would go to Batman, to Mukre . . . From Mardin we would go to Binxet, to the house of Haco [Mala Haco, a notable Kurdish family from the Hevêrkan tribal confed-

eration led by Haco Agha, who were exiled to Binxet at the end of 1920s], they were in Tirbespî. As we were *qaçaxçî*, once there we would change our clothes, we would wear a keffiyeh [checkered traditional scarf worn in Syria] and we would go to the marketplace for buying fabric, tea, jackets, lighters, flints, etc. We would load our stuff, we would wear our weapons on our back, at that time the borders were not mined. We had *rêzans*. If we ran into soldiers, we would fight against them. There was a *rêzan* called Muradê Sêvê. Once with him and another partner we got into shooting with soldiers. We seized 35 *cemses* [military vehicle], even that of the sergeant. One among us wanted to take a soldier hostage, but we had him released the soldier. [. . .] My horse was the best in Lice. There was nobody faster than me, but there was one person better than me. This was Mistefayê Xalit Axa. [. . .] When I returned from the military service at the age of 22, I started to work in *qaçaxçîtî*, up until the earthquake of Lice [1975]. When the earthquake occurred I was in Iran, when I returned my family had moved to Diyarbekir. There was a wedding in the village when the earthquake occurred, 24 people died, one of them being one of my sons. In our village more than 40 people died. I had exactly 70 rifles [to hand to 7 persons in Iraq]. A wall fell over them, but fortunately they were undamaged.<sup>20</sup>

According to the experiences and testimonies of my respondent, we could account for the end of *qaçaxçîtî* in Lice based on the combination of three factors: reinforcement of the borders, launching of the Sümerbank, and the Iran-Iraq war. These three factors seem to be behind the termination of smuggling with Binxet among the people of Lice.

The *qaçaxçîtî* far from being limited to the transportation of banned goods, was *lêxistina sînor*, that is, as stated above, “breaking/striking the border,” that the *qaçaxçî* were employing also with regard to transporting anything that the state wanted to limit or prevent its circulation. Over the years following 1915, they were the ones crossing the surviving Armenians, Syriacs, Chaldeans, and Yezidis to the south of the railway separating Turkey and Syria to Binxet (sometimes, in return of payment, they would pass a surviving Armenian so that they join their families but mostly also letters and gifts that they would exchange from Serxet to Binxet). Than a decade later these were the *mahkum* and *fîrar* that the Republic was searching for; the people who wanted to get to Beirut for working there during the famine in 1940s until 1950; the *feqi* (the students of *madrasa*) who wanted to pursue their studies at the *madrasas* of Binxet; and the people fleeing from a tribal hostility linked to a vendetta or abducting a woman (Bingöl 2004, 44). These were still the *qaçaxçî* who would transport banned cassettes, books and magazines from the borders; young people who wanted to join in the movement led by Barzanî in Iraq in 1960s–1970s and the people who were escaping the military coups of 1971 and than 1980 (Uzun 2013, 353). As Binxet had become the preferred destination of refuge for the Kurds of Turkey fleeing

the regime, the *qaçaxçî* played a crucial, systematic and, as such, political role in it.

In conclusion, although the state policy of fighting the *kaçakçılık* was initially conducted with the aim of building a national economy, starting from the 1950s it began to proceed from a very clear consciousness about the risk of political influence that the Kurdish communities, especially those of Iraq but also Syria, represented for the development of the Kurdish question in Turkey. In this regard, especially after the 1980s, the economic policies concerning the borders were completely put in the service of the “fight against terrorism” (the state began to tacitly allow those accepting to become *korucu* to do smuggling). The *qaçaxçî* got adapted to those new parameters that would end up transforming its nature and meaning.

### **The Transformation of *Qaçaxçî* and the State’s Attempt to Co-opt It**

It was discussed above that the borders were reinforced starting from the second half of the 1950s. Especially in the 1970s, the border with Syria became almost impassable. Both because of the high risks involved in crossing the border and the progressive integration of the Kurdish regions in Turkish economy in the 1970s the *qaçaxçî* lost its attraction. Instead of the old *qaçaxçî* that was done with horses, the border trade was mostly taken over by a new class of traders from border towns who collaborated with custom officers.

In that context, the *qaçaxçî* of Lice turned to selling weapons to Iraq and the trade of heroin from Iran to Europe. The traffic of heroin would become the principal means of subsistence from the second half of the 1970s.

The FBN <sup>21</sup> files compiled by the US agents based in Turkey in the 1950s and the 1960s make little reference to the power or impact of Kurdish traffickers on the Turkish narcotics trade. Apart from a few individuals arrested in “Inner Anatolia” (that is, eastern Turkey), the construction of “Kurdish contraband cartels” in eastern Turkey seems to have gone unnoticed. In 1979, a DEA<sup>22</sup> report states that “family and ethnic ties” facilitated the smuggling among Kurds across the Turkish-Iranian border (Gingeras 2014, 118). In the 1970s, US officials became aware of two turning points showing an increasing influence of Kurdish traffickers in the transnational trade of heroin produced in Turkey. Attention was drawn onto Kurdish drug traffickers primarily because of their role in the trade of weapons. Kurdish weapon sellers and smugglers have largely contributed to the delivery of firearms to buyers in Iraq. The second, and more important, factor that has led to the advent of networks of Kurdish traffickers is the growing scarcity of opium in Turkey following Ankara’s ban on poppy cultivation in 1971, which led to a reorientation of supplies to opium from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Starting in 1979,



laboratories along the Turkish-Iranian border proliferated within the span of several years. Clandestine production centers, especially located in Diyarbakır, seem to have had a central role in the processing of untreated opium coming from abroad and refined by hand in Kurdistan (Gingeras 2014, 216). In fact, after the 1979 revolution, the production, sale, and transport of the drugs were banned and punished with death in Iran. The famous opium production laboratories of Tabriz, Rezaiya [today Orumia], Hoy [Khoy], or Sasur were closed and moved to Turkey. In the words of Soner Yalçın, “the people from Lice who were experts in transportation transferred the best chemists and learned the art. In a very short span of time, they became professionals of heroin production, which enabled earning a lot of money” (Yalçın 2003).

So laboratories were started to be built one after the other in Lice: the Özyıldız family in Kochmar hamlet, the Zengo family in Engül hamlet, the Aytek family in Şemo hamlet, the Seviş family in Merkez Köy village of Diyarbakır, and the Cantürk family in Nergiz hamlet and in the Feritbey village of Hani had laboratories. Developments in Iran and the difficulty of the trade of weapons under the military regime in Turkey had made drug trafficking a vital livelihood. Drug trafficking exploded in Turkey in the 1980s.

Abidin, born in Lice in 1954, relates the early story of the heroin traffic:

I “went to *qaçax*” in 1969. At the beginning it was the Mala Solaxan family doing it. At that time, hashish was grown in Tokat. It was prepared and taken to Iran. It was sent untreated to Iran, here nobody would do it. Then the people of Lice also learned it. From Iran it went to Afghanistan. From Tatvan to Van on boat, than to Başkale and Iran. The Iranians would give us gold bars. There was the English stamp on them, we would try to erase it with hammer blows. [. . .] The people of Lice learned to fabricate heroin in the 1970s. Especially from 1977 onward all of the people of Lice knew how to make it. When Ecevit was in power he banned the production of poppy in Tokat. This time we started buying poppy in Iran and treat it here. That is, the route of the heroin was reversed. When I returned from military service in 1972, I was told to do heroin, I said that it did not suit me, they called “doctor.” Finally, I knew how to make it.<sup>23</sup>

Of course not all of the people from Lice doing *qaçaxçîî* since the establishment of the Republic and especially between the 1950s and 1970s followed this reorientation of smuggling to drug traffic. It was mostly the persons and families who, by doing this work since decades, had both developed strong networks and accumulated enough capital through *qaçaxçîî* and *çerçilik*. First, the profits allowed them to open locations for selling and trade (*han* and *borsa*) in Diyarbakır, than they became owners of touring and transporta-

tion companies. In the 1970s, the number of touring companies was rapidly multiplied, which were operating both between Kurdish cities and in the direction of large western and northern cities. The link between possessing a transport company and heroin trade is two-way: on one hand, a company is opened to secretly transport heroin in buses and trucks; on the other hand, if one owns a transport company it is easy task to add in there the heroin transport function. In the late 1970s, especially after the earthquake in Lice, these new companies moved to Istanbul and created new ties with Europe and the Black Sea mafia. The relations of solidarity, the know-how, and the ethos of *qaçaxçî* that had developed over the preceding decades were put to use in the success of these larger companies. The previous codes were made use of leading to the construction of real *mafias*.

Two personal trajectories represent this evolution very well, namely those of Behçet Cantürk and Hüseyin Baybaşın who became known in Turkey and in the world in the course of the 1980s and 1990s. Both were from Lice, sons of men living on *qaçaxçî* and inheriting that tradition.

Behçet Cantürk was born in Lice in 1949. His father was a small trader. He transported goods on the back of mules through the paths and mountains toward Iran and Syria. That is, like everybody in the region he was doing *qaçaxçî* (Yalçın 2003). Cantürk would tell later on that “the people of Lice are unlucky [*bahti kara*]. They started with selling trinkets and ended in trafficking heroin” (Bovenkerk and Yeşilgöz 2000, 173). His mother was the daughter of an Armenian family living in Lice after the genocide, abducted by his father to marry. As Bozarslan states, this poor milieu and this double descendence, Kurdish and Armenian, would permeate the consciousness of Beco and his image of the world all along his life. Taken to be an Armenian, that is Christian, in a Kurdish-Muslim majority city, he needed to prove himself and improve his social position through courage and bravery. At the age of fifteen, he found the opportunity to “win his honor” by killing, after a dispute, a man much older than himself. After the event, he ran away for several years. Later on, he got involved in other vendettas, always being searched for before the general amnesty of 1974 when he settled as a businessman (Bozarslan 1999). He acquired a bus company and got into touring business. The year 1975 marked a turning point in his life. As he began this new activity, he was confronted with a personal tragedy: the Lice earthquake, which destroyed the entire city, killed several members of his family. The indifference and passivity of the Turkish authorities following this tragedy deeply influenced him and became decisive factors in his politicization. He moved to Istanbul. In 1977–1978, Cantürk got involved in heroin trafficking. By the intermediary of Sarı Avni, one of Turkey’s most famous mafia leaders during this period, he became an intermediary in the heroin trade between Iran, Switzerland and Italy, before setting his own laboratories (Bozarslan 1999). According to Soner Yalçın, his biographer, he gave a quarter of his

revenue from the heroin trade to the DDKD (The Revolutionary Cultural Associations of the East). Despite his Kurdish nationalist involvement and his ties with his Armenian family members in Syria—and through them, with Armenian nationalists—Cantürk escaped the persecution during the early years of the 1980 coup. Without forgetting his commitment to Kurdish nationalism during the military rule, Cantürk also formed close ties with some Turkish authorities, namely Tahsin Şahinkaya, one of the five generals who ruled Turkey (Bozarslan 1999).

The year 1993 was another turning point in his life. That year, the main Turkish political authority, the military-dominated MGK (Milli Güvenlik Kurulu), decided to declare “a total war against the PKK” and to “destroy its financial resources.” In a report submitted to the MGK, the names of some Kurdish families and sixty-two people figured among the main financial supporters of the PKK. On October 4, the Prime Minister Tansu Çiller declared that these people would be held responsible for their betrayal to the nation. Ten days later, on October 14, 1993, Cantürk was murdered, probably by a paramilitary group led by Tarik Ümit and Abdullah Çatlı. A crowd of 3,000 people turned his funeral into a Kurdish nationalist demonstration. Cantürk was the first person on the list of Kurdish businessmen to be eliminated. A few weeks after his assassination in 1993, about twenty people, including his close friends and two lawyers (Medet Serhat and Tahsin Ekinci, two well-known Kurdish nationalists) were also executed. His friends or other Mafia godfathers like Inci Baba were also killed, while others like Nurettin Güven or Hüseyin Baybaşın fled Turkey and decided to stay abroad (Bozarslan 1999).

Those who have most benefited from the elimination of Cantürk and other members of the “Kurdish Mafia” are the other godfathers, especially the Black Sea Mafia. The second beneficiaries were “Susurluk Çetesi” (“Susurluk Band”<sup>24</sup>) and “ülküçü Mafia” (“Mafia of the Idealists,” far-right), who could act freely to control the market through extortion. Finally, of course, the state, then at the height of its “low-intensity war” policy, took advantage of the assassination of Cantürk and his friends (Bozarslan 1999) by eradicating their network, which put part of its profits in the service of the PKK cause (financing the main pro-PKK newspaper *Özgür Gündem* ).

In the 1980s, the name of Hüseyin Baybaşın started to be heard frequently (Bovenkerk and Yeşilgöz 2000, 268). Also born in Lice in 1956, he was called “Pablo Escobar of heroin” by the *London Observer*. Like Behcet, he put into service the networks and honour codes of his home milieu of *qaçaxçî* to develop a trade of illicit goods and large amounts opium. The devastating earthquake of 1975 forced him, like Cantürk and many others, to build a new life elsewhere, in this case Istanbul, where he entered smuggling circles in the city. After serving a prison sentence in 1976 for possession of more than ten kilograms of hashish (a sentence that he claimed was related to his refusal

to become an informant and provocateur as the police had wanted him to), Huseyin made his first attempt in the heroin trade. With the help of a friend from Malatya, he created his first connections in Turkey and Western Europe.

His personal network, which began to take shape after his first trip to Western Europe in 1982, gradually included distribution points in Holland, Germany, and the UK (Gingeras 2014, 254). Indeed the majority of the members arrested or convicted in Europe (Holland, Germany, Belgium) for drug trafficking were Kurds from Turkey, and among them the proportion of people from Lice was overwhelming (Yalçın 2003).

Menav, born in 1930 in Lice, was another “doctor” (manufacturer of heroin). He says:

After *qaçaxçîtî* this time the poppy started to come from Iran. Doctors would send us ingredients from Diyarbakir, and in the countryside we would make heroin out of the crude. Me too I was a “*doxtor*.” The people from Lice would get their supplies from us and sell them in Germany, Belgium, England. At that time it was very widespread. There were five important families in Lice involved in making heroin. The Germans got curious and came to see how we were doing it, since there were many people from Lice imprisoned in Germany. Many people were put into prison due to this.

We should try to evaluate this evolution of *qaçaxçîtî* from the trade of practical goods into the traffic of weapon and heroin, and particularly the fact that components of the state tried to approach them in mid-1980s, within the frame of state strategies to co-opt *qaçaxçîtî* where it failed to eradicate it. Cantürk and Baybaşın used the networks from this form of Kurdish infrapolitics, namely that of *qaçaxçîtî*, to turn into mafia godfathers. They found themselves facing parapolitics (in the sense of occult components of the state acting alongside the official government) and had to make a choice between the state or the Kurdish movement. Having refused to go to the parapolitic side, Cantürk was killed, and Baybaşın preferred to flee to Europe.

## CONCLUSION

The *qaçaxçîtî* is not a practice that is solely based on the exchange of goods prohibited by the state, it should rather be considered within the terms of “challenge” that goes well beyond its material dimension. In fact, *qaçaxçîtî*, far from being limited to the transportation of banned goods, was *lêxistina sînor*, that is, as stated above, “breaking the border.” The *qaçaxçî* would pass everything the circulation of which the state wanted to limit or prevent. In the years following 1915, they were the ones crossing the surviving Armenians,

Syriacs, Chaldeans, and Yezidis to the south of the railway that separated Turkey from Syria, to *Binxet* (sometimes, in return of payment, they would pass a surviving Armenian so that they join their families but mostly also letters and gifts that they would exchange from Serxet to Binxet). The *qaçaxçî* helped the *mahkum* and *fîrar* searched for by the Republic, the people trying to get to Beirut for working during the famine in 1940s and also, until the 1950s, the students of *madrassa* (*feqî*) who wanted to go and study in the *madrassas* of *Binxet*. They could also host the people fleeing a tribal hostility linked to a vendetta or an instance of abducting a woman (Bingöl 2004, 44). Their activities could be political as they also passed banned cassettes, books, and magazines from the borders; young people who wanted to join in the movement led by Barzanî in Iraq in 1960s–1970s and the people who were escaping the military coups of 1971 and then 1980 (Uzun 2013, 353). As *Binxet* had become the preferred destination of refuge for the Kurds of Turkey fleeing the regime, the *qaçaxçî* played a crucial, systematic and, as such, political role in it.

In conclusion, it can be said that after the relative withdrawal of the despotic power that had struck the region by grand displays of military force in the suppression of the revolts until the end of the 1930s, when the infrastructural power was not yet well advanced in the Kurdish regions, important infrapolitical manoeuvres developed among the Kurds, especially between the 1940s and 1970s. They disappear concomitantly in the early 1970s: the strengthening of border control gradually leads to end *qaçaxçîtî*. The combination of wider infrastructural power and complete despotic power, as well as other internal dynamics of the Kurdish society, resulted in the destruction of the networks and the destruction of the *ethos* built in the infrapolitical domain, which fell into an irreversible crisis. However, their heritage (as source of inspiration, network of relations, accumulation of know-how, and the practices based on a shared *ethos*) would partly evolve and get integrated either into new forms of resistance or new forms of cooptation serving the central power.

The *qaçaxçîtî* contributed to the crystalization of the political imagery of the unity of the geographic map of Kurdistan by actualizing the porosity of the borders between its four components. It would suffice to look at the secret reports and correspondances of the 1950s and 1960s to estimate to what extent the state took seriously those infrapolitical actions. Banning the transportation of Kurdish books and music cassettes through the borders as well as exerting further control were primarily attempting to end those networks of infrapolitics. This makes a lot of sense when the meaning of these practices is considered: they challenge the power in an essential domain that touches directly to the sovereignty as it is conceived within the frame of modern nation state. The *qaçaxçîtî* is the violation of the sovereignty on the borders.

## NOTES

1. The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewer as well as Lucile Johnes, Onur Günay, Lucie Drechselová, and Ergin Öpengin for their comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

2. The excerpts of this chapter were previously published in a much-reduced form in the journal of *Études kurdes* (See Çelik, A. (2018b).

3. *Qaçaxçîti* (in Kurdish) or *kaçakçılık* (in Turkish) can be translated as “smuggling.” However, the sense and connotations of the term are rather larger than this. Based on the root *qaçak/kaçak*, “secret” or “illegal,” it refers to any action, person or product breaching the law.

4. “Eastern Meetings” or “The Demonstrations of the East.”

5. The verb *lêxistin* in Kurdish means “to strike,” “hit.”

6. In the interviews realised after the “Kobanê resistance” (end of 2014), the term Rojava was starting to become the most widespread one for referring to Syrian Kurdistan. This is the term promoted by PKK and its followers who use the terms of cardinal points in Kurmanji for referring to the four major Kurdish region, which correspond to its situation since the division of the Kurdish lands in Lausanne: Bakur (North) for the Turkish Kurdistan, Başûr (South) for Iraqi Kurdistan, Rojava (West) for Syrian Kurdistan, Rojhilat (East) for Iranian Kurdistan. (However, the most commonly used term for Syrian Kurdistan remained, even within PKK, “Kurdistanana biçûk,” that is “the small Kurdistan.”

7. BCA 030.10.12.73.25, December 6, 1931.

8. BCA 030.10.180.244.6.

9. BCA 030.10.180.244.6, p.1.

10. BCA 030.10.180.244.6, p.3.

11. BCA 030.10.180.244.6, p.4.

12. BCA 030.10.180.244.6, p.12.

13. Sümerbank was established in 1933 as a state-owned bank for funding the construction of textile factories and the development of the textile industry in Turkey.

14. That is, illegal selling by street peddlers that are mobile in the rural areas: the *çerçi* would obtain the products of the peasants in exchange of manufactured goods or of small amounts and would re-sell them in other districts, without being ever concerned with taxes that traders are supposed to pay (See Tigrîs 2008, 53; Ebinç 2008).

15. Interview conducted on September 17, 2014, in Lice.

16. Interview conducted on September 14, 2014, in Lice.

17. Interview conducted on September 18, 2014 in Lice.

18. Interview conducted on September 17, 2014 in Lice.

19. Interview conducted on September 18, 2014 in Aqro, a village of Lice.

20. Interview conducted on September 18, 2014 in the Aqro village of Lice.

21. Federal Bureau of Narcotics.

22. Drug Enforcement Administration, a service of the US Federal police.

23. Interview conducted on September 20, 2014 in Lice.

24. On November 3, 1996, in Susurluk, a small city in the Balıkesir province, a car accident incidentally revealed the tight connections between the politicians, police, and the Turkish far-right mafia: the victims were a MP close to the government, Sedat Bucak, a powerful tribal chief that had accepted to become *korucu*, and Abdullah Çatlı who is a notorious mafia leader and a manager of the ultra-nationalist organization Grey Wolves.

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## Chapter Eight

# Toward a Resistance Literature

### *The Struggle of Kurdish-Kurmanji Novel in Post-2000s*

Davut Yeşilmen<sup>1</sup>

#### DEVELOPMENTS OF KURDISH-KURMANJI NOVEL

Since the beginning of the 2000s, in Turkish Kurdistan, Kurdish-Kurmanji literature, mainly the novel, has been in open quantitative and qualitative development. After eighty years of being forbidden, Kurdish language and literature came back to its homeland from exile for the first time. This trans-frontier development of Kurdish novelistic discourse brings us to social development described by Benedict Anderson in which the novel is seen as an important element of “imagined political community” (2016; 6). As such, it comes from the combination of both cultural and political nationalism. These developments are marked by the use of the term of resistance as a tool of political development. It is also a new way of advancing the Kurdish novel. Effectively, developments caused the Kurdish novel and politics to walk together.

Kurds, who are dealing with many political conflicts, out of necessity, in the products of their literary texts, will deal with their political situation and the division of their geography.<sup>2</sup> These texts will come out as examples of political and resistance literature. The well-known Kurdish novelist Mehmed Uzun, in his work *Destpêka Edebiyata Kurdi* (Introduction to Kurdish Literature) (1992) which is one of the first analyses on Kurdish literature, already in its first paragraph, evokes this reality: “As is known, political messages and literature do not fit together and these definitions and explanations do not make literature richer. But unfortunately, I must also start with a political explanation of this short research” (5). After twenty-two years, Remezan Alan, another scholar of modern Kurdish literature, almost repeats what

Mehmed Uzun said before: “Because Kurdish literature developed in out-of-the norm situations at places far from Kurdistan and was interested in awakening a nation, it is a political literature” (2016; 85).

Naturally, Uzun and Alan have good reasons for mentioning this. In Turkey, Kurds started publishing–writing in Kurdish at the beginning of the 1990s<sup>3</sup> with further rights granted in 2002.<sup>4</sup> Yet, still they cannot write and print in a “normal” situation. Even though there is an official permission for printing books in Kurdish, the writers have been under the fear of exile, prison, and torture, and today they still cannot feel safe in Turkey.<sup>5</sup> We can explain this situation of politicization of Kurdish society, mostly through the coming together of politics and literature. From the beginning, most Kurdish novelists were active participants of Kurdish liberation/freedom struggle<sup>6</sup> and try to use literary narration for their political success. The identity of the authors as well as the plot of books cannot escape politicization and lifelong resistance. In this chaotic and ambiguous situation, a scattered picture of Kurdish literature is evolving.<sup>7</sup>

Nguigi wa Thiong’o tells us about the writer of resistance literature: “Often the writer and the politician have been the same person. In the very process of articulating people’s collective consciousness, the writer is led into active political struggles” (1981; 73). In this aspect, as Clémence Scalbert Yucel stressed: “Modern Kurdish literature, normally, is typical for resistance literature; militant or active authors and literature which supports the cause of the Kurdish national movement, or if we generalize it, supports the Kurdish nation” (2014; 71). Also the interpretation of Aydogan below, clearly shows the political identity of Kurdish authors: “Whereas Kurdish language is not used in education, whereas all educated Kurds know some other languages for sure, and whereas Kurdish authors improve their reading and writing skills by themselves, then the choice of writing in Kurdish, in the situation of Kurdish nation, can be explained only by politics” (2013; 313).

Later on, for the necessity of resistance, as politician and poet Agostinho Neto, mentioned, pen, gun, and platform are necessary elements (wa Thiong’o 1981; 73). This sentence is very familiar to Kurdish literary scholars, and often appears in literary texts as a necessary need of Kurdish freedom and modernization. As Aydınkaya defends: “Neither resistance for and within modernization nor modernization for and within resistance was anything but necessity. (. . .) Consequently the ethos of resistance is an organic body of Kurdish modernization as well as breathed breath into its body. The pen and sword will write the texts of resistance as well” (2010; 209).

Resistance literature is a writing that has emerged in the organized national liberation struggles of Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, it does not seek to distinguish art from ideology, theory from practice (Jusdanis 1991; 8). As Barbara Harlow puts it: “The theory of resistance literature is in

its politics”(1987; 30). That is a serious challenge on western criticism, but as Jusdanis points out:

Texts of resistance literature differ from other writing not in an essential or absolute way, as Harlow assumes, but in their use. Hence the challenge they pose has nothing to do with inherent features. It is a community’s refusal to detach language from political reality and its integration of literature into social struggles that challenge the alleged universality of aesthetic autonomy. (1992; 8–9)

Within the frame of these examined troubles, this work will focus on the rise of the Kurdish-Kurmanji novel from beginning considering the conditions of the existential fight and social and national developments. Edward W. Said clearly supports the idea of resistance against the colonial systems and tries to show a prescription of cultural liberation to colonized societies:

Three great topics emerge in decolonizing cultural resistance, separated for analytical purposes, but all related. One, of course, is the insistence on the right to see the community’s history whole, coherently, integrally. (. . .) Second is the idea that resistance, far from being merely a reaction to imperialism, is an alternative way of conceiving human history. (. . .) Third is a noticeable pull away from separatist nationalism toward a more integrative view of human community and human liberation. (1993; 215–6)

These discussions consider novelistic discourse as a literary space that represents resistance as a sociological and discursive phenomenon of the Kurdish novel. Even though the main issues and terms are resistance in the Kurdish novel, the novel as an instrument of decolonizing the mind and writing as a counterhistory are other key terms that are useful for the clarification of the subject. Geographic distance between Kurdish societies for almost a century caused very deep differences between them. That is why the present paper focuses solely on the Kurdish novels from Turkish Kurdistan. Although the largest numbers of Kurds live in the Turkish Kurdistan, not all speak Kurdish-Kurmanji. A small group of the population also speaks Kurdish-Kirmancki (Zazaki). Due to a big difference between understanding and linguistics and the belated rising of the Kirmancki (Zazaki) novel, this article is restricted to Kurdish-Kurmanji written novels. Also, because of the long timeframe and multiple developments in democratization and multicultural changes in Turkey after 2002, for the unity of the argument, the focus is on Kurdish-Kurmanji novels written in Turkish Kurdistan after the 2002 period.

## A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF KURDISH POLITICAL RESISTANCE IN TURKEY

Next to modernization and nationalization movements, at the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire was destroyed. During these big transformations, collaboration with the Young Turks, the homogenization of society, and the politics of Turkish nationalism, particularly, bring the relation between Turks and Kurds to an ambiguous point. But, there are documents testifying to the fact that Turkish governments of these difficult post-empire and pre-republic times were open in their acceptance of Kurdish ethnicity and pledged to tackle the Kurdish question by politics of recognition toward the aim of group rights (Yeğen 2011; 68).

Shortly after the war of independence and foundation of the Turkish Republic, the brutal crushing of the Kurdish movements and society in the 1920s and 1930s, Kurdish oppositional organizations and groups remained silent until the 1960s. From the 1960s through to the 1980s, there were tens of Kurdish and Turkish left-wing political parties and organizations, resulting in two decades of prosecutions, clashes within and between the parties, extrajudicial killings, and the closure of the parties, followed by the PKK taking up arms in 1984 (Yeğen 2011; 74). After hard clash of arms for fifteen years, a timid politics of recognition began to replace the politics of repression and discrimination in the wake of two important developments. First, PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was captured in Kenya in February 1999. In December of the same year, Turkey was recognized as a candidate for European Union membership at the Helsinki Summit. In 2002, the Turkish parliament eliminated capital punishment, sparing the life of Öcalan in the process, as he had been sentenced to death on June 29, 1999. That same year, the two decades long state of emergency (OHAL) in Kurdish regions was lifted. Subsequently, parliament introduced reforms that effectively lifted the ban on the use of Kurdish language. First, private institutions were permitted to teach Kurdish. Then the public television channel TRT began broadcasting in Kurdish for thirty minutes per week (Yeğen 2014; 75).

This period of history, next to the ceasefire and return to civilian society, continued by giving some symbolic cultural rights, such as offering Kurdish private lessons or short broadcasts in the state TV channel. In spite of that, next to forbidding pro-Kurdish parties (DEHAP in 2005 and later DTP in 2009) and the imprisonment of Kurdish politicians accused of membership in the KCK, several assimilation projects were undertaken in the name of education, for instance, “Girls, Off to School,” “Children, Off to Nursery,” “Father, Send Me to School,” “Pre-School Education.” The disturbing point of these campaigns (from the perspective of Kurdish politicians) was that they were mainly organized in Kurdish cities and were not giving the right of education in the Kurdish language. These state-sponsored changes were far

from the agenda of Kurdish political actors. For them, the solution was not only contained language, cultural, and self-governance rights but also contained removing of ongoing political repression, socio-economic colonization, abasement, dishonor, and second-class citizenship; including providing women freedom and building a corporate economy<sup>8</sup> (Çiçek 2015; 90).

It should be noted that high political tension, fights, and migration caused some sociological changes and transformations in Kurdish society. After massive moving into metropolises from the 1999 onward Kurdish society substantially became an urban, legal, and institutionalized society (Çiçek 2018; 203). This institutionalization first manifested itself in local elections. In the local election of 1999, the pro-Kurdish party had a big success and for the first time in history, won some municipalities. This success made an overwhelming impression on the daily life of society.<sup>9</sup> Introduction of several measures followed, such as offering bilingual services in municipalities, supporting Kurdish cultural and art activities and festivals, Kurdish publications, staging Kurdish theater plays and concerts, and organizing international conferences on Kurdish literature and language which were sponsored by the municipality. On the other hand, mainly between 2005–2007, Kurdish legal and illegal organizations were, in a serious way, participating in a self-critical and reconstructive period of the Kurdish language. Several topics such as opening language institutes, the standardization of language and grammar, and using Kurdish in political activities were discussed and decided (Uçarlar 2016; 277–8). Next to these political successes of the Kurdish movement, cultural revival, and recognition of Turkey as a candidate for European Union membership, the state started to change its politics in line with the harmonization code of the European Union (*acquis communautaire*). For instance, in 2004, for first time private Kurdish courses were authorized. But, because they were not what society wished for, they could not continue.<sup>10</sup> Kurdish broadcasting which was limited to a few hours a week, from December 25, 2008 on, started to broadcast twenty-four hours every day in TRT 6 (later became TRT Kurdî). September 11, 2009, in Mardin Artuklu University, Institute of Living Language was opened and has accepted MA students still. This was followed by four more universities.<sup>11</sup> The above-mentioned same university on January 26, 2011, opened the Kurdish Language and Literature Department and again other universities followed. In the academic year of 2012–2013, Kurdish education became an elective lesson in the middle schools for two hours per week. On January 5, 2013, prisoners got the right to defend themselves in Kurdish in the courts (Çiçek 2018, 322–331).

All these reconstructive developments influenced society as well. The most important aspect was the normalization of speaking, reading, and writing in Kurdish. We can call it a social therapy or processing of a social trauma. The opening of several language schools and two conservatories,<sup>12</sup>

translation of scientific works, preparation of education materials for primary, middle, and high school, and collection of oral literature including *dengbêj* songs, were some intensive projects which were supported by municipalities. A few local Kurdish TV channels followed this.<sup>13</sup> Besides all cultural and political developments, the negotiation of solving the Kurdish question between the state and the PKK and the declaration of a peace process and ceasefire also relieved society.

Since July 2015, because of the unstable developments of the Turkish state, the peace process and social reconstruction was wounded and armed clashes began. These clashes, in contrast to the last thirty years, were much more destructive, and this time took place in the city centers and not in the mountains.<sup>14</sup> The chance of solving the Kurdish issue peacefully was heavily impeded. Also, the attempted military coup on July 15, 2016 caused a second socio-political earthquake. This brought society as well as the state to an unsafe position and caused a social crisis. Thereafter, with the declaration of a state of emergency (OHAL), all democratic accumulation was destroyed. Hundreds of media agencies<sup>15</sup> and civilian organizations were forbidden. For instance, Kurdi-Der (thirty-seven branches) which organized Kurdish private lessons and language materials, the Kurdish Institute, Kurdish PEN, the Kurdish Writers Association, Ehmedê Xanî Language Academy, the Mesopotamia Cultural Centre, the Dicle Fırat Cultural Centre, and three private primary schools which taught in Kurdish were closed. Some kindergartens (called Zarokistan) which taught in Kurdish and English were transformed into Turkish teaching kindergartens, and Aram Tigran and Cegerxwin Conservatoriums were deinstitutionalized. Thousands of academics and teachers lost their positions. Thousands of people were jailed. Kurds, who did not have any interest in the attempted military coup were put under the radar of the state. Some of the Kurdish MPs lost their immunity. At different times twenty-eight MPs were arrested, and in July 2018 ten of them were in the prison, including co-presidents Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ. Most Kurdish co-mayors are also in prison today, and the municipalities are governed by the state supported trustees (*kayyum*) (Çiçek 2018; 205–6). These changes were strong signs of a new period in the Kurdish question, notably because the first activities of these trustees were reminiscent of a new politics of linguicide and memoricide.<sup>16</sup>

## THE RISE AND RESISTANCE OF KURDISH NOVEL

In the last twenty years of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurdish intelligentsia was struggling between resistance, and building a new nation. With the constitution of prose,<sup>17</sup> the spreading of knowledge and story-telling in Kurdish came out in the late Ottoman Empire period, particularly by the publishing of

newspapers and magazines.<sup>18</sup> All these publications were hastily forbidden within a short time and some volumes of these journals are still inaccessible. Despite having no support or organization in this period, Kurdish intelligentsia “was requesting social and national revival” (Alan 2016a; 90).

In these publications, next to the positivist and belated modernization, there is the request for autonomy and a unique identity. In the documents of this period, two metaphors, pen and sword, appear as instruments of liberation (Alan 2016b; 26). There are also the metaphors of “sleeping” and “awakening” that take an important space in the Kurdish modernization; if someone is sleeping, then they must wake up some day. So the duty of the Kurdish intellectual must be to wake up society as fast as possible because the train of progress and freedom is departing.<sup>19</sup> This unclearness and belatedness brings them to a pathological situation.

After the World War I, with the establishment of four new nation-states, in different areas of Kurdistan and on different bases, with no connection between each other, Kurdish literatures developed: in the Caucasus,<sup>20</sup> particularly in Yerevan and Tbilisi; in the Middle East, particularly in Damascus, Beirut, and Baghdad (Aydogan 2014; 106), and later, in some European centers such as Stockholm, Paris, Berlin, Brussels, and finally in Istanbul. But, for a literary development in its own homeland, one must wait until the 2000s.

After the foundation of the Turkish Republic (in 1923) and squelching of Kurdish revolts (Sheikh Said and Ararat) when Kurds were forced to immigrate, “pieces of Kurdish [modern] literature consisted of a play (*Memê Alan*), a short story (Çîrok), a novella (*Le Xewme*), and some poems which could be considered a small collection (from E. Rehmi Hekari and Pîremêrd). Even these stories are unfinished. Translation which would indicate contacts with other cultures is almost non-existent” (Alan 2014; 90–1). In this defeated situation, with the publishing of *Hawar* journal in May 15, 1932, a new page opened in Kurdish literary history.<sup>21</sup> One of the most influential literary traditions which is still a basis and an important source for contemporary Kurdish literature, although there were no novels in this period, the Latinization of the alphabet, a new grammar system, critical and historical literary essays, the high importance of the short story,<sup>22</sup> and translation were inspiration for today’s Kurdish literature.<sup>23</sup> Discourse analysis reveals a representation of collective memory and of national and political resistance. Immigration, life and identity of exile, occupation, and the colonization of Kurdistan, ignorance, poverty, as well as Kurdish traditions and history were some of the main themes in the journal. The death of Celadet Ali Bedirxan, the editor of *Hawar* and the foundation of the Syrian Arab Republic, brought the end of the *Hawar* Ecole. Kamiran Ali Bedirxan moved to Paris, and until the end of his life, continued his work on Kurdish language and literature at the Sorbonne University (Tejel 2010).

In the 1970s, the Kurdish diaspora formed in Europe. In Iraq, after the fall of the Molla Mustafa Barzani revolt, the Iraq-Iran War between 1980–1988, Halabja and Anfal genocides<sup>24</sup> in Turkey after the military coups in 1971 and 1980,<sup>25</sup> and in Iran with the change of regime in 1979, and the fall of the communist regime in the Soviet Union in 1991, Europe suddenly became an umbrella for the Kurdish intelligentsia (McDowall 1996, Galip 2015). Tragically from all over the world, Kurds who met in Europe as refugees gave high importance to linguistic and literary research next to political activities. Sweden was always the main center for all these activities. However not everyone started to write literary texts such as Mehmed Uzun and Mahmud Baksi who were already active in politics and journalism in their homeland. Also, there were some who were writing before they immigrated like Rojen Barnas, Mehmet Emin Bozarслан, and Cegerxwin (Yücel, 2012; 553). These authors were blending political activism and literature. As Clemence Schalbert Yücel put it:

It must be seen that it is hard to see the difference between the author and the militant. In reality, political militants who lived in Sweden practiced a new way of militancy. For most of them political activities are not meaningful outside of the country [Kurdistan]. We see a transformation of political activities to cultural activities. But, culture is designed as an adaptation of a political attitude. (. . .) This strong new cultural militancy in Sweden is supported by Swedish politics as well. (2012; 553)

In this literary tradition in Sweden, between 1965 and 2005, there are around fifty Kurdish authors, most of whom came from Turkish Kurdistan. Of the 818 published Kurdish books, 420 are in Kurmanji. Also, of the 140 magazines and newspapers, eighty-two are wholly in Kurdish. Thirty-nine of these magazines were bilingual and nineteen of them were published in another language but they were published by Kurds and mostly focused on topics dealing with Kurds. Interestingly enough, up to 2005, a total of forty-five Kurdish publishing houses were established in Sweden.<sup>26</sup> All this shows that Sweden, in the Kurdish diaspora during the 1980s, was a shelter for identity, language, and memory, and in the meantime was the sphere of Kurdish literary and linguistic creations (Yücel 2012; 552).

Kurdish diaspora novels developed in three ways. Firstly, there were translations of canonical texts from Western literature, for example, Dostoyevsky, Victor Hugo, Albert Camus, Heinrich Böll, Jack London, John Steinbeck, and Yaşar Kemal, to Kurdish. But certainly, the Swedish texts have the biggest share of translations in this period. The second group of novels came from Caucasian Kurdish authors who produced a number of novels between 1935 and the 1990s in the Cyrillic alphabet, but the second editions came out in the Latin alphabet in Stockholm, and finally there was a new wave of novelists such as Mehmed Uzun, Mahmut Baksi, Brindar, and some others.<sup>27</sup>



If we generally identify novels of this period in Sweden, it is very obvious that most of them are didactic novels. Protagonists are teachers, students, or revolutionaries and try to change the society in an atmosphere of resistance. Novels stand on a realistic basis, and autobiographical factors are obvious: “in the first period of Kurdish novels, protagonists always find themselves in a fight against 'the other' non-Kurdish one, but in some later novels, protagonists face some local Kurdish powers who stand against their ideals” (Ahmadzadeh 2015; 237).

These novels mostly follow similar themes which are connected with social memory, social catastrophes, war, and social and individual traumas which have a political background. Also Kurdish revolts, military coups, prison life (mainly about Diyarbakir Prison), and the division of the Kurdish land and borders are some other themes. Özlem Belçim Galip, a scholar of the modern Kurdish novel, who devoted a significant part of her dissertation to Kurdish diaspora novels, mentioned that: “Kurdish diasporic novels in Sweden do not usually focus on any sort of dramatic and positive experiences that they have faced in exile. Put more simply, in most of these novels the story is set in any region of Kurdistan and very few of them focus on migrant or exile experiences in Europe” (Galip 2014; 84). In the same article Galip reports that about sixty-four novels were written in Sweden, and only three of them are telling stories of exile life.<sup>28</sup> But, these three novels also tell the exile life with nostalgia for the childhood and youth periods, as well as tragic political and identical involvement which happened in their homeland. In these three novels, we often see a protagonist who does not have any kind of relation with Swedish society and who lives as a stranger and alone in society. Symptoms of alienation and depression are very obvious in these novels.

Authors of this period are still not void of writing for ethical and political goals instead of writing for aesthetic. Their main aim is to demonstrate the existence of Kurds, Kurdish language, and literature. The main reason of writing in Kurdish is to protect their language from dying. This is because, while they were writing in the diaspora, it was forbidden to even speak Kurdish in their homeland. This is not surprising when we look at their autobiographies. All of them at different levels were political activists in different times. They feel responsible for saving the cultural heritage from the ashes. That is why Şener Özmen calls them a serious, missionary, major, archivist, collector, and builder generation (Ay and Yeşilmen 2015; 93).

During the years when there was a strong Kurdish literature movement in Sweden, as we mentioned in the historical overview, and since 1991 through the changing of a law about publishing in minor languages in Turkey, Kurdish was rising in the publishing and literature fields (mainly in Istanbul).<sup>29</sup> Centers such as the Kurdish Institute and Mezopotamia Cultural Center, magazines such as *Rewşen*<sup>30</sup> and *Nûbihar*,<sup>31</sup> and the weekly newspaper *Wel-*

*atê Me*<sup>32</sup> were main spheres for Kurdish literature. Later some more magazines as *Pelîn*, *Kevan*, and *Gûlistan* were published but only for a short period.<sup>33</sup>

One of the writers from the 1990s generation, Dîlawer Zeraq, who is a well-known critic, lexicographer, and novelist, shows the literature movement of the 1990s in Istanbul, not as a beginning but as a re-initiation which identified itself through a generation who could exist and rebuild itself even after catastrophe of the 12th of September [1980] (Ay and Yeşilmen 2016; 116). At the same time, for him, this period is “the step of revival and recognition” of Kurdish identity (Ay and Yeşilmen 2016; 117–8). Members of this generation mostly wrote for Kurdish magazines and newspapers. Because of political repression, it was important that they remained anonymous in magazines. To publish a book under their true names was highly risky. And, of course, this was also related to the financial opportunities of publishing books.

For Zeraq, this generation shares a tone of scream, saying with anger, “I exist and I am here” (Ay and Yeşilmen 2016; 120). Also, another member of this generation, novelist İbrahim Seydo Aydoğan, interprets a motto of this generation as: “If I die, it might as well be by hanging. It was like going to fight. Yes, it was true. For sure there was going to be a fight; because writing in Kurdish was a kind of resistance” (Aydoğan 2016; 10). This generation gave high importance to the building of language and literature via a belligerent view. The members of this generation were not politicians and did not get involved in active politics, but grew up in fights of 1990s between Turkish state and PKK. It is the first generation who could visit their homeland, but could not publish or sell their books there, all had to be hidden. But, at least there was an open way of communication and visiting people. Also, as Zeraq said about most of them that lived there:

80% of sent texts to these newspapers and magazines were from the North [Turkish Kurdistan], from the countryside. These publications were also mostly distributed and read. That means that Istanbul was only a space, but for sure not a base, for building and developing Kurdish literature. Istanbul, with its distance, foreignness and nonbelongingness, had a role and it is a big pleasure that this role was very useful for Kurds and mainly for Kurdish language and literature. And I must say that activities in Istanbul were mostly effective in the home country, but in Istanbul, almost nothing was getting through to society. (Ay-Yeşilmen 2016; 122)

On that matter, Aydoğan also testifies to this situation that “most of the writers of Kurdish newspapers and magazines in Istanbul were living in the home country [Turkish Kurdistan]. This generation was directly influencing the next generation, because there was a physical contact between them and society” (Aydoğan 2016; 9). This brings us to the relation between different

literary generations. Although there was a little contact between them, they were always informed about each other. “With individual activities, like Musa Anter and Mehmed Emin Bozarslan, *Hawar* could influence the time of *Tîrêj* and with the help of Arjen Arî and Berken Bereh, we could hear everybody’s cry, then we can openly say that there is a generation which are followers of the 1990s generation” (Ay and Yeşilmen 2016; 124). Both authors, İbrahim Seydo Aydoğan and Dilawer Zeraq, who were very important representatives of the 1990s, have written already. But, how was the contact of this generation with the authors in Europe, mainly in Stockholm? Aydoğan shows that there was almost no influence of this generation on them; because they could not reach the texts from Stockholm. In 1995, for the first time, Aydoğan could get the novel of Mehmed Uzun, *Sîya Şevê*, and the book of Celadet Ali Bedirxan, *Gramera Kurdî*. These texts played the role of Gogol’s *The Overcoat* for this generation (Aydoğan 2016; 15).

The most important and influential point of this generation comes from the decolonized identity of their narration and language which Aydoğan emphasizes:

Literary activities of the 1990s can be counted as an anticolonial movement as well. Because the biggest colonies are built in the mind and memory of subalterns. That is why the writing in Kurdish and regaining consciousness broke the shell of assimilation and also broke the colonial mind. Whomever wrote in Kurdish was free, existed and was happy. That is why s/he was fearless. (Aydoğan 2016; 14)

Another scholar Hasan Sun, who is known as Hesênê Dewrêş in the Kurdish literary field, also stresses this decolonized aspect of Kurdish literature, particularly the Kurdish novel: “It is quite obvious that, besides improving the written language and proving Kurdish as a qualified language, the effort of answering to the colonial power is at the fore until the 2000s” (2014; 2–3).

The aim of decolonization through literature which identified itself under the influence of Franz Fanon (1961), reminds us of an ideational revolution. Although the most publishers and magazines were in Istanbul, most of the authors were in their hometown. And later in early 2000s, with political and legal changes as well as the extension of distribution opportunities within society, the number of authors and texts suddenly increased and these authors were given the opportunity of institutionalization. The center of publishing was slowly moved toward the homeland, mainly to Diyarbakir.

## NEW PERSPECTIVES ON KURDISH-KURMANJI NOVEL IN POST-2000S

### **A Transfrontier Development in Kurdish Novel**

Social transformations such as urbanization, institutionalization, opportunities for printing and distribution, finding bookstores which sell Kurdish books, a high rate of readers, and of course politic changes about Kurdish publications are some reasons for quantitative and qualitative development of Kurdish-Kurmanji novel. As a result of these changes, a high number of publishers and books and the reading clubs in many cities brought about reading and discussion activities about Kurdish literature, mainly novels. Certainly, stable and rich magazines such as *W* and *Çirûsk* which were published in Diyarbakır, the establishment of Kurdish language and literature departments in several universities and conservatoriums, elective Kurdish lessons in the middle schools, and Kurdish broadcasting on several TV channels normalized written Kurdish. Namely, these developments broke the negative and dangerous image of the Kurdish and the trauma of the society as well as. A new sector appeared—people were able to earn their living through Kurdish (be it as publishers or teachers).

In the beginning, we must clarify that today's technological developments, social media, in addition to well-organized Kurdish intellectuals and their transborder relations with each other contribute to the authors being simultaneously and well organized in different places in the world. Kurdish literature used to be an "island literature," which has no contact with other parts, as shown above, but this has changed. While Diyarbakir took the opportunity of being a literary center for Kurds, Stockholm and Istanbul have also been strong and rich literary centers. Nowadays, Berlin and Paris are two other active centers. At the same time, the transforming of Kurdish authors from social objectivism to individual subjectivism, as one who has his/her own will and freedom, means there is no need of a society or center for writing in Kurdish anymore.<sup>34</sup>

Another change or development in the Kurdish novel is the geographic and intellectual means of border crossing. A Kurdish novelist from Europe could publish his/her novel in Diyarbakir, also a novelist from the other parts of Kurdistan such as Efrîn, Kirkuk, or Mahabad could publish his/her novel in Istanbul or Diyarbakir. The reverse is also highly possible. As such, Avesta publishers from Istanbul translated (or adapted) many Kurdish-Sorani novels from Bextiyar Elî, Ferhad Pîrbal, Eta Nehayî, and Şêzad Hesen to Kurdish-Kurmanji.<sup>35</sup> Also, Lîs Publishers from Diyarbakir show a special interest in Caucasian Kurdish literature which was published during the Soviet period in Yerevan, in the Cyrillic alphabet. Many novels and some other important texts were Latinized and republished. These ongoing projects create definite-

ly very strong transborder relations and bring Kurds together around a collective memory. Also, today we can speak about a strong tradition of a Prison Literature<sup>36</sup> and Mountain Literature<sup>37</sup> which were under a big hush in the 1990s and early 2000s. The books from these traditions were released in Turkish and focused on an ideological way of narration. But today, they are mostly in Kurdish and surely are novels which tell about the Kurdish politics and their memories, but with more of an aesthetical slant. Also, there are tens of Kurdish novels based on Kurdish oral culture or heroic epics.<sup>38</sup> Remezan Alan pointed out that: “[T]his political picture shows its shadow to today as well. Novels which are about national war, novels which yield to oral culture, stories which tell the tragedy of a dirty war, poetry which often has a historical background, all of them are proof of this [being political]” (2016; 93).

Kurdish novels are part of a border-crossing and de-colonial literature which takes its power from political resistance via adaptation, Latinization, or relations between authors, but also via plot and protagonists. Interestingly in Kurdish novels, Turkish characters are always *others*. They represent state power, and there is a border between Kurdish and Turkish characters. Yet, a Kurd from the KRG, Syria, or Iran is never *the other*. The Kurdish novel never normalizes the dividedness of Kurdish geography. The reader can often meet four characters in novels who are from different parts of Kurdistan and symbolize the unity of Kurds. Another interesting change that has mainly appeared in the last years is that some well-known authors who write in Turkish, started to write in Kurdish as well.<sup>39</sup> But, unfortunately most of the novelists are male. Female novelists are very few. Until today, only eight women have published a total of ten novels. The first one was published by Zarife Demir in 2008. Remezan Alan pays attention to this change in this important interpretation:

In today’s Kurdish novel, there is (quantitatively speaking) an obvious development. This development is, as if to take revenge on the dark times, shining tenaciously. Because inside, there is the light of all kinds of people: Poets, short story authors, journalists, politicians, young and old, the hardworking and the lazy, the author and the clerk. . . . Although somebody wrote in Turkish before, today they want to have their own star in this sky. People think that through the development of texts, the pent up water of seventy eight years suddenly opened and is completely destroying everything that had built dams in its path. (2013; 13)

### SOME IMPORTANT STATISTICS ON THE KURDISH-KURMANJI NOVEL

One approach in understanding a nation’s tradition concerning novels might be to create a map or a chronological list. But because of the political situa-

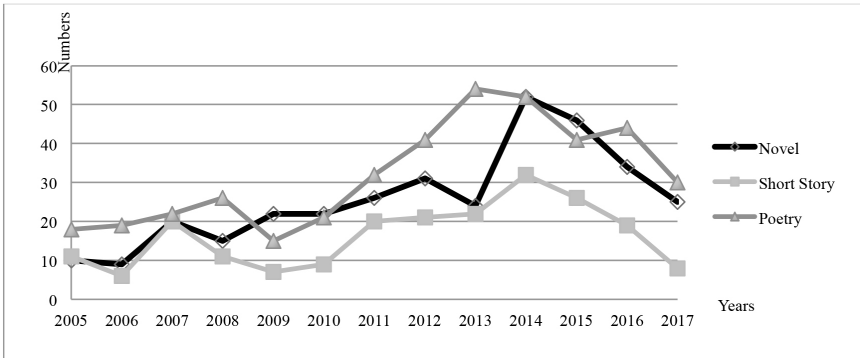
tion of the Kurds as has already been mentioned above, this does not apply to the Kurdish novel. Although some scholars have tried to organize a bibliography of the Kurdish novel, prepared lists do not contain everything and there is a lot missing.<sup>40</sup> There is no opportunity to organize a well-prepared bibliography of the Kurdish novel. In our research, through the end of May 2018, 459 novels (227 novelists) in Kurdish-Kurmanji have been published worldwide.<sup>41</sup> There are some texts which we know as novels but because we cannot find them, we cannot prove this, and despite trying to get in touch with all publishers and authors, this proved to be impossible. Therefore these numbers are not exact.

In our research about the development of the Kurdish novel in the post-2000s, as appears from the graphic below, there is an inverse relation between novelistic developments and political violence. When violence is less or the political atmosphere is more peaceful, the number of novels increases. The time of “the peace process,” between 2013–2015, was the golden age of Kurdish novels in all history. In the history of Kurdish-Kurmanji literature, only twice does the novel have the highest rate in all genres and both periods are interestingly at the time when the state was trying to find a democratic solution to the Kurdish question. But, shortly after, with the start of fights, bans, criminalization, and the isolation of Kurdish studies, although no publishing houses were closed, the new political situation influenced publishing in Kurdish. As can be seen below, there is an obvious decline in novels.

Of this number of novels between 2005–2017, in Diyarbakir, Van, Istanbul, and İzmir, there were 252 new novels and thirteen Latinized novels published in the Caucasian area. Also, twenty-one novels from Kurdish-Sorani were adapted to Kurdish-Kurmanji and fifty-six novels were translated from different languages.<sup>42</sup> The highest number of translated novels came from Turkish.<sup>43</sup>

### THEMATIC CHANGES IN THE KURDISH-KURMANJI NOVEL

Looking at the quantitative development of the Kurdish novel does not give scholars a satisfactory idea. For a literature which is under the pressure of criminalization, in resistance and fights for its existence, the numbers of authors and novels are significant. But for the topic of this article, next to the numbers, the representation of the world of novels, plot, and characters of the novels is remarkable as well. There are several different branches of the post-2000s novels. One is the republishing of Caucasian-Kurdish novels which were published between 1935 and 1990. The main reason for republishing of these novels is that publishers see them as sources of the Kurdish oral tradition that belongs to a non-colonized Kurdish space. Many of the novels were



**Figure 8.1. Translated Literature**  
**Source: Davut Yesilmen**

written under the rule of Bolshevik ideology, and the sense of yezidi humanism is in the forefront. Another kind of Kurdish novel is based on Kurdish oral culture and epics; it has some common points with Caucasian novels. They focus on the Kurdish collective memory and national heroic stories. This way of narrating is related to writing of an alternative history, offering a counternarrative to the dominant state discourse. For the Kurds, as a stateless society, these novels give great importance to an alternative way of history writing, and the novels give wide opportunities for rebuilding a national identity. Most of them are focused on Kurdish revolts, wars, and genocides and have a didactic background. Kurdish unity and internal betrayals are important shades in the novels and the authors expect readers to learn Kurdish history and to not repeat the same mistakes. We can read them as both fictional and historical texts.

Another kind of Kurdish novel is based on recent history or contemporary life of Kurdish society. These novels contain the themes of the military coup, the war in the 1990s, emigration and urban life, and of course individual life stories about alienation and resistance against assimilation and the colonial policies of the Turkish state and, from within the Kurdish society, against feudal and traditional powers. It is interesting that these novels mostly come out of a new generation of young authors who were children in the 1980s and the 1990s and who are not coming from active politics. They built their novels on testimonies about social developments. It is a well-educated generation and most of them can follow world literature in its original language and not through Turkish. Almost all of them live in their hometown or the major cities of Turkey, such as Istanbul, İzmir, or Mersin. In the following part of the article, readers can see the contextual elements of several of these novels.

In the early period of the Kurdish novel (1980–2000), the influence of Turkish, mainly Turkish leftist discourse, can appear in the aspect of narration. It is very obvious that even if they were living in a diaspora, they were following literature via Turkish and were far away from the spirit of the Kurdish language and its richness of vocabulary. This was related to their political background, as Kurdish political movements in those years were bounded with Turkish. Almost 100 percent of them used Turkish as a language of propaganda. Yet we cannot see this with most of the novels which were written in Turkish Kurdistan after the 2000s. Political and novelistic discourses do not grow in parallel although there are mostly parallel topics. These novels are far from copying Turkish literature and have their own means of development. This is related to authors' social background and to the fact that they are well educated. Most of them are teachers in Turkish schools and paradoxically teach Turkish. However, this can be seen as a pragmatic lifestyle. Having enough salary to live and free time to write is a big developmental chance for Kurdish literature. Instead of earning through publishing in Kurdish, most authors have to pay to print their books, even if they are sure that only a very small number of readers are waiting for their texts.

Next to the linguistic changes, the structural and contextual elements are defining a new way of novelistic discourse in Kurdish literature. Revolutionary and successful heroes are replaced by underground, unsuccessful, depressive protagonists. They have individual or social traumas. But, what does not change is the political and social memory, resistance, and de-colonial discourse, although the protagonists are underdogs. Readers see individual stories inside social catastrophes. "As a narrator of the truth, literature, used to recreate some main facts which have space in the collective memory in a new form, perpetuate the soul of the past. Particularly literary texts, which focus to war times, create their narration by telling the people, events, objects and memory places which assume space in the collective memory of that period's society" (Çelik 2015; 45).

#### RESISTANCE, TRAUMA, AND MEMORY AS A NEW WAY OF NOVELISTIC DISCOURSE

One of the first novels which were written in Turkish Kurdistan with high potential and characteristics of a new period in novelistic discourse is *Reş û Spî* (Black and White) (1999) written by İbrahim Seydo Aydoğan. The novel tells the story of Robîn, who migrates to Istanbul with his family after his brother is killed by an unidentified murderer. In this aspect, he looks like a stereotypical character, but later, because of his brother's death and having left his girlfriend behind, in Diyarbakir, he feels guilty. Leaving his city/



homeland and lover brings him to a psychological breakdown. With all his troubles and breakdowns, he escapes to Diyarbakir and searches for his memories, girlfriend, and friends. Diyarbakir which is a symbolic city in Kurdish history and for Kurdish political movement appears in the darkest period in the novel: the beginning of the 1990s. All of Robîn's friends are in prison or dead. The city has a new face which is full of fear. Everyday people are killed on the streets by radical Islamists or state soldiers. The city is not the city of his memory. He is not safe anymore but is slowly turning into a mad, homeless, or displaced person. Besides looking at his individual identity, the novel has a documentarian way of looking at the social memory of the city in 1990s. Although there are many autobiographical markers between Robîn and the author, the author underlines that it is not an autobiographical novel.

Another novel from this period is *Gava Heyatê* (The Step of Life) (2007) written by Lokman Ayebe. This novel destroys the cliché of patriotic and static characters. Ayebe shows a protagonist who has multiple identities and personalities such as Orphan Hemo, guerrilla Siyabend, confessor, informant, and hitman of the state who has killed Kurdish intellectuals. At the end of his life, he comes back to the city of his childhood, Derik. The reader can analyze his turning back as an inner metaphor of his own identity or spiritual purification. He is one of the first protagonists who changes and stands at the "other side" against his own society. This novel which has many novelties, like *Reş û Spî*, brings readers to Diyarbakir's streets. But contrary to *Reş û Spî*, it does so not from outside from the eyes of the victim, but from eyes of the co-opted ex-guerrilla murderer. The reader follows unidentified murderers, killing civilians, *Toros* cars.<sup>44</sup> Also, burned villages, and fights between Kurdish guerrillas and Turkish soldiers are among the book's themes. The novel wants to show us different variances of a character, with details. We, as reader, witness a crucial, dark and ambiguous period of Diyarbakir's history.

*Seyîneya Winda* (The Lost Trilogy) by Dilawer Zeraq also thematically follows the novels above. In all three novels of this trilogy, the catastrophe of the 1990s and the family of lost people, their drama and testimonies, appear. The traumatic loss of men and the resistance behind finding them/their bones is the main motif of the novels. Even more than lost people, we see the women behind them. The lost ones are men and women are dissidents. In *Şevên Winda Wêneyên Meçhul* (Lost Nights Indeterminate Pictures) (2005) a wife, in *Mirina Bêşî* (The Death Without Shadow) (2011) a lover, and in *Nexşên Li Giyan* (The Maps on the Soul) (2014) a mother is the protagonist. *Toros* cars, unidentified murderers, and the families who would be happy even if they would find the bones of their son/lover/husband are the main symbols of the loss, testimony, and resistance. The female protagonists are toughened by the atmosphere of political violence and the dirty war of the 1990s. As a strong political figure of the time, the death of Vedat Aydın<sup>45</sup> is

also the topic of *Mirina Bêsi*. Even though the author is male, the female character's voice is successfully in the front. Not only the pain, but the power and resistance of Kurdish women is remarkable. The trilogy deserves a deep feminist reading.

Another novel which follows the memory of the 1990s and Diyarbakir's dark and narrow streets is *Xaniyê Şîn* (The Blue House) (2017) by Tahir Taninha. It tells the story of a family whose village was burned by Turkish soldiers and who had to migrate to Diyarbakir. Also, it contains the silence of a family which is shoehorned into a small house. A family, together with their problems of urbanization, the political atmosphere of the city, inadaptability, and economic problems, takes a big space in the novel. The protagonist Binevşê, the mother, chooses silence, the daughter waits for the neighbor boy who was kidnapped by one of the Toros cars, and the son waits for his acceptance as a teacher, but it never comes. The father's profit (as fruit seller in the city bazar) dwindles away. The most interesting aspect of the novel is that the reader cannot keep track of the time. As we see, Diyarbakir takes an important space in the novels of the post-2000s. Not only because it is a cultural and political center for Kurds, but as a witness of the crucial times of the notorious Diyarbakir prison<sup>46</sup> and the fights of the 1990s, it is a highlighted city.

Şener Ozmen's novel *Pêşbaziya Çîrokên Neqediyayî* (The Contest of Incomplete Story) (2010) is perhaps one of the best examples in showing individual stories or individualism up front. The protagonist Sertac Karan was a schizoid, who lives in Hezex. Through his story, the author tackles the topics around power, colonialism, and the borders of individual freedom. Readers can follow different stories from the life of Sertac, but not chronologically. These stories confuse the reader, because they appear as belonging to different people or are transmitted as partial stories. At the end of the novel, the reader can see a "patchy" connection between these stories. And a hurt, crushed, cowardly and characterless protagonist is revealed. Everything is half in his life. Love, family, writing, work, memory, beliefs. . . . His mother loves his brother more than him. His wife is never happy about her life and fights between them are a daily life routine. He teaches in a religious high school (called in Turkish, İmam Hatip), but he is an atheist. His family wants to keep him away from politics, after the murder of his uncle by the state who was the only person really caring about Sertac. Yet, Sertac turns out to be mad with a dispersed mind and soul. He spends all his free time in his own library writing short stories, which he never completes. Because of his personal madness, his wife leaves him. And even after visiting a literature house, in Munster, Germany, he cannot complete his stories. At the end, he gets killed by one of his students from the religious high school because of his ideas about religion.

The novel brings all characters through individual and social catastrophes with their tragic life stories. They are underground Kurdish figures and for this reason, their life stories are full of victimization and colonization. As Sertac calls himself: “I am an unfinished result, a result which is produced only in colonial laboratories” (93). Kurdish critic Hasan Sun clarifies this:

We can read the schizoid character, Sertac, as a character who lives in between political walls and with whips of colonialism, traditions and power (in school, in the house, with friends, inside the political organization, around intellectuals etc.) which is dehumanizing and drives him mad. Sertac, who thinks that no help will come from sociologists and physiologists who observes his geography as a laboratory and life as their experimental object, sees himself as an unfinished outcome of the colonial laboratories.” (127)

Already on the first page, Sertac stresses on the correct form of his name which was a meaningless difference for his wife. He even obsessively shows his ID card to prove that he is not Sertaç but he is Sertac. The difference between “ç” and “c” is very meaningful for him. It shows the difference between to be Turk or Kurd (Sertaç is a common name in Turkish society and Sertac also for Kurds).

Seditiously, the personality of Sertac standing against colonial mechanisms of the state and his wish of creating a new personality deserves attention even though the problem of schizoidism appears more as a social problem rather than a psychological one. Pîra NA<sup>47</sup> who often comes to him whispering in his ears, makes him afraid of castration. “It is interesting that we see openly that Pîra NA, as a symbol of castration, turns to be his homeland, and then we see that Kurdistan also castrates him. In all, we can formulate it like this: Fear = Woman = Castration. Colonialist as the fear and homeland as colonization castrate [him]” (Baran 2014; 98).

*Kitim* (The Reckless) (2005), *Qerebafon* (Gramophone) (2009), and *Bavfileh* (Proselyte) (2009) are three novels of Mardin’s Trilogy written by Yaqob Tilermenî. They are novels of the recent history of Mardin city telling the life of three artists: a novelist, a musician, and a painter. In *Kitim* and *Qerebafon*, the story takes place in Mardin, but in the third one, *Bavfileh*, a big part of the novel takes place in Istanbul even though most of the characters have Mardin’s identity, with a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious background. Even though the reader may not see a strong bond between novels, there are always small signs or characters from the one before and they are following a chronology. *Kitim* follows the end of the 1980s, *Qerebafon* the early 1990s, and *Bavfileh* the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. In all three novels, the reader can see the soul of the period with wars, tragedies, and resistance widely. “It can be said that the common ground of all three novels is the fight of three artists for freedom to produce their art, relations over the fear of war, dying and suspicion, de-

stroyed families because of political reasons and smashed lives” (Parlıtı & Galip 2010; 141).

In the novel *Kitim*, readers follow the protagonist, Fendo, who is a novelist. The political situation and unidentified murderers take up a big space in the novel. Yet, the center of the novel is the kidnapping of the novelist by Kurdish guerrillas and their forcing him to write a novel about their life story. This story of writing a novel takes the biggest part of the novel. As subtopics, freedom of expression, writing in freedom, the meaning of the novel, ideology, and life stories of the guerrillas are also important topics. Readers can read a diary of a guerrilla as a paratext throughout the whole novel. Discussion between the novelist and guerrillas about the novel, topics as what the novel is and how a novel should be are important topics evoked. Dialogs take up a big space.

The second novel of Mardin Trilogy, *Qerebafon* focuses a tragic story of some young people in Mardin: Ronahî, Şevzar, Nalîn, Merdo, and Nabî. But the main figure of the novel is a pianist, Ronahî. She dreams of making a composition to rescue the Kurds. The novel consists of the hot tension of those years and shows a didactic picture as well. As an example, the research of characters on the history of civilization in Mardin and long dialogs about classical music stretch throughout the novel. Again, there is a diary of a guerrilla as a paratext.

*Bayfileh* is different from the others. Mostly it takes place in Istanbul. It focuses on the life of four Kurdish young people who came to Istanbul for different reasons: Taybet, Nadyazîn, Lewend, and Kamran. But, the painter Taybet is the central figure. In the background of the novel, we witness Kurdish migrant society of Istanbul and current political topics. In private, the relationship between Taybet and Nadyazin, the feeling of exile, and poverty are some individual themes. There is a paratext in the novel again. It tells the story of an Islamized Armenian woman. Taybet and Nadyazin follow this paratext and want to understand this woman’s (Prapiyon-Hedla) true story. In the shadow of the novel, the Armenian genocide, participation of Kurds in it, and the continuity of historical catastrophes are some contradicting topics. Even though there are not the same characters, there is a unity between the three novels. They follow a chronology and the reader can find the testimony of a hundred years in a multi-identity city. Discussions around possibilities of free art, and the meaning of art in colonized societies are some other remarkable points. Also, it is important to read these novels as material of a counter-memory.

In terms of collective memory, a recognized novel is *Pêşengeha Suretan* (Photo Exhibition) written by Irfan Amida. The novel focuses on a hundred years of a family within three generations. Irfan Amida witnesses the Armenian genocide through a story of an Islamized sister and brother. From there, the novel evolves to 1980s, to the military coup and the 1990s

fighters, the migration to Istanbul, the politicization of Kurdish young students in Istanbul and the beginning of 2000s. The novel focuses on society over the trauma of genocides under the aspect of hiding and silencing the true story of the protagonist until their deathbed. The transportation of this traumatic family story is combined with 1980s Diyarbakir prison and then the fights between the Turkish state and Kurdish guerrillas. The novel seems to be a labyrinth of catastrophic events. Forgetting, loss and silence are some important themes. At the end of the novel, Kurdish-Armenian and Muslim-Christian identities are turned to an ambiguous faces. Molla Selim (Aram) and Fatima Xanim (Aşxan) are remnants of genocide. Şervan and Zelal are two political, young Kurds studying at the university. Şervan is the grandchild of Fatima Xanim and represents today's Kurdish political movement. At the end of the novel, Zelal chooses to fight in the mountains, but Şervan follows the testimony of her story after learning the true story of his grandmother.

## CONCLUSION

In a shattered and colonized society, the effort of reconstruction against the powerful fosters feelings of unity and brings the members of the society together. In the last century, Kurds tried to bring this about through political resistance. Therefore, the intellectual and artistic dimensions of this resistance were overshadowed by political activism. But, the socio-political transformation of last twenty years has reflected on artistic and literary products as well. In the literary discourse, which has assumed its autonomy from politics, in addition to deeper, more forgotten, and non-spoken facts, decolonial, resistance, and trauma discourse also take an important space. The texts, which are products of this discourse, take on the imagery of post-traumatic literature. And, in this literature, as a highly productive sociological genre, the novel, under the aspects of collective memory, catastrophe, and counterhistory, provides us with some important insights.

The Kurdish-Kurmanji novel, which has been in a development of resistance and also a qualitative and quantitative development in last twenty years, must be seen as a "new" literature. It is quite obvious that Kurdish authors are no longer writing for language protection, but for literary creation. Aesthetic reasons are placed before ethical reasons. This is one of the reasons that readers cannot find political mottos, autobiographical, heroic, and didactic narrations anymore. Particularly, the young generation, who witnessed the 1980s and the 1990s, and in the meantime had the opportunity of literary education within foreign languages, were following new ways of novelistic discourse.

In the post-2000 Kurdish novels, there are heterogeneous and ambiguous characters. Not only Kurds, but also non-Muslim characters (Armenian, As-

syrian, Yezidis), Alawite, Turks, and Europeans can also be seen as main characters. Also, these novels focus on traumatic topics such as genocides, torture in the Diyarbakir prison, unidentified killings, migration, exile, the silencing of society, and the continuity of social catastrophes. Perhaps, until the post-2000s nobody dared to touch this wounded social memory. But, we must clarify that these novels show this social memory through individual stories. Additionally, with these individual stories, we witness topics such as alienation and assimilation under colonial politics, the problems of the modern individual who is between the modern and conservative worlds, the state and family power, religious, national, and gender ambiguity and hybridity. These novels are highly tense with topics such as nightmares, torture, demonstrations, revolts, wars, madness, and inner exile. . . . It does not matter what the topic is or who the characters are, there is always resistance in both the world of language and the literary world. Therefore the novel has the chance of liberating the mind, and the language, from the destructive force of colonial powers.

## NOTES

1. Thank you for very important comments of my dear friends Deniz Yonucu and Mehmet Rauf Kesici. Also, thank you very much for the important reading of Clémence Scalbert-Yücel and the patience and contributions of dear editors Adnan Çelik and Lucie Drechselová.

2. Mainly for scholars of modern Kurdish literature (who are the product of the last twenty years), there are deeper obstacles than for others. This atmosphere which in the first half of 2018, despite some small changes, still continues and causes a few troubles that make research in Kurdish more difficult. With the division of Kurdish geography between four nation-states, and because of this including the problems of communication with each other and border crossing and the speaking of four different dialects, using three different alphabets, and a language which was never an official language of education (except in Iraq), and still in need of much standardization, there appear to be some serious logistical problems awaiting literary scholars.

3. In 1991, the first change in the Turkish law system happened in the period of Turgut Özal. The law 2932 was changed, allowing publishing in other languages, besides Turkish, and from that moment on, the use of “local languages and dialects” in audio and visual recordings and other instruments of communication was authorized. (Clemence, 570–1). We must remember that until 2018, the state has not used “Kurdish” officially in any kind of official agreement about freedom of expression or publishing. The state used the term of “local dialects and languages.”

4. On August 3, 2002, in accordance with the Law Number 4771, broadcasting in TV and radio channels and teaching private lessons in other languages next to the Turkish was authorized.

5. In the last two years, again, some Kurdish writers had to leave in exile. For example Amed Çeko Jiyan and Yıldız Çakar live in Germany now.

6. Among the pioneers of modern Kurdish literature, the brothers Celadet Ali Bedirxan and Kamuran Ali Bedirxan (although both of them did not write Kurdish novels, with their tens of short stories, were like pioneers of modern Kurdish literature) were from the KHOYBUN movement. Erebe Şemo known as “father of Kurdish novel” was a member of the Communist Party in Armenia. İbrahim Ehmed, the author of first Kurdish-Sorani novel, was one of the leaders of PDK-Iraq. Another novelist, Rehimê Qazi, was a member of committee of PDK İran.

Mehmed Uzun and Mahmud Baksî, who are the first novelists from Turkish Kurdistan in diaspora, were from left-wing parties in 1970s (Yusiv 2011; 10–11).

7. At the same time, except Iraqi Kurdistan, if we speak about Kurdish literature, in general next to political dangers, the limited number of readers, few opportunities of printing and distribution, lack of libraries, bookstores, and archives are some other main and serious problems.

8. Due to this, just between 1984–2002, 40,000 people lost their lives, around 4000 settlements were burned or emptied, and around 3 million people had to emigrate. (TMMOB 2002–2004 Dönemi Çalışma raporu (Ankara: Türkiye Mimarlar ve Mühendisler Odaları Birliği, 2004: 566–574.)

9. In 1999, in the local elections, for the first time pro-Kurdish party HADEP won thirty-seven municipalities. In the following local elections this number increased. In 2004, DEHAP won sixty-five municipalities, in 2009, DTP won ninety-eight municipalities and in the last local elections, in 2014, HDP won 102 municipalities.

10. The main critique of these Kurdish courses in Adana, Batman, Diyarbakır, Mardin, Şırnak, Van, and Istanbul, was that Kurds should not learn their language in private schools but under the protection of the state. The language course must be for Kurdish kids in primary schools.

11. Bingöl University, Dicle University, Muş Alparslan University, Van 100. Yıl University.

12. Aram Tigran and Cegerxwîn Conservatories: They were teaching literature, music, dance, theater, art, and cinema in Kurdish.

13. Jiyan TV, Gün TV, Zarok TV, Deng TV were some of these TV channels.

14. As the TIHV (Turkey's Human Right Association) report mentioned, between August 16, 2015 and August 16, 2016, in total nine provinces and thirty-five districts, minimum 111 times the state declared the curfew. 1.7 million people were affected by these curfews. 500,000 people had to immigrate. 321 civilians lost their lives. In the state report, 4,949 members of the KCK, and 483 soldiers lost their lives.

15. All Kurdish local TV Channels, radio stations, newspapers, and news agencies were closed.

16. All Kurdish names of parks, squares, and streets were renamed with Turkish national symbols. Multilingual municipal services were cancelled and instead, all services were given only in Turkish. All members of Kurdish theater groups which were supported by the municipalities lost their jobs. Kurdish language activities were criminalized. Monuments which take an important place in Kurdish social memory, such as the Roboski monument, the sculptures of Uğur Kaymaz and Ehmedê Xanî and cemeteries of Kurdish partizans were destroyed. This memoricide movement was obviously the goal of the assimilation and recolonization movement. For further reading: Şerif Derince; <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/183814-kurtcenin-penceresinden-21-subat>; Elif İnce; [https://www.ifex.org/turkey/2016/12/13/state\\_emergency/](https://www.ifex.org/turkey/2016/12/13/state_emergency/) and Çiçek (2018).

17. There are some religious and grammatical pieces as prose works from seventeenth century but, as a remarkable work, we can point out works of Mela Mehmûdê Bayezidî (1797–1858) *Adat û Rusûmatnameê Ekradiye; Tewarixê Qedimî Kurdistan* and *Cami'eya Risaleyan û Hikayetan bi Zimanê Kurmancî* (Adak, Abdurrahman 2013, p. 306–7).

18. Newspapers: *Kurdistan* (1898, Cairo-Geneva-London-Folkston); *Ummîd* (1900, Cairo); *Kürt Teavun ve Terakki Gazetesi* (1908, Istanbul); *Şark ve Kurdistan* (1908, Istanbul); *Kurdistan*: (1909, Istanbul); *Serbestî* (1908–1920, Istanbul, Paris, Istanbul); *Amidî Sevda* (1909, Istanbul); *Kurdistan* (1917–1918, Cairo); *Têgeyiştini Rastî* (1918, Baghdad); *Jîn* (1919, Istanbul); *Gazî* (1918, Diyarbakır). Magazines: *Rojî Kurd* (1913, Istanbul); *Hetawî Kurd* (1913, Istanbul); *Yekbûn* (1913, Istanbul); *Bangî Kurd* (1914, Bagdat); *Jîn* (1918–1919, Istanbul); *Kurdistan* (1919, Istanbul) (Yeşilmen 2017; 197–201).

19. For Further reading (Alan 2016b, Yekdeş 2014).

20. Caucasian Kurdish literature had been built on a basis of Soviet ideology and because of hard censorship, until the end of 1970s, for other Kurds, Kurdish literature in the Caucasians was an unknown phenomenon. This literary tradition is built by Yezidi Kurdish orphans who escaped from the Ottoman Empire during 1915. Since 1935, thirty-four novels by twelve

authors at minimum have come out. Erebe Şemo (six novels), Eliyê Evdilrehman (four novels), Heciye Cindî (one novel), Mîroyê Esed (one novel), Seîdê Îbo (one novel), Xemgînê Temê (one novel), Wezîrê Eşo (eight novels), Egîdê Xudo (one novel), Ahmedê Hepo (two novels), Eskerê Boyik (three), Ezîzê Gerdenzerî (three), Tosinê Reşîd (three), Xelîlê Çaçan (one). These novels are surely typical propaganda novels but, we cannot bound them to an ideology and monotonic novels. All novelists have their own voice and topics. These novels have multidimensional worlds, and show society from different aspects. Also, the collective memory, culture and tradition of Yezidis have an important space. But, of course they are didactic novels with heroes or comrades. They wrote how they lived and they lived how they wrote. This seems to be an adequate expression for their literature. Daily life language and stories are in front. We must not forget that they were isolated by hard censorship. That is why until the 1970s, nobody had any concrete idea about them and we still know only a small part of their publications. For the first time, in 1977, Koral publishers printed *Şivanê Kurd* (*Şivanê Kurmanca*, Erebe Şemo) which is called the first Kurdish novel. Perhaps this was the first meeting with this tradition. (For further reading: Çoban, 2017).

21. Kurds celebrate this date as Kurdish Language Festival every year.

22. In this tradition, we see 129 Kurdish written and fifty-two translation or adaptation short stories (Seydo 2014; 105).

23. The Hawar ecole contained these magazines: *Hawar*, *Ronahî*, *Roja Nû* and *Stêrê*. Celadet Ali Bedirxan and Kamiran Ali Bedirxan were main figures in this school. Young writers such as Qedrîcan, Cegerxwîn, Osman Sebrî, and Nureddin Zaza are among other important writers.

24. In Halabja genocide approximately 5000 people and in Anfal genocide, between 150,000–200,000 people died (McDowall 1996, 357–360).

25. Between 1965–1990, only fifteen books were published. But none of them was distributed because of the ban on Kurdish language. Some of them were religious books. Musa Anter's play *Birîna Reş*, short story collection *Meyro*, republishing of Erebe Şemo's novel *Şivanê Kurda*, literary magazine *Tirêj* (only 3 volumes) were main literary books of that period. (Malmisanij 2006, 45–47).

26. Alakom, Rohat. *Kurdên Swêdê 1965–2005*, Serkland, 2006, Stockholm, pp. 191–200.

27. For the number of novels from this period, we have two sources. Hashem Ahmedzadeh gives the number of sixty-three until end of 1990s (Forty written in Kurdish, fifteen translated, eight latinized) (Ahmadzadeh 2003, 166). Özlem Belçim Galip in her dissertation *Imagining Kurdistan Identity, Culture and Society*, mentioned that from beginning until 2010, there are sixty-four novels written in Kurdish in diaspora (besides translation and Latinized novels) (Galip 2015, 88).

28. *Payiza Dereng* (2005) by Firat Cewerî, *Ronakbîr* (2003) by Laleş Qaso and *Pêlên Bêrikirinê* (1999) by Mustafa Aydoğan.

29. Publishers in Istanbul, Diyarbakir, İzmir, and Van which published Kurdish books: Komal (1974), Deng (1989), Doz (1990), Weşanên Enstîtuya Kurdî (1992), Nûbihar (1992), Avesta (1995), Pêrî (1997), Aram (1997), Elma (2002), Vate (2003), Lîs (2004), Bîr (2005), Tevn, Do, Ronahî, Bajar, Veng, Aram, Berfîn û Belkî, Na, Dara, Wardoz . . . etc. There have been minimum forty-three Kurdish publishing houses since 1974 in these cities. But most of them have open after 2000s.

30. *Jiyana Rewşen* and *Rewşenname* are other two magazines which were following up *Rewşen*.

31. This magazine was printed for twenty-six years. Volume 142 came out in spring 2018.

32. *Azadiya Welat* and *Welat* are other two newspapers which were following up *Welatê Me*.

33. We must understand that modification of law is a theory while most of the time, there is another reality. Yes, there were some published books but it is almost impossible to find a publisher or writer who was not in prison for a while because of publishing in Kurdish. Only, the reason for their imprisonment may have changed this time to become “supporting terrorism” or a “separatist movement.”

34. If we give examples of some successful Kurdish novelists, Bextiyar Elî lives in Cologne, Helim Yusiv in Wuppertal, İrfan Amîda in Mardin, and Yaqob Tilermenî in Mersin. They are living far from main centers but this is not a gap between them and Kurdish writing.



35. In two surveys in *Wêje û Rexne* (3) and *PopKurd* (1) magazines with readers of the Kurdish novel, most of readers estimate that if one day a Kurdish writer is awarded with Nobel Prize, this writer must be Bextiyar Elî. He is one of the few novelists whose novels made second edition in Turkish Kurdistan. At the same time, mainly in KRG, many novels written in Kurdish-Kurmanji are adapted to Kurdish-Sorani. Mehmed Uzun, Helim Yusiv, and Jan Dost are some important examples.

36. J&J Publisher which is in Diyarbakir gives an important space to prison writing, mainly novels. All of these prisoners are in prison for political reasons. The owner of publishing house Azad Zal, who was for twelve years in prison also, calls prison literature the richest and most developed part of literature: "Because these writers lived different situations in their lives such as war, resistance, devotion, love, betrayal, killing, lacerating, friendship, comradeship, whatever you can imagine. This life is a literary treasure." Also, he calls this literature a testimony literature and wants to keep alive (Yeşilmen, interview with Azad Zal, 24.04.2018).

37. This literature is produced by Kurdish partisans who are fighters at the same time. Mostly they have one or two books because of their life situation or their death (Nuri Firat 2012; 422–441).

38. Mehmed Uzun, Ronî War, Edip Polat, and Eyub Kiran are some important examples. For further reading: Alan, 2013.

39. İlhamî Sidar, Selim Temo, and Suzan Samancı are three important examples.

40. Jemo (1989), Ezdîn (2009), Pariltî-Galip (2010), Aydoğan (2011), Yusiv (2011).

41. This is the number of Kurdish-Kurmanji written novels. In this list, we do not find the number of translated and adapted novels. If we add them up, the total will come to around 540 novels. (In the list, we always account for a 5 percent margin of error. So, with the margin of error, we must conclude that the number of novels is between 440–480.)

42. Between 2005–2017, in total, 211 short story books were published. 178 of them are new books, twenty-four of them are translated books, four of them are adaptations from Sorani Kurdish, and four of them are Latinized books. 415 of poetry books were published. 349 of them are new books. Twenty-four of them are translated, thirty-five are classic poetry, four of them are adaptation from Sorani Kurdish, and three of them are Latinized books. In total, 1832 books were published. Although the number of poetry books is in the majority, it is clear that the popularity and the rate of the novel are in the forefront. (This information was obtained from the statistics of Cemil Oğuz, in [www.diyarname.com](http://www.diyarname.com), he collected the data systematically and shared them with the Kurdish readers in a form of report. We thank him for his support and sharing all of his reports.)

43. Between 2005–2017, fifty-six novels were translated to Kurdish-Kurmanji. The highest number is from Turkish (14). The following is English (12), Arabic (8), German (6), Swedish (5), French (5), Spanish (4), Persian (1), and Norwegian (1).

44. This is the name of a taxi company which was used by state secret service in the streets of Kurdish cities during the 1990s and was known as a symbol for kidnappings and disappearances. (For further reading, Adnan Çelik, 2015.)

45. Head of Pro-Kurdish party HEP in Diyarbakir who was killed by state paramilitary powers (JITEM) in 5.7.1991 in Diyarbakir. (For further reading, M. Şefîq Oncu, 2013.)

46. One of the most notorious jails in the world and main symbol and place of torture for political prisoners after 1980 military coup in Turkey. (For further reading, *Serbestî 14*, September-October 2003.)

47. "pîr" means "old person," "NA" means "No" in Kurdish, "Pîra NA" means "old woman NA" but remained as Piranha as she has some common points with piranha, the dangerous fish, as well.

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