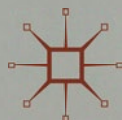




# The PKK-Kurdistan Workers' Party's Regional Politics

*During and After  
the Cold War*

ALI BALCI



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*For Elif Nur and Zeynep Erva*

## PREFACE

My wife, Elif Nur, spent almost ten months in İnlice, a village of Adıyaman, Turkey, as a primary school teacher. In one of my visits to her during the winter of 2012, we took a bus from Kahta, a district in Adıyaman, to Siverek, a district in Şanlıurfa. Although we were planning to catch another bus in Siverek to go to Diyarbakir, it was too late to find a public transport. Fortunately, a group of young people waiting at the bus terminal offered to take a taxi together so that it would cost less. We were now seven people including the driver in the taxi for a one-hour trip. Our conversation about the Kurdish issue turned a heated discussion between two local passengers. One of them was an ardent critic of the PKK and accused the PKK of killing innocent Kurdish people including his uncle. The other one was a vehement supporter of the PKK and tried to convince the first guy about the fact that the PKK killed ordinary Kurdish people in order to emancipate the Kurdish society from colonialism and those killed were just tools of colonial oppression over the Kurds. He often referred to US imperialism in his attempt to explain how this colonial oppression worked in Kurdistan. As a reader of poststructural analysis of foreign policy, his references to US imperialism as part of his strategy to convince his main interlocutor and other passengers in the taxi drew my close interest.

For a couple of years, this conversation haunted my mind occasionally since I am academically interested in how foreign policy practices are constitutive when it comes to identity and power relations. I was trying to understand the role of foreign policy discourses and practices in the power struggle between the ruling Justice and Development Party, a conservative

and religious-friendly party, and traditional secular institutions in Turkey such as the military and Republican People's Party. When I came back to Manchester, UK, where I was doing research as part of my postdoc project, I started to read about the perception of Kurdish political actors toward the European Union (EU) in order to understand how Kurdish political movement in Turkey used the EU in challenging the hegemonic state power and in mobilizing their supporters. Although this short-lived reading bore fruit as an article published by *Ethnicities* in 2003, my other studies on Turkish foreign policy interrupted my interrogation of the contemporary Kurdish nationalism in Turkey as a case for my theoretical questions such as what is the role of narratives on world politics in the construction of counter-identities.

Finally, the Title 2219 Postdoctoral Fellowship provided by TÜBİTAK (*Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu*, The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey) created an opportunity for me to think and write about these theoretical questions with a special focus on the contemporary Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. Therefore, first of all I would like to express my gratitude to TÜBİTAK. I am also grateful to Sakarya University's Bilimsel Araştırma Projeler Koordinatörlüğü (Scientific Research Projects Unit) for six months' funding that gave me opportunity to read deeply in the field of poststructural theory. Since most of the book was written in the Butler Library of Columbia University in 2015, I would like to thank the library staff for their help in finding books and primary documents. Throughout my study, Ibn-i Haldun Library of the Middle East Institute at Sakarya University was like a home for me.

I have benefited from comments and suggestions of many scholars, colleagues, and friends. Although it is impossible to credit them all, I want to particularly acknowledge Tuncay Kardeş, who read the manuscript and provided invaluable feedback. I have also benefited from comments and suggestions from Murat Yeşiltaş, Nicholas Onuf, Ayşe Selcan Özdemirci, Rümeyşa Köktaş, Kemal İnat, Burhanettin Duran, and Berkan Öğür. I also owe thanks to two anonymous reviewers of Palgrave Macmillan for their useful suggestions. At Palgrave Macmillan New York, I benefited from Alisa Pulver's professional spirit. And most of all, thanks to İbrahim Efe, not only for his invaluable support, advice, and final reading but also for his friendship.

Finally, my deepest gratitude is for my parents, Fatma and Basri, for a lifetime of love and pride in my academic achievements.

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	1
	<i>Beyond Repression and Resistance</i>	8
	<i>Reading the PKK Through Texts</i>	13
	<i>The Organization of the Book</i>	17
	<i>Notes</i>	19
<b>2</b>	<b>Identity, Hegemony, and Imagining World Politics</b>	27
	<i>Meaning, Identity, and Subject</i>	31
	<i>Writing the World into Exclusion</i>	37
	<i>Writing the World into Resistance</i>	43
	<i>Notes</i>	49
<b>3</b>	<b>Imagining the Kurdish Nation</b>	57
	<i>The Play of Difference</i>	65
	<i>Writing the Kurdish Self</i>	68
	<i>Writing Threats and Others</i>	72
	<i>Notes</i>	76
<b>4</b>	<b>Writing the USA as Imperial Power</b>	85
	<i>The Rise of “Kurdistan as Colony” Discourse</i>	88
	<i>Turkey as Subserving of US Imperialism</i>	92
	<i>Responsibility in Resistance Against Imperialism</i>	98
	<i>Notes</i>	103



<b>5</b>	<b>Writing the Soviet Union as Comrade</b>	111
	<i>The Kurds Embrace Socialism as Resistance</i>	113
	<i>The PKK's Imagination of the Soviet Socialism</i>	118
	<i>A Friend on the Wrong Track</i>	122
	<i>Notes</i>	127
<b>6</b>	<b>The Collapse of the Soviet Union as Dislocation</b>	133
	<i>The Soviet Union Redefined</i>	136
	<i>Marxist-Leninist Ideology Redefined</i>	141
	<i>Understanding the Transformation of the PKK</i>	146
	<i>Notes</i>	151
<b>7</b>	<b>Re-writing the USA After the Cold War</b>	157
	<i>The Prophecy Comes True: The Gulf War</i>	160
	<i>The Rise of "Human Rights" Discourse</i>	164
	<i>US Imperialism Revisited</i>	168
	<i>Notes</i>	174
<b>8</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	179
	<i>Notes</i>	184
	<b>Bibliography</b>	185
	<b>Index</b>	205

## Introduction

*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* (Kurdistan’s Workers Party; abbreviated as PKK) is an armed ethnic movement and its guerilla war against the Turkish state since 1984 left more than 40,000 deaths behind. When the PKK was established in the late 1970s, its founding leaders declared US imperialism as the main enemy and the Soviet Union as the natural ally. Moreover, the founding documents of the PKK allocated many pages to the description of the imperial system led by the USA and the revolutionary socialist system led by the Soviet Union. Apart from these founding documents, later publications such as monthly journals, bulletins, books, and party documents are full of comments and analyses about world politics. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the PKK continued to speak about world politics much more than it did during the founding years and the 1980s. These official representations of world politics became solidified as common sense and they often echoed in public outcries of the PKK supporters both in Turkey and Europe. Alas, contemporary scholars of foreign policy analysis paid almost no attention to these documents and other statements of the PKK on world politics. The contemporary Kurdish nationalism led by the PKK in Turkey is no exception. Far too little attention has been paid to “foreign policies” of ethnic dissident movements all around the world.

Is it possible to speak about “foreign policies” of ethnic dissident movements especially when considering that they have no characteristics

of modern sovereign states such as territory, border, and recognition? If it is, how can we study their policies toward and imaginations of the outside world? Traditional schools of International Relations (IR) such as Realism and Liberalism do not provide any answer to these questions since they accept the state as the only actor in making and practicing foreign policy. Similarly, neither Marxism nor the English School nor even Constructivism deals with dissident movements when foreign policy is considered, mostly because they focus on hegemonic class or resulting identity within a state as makers of foreign policy. Only critical theories such as Feminism, Poststructuralism, and Postcolonialism take resistant, dissident, or alternative movements seriously and provide a space for the study of their “foreign policy” performances. This is so mostly because these critical theories do not approach foreign policy performances as outcomes of political rivalries, bargains, or agreements. Rather, for these theories, foreign policy performances are discursive apparatus in hegemonic relations, in the production of political subjectivities, and in resistance against hegemonic state power.

If foreign policy is a discursive strategy in the construction, consolidation, destruction, and reconstruction of the existing power relations and if it is constitutive in the formation of political subjectivities, then not only hegemonic state powers but also dissident movements, be they ethnic or religious, in any given state can resort to foreign policy practices in their struggle for power and the construction of alternative subjectivities. This opens the field of foreign policy analysis to the study of dissident ethnic movements that have no “official” relations with other states or movements such as trade, agreements, alliances, mutual visits, and cooperation. For example, the PKK had no official relations with the USA in the 1980s, but on the other hand its political discourse was full of references to the USA and the latter’s policies in the Middle East. Therefore, understanding “foreign policy” as tangible practices of “sovereign” states toward other states inevitably leaves a wide range of narratives the PKK produced about world politics untouched. Again the PKK is no exception. This is the case when all other ethnic movements around the world are considered.

This book, therefore, is an attempt to discuss a theoretical framework to study dissident ethnic movements’ imagination of world politics with a special focus on the PKK as a case study. By doing this, it draws mostly on the works of poststructural, feminist, and postcolonial theories. While poststructuralism mainly focuses on the relation between identity construction and power relations, feminist and postcolonial theories are quite fruitful

in terms of theoretical concepts and approaches developed from the resistance of women against male domination and of colonized peoples against their colonizers. Instead of taking the armed PKK movement as a pure resistant, this book approaches the contemporary Kurdish nationalism led by the PKK as a counter-hegemonic narrative that entails the emergence of a new kind of identity and sense of belonging, through which the PKK has been able to exercise its power. As the concept “counter-hegemonic resistance” clearly implies, dissident ethnic movements are not only a challenge to the existing hegemonic power, but they also produce an alternative closed society based on different ethnic imagination. At this point, the main research question of the book can be formulated as follows.

*The Research Question How is the domestic domain of the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects who might willingly submit to the law and violence of Kurdish political institutions constituted, bounded, and set apart from the Turkish state so that this domestic domain may be taken to provide the unproblematic ground on which all discourses of legitimization refer?<sup>1</sup>*

However, addressing the question how a domestic society of separate Kurdish political subjects is “enframed, inscribed, and fixed in its content so that it may be understood, not as an arbitrary representation in itself, but as an originary source of truth and meaning that” Kurdish political institutions can be claimed to represent<sup>2</sup> requires an insurmountable work. For example, the representation of women in the PKK’s texts played a significant role in the production of a separate Kurdish political identity. Similarly, hundreds of pages were allocated to alternative historiography of the Kurds in order to create and legitimize the emerging closed society of separate Kurdish political subjects. Instead of looking at all aspects of identity construction, the main focus of this book will be the discourse of the PKK on world politics. Therefore, this book is an attempt to understand the role of the PKK’s narratives on world politics in the emergence of the PKK as an authoritative actor, and in the production of the post-1980 Kurdish political subjectivity. As the book shall try to show, it is those narratives of world politics in PKK texts that rendered the PKK a responsible and authoritative “sovereign” for the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects in a particular way. Then, the main hypothesis of the book can be formulated as follows.

*Hypothesis I The PKK’s discourse on world politics played a significant role in the constitution of a distinct Kurdish political subject who primarily takes*

*the Kurdish nationalist institutions as legitimate sovereign presence instead of the Turkish state.*

What is the post-1980 Kurdish political identity/subject? Although concepts such as Kurdish political society, Kurdish national identity, and Kurdish political subject will often be used interchangeably throughout the book, the post-1980 Kurdish national identity simply refers to the identity of Kurdish subjects who came into existence through the PKK's ideological, political, and military struggle against the Turkish state. This does not mean that the PKK is the only creator of this Kurdish political subject; rather it means that the PKK functioned as an institutional/discursive anchor in the emergence of the post-1980 Kurdish nationalist subjectivity. As I use the term, then, the post-1980 Kurdish political subject simply means those who, willingly or unwillingly, allow the PKK as an institutional power to play across their bodies and souls, which produces the new truths on being Kurdish. Therefore, neither does the post-1980 Kurdish political subject directly refer to those who speak Kurdish<sup>3</sup> nor is the post-1980 Kurdish national identity an all-encompassing category for all Kurdish-origin people in Turkey.<sup>4</sup> Rather, it particularly refers to a very strict category of identity for the Kurds.

This definition of the post-1980 Kurdish national identity attributes a “productive” role to the PKK, which is supposedly a violent terrorist organization. It is true that material power and brute violence of the PKK over people are very real and very much out there.<sup>5</sup> However, what is critical for the purpose of this book is “to grasp the nature of the normative [namely discursive] filter through which” the PKK's material violence must pass and how and why this violence is “transformed by this passage”.<sup>6</sup> That means the PKK did not exert violence simply against the Turkish state, rather it used violence against the Turkish state in terms of nationalist pretexts, which already constituted the alterity between the Turkish state and Kurdish nationalism.<sup>7</sup> The question in this book, therefore, is not whether material violence and terrorism existed but how the solidification of Kurdish nationalism occurred through writing the PKK's armed struggle into world politics. The reduction of power only to its physical and violent dimensions overlooks “a productive power that constitutes the very meanings and social relations it regulates”.<sup>8</sup> Hence, the key concern of this book is to understand the role of discourse on world politics within the PKK texts in the production of the post-1980 Kurdish national subjectivity.

Again, it is true that the armed struggle of the PKK weakened Turkish political institutions and traditional Kurdish structures, fixing meanings for the Kurds in a different way,<sup>9</sup> which resulted in the emergence of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity and subjectivity. However, without writing this armed struggle into counter-hegemonic language, the post-1980 Kurdish political identity would not be possible. Moreover, it is this textuality that retrospectively produced meanings vital for the new Kurdish political subjectivity. Then, this book is a study of this textuality with a special focus on the representation of world politics by the PKK. Unlike the representation of women, history, and other domestic issues, the inscription of world politics played a different but significant role in the PKK's strategy to destroy the meanings imposed by the Turkish state, and traditional Kurdish forces and to replace them with a new one. The representation of world politics functioned as a second layer under which the representation of other individual and domestic issues were normalized and naturalized. Therefore, studying the first layer in order to understand emerging alternative Kurdish subjectivities is deficient without the study of the second layer. However, it is important to emphasize that this does not give a privileged role to discourses on world politics in the construction of the new Kurdish political subjectivity. Rather, representations of world politics have their own specificity in the more general field of exercising power and inscribing identity, which brings us to the second hypothesis of the book.

*Hypothesis II Through the inscription of world politics, particular meanings were produced/normalized and attached to various subjects, which located the PKK as the rightful interpreter and judge of Kurdishness.*

Before everything else (for example, armed violence), the PKK appeared as a movement representing the world *differently* in the second half of the 1970s. In a political environment dominated by the Cold War mentality, one of the core binary categories under which several other categories are subsumed was the capitalism/socialism opposition. Therefore, during the Cold War, many dissident ethnic movements in the capitalist countries embraced socialism in their struggle against the hegemonic state discourse and similarly the hegemonic state power in these countries used socialism as a label to marginalize and silence these dissident movements. This was not limited to domestic politics; both, hegemonic states and dissident ethnic movements used external references to normalize, consolidate, and

reconsolidate their positions against each other. The PKK was no exception. In one of its report on the struggle against the Turkish state, the PKK declared that armed struggle could be successful “in the extent to which a healthy and dialectical relationship is established between domestic struggle and foreign struggle”. It went on to argue, “If we want to cultivate a successful struggle against fascism in Turkey, we have to find external allies against its own allies”.<sup>10</sup> As a corollary of this reasoning, it condemned American imperialism as the main supporter of the Turkish state and embraced relations with the Soviet Union as an antidote to the imperial system composed of the USA and its collaborators.<sup>11</sup> This Manichean representation of the world between the USA and the Soviet Union deeply shaped the character of the PKK and its counter-hegemonic resistance against the Turkish state.

The end of the Cold War, therefore, resulted in a sea change in the discourse of the PKK on world politics. As part of this change, the PKK’s ideology evolved from the national independence struggle in the 1980s to a demand for democratic autonomy in the 1990s and later decades. If nations or national identities are but narratives,<sup>12</sup> the dramatic changes in historical conditions those narratives refer to after the end of the Cold War could not pass by without any trace on the contemporary Kurdish nationalism. Put differently, it was the “temporality of representation” produced by “a tribe of interpreters” under different historical conditions<sup>13</sup> that forced the post-1980 Kurdish nationalism to change. For this reason, the effect of the end of the Cold War on the post-1980 Kurdish political identity deserves a detailed study. Moreover, studying this effect proves the fact that the post-1980 Kurdish political identity is not based on an *a priori* cause but an arbitrary and interpretative violence over things including world politics by “a tribe of interpreters”. Therefore, one of the main priorities of this book is to show the role of the end of the Cold War and its representation by the PKK in the change of the Kurdish nationalist movement from national independence struggle in the 1980s to a demand for democratic autonomy in the 1990s and later decades. This brief description of the PKK’s changing imaginations of world politics demands another hypothesis.

*Hypothesis III The end of the Cold War produced dramatic changes in the PKK’s discourse on world politics, which significantly reconstituted the post-1980 Kurdish national identity.*

At this point, it is important to underline that the interpretation of world politics is not an independent act of a pre-given PKK as a free and ahistorical sovereign actor. Since representations of world politics in the PKK's texts "precede, constrain, and exceed the performer [the PKK] and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'",<sup>14</sup> the PKK comes to be and appears stable subject through contextualized practices. This is a radical departure from the Cartesian description of the PKK, according to which the PKK as an independent self/actor produced a particular stance against the world. Unlike this Cartesian understanding of the PKK, this book argues that it was the representations of the USA's policies in the Middle East and the Soviet Union's practices supporting socialist movements in the region that fixed/constructed the meaning/identity of the PKK. As David Campbell aptly puts, foreign policy is not the external orientation of pre-established entities with fixed identities; it rather needs to be understood as a practice/statement disciplining "the ambiguity of global life in ways that help to secure always fragile identities".<sup>15</sup> In other words, the inscription of an act as a danger/threat (or safety/peace) is not the result of the thing attached neither to this act nor to its interpreter but the outcome of political imaginations aiming to fix "secure identities". Therefore, the PKK, for example, had to reinterpret the Soviet Union and the USA in the post-Cold War period when it was impossible to refer to the Soviet Union as the natural ally in the war against the Turkish state.

However, it must be also underlined that the speaking subjects of Kurdish nationalist community are not mere products of the discursive machinery; they are also actors taking role in the conduct of this machinery. They are, on the one hand, the product of discourse because the discursive machinery working over the people "clears and delimits the space of domestic politics" wherein Kurdish nationalist subjects can "secure their dominance" over others and the Kurdish nationalism can "establish its hegemony".<sup>16</sup> They are, on the other hand, actors because the discursive machinery works only through their bodies (particular clothing style, festivals, self-immolations, etc.) and their speakings. When they speak and do, they both mark their own identity in relation to other speaking/doing actors, and naturalize the hegemonic discourse through which acts/statements are experienced as "true" and "necessary". Therefore, those subjects not only share an abiding commitment to the Kurdish nationalist community but also defend/construct the domestic Kurdish community as a source of every legitimation. Those subjects also poised to defend the Kurdish nationalist



community against any kind of domestic alternative discourses and transfer them beyond the Kurdish space. As a result, those Kurdish subjects' "every practice is disposed to the reproduction"<sup>17</sup> of the Kurdish nationalist community, its borders, and its domestic and foreign enemies.

### BEYOND REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE

The existing literature regarding the Kurdish nationalism in Turkey largely agrees upon the fact that contemporary Kurdish nationalism is the result of a repression.<sup>18</sup> According to this scholarly agreement, the Turkish nationalism and its policy of subordination toward the Kurds ranging from assimilation to the prohibition of Kurdish identity markers resulted in the emergence and spread of the Kurdish nationalism.<sup>19</sup> Since "the repression of Kurdish cultural and political identity spurred considerable resentment in Kurdish provinces", the Kurds repeatedly revolted to emancipate themselves from repression at the hands of the Turkish state.<sup>20</sup> Put differently, the Kurdish nationalism "in Turkey *stems from the repression* of the Kurdish people, whom the Turkish government has denied all legal possibility of representing *their interests*".<sup>21</sup> This resistance-oriented approach simply proposes that in a society where cultural and political identities are dominated and controlled by Turkish nationalism, *a priori* Kurdish interests emerge as the main motive for resistance against the existing hegemonic order. While this view is not without merit, it simply overlooks the ways in which the PKK rose to hegemonic position representing the Kurds and "their" interests.

This book is an attempt to go beyond a resistance-oriented approach. It is true that foreign policy practices of the Turkish state contributed in the subordination of the Kurds into the Turkish identity. For example, Turkey's official relations with Iraq, Syria, and Iran, before anything else, made the border dividing Kurdish-speaking people appear normal, and inscribed the Kurds into Turkish citizenship. Again, it is also true that Kurds resisted against this artificial border through maps showing the distinct Kurdish geography, smuggling, and hit-and-run guerilla attacks. However, these two ways of reading the Kurdish issue in Turkey overlooks the power nesting in the PKK's resistance against the Turkish state and traditional Kurdish institutions. For example, the representation of the border dividing Kurds as a colonial artifact not only targets the legitimacy of the existing states, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, but it also produces new Kurdish subjects, which retrospectively legitimized the PKK's regula-

tory hegemony. Put differently, the imagination of world politics in a resistant way undertakes a significant role in the production of new Kurdish political subjects denying the existing border and demanding a national territory. Therefore, taking resistance as a “diagnostic of power”<sup>22</sup> unveils two faces of the PKK’s representation of world politics: its transformative effect on Kurds, and its exclusionary function toward traditional and alternative Kurdish subjects/institutions.

Neither a subordination-oriented approach (the Kurds were suppressed by the Turkish state)<sup>23</sup> nor a resistance-oriented approach (the Kurds defended their own interests against assimilationist policies of the Turkish state) provides a comprehensive answer<sup>24</sup> to the following questions: How did the PKK rise to a hegemonic position representing the Kurds’ “true interests”? And how did the post-1980 Kurdish political subject come to be? This, however, does not mean the abandonment of any critique toward practices of the Turkish state subordinating the Kurds.<sup>25</sup> Rather, what I argue here is that the analysis of assimilationist practices of the Turkish state does not say so much about the emergence and constitution of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity as looking at transformative effect and exclusionary practices of the PKK. For example, arguing that assimilationist policies of the Turkish state aiming “to create a secular nation-state resulted in the construction of Kurdish ethno-nationalism”<sup>26</sup> deprives the PKK of any role in the production of Kurdish nationalist subjects. Therefore, a subordination-oriented approach fails to interrogate how the PKK performatively contributed<sup>27</sup> in the production of the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects. On the other hand, the resistance-oriented approach attributes *a priori* agency role to the Kurds (the notion of intrinsically constituted Kurdish identity) and, therefore, like subordination-oriented approach, walks into the trap of ignoring how the PKK inscribed the Kurds into a new closed Kurdish national society.<sup>28</sup>

In fine, studying the genealogy of the PKK statements is more instructive than looking at the Turkish state’s policies in understanding the post-1980 Kurdish political identity. How the state’s policies were interpreted in a specific way instead of others was/is related to the interpretative violence<sup>29</sup> the PKK exerted on infinite possibilities of the meaning. While looking at policies of the Turkish state provides an understanding of official state identity in Turkey or the construction of specific Turkish subjectivities, understanding the post-1980 Kurdish political identity demands a look at the stylized repetition of statements out of and against the discourse of the Turkish state. It is true that the PKK emerged in a context the Turkish

state's exclusionary practices made possible, but important point here is that the PKK was not an inevitable or logical outcome of this context. Put differently, it was the PKK's interpretative violence that made some certain statements repeatable, which made the post-1980 Kurdish political identity possible. Without studying the PKK's interpretative violence excluding other possibilities of identity, the "political context" alone does not say anything about the post-1980 Kurdish political identity. Therefore, this book adopts "the notion of a performative that creates its own grounds" developed by Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler.<sup>30</sup> According to this idea, the context is always there but "it becomes a context only when the speech act intervenes within it". Actor or its speech act "transforms the context it enters, even though in retrospect that context seems to have been there already as the ground of the speech act's efficacy".<sup>31</sup>

Discourses accompanied by practices in the 1980s and 1990s created a disciplinary society in which the PKK is able to speak in the name of the Kurds and disciplinary technology through which Kurds are rendered into specific subject positions. In other words, the PKK as a resistant ethnic movement not only resisted the power/knowledge of the Turkish state but also staked out a space for differentiation in the constitution of an autonomous Kurdish political identity.<sup>32</sup> The PKK was an institutional and discursive power to the extent that it empowered a particular identity and excluded alternative modes of identity for the Kurds. This is the point where "resistors are doing more than simply opposing domination, more than simply producing a virtually mechanical re-action".<sup>33</sup> Therefore, arguing that the PKK empowered the "subaltern" Kurds who were subordinated by the Turkish state for a long time is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it is impossible to know whether the desire of the subaltern Kurds was the identity imposed by the PKK. On the contrary, what is clear in the genealogy of the PKK statements is the fact that the Kurds were inscribed into the post-1980 political identity through the work of power relations. Secondly, we know the subaltern Kurds through the lenses of either the PKK texts or the Turkish state's texts. Another source of knowing subaltern Kurds is texts left by traditional Kurdish institutions, tribal or religious. Since studying what the subaltern Kurds wanted out of political discourses is impossible,<sup>34</sup> the subaltern Kurds as a category can only be included in this book as a method.

It is the inclusion of "the subaltern Kurds" in this book as method that makes the following argument possible: The PKK did not "empower the subaltern"<sup>35</sup> Kurds, rather it inscribed them into a particular Kurdish

national identity. For example, an unnamed Kurdish villager told representatives from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: “We will lose either way... we don’t like the Turkish soldiers and we fear the PKK... both sides kill our people and burn our towns... you tell me which I should support.”<sup>36</sup> This statement of an unnamed villager clearly shows that there is no Kurdish identity ready to be utilized against the Turkish state by the PKK. Put differently, the PKK’s struggle did not recover or reinvigorate “the Kurdish identity” degraded and denied by the Turkish state. Rather, the PKK had to transform the subaltern Kurds into new subjects not only for a better resistance against the hegemonic Turkish state but concomitantly also for rendering itself as “true” representative of the Kurds. To use James C. Scott’s words with some minor changes, “the breaking of the norms and values of a dominant ideology”, be it the ideology of the Turkish state or that of traditional Kurdish institutions, “is typically the work of the bearers of a new mode of” ideology and power and not of subordinated Kurdish peasants.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, it was not the subordination of ordinary Kurds by the Turkish state but the frame of this subordination that made the PKK hegemonic and an existential threat to the hegemony of the Turkish state over the Kurds.<sup>38</sup> This is what Gellner calls “the basic deception” of nationalism:

Nationalism usually conquers in the name of a putative folk culture. Its symbolism is drawn from the healthy, pristine, vigorous life of the peasants, of the *Volk*, the *narod*. There is a certain element of truth in the nationalist self-presentation when the *narod* or *Volk* is ruled by officials of another, an alien high culture, whose oppression must be resisted first by a cultural revival or reaffirmation, and eventually by a war of national liberation. If the nationalism prospers it eliminates the alien high culture, but it does not then replace it by the old local low culture; it revives, or invents, a local high (literate, specialist-transmitted) culture of its own, though admittedly one which will have some links with the earlier folk styles and dialects.<sup>39</sup>

Barkey and Fuller are right when they claim that the exposition of the Kurds to “reinvigorated Kurdish political and cultural activities” awakened them to the contemporary Kurdish nationalism. But they are wrong when they assume “quiet Kurds” awaiting some political and cultural practices to reawake.<sup>40</sup> If we assume a pre-given “Kurdish nationalist sentiment experienced an awakening”,<sup>41</sup> then it becomes possible to find examples of Kurdish nationalism even in the sixteenth century long before the French Revolution.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, those who underline physical and social violence

exerted by the Turkish state over the Kurds as a warning, which awakened the Kurds to their ahistorical national self, again assume an essential Kurdish identity. Either way, the main problem of the “awakening” notion is to assume that the subaltern Kurds were awaiting a bell-ringing to be awakened to their self-consciousness. However, to use Gellner’s words again, the Kurdish nationalism, like all other nationalisms, “is not the awakening of” the Kurdish nation to self-consciousness; it rather invented Kurdish nation or the Kurdish self, where it does not exist.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the imagination of the “Kurdish nation” in danger<sup>44</sup> rather than an ahistorical Kurdish national identity waiting to be awakened was the main impulse that “awakened” the Kurds to the contemporary Kurdish nationalism. For this very reason, facing the reality, which is the possibility of being killed in the guerilla warfare against the Turkish Armed Forces, is the only escape from the terrifying reality of imagination in which the Kurds are robbed of everything.<sup>45</sup>

At this point, the inclusion of subaltern Kurds into this book not as subjects but as a methodological tool illustrates the arbitrary character of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity. Instead of treating the post-1980 Kurdish political identity as “a reactivated sense of identity and nationalism”,<sup>46</sup> this book focuses on how *a doubly articulated dominance*<sup>47</sup> over the Kurds produced a national subject position of the Kurds in the 1980s and 1990s. The dominance over the Kurds in these two decades was exercised not only by the Turkish state but also by the Kurdish nationalist elite mobilizing around the PKK. In other words, the insertion of Kurdish individuals into subject position during these two decades was made possible through the exercise of these two powers. Although many academic studies deal with the role of the first power, the Turkish state, in the formation of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity, the role of the PKK in the formation of this new identity is just a recent interest among the students of Kurdish nationalism. As much the Turkish state’s suppression of any public expression and demands about Kurdishness<sup>48</sup> as, the PKK’s interpretative violence on infinite possibilities against the Turkish state’s repressions played a role in the construction of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity. Without the analysis of how the PKK imposed a limit on the meaning of being Kurdish, and rendered the Kurdish individuals into specific subject positions, it is impossible to understand the post-1980 Kurdish political subjectivity in Turkey.

Since the authority of the Turkish state over the Kurds in Turkey was realized through state apparatus and hegemonic discourse, academic

scholars easily grasped and detailed the role of Turkish state's repression in the reconstruction of the Kurdish identity. On the other hand, "sovereign governmental authority" of the Kurdish nationalist elite mobilizing around the PKK was "no more than aspects of an unrealized project, an aspiration yet to be fulfilled, a dream" during the founding years and the 1980s.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, only when Kurdish "governmental" institutions such as civil society organizations, Kurdish parties, and Kurdish municipalities became highly apparent in the 1990s did scholars start to shed light on the role of these nationalist elite or nationalist institutions in the construction of the new Kurdish political subjects. Few of them, however, were able to escape from the "romance of resistance",<sup>50</sup> a reading of the Kurdish resistance as an emancipatory human spirit in its refusal to be dominated by the Turkish state, and able to grasp the production of new Kurdish subjects through subjection to new center of power, namely Kurdish nationalist discourse.<sup>51</sup> As a result, since the subject, the post-1980 Kurdish political subject here, only exists on the condition that it accepts the laws of the symbolic order,<sup>52</sup> the nationalist discourse regulated by the PKK, framing the issue as a matter of freedom is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it assumes an autonomous Kurdish subject free from the exercise of power relations and underestimates the productive role of the discourse regulated by the PKK. Secondly, it normalizes and justifies the resulting post-1980 Kurdish political identity as true and real identity for the Kurds.

### READING THE PKK THROUGH TEXTS

This book is a study of recurring statements about world politics in the PKK's texts. Since the social texts of the PKK are not the reduction of real life in the world to the page of a book<sup>53</sup> but the products of a specific discourse, the "regularity of statements" in those texts is central in understanding the formation of counter-hegemonic political identity regulated by the PKK. It is important to study recurring statements within "a set of texts by different people presumed to be authorized speakers/writers of a dominant discourse",<sup>54</sup> because it is the study of reiteration and regularity within texts that shows the hegemonic discourse regulating the emergence of statements.<sup>55</sup> Put differently, if writing is an act produced in the intellectual and imaginary territory,<sup>56</sup> studying the PKK's texts with a special focus on stylized reiterations within these texts can provide us the large political identity/concern imposed by the PKK. However, reading texts, images, and records is to read representations of the "reality", such as the

killings of a PKK militant, Syria's sheltering of the PKK's leaders, and the sale of arms to Turkey by the USA. Then, why do we look at texts instead of "reality" itself? For example, cannot we argue that the USA's military aid to Turkey was the reason of the PKK's vehement anti-American discourse in the 1980s? To ask this question in general terms, does a reality exist out of the text or representation? If it does, what is the worth of looking at recurring statements on foreign affairs in the PKK's texts?

A foreign policy act such as "the USA's military aid to Turkey" by itself is open to infinite meanings for different actors in different times. This action gains a specific meaning or it can be fixed to a concrete sense only through some representational practices. Therefore, we can never grasp a foreign policy act in itself but can only have access to the way it is represented.<sup>57</sup> To put it succinctly, outside of the con/text, any foreign policy action cannot have a fixed meaning. For this reason, "texts are not mimetic but productive of the political world".<sup>58</sup> In the context of the Soviet threat to Turkey's territorial integrity, for example, the USA's military aid to Turkey appears vital for survival while it appears as a threat to "fully independent Turkey" in the context of the US hegemony over the Middle East. Similarly, it is *context* that makes the USA's military aid to Turkey under the NATO commitments as existential threat to the Kurdish nation and the freedom of Kurdistan. Then, the reality is not fixed to the action; rather it is produced through a process of textualization. Studying recurring statements on foreign affairs in the PKK's texts is an attempt to understand how dispersed and free-floating actions are brought together under a specific meaning in the construction of the post-1980 Kurdish nationalist subjects. Since the fixation of meaning without "textualizing" it is impossible,<sup>59</sup> studying texts is the only way to understand meanings constructed arbitrarily.

In addition to the fixation of the meaning, text provides a context in which the fixed meaning can repeat itself and recur in time. For example, when Edward Said argues that it was the British novels that kept the British Empire over the colonies "more or less in place" throughout the nineteenth century, he points out the fact that the fixed meaning of the Empire over the colonies was conveyed by novels in the course of time.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, a specific representation of the USA's military aid to Turkey in the PKK texts is able to construct a discursive meaning in a historical period only when this representation is cited or repeated by other texts.<sup>61</sup> Put differently, what constitutes reality is not a specific statement representing the event but "the entangled mass of documentation with which

a society is always bound up".<sup>62</sup> It is this *intertextuality* that imposes an interpretation on social facts. If this is the case, a statement that has no relations with other statements is irrelevant, because what makes any statement meaningful in a discursive sphere is its repeatability in time<sup>63</sup> or its openness to intertextual relations. Otherwise, a particular meaning of the USA's military aid to Turkey produced and imposed by the PKK cannot be recognized in different times and by different actors, potential subjects for the post-1980 Kurdish political identity.

All recorded/textual statements, of course, will not have a place in this book. Without abstraction and data selection, a finite book is impossible since no individual study can deal with all aspects of a discourse. Therefore, texts written by the PKK elite will be read, classified, and quoted through the lenses of the following questions: What is the relation between representations of world politics and the PKK's fight against the Turkish state? How was the representation of world politics related to the post-1980 Kurdish political identity? How did changes in the representation of world politics reshape the PKK's fight against the Turkish state and the post-1980 Kurdish political identity? Although these questions render some assumptions (for example, there is a relation between foreign policy practices of the PKK and post-1980 Kurdish political identity) logical and proper, this book will forward, "rather than selectively choosing data according to *a priori*" assumptions, "by developing provisional categorizations via empirical study and abstraction, comparing on the basis of new data whether these categories fit and, if necessary, reformulating the categories so that they are empirically valid" under the guide of the above questions.<sup>64</sup>

If discourse is reflected in all statements made about a certain topic,<sup>65</sup> do the above research questions impose a selective reading? To ask differently, do PKK's official texts have a monopoly in reflecting counter-hegemonic discourse? As we know from Frantz Fanon, a national culture is not "an abstract populism" imposed by a center but "*the whole body of efforts* made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence".<sup>66</sup> Therefore, a speech of an orator sympathetic to the PKK in a public gathering is not only a product of discourse but it also contributes in the construction and reconstruction of Kurdish national discourse. Then, a limited focus on the "statements made by individuals who are authorized to speak on behalf of a specific institution"<sup>67</sup> puts a study of discourse at risk of being a reductionist analysis. As a solution to



this risk, statements of Kurdish activists, Kurdish nationalist newspapers and magazines, and biographies of PKK and other Kurdish nationalist organizations' members<sup>68</sup> are also included as primary sources in addition to official publications of the PKK. Semi-official narratives like those in popular media and literature have the capacity to authorize and embody a certain narrative, while at the same time silencing and marginalizing counter-narratives.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, the inclusion of as broad a range of texts as possible into analysis is critical in illustrating law-like regularities in statements ranging from a party document to songs played in public festivals like *Newroz*.<sup>70</sup>

Texts produced by the PKK during the Cold War have significant overlaps in representing the world and foreign affairs. This is also true for the PKK's texts produced in the post-Cold War period. This overlapping or, in Derrida's term, this "interweaving" of one text with another<sup>71</sup> is highly critical not only because it rendered some subjects (say the PKK) to the status of power responsible to speak but also it created the very possibility of the post-1980 Kurdish nationalist identity. Therefore, studying the PKK-affiliated texts with a special focus on "interweaving" provides an answer to the following questions: How did the PKK construct the structure/condition of Kurdish nationalist existence? How did the PKK render representation of world politics as instrument in this construction by imposing specific interpretations upon events, silencing alternative interpretations? And how did this "interweaving" of one text on foreign affairs to another throughout a specific period render the PKK to a responsible actor in speaking in the name of the Kurdish people in Turkey? How did these texts, firstly, delegitimize the authority of the Turkish state and traditional Kurdish powers over the Kurds and, secondly, construct them as others in the constitution of the new Kurdish national identity?

The above questions aim to expose the contingency of the PKK's discourse on the world politics. For example, primary messages of the PKK's texts in the 1980s such as "the US's military aid to Turkey is an existential threat to the survival of the Kurds" are arbitrary because this message relies on the exclusion of other possible readings of the USA's military aid to Turkey. Instead of reading the statements in the PKK's texts on the USA as natural or obvious truths, this book focuses on reasons for being the way they are or their constitutive role in the production of the post-1980 Kurdish national identity. In the words of Derrida, a critical distance to the PKK's texts "reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident or universal, in order to show that these things have their history,

their reasons for being the way they are, their effects on what follows from them, and that the starting point is not a (natural) given but a (cultural) construct, usually blind to itself".<sup>72</sup> Therefore, this book approaches the PKK's texts not only as "political resources, which can be mobilized and used to justify particular political arrangements in the world",<sup>73</sup> but also as productive of the political world.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The remainder of this book is organized as follows. Chapter 2 introduces theoretical answers to the question of what is the role of resistant ethnic movements' imagination of world politics in the construction of alternative closed society through which a new mode of power relations can exercise. Having discussed the necessity of a theoretical framework in order to study resistant ethnic movements' discourse on foreign affairs in the production of sub-national ethnic identities, this chapter presents a detailed evaluation of how foreign policy discourses and performances play an important role in the construction of identities and the exercise of power relations. Because of its significant role in constructing and disciplining identities through which power can exercise, not only the state but also dissident movements resort to foreign policy discourses and practices in their struggle for power and the construction of alternative subjectivities. Therefore, the chapter presents the function of foreign policy, at the hands of dissident ethnic movements, in challenging the existing hegemonic state power and producing an alternative closed society based on different ethnic imagination.

Chapter 3 provides a critique of the existing literature on the Kurdish nationalism in Turkey and highlights the difference between religiously motivated Kurdish uprisings such as the Sheikh Said Rebellion in 1925 and modern nationalist uprisings. Having differentiated the post-1980 Kurdish nationalism from previous cases, the chapter evaluates the main dynamics in the imagination of the Kurdish nation in contemporary Turkey. This chapter argues that the perception of self, others, and threats among the Kurds was reshaped in a discursive space dominated by the PKK and its armed struggle against the Turkish state. Although the chapter discusses all these dynamics, it, however, focuses mainly on the imagination of traditional Kurdish social forces such as religion and tribes as internal others in the constitution of a new closed Kurdish nationalist society, which is the

most striking difference between the post-1980 Kurdish nationalism and previous Kurdish uprisings.

Chapter 4 deals with the rise of anti-Americanism within Kurdish nationalism in the 1970s, the PKK's discourse on the Turkish state as a puppet of US imperialism, and the PKK's so-called war against US imperialism in the Middle East, respectively. By closely examining the PKK's discourse toward the USA and its policies in the Middle East, this chapter aims to show the role of anti-American discourse in delegitimizing the Turkish state in the eyes of its Kurdish citizens, normalizing the fight of the PKK against traditional Kurdish social forces and making the PKK responsible for saving the Kurds from slavery under US imperialism supported by the Turkish state and traditional Kurdish social forces. While the description of the Turkish state as a puppet of US imperialism dismantles the identificatory process, which is vital in making the Turkish state the legitimate representative of Kurdish people, the discourse on the war of emancipation against US imperialism not only produces a new identificatory process for the Kurds in Turkey but also generates obligations/responsibilities that inscribe the PKK into the center of power.

Chapter 5 tackles why the contemporary Kurdish nationalism developed a pro-Soviet imagination of world politics from the early 1970s until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990. The chapter interrogates the description of the October Revolution and Joseph Stalin in the PKK's official documents in order to understand how positive connotations attached to early Soviet period legitimized the PKK's brutal war against critical figures within the PKK and alternative Kurdish movements. In other words, the main aim of this chapter is to deal with the constitutive relation between the PKK's description of the Soviet Union and the exclusion of alternative representations regarding the Kurdish identity. This constitutive relation played a significant role in rendering the PKK hegemonic in the representation of the newly emerging Kurdish subjectivities. This chapter also discusses the PKK's stance toward daily policies of the Soviet Union throughout the 1980s.

Chapter 6 tries to understand the radical shift in the PKK's perception of Stalin and the Soviet socialism after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This shift is very intriguing when it is considered that the representation of the Soviet Union as comrade or a natural ally during the Cold War played a significant role in the production of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity and in the legitimation of the PKK's guerilla war against the Turkish state, and alternative Kurdish groups. Therefore, the chapter argues that

this dramatic shift in the representation of the Soviet Union played a significant role in the transformation of the PKK's aim from a national independence of Kurdistan to a demand for democratic autonomy within the borders of the Turkish state. The chapter also discusses how the PKK survived from such a dramatic collapse of the Soviet socialism unlike other similar movements following Soviet socialism all around the world.

Finally, Chap. 7 attempts to understand how the PKK as an anti-American movement continued to be attractive for its followers when it radically changed its symbolic other, US imperialism, in the 1990s. As part of this attempt, the chapter tackles how the 1991 Gulf War created a dislocation for the PKK's imagination of the USA, and how the post-Cold War human rights discourse of the USA played a significant role in the transformation of the PKK's discourse of US imperialism. Despite a radical change in PKK's perception of the USA, references to US imperialism in the PKK's political language did not end. Rather, the PKK developed a dyadic stance toward the USA during the 1990s and later. This dyadic stance was not a contradiction when it comes to the PKK's armed struggle against the Turkish state. While the PKK delegitimized the Turkish state through the identification of Turkey as the puppet of US imperialism in the region, it reconsolidated this delegitimization by appropriating criticisms by the USA toward Turkey's human rights violations.

The conclusion, Chap. 8, summarizes the main approach of the book about "foreign policy", and the role of foreign policy in dissident ethnic movements' counter-hegemonic struggle. This chapter also suggests a number of research questions about the evolution of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey after the capture of Öcalan, the leader of the PKK.

## NOTES

1. The formulation of the research question is inspired from Richard K. Ashley, "Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 17(2), 1998: 227–262, p. 256.
2. Ashley, Untying the Sovereign State, p. 256.
3. The number of the Kurds in Turkey is highly contested among scholars. Şener Aktürk, after a comparative analysis of different estimations ranging from less than 10 percent to 24 percent, arrives at the figure of 16 percent of Turkey's population for the year 2010. Şener Aktürk, *Regimes of Ethnicity and Nationhood in Germany, Russia and Turkey*, (Cambridge: Cambridge

- University Press, 2012), pp. 126–7; see also, Servet Mutlu, “Ethnic Kurds in Turkey: A Demographic Study”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 28(04), 1996: 517–541.
4. There are many Kurds in Turkey who identify themselves with religion over ethnicity and vote for Islam-friendly parties such as the Justice and Development Party. This group of the Kurds also played an important role in transforming secular Kurdish nationalism of the 1980s and 1990s into a religion-friendly national movement in the 2000s. Not all religious Kurds supported mainstream Islam-friendly parties in Turkey. While some religious Kurds supported the PKK, the Hezbollah movement in Turkey mobilized the Kurds around the idea of an Islamic-Kurdish state in the 1980s and 1990s. There are also secular Alevi Kurds who vote for the Republican People’s Party, the founding secular party of Turkey. Paradoxically, the very existence of these different Kurdish political identities proves that the post-1980 Kurdish nationalist identity is not a full/real identity of the Kurds but one among many possibilities.
  5. The armed struggle, namely war, against traditional Kurdish institutions and the Turkish state was already “a major aspect of *being*”, and it emerged “as a production, maintenance, and reproduction of the virtuous” Kurdish national self, a way for the Kurds “to achieve an ideal form of subjectivity” (Michael J. Shapiro, “That Obscure Object of Violence: Logistics, Desire, War”, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 17(4), 1992: 453–477, p. 460). In other words, the practice of war waged by the PKK throughout the 1980s and 1990s rendered traditional Kurdish institutions as internal other and the Turkish state as external other in the construction of a distinct Kurdish national identity. However, without the contextualization of the armed struggle in space and time through a collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation, it would be impossible to fix the meaning of the Kurdish self and its others.
  6. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 306.
  7. As Peter Hulme argued that the Caribbean other had been constituted in European texts before Columbus invaded the area. See, Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797*, (London: Routledge, 1992).
  8. Charlotte Epstein, *The Power of Words in International Relations: Birth of an Anti-whaling Discourse*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 3; see also, Michael Barnett, and Raymond Duvall, “Power in International Politics”, *International Organization*, 59(01), 2005: 39–75.
  9. Some scholars call the PKK’s armed struggle as “a dual rebellion” since it targeted “both the traditional structure of Kurdish society and the Kemalist state system”. Hakan Yavuz and Nihat Ali Özcan, “The Kurdish Question

- and Turkey's Justice and Development Party", *Middle East Policy*, 13(1), 2006: 102–19, p. 106.
10. PKK "Faşizme ve Ulusal Baskı Sistemine Karşı Ortak Mücadele'nin Sorunları FKBDC- Genel Komite 2. Toplantısına Sunulan PKK Raporu", *Serxwebûn*, Şubat 1983, (14): 8–11, p. 9.
  11. "Ortadoğu'da Artan Bunalm ve Derinleşen Bloklar", *Serxwebûn*, Haziran 1984, No: 30, p. 8; Abdullah Öcalan, Uluslararası Güncel Siyasal Durum ve Devrimci Gelişme Olasılığı, *Serxwebûn*, Ağustos 1988, No: 80, p. 10.
  12. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Vintage, 1994), p. xiii; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd Edition, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), p. 55; Therefore, Homi Bhabha urges us to "encounter the nation as it is written". Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation", In: *Nation and Narration*, Editor: Homi K. Bhabha, (London: Routledge, 1990): 1–7, p. 2.
  13. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 202.
  14. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 141.
  15. David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 16; This is the reorientation of foreign policy analysis "from concern with the international acts of pre-given subjects to the problematic of subjectivity". Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 8.
  16. Richard K. Ashley, "The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space: Towards a Critical Social Theory of International Politics", *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 12(4), 1987: 403–434, p. 423.
  17. Ashley, *The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space*, p. 419.
  18. See for example, David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996); Robert Olson (Editor), *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s: Its Impact on Turkey and the Middle East*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996); Hakan Yavuz, "Five Stages of the Construction of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 7(3), 2001: 1–24; Mustafa Saatci, "Nation-States and Ethnic Boundaries: Modern Turkish Identity and Turkish–Kurdish Conflict," *Nations and Nationalism*, 8(4), 2002: 549–564; Ömer Taşpınar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey: Kemalist Identity in Transition*, (London: Routledge, 2005); Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*, Syracuse, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005); Zeki Sarigil, "Ethnic Groups at 'Critical Junctures': The Laz vs. Kurds", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 48(2), 2012: 269–286.
  19. For how the denial of recognition and the experience of disrespect provide the motivational and justificatory basis for ethnic uprisings, see Axel

- Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996); Ted Robert Gurr, *Peoples versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century*, (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2000).
20. Taşpınar, Kurdish Nationalism, p. 5.
  21. Gülistan Gürbey, “The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Turkey since the 1980s”, In: *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s: Its Impact on Turkey and the Middle East*, Editor: Robert W. Olson, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996): 9–37, p. 25; Italics are mine.
  22. Lila Abu-Lughod, “The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women”, *American Ethnologist*, 17(1), 1990: 41–55, p. 9.
  23. For a critique of grievance/oppression-oriented approaches from a different perspective, see, Paul, Collier, and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”, *Oxford Economic Papers*, 56(4), 2004: 563–595; James D. Fearon, and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War”, *American Political Science Review*, 97(1), 2003: 75–90; David D. Laitin, *Nations, States, and Violence*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); John Mueller, “The Banality of Ethnic War”, *International Security*, 25(1), 2000: 42–70.
  24. See for a theoretical discussion of these two approaches, Sirma Bilge, “Beyond Subordination vs. Resistance: An Intersectional Approach to the Agency of Veiled Muslim Women”, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 31(1), 2010: 9–28.
  25. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 36.
  26. Yavuz, Five Stages, p. 2.
  27. The importance of the PKK as an actor comes from its uninterrupted continuity from the 1970s to the 1980s and to the 1990s (and even today). The precedents of this new language was either oppressed by the Turkish state or rendered to be faded away. However, the PKK survived for a time span in order to render a specific discourse hegemonic among the Kurds. Since alternative center for power demands a discursive strategy based on the articulation of modes of differences and an uninterrupted repetition of this discursive strategy over a period of time, the PKK was able to provide a ground on which a new Kurdish subjectivity becomes resonant.
  28. To use Gledhill’s words, the Kurds may resist assimilation of the Turkish state, but on the other hand they accept other things such as primacy of national identity over other identities, and even dominate other Kurds resisting newly emerging national values and insisting on pursuing their old values. See John Gledhill, *Power and its Disguises: Anthropological Perspectives on Politics*, (London: Pluto Press, 1994) p. 89.

29. Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, Edited by Gil Anidjar, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 228.
30. Joseph Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 112.
31. Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, p. 111; Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 12–3; For example, the context of the 1970s put its imprint on future times only through the “interpretative violence” of the PKK. The PKK emerged in the political context of the 1970s but it transformed this context by exerting an interpretative violence on infinite possibilities, which might emerge in this specific context.
32. Albert J. Paolini, *Navigating Modernity: Postcolonialism, Identity, and International Relations*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), p. 63.
33. Sherry B. Ortner, “Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37(01), 1995: 173–193, pp. 176–7; Tim Cresswell, “Falling Down: Resistance as Diagnostic”, In: *Entanglements of Power: Geographies of Domination/Resistance*, Editors: Joanne P. Sharp, Paul Routledge, Chris Philo and Ronan Pattison, (London: Routledge, 2005): 256–268, p. 264; See for a recent study, John Gledhill and Patience A Schell (Editors), *New Approaches to Resistance in Brazil and Mexico*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).
34. Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In: *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Editors: Gary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 271–313.
35. Paolini, *Navigating Modernity*, p. 63.
36. Kim Rygiel, “Stabilizing Borders: The Geopolitics of National Identity Construction in Turkey”, In: *Rethinking Geopolitics*, Editors: Simon Dalby, and Gearóid Ó. Tuathail, (London: Routledge, 1998): 119–130, p. 116.
37. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, p. 318.
38. The main weakness in most of the existing literature on the PKK, be they critical or commendatory, is that they focus merely on the material violence exerted by the PKK, though, the productive power of the PKK in the production of new Kurdish subjects is a recent interest in academic studies. For example, see Cengiz Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey: From Protest to Resistance*, (London: Routledge, 2013).
39. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 56; Italics are in original.
40. Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher, 1998), p. 83.
41. David Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 169.



42. See, for example, Amir Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan, 1918–1985*, (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), p. xxxiv; Kirmanj explicitly argues there were experiences of Kurdish nationalism long before the French Revolution. See Sherko Kirmanj, “Kurdish Integration in Iraq”, In: *Kurdish Awakening: Nation Building in a Fragmented Homeland*, Editor: Ofra Bengio, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014): 83–98, p. 91.
43. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 46.
44. Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement*, p. 100.
45. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 2008), p. 45. For an article on why ordinary Kurdish people take extraordinary risks and join an ethnic armed rebellion, see Güneş Murat Tezcür, “Ordinary People, Extraordinary Risks: Participation in an Ethnic Rebellion”, *American Political Science Review*, (forthcoming).
46. Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*, p. 83.
47. Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 100.
48. See for example, Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds in Turkey: A Political Dilemma*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990); Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992); Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*; Kemal Kirişçi, and Gareth M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict*, (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997); Hamit Bozarslan, “Human Rights and the Kurdish Issue in Turkey: 1984–1999”, *Human Rights Review*, 3(1), 2001: 45–54, Murat Somer, “Resurgence and Remaking of Identity Civil Beliefs, Domestic and External Dynamics, and the Turkish Mainstream Discourse on Kurds”, *Comparative Political Studies*, 38(6), 2005: 591–622; Güneş Murat Tezcür, “Kurdish Nationalism and Identity in Turkey: A Conceptual Reinterpretation”, *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 10, 2009: 2–18.
49. Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, p. 101.
50. Abu-Lughod, “The Romance of Resistance”, p. 42; see also, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 58–85; for an excellent critique of exoticizing resistance, see Dimitrios Theodossopoulos, “On De-Pathologizing Resistance”, *History and Anthropology*, 25(4), 2014: 415–430.
51. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 61; For a respected study on this new center of power for the Kurds, see Nicole F. Watts, *Activists in Office: Kurdish Politics and Protest in Turkey*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), p. 57; On the other hand, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed, to my reading, no academic research on this aspect of the PKK.

52. Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 20.
53. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 272; Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 67.
54. Jennifer Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods", *European Journal of International Relations*, 5(2), 1999: 225–254, p. 233.
55. This is so because "there is no statement in general, no free, neutral, independent statement; but a statement always belongs to a series or a whole, always plays a role among other statements". Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 111.
56. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 2003 Edition, p. 15.
57. Dan Bulley, *Ethics as Foreign Policy: Britain, the EU and the Other*, (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 6; Nabers argues that "a conception of an 'independently existing reality' can only be attained by studying the structure of the meaning systems in which it is embedded". Dirk Nabers, *A Poststructuralist Discourse Theory of Global Politics*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 56.
58. Martin Müller, "Text, Discourse, Affect and Things", In: *Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, Editors: Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus, and Joanne Sharp, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013): 49–68, p. 49
59. William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 54; Nabers, *A Poststructuralist Discourse Theory*, p. 105.
60. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 74.
61. For example, Edward Said argues that the very possibility of the Orientalist discourse is produced by "the unity of the large ensemble of texts... that they frequently refer to each other". Therefore, he comes to the conclusion that "Orientalism is after all a system for citing works and authors". Said, *Orientalism*, p. 23.
62. David Campbell, *Politics Without Principle: Sovereignty, Ethics, and the Narratives of the Gulf War*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), p. 9.
63. For the idea that any resulting society is grounded in the repetition of difference, see Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, Translated by Paul Patton, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
64. Milliken, *The Study of Discourse in International Relations*, p. 234.
65. Bahar Rumelili, *Constructing Regional Community and Order in Europe and Southeast Asia*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 14.

66. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Translated by Constance Farrington, (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 231.
67. Rumelili, *Constructing Regional Community*, p. 14; Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p. xvii.
68. Autobiographies of the PKK leaders are important sources in understanding the discursive construction of the Kurdish national identity since they embed individual authors in a nationalist discourse. Felix Berenskoetter, "Parameters of a National Biography", *European Journal of International Relations*, 20(1), 2014: 262–288, p. 270.
69. Edward Said, "Identity, Negation and Violence", *New Left Review*, 171, 1988: 46–60, p. 58.
70. Aydın calls the revival of Newroz, festival for New Year, in the Kurdish discourse "as an ideological apparatus utilized for the constructing a counter-hegemony against the hegemonic culture". Delal Aydın, "Mobilising the Kurds in Turkey: Newroz as a Myth", In: *The Kurdish Question in Turkey: New Perspectives on Violence, Representation, and Reconciliation*, Editors: Cengiz Güneş and Welat Zeydanlıoğlu, (London: Routledge, 2014): 68–88; p. 68.
71. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, Translated by Alan Bass, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 26.
72. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, Translated by Barbara Johnson, (London: Continuum, 2004), p. xv–xvi; This is what Talal Asad understands from Genealogy as method. For him, genealogy is "a way of working back from our present to the contingencies that have come together to give us our certainties". Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 16.
73. Simon Dalby, "American Security Discourse: The Persistence of Geopolitics", *Political Geography Quarterly*, 9(2), 1990: 171–188, p. 174.

## Identity, Hegemony, and Imagining World Politics

The state, since the late 1980s, has become the main subject of poststructuralist International Relations (IR) inquiry aiming to show that the alleged self-contained character of the state is an arbitrary construction based on a discursive difference between inside and outside. There is an extensive literature<sup>1</sup> that explores the association of foreign policy with nation-state identities mostly because the state is seen as “not only categorically distinct from other classes of subjects or objects”, but also numerically distinct from other states “and therefore ordinally separable”.<sup>2</sup> Such studies have made a significant contribution to our understanding of how foreign policy performances of the state produce the effect of a coherent substance/identity and conceal the state’s lack of a stable foundation. Despite this primary preoccupation “with ‘the problem of the state’”,<sup>3</sup> poststructuralist theory also produced an extensive literature devoted to non-state actors such as international and non-governmental organizations. For example, some scholars paid attention to international and supranational organizations and analyzed how their identities are constructed through international practices.<sup>4</sup> Despite this broadening application of poststructuralist theory into the study of foreign policy from the early 1990s onwards,<sup>5</sup> how to study dissident movements’ representation of world politics, however, continues to remain largely underexplored and under-theorized.<sup>6</sup> For example, how ethnic minorities can potentially utilize “foreign policy” as a field of resistance and a stage for demonstrating

their distinct identities remains an intriguing research question in IR literature.

The lack of poststructuralist studies<sup>7</sup> on dissident ethnic movements' discourse on foreign affairs in the production of subnational ethnic identity as a category is mostly due to the domination of the following research question: If all differential struggles are equally capable of expressing, what does determine that one of them rather than another incarnates, at particular periods of time, universal function?<sup>8</sup> Not only has this question led poststructuralist scholars to analyze hegemonic discourses, but it has also made the notion of dissidents the subject of their study insofar as dissident is a correlative concept. Therefore, while the advent of poststructuralist theory to IR triggered an explosion of studies on the role of silencing dissidents in the formation of state power/identity, dissident ethnic movements' use of foreign policy as a strategy in fighting against the state power, delegitimizing hegemonic state identity, and disseminating their own representations remained somewhat underexplored. This overemphasis on the state leads some scholars even to argue that from the replace of Christian universalism in the West with the state on "the principle of identity, the claim to universalism, was pursued within state".<sup>9</sup> However, the claim to be the source of truth belongs not only to territorially bounded human collectives, but also to not-yet-territorial human collectives. The domination of state-focused studies in poststructuralist IR theory, therefore, precluded researchers from understanding how dissident movements create and disseminate their own representations through which different and challenging subjectivities emerge within a territorially bounded nation-state.

"Modern discourses of politics", Ashley writes, "are disposed to recur to the ideal of a sovereign presence, whether it be an individual actor, a group, a class, or a political community".<sup>10</sup> In our modern age, the "sovereign presence" does not have to be a state or nation-state; it can also be a dissident movement. What Ashley tries to point out is the fact that all sovereign entities work in the same way and replicate "the heroic practice" turning on the hierarchical opposition between sovereignty and anarchy. As a source of truth and meaning, this heroic practice works through "a dichotomy of *sovereignty* versus *anarchy*, where the former term is privileged as a higher reality, a regulative ideal, and the latter term is understood only in a derivative and negative way, as a failure to live up to this ideal and as something that endangers this ideal".<sup>11</sup> In the working of heroic practice, the sovereign presence, be it the state or dissident

movement, emerges as “a fundamental source of truth and meaning... a principle of interpretation that makes it possible to discipline the understanding of ambiguous events and impose a distinction”. Therefore, only those who “replicate this interpretive attitude and invoke a sovereign voice as an absolute ground” can find a path to be a resulting entity.<sup>12</sup> Ashley’s reading of politics tears down the traditional assumption of sovereignty disavowing any other source of legitimate authority except the state, and opens the field to other centers of power.

Comprehending “all history, including the production of order, in terms of the endless power political clash of multiple wills”<sup>13</sup> requires studying dissident movements as part of “the endlessly repeated play of dominations”.<sup>14</sup> This point is very clear in Laclau’s “field of the social” concept. For him, the field of the social could be “regarded as a trench war in which different political projects strive to articulate” a discourse asserting the particular representation of the world as a universal truth.<sup>15</sup> Following what Gramsci called a “war of position” in which no participant forces can achieve absolute victory, Laclau develops the concept “trench war” as an endless struggle among different political positions in fixing a specific meaning over the society. This struggle is infinite because “the impossibility of managing a total fixity” results in “the periods of ‘organic crisis’ characterized as those in which hegemonic articulations weaken”.<sup>16</sup> To put it another way, alternative discourses may challenge hegemonic discourses and they may even replace the place of the hegemon during the periods of “organic crisis” because there cannot be a closed totality in the political positions. However, alternative representations do not open the political to all alternatives, rather they render a specific meaning to hegemonic because “all objectivity necessarily presupposes the repression of that which is excluded by its establishment”.<sup>17</sup>

Foreign policy, to use the terms in the critical studies on sociology of sport, is a “contested ideological terrain” of competing narratives and interpretations. In other words, foreign policy is not just a practice whereby state interests are either inhibited or advanced but at the same time a practice through which identity formations are constantly struggled on and over.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, this terrain is used by hegemonic state power but might also be used just as well by subordinated groups in undermining the identity imposed by the hegemonic state power. Counter-discourse aiming to undermine the hegemonic identity inevitably produces an alternative web of meaning through which a new kind of power can exercise. It is this “tragedy of resistance” (or liberation discourse) that made Michel

Foucault and many poststructuralist philosophers turn their attention away from the oppositional forces as resistance to exclusion and confinement in the 1970s and later. As Edward Said, despite his belief in the merit of intellectual resistance, rightly captured, critical scholars realized how futile it was to support revolutions and how barbaric were the new regimes that came to power after the long and tragic processes of anti-colonial struggles in many non-Western societies.<sup>19</sup>

Like all objectivities, resistant ethnic movements in modern age produce a totality by repressing alternative voices. This is what Said calls as the “tragedy of resistance”.<sup>20</sup> Through the nationalist rhetoric of belonging, dissident ethnic movements end up being a hegemonic totality. For Said, “after the period of ‘primary resistance,’ literally fighting against outside intrusion, there comes the period of secondary, that is, ideological resistance, when efforts are made to *reconstitute* a shattered community, to *save or restore the sense and fact of community* against all” pressures.<sup>21</sup> In this second stage, there emerges a strong relation between cultural-ideological works and political/military process. While cultural-ideological works extend and legitimize a fundamentally political-military process, the latter feeds and reproduces the first. Therefore, dissident ethnic movements (be they religious or secular), like all hegemonic entities, lead to “the principal teaching of nationalism: the need to find the ideological basis for a wider unity”.<sup>22</sup> Put differently, in the process of ethnic resistance against the hegemonic culture, the world of differences, of conflict, of the struggle between classes, of history and politics finds its unity in the life of a wider ethnic unity.<sup>23</sup> The tragic evolution of an ethnic resistance in the age of nationalism is the emergence of a more “legitimate” relation between the new center of power and the people.

For example, the emancipation of women from both traditional Kurdish structure and the Turkish state has been one of the main promises of the Kurdish nationalist movement led by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). The PKK-sponsored discourse of emancipation created some spaces and opportunities for the Kurdish women to have their political organization and claim their “own” rights. However, these new spaces and opportunities were reduced to the justification of women’s radical actions such as suicide bombings and further mobilization of the Kurdish women for the Kurdish national struggle. In other words, the Kurdish women “can emancipate themselves only inasmuch as the liberation of the nation benefits from their emancipation. Their interests are defined and gain importance only through the interests of the nation”.<sup>24</sup> Since the PKK reproduced

the Kurdish women in a new closed setting, that is Kurdish nationalist struggle,<sup>25</sup> the PKK-sponsored discourse of emancipation was challenged by some women organizations such as KA-MER (Women's Center) on the grounds that the PKK framed Kurdish women's problems in ethnic or nationalist terms. Therefore, KA-MER was accused by the Kurdish nationalist movement of introducing "a division within the movement between men and women".<sup>26</sup> As a result, the voice of oppressed (or subaltern) such as women, workers, and villagers can be heard only when they become active participants in the construction of the Kurdish nationality.

Then, for what reason is resistant collective ethnic movements juxtaposed against hegemonic nation-state ideology if the first simply means an attempt to establish another social community by challenging the second one? Why an "a priori affirmation"<sup>27</sup> of resistant movements' progressive nature? Since "human beings are 'thrown into' and inhabit a world of meaningful discourses and practices, and cannot conceive or think about objects outside of it",<sup>28</sup> all discourses, be it resistant or hegemonic, are a form of violence on human beings' so-called free choice. Therefore, discourses, be they hegemonic or resistant, are "always a question of the production or legitimation of power"<sup>29</sup> and they serve to conceal, and cover up the existing hegemonic power or the power nesting in resistance. Marginalized groups, despite their resistance to the hegemonic identity imposed by hegemonic groups, express issues ranging from gender to "national" history in the ways that accommodate new hegemonic identities. For this very reason, resistance does not result in the dissolution of the existing hegemonic relations. Rather, social dislocation stemming from resistance is, in the words of Laclau, "coterminous with the construction of [new] power centers".<sup>30</sup>

### MEANING, IDENTITY, AND SUBJECT

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes that "the agent of punishment must exercise a *total power*, which no third party can disturb; the individual to be corrected must be *entirely enveloped* in the power that is being exercised over him".<sup>31</sup> This, however, is the case only for prisoners in the prison although the power tends "to cover the entire social body". Outside the prison, individuals cannot be "entirely enveloped" and exercising a "total power" on the whole society is impossible. At this stage, prisoners turn into the very agents of the exercise of power in disciplining the whole society. Individuals who wish to disrupt the social order are



controlled, disciplined, and prevented by the existence of punished prisoners. Similarly, David Campbell argues that treasonous subjects who wish to subvert the state “give rise to the problematic through which it is possible to impose discipline on a wider domain”.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, rebellious individuals to the state are not a “threat” for the existence of the state (or the social order); they, on the contrary, are essential for the exercise of the state. For example, the religiously motivated Kurdish challenge to the state in the second half of the 1920s (the Sheikh Said rebellion) were rendered as an instrument in the consolidation and normalization of the exceptional control of the one-party rule over the society and democratic politics, and in the marginalization of all oppositional groups ranging from Islamist to liberals.<sup>33</sup>

The need to externalize threats from the domestic realm and locate them in the external sphere through discourses of danger stems from the fact that “the sovereign domain, for all its identification as a well-ordered and rational entity, is as much a site of ambiguity and indeterminacy as the anarchic realm it is distinguished from”.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the order in the domestic realm is an arbitrary one, and therefore it needs to be perpetually (re)produced through the inscription of the world. The fact that differences, discontinuities, and conflicts can be found in the domestic realm in all places and times is the principal impetus behind this perpetual (re) inscription of danger/threat to the external realm, a domain of anarchy. Therefore, “the absolute difference *between* a domain of domestic society, understood as an identity, and a domain of anarchy, understood as at once ambiguity, indeterminate, and dangerous”<sup>35</sup> is essential for the exercise of any social order. The representation of the outside plays an existential role in constructing what inside is because the domain of anarchy is a constant reminder of what the domestic order “would become if differences inside and out were not confined, contained, and controlled”.<sup>36</sup> In short, since identities are not stable on their own terms and have no inner stable ground, their arbitrariness can be perpetually deferred only through the discourses of danger/outside.

Why are identities inherently instable? How do they need a constitutive outside, other, danger or enemy? Instead of being completed, how do they exist *as if* they are self-contained representations complete in themselves? Without answering these questions, it is impossible to explain the following questions: Why the main function of foreign policy is to hide the fact that the resulting representation (identity) is not the true one but the “one among many contesting interpretations”?<sup>37</sup> Why do resistant/

alternative voices that would expose the arbitrary nature of the resulting interpretation and the possibility of other interpretations outside the self-assigned boundaries have to be excluded or silenced through the practices of foreign policy? The idea that identities, sovereign presences, and meanings are arbitrarily constructed comes from a philosophical tradition based on the thoughts of Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist. For him, words in language have to be organized into “a system of differences” in order to produce meaning. The meaning does not come from the supposedly intrinsic essence; rather it is determined relationally, through difference from other words. That is to say, words, for Saussure, have meaning only in contrast with other words within the language system.<sup>38</sup> To put it succinctly, their “most precise characteristic is that they are what the others are not”.<sup>39</sup>

Saussure’s idea challenged the traditional wisdom on the source of meaning in a radical way. However, he believed meaning is fixed at the moment when it is constructed through difference within a language system. Agreeing with Saussure on the fact that “in language there are only differences without positive terms”,<sup>40</sup> a poststructuralist school of thought pioneered by philosophers such as Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida revised Saussure’s idea by arguing that there is no finite “play of differences”. According to this correction, the meaning constructed through difference can never be arrested in time but must be perpetually deferred, since the meaning is possible only in difference and deferral. For Derrida, “every concept is inscribed in a chain or a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of difference”.<sup>41</sup> But this presence of absence in the genesis of meaning has to be deferred in order to have a meaning at any given point in time. To put it simply, the arbitrary nature of the meaning discloses itself without the work of perpetual deferral. The meaning is essentially temporal, since it has no direct connection to the material ground<sup>42</sup> and its difference, thus, must be repeated in different moments of time. Then, although there is an “impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning” or an irrepressible lack of completeness, meanings/identities can still be produced as “partial fixations”.<sup>43</sup>

Following this philosophical point of departure, Laclau’s idea of the impossibility of “a closed totality” should be detailed here. For him, “any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre”.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, any discursive closure is a reduction of many meaning possibilities to the

one through the exclusion of alternative meanings. However, for Laclau, a permanent closure is impossible not only because of the fact that “no hegemonic system can be fully imposed”, but also because ambiguity is intrinsic to any hegemonic meaning.<sup>45</sup> Since taking a position “can only mean repressing possible alternatives”,<sup>46</sup> hegemonic presence is constantly challenged by what it excludes. However, it is not simply the presence of an other that prevents the resulting fixity from totally being fixed because identity itself is always already unstable and insecure.<sup>47</sup> The desire to be attached to a secure identity is unsatisfiable except that the ultimate security of identity is deferred. In other words, the construction of a satisfying identity for the subject “is possible only through continual process of identification”.<sup>48</sup> Since the meaning/identity is not something inherent to the thing/subject but something imposed on the thing/subject, it always fluctuates without the exercise of power. Therefore, Laclau reaches the conclusion that any articulation or the fixity of the meaning/identity “can only be partial” because no meaning/identity “can be referred back to an absolute ground”.<sup>49</sup>

At first sight, this idea of partial fixation seems in contradiction with the endless repositioning of differential terms.<sup>50</sup> However, on the other hand, it is impossible to have an identity in the infinite postponement of meaning. According to Stuart Hall, this seemingly contradictory argument can be overcome if we take the cut of identity from the infinite postponement of the fixity of the meaning as an arbitrary and contingent ending rather than natural and permanent.<sup>51</sup> Put differently, identities can only exist in a specific historical period since the permanent fixation of the meaning is impossible. This is what Laclau means by the idea of the fact that the meaning/identity “can only be partial”. Therefore, the following questions need to be answered: If the fluctuation (or infinite postponement) of meaning is the rule, then how do we have a partial fixity on which identities can be grounded? Under what conditions do we attach ourselves to a partial fixity, although this fixity is not the true one but partial and arbitrary?

The answer to the earlier questions, for Laclau, is the “act of power” since there would be no fixity at all without the exercise of power.<sup>52</sup> Because the exercise of power is able to identify with something (identification), identity can be fixed for a moment only by the exercise of power.<sup>53</sup> The idea of “constitutive outside” postulates that if an identity/fixity “manages to partially affirm itself, it is only by repressing that which threatens it”. To put it in other terms, the play of exclusion is vital in constructing

identities because “constitutive outside” is produced only through the exercise of power. And, Laclau argues powerfully, without the constitutive outside, “the elements constituting popular unity would disintegrate and its identity would fall apart”.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, Foucault proposes to us not to describe “the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes,’ it ‘represses,’ it ‘censors,’ it ‘abstracts,’ it ‘masks,’ it ‘conceals.’ In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth”.<sup>55</sup> However, the act of power is not limited with one stroke. The second function of power is to assure the stability of identities by keeping the excluded outside. Since the end of representational practices would be to evince the lack of pre-discursive foundations,<sup>56</sup> the existence of hegemonic representation is confined to reiteration. Otherwise, the hegemonic representation may be replaced by other representations that were once oppressed, marginalized, and silenced. This is very evident in “the time of crisis” when naturalized identities and the existing order are challenged and put into question by alternative modes of representation.<sup>57</sup>

Only the constant declaration of what “we” are and what “we” are not can *defer* the grave truth, which reminds the fact that the resulting imagination is among many not the real one. In other words, hierarchical dichotomy between inside and outside exists only to “the extent that it *works* in history and through practices that replicate [this dichotomy] to discipline what people know and do”.<sup>58</sup> Because of this, the past is reproduced in a never-ceasing way and resistances to this reproduction are constantly suppressed.<sup>59</sup> Otherwise, the distinct boundary between what “we” are and what “we” are not could easily be eradicated by other modes of representation. Once it is no longer possible to impose a distinct boundary between the domain of domestic order and the domain of anarchy, the effectiveness of hierarchical dichotomy depletes gradually. Therefore, the disciplinary and regulatory character of hierarchical dichotomy never ceases to operate, and the insertion of individuals into subject position is in need of permanent replication. This is the case because alternative representations challenge the resulting interpretation through the extraction of individuals from their already-imposed subject positions and the creation of other “vacant” positions to be filled.

Any sovereign presence operates in and through subjects whose identities are constructed through acts of *identification*. This identification, however, is not independent from the exercise of power since only the act of power can create subject positions by imposing limits and fixing meanings “within an open range of possibilities”.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, there is

no independent and ahistorical subject but already-imposed subject positions. To recapitulate, the subject is a subject insofar as she/he is reduced to “subject position”.<sup>61</sup> According to Foucault’s earlier texts, “the subject of statement is a particular function... in so far as it is an empty function (vacant place) that can be filled” by different individuals<sup>62</sup> since discourse does not construct the subject itself but “subject positions” through rules of formation. Although Foucault’s earlier texts provide an understanding for the rules of formation operating on all individuals who undertake to speak in a specific discursive field, they, however, remain unclear as to why it is that certain individuals occupy some subject positions rather than others.<sup>63</sup> In his later studies, Foucault reintroduces power in his discourse analysis in order to provide a better understanding of why certain individuals occupy subject positions created within and through discourse rather than others. In other words, the insertion of individuals into the subject positions and keeping them in these positions require a disciplinary and regulatory power.

To recapitulate, any sovereign presence, may it be a dissident ethnic movement or state, is “nothing more and nothing less than an arbitrary political representation always in the process of being inscribed in history, through practice, and in the face of all manner of resistant interpretations that must be excluded or silenced if the representation is to be counted as a self-evident reality”.<sup>64</sup> During the act of relation with the sovereign presence, subjects proceed *as if* this entity is a real sovereign and capable of deciding and enforcing what the people can know and do. However, this foundational “as if” (to rephrase it in Lacanian terms, *the lack*) has to be covered by the perpetual production of what “we” are and simultaneously the exclusion of what “we” are not through the discourses of danger. If not, it will appear that the seemingly unproblematic foundation of sovereign presence or already-imposed subject positions were “never so secure as they might have seemed” because the “as if” reality “could be made to work only so long as competing voices of an always equivocal culture could be excluded or silenced”.<sup>65</sup> The exclusionary process does not mean that power has a center from where it creates subject positions by prohibiting all other alternatives. Rather, sovereign presence lacks a privileged center since it is also made possible only through constantly reconstituted articulations/statements subjects make.

## WRITING THE WORLD INTO EXCLUSION

Yannis Stavrakakis, in his book on Jacques Lacan, writes that “there is no society and social reality without exclusion; without it the world collapses into a psychotic universe”.<sup>66</sup> It is the continual process of the exclusion of certain alternatives that renders the resulting social reality in a specific meaning. Put differently, the imposition of a fixed interpretation on the social life is possible only when other interpretations are excluded from the realm of the social life. Then, the constitution of a collectivity with a definable character or the imposition of an interpretation on the ambiguity of social life “is always already a sedition to another state of being, a betrayal to other performative possibility, condition, or community”.<sup>67</sup> Without the exclusion of contesting interpretative possibilities, it is impossible to have a self-referential, self-sufficient, timeless, universal, and closed community with a sovereign voice. A sovereign voice of interpretation must silence alternative mode of interpretations and historical differences, and move them to the margins of its discourse, “lest they undo the effect of presence in which a [...] discourse would establish its hegemonic center, its absolute ground, its sovereign voice”.<sup>68</sup> As Foucault taught us, it is the “mechanisms of exclusion” that determines the formation of a discursive field because what is driven out is the “absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary”.<sup>69</sup>

However, the problem in sovereign’s exclusionary practices is that excluded alternatives are representations among many representations including the one imposed by sovereign. If this is the case, on what ground do sovereign power exclude other representations? Put differently, how do subjects in a community proceed as if alternative representations are excluded not because of their status as alternative but because they are threat in reality? To give a short answer, it is the contextualization of alternative representations that makes exclusion appear as if it is a natural state of affairs. Because of this contextualization, those who are excluded or forced into silence take part in the formation of hegemonic discourse by being “an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies... an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses”.<sup>70</sup> The lion share belongs to foreign policy discourses in the contextualization of exclusionary practices and therefore, foreign policy practices undertake a central and significant role in the construction of hegemonic identity and the pursuit of the existing power relations. To be more precise, the normalization of exclusion

and thereby the pursuit of the resulting order are made possible by the perpetual production of what “we” are and simultaneously the exclusion of what “we” are not through the discourse of danger.

The disciplinary exclusion of alternative representations in the domestic realm, therefore, is matched by a further exclusion, as dissidents become isolated from the domestic realm and located in the domain of anarchy. Only can this further exclusion mask, normalize and legalize the violence exerted on dissident movements in the domain of domestic order. In other words, the further exclusion of domestic alternative representations through the discourses of foreign policy makes the first exclusion, and thereby resulting hegemonic representation, to appear natural and indisputable. This is the one side of the story. At the same time, these alternative representations gain their specific meanings through the act of exclusion since the power “retroactively produces the fullness we attribute to what was excluded”.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, hegemonic discourse on foreign policy not only normalizes the exclusion of alternative representations in domestic realm, but it also contributes in the production of their meanings retroactively. For example, saying that the nationalist Kurdish movements are tools of foreign powers has a double function. On the one hand, it legitimizes the exclusion of these movements from the legal political life of Turkey at the domestic level. On the other hand, this statement consolidates and fixes the meaning of these nationalist Kurdish movements around the concepts such as treason, threat, and danger. It is this second function that makes the first appear normal.

Drawing our attention to the role of exclusion in the construction of hegemonic state identity, David Campbell conceives hegemonic state identity as the outcome of exclusionary practices toward alternative representations. For him, it is the exclusionary practices based on discourse on danger that link resistant representations to secure identity on the “inside” with threats identified and located on the “outside”.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, the function of foreign policy is vital in securing the resulting hegemonic identity at the domestic realm. What Campbell says on this point is worth quoting at some length:

Inscribing domestic society, arriving at a representation of the state involves, therefore, a double exclusion. The interpretations of domestic society resistant to its inscription must be excluded from the internal realm... This first exclusion is matched by a second, the purpose of which is to ‘hide’ the status of the first as an exclusion. For the inscription of domestic society to

appear as unproblematic, it is not possible for it to be understood as having the status of one interpretation among many... '[S]uccessful' instances of foreign policy can be understood as instances where the double exclusionary practice operates continuously in the face of resistant interpretations about 'man'... 'Unsuccessful' instances of foreign policy are those where the double exclusionary practice does not operate, thereby allowing the recognition that the boundaries of domestic society can be disputed, so that the grounds of state legitimation become the site of political contestation about interpretations of 'man'.<sup>73</sup>

In the words of Laclau and Mouffe, "every 'society' constitutes its own forms of rationality and intelligibility by dividing itself; that is by expelling outside itself any surplus of meaning subverting it".<sup>74</sup> This is the case because any social formation has no essence out there and therefore it has to be constituted on difference. Nor does difference have essence since it acquires its meaning in the field of articulatory practices. Therefore, the frontier separating two antagonistic forces is not stable by its very nature. It is this very instability of frontiers that makes exclusionary practices as constitutive for all social formations. Although exclusionary practices are fundamental to any social formation, these practices need to be normalized in order to hide the arbitrary nature of hegemonic meaning based on the exclusion of meanings subverting it. At this phase, foreign policy practices undertake a vital role since they not only hide the status of exclusionary practices as exclusion but also make the resulting social formation to appear as unproblematic and natural. As a result, it can easily be argued that insofar as foreign policy practices linking internal subverting meanings to external threats have regularity in dispersion, resulting social formation/identity appears natural and renders itself hegemonic.<sup>75</sup>

If exclusionary practices make the society possible, why there is no an absolute exclusion through which the society can be secured enduringly? What makes exclusion perpetual or never-ending act? "Continuous redefinition of the social and political space and... constant processes of displacement of the limits constructing social division" are two main conditions for the existence of any hegemonic formation since there is no pre-given or final essence.<sup>76</sup> Since identity is nothing but the inscription of pure difference, and difference has no a priori existence, the only way to pursue an identity is the perpetual reiteration<sup>77</sup> of what we are and what we are not. This means that there is no achievable society and any given society is something always in progress. Therefore, one of the main roles of foreign



policy through which the outside turns the source of danger is to defer the realization of the “ideal” society. The only way to belie the inadequate nature of the resulting sovereign presence is to defer the realization of a promised societal order through the discourses of danger. It is the dangerous outside and its domestic collaborators that make the never-ending task, which is always to come, possible for sovereign presence. Thereby, an excessively narrowly delimited political act is normalized. Derrida uses the term *différance* to explain the impossibility of a self-referential sovereign presence and the constant and constitutive deferral of realizing this “impossible presence”.<sup>78</sup>

If an identity functions only when its dominance is perceived as “natural” and eternal and its strength is based on perception not on reality, the manifestation of its “disguised contingency”, then, has a potential to shake and disrupt the temporal fixity of identity. This is where the fragility of identity is located. When the dependence on differentiation is accepted, the possibility of “an all-embracing identity grounded in the truth of a fixed moral code loses some of the power it exercised over the self”.<sup>79</sup> To put this point another way, the construction through difference not a pre-given ground never merely determine an identity without simultaneously leaving some open voids for resistance. Therefore, the ultimate task of construction is to obstruct these voids continuously because the inevitable existence of the other within the self-evinces the impossibility of a competed identity. However, these voids paradoxically disclosure themselves when the police operation by which the self seeks to exclude its antagonists is exercised.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, it is not a surprise that the more the Turkish state oppressed the Kurds, the more the nationalist Kurdish movements gathered supporters among the Kurds. Since identities are produced precisely by forgetting/deferring their performative grounding, oppressions or police operations expose how identities are performed artificially.

After this brief discussion of exclusion, foreign policy can now be defined as “a practice of the inscription of the dangerous, the externalization and totalization of dangers, and the mobilization of populations to control these dangers – all in the name of a social totality that is never really present, that always contains traces of the outside within, and that is never more than an effect of the practices by which total dangers are inscribed”.<sup>81</sup> Ashley’s definition of foreign policy needs a couple of amplifications. Firstly, the social totality, namely the state, is fully imaginative since there is no state but a “state effect”.<sup>82</sup> This is the case because the distinction between inside and outside is never fixed, stable, or permanent

but is constantly being reproduced through statements, practices, and regulations. Unlike those who take the border as a material ground through which the inside is differentiated from the outside, poststructuralist thought in IR argues that there is no pre-discursive border. Therefore, the border between the inside and outside is continuously articulated, and rearticulated to be appeared as natural. Since there is no stable and fixed territorial entity, states “with no ontological status apart from the many and varied practices that constitutes their reality” have to be “always in a process of becoming”.<sup>83</sup>

For example, the border between Turkey and Iraq became contested when a Kurdish autonomous entity emerged in the Northern Iraq after the First Gulf War in 1990–1991. Until the emergence of Kurdish Regional Government, the Turkish state’s foreign policy practices with Iraqi government in Baghdad consolidated the Turkish–Iraqi border as a “natural” separating line between the Turkish nation and the Iraqi nation.<sup>84</sup> In other words, Turkey’s relations with Iraq as a state based on territorial integrity aimed in making the Kurds living in the southeastern part of Turkey “as members of Turkish nation-state and not as member of a Kurdish nation”.<sup>85</sup> However, the Kurdish Regional Government exposed that this border divides the same ethnic group, the Kurds, into two and does “not coincide with language, ethnicity and possibly not even with feelings of national belonging”.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, the idea of the Kurdish state turned a nightmare not only for the Turkish state but also for other nation-states of the region, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, in the 1990s because it exposed the artificiality of the both existing borders and citizenships/identities in these countries. As a result, the Kurdish entity in the northern Iraq was labeled by these states as a project of US imperialism in order to realize the latter’s interests in the region.<sup>87</sup> As Turkey’s policies toward Baghdad and its reactions to the establishment of a Kurdish entity in the northern Iraq clearly prove, foreign policy is not external to the state identity but constitutive part of it. In other words, foreign policy practices are vital in the production of the state effect since there is no a state or a given territory external to those practices.

Therefore, secondly, the discourse of danger plays a significant role in the production of this “imagined” border and simultaneously “imagined” social totality, the state. Since the closure of free-floating meanings is, as explained earlier, the precondition of sovereign presence, namely the state, the discourse of danger seal and reify the border located between the inside and outside to make closure possible. However, this reification of

distinction between inside and outside through the invention of dangers<sup>88</sup> takes considerable effort and resources since the danger is not fixed to things outside. This effort is not only about having the privilege to speak about the other as the source of dangers but it also about forcing the other into silence. The more “the Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse”,<sup>89</sup> the more the self imposes its own articulations on dangers. For example, when the Turkish state’s description of the Kurdish resistance as reactionary, tribalism, backwardness, and foreign incitement was challenged by nationalist Kurds’ writing back in the 1970s and later, the identity of the Turkish nation-state was put into question at least by its Kurdish citizens.

Thirdly, dangers should be totalized and externalized in order to produce a united and homogenized community. Since any arbitrary “closure requires the establishment of limits, and no limit can be drawn without, simultaneously, positing what is beyond it”, only the work of exclusion can establish what is beyond the border.<sup>90</sup> In other words, discourses of danger provide a regime of truths about who “we” are by clarifying who “we” are not, and what “we” have to fear.<sup>91</sup> The definition of the other as evil and dangerous is instrumental in securing the identity for any individual or group because the identity comes to be through this differential representation. However, the discourse of dangers does not stop at the point where dichotomy between safe and dangerous is produced. It exerts “a violent hierarchy” between what is safe and what is dangerous in order to subordinate second term to the first.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, the discourse of dangers not only produces a distinction between inside and outside, but it also privileges the inside against the outside. This is vital for the construction of any united community such as the state, and dissident ethnic movement because it is impossible to attach the people to the imagined community without a violent hierarchy of the inside over the outside. Then, the main function of the discourse of dangers is to regulate, discipline, and constitute the inside and simultaneously render the people to subjects of this “inside”.

In sum, foreign policy statements and practices are vital in the externalization of dangers. Because of its vital role in locating the danger in an external and anarchic environment, foreign policy is “a specific sort of boundary-producing political performance”.<sup>93</sup> This exclusionary mechanism is more acute when the border and territory are highly contested as in the case of the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state because

there is a greater need to reproduce the self in relation to the other. As Campbell argues “the constant articulation of danger through foreign policy is thus not a threat to a state’s identity of existence, it is its condition of possibility”.<sup>94</sup> As a result, these considerable efforts and resources leave a scar/trace on the people since the totalization and externalization of dangers necessitates the mobilization of the people. This is the point where the discourse regarding the outside world or the imagination of world politics contributes in the production of subjectivities. Therefore, Krishna calls foreign policy a “careful spatialization of the self against an other”.<sup>95</sup>

### WRITING THE WORLD INTO RESISTANCE

Counter narratives are articulated as a response to the existing particular set of social circumstances and reproduced unceasingly in order to construct alternative meanings on which new subjectivities can base their actions. As explained earlier, what makes counter-discourse possible is ironically the existence of hegemonic discourse because it is impossible to close the society with a fixed identity. Since the society is a “field of struggle”,<sup>96</sup> it includes both hegemonic discourse and the “opposite phenomenon” which may gather momentum in a specific time.<sup>97</sup> In other words, marginal or submerged meanings are able to come to the surface, allowing different meanings to be constructed, because meaning can never be finally fixed.<sup>98</sup> All attempts for the stabilization of the “same” necessitate the production of “difference” through exclusionary practices,<sup>99</sup> and therefore the resulting society inevitably produces its own enemies. As a result, “an alternative, liberating newness against the absorptive capacity of those established discourse”<sup>100</sup> exists immediately beside the hegemonic discourse. When hegemonic discourse exposes its “disguised contingency” or when it loses its natural existence as a result of an organic crisis, hegemonic representation encounters a destructive challenge from those who were inscribed to inferior side of the hierarchy in a given society.

Therefore, counter-discourses are always interlocked with the dominant discourse since they have to deny and reject the dominant discourse in order to project a space for their existence.<sup>101</sup> In other words, there is no “difference” which makes counter-discourse possible before interaction with the dominant discourse. If this is the case, counter-discourse comes into existence in its practices of refusing a position of subjugation and dispensing with the terms of the hegemonic existence’s definitions. It is

this refuse, challenge, undermining of hegemonic discourse that provides counter-discourse its identity and opens the space of alternative political subjectivities. Put differently, practices that register a rejection of the subject position assigned by the hegemonic discourse<sup>102</sup> are the grounds on which difference can be constructed and it is this difference that makes alternative political subjects possible. However, the difference based on the rejection of previously imposed meanings is not enough for the end of hegemonic discourse and the emergence of an alternative sovereign. Therefore, the existence of alternative discourses, thus, is depended not only on their difference to hegemonic discourse but also their ability to reiterate alternative inscription of society unceasingly. This is so because it is the utterance of the alternative that makes the difference attached to resistant discourse possible, through which the alternative society generates.

Counter-discourse is a language by which resistant groups constitute the field of “truth” through the imposition of alternative representations over individuals subjectified once by the hegemonic state power. That means the deconstruction of the truth imposed by the hegemonic state by the resistant groups institutes a new political relationship affecting the resisting political subject instead of providing pure emancipation for them. This is the moment when the new sovereign emerges because the sovereign is recognized as a sovereign retrospectively when it produces alternative subject positions. That is to say, only after the solidification of the post-1980 Kurdish political subject into a form that made it appear to have been there all along, the PKK started to exercise its sovereignty through these Kurdish political subjects. To put this point in different terms, it is the resistant discourse that opens the space for resistant political subjects through whose bodies the new sovereign is able to operate. This is what Jacques Lacan once reacted to 1968 student protests in Paris: “What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a new Master. You will get one”.<sup>103</sup> If there is no such collective position of implied freedom or emancipation beyond the exercise of power,<sup>104</sup> the category of a “resistant” political subject is a subject produced and restrained by a regulatory counter-hegemon whose exercise becomes possible only through those performatively constructed political subjects.<sup>105</sup>

The counter-discourse of dissident ethnic movements, then, is not a rejection of “nation normativity” but that of “nation hierarchy”.<sup>106</sup> This is so because it is nation normativity in which the peoples are required or even forced to be part of a nation that makes what “dissident ethnic

movement” is. Put differently, it is not a pre-given difference between two nations but nation normativity that makes the imagination of two different nations possible and therefore pits dissident ethnic movement against the hegemonic nation-state.<sup>107</sup> Since these ethnic movements emerge within the dominant order in which the normative acceptance over a wide spectrum of political opinion of nationalism appears as the universally normal and legitimate form of thought, they end up in mimicking the strategies of hegemonic nation-states such as exclusion,<sup>108</sup> othering, and writing the self. That is why the students of the Kurdish question in Turkey often criticize the contemporary Kurdish nationalism led by the PKK of being the imitation of the Turkish nationalism.<sup>109</sup> However, these dissident ethnic movements, unlike hegemonic nation-states, have to delegitimize the existing hegemonic discourse before mimicking in order to open a space from where they can speak a language imposed by nation normativity.

If counter-discourse produces identity, meaning, and subject positions from a performative rejection of and resistance to the existing hegemonic discourse, this rejection has to be made appear natural and permanent. At this stage, the representation of world politics undertakes a significant role in legitimizing the domestic rejection of and resistance to the hegemonic discourse. In doing this, foreign policy or the representation of existing world politics plays two complementary and vital roles at the hands of resistant groups. Firstly, it unmask the fiction the existing nation-state imposed on its subjects/citizens. Put differently, foreign policy of dissident groups aims at de-legitimizing the targeted nation-state through demolishing the latter’s claim to be the true representative of its “own” people. Since the nation-state exists only when it is able to present its existence as universal, natural, and something proceeding from an out-there reality, dissident ethnic movements, first of all, target this fictional aspect of the existing state. Accordingly, foreign policy of dissidents not only delegitimizes the territory and borders of the resulting sovereign state, it also dismantles the tie between the nation-state and its nation. In this way, the arbitrary character of the resulting sovereign state is unmasked. And thereby, the undisputed and “natural” power of the hegemonic entity to determine and allocate a person or a group of people a place inside and outside of community are put into question, which opens a space for alternative interpretations.

For example, the PKK-affiliated texts, especially in the late 1970s and the 1980s, presented Turkey’s alleged cooperation with the British (and Western) colonialism during its founding years as the main reason behind

the perpetual colonization over Kurdish territories. By depicting founding agreements of Turkey as “illegitimate” agreements made between “colonialist Turkish bourgeoisie and British and French imperialists against the will of the Kurdish people”<sup>110</sup> in its founding manifesto, the PKK not only targeted the legitimacy of the Turkish state but it also questioned the existing borders and territories. Therefore, Turkey’s relation with the US, a successor of the British imperialism, was presented as a logical extension of this colonial/imperial heritage, which prevents the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. The inscription of imperial powers such as Britain and the USA played a significant role in justifying and consolidating counter-territorial narrative and practices at the domestic level. For the disidentification of Kurdish-populated territories from the existing Turkish state through guerilla violence and counter-discourses such as alternative history to appear unproblematic, the PKK presented four states, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, over the Kurdish territory as artificial and arbitrary on the grounds that the borders that divide the Kurdish nation into four different territories reflect imperial will and interests in the region.

What is unmasked, however, is not “nation normativity” but “nation hierarchy” which makes the hegemony of the existing nation-state over different nations within its borders thinkable and possible. Therefore, the PKK’s way of framing the outside world performs “a disidentificatory function”<sup>111</sup> for the existing hegemonic Turkish state. If the Turkish state with its current territory is an artificial construction of imperial powers, then it is not representative of the people on whom it claims sovereignty. Rather, it represents the interest of colonial/imperial powers. Therefore, the most visible component of dissident ethnic movement’s ideologies is their negation of hegemonic state’s claim to the legitimacy of its rule. The main function of foreign policy at the hands of dissident ethnic movements is to consolidate this negation, which makes counter-nationalist narrative, of course imposed by nation normativity, appear more desirable and feasible than others. In other words, disidentification of the people with the existing state through the discourse regarding the world politics is a necessity for dissident ethnic movements in opening the space for the so-called real representative, namely new nationalist institutions, and a new identificatory process that inscribes the people into new nationalist subject positions. Therefore, disidentificatory process has two functions; firstly, it opens a free space in which the new nation and its subject are produced, and secondly it applies a closure on the range of possibilities, through which nationalist possibility appears natural and undisputed option.

Negation not only rejects the existing hegemonic discourse but it, through its way of being articulated, also imposes a closure on the new nation. Therefore, added to the disidentification of the subjects through dismantling of the process of identification to produce citizens,<sup>112</sup> “foreign policy” of dissident movements, secondly, aims to naturalize the new identificatory process between the new sovereign and its subjects. To put this point differently, the displacement of the subject position imposed by the dominant sovereign is “accompanied by the demand for an entirely new and wholly recovered ‘reality’”.<sup>113</sup> It is this new “reality” that produces new subjects through whom the new sovereign operates. Since resistance “takes place only within a social context which has already construed subject-positions for the human agent”,<sup>114</sup> it is regulatory and productive as the hegemonic power is. The discourse regarding the existing world politics not only attaches the responsibility of resistance against the hegemonic state to dissident ethnic institutions but also provides a ground on which relations between new centers of power and its new subjects are established. Just as in nation-states exclusionary practices create a responsibility through which sovereign power exercise, so in dissident ethnic movements the act of resistance produces and generates obligations, which inscribe some actors and institutions into the centers of power.

The resistance discourse/practice of dissident ethnic movements creates an alternative world of meanings through which the imagination of alternative closed society becomes possible. However, this is not the point where the function of resistance discourse ends. Counter-discourse also attempts to institutionalize this world of meanings as an alternative closed society and to make that society real, turning it into a part of people’s common sense not only by instilling it in the minds of targeted population but also integrating it into the period’s consciousness.<sup>115</sup> This is the production of alternative political subjectivities only through which the emerging center of power can achieve legitimation and pursue its hegemonic position. Therefore, a specific imagination of world politics by dissident ethnic movements not only delegitimizes the claims of the existing state, but it also contributes in the production of alternative society and its political subjects. It undertakes a significant role in the production of alternative society because it is the imagination of world politics that both contributes in the production of alternative meanings and makes that alternative world of meanings appear natural and undeniable for new political subjects.



Here it is necessary to consider Butler's question: "What do we make of resistance that can only undermine, but which appears to have no power to rearticulate the terms... by which subjects are constituted, by which subjection is installed in the very formation of the subject?"<sup>116</sup> This question explicitly implies that if there is no a rearticulation of the terms but just a resistance or the disidentification of subject, this is simply the end of the possibility of a subject.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, resistance is by no means the emancipation of the subject from all relations of power, it, rather, emancipates the repressed subjects to a new process of subjection through which those subjects are forced into new subjectivities. If this is the case, the task of foreign policy at the hands of dissident movements, in addition to the normalization of disidentificatory discourse against the hegemonic state power, is to make this new process of subjection to appear as normal, unproblematic, and self-evident. In doing this, the imagination by dissident ethnic movements of the world politics undertakes three significant normative-political functions: firstly, it produces and normalizes the distinction between the newly emerging inside and outside through a discourse of threat; secondly, it legitimizes new exclusionary practices in the process of subjection; finally but not least importantly, it creates responsibility through which both subjects are constructed and the new center of power produces the effect of its necessity.

As a result, to read the activities of dissident movements primarily in terms of disidentification from the existing hegemonic state ignores the most important aspect of these movements, reidentification. This is a gross analytical mistake simply because the transformative power of these dissident movements such as contemporary Kurdish national movement in Turkey is immense and, in many cases, exceeds that of the hegemonic state power.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, unlike regnant poststructuralist studies in IR, this book does not approach dissident movements, be they religious or ethnic, as agents of change or emancipation. Nor does it approach them as a correlative analytical category through which operations of state power could be understood.<sup>119</sup> Rather, this book primarily aims to tackle regulatory and productive power of dissident ethnic movements that constructs different kind of knowledge and subjectivities.

## NOTES

1. For example, see Campbell, *Writing Security*; Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation*, (University of Hawaii Press, 1994); Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: the Politics of Representation in North-South Relations*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: the United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson and Raymond Duvall (Editors), *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Kyle Grayson, *Chasing Dragons: Security, Identity, and Illicit Drugs in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Alexander Bukh, "Identity, Foreign Policy and the Other?: Japan's Russia?", *European Journal of International Relations*, 15(2), 2009: 319–345; Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2014); Taesuh Cha, "The formation of American exceptional identities: A three-tier model of the 'standard of civilization' in US foreign policy", *European Journal of International Relations*, 21(4), 2015: 743–767.
2. Jens Bartelson, "Second Natures: Is the State Identical with Itself?", *European Journal of International Relations*, 4(3), 1998: 295–326, p. 298.
3. Richard K. Ashley, "Living on the Border Lines: Man, Poststructuralism, and War", In: *Intertextual/International Relations: Postmodern and Poststructural Readings of World Politics*, Editors: James Der Derian and M. J. Shapiro, (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989): 259–321, p. 269.
4. See for NATO, Bradley S. Klein, "How the West was one: Representational Politics of NATO", *International Studies Quarterly*, 34(3), 1990: 311–325; Costas M. Constantinou, "NATO's Caps: European Security and the Future of the North Atlantic Alliance" *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 20(2), 1995: 147–163; Andreas Behnke, *NATO's Security Discourse after the Cold War: Representing the West*, (London: Routledge, 2013); see for the EU, Thomas Diez, "Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering Normative Power Europe", *Millennium-Journal of International Studies*, 33(3), 2005: 613–636; Rumelili, *Constructing Regional Community*; James Rogers, "From

- ‘Civilian Power’ to ‘Global Power’: Explicating the European Union’s ‘Grand Strategy’ through the Articulation of Discourse Theory”, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 47(4), 2009: 831–862; Gabi Schlag, “Into the ‘Heart of Darkness’—EU’s civilising mission in the DR Congo”, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 15(3), 2012: 321–344; Senem Aydin-Düzgüt, *Constructions of European Identity: Debates and Discourses on Turkey and the EU*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Caterina Carta and Jean-Frédéric Morin (Editors), *EU Foreign Policy through the Lens of Discourse Analysis: Making Sense of Diversity*, (England: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2014); see for other non-state actors, Michael Strange, “Discursivity of Global Governance Vestiges of ‘Democracy’ in the World Trade Organization”, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 36(3), 2011: 240–256.
5. In the early 1990s, the study of foreign policy was largely unaffected by the critical insight of poststructural theory. Roxanne Lynn Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-positivist Analysis of US Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines”, *International Studies Quarterly*, 37(3), 1993: 297–320, p. 297.
  6. There is a body of studies exploring the role of resistance in the production and the pursuit of hegemonic power. See for example, Randolph B. Persaud, *Counter-hegemony and Foreign Policy: The Dialectics of Marginalized and Global Forces in Jamaica*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2001), p. 49. There are also some studies aiming to explore the possibilities of resistance to sovereign power. For example, see Jenny Edkins and Véronique Pin-Fat, “Through the Wire: Relations of Power and Relations of Violence”, *Millennium-Journal of International Studies*, 34(1), 2005: 1–24; Oliver P. Richmond, “Critical Agency, Resistance and a post-Colonial Civil Society”, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 46(4), 2011: 419–440. They, however, mostly focus on the strategies of resistance against the sovereign power or the emancipatory potential of resistance rather than alternative inscriptions of the society by resistant groups. They assume that there is a way out of the mutually constitutive relationship between the sovereign and the subject. Unlike this emancipatory approach to resistance, I assume that resistance is productive and constitutive as how power produces and constitutes subjects. For a recent study on resistant groups’ “demand of being”, see Andreja Zevnik, “Sovereignless Subject and the Possibility of Resistance”, *Millennium-Journal of International Studies*, 38(1), 2009: 83–106.
  7. In the field of political geography, the 2000s witnessed the rise of “dissident geopolitics” which aims at analyzing counter-hegemonic imagination of territory by those who have engaged in resistance to the state. See for example, Paul Routledge, “Anti-geopolitics”, In: *A Companion to*

- Political Geography*, Editors: John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell, and Gerard Toal (London: Routledge, 2003): 236–248; Lari Nyroos, “ReligioPolitics: Dissident Geopolitics and the ‘Fundamentalism’ of Hamas and Kach”, *Geopolitics*, 6(3), 2001: 135–157; Jan Mansvelt Beck, “Geopolitical Imaginations of the Basque homeland”, *Geopolitics*, 11(3), 2006: 507–528.
8. Ernesto Laclau, “Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?” In: *Emancipation(s)*, Editor: Ernesto Laclau, (London: Verso, 1996): 36–46, p. 42.
  9. Rob B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 117; Although Nabers argues that focusing on “other centers of power” within the state is the merit of poststructuralist IR inquiry, the formation of counter-discourses is not adequately studied as part of poststructuralist IR. Nabers, *A Poststructuralist Discourse Theory*, p. 142.
  10. Ashley, *Untying the Sovereign State*, p. 230.
  11. Ashley, *Untying the Sovereign State*, p. 230.
  12. Ashley, *Untying the Sovereign State*, p. 230.
  13. Ashley, *The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space*, p. 409.
  14. Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, In: Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 85.
  15. Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, (London: Verso, 1990), p. 28.
  16. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 28.
  17. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 31; Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 7.
  18. See for example, Michael A. Messner, “Sports and Male Domination: The Female Athlete as Contested Ideological Terrain”, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5(3), 1988: 197–211; Solomon uses the term “ambiguous site” in order to explain this fact. Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity*, p. 67.
  19. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 27; Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. xxi.
  20. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 210.
  21. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 209.
  22. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 210 quoted from Basil Davidson, *Africa in Modern History: The Search for a New Society*, (London: Allen Lane, 1978), p. 156.
  23. Partha Chatterjee, *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 58; See also, Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*, (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 42.
  24. Necla Açıık, “Re-defining the Role of Women within the Kurdish National Movements in Turkey in the 1990s”, In: *The Kurdish Question in Turkey*:

- New Perspectives on Violence, Representation, and Reconciliation*, Editors: Cengiz Güneş and Welat Zeydanlıoğlu, (London: Routledge, 2014): 114–136, p. 120; Handan Çağlayan, “From Kawa the Blacksmith to Ishtar the Goddess: Gender Constructions in Ideological-Political Discourses of the Kurdish Movement in post-1980 Turkey, Possibilities and limits”, *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 14, 2012: 2–23, p. 10.
25. For an excellent analysis of how the liberation of women discourse went hand in hand with anti-colonial nationalist movements, see, Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, (London: Zed Books, 1986). For the relation between nation building and the representation of women, see Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, (London: Sage, 1997).
  26. Zeynep Gambetti, “The Conflictual (Trans)formation of the Public Sphere in Urban Space: the Case of Diyarbakir”, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 32, 2005: 43–71, p. 63.
  27. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards A Radical Democratic Politics*, (London: Verso, 2014), p. 77; Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 31 and 149.
  28. David R. Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis, “Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis”, In: *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change*, Editors: Howarth, Aletta J. Norval, and Yannis Stavrakakis, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000): 1–23, p. 3.
  29. Jenny Edkins, *Poststructuralism & International Relations: Bringing the Political Back in*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), p. 59.
  30. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 40; Among the studies focusing on the Kurdish national movement in Turkey, Olivier Grojean’s studies are worth mentioning here. According to him, resistance movements, like states, are based on “the idea of the regeneration of man” and therefore, they are centers of power through which new subjectivities are produced. See. Olivier Grojean, “The Production of the New Man within the PKK”, *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 8, 2008, URL: <http://ejts.revues.org/2753>.
  31. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Translated by Alan Sheridan, 2nd Edition, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 129.
  32. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 60.
  33. Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nde Tek Parti Yönetimi’nin Kurulması*, 4th Edition, (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2005), p. 136.
  34. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 63 and 64.
  35. Ashley, *Untying the Sovereign State*, p. 257.

36. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 114.
37. Ashley, *Untying the Sovereign State*, p. 257.
38. Ferdinand De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, Translated by Wade Baskin, Edited by Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
39. Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 117.
40. Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 120.
41. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, Trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 11.
42. This point is the main difference between constructivism and poststructuralism in IR theory. For example, Alexander Wendt, one of the most well-known names of constructivist theory, argues that there is essential and fixed ground that provides identity stability. For Wendt, identity “has a material base, the body in the case of people, many bodies and territory for states”. See, Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 225.
43. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 98; Nabers, *A Poststructuralist Discourse Theory*, pp. 107–9.
44. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, pp. 98–9.
45. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 28; Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 97.
46. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 30.
47. Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity*, p. 15.
48. Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity*, p. 29.
49. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 29 and 27.
50. Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, In: *Identity: Community and Culture and Difference*, Editor: Jonathan Rutherford, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), p. 229.
51. Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, p. 230.
52. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 32; See also, Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, (London: Verso, 2005), p. 117.
53. Ernesto Laclau, “Introduction”, In: *The Making of Political Identities*, Editor: Ernesto Laclau, (London: Verso, 1994): 1–8, p. 3.
54. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 32.
55. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 194 and 24; Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 119; However, this does not mean that the power both limits and produces; rather it means that the exercise of power through restrictions, prohibitions and limitations is productive. See also, Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 33; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 103 and 183.
56. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 12.

57. Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, p. 12.
58. Ashley, *Untying the Sovereign State*, p. 243; Donna U. Gregory, "Foreword", In: *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics*, James Der Derian, (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1989), p. xvi.
59. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 114.
60. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 60.
61. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 61.
62. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 105 and 107.
63. Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?", In: *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Editors: Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, (London: Sage, 1996): 1–17, p. 10.
64. Ashley, *Untying the Sovereign State*, p. 252.
65. Ashley, *Untying the Sovereign State*, p. 252.
66. Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 34.
67. Costas M. Constantinou, *States of Political Discourse: Words, Regimes, Seditions*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 4; Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 23.
68. Ashley, *Living on the Border Lines*, p. 263.
69. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Translated by Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 27.
70. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 27.
71. Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 43.
72. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 68 and 140.
73. Campbell, *Writing Security*, pp. 65–6.
74. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 123.
75. This argument does not exclude the fact that "internal threats" stemming from alternative representations to the resulting state identity are protected and supported by external powers. Rather, it means that what makes these challenging representations alternative is the existence of the resulting hegemonic representation before anything else.
76. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 130.
77. This does not refer to reiteration that reproduces preceding act in the future as an act that is completely same. Rather, it is both a repetition and a change in reiteration simultaneously. While repetition creates a temporal fixity, change consolidates this "malleable" fixity against new challenges.
78. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 19; According to Žižek, however, what is impossible is not ahistorical identity but its antagonism. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*, (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 100–1.
79. Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, p. 167.
80. Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth Century France*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 15.

81. Ashley, *Living on the Border Lines*, p. 304.
82. Timothy Mitchell, "Society, Economy, and the State Effect", In: *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, Editors: Akhil Gupta and Aradhana Sharma, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006): 169–186.
83. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 12.
84. Asa Lundgren, *The Unwelcome Neighbour: Turkey's Kurdish Policy*, (London: IB Tauris, 2007), p. 4.
85. Lundgren, *The Unwelcome Neighbour*, p. 35.
86. Lundgren, *The Unwelcome Neighbour*, p. 32.
87. For the perception of the Turkish Armed Forces on the possible establishment of the Kurdish State in the Northern Iraq, see, Mehmet Kocaoğlu, *Petro-Strateji*, Prepared by Harp Akademileri Komutanlığı, (İstanbul: Harp Akademileri Basım Evi, 1996).
88. See for example, Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-definition through Tragedy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
89. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 46.
90. Ernesto Laclau, "Ideology and post-Marxism", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(2), 2006: 103–114, p. 107.
91. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 48.
92. Derrida, *Positions*, p. 41.
93. Richard K. Ashley, "Foreign Policy as Political Performance", *International Studies Notes*, 13(2), 1987: 51–54, p. 41.
94. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 13; See also, Bahar Rumelili, "Constructing Identity and Relating to Difference: Understanding the EU's Mode of Differentiation", *Review of International Studies*, 30(1), 2004: 27–47.
95. Sankaran Krishna, *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka, and the Question of Nationhood*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 29.
96. Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, p. 25.
97. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 18.
98. Hall, *Introduction: Who Needs Identity?*, p. 259.
99. Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, p. 14.
100. Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, p. 13.
101. Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, pp. 16–7.
102. Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 38.
103. Quoted in Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, (London: Verso Books, 2012), p. 79.
104. See, Sergei Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).
105. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 3; See also, Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, (London: Routledge, 1993).



106. These two concepts are developed from Butler's studies. She makes a distinction between "gender hierarchy" and "gender normativity". For her, criticizing gender hierarchy between men and women is the reproduction of gender normativity, which makes gender what they are. See, Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. xiii.
107. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 87 For Butler, the law, gender normativity, is the preceding condition of the boy's desire for mother because it prohibits the desire for father. Therefore, it is the gender normativity that pits two different sexes against each other.
108. Like hegemonic nation-state, dissident ethnic movements end up in practicing exclusionary strategies. For example, in the PKK's discourse, internal enemies (religious and tribal Kurdish institutions) supported by external others (the global imperialism and its regional collaborators such as the Turkish state) were accused of preventing "the Kurds from achieving their full identity and unity" (Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, p. 40). According to the PKK discourse, the traditional Islamic culture of Kurds, which was introduced by colonial powers, rendered the Kurds being obedient to the Turkish authorities. See, Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, p. 25; Izady, *The Kurds*, p. 136; Abdullah Öcalan, *Özgür İnsan Savunması*, (İstanbul: Berdan Matbaacılık, 2003), p. 18.
109. Hamit Bozarslan, "Türkiye'de Kürt Sol Hareketi", In: *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasal Düşünce*, Editor: Murat Gültekinil, Volume: 8, Sol Düşünce, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007): 1169–1180, p. 1200.
110. M. Can Yüce, *Doğu'da Yükselen Güneş*, Volume II, (İstanbul: Zela Yayınları, 1999), p. 294.
111. Helen M. Tiffin, "Rites of Resistance: Counter-Discourse and West Indian Biography", *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 3(1), 1989: 28–46, p. 45.
112. Tiffin, *Rites of Resistance*, p. 31.
113. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 220.
114. Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 25.
115. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 103.
116. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, pp. 88–9; Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 24.
117. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 91; See also, Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.
118. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 35, and 24–25.
119. Abu-Lughod, *The Romance of Resistance*, p. 53.

## Imagining the Kurdish Nation

This chapter argues that the contemporary Kurdish nationalism as a resistant ethnic movement emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s. Unlike early elite nationalisms, the contemporary Kurdish nationalism is not based on the manipulation of the Kurdish masses by elites or feudal lords but the internalization of the nationalist sentiments by the Kurdish masses. This does not mean that the Kurdish elite did not play any role in the formation of the Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. Rather, although nationalist sentiments were formulated and disseminated by the Kurdish elite, the contemporary Kurdish nationalism as an ethnic mobilization emerged only when these sentiments were internalized by Kurdish masses, not when the elite used religious or other sentiments in the process of realizing a nationalist society. It is true that ethnic identities are not a cultural given but a product of a constitutive process.<sup>1</sup> However, they are not constructed by elites alone. Rather, they are constructed by articulatory performances of both the elite and masses. The main motivation behind specific articulatory (and therefore constitutive) performances instead of others leading non-nationalist imagination of society is the disadvantageous position of articulators “in a power context”.<sup>2</sup> These three conditions of ethnic resistance mobilization, a constitutive process, the merge of the elite and masses in articulatory practices, and politics of domination and exclusion, appeared available in the late 1960s and 1970s when the Kurdish nationalism in Turkey is considered.

The politics of domination and exclusion was available in the early republican period and therefore many students of the Kurdish nationalism in Turkey argued that the Kurdish nationalism is the inevitable and logical result of the Turkish nationalism, which denies the existence of the Kurds within the borders of the Turkish state and accordingly assimilates those who speak Kurdish into Turkish identity.<sup>3</sup> For them, the Kurdish nationalism emerged in the first quarter of the twentieth century, when the Turkish nationalism turned into a hegemonic ideology of the ruling class.<sup>4</sup> To cite an example, the 1925 Sheikh Said rebellion “was ethno-politic rebellion as much as it was religious and tribal since it embraced a resistance against the nationalization of non-national space” in Turkey.<sup>5</sup> Put simply, the first Kurdish nationalist mobilization emerged when the Turkish state started to nationalize the public space through consecutive nationalist steps such as the promotion of being Turk or accepting Turkish culture as a condition for party membership in the 1923 program of the ruling People’s Party,<sup>6</sup> the enactment of Turkish as the sole language in the law courts in March 1924,<sup>7</sup> the emphasis on being Turk as the definition of citizenship in the 1924 constitution (29 October),<sup>8</sup> and the transfer of the land of large landowners to the new Turkish settlers in Kurdistan under the law 1505.<sup>9</sup>

The sole emphasis on politics of domination and exclusion overlooks and underplays the representations of hegemonic exclusionary practices on the part of the Kurdish side. At this point, scholars shed light on the ideas of the Kurdish elite, and ignore overt religious motivations of Kurdish masses. Hereby, the Kurdish nationalism is presented as an instrument of elites who were in the struggle of power against the hegemonic Turkish elite and their nationalization policy, while the agency of the Kurdish masses in the rebellion is neglected simply because they do not fit the so-called nationalist character of the rebellion.<sup>10</sup> This idea was formulated by Martin van Bruinessen, a leading and one of the most-cited scholars on the Kurdish history, and has been repeated by subsequent studies regarding the character of the 1925 Sheikh Said rebellion. His basic argument is worth quoting at some length:

The *primary* aim of both Shaikh Said and the Azadi leaders was the establishment of an independent Kurdistan. The motivation of the rank-and-file was equally mixed, but for them the religious factor may have predominated. The planners and leaders of the revolt, at any rate, thought that religious agitation would be more effective in gaining mass support than

nationalist propaganda alone. Partly for this reason, shaikhs were chosen as figureheads for the revolt. The movement was called a *jihad* ('holy war'); Shaikh Said assumed the title of *amir almujaahidin* ('commander of the warriors of the faith').<sup>11</sup>

Martin van Bruinessen and many other scholars are right about the fact that Kurdish nationalists in the early 1920s emerged from educated classes in Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, and their influence among the Kurdish population at large was quite limited. However, they are mistaken when they overstate the role of the Kurdish elite and exclusionary practices of the Turkish state as the only condition of the Kurdish nationalism. The implication that the Kurdish masses were manipulated and duped by the Kurdish elite inevitably results in an analysis based on two independent and isolated actors, the elite and the masses. For example, "in short", writes Paul White about the Sheikh Said Rebellion, "religion was obviously a major mobilizing factor for the base-level combatants, but it was not a real motivation for many of its initiators".<sup>12</sup> If the Sheikh Said Rebellion did not include a process of subject formation but a manipulation of religious subjects and if there is no *acting together*,<sup>13</sup> how can it be called as an example of the Kurdish nationalist mobilization? It is clear that the second condition of ethnic mobilization was missing during the 1920s and the following decade, since rebellions against the Turkish state were motivated by a loyalty to tribal and religious bonds and not by a sense of belonging to a Kurdish nation.<sup>14</sup>

The idea that "Kurdish nationalist demands were articulated within" Islamist-conservative discourse<sup>15</sup> is problematic for two simple reasons. Firstly, this idea assumes that "beneath manifest statements something remains hidden and subjacent",<sup>16</sup> and therefore ignores declared aims/intentions of the actors. Although Sheikh Said, the main leader of the rebellion, openly declared in his court statement at the tribunal that the aim of rebellion was to reconstruct the Islamic regime and Caliphate,<sup>17</sup> Robert Olson, for example, argues that "the fact that the rebellion had a religious character was the result of... the strategy and tactics necessary for carrying out a successful revolution".<sup>18</sup> The main reason behind the nationalist framing of the Sheikh Said Rebellion is the fact that researchers read the event from the time nationalist Kurdish identity is rendered dominance. Secondly, this idea assumes that the power mobilizing the Kurds into resistance is independent of the people and exercises over, not through, their minds/bodies. According to this assumption, nationalists

can mobilize people who are emotionally attached to religious or tribal sense of self. However, power “is not something that is held on to or possessed. It is not centralized but is exercised” through the bodies/minds of its subjects.<sup>19</sup>

Because the meaning sources of the rural Kurdish masses were religious or tribal bonds, which were hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history, the nationalist exclusion exerted by the Turkish state over the Kurds throughout the first half of the twentieth century did not produce further nationalist uprisings; rather it made Kurdish subjects in rural areas docile in the post-rebellious period, namely in the 1940s and 1950s. Since nationalism as a sentiment is functional only in large-scale urban and industrial societies, a small group of educated Kurdish nationalists simply failed to plant the seeds of nationalism within the Kurdish society. In other words, the reach of purely cultural nationalism did not extend much beyond a small group of educated Kurdish elite.<sup>20</sup> When nationalism as a common identity across the whole society started to make its headway under modern urban-based conditions<sup>21</sup> in the 1960s and 1970s, the picture completely changed. Therefore, this chapter argues that contemporary Kurdish nationalism emerged as a functional sentiment or movement when traditional bonds for the Kurdish society were shattered by structural changes in Turkey during the 1950s and the following decades.

This argument needs two simple clarifications. Firstly, it postulates that it is not the violence of the Turkish state over the Kurds alone but “the Kurds’ own interpretation of their experience as oppression... in the national liberation discourse”<sup>22</sup> that made the Kurdish nationalism possible and thinkable. That means the PKK’s resistance was not an unavoidable and natural outgrowth of state domination but rather it was a social construction.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, the elimination of traditional Kurdish institutions is not a result of the Kurdish nationalism<sup>24</sup> but rather the vice versa.<sup>25</sup> Put differently, the Kurdish nationalism emerged to fill the void left in the uprooting of traditional Kurdish institutions such as religion and tribes. It was the collapse of traditional meaning sources that made the second condition of nationalist mobilization, the merge of the elite and masses in articulatory practices, possible. These two arguments are complementary; it was historical conditions that brought the Kurds together around being Kurdish rather than being a member of religion or tribe, which made the interpretation of the Turkish state’s violence over the Kurds as a threat to the existence and pursuit of the Kurdish identity and its interests possible. Unlike previous Kurdish revolts, for which the existence of traditional

Kurdish institutions was under threat as a result of the new state system based on centralization and secularism, the contemporary Kurdish nationalism perceived the Turkish state itself as a threat.

Traditional social order among the Kurds was largely based on the system of tribal landlords (aghas) and religious leaders (sheikhs), which provided a ground for meaning and identity.<sup>26</sup> In as late as 1960, Wadie Jwaideh, the author of a comprehensive study on Kurdish nationalism, wrote the following: “he autonomous Kurdish political system never developed beyond the tribal stage. Those Kurdish leaders who succeeded in founding such systems followed an Islamic rather than a Kurdish pattern of organization.”<sup>27</sup> Ironically, when Jwaideh witnessed this fact, wider processes of change were happening, which dislocated the central structures of the Kurdish society and undermined the frameworks providing Kurdish individuals a stable anchorage within the society. The decades-long disciplinary practices of the Turkish state over the Kurdish society such as education, conscription, and urbanization not only disrupted traditional Kurdish structure<sup>28</sup> but also, at the same time, offered spaces for resistance and counter-hegemonic purposes. Therefore, the two decades preceding the late 1970s was a moment of openness when one sovereign power within the Kurdish society (the system of tribal landlords and religious leaders) collapsed and another sovereign was yet to emerge. In such a moment, the Kurds who experienced a crisis of representation turned their faces to alternative prescriptions for this crisis starting to sprout.

Unlike traditional figures of Kurdish resistance as a subject who stands outside the state power and refuses its demands, the new mode of counter-hegemonic Kurdish discourse was formed within the organizational terrain of the Turkish state.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, industrialization, urbanization, and mass education that Turkey experienced in the first half of the twentieth century were both a dislocation for traditional Kurdish institutions and the source of contemporary Kurdish nationalism. Industrialization in Turkey spread unevenly, which left some groups and regions including Kurdish territories disadvantaged. If we follow Gellner, this uneven spread of industrialization in Turkey incites the disadvantaged groups to use their distinctions such as skin color, language, and religion in justifying the goal of political autonomy.<sup>30</sup> Not surprisingly, the “zone of deprivation” discourse became the main language of Kurdish mobilization against the Turkish state in the 1960s. For example, Edip Karahan, a Kurdish activist and publisher, wrote in 1962 the following: “the East was neglected so that the Easterners forgot their mother tongue and customs and traditions.”<sup>31</sup> However, this

uneven spread of industrialization would not be enough for the rise of the Kurdish nationalism if the Kurdish masses had been living in rural areas at that time since it is the alliance between a group of intelligentsia and the mass of disadvantaged people that makes nationalism possible. Rapid industrialization in the 1950s, which later pushed Kurdish masses into urban centers,<sup>32</sup> both deprived them of traditional institutions and made “exo-socialization”<sup>33</sup> possible. Only then, the Kurdish intelligentsia educated in Turkish schools gained an access to the production and reproduction of Kurdish subjects outside the local intimate unit.

Contrary to expectations of the Kemalist modernization according to which the Kurds would be assimilated into Turkishness through education, Turkish modern education system had a double effect on the emergence of nationalist discourse paradoxically.<sup>34</sup> On the one hand, Kurdish students freed themselves from traditional Kurdish bonds by migrating from their “closed society” to metropolitan cities such as Ankara and İstanbul. On the other hand, secular education introduced Kurdish students to socialism, nationalism, anti-colonialism, and other secular ideologies and weakened their religious/tribal bonds. “Through access to the cultural aspect” of the Turkish modernization, the Kurds “acceded to sentiments of nationhood” and it was then that genuine Kurdish nationalist resistance against the Turkish state developed.<sup>35</sup> Going out of the system of landlords and religious leaders, Kurdish students turned the Kurdish intelligentsia, producing an “alternative discourse” in leading outlets. The diffusion of “print-language”, as Benedict Anderson rightly points out, was what invented Kurdish nationalism as distinct form of discourse.<sup>36</sup> Through this print-language, the Kurdish intelligentsia (or Kurdish organic intellectuals)<sup>37</sup> in different leftist political organizations created a “discursive coalition” through which a body of literature for Kurdish nationalism was produced. This time, nationalist literature had its consumers/audiences who migrated from their villages to towns as a result of structural changes in relations of production. As Kendal rightly puts it, these new urban Kurdish masses “were the most dynamic and responsive sectors of Kurdish society. Contact with the world of proletarians and with progressive intellectuals politicized them very rapidly”.<sup>38</sup>

Under such historical conditions dislocating traditional structures of the Kurdish society, the PKK, like other Kurdish nationalist movements in the 1960s and 1970s, emerged to occupy the position that the system of landlords and religious leaders once held and its ultimate task was to fill “the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin and turn [sic] that

loss into the language of metaphor”.<sup>39</sup> The need for an institutional mechanism mitigated when the military coup of 12 September 1980 crumbled all civilian and armed Kurdish organizations and prohibited any manifestation of Kurdishness from speaking Kurdish to listening to Kurdish music. Therefore, the PKK started to dominate the Kurdish nationalist discourse and turned the only institution articulating a “politico-hegemonic” language among the Kurds. Unlike the late Ottoman period and early Republican times, the Kurdish society was highly open to state’s intrusions because the traditional Kurdish institutional barriers against outsiders were not available as a result of rapid urbanization.<sup>40</sup> When the Turkish military regime targeted all symbols of Kurdishness from the ban of speaking Kurdish language in public to the closure of political sphere for Kurdish demands, the hundreds of thousands of Kurds who did not become guerilla fighters turned their face to the PKK as representing their national aspirations and interests.<sup>41</sup> As a result, the PKK with its social and political networks turned a discursive institution through which the Kurdish people were reminded who they are (Kurds, not Turks, Arabs, or Persians).<sup>42</sup>

To put the above point differently, the stable hegemonic discourse based on the system of landlords and religious leaders became dislocated when it was confronted by new events that it could not explain, represent, or in other ways domesticate,<sup>43</sup> although it had been capable of accommodating, interpreting, or resisting against a lot of new events such as centralization and secularization during the early years of the Turkish state into its symbolic order. It was this organic crisis of previous discursive structure that opened the social to alternative discourses such as nationalism. The solution for this organic crisis of meaning and identity was, of course, radically different from that of traditional Kurdish institutions. Now territory and ethnicity started to undertake the role once religion and tribes played in rendering a contingent Kurdish identity secure. This re-writing the Kurdish self through territory, language, and ethnicity resulted in new Kurdish political subjects who value the well-being and status of the imagined Kurdish community rather than that of any tribe, religion, or their own lives as individuals.<sup>44</sup> In short, new Kurdish nationalist movements had to fill the void left by the deterioration of traditional Kurdish institutions to bring about “the possibility of an order, of a certain regularity”.<sup>45</sup>

However, the contents of the new order were not ready out there; rather they had to be produced through *a perpetual act of identification*, an attempt to fill the void without having a source of justification external



to the PKK's own discourse. A *perpetual act of identification* on the part of Kurdish side does not mean that authoritarian practices of the Turkish state and remnants of traditional meaning sources did not play any role in the construction of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity. Rather, the post-1980 nationalist identity was constituted in relation to these forces by resisting against the transformative power of the Turkish state and "civilizing" backward social bonds of the Kurds.<sup>46</sup> What I argue here is that both the PKK and post-1980 Kurdish nationalist identity are not results of the Turkish state's ruthless oppression against the Kurds. Nor did the PKK alone destroy and eliminate the traditional social bonds among the Kurds. Rather, the post-1980 Kurdish political identity was (re)constituted by the PKK through a series of ritualized practices and discourses in a period when the traditional sources of meaning for the Kurds faded away and when the Kurds had no strong web of meanings to defend themselves against the Turkish state. Traditional bonds and the prosecutor Turkish state were together inscribed into the PKK's discourse as "constitutive outsiders". Therefore, my argument is that the post-1980 Kurdish political identity is a by-product of the violent exclusion of the waning traditional Kurdish bonds and the prosecutor Turkish state from the "Kurdish space". Because of this, writing the world into the Kurdish nationalist resistance by the PKK functioned as the normalization of these exclusions.

In fine, the post-1980 Kurdish nationalist subject is radically different from traditional Kurdish political subjects. The perception of the self, others, and threats among the Kurds was reshaped in a discursive space dominated by the PKK and its armed struggle against the Turkish state. That means re-writing new Kurdish political subject through discourse on the self, others, and threats was based neither on a cultural given nor the objective existence of threats out there but on the play of difference. This idea is different from arguing that the material violence the Turkish state exerted over the Kurds tied the differential meanings into a complex whole that became a political problem for the Kurds.<sup>47</sup> It is true that the violence of the Turkish state over the Kurds is an event, in the sense that it occurred and continues to occur, independently of the Kurds' will. But whether its specificity as violence is constructed in terms of a necessity for independent Kurdish state or motivation for further assimilation depends upon the structuring of a discursive field.<sup>48</sup> Presenting the violence of the Turkish state over the Kurds as something defined independently of any specific type of society<sup>49</sup> frees the threat, the self, and the other from the play of difference.

## THE PLAY OF DIFFERENCE

It is the play of difference that allowed the Kurds “to fabricate a sense of community and to retrieve for themselves a subject position from which to address”<sup>50</sup> the Turkish state and world affairs. Looking at the play of difference in the construction of identity assumes that there is nothing inherent to being Kurdish but concrete processes or mechanisms that inscribe the people into Kurdishness. Therefore, the Kurdish national identity is not, as Hassanpour argued, “the feeling, idea or experience of belonging to a collective entity called ‘Kurd’”. For him, “this identification transcends, though it does not exclude, affiliation with one’s family, tribe, village, city, locale, region or dialect”.<sup>51</sup> This primordial definition of the Kurdish ethnicity and identity, which is shared by some scholars and all Kurdish nationalists,<sup>52</sup> is based on “the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation, abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates” the Kurds both in regard to themselves and in regard to others.<sup>53</sup> Like all anti-colonial nationalist movements, the Kurdish nationalism and its intelligentsia assume that the Kurdish identity is a rediscovery or unearthing of the real one oppressed and buried by the hegemonic (colonial) power.<sup>54</sup>

Contrary to the idea of primordial identity, critical approach to the matter of ethnic identities argues that what is lost or sacrificed when the Kurds step in the symbolization of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity is the possibility of the real Kurdish identity.<sup>55</sup> Ironically, it is the loss (or the impossibility) of the real Kurdish identity that forces post-1980 Kurdish political subjects to identify again and again because only this performative reiteration of identificatory practices enacts a fixed identity into being.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, the post-1980 Kurdish political identity is grounded not in the past but in the perpetual “re-telling of the past”.<sup>57</sup> Since identity is not grounded on stable, unchanging, and continuous roots waiting to be discovered, the perpetual re-telling of the difference from others with a special reference to the imaginative rediscovery of the past is vital in the production of the underlying unity of the Kurdish nation. To put this point differently, since all attempts result in the loss of the real Kurdishness or no identification can restore this “real”, what makes the post-1980 Kurdish political identity possible is the perpetual play of difference. Although the real Kurdishness is unrepresentable, the play of difference based on the discourse of what the Kurds are and what they are not can offer audiences “points of identification”.<sup>58</sup> That means, not the difference intrinsic to

being Kurdish but the play of difference, a perpetual inscription of the Kurds into Kurdishness through a constitutive exclusion of others, makes the post-1980 Kurdish political subject possible.

When did a particular play of difference enacting the post-1980 Kurdish political identity hegemonic emerge? If the play of difference facilitating the nationalist Kurdish identity does not date back to the late Ottoman Empire or the early Republican period, which historical period signifies “the true birth of modern Kurdish nationalism”<sup>59</sup> in Turkey? As argued above, the moment when nationalist discourse came to be common sense, and when the leaders and audiences simultaneously came to believe in a nationalist framing of political reality is the moment that a researcher aiming to understand the genesis of nationalist discourse should focus on. Put differently, the moment when the power centering around the Kurdish nationalism discursively “reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning process and everyday lives”<sup>60</sup> is the moment on which researchers of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity/subjectivity shed light. Such a moment came in the late 1960s when nationwide protests and mobilizations to secure social, political, and economic goals appeared and when an explanatory discourse for these mobilizations emerged. Unlike previous rebellions, these new mobilizations transcended religious and tribal bonds, embraced all segments of the Kurdish society ranging from workers to small entrepreneurs, and brought them together only around being Kurdish.

The 1960s witnessed the waning of alternative hegemonic discourses such as tribalism, and sectarianism in the public language of the Kurds, and concomitantly nationalism was rendered as the full and final truth for the Kurds. To put it in other words, the public debate started to use “mainly the language, terms, ideas, and ‘knowledge’ of the dominant” nationalist discourse, and alternative words and meanings were rarely found and dissenting voices were almost never heard.<sup>61</sup> For example, when a Turkish far-right journal *Örüken* published two follow-up articles in April 1967 whose author claimed that Turkey was only for the Turks and the Kurds may go to Iran, Pakistan, or somewhere in Africa, the Kurds took to the streets, 10,000 people in Silvan, over 25,000 in Diyarbakır, and many others in different Kurdish cities,<sup>62</sup> not in the name of Islam or their tribes but in the name of Kurdishness. These mass protests and mobilizations were developed and institutionalized with the establishment of the DDKO (*Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları*, Revolutionary

Eastern Cultural Associations) in 1969 by a group of Kurdish intellectuals. Not surprisingly, the growing “Kurdification” of the Kurdish movements was reflected in the DDKO’s new discourse according to which the Kurdish issue was no longer “an issue of regional underdevelopment” or an unpleasant result of centralization policies but it was a national and colonial problem.<sup>63</sup> Despite the closure of the DDKO, the redefinition of the Kurdish issue under the influence of Marxist perspectives on nationalism<sup>64</sup> was consolidated and disseminated by subsequent Kurdish political movements including the PKK.

Unlike previous political movements, now the Kurds were making claims for Kurdish ethnic identity and language, not religion, tribes, or other traditional bonds.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the Kurdish nationalism appeared as natural mode of thought, secured itself as the unquestioned narrative, pushed all other alternative narratives into marginal, and lured audience who felt insecure against the collapse of traditional Kurdish institutions and assimilation policies of the Turkish state with “the promise of full identity”.<sup>66</sup> Although the possibility for a particular play of difference emerged under some historical conditions, what was needed in this historical moment were institutional apparatus that convey the play of difference from a specific moment in history to subsequent moments of time. Without a travel through time, the play of difference in a specific moment fails to produce a partially fixed identity because the end of the play of difference would make visible the lack or the unrepresentable character of the so-called real Kurdishness on which the post-1980 Kurdish political identity was constructed. Not surprisingly, many different ethnic movements emerged in the 1970s in order to institutionalize the play of difference. Of them, the PKK took the lead in the production of an uninterrupted and continuously disseminated language in rendering the Kurdish nationalism hegemonic.

In addition to the capability of traveling in history, the play of difference basically demands some exclusionary practices in order to privilege a particular representation and delegitimize, exclude, and even annihilate all other alternatives. This is so because no particular identity can emerge without enacting the violent exclusion of others. Therefore, exclusionary practices of the PKK ranging from physical violence over different Kurdish movements and against the Turkish state to discursive violence over alternative representations played a significant role in the exercise of the play of difference. Needless to say, the PKK was not the only movement aimed at establishing a Kurdish nation-state and waging an “anti-colonial fight”

against the Turkish state. To attract new members, create legitimacy for itself among the Kurds, and more importantly to promote a specific imagination of the Kurdish nation, the PKK needed to eliminate its rivals and become the only armed group pursuing the Kurdish cause. Therefore, the PKK fought bloodily against other revolutionary Kurdish organizations during the last years of the 1970s and traditional Kurdish institutions throughout the 1980s. Like members of different Kurdish organizations and tribal institutions, many PKK militants were also executed with the accusation of being an agent of the Turkish state or Western imperialism.<sup>67</sup>

This repression and elimination of alternative Kurdish voices, however, proves that the PKK was not the natural representative of the Kurdish nationalism. Therefore, the elimination of external (the Turkish state and other Kurdish organizations) and domestic (critics within the PKK) competitors functioned as the main condition on which the play of difference was exercised. However, this does not mean that the play of difference was exercised through the PKK's monologue interaction to (or interpretation of) its others; but rather it was produced by a dialogical interaction between the PKK and its competitors, namely alternative Kurdish movements, traditional Kurdish institutions, and the Turkish state. In other words, the PKK's discourse was legitimized and normalized by the ways in which the Turkish state and traditional Kurdish institutions reacted to this dialogical interaction. As a reaction to the PKK's attempt to define who are the Kurds, the Turkish state attempted to bolster the markers of being Turkish citizen through exclusion, prohibition, and assimilation. In this process of "Othering", not only the PKK situated representations imposed by the Turkish state and traditional Kurdish bonds as others, the Turkish state also put representations disseminated by the PKK in the position of other.

### WRITING THE KURDISH SELF

The creation of a coherent vision of the Self is intrinsic to the inscription of the other since there is nothing stable out of the play of difference. However, on the other hand, without a repeated articulation of what "we" are, speaking on what "we" are not cannot produce an identity that is inherently or necessarily connected. Similarly, the identity does not come to seem as though it is preferable to others without positive connotations attached to it through reiterated articulations.<sup>68</sup> For example, articulating that US imperialism is a threat for the peace in the Middle East does

not produce any privileged self for the Kurds specifically. This articulation should be complemented with some other articulations such as the following: US imperialism is the main obstacle before Kurdish independence; the only way to realize the potentiality of being Kurd is to destroy US imperialism, and having an independent Kurdish entity is better than the US rule over the Middle East. In other words, the exclusion of US imperialism as other has to be accompanied with speaking on being Kurdish in the process of re/writing the self. Without the articulation of what we are, the exclusion of other alternatives in creating a stable, and self-referential identity is impossible. Since the articulations of what “we” are not leave an identity with many possible alternative representations, only way to close the door for alternatives is to articulate what “we” are.

Until the 1960s, religion and tribal bonds were main references in the construction of the Kurdish self. To put it in different words, those who prioritize religious affiliations and tribal connections over others were the main speaking subjects within the Kurdish society until the second half of the twentieth century. Those speaking subjects were put into subject positions through a wide range of institutions and rituals such as the distribution of land, madrasa-type education, rural life, and marriage customs. Therefore, alternative representations of identity such as nationalism were excluded and marginalized first and foremost by the dominance of existing and already-institutionalized social meanings in the Kurdish society simply because the Kurdish nationalism would not only break the *Umma* notion but it would also shatter the privilege of being part of a specific tribe. It is this radical difference that resulted in different representations of the world between traditional Kurdish institutions and Kurdish nationalist movements. For example, while the destruction of madrasa-type schools as part of secular education in Turkey, for example, was seen by traditional Kurds as a threat to the existing social bonds and therefore perceived as a tool of Western imperialism, secular education gained a completely different emancipatory meaning for Kurdish nationalists in the destruction of traditional obstacles before a united Kurdish consciousness.<sup>69</sup>

The Kurdish nationalism as privileging of ethnic identity over other identities such as tribe and religion emerged as a flash in the pan at different moments of history but its rise to hegemonic status has a specific time, the 1960s and the 1970s. For example, “to those who travelled in the Kurdish countryside in the late 1970s”, according to van Burinessen, “it appeared that Kurdish nationalism found unprecedented support there”.<sup>70</sup> For the first time in Kurdish territories of Turkey, the Kurdish

“nationalism became a mass movement, spawning numerous public organizations, mobilizing urban populations, taking on a central position in Kurdish political life, and leading in 1977 to the victory of a nationalist candidate in the country’s largest Kurdish city, Diyarbakır”.<sup>71</sup> The effect of this tremendous shift from traditional Kurdish society to nationalist imagination was immense since it was this change that transformed the representation of the Turkish state’s repression in the Kurdish-populated areas from oppression on religious and tribal codes to an existential threat to the Kurdish identity itself. At this point, however, a substantial question needed to be answered: If we are not part of a tribal or a religious community, what are we and what determines being Kurdish? If religion and tribe have lost their status in defining what we are, then what are the new references of being Kurdish?

Territory, language, and history emerged as main references in re-writing the Kurdish self and they were redefined in order to create a stable ground for the new nationalist identity. Since the Kurdish region is geographically divided between four different states and existing official borders make different parts of Kurdistan as territories of non-Kurdish nation-states, the re-imagination of territory as Kurdistan has been vital for the Kurdish national identity. To use Said’s words, “if there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of” the Kurdish nationalism, “it is the primacy of the geographical element”.<sup>72</sup> For Kurdish nationalists, the history of “colonial” domination over the Kurdistan region is accompanied with the loss of the Kurdish territory to outsiders, and therefore, geographical identity before anything else must be searched for and somehow restored. The PKK used guerrilla warfare, border violations, and counter-mappings<sup>73</sup> in re-imagining and restoring the Kurdish territory. Limiting the guerrilla warfare with some regions of Turkey created a distinction between the Kurdish territory where guerrillas fought and died for and the rest of the Turkish territory. Border violations such as cross-border attacks and smuggling have created a Kurdish territory where Kurdish subjects can move freely and blurred the official border between Turkey and its nation-state neighbors at the south.

The spread of Kurdistan maps both in official documents of nationalist Kurdish movements and Kurdish popular culture created a strong sense of Kurdish territory. The perceived neutrality and objectivity of maps<sup>74</sup> made Kurdistan maps one of the most powerful ways to create and normalize a distinct Kurdish territory since they provided a tangible evidence for the existence of “a sort of political-biographical narrative of the realm”, which

can otherwise be an abstract geographical space.<sup>75</sup> The restoration of the Kurdish territory through guerrilla warfare, border violations, and maps was important not only because it functioned as an evidence of the Kurdish nation, but it also worked as a reference for the creation of alternative knowledge.<sup>76</sup> While the alternative narrative based on the Kurdish territory creates the “organic link between the Kurds as a nation and Kurdistan as their homeland”,<sup>77</sup> the war of the PKK against the Turkish state within the Kurdish territory makes the transition “from an imaginative Kurdistan to the realized Kurdistan”<sup>78</sup> possible. Accordingly, the restoration of the Kurdish territory both in imagination (maps and narratives) and practice (the guerrilla fight occurred mostly within the Kurdish territory) turned a strong reminder of the fact that the existing border of the Turkish state is a threat for the Kurdish nation.<sup>79</sup>

Although Kurdish language has traditionally been the most salient emblem of the Kurdish culture and leading marker of the Kurds as a distinctive group of people,<sup>80</sup> it turned a tool in justifying the goal of political autonomy after the 1960s among nationalist Kurds. Because the Turkish state, as part of its assimilation policy, denied the existence of a Kurdish language, nationalist Kurdish movements not only attempted to prove its originality as a distinct language, but they also reinvigorated the Kurdish language as a language of literature. For example, the defense of the DDKO activists in the court in the early 1970s included a detailed study of the Kurdish language to refute the claim that it was primitive and a mixture of other languages.<sup>81</sup> As part of reinvigoration, many Kurdish classics such as Ehmedê Xani’s *Mem û Zîn* widely diffused and sold in record quantities<sup>82</sup> and the Kurdish novel emerged especially among the Kurdish diaspora in the 1980s. The development of the Kurdish literature has very significant effect on the Kurdish nationalism not only because it provides a distinct imagination of the world for the Kurds but because it also creates a closed literature understandable only by the Kurds. This last point was strikingly articulated by Laleş Qaso, a Kurdish novelist, in his novel *Ronakbîr*’s back cover with the following words:

No matter whoever tells me what; whoever gives me whichever nicknames; the biggest threat for my existence and my Kurdishness is to translate my books into Turkish and that Kurds will be reading it in Turkish before the Kurds in the North have set up a country, or a state similar to a country, and the Kurdish language is used in all areas. This would be my death and



the ruining of all my efforts. I will never forgive that! And I do not want the Kurds to forgive it either. This is my will.<sup>83</sup>

If the nationalist Kurdish subjects “are to have any prospect of recovering land stolen from them, they will have to establish the principle of traditional rights of ownership”.<sup>84</sup> Only a historical narrative based on discourses of absolute cultural and geographical continuity with the past can provide a right of ownership for the Kurds and delegitimize the claim of the Turkish state over the Kurdish territory. In the early 1970s, the DDKO activists, for example, produced a historical narrative in order to challenge the claims of their judges who denied the existence of the Kurds as a separate nation. This historical narrative based on the fact that the Kurdish nation is one of the oldest in the Middle East made the Kurds the legitimate owner of the land.<sup>85</sup> The counter-historical narrative as a resistance against the official state discourse was developed and conveyed through time by other nationalist Kurdish movements during and after the 1970s. This counter-historical narrative had a tremendous effect on Kurdish society since it functioned as an “inexhaustible source of legitimation of Kurdish nationalist claim” and provided a confirmation of territorial, cultural, and linguistic continuity with the past.<sup>86</sup> The invention of “the Kurdish *volk-geist*, unchanging through the ages” in counter-historical narrative not only created an evidence of the imagined Kurdish self but it also played a decisive role in the struggle against the Turkish state.<sup>87</sup>

## WRITING THREATS AND OTHERS

As Freud once said, “it is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left to receive the manifestation of their aggressiveness”.<sup>88</sup> But how can the other people be located at the outside in order to create a distinction between the people to be loved and the people to be hated? To put it simply, only a threat that is supposed to be coming from the outside is able to render a group of people the other of the self. Because of this, like modern nation-states that require discourses of danger/threat, dissident movements aiming to construct a closed society need a discourse of danger/threat “to provide a new theology of truth about who and what ‘we’ are by highlighting who and what ‘we’ are not, and what ‘we’ have to fear”.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, the discourses of enemy/friend through a series of ritualized foreign policy performances are essential to the construction of particular subjectivities

and functions to discipline the boundaries of identity. Since people react not only to psychical and material threats but also “perceived threats” to their sense of self, “how we interpret threats has much to do with how we see ourselves, with our identities as subject”.<sup>90</sup> In short, the discourse of threat and danger undertakes a significant role in the play of difference between the self and other by normalizing the position of other as other and privileging the appropriation of the self against the other.

However, threat is not objectively out there. The world exists out there but the meaning (whether it is threat or secure) is something constructed through interpretation. An event therefore “does not in and of itself constitute a danger, risk, or threat”.<sup>91</sup> Rather, it is the regime of truth specifying the criteria for assessing something that ascribes an event as threat or danger. To use Ashley’s terms, without a paradigm of sovereignty regulating communities by imposing a certain interpretation, it is impossible “to say with clarity what states, domestic societies, their boundaries, and their historical problems and dangers are”.<sup>92</sup> For example, different Kurdish communities can interpret the Turkish state’s military operations against any Kurdish uprising either as the restoration of security/order in Kurdish-populated areas or a threat to Kurdish mobilization. Similarly, the elimination of tribal system among the Kurds can be constructed as a threat to the existing social order or the emancipation of Kurdish national consciousness. Because of this interpretative nature of threat, Connolly underlines that “the threat is posed not merely by actions the other might take to injure or defeat the true identity but by the very visibility of its mode of being as other”.<sup>93</sup>

Then, can it be argued that extrajudicial killings of the Kurds and systematic torture of those who claimed Kurdishness during the post-1980 military regime in Turkey had no effect on the re-articulation of threat(s) to the Kurdish nation?<sup>94</sup> Or was this “apocalyptic event” not such a threat to being Kurdish, although the post-1980 military regime explicitly declared its aim to transform those who claim Kurdish identity through coercive mechanisms? The post-1980 military regime’s violent practices toward the Kurds were surely apocalyptic for the Kurds as much as the Dersim massacre in the 1930s. However, it is important to underline that before the military regime’s brutal violence over the Kurds, Kurdish nationalist sentiments had already rendered the hegemonic resistance language against the Turkish state. On the one hand, the brutality of the military regime against the Kurds was interpreted through the prism of already existing nationalist sentiments among the Kurds. On the other hand, the

military regime's brutal violence functioned as an "omnipresent point of reference around which" the nationalist Kurds "subsequently reinscribe [their] historical and political narratives leading to the event and following from it".<sup>95</sup> Therefore, the brutality of the military regime in Turkey during the first three years of the 1980s gained a specific meaning through an "imaginary schema"<sup>96</sup> or an interpretational framework that made the experiences of the Kurds available and knowable as existential threats to the "Kurdish nation".

Why, then, was the brutality of the 1980 military regime in Turkey interpreted in such a particular way? For traditional Kurdish social forces, threats were secularism, which targeted religious order among the Kurds, and modernization, which targeted tribal order in the Kurdish-populated region. Kurdish national movements in the 1970s and the PKK re-articulated threats as the Turkish nation-state, which aimed to destroy Kurdish consciousness, and the imperial system, which prevented the possibility of the Kurdish nation-state. As explained before, this re-articulation of threat was not a product of the PKK, but rather it was made possible by the fact that previous web of meanings faded as a result of an "increasing number of dislocations that cannot be integrated" into existing representation.<sup>97</sup> To put it in other terms, the transition from one way of framing threats to another way became possible only because the weakening system of landlords and religious leaders began to absorb less social demands, its power of identification reduced dramatically, and all routine practices were entirely shattered. Therefore, nationalism-based discourse articulating the brutality of the Turkish state in a particular way emerged as a response to the crisis of representation where "no other discourse presented itself as a real hegemonic alternative"<sup>98</sup> in dealing with the brutality the Kurds faced.

The main others of contemporary Kurdish ethnic movements were the Turkish state ruling Kurdish-populated territories and traditional social institutions bringing Kurdish people together around different meanings. By writing these two others into the inferior side of binary opposition, the PKK not only re/constructed the ground for the new Kurdish identity but it also emerged as a disciplinary power over the new and distinct Kurdish subjectivities. The PKK inclined participants "to identify his voice of interpretation and practice with a subjective standpoint, a sovereign interpretative center, from which one side in such oppositions can be conceived as a higher reality, belonging to the domain of logos, or pure and indecomposable presence in need of no explanation".<sup>99</sup> Therefore, the re-figuration of others in a hierarchical way appeared as a critical phase not only in the

transition from the old Kurdish identity to the new one in the post-1970 period, but also in rendering the PKK hegemonic. This, however, does not mean that the Turkish state was a blank page on which the PKK wrote what it is. Rather, what the post-1970 Kurdish ethnic movements including the PKK did was to represent the Turkish state's repressive policies on the Kurds in a way radically different from previous representations.

The imbrication of the external other (the Turkish state) and the internal other (tribal and religious institutions of the Kurds)<sup>100</sup> emerged in the 1970s as a discourse radically different from that of previous Kurdish resistances against the Turkish state. For the PKK, the main local obstacle blocking the inclusion of the Kurdish masses into the struggle against the Turkish state was the feudal and tribal structure and its traditionalist ideology. Since "the national independence requires strong peasant armies, the exploitation of landlords... has to be eliminated... Otherwise, peasants could not be enlisted in the army for independence".<sup>101</sup> However, the argument that landlords are barriers before the real Kurdish conscience does not refer anything without a wider narrative. At this stage, the Turkish state as an external other undertook a significant function in delegitimizing traditional Kurdish institutions and rendering them as internal enemies/threats. According to this associating narrative, the traditional Kurdish institutions are tools of the Turkish state in repressing the Kurds and suppressing the Kurdish nationalist consciousness. Hereby, the PKK's brutality against "internal threats" is normalized and legitimized. For example, the PKK made an attempt to kill Mehmet Celal Bucak, a powerful landlord in *Siverek* district and also a member of parliament for the Justice Party, on the grounds that he was exploiter of the Kurdish nation and collaborator of the colonial Turkish state.<sup>102</sup>

The fixation of what internal others mean was realized through the imbrication of traditional Kurdish social forces (and alternative representations of Kurdish nationalism) with the external other, the Turkish state.<sup>103</sup> Since the external other plays a significant role in the construction of internal others and the new Kurdish self, the Turkish state as external other had to be situated in history temporally and the world politics spatially.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, while the PKK traced the existing "Turkish" domination over the Kurds as far back as the defeat of the Median Empire, the last independent Kurdish "state", around 550 BC, on the one hand (temporal fixation), it also described the Turkish state as a tool of the global imperial order led by the USA on the other (spatial fixation). In short, the emergence of the contemporary Kurdish

nationalism was based on three others, internal, external, and symbolic. These three others are very evident in the discourse of the PKK. For example, Abdullah Öcalan argued “the revolution in Kurdistan targets Turkish colonialism... This colonialism is supported externally by the imperialists and internally by the feudal comprador classes. *These three forces*, which are connected together through close economic ties, constitute the targets of Kurdistan’s revolution”.<sup>105</sup>

As a result, the post-1980 Kurdish identity was constituted “in relation to multiple others, including internal and external others as well as the generalized other”.<sup>106</sup> While the traditional meaning-makers of the Kurdish society were internal others, the Turkish state functioned as external other in the imagination of the new Kurdish society by the PKK. The generalized other was the symbolic order structured by the desire of US imperialism to rule the world in general and Kurdistan in particular. Put differently, the symbolic order provided the language through which the PKK was able to speak about Kurdistan as colony of US imperialism supported by regional collaborators, the Turkish state and traditional Kurdish institutions. Therefore, it was the spatial identification with the imperial order led by the USA and temporal identification with the history of colonial domination that fixed the Turkish state as the external other and traditional Kurdish institutions as internal others of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity.<sup>107</sup> Without this, it was impossible for the PKK to project the post-1980 Kurdish political subject position as “having always been” a full and complete “self”.<sup>108</sup> In other words, what made the PKK (and the post-1980 Kurdish political identity) as a spatially delimited entity alongside other such entities was the process of identification with these three others. From this “stable and presentable determination of a locality”, *Ontology* in Derrida’s terms,<sup>109</sup> the PKK endeavored to rewrite the history as a history of colonialism over the Kurds in order to produce the effect of fixity and surface.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1998) and Joane Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture”, *Social Problems*, 41(1), 1994: 152–176.

2. Edwin N. Wilmsen, "Premises of Power in Ethnic Politics", In: *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power*, Editors: Edwin N. Wilmsen and Patric McAllister, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996): 1–23, p. 5.
3. A recent article on the source of Kurdish uprisings had this to say: "the PKK is and has always been primarily a political organization, prompted to use violence in circumstances in which there was no alternative (legally permitted) avenue of genuine political expression". Joost Jongerden and Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya, "The Kurdistan Workers Party and a New Left in Turkey: Analysis of the Revolutionary Movement in Turkey through the PKK's Memorial Text on Haki Karer", *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 14, 2012: 2–17, p. 4.
4. Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion*, (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1989); Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2004).
5. Mesut Yeğen, *Devlet Söyleminde Kürt Sorunu*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999), p. 259.
6. Yeğen, *Devlet Söyleminde*, p. 94.
7. MacDowall, *A Modern History*, p. 191.
8. Mesut Yeğen, "Türk Milliyetçiliği ve Kürt Sorunu", In: *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: Milliyetçilik*, Editors: Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekinil, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002): 880–892, p. 883.
9. Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish*, p. 16.
10. See, Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Varieties of Ethnic Politics and Ethnicity Discourse", In: *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power*, Editors: Edwin N. Wilmsen and Patric McAllister, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996): 25–44, p. 28.
11. Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agba, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structure of Kurdistan*, (London: Zed Books, 1992), p. 298; Italics are added.
12. Paul J. White, *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers?: The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, (London: Zed books, 2000), p. 74.
13. Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*, 2nd Edition, (London: Sage, 2008), p. 10.
14. Martin van Bruinessen, "Shifting National and Ethnic Identities: The Kurds in Turkey and the European Diaspora", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 18(1), 1998: 39–52, p. 39. In his later studies, Bruinessen accepts that "as long as the middle and lower strata" of the Kurdish society "do not share" a national awareness, any awareness among the upper class of society "does not make much sense to speak" of nationalism. See, Martin

- van Bruinessen, "Ehmedî Xani's Mem û Zîn and Its Role in the Emergence of Kurdish National Awareness", In: *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, Editor: Abbas Vali, (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2003): 40–57, pp. 55–6.
15. Güneş, The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey, p. 11.
  16. Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p. 119.
  17. See, for example, İlhami Aras, *Adım Şeyh Said*, (İstanbul: İlke Yayıncılık, 1994).
  18. Olson, The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism, p. 153.
  19. Edkins, Poststructuralism & International Relations, p. 53; see also, Foucault, Discipline and Punish, p. 27; Michael Williams, *Culture and Security: Symbolic Power and the Politics of International Security*, (London: Routledge, 2007).
  20. See Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
  21. See Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 2006), p. 6.
  22. Güneş, The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey, p. 177; Ayşegül Aydın and Cem Emrence, *Zones of Rebellion: Kurdish Insurgents and the Turkish State*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), p. x.
  23. See Susan Gal, "Language and the 'Arts of Resistance'", *Cultural Anthropology*, 10(3), 1995: 407–424; Peter Bloom, "The power of safe resistance", *Journal of Political Power*, 6(2), 2013: 219–239, p. 225.
  24. See, for example, Barkey and Fuller, Turkey's Kurdish Question.
  25. The first argument does not explain the following paradox: Why were active Kurdish nationalists who had thought of themselves as Turks unable to rediscover their Kurdish identity until, for example, their university education or migration to urban centers? See, van Bruinessen, Shifting National, p. 39. Put differently, why did the Kurdish nationalism emerge in urban centers of Turkey instead of rural Kurdish places although the latter includes the Kurds whose linguistic distinctiveness was incomparably greater than the cultural distinctiveness of the Kurds within Turkish metropolitan centers. See Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, p. 46.
  26. Not surprisingly, the main target of the Turkish nation-state was these traditional sources of meaning among the Kurds in its attempt to assimilate the Kurds into hegemonic Turkish identity. For an excellent study that develops this argument, see Mesut Yeğen, Devlet Söyleminde.
  27. Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006), pp. 30–1.
  28. White, Primitive Rebels, Chapter 5.
  29. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. xi.

30. See Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 60–1; for an excellent analysis of the effect of “the spatially uneven wave of modernization” on Celtic nationalism in Britain, see Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536–1966*, (California: University of California Press, 1975). However, this argument alone is problematic because it leaves students of nationalism with an uncertainty; whether the Turkish state left the Kurdish area underdeveloped intentionally as a result of its ethnic character or the underdevelopment of the Kurdish area is an inevitable consequence of industrialization.
31. Quoted in Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, pp. 54–5.
32. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 44; for the effect of rapid industrialization on the Turkish population, see Kemal H. Karpat, *The Gecekondu: Rural Migration and Urbanization*, (Cambridge University Press, 1976).
33. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 37–8.
34. Van Burinnesen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p. 32.
35. Spivak, *In Other Words*, p. 338.
36. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 136.
37. Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, p. 49.
38. Kendal, “Kurdistan in Turkey”, In: *A People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, Editor: Gérard Chalian, (London: Zed Books, 1993): 38–94, p. 79.
39. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 200.
40. Aslan, *Nation-Building in Turkey*, p. 131.
41. Watts, *Activists in Office*, p. 57.
42. Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, p. 136.
43. Jacob Torfing, “Discourse Theory: Achievements, Arguments, and Challenges”, In: *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance*, Editors: David Howarth, Jacob Torfing, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 1–33, p. 16.
44. Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, p. 161.
45. Laclau, *Introduction*, p. 3.
46. Güneş Murat Tezcür, “Violence and Nationalist Mobilization: the Onset of the Kurdish Insurgency in Turkey”, *Nationalities Papers*, 43(2), 2015: 248–266, p. 259.
47. For the primacy of the material over the differentially produced meaning, see Colin Wight, *Agents, Structures and International Relations: Politics as Ontology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 159.
48. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 94; Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, p. 10.
49. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 84.
50. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 39.



51. Amir Hassanpour, "The Making of Kurdish Identity: Pre-20th Century Historical and Literary Discourses", In: *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, Editor: Abbas Vali, (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2003): 106–62, p. 110; Mehrdad Izady traces the existence of the Kurdish culture back more than 50,000 years and refers to the Neanderthal findings in the Shanidar caves. Accordingly, he defines the Kurds as "a multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-racial nation, but with a unified, independent, and identifiable history and culture". Such a definition assumes that there is a distinct character of Kurdishness since the beginning of history. See Mehrdad R. Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook*, (Washington D.C.: Taylor & Francis, 1992), p. 185.
52. For a critique of primordial conceptions of Kurdish nationalism, see Abbas Vali, "Genealogies of the Kurds: Constructions of Nation and National Identity in Kurdish Historical Writing", In: *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, Editor: Abbas Vali, (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2003): 58–105.
53. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 210.
54. Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, p. 224.
55. This idea is developed through Foucault. According to him, only through the destruction of the body, the subject is able to appear as a "dissociated unity". See Foucault, Nietzsche, Genealogy, History; Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, pp. 91–2.
56. Stavrakakis, Lacan and the Political, p. 34. Although this is a kind of loss through which the post-1980 Kurdish political identity emerged, it is ironically this same loss that haunts the Kurdish subject's subsequent attachment to this post-1980 political identity.
57. Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, p. 224.
58. Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity*, p. 36.
59. White, *Primitive Rebels*, p. 69 quotes from Hamit Bozarslan, *Le problème National Kurde en Turquie Kémaliste*, Paris EHESS: unpublished PhD thesis, p. 96.
60. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 39. For this reason, a particular representation of world politics is indeed integral to the everyday practices of the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects and their various modes of life. Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)introduction to International Relations*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), p. 7.
61. Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-terrorism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 19.
62. White, *Primitive Rebels*, p. 133.
63. Bozarslan, *Türkiye'de Kürt Sol Hareketi*, p. 1176.

64. For main bulletins of DDKO, see, Mümtaz Kotan, *Yenilginin İzdüşümleri*, (Dortmund: Yunan Kürt Dostluk Derneği, 2003).
65. Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005), p. 96. Natali uses two different concepts, ethnoreligious and ethnonationalist, to differentiate the post-1960 Kurdish mobilizations from previous revolts and uprisings. Paul White is more explicit on this point. For him, while uprisings in the Kurdish region were “social rebels”, post-1960s Kurdish mobilizations have nationalist character. See White, *Primitive Rebels*, p. vii, 3, 5, and 206.
66. Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity*, p. 18; Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, p. 10.
67. White, *Primitive Rebels*, pp. 144–6; Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and The Kurdish Fight for Independence*, (New York: New York University Press, 2007), pp. 89–96; see also, Aytekin Yılmaz, *Yoldaşını Öldürmek*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014).
68. Prasenjit Duara, *The Global and Regional in China’s Nation-formation*, (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 112; see also, Prasenjit Duara, “De-constructing the Chinese Nation”, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, 30, 1993: 1–26, p. 20; Prasenjit Duara, “Historicizing National Identity, or Who Imagines What and When”, In: *Becoming National: A Reader*, Editors: Geoff Elegg and Ronald G. Suny, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
69. For the role of education in the emancipation of the Kurdish consciousness in the PKK’s discourse, see Kariane Westrheim, “Prison as Site for Political Education: Educational Experiences from Prison Narrated by Members and Sympathizers of the PKK”, *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 6(1), 2008: 1–20. When this difference is considered, it can be argued that the anti-imperialism of the traditional Kurdish institutions was more radical than that of Kurdish nationalists.
70. Van Burinnesen, Agha, Shaikh and State, p. 33.
71. Hamit Bozarlan, “Some Remarks on Kurdish Historiographical Discourse in Turkey (1919–1980)”, In: *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, Editor: Abbas Vali, (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2003): 14–39, p. 35.
72. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 225.
73. For the concept of counter-mapping, see Leila M. Harris, Helen D. Hazen, “Power of maps:(Counter) mapping for conservation”, *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 4(1), 2005: 99–130 and Karen Culcasi, “Mapping the Middle East from Within: (Counter-) Cartographies of an Imperialist Construction”, *Antipode*, 44(4), 2012: 1099–1118.

74. J. B. Harley, “Deconstructing the Map”, *Cartographica*, 26(2), 1989: 1–20.
75. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 179.
76. Paul Routledge, “Critical Geopolitics and Terrains of Resistance”, *Political Geography*, 15(6/7), 1996: 509–531, p. 520.
77. Özlem Belçin Galip, *Imagining Kurdistan: Identity, Culture and Society*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), p. 138; a definition of territory-bounded Kurdishness can be seen in academic studies. For example, Izady writes that “I treat as Kurdish every community that has inhabited the territory of Kurdistan and has not acquired a separate identity to this day, or been unequivocally connected with other identifiable nation, the bulk of which is or was living outside the territories of Kurdistan”. Izady, *The Kurds*, p. xiii-xiv. For how Izady’s thesis turned a common sense among nationalist Kurds, see Maria O’Shea, *Trapped Between the Map and Reality: Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan*, (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 67–8.
78. “Muhayyel Kürdistan’dan Gerçekleşen Kürdistan’a”, *Serxwebûn*, Sayı: 191, Kasım 1997, p. 1.
79. For an analysis of the imagination of Kurdistan territory in the PKK’s discourse, see Berkan Öğür, *Muhelif Bir Söylem Biçimi Olarak Kürdistan (1980–2014)*, M.A. Thesis, (Sakarya: Sakarya University, 2015).
80. Galip, *Imagining Kurdistan*, p. 67.
81. Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, p. 70.
82. Bozarlan, *Some Remarks*, p. 35.
83. Quoted in Galip, *Imagining Kurdistan*, p. 95.
84. John Sharp, “Ethnogenesis and Ethnic Mobilization: A Comparative Perspective on A South African Dilemma”, In: *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power*, Editors: Edwin N. Wilmsen and Patric McAllister, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996): 85–103, pp. 95–6.
85. See Komal, *Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları Dava Dosyası*, Volume 1, (Ankara: Kalite Matbaası, 1975). Nationalist Kurdish intelligentsia in the following decades went further. They even claimed that the history of Kurds went back to 12000 BC and all civilizations including Sumerians, and even the Ottoman Empire sprang from the Kurds. See Musa Aydın, *Kürt’ün El Kitabı*, (Köln: Berfin, 2005), pp. 14–45; Öcalan, Özgür İnan Savunması, pp. 24–35 and 108–28; Abdullah Öcalan, *Bir Halkı Savunmak*, (İstanbul: Çetin Yayınları, 2004), pp. 208–215.
86. Bozarlan, *Some Remarks*, p. 14 and 37.
87. Bozarlan, *Some Remarks*, p. 15 and 38.
88. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), p. 72.
89. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 48.

90. Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity*, p. 10.
91. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 1; Securitization theory developed this idea further by showing that security threats do not exist as objective conditions awaiting discovery. Rather, according to securitization theory, it is a socially constructed security process that produces threats. See Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998); Matt McDonald, "Securitization and the Construction of Security", *European Journal of International Relations*, 14(4), 2008: 563–587.
92. Ashley, *Living on the Border Lines*, p. 270; Hansen, *Security as Practice*, p. 34.
93. Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, p. 66.
94. If Freud is right, bodily pain must be the precondition of the discovery of "who we are". For him, "the way in which we gain new knowledge of our organs during painful illnesses is perhaps a model of the way by which in general we arrive at the idea of our own body". See, Freud Sigmund, *The Ego and the Id*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), p. 20; for the idea that pain was/is the driving force behind the formation of contemporary Kurdishness, see Ramazan Aras, *The Formation of Kurdishness in Turkey: Political Violence, Fear and Pain*, (London: Routledge, 2013).
95. Antoine Bousquet, "Time Zero: Hiroshima, September 11 and Apocalyptic Revelations in Historical Consciousness", *Millennium-Journal of International Studies*, 34(3), 2006: 739–764, p. 741.
96. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 66; V. P. Gagnon Jr. reaches the same conclusion in his detailed study of ethnic conflicts in post-Yugoslavia. According to him, "Every group has collective memories of injustice and grievances. The relevant question is what meaning is attributed to those memories; which memories are foregrounded and which are ignored or minimized; when do memories become instrumentalized in order to justify violence; who undertakes such instrumentalization, and to what purposes?" V. P. Gagnon Jr., *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. xvi.
97. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 65.
98. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 66.
99. Ashley, *Living on the Border Lines*, p. 261.
100. See also, Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, p. 83.
101. Abdullah Öcalan, "1975–76 İlk Defa Yazıya Geçirilen PKK Doğuşunun Düşünsel Temelleri", In: *İlk Konuşmalar*, Abdullah Öcalan, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1998): 99–138, p. 121.
102. Martin Van Bruinessen, "Between guerrilla war and political murder: The Workers' Party of Kurdistan", *Middle East Report*, No: 135, 1988: 40–50, p. 42.

103. The establishment of the System of Village Guards (*Köy Korucuları Sistemi*), composed of local Kurdish villagers commanded by the nearest army post and responsible to keep the PKK away from their districts, in the mid-1980s turned a concrete reference for the PKK's discursive argument. Although Kurdish villagers were forced to choose between being part of this system and evacuating their villages by the Turkish state, the PKK framed this system as a sign of the cooperation between internal and external others.
104. For spatiality and temporality in foreign policy discourse, see Hansen, *Security as Practice*, pp. 64–9.
105. Abdullah Öcalan, *Demokratik Toplum Manifestosu*, (Cologne: Mezopotamya Yayınları, 2006), p. 192, quoted in Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, pp. 88–9.
106. Viatcheslav Morozov, and Bahar Rumelili, “The External Constitution of European Identity: Russia and Turkey as Europe-makers”, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 47(1), 2012: 28–48, p. 30; see also, Jutta Weldes, “The Cultural Production of Crises: US Identity and Missiles in Cuba”, In: *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger*, Editors: Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson and Raymond Duvall, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999): 35–62, p. 46.
107. This framing of multiple others was not peculiar to the PKK's discourse. It was widely propagated by all Kurdish movements in the 1970s. For example, Kemal Burkay, who was then in exile in Europe, argued that the Kurds are a dependent nation whose country is “divided by the combined efforts of the imperialist [the US], racist [the Turkish state] and feudal [traditional Kurdish institutions] reactionary forces and which has been forced to live under the yoke” (see, Hevra: Devrimci Türkiye Kürtleri Örgütü, *Türkiye Şartlarına Ters Düşen Bir Tez: Milli Demokratik Devrim*, Zurich: Rohani Yayınları, 1974, p. 28, This pamphlet was later attributed to Kemal Burkay) During many public gatherings organized by Kurdish movements in the 1970s, demonstrators shouted slogans such as “Damn colonialism, imperialism [the US], fascism [the Turkish state] and local reactionaries [traditional Kurdish institutions]”. *KİP/DDKD Davası: Kesinleşmiş Karar*, (Bromma: Jina Nû Yayınları, 2006), p. 134.
108. Ty Solomon, “Time and Subjectivity in World Politics”, *International Studies Quarterly*, 58(4), 2014: 671–681, p. 672.
109. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 82.

## Writing the USA as Imperial Power

A civil society organization, *Halkevi* (People's House),<sup>1</sup> strongly sympathetic to the PKK, joined the Newroz celebration organized in Ankara in 2005. During this conviviality, *Halkevi* General Secretary Mustafa Coşar spoke to the crowd: "We should know that *Dabhak* haunts the Middle East and it represses, subjugates and destructs fraternal peoples of the region in our age. In today's world, the cruel *Dabhak* is American imperialism and its regional collaborators."<sup>2</sup> The demonstrators from *Halkevi* were also carrying a placard that read, "Cruel *Dabhak* is American Imperialism". According to the legend, *Dabhak* was a cruel ruler with snakes coming out of his shoulders. Since the brains of humans fed his snakes, *Dabhak* ordered two young humans to be sacrificed each day. The people escaped to high mountains to hide and their children grew up there in safety. One day, a blacksmith named Kawa whose son was to be killed for snakes turned those people into an army and led them down from the mountains to put an end to evil *Dabhak* and its huge army.<sup>3</sup> The re-inscription of this legend, of course with some revisions and omissions, into the contemporary *Newroz* celebrations turned it into a resistance and identity narrative for the Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. But why did the USA have a central place in speeches and placards during *Newroz* celebrations? How did the narrative equating the USA with *Dabhak* become solidified as a common sense or go right down into the depths of Kurdish society?

Unlike the popular opinion in Turkey according to which the PKK was supported, armed, and trained by the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency, one of the principal intelligence-gathering agencies of the USA),<sup>4</sup> one of the dominant signifiers of the PKK was American imperialism, especially during its founding and early years, namely the late 1970s and 1980s. It was a dominant signifier not only because founding documents of the PKK allocated many pages for the description of US imperialism in order to justify the “armed revolutionary war” against the Turkish state but also because US imperialism functioned as a nodal point by traveling through all other counter-narratives on Kurdish history, the status of woman in Kurdistan, and Kurdish geography. More important, discourse of the PKK regarding US imperialism played a significant role in the reconstruction of Kurdish identity “as a hegemonic ‘resistance subject’ at the expense of other such possible identifications”.<sup>5</sup> This was the case for three reasons. Firstly, it was the centrality of US imperialism in the PKK’s discourse that pitted the post-1980 Kurdish political subject against the Turkish state and traditional Kurdish institutions. Secondly, the delegitimization of the Turkish state and traditional Kurdish institutions through references to US imperialism carved empty spaces from which this new Kurdish political subjects started to speak. Lastly, the post-1980 Kurdish political subject retrospectively filled these empty spaces by speaking on US imperialism and taking to the streets with placards that read “Down with American imperialism”.

Throughout the two decades-plus from the end of the 1970s to the closing years of the twentieth century, the “Kurdish-Nation” was inscribed by the PKK as the subject that has supposedly been wounded by the collaboration between the Turkish-state and the USA for the sake of the latter’s interests in the region. Therefore, the PKK’s anti-Americanism was “an attempt to construct a unified subject over the wounds” that the USA is perceived to have wrought.<sup>6</sup> This centrality of anti-American discourse in the language of the PKK triggers some intriguing questions: How did this foreign policy narrative become solidified as common sense and turn a source of identity for the PKK and the post-1980 Kurdish nationalist subjects? While the Kurdish nationalist movement(s) in Iraq developed a pro-American discourse<sup>7</sup> especially after the 1960s, why did the PKK as a nationalist Kurdish movement vehemently oppose the USA and its policies in the Middle East? Last but not least, why did the PKK not limit its discourse of war with the Turkish state, which is the state that claims sovereignty over the territory the PKK fought for? Consistently

returning to these questions, this chapter attempts to explain why the PKK, first and foremost, emerged as an anti-American movement and how did this particular understanding of the USA come to the fore over other alternative understandings. Or, to be more precise, what the role of perpetual reference to the USA as imperial power or the array of practices/discourses toward the USA was in the justification and functioning of the Kurdish nationalist movement is the main research question. Accordingly, this chapter assumes that the anti-American stance played a significant role in power relations, representational strategies, the production of differences, and the politics of identity, all of which made the very possibility of the PKK's being a sovereign entity and the post-1980 Kurdish political identity.

The PKK's policy toward the USA, however, manifested itself in narratives because the parties had no official relations such as agreements, mutual visits, negotiation, and cooperation, particularly until the first Kurdish party was established in the 1990s. It is critical though to note that narratives are performances like other actual relations and they take role in the production of identities, differences, and power relations. In the extent to which narratives "are remembered and they are capable of finding a place in a chronologically ordered sequence", they can undertake a vital role in the performative constitution of identity, and the consolidation of/challenge to the existing power relations.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, those textual narratives regarding the imperial system led by the USA were widely read by the PKK members and sympathizers since the PKK saw "itself primarily as a teaching and even an educational organization".<sup>9</sup> Although the PKK had some agreements with third actors<sup>10</sup> as a reaction to American policies in the region, studying the PKK's policy toward the USA throughout the 1980s predominantly relies on textual narratives. Turkish-language memoirs of leading Kurdish figures, periodicals, dailies, party documents, and published interviews are useful sources. Of these, the PKK's official journal *Serxwebûn*, which has been published since 1982, represents uninterrupted language of the Kurdish nationalist movement and provides quite important source about the PKK's writing the USA into its resistance against the Turkish state.



## THE RISE OF “KURDISTAN AS COLONY” DISCOURSE

In Turkey, anti-Americanism was the ambient air of the late 1960s mostly because the then US President Lloyd B. Johnson’s letter disappointed the Turkish public opinion.<sup>11</sup> The letter informed Ankara that the NATO alliance would not come to Turkey’s rescue against any Soviet intervention if Turkey acted unilaterally in the Cyprus issue. Especially leftist movements used this latter and the USA’s “neutrality” in the Cyprus crisis between Turkey and Greece as proofs of the fact that the NATO was not in the interest of Turkey but in that of US imperialism. When Kurdish intellectuals and students who had been active in leftist movements in the 1960s established their own independent Kurdish movements such as the DDKO (Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Associations) in 1969, their main discourse about world politics was, unsurprisingly, based on anti-imperialism and anti-Americanism. Despite this continuation, the separation of Kurdish movements from the Turkish left shifted their discourse from economic and cultural demands from the Turkish state to the struggle for national self-determination. Therefore, the Kurdish nationalism was presented as a cure for the plight of the Kurdish people at the hands of the imperialist system led by the USA and its local collaborator, the Turkish state.

The imperialism thesis played a vital role in both framing and normalizing the nationalist turn Kurdish movements experienced in the early 1970s.<sup>12</sup> For example, in the reply to indictment against the DDKO, its members declared the following<sup>13</sup>: “There are irreconcilable contradictions between imperialism and nationalism because *the development of national movements results in the retreat of imperialism*”. This sentence was the reflection of the nationalist turn among leftist Kurds because it indisputably declared that not the unity of workers or oppressed people but an independent Kurdistan could end the imperial rule and colonial exploitation over the Kurdish people. Therefore, this framing of the Kurds’ struggle as a struggle against imperialism had a dramatic impact on the meaning of the Turkish state in the eyes of activist Kurds. Now, the Turkish state was not the interlocutor for economic and cultural demands of the Kurds but the main obstacle before the freedom of the Kurds.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the Turkish state as collaborator of global imperialism could be far worse than global imperialist states since the latter do not annihilate the culture and people of countries under their colonial rule. However, the ultimate aim of a semi-colony state regarding colonized people is to annihilate their

existence as a separate identity and culture.<sup>15</sup> This dramatic shift was very evident in discussions between Kurdish movements and Turkey's mainstream leftist groups during the first half of the 1970s.

The main difference between the Kurdish revolutionary movements and Turkish revolutionary Left was the definition of the Turkish state as colonizer. For example, according to *Dev-Yol*, a popular revolutionary leftist organization in the 1970s, Turkey could not be an imperialist country or colonizer simply because it was already colonized by global imperialism.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, *Dev-Yol* argued against Kurdish movements' colony thesis as the following: "It is absurd to create a difference between a Turkish bourgeoisie standing against a Turkish proletariat, and a Kurdish bourgeoisie standing against a Kurdish proletariat. There is a bourgeoisie of Turkey standing against the proletariat of Turkey. Within the borders of this state, all suppressed classes without differentiating between nations have to struggle against the ruling class who has control over the state."<sup>17</sup> Against this argument, Kurdish movements in the second half of the 1970s such as *Rizgari*, and *Kawa* insisted on the fact that Kurdistan is the colony of a semi-colony Turkey,<sup>18</sup> and provided similar examples such as Eritrea, and Ethiopia in order to prove their counter-arguments.<sup>19</sup> According to *Kawa's* defense submitted to the court, for example, "Kurdistan is not a direct colony of the global imperialism but a colony of semi-colonizer states", Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, "the national aspect of revolution" in Kurdistan, for *Kawa*, had to target both direct colonizers (regional countries) and imperialist states as master of those colonizers.<sup>21</sup> This difference was both the reason behind the separation of Kurdish revolutionary movements from their Turkish counterparts and the manifestation of the nationalist turn among Kurdish movements.<sup>22</sup>

A close reading of primary documents of these Kurdish movements shows that a detailed story about the colonial history of Kurdistan composes the bulk of the Kurdish nationalist narrative at that time. This narrative not only gave rise to a "counter historiography", which was vital for promoting the national self-determination, but it also contributed in the emergence of different Kurdish political subject. The existing historiography allegedly written by the Turkish state and its intellectuals was rejected on the grounds that it aimed at legitimizing the continuation of colonial rule over Kurdistan<sup>23</sup> and was replaced by a counter-narrative based on the perpetual colonization of Kurdistan by outsiders. Put differently, a long and detailed history of colonialism over Kurdistan was told by these leftist revolutionary movements because it was instrumental and functional not

only in legitimizing national independence struggle against the Turkish state but at the same time in rendering the Kurdish nationalist movements as true representatives of the Kurds. Since there is “no power relations without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge”,<sup>24</sup> this knowledge production (counter-historiography) put nationalist Kurdish movements in the position of power, responsible to speak in the name of the Kurds. At the same time, this counter-historiography could exist only because it was the operation of power that made knowledge possible. To use the words of Foucault, the power relations among the Turkish state, Kurdish traditional institutions, and the Kurdish nationalist movements gave “rise to a possible corpus of knowledge” (the “Kurdistan as colony” thesis), and this knowledge extended and reinforced the effects of Kurdish nationalist movements’ power.<sup>25</sup>

The above-mentioned Kurdish movements were not alone in the description of the Turkish state as both colonizer and a collaborator of global US imperialism because the “Kurdistan is a colony” thesis had already turned a hegemonic discourse among all Kurdish movements in the mid-1970s.<sup>26</sup> Under such a hegemonic atmosphere, Abdullah Öcalan and his friends established *Kurdistan Devrimcileri*<sup>27</sup> (the Kurdistan Revolutionaries) in 1975, which would be named as the PKK in the late 1970s. Although founding leaders were influenced by the revolutionary Left in Turkey such as the THKO (the People’s Liberation Army of Turkey) and the THKP-C (the People’s Liberation Party-Front of Turkey),<sup>28</sup> they distinguished themselves from the Turkish Left by presenting the Turkish state as both colonizer and the collaborator of US imperialism. According to *Kurdistan Devrimcileri*, “instead of applying historical materialism to Kurdistan and the existence of Kurds, they [the Left in Turkey] approach the issue as if there is only one country within the borders... For them there is no Kurdistan, only Turkey”.<sup>29</sup> Because of this departure from the revolutionary Turkish Left, not rulers or political system in Turkey but the Turkish state itself became the target of nationalist independence struggle for *Kurdistan Devrimcileri*. To put this point in different terms, it was the definition of Turkey as a colonizer that made the national independence war of the Kurds thinkable and desirable.<sup>30</sup>

Turkey, however, was not a simple colonizer and struggle against the Turkish state was, at the same time, a struggle against the global imperial order led by the USA. In his 1977-speech in Elazığ, for example, Öcalan presented a long and detailed history of imperialism and described the USA as “the last strong imperialist power”.<sup>31</sup> For him, the order

established by the USA in the Middle East region was an order of exploitation in which all regimes including *Kemalist* regime in Turkey were just regional compradors.<sup>32</sup> As this early document indicated, Öcalan's narrative of US imperialism (leftist) was not independent from his narrative of the Turkish state as colonizer (nationalist). Therefore, the PKK's anti-Americanism was formulated and disseminated mostly because this narrative undertook a significant function in the PKK's guerilla war against the Turkish state and its ultimate aim to build a counter-state Kurdish public collectivity. In other words, a detailed history of imperialism in time (the Kurds were colonized throughout history) and space (the Kurds are living in a colonial condition created by the USA and its regional collaborators) in the main documents of the PKK was basically a narrative of grounding the PKK's legitimacy and its fight for independence "in a mission predetermined by universal history".<sup>33</sup>

The rise of anti-American and anti-imperial discourse among organized Kurds in the 1970s clearly proves that its inventor or explorer was not the PKK or another specific Kurdish nationalist movement at that time. Rather, it emerged in its field of operation, where anti-Americanism was not the sole practice.<sup>34</sup> Together with other practices such as re-writing Kurdish history, and the redefinition of the Kurdish space, anti-American discourse undertook a function in the constitution of the new political Kurdish identity by rendering the Turkish nation-state as other. Additionally, discourse on US imperialism also normalized and justified all counter-narratives and practices at the domestic level in the process of constituting new nationalist Kurdish identity. To put it succinctly, discourse on US imperialism made the inscription of domestic counter-practices and discourses against the Turkish state and traditional Kurdish institutions to appear unproblematic and natural. Therefore, "Kurdistan is the colony of the Turkish state and its imperial employers" thesis was reiterated in immense discontinuous network of nationalist "Kurdish" texts ranging from statements on gender to a public speech about environmental issues in the 1980s. This thesis, to use Said's words, functioned as, "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between" the Kurds and their external other, the Turkish state and its imperial employers.<sup>35</sup>

If the "Kurdistan as colony" thesis was so strongly embedded<sup>36</sup> in the PKK's discourse, tracing the evolution of anti-Americanism within the PKK's language can illustrate discursive conditions in which the rise of the PKK to hegemonic position and the construction of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity became possible. To cite an example, the following quo-

tation from M. Can Yüce, one of the PKK's chief ideologues, not only illustrates the centrality of the "Kurdistan as colony" thesis in the construction of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity but also shows how this thesis functioned in rendering the Kurdish nationalist movement, the PKK, hegemonic. According to him, "the phrase 'Kurdistan is a colony' was

the first cement of Kurdistan's revival... The 'Kurdistan is a colony' thesis is a strong projection on our reality that we as a country and people were on the verge of extinction in darkness. This [thesis] was first warming and enlightening rays reaching to the county from *the sun rising from the East* [Abdullah Öcalan]. As the sun rose, movements of enlightenment, habitation, recovery, and revival would multiply; our history would tend to rise.<sup>37</sup>

### TURKEY AS SUBSERVIENT OF US IMPERIALISM

As argued before, the PKK discursively emerged as a movement that defined itself with a strong reference to American imperialism. Anti-Americanism functioned as both "a nodal point"<sup>38</sup> around which the meanings of the PKK's other concepts were fixed and the reference point by which identity and difference were constructed. In the PKK's foundation manifesto declared in 1978, the history of colonialism in general and American imperialism in particular was widely analyzed and it reached the conclusion that "American imperialism is the enemy of all Middle Eastern peoples". Accordingly, the foundation manifesto claimed, "the PKK believes that without the end of the order established by primarily the USA, other imperialist powers and their regional collaborators, it is not possible to establish a peaceful and cooperative environment based on equality and freedom among Middle Eastern nations".<sup>39</sup> The foundation manifesto also postulates that the main regional collaborators of American imperialism are Zionism, Kemalism, and religious movements.<sup>40</sup> Among these collaborators, Kemalism—decades-long official state ideology in Turkey—was allegedly an ideal type for other collaborators in terms of consolidating American imperialism and eliminating all revolutionary powers fighting against the colonization and exploitation of different peoples in the region.<sup>41</sup>

US imperialism, in the discourse of the PKK, was the successor of the British imperialism in the period after "the second imperialist war of distribution", namely the Second World War. "In order to sustain the capitalist

system, which is on the brink of collapse in the age of socialism and national liberation revolutions”, the USA emerged as the main imperial power.<sup>42</sup> Neo-colonialism, therefore, “emerged as a counter-revolutionary movement in order to prevent the development of proletarian and national liberation revolutions and to terminate the age of revolutions”.<sup>43</sup> The primary aim of the USA in suppressing revolutionary powers, according to Öcalan, was to tie existing countries to itself in a neo-colonial system and to keep the imperialist-capitalist system functioning.<sup>44</sup> In suppressing and defeating revolutionary powers, the main strategy of US imperialism was to establish strong states/armies all around the world as collaborators. The most important of them, for the PKK, was created in Turkey as a military-fascist junta after long and detailed discussions among imperialist generals in the USA about how to prevent revolutionary powers such as the PKK and restore the capitalist system.<sup>45</sup> This way of reading world politics, indisputably targets, over and above everything else, the legitimacy of the Turkish state as the “true” representative of its own people, including Kurdish-origin citizens.

In this representation of the imperial system, the role of Turkey, according to the PKK, was being the puppet of US imperialism in the pursuit of the latter’s rule over the Middle East. Accordingly, the 12 September 1980 coup in Turkey was framed as the main concrete event proving the claim of the PKK about the role of the Turkish state in the imperial system.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, after the coup, the PKK increased the degree of its counter-narrative based on the collaboration thesis between American imperialism and the Turkish state/army. In a 1982-dated article published by the PKK’s official journal *Serxwebûn*, this collaboration was analyzed as follows: “The hegemony of the Turkish bourgeoisie... is based on American imperialism. In Turkey, a new colony of American imperialism, a militarist-fascist rule has been assigned to the government due to American interests in the Middle East.” Therefore, it is not coincidence that a militarist-fascist dictatorship emerged as “a loyal partisan and puppet of American imperialism” in Turkey.<sup>47</sup> For this very reason, according to the PKK, the main task of “the 12 September regime”, which was created as a counter-revolutionary power by the USA was to prevent revolutionary movements including Kurdish national liberation movements in order to restore and consolidate American imperialism in the region.<sup>48</sup> Because “the fascist junta” with its Kemalist ideology was a servant of US imperialism and it is not in the interest of its own citizens including even Turkish people, the

PKK often called the Turkish state as an enemy not only for the Kurdish people but also for the Turkish people.<sup>49</sup>

This pedagogical narrative in the PKK's texts was consolidated and solidified by performativity of Kurdish prisoners tortured and forced to say "Happy is the man who calls himself a Turk" (*Ne mutlu Türküm diyene*) in the notorious Diyarbakir prison. When Mazlum Doğan, the PKK's central committee member, committed suicide on 21 March 1982, hegemonic language of resistance in prison was anti-imperialism. Almost two months after Doğan's self-scarification, four other PKK prisoners burned themselves to death and left behind a letter ending with slogans such as "Damn with Turkish Colonialism and Imperialism", and "Long Live the Struggle of Independent Kurdistan".<sup>50</sup> The first issue of *Berxwedan*, PKK's another journal in Kurdish language, appeared with a front cover carrying two photos. While the first one was from Diyarbakir Prison, in which prisoners crouch in front of a wall with a graffiti that says, "Damn with Colonialism", the second one was of armed guerillas.<sup>51</sup> This image was so powerful in the sense that it defined who the enemy of the Kurds was and who the real representative of the Kurds, at one stroke. The back cover of the same issue bears a picture representing the cooperation between the Turkish state and imperial powers in turning Diyarbakir Prison into a bloody place for the Kurds. Like PKK's top figures and supporters in Diyarbakir prison, subsequent deaths of PKK militants were narrated as martyrs of the PKK's anti-imperial and anti-colonial war.

For the PKK, American imperialism was a sort of "the theory of everything" when it came to the Turkish state. The transition to democracy in 1983 was also presented as the project of US imperialism aiming to restore and consolidate its eroding power/image in the Middle East region. Therefore, US imperialism had to change a "frazzled" 12 September regime with a polished civilian one as it did in other collaborator countries such as Spain, Portugal, and the Philippines.<sup>52</sup> Not surprisingly, Öcalan described all Turkish politicians from Turgut Özal to Süleyman Demirel and all legal political movements in Turkey as the project of US imperialism.<sup>53</sup> This narrative undertook two significant functions. On the one hand, targeting the Turkish state was legitimized and justified because not the regime (be it military regime or democratic system) but the Turkish state itself was the puppet of US imperialism. On the other hand, depicting all political actors and movements as tools or "puppets" of US imperialism automatically left the Kurdish nationalist movement as the true and real representative of the region's and the Kurds' interests. For example,

although the strategy of US imperialism, according to Öcalan, worked in other collaborator countries, it would not work in the Turkish case because “the Kurdistan reality” had already planted a deep fear for the regime in Turkey.<sup>54</sup>

Even when Western countries pressured the Turkish state for reforms regarding Kurdish rights such as lifting the ban on the Kurdish language in the second half of the 1980s, these reforms were attributed to the aim of US imperialism to save its vital outpost, the Turkish state, in the Middle East from an impending collapse. Öcalan framed those pressures on the Turkish state by US imperialism and its European counterparts as “Kurdism (*Kürtçülük*) in the form of autonomy and self-rule” and condemned their “yes to the Kurdish problem, no to the PKK” policy on the grounds that the ultimate aim of the new imperial policy was to kill the Kurdish state before its birth.<sup>55</sup> Since the main target of imperialism is to divorce nationalist movements from “their revolutionary nature, and national identity”, and turn them into docile bodies, the real intention of the US governments in pressuring the Turkish state regarding reforms for Kurdish rights, for Öcalan, was to save its collaborator from what was inevitable, an outrageous collapse at the hands of the PKK.<sup>56</sup> Again, while the PKK was presented as the only actor who could destroy this insidious imperial design<sup>57</sup> against the emancipation of the Kurds, the Turkish state, on the contrary, was framed as an actor controlled, designed, and even ruled by imperial powers.

This discourse of the PKK not only targeted the legitimacy of the Turkish state, but it also associated all other Kurdish groups with this imperial design on the grounds that those groups were in collaboration with the USA in killing the Kurdish state before its birth.<sup>58</sup> Comparing alternative Kurdish groups to “fake nationalist movements” established by US imperialism in order to destroy real nationalist groups in Albania, Angola, and Nicaragua, Öcalan often claimed that the ultimate aim of alternative Kurdish groups demanding improvement of Kurdish cultural rights and autonomy was to restore and strengthen the rule of US imperialism over the Kurdistan region in particular and the Middle East in general.<sup>59</sup> In his detailed analysis titled “On National-cultural Autonomy Project of Imperialism and Its Collaborators” in April 1989, Öcalan described the relation between imperialism and its Kurdish collaborators as follows:

Leaders of Kurdish institutes [in the West] are sort of myrmidon brain-washed by countries where those institutes are established. They have no



relations with their own country and people, let alone with humanity.... They were prepared as ambiguous spy behind closed doors. They were turned into puppets. They were tempted with a promise ‘keep away from the PKK... and get a cultural autonomy’. They are [tools] of tactical projects aiming to eliminate the PKK from the Kurdish movement and to impose a thought based on the Kurdish question without the PKK... To realize this pseudo solution, KOMKAR<sup>60</sup> was promoted.<sup>61</sup>

In order to legitimize its hegemonic position in representing the Kurds, the PKK applied the “US imperialism” thesis, according to which other Kurdish groups and movements, competitive against the PKK in terms of representing the Kurdish people, are only part of comprador class in Kurdistan. For example, when some exiled Kurdish figures and other Kurdish movements such as TKSP (*Türkiye Kürdistanı Sosyalist Partisi*, Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan) criticized the PKK for not being democratic and the real representative of the Kurds,<sup>62</sup> the PKK condemned them as the mouthpiece of global imperialism. Since “all these figures have an artificial personhood shaped by the CIA” and the Turkish intelligence, “what is done in the name of political solution and democratic solution is to secure the interests of Europe and imperialism”.<sup>63</sup> Through this exclusionary discourse based on the cooperation between other Kurdish movements and US imperialism, the PKK rendered itself being a unique movement in taking responsibility for the emancipation of the Kurds from the “colonial oppression”. Because other Kurdish movements and figures are just collaborators of US imperialism in the pursuit of the latter’s interest in the Middle East and Kurdistan, the PKK and its leadership automatically emerged as “vital” to “the existence of the Kurdish people” and “for a revolution” freeing the Kurds from oppression.<sup>64</sup>

Similarly, the Kurds who fought against the PKK along with the Turkish state were accused of being tools of the imperial system. The village guard system was established in April 1985 by the Turkish state in order to “enable villages to defend themselves against attacks from the PKK”.<sup>65</sup> Despite its controversial effects such as further militarization of the Kurdish area, and turning the Kurds into a paramilitary force of the Turkish state, many Kurds joined the village guard system voluntarily mostly because the PKK targeted influential Kurdish landlords and Kurdish tribes during the 1980s. However, the PKK presented village guard system as a new tactic of US imperialism not of the Turkish state in defeating the Kurdish liberation movement. The PKK likened the village

guard system to paramilitary forces in Vietnam whose main aim allegedly was to defeat Vietnam's national revolutionary army fighting against the US invasion.<sup>66</sup> Experienced in establishing paramilitary force against anti-imperial national movements all around the world, the USA, according to the PKK, proposed the same tactic to the Turkish government. Öcalan claimed that the brain behind this new tactic was Paul Henze, then a CIA and National Security Council specialist in psychological operations.<sup>67</sup> According to this associative logic, any cooperation with the Turkish state against the PKK would make the Kurds the agent and servant of US imperialism automatically.

When Öcalan and other PKK actors spoke about cooperation between US imperialism and the Turkish state/other Kurdish groups, this narrative undertook two significant functions in terms of contemporary Kurdish nationalism in general and the PKK in particular. Through a discourse on US imperialism, the PKK not only differentiated itself from the Turkish state and other Kurdish groups, but it also delegitimized the hegemonic state representation and all competing Kurdish representations. For the PKK, the core of the regime in Turkey was "being part of capitalist-imperialist system" as advised in Turkey's founding leader Atatürk's instruction "to achieve the level of contemporary civilization".<sup>68</sup> Like the Turkish state, all alternative Kurdish groups, be they revolutionary or reconciliatory, were accused of being collaborator and opportunist in ending the march of the Kurds toward independence under the leadership of the PKK. Therefore, the PKK differentiated its position from that of the Turkish state and of all other Kurdish groups by presenting itself as the real contender to the capitalist-imperialist system led by the USA. Put differently, speaking on US imperialism took a significant role in creating the difference, vital for the constitution of the PKK as an institutional power playing across bodies and souls of the Kurds and producing the new truths on being Kurdish.

On the other hand, the PKK delegitimized the Turkish state and all other Kurdish political movements by depicting them as entities designed, shaped, directed, and controlled by American imperialism for the latter's interest in the Middle East region.<sup>69</sup> More importantly, this delegitimizing discourse involved also fixing the meaning of the Turkish state around negative labels such as subordinate, inferior, non-sovereign, servant for the USA, and not in the public interest. Therefore, speaking on American imperialism was the reaffirmation of the PKK's claim that the Turkish state was not in the interest of its own people and a nationalist independence war based on Marxist-Leninist revolution was a must in order to liberate

the people, especially the most oppressed Kurds. As a result, the delegitimization of existing representations by presenting them as the project of US imperialism targets the identificatory relationship between the Kurdish people and the Turkish state or other Kurdish groups. Without the disidentification of the Kurdish subjects with either the Turkish state or other Kurdish groups, it was impossible to impose a new identificatory relationship between the PKK and the Kurdish people.

### RESPONSIBILITY IN RESISTANCE AGAINST IMPERIALISM

The “Turkey as the puppet of US imperialism” discourse does not say so much about what dictated the PKK the obligation of saving the Kurdish people or how emancipatory duties were inscribed on the PKK. Put differently, the discourse of suspicion on the part of the Kurds over the fact that the Turkish state represents the interests of its own citizens was insufficient without the discourse of trust over the PKK as the “real” representative of Kurdish interests. Therefore, the PKK had to situate itself in a resistance position against US imperialism for the interests of the Kurdish people in Turkey. However, this spatial location of the PKK against US imperialism had to be consolidated by a temporal location of the PKK, through which the PKK emerged as the latest representative of resistance in the history of the Kurds. Through the discourse of an “unbroken continuity leading to the first warriors who stood against” all imperialist oppressors throughout history,<sup>70</sup> the legitimacy and cultural primacy of the nationalist PKK among the Kurds was sealed. During the formation years of the PKK, therefore, the liberation narrative against US imperialism in the Middle East coincided with the narrative over the historical evolution of the Kurdish struggle against all imperial oppressors.

The historical narratives told by the PKK, however, are contradictory with the “proud of being Kurd”, which is vital in the construction of national identity. Why have the Kurds, unlike other nations, kept failing to gain independence if their history is so ancient, dating to the Meds in the tenth century BC and they are a self-respecting society? The imperial oppressions attributed to the Arabs, the Turks, the British, and the Americans, respectively, played a significant role in overcoming this internal contradiction of the PKK’s discourse. In the founding manifesto, the PKK asked the same question and proposed a solution to this contradiction. According to the PKK’s discourse, the main reason behind the perpetual failure of the Kurds to gain their own independence is the fact that

“enemies are too strong”.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, the oppression of the Turkish state over the Kurds had to be strongly linked to the contemporary imperial power, the USA, in order to defer the sense of defeat and failure at the hands of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) among the PKK members in particular and the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects in general.<sup>72</sup> For this very reason, the trust on the PKK as the real representative of the Kurds continued despite some major military losses. For example, Öcalan used the “enemies are too strong” thesis (the Turkish army supported by the NATO)<sup>73</sup> in explaining the failure of the PKK’s further success in the Botan insurgency in the 1980s.

It is true that the PKK’s discourse of US imperialism played a significant role in deferral of responsibility the PKK undertook. Through the “too strong enemy” discourse, the PKK attributed a vital role to US imperialism in deferring all objections and questionings regarding the legitimacy of the PKK and its hegemonic position. However, as important as its deferring function, the US imperialism discourse was vital in the production of responsibility attached to the PKK. Accordingly, the PKK described its armed struggle as an independence war against US imperialism and its regional collaborators. Why was US imperialism the target of such a national independence war, which is supposed to be against the allegedly invading power, the Turkish state and its local collaborators, traditional Kurdish institutions, and reconciliatory Kurdish political groups? The meaning and necessity of the war against US imperialism was explained by Öcalan as follows:

The powers, which would destroy the imperialist siege from its weakest link, are national independence movements. Only the enduring resistance of these movements all around the world and especially in the Middle East can destroy weakest links of imperialism... If the reality of peoples who are against imperialism and followers of revolutionary ambitions emerge in the Middle East, a region without which imperialism would stagger, restraining imperialism all around the world will be easier.<sup>74</sup>

Because of their vital function in ending imperialism and colonial exploitation, national independence movements in the Middle East, for Öcalan, were at the target of imperialist powers, especially the USA.<sup>75</sup> According to nationalist Kurds, the obvious proof of the fact that the PKK’s real fight was against US imperialism was the existence of *Çevik Kuvvetler* (the Rapid Deployment Force) in Turkish territories. As part of NATO deals

and other bilateral agreements in the 1950s, the USA established air bases, monitoring systems, and rapid deployment forces in some Turkish cities including Diyarbakır.<sup>76</sup> However, these deployments, in the discourse of the PKK, not only proved the fact that Turkey was the collaborator of US imperialism but they also made the guerilla fight of the PKK a war against US imperialism. In early documents of the PKK, *Çevik Kuvvetler* was described as auxiliary power unit, which US imperialism would use in case its collaborators in the Middle East failed to prevent national independence war of the Kurds.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, the main task of *Çevik Kuvvetler* was to guarantee the survival and continuation of colonial and imperial order in the Middle East and Kurdistan region.

The reference to US imperialism in describing the war against the Turkish state and traditional Kurdish forces was a discursive strategy, through which the PKK not only, as explained before, delegitimized any steps taken by the Turkish state and other Kurdish actors, but it also pursued and consolidated the PKK's position as a responsible actor. This is so because the only way to present the PKK's own particular aims as the ones that are compatible with the whole Kurdish community was its discursive ability to overthrow a repressive regime or imperial oppression over the Kurds.<sup>78</sup> To put it succinctly, the US imperialism discourse had two significant functions during the 1980s. Firstly, the PKK situated itself in a responsible position by framing its war as a war against the "real" enemy, the colonial order led by the USA. Only an actor capable of fighting against this real enemy can bring the Kurds from a "cadaver status" to life. Secondly, as explained before, the PKK was able to exclude other competing alternative movements from its responsible position through the discourse of the cooperation between these alternative movements and US imperialism for the latter's interest in the Middle East. Therefore, the US imperialism discourse played a significant role in the creation of responsibility attached to the PKK.

The main war of the PKK and its predecessors, according to nationalist Kurds, has not been against regional weak states such as the late Ottoman Empire and Turkey but against imperial great powers such as the British Empire and the USA. If the main role of the Turkish state or the military-fascist junta established by the 1980 military coup was to prevent and suppress revolutionary movements, the main power behind this suppression, according to the PKK, was US imperialism. In this discourse, the PKK emerged as the "only actor capable of carrying out a revolution" against American imperialism and its main servant in the region, the

Turkish military-bourgeoisie.<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, the PKK presented itself as the main obstacle before the absolute hegemony of American imperialism and its “puppet Turkish state” in the region<sup>80</sup> and as the “vanguard” of a new “October revolution” in the Middle East, which could save the peoples of the region from capitalist/imperialist system.<sup>81</sup> In other words, the PKK introduced itself as the most effective barrier before the realization of imperialist designs in the Middle East and Kurdistan.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, the PKK tied its local fight against the Turkish state to global imperialist order and every strike against the Turkish army was presented as “a slap to the NATO and its imperialist system”.<sup>83</sup>

As Levinas taught us, responsibility is “the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity”.<sup>84</sup> This is the point where the way of emancipation from one form of power (imperialism and colonialism) leads to a new form of power (nationalism) since undertaking responsibility in resistance against oppressor inevitably privileges some actor(s) over others. This is so because the following questions have to be answered during resistance: Who or which movement will save the Kurds from oppression and slavery? Which narrative/ideology is the best in animating docile Kurdish individuals toward resistance against colonizers, imperialists, and collaborators? What will be the relation between Kurdish individuals that do and do not engage in resistance? Therefore, the imagination of the USA as the imperial oppressor over the Kurds not only constructs the PKK as the leading and legitimate actor of resistance, and justifies national independence based on Marxist-Leninist revolution, but it also provides necessary excuses in excluding all alternative movements aiming to save the Kurds. Put differently, the PKK’s discourse of resistance against US imperialism in the 1980s delegitimized the existing state of which Kurds are citizen, excluded alternative Kurdish groups by labeling them as collaborators, or traitors, and put the PKK at the center of power in the mobilization of Kurds toward a new identity.

Unlike internal and external enemies, the symbolic enemy, US imperialism, made the target of the PKK’s guerilla war insuperable. This “too strong” nature of the enemy increased the burden of responsibility, which required a more devoted personality to the PKK’s cause.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, the death of PKK militants was framed as a necessary self-sacrifice “in order to change the destiny of” the Kurdish people colonized by imperial powers and their local collaborators and enslaved by the capitalist system.<sup>86</sup> This discourse found its maxim in the title of Öcalan’s written statement in January 1991: “If the People is Slave, Only Martyrs Can Set Them

Free”.<sup>87</sup> Practically, this frame of responsibility increased the number of people taking part in the armed struggle. But more importantly, shouldering the responsibility to end American imperialism in the region not only rendered the PKK being the main center of power but also turned it as the main reference for the Kurdish people in the construction of their individual political subjectivities. Therefore, the PKK often claimed that “the road from nothingness to freedom” for the Kurdish people was constructed by the PKK’s fundamental war against the Turkish state in particular and the imperialist system in general.<sup>88</sup> The role of resistance in the constitution of new Kurdish political subjectivity was clearly emphasized by Öcalan himself as follows:

The PKK movement is a movement, determined in the struggle against... policies aiming to destroy a people along with its history and societal values. The PKK movement is a movement composed of individuals, who are... determined to live as a progressive species, a species of humanity, in Kurdistan, who believe that the advance on the path of humanization is feasible only through *every sign of life which is created in the course of the resistance* against this barbarian [the Turkish state], and aware that *only on this basis can national and social identity be attained*; who reorder and remold all aspects of their life in accordance with these exigencies.<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, Öcalan, in his analysis after the establishment of Kurdistan National Liberation Front (*Eniye Rizgariye Navata Kurdistan*, ERNK), described the two competing pictures of Kurdistan as follows: “Instead of a dark Kurdistan, from which imperialism and local reactionary forces benefit, the creation of a [socialist] Kurdistan will bring many profits to humanity.”<sup>90</sup> Of course, for Öcalan and the PKK, the path from the first Kurdistan to the second one is passable only through the PKK’s revolutionary war (resistance) and martyrs fallen during this war. By promising to cut the Kurds’ political ties with global imperialism led by the USA, destroy colonial structure, and eliminate local comprador class, the PKK was undertaking a great responsibility, which was vital in constructing a new Kurdish national identity.<sup>91</sup> Since only coming together around the PKK would end the tragic history of the Kurds, full of slavery and exploitation, the establishment of the PKK was described as a turning point for the resurrection and emancipation of the Kurds.<sup>92</sup> For this reason, being Kurdish means the protection, and promotion of values created by martyrs.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, the post-1980 Kurdish political identity became

characterized by its admiration of the PKK, which conducted the independence war against the Turkish state in particular and US imperialism in general, and of martyrs who sacrificed themselves in liberating the Kurdish people from their centuries-old slavery and oppressed status.

## NOTES

1. Originally founded by the Kemalist regime in the 1930s in order to consolidate and legitimize the new republican regime, Halkevleri (plural) were reinvigorated as cultural and political centers of the Kurdish national movement in the 1990s. See MacDowall, *A Modern History*, p. 548.
2. “Newroz’da Kawa’nın özgürlük ateşi birkez daha yakıldı!”, [halkevleri.org.tr](http://halkevleri.org.tr), 20 March 2015.
3. Aydın, *Mobilising the Kurds in Turkey*, pp. 72–3.
4. See, for example, Can Dündar, “İşte Kanıt”, *Milliyet*, 23 January 2003, p. 1 and 17. In this report, *Milliyet* published a photograph, in which four top commanders of the PKK and an American military personnel sit on the grass, as a proof for the cooperation between the USA and the PKK. Can Dündar, “ABD PKK ile 6 Kez Görüştü”, *Milliyet*, 21 January 2013, p. 1 and 20; See also, Bilal N. Şimşir, *Kürtçülük II, 1924–1999*, (İstanbul: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2009), Chapter 4; A. B. Hakkı Çin, *ABD’nin Kürt Sorununa Yaklaşımı ve Stratejisi*, (Ankara: Türkiye Fikir Ajanı, 1988); M. Hüseyin Buzoğlu, *Körfez Krizi ve PKK*, (Ankara: Strateji Yayınları, 1996), pp. 134–145.
5. Bloom, *The Power of Safe Resistance*, p. 227.
6. Solomon, *Time and subjectivity*, p. 79.
7. Mehmet Ali Birand, *APO ve PKK*, (İstanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1992), p. 69; see also, Marianna Charountaki, *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy: International Relations in the Middle East since 1945*, (London: Routledge, 2010).
8. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 20.
9. Grojean, *The Production of the New Man*, p. 5.
10. The PKK leaders paid visits to Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon and signed some official/written agreements with Kurdish groups in Iraq and Palestinian movements in Lebanon throughout the 1980s.
11. See İsmet Giritli, “Turkey since the 1965 Elections”, *The Middle East Journal*, 23(3), 1969: 351–363, p. 354; Jacob M. Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*, (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 27–9.



12. For the nationalist turn anti-colonial and anti-imperial movements experienced in the second half of the twentieth century, see Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
13. Komal, Devrimci Doğu Kültür, p. 137; Italics are mine.
14. Kemal Burkay, with the pseudonym of Hıdır Murat, formulated this idea in his book titled “*Salvation Struggle of the Kurdish People in the Conditions of Turkey*” in 1973. Hıdır Murat, *Türkiye Şartlarında Kürt Halkının Kurtuluş Mücadelesi*, (Zurich: Ronahi, 1973). Burkay and his friends further developed this idea in *Özgürlük Yolu*, the political journal of the TKSP (Türkiye Kürdistanı Sosyalist Partisi, Kurdistan Socialist Party of Turkey).
15. See, for example, İsmail Beşikçi, *Devletler Arası Sömürge Kürdistan*, (Bonn: Weşanên Rewşen, 1990), p. 34 and 64; Abdullah Öcalan, *Tarih Günümüzde Gizli ve Biz Tarihin Başlangıcında Gibiyiz*, (İstanbul: Aram Yayınları, 2000), p. 67.
16. The only revolutionary (not Kurdish) leftist group advocating that Kurdistan is the colony of Turkey was Kurtuluş, later renamed TKKKÖ (Türkiye ve Kuzey-Kurdistan Kurtuluş Örgütü, the Liberation Organization of Turkey and Northern Kurdistan). According to Kurtuluş, “the relation between Turkey and Kurdistan is a relation of colonizer-colonized” and therefore the independence of Kurdistan could be a solution for this exploitation. Mesut Yeğen, *Müstakbel-Türk'ten Sözde-Vatandaş: Cumhuriyet ve Kürtler*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006), pp. 178–9.
17. “Türkiye’de Kürt Meselesi ve Devrimci Hareketin Görevleri”, *Devrimci Yol*, Volume: 9, 19 September 1977, p. 10.
18. Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, p. 83; see also, Raşit Kısacık, *Rizgari ve Ala Rizgari*, (İstanbul: Ozan Yayıncılık, 2010).
19. KİP/DDKD Davası, p. 145; Jongerden and Akkaya, *The Kurdistan Workers Party and a New Left*, p. 8.
20. Cemil Gündoğan, *Kawa Davası Savunması ve Kürtlerde Siyasi Savunma Geleneği*, (İstanbul: Vate Yayınevi, 2007), p. 471.
21. Gündoğan, *Kawa Davası Savunması*, p. 473.
22. The framing and legitimizing of the nationalist turn among Kurdish groups traversed through time from the 1970s to the early 1990s, when the PKK gave up the claim for an independent Kurdish state. Even in as late as 1992, Öcalan framed and legitimized the PKK’s national independence struggle with the same argument. For him, “it is very clear that being determined in anti-Americanism and anti-imperialism necessitates demolishing the outpost” and therefore the collapse of the Turkish state as an outpost of American imperialism was the primary task in defeating

- the US imperialism in the Middle East. Abdullah Öcalan, *Sanat Edebiyat ve Kürt Aydınlanması*, (İstanbul: Çetin Yayınları, 2003), p. 27.
23. Beşikçi, *Devletler Arası Sömürge*, p. 28; For Beşikçi's central role in the production of Kurdish counter historiography, See, Bozarslan, *Türkiye'de Kürt Sol Hareketi*, p. 1181.
  24. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 27.
  25. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 29.
  26. Beşikçi, *Devletler Arası Sömürge*, p. 11.
  27. This group is also known as Apocular (followers of Apo) and Ulusal Kurtuluş Ordusu (National Liberation Army).
  28. For the influence of leftist revolutionary movements on *Kürdistan Devrimcileri* and later the PKK, see Joost Jongerden and Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya, "Born From the Left: The Making of the PKK", In: *Nationalism and Politics in Turkey: Political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish Issue*, Editors: Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden, (London: Routledge, 2011): 123–142.
  29. Jongerden and Akkaya, *The Kurdistan Workers Party and a New Left*, p. 10.
  30. For example, Ismail Besikci, a Turkish sociologist who propagated the "Kurdistan is a colony" thesis, comes to the conclusion that the guerilla war should be evaluated as a way to destroy colonialism over the Kurdish region. See Beşikçi, *Devletler Arası Sömürge*, p. 63.
  31. Abdullah Öcalan, "1977 Elazığ Konuşması", In: *İlk Konuşmalar*, Abdullah Öcalan, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1998), p. 44.
  32. Öcalan, 1977 Elazığ Konuşması, pp. 46–7 and 83.
  33. Laclau, *Introduction*, p. 1.
  34. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 24.
  35. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 2.
  36. According to Özcan, these two terms (Kurdistan, and colony) "were what Öcalan always refers to when he says: 'I began with two words', which he regards as the 'key words' for initiating the struggle for national liberation". Ali Kemal Özcan, *Turkey's Kurds: A Theoretical Analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 80.
  37. M. Can Yüce, *Doğu'da Yükselen Güneş*, Volume I, (İstanbul: Zela Yayınları, 1999), p. 120.
  38. Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, p. 125; Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 102.
  39. PKK, *Kuruluş Bildirgesi*, 3rd Edition, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebun, 1984), p. 39.
  40. PKK, *Kuruluş Bildirgesi*, p. 19.
  41. "12 Eylül Faşist Rejimi 4. Yılına Giren Genel Durum, Sorunlar ve Görevlerimiz", *Serxwebûn*, Ekim 1983, No: 22, p. 13.

42. Abdullah Öcalan, *Kürdistan'da İşbirlikçi İhanet ve Devrimci Direniş*, (İstanbul: Zagros Yayınları, 1993), p. 117-8; Mazlum Doğan, *Toplu Yazılar*, 2nd Edition, (Köln: Weşanen Serxwebun, 1994), pp. 152-3.
43. Öcalan, *Kürdistan'da İşbirlikçi İhanet*, p. 118; Doğan, *Toplu Yazılar*, p. 153.
44. Öcalan, *Kürdistan'da İşbirlikçi İhanet*, p. 118.
45. Öcalan, *Kürdistan'da İşbirlikçi İhanet*, p. 119.
46. See Yüce, *Doğu'da Yükselen Güneş*, Volume II, pp. 441-5; while Öcalan praises Yüce's book, he also criticizes it on the grounds that it includes some important misinformation. See Öcalan, *Sanat Edebiyat*, p. 168.
47. "Türk Burjuvazisinin Zor Sistemi, Kemalizm ve 12 Eylül (3)", *Serxwebûn*, Haziran 1982, No: 6, p. 8; Öcalan, *Kürdistan'da İşbirlikçi İhanet*, p. 119-20; Dursun Ali Küçük, "Türkiye ve Kürdistan'ı ABD Güdümlü Özel Harp Dairesi Yönetiyor", *Serxwebûn*, Aralık 1990, No: 108.
48. "ABD Jandarmalığı Rolü Öne Çıkıyor", *Serxwebûn*, Nisan 1983, No: 16, p. 19; "Türk Faşist Cuntası Uşaklığın Çukurunda", *Serxwebûn*, Mayıs 1983, No: 17, p. 22; Doğan, *Toplu Yazılar*, p. 230.
49. "Sömürgeci-Faşist Türk Devleti ve Dostları, Türkiye-Kürdistan Halkları ve Sosyalizm Güçlerinin Ortak Düşmanıdır", Ocak 1984, No: 25, p. 7.
50. Selim Cürükkaya, *Eylül Karanlığında Diyarbakır Şafağı*, (Berlin: Druck und Verlag, 2013), p. 466.
51. *Berxwedan*, Nisan 1983, Hejmar: 1, p. 1.
52. Abdullah Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: II, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1986), pp. 190-2.
53. Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: II, pp. 192-4.
54. Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: II, p. 192.
55. Abdullah Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: V, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1992), p. 24.
56. Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: V, p. 25; Abdullah Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: IV, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1989), pp. 135-6.
57. Öcalan equates "the Kurdish issue to the liberation movement led by the PKK". Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: V, p. 25; "Hiçbir Güç Bağımsızlık ve Halk Demokrasisi için PKK Öncülüğünde İlerleyen Kürdistan Halkının Mücadelesini Durduramaz!", *Serxwebûn*, Nisan 1990, No: 100, p. 28.
58. Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: V, p. 25; "Şanlı 15 Ağustos Atılımının 4. Yılı Halkımıza Kutlu Olsun", *Serxwebûn*, Ağustos 1987, No: 68, p. 24.
59. Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: V, p. 25; "Faşist-Sömürgeci Türk Devletini Çıkmaza Sokan 15 Ağustos Devrimci Atılımı, Ulusal Kurtuluş ve Demokrasi Mücadelesinin Gerçek Ölçütüdür", *Serxwebûn*, Ağustos 1987, Special Issue: 12: 2-6, p. 6.

60. KOMKAR (Union of Associations from Kurdistan) had close relations with the Kurdistan Socialist Party led by Kemal Burkay who was very critical of the PKK and its methods.
61. Öcalan, Seçme Yazılar, Volume: V, pp. 39–40.
62. For a critique of the PKK by an exiled Kurdish political figure, see Kemal Burkay, *Devrimcilik mi Terörizm mi? PKK Üzerine*, (N.P.: Özgürlük Yolu Yayınları, 1983).
63. Öcalan, Kürdistan’da İşbirlikçi İhanet, p. 347 and 344; Abdullah Öcalan, *PKK IV Kongresi’ne Sunulan Politik Rapor*, (İstanbul: Aydınlar Matbaası, 1993), p. 63; Öcalan, Seçme Yazılar, Volume: V, p. 39. According to the PKK, they are contemporary successors of old collaborators such as İdris Bitlisi who allegedly cooperated with the Ottoman Empire in the colonization of Kurdistan. For a detailed historical narrative about “feudal collaborators”, see İsmail Beşikçi, *Doğu Anadolu’nun Düzeni: Sosyo Ekonomik ve Etnik Temeller*, (Ankara: Yurt-Kitap yayınları, 1992); Öcalan approves Beşikçi’s analysis on the colonization of Kurdistan. See Öcalan, Seçme Yazılar, Volume: V, p. 339.
64. Öcalan, Kürdistan’da İşbirlikçi İhanet, p. 345 and 352.
65. Kirişçi, and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, p. 129.
66. “‘Köy Korucuları’ ya da ‘Yeni Hamidiye Alayları’”, *Serxwebûn*, Temmuz 1985, No: 43, p. 18.
67. Öcalan, Seçme Yazılar, Volume: II, p. 185.
68. “Türk Burjuvazisinin Zor Sistemi, Kemalizm ve 12 Eylül (3)”, *Serxwebûn*, Haziran 1982, No: 6, p. 8.
69. “ABD-Türk Ortak Savunma Gurubu: Çevik Kuvvetler ve Kürdistan’daki Gelişmeler”, *Serxwebûn*, Aralık 1982, No: 12, p. 16; “Faşizme ve Ulusal Baskı Sistemine Karşı Ortak Mücadele’nin Sorunları (FKBDC- Genel Komite 2. Toplantısına Sunulan PKK Raporu)”, *Serxwebûn*, Şubat 1983, no. 14, p. 8 “Özal Hükümeti Yangından Mal mı Kaçırıyor?”, *Serxwebûn*, Ocak 1984, No: 25, p. 11.
70. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 197.
71. Öcalan, Kürdistan Devriminin Yolu, p. 116; Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, p. 84; According to the PKK, the clear proof of imperialist powers’ role in the further colonization of Kurdistan is the Baghdad Pact established by Turkey, Iran, and Iraq in 1958 under the auspices of the USA. The main function of the Baghdad Pact, for the PKK, was to suppress revolutionary powers, mainly the Kurdish independence struggles, in the Middle East. See, Öcalan, Kürdistan Devriminin Yolu, p. 85.
72. For the role of locating responsibility in the other in the production of identities, see Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, p. 8.
73. Öcalan, Kürdistan’da İşbirlikçi İhanet, p. 327.

74. Abdullah Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: I, 2nd Edition, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1991), pp. 145–146.
75. Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: I, p. 146.
76. See Selin Bölme, *İncirlik Üssü: ABD'nin Üs Politikası ve Türkiye*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2012).
77. “Kürdistan Halkının Devrimci Şiddeti”, *Serxwebûn*, Şubat 1983, (14): 14–16 p. 16; “ABD Yönetimi Kürdistan’ı Saldırı Üssü Durumuna Getirmeye Çalışıyor”, *Serxwebûn*, Şubat 1983, (14): 14–16 p. 16.
78. See Ernesto Laclau, “Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics”, Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, (London: Verso, 2000): 44–89, p. 54.
79. “PKK Genel Sekreteri Abdullah Öcalan Yoldaşın Newroz Dolayısıyla Bir Kadro Eğitim Devresinde Yaptığı Konuşma”, *Serxwebûn*, Nisan 1986, No: 52, p. 14; “Kendi Belgelerinden Türk Ordusunun Acizliğini Sergiliyoruz”, *Serxwebûn*, Temmuz 1986, No: 55, p. 25.
80. “Ortadoğu Halklarının Kurtuluşu Ancak Devrim Silahıyla Mümkündür”, *Serxwebûn*, Ağustos 1990, No: 104, p. 22.
81. Abdullah Öcalan, “Dünyaya Yeni Bicim Vermek İsteyen Güçlere En Büyük Darbeyi Vuran Ortadoğu Bölgesinde Kürdistan’a Dayalı bir Ekim Devrimi Doğabilir”, *Serxwebûn*, Eylül 1990, No: 105, pp. 12–13; Yüce, Doğu’da Yükselen Güneş, Volume II, p. 27.
82. Öcalan, Kürdistan’da İşbirlikçi İhanet, p. 133.
83. “A. Haydar Kaytan yoldaşın T. Almanya-PKK Davası’nda Yaptığı Konuşmanın Metnini Yayımlıyoruz: Kürdistan Kazanacak”, *Serxwebûn*, Kasım 1989, No: 95, p. 6.
84. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 95.
85. For the political discourse of the PKK on women’s self-sacrifice and its role in the construction of national identity, see Çağlayan, From Kawa the Blacksmith.
86. “Kürdistan Bağımsızlık Mücadelesinin Önderlerinden Yiğit Partizan Delil Doğan’ın Anısına”, *Serxwebûn*, Ocak 1982, No: 1, p. 6.
87. Abdullah Öcalan, “Eğer Bir Halk Köleyse, Ancak Şehitleriyle Kölelikten Kurtulabilir”, *Serxwebûn*, Ocak 1991, No: 109: 15–19; Abdullah Öcalan, *Kürdistan’da Halk Kahramanlığı*, (İstanbul: Çetin Yayınları, 2004), pp. 207–217.
88. “A. Haydar Kaytan yoldaşın T. Almanya...”, *Serxwebûn*, p. 6; Abdullah Öcalan, “Cephe ve İttifaklar Sorunu Üzerine”, *Serxwebûn*, Ekim 1990, No: 106, p. 9; Ali Firat, *Kürdistan’da Kişilik Sorunu*, Volume: I, (İstanbul: Melsa Yayınları, 1992), pp. 9–10; In the 1990s, while “the PKK is a place for the creation of new personality” discourse remained intact, tools of

- creating new Kurdish subject changed from the war against the imperial system to the promotion of democracy and human rights within the Kurdish society. See Abdullah Öcalan, *PKK 5. Kongresi'ne Sunulan Politik Rapor*, (İstanbul: Güneş Ülkesi Yayıncılık, 1995), p. 124.
89. Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: II, p. 17; See also, Özcan, *Turkey's Kurds*, p. 95.
90. Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: I, p. 205.
91. Aydın and Emrence, *Zones of Rebellion*, p. 40.
92. Yüce, *Doğu'da Yükselen Güneş*, Volume II, pp. 180–1; When it came to those who had hesitation in being part of the PKK, they were just opportunist or collaborator. Fırat, *Kürdistan'da Kışılık*, p. 133 and 137.
93. “Büyük Amaç Uğruna Ölmek Her Zaman Yaşamaktır”, *Serxwebûn*, Mayıs 1995, (161), p. 14.

## Writing the Soviet Union as Comrade

“The Soviet Union went to elections and turnout was 98,95 percentage. Such a turnout was not experienced in democracies of western countries. Those who lived and being educated in western democracies where people are used to vote for donkeys, horses, and elephants can never understand the Soviet democracy and its elections... the Soviet people, when they elect their rulers and state officials, are in real democratic order, to which we [as those who live in Turkey] are unfamiliar”.<sup>1</sup> This long quotation is from the DDKO’s bulletins published and distributed in the early 1970s. Needless to say, the comparison between Soviet and Western democracies in this long quotation was not a pure reflection of reality but a distortion and therefore it relied very little on what the Soviet democracy really was at that time. On the contrary, this written statement about Soviet politics was driven by the position of revolutionary Kurdish nationalism against the Turkish state and it had nothing to do with the Soviet experience of democracy.<sup>2</sup> The DDKO was no exception. According to revolutionary leftist Kurdish movements in the 1970s, including Öcalan’s Kurdistan Revolutionaries, the Soviet Union was both a symbol of a successful revolution against Western capitalist imperial system and, at the same time, a supporter for “national liberation struggles of oppressed peoples” all around the world.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, these Kurdish revolutionary movements divided the world in two, as in the founding party program of the PKK in 1978: “counter-revolutionary alliance among imperialism, comprador

bourgeoisie, and feudalists versus revolutionary alliance among socialist countries, labor class movement and national liberation movements".<sup>4</sup>

Like the DDKO's praise for the Soviet democracy, the PKK's reaction to the Soviet involvement against the Solidarity Mass Movement in Poland was based on a "distortion" stemming from the PKK's imagination of the Soviet Union. When Western countries criticized the Soviet Union for supporting military intervention in Poland against the Solidarity mass movement, which challenged the Soviet control over Eastern Europe, the PKK vehemently defended the Soviet's right to intervene. In the first issue of *Serxwebûn*, an anonymous news article had the following to say: "Since even a minor development within the Socialist block is an immediate concern for all socialist countries and especially the Soviet Union, and [Moscow] has a direct responsibility to protect the interests of socialism, what determines any interventions of the Soviet Union is the general interests of socialism. This is beyond any limitations based on law... Therefore, the military intervention of General Jaruzelski [in Poland] is an important step in suppressing internal obscurantism."<sup>5</sup> Such an obvious pro-Soviet approach to political affairs in Poland was developed not only because the Soviet Union, for the PKK, was the natural ally and protector of national independence movements all around the world but also because the representation of the Soviet Union was highly embedded in the production of an alternative Kurdish subject/society. While the 1917 October Revolution and early periods of the Soviet Union were inspirational for the organization of the PKK in the production of the new Kurdish national society, writings of two leading Soviet leaders, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin, were main, if not only, ideological sources of the PKK's assumptions, beliefs, and values narrated mainly within texts written by Abdullah Öcalan.

Despite this affirmative imagination of the Soviet Union, the PKK, however, developed some criticism toward daily politics of Moscow, especially when Soviet leaders allegedly deviated from the policy of unconditional support to national independence movements. The pre-1960 period of the Soviet Union was fully immune to any criticism of the PKK because it operated directly as suppliers of material aid, inspiration, and the guiding political philosophy of the anti-colonial struggle.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the PKK, throughout the 1980s, used this "impeccable" period as canon in developing any criticism toward Soviet policies of the time. For this reason, the PKK's criticism of Moscow can be called a criticism for a friend on the wrong track. In other words, the PKK embraced the Soviet Union



as a natural ally until the collapse of the Soviet Union despite some occasional criticisms of daily Soviet policies. Although there is no record that the Soviet Union provided military or economic aid<sup>7</sup> to the PKK in the latter's so-called anti-imperialist fight during the 1980s, why did the PKK embrace the Soviet Union as comrade and endorse its policies except the rapprochement with the West without any question? Put differently, why was the Soviet Union inscribed into the PKK's discourse as friend or comrade instead of enemy particularly when it is considered that the Soviet Union had alliance relations with regimes in Iraq and Syria, notorious of suppression of the Kurds in their own territories?

As Aydin and Emrence argued, "the PKK's main strategy was to delink Kurdistan from Turkey and consolidate it around its agenda".<sup>8</sup> While the imagination of the Turkish state as a puppet regime and the Turkish borders as artificial construction through a discourse on US imperialism normalized and justified this delinking process, the PKK had to speak about an alternative society through which the Kurds could aspire for new subject positions. This is the case because the boundaries of identity are not only secured through the discourses of enemies and threats, but they are also often associated with alliances.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the Soviet revolution and subsequent course of events were welcomed by the PKK "as evidence of the universal aspiration for liberty in the face of"<sup>10</sup> the fascist Turkish state. Put differently, the PKK was equally likely to find ontological security in alliance with the Soviet Union as it was in intractable conflicts or enduring rivalries with the USA, the Turkish state, and traditional Kurdish institutions.<sup>11</sup> However, the meaning of the Soviet Union was not constructed in a way external to the representations of the USA (Turkey and Kurdish traditional institutions as well) in the 1980s. As Laclau and Mouffe rightly captures, "no element in the system of equivalences enters into relations other than those of opposition to the elements of the other system".<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the representation of the Soviet Union as comrade/friend gained a specific meaning only when the USA was simultaneously represented as imperial oppressor or threat by the PKK in the late 1970s and 1980s.

### THE KURDS EMBRACE SOCIALISM AS RESISTANCE

According to Hamit Bozarslan, a prominent scholar of the Kurdish national movement in Turkey, "the Kurdish movement and the Kurdish Left became synonym after coups in Iraq and Turkey in 1958 and 1960

respectively". On the other hand, the Kurdish right remained exceptional and it was represented by a few figures. For Bozarslan, the Kurdish Left was so dominant in the 1960s and 1970s that even rightist Kurdish activists "necessarily merged with the Kurdish Left".<sup>13</sup> The mainstream explanation for this dominance of the Left among Kurdish movements is based on the economic conditions in which the Kurds lived at that time. According to this wisdom, the universality of poor classes necessitates the embrace of Marxism–Leninism without any critical thinking.<sup>14</sup> This sheer class-based explanation is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it assumes that the embrace of Marxism–Leninism was an inevitable outcome of being poor and oppressed and therefore provides an ahistorical explanation. Secondly, it overestimates the Cold War conditions in which resistant movements in capitalist countries generally embraced socialist ideas in their fight against the hegemonic state. For these two reasons, this book argues that Marxism–Leninism emerged as a dominant discourse among the urban Kurds in constituting a counter-Kurdish political identity and rendering Kurdish national movements hegemonic under the Cold War conditions.

Within existing relations of production in the Kurdish-populated areas of Turkey, tribal notables owned much of the land when the Turkish state was established in 1923. The nationalist leaders of Turkey confiscated and redistributed lands to Kurdish peasants as part of a massive campaign to detribalize the region. However, redistribution policies failed to impose a major transfer of land from Kurdish tribal leaders to the peasants because the letters did not want to acquire land against the wishes of tribal notables. Many landlords found a way to reacquire their land through their continuing legitimacy over the peasants.<sup>15</sup> This failure proves that the system of landlords and religious leaders was the main source of social meanings among the Kurds in the first half of the twentieth century. The failure does not point out the false consciousness of Kurdish peasants about their oppressed situation within the system of landlords and religious leaders; rather, it proves that it was in this system that the Kurds could have a distinct and counter identity. When the function of the system of landlords and religious leaders disrupted with the advent of machine into farms in the 1950s, which shattered traditional relations of production entirely and weakened traditional bonds between tribal leaders and the peasants, the urban Kurds looked at other meaning sources for their identity. While many of them chose to be assimilated into hegemonic Turkish identity,

some others embraced Marxism–Leninism as a strategy of resistance against assimilation.

Although the turn of the Kurds toward the Soviet Union as an external leverage in their struggle against the Turkish state had some roots in political movements such as *Azadi* in the 1920s and public figures such as Kadri Cemil Paşa (Zinar Silopi) in the 1940s,<sup>16</sup> the Soviet Union and the Soviet socialism did not turn a source of counter-discourse for Kurdish movements until the late 1960s. Unlike mainstream political parties and organizations in Turkey, the leftist Turkish Workers' Party (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TİP) and leftist organizations such as the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers Unions (*Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*, DİSK), and the Federation of Revolutionary Youth (*Dev Genç*) publicly attached themselves to demands for Kurdish rights and an end to repressions of Kurdish identity. This radical difference of leftist political groups from the mainstream political parties in Turkey swiftly attracted literate and urban Kurds who were in search for an institutional platform to raise their social and political demands. Mehdi Zana, and Kemal Burkay became the leading Kurdish figures within the TİP during the second half of the 1960s and they subsequently played a significant role in the organization of Eastern Meetings (*Doğu Mitingleri*), representing a crucial phase in formulating and promoting Kurdish national consciousness.<sup>17</sup>

Although many Kurds joined the TİP and other leftist groups in the 1960s not because they shared their socialist vision but because these platforms had a more progressive attitude towards the Kurdish issue,<sup>18</sup> the picture changed radically in the 1970s. While the 12 March military coup in Turkey radicalized Kurdish activists by limiting political mobilization opportunities, the failure of Mullah Mustafa Barzani's revolt against Baghdad in 1975 pushed all Kurdish activist including conservative-leaned figures closer to socialist revolutionary ideas and the Soviet Union. For example, pro-Barzani the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Kürdistan Demokrat Partisi*, TKDP), founded in 1965 as the first Kurdish party in Turkey, lost its influence in the first half of the 1970s as part of radicalization among Kurdish political activists. Disappointed about the support of the USA and Iran, the then close ally of the USA in the region, to Barzani,<sup>19</sup> Kurdish activists within the TKDP not only split from the TKDP by questioning its conservative discourse but also revised the TKDP's imagination of world politics. Unlike Said Kırmızıtoprak, a leading figure within the TKDP and outspoken critic of the Soviet Union's support to Syria and Iraq in suppressing Barzani's revolt,<sup>20</sup> his followers,

like other TKDP-cum groups, swiftly embraced a pro-Soviet discourse in the mid-1970s.

Like the fragmentation of the TKDP in the 1970s, Kurdish activists within the TİP also established their own groups with the aim of establishing an independent Kurdish state through a Marxist-Leninist revolution in this decade. According to their revolutionary nationalist discourse, as Tezcür rightly captures, only “a nationalist revolution would end the rule of” colonial states such as Turkey, Iran, and Iraq and of imperial powers led by the USA over the Kurdistan region and establish an independent Kurdish state. During this nationalist revolution based on Marxist-Leninist thoughts, according to Kurdish political groups of the 1970s, “the leftist revolutionaries in Turkey and the Soviet Union would be the natural allies of the Kurdish national liberation struggle”.<sup>21</sup> Especially after the failure of the Barzani revolt, all Kurdish revolutionary movements except *Kawa*, a Maoist Kurdish party founded in 1976,<sup>22</sup> and some small groups embraced the Soviet Union as a natural ally in their struggle against the Turkish state and its imperial protector, the USA, and developed a pro-Soviet political language. In other words, the mid-1970s witnessed a merge of conservative TKDP tradition and leftist TİP tradition among the Kurds when it came to being pro-Soviet.

After Barzani’s failure, figures within the TKDP simply came to the conclusion that the reliance on the support of the imperialist and colonialist forces was bound to fail in national independence movements.<sup>23</sup> For example, *Şivancılar* (followers of *Şivan*, the nickname of Said Kirmızıtoprak), established by Kurdish activists left from the TKDP in 1972, strongly criticized the USA for betraying Barzani and for causing the failure of his revolt. Therefore, this group adopted a strong pro-Soviet attitude, although it was named after Kirmızıtoprak, a well-known critic of the Soviet Union among Kurdish activists.<sup>24</sup> *Kürdistan Ulusal Kurtuluşçuları* (Kurdistan National Liberationists), another group split from the TKDP, took the October Revolution as inspiration for national independence struggle and developed a pro-Soviet discourse.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Kurdish groups splitting from the TİP, such as *Özgürlük Yolu* (The Path of Freedom) and *Rizgari*, believed that an independent Kurdish state would be established only with the help of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc.<sup>26</sup> Although the Soviet Union did not provide any direct support to these groups, Kurdish revolutionary movements turned the Soviet Union as an empty signifier in legitimizing their distinct nationalist identity and in discrediting the Turkish state.

The representation of the October Revolution in 1917 as a turning point for national independence movements all around the world was the central theme of Kurdish movements in the 1970s.<sup>27</sup> According to *Özgürlük Yolu*, the October Revolution divided the world into two parts between imperialist countries aiming to oppress all nationalist revolutionary movements and socialist countries led by the Soviet Union, a determined supporter of national independence movements against colonial and imperial rules over their own territories. In such a Manichean world, the natural ally of the Kurds was the Soviet Union not only because Moscow was the main outspoken promoter of the national self-determination principle but also because its founding figures, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin, provided a philosophical language for national revolutionary struggle against colonial and imperial invaders.<sup>28</sup> For example, Lenin's books and Stalin's *Marxism and the National Question*, and *The Foundations of Leninism* were widely cited with long and detailed quotations in magazines and booklets published by leftist Kurdish movements at that time. Despite some criticism toward Soviet policies of the time, revolutionary Kurdish movements embraced the Soviet Union and its founding figures without any question.<sup>29</sup>

The PKK emerged in this hegemonic pro-Soviet atmosphere. That means the PKK was not the actor or performer of the "founding interpellation",<sup>30</sup> which shifted the contemporary Kurdish nationalism toward a pro-Soviet stance. However, the PKK reiterated this pro-Soviet discourse throughout the late 1970s and 1980s to harden the national independence of the Kurds through Marxist-Leninist revolution into the legitimate and inevitable course of history. As part of this pro-Soviet discourse, the PKK, in 1983, defined the Kurdistan revolution as follows:

The Kurdistan revolution will play its role in the region and the world definitively... If revolutionary tasks are internalized correctly in such a fertile period, *the course of history*, which is normally resistant to any swift change, will change within few years. To reach this target, the PKK movement will follow, before anything else, its own ideological-political line, namely the line based on Marxist-Leninist ideology.... By injecting Marxist-Leninist ideology into veins of the state [Kurdish state], it will reach its targets. The PKK trusts such an ideology<sup>31</sup>

## THE PKK'S IMAGINATION OF THE SOVIET SOCIALISM

A close examination of the two major founding documents of the PKK clearly shows that the pro-Soviet imagination of the world determined the language of the Kurdish nationalism during the late 1970s and 1980s. Firstly, the founding manifesto of the PKK, *Kürdistan Devrimi'nin Yolu* (The Path of Kurdistan Revolution), was not just a simple roadmap for achieving the national liberation of Kurdistan as a unified country through a Marxist-Leninist revolution. In the eyes of PKK members and its sympathizers, this founding document had an equal status to Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* and therefore, thoughts and arguments in it were ahistorical.<sup>32</sup> After a detailed account of the struggle between imperialist countries led by the USA, and socialist countries led by the Soviet Union, *Kürdistan Devrimi'nin Yolu* declared socialist states as natural allies of the Kurdistan revolution:

Aiming to create an independent state... Kurdistan Independence Movement, due to the alliance structure within which it emerged, advocates close relations with socialist countries, states, and independence movements struggling against imperialism, and proletarian movements within imperialist countries. At this point, the basic principle Kurdistan Independence Movement follows is the fact that there would be no success without the support coming from independence, democracy and socialism struggles peoples of the world made against imperialism.

Declaring socialist countries as 'imperialist' or 'fascist' is the biggest evil that could be done to Kurdistan Independence Movement. For us, having relations with all socialist countries including Soviet Union and China in line with the principles of proletarian internationalism is a revolutionary duty.<sup>33</sup>

Secondly, the founding party program of the PKK, declared in 1978, was the abridged version of the founding manifesto.<sup>34</sup> The first part of the party program underlines the critical importance of the October Revolution in Russia and the establishment of the Soviet Union for world history. According to the party program, the October Revolution initiated a new age, the age of proletarian revolutions, because unlike all previous revolutions, which were nothing but the replacement of old exploitative regimes with the new ones, it resulted in socialism, a necessary phase to classless society.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the Soviet Union was presented as the main institutional anchorage for socialist independence movements all around

the world in their struggle against imperialism and comprador countries. The primary task of revolutionary movements in non-socialist countries, for the founding party program, was to make their own October revolutions based on two principles: nationalism and democracy. While the nationalist character of revolution aimed to destroy political, military, economic, and cultural colonialism over the society, the democratic character of revolution targeted reactionary structures within the society.<sup>36</sup> Put differently, the ideological attachment of the PKK to the October Revolution not only constructed its own distinct identity, but it also defined external (the Turkish state) and internal others (tribal lords and religious leaders) of the new Kurdish society.

However, the central place of the October revolution and socialist figures such as Joseph Stalin in the PKK's discourse does not automatically mean that "Marxism, not Kurdish nationalism, has always defined the PKK"<sup>37</sup>; rather, the October Revolution and Soviet socialism functioned as an "empty signifier" in framing, disseminating, and consolidating the PKK's hegemony<sup>38</sup> in the constitution of the Kurdish political identity and its nationalist independence war against the Turkish state especially in the 1980s. Since "Marxist movements and states have tended to become national not only in form but in substance",<sup>39</sup> the PKK's Marxist ideology does not automatically make its nationalism secondary. Therefore, instead of labeling the ethnic dimension of the PKK's guerilla war as "specious", "secondary", and "purported",<sup>40</sup> this chapter approaches the PKK of the 1980s as a nationalist movement aiming to establish "an independent, united and democratic Kurdistan" through a Marxist-Leninist revolution and to create a nationalist Kurdish political subject.<sup>41</sup> For this very reason, the imagination of the Soviet Union in the discourse of the PKK not only served to delink the Kurds from both the Turkish state and traditional Kurdish institutions but it also took a significant role in the constitution of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity and the rise of the PKK to hegemonic position in representing the Kurds.

That the October Revolution (and other Soviet figures and events) functioned as empty signifier in the PKK's rise to hegemonic position in representing the Kurds (power) and the constitution of the post-1980 nationalist Kurdish subjectivity (identity) is also very clear in statements of the PKK's leading figures. For example, Selim Çürükkaya, an early PKK dissident, stated that "the 1920s were our model, how the Russian Communist Party forbade all other parties and got rid of the cliques. We saw this as all positive and we wanted to do the same".<sup>42</sup> In other words,

the central place of the October Revolution in the PKK's discourse normalized and legitimized the elimination of alternative Kurdish political groups and ideas in order to render the PKK being hegemonic in the representation of the Kurds. The function of the October Revolution in privileging the PKK against other Kurdish groups is evident in the representation of Leon Trotsky's political stance during and after the revolution in Russia. For the PKK, Trotsky reconciled with imperialism and became the enemy of the revolution by criticizing and denying the possibility of building socialism in one country. Therefore, while Trotsky was often presented as a Trojan horse of imperialist powers in choking the October Revolution, Stalin was praised as a sword of proletariat against saboteurs who aimed to prevent socialist revolution.<sup>43</sup> The representation of the October Revolution's internal enemies normalized and justified the elimination of opposing voices within both the PKK and the Kurdish society and, therefore, played a vital role in rendering the PKK as a hegemonic voice.

Added to its function in power relations, the October Revolution also played a significant role in defining the Kurdish subjectivity not only because it made US imperialism, the Turkish state, and traditional Kurdish institutions as legitimate target for the revolutionary war but also because it acted as the ground through which the meaning of being Kurdish transformed from an allegedly "passive" identity to a resistant and revolutionary one. Therefore, the October Revolution as an empty signifier in the PKK's discourse made constructing a new social reality, "nationalist" Kurdish society or political community, possible. In a long statement written for the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution in October 1987, Öcalan unequivocally explained the function of the October Revolution in the creation of the new Kurdish subject. For him, "the October Revolution makes the recreation of identity" for the Kurdish people possible. It also elevates Kurdish people to the level where they can fight against the cruellest enemy, the Turkish state in particular and global imperialism in general. More importantly, the October Revolution, for him, had a power to recreate Kurdish people as the people who are competent for conducting a war.<sup>44</sup> In short, the October Revolution and its discursive power in the language of the PKK were vital in the creation of nationalist and revolutionary Kurdish political subjects in order to wage a fight for an independent Kurdish state. When it was presented as what the PKK's revolutionary war was inspired from, the October Revolution not only nurtured the sense of "being Kurdish" but it also underpinned the creation of the Kurdish



people, actively constituting a Kurdish nation and fighting for the Kurdish state.

As part of Soviet imagination, another central topic in the PKK's texts throughout the 1980s was the cult of Joseph Stalin and his period. As one of the early members of the PKK claimed later, the PKK, during this decade, was ideologically based on "a Stalin type of socialism".<sup>45</sup> As Öcalan himself later wrote, the PKK's founding manifesto, *Kürdistan Devrimi'nin Yolu*, was based on "Stalin's theoretical thoughts on anti-colonial revolutions".<sup>46</sup> Because of this ideological affiliation to Stalin, the PKK, during the late 1970s and 1990s, praised and defended all policies of the Soviet Union under the rule of Stalin. Since the socialist revolution was at the target of imperialist powers and their local collaborators, the only way to save and consolidate the revolution was to resort to dictatorial methods.<sup>47</sup> For this reason, "what Stalin did was essential in the defense and improvement of socialist legacy" simply because "the institutionalization of authority and power as state apparatus" required an authoritarian style.<sup>48</sup> Without his authoritarian ruling, according to Öcalan, it was impossible to destroy the imperialist siege of the socialist revolution in the Soviet Union.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, Öcalan clearly declared his discontent regarding the condemnation of Stalin by ensuing Soviet leaders after his death "in the name of the struggle against the cult of personality".<sup>50</sup> This centrality of Stalin in the PKK's discourse not only justified the exclusion of alternative Kurdish representations but it also created a strong sense of belonging to the PKK among its followers in the 1980s.

The imagination of the October Revolution and Stalin played a significant role in justifying the delegitimization and elimination of alternative Kurdish political movements from Kurdish public sphere, which left the PKK as the only and true representative of the Kurds. For example, *Sterka Sor* and *Tekoşin* were associated to the Mensheviks, a faction of the Russian socialist movement disputing with Lenin, by the PKK on the grounds that the ultimate aim of these alternative Kurdish revolutionary movements was to prevent the PKK's revolution with the help of imperialist powers much as the Mensheviks in Tsarist Russia were used in preventing the October revolution.<sup>51</sup> Unlike the PKK, *Sterka Sor* defined the Soviet Union as an imperialist power since the Kurds and other peoples in the Soviet Union were oppressed by the Soviet regime. Therefore, the discourse of *Sterka Sor* regarding the Soviet Union was interpreted by Öcalan as an overt sign of the fact that this seemingly socialist movement was the agent of the CIA and Turkish intelligence.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Kemal Burkay's criticism of Stalin was

condemned by the PKK on the grounds that such criticisms were fabricated by imperial powers aiming to destroy revolutionary movements all around the world.<sup>53</sup>

Like the exclusion of alternative Kurdish political movements, the elimination of intraparty critics to Öcalan's authority and to the unity of the PKK under his leadership was justified and normalized through perpetual references to Stalin and his methods against internal enemies of the October revolution. For example, when Çetin Güngör, a high-ranking and devoted member of the PKK's European committee, started to criticize the PKK's authoritarian structure, he and his close friends, despite their clear preference of the PKK against Güngör's thought, were executed between 1983 and 1985.<sup>54</sup> For the PKK, Güngör and other critics were just the tools or agents of colonial and imperial powers losing their control over the Kurdish region as a result of the PKK's revolutionary war.<sup>55</sup> In an article published in *Serxwebûn*'s February 1989 issue, the execution of Güngör and his friends was justified through reference to Stalin's authoritarian way of dealing with counter-revolutionary traps, collaborators, and petit bourgeoisie.<sup>56</sup> Put differently, members of the PKK who wanted to call attention to authoritarian practices within the party were subject to the accusation that they were undermining their own class or resistance solidarity and playing into the hands of the dominants.<sup>57</sup> This is the moment when a social group prevents all reversibility of movement and freezes free-floating relations of power for its own advantage.

### A FRIEND ON THE WRONG TRACK

In 1986, the Soviet Union declared *glasnost* (openness), an appeal for change in the existing political and social structure of the country. This appeal was followed by the declaration of *perestroika* (re-structuring) in 1988. These reforms "weakened the centralized command system on which both state and society rested"<sup>58</sup> and therefore, accelerated the collapse of the Soviet Union. In such a period, the PKK and other Kurdish nationalist movements such as the PPKK (*Partiya Pêşeng a Karkerî Kurdistan*) and the PRK (*Partiya Rizgariya Kurdistan*) rushed to restore the image of the Soviet Union as protector of national independence movements all around the world. For example, in a Political Report submitted by the PPKK's Political Bureau to the Central Committee Meeting in 1987, the Soviet Union was located at the superior side of the global dichotomy. According to this framing, while the USA represents "the enmity against humanity",

the Soviet Union embraces “all interests of humanity”.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, not surprisingly, the report could not read the developments in the Soviet Union as signs of the collapse. Rather, it had this to say: “for us, the radical movement of reformation indicating a new period is not a sign of return to capitalism and its so-called superior values as imperialism propagated. Thinking this way is too absurd and a blindfold against all gains in the past and transformations at the moment in the Soviet Union.”<sup>60</sup>

While the PKK was highly sympathetic to the Stalin period in the Soviet Union, it developed a critical approach toward the period after 1960 on the grounds that Moscow’s compromises such as the doctrine of “peaceful coexistence” in Soviet foreign policy were not in the interest of socialist movements but in that of imperialism and counter-revolutionary countries. This approach was clearly stated by Öcalan in his early writings:

A delicate balance developed between imperialist-capitalist system and socialist system for last 20 years includes many negative and false aspects. The worst results of this balance occur in the Middle East... While imperialism implements the latest strategies of its counter revolutionary tradition in this region, socialism has to try everything in order to balance [the rise of imperialism]. But I have to underline an important point. Socialist revolutions, especially the USSR, played an important role, which was highly devastating and destructive against imperialism and its collaborators, in the beginning. By pursuing and consolidating this role during inter-war period and especially after the Second World War, [socialism] purged imperialism significantly. However, this role has been replaced by a balanced approach for the last 20 years. Instead of counterbalance and intense revolutionary attempts, today there is a new policy, in which revolution slowed down and peaceful coexistence become dominant... This policy weakened revolutionary-democratic powers against imperialism...

Middle Eastern peoples entered into a new phase especially since 1960s by developing liberation movements. These peoples encountered socialist system’s policy of prioritizing compromise with imperialism in a period when revolutionary winds blow in many countries. This is a negative fact for peoples’ liberation movements.<sup>61</sup>

The above analysis of Öcalan shaped the PKK’s imagination of actual Soviet policies throughout the second half of the 1980s. While the Soviet Union was the natural ally of the PKK, Moscow could be the target of criticism as far as it made compromises to imperialism. Therefore, the PKK

celebrated the period of Yuri Andropov during the first half of the 1980s, a period of renewed confrontation in the Cold War, as the restoration of uncompromised stance of the Socialist revolution against the imperial system.<sup>62</sup> The accession of Mikhail Gorbachev as Secretary-General in the Soviet Union in 1985 was welcomed with some conditions. According to the PKK, the main tasks lying ahead of Gorbachev would be the restoration of militant image of socialism against imperialist and counter-revolutionary powers, an active support for national liberation movements all around the world, and a determined struggle against increasing influence of non-proletarian classes over the Soviet society.<sup>63</sup> Contrary to these expectations of the PKK, Gorbachev started a dialogue with the USA and met with the then US President Ronald Reagan, famous for his incendiary rhetoric concerning socialism, in Geneva soon after he came to power in the Soviet Union.

Taking a wary approach toward the Geneva meeting, the PKK compared it with previous rapprochements between the Soviet Union and imperial powers. For the PKK, the 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed between the new Bolshevik government of Soviet Russia and the Central Powers was to buy time for the new socialist regime to consolidate. The 1939 Treaty of Non-aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union was, again for the PKK, an agreement aiming to exploit existing disagreements among imperial powers in favor of the socialist revolution.<sup>64</sup> Instead of developing a direct criticism toward the Geneva meeting, the PKK preferred to hope that negotiations between the USA and Soviet Union would be in the interest of socialist revolution not in that of counter-revolutionary powers. Öcalan, in one of his later assessment of Gorbachev's rapprochement policy, argued that instead of taking Gorbachev's reforms as examples of opportunist practices, they should be evaluated as practices imposed by systemic pressures. Moreover, Öcalan approached Gorbachev's retreat in the goal of promoting revolution as understandable policy change on the grounds that it is not revolution but counter-revolution that needs an outside promotion for success.<sup>65</sup>

In his interview to Mehmet Ali Birand, a famous Turkish journalist, in 1988, Öcalan defined *glasnost* and *perestroika* as necessary steps and criticized those who accuse Soviet rulers of being capitalist and defector of the socialist revolution.<sup>66</sup> In a detailed analysis of relations between the PKK and the existing socialism published in May 1989, Öcalan presented the rapprochement policy of the Soviet Union with imperialism as a strategy in the process of strengthening revolutionary movements:

A fierce struggle between two superpowers over a little piece of land may result in the genocide of peoples ranging from Afghanistan to Palestine. *Détente*, a release from tension, may evoke some positive outcomes. This is a kind of tactic. But labeling such a tactical change as a sliding to the right [deviation from the Soviet socialism] may not be realistic. Compromises or compromises in tactic in the process of resolving gradually complicated issues in our world may bring about some opportunities for revolution.... Current reformist approaches may not only eliminate deadlocks within socialism, but they also may put revolutionary movements on the right track again.<sup>67</sup>

Despite this clear pro-Soviet stance, the PKK simultaneously continued to criticize the rapprochement policy of the Soviet Union with the imperial system led by the USA on the grounds that this policy would also mean the withdrawal of Soviet support for national independence movements. The clear proof of this deviance from “the essence of the Socialist revolution” was, according to the PKK, Moscow’s reaction to the bombardment of the Kurdish people by the Iraqi regime with Soviet-made MiG warplanes. Put differently, the policy of not supporting Kurdish national independence movements in Iraq for the sake of alliance with Iraqi regime was, for the PKK, a deviance from the core principles of the Soviet revolution such as unconditional support for national revolutionary movements.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, it can be argued that when the PKK faced a choice between criticism toward and support of the Soviet Union, it directed its main criticism to divergent policies of the Soviet Union from supporting revolutionary movements while it pursued an engagement policy with the Soviet Union and its values.

It is clear that criticism of the PKK toward Soviet daily policies increased gradually during the second half of the 1980s. Together with “too strong enemy” discourse (explained in previous chapter), the discourse of “a friend on the wrong track” increased the degree of responsibility for the PKK. Accordingly, the Kurdish national movement was not only a movement fighting against US imperialism, but it was also a movement aiming to restore the real Soviet values and remind the Soviet Union of these values. Therefore, the realization of a Marxist-Leninist revolution in Kurdistan region before the mid-1980s was replaced by a “too heavy burden”, the revitalization of Marxist-Leninist values in the Middle East in particular and all around the world in general. This change was triggered by two developments: the PKK increased its militia power in the second half of the 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union became imminent during

the closing year of the 1980s. While the first strengthened the PKK's self-trust, the second provided a legitimate ground on which the PKK claimed the necessity of a new October revolution. Therefore, the PKK started to present itself as the vanguard of a new October revolution against capitalist imperial system led by the USA. Since the Soviet Union compromised on socialist values in favor of US imperialism, the PKK could be the new owner and defender of these values against the imperial system.

This dramatic change, during the closing years of the 1980s, from being a simple follower of the October revolution to being a vanguard of a new October revolution in the Middle East turned the PKK to a self-referential actor and elevated its leader Abdullah Öcalan to the status of Lenin. Therefore, the imagination of the actual Soviet rule as a friend on the wrong track consolidated the domestic shift within the PKK after the third Congress in 1986. In this congress, the PKK introduced "an internal promotion system based on loyalty to the leader and his values" and placed "Öcalan above everyone else in the position of just, infallible, and unassailable judge".<sup>69</sup> After this congress, PKK publications allocated more pages to actual developments in the Soviet Union and judged Soviet leaders and their policies according to Marxist-Leninist values. As far as the then Soviet leaders moved away from these socialist values, Öcalan emerged as the true leader and representative of the Leninist ideology. For example, Öcalan was likened to Lenin in the letter of a Kurdish prisoner published by the PKK's official journal *Serxwebûn*. According to this framing, "whatever role Lenin played in the determination of the path to the 17 October revolution and the construction of the Bolshevik spirit, Öcalan's role is the same in the emergence of the PKK in Kurdistan, the formation of the PKK's ideological and political aspects, the creation of the PKK's personality, and the determination of the direction of our revolution".<sup>70</sup>

However, the Soviet Union was still a comrade and the natural ally of the PKK during the closing years of the 1980s. For Öcalan, the triumph of socialism in the Soviet Union was "irreversible" and the reversion back to capitalism was impossible.<sup>71</sup> Even as late as April 1989, on the immediate eve of the Soviet collapse, he claimed that the "Soviet Union does remain loyal to the socialist principles, but there is a *right-deviancy* today in the tactics nevertheless".<sup>72</sup> The source of this unshakeable belief in the Soviet Union even in the face of contrary political developments was the symbolic imagination through which both the PKK and the post-1980 nationalist Kurdish subject were constructed. According to this symbolic imagination, "Kurdistan is like a corpse, which lost its all vitality and energy" and

the only way to save Kurdistan “is to implement Marxist-Leninist ideology in a proper and creative way”.<sup>73</sup> In other words, “without the adaptation of Marxism-Leninism into the reality of our country [Kurdistan] from top to bottom, it is impossible to take a step further”.<sup>74</sup> Because the imagination of the early Soviet period played a central role in the construction of the PKK’s identity and the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects, the Soviet Union might be criticized for its wrong policies but it was still a natural ally and the source of inspiration.

## NOTES

1. Komal, Devrimci Doğu Kültür, p. 519.
2. This idea is developed from Said’s argument that Orientalist texts are based more on the West’s relations with the Orient than on what really happened in the Orient, Said, *Orientalism*, p. 23.
3. Özcan, Turkey’s Kurds, p. 89.
4. Öcalan, Kürdistan Devriminin Yolu, p. 47.
5. “Polonya Olayları ve Son Gelişmeler”, Serxwebûn, Volume: 1, January 1982, p. 16.
6. For a detailed discussion of the Soviet Union’s role in anti-colonial movements, see, Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).
7. Some authors claim that the PKK was established with the help of the Soviet intelligence in order to balance the USA’s increasing influence over the Kurds. See Nihat Ali Özcan, *PKK (Kürdistan İşçi Partisi): Tarihi, İdeolojisi ve Yöntemi*, (Ankara: Asam, 1999), p. 48; Fikret Bila, *Satranç Tahtasındaki Yeni Hamleler: Hangi PKK?*, (Ankara: Ümit Yayıncılık, 2004), pp. 31–2; see also, İsmet İmset, *PKK: Ayrılkıç Şiddetin 20 Yılı (1973–1992)*, (Ankara: Turkish Daily News Yayınları, 1993), p. 229; Abdülkadir Aygan, “PKK’nın Dış Bağlantıları”, *Yeni Forum*, No. 182, 1 Nisan 1987, p. 37; However, when it came to the 1990s, the PKK received some Russian-designed SA-7 Strela shoulder-fired missiles. Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, pp. 188–9.
8. Aydın and Emrence, *Zones of Rebellion*, p. 51.
9. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 125; Hansen, *Security as Practice*, p. 40.
10. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 125.
11. See, Jennifer Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma”, *European Journal of International Relations*, 12(3), 2006: 341–370, p. 343.
12. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 116.
13. Bozarşlan, *Türkiye’de Kürt Sol Hareketi*, p. 1169.

14. Bozarslan, Türkiye’de Kürt Sol Hareketi, p. 1170.
15. Senem Aslan, *Nation-Building in Turkey and Morocco: Governing Kurdish and Berber Dissent*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 53.
16. In his letter to Stalin, Kadri Cemil Paşa asked for the Soviet help in the struggle of the Kurds for independence. See Kadri Cemil Paşa (Zinar Silopi), *Doza Kürdistan (Kürdistan Davası): Kürt Milletinin 60 Yıllık Esaretten Kurtuluş Savaşı Hatıraları*, Abridged and Edited by Mehmet Bayrak, (Ankara: Özge Yayınları, 1991), pp. 180–182.
17. For the story of Mehdi Zana from local political leadership of the TİP in Silvan, Diyarbakır, to organizer of the first Eastern Meeting in Silvan, see Şeyhmus Diken, *Amıdalılar: Sürgündeki Diyarbakırlılar*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007), pp. 138–141; see also, Sadun Aren, *TİP Olayı 1961–1971*, (İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1993), pp. 261–271.
18. Nicole F. Watts, “Silence and Voice: Turkish Policies and Kurdish Resistance in the mid-20th Century”, In: *The Evolution of Kurdish Nationalism*, Editors: Mohammed M. A. Ahmed, Michael M. Gunter, (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2007): 52–77, p. 64.
19. See, Bryan R. Gibson, *Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds, and the Cold War*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), especially chapter 7.
20. See, Dr. Şivan, *Kürt Milli Hareketleri ve Irak’ta Kürdistan İhtilali*, (Stockholm: Apec, 1997).
21. Tezcür, Violence and Nationalist Mobilization, p. 252.
22. According to Kawa, pro-Soviet Kurdish movements in Turkey were ignoring two important historical facts. Firstly, the Soviet Union, like the USA and other Western countries, was colonizer because different national groups including the Kurds were under oppression within the Soviet territory. Secondly, Syria and Iraq were semi-colonial countries because they were just collaborators of the Soviet Union as in the case of Turkey and Iran, two regional collaborators of US imperialism. See “Sömürgecilik ve Milli Mesele”, *Kava*, Volume: 1, December 1978: 9–17, p. 13.
23. Güneş, The Kurdish National Movement, p. 76; For an example of how Kurdish revolutionary movements framed the failure of the Barzani revolt as a proof for the untrustworthy character of US imperialism, see “Kürdistan Tarihi ve Sömürgecilik: Sömürgecilik Üzerine”, *Tekoşin*, Volume: 3, April 1979, pp. 105–110.
24. İmset, PKK: Ayrılıkçı, p. 411.
25. See, “Sovyet Devrimi’nin 61. Yıldönümüne Girenken”, *Xebat: Ji Bo Rizgariya Kurdistan*, Volume: 3, November 1978: 1–5.
26. İmset, PKK: Ayrılıkçı, p. 418, 426, and 428.
27. See for example, İhsan Aksoy, “İttifaklar Sorunu”, *Özgürlük Yolu*, Volume: 9, February 1976: 40–51.



28. İhsan Aksoy, "Ulusal Hareket ve İttifakın İki Kesimi", *Özgürlük Yolu*, Volume: 19, December 1976: 3–20.
29. Bozarslan, Türkiye'de Kürt Sol Hareketi, p. 1190.
30. Butler, Bodies That Matter, p. 8.
31. "Faşist Türk Ordusunun Güney Kürdistan'ı İstila Hareketi, Sonuçları ve Devrimci-Yurtsever Güçlerin Görevleri Üzerine", *Serxwebûn*, Haziran 1983, (18): 10–19, p. 18.
32. Yüce, Doğu'da Yükselen Güneş, Volume II, p. 132.
33. Öcalan, Kürdistan Devriminin Yolu, p. 128.
34. For full text, see "Parti Programı (Kuruluş Dönemi, Kasım 1978)", In: Özcan, PKK (Kürdistan İşçi Partisi), pp. 350–69.
35. Parti Programı (Kuruluş Dönemi, Kasım 1978), p. 351.
36. Parti Programı (Kuruluş Dönemi, Kasım 1978), pp. 365–6.
37. Michael Radu, "The Rise and Fall of the PKK", *Orbis*, 45(1), 2002: 47–63, p. 48.
38. For the function of empty signifier in the constitution of hegemony, see Laclau, Why Do Empty Signifiers, p. 43.
39. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Politics for a Rational Left: A Political Writing 1977–1988*, (London: Verso, 1989), p. 130.
40. Radu, The Rise and Fall, p. 51; Radu even goes further by arguing that "the PKK's claim to be 'the leading force in the liberation of Kurdistan' is sheer obfuscation". See Radu, The Rise and Fall, p. 51.
41. Yüce, Doğu'da Yükselen Güneş, Volume II, pp. 297–8.
42. Marcus, Blood and Belief, p. 42; "69. Yıldönümünde Ekim Devriminin Bolşevik Ruhunu Kürdistan Devrimci Direniş Savaşında Yaşatıyoruz", *Serxwebûn*, Ekim 1986, (58), p. 24; This point was clearly stated in the founding declaration of the PKK as the following: "The October Revolution enabled the Russian proletariat to establish its political dictatorship. By building alliances, based on equality and freedom, with the people oppressed by the Tsar regime and the people of depended countries, it was able to defeat the counter revolutionaries inside and the imperialist forces outside. This enabled the revolution to build a socialist economy. The fight against Trotskyism that had lent itself to be the agent of imperialism within a socialist country had been won successfully." PKK, Kuruluş Bildirgesi, p. 7.
43. For example, see "Kiminle Nasıl ve Nereye Kadar Yürünür," *Serxwebûn*, Şubat 1989, (86): 14–17, p. 14; "Kürdistan'da Suç ve Ceza", *Serxwebûn*, Aralık 1985, (58): 4–6, p. 6; Öcalan, Seçme Yazılar, Volume: I, p. 125.
44. Abdullah Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: III, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1988), p. 155.
45. Marcus, Blood and Belief, p. 42; Aktürk, Regimes of Ethnicities, p. 166.
46. Öcalan, Seçme Yazılar, Volume: III, p. 148.

47. “Stalin Saygı ve Minnetle Anılıyor”, *Serxwebûn*, Ocak 1983, No: 13, pp. 21–2.
48. Öcalan, Seçme Yazılar, Volume: III, pp. 131–2.
49. Öcalan, Seçme Yazılar, Volume: III, p. 133.
50. Öcalan, Seçme Yazılar, Volume: I, p. 129.
51. “PKK MK’NE”, *Serxwebûn*, Kasım 1984, (35), p. 19; Abdullah Öcalan, *Bir Halkı Savunmak*, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 2004), p. 341; Yüce, Doğu’da Yükselen Güneş, Volume II, pp. 115–29.
52. Abdullah Öcalan, *PKK’ya Dayatılan Tasfiyecilik ve Tasfiyeciliğin Tasfiyesi*, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1993), p. 348.
53. “Halkımız Kürt Küçük Burjuvalarından Hesap Soruyor”, *Serxwebûn*, Kasım 1984, (35), p. 5; “Emperyalizmin Özel Savaşı ve Türk Ordusunun Kürdistan’da Yürüttüğü Savaşın Niteliği Üzerine”, *Serxwebûn*, Ağustos 1985, (44): 12–18, p. 16.
54. For a detailed story of Güngör and his friends, see Marcus, Blood and Belief, pp. 89–96.
55. “15 Ağustos Direnişi ve Saldırı Eylemlerinin Anlamı ve Dayattığı...”, *Serxwebûn*, Eylül 1984, (33), p. 9.
56. “Kiminle Nasıl ve Nereye Kadar Yürünür”, *Serxwebûn*, Şubat 1989, (86): 14–17, p. 15; See also, N. Çirisk, “İflah Olmazlık Küçük Burjuva Refermculuğunun Temsilcilerini Nereye Götürüyor”, *Serxwebûn*, Eylül 1984, (33): 7–8.
57. See Ortner, Resistance and Ethnographic, p. 178; Jocelyn A. Hollander, and Rachel L. Einwohner, “Conceptualizing resistance”, *Sociological Forum*, 19(4), 2004: 533–554, p. 550.
58. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism, p. 168.
59. *PPKK Politik Bürosu’nun Merkez Komitesi Toplantısına Sunduğu Politik Rapor*, (PPKK Yayınları, Temmuz 1987), p. 11; According to this report, “the US imperialism... prevents the people fighting for independence, right to live in honor, and dignity either by using counter-revolutionary, reactionary and fascist states or intervening directly.... On the contrary, the Soviet Union, socialist countries and other powers supporting peace, independence and freedom of the people, democracy, and human rights reject any intervention to domestic affairs of other countries and people, creating regional wars and tensions, and any intervention to struggles for democracy and independence and pursue their insistence on supporting struggles of people and laborers for independence, freedom, and human dignity”. See PPKK Politik Bürosu’nun, pp. 11–12.
60. PPKK Politik Bürosu’nun, p. 13.
61. Abdullah Öcalan, *PKK’de Gelişme Sorunları ve Görevlerimiz*, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1984), pp. 18–9.

62. “Yuri Andropov Öldü!”, *Serxwebûn*, Şubat 1984, (26), p. 1; Öcalan, Seçme Yazılar, Volume: I, p. 143.
63. SBKP Genel Sekreteri ve SSCB Devlet Başkanı K. U. Çernenko Öldü...”, *Serxwebûn*, Mart 1985, (39), p. 23.
64. “Reagan ve Gorbaçev Zirvesinin Düşündürdükleri”, *Serxwebûn*, Kasım 1985, (47), p. 20.
65. Abdullah Öcalan, “Reel Sosyalizm, Enternasyonalizm ve PKK Gerçekliği”, *Serxwebûn*, Mayıs 1989, (89): 10–14, p. 11.
66. Abdullah Öcalan, *Seçme Röportajlar*, Volume: I, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1994), p. 172.
67. Öcalan, “Reel Sosyalizm, Enternasyonalizm...”, p. 14.
68. “İlkel Milliyetçiliğin İflası ve Tarihi İhaneti Üzerine”, *Serxwebûn*, Ocak 1989, (85): 21–25, p. 23.
69. Grojean, *The Production of the New Man*, p. 8; Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, p. 109.
70. “Başkan Apo’ya”, *Serxwebûn*, Ağustos 1989, (92), p. 7.
71. Öcalan, *Kürdistan Devriminin Yolu*, p. 49.
72. Özcan, *Turkey’s Kurds*, p. 93; see also, Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: IV, p. 58.
73. Öcalan, *PKK’de Gelişme Sorunları*, p. 57.
74. Öcalan, *PKK’de Gelişme Sorunları*, p. 77.

## The Collapse of the Soviet Union as Dislocation

Abdullah Öcalan gave an interview to *Middle East Quarterly* journal in 1998. The question asked by the journal was about whether the PKK's shift from socialism is a true change or not: "At its fifth congress in January 1995, the PKK removed the hammer and sickle from its flag and continued to de-emphasize its earlier Marxism. What do you say to those who say this was a cosmetic change and that you are still a Marxist, a communist?" Öcalan's response to this question reflects the dramatic change of the PKK's discourse on world politics: "This is just propaganda. It is not possible for us to be communists. Why did the Soviet Union collapse and the United States has not? It is because communism made the government everything, but the human being nothing. *The United States represents development.*"<sup>1</sup> Given the fact that the representation of the Soviet Union as comrade or natural ally played a significant role in the production of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity and in the legitimation of the PKK's guerilla war against the Turkish state, and alternative Kurdish groups, how can we explain this dramatic change? And more importantly, how did this dramatic change or re-writing the Soviet Union into the PKK's counter-hegemonic resistance affect the post-1980 Kurdish political identity and the PKK's quest for hegemony over the Kurdish society?

The most important thing exposing itself in the collapse of the Soviet Union was the fact that the Soviet system was not the same with what the PKK incorporated in its symbolic construction of the Kurdish national

identity throughout the late 1970s and 1980s. Put differently, what unfolded by the collapse of the Soviet Union contrasted sharply with the story the PKK narrated in its discursive fight against the Turkish state. Therefore, the encounter with the real had a dislocatory effect not only on mediation of the PKK's relationship to the outside world but also on the imaginary/symbolic construction of Kurdish national identity. If discursive formation is but "a naturalized foundational premise that subsequently legitimates"<sup>2</sup> the PKK's own regulatory hegemony, the exposition of the "real" through the collapse of the Soviet socialism challenged the very substance of naturalized foundational premise, the emancipation of the Kurds through a Marxist-Leninist revolution. This challenge evoked a dramatic change in the PKK's imagination of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the possibility of the Kurdish national identity's "perversion through equivalential articulation with other values"<sup>3</sup> such as democracy, and human rights is not more obvious in other examples than in the discursive shift on the interpretation of the Soviet Union after the end of the Cold War.

This point needs further clarification. The preceding two chapters contend that the Manichean representation of the USA and the Soviet Union in the discourse of the PKK played a significant role in the production of the category of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity, which retrospectively legitimized the PKK's regulatory hegemony. The same chapters also asserted that it was not policies of the USA and the Soviet Union toward the PKK but the power relations between the PKK and the Turkish state/traditional Kurdish institutions/alternative Kurdish movements that produced this Manichean representation of the world. Therefore, the imagination of the Soviet Union not only made the PKK's promise of a Kurdish state through a Marxist-Leninist revolution appear "real" and accessible but it also turned the Soviet socialism as an empty signifier through which the post-1980 Kurdish political subject was able to produce itself as a distinct and stable category. Since the Soviet experience was strongly inscribed into this discursive structure that organized the way nationalist Kurdish people perceive and interpret the world, the collapse of the Soviet Union created "the need for a new discursive structure to fill the lack produced by this dislocation".<sup>4</sup> However, this need did not immediately produce a new discursive structure and the PKK continued to ignore the implications of the Soviet collapse for the direction of the nationalist Kurdish movement in Turkey for a while. After a period of avoidance to accept the real, the PKK or the Kurdish national movement started to

re-write the world into its counter-hegemonic resistance in order to neutralize “the terrorizing presence of this impossible real”.<sup>5</sup>

This re-writing of the Soviet Union evoked two radical changes for the PKK and the post-1980 Kurdish political identity. Firstly, it was this re-writing of the Soviet socialism into the PKK’s counter-hegemonic resistance that made the change from national independence war to a demand for democratic autonomy possible in the 1990s. Put differently, the shift the PKK experienced throughout the 1990s was produced by the dislocation of the previous structure based on the desire to realize an independent Kurdish state through a Marxist-Leninist revolution against the Turkish state. Disidentification from the Soviet experience cleared the ground for the identification of the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects to human rights and democracy, political values primarily promoted by the West.<sup>6</sup> This dramatic shift ironically happened in such a period when the Turkish state resorted to more violence such as indiscriminate and extrajudicial killings, forced evacuation of Kurdish villages, arbitrary detention, and torture. This point challenges a conventional argument that the Kurdish nationalist identity has been governed by a self-defined cause external to its own existence such as the violence of the Turkish state over the Kurds. While the violence of the Turkish state in the 1980s was interpreted as an excuse for Kurdish national independence, the same practice of the state was represented by the PKK as a legitimate excuse of a demand for human rights and democracy in the 1990s.

Secondly, the collapse of the Soviet socialism left a void of meaning that would deliberately be filled by the PKK, and Abdullah Öcalan in particular, in a specific context of power relations. To put this point in different terms, the PKK continued to produce and regulate meanings for the post-Soviet Kurdish political society within highly strict bounds of existing power relations. Within the system of nation normativity, the Turkish state had to be inscribed into the category of other and the Kurds had to be embedded in the post-1980 Kurdish national identity. Therefore, the PKK, a movement resisting against nation hierarchy not the system of nation normativity, re-inscribed the collapse of the Soviet socialism into its counter-hegemonic resistance in a different way. On the one hand, the collapse of the Soviet socialism forced the PKK to legitimize its socialist ideology by producing a self-referential socialism, the PKK’s socialism. On the other hand, the waning of the Soviet Union left the PKK alone in the defense and promotion of socialism, which increased the degree of responsibility the PKK claimed to undertake. It was these two dynamics

that made the continuation of the PKK as regulatory hegemon for the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects (and, as mentioned above, the change of its Marxist-Leninist revolutionary ideology) possible.

### THE SOVIET UNION REDEFINED

The death-reflex of the PKK about the Soviet socialism at the end of the 1980s did not last long and it was replaced by a sheer criticism of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. In January 1990, Öcalan started to talk of the “impasse of the October Revolution since Lenin was doomed to pragmatism”.<sup>7</sup> Öcalan went even further when he equated the Soviet Union with all other imperialist powers: “In the face of colonial and fascist massacres conducted in Kurdistan, the Soviet Union took a stand, which was far more unfavorable than that of capitalists and imperialists. [Therefore,] the collapse of such a system can not be counted as a loss for us.”<sup>8</sup> This was a radical departure from the imagination of the Soviet Union during the late 1970s and 1980s. Now for Öcalan, unlike his ideas throughout the 1980s, Soviet Union was not the realization of socialist thoughts in the form of a state; rather it was a nationalist state inspiring from socialism. Therefore, he redefined the Soviet Union as such: “it appears that the Soviet experience is the realization of a process which was inspired by socialism rather than being an experience of socialism, in which honorable socialists also struggled, and as a result, which emerged in the form of national socialism with the rise of sociality and class related entities that held capitalistic longings but did not have the opportunity of becoming bourgeois at the time”.<sup>9</sup> The denunciation of the Soviet Union and the celebration of its dramatic demise seem an intriguing puzzle insofar as considering the fact that the PKK wrote the Soviet Union as comrade/friend into its counter-hegemonic resistance against the Turkish state throughout the 1980s.

As part of criticism toward the Soviet Union, the cult of Joseph Stalin had to be redefined before everything else when his central role in the formation of the PKK’s ideology is considered. As late as February 1989, the critique of Stalin and his period was condemned by the PKK on the grounds that all dictatorial practices during that time were essential in the pursuit and consolidation of the Socialist revolution.<sup>10</sup> The period of Stalin, for the PKK, was full of lessons because a close examination of this period would prove the necessity of dictatorial methods against the petit bourgeoisie, collaborators, and traitors. Therefore, Stalin, for the PKK, was loyal to Lenin and his revolution unlike other prominent figures in

the party such as Trotsky and Nikolai Bukharin. Just a year later, in March 1990, Öcalan wrote a statement titled “On Searches for A New Socialism at the Threshold of the Existing Socialism” and accused Stalin of being much too compromising against capitalism.<sup>11</sup> As the title implied, the existing socialism, the Soviet experience, and one of its leading executives, Stalin, were now at the center of criticism developed by Öcalan and other figures within the PKK. The main function of existing socialism in the Soviet experience, according to those leading figures, was being an obstacle before all revolutionary powers, which had the potential to derail capitalist developments. Therefore, the realization of “the fake socialist utopia” in the Soviet Union resulted in the restoration and consolidation of the capitalist system.<sup>12</sup>

After the year 1992, Joseph Stalin and his rule, in the discourse of the PKK, were redefined as the symbol of the Soviet chauvinism turning the Russians a dominant nation while oppressing all other nations within the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> Since chauvinism, privileging the Russian nation over others, prevailed and was consolidated under Stalin’s rule, the Soviet Union was a kind of imperial power in its essence. According to Öcalan, Lenin predicted this future evolution of the Soviet socialism and accordingly raised his doubts about chauvinist inclinations of Stalin.<sup>14</sup> As part of redefining Stalin and his period, Öcalan also criticized dictatorial practices of Stalin such as the exclusion of oppositional figures within the communist party like Trotsky and Bukharin.<sup>15</sup> This radical shift in Öcalan’s perception of Stalin and Trotsky prompts the following questions: How and under what conditions did such dramatic change in the perception of Stalin and the Soviet socialism occur? What was the function of this change when it came to the PKK’s identity and its hegemonic position within nationalist Kurdish society? Before answering these questions, it needs to be underlined that two dynamics forced the PKK to speak about the collapse of the Soviet Union. Firstly, the collapse of the Soviet Union undermined symbolic and discursive foundations of the PKK and post-1980 Kurdish political subject. Therefore, hiatus in the symbolic order had to be sutured by a new and revised discourse. Secondly, the collapse of the Soviet Union had to be inscribed into the new discourse of the PKK since such a dramatic event could not be simply ignored.

The redefinition of Stalin as chauvinist and the Soviet Union as an imperialist power during the first half of the 1990s was significant in providing an answer to such a question as: In a period when existing socialism and Stalinism collapsed, why did the PKK based on a Stalin type of socialism



still continue to exist?<sup>16</sup> As an answer to this fundamental question, the PKK started to speak about the distinction between its own distinct socialism and the Soviet socialism by promoting a “scientific socialism” discourse. Denying its close affiliation to the existing socialism or the Soviet experience during the late 1970s and the 1980s, the PKK now embraced the scientific socialism advocating the coexistence of peoples “based on the recognition of their mutual independence and equality”.<sup>17</sup> According to Cemil Bayık, the PKK’s number-one man after Öcalan’s arrest, it was this different character of the PKK’s socialism that saved the PKK from being outmoded or collapse unlike other socialist movements embracing existing socialism.<sup>18</sup> In short, scientific socialism became a suture for the PKK in a time when the symbolic order based on Soviet socialism collapsed and therefore, the PKK restored its identity through scientific socialism and continued to provide a source of meaning to post-1980 Kurdish nationalist subjects without denying its own socialist past.

This redefinition of the PKK’s socialism through a reference to the Soviet Union, the realization of nineteenth-century socialism, was central in the transition of the PKK from a national liberation movement to a movement demanding human rights, democracy, and solutions of environmental problems.<sup>19</sup> It was this change in discourse, the redefinition of the Soviet Union as other, which provided a “legitimate” answer to the above question: “the ideological line of our party [the PKK] is not like classic communism. If it were such, we had already collapsed as other parties disintegrated after the collapse of the existing socialism.”<sup>20</sup> For Öcalan, the difference between the old socialism represented by the Soviet Union and the new socialism represented by the PKK was very clear as in the following quotation:

Behold! Socialism is the name of the struggle against overconsumption, the destruction of nature, and against the captivity of the society by the global media and similar kinds of epidemic social diseases. The approach of nineteenth-century socialism is absolutely insufficient. It always accepted the notion of *‘class against class, national liberation against colonialism’ as the main perspective*. Although this is needed to some extent, the main aspect of socialism should indeed be the promotion of the socialist democracy. Struggling against the terrible destruction of the environment and overconsumption is also essential. This may then be the new programme of socialism. Such a programme will obviously be both the simplest expression of socialism and the liberation of humanity itself.<sup>21</sup>

However, the PKK did not give up speaking about the Soviet Union and Stalin; rather it re-articulated these dislocated elements in the reproduction of post-1980 Kurdish political identity. Therefore, the Soviet socialism and Stalin gained a new function in the PKK's struggle against the Turkish state and in the constitution of difference between the post-1980 nationalist Kurdish subject and citizenship imposed by the Turkish state. As part of delegitimizing the Turkish state, the Kemalist regime in Turkey was now associated with Stalin and his ruthless ideology. For example, Öcalan not only redefined Stalin together with Hitler and Mussolini as inspiring figures for the Kemalist regime, which ruthlessly suppressed the Kurds,<sup>22</sup> but also accused Stalin of being the main supporter of the Kemalist regime.<sup>23</sup> Because of this close relation between founding leaders of Turkey and Stalin, the collapse of the Soviet Union was reformulated as a proof and an early indicator for the future collapse of the Turkish state. As the Soviet army and Yugoslavian army desperately failed to prevent nationalist independences all around their old territories, the Turkish army, according to Öcalan, would certainly fail to prevent the Kurdish independence led by the PKK.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Öcalan even claimed that NATO, which promoted nationalist independences in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, would ask from Turkey to be open regarding demands for all options ranging from federation to independence.<sup>25</sup>

The association of the Soviet Union with the Turkish state undertook two main functions: the consolidation of the PKK's new identity based on human rights and democracy and the delegitimization of the Turkish state as antidemocratic and authoritarian state. In the October 1995 issue of the PKK's official journal *Serxwebûn*, Öcalan published an article titled "Everything is not Party and State But Humanity and Republic", which was an ample example of both the redefinition of the PKK's identity and the delegitimization of the Turkish state through references to the Soviet Union. Öcalan clearly stated that "the Turkish fascism developed with the Soviet support" and also went further to argue that this support to the Turkish state, which was a sort of deviation from socialist principles, was one of the reasons behind the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>26</sup> In the same article, Öcalan differentiated his movement, the PKK, from the Soviet Union and clearly stated that *the ultimate aim of the PKK is not to establish a state like the Soviet Union* but to create "new personality" in Kurdistan. Again unlike the Soviet Union, the PKK, for Öcalan, was "an organization based on voluntariness not compulsion" and therefore, "everybody joining to the PKK was free in their choice".<sup>27</sup>

It is clear that Kurdish nationalists utilized the collapse of the Soviet Union as a signifier in legitimizing the transformation of the PKK and discrediting the Turkish state. But this dramatic event was also re-written into the PKK's resistance against the Turkish state and US imperialism, now an absolute hegemon in world politics. For Öcalan, "the US was standing alone against the Soviet Union [during the Cold War], now it, together with Germany and the UK, is fighting against the PKK. Moreover, Turkey too is fighting against us with the help of [Russia]".<sup>28</sup> In such a time when the Soviet Union and other socialist movements collapsed or weakened, the PKK, according to Öcalan, remained potent and stood alone against all imperial powers and their regional collaborators in order to defend socialism and its interests in the Middle East in particular and all around the world in general. Therefore, Öcalan described the PKK's war against the imperial system in the name of socialism as "a fight which is more destructive than that of the Soviet Union" during the Cold War.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the discourse on the collapse of the Soviet Union secured and consolidated the PKK as a sovereign actor by increasing the burden of responsibility, which it had to undertake in this new period. Theoretically speaking, responsibility does not arise from sovereignty and will. Rather, the PKK's writing the collapse of the Soviet Union into the realm of responsibility contributed in the production of the PKK as a sovereign entity.

Therefore, re-writing the Soviet Union (or writing the collapse of the Soviet Union) into the PKK's counter-hegemonic resistance throughout the 1990s and thereafter served to produce and legitimize the responsibility attached to the PKK. However, responsibility has a double function. On the one hand, as shown in previous chapters, discourse regarding US imperialism in the Middle East, which seems unbeatable in the short run, turned an instrument in deferral of questioning the PKK's legitimacy. But on the other hand, the same US imperialism in the language of the PKK functioned as a legitimate excuse in the pursuit of the PKK's independence war. Therefore, the more the PKK was able to put the responsibility for blocking the realization of full Kurdish identity on others (the US imperialism and its local collaborators), the more the PKK became responsible in the struggle for Kurdish identity and unity. Similarly, the collapse of the Soviet Union, which left the PKK alone against a "too strong enemy", functioned, in the language of the PKK, as both the legitimization of the PKK's escalating guerilla war and an instrument in keeping the PKK's legitimacy intact against military defeats especially during the second half of the 1990s.

## MARXIST-LENINIST IDEOLOGY REDEFINED

As death-reflexes indicated, the collapse of the Soviet Union as dislocatory event did not automatically result in a shift from independence war based on Marxist-Leninist revolution to a demand for democratic autonomy. What was needed, besides the collapse of the Soviet Union, was the dislocation of a certain ideological field,<sup>30</sup> Marxist-Leninist ideology or revolutionary socialism. Because the PKK and the post-1980 Kurdish nationalist subject attributed an ahistorical status to the founding Manifesto based on Stalinist socialism, even the end of Soviet Union as a dislocatory event failed to prove the Manifesto false or outmoded.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the reinterpretation of a socialist revolution in Kurdistan according to structural changes emanating from the end of the Cold War took a while. The first half of the 1990s can be called a period in which the PKK redefined its socialist ideology. As part of this redefinition, the PKK started to underline the difference between the existing socialism and scientific socialism. This difference played a significant role in the transition from national independence discourse based on Marxist-Leninist revolution to democratic autonomy discourse because only this difference could facilitate this dramatic transition without denying the past.

Although the PKK defined itself as “a political organization under the guidance of scientific socialism” in its founding manifesto, *Kürdistan Devrimi'nin Yolu*, it did not see in the Soviet experience any significant deviation from scientific socialism throughout the 1980s. Rather, Öcalan presented the Soviet revolution as the restoration of scientific socialism<sup>32</sup> after the Second International (1889–1916), during which the continuation of capitalist state not an intervention to it through a socialist revolution was accepted as the condition of transition to a communist system.<sup>33</sup> This approach was understandable because the reading of the Soviet experience as the triumph of scientific socialism against opportunists of the Second International not only legitimized the PKK's guerilla war for a socialist revolution in Kurdistan in the 1980s, but it also put the PKK, a revolution-making party, in a hegemonic position within nationalist Kurdish society. Therefore, until the end of the 1980s, the Soviet experience under the rule of Lenin and Stalin was praised as the realization of scientific socialism and all deviations from scientific socialism were attributed to the post-1960 Soviet practices.<sup>34</sup> The main deviation of the post-1960 Soviet leaders from scientific socialism, according to Öcalan,

was their compromise in supporting national independence movements all around the world.<sup>35</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Union and its socialist system was too dramatic for a movement aiming at a Soviet-type revolution in Kurdistan. Therefore, the PKK had to deal with this challenge in the early 1990s either by dissolving itself or reformulating its identity in order to continue to be the source of meaning for the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects. Unlike other socialist movements all around the world, the PKK was on the rise politically and militarily in the early 1990s and therefore it chose the second path. “Retaining the core socialist ‘values’ while keeping a distance from a political regime that had failed” became the maxim in restructuring the PKK’s identity and it was “achieved by developing a distinction between ‘experienced’ socialism and ‘scientific’ socialism”.<sup>36</sup> In other words, since Marxist-Leninist ideology was central in the PKK’s attempt to create new Kurdish political subjects, and to imagine an independent Kurdistan by transforming Kurdish people and redefining the Kurdish territory, the PKK, instead of rejecting socialism entirely, reimagined socialism through speaking on the distinction between experienced socialism and scientific socialism.

Socialism, therefore, continued to be a discursive capital in creating new Kurdish political subject in the 1990s.<sup>37</sup> For example, Öcalan, in 1991, clearly underlined this role of socialism by saying that “doubting about socialism is to doubt about human being and its social existence”.<sup>38</sup> An ideologue of the PKK claimed “applying scientific socialism to the reality of our country creates the new man”.<sup>39</sup> That means, the PKK continued to embrace socialism as its main ideology with a minor but a crucial change. Unlike the 1980s, omitting the Soviet experience from the PKK’s understanding of socialism resulted in the promotion of individual aspect of socialism. As Ali Kemal Özcan rightly captured, this crucial shift from state-based socialism to individual-based socialism occurred during the first two years of the 1990s:

[For Öcalan, socialism] ‘needs to be reduced to an individual’s personality and pursued to the extent that he/she becomes socialist’... What Öcalan was concluding was that ‘Russia wielded socialism in order to develop its own form of capitalism’ substantially in the course of the ‘socialist construction’ of the October Revolution because a socialism of the genuine liberation of mankind must ‘infiltrate into the spiritual structure of the individual’ and mold the ‘individual who constructs socialism in his/her little nucleus’.<sup>40</sup>

While this shift transformed Kurdish demands from an independent Kurdish state to democratic autonomy within the borders of Turkey, it, however, did not slacken the march of the Kurdish nationalism. Rather, it further radicalized “the production of new man” in Kurdistan. The Soviet model was replaced by the cult of Öcalan ahead of Kurdish nationalist subjects as an unattainable role model. This was a transformation “from a classical national liberation movement based on Marxist-Leninist principles to a sui generis organization, embodied in the figure of a ‘Divine King’ (the supreme leader), Abdullah Öcalan”.<sup>41</sup> While Kurdistan as a geographical entity is embodied in the personality of Öcalan, on the one hand, the post-1980 Kurdish political subject are now inscribed into self–other relations determined only by Öcalan himself on the other. Instead of experienced Soviet socialism, the PKK developed the “*APOist socialism*”, a sort of socialism formulated, developed, and regulated by Abdullah Öcalan.<sup>42</sup> Since “the *APOist socialism* is an ideological position realizing the true socialism by destroying petit bourgeois masks of the experienced socialism”,<sup>43</sup> it was described as “the most developed phase of socialist movement”.<sup>44</sup> Put differently, the collapse of socialism cut the relation between Marxist-Leninist socialism and the *truth* through which the Kurdish nationalism was produced. And therefore, socialist ideology was replaced with a new *truth*, which “has always and can only come from Öcalan”.<sup>45</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet socialism was surely not the only reason behind Öcalan’s rise to unchallenged position in the creation of the new Kurdish political subject, but it remarkably created a fertile ground for the cult of Öcalan.<sup>46</sup> Unlike previous decades, the 1990s witnessed the fetishization of Öcalan as the sole and undisputed source for the post-1980 Kurdish political subject. Accordingly, the fifth congress of the PKK institutionalized the cult of Öcalan and prioritized the creation of the new Kurdish political subject over the establishment of an independent Kurdish state.<sup>47</sup> After this congress, as Grojean aptly captured, Öcalan emerged not only as the key to liberation but also as an authority, “able to judge the level of investment required of each person if they are to become a true Man”. Therefore, Kurds can be Kurdish subjects only through a “total submission to the truth as revealed by” Öcalan.<sup>48</sup> Because the new discourse of the PKK gave the central role to Öcalan in creating new personality of Kurdish individuals, the PKK supporters even went as much further as to claim<sup>49</sup> that Öcalan “created a heaven [on the earth] as an answer to the eternal pursuit of human beings”. As a result, the personality of Öcalan, freeing itself from any founding reference to the Soviet

experience after the collapse of the Soviet Union, “became the major vector of subjectivization which demanded the birth of a new Kurdish man, in the leader’s image”.<sup>50</sup>

This point is very clear in Öcalan’s interview with academic Ali Kemal Özcan as part of the latter’s master thesis in the mid-1990s. In his response to Özcan’s question regarding the aim of the PKK in completing “the unaccomplished half of the October Revolution”, the individual purification of human beings,<sup>51</sup> Öcalan distinguished himself and the PKK from Lenin and his Socialist party. Therefore, not the socialist ideology but Öcalan himself turned an undisputable reference for the Kurds in transforming themselves from a slave of the system to a pure human being. At this point, some part of this interview is worth quoting at some length:

Lenin is not as profound as us [*sic*] on this matter [carrying out the revolution despite problematic personalities of cadres] and perhaps did not accord it as much weight. But on this point we are [*sic*] real expert. Many things, which he did not take into account, we have put into practice. Lenin is also limited, as far as solving internal problems within the organization [are considered], and he is even helpless... We are much further ahead. On the level of struggle and of the organization, we have definitely gone further. We are very different from what is encompassed by the framework of Leninism. Our situation cannot be explained by the crude outlook of Lenin’s organization. There may be similarity but it is superseded.

These young people [implying the PKK militants] are [the victim of the existing society]. This is the source of my extra-ordinaries. I have protected myself carefully ever since childhood... It is true that I can say to myself that *I am like a virgin being* – a virgin of human naturalness. You, however, live according to the class society’s production mechanisms, goods, and property – prostitution to the last degree. But myself in particular, I direct myself to live overwhelmingly as a ‘virgin’ and am careful not to involve myself in anything unclean... The difference between us lies there. I define this as a ‘purification movement’.... *My movement, therefore, is a movement, which creates a clean human being.* And as a matter of fact, whoever comes close to us sees the PKK in this way. This is what is so interesting about the PKK. Its emancipation lies in this.<sup>52</sup>

This self-referential reconstruction of the PKK throughout the 1990s resulted in more devoted Kurdish political subjects. Since the subject is formed in the repeated act of acquitting himself or herself of the guilt of

which he/she is accused by the law,<sup>53</sup> the constant fear of betraying the law,<sup>54</sup> which was embodied in the orders of Öcalan, radicalized the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects. To use the words of Bozarslan, such a reinterpretation of the PKK's identity "created a truly sectarian universe and an almost religious outlook, which explained the willingness of many militants to submit to Öcalan, and their astonishing acts of self-sacrifice under emotional pressure".<sup>55</sup> When the PKK had to make some compromises to the Turkish state by declaring unilateral ceasefires especially after some serious military defeats at the hands of the Turkish army, the PKK sympathizers both in Europe and in Turkey conducted self-immolations and suicide bombings: "6 attempts at self-immolation in Switzerland and Germany just one month after the end of the first unilateral cease-fire on the part of the PKK, 12 self-immolations in several German cities in 1994, a few months after the ban of the PKK in Germany; 3 suicide bombings in Turkey and 7 self-immolations between June and October 1996, a few months after the failure of the second unilateral ceasefire; a wave of 85 self-immolations and 12 suicide bombings after the PKK's third ceasefire and then Öcalan's arrest and apologies in 1998-99".<sup>56</sup>

Since it was "the PKK's socialism", not socialism as a universal imaginary, that "created a free life from an ignoble life" for the Kurds,<sup>57</sup> the existence of the PKK and the Leadership (Öcalan) were more important than the pursuit of life for these new Kurdish subjects. The first PKK female suicide bomber Zeynep Kinaci, blew herself up along with ten soldiers in 1996, explaining the uniqueness of the PKK's socialism in her three suicide letters by comparing it with the Soviet experience. For her, in the letter to the Leadership, "even Lenin as the leader of the Russian Revolution remains cosmetic in the solution of woman. The militarization (*ordulaşma*) of woman... was succeeded in the PKK for the first time in the history of the world. The mind... and experience of the Party Leadership is beyond any comparison with other leaderships".<sup>58</sup> Therefore, Kinaci concluded, "if we even sacrifice our life to you, it is not adequate in comparison to your unlimited labor and efforts. I wish we had things further than our life that we could sacrifice. You re-create a people through your own life. We are merely your work".<sup>59</sup> Another tragic example of being a subject in "the leader's image" was Sema Yüce, who burned herself to death in prison in 1998. In her suicide letter, she described the moment of writing the letter as a moment of "making the Leader APO as the only center in terms of intellectual, moral, and staminal aspects [for herself], and leaving all obstacles in the self behind".<sup>60</sup>



However, this excess in the discursive construction of responsibility or in the attempt to impose a complete closure on the political produced its discontents at the same time.<sup>61</sup> Former PKK members harshly criticized Öcalan in particular and the PKK in general for being new oppressors over Kurdish people. Therefore, the advance of the PKK in controlling the Kurdish society “made possible the formation of ‘reverse’ discourse”.<sup>62</sup> However, as Foucault warns us,<sup>63</sup> this reverse discourse may not result in emancipation from the PKK’s hegemonic status in the formation of the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects. Rather, reverse discursive practices may serve the PKK’s hegemonic discourse simply because they may function as concrete references in the PKK’s exclusionary discourse on treachery to the Kurdish cause of freedom and collaboration with imperialist system. Since, for example, “the NATO’s secret armies” ordered Sakik to write his book,<sup>64</sup> the reverse discourse turned a legitimizing tool in exclusionary practices through which the PKK continued to discipline the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects.

### UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PKK

At the fifth congress held 8–27 January 1995, the PKK put the final nail in the coffin for its pro-Soviet socialism that marked its early years.<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, “the Soviet socialists’ depoliticized and dogmatic ruling tactics” were condemned on the grounds that “Soviet socialism was a kind of deviation”<sup>66</sup> from the existing socialism promoting “humanity” and therefore it was just a “rough and wild phase of socialism”.<sup>67</sup> As a result of this radical departure from pro-Soviet imagination, “former party regulations, which were accepted during the party’s founding congress,” were replaced by new regulations based on scientific and creative socialism “which goes beyond the practices of other socialist organizations in the world and the abstract ideas of the petty bourgeoisie”. Adopting scientific and creative socialism was so significant that it made it possible to reshape the PKK’s perception of international politics. In other words, this new conception of socialism cleared the ground for the PKK in establishing “relations with the democratic and progressive forces in the environmentalist, liberal, and social justice organizations and the participation in international institutions”.<sup>68</sup>

The radical departure from the Soviet-type socialism led the PKK to question the necessity of the state for the Kurdish people. For example, the main conclusion Öcalan drew from the collapse of the Soviet Union

was the fact that “the aim of socialism can not be realized through becoming a state”.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, the socialist ideology, for Öcalan, must be based on “the development of democracy” unlike the Soviet experience promoting the state.<sup>70</sup> Although the fifth congress of the PKK sealed the end of aim for an independent Kurdish state through a Soviet-type revolution, early signs of this radical change date back to the early 1990s when the Soviet Union and communist block collapsed. A possible federal solution to the Kurdish question was discussed at the fourth congress of the PKK held on 25–31 December 1990, and it was argued that independence for the Kurds did not have to mean the creation of a separate state.<sup>71</sup> This idea was conveyed to the public when Öcalan declared his willingness for a negotiated political settlement for the Kurdish question in his interviews to journalists between 1990 and 1992.<sup>72</sup> After these early departures from its ultimate aim for creating an independent Kurdish state, the PKK officially declared a cease-fire in early 1993 in order to engage for negotiations based on “commitment to the unity of Turkey and rejection of separatism and a commitment to the legal democratic process”.<sup>73</sup>

This dramatic change during the first half of the 1990s cannot be reduced to a sole reason, the collapse of the Soviet Union. Why did the PKK, which was militarily strong, which received increasing support from the Kurdish people in the region, and whose struggle was positively framed as a struggle for Kurdish rights by many Western political actors, abandon the claim for an independent Kurdish state and embrace federal solutions to the Kurdish question in a time when opportunities for an independent Kurdish state were unprecedented?<sup>74</sup> Not surprisingly, this intriguing question attracted the attention of many pundits studying the Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. Four dominant explanations were developed: the success of counter-insurgency, a deadlock in being a guerilla movement, the challenge of expansion, and democratic reforms in Turkey. All these four dominant explanations in the existing literature are material-based ones and emphasize the role of concrete practices in the dramatic shift of the PKK’s aim from the fight for independence to a demand for democratic autonomy. While the first two underline military reasons, the latter two propound political developments as explanatory variable.

According to “the success of counterinsurgency” argument,<sup>75</sup> large-scale operations of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) both within Turkish borders and in northern Iraq resulted in significant military loses for the PKK. For example, while insurgent fatalities averaged 2.5 per operation in the 1980s, they climbed to 6.2 in the 1992–1999 period. When insur-

gent losses are compared with security losses in the two periods, security losses increased at a much slower pace, rising from 1.7 to 2.9 on average.<sup>76</sup> Also, counter-insurgency measures such as the evacuation of rural villages, which were important sources of new recruitments, and logistical support for the PKK, prevented mobilization capacity of the PKK. Added to these two developments, the Turkish state pressured Kurdish political groups in northern Iraq, where the PKK found a safe shelter and an operating ground for its hit-and-run tactics against Turkish soldiers and military targets. After this pressure, a clash between the PKK and Kurdish groups in northern Iraq erupted and the PKK experienced heavy military losses during the autumn of 1992.

The trap of being a guerilla movement<sup>77</sup> became very clear when the PKK started to declare some cities as “controlled areas” and established its local courts and administrations in the early 1990s. Deploying the large size of militia forces in these cities made the PKK an open target for the Turkish Armed Forces. According to McDowall, “a disastrous change in PKK strategy, away from guerilla operations that tied down the maximum number of troops for the minimum efforts, into direct conventional confrontation aimed at driving Turkish forces out of parts of Turkish Kurdistan” resulted in devastating defeats against the Turkish Armed Forces.<sup>78</sup> Accessing the Kurdish masses created another problem, the problem of expansion. According to Aydin and Emrence, the most urgent problem in the early 1990s was “the absence of a managerial class” for the Kurdish nationalist movement. Since the leadership cult of Abdullah Öcalan “prevented a middle stratum from developing and moving up in the organization”, the growing size of guerrilla units and mass movements in cities were not utilized in line with the independence of Kurdistan.<sup>79</sup>

For those who claim that democratic reforms in Turkey played a significant role in the dramatic shift the PKK experienced during the first half of the 1990s, reforms under the leadership of Turgut Özal, prime minister and president of Turkey respectively, such as “the legalization of spoken Kurdish” and the acceptance of the Kurdish reality by leading political parties in Turkey in the first half of the 1990s are worth mentioning. As a result of these reforms and proposals coming from the Turkish side, “Öcalan revealed a soft side of the PKK” and raised “the distinct possibility of his party working by legal means”.<sup>80</sup> To put differently, at about the same time as “the Turkish establishment was moving towards a more open policy towards its Kurds... the PKK also started to show a new flexibility”.<sup>81</sup> This flexibility was clarified by Öcalan himself in his “watershed

interview” with *Hürriyet*, one of the leading newspapers in Turkey, on 1 April 1990. For the first time, Öcalan declared the dramatic change in the ultimate target of the PKK by saying that “there is no question of separating from Turkey”.<sup>82</sup>

Although these explanations are in fact perfectly sound when the question why the PKK changed its ultimate aim is considered. However, they fall short in explaining the continuation of the PKK’s counter-hegemonic resistance during the rest of the 1990s and subsequent decades. Why, for example, did Öcalan remain as the central figure in the reproduction of new political Kurdish subjects despite the PKK’s one military failure and the other during the second half of the 1990s? The PKK’s ability to inscribe all these material developments into a new discursive language shaped by the end of the Cold War provides a convincing answer to the above question. For example, the new discourse of the PKK played a significant role in framing military failures at the battlefield as human rights violations of the Turkish state. Similarly, the new language of the PKK framed democratic reforms of the Turkish state regarding the Kurdish rights as the success of the PKK’s struggle for human rights and democracy. Therefore, the strength of the end of the Cold War as an explanatory variable stems from the fact that it provides an answer for both the change and the continuity simultaneously. While the void of meaning stemming from the collapse of the Soviet socialism forced the PKK to renounce its aim for independence, the same void of meaning simultaneously opened up the space for the PKK actors to speak. It was this process of reconstructing and stabilizing new meanings from which the PKK was able to re-emerge as a sovereign entity.

Since the PKK’s goals and identity were considerably affected by the Cold War conditions and the Marxist-Leninist attitude toward the national question, the collapse of the Soviet Union made it “imperative for the PKK to build a new political/ideological perspective and an organizational structure”.<sup>83</sup> This *imperativeness* was the main impetus behind the change of the PKK throughout the 1990s because any change in the statement’s conditions of use inevitably leads to the emergence of a new statement, human rights and democracy discourse. As Nabers rightly argues, “international crisis are crucial in processes of change, as they are characterized by a void of meaning—that might be deliberately constructed—a structural gap that has to be filled, a situation of fragmentation and indeterminacy of articulations”.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, this chapter (and the following one too) contends that it was the possibility of *change* in “meaning struc-

tures” after the end of the Cold War that prevented the collapse of the PKK as the hegemonic reference for new Kurdish political subjects and made the PKK adaptable to material challenges on the ground such as military failures, and accessing the Kurdish masses in the 1990s.

Insofar as the PKK is considered, the void of meaning resulted in two seemingly contradictory reactions: a return to the leader for coherence and justification (the cult of Öcalan) and the rise of human rights discourse for survival against the Turkish state. While the first, as showed in this chapter, turned Öcalan in particular and the PKK in general as indisputable sources of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity and its legitimization, the second, which is the main issue of the next chapter, simultaneously enabled and undermined the closure sought by the cult of Öcalan. Having lost the main alliance, the Soviet Union, in justifying the alternative Kurdish society, the PKK turned to human rights and democracy as external justifications of the post-1980 Kurdish society based on the cult of Öcalan in particular and the PKK in general. At first stage, this “human rights and democracy” turn provided legitimacy for the post-1980 Kurdish political society and a shield against intrusion of the Turkish state into this closed society. However, this human rights turn the PKK experienced in the 1990s, in the long run, undermined the centrality of the PKK in the production of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity. The emergence of non-military actors in Kurdish national public sphere during the late 1990s and later decades resulted in a new form of power expressing itself in civil society, liberal concerns and democratic demands.

In fine, while the first reaction to the collapse of the Soviet Union made the pursuit of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity possible, the second reaction, the human rights turn, provided both a shield against the Turkish state and a discursive space through which the post-1980 Kurdish political identity survived in a different hegemonic environment. Put differently, it was this second reaction that replaced the function of the Soviet Union in the late 1970s and 1980s. In the post-Soviet era, human rights and democracy promotion turned external leverages for the PKK and contemporary Kurdish nationalism in justifying the domestic counter-hegemonic discourse. This will be the main focus of the next chapter.

## NOTES

1. Michael M. Gunter, "Abdullah Öcalan: 'We Are Fighting Turks Everywhere'", *Middle East Quarterly*, 5(2), 1998: 79–85, p. 82.
2. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 3.
3. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 103.
4. Yannis Stavrakakis, "The Dislocation Factor in Green Politics", In: *Lacan, Discourse, Event: New Psychoanalytic Approaches to Textual Indeterminacy*, Editor: Ian Parker and David-Pavon-Cuellar, (London: Routledge, 2014): 27–37, p. 29.
5. Stavrakakis, *The Dislocation Factor in Green Politics*, p. 29.
6. Because of this identificatory process to human rights and democracy, some authors even called these new Kurdish political subjects as subjects enacting themselves as European citizens through their engagement with European law, particularly the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). See Bahar Rumelili, Fuat Keyman, and Bora Isyar, "Multilayered Citizenship in Extended European Orders: Kurds Acting as European Citizens", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 49(6), 2011: 1295–1316.
7. Quoted in Özcan, *Turkey's Kurds*, p. 93.
8. "Geride Kalan Sosyalizmin İlkel ve Vahşi Dönemidir: Ekim Devrimi İnsanlığa Yol Göstermeye Devam Edecektir", *Serxwebûn*, Kasım 1990, (107): 21–22, p. 22; Öcalan, *PKK IV Kongresi'ne*, p. 26.
9. Quoted in Özcan, *Turkey's Kurds*, p. 93.
10. "Kiminle Nasıl ve Nereye Kadar Yürünür," *Serxwebûn*, Şubat 1989, (86): 14–17, p. 16.
11. Abdullah Öcalan, "Gerçekleşen Sosyalizmin Dönüm Noktasında Yeni Sosyalizm Arayışları Üzerine", *Serxwebûn*, Mart 1990, (99): 16–22, p. 17.
12. Abdullah Öcalan, "Kendini Çözümleyen Militan, Tarihi ve Toplumsal Sorunların da Çözümleyici Gücü Olur", *Serxwebûn*, Eylül 1991, (117): 10–13, p. 12.
13. "Özel Savaşın Yeni Saldırı Taktiği Hizbullah ve Buna Karşı Görevlerimiz", *Serxwebûn*, Ağustos 1992, (128): 20–24, p. 20.
14. Abdullah Öcalan, *Sömürgeci Cumhuriyet Kirlî ve Suçludur*, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1995), p. 17 and 284.
15. Abdullah Öcalan, *Seçme Röpörtajlar*, Volume: III, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1996), p. 275; see also, Doğu Perinçek, *Abdullah Öcalan ile Görüşmeler*, (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2009), p. 175.
16. Abdullah Öcalan, "Sosyalizmin İdeolojik Politik Sorunları ve PKK'de Gerçekleşen Çözüm", *Serxwebûn*, Kasım 1994, (155): 12–18, p. 18.

17. Cemil Bayık, “Geçmişimizle Gurur Duyuyoruz ve Ona Dayanarak Geleceği Yaratmaya Çalışıyoruz”, *Serxwebûn*, Kasım 1999, (215): 4–8, p. 5.
18. Bayık, Geçmişimizle Gurur Duyuyoruz, p. 5.
19. Abdullah Öcalan, *Sosyalizmde Israr İnsan Olmakta Isrardır*, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebun, 1998), p. 25.
20. Öcalan, Sosyalizmde Israr, p. 99.
21. Öcalan, Sosyalizmde Israr, p. 30; Italics are mine. For the transition from socialism as class struggle to socialism as democracy in the discourse of the PKK, see also, “Sosyalizm, 20. Yüzyılın Dar Sınıf İdeolojisi Değildir, Apoculuk Yaratıcı Sosyalizmdir”, *Serxwebûn*, Mayıs 2000, (221), p. 1.
22. Öcalan, Sömürgeci Cumhuriyet, p. 153 and 200; Abdullah Öcalan, “12 Eylül Faşizminin 14 Yılı ve PKK Savaşı”, *Serxwebûn*, Ekim 1994, (154): 19–22, p. 20; Abdullah Öcalan, “71. Yıldönümünde ‘Cumhuriyet’ Gerçeği II”, *Serxwebûn*, Aralık 1994, (156), p. 28.
23. Abdullah Öcalan, “Kürt Halkı Köklü Bir Özgürlük Hareketine, Devrime Girişmeden Tatmin Edilemez”, *Serxwebûn*, Aralık 1991, (120): 20–21, p. 21; Abdullah Öcalan, “TC'nin Tarihsel ve Güncel Yapısı, Özel Savaş Düzeninin Geleceği”, *Serxwebûn*, Ocak 1995, (157): 4–7, p. 7.
24. Abdullah Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: VI, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1995), p. 172, 175 and 243.
25. Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: VI, p. 243.
26. Abdullah Öcalan, “Herşey Parti Devlet Değil, Herşey İnsanlık ve Cumhuriyet İçin”, *Serxwebûn*, Ekim 1995, (166): 12–15, p. 12.
27. Öcalan, Herşey Parti Devlet Değil, p. 14.
28. Öcalan, Herşey Parti Devlet Değil, p. 13.
29. Öcalan, PKK 5. Kongresi'ne, p. 134.
30. Stavrakakis, The Dislocation Factor in Green Politics, p. 32.
31. Yüce, Doğu'da Yükselen Güneş, Volume II, p. 134.
32. Öcalan, Seçme Yazılar, Volume: I, p. 124; Öcalan, Seçme Yazılar, Volume: III, p. 126 and 150; Öcalan, Seçme Yazılar, Volume: II, p. 27; Öcalan, Seçme Yazılar, Volume: IV, pp. 29–30 and 72.
33. According to Karl Kautsky, the most distinguished intellectual of the Second international: “The Socialist party is a revolutionary party, but not a revolution-making party... It is no part of our work to instigate a revolution or to prepare the way for it. And since the revolution cannot be arbitrarily created by us, we cannot say anything whatever about when, under what conditions, or what forms it will come. We know that the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat cannot end until the latter is in full possession of the political powers and has used them to introduce the Socialist society... We know that the proletariat must continue to grow in numbers and to gain in moral and economic strength, and that therefore its victory and the overthrow of capitalism is inevitable.” See Karl Kautsky,

- The Road to Power*, (Chicago: Progressive Woman Publishing Co., 1909), p. 50; Öcalan was also a vehement critic of Kautsky in the 1980s and accused him of being agent of the capitalist system.
34. See, for example, “Reykjavik Görüşmesinin Anlamı”, *Serxwebûn*, Ekim 1986, (58), p. 22; Abdullah Öcalan, “Reel Sosyalizm, Enternasyonalizm ve PKK Gerçekliği”, *Serxwebûn*, Ekim 1986, (89): 10–14, p. 10.
  35. Öcalan, Reel Sosyalizm, p. 10.
  36. Güneş, The Kurdish National Movement, p. 127.
  37. In his 1998 interview, Abdullah Öcalan explained the task of the PKK in creating the new Kurdish subject as follows: “I have struggled to develop a new type of Kurdish person, a new identity amongst the Kurds, one that is informed and capable of making a stand for Kurdish demands.” Sheri Laizer, “The International Debate: the status of Ocalan - Kurdish National Icon or Political Scapegoat?”, *KurdishMedia.com*, 22 December 1998.
  38. Abdullah Öcalan, “Sosyalizmden Kuşku Duymak, İnsandan ve Onun Sosyal Varlığından Kuşku Duymaktır”, *Serxwebûn*, Haziran 1991, (114), p. 1.
  39. M. Sati Üçlü, “Kürdistan’da Yeni İnsan”, *Serxwebûn*, Mart 1996, (171): 21–23, p. 21.
  40. Özcan, Turkey’s Kurds, pp. 93–4.
  41. Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya, and Joost Jongerden, “The PKK in the 2000s: Continuity through Breaks?”, In: *Nationalism and Politics in Turkey: Political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish Issue*, Editors: Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden, (London: Routledge, 2011): 143–162, p. 151.
  42. Yüce, Doğu’da Yükselen Güneş, Volume II, p. 13, 22 and 26.
  43. “İnkarcı ve Ortayolcu Sağ-liberal Eğilimi Aşalım ve Yeni Sürece Doğru Katılım”, *Serxwebûn*, Haziran 2001, (248): 5–10, p. 8.
  44. “Apocu Sosyalizm Sosyalist Hareketin Ulaştığı En İleri Düzeydir”, *Serxwebûn*, Ağustos 2002, (248): 20–23.
  45. Grojean, The Production of the New Man, p. 9; See also, Bozarslan, Türkiye’de Kürt Sol Hareketi, p. 1199.
  46. Özcan, Turkey’s Kurds, p. 100 and 102.
  47. “PKK’lileşmek” (turning into a person in whose life the PKK plays an indisputable and existential role) became a key term after this congress. See *PKK 5. Kongre Kararları*, (Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1995), pp. 18–19.
  48. Grojean, The Production of the New Man, p. 9; Hamit Bozarslan, “Kurds and the Turkish State”, In: *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, Editor: Reşat Kasaba, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, Press, 2008): 333–356, pp. 351–2.
  49. Abdullah Öcalan, *Özgür Yaşamla Diyaloglar, 1995-1998 Çözümlemeleri*, (İstanbul: Çetin Yayınları, 2002), p. 21.



50. Olivier Grojean, “Violence against the Self: the Case of a Kurdish Non-Islamist Group”, In: *The Enigma of Islamist Violence*, Editors: Amelie Blom, Laetitia Bucaille, and Luis Martinez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007): 105–120, p. 112.
51. Ali Kemal Özcan, *Humanisation Movement: An Attempt at Rehumanization in the ‘Cradle of Civilization’*, (Berlin: Weşanên İnstitüya Kurdî, 1999), p. 56.
52. Özcan, Humanisation Movement, p. 62 and 66, Italics are mine.
53. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 118.
54. Bozarslan, “Kurds and the Turkish State”, p. 352.
55. Bozarslan, “Kurds and the Turkish State”, p. 352
56. Grojean, *Violence against the Self*, p. 112; see also, Banu Bargu, *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 163–223.
57. “Ekim Devriminin 78. Yıldönümünde Kürdistan Sosyalizmi Sınırları Aşıyor”, *Serxwebûn*, Ekim 1995, (166), p. 11.
58. “Zilan Hevalin Parti Önderliğine Mesajı”, *Serxwebûn*, Temmuz 1996, (175), p. 16.
59. Quoted in Özcan, *Turkey’s Kurds*, p. 153.
60. Quoted in Yüce, Doğu’da Yükselen Güneş, Volume II, p. 9. For how the new ideology of the PKK or the cult of Öcalan motivated the PKK followers in sacrificing their lives, see also, Özcan, *Humanisation Movement*, pp. 80–85.
61. See for example, Şemdin Sakık, *İmralı’da Bir Tiran Abdullah Öcalan*, (İstanbul: Togan, 2012); Selim Çürükkaya, *APO’nun Ayetleri: Beyrut Günlüğü*, (İstanbul: Doz-Basım Yayın, 2005).
62. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 101. For a recent study on this, see Mustafa Gürbüz, *Rival Kurdish Movements in Turkey: Transforming Ethnic Conflict* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016).
63. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 102.
64. Abdullah Öcalan, “Görüşme Notları”, *Özgür Gündem*, 29 August 2008.
65. Gunter, *The Kurds and*, p. 51; “Silah ve Slogan Sesleri Zaferi Müjdeliyordu”, *Serxwebûn*, Şubat 1995, (158): 24–26.
66. Öcalan, *PKK 5. Kongresi’ne*, p. 62.
67. Öcalan, *PKK 5. Kongresi’ne*, p. 63.
68. See also, *PKK 5. Kongre Kararları*, pp. 219–220.
69. Öcalan, *PKK 5. Kongresi’ne*, p. 63.
70. Öcalan, *PKK 5. Kongresi’ne*, p. 65 and 67; for the PKK, the development of democracy did not mean the promotion of “individual freedom” because such a democratic development was the main obstacle before the militarization of the Kurds, nationalization, and the centralization of the party. *PKK 5. Kongre Kararları*, p. 21.

71. Kirişci, and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, p. 148; Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 49.
72. White, *Primitive Rebels*, p. 163; see also, Doğu Perinçek, *Abdullah Öcalan ile Görüşme*, (İstanbul: Sistem Yayıncılık, 1993), p. 91.
73. MacDowall, *A Modern History*, p. 437; Robert Olson, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s: Its Impact on Turkey and the Middle East*, pp. 23–4.
74. Under such an atmosphere, a leading pundit on the Kurdish issue came to the conclusion that “it is the Kurds of Turkey who are the most wholeheartedly in favour of independence rather than autonomy”. David McDowall, “The Kurdish Question: A Historical Review”, In: *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, Editors: Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 30; Even as late as 1998, many leading pundits continued to believe that separation of the Kurds as a different state was inevitable. See van Bruinessen, *Shifting National*, p. 49 and Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, p. 214.
75. Aydın and Emrence, *Zones of Rebellion*, p. 41 and 111; Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement*, p. 130.
76. Aydın and Emrence, *Zones of Rebellion*, p. 111 and 178 (15).
77. Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement*, p. 108; Aydın and Emrence, *Zones of Rebellion*, p. 7 and 155.
78. MacDowall, *A Modern History*, pp. 236–7.
79. Aydın and Emrence, *Zones of Rebellion*, p. 28.
80. White, *Primitive Rebels*, pp. 162–3; Henri J. Barkey, and Graham E. Fuller, “Turkey's Kurdish Question: Critical Turning Points and Missed Opportunities”, *The Middle East Journal*, 51(1), 1997: 59–79, pp. 67–8.
81. Nicole Pope and Hugh Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: Atatürk and After*, (London: John Murray, 1997), p. 264 and 266
82. Pope and Pope, *Turkey Unveiled*, p. 266
83. Özüm Yeşiltaş, *Rethinking the National Question: Anti-statist Discourses within the Kurdish National Movement*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, (Florida: Florida International University, 2014), p. 149.
84. Dirk Nabers, “Filling the Void of Meaning: Identity Construction in US Foreign Policy after September 11, 2001”, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 5(2), 2009: 191–214, p. 193.

## Re-writing the USA After the Cold War

In October 1995, Abdullah Öcalan wrote a letter to the then US President Bill Clinton.<sup>1</sup> Before asking for help from the USA, Öcalan, in his letter, made some corrections about the image of the PKK as a communist movement: “Allow me at this time to dispel some misconceptions about our party, namely that we are like other classic Communist parties and that we may be seeking to change the existing borders of Turkey or that we insist upon separation from Ankara. None of these assertions is true”.<sup>2</sup> This statement was striking because the PKK’s representation of the world was totally Manichean, a world divided between imperialist West and revolutionary Communism, in the late 1970s and 1980s. In this Manichean representation, imperialist West, mainly the USA, was presented as evil, wrong, inhuman, and exploiter, while the revolutionary communism led by the Soviet Union was referred as good, right, humane, and emancipatory. Therefore, the shift, as Öcalan’s letter to Clinton clearly showed, triggers many intriguing questions. What made this radical shift possible? How did a movement whose identity is based on a radical anti-imperialism plea for help from an imperial power? More importantly, how did this radical shift in reading world politics reshape the PKK and post-1980 Kurdish political identity?

Three structural changes, the rising interest of the West, especially the USA, in political demands of ethnic groups, the rise of human rights discourse, the US interest in the Middle East, during the 1980s cleared

the ground for a possible rapprochement between the PKK and the USA. During the 1980s, ethnic minorities and their political rights started to find a resonance in the US foreign policy. The Middle East had a special place in this comparatively new interest of the USA.<sup>3</sup> The wave of ethnic conflicts ranging from the former Yugoslavia, to Africa and the Caucasus in the early 1990s put ethnic issues at the center of the US foreign policy especially during the presidency of Bill Clinton.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, countries with ethnic tensions became the issue of criticism, regulations, and sanctions coming from the West in general and the USA in particular throughout the 1990s. For example, the USA cut military aids and made some economic aids conditional in order to force the Turkish state to improve ethnic rights of the Kurds. The raising interest of the West in ethnic minorities created an external leverage for dissident ethnic movements all around the world in the pursuit of their counter-mobilization against hegemonic states.

After the end of the Cold War, it was democracy promotion and human rights that appeared most frequently in the speeches of Western politicians.<sup>5</sup> While the USA stated that the promotion of democracy was at the heart of its foreign policy during the Clinton period, the EU turned democracy, human rights, and the rule of law as compulsory conditions for candidate countries at the Copenhagen summit in 1993. After Turkey's application for full membership of the European Community (EC) in 1987 and the reinvigoration of Custom Union Process with the EU in the early 1990s, the influence of the EC/EU on Turkish politics increased steadily. However, neither the resolutions of European Parliament on human rights' abuses in Turkey nor criticisms of other EC institutions toward Turkey in the 1980s directly addressed the problems of the people with Kurdish origins. Unlike the 1980s, starting from the beginning of the 1990s particularly the European Parliament increased its interest in the Kurdish problem of Turkey. This discursive change in the West was utilized by the PKK, confronting with military decline against the Turkish Armed Forces and struggling with an ideological crisis after the collapse of socialist block, as a way to put pressure on the Turkish state regarding Kurdish demands.<sup>6</sup>

The change in the PKK's perception of Europe is an ample example. Unlike the 1980s when the PKK presented leading countries of Europe such as Germany, France, and the UK as imperial powers aiming to prevent the Kurdish revolution in the Middle East,<sup>7</sup> the PKK, in the 1990s, developed a cooperative discourse regarding the European Union. The

combination of EU's pressure on Turkey about the continuing human rights violations related to the Kurdish issue with the domestic constraints such as the closure of Kurdish parties and imprisonment of Kurdish MPs by the Constitutional Court made Turkey's EU membership bid a source of useful external pressure over the Turkish political system in the eyes of Kurdish political actors. Therefore, after the closure of the legal Kurdish political party, the Democracy Party, Kurdish politicians and activists reframed their national cause as one of fundamental human rights<sup>8</sup> and often visited EU institutions and influential European politicians to find external anchors for escaping the suffocating climate in the Turkish political system.<sup>9</sup> By the end of the 1990s, the PKK even went further to equate its own demands with the demand of the EU. In the letter from the PKK to the Helsinki summit on 29 November 1999, the PKK presidential council declared that its new strategy "corresponds to the aims of the EU to foster democracy, freedom and human rights" in Turkey and approved "of conditions for Turkey implementing the Copenhagen Criteria".<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the Cold War, the Middle East was a geography on which the USA and the Soviet Union competed for power. However, the USA, deeply involved in the Middle East with the Gulf War of 1991, became a hegemonic power in this region. Also, the USA, for the first time, used force against the Iraqi state in support of the Kurds in northern Iraq. Stories and images of the Kurds fleeing from the massacre at the hands of the Iraqi regime in the US media created pro-Kurdish sentiment in American public opinion.<sup>11</sup> Together with the rise of ethnic minority issues and human rights discourse, the US active involvement in the Middle East evoked an international attention to the problems of the Kurds in Turkey. As Aydın and Emrence rightly captured, "international attention allowed the PKK to shift its political ideology. It abandoned the goal of an independent Kurdistan and instead looked for ways to negotiate with the Turkish state. Imperialist powers were removed from the list of eternal foes, and local collaborators seemed risky targets in this political environment."<sup>12</sup>

Another remarkable change in the early 1990s on the side of the PKK was the emergence of legal political organizations representing the Kurdish nationalism. The first Kurdish party, the HEP (*Halkın Emek Partisi*, People's Labour Party), was established on 7 June 1990. While Öcalan, at the beginning, was critical of such a political organization outside of his sphere of influence, he declared his support to this party before Turkey's 1991 national elections.<sup>13</sup> The PKK also decided to establish mass appeal newspapers such as *Yeni Ülke* (New Country), and *Özgür Gündem*

(Free Agenda) in the early 1990s and many Kurdish nationalist and leftist journalists started to write in these newspapers. Added to these, many civil society organizations close to the PKK were established in Kurdish-populated cities, which was vital in transforming the public sphere from a place controlled and regulated by the state to the space promoting the post-1980 Kurdish national identity.<sup>14</sup> Kurdish political activists of these legal NGOs and political organizations not only exposed human rights violations of the Turkish state by being the target of bans, criminal investigations, imprisonment, and even extrajudicial killings, but those activists also contacted with their Western counterparts in an official way.

### THE PROPHECY COMES TRUE: THE GULF WAR

Throughout the 1980s, the PKK kept saying that US imperialism would use the Rapid Deployment Force in the Middle East in case collaborator regimes fail to prevent national independence war of the Kurds. Therefore, the failure of the Turkish Armed Forces in the fight against revolutionary war of the PKK resulted in the Gulf War, a direct military involvement of US imperialism together with other imperial powers in different parts of Kurdistan.<sup>15</sup> Put differently, the real aim of the Gulf War, according to the PKK, was “to put the Kurdish people under the control” by defeating revolutionary powers in Kurdistan and restoring the imperial rule over the Middle East.<sup>16</sup> This was the case because the PKK’s revolutionary war was about to defeat counter-revolutionary collaborators in the region and thereby put the interest of global imperialism at risk. The PKK often referred to the uprising in spring 1990 (*Bahar Atılımı*), during which mass demonstrations (known as *serhildan*) took place in cities of Cizre and Nusaybin as a show of public support to the PKK, in order to prove its claim that the Gulf War was a response of US imperialism to the success of the PKK’s revolutionary war.

The PKK swiftly utilized the Gulf War as a discursive tool in consolidating its unique position to represent the Kurds and in presenting itself as the only real Kurdish organization, capable to fight against US imperialism. Therefore, the PKK and its revolutionary war were presented as the real targets of the Gulf War. For example, the PKK explained its central position in the new policy of US imperialism toward the Middle East as the following: “What is important for the US is to prevent a revolutionary solution for the Kurdish question and to stop the spread of anti-imperial wave of struggle triggered by the Kurdish revolution... What is important

for the US is to pursue its rule [over the Middle East]. If this seems impossible through old methods (supporting counter revolutionary regimes in the region such as Turkey and Iraq), it is the reality that the US can sell its existing collaborators out.”<sup>17</sup> If the real target of US imperialism was the PKK in restoring its imperial rule over Kurdistan in particular and the Middle East in general, this automatically meant that the PKK, unlike other Kurdish groups in Iraq, did not represent the interest of US imperialism but the interest of Kurdish people. Therefore, other Kurdish groups in Iraq appeared as legitimate target in the PKK’s revolutionary war since they were just new collaborators of US imperialism in suppressing the PKK, the real representative of the Kurds.

In the new order based on the restoration of US imperialism in the Middle East, Kurdish groups in northern Iraq, according to the PKK, became new collaborators of US imperialism in suppressing the real revolutionary Kurdish movement, the PKK. Therefore, US imperialism, which failed to prevent the Kurdish revolutionary war through its existing collaborators such as Turkey and Iraq, developed a new policy based on “the creation of a buffer zone” in northern Iraq with the aim of preventing the PKK’s successful revolutionary war. For the PKK, the strategy of the USA was quite simple: “the Southern Kurdistan was the weakest link in the chain... The promotion of primitive nationalist and reformist Kurdish organizations [in this region by US imperialism] was not aiming at solving the Kurdish question for a better life in Kurdistan but at debilitating Kurdistan, which grew stronger.”<sup>18</sup> For this very reason, US military forces were deployed in the southern Kurdistan and traditional Kurdish forces led by the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party under the leadership of Mesud Barzani were transformed into counter-revolutionary forces aiming to “prevent national independence movement led by the PKK” and restore US imperialism in the Middle East.<sup>19</sup>

Although the PKK and the KDP, in 1983, signed an accord termed “Principles of Solidarity” under which they each agreed upon a unified commitment against “every kind of imperialism, with American imperialism at the top of the list, and the struggle against the plans and plots of imperialism in the region”, Öcalan often criticized Mustafa Barzani, the leader of early Kurdish revolts in Iraq during the second half of nineteenth century and father of Mesud Barzani, for being feudal and petit bourgeois and of taking refuge in the USA in his last days.<sup>20</sup> After the Gulf War, the PKK increased the critical tone of the collaboration thesis labeling Kurdish movements in Iraq as agents of US imperialism against the true

representative of the Kurds, the PKK. Through this collaboration thesis, the PKK not only delegitimized demands of Iraqi Kurdish groups about peaceful negotiations with the Turkish state, but it also undermined the legitimacy of Kurdish parties in Iraq as true representatives of the Kurds. Öcalan swiftly “called Mesud Barzani a collaborator, reactionary, feudal person and a primitive nationalist” and accused two prominent Kurdish leaders in Iraq, Mesud Barzani and Celal Talabani “of trying to stab the PKK in the back by cooperating with Turkey”.<sup>21</sup> Aiming to render the PKK central in representing the Kurds, Öcalan framed his war against Iraqi Kurdish groups during the first half of the 1990s as “a war between Kurdish collaborators fully supported by imperialism and a power [the PKK] aiming to improve and finalize the Kurdistan revolution”.<sup>22</sup>

The representation of the Gulf War as an imperial invasion of Kurdistan not only legitimized the accusation of Iraqi Kurdish groups being collaborator, but it also justified the execution of critics within the PKK. The Fourth Congress of the PKK was convened in December 1990 in order to investigate six leading military commanders of the PKK who were accused of misapplying Öcalan’s orders in the battlefield. During the congress, Mehmet Cahit Şener, a famous and respected member of the PKK as a leading figure in the organization of the PKK’s Diyarbakir prison uprising and hunger strikes, strongly criticized Öcalan’s strategy of consolidating his authority by putting responsibility of all mistakes on other leading figures of the PKK.<sup>23</sup> When the congress ended, Öcalan ordered an investigation into Şener’s activities. However, Şener and his friends were not easy targets because they were at top positions within the PKK’s executive committees and they were known among PKK members as the most devoted figures to the PKK’s fight for an independent Kurdish state. Therefore, Öcalan utilized the deployment of US military forces in the region as part of the Gulf War and the cooperation of Iraqi Kurdish parties with the USA in order to legitimize his order. According to *Serxwebûn*, the official journal of the PKK, Şener and his friends, who took refuge in the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party after Öcalan’s order, were agents in a great conspiracy of imperial and colonial powers against the PKK and its revolutionary war.<sup>24</sup>

Contrary to the PKK’s framing, the policies pursued by the USA after the 1991 Gulf War, however, provided an opportunity for the creation of a “*de facto* Kurdish state” in northern Iraq.<sup>25</sup> The cooperation of Iraqi Kurdish parties with the USA and Turkey against Baghdad before and during the Gulf War resulted in a “*de facto* Kurdish state” in northern Iraq



protected by a United Nations presence sanctioned by Security Council Resolution 688 of 5 April 1991 and the Allied Poised Hammer forces stationed in south-eastern Turkey. This was a dislocation for a movement based on the idea that US imperialism is the main obstacle before the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. Put differently, the establishment of a *de facto* Kurdish state with the help of the USA was contrary to the PKK's framing of US imperialism, according to which the main obstacle before the establishment of any independent Kurdish state was the imperial system led by the USA. Therefore, like the collapse of the Soviet socialism, the significant role of the USA in the establishment of a *de facto* Kurdish state in northern Iraq undermined the idea of the Kurdish national independence *through a Marxist-Leninist revolution*.

The creation of a protected zone by allied forces led by the USA for Iraqi Kurds to protect them from Baghdad's military assaults inspired Kurdish nationalists in Turkey to ask "why Kurds in Iraq deserved protection while those in Turkey did not" especially when conflict between the Turkish army and PKK guerillas escalated in 1992 and 1993.<sup>26</sup> This was not a simple question. It rather was a dislocatory question because it undermined seemingly fixed ideas about "what the Symbolic Other demands"<sup>27</sup> produced by the PKK in the late 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, some PKK commanders came to the conclusion that similar protection would ease the PKK's ultimate aim to establish a Kurdish state as in the case of a *de facto* Kurdish state in northern Iraq.<sup>28</sup> Although Öcalan tried to frame this development as an ample evidence to support his claim that Kurdish leaders in northern Iraq were collaborators of US imperialism,<sup>29</sup> the explicit and undeniable existence of a *de facto* Kurdish state dislocated the hegemonic discourse within the PKK based on a complete rejection of any cooperation with imperial powers. Therefore, even Öcalan himself accepted this reality in his later writings.<sup>30</sup> This evident openness of the Gulf War to reinterpretation as a positive development for the interests of the Kurds coincided with the change in Öcalan's imagination of the USA during the rest of the 1990s.

It is, then, clear that the prophecy is functional in the production of any political society only when its realization is deferred. While the discourse on a possible use of US military power in the Middle East against the Kurds normalized the PKK's anti-American and anti-imperialist language, the US military intervention aiming to save the Kurds from Iraq's brutal and destructive policies proved the PKK's anti-American language wrong as far as the interest and survival of the Kurds was considered. Therefore,

the Gulf War and subsequent course of events such as the establishment of no-fly zone over northern Iraq dislocated the PKK's hegemonic language regarding US imperialism and opened a space for the development of a human-rights-based discourse in the PKK's language. This was so because framing the brute violence of Saddam against Iraqi Kurds as human rights violation by Kurdish political actors in Iraq and international media mobilized international forces led by the USA, which eventually resulted in an autonomous Kurdish geography within the borders of Iraq.

### THE RISE OF "HUMAN RIGHTS" DISCOURSE

The discursive anchor of the 1970s and 1980s, US imperialism, to which the meanings of other terms such as the status of women in the Kurdish society, the responsibility of the PKK, and the function of alternative Kurdish movements refer back, were shattered by many dislocations such as the end of the Cold War, the collapse of socialism, and the Gulf War of 1991. It is empirically clear that this "organic crisis" forced the PKK to redefine its responsibility or its function, and to reconstruct the post-1980 Kurdish political subject through which the PKK would exercise its power throughout the 1990s. But an intriguing question remains to be answered: How did the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects, who were inscribed into Kurdish independence through Marxist-Leninist revolution and a fight against US imperialism, continue to attach themselves to the PKK abandoning claim for independence through Marxist-Leninist revolution and stepping back from its radical fight against US imperialism, in the 1990s? To put this question in other words: How was a movement facing an organic crisis regarding its settled meanings (an independence movement, a Marxist-Leninist movement, and an anti-American movement) still attractive for those who were inscribed into a different symbolic universe (the independence of Kurdistan through a Marxist-Leninist revolution against the imperial system and its colonial collaborators) throughout the 1980s?

The ambiguity or plurality in the meaning of the end of the Cold War (both the collapse of socialism and the rise of human rights) provided a discursive space through which the shift the PKK experienced in the early 1990s was legitimized and justified. Then, the end of the Cold War was important for the Kurdish movement's imagination of the world not only because it represented the waning of socialism as an ultimate reference for dissident and separatist movements within capitalist societies,<sup>31</sup> but

because it also yielded the spread of human rights, freedom, and democracy around the globe. While the first course of events triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union forced the PKK to redefine itself, the second course of events made this redefinition possible without losing hegemonic position in writing the Kurds into the post-1980 Kurdish political identity. However, this redefinition was not based on a complete denial of the past when US imperialism was rendered to the symbolic other in the construction of the new Kurdish political identity. Rather, the PKK developed a dyadic stance against the USA in the 1990s and following decades: while positive connotations attached to the USA normalized and justified the “human rights turn” in the PKK, the continuous imperial character of the USA in the discourse of the PKK served to sustain the distinction of the PKK as the true representative of the Kurds.<sup>32</sup>

The changes on the part of the USA provided vital and “legitimate” excuses for this transition in the discourse of the PKK concerning US imperialism. The US government started to publish “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices” in 1977 for the first time. Although these annual reports gave a limited space for the problems of the people with Kurdish origins in Turkey, the report for 1988, for the first time, openly criticized Turkey’s “pursuit of full assimilation” on the grounds that it led to the ban of books, newspaper, and other materials in the Kurdish language, imprisonments of Kurdish public figures, and killings.<sup>33</sup> With the passage of time, the USA increased its critical tone against the Turkish state regarding human rights abuses toward the Kurdish people. “The use of excessive forces” in the fight against the PKK, the violation of “the freedom of expression”, occasional killings of ordinary Kurdish people by the security forces, “discriminations against Kurds”, tortures on family members of suspected rebels, and “incommunicado detention” were openly cited in the 1989 Report.<sup>34</sup> Added to these reports, some US statesmen openly criticized Turkey’s ban on speaking Kurdish on the grounds that it violates the basic human rights of the people whose mother tongue is Kurdish.<sup>35</sup>

In an environment in which the Turkish state was criticized for violating the Kurds’ cultural rights by the USA and the European Union, the PKK rescheduled its imagination of the world in accordance to the new trends in world politics in its Second National Conference held in May 1990. Underlying the importance of human rights, democracy, and environmental problems in the new world, the PKK declared that this new trend is useful for its struggle against the Turkish state and therefore

it would utilize these new principles.<sup>36</sup> According to this new strategy, the PKK would develop “a new and moderate approach” by which the Turkish state could be isolated from the world and detracted in the eyes of European countries and even the USA.<sup>37</sup> This new discursive change would be impossible if the PKK had limited itself with the argument that the Turkish state was a mere puppet of US imperialism for the latter’s regional interests. Therefore, unlike the 1980s, the PKK revised its discourse on Turkey’s puppet role for American interests in the region and started to argue that “Turkey tries to include imperialist and colonialist powers to its genocide [against the Kurds] and unite them under its own leadership in order to annihilate the Kurdish people”.<sup>38</sup> In this new discourse, for the PKK, Turkey manipulated the Western powers in order to prevent the development of an independent Kurdish policy and incorporated these powers in its own war against the Kurds.<sup>39</sup>

It was not the USA’s changing policy toward the Kurdish issue in Turkey that alone shaped the PKK’s new attitude or the perception of the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects. Rather, the PKK’s reinterpretation of world politics in line with human rights and democracy resonated among the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects.<sup>40</sup> When those subjects were offered a new language based on human rights, they were already in the position in which they were “capable of making sense of them and capable of making the connections and inferences”.<sup>41</sup> This was the case because the Turkish state was harshly violating basic human rights of both post-1980 Kurdish political subjects and those who were the target of the PKK in the process of producing the new Kurdish political subject. In the beginning of the 1990s, the Turkish state not only started to evacuate and burn villages that were perceived as being supporters of the PKK but it also became notorious with extrajudicial killings, tortures, and imprisonments among the Kurds.<sup>42</sup> The Kurds facing these human rights violations facilitated the shift in the language of the PKK toward the discourse based on human rights, the rule of law, and democracy.

The need to reconstruct the post-1980 Kurdish political identity through human rights discourse was also motivated by the expansion of the nationalist Kurdish movement in the 1990s from a mere illegal terrorist organization, the PKK, to a movement embracing a legal political party and many civil society organizations. Human rights discourse widened the space of further mobilization for these legal and Kurdish nationalist groups and limited the reach of the Turkish state to the Kurdish public space where new counter-hegemonic language was constructing new

Kurdish political subjects. Any intervention of the Turkish state into this Kurdish public space was framed as the violation of basic human rights, freedom of thought, freedom of association, freedom to speak and publish in mother tongue, and so on. Therefore, the new discursive alliance between the Kurdish national movement and Western “imperial” powers through human rights and democracy not only protected legal Kurdish political movements against the enforcement of the Turkish state, but it also undermined the legitimacy of the Turkish state. It targeted the legitimacy of the Turkish state because the criticism of the West concerning human rights violations and weak democratic standards contributed to produce the image of the Turkish state as evil other having no hesitation to conduct war crimes, unlawful killings, torture, and other brutal human rights violations toward its own (Kurdish) citizens.

The identification of the Kurdish national movement with human rights and democracy by its own actors was consolidated by a range of “foreign policy” practices from the USA’s official policy toward legal Kurdish politics in Turkey to the Kurdish party’s relations with the US administration on the basis of human rights and democracy. For example, when the Parliamentary Human Rights Foundation in the USA sent, in February 1995, a human rights fact-finding mission to Turkey in order to meet with Kurdish NGOs (Human Rights Association of Turkey, the Turkey Human Rights Foundation, the Diyarbakır Bar Association), Kurdish party’s officials, and banned Kurdish deputies, the Kurdish movement’s human rights-based identity/struggle *vis-à-vis* the Turkish state was affirmed and reinforced. Similarly, the Kurdish party’s policy to solve “the Kurdish problem through peaceful and democratic methods in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Human Rights Agreement, and the statutes of the Helsinki Final Document”<sup>43</sup> made the very possibility of taking the USA as an interlocutor. For example, banned Kurdish parliamentarians Mehmet Ali Yiğit and Remzi Kartal, later representatives of the PKK in Europe, traveled to the USA in order to give a briefing to the US Congress’ Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe in July 22, 1994. Kartal, in his speech, proposed that “the United States government should cut its foreign aid to Turkey”, encourage “Turkey towards a more democratic position”, and “recognize the duly elected Kurdish deputies as the true representatives of the Kurdish people”.<sup>44</sup>

It is true that this new “foreign policy” was the result of the human rights turn the PKK experienced in the early 1990s. But it is also

important to underline that this new policy functioned as an external approval of the new identity of the PKK in particular and of the post-1980 Kurdish national society in general. Put differently, the fact that the relations between the legal side of the Kurdish movement and the USA were mostly shaped by human rights concerns was an integral part of identity construction for the Kurdish national movement. Mutual visits between Kurdish actors and the US representatives, statements from the US officials, sanctions on the Turkish state, and documents prepared on human rights violations in Turkey reframed the Kurdish issue “as one of fundamental human rights and depicted the Turkish rejection of pro-Kurdish parties’ demands as a violation of an international human rights norm that the Turkish state had already agreed to uphold in various treaties”.<sup>45</sup> This new discourse reproduced the difference between the Kurdish national movement as the “real” representative and defender of the Kurds and the Turkish state as the main violator of the Kurdish rights. Therefore, the change of the Kurdish nationalist movement from national independence struggle in the 1980s to a demand for democratic autonomy in the 1990s does not automatically mean that the Turkish state lost its status as the other for the PKK and post-1980 Kurdish political society. Rather, this new language facilitated the pursuit of the creation of a closed Kurdish society free from the intrusion of the Turkish state.

### US IMPERIALISM REVISITED

Unlike the 1980s, the PKK oscillated between the discourse of war against the Turkish state and that of war against the imperial system led by the USA in the 1990s. For example, while Öcalan claimed to wage an anti-imperialist war allegedly perceived by the USA as a war threatening US interests more than the Soviet socialism,<sup>46</sup> he, at the same time, declared, “this is not your war and do not move against the PKK. We do not want to fight against you as well”.<sup>47</sup> The second aspect of the PKK’s discourse on the USA was best captured by Öcalan’s response to Washington-based analyst David Korn’s questions: “the chief of the CIA has defined our party as a foremost international terrorist organization. [However], the PKK has no other role but to promote the demands of the Kurds for their own national identity and rights”. Öcalan continued, “I’m surprised when the US and its intelligence circles have seen the PKK as the foremost danger in the world although we are not in fight with the US” and “its interests”. For Öcalan, this awkward situation is something that should be changed

by the US administration and accordingly the US should “see that we are a movement which promotes human rights and struggles for democracy”.<sup>48</sup> This ambivalence located in the other, US imperialism, was vital in such a period when the PKK faced fundamental dislocations. While the desire to see itself endorsed as a movement of human rights and democracy by US imperialism provided a language to the PKK in getting rid of fundamental dislocations, the rejection of US imperialism as the “real” enemy of the PKK functioned as the condition of pursuing the distinctiveness of the PKK in representing the post-1980 Kurdish political subject.

Two underlying facts shaped this dyadic stance of the PKK toward US imperialism. Firstly, the imagination of the USA as imperial power functioned not only as an empty signifier through which the PKK defined the Kurdish political subject and its others, but also as a threat through which the PKK put itself in the position of responsibility to protect the Kurds. In other words, discourse regarding the emancipatory fight of the PKK against US imperialism played a vital role in the construction of the Kurdish political subject. Therefore, the PKK’s new discourse had to be compatible with its previous discourse during the late 1970s and 1980s and its main interlocutors were now Kurdish political subjects produced by this previous discourse. Secondly, the USA, despite its discursive shift toward the improvement of human rights for the Kurds in Turkey, was still the ally of the Turkish state and continued to define the PKK as a terrorist organization. The USA clearly supported the Turkish state’s position on the Kurdish issue particularly when the PKK is considered.<sup>49</sup> Although the USA directed serious criticism toward Turkey in its annual human rights reports, sent human rights fact-finding missions to Turkey, and made critical statements on human rights violations in the Kurdish-populated areas, it often reaffirmed “Turkey’s continuing importance as a longstanding NATO ally which faces a major threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity from the terrorist” PKK and stressed that “continued support for Turkey’s security serves major US interests”.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, alliance relation between the US government and the Turkish state and the USA’s oft-declared support for Turkey’s fight against the PKK prevented the PKK’s further engagement with the USA through discourses on human rights and democracy. In other words, while contradiction between Turkey and the USA over autonomy in Kurdistan was the main reason behind the PKK’s engagement with the USA in the 1990s, the cooperation between the Turkish state and the Washington administration over the fight against the PKK resulted in the maintenance of a strong anti-American discourse.<sup>51</sup>

In the period after Öcalan was forced to flee from Syria on 6 October 1998, the PKK resorted to the discourse of US imperialism. This event was called “a great international plot” against Abdullah Öcalan in particular and the PKK in general.<sup>52</sup> The first issue of *Serxwebûn* after Öcalan was expelled from Syria described the event as a conspiracy organized by US imperialism and its regional collaborators, Turkey and Israel:

By eliminating the Party Leadership [Öcalan] and destroying the PKK, the core of the most revolutionary resistance in the region and a hope for peoples dreaming of emancipation and freedom, organizers of the 9 October Plot aimed the followings: to establish the *new world order* in the Middle East; to replace the current rulers in Syria, Iraq and Iran, who are obstacle before the establishment of the new world order in the region, with comprador ruling classes; to turn the southern Kurdistan [northern Iraq] the main military base of the US; to prevent any other country, be it imperialist or not, from having influence over the Middle East; to implement the Middle East-Eurasia plan developed by the US.

The PKK was the biggest obstacle before all these plans. What the PKK meant was the Leader APO. Therefore, the target was the Leader APO.... Therefore, Turkish colonialism, US imperialism, Zionism, regional reactionism, and Kurdish traitors cooperated in order to eliminate the Leader APO. Because of the Leader APO’s determining and strategic role in national independence struggle of the Kurds, they think that they can end the hope and desire of the Kurds for freedom by eliminating the Leader APO.

However, the Party Leadership invalidated the 9 October Plot prepared with a great skill by the US, Israel and Turkey... Although US imperialism is the gendarme of the world and the imperial system is the only dominant system all around the world, all abilities and smart plans of [imperialism] were swiftly invalidated... by the Party Leadership’s simple intuition, reasoning, and precaution.<sup>53</sup>

This long quotation is an ample summary of the PKK’s discourse on US imperialism since it, at one stroke, declares US imperialism, the Turkish state and traditional/alternative Kurdish groups as main obstacles before Kurdish emancipation, and privileges the PKK (and its leader Öcalan) as the only and true representative of the Kurds in the path to freedom.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, throughout the 1990s (even in subsequent decades too), the PKK continued to situate itself in a greater struggle between imperial



powers and oppressed peoples. For example, according to Öcalan, “while imperialism, colonialism and fundamentalism represent one front, the PKK represents another one aiming to develop an alternative”. He continued that when the struggle of the PKK is over, the USA as a leader of imperialist front and Turkey as a collaborator of US imperialism would remain under the wrecks of this struggle.<sup>55</sup> This was the point where the security/threat discourse invested those enacting emancipatory policies with the legitimate power to undertake decisive actions and also constructed those actors with a particular responsibility for doing so.<sup>56</sup> For this reason, the PKK, throughout the 1990s, often defined its armed struggle as emancipation of the Kurds from US imperialism. In other words, the continuing fight of the PKK against US imperialism was presented as the inevitable condition of liberating Kurds to their real Kurdishness. This point is very clear in an anonymous article published in *Serxwebûn*:

The US is the current leader and gendarme of the world. However, this does not mean that there is no space for life beyond its reach... The PKK and its national independence struggle unequivocally proves that the US, imperialism, and international order are not omnipresent, and there is a chance for a life and free development despite and against them... Nobody dares to claim that the PKK failed in doing this. Bringing a corpse to life and creating a movement which challenges regional and international balances was succeeded despite the US and the new world order.<sup>57</sup>

However, the ambivalence on the symbolic other (the USA as both interlocutor in line with human rights and democracy, and existential threat to the freedom of the Kurds simultaneously) not only created the very condition of the PKK's relations with the USA in the 1990s, and the following decade, but it also provided a discourse through which the interpretation of this relation as submission was prevented. For example, in the political report submitted to the fifth Congress of the PKK in 1995, Öcalan described the relations of the PKK with the USA (and other imperialist powers) as an “alliance” through which the truth could be told to the USA.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, the relation with the USA through human rights and democracy was not a submission of the PKK to US imperialism, which was still the symbolic other of the Kurdish national movement. Rather, the relation with the USA was presented as an opportunity to tell the truth to the leading power of imperial system and to convince the USA in ending its imperial rule over Kurdistan in particular and the Middle East in

general. Like in the late 1970s and 1980s, the PKK, after the Cold War, continued to describe the imperial system led by the USA as the main obstacle before the realization of the Kurdish self. However, unlike the preceding decade, US imperialism was now an interlocutor, who was in need to be told the truth. In this manner, the PKK was able to pursue and consolidate its position of knowing of and speaking about “the truth” as a sovereign actor and of representing the interest of the Kurds against the imperial power and its regional collaborators.

This discourse of the PKK regarding US imperialism in the 1990s is very clear in Öcalan’s call to the USA when he was in exile in Europe after leaving Syria. Without any retreat from his discourse on US imperialism, Öcalan called the USA to do something for the interest of the Kurds in Turkey:

The US made some agreements for the interest of southern Kurds [in Iraq]. There are 20 millions Kurds in the north [in Turkey], the US must make an agreement with Turkey for the interest of those Kurds. The US alleged that she loves the Kurds but APO is an obstacle before any favor to the Kurds. Now, APO has withdrawn [to Europe]. The US must organize a Washington Committee for the Kurds. Kurdish organizations are ready. All of them can go to Washington right now... If the US has a positive thought for the Kurds, if it has an honor of great powers, it must make an agreement [with Turkey] for the interest of northern Kurds as it did for southern Kurds before... The US has to do something for the north. Otherwise, it is dishonest, hypocritical, and plotter.... The Kurdish question will be solved within 48 hours, if the US stops to help the Turkish army for 24 hours.

It is important that the US should pursue at least a Europe-like policy about the Kurdish issue... We are going to tell this to the US. Helping Turkey as part of ‘struggle against terrorism’ policy will not result in any favor to the Kurds but a massacre.<sup>59</sup>

The continuation of US imperialism in the language of the PKK made “human rights turn”, which made the USA an interlocutor, to appear as a natural evolution of the PKK not as a submission to the USA. Therefore, the PKK differentiated the promotion of human rights, which is in the interest of the peoples, from human rights as a mask of the US global imperialism over the world.<sup>60</sup> According to this discourse, while human rights organizations in the USA were just tools of a grand strategy aiming “to distort the peoples from their direction and garble societal conscious

of masses” and advocating “the US interests not human rights”,<sup>61</sup> on the other hand, human rights embraced and promoted by the PKK was in the interest of the people. Therefore, the PKK again emerged as the main sovereign actor having authority to measure the value and sincerity of the US policies regarding human rights and democracy. As a result, the continuation of the US imperialism discourse in the language of the PKK not only prevented the interpretation of “human rights turn” as submission, but it also functioned as a source of legitimacy through which the PKK’s sovereign status in the definition of human rights and democracy continued.

The dyadic stance of the PKK toward the USA in the 1990s and later decades also undertook another significant function: a double delegitimization of the Turkish state as “true” and “legitimate” representative of its own citizens including the Kurds. While the PKK delegitimized the Turkish state through the identification of Turkey as the puppet of US imperialism in the region, it reconsolidated this delegitimization by appropriating criticisms by the USA toward Turkey’s human rights violations.<sup>62</sup> In this discourse, the Turkish state represented a doubly corrupt state. On the one hand, the Turkish state, as explained above, did not hesitate to conduct war crimes, unlawful killings, torture and other brutal human rights violations against its own Kurdish citizens. On the other hand, Turkey, according to the PKK, was not acting for the interest of its own people because CIA-trained generals shaped its policies in line with US interests in the region.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, the discourse of the PKK on US imperialism even after the end of the Cold War functioned as the delegitimization of the Turkish state in the eyes of the post-1980 Kurdish political subject and simultaneously as a way of rendering the Kurdish nationalism morally and rationally acceptable.

In fine, like in the 1980s, the PKK continued its anti-American discourse despite all dramatic changes in Turkish politics such as the rise of an Islam-friendly party to power in 2002.<sup>64</sup> In an analysis of the March 2004 Municipal Elections, Kongra-Gel, the renewed name of the PKK after October 2003, described the new ruling party (the Justice and Development Party, JDP) as a collaborator of the USA in the Greater Middle East Initiative and argued that “the mission of Turkey and the JDP in this initiative is being a regional outpost. The emergence and rise to power of the JDP is closely related to this project”.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the PKK was able to continue its unique position as the only actor that “prevents the use of Kurdistan and the Kurdish society by the US in accordance with the latter’s own interests”.<sup>66</sup> To put this point in different terms, the

representation of the Turkish state, be it ruled by Kemalists or Islamists, as both a puppet of US imperialism and human rights violator facilitated and privileged the self-representation of the PKK as the true representative of the Kurds and the real defender of Kurdish interests/rights.

## NOTES

1. Yasemin Çongar, "İşte Apo'nun Mektubu", *Milliyet*, 25 Ekim 1995, p. 26.
2. For the full text of the letter, see James Joseph Sanchez (Editor), *The Middle East Abstracts and Index*, Volume 22E(i): Kurdistan and the Kurds, (Seattle: Reference Corporation Aristarchus Knowledge Industries, 1999), p. 37.
3. See Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), pp. 146–7.
4. See David A. Lake, and Donald S. Rothchild (Editors), *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Jennifer Jackson Preece, *National Minorities and the European Nation-states System*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 199.
5. Ali Balci, "The Kurdish Movement's EU policy in Turkey: An Analysis of a Dissident Ethnic Bloc's Foreign Policy", *Ethnicities*, 15(1), 2015: 72–91, p. 75.
6. Aydın and Emrence, *Zones of Rebellion*, p. 41.
7. See, for example, "F. Almanya-PKK Davası Devam Ediyor", *Serxwebûn*, Kasım 1989, (95), p. 1 and 5.
8. Watts, *Activists in Office*, p. 139.
9. PKK 5. Kongre Kararları, p. 219.
10. Abdullah Öcalan, *Özgür İnsan Savunması*, p. 151; PKK, Letter of PKK to Helsinki Summit, *PKK Presidential Council*, 29 November 1999.
11. Daniel Schorr, "Ten Days that Shook the White House", *Columbia Journalism Review* 30(2), 1991: 21–23.
12. Aydın and Emrence, *Zones of Rebellion*, p. 44.
13. Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, p. 161.
14. See, Zeynep Gambetti, *The Conflictual (Trans)formation*.
15. "NATO Çevik Kuvveti ve Kürdistan Ulusal Kurtuluş Mücadelesi", *Serxwebûn*, Ocak 1991, (109), p. 13.
16. "Halkımızın Seçeneği Kürdistan Halk Cumhuriyetidir", *Serxwebûn*, Nisan 1991, (112), p. 1.
17. "Direnen Kürdistan Kazanacaktır", *Serxwebûn*, Mayıs 1991, (113): 2–5, p. 3.

18. “Halkımızın Seçeneği Kürdistan Halk Cumhuriyetidir”, *Serxwebûn*, Nisan 1991, (112), p. 2.
19. “Direnen Kürdistan Kazanacaktır”, *Serxwebûn*, Mayıs 1991, (113): 2–5, p. 4.
20. For example, Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: III, pp. 42–3.
21. Michael M. Gunter, “A de facto Kurdish state in Northern Iraq”, *Third World Quarterly*, 14(2), 1993: 295–319, p. 306; see also, Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, p. 123; Aydın and Emrence, *Zones of Rebellion*, p. 39; Öcalan, *Seçme Yazılar*, Volume: IV, p. 39; Birand, *APO ve PKK*, p. 196.
22. Abdullah Öcalan, *Seçme Rôportajlar*, Volume: II, (Köln: Weşanên Serxwebûn, 1995), p. 129.
23. Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, pp. 146–8; Raşit Kısacık, *İşkence ve Ölümün Adresi Diyarbakır Cezaevi*, (İstanbul: Ozan Yayıncılık, 2011), pp. 164–6.
24. “Yeni Bir Atılım ve Provokatif Çırpınışlar”, *Serxwebûn*, Mayıs 1991, (113), p. 26; İzzet Baykal, “PKK Kongreleri V”, *Serxwebûn*, Ocak 1999, (205), pp. 17–18; According to Marcus, Şener’s attempt “to force change within the PKK was the most serious challenge Öcalan ever faced to his leadership. It was also the last. After Şener’s death, Öcalan’s power was complete.” See, Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, p. 151.
25. See Gunter, *A de facto Kurdish state*.
26. Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, p. 200.
27. Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity*, p. 37.
28. Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, p. 179.
29. Aydın and Emrence, *Zones of Rebellion*, p. 39.
30. For example, Abdullah Öcalan, *Declaration on the Democratic Solution of the Kurdish Question*, (London: Mezopotamian Publishers, 1999), p. 128.
31. For the effect of the end of the Cold War on insurgent movements, see Stathis N. Kalyvas, and Laia Balcels, “International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the End of the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict”, *American Political Science Review*, 104(03), 2010: 415–429; The PKK was not alone. The end of the Cold War forced similar nationalist movements to renounce the armed struggle for national independence and embrace peaceful negotiations. The Palestinian Liberation Organization based on revolutionary Marxist ideology accepted the existence of Israel and started to negotiate two-state solution in the 1990s. Similarly, the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) has drifted away from its strict national independence struggle based on Marxist-Leninist ideology and embraced a vision for local autonomy and sweeping agricultural reform.
32. More important, when it came to the Turkish state against which the PKK fought a guerilla war throughout the 1990s, both anti-American discourse

- and engagement with the USA through human rights and democracy targeted the legitimacy of the Turkish state.
33. US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1988*, February 1989, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, p. 1208.
  34. US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1989*, February 1990, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, p. 1260.
  35. "U.S. Concern on Torture in Turkey", Info-Türk, No. 158, December 1989; "ABD'den Ankara ve Sofya'ya Suçlama", Milliyet, 8 December 1989, p. 8; See also, H. Akin Ünver, *Turkey's Kurdish Question: Discourse and Politics since 1990*, (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 32–34 and 56–58.
  36. "PKK II. Ulusal Konferansı Kararları: İttifakları Sorununda Çözümüne Gitme, Dost ve Düşmanı Netleştirme", *Serxwebûn*, Eylül 1990, (105), p. 21; see also, Abdullah Öcalan, *Politik Rapor: Dönüşüm Süreci Üzerine Perspektifler*, (İstanbul: Mem Yayınları, 2000), p. 146.
  37. Abdullah Öcalan, "Cephe ve İttifaklar Sorunu Üzerine", *Serxwebûn*, Ekim 1990, (106), p. 15; Öcalan, PKK IV Kongresi'ne, p. 53.
  38. "NATO Çevik Kuvveti ve Kürdistan Ulusal Kurtuluş Mücadelesi", *Serxwebûn*, Ocak 1991, (109), p. 13.
  39. NATO Çevik Kuvveti ve, p. 13.
  40. For the role of audience in constructing an hegemonic discourse, see Thierry Balzacq, "The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context", *European Journal of International Relations*, 11(2), 2005: 171–201; Wesley W. Widmaier, Mark Blyth, and Leonard Seabrooke, "Exogenous Shocks or Endogenous Constructions? The Meanings of Wars and Crises", *International Studies Quarterly*, 51(4), 2007: 747–759.
  41. Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 84.
  42. During the 1990s, around 3,500 settlements in Kurdish-majority areas were forcefully evacuated by the state. See TBMM, "Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu'da Bosaltılan Yerleşim Birimleri Nedeniyle Göç Eden Yurttaşlarımızın Sorunlarının Araştırılarak Alınması Gereken Tedbirlerin Tespit Edilmesi Amacıyla Kurulan Meclis Araştırma Komisyonu Raporu", T.B.M.M. Tutanak Dergisi, 53, Year: 2, Period 20, Session 96, June 2, 1998.
  43. Nicole F. Watts, *Activists in Office*, p. 128.
  44. US Congress, "Banned Turkish Parliamentarians Discuss State of Democracy in Turkey: Briefing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe", *United States Congress, Commission on Security*

- and Cooperation in Europe*, 4(84), 1994, p. 5; “DEP’lilerden PKK Savunması”, *Cumhuriyet*, Temmuz 24, 1994.
45. Watts, *Activists in Office*, p. 139; Aslan, *Nation Building in Turkey*, pp. 149–151.
  46. Öcalan, PKK 5. Kongresi’ne, p. 142.
  47. Gunter, *The Kurds and the Future*, p. 53.
  48. Abdullah Öcalan, “Yürüttüğümüz Mücadele Terörizmdir Bundan Vazgeçmeye Hazırız’ Sözüünü, ABD ve TC Benden Hiçbir Zaman Duyamayacak”, *Serxwebûn*, Nisan 1995, (160), p. 12; “Özel Savaş’ta Israr Türkiye’nin Bitişidir”, *Serxwebûn*, Ekim 1996, (178), p. 5.
  49. Michael M. Gunter, “The Five Stages of American Foreign Policy Towards the Kurds”, *Insight Turkey*, 13(2), 2011: 93–106, p. 95.
  50. Shelly Christine, “Human Rights Abuses by Turkish Military and the Situation in Cyprus”, *US Department of State Dispatch*, 6(24), June 12 1995.
  51. “Dış Politika Açısından TC’nin İflası ve Devrimci Gelişme Olanakları”, *Serxwebûn*, Eylül 1993, (141), pp. 6–7.
  52. See, for example, Cemal Uçar, *Çarmıhın Çivileri*, (Stockholm: Mezopotamya Yayınları, 2001).
  53. Respectively, “Komplo Bitmedi, Kavga Sürüyor”, *Serxwebûn*, Ekim 1998, (203), p. 2; M. Can Yüce, Sabri Ok, Muzaffer Ayata, “Güneşin ve Ateşin Çocukları, Yurtsever Kürdistan Halkı, Değerli Dostlar, Yoldaşlar!”, *Serxwebûn*, Ekim 1998, (203), p. 8; Taylan Pir, “Önderlik Kazanma Sanatıdır”, *Serxwebûn*, Ekim 1998, (203): 10–11, p. 11; Italics are in original.
  54. This does not mean that the PKK’s imagination of the USA’s role in Öcalan’s deportation from Syria and Italy, respectively, was fully imaginative. On the contrary, Madeleine Albright, the then US secretary of state, said the following: “there is, obviously, a problem with Mr. Ocalan. We do want extradition. We have said that the PKK is a terrorist organization. In the past, Mr. Ocalan has said that he would give up terrorist activities and he hasn’t, and so we remain skeptical. Because we are dealing with the whole problem of terrorist acts, it is very important that he be brought to justice. We have said that we would prefer that this take place in Turkey.” “Washington Tells Italy: Extradite Ocalan to Turkey”, *Turkish Daily News*, 22 November 1998.
  55. “Güney’i Kuzey’e Çevireceğiz”, *Serxwebûn*, Mart 1995, (159), p. 2.
  56. Hansen, *Security as Practice*, p. 35.
  57. “Güney’de Devrim”, *Serxwebûn*, Eylül 1995, (165), p. 9.
  58. Öcalan, PKK 5. Kongresi’ne, p. 127.
  59. See, Abdullah Öcalan, “Hiçbirşey Eskisi Gibi Olamaz, *Serxwebûn*, Aralık 1998, (204), p. 15 and 17.

60. KADEK, “Halkların Demokratik Kurtuluş Seçeneğini Hakim Kılalım”, *Serxwebûn*, Nisan 2003, (256), pp. 2–3.
61. M. Can Yüce, “Tarihi Roma Yürüyüşü ve Ötesi”, *Serxwebûn*, Ocak 1999, (205): 8–11, p. 10.
62. See, for example, Öcalan, *Politik Rapor*, p. 18.
63. “Ortadoğu'da Emperyalizmin Çekilmiş İki Kılıcı”, *Serxwebûn*, Nisan 1996, (172), pp. 4–5; Öcalan, *Sosyalizmde Israr*, p. 134.
64. For the JDP's policy about Turkey's Kurdish issue, see Hüseyin Alptekin, “Ethnic Incorporation Policies and Peripheral Reactions: How are Turkey's Kurds Treated by the State and How do They Perceive Their Treatment?” *Afro-Eurasian Studies*, 1(2), 2012: 97–119. For Turkey's new security and foreign policy strategy under the JDP, see Ramazan Erdağ, “Türkiye'nin Stratejik Kültürü ve Dış Politikada Yansıması”, *Akademik İncelemeler Dergisi*, 8(1), 2013: 47–70.
65. Kongra-Gel, “28 Mart Yerel Seçimleri ve Çıkarılması Gereken Sonuçlar”, *Serxwebûn*, Mayıs 2004, (269), p. 9.
66. “Cumhuriyetin 82. Yıl Gerçeği ve Demokratik Görevlerimiz”, *Serxwebûn*, Kasım 2005, (287), p. 23.



## Conclusion

This book assumes that foreign policy is “not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects”.<sup>1</sup> As important as its function in the production of political subjects, foreign policy also is not a one-way practice of rulers or hegemonic powers but functions as a practice that renders particular actors and ideas hegemonic in a given society. Therefore, studying foreign policy of dissident ethnic movements not only tells us how alternative imagined communities emerge from the way in which the world is represented differently but at the same time it shows how an alternative center of power emerges from the discursive struggle against the existing hegemonic power within a state. The ultimate aim of dissident foreign policy is to draw a line between the place where dissident ethnic community lives and the outside. Only this distinction between inside and outside provides emerging hegemonic institutions with a monopoly of the legitimate use of force and creates a sense of belonging among new political subjects. For this reason, resistant ethnic movements speak on world politics in order to justify not only their struggle against the existing hegemonic state power but also the creation of another closed society.

Since neither inside nor outside has a complete meaning of its own, dissident ethnic movements, over and above everything else, speak about the outside in order to construct/imagine the “national” inside spatially. At

this point, dissident ethnic movements write the world into resistance not only for justifying their fights against the existing society, but also for producing another alternative society. Without the latter (writing the world into counter-society), resistance is neither sustainable nor even thinkable because it is the inscription of world politics into new (national) identity that offers individuals a common identification associated with their status as a “resistance subject”, amidst the multiplicity of available social “selves”.<sup>2</sup> Without “a well-organized sense” that the Turkish state does not represent the Kurdish people and that the Kurdish people are in need of a distinct/separate society, there would be no war<sup>3</sup> between the PKK and the Turkish state. Therefore, treating ethnic separatist movements simply as emancipatory struggle from a given hegemonic state power or as a heroic refusal forecloses certain questions about the working of power<sup>4</sup> within resistance, through which dissident ethnic movements are able to construct alternative closed societies. In line with this argument, the contemporary Kurdish national movement in Turkey should also be understood as re-inscribing forms of power that are rooted in practices of nation normativity.<sup>5</sup>

The main battle between the state and dissident ethnic movements is, of course, over land, which is material. However, to use Edward Said’s words, when it comes to who owns the land, who has the right to settle and work on it, who keeps it going, who wins it back, and who plans its future, these issues are reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative.<sup>6</sup> Since it is these grand narratives of enlightenment, emancipation, and liberation that mobilize people who are assumed as different ethnic category to rise up and throw off subjection imposed by the hegemonic state, nations themselves are narratives in the final analysis.<sup>7</sup> Whereas in already-established nation-states these narratives are mostly based on the exclusion of alternative (national) discourses, this strategy expresses itself in resistance narratives against the existing hegemonic narrative when it comes to new nations in the making. Therefore, the PKK as an expression of a new “Kurdish” nation in the making had to define itself above all through its rejection of the Turkish state’s discourse. Writing the world into the PKK’s resistance was part of this discursive definition and it simply legitimized, justified, and consolidated the new nation in the making.

This is the point where the main problem of counter-hegemonic ethnic movements emerges because these movements liberate the people at target to their “natural” past or to their “original” pleasures, not to an

open future of cultural possibilities.<sup>8</sup> To use Laclau's words, "emancipated social order" of the Kurds cannot be considered as the liberation of any true Kurdish essence.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the new Kurdish political subject who gets emancipated may be even more deeply shackled than before because the new power relation between the Kurds and the Kurdish nationalism appears as more "legitimate". Nativist and radical nationalism of the PKK produced a post-1980 Kurdish political subject by codifying and observing everything about the Kurds, which was so detailed in a manner as to leave few Kurdish people unclaimed. In this process of codification, representation of world politics played a significant role because narratives on world politics by authorized speakers/writers not only "describe to individuals in a recognizable way the manner in which they live their lives", but they also "construct and entail subject positions or identities from which both perceptions of the world and perceptions of the self make sense".<sup>10</sup> This is the point where the dominance of the Turkish state over the Kurds was replaced by the hegemony of the PKK over the Kurds.

The post-1980 Kurdish political subject, to use Butler's words with some minor changes, only appeared, only endured, only lived within the productive constraints of certain highly nationalized regulatory schemas.<sup>11</sup> Put differently, the regulatory norm of nationalism governed identificatory practices of the PKK and the post-1980 Kurdish subject emerged from these identificatory practices. As explained in Chap. 3, the PKK emerged from the regulatory norm of nationalism, which reiterates itself through the forcible production of national selves. That means the PKK was/is an agency to the extent that the regulatory law of nationalism opened up its possibility.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the PKK as an agency undertook the production of identificatory practices, which were vital in the pursuit and consolidation of the regulatory law of nationalism. Then, it can be argued that the PKK, which was governed by the regulatory law of nationalism, produced identificatory practices through which the post-1980 Kurdish subject became possible. These identificatory practices ranged from history writing and the production of a Kurdish literature to the invention of myths, and the redefinition of women's status within the Kurdish society. As this study tried to show, imagining the world or the PKK's (discursive) relations with the outside world was of these identificatory practices.

The imagination by the PKK of world politics during the last decade of the Cold War and the first decade after the Cold War had a double function. On the one hand, the imagination of world politics by the PKK was one of the nationalized identificatory practices to the extent that it

played a significant role in situating the Kurds into the post-1980 national subjectivity. On the other hand, it justified all other nationalized identificatory practices ranging from counter-historiography to language and made them appear natural or normal. The PKK's writing the world into its "resistance" concealed or dissimulated the convention of which the post-1980 Kurdish political subject was just a construction through nationalized identificatory practices, including the imagination of the world itself. Because of its double function, discursive relations of the PKK with the outside world during and after the Cold War played a significant role not only in the construction and reconstruction of the post-1980 Kurdish political subject but also in the production of the PKK as a "legitimate" power center, capable of representing and ruling this Kurdish political subject.

Emerging as a liberator of the repressed Kurds, the PKK paradoxically continued to produce the Kurds as repressed to be liberatory. Firstly, the imagination of the world politics by the PKK was directly involved in the production of the repressed Kurds<sup>13</sup> because it functioned as a discourse proliferating hopes for emancipation from a three-layered oppression allegedly institutionalized by traditional Kurdish institutions, the Turkish state, and imperial powers. Secondly, discursive relations of the PKK with the outside world normalized and justified other nationalized identificatory practices, through which the repressed status of the Kurds was perpetually produced. Because it was the PKK, in the process of resisting discursively against US imperialism that reinstated the Kurds as repressed, it automatically emerged as a liberatory power, which was consolidated by the imagination of the Soviet Union and its socialist experience. As a result, the reproduction of the repressed Kurds through discourse regarding world politics not only constructed a distinct Kurdish category but it also elevated the PKK to the status of liberatory. The new power and the new Kurdish subject were simultaneously produced by and in discourse. For this very reason, the main question of this study can alternatively be formulated as follows<sup>14</sup>: Why do the PKK and contemporary Kurdish nationalists reiterate that they have been repressed, with so much passion and so much resentment against the history of the Kurds, against the present condition of the Kurdish society within the Turkish state, and against the Kurds themselves?

Then, should we come to a conclusion that the PKK gained hegemony over the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects or produced a closed Kurdish society? Absolutely not. "No vision", as Said argued, "has total hegemony

over its domain".<sup>15</sup> That means the production of the new Kurdish political subject was not under the full control of the PKK's discourse, which was impossible. The end of the Cold War not only forced the PKK to change its discourse of resistance, it also sowed the seeds of new and alternative Kurdish political subjects, critical to the nativist nationalism of the 1980s. The new Kurdish society started to include a wide variety of subjects ranging from those who want to mix with the Turkish state by transforming it to those who are more integrative of human community, and to those who promote Islam in political life.<sup>16</sup> These new alternative narratives within the Kurdish society have turned new resistance sources against the hegemonic Kurdish nationalism. Put differently, they emerged from the PKK's nationalist resistance to the Turkish state but they are vitally critical and reject nativist Kurdish nationalism<sup>17</sup> in favor of a larger community composed of different cultures. Therefore, we should avoid reading the emergence of the post-1980 Kurdish political identity as something homogenous and unchanging.

The capture of Öcalan, unilateral cease-fire of the PKK in 1999, and reforms in the Turkish political system widening political and cultural rights of the Kurds resulted in the empowerment of Kurdish legal politics in Turkey. Therefore, the PKK lost its monopoly over the production of discourse, which opened space for legal Kurdish political and civil organizations. The production of the Kurdish political subject as a singular and monolithic subject was challenged by the multiplying political institutions claiming to represent the Kurds. However, the rise of alternative voices within Kurdish national institutions should be interpreted as the emergence of a new form of power since it does not necessarily represent the end of the PKK as sovereign power that regulates and orders the behavior of people within the Kurdistan region of Turkey. It rather may represent the replacement of "docile bodies" produced, above all else, by the PKK's strict regulatory techniques in the 1980s and 1990s with the "free" and active Kurdish subjects created by the new governmentality from the first decade of the 2000s onward.

These two opposite lines of thought about the evolution of the contemporary Kurdish nationalism in Turkey necessitate new meticulous studies in order to understand new political trends within the post-1980 Kurdish society in the new millennium. Those studies can either focus on the role of foreign policy in the new form of power expressing itself in civil society, liberal concerns, democratic demands, and local governances—namely, in not governing too much.<sup>18</sup> Or they can tackle the role of foreign policy

in the rise of challenging Kurdish movements aiming to delegitimize the post-1980 Kurdish political society.

## NOTES

1. Hall, Cultural Identity and Diaspora, pp. 236–7.
2. Bloom, The Power of Safe Resistance, p. 227.
3. Said, Orientalism, p. xx.
4. Abu-Lughod, The Romance of Resistance, p. 42; Mahmood, Politics of Piety, p. 35; Bilge, “Beyond Subordination vs. Resistance, p. 19.
5. Abu-Lughod, The Romance of Resistance, p. 50.
6. Said, Culture and Imperialism, p. xii–xiii.
7. Said, Culture and Imperialism, p. xiii.
8. Butler, Gender Trouble, p. 127.
9. Ernesto Laclau, “Beyond Emancipation” In: *Emancipation(s)*, Editor: Ernesto Laclau, (London: Verso, 1996): 1–19, p. 4.
10. Weldes, Constructing National Interests, p. 105.
11. Butler, Gender Trouble, p. xi.
12. Butler, Bodies That Matter, p. 12.
13. Watts calls this production “homogenizing categorization”. Watts, *Activists in Office*, p. 11.
14. Foucault, History of Sexuality, pp. 8–9.
15. Said, Culture and Imperialism, p. 186.
16. See, for example, Ahmet Yıldız, “Mystifying Nationalism: Kurdish Islamists and the Kurdish Question”, In: *The Turkish AK Party and its Leader Criticism, Opposition and Dissent*, Editor: Ümit Cizre, (London: Routledge, 2016), 205–226 and Gürbüz, *Rival Kurdish Movements in Turkey*.
17. For example, a number of high-ranking commanders who split from the PKK in May 2004 criticized the authoritarian culture of the PKK and blind submission to Öcalan.
18. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, (New York: Picador, 2010), p. 95; For a detailed analysis of this new situation in Kurdish-majority cities especially after the 1999 elections in Turkey, see Watts, *Activists in Office*, Chapter 6.

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# INDEX

## A

Afghanistan, 125  
Africa, 66, 158  
Albania, 95  
American imperialism, 6, 85, 86,  
    92-4, 97, 100-2, 104n22, 161  
Anderson, Benedict, 62, 78n21, 79, 82  
Andropov, Yuri, 124, 131n62  
Angola, 95  
Ankara, 62, 82n85, 85, 88, 103n4,  
    107n63, 127n7, 128n16, 157,  
    176n35  
anti-Americanism, 18, 86, 88, 91, 92,  
    104n22  
anti-imperialism, 81n69, 88, 94,  
    104n22, 157  
*APOist socialism*, 143  
Arabs, 63, 98  
Ashley, Richard K., 19n1-2,  
    21n16-17, 28, 29, 40, 49n3,  
    51n10-13, 52n35, 53n37,  
    54n58, 54n64-5, 54n68, 55n81,  
    55n93, 73, 83n92, 83n99

Ataturk, 97  
Azadi, 58, 115

## B

Baghdad, 41, 107n71, 115, 162, 163  
*Babar Atylýmýj*, 160  
Barkey, Henri J., 11, 23n40, 24n46,  
    24n48, 56n108, 78n24, 155n74,  
    155n80  
Barzani, Mesud, 161, 162  
Barzani, Mustafa, 115, 116, 128n23, 161  
Barzani's revolt, 115  
Bayýk, Cemil, 138, 152n17, 152n18  
*Berxwedan*, 94, 106n51  
Birand, Mehmet Ali, 103n7, 124,  
    175n21  
Bolshevik Revolution, 124, 126  
Bozarslan, Hamit, 24n48, 56n109,  
    80n59, 81n71, 82n82, 82n86-7,  
    90n63, 105n23, 113, 114,  
    127n13, 128n14, 129n29, 145,  
    153n45, 153n48, 154n54-5

Note: Page numbers followed by “n” denote footnotes.

- British colonialism, 14, 45, 46  
 British Empire, 14, 100  
 British imperialism, 46, 92  
 Bucak, Mehmet Celal, 75  
 Bukharin, Nikolai, 137  
 Burkey, Kemal, 84n107, 104n14,  
 107n60, 107n62, 115, 121  
 Butler, Judith, 10, 21n14, 23n31, 48,  
 51n17, 53n55, 55n105,  
 56n106–7, 56n116–7, 80n55,  
 83n96, 108n78, 129n30, 151n2,  
 154n53, 181, 184n8, 184n11–12
- C**  
 Caliphate, 59  
 Campbell, David, 7, 21n15, 25n62,  
 32, 38, 43, 49n1, 52n32, 52n34,  
 53n36, 53n56, 54n59, 54n67,  
 54n72–3, 55n83, 55n91, 55n94,  
 82n89, 83n91, 127n9–10  
 Caucasus, 158  
 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA),  
 86, 96, 97, 121, 168, 173  
 Christian Universalism, 28  
 Cizre, 160, 184n16  
 Clinton, Bill, 157, 158  
 closed totality, 29, 33  
 Cold War, 5–7, 16, 18, 19, 49n4, 114,  
 124, 128n19, 134, 140, 141,  
 149, 150, 157–78, 181–3  
 colonialism, 45, 62, 76, 79n30,  
 84n107, 89, 92, 94, 101,  
 105n30, 119, 138, 170, 171  
*Communist Manifesto*, 118  
 Confederation of Revolutionary  
 Workers Unions, 115  
 Connolly, William E., 25n59, 54n79,  
 73, 83n93, 107n72  
 constructivism, 2, 53n42  
 Copenhagen summit, 158  
 Coşar, Mustafa, 85  
 counter-discourse, 29, 43–7, 51n9, 115  
 counter hegemonic resistance, 3, 6,  
 133, 135, 136, 140, 149  
 counter historiography, 89, 90,  
 105n23, 182  
 counter-narrative, 16, 86, 89, 91, 93  
 Cürükkaya, Selim, 106n50, 119,  
 154n61  
 Cyprus, 88, 177n50
- D**  
*Dabhak*, 85  
 Demirel, Süleyman, 94  
 Democracy Party, 159  
 Derrida, Jacques, 10, 16, 23n29,  
 26n71–2, 33, 40, 53n41, 54n78,  
 55n92, 76, 84n109  
 Dersim massacre, 73  
 de Saussure, Ferdinand, 33, 53n38  
 Dev-Yol, 89  
 disciplinary power, 74  
 discourse, 2–10, 12–19, 22n27,  
 25n61, 26n68, 26n70, 28–33,  
 36–48, 51n9, 52n25, 56n108,  
 59–68, 72–6, 81n69, 82n79,  
 84n104, 84n107, 86–92,  
 95–101, 108n85, 108n88,  
 113–21, 125, 133, 134, 137–41,  
 143, 146, 149, 150, 152n21,  
 157–9, 163–73, 175n32,  
 176n40, 180, 182, 183  
 disidentification, 46–8, 98, 135  
 dislocation, 19, 31, 61, 74, 133–55,  
 163, 164, 169  
 dissident movements, 1, 2, 5, 17,  
 27–9, 38, 47, 48, 72  
 Diyarbakır, 66, 70, 100, 128n17, 162,  
 167  
 Diyarbakır Prison, 94, 162  
 Doğan, Mazlum, 94, 106n42,  
 106n43, 106n48  
 double exclusion, 38, 39  
 double resistance, 39, 140, 182

**E**

- Eastern Bloc, 116  
 Eastern Meetings, 115, 128n17  
 Elaziğ, 90, 105n31–2  
 English School, 2  
 Eritrea, 89  
 Ethiopia, 89  
 Europe, 1, 49n4, 84n104, 84n107,  
 96, 112, 145, 158, 167, 172,  
 176n44  
 European Community (EC), 158  
 European Parliament, 158  
 European Union (EU), 49–50n4,  
 158, 159, 165, 174n5

**F**

- Fanon, Frantz, 15, 26n66, 80n53  
 Federation of Revolutionary Youth  
 (*Dev Genç*), 115  
 Feminism, 2, 52n25  
 Foucault, Michael, 25n55, 30, 31,  
 35–7, 51n14, 52n31, 53n55,  
 54n62, 54n69–70, 55n97,  
 56n117, 78n16, 78n19, 80n55,  
 90, 105n24–5, 105n34, 146,  
 154n62–3, 184n14, 184n18  
*The Foundations of Leninism*, 117  
 France, 54n80, 158  
 French Revolution, 11, 24n42  
 Freud, Sigmund, 72, 82n88, 83n94  
 Fuller, Graham E., 11, 23, 24n46,  
 56n108, 78n24, 155n74, 155n80

**G**

- Gellner, Ernest, 11, 12, 21n12,  
 23n39, 24n43, 24n51, 61,  
 78n21, 78n25, 79n30, 79n32–3  
 General Jaruzelski, 112  
 Geneva meeting, 124  
 Germany, 19n3, 140, 145, 158, 214

*glasnost*, 122, 124

- Gorbachev, Mikhail, 124  
 Gramsci, Antonio, 29  
 Greece, 88  
 Grojean, Olivier, 52n30, 103n9,  
 131n69, 143, 153n45, 153n48,  
 154n50, 154n56  
 Gulf War, 19, 25n62, 41, 159, 160–4  
 Gungor, Çetin, 122, 130n54

**H**

- Halkevi*, 85  
 Hall, Stuart, 34, 53n50, 54n63  
 hegemonic ethnic movements, 180  
 Helsinki Summit, 159, 174n10  
 Henze, Paul, 97  
 Hitler, Adolf, 139  
 Hobsbawn, Eric J., 78n20, 129n39,  
 130n58  
 Human Rights, 19, 24n48, 109n88,  
 130n59, 134, 135, 138, 139,  
 149, 150, 151n6, 157–60,  
 164–74, 176n32, 177n50  
 Human Rights Agreement, 167  
*Hürriyet*, 149

**I**

- identification, 76  
 imagination, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 12, 17–19,  
 35, 43, 45, 47, 48, 50n7, 51n7,  
 57, 68, 70, 71, 76, 82n79, 101,  
 112, 113, 115, 118–23, 126,  
 127, 134, 136, 146, 163–5, 169,  
 177n54, 181, 182  
 Index, 174n2  
 industrialization, 61, 62, 79n30,  
 79n32  
*intertextuality*, 15  
 Iran, 8, 21n18, 41, 46, 66, 81n65, 89,  
 107n71, 115, 116, 128n22, 170

- Iraq, 8, 21n18, 24n42, 41, 46, 55n87, 81n65, 86, 89, 103n10, 107n71, 113, 115, 116, 125, 128n19, 128n22, 147, 148, 159, 161–4, 170, 172, 175n21
- Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party, 161, 162
- Iraqi Kurds, 163, 164
- Islam, 20n4, 66, 173, 183
- Islamic regime, 59
- Israel, 170, 175n31
- Istanbul, 55n87, 59, 128n17
- J**
- Jihad, 59
- Johnson, Lloyd B., 88
- Justice and Development Party (JDP), 20n4, 21, 173, 178n64
- Justice Party (JP), 75
- Jwaideh, Wadie, 61, 78n27
- K**
- Kadri Cemil Paşa, 115, 128n16
- Karahan, Edip, 61
- Kartal, Remzi, 167
- Kawa, 52n24, 85, 89, 108n85, 116, 128n22
- Kemalism, 92, 105n28, 153n41
- Kemalist ideology, 93
- Kemalist modernization, 62
- Kemalist regime, 91, 103n1, 139
- Kendal, Nezan, 62, 79n38
- Kinaci, Zeynep, 145
- KOMKAR (Union of Associations from Kurdistan), 96, 107n60
- Korn, David, 168
- Krishna, Sankaran, 43, 55n95
- Kurdification, 67
- Kurdish elite, 57–60
- Kurdish ethnicity, 65
- Kurdish ethnic movements, 74, 75
- Kurdish issue, 8, 24n48, 67, 106n57, 115, 155n74, 159, 166, 168, 169, 172, 178n64
- Kurdish Left, 113, 114
- Kurdish liberation movement, 99
- Kurdish nation, 12, 14, 17, 41, 46, 57–84, 86, 121, 180
- Kurdish nationalism, 1, 3, 4, 6–8, 11, 12, 17–19, 20n4, 21n18, 22n20, 24n42, 24n48, 45, 57–62, 65–71, 75, 78n18, 78n25, 80n52, 85, 88, 97, 111, 117–19, 143, 147, 150, 159, 173, 181, 183
- Kurdish nationalist mobilization, 58, 59
- Kurdishness, 5, 12, 63, 65–7, 71, 73, 80n51, 82n77, 83n94, 171
- Kurdish resistance, 13, 42, 61, 128n18
- Kurdish revolt, 60, 161
- Kurdish revolution, 158, 160
- Kurdish rights, 95, 115, 147, 149, 168
- Kurdish state, 20n4, 41, 46, 55n87, 64, 95, 104n22, 116, 117, 120, 121, 134, 135, 143, 147, 162, 163, 175n21, 175n25
- Kurdish uprising, 17, 18, 73, 77n3
- Kurdistan, 1, 14, 19, 30, 58, 70, 71, 76, 77n3, 79n38, 82n77–80, 82n83, 83n102, 86, 88–92, 94–6, 100–2, 104n14, 104n16, 104n19, 105n29, 105n30, 105n36, 107n60, 107n63, 113, 116–19, 121, 125–7, 136, 139, 141–3, 148, 159–62, 164, 169–71, 173, 174n2, 183
- Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey (TKDP), 115, 116
- Kurdistan Devrimcileri*, 90, 105n28

Kurdistan National Liberation Front (ERNK), 102  
 Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), 41  
 Kirmızıtoprak, Said, 115, 116

## L

Lacan, Jacques, 33, 37, 44, 53n55, 54n66, 54n71, 80n56  
 Laclau, Ernesto, 29, 31, 33–5, 39, 51n8, 51n15–17, 52n27, 52n30, 53n43–6, 53n49, 53n52–4, 54n60–1, 54n74, 54n76, 55n90, 79n45, 79n48–9, 83n97–8, 105n33, 108n78, 113, 127n12, 129n38, 151n3, 181, 184n9  
 Laleş, Qaso, 71  
 landlords, 61–3, 74, 75, 96, 114  
 Lenin, Vladimir, 112, 117, 121, 126, 136, 137, 141, 144, 145  
 Lévinas, Emmanuel, 101, 108n84  
 Liberalism, 2

## M

Marxism, 2, 55n90, 119, 133  
 Marxism-Leninism, 114, 115, 127  
 Marxist-Leninist revolution, 97, 101, 116–19, 125, 134–6, 141, 163, 164  
 meaning sources, 60, 64, 114  
 Median Empire, Meds, 75, 98  
*Mem û Zîn*, 71, 78n14  
 Menshevik, 121  
 Middle East, 2, 7, 14, 18, 68, 69, 72, 81n73, 85, 86, 91–101, 105n22, 107n71, 123, 125, 126, 133, 140, 155, 157–61, 163, 170, 171, 173  
*Middle East Quarterly*, 133, 151n1  
 Moscow, 112, 117, 123, 125

Mouffe, Chantal, 39, 52n27, 53n43–5, 54n74, 54n76, 79n48–9, 113, 127n12, 151n3  
 Mussolini, Benito, 139

## N

National Security Council, 97  
 nation normativity, 44–6, 135, 180  
 NATO, 14, 49n4, 88, 99, 101, 139, 146, 169, 174n15, 176n38–9  
 Neo-colonialism, 93  
 New Country (*Yeni Ülke*), 159  
 new personality, 108n88, 139, 143  
 Newroz, 16, 26n70, 85, 103n2, 108n79  
 Nicaragua, 95  
 northern Iraq, 41, 55n87, 147, 148, 159, 161–4, 170, 175n21  
 Nusaybin, 160

## O

Öcalan, Abdullah, 19, 21n11, 56n108, 76, 82n85, 83n101, 84n105, 90–5, 97, 99, 101, 102, 104n15, 104n22, 105n22, 105n31–2, 105n36, 106n42–7, 106n52–9, 107n61, 111, 120, 121, 123, 124, 129n44, 133, 137, 139, 143–50, 157, 162, 170–2, 174n10, 183,  
 October Revolution, 18, 101, 112, 116–22, 126, 129n42, 136, 142, 144  
 Olson, Robert, 21n18, 59, 77n4, 77n9, 78n18, 155n73  
*Ontology*, 76  
 Ottoman Empire, 59, 66, 82n85, 100, 107n63  
 Ötügen, 66  
 Özal, Turgut, 94, 148

Özcan, Ali Kemal, 105n36, 142, 144,  
154n51  
*Özgür Gündem*, 154n64, 159  
*Özgürlük Yolu*, 104n14, 107n62, 117,  
128n27, 219n28

## P

Pakistan, 66  
 Palestine, 125  
 Parliamentary Human Rights  
 Foundation, 167  
*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*  
 (Kurdistan' Workers Party), 1  
 Path of Kurdistan Revolution, 118  
 People's Labour Party (HEP), 159  
 People's Party (PP), 58  
*perestroika*, 122, 124  
 performativity, 94  
 Persian, 63  
 Philippines, 50n5, 94  
 PKK, 1–19, 20n4, 20n5, 20n9,  
21n10, 22n27, 23n31, 23n38,  
24n51, 26n68, 30, 31, 42,  
44–6, 52n30, 56n108, 60, 62–4,  
67, 68, 70, 71, 74–6, 77n3,  
81n69, 82n79, 83n101,  
84n103, 84n107, 86, 87,  
91–102, 103n4, 103n10,  
104n22, 105n28, 105n39,  
106n57, 107n60, 107n63,  
107n71, 108n88, 111–13,  
117–26, 129n42, 133–50,  
153n37, 153n41, 154n60,  
154n70, 158–74, 175n31,  
175n32, 177n54, 180–3,  
184n17  
 PKK's socialism, 135, 138, 145  
 play of difference, 33, 64–8, 73  
 Portugal, 94  
 Postcolonialism, 2  
 post-1980 Kurdish political subject, 3,  
4, 9, 12, 13, 44, 65, 66, 76,

80n60, 86, 99, 127, 134–7, 142,  
143, 145, 146, 164, 166, 169,  
173, 181, 182  
 poststructuralism, 2, 49n3, 53n42,  
78n19

## R

rapid deployment force (Çevik  
 Kuvvet), 99, 100, 107n69, 160,  
174n15, 176n38–9  
 Reagan, Ronald, 124, 131n64  
 Realism, 2  
 representation, 1, 3, 5–9, 13–16, 18,  
19, 27–9, 32, 35–8, 42–5, 49n4,  
52n25, 54n75, 58, 61, 67–70,  
74, 75, 80n60, 87, 93, 97, 98,  
112, 113, 117, 120, 121, 133,  
134, 157, 162, 174, 179, 181  
 repression, 8–13, 29, 68, 70, 115  
 Revolutionary Eastern Cultural  
 Associations (DDKO), 66, 67,  
71, 72, 81n64, 88, 111, 112  
*Rizgari*, 89, 104n18, 116  
 romance of resistance, 13, 22n22,  
24n50, 56n119, 184n4–5  
*Ronakbîr*, 71  
 Russia, 19n3, 49n1, 84n106, 118–20,  
124, 140, 142  
 Russian Communist Party, 119  
 Russian Revolution, 145

## S

Said, Edward W., 14, 21n21, 25n56,  
25n61, 26n69, 30, 174n3, 180  
 Said, Sheikh, 17, 32, 58, 59, 77n4  
 Scott, James C., 11, 20n6, 23n37  
 The Second World War, 92, 123  
 self-referential, 37, 40, 69, 126, 135,  
144  
 Sener, Mehmet Cahit, 162  
*Serbildan*, 160

- Serxwebun*, 21n10–11, 82n78,  
83n101, 87, 93, 105n31,  
105n39, 105n41, 106n42,  
106n47–8, 106n52, 106n55–9,  
107n66, 107n68–9, 108n74,  
108n77, 108n79–81, 108n83,  
108n86–8, 109n93, 112, 122,  
126, 129n31, 129n42–4,  
130n47, 130n51–3, 130n55–6,  
130n61, 131n62–6, 131n68,  
139, 151n10–16, 152n17,  
152n19, 152n21–4, 152n26,  
153n34, 153n43–4, 153n47,  
154n57–8, 162, 170, 171,  
174n7, 175n15–19, 175n24,  
176n36, 176n38, 177n48,  
177n53, 177n55, 177n57,  
177n59, 178n60–1, 178n65–6,  
217n5, 513n38–9
- Sheikh Said Rebellion, 17, 32, 58, 59,  
77n4
- Silvan, 66, 128n17
- şivan, şivancilar*, 116, 128n20
- Siverek, 75
- socialism, 5, 18, 19, 62, 93, 112–26,  
133–43, 145–7, 149, 152n21,  
163, 164, 168
- Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan  
(TKSP), 96, 104n14
- Soviet army, 139
- Soviet intervention, 88
- Soviet revolution, 113, 125, 141
- Soviet socialism, 18, 19, 115, 118–22,  
125, 134–9, 143, 146, 149, 163,  
168
- Soviet Union, 1, 6, 7, 18, 19, 111–31,  
133–55, 157, 159, 165, 182
- Spain, 94
- Stalinist socialism, 141
- Stalin, Joseph, 18, 112, 117, 119–23,  
128n61, 130n47, 136, 137, 139,  
141
- Stavrakakis, Yannis, 25n52, 37, 52n28,  
53, 54n66, 54n71, 80n56,  
151n4–5, 152n30
- Sterka Sor*, 121
- subaltern Kurds, 10–12
- subject, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 27, 28,  
31, 34–6, 44–8, 50n6, 59, 61,  
64–6, 69, 73, 76, 80n55, 86, 89,  
109n88, 112, 113, 119, 120,  
122, 126, 134, 137, 139, 141–5,  
153n37, 164, 166, 169, 173,  
180–3
- subjugation, 43
- Switzerland, 145
- Syria, 8, 14, 41, 46, 89, 103n10,  
113, 115, 128n22, 170, 172,  
177n54
- T**
- Talabani, Celal, 162
- Tekosin*, 121, 128n23
- THKP-C, 90
- Treaty of Brest Litovsk, 124
- tribal bonds, 60, 62, 66, 69
- Trotsky, Leon, 120, 137
- Turkey, 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 14–19, 19n3,  
20n4, 22n21, 23n36, 38, 41, 45,  
46, 48, 52n26, 52n30, 57, 58,  
60, 61, 69, 70, 73, 74, 77n14,  
78n25, 79n46, 81n66, 81n71,  
84n106, 85, 86, 88–98, 100,  
103n11, 104n16, 107n65,  
107n71, 111, 113–16, 128n22,  
134, 139, 140, 143, 145, 147–9,  
155n73–4, 157–9, 161–3,  
165–73, 174n5, 176n35,  
176n44, 177n45, 177n54, 180,  
183, 184n16, 184n18
- Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), 12,  
55n87, 99, 147, 148, 158, 160
- Turkish colonialism, 76, 94, 170



- Turkish Kurdistan, 96, 148  
 Turkish state, 1, 3–19, 20n5,  
 22n27–8, 30, 40–2, 46, 56n108,  
 58–68, 70–6, 79n30, 84n103,  
 84n107, 86–103, 104n22, 111,  
 113–16, 119, 120, 133–6, 139,  
 140, 145, 148–50, 153n48,  
 154n54–5, 158–60, 162, 165–70,  
 173–4, 180–3  
 Turkish Workers' Party, 115
- U**  
 United Kingdom, the UK, 140, 158  
 United Nations High Commissioner  
 for Refugees, 11  
 United States, the US, the USA, 1, 2,  
 6, 7, 14, 16, 18, 19, 41, 46,  
 49n1, 50n5, 68, 69, 75, 76,  
 84n106–7, 85–109, 113, 115,  
 116, 118, 120, 122, 124–6,  
 128n22, 128n23, 130n59, 133,  
 134, 140, 157–78, 182  
 urbanization, 61, 63  
 US imperialism, 1, 18, 19, 41, 68, 69,  
 76, 86, 88, 90–101, 103,  
 105n22, 113, 120, 125, 126,  
 128n22–3, 130n59, 140, 160,  
 161, 163, 164–6, 168–74, 182  
 US invasion, 97
- V**  
 van Bruinessen, Martin, 58, 59,  
 77n11, 77n14, 78n14, 78n25,  
 83n102, 155n74
- Vietnam, 97  
 village guard system, 96
- W**  
 Washington, 168, 169, 172,  
 176n33–4, 177n54  
 West, 28, 49n4, 56n111, 95, 113,  
 135, 157, 158, 167  
 Western, 30, 45, 68, 69, 95, 111,  
 112, 128n22, 147, 158, 160,  
 166, 167  
 Western imperialism, 68, 69  
 White, Paul, 59, 77n12, 78n28,  
 80n59, 80n62, 81n65, 81n67,  
 155n72, 155n80
- X**  
 Xanî, Ehmedê, 71, 78n14
- Y**  
 Yiğit, Mehmet Ali, 167  
 Yüce, M. Can, 56n110, 92, 105n37,  
 106n46, 108n81, 109n92,  
 129n32, 129n41, 130n51,  
 152n31, 153n42, 154n60, 177,  
 178n61  
 Yüce, Sema, 145  
 Yugoslavia, 83n96, 139, 158
- Z**  
 Zana, Mehdi, 115, 128n17  
 Zionism, 92, 170