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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

Introduction

- 1 Speaking in his 1981 court defense, Kemal Pir, one of the founders of the PKK, declared that “The movement known as the PKK movement, which emerged after 1972, is not an organization; it is an ideological and political movement. That movement has the intention to unite [the divided revolutionary left in Turkey].”¹ Mehmet Hayri Durmuş, another prominent PKK cadre, said in court, “We believe in the necessity of uniting all forces that are on the side of independence and democracy.”²
- 2 At the time of these statements, the left in Turkey had splintered into various factions, unable to recover from the severe repression unleashed by the military junta and organize effectively. Pir and Durmuş referred not just to this particular organizational splintering, however, but also ideological divisions, not to say misconceptions, to which the left was prone, and which had weakened its struggle. One of the banners the left had been marching behind in the 1970s was that of a “Fully Independent Turkey!” – and yet, while these radical voices evaluated Turkey’s status as that of a semi-colony (of Western capitalist imperialism), it had turned a blind eye to Turkey’s own role as itself a colonizing country, vis-à-vis Kurdistan. This contradiction had produced divergent left-wing nationalisms, one Turkish the other Kurdish, instead of a revolutionary left in Turkey. The challenge the PKK envisaged for itself, was to develop a program in which revolutionary politics in Turkey/Kurdistan could be reestablished, beyond nationalist lines, while recognizing the ‘national question’ in Turkey/Kurdistan.
- 3 In this article, we will discuss the contentious relationship between the PKK and the left, and the critique of the PKK on the left in Turkey (i.e. the perception of the PKK as Kurdish nationalist left by the Turkish nationalist left). We will argue that the PKK, itself emerging from the revolutionary left in Turkey but organizing the liberation struggle in Kurdistan, sought for a unification of the left in a metaphorical sense. According to the PKK such a unification of the left could only take place in the context of an ideological transformation: the recognition of being engaged in a common struggle, but from different subject positions. A new left was needed, one that would free itself from the blind-spot of what the PKK called ‘social-chauvinism’, an attitude in which there was only Turkey, no Kurdistan. In this article we will discuss the PKK’s relationship to the Turkish left in the years of its formation, paying particular attention to its critique of revolutionary politics in Turkey at that time.
- 4 We think such a study is of interest for those who want to understand the nature of the political struggle of the PKK, sometimes referred to as the 29th (Suleyman Demirel) or 38th (Turgut Özal) Kurdish rebellion or Kurdish insurgency³. Let alone the obsession with numbers, we are reluctant to depict the struggle of the PKK as an ethnic struggle. As this article will make clear, those involved in the organization mainly framed their issues and concerns in a discourse of socialism and rights. It is through a close reading of the texts which were produced from within this group and read by those involved that we are able to disclose the strong convictions and beliefs, and understand how a group of university students start to organize and act together on a shared analysis and on basis of identified opportunities and constraints. From the outset we should be clear also about the limitations of this article: this is a contribution which delves into discourses, not into activities and practices. Our interest is in the way the Kurdistan Revolutionaries / PKK have understood themselves and mainly delves into discursive repertoires about self-declared key events in the years of the formation of the organization.⁴

Methodology

- 5 Temporally, our analysis limits itself roughly to the period between the two military coups of 1971 and 1980. This coincides with the process of group and party formation leading to the establishment and early development of the PKK (for a discussion of this process, see Jongerden & Akkaya 2011). Spatially, the analysis takes place against the background of developments in Ankara, where the PKK initially was shaped. At the beginning of the 1970s Ankara was a main center of the radical left. Leading journals in the radical left had their offices in Ankara and for the time important organizations like the People Liberation Army of Turkey THKO and the People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey THKP-C had been established in Ankara (Erkiner 2010). We should note also that the term 'left' here refers to the radical left, to revolutionary socialist parties and organizations, that is, inspired by Marxist political thought (and not to social-democracy). The term 'new left' refers to a re-constituted revolutionary left, the parameters of which are discussed.
- 6 Concerned with the PKK and its relationship with / critique of the left in Turkey, this article takes its place in a body of work that aims, so to say, at making sense of this movement. Work on the PKK, both popular and academic, tends to treat this organization and its political ideology and strategy as somewhat exceptional in the wider framework of Kurdish politics. Indeed, the PKK is sometimes referred to as a party without a history (Ibrahim Güçlü personal communication, June 19, 2008), meaning a party without roots in and linkages to Kurdish society – in short, an anomaly. Yet when something seems bizarre, unintelligible or incomprehensible, this does not say more than that we simply do not understand it, and that we should, therefore, try to look for the sense it makes, at least for those involved (Becker 1998: 28). In this article, we will attempt to make sense of the PKK in terms of its vision of and relation to the left.
- 7 The data for this article has been collected by means of interviews and literature study. The interviews have been conducted with people active in the revolutionary left in Ankara in the mid-1970s, among them people who took place in the first process of group formation, which started after Abdullah Öcalan release from Mamak prison in 1972, and members of ADYÖD, a student organization in which young revolutionaries from different political factions organized themselves in the brief but intense period between November 1973 and December 1974. The core cadre of what would become the PKK, as well as radical left organizations like *Dev-Yol* and *Kurtuluş*, had been active in this student organization. The interviews with Ali Haydar Kaytan, Duran Kalkan, and Cemil Bayık, PKK leaders from its early years, have been conducted in the context of a video documentary on the history of the PKK by one of the authors (Akkaya 2005). Various primary source publications have also been studied, in particular from the PKK and *Dev-Yol*. The main publication we have used for this study, however, has been a booklet commemorating the killing of Haki Karer in 1977.⁵
- 8 "In remembrance of the proletarian and internationalist revolutionary Haki Karer" is a 33-page text published in May 1978, one year after the killing of Haki Karer in Antep, a large city on the south-western fringe of the Kurdistan region in Turkey. The text is credited to the *Kurdistan Devrimcileri* (Kurdistan Revolutionaries), the name by which this small group of committed radicals was known before adopting the name PKK. In this text, the Kurdistan Revolutionaries formulate a scathing criticism of the left in Turkey. The text is of particular significance politically since it was published a few months before the Kurdistan Revolutionaries established their organization as a political party, in November 1978.⁶ As such, the text under study here may be considered an important document, one in which the Kurdistan Revolutionaries – the PKK to be – distinguish themselves from the left in Turkey, and signal their determination to organize themselves separately.

Backgrounds: the PKK and the Left in Turkey

- 9 The Kurdistan Workers Party or PKK is one of the most important secular insurgent political movements in Kurdistan and the Middle East. Unlike most Kurdish political parties, which have adopted a rather conservative outlook and been organized around tribal leaders and structures, the PKK originated from the left in Turkey and drew its leaders, members and

militants from the disenfranchised and marginalized. The core group members of the Kurdistan Revolutionaries and later the PKK were university students from low and lower-middle class backgrounds. They were among the brightest students of their year (personal communication with Ibrahim Aydin, 30-12-2010). Frequent meetings and group discussions contributed to the carving out of a distinctive ideology and the forging of kindred spirits in the period 1973-1978 (PKK 1982; Yüce 1999; Jongerden & Akkaya 2011). The transformation from ideology/group formation to a political party took place in the period 1977-1978. This process started after the killing of Haki Karer in 1977, through the meeting in 1978 which was depicted in retrospect as a founding congress (Akkaya 2005), the publication later that year of a party program, (*Kurdistan Devrimcileri*, 1978), and reached its conclusion with a formal declaration in 1979 in which the PKK announced its existence (PKK 1979).

10 The PKK is commonly known as a guerrilla/armed organization. However, it would be wrong to characterize it in military (or similar) terms. 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 (Bozarslan 2004: 23; Jongerden & Akkaya 2011: 168-9). Reading PKK documents, one may distinguish between two objectives the movement had from its inception. The first was a progressive realization of the right to self-determination.⁷ A second objective of the PKK, however, was a reunification, or better, reestablishment of the left, a reestablishment envisaged in both organizational and ideological terms.

11 At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the revolutionary left in Turkey had gained some momentum in the political life of the country. The 1960 coup was followed by a new constitution, the most liberal Turkey had ever had, creating political opportunities for the public expression of leftist politics. Moreover, the left was gaining morale and inspiration from revolutionary struggles elsewhere in the world – from Cuba to Vietnam, Laos to Angola, Mozambique and Guinea, and Algeria to Palestine. Radical ideas for societal change gained credits, even more since people started to believe collective action could really make a difference.

12 However, as elsewhere in the world, the left in Turkey was severely handicapped by divisions and internal struggle. The left was composed of different factions, with very distinct ideologies and practices, able and willing to use force and violence against each other. Divisions had already manifested in the 1960s, but the number of factions and splits would only increase in the 1970s. Very basically, we may distinguish between two main currents of thought and action in Turkey, referred to as the ‘socialist revolutionaries’ and the ‘national democratic revolutionaries’. Each of these currents, however, are split into various factions, so the division was much more serious than this simple duality suggest.

13 The socialist revolutionaries held that capitalism had advanced in Turkey, and a transition to socialism was possible. The main representative of this current was the *Türkiye İşçi Partisi* TİP (Workers Party of Turkey), a legal party adhering to parliamentary democracy. The national democratic revolutionaries, on the other hand, held that Turkey was still a semi-feudal society and, rather than being fully independent, was dominated by the United States. Accordingly, therefore, a national-democratic revolution (the *Milli Demokratik Devrim*, or MDD thesis) was necessary, one in which workers, peasants and progressive forces within the bourgeoisie needed to enter into an alliance. Anti-feudal and anti-imperialist in character, this national-democratic revolution, the theory went, would be followed by a socialist revolution. The national-democratic revolutionaries were convinced, furthermore, that violent force was necessary to bring about the necessary change (Lipovsky 1992). Contrary to the ‘socialist revolutionaries’, therefore, the ‘national-democratic revolutionaries’ did not reconcile themselves with the parliamentary system, but agitated for a violent take-over of power, either through a coup d’état or armed struggle.

14 In spite of their radical political outlook and practice, the national-democratic revolutionaries did not dispose of Kemalism.⁸ Mihri Belli, one of the main ideologues of the thesis of ‘national democratic revolution’ expressed himself in favor of reconciling the revolutionary movement with the Kemalist ideology, through a coalition of workers and peasants, or

the organizations representing them, with the left-leaning section of the military. Muzaffer Erdost, another ideologue of the national-democratic revolution thesis, flirted with Turkish nationalism, arguing that it was imperialism which lost from the development of nationalism, and not socialism (Lipovsky 1992: 111-2).⁹

15 In 1970 the THKO and THKP-C were established, and in 1972 the TKP/ML¹⁰ – three parties born from the ‘national-democratic revolution’ current. These were politico-military organizations, in the sense that they practiced the idea that only an armed struggle, guided by a political party and carried by a coalition of peasants and workers, could bring the necessary changes to Turkey. Although themselves national-democrats, these radical organizations criticized the original MDD thesis in the strongest terms, rejecting their leaning towards and confidence in the military and the belief that a socialist revolution could be realized through a coupe¹¹. The THKO, THKP-C and TKP-ML all took the position that the revolution would have to be proletarian, with peasants forming a main force of support (THKO 1972, Çayan 2008). Though these organizations, especially THKO and THKP-C evaluated the Kemalist movement in the period 1919-1924 as progressive, they rejected nationalism. The TKP_ML, on the other hand, has taken a very critical standpoint towards Kemalism, considering it as ‘fascism which represents the comprador-bourgeoisie and feudal landlord’ (STMA 1988: 2194).

16 However, the cadre and leadership of these parties were killed in 1972 and ’73. The main leaders of the THKO were detained, tried and sentenced to death.¹² The THKP-C leadership and cadre, together with the THKO cadre, were killed in a shoot-out with the army, following a joint action to liberate the THKO leaders from prison and save them from the death penalty.¹³ The leader of the TKP/ML-TIKKO was taken prison and tortured to death in Diyarbakir prison.¹⁴

17 Politically, the PKK was directly inspired by the THKO and THKP-C. Abdullah Öcalan, a Kurd from the Syrian border province of Urfa who would become the PKK leader, and Kemal Pir, a Turk from Gümüşhane in the Black Sea Coastal Region and co-founder of the PKK, were known for having been sympathetic to the THKP-C. Haki Karer, another Black Sea Turk (from Ordu) who played a prominent role in the period of group formation, along with Ali-Haydar Kaytan, and Mustafa Karasu, who were also both involved in the establishment of the PKK (and continue to play a role in the leadership of the PKK), were known for having sympathies for the THKO (Sayın 1997; Kaytan 2006; Karasu 2006). In spite of the critique of the Kurdistan Revolutionaries, and later the PKK, on the revolutionary left, they felt as being a part of them, sharing a common history and building upon common experiences (these of THKP-C and THKO, and in a lesser extend TKP-ML/TIKKO) (personal communication with Ibrahim Aydin, 30-12-2010).

A Shared History

18 A new, liberal constitution had created political opportunities after the coup in 1960, but opportunities narrowed down with the coup of 1971. The beginning of the 1970s became a period of collapse and re-establishment for the left in Turkey and of crucial importance for the formation process that led to the establishment of the PKK. After the military coup of March 12, 1971, which resulted in a ban on left wing organizations and publications, the arrest of its militants and the killing (in 1972) of the main leaders of the revolutionary movement, the left collapsed. This marked the temporary end of an organized left. The period following the 1971 coup and the general elections in 1973 was marked by an absence of publicly visible and active political organizations on the left. Remnants of the THKO and THKP-C continued to exist, but they were disoriented and weak. There were no overtly active radical left organizations (in Ankara), but only circles of people (*çevreler*) who knew each by family bonds or regional ties (*hemşehrilik*¹⁵), from previous political activities or from the campus, and were mainly active as reading and discussion groups (personal communication with Suat Bozkuş, 24-4-2010). It was during this period that the thesis of Kurdistan as an (international) colony was born, as well as the idea of organizing the struggle in Kurdistan separately from that in Turkey. In 1973, a small group of people became established – Abdullah Öcalan, Haki Karer, Baki Karer, Fehmi

Yılmaz, Ali Haydar Kaytan, and Ibrahim Aydın, to be followed later by Cemil Bayık, Duran Kalkan, Mehmet Hayri Durmuş, Mazlum Doğan and others – who would name themselves the Kurdistan Revolutionaries. Even then, there was already a sense of a strong group feeling (personal communication with Ibrahim Aydın, 30-12-2010).

19 In the second half of 1973, the mainstream political parties, whose activities had also been put on hold after the military coup, started to organize again and prepare themselves for the elections of October 14, 1973. In Ankara, in the shadows of the re-emerging political space, the radical left also started to organize itself. Circles referred to as '*doktorcular*', followers of the political school of thought of Hikmet Kıvılcım,¹⁶ took the initiative to establish a legal association. This initiative was met with skepticism from other circles, in particular the *cepheciler*, followers of the THKP-C, and the THKO, who were convinced that the formal establishment and registration of an association would in practice be nothing more than a surrender to the police. After all, the military were still in power, and for the establishment of an association a list of names of founders and board-members had to be handed over to the police. To the surprise of the *cepheciler*, however, the establishment of ADYÖD in November 1973 was not obstructed by the police, and the association started its activities in an apartment on the Izmir Avenue in Kızılay, in the center of Ankara (Suat Bozkuş, Personal Communication, March 24, 2010).

20 Directly following the establishment of ADYÖD, the *cepheciler* argued that the association had been imposed on the students in Ankara, so the ADYÖD board members and its critics agreed on the election of additional board members. In the election, in which about 200 delegates participated, representing ten times that number of students, eleven representatives were elected, and added to the official board of seven.¹⁷ Among these new board members were Abdullah Öcalan,¹⁸ Haki Karer, Nasuh Mitap and Taner Akçam (Suat Bozkuş, Personal Communication, March 24, 2010).¹⁹ ADYÖD had in fact two constituting moments: the first one as being officially established by students with a strong leaning towards the Hikmet Kıvılcımlı fraction ~~within the communist party of Turkey~~, and a second one by radical students through an unofficial conference.

21 A year after its establishment, on December 10, 1974, ADYÖD was closed by the Ankara Martial Law Command (*Ankara Sıkıyönetim Komutanlığı*)²⁰. The closure was preceded by a police raid on the association, on December 4, at which 162 students were arrested. After the crackdown on ADYÖD, the process of fragmentation at the left took new dimensions. In the months preceding the closure of the association, many leftists had been released from prison following the amnesty, and ADYÖD had operated as a platform in which several circles came together. After the closure, however, these circles, strengthened by the released cadres, started to establish their own organizations. The idea of a common purpose or perspective faded away.

22 Those around Öcalan were the only faction that did not turn to the establishment of a new association or journal. Instead, they formed a tightly organized and well disciplined but open network, mainly engaged in discussion (Kaytan 2006; Karasu 2006; Kalkan 2008). They met in the secrecy of the houses of the group's members and did not engage in external activities, preferring to engage in long and intensive discussions with each other. In Turkish, this process was conceptualized in terms of '*yoğunlaşmak*', a typical PKK term, literally meaning 'to become intense'. In practice, this was (is) an intense process of thinking, discussion, reflection and (self)-criticism, a kind of focused group study. Sometimes two or three meetings a day took place, with up to 10 or 20 participants. The frequent, long, intensive discussions at these meetings contributed to the carving out of a distinctive ideology, the enlisting of new recruits and the forging of a close camaraderie. In short, they did not simply announce the existence of a new organization, journal or party, but started to work on a mobilizing structure and a distinct ideology.

23 The group around Öcalan identified two main problems in the left, one organizational, the other ideological. At the level of organization, the left's urgency to act, the hurry to engage in political action was criticized (PKK 1982: 92; Sayın 1997; Doğan 1992; (personal communication with Ibrahim Aydın, 30-12-2010). . Hasty organization and immediate action followed each other apace, poorly thought out and under-planned, they concluded. Öcalan

argued on several occasions that the PKK developed from the experiences, actually the mistakes, made in the organization of the armed struggle by the revolutionary left in Turkey, in particular THKP-C, THKO and TİKKO. These revolutionary parties, Öcalan argued, had been defeated only a short time after their establishment because they entered into a direct confrontation with the state while they were still weak. With this knowledge, the group around Öcalan, decided to organize itself thoroughly before embarking on such action (Sayın 1997: 71-83). Instead of rushing into action, therefore, the group around Öcalan took five years over its preparations to establish a party, and then waited another year before announcing its existence publicly.²¹ And it was not until 1984, some eleven years after the process of group formation had begun, that the PKK initiated its armed struggle against the state.²²

24 In addition to organizational weakness, it was argued, the development of the left was also hindered ideologically. A clear political and theoretically rigorous line was lacking, with Kemalist nationalism – or social-chauvinism – in particular forming an obstacle to the progress of the left (PKK 1978; PKK 1982). Kemalism, as analyzed by the emergent PKK, prevented the left from functioning as a genuine force of opposition since it (the left) was unable to escape the very political reality it was struggling against. The radical left in Turkey, that is, was crucially defined (through Kemalism) by the same force (colonialism) it was fighting to be free from (i.e. the oppression of a dominant class empowered by/as a controlling state). How could the left advance a viable political position outside of Kemalism if it was unable to shake off what was an essentially colonialist ideology?

The Left and the Kurdish issue

25 In 1977, the Kurdistan Revolutionaries organized a meeting in Ankara in which cadres from several leftist political organizations participated.²³ The analysis of the left made by the Kurdistan Revolutionaries, and their determination to organize themselves separately from, other groups, albeit in conjunction with them, was not met with enthusiasm.

26 The revolutionary left in Turkey, a wide range of parties as varied as the pro-Soviet TKP (Communist Party of Turkey), the pro-Chinese TİKP (*Türkiye İşçi Köylü Partisi*, the Peasants and Workers Party of Turkey) and the independent Dev-Yol (*Devrimci Yol*, Revolutionary Path), and many other parties, groups or factions. Nevertheless, these parties and the left as a whole had a common approach towards the Kurdish issue, which was to regard it as of secondary importance, subordinate to the struggle against capitalism and (Western) imperialism. The position of the left generally on this issue is represented by publications on the Kurdish issue from Dev-Yol, also an off-spring of the THKP-C and the most influential party in revolutionary politics during the period preceding the 1980 coup.

27 Named after a journal first published in May 1977, Dev-Yol published four notable articles on the Kurdish question, made up of two pairs of texts, viz. ‘The Kurdish Question in Turkey and the Tasks of the Revolutionary Movement (I and II)’ (*Türkiye’de Kürt Meselesi ve Devrimci Hareketin Görevleri I ve II*) (Devrimci Yol 1977a and Devrimci Yol 1977b) and ‘On the ‘Colonialism’ Discussions (I and II)’ (*‘Sömürgecilik’ Tartışmaları Üzerine I ve II*) (Devrimci Yol, 1978a and 1978d).²⁴ In these works, Dev-Yol defines the relationship between the Turkish and Kurdish nation in terms of oppressor and oppressed. The colony argument was mainly developed on an understanding of the status of Kurdistan as dependent country. However, Dev-Yol claimed, the status of colony could not be asserted on the basis of the dependent country – this had to be done by analyzing the status of the oppressing country. Colonialism was a phenomenon that occurred in the historical stage of imperialism, and Turkey could not be an imperialist country since it itself had the status of (semi)-colony:

“Marxist theory of colonialism shows that in the age of imperialism a dependent country which is not capitalist by its internal dynamic but has a kind of distorted capitalism (such as Turkey) historically cannot establish a colonialist relationship. Nowadays the debate on colonialism makes only sense within the framework of discussion of imperialism” (Devrimci Yol 1978a).

28 Colonialism, Dev-Yol argued, was a specific kind of relationship between two countries, and this did not fit the relationship between Turkey and Kurdistan. The suggestion that Kurdistan was a colony was in conflict with Marxist theory. And since the main political struggle was

the struggle against capitalism and imperialism, the struggle of the Kurds needed to take place in the context of a common (Turkish-Kurdish) struggle against capitalism:

“In Turkey the differentiation is not on the basis of nation, but on the basis of class” (Dev-Yol 1977b).

“It’s absurd to differentiate between a Turkish bourgeoisie standing against a Turkish proletariat, and a Kurdish bourgeoisie standing against a Kurdish proletariat. Against the proletariat in Turkey stands a bourgeoisie of Turkey. Within the borders of this state all suppressed classes are struggling without differentiating between nations against the ruling class who has control over de state” (Dev Yol 1977a).

- 29 Against this argument, Kurdish groups tried to find examples from other cases. For example, the PKK distributed a brochure about Eritrea regarding it as colony of another semi- (or new) colony, Ethiopia. “We were trying to analyze the relationship between colony and colonialist,” recalls Duran Kalkan, leading activist in the movement. “Therefore we had to find other examples in order to elaborate a convincing definition. When we said that Kurdistan is a colony of Turkey, we had to prove it. Eritrea was an example” (from an interview with Duran Kalkan in the documentary *Ateşten Tarihi*, February 2003). Ibrahim Aydin, who was involved in the process of group formation from its very outset, recalls that in group discussions in 1973, the case of Portugal was discussed, itself like Turkey not an advanced capitalist country, and regarded thus as still a colonial power (personal communication at 30-12-2010).
- 30 The first group discussions started after Abdullah Öcalan release from Mamak prison in autumn 1972, when he moved into the house where Haki Karer and Kemal Pir were living. Ibrahim Aydin, who had come to know Abdullah Öcalan in Mamak, was also a friend of Fehmi Yilmaz, who happened to know Haki Karer and Kemal Pir. Fehmi Yilmaz introduced Ibrahim Aydin and Abdullah Öcalan to Haki Karer and Kemal Pir, and the first group discussions started soon after. Apart from these people – Abdullah Öcalan, Haki Karer, Kemal Pir, Fehmi Yilmaz and Ibrahim Aydin – Haki Karer’s brother Baki and Ali Haydar Kaytan also took part in this meetings. In the first year they met almost every evening, this core of people and others who were introduced by one of group. Sometimes they were with 15 people, other times 20 or even 30. The discussions centered on such themes as the problem of revolutionary organization, which was high on the left’s agenda after the defeat of THKP-C, THKO and TKP-ML/TIKKO, and also socialism and the national question, and the status of Kurdistan (personal communication with Ibrahim Aydin, 30-12-2010).
- 31 The discussion on the status of Kurdistan, as a colony or not, was in fact the ideological aspect of the Kurdish issue for the left in Turkey, on which another, more obviously practical, discussion took place: do the peoples of Turkey and Kurdistan have a common struggle, or should they organize themselves separately? Kurdish groups, based on the colony-thesis, had envisaged another path for their revolutionary struggle. Concretely this meant separate organization. The revolutionary left in Turkey, based on the rejection of the colony-thesis, saw a common struggle and favored a united organization. (Dev-Yol 1977a, 1977b, 1978a, 1978b).²⁵ The one exception on this matter among the various factions of the revolutionary left was that of *Kurtuluş*, later renamed *Türkiye ve Kuzey-Kurdistan Kurtuluş Örgütü*, TKKKÖ (the Liberation Organization of Turkey and Northern Kurdistan), which had helped the Kurdistan Revolutionaries to find the TMMOB meeting place in Ankara where they had first presented themselves to the left.

Haki Karer and the making of a New Left

- 32 In the leaflet “In remembrance of the proletarian and internationalist revolutionary Haki Karer” the left is criticized for its denialist stance towards the Kurdish issue. Revolutionaries are shown a mirror through the person of Haki Karer, who dedicated his life to the struggle in Kurdistan and thus became an example of international solidarity. Indeed, Haki Karer may be considered one of the architects of the PKK movement. Together with Abdullah Öcalan he had been in the board of ADYÖD and developed into an important propagandist for the Kurdistan Revolutionaries.

33 Haki Karer was a Turk from the Ulubey District of the Black Sea province of Ordu. Born in 1950, he left for Ankara after completing his High School education, took the university entrance examination there and started to study physics (at Ankara University). In leftist circles he was known as a THKO sympathizer. Haki Karer was a housemate of Kemal Pir, a Turk from Gümüşhane, and later legendary PKK militant (following his death in prison while on hunger strike, in 1982). Abdullah Öcalan moved in with Haki Karer and Kemal Pir after his release from the Mamak prison at the end of 1972 (he had been held there for his role in organizing a boycott at the university to protest the killing of Mahir Çayan and his comrades of the THKP-C and THKO). In PKK historiography, Haki Karer and Kemal Pir are celebrated as the first people with whom Öcalan started to work on a new political movement (Jongerden & Akkaya 2011).

34 Haki Karer participated in the main meetings and decisions of the group, which was known by others as *Apocu* (followers of Apo, a nickname for Abdullah Öcalan), but which started to depict itself as Kurdistan Revolutionaries. One of those meetings was the Dikmen meeting in 1976, named after the neighborhood in Ankara where the gathering took place. At this meeting the revolutionaries decided to establish themselves in (Turkish) Kurdistan, and to establish a center (*merkez*) of the movement, of which Abdullah Öcalan would become the chairman, and Haki Karer his associate. Karer was thus made the second person in rank in the organization (and the only person in the movement who has ever reached that status). He is described in the commemorative booklet as one of the leaders of the organization (Serxwebun 1979: 21).

35 After the Dikmen meeting, Haki Karer went to Adana and then Batman, where he stayed for a short while before establishing himself in Antep. Once there, Karer started to work intensively. Like all the main cities in Turkey at the end of the 1970s, Antep was a hotbed of political activity. Several leftist organizations were operative in cities and fighting for control, sometimes literally, not only with the far right but also with one other. On 18 May, 1977, Haki Karer was killed in a coffeehouse, allegedly by Alaattin Kapan, one of the leaders of *Stêrka Sor*, a small Kurdish leftist organization, mainly active in Antep. Alaattin Kapan had been active in the revolutionary movement since the beginning of the 1970s, and was a well-known Maoist in Antep at the time (Jongerden & Akkaya 2011).²⁶

36 Öcalan also recalled on several occasions that the PKK had been established as an oath to Haki Karer. According to Ali Haydar Kaytan, “It can be easily said that the foundation of the PKK has been a fundamental step taken under the influence of his [Haki Karer] martyrdom’ (from the interview with Ali Haydar Kaytan in *Ateşten Tarih*, February 2003). After the killing of Haki Karer, the attitude of the Kurdistan Revolutionaries vis-à-vis other organizations became more aggressive, and also the group began to organize itself more professionally (personal communication with Ibrahim Aydın, 30-12-2010), i.e. patrolling the borders of the organization and turning the group into a party. The commemorative booklet, published in May 1978, had been the first attempt to define the heritage of Haki Karer and his meaning for the revolutionary struggle. In a certain sense, we might define this as a belated attempt. At his funeral, in Ordu, the Kurdistan Revolutionaries were present, but torn by grief no one had been able to address the crowd. On their return to Ankara, Öcalan, who did not attend the funeral, was angry. Mustafa Karasu recalls Öcalan saying:

“Is this your faithfulness to Haki? You went there and cried. Is this how you expressed your dedication to the revolution? Is this how you organized the funeral? For sure you did not do it the right way. This is not faithfulness to the memory of Haki. You have not done your revolutionary duty. So many people went there, you should have told them the importance of Haki’s martyrship” (Karasu 2006: 109).

37 In the booklet, Haki Karer is depicted as a genuine internationalist, a dedicated revolutionary in the spirit of Che Guevara. Both Che and Haki participated and played a leading role in the struggle of the oppressed outside the land where they were born and raised. Haki is described as self-effacing, motivated, persevering and austere, but also as knowledgeable and a strong debater. His ability to engage into dialogue with both young and old, men and women, is celebrated. Haki Karer’s is depicted as an example of how militants should dedicate themselves to the struggle, and how the left in Turkey should conceptualize the struggle in Kurdistan. By

doing that, a two-fold distinction is drawn, between the PKK and other Kurdish nationalist parties, and between the PKK and the left in Turkey.

“Haki Karer (...) was engaged in an intensive ideological struggle against social-chauvinism and bourgeois-nationalism” (*Kurdistan Devrimcileri* 1978: 9).

38 Though the booklet denounces bourgeois-nationalism in strong terms, the main target is the social-chauvinism within the left. However, it would be wrong to conclude that the animosity toward the left was stronger than their aversion to Kurdish nationalism. On the contrary, it was because of the Kurdistan Revolutionaries’ closeness to the left and what they had in common as revolutionaries that the Turkish left became a main target for criticism.

39 Where the left was taking a denialist position vis-à-vis the Kurdish issue or rendered it as irrelevant in the context of class-struggle and the unity of the working class, the Kurdistan Revolutionaries analyzed the history of Kurdistan as a history of colonization. In Northern (Turkish) Kurdistan they identified a process distinguished by three phases. The first phase started in 1925, the year of Sheikh Said’s rebellion against the new Kemalist regime, which was used as a pretext to start the military occupation, and ended in 1940, a few years after the repression of the Dersim rebellion. This was followed by a period of assimilation, symbolized in boarding schools, which were used for the Turkish state enculturation of the Kurdish youth, and then, from the 1960s onwards, a period of economic colonization, symbolized by (state-led) agricultural modernization which functioned to break up the traditional (tribal-based) structures of Kurdish society (*Kurdistan Devrimcileri* 1978: 20-24; personal communication with Ibrahim Aydin, 30-12-2010)). The left, however, was seen as ignorant of this process of colonization:

“Instead of interpreting history from a Marxist perspective, 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 of the *Misak-i Milli* (...) For them there is no Kurdistan, only Turkey” (*Kurdistan Devrimcileri* 1978: 4).

40 The failure to recognize Turkey as a colonial state and support the struggle of the people in Kurdistan against their colonial oppressor was severely criticized. The Kurdistan Revolutionaries slapped the left in the face with a citation from a speech Che Guevara had given to the Tricontinental 1966 international leftist conference in Cuba, a citation moreover, often used by the left itself. In this speech, Che had lashed out at the left by saying:

“The solidarity of all progressive forces of the world towards the people of Vietnam today is similar to the bitter irony of the plebeians coaxing on the gladiators in the Roman arena. It is not a matter of wishing success to the victim of aggression, but of sharing his fate; one must accompany him to his death or to victory” (Guevara 1967).

41 The left in Turkey, however, did not applaud the liberation movement in Kurdistan. They were not standing on the sideline, supporting, but looking away, or, worse, supporting the force of oppression, and as such were worse than those who had encouraged the gladiators. For Haki Karer, argued the Kurdistan Revolutionaries, this social-chauvinist attitude (not recognizing the legitimacy of the liberation struggle in Kurdistan) had been an important reason to get involved in the construction of this liberation movement:

“Social-chauvinism made itself felt within the Revolutionary Movement. For Comrade Haki Karer this was an important reason to join the Kurdistan Independence Struggle” (*Kurdistan Devrimcileri* 1978: 7).

42 Within the left as a whole, Kurdish identity was rendered insignificant, with Kurdish liberation subsumed as part of the class-struggle. In practice, it was expected that Kurds would simply join the Turkish revolutionary organizations, and struggle shoulder-to-shoulder with Turks. But for the Kurdistan Revolutionaries, bonds of brotherhood between Kurds and Turks were not assumed as though natural, the inevitable and unquestioned union of common cause. For them, such a bond could only be the product of struggle, a common struggle from equally important, but different positions, i.e. as revolutionaries of Kurdistan and of Turkey. Since Kemalist nationalism was so deeply engrained in Turkey’s ‘Revolutionary Movement’, the realization of this common struggle was predicated on the left progressively liberating itself

from what was conceived as its social-chauvinistic illness. With the (re)emergence of the Kurdistan Liberation Struggle, the left in Turkey would throw of its chauvinism:

“Naturally, revolutionaries in Turkey will than take the right approach to the Kurdistan Issue. In other words, the Kurdistan National Liberation Struggle will free the Left in Turkey from its social-chauvinist illness” (*Kurdistan Devrimcileri* 1978: 6).

- 43 For the Kurdistan Revolutionaries, Haki was the personification of a new left, of a left that was truly internationalist. Therefore the Kurdistan Revolutionaries emphasize:

“We are proud to have had a revolutionary from Turkey like Haki Karer within the ranks of the Communist Movement, which is in the process of being established in our country, and who, while coming in a heroic way came to the forefront of anti-colonial struggle, fell martyr (...) Haki Karer is a perpetually burning torch in the Kurdistan Liberation Struggle”. (*Kurdistan Devrimcileri* 1978: 24, 33)

Internal division and violence

- 44 Following the killing of Haki Karer, the Kurdistan Revolutionaries declared *Stêrka Sor* a satellite organization of Turkey’s intelligence services, a force of the counter-revolution that had to be eliminated by the revolutionary forces:

“We are obliged to use violence against the violence of counter-revolution, and the revolutionary armed forces must crush the armed forces of the counter-revolution” (Kurdistan Revolutionaries 1978: 2).

- 45 Alaattin Kapan was eventually killed. The death of Karer, however, was a cause of unrest and divisions within the Kurdistan Revolutionaries. Following the death of Karer, the Antep branch of the Kurdistan Revolutionaries fell apart. Many of its members joined *Tekoşin* (Kurdish: ‘Liberation’), a newly established political party established by sympathizers of *Kurtuluş* (not coincidentally Turkish for *Tekoşin*), who were convinced of the necessity to organize separately. The organization had its main base of support in Antep, Maraş and Dersim.

- 46 The Kurdistan Revolutionaries declared *Tekoşin* a continuation of *Stêrka Sor*, and thus a legitimate and necessary target of violence. At the same time, those who distanced themselves from these organizations were contacted with the objective of winning them back. Öcalan allegedly returned to Antep for this purpose, the city he had left following the killing of Haki Karer. According to Mustafa Karasu, Öcalan’s response to the falling apart of the Antep branch ran thus:

“This can’t be. We have to talk with each of them [those who had left the organization and joined *Tekoşin*] individually. (...) If there is the slightest chance of winning them back, we have to do so” (Karasu 2006: 101)

- 47 Back in Antep, Öcalan allegedly first talked face-to-face with activists within the movement who were drifting way and attracted by *Tekoşin*, followed by a joint meeting. These talks took place in a rather strained atmosphere, and under a continuous threat of violence. Mustafa Karasu, who was with Öcalan at the time, remarked the following in his memoirs of that period:

“Kemal Pir, Fuat Çavgun and I were on armed guard outside [the meeting took place in the house of a friend, a teacher living at the Kırkayak street in Antep]. We could not understand why the chairman [Abdullah Öcalan] was talking to them. We were not able to understand why the chairman was behaving with such good intentions to people who had stolen our weapons and wanted to kill our friends. In fact, it wouldn’t true if I said that it didn’t come to our minds to kill them all while they were gathered inside” (Karasu 2006: 102)

- 48 How many returned is not told, but that many did not is clear. Cemal Bayık explained matters thus in an interview in 2009:

“Those who said they could take over our movement had to run away. The movement [Kurdistan Revolutionaries] regained control again in Antep. (...) We mobilized for war against the agent organization which calls itself *Tekoşin*. Those provocateurs and agents who are known as *Tekoşin* were forced to run away and leave Antep. Just as (we) acted determined in the *Sterka Sor* event and neutralized the traitorous gang through series of blows, *Tekoşin* was neutralized in Antep. They wanted to protect their existence and continue their attacks, but from the side of the movement [Kurdistan Revolutionaries] and under leadership of Kemal Pir the struggle against *Tekoşin* was

continued. The struggle reached an important conclusion; Tekoşin was finished and when Kemal Pir in the course of this struggle wanted to give the final blow and bring it to an end, he was captured by the enemy [the police] in the Maraş region.”²⁷

49 The violence served an important function. The Kurdistan Revolutionaries make clear that any attack on its members would meet serious revenge and that they would not hesitate to wipe out an entire branch or organization as a form of retaliation (as in the case of *Stêrka Sor*), The organization also made clear its determination to win over people by convincing them, but that it ultimately patrolled its borders by means of violence.

Final remarks: A Common Future?

50 In PKK writings and historiography, Haki Karer has become the personification of a new left, a left freed from a Kemalist nationalism that functions as an iron cage preventing the left from becoming a genuine force of opposition, of transformation, and becoming genuinely internationalist in orientation, able to engage in true solidarity with Kurds. In the final analysis, everything is for a common future, yet one that is not waiting for the present to get there, as it were, but needing “to be established between the peoples” (Kurdistan Revolutionaries 1978: 3). It was thought that through such a struggle that the real unity of the left could be forged.

51 On 15 August 1984, guerilla units of the PKK attacked the towns of Erüh and Şemdinli in the provinces of Siirt and Hakkari.²⁸ In Erüh one soldier lost his life and six were wounded. In Şemdinli officer housing and a military guard post were attacked with machine guns and rockets. Several soldiers and officers were killed and wounded. The guerillas handed out leaflets in the coffeehouses and hung up banners with slogans and images of the martyrs of the liberation army.²⁹ This was a large-scale, daring and well-coordinated operation, with which was opened what was called the people’s war under the leadership of the PKK against the colonial and fascist Turkish state. Armed actions had been executed in Turkey (Kurdistan) in the years before that, but state institutions and their representatives themselves had not yet been the direct target of armed operations carried out by the PKK (Çelik 2000: 71).

52 When the PKK launched its attack, it issued a statement directly addressing the people in Turkey and the revolutionary left in Turkey, calling them to join forces with the PKK and to fight against dictatorship. It emphasized that the struggle was not a specifically Kurdish cause, but also in the interests of Turks. The statement implored all the people of Turkey to make the struggle their own, as part of the struggle of the working class against fascism:

“Democrats and revolutionaries in Turkey, laboring Turkish people, the HRK is fighting the barbarity which lays as a dark cloud over your life and over your future” (Çelik 2000 496-497).³⁰

53 This announcement of hostilities and call to action was more than just sloganeering. A cadre of an offspring party of the THKO participated in the unit led by Mahsum Korkmaz, the general commander of the armed forces of the PKK at the time. Members from various leftist organizations did actually participate in or were trained by the PKK. Öcalan, on several occasions, emphasized the common interest and common struggle of the left in Turkey and the PKK. In an interview with Mahir Sayın, a prominent leader of the left in Turkey (member of THKP-C, co-founder of *Kurtuluş*, and leading member of ÖDP and SDP), he said:

“This [the struggle by the PKK] is not a war of liberation for the Kurds. The day the Kurds will be free, the Turks will be free too. (...) The national liberation struggle of the Kurds is also a liberation struggle of the Turkish people. (...) This is what I mean to say. Some announce they will make a similar step as the PKK did. It is not necessary to make such a step; that step has already been made for you. Ha! But you can add something to our struggle, make a contribution” (Sayın 1997: 40).

54 As described, the PKK has considered itself as a force for struggle along the lines of the revolutionary left in Turkey. PKK militants considered themselves Marxists engaged in initiating a revolution with Kurdistan as their focal area. Linkages with ‘traditional’ Kurdish parties did not exist, for which reason it is not surprising that these parties were not familiar with the PKK’s process of party formation and regarded the party as ‘without a history’. On the other hand, it should be noted that the Kurdish movement in Turkey in general since the 1960s has been influenced by the leftist movements of the period. Indeed, ‘the terms of Kurdish

movement and Kurdish left have appeared as almost synonymous terms' (Bozarslan, 2007: 1169).

55 Although the relationship or resonance with the revolutionary left was common to all Kurdish movements in that period, the approach of the PKK was very distinctive. It did not depict its struggle as an ethnic one, and it envisaged the revolution in Turkey and Kurdistan as an intertwined process in which, for the PKK, the center of gravity lay in Kurdistan. The distinctiveness of the PKK in this regard can be seen by the fact that in no other Kurdish organization included, from their outset, people of Turkish origins, like Haki Karer and others, and especially none who have played such a decisive role. Also, throughout its history, the PKK never lost its interest in Turkey's revolutionary organizations and their agendas, and moreover, has become a force capable of influencing the political agenda of the whole country.³¹

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Notes

- 1 <http://www.ozgurtutsak.com/savunma-kemal-pir-t2944.html?s=0d999dda3593f65d14ffbd25a5c708b9&latest accessed: 15-08-2008>
- 2 "Sorgu ifadesi- M. Hayri Durmuş"
- 3 "Devletin Kasasındaki Üç Kürt Raporu"
- 4 For the actual practices of collaboration see Jongerden & Akkaya 2011: 130-135.
- 5 All translations from these (Turkish language) texts are made by the authors.
- 6 At the time of its establishment the party was named, still, the Kurdistan Revolutionaries. The change of name to PKK occurred some months later – around the time that the Haki Karer booklet was completed – in April, 1979 (Akkaya 2005: part 8).

7 Initially, this right to self-determination was considered in terms of the right to secession. Later, cautiously explored in the 1990s, and decisively articulated in the 2000s, the PKK defined the right to self-determination in three inter-related projects: democratic-republic, democratic-autonomy and democratic-confederalism, respectively standing for i) a reform of the political system in Turkey from a nation-state to a 'citizens-state', ii) the right of people within that state to define their own cultural characteristics, and iii) the right to bottom-up self-organization (Akkaya & Jongerden 2011). Though it has been argued that the PKK abandoned its original position, we would argue that the party creatively inverted the original Leninist thesis. In 1914, Lenin argued that "it would be wrong to interpret the right to self-determination as meaning anything but the right to existence as a separate state" (Lenin 1914). Turning this on its head, one could say it is equally wrong to interpret the right to self-determination as meaning anything like the right to existence as a separate state, where 'state' is understood in conventional terms. According to Mustafa Karasu, a leading PKK veteran, the nation-state is a bourgeois concept, and thus to be rejected by socialists. The PKK project of 'radical democracy', in particular the idea of 'democratic-confederalism', developing a bottom-up democratic system beyond existing (state) borders, aims to render those borders as ultimately irrelevant (Karasu 2009: 17-219). Through its political projects of democratic-republicanism, democratic-autonomy and democratic-confederalism, the PKK is drawing up a new agenda for self-determination, while simultaneously criticizing the concept of the nation-state.

8 Established during the republic's foundation period by the Turkish nationalist movement when early Kurdish claims were rejected and associated uprisings crushed, the principles of Kemalism were formulated in ways quite antithetical to the Kurdish – qua Kurdish – cause. They specifically included the hegemonically centralizing 'arrows' of nationalism and statism, along with those of revolutionism and populism, which were conceived along similar, homogenizing lines, and they notably did not include reference to things like suffrage, liberty or the rights of man. See e.g. Laclau (2005: 208ff) on populism.

9 The Maoist section in the national-democratic revolution current held a more extreme position: "Our party is the National Liberation Front. Our party leader is Mustafa Kemal. Our party is composed of the whole nation, whose interests are hostile to American imperialism (Lipovsky 1992: 116).

10 THKO: *Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu* (People's Liberation Army of Turkey); THKP-C *Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu Cephesi* (People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey); TKP/ML-TIKKO: *Türkiye Komünist Partisi/Marksist-Leninist – Türkiye İşçi ve Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu* (Communist Party of Turkey / Marxist-Leninist – Liberation Army of Workers and Peasants in Turkey) – TIKKO was the armed wing of TKP/ML an armed wing was attached to the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party, *Türkiye İşçi ve Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu, TIKKO (Liberation Army of Workers and Peasants in Turkey)*, i.e. ~~TKP/ML TIKKO~~.

11 Belli stressed the importance of independent (not party affiliated) student militancy, which, he hoped, would create a situation in which radical officers would grab power and form a leftist junta. "Students agitate, officers strike, and a national junta take power" (Samim 1981: 70-71). This was not typical for Belli. Previously, Hikmet Kıvılcım, who, like Belli, had been politically shaped in the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), tried desperately to contact the so-called 'progressive' military junta that came to power in 1960, hoping to work together with them – attempts which were in vain (Ünal 1998: 123).

12 The penalty (hanging) was carried out on May 6, 1972.

13 The shoot-out at Kızılderem took place on March 30, 1972.

14 İbrahim Kaypakkaya was taken prisoner on January 24, 1973, and after months of torture killed on May 19, 1973 in the prison of Diyarbakır.

15 As Ayşe Betül Çelik explains, '*hemşehrilik*' literally refers to "the link between people originating 'from the same city'. However, it may also mean people 'from the same village', 'from the same town', or even 'from the same region'. Thus, two people from the same city might consider themselves as *hemşehri* in a neighborhood dominated by people from other cities. Again, two people from the same region are *hemşehris* in a different region" (Çelik 2005).

16 Hikmet Kıvılcımlı was a communist leader and theoretician. His main work was the 'History Thesis'. He also translated and published many of Marx's works in Turkish. Because of his political activities in the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), he served more than 20 years in prison. He also founded a legal party, *Vatan Partisi* (The Homeland Party), in 1954. Kıvılcımlı's followers participated in the foundation of the first legal socialist party after the military coup, *Türkiye Sosyalist İşçi Partisi*, TSİP (the Socialist Workers Party of Turkey), which was founded three years after Kıvılcımlı's death in 1971, while escaping from Turkey under the military junta. *Ankara Demokratik Yüksek Öğrenim Demeği*, ADYÖD (Ankara Democratic Association of Higher Education) was co-established by those who would later establish TSİP.

17 These additional board members were not officially registered. Officially, ADYÖD continued to have seven board members, but in practice this increased with the additional eleven to a total of eighteen members.

18 Activists from that period remember Abdullah Öcalan as an important organizer of the association (Suat Bozkuş, Personal Communication, March 24, 2010).

- 19 Nasuh Mitap and Taner Akçam would later become leaders of Dev-Yol.
- 20 See: TÖB-DER, 1975 (volume and issue number not known) and *Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi*, 1988, v.7., 2241.
- 21 The process of group formation started in 1973 and the party was established in 1978 (which was only announced in 1979).
- 22 It is not clear when the organization first decided to embark on an armed struggle, but the Kurdistan Revolutionaries/PKK refers to the armed struggle in its party program, published in 1978, which was the first publication of the group.
- 23 The meeting took place at the head office of *Türk Mühendis ve Mimar Odaları Birliği*, TMMOB (the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects), on Konur Sokak (Street) in Kızılay, a district in the center of the city.
- 24 ~~Published as 'Türkiye'de Kürt Meselesi ve Devrimci Hareketin Görevleri I ve II' and "Sömürgecilik" Tartışmaları Üzerine I ve II.~~
- 25 For the expression of this view from other groups, see e.g. publications by the TKP (Ürün (1977) and TIKP (Aydınlık 1977)
- 26 There is also a dissident reading of this event. According to Baki Karer, the brother of Haki, Haki was killed after a conflict with Öcalan. The reason for this political murder, Baki Karer argues, was Öcalan's close relations with a person known under the code name of Pilot and suspected of being an intelligence agent. Others within the party were agitated by the relationship between Öcalan and Pilot, and Baki Karer, as member of the political center of the movement, allegedly raised the issue in a personal meeting with Öcalan, at which Haki is said to have announced an investigation into the issue. It was on the following day that Haki was killed. Accordingly, critics have regarded the death of Haki as symbolic of the way Öcalan led (leads) the party (Karer 1999). However, this account and interpretation of the events surrounding the death of his brother was only made by Baki Karer after he had left the party in 1983, six years after the killing.
- 27 *Yeni Özgür Politika*, 27-11- 2009, latest date of access 10-06-2010
- 28 August 15 was not planned as a twin attack, but a triple. The third town targeted was Çatak, in the province of Van, but the commander of the unit called off the operation. The decision to commence the armed struggle against the state had been taken at the second congress of the PKK, in 1982. Tactical preparations had taken much time. Eventually, on July 22, 1984, Abbas (Duran Kalkan), Fuat (Ali Haydar Kaytan), Fatma (Kesire Yıldırım), Ebubekir (Halil Ataç), Cuma (Cemil Bayık) and Selim (Selahattin Çelik) unanimously gave the green light to the military operation in which the two towns were attacked (Çelik 2000: 73).
- 29 The action was claimed in the name of '*Hêzen Rizgarîye Kurdîstan*' (Kurdistan Liberation Units), like the name given by General Giap to his army in Vietnam, the Vietnam Liberation Units, and HRK used as the name for the armed wing of the PKK.
- 30 See also Sayın (1997)
- 31 In the process of party formation and party building, and afterwards, the PKK aspired to collaborate with the revolutionary left in Turkey, although such collaboration never bore fruit. In the legal sphere, however, collaboration between the legal political parties close to the PKK and various Turkish leftist groups/parties since the 1990s has been more successful, securing representation at national level. See our two articles on this matter (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2011; Akkaya & Jongerden, 2011).

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

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Droits d'auteur

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Résumé

One of the banners the left had been marching behind in the 1970s was that of a “Fully Independent Turkey!” – and yet, while these radical voices evaluated Turkey’s status as that of a semi-colony (of Western capitalist imperialism), it had turned a blind eye to Turkey’s own role as itself a colonizing country, vis-à-vis Kurdistan. In this article, we will discuss the contentious relationship between the PKK and the left, and the critique of the PKK on the left in Turkey (i.e. the perception of the PKK as Kurdish nationalist left by the Turkish nationalist left). We will argue that the PKK, itself emerging from the revolutionary left in Turkey sought for an ideological and political transformation of radical politics in Turkey, one that would free the left from the blind-spot of what was called ‘social-chauvinism’, an attitude in which there was only Turkey, no Kurdistan. We think such a study is of interest for those who want to understand the nature of the political struggle of the PKK. Data for this article has been collected by means of interviews and literature study.

Entrées d'index

Index by keywords : Colonialism, Haki Karer, Kurdistan Revolutionaries, Left, PKK, Turkey, Violence