

**TOWSON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH**

THE KURDISH MOVEMENT IN TURKEY FROM 1921 UNTIL THE PRESENT

by

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A thesis

Presented to the faculty of

Towson University

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Masters of Social Science

May, 2011


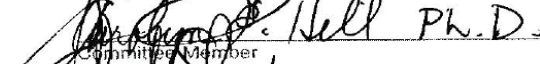

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THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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entitled The Kurdish Movement in Turkey Since 1921 to the Present

has been approved by the thesis committee as satisfactorily completing the thesis requirements for
the degree Master of Science in Social Science Program


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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis advisor Dr. Jeremy Tasch for his supervision, patience and support in addition to his valuable insight and criticism throughout this research.

I wish to thank Dr. Carolyn Hill and Dr. Charles Schmitz for their useful suggestions and comments. I also would like to thank my dear friend Nikolaos Konstantinos Koumouris for always being there for me.

I dedicate this study to my mother, Funda Akar and to my father, Ilyas Akar. I could have never made it so far without your faith in me...

ABSTRACT

THE KURDISH MOVEMENT IN TURKEY FROM 1921 UNTIL THE PRESENT

Diyar Akar

In my thesis I have conducted a historical research that focuses on the Kurdish ethno-nationalist movement in Turkey starting from 1921 until the present. I focus on the varied reactions of the Kurdish citizens of Turkey to the changing socio-political circumstances, the policies of the government, and its ideology concerning the minority groups and their rights. I have analyzed the causes of the ethnic conflict following a historical pattern. The responses of the Kurdish citizens of Turkey to the government's policies and ideology have varied from political involvement to mass violence. I propose possible solutions to the problem. I have distinguished a historical pattern for the Kurdish movement and analyzed the important events that shaped both the movement itself and the Turkish government's ideology and policies. I have distinguished four different periods of times concerning the evolution of the "Kurdish problem" in Turkey. These are: Nation Building process and the Kurdish Revolts (1923-1946), multi-party period and how it affected the Kurds from 1946 until the resurrection of the violent and terrorist organization, the PKK. After analyzing the PKK, its methods, structures and ideology, from 1999 until the present, I study the changing policies of the Turkish government with the hope of entering the European Union.

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1. Introduction

This study focuses on the Kurdish movement in Turkey starting from the establishment of the Republic of Turkey (1923) until the present. I focus on the varied reactions of the Kurdish citizens of Turkey to their changing socio-political circumstances, the policies of the national government and its ideology concerning the Kurds and their rights. Turkey claims to be a democracy among the Middle Eastern countries and has been trying to become a member of the European Union. On the other hand, the “Kurdish problem”¹ has been a longstanding obstacle for Turkey to enter the EU and has contributed Turkey’s negative international human rights reputation. Resolution of the Kurdish problem in a manner that protects and enhances civil rights while demonstrating Turkey’s democratic development is virtually a prerequisite for Turkey’s acceptance into the EU. On the other hand, Turkish government should not do the reforms concerning the Kurds or other minority groups as a result of the pressure coming from the EU or the United States. It should fully understand and accept the civil rights of all its citizens regardless of ethnicity, race or religious belief to become a real democracy. The questions that guide this research are:

- How has the “Kurdish problem” evolved in Turkey starting from 1920 until the present?

¹ Throughout this study the words “Kurdish problem” is used to refer to the issues of a minority group which has claimed to have been discriminated and oppressed by the government. On the other hand, it is a subjective definition as the Turkish government did not recognize the existence of a minority group as “Kurds” for many years. Instead of the “Kurdish problem,” the words the “problem of the Kurds” may also be used which would carry a different meaning that I would not prefer.

- What are the policies of the Turkish government and the ideology that lies behind these policies regarding its Kurdish minority, since the establishment of the Turkish nation-state?
- How have the Kurdish citizens of Turkey responded to the policies of the state and to the changing socio-political and cultural circumstances of the times?

The “Kurdish Problem” in Turkey has gone through different phases since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey.² The Turkish nation-state which was established after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire (1299-1923) introduced a new understanding of what constitutes a minority.³ The Kurds, who had been recognized and granted a good deal of autonomy for more than six hundred years under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, suddenly became invisible and were left out of the new “Turkish” state. Not only the official ideology did not give them political and cultural rights, but also their separate existence and identity were denied. According to the Turkish government, every citizen of Turkey was considered a Turk. While aiming to be inclusive by calling every citizen a Turk, the policies and the ideology of the government became radicalized when the Turkification and assimilation policies were put into practice. In the early years of the republic, even anthropological and historical studies were conducted to prove that the

² The Republic of Turkey was established after World War 1 with a heavy influence of nationalism. It was officially proclaimed on October 29, 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who was the founder and the first president of the new nation-state. Atatürk aimed at creating a “Turkish” state following Western ideals starting with secularism, nationalism and modernism, which was ground-breaking for the society. The ideals of the Turkish nation-state are discussed thoroughly in this study under the heading, “Turkish nationalism.”

³ There is a difference between the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey concerning their treatment and understanding of minority groups. Although my focus is on the period after the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, some discussion is presented in this research as the studies show that during the Ottoman Empire the Kurds and the Turks lived in a more harmonious way. For a detailed study see McDowall, David. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 1996 and Bruinessen, Martin Van. *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*. London, New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992.

“Kurds” were actually “Turks” who had lost their “Turkish” culture and identity. For instance, an author who was conducting research on the history of the eastern provinces of Turkey says: “The one and only ideal that motivated me to write this book was [the desire to liberate] these common Turkish and Turkoman tribes people and these peasant villagers – who in reality are of Turkish blood and pure Turkish stock – [from] the suffering of speaking these half-baked [Kurdish] languages” (Meiselas cited in Kasaba; 2001, p. 164). Although official ideology held that the Kurds were a branch of the Turkic people as a result of the Kurdish protests during the 20th century, which became violent during the 1980s, resulted in polarization of the Kurds and the Turks in Turkey. The Kurds in Turkey are not regarded as “Turks” any more. Instead, they have become the “others” to the Turkish majority. The notion of Muslim brotherhood during the Ottoman Empire between the Kurds and the Turks was abolished with the Turkish nation-state of the 20th and 21st century. On the other hand, those who assimilated or claimed to be Turks, were welcomed by the state regardless of their ethnic origin, race or religion. Any cultural or political rights, based on ethnicity or race, were refused to be granted to the Kurds as this would be seen as a threat to the integrity and the unity of the Republic of Turkey. For instance, one of the articles of the Settlement Law says: “[...] the Law does not recognize the political and administrative authority of the *tribe* [...] all previously recognized rights have been abolished even if they were officially documented. *Tribal chieftdoms*, [...] sheikdoms and all their organizations and elements have been abolished” (emphasis added by the original author) (*Official Paper* quoted in Yegen; 2007, p. 129). While the article refers to the minority group as a basis of tribal organization, which

would not be tolerated by a modern nation-state, it ignored the cultural and political rights and the particular existence of the Kurds.

The responses of the Kurdish citizens of Turkey to the government's policies and ideology have varied from political involvement to mass violence. In this study, I focus on the multiple responses of the Kurds to the changing circumstances of Turkish state consolidation through the 20th century. Through the documentation of Turkish state policy and Kurdish response, I try to show more clearly the relationship between a powerful state with strong nationalist sentiments and a weak minority group living under the rule of this state. I also indicate possible policy directions that have been overlooked by the government as a result of nationalist political maneuvers.

The Turkish government was established on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. It is known that the Allies tried to establish independent states for both Armenians and Kurds on the southeast part of Turkey after World War I.⁴ Although neither an Armenian nor a Kurdish independent state was established after the victory of the Turkish nationalists against the Allies, the plans of the Allies left scars on Turkish politics. The government became suspicious about not only its minority groups but also possible foreign incitements, which, according to the Turkish officials, made the problem more complicated and difficult to solve. What has often been neglected by the Turkish state is that there are millions of Kurds who are willing to continue their lives as Turkish citizens

⁴ For further discussion, see Vali, Abbas. eds. *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*. Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 2003. Ergil, Dogu. "The Kurdish Question in Turkey." *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 3 (2000): 122-135.

as long as their cultural and political rights are respected. In this study, I also try to show what some Kurds have done for a democratic Turkey, which could accept its multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society. While analyzing driving forces of the problem, the study follows a chronological discussion of the Turkish and Kurdish political interactions since the establishment of the Republic Turkey. This enables one to understand the relations between events and how they have developed to the present, showing how the development of a modern state has systematically denied its multiethnic structures of the society in its pretense to democratic “Western” principles.

2. The Kurds

The ancestral homeland of the Kurds is the mountainous southeast Anatolia, which is now included in Turkey. Both McDowall and Gunter, both researchers on Kurds and their historiography, argue that the origin of the Kurds is not certain although it is commonly accepted that they are the descendants of various Indo-European tribes (Gunter; 1990, p. 5). The Kurds history dates back to 1000 B.C. which means that they had been in Anatolia centuries before the Turks migrated from Central Asia to Anatolia in 11th century. Contrary to the argument that the Kurds are the “mountainous Turks” which have been isolated and consequently departed from their Turkic origins, there seems to be no supportive data to prove this conclusion. Just looking at the origins of two nations, it is almost impossible that the Kurds are included in the Turkic people. On the other hand, McDowall confirms that some Arab and Turkoman tribes might have become Kurdish by culture after the migration of the Turks to Anatolia. He also adds that the Kurds, who were living in areas resided mostly by the Arabs and the Turks, might have lost their Kurdish identity (McDowall; 2004, p. 9). Unlike another argument that the

word “Kurd” was derived from the noises the Kurds were making while they were walking in the mountains in the snow, is, most probably, a way to insult the Kurds. Kasaba confirms this argument: “....in the official publications of the armed forces, one still reads that Kurds ‘live in mountains of eastern Turkey where there is too much snow. Those who walk on this snow create a ... noise, and the name ‘Kurd’ is derived from the way this noise sounds to ear” (Yavuz cited in Kasaba; 2001, p. 165). On the other hand, McDowall says that “the ethnic term ‘Kurd’ was applied to an amalgam of Iranian or Iranicized tribes, some autochthonous (possibly Kardû?), some semitic, and, probably, some Armenian communities (McDowall; 1991, p. 11).

According to the data collected by *Azadi Kurdistan Humane Foundation*, there are more than 26 millions of Kurds scattered in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and some European countries (*Azadi Kurdistan Humane Foundation* quoted in Gunter; 1990, p. 6).⁵ Accordingly, the Kurds are believed to be the largest ethnic group that does not have their independent state. There are various reasons to that, including their history and relations with the neighboring countries, the social and political structures of the Kurdish society, the geographical conditions and so on.⁶

Kurdish is an Indo-European language. It has many different dialects, which according to McDowall, indicates the varied origins of the Kurds. These dialects are Zaza, Kurmanji, Sorani, Gurani, Hewrami. Kurmanji and Sorani are the mainstream Kurdish dialects which are spoken widely. There are two reasons why the Kurds have not been able to create a standardized language. The first and the more important reason is that

⁵ This result is from 1986. It is most likely that the population of the Kurds must be higher at the present.

⁶ Although it is not the focus of my study, the reasons why the Kurds still do not and cannot have their independent state is an important aspect of the Kurdish historiography. I also believe this study might answer to some questions regarding this focus.

they still do not have a nation-state. Being oppressed linguistically by the governments they have lived under, they have not been given the opportunity to educate, not even to speak freely, in their language. Another reason is the geographical circumstances of the lands they have inhabited. Because of the mountainous structure, they were, especially during the Ottoman Empire, unable to communicate easily. Today, efforts are made by the Kurdish intellectuals to develop a standardized language.⁷

Most of the Kurds, about 75 per cent, are Sunni Muslims (McDowall; 1996, p. 10). Some, living in the Dersim area which is in southeast of Turkey, are Alevi and some follow Yarsanism, both of which are the branches of Shi'ism. Unlike Sunni Muslims, for Yarsanis and Alevis, the most important figure in Islam is Ali, the first Shi-ite Imam (Tahiri; 2007, p. 5). Regardless of different branches, Islam brought the Kurds and the Turks together for centuries before the establishment of the Turkish nation state. With the Republic of Turkey, nationality and ethnicity became valid while the state still recognized the non-Muslim as minorities. This distinction and contradiction in the Turkish state discourse will be analyzed further in this study.

Kurds are a traditional tribal society. Many scholars argue that the Kurds could not go further than tribalism for a political form.⁸ This, also, played a role why they could not establish a united, independent state. McDowall explains the incompatibility between state and tribe. The author says:

⁷ For more information on Kurdish, see Philip G. Kreyenbroek, 'On the Kurdish Language,' in Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, p. 73.

⁸ For different arguments see, White, Paul J. *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers? The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*. London, New York: Zed Books, 2000. Also, for a more detailed study, see Bruinessen, Martin Van. *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*. London, New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992.

States are static, intent on exercising a monopoly of power within a defined territory. They require an urban dimension which embodies a bureaucracy and culture based upon the written word. They comprise a multiplicity of economic, legal and administrative functions in town and country, and may include religious functions also. Tribes operate on kinship ideology and territoriality; the latter includes both established villages and but also more fluid ideas that no state could entertain (McDowall; 2004, p. 15).

During the Ottoman Empire, as a result of decentralization the tribes enjoyed a great deal of autonomy. On the other hand, with the Turkish state, centralization policies were introduced. This did not mean that the longstanding tribal structure of the Kurdish society suddenly eroded. Indeed, after the state entered the multi-party period, the politicians needed the tribal chieftains' support to gain votes from the southeast. The Turkish government, while being opposed to the tribalism, used this for their favor at times. Even today, there are certain aghas and families who hold the power and are respected by the locals regardless.

3. The Ottoman Empire and The Kurds

The Ottoman Empire lasted for more than six hundred years (27 July 1299 to 29 October 1923) as a multi-ethnic state. It was founded by the Turkic tribes which migrated from Central Asia to Anatolia in the 11th century. In the 16th and 17th century during its golden age, the empire had colonies in North Africa, Western Asia and Southeastern Europe. Its longstanding success was mostly linked to its political strategy in governing the various religious and ethnic groups residing in the empire. Mustafa Saatci, a Turkish sociologist, explains the political system in the Ottoman Empire:

Its success was made possible, among other factors, by the ability to integrate conquered lands and population into the Empire. This was crucial since its immense size could not be maintained in any other way. There were many different groups characterized by difference in religion,

language, culture and institutions. Even the Porte (Ottoman government/court) was isolated from the rest of the Turkish population by its own language and customs (Saatci; 2002, p.552).

Instead of applying strict assimilation or homogenization policies, which would be the case in the Republic of Turkey, the empire followed the policy of integration for its multiethnic and multi-religious society. For the non-Muslims, who were considered to be minorities in the Ottoman Empire, separate legal courts were constructed which were called *millet*. While all the *millets* were tied to the central government and the sultan, the head of the empire, the religious minorities, Armenian Christians, Jews and Orthodox Christians, were free to regulate their own laws according to their religious beliefs.

The empire was a Turkic-Ottoman dynasty which was governed by the law of Islam, *Sharia*. As it was a Muslim state, the Kurds were not regarded as a minority group in the empire. Islam was the common bond between the Turks and the Kurds. With the migration to and invasion of the Turks to Anatolia which included the Kurdish areas, the Kurds became part of the empire. Until the 19th century when the centralization policies of the Ottomans began, the Kurds did not have any major revolts against the government. Just like every other minority groups, they were under the control of the Ottomans. They would pay taxes and support the government with troops during time of war. On the other hand, the Kurds enjoyed a good deal of autonomy as a result of the geo-political structures in the lands they resided and social structures of their society until the 19th century. Martin van Bruinessen, a Dutch anthropologist who has conducted significant research on Kurds, says:

The inaccessibility of Kurdistan and the fierce warring capacities of its inhabitants have always made it a natural frontier of the empires that emerged around it. None of these empires could maintain sovereignty in

more than a part of Kurdistan. As a consequence, Kurdistan became divided by the political borderlines of surrounding states. Wars between the Ottoman and Persian empires fixed the present boundary of Iran with Turkey and Iraq. The British and French conquests in the First World War cut Syria and Iraq away from the Ottoman Empire (van Bruinessen; 1992, p.13)

In the 19th century, the developments in the Balkans for independence made the empire take some steps against the possibility of disintegration. The fact that there were many Christian elements and ethnic minorities living under the rule of the empire made it the target of the European forces. Other than the effects of imperialism and industrialization in Europe during the 19th century, the empire had already been weakening during the preceding two centuries. Although the Kurds started to grow nationalist sentiments and realized their separate identity from the Turks during the 19th century, when World War 1 broke out they supported the Ottomans as a result of the common Islamic identity. David McDowall, a specialist on the Middle Eastern peoples and politics and the author of *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, says:

When the Ottomans went to war, it was against the European powers, particularly Russia. It was therefore natural that the majority of Kurds, as Ottoman citizens, as Sunni Muslims, and as neighbors of the Armenians whose loyalty remained in doubt, should accept conscription and serve. In 1915 some Kurds helped to kill and expel Armenians from Kurdish areas and when they had the chance the more nationally-minded amongst the latter took equally bloody revenge. Nevertheless, the government extended persecution of minorities to include Kurdish villages in Bitlis and Erzerum provinces during the winter of 1916-17. It feared the Kurds might make common cause with the Russian enemy on the north-eastern front (McDowall; 1992, p. 31).

In 1918, the Ottoman Empire was defeated after four years of war. The empire lost much of its territories which included the lands inhabited by the Kurds. These lands were planned to be distributed between Italy, Greece, France and Russia. This created a

different political and territorial situation for the Kurds. Although some Kurds wanted to have an independent nation-state, some still believed in the Sunni brotherhood between the Kurds and the Turks (McDowall; 1992, p. 32).

Aware of the Armenian threat on the lands occupied by the Kurds, the Kurds decided to co-operate with the Armenians during the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919 (McDowall; 1999, p.33).⁹ The Treaty of Sevres, one of the outcomes of the Paris Peace Conference, was signed between the Allies and the Ottoman Empire on 20 August, 1920. According to this treaty, which was never implemented, the Kurds were given the right to have their independent state if they asked for it. This treaty was crucial in the history of the Kurds as it was when they came closest to having their own independent state. The treaty articles, related to Kurdish regions, include:

A Commission sitting at Constantinople and composed of three members appointed by the British, French and Italian Governments respectively shall draft within six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia, as defined in Article 27, 2. (2) and (3). If unanimity cannot be secured on any question, it will be referred by the members of the Commission to their respective Governments. The scheme shall contain full safeguards for the protection of the Assyro-Chaldeans and other racial or religious minorities within these areas, and with this object a Commission composed of British, French, Italian, Persian and Kurdish representatives shall visit the spot to examine and decide what rectifications, if any, should be made to the Turkish frontier where, under the provisions of the present Treaty, that frontier coincides with that of Persia (Article 62).

⁹ Paris Peace Conference was the meeting, followed by the Armistice of 1918, in Paris in 1919. It was held by the Allied forces to decide on the peace terms and to sign several treaties which would reshape the borders of Europe including the Ottoman Empire. The League of Nations was also founded during the Paris Peace Conference, which later became the United Nations.

The Turkish Government hereby agrees to accept and execute the decisions of both the Commissions mentioned in Article 62 within three months from their communication to the said Government (Article 63).

If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas.

The detailed provisions for such renunciation will form the subject of a separate agreement between the Principal Allied Powers and Turkey.

If and when such renunciation takes place, no objection will be raised by the Principal Allied Powers to the voluntary adhesion to such an independent Kurdish State of the Kurds inhabiting that part of Kurdistan which has been hitherto included in the Mosul Vilayet (Article 64) (McDowall; 2004, p. 464-465).

Regardless of the significant and clear promise given to the Kurds for their own independent state, it would never become reality as the Ottoman Empire did not last and was replaced by the Republic of Turkey in July 1923.

4. Turkish Nationalism

After World War 1, the Turks waged a war against the Allies, later called the Turkish War of Independence (May 19, 1919 – July 24, 1923). This national liberation movement was led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who was the founder of the Republic of Turkey and the first president of this nation-state. Elected the leader of the movement by the Defence of Rights Associations held in different cities in Anatolia, Mustafa Kemal soon gathered all the troops against the Allies and resigned his commission in the Palace in 1919. There occurred a gradual change concerning citizenship and an evolution of Turkish nationalism during and after the War of Independence. The rhetoric of Mustafa Kemal, as

the founder of Turkey, is the leading example of this change. Feroz Ahmad, the author of the book, *Turkey: The Quest for Identity*, explains:

A word ought to be said about the Ottoman-Turkish terms *millet*, *milli*, and *milliyetci*, terms that are rendered into English as ‘nation’, ‘national’, and ‘nationalist’. But during the war of liberation and after, the terms were intended to be more patriotic than nationalist, inclusive rather than exclusive. The terms embraced all the Islamic elements of Anatolia – Turks, Kurds, Circassians, Arabs, and Lazes – all of whom had identities of their own, and Kemal noted in October 1919 that the ‘National Pact’ border in Anatolia had been demarcated accordingly. ‘Gentlemen’, he lectured his audience, ‘this border is not a line which has been drawn according to military considerations. It is a national (*milli*) border. It has been established as a national border. Within this border there is only one nation which is representative of Islam. Within this border, there are Turks, Circassians, and other Islamic elements. Thus this border is a national boundary of all those who live together totally blended and are for all intents and purpose made up of fraternal communities (*milletler*).’ (Ahmad; 2003, p.80).

The Islamic identity of the state would soon be abolished in favor of the new nation-state, intended secular, western and modern. Moreover, this was not a sudden change as westernization policies were already seen during the late nineteenth century, under the Ottomans but did not succeed in their implementation. The gradual change and the establishment of the nation-state in 1923 was followed by the removal of the institution of the Caliphate in 1924 which had carried the symbol of the “Muslim brotherhood” until that time (Yegen; 1999, p.559). This was an important step for a secular and homogenous Turkish state, as the institution would support and promote the unity of Islamic elements in the multi-ethnic state. In other words, regardless of the ethnic and linguistic differences in the Ottoman Empire, all Muslim communities were considered as united. The removal of the institution of the Caliphate was the end of this unity.

With the victory of the nationalist troops at the end of the Turkish War of Independence, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed in 1923 which replaced the Treaty of Sevres. This was a turning point concerning the citizenship and minority rights in the Republic of Turkey. Only one of three elements, which have been accepted by the United Nations (UN) as the determining factors which make a group a minority, was decided to be taken into account for the minorities living under the rule of the Turkish government. This determining factor was religion. Neither language nor ethnicity was considered to be important for defining a minority unlike the definition which developed by the UN in 1979. The definition is:

A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the State – possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language (Capotorti quoted in the Report by Minority Rights Group International, *A Quest for Equality: Minorities in Turkey*; 2007, p.8).

The rights and definition given to the minorities under the new nation-state were strongly related to the official ideology of the government. While the Ottoman dynasty was ethnically neutral, the Republic of Turkey was not (Ergil; 2005, p.52). According to the new ideology, all the citizens of the state were considered as “Turks” regardless of their cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences. Mesut Yegen, a sociologist from Turkey who has conducted significant research about the Kurds in Turkey, says:

As was stated in the justification of the 1924 Constitution (Gozubuyuk and Sezgin 1957, p. 7), the new Turkish Republic ‘is a nation-state. It is not a multi-national state. The state does not recognize any nation other than the Turks. There are other peoples who come from different races and who should have equal rights within the country. Yet it is not possible to give rights to these people in accordance with their racial [ethnic] status’ (Yegen; 2007, p. 126).

As a result of this ideology, the Kurds, who were granted autonomy during the Ottoman dynasty and through the Sevres Treaty, were not considered to have a separate identity or culture. Kurds did not exist according to the official doctrines of the Republic of Turkey. They were “mountainous Turks” who mostly consisted of bandits and tribes that represented the backwardness and pre-modern times (Yegen; 2007, p. 129). In the first constitution of the Turkish state in 1924, article 88 defines citizenship. It says: “Everyone who belongs to the Turkish society regardless of religion and race is considered Turk ... The adjective ‘Turk’ is a legal definition” (Nisanyan quoted in Argun; 1999, p. 90).

Some scholars argue that Turkish state nationalism is affected by both “German style” and “French style” nationalism.¹⁰ While French nationalism carries *civic* elements in its ideology, German nationalism considers *ethnic* elements. Civic nationalism refers to the dogma that regardless of race or ethnicity, one’s feeling of belonging to a country and choice of living there, are the elements that defines his/her nationality. On the other hand, according to the theory of ethnic nationalism, one’s roots, blood, ethnicity or race are the decisive factors of nationality. When the history of Turkish nationalism is examined, both types of nationalism seem to exist, especially in the constitutional texts. On the other hand, there are different interpretations and arguments by authors who have analyzed the constitutional texts. For instance, Metin Heper, a professor of politics in Bilkent

¹⁰ For varied arguments see Argun, Betigul E. "Universal Citizenship Rights and Turkey's Kurdish Question." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 19, no. 1 (1999): 85-103; Heper, Metin. *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; Bora, Tanil "Nationalist Discourses in Turkey." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, No: 2/3 (2003): 433-451.

University in Turkey, argues that Turkish nationalism is not an ethnic one. He talks about Ataturk's understanding of nationalism as civic even though it is observed that the leader mentioned the words *kavim* (clan) and *irk* (race) in his speeches (Heper; 2007, p. 87). According the author, Ataturk was interested in the similarities and a shared history between peoples to create unity and harmony in the multi-ethnic society of the Turkish Republic. But it is highly argumentative whether the new nation-state is considered a multi-ethnic society; this will be discussed thoroughly in this study. Heper argues:

Ataturk had considered common roots and descent (*soy ve koken birliği*) as another important dimension of a nation, and he had talked about the sacred inheritances people received from their ancestors. Could this be one instance where Ataturk had been inclined towards ethnic nationalism? When we talked about common roots and descent, Ataturk did not think that the members of the Turkish nation had descended from the *same ancestors*; rather, for him, it was a sociological fact that the people in Turkey had come from *ancestors who, while maintaining their sub-identities, had for a long time lived in close proximity*. The past was important for him to show that in time disparate elements in question had gradually formed a nation (Heper; 2007, p. 87)

On the other hand, there are authors that argue there are hints of German ethnic nationalism in the constitutional texts. When broadening the historical timescale of this research, it is evident that different types of Turkish nationalism exist, such as the mainstream nationalism of the thirties and the extreme nationalism of the sixties and seventies (Yegen; 2007, p. 133). Yegen lists distinct types of Turkish nationalism through time such as left-wing Turkish nationalism, nationalism in Islamism and popular nationalism of the last 21st century while examining the "Kurdish question" (Yegen; 2007, p. 120). But my focus here is on the state's official ideology and Kemalist nationalism to analyze the roots of the Kurdish question. It is very crucial to understand what a Turk means, who is a Turk and the difference between a citizen of the Republic of

Turkey and a Turk, according to the state. For instance, according to the report about Turkey by the Minority Rights Group International (2007):

While a separate legal regime was created for some non-Muslims (in practice only Armenians, Greeks and Jews), all Muslims, categorized as 'Turks', became subject to homogenization policies. Inherent in this dichotomy was a trade-off between minority status and full citizenship: non-Muslims had to pay the high price of 'second-class citizenship' in return for minority rights, and various ethnic groups, as well as individuals belonging to non-Sunni denominations of Islam, were compelled to suppress their differences in exchange for 'full citizenship'.

Also, Argun argues that a civic definition of citizenship is not the case in Turkish nationalism (Argun; 1999, p.91). There exists, in different time periods in the history of Turkish nationalism, both French civic and German ethnic elements. Argun offers:

..., the state of the new Turkish republic has been trying, since the end of World War 1, to formulate a solid understanding of a Turkish nation to derive its legitimacy from. In the state's 'quest for its nation' distortions have occurred in the civic definition of citizenship. As Sevan Nisanyan's interpretive analysis of early constitutional texts show, the notion of *Turk* might be interpreted as something existing independently of the concept of *Turkish citizen*. Such a lack of overlap between a Turk and a Turkish citizen renders some citizens of Turkey more Turkish than others and leads to the rather awkward notion of considering non-Muslim Turkish citizens, for example, not Turkish and non-citizen Uzbeks or Azeris ethnic Turks. As a result, Turkish citizenship appears to be resting on an ambiguous foundation of citizenship which lies somewhere between the principles of *jus soli* (the territorial definition of citizenship like the one found in the United States) and *jus sanguinis* (a conception of citizenship based on blood ties like the one used to be found in Germany until very recently) (Argun; 1999, p. 91).

The Kurdish ethno-nationalist movement occurred after the establishment of the nation-state and its policies as a result of the laws introduced by the government during the nation-building process aiming at homogenization of the state and assimilation of the minority groups. The resistance of the Kurdish citizens of Turkey has varied from the revolts to terrorist activities, from political participation to intellectual involvement.

When analyzing the “Kurdish problem” starting from the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, it is reasonable to analyze the events and types of resistance by conducting historical research. I have distinguished four different periods of time based on my studies.¹¹

- The nation-building process and the Kurdish Revolts (1923-1946)
- The Multiparty period and the silent years of the Kurds (1946-1984)
- The violent and terrorist organization – The PKK (1984-1999)
- The Kurdish opening (1999 until today)

Following this order, I shall begin with the time period when several Kurdish revolts first occurred and were suppressed by the Turkish military forces. My aim here is to show the causes of the revolts, its subsequent effects on Turkish state policies and the goals of these revolts.

5. The Nation-Building Process and the Kurdish Revolts (1923-1946)

As brought up earlier, with the Lausanne Treaty (July 24, 1923), the rights given to the Kurds during the Sevres Treaty were abolished and the Caliphate was removed. The socio-political atmosphere was not the one that had been expected by the Kurds. As a result, a new Kurdish organization was founded in 1923 which was called Azadi (Van Bruinessen; 1992, p. 280). The group drew up a list of complaints and delivered them to the British government regarding the new Turkish government and its treatment of the Kurds (Van Bruinessen; 1992, 282). The list exemplifies the situation of the times before

¹¹ For more information about the history of the Kurdish resistance during the Republic of Turkey, see Yavuz, Hakan M. "Five Stages of the Construction of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey." *Nationalism & Ethnic Politics* 7, no. 3 (2001): 1-24.

the first nationalist revolt of the Kurds, the Sheik Said revolt, against the Turkish government in 1925. It says:

1. A new law on minorities aroused suspicion. Fears were that the Turks planned to disperse the Kurds over western Turkey, and settle Turks in their stead in the east.
2. The caliphate, one of the last ties binding Kurds and Turks together, had been abolished.
3. Use of the Kurdish language in schools and law courts was restricted. Kurdish education was forbidden, with the result that education among the Kurds virtually non-existent.
4. The word 'Kurdistan' (used previously as a geographical term) was deleted from all geography books.
5. All senior government officials in Kurdistan were Turks. Only at lower levels, were carefully selected Kurds appointed.
6. Relative to the taxes paid, there were no comparable benefits received from the government.
7. The government interfered in the eastern provinces in the 1923 elections for the Grand National Assembly.
8. The government pursued the policy of continuously setting one tribe against another.
9. Turkish soldiers frequently raided Kurdish villages, taking away animals; requisitioned food supplies were often not or insufficiently paid for.
10. In the army the Kurdish rank-and-file were discriminated against, and generally selected for rough and unpleasant duties.
11. The Turkish government attempted to exploit Kurdish mineral wealth, with the aid of German capital (report "Kurdish Nationalist Society in East Anatolia" quoted in Van Bruinessen; 1996, p.282-283).

As the members of the organization had nationalist sentiments and were seeking an independent Kurdish state, they needed to gain more support from the religious Kurdish segments of the society and thus sought to bring the highly respected sheiks to their side. Moreover, the arrest of the Azadi's leaders led to the takeover of Sheikh Said and his followers for their aim to regain the rights they had been given with the Sevres Treaty.

a. The Sheikh Said Revolt (1925)

There are different arguments about the Sheikh Said revolt regarding its aims and motivation. While some authors argue that it is a religious revolt against the modernization and westernization policies of the republic, some consider it as the first nationalist rebellion by the Kurds.¹² There are two reasons for these arguments. In the history books in Turkey, the Sheikh Said rebellion is depicted as religious and representing backwardness. It is assumed to be against the reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and was a result of the removal of the institution of the caliphate. The reason for this argument is the rejection of the nationalist sentiments of the Kurds during the nation-building process of Turkey. As the official ideology of the Republic of Turkey did not accept the separate identity or the existence of the Kurds at this time, the history taught in high school describes the revolts as religious and is characterized as tribal. As a result of the centralization policies of the government, the tribal chiefs and local leaders were afraid to lose the power and autonomy that were granted to them during Ottoman dynasty. Dogu Ergil, a Turkish sociologist, interprets the rebellion:

The official Turkish view is that the Kurds were instigated by the British, and there is some truth to that, but the rebellion was also a reaction to the encroachment of the new government on the heretofore largely autonomous power of the local Kurdish notables. Since the inclusion of the Kurdish areas in the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Ottoman sultans had granted considerable autonomy to Kurdish local leaders in return for their allegiance to the state. Now, however, the ruling elite established the principles of governance that were secular, Western, progressive, and centralist, and Kurdish notables, viewing the

¹² For different arguments see Olson, Robert. *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989. Olson, Robert. "The Kurdish Rebellions of Sheikh Said (1925); Mt. Ararat (1930), and Dersim (1937-8):" Their Impact on the Development of the Turkish Air Force and on Kurdish and Turkish Nationalism." *Die Welt des Islams* 40, no: 1 (2000): 67-94; Bruinessen, Martin Van. *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*. London, New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992; Vali, Abbas. eds. *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*. Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 2003; White, Paul J. *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers? The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*. London, New York: Zed Books, 2000.

new republican regime as a threat to their historical rights and privileges, rebelled. This helped convince Turkey's ruling republican elite to abandon its faith in multiculturalism (Ergil; 2000; p.124).

As opposed to the argument of Dogu Ergil, Robert Olson, the author of the book *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*, characterizes the event as nationalistic. It was neither only tribal nor religious. It is true that the members of the Azadi, who were the participants and the leading actors of the rebellion wanted to gain the support of the tribes through the appropriation of religion. On the other hand, their aim was to establish an independent nation-state. In this sense, the rebellion was more counterrevolutionary than religious.

Olson agrees that the Sheikh Said rebellion played a major role in shaping the future policies of the Turkish government concerning its Kurdish minorities and caused it to become guarded against political initiatives of the Kurdish population. The Sheikh Said rebellion made the government even more suspicious of the foreign elements' goals on the Turkish lands, as the Kurds asked for help from the British government (Olson; 1989, p.45). It was assumed that not only the external enemy but also the internal one that were against the unity and integrity of a Turkish nation-state.¹³ The Kurds were aware that it would be hard to secure success against the military forces of the Turks and that they

¹³ Ahmet Icduygu and Ozlem Kaygusuz (2004) explain how the Sevres Treaty shaped the foreign policy of the new Turkish government. See Ahmet Icduygu and Ozlem Kaygusuz, "The Politics of Citizenship by Drawing Borders: Foreign Policy and the Construction of National Citizenship Identity in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 40, No.6 (2004), 29-32. Also, Henri J. Barkey and Graham Fuller refer to the atmosphere after the treaty and the perception of the government about the foreign forces as "Sevres syndrome." As the lands of the Ottoman Empire were divided between the Allied Forces, Greeks and Armenians, granting the Kurds and Armenians independent states, since then the Turkish government has been skeptical about the collaboration of the internal and external enemies against the Turkish state. For further information see Barkey, Henri J., and Graham E. Fuller. *Turkey's Kurdish Question*. Lanham, Boulder, New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998.

could not establish an independent nation state without the support of a powerful government.

Sheik Said was born in Palu in 1865. He was one of the six brothers and would become the head of the family after the death of his father. He was one of the wealthiest men of the area as a result of his position as a sheikh along with his two brothers, Mehdi and Tahir, who were also the leaders of the rebellion (Olson; 1989, p.100). He was also the leader of the Naksbandi order which was important for the Kurds for their political and religious matters (Olson; 1989, p.99). Regardless of the power the family had sustained for decades, not all the Kurds supported the rebellion. The nontribal Kurds, the lower and working class, did not participate in the revolt as a result of the disorganization and the lack of military training among the Kurds (Olson; 1989, p.99). The revolt was unsuccessful and on June 29, 1925 Sheikh Said and forty-six others were hanged. Although the sheikh and his followers did not accomplish their goals, their revolt shaped the future policies of the Turkish government. Robert Olson, who argues that the Sheikh Said rebellion was a prototype of a post – World War 1 nationalist rebellion, explains:

The Sheikh Said rebellion created and provided a means whereby most serious subsequent opposition to government policies or comprehensive disagreement with its progress laid open the possibility that the disaffected groups would be labeled as traitors. In the aftermath of the rebellion, it was relatively easy to color opposition forces with a hostile ethnic tinge. The vehicles created and the laws passed for the suppression of the rebellion and the symbols of opposition to the Kemalist program that it generated meant that the consolidation of the Turkish state and of Turkish nationalism were greatly expedited by the suppression and perceived threat of Kurdish nationalism. The nationalist aspirations of ten percent of the population had to be denied if the nationalist goals of the other ninety percent were to be achieved. It is in this sense that the Sheikh Said rebellion, its suppression, and its aftermath were more important than the purges of 1926, which simply eliminated the remaining opposition to the Kemalist' programs. Most of those who were purged or sentenced to death

agreed or would have agreed with the position subsequently adopted by the Turkish government vis-à-vis the Kurds and their nationalism. After all, when opportunities arose after 1950 for different policies to be followed or implemented, they were not (Olson; 1989, p. 159-160).

While the Sheikh Said revolt was the first nationalist revolt in the history of the Republic of Turkey, it was not the last. There appeared eighteen revolts between 1924 and 1938, sixteen of which were Kurdish rebellions (Kirisci & Winrow; 1997, p.100). I will examine the three major rebellions most influential for causing the government to develop new policies to control the Kurdish populated areas. The damage done to the areas where these revolts occurred was intense. Not only were there thousands of casualties, but also there was mass relocation of the population to the west side of the country (McDowall; 1992, p. 37). Many villages that were densely populated by the Kurdish citizens were burnt down. The psychological damage and oppression that faced by the people were, unfortunately, long-term.

b. The Mount Ararat Revolt (1927-1930)

After the Sheikh Said revolt, a new revolt broke out further north from the center of the previous revolt, around Mount Ararat, which is now called Agri Mountain. This revolt was supported by both the local aghas and a National Kurdish League which was called *Khoyboun* (Chailand; 1978, p. 63). The new Kurdish liberation organization was founded by some Kurdish intellectuals and chieftains in Lebanon (McDowall; 1992, p. 37). And the revolt was, in its early times, supported by Shah of Iran. Not only Iran but also Armenians became allies with the Kurds for an independent Turkish Armenia (Chailand; 1978, p. 64). These incidents urged the Turkish government to negotiate with the leader of the movement. As a result some chiefs who had been exiled returned to

Turkey while some sought refuge in other countries. When it seemed like the Kurdish troops were gaining control in the area, Turkey came to agreement with the Shah that Iran would not support the Kurdish forces anymore (Chailand; 1978, p.65). In the summer of 1930, the rebellion weakened by the Turkish military forces. Two laws, one of which was published in 1930 and the other in 1932, describe the atmosphere during and following years of the Ararat Revolt. Law 1850, 1930, is as follows:

Murders and other actions committed individually and collectively, from the 20th of June to the 10th of December 1930, by the representatives of the state or the province, by the military or civil authorities, by the local authorities, by guards or militiamen, or by any civilian having helped the above or acted on their behalf, during the pursuit and extermination of the revolts which broke out in Ercis, Zilan, Agridag [Ararat] and the surrounding areas, including Pulumur in Erzincan province and the area of the First Inspectorate [which covered all the provinces of Anatolian Kurdistan], will not be considered as crimes (Article 1) (Quoted by McDowall in Chailan; 1978, p. 65)

Following the suppression of the revolt, the Turkish government implemented a relocation strategy in an attempt to avoid future conflicts or revolts. To legalize this mass deportation a new law was introduced in 1932. It was as follows:

Four separate categories of inhabited zones will be recognized in Turkey, as will be indicated on a map established by the Minister of the Interior and approved by the other Ministers.

No. 1 zones will include all those areas in which it is deemed desirable to increase the density of the culturally Turkish population. (This obviously referred to Kurdistan.)

The No. 2 zones will include those areas in which it is deemed desirable to establish populations which must be assimilated into Turkish culture. (Ethnically Turkish Turkey)

The No. 3 zones will be territories in which culturally Turkish immigrants will be allowed to establish themselves, freely but without the assistance of the authorities. (The most fertile and habitable areas of Kurdistan were thus graciously offered to Turkish immigrants.)

No. 4 zones will include all those territories which it has been decided should be evacuated and those which may be closed off for public health,

material, cultural, political, strategic or security reasons. (This category included the more inaccessible areas of Kurdistan.) (Chailand; 1978, p.66)

There occurred one more major revolt by the Kurdish nationalists, the Dersim Rebellion (1937-38). The Turkish military forces along with the tactical policies regarding the Kurds helped the government to silence and frighten the remaining population in the area especially following the Dersim revolt.

c. Dersim Rebellion (1937-1938)

The Dersim Rebellion was the last rebellion of the nation-building process of the Republic of Turkey.¹⁴ Bruinessen talks about the Dersim rebellion as a massacre and argues that it was not only an attempt to suppress an internal rebellion in a brutal way but also was part of a wider policy of the Turkish Republic against the Kurds (Bruinessen; 1994, p. 2). Dersim, as a result of its geopolitical conditions, was not taken under control by the Turkish government by the mid 1930s. It had several tribes and the area they inhabited was inaccessible, mountainous with narrow valleys (Bruinessen; 1994, p.2). The reason of the conflict was simple which showed that the government had already been expecting a revolt from the people of Dersim (Bruinessen; 1994, p.3). When a bridge was burnt down by some locals and the telephone lines were cut, the army immediately took action. The heavy military campaign with both the Turkish air force and army were aiming at the “bandits” and the “mountainous Turks” who had forgotten their identity and stayed backward. As there were no Kurds but “authentic Turks,” the military operation was for the sake of “civilizing” these “Turks” who had forgotten their

¹⁴ My researches show that there did not appear any insurgency after the Dersim rebellion, for couple decades which will be discussed later on my thesis. Also, it is observed that the authors such as Hamit Bozarslan (2003), Gerard Chailand (1978), Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller (1998), the respected researchers on the Kurdish historiography, characterize these years as “silent” or “quiet” in their works.

language and culture. It was for the goal of creating a modern, secular and Western Turkey. I find Olson's example about the role of the first female pilot in Turkey, who was involved in the suppression of the rebellion, very interesting. Sabiha Gokcen was the adopted daughter of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and her participation in the bombing raids of the Dersim Kurds apparently strengthened Turkish nationalism (Olson; 2000, p.91).

Olson says:

Sabiha Gokcen provides a good example of the role of women from the majority ethnic group and the dominant class of Turkish society who served as models and symbols of progress for that group and class while simultaneously serving as the instrument of that group's and class' suppression of minorities....Gokcen is also an example of the role women played in a developing and non-Western state such as Turkey that followed imperialist European patterns of utilizing women for the purpose of securing state or imperial dominance in spite of the subordinate position they occupied in imperial and colonial hierarchies of power and in the Turkish state structure (Olson; 2000, p.90).

The Dersim Rebellion was suppressed successfully by the government and subsequently no major revolts occurred. Many villages were burnt and the casualties included Kurdish women, men and children. Bruinessen says:

At several instances the reports mention the arrest of women and children, but elsewhere we read of indiscriminate killing of humans and animals. With professional pride, reports list how many "bandits" and dependents were "annihilated," and how many villages and fields were burned. Groups who were hiding in caves were entirely wiped out. The body count in these reports (in some engagements a seemingly exact number like 76, in others "the entire band of Haydaran tribesmen and part of the Demenan") adds up to something between three and seven thousand, while tens of villages are reported destroyed. In seventeen days of the 1938 offensive alone, 7,954 persons were reported killed or caught alive; the latter were definitely a minority. According to these official reports, then, almost 10 percent of the entire population of Tunceli was killed. The Kurds claim that their losses were even higher (Bruinessen; 1988, p. 5-6).

The failure in revolts and the fear of the Turkish government shaped the future of the Kurdish ethno nationalist movement in Turkey. After the Dersim rebellion, Turkey entered a new era concerning its Kurdish citizens. What is important in the sequence of the events and relations between them is that while the Turkish government was trying to suppress and ignore the demands of its Kurdish citizens, it actually led to even more nationalist sentiments and new strategies to struggle against a system which did not recognize their socio-cultural identity.

6. Multi-Party Period

a. 1946-1960 (One-Step to Democratization)

Analyzing different periods of time and classifying them in accordance with the events that shaped the socio-political circumstances of the Kurdish minority has enabled me to understand the dynamics of the “Kurdish problem” in Turkey. The sequence of events has a rationale which exemplifies the ethno-nationalist movement, how it may evolve and develop according to changing state policies and socio-political developments (Somer; 2002; 74). The changing patterns of the conflict and the varied reactions of the Kurds from different classes and times show that the ethno-nationalist movement of the Kurds in Turkey has variables rather than fixed with predetermined structures. This fluidity relates to the evolving socio-political conditions in Turkey and the government’s policies regarding the Kurds. Murat Somer, an assistant professor of International Relations in Koc University in Turkey, summarizes the Turkish-Kurdish case in Turkey and why it is remarkable:

First, it manifests a critical case in a formally democratic context in which an ethnic identity’s expression was nearly absent in the mainstream discourse until this situation changed relatively swiftly and unexpectedly

during the past decade. Second, comparing the same society's discourse in different periods instead of comparing the discourses in different countries has the advantage of controlling for many contextual, such as culture, ethnic composition and history of political institutions. Third, focusing on one country enables one to offer a "thick" explanation and examine the influential historical events, acts of individuals, qualitative variables, and casual mechanisms that effect change (Somer; 2005, p. 594).

After Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, Turkey entered the multi-party period in 1946, which helped to ease the relationship between the government and the Kurdish citizens of the state. The Kurdish revolts, a reaction to the nation-building process of the Turks, were unsuccessful so with implementation of the multi-party period, the Kurds tried to become politicized in mostly Turkish leftist parties. On the other hand, both the tribal structure of the Kurdish populated areas and the government's fear of Kurdish nationalism made the possible peaceful solution for the Kurdish problem impossible. The Kurds did not receive the support they were expecting from the leftist parties. Neither did they accomplish much with the Kurdish parties they established. Here I propose that after the violent era of the 1920s through the 1940s, there occurred a transformation of the Kurdish problem in Turkey until the 1980s when the PKK started its armed struggle. The acceleration of violence and conflict in times was the result of the events which had preceded the violence. To study these events reveals the causes and effects of an ethno-nationalist movement which might have many forms from armed struggle to political participation.

As a reaction to the Republican People's Party, which was founded by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, many Kurds voted for the Democratic Party with the hope for active political participation. In their election campaign, the Democrats promised to alleviate the oppression in the east, to grant amnesty to the exiled members of the families during the single party period, and to give them a chance to be politically active in their regions and

remove the gendarmes' unfair treatment of the peoples of the east (Erogul and Hun quoted in Barkey&Fuller; 1998, p. 14). As a result, in the 1954 election the Democratic Party (DP) won 34 seats in the Turkish parliament from eastern Turkey, which was still mostly Kurdish populated even after the forced relocation of the Kurds during and after the revolts (McDowall cited in Tahiri; 2007, p.190). While with the DP there appeared a chance for a more democratic Turkey, neither the Kurds nor the Turkish left seemed to use this opportunity as a positive development.

During the multi-party period, the aghas and the tribal chieftains of the Kurdish areas retained their power. They worked as intermediaries between the locals and the government sources. As a result the DP used these local leaders as a tool to gain the votes. While some tribal chieftains used this as an opportunity to grow Kurdish nationalism, some chose to distance themselves from their Kurdish identity to be able to maintain their power. Hussein Tahiri, the author of the book *The Structure of Kurdish Society and the Struggle for a Kurdish State*, explains:

Kurdish tribal rivalries pushed some tribal elements into assimilation. Sympathy with Kurdish nationalism would cause problems for tribal leaders. The more they could deny their Kurdish identity, the more they could be accepted into general Turkish society and get ahead of their rivals. To get high positions, some tribal leaders denied their Kurdishness and identified themselves as Turks (McDowall cited in Tahiri; 2007, p191). The assimilation of these Kurdish politicians into Turkish society was a setback for Kurdish nationalism. However, there were other Kurdish politicians who, out of rivalry against assimilated Kurds, tried to revive Kurdish identity (Tahiri; 2007, p.191).

Not only these tribal leaders but also the new commercial bourgeoisie that appeared with the less restrictive government during the multi-party period turned out to be a

setback for the Kurds (Barkey&Fuller; 1998, p. 14). Barkey and Fuller explain how this change affected the eastern provinces of Turkey.

...most Kurdish businessmen chose to invest, as they continue to do, in the economically more developed regions of the country, ignoring their own, more backward provinces. This further increased the difference and distance between the underdeveloped Kurdish areas and those of the western provinces, primarily Istanbul. In turn, the growing differentiation would provide one of the main reasons for the Kurds' turn to left wing activism (Barkey&Fuller; 1998, p.14).¹⁵

In 1960 a military coup in Turkey overthrew the Democrats. Forty-nine Kurdish intellectuals were arrested ("the event of 49's") for participating in separatist and communist activities in 1959. Gunter confirms that 485 Kurds were detained and 55 tribal leaders were deported to western Turkey (Gunter quoted in Tahiri; 2007, p. 191). The reason for the arrests and the deportations was to avoid conflict resulting from the communist and nationalist activities of the Kurds. As a result the Kurdish intellectuals became excluded from Turkish political life. On the other hand, the suppression and assimilation policies of the government would become unsuccessful and both the Kurdish and leftist Turkish parties started to voice the problems and the demands of the Kurds in Turkey.

b. 1960-1970 (The Second Chance)

David McDowall says that the "49 event" affected the national awareness of the Kurds especially after one of the 49, Sait Elci, openly defended the rights of the Kurds in Turkey in the court (McDowall; 2004, p. 405). The Turkish government, while trying to silence the Kurdish minority by various laws and assimilation policies, ended up helping

¹⁵ Although not referred by these authors, the circumstances regarding the socio-political conditions in the eastern Turkey, the tribalism and the exploitation of the chieftains of the peoples, would soon become the causes of the PKK. The party would aim not only at the cultural repression but also the imperialist powers and the uneven development in Turkey.

them grow even more nationalistic sentiments and identity awareness. The forced relocation of the Kurds from the southeast of Turkey to the cities in the west affected the future of the Kurdish struggle in a way that government officials had not expected. As a result of the urbanization of the Kurds, they became more educated and conscious about their problems, unlike the tribal leaders who had been generally seeking their own economic power. McDowall explains:

Anter was sent to study law in Istanbul in 1941, one of several of the brightest, handpicked by the First Inspectorate General (covering most of Kurdistan) to be turned into good Turkish citizens. He was lodged in a special hostel for students from the east, where he made contact with fifty or so other young intellectuals Azioglu, Democrat Deputy and founder of the Turkish Nation Party, and Faik Bucak, founder of the Democratic Party of Turkish Kurdistan (KDPT). Thus in Ankara and Istanbul, alongside migrant workers, small but highly articulate groups of educated Kurds gathered to form the intellectual spearhead of Kurdish identity (McDowall; 2004, p. 405).

Musa Anter was one of the members of this new generation who differed from the traditional tribal leaders of the east. This younger generation of the Kurds attended higher education in the urban centers such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. Unlike the religious and tribal elements of the Kurdish society, they were mostly socialist and aimed at changing the socio-political structures of the Kurdish areas. While the earlier generation carried out an armed struggle against the Turkish state, this new generation would politicize and work collaboratively with the Turkish left in a legal and non-violent way (Watts; 2007, p. 54). Nicole F. Watts, a specialist in Middle East studies who researches the Kurds in Turkey, argues that the era from 1960 to 1971 was the “reawakening” or “rebirth” of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey (Watts; 2007, p.53). The author also argues that contrary to the general idea that the Kurdish movement in Turkey started with the

Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), the structure of the future of the Kurdish struggle in Turkey had its ideological and political roots during this era (Watts; 2007, p. 55). The ideology of the Kurdish elites in this era resembled in some ways the ideology of the PKK, although their methods differed. While the Kurdish elites stayed within the legal boundaries of Turkish politics, the PKK had employed armed struggle, which will be analyzed in this research.

Not only the lack of democratization and worsening economic conditions in Turkey, but also broader international developments affected the Kurdish leftist movement in the 1960s (Yavuz; 2005, p.243). Especially the Iraqi Revolution in 1958 and the return of Mullah Mustafa Barzani from exile in Soviet Union in the same year influenced the Kurds from Turkey (McDowall; 2004, p.405). The revolution which overthrew the monarchy in Iran was moving for many. Also, the fact that Barzani was a Kurd himself gave hope to the Kurds. Not only the international developments but also the left-wing student movements in Turkey inspired the Kurdish youth. They believed that they could make a revolution in Turkey that could bring democracy and establish a socialist state (Watson; 2007, p. 60). On the other hand, the words of English writer G. K. Chesterton seemed to apply to the situation in Turkey. The author says: “You can never have a revolution in order to establish a democracy. You must have a democracy in order to have a revolution” (<http://www.chesterton.org/wordpress/>) Before mobilizing in Kurdish parties, the Kurds looked for support from the Turkish leftist parties. Tahiri explains:

Kurds filled the ranks of many Turkish leftist organizations. Under pressure from the Kurdish militants within the Turkish left, some leftist organizations recognized the identity of the Kurds. The Workers’ Party of Turkey (WPT) which was a legal organization and had won fifteen seats in the Turkish National Assembly in 1965, went so far as to officially

recognize the Kurdish identity in its Fourth Congress in 1971, and criticized the Turkish ruling class for the suppression and legal assimilation of the Kurds. As a result, the WPT lost its legal status (Tahiri; 2007, p.193).

Not only by indulging in Turkish politics, but also by being active in literary life, the Kurdish intellectuals tried to have their voice heard in a non-violent way in the 1960s. A new publication at that time, *Ileri Yurt*, was the first one after the Dersim Rebellion. Its publishers were the ones who also developed a new campaign called ‘Eastism’ (Doguculuk) (McDowall; 2005, p.405). Although the followers of the movement were cautious in their rhetoric regarding the Kurds and avoided using the word “Kurdistan,” which is still used today in reference to the southeast part of Turkey, they would soon get into trouble with the officials of the government and military (McDowall; 2004, p.405). The publication *Ileri Yurt (Forward Country)* by the Kurds was closed down in 1959. This was directly linked to the incident in Kirkuk, Iraq where Kurds killed Turkomans¹⁶ (McDowall; 2004, p.405). The government, afraid of international incidents and developments concerning the Kurds and how it might affect the situation in Turkey, reacted to the event by punishing the Kurds from Turkey. This was another chance lost for the possible peaceful solution to the minority problem.

The dominating Turkish leftist party of the 1960s was the Turkish Workers Party (TWP), which was founded in 1961 by a dozen trade union leaders (Watts; 2007, p. 63). The party’s aim was to establish a socialist order in Turkey which would help diminish the national and international imperialist powers. It further focused on breaking the feudalism in the south-east part of Turkey and ending the exploitation of the Turkish

¹⁶ Turkoman refers to the Turkic people living in the states of Central Asia such as Turkmenistan, Afghanistan also in some Middle Eastern countries such as Iran, Iraq, etc.

workers by the Western powers (Watts, 2007, p. 63). In the 1965 elections TWP won 15 seats in the parliament. Among these members were the Kurdish intellectuals such as Tarik Ziya Ekinçi, Kemal Burkay, Naci Kutlay and Mehdi Zana (Aren cited in Watts; 2007, p.64). TWP was important in the history of the Turkish politics as it was the first Turkish party that acknowledged the presence of the Kurds and their socio-economic and cultural concerns. In 1964, TWP offered in its party program:

Parallel to the region's economic backwardness is the backwards social and cultural circumstances faced by our citizens of this region. Particularly those of our citizens who speak Kurdish and Arabic, and those from the Alevi mezhep [denomination], encounter discrimination because of these circumstances (TIP Party Program quoted by Watts; 2007, p. 65).

Although the Kurdish problem seemed to have its place in the party's agenda, it was regarded more as a socio-economic problem than a minority one until 1969-70 (Bozarslan; 1992, p. 99). The party's approach to the "Kurdish problem" could have been successful and efficient as it was not aiming at separation and disintegration as the Turkish officials had feared since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. It was more concerned with citizenship rights, socio-economic development in the southeast and the political structure of the society which disabled the equal treatment of the peoples of the region (Bozarslan; 1992, p. 99). On the other hand, when the party took a more leftist stand towards the end of the 1960s and openly announced the repression and assimilation policies of the government towards Kurds, it was declared an illegal organization that was supporting separation (McDowall; 1996, p.409). The party was closed by the government affecting the public in a manner that will be discussed in the next chapter.

The participation of the Kurds in Turkish leftist parties around 1960s did not succeed in finding a solution to the problem. Tahiri explains:

The alliance between Kurds and Turkish left did not last long. Other leftist organizations in Turkey rarely dared to talk about the Kurdish problem or felt that the Kurdish question was of secondary importance. Kurdish activists realized that their nationalist aspirations could not be reconciled with Turkish leftist ideas. For them, their ethnicity was the cause of underdevelopment in Kurdistan, not the policies of the ruling class *per se* as the left believed; Kurdistan was kept underdeveloped to prevent the rise of Kurdish nationalist. The Kurdish activists felt the need for Kurdish organizations (Tahiri; 2007, p.193).

One major mobilization of the Kurdish activists was the “Eastern Meetings,” which were held in seven cities, Diyarbakir, Silvan, Siverek, Batman, Tunceli, Agri, Ankara, in southeast Turkey, in the fall of 1967 (Watts; 2007, p. 69). The meetings were important in a sense that it reached out to the peoples of the east from every class and beliefs. They helped to create consciousness among locals about the problems of the east. Watts informs that while some Turkish politicians used the meetings as proof for the existence of democracy in Turkey, the high participation of the military forces and the police in the meetings both to frighten and to control people was contradictory to the argument of these politicians (Besikci quoted in Watts; 2007, p. 71). The heavy participation of the forces in the meetings was a sign that the government still regarded the peoples of the east and their political activities as suspicious which needed to be watched out and controlled cautiously. When today’s events are analyzed in the Turkish media, the same attitude towards the leftist and Kurdish organizations’ political activities can be observed which shows the longstanding beliefs of the government. In a similar manner, the comments of an author in one of the most popular newspapers in Turkey during the events are significant. Watts says:

A front page editorial published in Cumhuriyet on September 28, 1967 argued that, despite rumors that the meetings were linked to Barzani or to Kurdish nationalist activities outside the country, the real cause of any

‘Kurdish propaganda’ (if indeed it was occurring at the meetings) was rapid social changes that had created new – and unmet – demands in the region. If ‘Kurdism’ was stirring in the region, the writer argued, it was ‘only the result of, not the cause of, the movement in the east’ (Watts; 2007, p. 71).

The author’s words about the future of the “Kurdish problem” analyzing the events of the time were also significant. He said: “Turkey is a whole, complete with its East and West. But within this whole (oneness) there is also an Eastern reality. It is an undeveloped East, a primitively governed East, a neglected East, and it is certain that it will cause an imbalance, and when people wake up to this imbalance, they will certainly want to take various roads to achieve a balance” (the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* quoted in Watts; 2007, p. 71). The author’s comment was remarkable as the Kurds did use methods varying from violence to political participation to solve their problems. What was not occurring during the times when the author made this comment was the violence. During this era, the Kurds tried to mobilize legally. And their suppression in the political arena together with the socio-economic problems and the assimilation and homogenization policies, would lead to the emergence of the violent and illegal organizations. The minority problems including language, religion and ethnicity will unlikely to disappear in the countries such as Turkey where minority rights are not protected.

c. 1970 until the PKK

Hamit Bozarslan, a historian and an expert on Middle Eastern affairs and particularly on Kurds, argues that 1969-70 was a “turning point” regarding the Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. There appeared a mass awakening followed by the demonstrations of the working class and student organizations around the country (Bozarslan; 1992, p.100). It was not only the Kurdish youth that became conscious about problems and sought

solutions. The activities of the working class and the student movements, which would confront to the rightist, Islamists, and nationalists, were demanding to overthrow the regime in favor of a socialist one that would bring justice, democracy, and equality to all. Observing the atmosphere of these times and also having long conversations with my father, who himself one of the young Kurds who came to Istanbul for higher education in 1970s, it seemed almost inevitable there would appear an inner conflict in Turkey which would also affect the Kurds.

During this unrest, bunch of organizations was founded by the Kurdish intellectuals. The first Kurdish organization was the Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearts, the DDKO, which was established in major Turkish cities including Istanbul and Ankara and across Eastern Turkey in 1969. This cultural club was unique in a way that it was openly nationalist and did not see the Kurdish issue only as a regional underdevelopment (Bozarslan; 1992, p. 101). Although the underdevelopment of the region was a part of the problem and the policy of the state upon the region, it was also a problem of a nation that was oppressed by a strong state in various ways. Bozarslan explains:

Only progressive forces could, therefore, bring such a situation to an end by liberating Kurdistan – not necessarily as an independent state – from this double yoke. In addition, with the emergence of the DDKOs, the Kurdish movement in Turkey achieved autonomy twice over: firstly from the Kurdish movement in Iraq in that it became, far more than previously, a Turkish phenomenon, secondly, from the Turkish student and working-class movement, in that it became an integral part of the Kurdish movement in the Middle East (Bozarslan; 1992, p. 101).

In October 1970, the leaders of DDKO were arrested with the accusation of separatism. Musa Anter, Tarik Ziya Ekinçi, Sait Elçi and a Turkish sociologist İsmail Beşikçi were among the ones who were imprisoned. Although the members with the

leadership of Ismail Besikci prepared a 150-page statement of defense, the DDKO was closed and many were sentenced more than ten years (McDowall; 2004, p.412). Following this event, in 1971 two new leftist groups, the Turkish Popular Liberation Army (TPLA) and the Popular Liberation Front (TPLF) became activated with both legal and illegal activities such as abducting US servicemen in Turkey (McDowall; 2004, p. 412). On 12 March, 1971 an indirect intervention by the Turkish military occurred. McDowall explains the government's reasons to the intervention:

The interior minister gave three reasons for military intervention: the rise of the extreme leftists and urban guerillas; the response of the extreme rightists and 'those wanting dictatorship'; and finally, the separatist question in the East where he said a large number of weapons had been found. He accused Mulla Mustafa of assisting the separatists, and the latter of forming a Kurdish Independence Party (McDowall; 2004, p. 412).

After the intervention, from 1971 to 1980, the political turmoil got even worse. Although it was not clear that the intervention was against the rise of the leftists and pro-Kurdish movements, the fact that Alparslan Turkes' ultra-nationalist/fascist party, the Nationalist Action Party (NAP), was not closed, gave some hints about the aim of the intervention. While the government saw not only the Kurdish but also the Turkish leftist parties as threats to the official ideology of the state, Kemalism, it did not give notice to the violent actions and the extreme beliefs of the Nationalist Action Party (Taspinar; 2005, p. 93). According to the members of this party, which were called "Grey Wolves," "One who does not have Turkish blood is not Turkish even though he does not speak any other language except Turkish" (Caglar quoted by McDowall from Nihal Atsiz works; 2004, p.413). Although Kemalism is not exclusive and as long as one says he/she is Turkish, he/she is considered to be one regardless of ethnic origin and language, the

ideology of the fascist party was not regarded as an opposition to the national integrity of the nation. Moreover, McDowall argues that as the “Grey Wolves” were openly anti-Communist and anti-Kurd, the government even considered them as useful (McDowall; 2004, p. 413).

The 1961 Constitution after the 1960 military intervention in Turkey aimed at expanding the basic rights and liberties which gave birth to the various leftist organizations (Heper; 2007, p. 155). On the contrary, after the 1970 military coup d’état, the 1972 Law of Associations limited associational life (Natali; 2005, p. 104). While the previous Constitution was a reaction to the single-party period and extended the participation of various parties, the 1970 military intervention occurred to put an end to the chaos as a result of the clashes between the extreme rightists and the extreme leftists (Heper; 2007, p. 156). It seemed, however, this just worsened the situation which would lead to the third military intervention in 1980.

Gunter explains the chaotic atmosphere between these two military interventions as “political deadlock” (Gunter; 1990, p. 24). Although all leftist parties were closed down, including TIP, which was mentioned above, during the 1970s twelve illegal Kurdish parties were opened (Heper; 2007, p. 156). The pressure coming from the government and the unsuccessful collaboration between the leftist Kurdish and Turkish parties in solving the “Kurdish problem” or “the problem of the Kurds” led the Kurdish groups to become radical and alienated from the Turkish parties. Natali says:

In contrast to the early liberalizing period, however, Kurds moved away from Turkish leftist parties and toward distinctly Kurdish nationalist groups that were illegal, including the Socialist Party of Kurdistan in Turkey (Turkiye Kurdistan Sosyalist Partisi), the Kurdistan Workers’ Vanguard Party (Kurdistan Oncu Isçi Partisi), and the Liberty Party

(Rizgari). Among others, they popularized the slogan “Kurdara Azadi” (Freedom to Kurds) in their manifestations in the big cities and supported Kurdish candidates in local elections. The politically restrictive and unmanageable political space of the late 1970s also gave rise to radical Kurdish nationalist parties such as the National Liberators of Kurdistan (Kurdistan Ulusal Kurtulusculari) and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, which manifested a highly ethnicized and violent form of nationalism against the government and each other (Natali; 2005, p. 106-107).

The civil violence and terrorism in the late 1970s have varied political, institutional and sociological causes. First of all there was long ministerial crisis that resulted in policy announcements that were not agreed upon by the national front governments, right-of-center JP (Justice Party), the extreme right-wing parties of NSP (National Salvation Party), and NAP (National Action Party) (Gunter; 1990, p. 24-25). Gunter argues that even though the Republic of Turkey, which was the successor state of the Ottoman Empire, claimed that it would be a democracy, the government was nonetheless established with a one-party system that its authoritarianism was like the Ottoman dynasty (Gunter; 1990. P. 26). As a result, when liberalization policies were introduced and Turkey entered the multi-party period, it was nothing but a failure with terror and anarchy which resulted in three military interventions in twenty years time. Gunter explains the institutional causes of the failure of the coalitional-government:

When in power, each party staked out its own political turf. In time the bureaucracy grew so polarized that even judges, police, university rectors, and other civil servants, as well as majors and provincial officials became openly partisan. Thus, although both Ecevit and Demirel began as moderate proponents of western-style democracy, the dynamics of the party system increasingly polarized them and precluded their cooperation. It seems that the mutual hostility of the party leaders and their resulting inability to cooperate for the good of their country might have been the key factor in turning Turkey’s multiparty, coalitional-government system of the 1970s on to the road of disaster (Gunter; 1996, p.26).

The political polarization was not only limited to the government but also affected daily life. The street violence, robbery, armed attacks and unlawful acquisition turned out to be every day events. This was a result of both rapid urbanization and youth unemployment which led to radical leftist and rightist movements (Gunter; 1996, p. 30). Gunter argues that economic deprivation, the uneven distribution of the wealth, the rate of unemployment, high rates of inflation, and the limited supply of higher educational opportunities all led to violence and extremism (Gunter; 1996, p. 27-28). The scale of the violence and loss during these times is shown starkly useful through statistical analysis. On the other hand, as the data comes from the report issued by the Turkish government, there is a possibility that the numbers were much higher than they were reported. Gunter states:

There were a total of 9,795 incidents of clashes and armed attacks during the overall period. Of these, 91 percent occurred before September 12, while only 9 percent took place afterwards. At the same time a total of 6,732 incidents of arson and throwing of explosives took place. Of this figure, 94.5 percent occurred before the military intervention and only 5.5 percent after (Gunter; 1996, p. 31).

The number of people who lost their lives during the events is unfortunate. Moreover, it is doubtful whether whether the missing people and people who died during torture under arrest were reported or not. Gunter states:

During these times, a total of 4,040 people lost their lives as a result of violence, a figure which includes the members of the security forces who were killed, but excludes those from the ranks of the terrorists. Of this total, 92 percent occurred before the military intervention and only 8 percent after. In all, 11,160 people were wounded as a result of terrorist incidents, 93.3 percent before and only 6.7 percent after September 12. Concurrently martial law forces confiscated a total of 804,197 weapons during the overall period. Only 4 percent of these were seized before the military takeover, while the rest were taken after (Gunter; 1996, p. 31).

As a result on September 12, 1980 the third military intervention occurred headed by General Kenan Evren. The military was concerned that the core values of the Republic of Turkey were under attack by Islamists, extreme rightists and leftists groups, and the Kurdish nationalists (McDowall; 2004, p. 415).¹⁷ McDowall says that according to the statistics from the time when there was direct rule, over 60,000 people were arrested, including 54 percent leftists, 14 percent rightists, and 7 percent Kurdish separatists (McDowall; 2004, p. 416). On the other hand, the author voices his doubt about the number of arrests, and how the official figures can be reconciled with other reports suggesting that there had been detained not fewer than Kurds 81,000 according to the International League of Human Rights (McDowall; 2004, p. 416). The consequences of the intervention were not limited to the arrests and casualties. Its effect on the Constitution and political life was negative. McDowall explains:

When the generals returned the republic to civilian rule it was with a new constitution, which stripped away most of the liberties, which had escaped the revision of 1971. The 1961 Constitution had been about pluralism and civil liberties, the 1982 one was about control. It strengthened the power of the executive president, giving him the right to dissolve the Assembly and to rule by decree. It reduced the Assembly to one chamber from the bi-cameral system of 1961, and reduced the role of political parties. Above all, it included a catch-all provision, Article 14, which restricted the freedoms of individuals and organizations and prohibited political struggle

¹⁷ McDowall lists national unity, ethnic Turkism, populism and secularism as the core values of the Ataturk legacy (McDowall; 2004, 415). I believe it is valid to state here that there are six fundamental pillars of “Kemalism” that include republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, statism and revolutionism. It should not be forgotten that these principles are based on and for the good and the integrity of the Turkish nation. While Ataturk is admired by the Turks as a leader and the founder of the Republic of Turkey with good reasons, his achievements were only made possible by ignoring the existence of the Kurds and denying the multi-ethnic structures of the society. Although his ideology was not implying any racist sentiments and was inclusive rather than exclusive, it was not successful with the Kurds which has been discussed and will further be analyzed in this study. As a result the Kurdish nationalism as counter-nationalism to Turkish nationalism which was, and still is, one of the pillars of the Republic was seen as a threat to the unity and the integrity of the Republic of Turkey. It can also be analyzed that the ideology of revolutionism was not for any other nation but the Turks. The possibility of a socialist or Kurdish revolution directly led the country to military intervention.

based upon class, sect, language and race. It was clear warning against Islamists, Marxists and Kurdish nationalists (McDowall; 2004, p. 416).

The military ruled the country for three years, from 1980 to 1983. During its rule, many politicians, lawyers, academicians, journalist, especially those identified as having leftist tendencies, were under threat from the government. They could lose their jobs, get arrested or just disappear unexpectedly. The fact that the universities lost their autonomy and were controlled by the centralized government demonstrated official anxiety that anyone from any part of the society could be a danger to law and order.

Regarding the Kurds in Turkey, the 1982 constitution limited their cultural and political participation which had already been constrained by the principles and the ideology of the Turkish Republic. Taspinar identifies the brutal repression in the southeastern cities and says that between September 1980 and November 1981, 74 prisoners lost their lives under arrest in the military prison in Diyarbakir (Weiker quoted in Taspinar; 2005, p. 97). In addition to the strict military rule in the southeastern provinces which watched and controlled the activities, new policies were introduced by the government. In October 1983, Law 2932 stated:

It is forbidden to express, diffuse or publish opinions in any language other than the official language of states recognized by the Turkish state....The mother tongue of Turkish citizens is Turkish. It is forbidden to use as a mother tongues of any language other than Turkish and to carry, at public gatherings and assemblies, placards, banners, signs, boards, posters and the like, written in a language other than Turkish (Taspinar; 2005, p. 97).

As Taspinar emphasizes the language of the law is distinguishable in the sense that the words “Kurds” and “Kurdish” are not used. According to the Turkish government, there is not a language as Kurdish or a minority as Kurds, thus it followed that there was no

need to refer to these culturally and linguistically different group of people. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier in this study, the law did not exclude anyone specifically and referred to everyone with Turkish citizenship in equal terms. As Taspinar argues there would not be any problem as long as the Kurds or other minorities did not demand any cultural, linguistic or political rights (Taspinar; 2005, p.97). By 1983 the government was satisfied that the insurgency was over until 1984's summer when the PKK launched a series of attacks against the Turkish forces in the southeastern provinces which was the start of a new era in Turkish and Kurdish history of violence, battles, and loss.

7. PKK (The Kurdistan Workers' Party)

Bozarslan explains the reasons for the emergence of violence in Turkey to which I have so far implied in this study. The sociologist says:

...the non-recognition of the cultural rights and symbolic resources as legitimate resources to which a group is entitled, and, the denial of a distinct administrative status, provoke, in turn, a violent response of some segments of the population within the economically marginalized urban youth. In fact, one should admit that neither Turkey, nor Turkish Kurdistan, are non-sociological spaces. Therefore, the more demands of the integration of the Kurdish political and social space to the Turkish political arena, on the condition of the recognition of its specificity, is rejected by the power, the more its actors are pushed to the clandestine modes of action, or, to violence. The PKK's violence and its popularity among some parts of the Kurdish population is largely a product of the State's coercion, of the impossibility of conducting a legal opposition and of the feeling that there is "no other way out." (Bozarslan; 2000, p. 25)

Here I feel the responsibility to make it clear that there is no excuse for the violation of human rights and mass violence, especially when the civilians are being targeted along with the military forces. Bozarslan's analysis, which I agree with, is the result of a sociological study. Many politicians, scientists, and journalists have been arrested, killed, and tortured not only in Turkey but also in many semi-democratic countries where the

freedom of speech is not a protected core value. The violent organization, the PKK, not only caused the deaths of thousands but also made the possible solutions to the Kurdish problem hard to be implemented.

Before entering a discussion of the PKK in detail, I want to emphasize a couple of arguments that Bozarslan made in the paragraph above. So far in this study, I have shown the relationship between a strong nation-state and a weak minority group. I have pointed out the results of the ideology, policies and the approach of the Turkish government to the “problems of the Kurds” which influenced the reaction from some segments of the Kurdish citizens of Turkey. The birth of the PKK was the negative outcome of forced relocation and varied repression by the government on the Kurds. Bozarslan points out the segment of the Kurds that widely joined the PKK as “culturally marginalized urban youth.” As analyzed earlier these youth were the new generation that had been forced to relocate to Western Turkey and had attended the higher education. This new generation was different from their predecessors as they were civically more conscious as a result of urbanization and education. They believed neither in the feudal system nor tribalism. On the other hand, the mass unemployment and the uneven distribution of wealth influenced their desire to change the system. When the system did not allow their political participation and they saw little for their collective future, the PKK came into scene. Here, I find it effective to study this organization under four different subsections:

- Abdullah Ocalan (the creator and the leader of the PKK)
- The ideology of the PKK, its structure and methods
- The Turkish government’s response to PKK
- Other Kurdish parties in Turkey through the duration of the PKK

While the reasons I have chosen to analyze this organization are multiple, the most important motive is the success of this organization and the high participation and support of the Kurds have given it. These four aspects of the PKK played a cumulative role in its success. The leadership and the characteristics of Abdullah Ocalan have been important elements especially for the party's followers. As other Kurdish parties preceding the PKK were unable to reach the masses or were not recognized by the Turkish government, the ideology of the PKK, its structure and methods are valid in understanding the organization and people's attitude towards it. Barkey and Fuller argue:

It would be incorrect to assume that the PKK is simply a military cum terrorist organization. No nationalist movement has ever achieved as much as the PKK has without recourse to political activism and preparation. The group's military prowess has only made it easier to organize politically. The PKK is first and foremost a political organization with distinct political objectives – even if they are modified when necessary – that employs violence, often extensively and even erroneously from its own standpoint. This violence is basically secondary to its fundamental character; while this does not imply that violence is unimportant for the PKK, it does not mean that violence is used to define and pursue political objectives (Barkey & Fuller; 1998, p. 26)

During the active years of the PKK, Kurdish political parties were established and became the part of Turkish parliament. The relation between the PKK and the Kurdish politicians together with their differences regarding ideology and goals are also essential parameters in addressing the Kurdish political cause. Finally, the government's approach to the PKK, its methods to suppress it, and the conditions of the peoples of southeast Turkey during the conflict will help support my argument that these factors were interrelated and produced the Kurdish ethno-nationalist movement in Turkey.

a. Abdullah Ocalan

Abdullah Ocalan was born in Urfa, in the village of Omerli in 1948. He had six brothers and sisters, some of whom would become active in the PKK. His nickname “Apo” is the shortest version of his name “Abdullah” which means “slave of Allah.” His last name “Ocalan” means someone who takes revenge in Turkish. Gunter tells about Ocalan’s mother as a strong female and his father as a weak person who Ocalan confronted and came to symbolize for Ocalan the oppressive make up of Kurdish families that should be altered (Gunter; 1997, p, 28). Although he knows both Turkish and Kurdish, the leader claimed that he thought and planned in Turkish (Gunter; 1997, p. 28). Ocalan came from a poor farmer family and had to work on the cotton fields for his family in 1960s. Before he became a Marxist during his university years in Ankara (the capital of Turkey) he had been religious and even attended mosque regularly. It is an irony that he attended the seminars of the Association to Fight Communism in the early days of his higher education of his own will as he would become a communist later on (Gunter; 1997, p. 28). Gunter also argues that Ocalan felt himself as a “Turk” in the 1960s. The leader said he was emotionally touched when he saw the statue of Ataturk in the district of Ulus (Gunter; 1997. p. 28). This is also unexpected as he would fight against the ideology of Ataturk, Kemalism, for 16 years when he was the leader of the PKK. The ideological transformation of the leader and his contradictory statements would continue with the violent organization he established.

In 1970, Ocalan entered the political science department of Ankara University. In the same year, he joined the Turkish left-wing movement, the Revolutionary Youth. He also became a member of the Ankara Higher Education Association and was a supporter of the DDKO. As a result of his participation in an illegal demonstration, Ocalan spent

seven months in prison in 1970 which Gunter says was a turning point for Ocalan (Gunter; 1997, p. 29). As a university student, he started exploring Marxism and scientific socialism. Praising Mustafa Kemal when he was in prison thirty years after, the leader was then inspired by Deniz Gezmiş and Mahir Cayan who were radical leftists and were executed by the Turkish government as a result of their anti-imperialist and Marxist views. Although supporting the Turkish left for a while, Ocalan decided that an independent Kurdish party focused on the liberation of the Kurdish people was necessary. Through the meetings of the Higher Education Association in the southeastern provinces of Turkey, in 1973 Ocalan and his supporters established the National Liberation Party which was the basis of the PKK. In 1978, the party's name was changed to *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* or Kurdistan's Workers' Party (PKK) with the leadership of Abdullah Ocalan. Defining the organization as Marxist-Leninist, Ocalan believed in the "New Man" project which is an important theory of Marxist-Leninist movements. According to this theory, the person should be selfless, tireless but at the same time cheerful and nice while carrying the struggle to change the world's imperialist system for the sake of the oppressed (White; 2000. p. 139). Follower of the belief of "New Man," Ocalan argued to bring out the "real" Kurdish personality and expected guerillas to follow him and his rules unquestioningly. According to PKK, the "New Man" is characterized as follows:

The new person does not drink, does not gamble and never thinks about his personal pleasures and comfort and he won't womanize and the ones who (previously) indulged in these sort of activities will cut all these habits as sharply as a knife, once he or she is among new persons. The new person's philosophy and morality, the way he sits, he stands up, his style, his ego, his attitude and his reactions are uniquely his. The fundamentals of all these things are the rocks solid love towards

revolution, freedom, homeland and socialism. The application of scientific socialism to the reality of the homeland creates the new person (Uclu quoted in White; 2000, p. 141).

White argues that in creating such a personality among the members of the PKK, Ocalan played a major role. Not only was he comparing himself to the prophets as well as to Jesus, but also his followers believed in his messianic character. The following words from the article, *Abdullah Ocalan: the End of a Myth*, are exemplary:

Hated by his enemies, who variously describe him as a “bloody terrorist” or a “baby killer,” adored by his partisans who propagated a personality cult calling him a sun and a prophet. The truth lies somewhere in between. Abdullah Ocalan is not in any way an ordinary personality. This man, who embodied the hopes of a large section of the Kurdish people, was undeniably an exceptional guerilla leader: he will be recorded in history as the man who knew how to muster and, more importantly, organize, a formidable fighting force of several thousand Kurdish fighters (Middle East; 2000, p.12).

Either call him a coward or a prophet, it is not questionable that Abdullah Ocalan changed the dynamics of the “Kurdish problem” in Turkey. Before Ocalan no other Kurdish parties or Kurdish politicians gained the support of the number of Kurds that he was able to attract. Though unsuccessful in his attempt to create an independent Kurdish state, Ocalan gained recognition from the Turkish government, one of the goals he was seeking for himself and the people he represented.

When the leader was caught in 1999, he made a statement calling for democracy and unity of Turkey from the prison, which was unexpected by many. Moreover, he praised Ataturk and said the following words: “Some primitive Kurdish intellectuals...could not share their program with Mustafa Kemal [Ataturk] and became narrow-minded separatists....They ended up participating in the [Sheikh Said] uprising of 1925...a weak affair, without a program, disorganized and leaderless” (Ocalan quoted in Gunter; 2008,

p. 69). His statement is not only contradictory with his previous actions and statements, but also is not supported by any sociological or historical research data. Sheikh Said rebellion neither aimed at separatism nor was leaderless. The movement's leader was Sheikh Said himself along with his brothers. The reason why they could not share their program with Mustafa Kemal was the abolishment of the Treaty of Sevres which had granted the rights to the Kurds and recognized them. Moreover, Ocalan himself admitted that he did not have enough access to research materials while he was writing his declaration (Gunter; 2008, p. 71). Ocalan's statements went further when he was telling his views about the Turkish army which he had fought against for fifteen years. He said: "The army is more sensitive than the most seemingly democratic parties... The army has taken upon itself to be the protector of democratic norms....Today the army is not a threat to democracy, but on the contrary a force that guarantees that democracy will move on to the next stage in a healthy manner" (Ocalan quoted in Gunter; 2008, p. 70). It is hard to analyze the leader's psychology or thoughts while he decided to publish these words. Was he afraid of death and trying to save his neck? Or was it a different tactic to pursue? Although my aim here is not to make assumptions about Ocalan's thoughts or his psychological conditions in prison, it is important to understand his aims and motivations as he was the creator of the PKK and was followed by the thousands of Kurds.¹⁸ It is no doubt that Ocalan has a controversial and strong personality which has caused a variety of speculations even among his followers. He is still held responsible for thousands of

¹⁸ For further analysis about Abdullah Ocalan, see Ozcan, Ali Kemal, *Turkey's Kurds: A Theoretical Analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Ocalan*. London, New York: Routledge, 2006. Also, Ocalan, Abdullah, *Prison Writings: The Roots of Civilization*. London: Pluto Press, 2007. For some valuable discussion, see Radu, Michael, *Dilemmas of Democracy & Dictatorship: Place, Time, and Ideology in Global Perspective*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007.

casualties including the civilians and his own followers that he accused of being disloyal to him and the PKK cause. His statements, that he loved the Turkish nation and was ready to serve the Turkish state when he was captured, were not regarded as sincere by the Turkish government and many Turkish citizens who had lost family members during the war between the state and the PKK.

b. An Analysis of the Ideology of the PKK, Its Structures and Methods

Defined by the Turkish government as “Marxist-Leninist Communist Party and terrorist organization,” Gunter argues that the PKK is first a Kurdish nationalist movement and this is the reason why the members of the party broke from the Turkish leftist parties during 1970s (Gunter; 1997, p. 32). The party follows the Leninist policy of democratic centralism which means that the members should follow and obey the rules of the party leader. Moreover, criticism can be considered disloyal and treasonous. Paul J. White discusses how internal critics are treated in the PKK in his book, *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers: The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey* (2000). The author notes:

The PKK’s Fourth Congress reportedly decided upon the physical elimination of a number of Ocalan’s critics. On 14 April 1988, the Turkish daily *Tercuman* asserted that twenty-eight party members had been executed by the organization for fleeing the group, on Ocalan’s orders. On 7 May, the newspaper *Milliyet* reported that thirty-eight senior PKK leaders had been killed for opposing Ocalan’s policies. Once again, the alleged murders supposedly took place on Ocalan’s personal orders, with at least twenty being killed by the late 1980s (Imset quoted in White; 2000, p. 144).

In addition to proclaiming ultimate loyalty and unquestionable obedience to the party, its aims and leader, the guerillas were further expected to report their success, weaknesses, and strengths regularly as a means of self-criticism (White; 2000, p. 141).

These reports were taken seriously not only as a means to pursue social control but also to ensure that the members were reaching the qualifications of the “ideal man.” Ali Kemal Ozcan, the author of *Turkey’s Kurds: A Theoretical Analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Ocalan*, lists the traits of the party members are listed in all constitutions (1978, 1995, 2000) as follows:

He or She

- (a) bears a great love for the country and its humans,
- (b) is in favor of a democratic regime,
- (c) fights for socialism and is internationalist,
- (d) bears love and respect towards his/he comrades and people,
- (e) is the representative [model/example] of the socialist ethic,
- (f) is not a coward or selfish but brave and self-sacrificing,
- (g) should keep a good balance between firmness and flexibility,
- (h) is careful, sensitive and measured,
- (i) is, in educating oneself, investigative and exploratory,
- (j) should not be dogmatic but creative,
- (k) does not work haphazardly but in a planned way (Ozcan; 2005, p.398).

As the author points out, there is no reference to socialism among these traits. They are more spiritual and focused on the individual’s virtuous characteristics. Ozcan explains that in the party the members were expected to devote their lives solidly to the party, which makes development of their personalities foremost. It was declared in the constitution and in the definition of the party member that working in and for the party required more dedication than a full time job. It required every member to devote every day and all day to the “cause.” To be more specific and explanatory, I find it valid to share the definition of the party member here. Moreover, Ozcan informs that it gives clues about the nature of the PKK’s organizational life (Ozcan; 2005, p. 393). It says:

A party member is one who acknowledges the program of the party and is responsible for its implementation; who takes the will of the party as fundamental and gradually *attaches himself to the party’s will*; who joins

in party life and tactical application [daily practical activities] *all day* in an organ of the party; who exuberantly works for the party's fundamental aims in the manner of not making concessions, of not following self-advantage and of unlimited self-sacrifice by embracing the party's demeanor, tempo, and style through *undoing* oneself [analysis/remolding one's personality]; and who devotes his/her life to the cause of the party [italics added by the author] (Ozcan; 2005, p. 393).

Ozcan analyzes the paragraph and argues that certain words such as “all day” instead of “part time” while talking about the timeframe of the work that the members are responsible for are deliberate choices (Ozcan; 2005, p. 393). What is referred by “all day” is the members are expected to give up their lives, including private and personal lives, to the cause and work to become selfless beings. The PKK regarded itself more than just a violent, terrorist organization and had strict ideologies and policies to achieve its goals. Both the PKK leadership and the members of the party were expected to dedicate their lives for their cause.

Although there are different arguments from the opponents and the members of the party about the party's structure, there is one thing that both sides agree on. The aim of the party was the establishment of the independent Marxist-Leninist Kurdish state. In other words, the party threatened the territorial integrity of the Republic of Turkey and was a separatist movement. Although Turkey was not unfamiliar with terrorist organizations when the PKK launched its first attack in 1984, it was not expected for two reasons. First, the party was different from the previous ones, as it was directly aiming at the disintegration of the Turkish state. Second, after the third and last military coup in 1980, Turkey achieved partial democratization by 1984 and the newly established institutions were functioning relatively smoothly.

The Kurdish state would be created from the lands that were densely populated by the Kurds in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. This was almost an impossible goal as the map of the Middle East would have changed radically, an option for which none of the countries would agree. On the other hand, apparently the members of the PKK believed in their cause as their armed struggle against the Turkish state continued until their leader got captured in 1999.

The PKK not only aimed at establishing an independent Kurdish state but also targeted a social and political revolution in the Kurdish areas. Against the tribal and feudal structures of the Kurds, it worked on abolishing the imperialist and oppressive elements by having a socialist revolution. On the other hand, this was a major obstacle for the PKK as religion and traditionalism were valued throughout Kurdish society. The PKK not only saw the Turkish government as enemy but also regarded the “feudal landlords” and collaborators as opponents. This meant that regardless of ethnic origin or religious beliefs of peoples, anyone that was opposed to the ideals and goals of the PKK was perceived as threat and could become their target. On the other hand, the PKK seemed to evolve with the changing circumstances. When it was observed that the party could not get any support from the religious segments of the Kurds, it tried to reach out to them. The results of a survey that was conducted in 1984 in the southeast part of Turkey suggest:

28.6 percent of the respondents identified themselves with a religion such as Muslim or Safii, rather than a particular ethnicity. More importantly, the majority of the respondents (78 percent) who described themselves as either Muslims or Kurds said they perceived the PKK as a terrorist organization and believed that if the PKK ever created a free Kurdistan it would be a communist state, which they would not be happy to support....This outcome was not surprising since even in the more liberal

western parts of the country, people were not eager to support Marxist-Leninist movements during the 1970s. Even at the peak of the extreme leftist movement's support in 1977, popular support was still only 3.9 percent (Ankara Paper 9; 2000, p. 30).

Although there occurred some changes in the second half of the 1980s, the PKK was still unable to get the support of the religious and traditional Kurds. At the beginning of the 1990s the members were required to study the Quran instead of Marxism although the party still remained a socialist Kurdish movement. The author of the Ankara Report argues that this was more like "window-dressing" than a sincere change to get more support that the party needed to succeed (Ankara Paper 9; 2000, p. 31). The Ankara Report reports that the Turkish National Police Counter-Terrorism Department in Ankara identified 9 percent of the 262 convicted PKK militants as illiterate, 12 percent had a pre-school education, and 39 percent had only attended primary school (Ankara Paper 9; 2000, p. 30). When these statistics are analyzed, it is not hard to conclude that the socialist education the militants were required to go through in the camps was not reasonable. Ocalan must have realized the high proportion of the illiterate and uneducated militants as his speeches offered through the radio, recorded, edited, printed, and distributed to party organizations (Ozcan; 2005, p. 395). Ozcan says that from 1980 until his arrest these speeches were published monthly, called "*Cozumlemeler*," or "Analysis."

The PKK was well structured and composed of organizations that were responsible for different actions and goals. Gunter confirms that the organization is much like a communist party including an ultimate leader, a central committee and a range of agencies functioning under the central committee (Gunter; 1997, p. 31-32). There was a guerilla army, the ARGK, and one that deals with the political work, the ERNK. Gunter

lists the other sub-organs as Patriotic Youth Union (YXWK), Patriotic Women's Union (YJWK), Patriotic Workers' Union (YKWK), Patriotic Religious Men's Union (YDWK), and Patriotic Artists' Union (YRWK). Ocalan's wife worked actively for the Patriotic Women's Union. MED TV, started its operations in 1995 (Gunter; 1997, p. 32), was important for the PKK as announcements, ceremonies, and live reports to be broadcasted. Also, the party leader often gave talks on the channel by telephone. The channel was significant as it was the first television programming specifically for the Kurds and their culture. Although it has been made clear in this research that not all the Kurds supported the PKK, the channel was followed by millions of Kurds not specifically for the PKK but for its Kurdish programs. The Turkish government could have avoided MED TV broadcasting if it had allowed its Kurdish citizens to broadcast in their own language under the control of the government. On the other hand, television broadcasting in Kurdish was not allowed until after 2000, with the argument that such rights would be against the unitary principles of the Turkish state.

The political organization of the PKK, *Eniye Rizgariye Nevata Kurdsitan* (ERNK), which had sub-committees and branches in foreign countries, had various responsibilities.

The unit in Turkey was responsible for:

- (1) generating recruits for the ARGK;
- (2) coordinating and organizing PKK activities in urban and rural settlements;
- (3) information and intelligence gathering for the PKK;
- (4) collecting money for the organization;
- (5) organizing mass riots, urban rebellions and small-scale military attacks;
- (6) trying to take on judiciary-police responsibilities in areas where there was a vacuum of authority, showing the PKK's strength to the public and trying to act as a government; and
- (7) carrying out Islamic activities and propaganda on behalf of the PKK, which became important after the failure of Marxism...This work outlined how to counteract the anti-religious image of the organization, after recognizing the

strong religious tendencies amongst the people in region (Ankara Paper 9, 2000, p. 32).

The ARGK (*Artes-I Rizgariye Geli Kurdistan*) or Kurdistan People's Liberation Party was the party's guerilla army which was established in October, 1986 by the PKK's third congress. By 1993, *Imset* reported that there were 8,000-10,000 full-time fighters, 35,000 active supporters and 370,000 sympathizers in the southeast of Turkey (*Imset* quoted in Gunter; 1997, p. 143). According to the PKK's likely exaggerated report, there were 5,000 highly trained guerillas [ARGK], 150,000 militia men [ERNK], and an estimated 2 million sympathizers in Turkey by 1993 (Painton quoted in Gunter, 1997, p. 143). Although the PKK was relatively weak compared to the Turkish army, the rugged mountainous topography and harsh winters in the southeast of Turkey and the guerillas' practice at survival in these hard conditions, gave them some advantage to resist the Turkish army. Of all the mistakes it made, the terrorist organization's biggest mistake was to target the civilians regardless of their ethnic origin, gender or age. By 1999, when Ocalan was captured, an estimated 30,000 or more casualties were reported (Bellaigue quoted in Somer; 2005, p. 596). What I have argued so far in this study is that the PKK and other violent or non-violent, political or terrorist organizations would not have come to prominence if the necessary steps for a multi-cultural democratic society had been taken by the Turkish government.

c. The Turkish Government's Response to the PKK

After the arrest of 1,790 PKK members right after the 1980 military coup, PKK's leaders left for Syria where they started to prepare counter attacks. In 1984, three bodyguards responsible for the security of President Evren were killed and over 60

civilians, soldiers and guerillas died in the armed clash (McDowall; 2004, p. 423). The PKK continued its attacks and McDowall confirms that by 1985, seventy armed incidents occurred resulting in almost 200 casualties (McDowall; 2004, p. 423). The growing casualties and the threatening atmosphere in the southeast caused major problems for the government. The civilians who had to live with the pressure from both the PKK and the Turkish forces grew bitter both towards the state officials and the PKK. While some directly supported the PKK or sympathized with it, some were intensely hostile to the cause of PKK as a result of its Marxist stand and killings. This helped the government to arm the villagers who were opposed to the PKK. Other than the political and security issues, the economic disparity of the villagers played a major role in the work of the Turkish government. The government put the village guards on a monthly stipend which helped the unemployed and under-employed to grow their income. Although it seemed as if the village guard system that the government introduced to fight the PKK had been beneficial for locals, there were a number of unfortunate issues as they were faced with choosing between the PKK and the government. McDowall explains:

Those tribes refusing a government invitation to join the village guards risked retribution. Some were expelled from their villages, which were then razed. In the case of one chief, the security forces persuaded him to reconsider his position by executing his brother in front of the villagers. Several tribes migrated to avoid coming under either government or PKK pressure (McDowall, 2004, p. 425).

The PKK brutally killed families, children, and women to avoid the village guard system becoming stronger, creating the opposite effect (McDowall; 2004, p. 425). It turned out that the Kurds were killing Kurds. The government measures were getting stricter through both extreme military forces in the area and the introduction of new

policies such as Law 2932, which prohibited the use of the Kurdish language (McDowall; 2004, p. 426). Even Kurdish folk songs were prohibited as they might be used for ethnic and separatist purposes. Further, Kurdish names were banned under Law 1587, which banned their legal registration on birth certificates (McDowall; 2004, p. 427). McDowall argues that while in the early years of the PKK many Kurds were opposed to the organization, many developed bitter feelings towards the state as a result of its oppressive approach. The author adds:

State oppression was most overwhelming and pervasive in the field of physical abuse and torture. Only pro-government villages were inexperienced in the routine of security sweeps in which hundreds were arbitrarily arrested and beaten to confess to assisting the PKK. Doubtless many had, either by conviction or intimidation, assisted the PKK with food, shelter or merely by looking the other way as they passed through. But the manner in which the security forces sought evidence from those it detained was calculated to be the most potent nutrient to the PKK's own recruitment activities (McDowall; 2004, p. 427).

In addition to the village guard system, the government introduced a special legal system to secure the life in densely Kurdish populated provinces in 1987. The provinces that were under the Regional State of Emergency Governorate (OHAL) included Bingol, Diyarbakir, Elazig, Van, Hakkari, Tunceli, Mardin, Siirt, Adiyaman, Bitlis, Mus and in 1990 expanded to include Sirnak and Batman. Hakan Yavuz, a specialist in Middle East politics, argues that OHAL rule further strengthened Kurdish nationalism as a result of its application of different legal and administrative rules to Kurdish regions, more strict than the rest of the country (Yavuz; 2005, p, 246). The author also says that the use of ultra-rightist gangsters and religious fanatics by the government to fight the PKK created new terrorist groups. Hizbullah, a fundamental religious organization, was built to create the

Islamic Republic of Kurdistan and targeted anyone, who they believed, opposed their goals.

Yavuz reports that since 1984, 4,302 servants, 5,018 soldiers, 4,400 civilians and 23,279 PKK terrorists were killed during the insurgencies (*Yavuz*; 2005, p. 246). The effects of the war became nationwide as a result of the migration from the southeastern provinces to the west. The crime rate in the big cities rose because of the high levels of unemployment and hopelessness of the Kurdish youth who grew up in an atmosphere of violence and insurrection.

One Turkish leftist party, SHP, seemed to be more willing to alleviate the military forces in the southeastern areas and tried to come up with democratic solutions that would give cultural and civic rights to the locals of the region. The party published a report in 1990 suggesting “free expression of identity and linguistic freedom of expression, abolition of the village guards, the governorate-general and state of emergency, and a major program of regional development” (*McDowall*; 2004, p. 430). On the other hand, when President Ozal tried to introduce Law 2932, which would allow the Kurds to broadcast, publish and have education in Kurdish, SHP was amongst the ones that accused Ozal to have lost sight of Kemalism (*McDowall*; 2004, p. 431). Heavy military influence on Turkish politics and the growing gap between the Turks and the Kurds as a result of the civil war made it harder to have compromises between the “two sides.” During the Ottoman Empire dynasty, apparently there did not exist polarization between the Kurds and the Turks largely with the common religion, Islam. As a result of the creation of a Turkish nation-state, for Turks the non-Turkic identity of the Kurds became increasingly problematic. By the 1990s, many Turkish politicians concluded that

they could no longer ignore the rights and the demands of the Kurds and the growing violence, without some clearer effort toward democratization. Moreover, the pressure coming from the European Union regarding human rights violations and mass violence in Turkey left little room for the government but to recognize the Kurds. While in the 1980s, the government officials did not acknowledge the existence of a separate ethnicity of group of people called Kurds, by the 1990s even the rightist parties started to use the word “Kurds.” Natali explains:

On December 8, 1991, in Diyarbakir, Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel claimed, “Those who speak Kurdish, who call themselves of Kurdish origin, who claim their Kurdish identity. It is not possible to oppose these claims (Akin quoted in Natali; 2005, p. 109). In 1992 Ozal overturned the 1980 law by allowing limited language opportunities for Kurds and the creation of a Kurdish cultural center in Istanbul. The following year he tried to negotiate a cease-fire with the PKK. Similarly, when she assumed the premiership Tansu Ciller proposed a Basque solution, or a model of limited autonomy, to resolve the Kurdish problem. She attempted to limit the role of the military and check the National Security Council with a special committee of civilians within Parliament (Barkey and Fuller quoted in Natali; 2005, p. 109).

The situation in Turkey regarding the Kurds after 2000 resembles the Ottoman’s military marching band.¹⁹ Each time reforms were introduced to parliament, controversy followed. Speeches that acknowledge the “Kurdish problem” or the existence of these people, were suspected by not only the Turks but also by the Kurds but for different reasons. The behaviors and words of the Kurdish parliamentarians, journalists, artists and politicians were under scrutiny by all sides. In the next section, I analyze other “legal” Kurdish parties and the key events related to the Kurdish politicians.

d. Other Kurdish Political Parties

¹⁹ Ottomans created this marching band in which the individuals are supposed to stake two steps forward and one step back during ceremonies.

The political participation of the minorities has been an issue in Turkey rather than a natural right given to minority groups in real democracies. Both the ICCPR and the UN Declaration recognizes the minority groups' right to participate in religious, social, cultural, economic and public life (Minority Rights Group International Report: A Quest for Equality: Minorities in Turkey; 2007, p. 24). Also, "Article 15 of the FCNM requires states to 'create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them.' Article 7 guarantees freedom of association, which extends to political parties as well" (Minority Rights Group International Report: A Quest for Equality: Minorities in Turkey; 2007, p. 24). While in Turkey the electoral threshold was 10 per cent from 1999 until 2007, in most European countries it is not above 5 per cent.

The high percentage of the electoral threshold was a setback for the Kurds for years. Although the representative political parties of the Kurds had high regional votes, they could not reach the 10 percent threshold which prevented their participation in the parliament. For instance, in the 2003 elections the Democratic People's Party (DEHAP) gained more than 45 per cent of the vote from the southeastern region but was unable to enter the parliament as it did not receive more than 6 per cent of the national vote (Yildiz & Muller; 2008, p. 67). Another obstacle for the Kurdish minorities to participate in the national political life is the "capacity of the Chief Prosecutor of the Court of Appeal to bring cases seeking the closure of political parties before the Constitutional Court" (Yildiz & Muller; 2008, p. 68). Yildiz and Muller argue:

Relevant in this context is section 81 of Law No. 2820 on Political Parties, which prohibits parties from claiming that there are minorities in Turkey or protecting or developing non-Turkish cultures and languages. This law, which dates from 1983, was born of the Kemalist notion of nation-building in which ethnic diversity was viewed as a danger to the integrity of the state (Yildiz & Muller; 2008, p. 68-69).

This was a major problem for the Kurdish parties even if they did not want to call them specifically “Kurdish” and argued that it was a narrow definition of the party (Watts; 1999, p. 637). Attacked for being pro-Kurdish, the head of the party Isiklar declared in June 1991: “There are circles that have attempted to brand HEP in the narrow definition of a Kurdish party ever since it was founded. We are the party of the suppressed – within this framework, we are proud of being branded as a Kurdish party” (*The Anatolian* quoted in Watts; 1999, p. 637). Not surprisingly, this declaration did not help or satisfy the party opponents who saw every Kurdish party as pro-Ocalan and a “legal” formation of the PKK. Another hindrance in the way of participation of the Kurdish parties was the ban of the Kurdish language under Article 81 (c) of the Law on Political Parties (Yildiz & Muller; 2008, p. 71). The members of the Turkish parliament are required to be fluent in Turkish, as it is the nation’s official language. Most of the Kurdish deputies’ first language was Turkish, but many of them also knew Kurdish and regarded it as their mother tongue. On the other hand, when they wanted to talk in Kurdish, it was regarded as separatist and provocative. Yildiz and Muller say:

In July 2004, former chairman of HADEP Murat Bozlak and twelve others were sentenced to five months’ imprisonment under the Law on Political Parties for using a language other than Turkish in election campaigning after playing Kurdish music during a meeting (Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, ‘Monthly Report’ quoted in Yildiz & Muller; 2008, p. 71). The Nusaybin prosecutor’s office investigated DEHAP head Tuncer Bakirhan in July 2004 on allegations that he had violated Article 81 (c) of Law No. 2820 on Political Parties when saying ‘goodbye’ and ‘thank you’ in

Kurdish at an election rally speech on 26 March 2004 (Yildiz & Muller; 2008, p. 71)

The journey of the Kurdish parties and their struggle started with HEP (Halkin Emek Partisi or People's Labor Party) in 1990. It included eleven members of the parliament, who for the first time in Turkish political life, made Kurdish people's cultural, political, civic and human rights their priority in the party's agenda in a "legal" way. The party members did not hesitate to voice their opinions concerning the unfair treatment of the people of the southeast and how a democratic solution was needed to solve the "Kurdish problem." In 1991, an event which caused crisis in Turkey and was heard internationally happened. The female Kurdish parliamentarian, Leyla Zana, arrested for speaking Kurdish and jailed for 15 years along with three other politicians. In response to the accusations of being a separatist and a terrorist, Leyla Zana countered:

The relation to language is vital, essential. It is an almost physical love. Nothing in the world could get us to give up our mother tongue. Look – every bird likes to sing in its own way. The rose is without a doubt a very beautiful flower. Yet a flower bed made up only of roses would be monotonous and boring, while a garden where a thousand and one varieties of flowers bloom is a real pleasure to look at, an inexhaustible source of inspiration and beauty. In the garden of languages, Kurdish may not be a rose claiming universality, nor a stylish orchid, nor a royal lily. It is only a modest snowdrop, poppy, or wild flower. But these flowers have the right to live, too, and they make poets and lovers happy. Life also means the right of the weak, the unnecessary, and the marginal to exist (Zana; 1999, p. 9).

Not surprisingly, HEP was closed in 1993 by the Constitutional Court, found guilty of separatist propaganda and illegal political activities. The party was succeeded with another one, DEP (Democracy Party), but lost their seats in 1994 and was stripped of their "immunity from prosecution: which was granted to Turkish citizen parliamentarians under law" (Watts; 1999, p. 639). In December 1994, seven members of the party and

one independent “pro-Kurdish” deputy, Mahmut Alinak, were jailed for three to fifteen years. Orhan Dogan, one of the deputies, was accused of sheltering a PKK militant and the others were found guilty through their speeches and written statements (Watts; 1999, p. 639). Ironically, Prime Minister Tansu Ciller accused the MPs as simply being “an extension of the PKK” after the party had run a “Campaign for Peace” (Barkey & Fuller; 1998, p. 85). The campaign “articulated the need for the state to recognize the ‘Kurdish identity,’ for negotiations with elected members of the population, for freedom to publish, educate, and broadcast in Kurdish, for abolition of the emergency rule in the southeast, for removal of the special security forces and village guards, and for introduction of economic measures and judicial reforms” (Barkey & Fuller; 1998, p. 85). Other than the MPs who were arrested, some fled to Europe and joined the Kurdish Parliament in Exile (KPE). The KPE members worked outside of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, the countries where the most of the Kurdish population resided. It claimed to represent all Kurds around the world with the aim of uniting and rescuing them from oppressive governments. After the imprisonment of the Kurdish parliamentarians, those joined the KPE established the Preparatory Commission. A total of twenty three members aimed:

- to establish a national congress and a national parliament of a free Kurdistan;
- to enter into voluntary agreements with the neighboring peoples, guided by the principle of self-determination for the Kurds;
- to support and strengthen the national liberation struggle to end the foreign occupation of Kurdistan;
- to undertake programs to safeguard the political, cultural, and social rights of the Kurds;
- to engage in lobbying for the purpose of convincing members of the international community to initiate military, economic, and political embargoes on the Turkish state;
- to undertake to improve the Kurdish language;

- to establish national institutions in cultural fields;
- to work with youth to put an end to its alienation;
- to ease the return of the Kurdish people to Kurdistan;
- to protect the natural riches in Kurdistan and see to it that these resources are used for the people's happiness and liberation;
- to establish close links with the democratic public in Turkey;
- to derive its authority for the memory of the martyrs;
- to prepare draft resolutions relating to a constitution, citizenship laws, conscription laws, civil laws, tax laws, penal laws, and an environmental protection act ("Kurdish Parliament Exile" quoted in Barkey & Fuller; 1998, p. 36).

Attempting to work with the Turkish government to find a peaceful solution to the minority group problem in Turkey, the parliamentarians ended up fighting against the Turkish state as a result of their political oppression. This, likely, could have been avoided if government officials, police and the military had been less suspicious of speeches and actions by the party members as treason. Neither HEP nor DEP claimed separatist institutions. On the contrary, by joining the Turkish parliament instead of joining the PKK, they showed their political priorities. Nonetheless, some politicians saw no place for a Kurdish identity in the Turkish government regardless of other Turkish politicians who struggled for unity among diversity of the Republic of Turkey, through recognizing its citizens of Kurdish origin.

Here, I want to point out the word, "pro-Kurdish." As can be observed, few in the Republic of Turkey would be found guilty of being "pro-Turkish." It is difficult to come across any negative implications towards being a Turkish nationalist. Moreover, nationalism, but only Turkish nationalism, is one of the ideals of Kemalism. One nation's nationalism cannot carry "another nation's" nationalism in its rhetoric. While being a Kurdish nationalist is treason in Turkey, being a Turkish nationalist is a must. The Kurdish politicians, as Turkish citizens and unlike the PKK, tried to actively participate

in Turkish politics in a non-violent and legal way. While opposing a terrorist organization that was seeking separation could be considered normal, opposing every politician, journalist, or artist as they came forward with their Kurdish identity and voicing their political demands is arguably anti-democratic and oppressive. Upon assuming the DEP's leadership, Hatip Dicle gave a statement that the PKK constituted a political party, not a terrorist organization. Immediately following were a series of discussions about lifting the pro-Kurdish deputy's immunity. Regardless of whether Dicle's statement was correct, no crime was committed. What Dicle did by voicing his perspective was counter political morals of millions. Erdal Inonu, the Turkish politician and the son of Turkey's second president Ismet Inonu, made this statement following the event:

One of the basic characteristics of democracy is freedom of thought and ideas. That is, everyone, and especially deputies, should be able to say what they want. Should things that are wrong and against the country be said? That is the meaning of freedom of ideas. By lifting immunity you are prohibiting the expression of ideas that are wrong. If you prohibit wrong ideas, how will you explain that right ideas are right? (*Milliyet* quoted in Watts; 1999, p. 648)

HADEP was founded by Murat Bozlak on the 11th of May 1994, before DEP was closed on the 16th of June, 1994. Although efforts were made both by the HADEP members to stay discreet and by Turkish politicians to support their Kurdish friends, the extremists from both sides made this harder for everyone. The words "both sides" are significant as the polarization between the Kurds and the Turks not only in political but also in daily life was noticeable, especially after the formation of PKK. The supposed "brotherhood" between the Kurds and the Turks did not seem to exist any longer. Both Turks and Kurds became suspicious of each other and felt the need to watch their steps. I personally remember this from my father. The evening of the day when Ocalan was

captured, my father was in a local coffee shop with his friends following dinner. When they were watching the news, one of my father's "friends" asked why my father inhaled deeply upon seeing the images of Abdullah Ocalan, blindfolded and handcuffed. My father got upset and left the cafe. He came home frustrated, leading to an argument with my mother. My mother, who had always been uncomfortable with my father's Kurdish origins, told my father to be more careful in public as they might be watched by the MIT (Milli Istihbarat Teskilati or National Intelligence Organization). My father asked: "Do you mean I have to be careful, before I take a deep breath, because of my stomach? Or, do you mean I have to be careful because I was born a Kurd, which I did not choose? What can be worse than not being able to speak, act, sing, read or even breathe freely in my own land? Where shall I go? Where is my home?" Just like he had left the coffee shop, my father left the room, and went to sleep...

HADEP made it clear that it was separate from the PKK. The party's goals were the same with the previous Kurdish parties, such as removing the emergency rule in the southeast, and cultural, linguistic and political reforms for a more democratic and multi-cultural Turkey. On the other hand, the speculations about the close linkage of the party with the PKK did not cease. Eventually, one incident created a crisis in Turkey. In HADEP's party congress in 1996, men wearing masks removed the Turkish flag and replaced it with the PKK flag. The images were shown on TV over and over again for days resulting in anger throughout Turkish society. Barkey and Fuller discuss the widely held interpretation of the event as a provocation at the time. They add that if any groups could benefit from the situation, it would be the PKK and the state (Barkey & Fuller; 1998, p. 89). The reason why the PKK benefited from the incident was that it could be

used to show there was no way but through armed struggle and violence for the Kurds to be heard. What the government gained from the unfortunate event was that a party, which it did not approve, was banned (Barkey & Fuller; 1998, p. 89). Barkey and Fuller further offer: “The night after the flag incident, three HADEP members returning home to the southeast from the convention were ambushed and killed near Kayseri. This brought the total number of HEP/DEP/HADEP leaders and members killed under mysterious circumstances in which the perpetrators were never caught to ninety-two since 1990” (Barkey & Fuller; 1998, p. 89).

8. After Ocalan’s Capture and the Kurdish Opening

With Ocalan’s capture in 1999, there occurred mass strikes by the Kurds both in Turkey and Europe. A group of people, calling themselves the “Revenge Hawks of Apo,” killed thirteen people by setting fire to a department store in Istanbul, Turkey. Also, protests occurred around Europe in London, Paris, Brussels, Marseilles, The Hague, Copenhagen, Strasbourg, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Bonn, Hamburg, Cologne, Hanover, Moscow, Geneva, Vienna and other cities (Gunter; 2008, p. 61). The polarization between the Kurds and the Turks became more apparent when the ultra-nationalist National Action Party (MHP) won 18.6 percent of the votes on the April 18, 1999 election, coming in second. The Turkish leftist but nationalist Democratic Party gained 22.6 percent, coming in first (Gunter; 2008, p. 62). Surprisingly, the positive speeches of Ahmet Sezer, the chief justice of the Turkish Constitutional Court, and Sami Selcuk, the chief justice of the Turkish Supreme Court of Appeals, gave some hope for future democratization of Turkey. Sami Selcuk argued that the 1982 Constitution was not illegitimate any more as it was resulted from the military intervention. As the

Constitution was put on practice under extraordinary circumstances to secure the peace, it limited the personal freedom which was not necessary or suitable any more (Gunter; 2008, p. 64). Gunter explains how Sezer's speech helped him to become elected the new president of Turkey:

Sezer specifically mentioned the necessity to defend freedom of speech and eliminate what some have called "thought crimes" to imprison as terrorists those who called for Kurdish cultural rights. He also lashed out at the restrictions still existing against the use of the Kurdish language, insisted on the need to conform to the universal standards of human rights, and asked for the appropriate revision of the Turkish Constitution, among other points (Sezer quoted in Gunter; 2008, p. 63-64).

The efforts for peace settlements seemed to be coming from both sides. Ocalan, upon his capture, wanted the PKK militants to cease the armed struggle and agreed that there was no option for separation. Instead, he declared that he was ready to serve the Republic of Turkey for a peaceful and democratic state, which would grant cultural, political and human rights to its Kurdish citizens. Ocalan, who fought for separation and an independent Kurdish state for years, came to the conclusion that his mission was impossible to achieve. Interestingly, in his book, *Prison Writings: The Roots of Civilization* (2007), Ocalan does not mention an independent Kurdish state and says:

Now the mission of the Kurds is to become democrats in a democratic Islamic Republic of Iran or, better, in a democratic federation of Iran. They will contribute to the continued existence of Iraq as part of a democratic federation of Iraq. In Turkey, they will play a major part in creating a real and coherently democratic and secular republic. They will also be of considerable influence in the democratization of Syria. All in all, they will be fundamental power of peace and democracy in the Middle East and a warrant for the continued peaceful existence of the Middle Eastern nations (Ocalan; 2007, p. 297).

When Ocalan demanded his militants to stop the guerilla fight and confirmed that he would do anything for peaceful solutions, the Turkish government, which had been

waiting for accession to the EU, was willing to make some efforts for their Kurdish citizens. For the EU, the “Kurdish problem” facing Turkey for decades was a major obstacle to joining the EU. To solve the Kurdish issue in a democratic manner, as called for in the OSCE’s Copenhagen Criteria of minority rights, was a must for Turkey’s full EU membership. After the second meeting of OSCE members in Copenhagen from 5 June to 29 July 1990, it was declared that “persons belonging to national minorities have the right to exercise fully and effectively their human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discrimination and in full equality before the law” (Fastenrath quoted in Gurbey; 2001, p. 8). Gulistan Gurbey, one of the two editors of the book, *The Kurdish Conflict in Turkey: Obstacles and Chances for Peace and Democracy* (2000), adds:

Moreover, the problem of minorities and its dimensions have been highlighted and protection from discrimination for minorities and legislation on minorities have been demanded for the first time. It is of great import that minorities, also for the first time, are granted rights such as the free use of their mother tongue, the right to form organizations and associations, the free development of their ethnic and cultural identity and the right to specific representation in Parliament. The participating nations are committed to protecting the rights of minorities, observing the principle of equality and non-discrimination and to set up suitable local and autonomous administrations if necessary (Gurbey; 2001, p. 8).

In 1996, the EU came up with the conclusion that Turkey failed in meeting the criteria of the EU in safeguarding human rights and implementing democratization policies even though the Turkish government amended the Constitution and changed its anti-terrorism law (Yildiz & Muller; 2008, p. 22). During the late 1990s, especially with the capture of Ocalan and decreased violence in Turkey, the Helsinki European Council of 1999 declared that Turkey was a candidate for EU membership as long as it would meet the standards of membership. This meant that Turkey had to fulfill the Copenhagen Criteria

if it wanted to become a member (Yildiz & Muller; 2008, p. 23). Upon the victory of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the 2002 election, the conditions regarding the Kurds would change in a positive way. During the election campaigns, AKP stepped forward with its Islamic identity and sensitivity to the “Kurdish problem” of Turkey. It is widely believed that many Kurdish citizens voted for AKP as a result of its promises to solve the problem and its opposition to extensive military power in Turkey. Additionally, twenty seats were gained by the Democratic Society Party (DTP), which replaced the HADEP. The first reform package that passed on February 19, 2002 was Article 312 of the Penal Code, “which punished incitement to hostility and hatred on the basis of differences in social class, race, religion, sect, and region” (Ozbudun; 2007, p. 184). The military force in Turkey and especially its enforcement in the southeast region had caused resentment by the locals and disapproval from the EU. Narrowing the military’s power in the southeast was popularly viewed as a positive step. With the third reform package of August 2002, Article 159 was changed under which “insulting and deriding the Republic, ‘Turkishness,’ the Grand National Assembly, the government, the ministries, the military and security forces, and the moral personality of the judiciary had been a criminal offense” (Ozbudun; 2007. P. 184). This reform also allowed using the local languages other than Turkish, including broadcasting by the Turkish Radio and Television (TRT), which had been a taboo and a major problem for a long time (Ozbudun; 2007, p. 184). On the 7th of June, 2004, TRT3 (The Turkish Radio and Television) started broadcasting TV and radio in Arabic, Cherkesian, Bosnian and Kurdish from Monday to Friday for half an hour under the government’s new provision. It was in 2009 when the government founded a TV channel, TRT 6, which started broadcasting 24 hours in Kurdish. On the

other hand, radio and TV broadcasting could only be done by the government, and private channels were not allowed to operate in other languages. Abdullah Demirbas, the mayor of Diyarbakir's Sur municipality, was dismissed by Turkey's highest administrative court (Danistay) as a result of publishing brochures in Kurdish, English and Syriac in 2008. Robert Olson, the author of *Blood, Beliefs and Ballots: The Management of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey, 2007-2009* (2009), explains:

The court ruled that the municipality and Demirbas, who as mayor had approved of the publication, violated articles 3 and 42 of Turkey's constitution and Turkish law. Articles 3 and 42 deal with the unity of the state, its official language, flag and national anthem, capital city, and the rights and duties in education. It was the 'duties of education' section of the articles that the municipality had violated, as well as Article 301 of the Penal Code, which forbids insulting the state (Olson; 2009, p. 41-42).

The penalty was not reasonable. If publishing in local languages were considered a crime, then publishing in English should also have been considered a crime, although it was not, according to the Turkish government. Even after "reforms" had been introduced, the government showed its sensitivity and suspicion against minorities and their rights.

The Turkish government's official understanding of what a minority is should have been altered and reformed by now. The roots of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey can be found in the official ideology of the Turkish government regarding its minorities, going back to the establishment of the Turkish nation-state. While during the Ottoman Empire there had been the notion of being an "Ottoman," which referred to all Muslim citizens of the empire, there does not exist such a civic understanding of "being from Turkey" (*Turkiyeli*) in the Republic of Turkey. The government has insisted on calling all the Turkish citizens of Turkey "Turks," although clearly they are not. There obviously is a

minority group in Turkey who identifies themselves as “Kurds” and demand their cultural, linguistic and political rights accordingly. Gunter offers the following:

In November 2006, Hans Jorg Kretschmer, the outgoing head of the EU Commission in Ankara, called on Turkey to recognize the identity of the Kurds and supported the notion of *Turkiyeli* [of Turkey] as a replacement for the term “Turk.” He also declared: “It is necessary to recognize the identity of the Kurds, to recognize that Kurds are Kurds and Kurds are not Turks. They are Turkish citizens and they want to be Turkish citizens, but they are Kurds. You cannot deny that.” General Yasar Buyukanit, the new chief of the General Staff, however, refused to countenance the concept of the Kurds as a legally protected minority by replying: “Approaches based on race are a shame in this century. Such approaches are an insult to the Turkey of Kemal Ataturk....Ataturk would have been deeply saddened if he had lived through these days” (Gunter; 2008, p. 101).

I agree with Gunter’s comments followed by the paragraph above in his book, *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey*, that it is not possible to know what exactly Ataturk would think or do about the minority problem in Turkey. It is most likely that as a leader who embraced Western ideals, he might have looked for a democratic solution which would help Turkey reach the standards of the EU and to become a part of it.

9. Conclusion

This historical research focused on the Kurdish ethno-nationalist movement in Turkey starting from 1921 until the present. While the events, that I have chosen to study, are important for understanding the conflict, the sequence of these events helps suggest the relationship between them. In other words, to explain the cause and effect relationship in this ethnic conflict, I have paid attention to the historical pattern of the events and some of the antecedents of those events. Gurr and Harff’s model (1994) in explaining the causes of ethnic conflict is applicable to understanding the Kurdish conflict. I find their

analysis applicable to the understanding the Kurdish ethnic conflict in Turkey. They argue: “....a people who strongly identify with their ethnic brethren and who live in an autocratic political system with low international economic status, one that has used discrimination and intermittent violence to repress its ethnic peoples, are the most likely to challenge their oppressors” (Gurr & Harff ; 1994, p. 92). They discuss seven processes that play a decisive role in producing ethnic conflicts. Here I use the first seven concepts for my discussion. These are:

- Discrimination
- Group identity
- Ethnopolitical leadership and group cohesion
- Political environment
- Use of violence by governments
- External support
- International economic status (Gurr & Harff; 1994, p. 87)

The authors identify two types of discrimination: economic and political. Although there does not exist a law against the Kurds that openly create economic discrimination, the low income level of southeast Turkey, the high unemployment rate, insufficient numbers of social and health facilities including hospitals, roads, schools etc. contributed to resentment by the peoples of the region. This also was a factor for PKK’s growing membership. Many who did not expect much for their future, saw hope in the armed struggle. Political discrimination was one of the main contributing reasons for the Kurdish ethnic conflict. Especially starting in the 1990s, each time a Kurdish political party was banned another was established. The members of these political parties were frequently arrested and imprisoned, state actions heavily criticized by the EU.

Gurr and Harff argue that the stronger group identity is, the more likely an ethnic conflict might occur. The authors list the traits that affect the strength of group identity as follows:

- The extent to which they share and use a common language.
- The proportion of people who share a common religious belief
- Visible racial characteristics
- A shared history over at least a one-hundred-year period
- A common culture – identifiable social and legal customs developed and practiced within close proximity (Gurr & Harff; 1994, p. 89).

Other than the visible racial characteristics, the Kurds share a long history, a common language (although with different dialects), a common culture and a common religion (Islam).²⁰ Neither Turkish nor Kurdish nationalism find a basis on racial characteristics, a crucial characteristic for German nationalism during World War 2. Moreover, Turkish nationalism is inclusive rather than exclusive as it invites all the citizens of Turkey to call themselves “Turks” regardless of their ethnic origins or religious beliefs. As long as one feels himself/herself a Turk, he/she is considered to be one. These traits play a crucial role both for Turkish and Kurdish nationalism, which makes one (Turkish) see the other (Kurdish) as threatening to its existence.

The third trait is identified as the ethno-political leadership and group cohesion. The authors argue that “the more factions that exist within the group, the less cohesive it is” (Gurr & Harff; 1994, p. 89). They point to the importance of a strong leader in a group and the obedience he is granted by his followers, claiming that “autocratic leaders are more likely to be able to mobilize people than their democratic counterparts, because democratic practices emphasize individual rights rather than the rights of the collective

²⁰ See Chapter 2, “the Kurds” for more detailed information about the common traits of the Kurds.

body over and above the individual” (Gurr & Harff; 1994, p. 89). This argument is applicable for the Kurds. Prior to Ocalan there had not been such a long-standing and strong movement supported by so many Kurds. The revolts of the 1920s from 1940s were suppressed by the Turkish government without much effort when compared to the PKK which lasted for more than 10 years and remains active. This is most likely a result of the ideology of the PKK, which expected full obedience and devotion from its members. As the creator of the PKK, Ocalan’s personality, beliefs and methods attracted many to the cause of the PKK.²¹

Another concept the authors identify is the political environment. Under this heading, they list four different kinds of regimes with which the ethno-political groups may have conflict. These are:

- Institutionalized democracies
- Institutionalized autocracies
- Socialist states
- Populist states (Gurr & Harff; 1994, p. 90)

Although Turkey claims to be a democracy, it is hard to identify it as one. In democracies, all citizens regardless of their ethnic origin, religious, and political beliefs are granted political and civil rights. Multiple political parties participate and compete in a safe environment. On the other hand, the Kurdish political parties have been banned and closed several times by the Turkish government. Although the Kurdish parliamentarians demanded to participate fully in Turkish politics according to Turkish laws, they were often accused of conducting separatist activities as a result of their Kurdish identity and cause. Gurr and Harff argue that in autocracies it is common that

²¹ For a detailed argument see Chapter 7a. *Abdullah Ocalan* and 7b. *An Analysis of the Ideology of the PKK, Its Structure and Methods*.

political parties are banned and civil rights are restricted. Even though Turkey is not defined as an autocracy, it is also hard to define it as a democracy. Yildiz and Muller argue:

....key elements of democracy which pertain towards the preservation of peace and the management of conflict, including the facilitation of the expression of a plurality of opinions, the promotion of political participation, and fostering of peaceful coexistence of different communities within state borders, are markedly absent from Turkey. These democratic elements allow for tensions to be worked through in the political and legislative arenas, replacing battlefield confrontations with peaceful bargaining and detailed negotiation processes. Turkey's persistence in stifling forms of expression which allude to the existence of a Kurdish identity, harassing pro-Kurdish political parties, and conducting ruthless security operations against Kurdish civilians thought to harbor 'separatist' sympathies, therefore substantially impedes the peaceful resolution of the conflict in the southeast. Until Turkey sets aside her disinclination to comply with these basic democratic criteria and thus to take concrete steps towards effecting long-term peace and security in the Kurdish region, she cannot be deemed a member of the ever-growing international community of democratic states (Yildiz & Muller; 2008, p.111)

The fifth concept identified by the authors is the use of violence by governments against ethnic groups. This is still a highly argumentative subject in Turkey, although government officials have recently started to admit that some "mistakes" were made in the past. The civilians in the southeast have suffered from the heavy military enforcement in the area and the forcible relocation of the region's peoples. The mistreatment of political prisoners and widespread torture in Diyarbakir Prison is reported by a Helsinki Watch Report, *Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Kurds of Turkey* (1988).

Another concept listed is external support. The authors say that the more widespread the support is, the stronger the ethnic group. It is known that Ocalan was organizing the party's attacks from Syria while living there for years. Other than the support this

terrorist organization received from the neighboring countries, the Kurdish political parties are now supported by many European countries. On the other hand, the support of the political parties is a legitimate one unlike the support given to the PKK, which caused international tension between Turkey and Syria.

The last concept that is discussed by the authors is the international economic status. The authors say: "The status accorded to challenging groups depends upon the position accorded to their states by the international community. Thus, movement fighting regimes with low status that are autocratic and have command economies are likely to enjoy higher international status than ethnic challengers fighting capitalist states" (Gurr & Harff; 1994, p. 91). The underdevelopment in southeast of Turkey where the Kurdish population is dense has attracted the attention of the member countries of the European Union. One of the demands of the Union from the Turkish government is to improve the life standards of the region and aim at economic development. The economic status of southeast Turkey compared to western Turkey has been observed by the Union and known by the Turkish government which led to start the GAP (Southeastern Anatolian Project) project which intend at socio-economic conditions of the region.

Kurds started their revolts against the state as a result of the policies of the new Turkish nation-state, which did not recognize their identity and thus did not grant them any political and cultural rights. After the revolts were suppressed through heavy military intervention, by the end of the 1930s instead of finding a democratic solution, the conflict remain smoldering, counter government expectations. During the silent years of the Kurds, as a result of the policies of the Turkish government such as the Settlement Law, the Kurds started to mobilize politically. Some Kurds tried to become politically active

and asked for legitimate participation as Kurdish citizens of Turkey in Turkish politics rather than pursuing separation. When the political participation of the citizens was rejected, the PKK found a cause around which to mobilize and started its violent attacks against the Turkish government. I have argued in this paper that the violent insurrection of the Kurds via the PKK could have been avoided if the policies of the government had accepted the multi-ethnic identity of the country instead of claiming it to be a pure Turkish nation-state. After 15 years of armed struggle, with the capture of its leader, the terrorist organization ceased fire and came up with the conclusion that separation was not an option for the Kurds. At present, the Turkish government is seeking a democratic solution to the “Kurdish problem,” not only as a result of the internal demands and pressure of its Kurdish citizens, but also with the pressure coming from the EU. The EU made it clear that without an effective and democratic solution, which would grant cultural and political rights to this minority group, it is not possible for Turkey to become a full member of the Union.

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DEGREE AND DATE TO BE CONFERRED: Master of Science, 2011

Secondary Education:

Towson University, Towson, MD	Master of Science, Social Science	2011
Istanbul University, Istanbul, Turkey	English Language Teaching	2005

Professional positions held:

Graduate Assistant, Office of Assessment, Towson University, MD February 2010 until May 2011

As a part of my assistantship, I participated in collecting, analyzing and reporting data for institutional surveys, collected data, monitored data collection and updated assessment database for undergraduate and graduate programs, analyzed the data about the learning goals, teaching and learning strategies, assessment methods and use of results of the programs for accreditation process, administered CLA (Collegiate Learning Assessment) test, assisted overall organization and filing for the process, prepared reports for course evaluation results for faculty and provided clerical support the office.

