



Education in a Political Context

A study of knowledge processes and learning sites in the PKK

Kariane Westrheim

Dissertation for the degree Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)

University of Bergen
Norway

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Engin Sincer (Erdal), the first member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) I met. He was born in Kurdistan but grew up in Europe where he received his party education in 1990. In 1992, he continued his military and political education in the Mahsum-Korkmaz Academy, the first recognised education site in the Lebanon. He joined the PKK forces in 1998. Engin Sincer was the one who facilitated access to the organisation for me and thereby made the fieldwork underpinning the thesis possible. He became a member of the Executive Council of the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK).

Engin Sincer was killed in his beloved Mountain Qandil in August 2003.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	I
SUMMARY	III
LIST OF PAPERS	V
FOREWORD.....	VII
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Organisation of the study	4
2.0 SCHOLARLY RESEARCH ON THE PKK.....	7
3.0 THE RESEARCH QUESTION	13
4.0 THE PKK IN ITS CONTEXT	15
4.1 Who are the Kurds?.....	15
4.2 Turkey’s betrayal and Kurdish rebellions	18
4.3 From Tribalism to Marxism	20
4.4 The Kurdistan Workers Party.....	21
4.5 The PKK’s pedagogy of revolution	24
4.6 Women in the armed guerrilla.....	27
4.7 The PKK as a political and social movement	30
4.8 Political identity and collective action	31
4.9 Becoming Global: the PKK as a Transnational Project.....	32
4.10 Reorganising the struggle in Diaspora	33
4.11 Becoming global through transnational activities.....	34
4.12 Transnational recruitment	36
4.13 Kurdish media, culture and language.....	37
5.0 SITUATING THE STUDY THEORETICALLY	41
5.1 Introduction	41
5.2 Critical pedagogy: the Freirian perspective	41
5.3 A place in the world	42
5.4 Critical consciousness and transformation.....	43
5.5 Critical literacy: Reading the word and the world	46
5.6 Freire and Gramsci – some similarities.....	48
6.0 SITUATING THE STUDY METHODOLOGICALLY.....	53
6.1 Approaching the Field.....	53
6.2 “Tell Europe”: Reflections on observations.....	54
6.3 General methodological approach.....	54
6.4 Reflections on qualitative interviews	55
6.5 Qualitative research: a critical perspective.....	56
6.6 Culture of Silence.....	57
6.7 The interpreters and translation.....	58
6.8 Data collection and analysis.....	59

6.9	Selection of informants	61
6.10	Fieldwork	62
6.11	Security of informants	68
6.12	Data analysis	68
6.13	Validity and reliability of the data.....	69
7.0	ETHICS: THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER IN CONFLICT AREAS.....	71
7.1	Closeness and distance	72
7.2	Moral dilemmas in fields of political unrest	73
7.3	Fieldwork in violent environments	75
8.0	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....	79
8.1	Paper I: Summary	79
8.2	Paper II: Summary	80
8.3	Paper III: Summary	81
9.0	GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE THESIS.....	85
9.1	Education is about <i>becoming</i>	86
9.2	Taking to the streets	89
9.3	Concluding remarks	92
	REFERENCES	95

PAPER I, II & III

APPENDIX I - V

A School Memory from Kurdistan

"Since I was smart, my father sent me to a boarding school in Western Turkey. My mother told me never to mention to anyone that I was a Kurd. What I had learnt from teachers in my former school was that being a Kurd was bad. When I told the children at my new school where I came from they asked me if I had seen Kurds, I said yes. Then they asked me what they look like because they had heard that Kurds had only one eye" (Female informant, 6.10.2005).

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My gratitude is first and foremost directed to the informants who have participated in and contributed to this study. They are all active members and supporters of the Kurdistan Workers Party, the PKK. In spite of the horrible experiences many of them have faced, and their difficult and risky political life situation, not one of them ever resisted or rejected my request for research participation. The informants' stories brought me into a world very unlike my own, and through their willingness to dialogue, we jointly developed a mutual *zone of deliberation* where we tried to achieve a broader understanding of each other's perspectives of the subject discussed. The informants opened a path into this field of research, and my work can only be regarded as a minor payback considering the valuable knowledge that each and one of them shared with me. I owe them my deepest thankfulness.

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I would like to express my gratitude to representatives of the PKK leadership, Mr. Murat Karayilan and Mr. Duran Kalkan, who welcomed me to the Xinere Camp in South Kurdistan (Northern Iraq) in March 2006. The stay in the camp, including the conversations with the students, guerrillas and the leaders, brought me closer to the subject investigated, and gave me an in-depth understanding of some aspects of the daily life, work and education of the cadres, an insight that has been of great value to a more profound understanding of the PKK.

It is difficult to express how grateful I am for the supervision I have received from my supervisor Professor Sølvi Lillejord. She has been a generator of inspiration throughout the different phases of the writing of the thesis. She believed in the project from the very beginning, even when others found it hard to discover the link between an armed guerrilla and education. Thank you for always keeping your door open to me, for your tireless support and for your careful reading of my uncountable and very long drafts. You are the best!

Deep felt thanks also to Professor Gro Lie who is the leader of the cross-disciplinary research group *Multicultural Venues in Health and Education* (MCV), wherein my

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Finally, but not least, thank you Haci Akman, and my two sons, Thomas Westrheim Stave and Welat Akman Westrheim, for encouragement and love.

SUMMARY

This thesis focuses on educational practices within the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and how members of the organisation perceive the educational and personal outcome of their participation. The thesis consists of three articles and a longer text (a mantle); showing how the articles are thematically, theoretically and methodologically interrelated. The theoretical foundation of the thesis is Paulo Freire's perspectives on education (critical pedagogy) and the way he uses concepts such as literacy, critical consciousness, transformation, liberation and change. These perspectives are supplemented with the work of the political theorist Antonio Gramsci who explores concepts related to resistance and collective action, recruitment and identity within the frames of social and political movements. The project is based on sixteen qualitative interviews with PKK members, residing in Europe and North Kurdistan (Turkey), and participatory fieldwork in one PKK camp.

The practical and ethical challenges and specific constraints confronting the researcher in fields of political unrest are discussed both in the mantle and in the first article. The article discusses the term *zone for deliberation* to analytically understand how meaning is being negotiated and re-constructed between parties who struggle to understand each other's political and cultural positions. The second article asks why thousands of youths during the 1980s and 1990s went to the mountains in order to fight with the PKK and presents what the informants claim to have learned from participation. It seems that in the struggle for personal, social and political change, transformative education represents a major force. In the context of a lack of a relevant educational opportunities for millions of Kurdish youths, the political education of the PKK takes place in a variety of non-formal sites such as the mountains, Diaspora, Kurdish communities and in prisons. Education in prison has had a major impact on the overall Kurdish struggle. The third article therefore discusses how former political prisoners in Turkey organised educational activities in prison in order to educate themselves and fellow prisoners.

Historically, family and tribal relationships have been the core of Kurdish social life. In the late 1970s, however, the PKK began to challenge this traditional way of living in addition to liberating its members from Turkish oppression through transformative education. Political education and personal development became important in the struggle. The PKK education benefited not only those who joined the armed struggle, but also members and supporters working in the social, cultural, political or academic field. In addition, the PKK put

major emphasis on gender issues, which explains why so many women attended. The women's army and the women's party of the PKK have been vanguards for female emancipation within the PKK and for Kurdish women in general. Transnational migration after 1980 strengthened the struggle, by providing opportunities to operate within Diaspora communities.

New technology, media and TV channels have become important educational tools. By the use of e-mails, mobile phones, internet or TV, millions of Kurds could rapidly be mobilised for collective action in the streets. Funerals for PKK guerrillas, attacks and killings by the military or security forces are typical examples of incidents that call for Serhildan; popular uprising or mass mobilisations in favour of the PKK. Since the 1990s, even the streets have turned into educational sites where people learn how to communicate and organise. When people participate in emotionally-charged action, the atmosphere often reaches a high energy level, creating a sense of togetherness. In these collective moments, political meaning is created and collective memory established. Collective learning takes place when the "collective participant" discovers the relationship between collective action, political meaning and change, and is able to transfer these experiences to the next collective event.

Political education and personal development are rarely mentioned as positive factors in research on the PKK. In this thesis, I have tried to nuance this picture. Even though members of the organisation refer to the PKK "school", education is not institutionalised, but organised in the mountain camp, in prison, through different media, in the communities and on the streets. This is where the Kurds learn what it means to be Kurdish. Through literacy courses and the development of various skills, they also gain dignity and a sense of empowerment.

The informants claim that because of the PKK education, they have become *more* than they were before, and perceive themselves as better persons. 'Becoming' entails the notion of transformation and is linked to ideas about human development, growth and potential. It is a dynamic process. Through participation in collective and individual educational activities, self-evaluation and evaluation by other members, the informants claim to have transformed their lives in ways that empowered them to *do* and to *be* through the process of becoming. Therefore, becoming [someone], who is capable of doing something for him- or herself and the people, seems to be the most important outcome of a transformative educational process. Practical educative activities, along with political education in the mountains, prison, streets and communities, have become a school for those who participate.

LIST OF PAPERS

Article I

Westrheim, Kariane & Lillejord, Sølvi (2007):
A Zone for Deliberation? Methodological Challenges in Fields of Political Unrest. In *Policy Futures in Education*, 5(3), 373-85.

URL: http://www.worldwords.co.uk/pfie/content/pdfs/5/issue5_3.asp#8

Article II

Westrheim, Kariane (in press)¹:
Choosing the Mountains: The PKK as Alternative Knowledge and Identity Project. *Politics, Culture and Socialization*.

URL: <http://www.politicalsocialization.org/journal.php>

Article III

Westrheim, Kariane (2008):
Prison as Site for Political Education: Educational Experiences from Prison narrated by Members and Sympathisers of the PKK. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 6(1).

URL: <http://www.jceps.com/?pageID=article&articleID=120>

¹ This article is accepted for publishing. See appendix V.

FOREWORD

My research interest in the Kurdish question rests on four different, but interwoven experiences. First, in 2001 I completed my master's thesis at the University of Bergen entitled *From Silence to Speech: A critical multicultural perspective on oppression and identity, with a view to Kurds in Norwegian schools*. Some of the informants, aged 16-18, seemed to have no motivation for school. They found it difficult to learn, claimed that teachers treated them unfairly, and that language difficulties hindered them from fully participating in academic and social activities in school. The students' attitude towards learning and knowledge changed, however, when we started to talk about the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), the Kurdish guerrilla in North Kurdistan (Turkey). While enthusiastically narrating the story of the PKK, the young informants displayed knowledge about several subjects like history, culture and politics. They had read books by the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and learnt from listening to PKK militants sharing their experiences as fighters in the PKK guerrilla. The students described the PKK as an arena for learning with prospects for personal growth regardless of physical attendance, whilst the school was of little or no significance for their learning and development. In this perspective, the PKK might actually be perceived as an alternative path to education, a *school* that provides certain forms of knowledge to its members. Even though these students had never joined the guerrilla or the organised PKK education in Diaspora, they felt a strong sense of *belonging* to the struggle of the PKK movement.

The meeting with the informants raised questions that became crucial for my research: Why are these immigrant students so unmotivated for learning in the formal school system, while they had eagerly learned from stories about an armed liberation movement? Why do schools fail to acknowledge the experiences and prior knowledge these students have? What does the PKK offer its followers with regards to knowledge and personal development since the students obviously direct their attention and motivation towards it?

These questions were reactivated in 2002, when I coincidentally met some representatives of the PKK at an international meeting regarding the situation for the Kurds in Turkey. The meeting renewed my academic interest in the PKK as an educational site. Because of this meeting, I had the opportunity to travel to Turkey and North Kurdistan conducting meetings with representatives of the political and civic Turkish society, in order to report on the human rights situation in the country. This work provided me with a foundation for understanding the situation of the Kurds in Turkey.

Third, I will mention the encounter with Mehdi Zana in 1999, a writer and former mayor of Diyarbakir, arrested during the 1980 military takeover in Turkey. He was imprisoned for 16 years. While in prison, his wife Leyla Zana entered Kurdish politics and gradually became a symbol to Kurds and to women in particular. In 1994, Leyla Zana was elected to the Turkish Parliament as a member of the pro-Kurdish Democracy Party (DEP). When addressing her parliamentary oath in Kurdish she was arrested and imprisoned for 14 years of which she served ten. The international community followed her case closely and in prison, she received official visitors from several political delegations².

Fourth, in 2004, I was elected the chair of the Brussels based *EU Turkey Civic Commission* (EUTCC), a civic body of five NGOs³ aiming at monitoring the membership process between the European Union and Turkey. Through the EUTCC's annual international conferences in the European Parliament in Brussels, I have established a broad international network that has been valuable to my PhD work.

² As the President of the Norwegian Parliament, Ms. Kirsti Kolle Grøndahl visited Leyla Zana in prison in 1995, together with the parliamentarians, Mr. Kjell Magne Bondevik, Ms. Kaci Kullmann Five and Ms. Anne Enger Lahnstein.

³ Rafto Foundation (Norway), KHRP (UK), medico International (Germany), Human Rights Bar Association of England and Wales (UK), TOHAV (Turkey)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Political violence in war, occupation and under oppressive regimes influences the daily lives of millions of people throughout the world (Adams, 2001). Each year more than 30 million people flee their homes because of conflicts and natural disasters. Over 500 000 people are killed in war. Currently, more than 50 countries are considered ‘conflict countries’. In January 2004, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that the total number of refugees, asylum-seekers and others of concern amounted to 17.1 million (Hanemann, 2005, p. 3). Historically, oppression of groups within the state, leads to exclusion and marginalisation and often results in counter-resistance (Adams, 2001, p. 154). This is the case of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, the PKK, which took up arms against Turkey in 1984, due to continuous attacks and repression of the Kurdish people in the southeast of the country.

One consequence of living in areas of political unrest, oppression and marginalisation is a lack of education and limited access to knowledge that is a prerequisite for active participation in modern societies. Under oppressive regimes, formal education may actually contribute to the multiple processes underpinning social exclusion, and deprive many students of participation in democratic processes (Crowther, 1999). In areas of political unrest and in politicised fields, schools also often become sites for political struggle (Grande, 2000, p. 343). In Turkey, many Kurds find educational institutions oppressive and irrelevant. It should be possible to imagine that an educational system that is not experienced as relevant will alienate its students. Many look beyond the formal institutional education towards educational sites that offer alternative education, values and belief systems, whether these are political, religious, or both.

Ever since Turkey was founded in 1923, the Kurds have been oppressed. The educational system in Turkey, which has a strong nationalistic and secular basis, has been a main tool of assimilation and oppression that has resulted in exclusion of a large part of Turkey’s population. PKK members struggle for the Kurdish people, but they also seek alternative sites for education whether these are in the mountains, in prison or in Kurdish communities. The PKK therefore offers non-formal⁴ educational alternatives to thousands of youths. In the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) 2008 report, “Youth in Turkey”, the Turkish professor Dogu Ergil (2008) found that the population between the ages

⁴ In contrast to informal education, non-formal education is to some degree planned and organized, offering specific learning environments and opportunities. These are usually more flexible and open than the formal education typified by schooling. (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. ix).

of 15 and 24 is more than 12 million. Of these, 5 million (40%) go neither to school nor to work. Women are worse off both in terms of education and employment. 2.2 million women have lost their chance for education and are unemployed. In his comment to the report, Ergil (2008) states:

This is the youth we are fighting against on mountaintops, in the urban underworld and in our cosy “secular” social environments. We learn the hard way that poverty and hopelessness neither marry secularism nor flirt with rule of law. Yet these are the by products of the system we have built and still maintain as if that is the right thing to do for national security and stability⁵.

The aim of this thesis is to broaden the understanding of how violence, oppression and marginalisation, over the last 25 years have motivated young Kurds, male and female to seek the armed struggle of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party). As this project shows, the educational aspects of an organisation such as the PKK are easily neglected. Not only marginalised individuals, but also well-educated youth have joined the PKK. In the mountains of Northern Iraq, the writer and broadcaster Michael Ignatieff (1994) met a young female guerrilla born in urban Australia of Kurdish parents. Her parents had never told her about their cultural background. When she was seventeen she started to realise that she, an Australian teenager, belonged to a people who had no nation of their own. This was the beginning of a long process, starting in the Bekaa Valley in the Lebanon, where she underwent Kurdish language courses, political education and training (1994, p. 154). During the past 25 years, thousands of young Kurdish individuals have travelled from Kurdistan and Diaspora societies all over the world to fight for the rights of their people. In return, the PKK offers them political education, personal development and opportunities for action, heroism and martyrdom (McDowell, 2000, p. 420). The PKK members, however, seem to gain more than this. The PKK emphasises that political education also entails a language of identity, belonging, possibility and hope. Seen against this background, the PKK movement proclaims the *pedagogy of hope* in a Freirian sense.

There are many examples of liberation movements that regard political education and a strong collective identity as important to the overall struggle of the movement. What most of them have in common is that they perceive the educational system as an assimilation agent for the political establishment they are fighting. In areas such as Africa, Latin America, and

⁵ The article Dangerous Polarisation, was published in two parts in the Turkish Newspaper *Today's Zaman*. The citation is from part II published 6.4.2008.

Kurdistan, social and political struggles have taken a clear educative direction. Kane (1999), who compared popular movements in Latin America and Scotland, points to the importance of non-formal education in the development of social and political movements, which he also terms 'knowledge movements'. It is broadly accepted that people do not learn from structured education alone, but also directly from civic and voluntary activities they participate in (Martin, 1999; McCowan, 2003, 2006; Paterson, 1999; Torres, 1990). Through experiences from everyday life, people learn to connect the personal and the political. The way liberation movements perceive knowledge and the way knowledge is generated on a micro-level are key factors in the understanding of how such liberation movements can function as educational arenas (see Hammond, 1998). A well-known example is how the African National Congress (ANC) opposed the Apartheid educational curricula, and saw the teachers as carriers of oppressive ideologies. To the ANC, formal educational institutions were problematic and irrelevant. An alternative curriculum had to be developed; one that had the potential to transform people's perception of themselves and their society (Tikly, 1999, p. 613). Several liberation movements consider political knowledge and education as key factors in their struggle.

For the PKK, Kurdish societies could hardly be transformed without a literate people, particularly in the rural Kurdish regions. An educational program was therefore gradually developed. The means, through which the resistance politics and practice of the PKK became possible, was education and a shared collective identity. How education was tried out in the mountains, in prison, in Kurdish societies and Diaspora clearly emerges through the informants' narratives in the second and third articles of the thesis.

The importance of political learning processes seems to be underestimated in the current discussion of political formations. Even though the PKK "school" is not formally institutionalised, its political education seems to have been crucial to knowledge construction and personal development for thousands of members and sympathisers. There are several examples showing that PKK education has contributed to the development of what Antonio Gramsci (Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci [SPN], 2005) terms *organic* intellectuals; once perhaps illiterate, now leaders, politicians, spokespersons, writers or artists.

Increased diversity in Western societies challenges educational institutions on all levels. Schools have to broaden their pedagogical repertoire for educational dialogues with students, in particular on issues that are ethnically, culturally and politically sensitive. Faced with political ambitions of inclusive practices, schools in Norway today experience huge

challenges. Differences in learning outcomes within specific socio-economic groups, an increasing number of dropouts in secondary school and the low rate of minority students seeking higher education are hindrances for the development of an inclusive, multicultural and democratic society. Resolving these problems is a prerequisite for the harmonious and prosperous development to which Norwegian politicians aspire.

1.1 Organisation of the study

This thesis consists of three articles and a longer text (a mantle); showing how the articles are thematically, theoretically and methodologically interrelated. In the mantle, I broaden the theoretical and methodological framework and discuss issues that have not been adequately dealt with in the three articles. In the following, I will briefly summarise the main content of each article and each chapter in the mantle.

The *first* article focuses on methodological challenges and specific constraints the researcher faces when approaching fields of political unrest, in particular when the worldviews of the researcher and interviewees are extremely different. The article applies the term *zone for deliberation* to discuss how meaning is being negotiated and re-constructed between parties who struggle to understand each other's political and cultural positions. The *second* article asks why thousands of youths from Kurdistan, Turkey and Diaspora went to the mountains during the 1980s and 1990s in order to fight with the PKK and presents what they claim to have learned from the participation. Obviously, in the struggle for personal, social and political changes, transformative education represents a major force. The *third* article shows that political education in the PKK is not confined to institutional education, but takes place in a variety of informal sites. It is based on interviews with former political prisoners in Turkey. In prison, members and supporters of the PKK were expected to organise politically and to educate themselves and fellow prisoners.

In the mantle, the introductory chapter (chapter 1), discusses how education often becomes a tool in the hands of the establishment, or the people in power, in order to maintain what Paulo Freire terms "the culture of silence". The aim of this chapter is to broaden the understanding of how war and political conflict affect education generally and more specifically how violence, oppression and marginalisation in the Kurdish regions of Turkey over the last 25 years have motivated young Kurds to seek the PKK. The way the PKK movement perceives education and how knowledge is generated on a micro-level are key

factors in the understanding of how such liberation movements can function as educational arenas.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the scholarship on the Kurds, focusing primarily on literature about the PKK as a social and educational movement. Numerous books and articles are published on Kurdish issues. The majority of the literature, however, focuses on the historical and societal background of the Kurds, wherein the PKK constitutes one part. The selection of books and articles presented in this chapter therefore deals with literature on the PKK and in particular on the questions that are raised in this thesis.

Chapter 3 presents the research question. The aim is to investigate in which regard the PKK represents an alternative path to education and how its members perceive educational and personal outcomes, both as individuals and as members of a collective group. The sub questions relate to the theme of each article included.

Chapter 4 outlines some central aspects of Kurdish history, as well as the establishment and development of the PKK. Since ancient times, the Kurds have lived in a geographical area known as Kurdistan. Historically, family and tribe have been at the centre of the Kurdish worldview and lifestyle, and in the late 1970s, the PKK began to challenge this traditional way of living. One aim of the organisation is to educate and liberate its members. Political education and personal development thereby became important aspects of the struggle. The PKK pays particular attention to gender issues, which may explain the many female members and women engaged in Kurdish politics. The work of the women within and outside the PKK has had a crucial impact on the growth of the movement. Transnational migration after 1980, in particular to Europe, gave the PKK the opportunity to operate politically within Diaspora communities while initiating projects, actions and demonstrations linking Diaspora members more closely to their places of origin.

Chapter 5 presents the thesis' theoretical perspectives. It discusses the importance of Freire's perspectives on education (critical pedagogy) and his use of concepts such as literacy, critical consciousness, transformation, liberation and change. These perspectives are supplemented with insights from the founder of the Italian communist party, Antonio Gramsci. The chapter explores concepts related to resistance and collective action, recruitment and identity within the frames of social and political movements. Themes related to these concepts are raised in the interviews with the informants and are central in the three articles.

Chapter 6 discusses the methodological framework of the study, which is positioned in the qualitative paradigm. It highlights ethical and methodological challenges facing the

researcher and focuses on the role of the interpreter in this kind of study; the selection and security of the informants; overview of the fieldwork conducted; how data were collected and analysed; and the validity and reliability of the study. Fieldwork in areas of political unrest is challenging, not only with respect to the practical ramifications, but in particular when it comes to ethical considerations. Reflections on some ethical aspects in fields of political unrest are therefore discussed separately in chapter 7.

Chapter 8 provides a brief summary focusing of the main findings in each article included, while chapter 9 discusses the findings in the light of the main research question and sub questions. Political education and personal development are rarely mentioned as positive factors in research regarding the PKK movement; on the contrary, it is often seen as extreme authoritarian cadre discipline followed by ideological brainwashing. I have tried to nuance this perception. The political education of the PKK is not formally institutionalised but takes place at different educational sites in the mountains, in prisons, and even on the streets in Kurdistan and aboard. Even so, it seems to have been crucial to knowledge, learning and personal development for thousands of members and sympathisers. It is therefore worthwhile investigating.

2.0 SCHOLARLY RESEARCH ON THE PKK

Because of the very high degree of sensitivity of the issue, Kurdish studies has been shaped and evolved as a complex and fragmented field where scientific issues have constantly intersected with political ones. Since the existence of Kurds was mostly denied by the relevant states in the 20th century, the definition of the object of these studies as ‘Kurds’, as well as the very construction of ‘Kurdish studies’ are loaded with political stakes [...] (Scalbert-Yücel & Ray, 2007, §75).

Up to the present, research about the PKK has been relatively scarce. Even if the amount of scholarly literature on Kurds is increasing in international scholarly literature, a popular mass movement like the PKK has rarely been subject for research.

In this section, I will give an overview of the recent academic literature on Kurds and the PKK. The Kurdish question in Turkey is complex, and cannot be understood without a reference to the historical political situation in the neighbouring states (Iraq, Iran and Syria) where Kurds reside. For the last couple of years, the question of the PKK has therefore been analysed against the background of political developments in Iraq. The Kurdish question appeared on the international agenda following the Gulf war in 1991, when the United Nations created what it called a "safe haven" for Kurds in northern Iraq in order to protect them from Saddam Hussein's attacks. The question has become even more important since the US led incursion into Iraq in 2003, which led to the fall of the Baath regime. Recently, Turkey's continuing incursions into North Iraq in order to crush the PKK, the latest in 2008, has received international attention. In order to understand the question in its totality, Michael Gunter provides an analysis of the evolving development in his book *The Kurds Ascending: the Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey* (2008a). Gunter (2008b) also argues that there has been an expansion in the scholarly literature on Kurdish issues⁶.

Two works stand out as leading in the field of Kurdish studies: Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Sheikh and the State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (1978), and David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (2000). Most scholarly books and articles refer to these scholars. The two classics provide an overview and in-depth analysis of the history, identity, political formation, struggles and popular uprisings of the Kurds through history.

In the most recent scholarly work on the Kurds the question of the PKK is frequently included and analysed while there has been a shortage of works dealing with the significance

⁶ Gunter, M. (2008b). Review Essay: Kurdish Scholarship comes of Age. *Middle East Policy*, 15(3).

of the PKK movement. Four recent studies of the PKK and its imprisoned leader, Abdullah Öcalan have been important for my understanding of the movement. First, I would like to mention Paul White's book *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers? The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey* (2000), which is a study of the origins and future of the PKK based on interviews with Öcalan and his supporters. The most interesting part, with particular relevance for my study, is when the author examines the transformation of peasants from what he terms social rebels into modern Kurdish nationalists. White concludes that the PKK represents a qualitatively different sort of leadership than did its historical predecessors.

The second book is Ali Kemal Özcan's, *Turkey's Kurds: a Theoretical Analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan* (2006) that is based on observations, a questionnaire to Kurdish respondents in several Kurdish-populated cities in Turkey, and interviews with Öcalan. The author was allowed to join the PKK's education program during the summer of 1994 and gives an in-depth description of the organisation of education within the PKK. He takes a critical stance towards the impact this kind of education has on its participants, in particular how the organisation uses the writings of Öcalan's as a foundation for nearly all educational activities.

The third recent book on the PKK is Aliza Marcus', *Blood and Belief: the PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (2007). Marcus, who has a lengthy journalistic experience in covering the Kurdish question in Turkey, gives an analysis of the emergence of the PKK, partly based on interviews with former PKK members, mostly from the European Diaspora. Marcus' interviews are primarily based on conversations with PKK members who have left the organisation.

Finally, in order to understand how the PKK developed into a social and political movement, David Romano's book, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity* (2006) offers important readings. Taking social movement theory as a point of departure, Romano argues that the unwillingness of mainstream political parties in Turkey to address the Kurdish question in anything but repressive terms, and with civil society crushed under the [1980] coup, the only form of dissent left was that which the PKK adopted. I would also like to mention Kerim Yildiz and Mark Muller's book *The European Union and Turkish Accession. Human Rights and the Kurds* (2008), which analyses the emergence of the PKK on the background of the historical and political situation in Kurdish regions in Turkey.

In this thesis, the PKK is regarded as a social and political movement, even though I have not applied the theory of social movements. It has been important to understand how the

individual member, through active participation, develops a sense of a collective “we”, through collective mobilisation and actions. In this regard, the work of della Porta & Diani, *Social movements: an Introduction* (2002) has been important reading, especially about recruitment pattern, identity and knowledge construction in social movements.

Since women constitute a major part of the PKK, and emancipation and education of women is of major concern in the PKK, I would like to mention another recent work, *Frauen in der kurdischen Guerrilla: Motivation, Identität und Geschlechterverhältnis in der Frauenarmee der PKK* (2007)⁷ by the German-born Anja Flach. Flach spent two years in the women’s army of the PKK, and later as a member of the women’s party established in 1998. She provides an inside analysis of the life in the guerrilla from a female perspective.

An important source of inspiration for this thesis is Kristiina Koivunen’s work, *The Invisible War in North Kurdistan* (2001). I would especially like to mention the part on research ethics and her reflections and analysis concerning research and the role of researchers in environments affected by war. Her reflections have inspired the methodological considerations underlying my own work.

Diaspora, transnationalism and the role of information, communication and technology for the Kurdish nationalist struggle, are themes that have been analysed by a number of scholars. Especially interesting is Amir Hassanpour’s work analysing the role that Kurdish Diaspora, satellite TV and the internet have played in the development of a Kurdish language and identity. Two often cited articles are “Satellite Footprints as National Borders: MED-TV and the Extraterritoriality of State Sovereignty” (1998), and “Diaspora, homeland and communication technologies” (2003). Also Mino Alinia offers a significant contribution to the study of Kurdish Diaspora in her book *Spaces of Diaspora: Kurdish identities, experiences of otherness and politics of belonging* (2004). The term *mobilising Diaspora*, has been useful for understanding the connection between Diaspora members and their place of origin. Martin Van Bruinessen’s paper “Transnational aspects of the Kurdish question” (2000) and David Romano’s article, “Modern Communication Technology in Ethnic Nationalist Hands: The Case of the Kurds” (2002), are both studies analysing Kurdish movements and how the PKK in particular has transformed into a transnational movement. I would also like to mention an article by Vera Eccarius-Kelly, “Political Movements and Leverage Points: Kurdish Activism in the European Diaspora” (2002), analysing political opportunities and recruitment of the PKK in German Diaspora. Andy Curtis’ “Nationalism in the Diaspora: a

⁷ *Women in the Kurdish Guerrilla: Motivation, Identity, Gender Relations in the Women’s Army of the PKK* (my translation).

study of the Kurdish movement. Nationalism, ethnicity and conflict” (2005), discusses how and why nationalism occur in Diaspora and psychological factors that seems to underpin second-generation Kurdish youths’ decision to attend the PKK.

In a recent work *Imagining Transnational Lives of Iraqi-Kurds* (2008) Espen Gran investigates the different kinds of transnational relations Iraqi-Kurds living in Norway maintain with their families and friends in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq.

Members of the organisation have written major parts of the books, reports and writings on the PKK. Some of these publications have no identified author or publisher, such as *Licht am Horizont. Annäherungen an die PKK* (Anonymous 1996). As the larger part of this literature is in either Turkish or Kurdish, or in non-English languages it has unfortunately not reached a larger audience. Abdullah Öcalan has written many papers, books and notes; mainly published in Turkish or Kurdish. His recent works such as *Gilgameschs Erben. Von Sumer zur demokratischen Zivilisation*⁸, I, II (2003) and *Prison Writings* (2007), however, have been translated. Both works provide an analysis of the PKK history and reflections on the Kurdish history in a Middle-Eastern context, coupled with proposals for a peaceful solution to the armed conflict in Turkey and the Middle East.

For an in-depth understanding of the political education of the PKK and the impact the PKK has had on thousands of youths, the theoretical contribution of Paulo Freire’s classical work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996 [1972]), and Antonio Gramsci’s *Selection of Prison Notes* (SPN, 2005) have been crucial readings, also in order to explore central concepts underpinning this thesis. Paula Allman’s books *Revolutionary Social Transformation. Democratic Hopes, Political Possibilities, and Critical Education* (1999), and *Critical Education and Karl Marx and Revolutionary Critical Education* (2001), explore Freire’s and Gramsci’s contributions to our understanding of adult education and the collective subject. In addition, Diana Coben’s book *Radical Heroes* (1998) provides a useful analysis and comparison of the two major thinkers within political education. Other significant contributors to the understanding of Freire and Gramsci are the critical theorists Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard in their edited book *Paulo Freire: a Critical Encounter* (2000), where a number of scholars within the Freirian tradition contribute. Carmel Borg, Joseph Buttigieg & Peter Mayo’s, *Gramsci and Education* (2002) introduces various perspectives on Gramsci and his ideas on party politics and political education.

⁸ *Gilgamesch Heritage: From Sumer to Democratic Civilisation* (my translation).

With the exception of Ali Kemal Özcan (2006), Anja Flach (2007), Aliza Marcus (2007) and, to some extent, Paul White (2000), none of the scholars mentioned have been dealing with the educational policy of the PKK in particular or the way in which current PKK members perceive their stay in the movement. My intention in this thesis is to give a voice to the PKK members, not to analyse other perspectives on the PKK or to question their opinions. As little has been written about the PKK as an education movement, and what the members have gained by participating, this work contributes to an underexplored part of the research on Kurdish issues.

3.0 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This study investigates how PKK guerrillas perceive educational and personal outcome, both as individuals and as members of a collective group. Many members of the PKK regard the party as an education movement. By interviewing members and supporters of the movement, I have investigated how political education is perceived by those who attend. It has been crucial to analyse how education is understood in the context of marginalisation through political violence and oppression in Turkey. Political education and personal development are rarely mentioned as positive factors in research regarding the PKK; on the contrary, they are often seen as extreme, authoritarian cadre discipline followed by ideological brainwashing. So we are faced with the paradox that youth from North Kurdistan, Turkey and Diaspora communities continue to join the PKK, as thousands have done during the last 25 years, perceiving the movement as an arena for education and personal growth. Against this background, the following research question has been developed:

In what respect can the PKK be perceived as an alternative path to education for those who participate?

The question has been approached through the following sub-questions:

- What are the constraints when researching the educational practice within an organisation such as the PKK?
- What do the informants claim to have learned from participating in the PKK and why do they join the organisation?
- How and on which sites does the PKK practice its educational programme?

These questions will be discussed and answered in light of the theoretical framework and the three empirically based articles.

To understand the development of the PKK, it is however, essential to look to contextual dimensions such as the Kurdish experience in Turkey. In the following chapter, I will therefore explore the historical-political developments in Turkey and reasons why the PKK emerged in the 1970s.

4.0 THE PKK IN ITS CONTEXT

I do not intend to give an in-depth analysis of the historical and political situation of the Kurds, Turkey or the relations between them. In order to give meaning to why the informants' chose to join the PKK, it is however, important, to situate their narratives in a historical-political context.

The declared enemies of the early PKK were at the time, according to McDowall (2000), the fascists, the Grey Wolves⁹ and agents of the state, as well as the Turkish Left which subordinated the Kurdish question on its political agenda (op.cit, p. 419). The followers of Abdullah Öcalan (Apocular), the founder of the PKK, were angered by the exploitation of the urban and rural proletariat at the hands of the *aghas*¹⁰. By co-operating with the state, for instance by instructing villagers to vote for the ruling parties, the *aghas* were free to rule the Kurdish countryside and had power and influence on almost all levels of Kurdish society. Poor villagers were expected to work an eleven-hour day for the *gha*¹¹, with the exception of very young and very old villagers (op.cit, p. 417). During the first years of its existence the PKK occasionally attacked or killed individuals who were regarded as traitors, collaborators and state employees, such as teachers, village guards (Yildiz & Muller, 2008, p. 107), or local *aghas*, and according to van Bruinessen (1988), the PKK thereby gradually increased its popularity in the population.

4.1 Who are the Kurds?

Historically, the notion or idea of Kurdistan has always been contested. Even today, it is likely to create heated and controversial debates. In a historical perspective, White (2000) argues, there seems to be a lack of consensus among scholars as to who exactly the Kurds are, but there is general agreement that the Kurds since ancient times have lived in a geographical area known both to themselves and many outsiders as Kurdistan. The name Kurdistan has been used in this area since the 13th century, but was not in general use until the 16th century (op.cit, p. 14). McDowall (2000), however, claims that the emergence of Kurdish societies

⁹ Extremely violent rightist groups were encouraged by the Parliament to attack leftist opponents in the streets and in universities and were allowed to operate freely in order to spread fear among the public (Romano 2006, p. 46).

¹⁰ Kurdish landlords/landowners.

¹¹ The payment in USD were in 1983, 1.50 for a woman, 2 for a man and 1 for a child. The mortality rate at the time were 30 % among children (McDowall, 2000, p. 417).

can be dated back as far as 2 000 years, while Izady (1992, p. 28) argues that Kurdish existence stretches even further back – to pre-historic times.

According to Özoglu (1996), the term 'Kurd' seems to have been adopted by educated Kurds in the sixteenth century to refer to a collective identity. He shows to an early well-known document, the *Serefname*: a history of the Kurds, written by Serefhan Bitlisi, a sixteenth-century Kurdish ruler of the Bitlis emirate¹². The book demonstrates a very elaborate perception of Kurdish identity. While Serefhan uses the term Kurd consciously; he does not give a clear definition of the term. He understands the term Kurdish as a collective identity, closely associated with a geographical region named Kurdistan (op.cit, p. 9). The tribal community, which was the central unit in Kurdish life, defined the members as Kurds. Without this tribal affiliation, a person was a non-Kurd, an outsider (Akman, 2002, p. 103).

Amir Hassanpour (1994) claims that the Kurdish people are one of the largest stateless nations in the world. There are probably 30 million Kurds living in the Middle East (Yildiz, 2005. p. 4). More than half of these live in Turkey. The present territory called Kurdistan has been divided and lies within the present borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and a smaller part in Syria and in some republics in the former Soviet Union, like Armenia and Azerbaijan (White, 2000, p. 16). McDowell (2000, pp. 2-3) emphasises that what binds Kurds together is a feeling of solidarity arising from the idea of common ancestry and a shared language, even though it contains different dialects¹³. There is also the question of a recognised territory. While regional states may deny its existence, Kurdistan exists within well-defined limits in the minds of most political groups. McDowell (2000) argues that there are both a *practical* and a *mythical* interpretation of political Kurdistan. The former “affords Kurdistan the borders that the political leadership either hopes or believes it can achieve”. The mythical idea of Kurdistan is for many Kurds regarded as the *mountain*, an imaginary as well as a real place. Even if Kurds leave the mountain valleys to live in urban areas, the mountain image is strong because “nations are built on imaginations before they are built on the ground” (McDowell, 2000, p. 3). Izady (1992) also argues that to a Kurd, the mountain is the “embodiment of the deity”; the mountain is his [her] mother, his refuge, his protector, his home, his farm, his

¹² According to Hakan Özoglu (1996, p. 8) the Kurdish emirate or confederacy differs from the tribe in terms of size and heterogeneity; its origin and class composition; its more circumstantial solidarity; and its closer relations with the state. The Kurdish emirate is composed of a number of tribes, both nomadic and settled and of non-tribal groups who speak different dialects. The supreme leader of the emirate (*mir*) possesses considerable military power and lives in a fortified city with his entourage.

¹³ According to McDowell (2000, p. 9) Sorani and Kurmanji constitute the two main dialects. Kurmanji spoken most by Northern Kurds (Turkey) and Sorani is spoken most by southern Kurds (Iraq). Both main dialects represent a standardised version of a multiplicity of local dialects.

market, his mate, and his only friend. This attachment is the source of many folk beliefs that the mountains are inhabited by the Kurds (op.cit, p. 188). The saying: “*The Kurds have no friends but the mountains,*” describes this close relationship. When thousands of Kurdish youth from all parts of the world find their way back to the mountains in order to struggle and to seek new knowledge, this can also be regarded as a symbolic act. The fact that thousands of PKK martyrs are buried there only strengthens the strong affiliation to the almost sacred mountains (see article II).

Historically, Gunter (1992) emphasises, family and tribe have been at the centre of the Kurdish worldview and lifestyle. In many areas in Kurdistan, they still hold a strong position. Gunter claims, in line with van Bruinessen (1978), Hassanpour (1994), McDowell (2000), Akman (2002), and White (2000), that the lack of a Kurdish state has made the tribe the focus of loyalty and also the organising unit; the power of the tribal chieftain has always been considerable. There are a considerable number of tribes in Kurdistan, each with its own defined territory, a fact that has strengthened the view that Kurds lack inner unity (Özcan, 2006, p. 139). There has been an expectation that the primary duty of a tribesman was to his tribe and chieftain, the second was to his religion. In this worldview, the idea of having duties towards fellow Kurds was non-existent. If a chieftain decreed that the tribe was obliged to fight on the side of the non-Kurdish actors against other Kurds, then the tribesmen would probably obey (Gunter, 1992). In Turkey, many Kurds have sided with Ankara against fellow Kurds without regarding this as a betrayal of a national Kurdish cause (Bulloch & Morris, 1992). An example of this is the Kurdish village guards¹⁴ who since the 1980s have sided with Turkish authorities in order to destroy the PKK.

Historically, it seems that conflicts among tribes have contributed to the maintenance and strengthening of the tribal system, rather than weakening it.

¹⁴ The Law of Temporary Village Guards of 1924 or The Village Law was revitalised in 1985. The village guards were a renewal of the *Hamidiya*, a local militia system used in the early days of the Turkish Republic. (McDowall, 2000, p. 422). The village guards were recruited from Kurdish tribes, armed and paid by the state in order to assist in operations against the PKK. They were selected because of their inside knowledge and the chieftain received a monthly amount for each recruit. At the largest the number of village guards counted about 90 000. They are accused of being extremely brutal against the population and rapes against women are continually reported (Westrheim, 2005b).

4.2 Turkey's betrayal and Kurdish rebellions

Except from a limited historical period in the early days of the Ottoman Empire¹⁵, the Kurds never had a nation of their own. According to Rugman & Hutchings (1996), Kurdish emirates were granted limited recognition by Ottoman sultans in change of practical help – among others in policing the conflictual Persian border. In the nineteenth century, the Ottomans took direct control of Kurdistan out of fear that it would break away from the empire. In the years to come, several Kurdish rebellions followed, as tribal and religious leaders tried to retain the previous principalities (op.cit, p. 25).

At the end of the First World War (1914-1918), with the defeat of Germany and its ally the Ottoman Empire in 1918, the Kurds were offered the opportunity to establish a nation of their own (Rugman & Hutchings, 1996). Under the Treaty of Sévres¹⁶, signed with the Allies in 1920, Ottoman leaders agreed that Kurds should be offered local autonomy in Kurdish dominated regions. The traditional tribal leadership did not manage to use this golden opportunity to prove, by unifying its forces, that they were capable of nationhood. A result was that the agreement never saw the light of day. The Treaty was annulled as the new Turkish Republic came into power in 1923 after the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923). The Treaty of Lausanne signed the same year, which established the current borders of Turkey, ignored the Kurdish claims to self-determination (Yildiz & Muller, 2008, p. 7). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk¹⁷ had declared that all citizens of Turkey, including the Kurds, would be treated as equal before the law regardless of birth, nationality, language or religion (Rugman & Hutchings, 1996, p. 25; see Gunter, 1997). His statement overruled the original First World War peace agreement in which the Kurds, according to Hassanpour (1994), were promised a national state of their own. The new Turkish Republic of 1923, Romano (2006) claims, had every opportunity to exert repressive force against internal threats. In the time to come, the Kurds were brushed aside, and, according to Gunter (1997, p. 6), a personality cult presented Atatürk as the father, savior, and teacher of the nation. Romano (2006) argues that the Kurdish response to Atatürk's betrayal, of the Sevres agreement and the oppression that followed led to a series of bloody revolts in the 1920s and 1930s¹⁸ by landlords, tribal chiefs, sheiks and intellectuals. Each revolt was crushed by the Turkish army followed by more

¹⁵ The dominance of the Ottoman Empire was between 1299 and 1922. The height of its power was the 16th–17th century.

¹⁶ The Treaty of Sevres (1920) was the peace treaty of World War I between the Ottoman Empire and its Allies.

¹⁷ Atatürk means 'Father of the Turks'.

¹⁸ The Sheikh Said revolt in 1925, the Mount Ararat revolt in 1928-1930, and the Dersim revolt in 1938. (Romano, 2006, p. 37-37).

oppression and a wave of killings and executions (op.cit, p. 34). In the aftermath of the last of these massive revolts, the Dersim uprising (1938) led by Seyit Riza, more than 100 000 Kurds were killed, 47 tribal chieftains were executed, the Kurds were brutally repressed by the Turks and hundreds of thousands of Kurds were forcibly deported to western Turkey (Hassanpour, 1994; Romano, 2006, p. 37-37).

According to Marcus (2007), history was re-written in order to fit the ideology of the new republic. As is experienced in other colonialised areas, village names as well as personal names were changed to Turkish ones, the word Kurdistan was expunged from books and the language was banned (op.cit, p. 18), and the very existence of Kurds was denied (Gunter, 1997; Rugman & Hutchings, 1996). In the name of national unity, the new Kemalist government pursued a policy of forced assimilation and denied the identity of several million Kurds. Kurdish schools were closed and Kurdish children physically separated from their parents as a means to erase the Kurdish language (Blau, 2006, p. 198). Instead, boarding schools were established, and Kurdish children were supposed to learn Turkish in order to hasten assimilation. Turkish authorities developed a policy they claimed would liberate Kurdish children from backwardness (Folkvord & Melå, 2002, p. 75; Gunter, 1997, p. 6).

After the Second World War, the Kurds were again promised autonomy. With the backing of the Soviet Union and through the establishment of the Kurdish Republic in Mahabad¹⁹ in 1946 (Hassanpour, 1994) the idea of ethnic nationalism first found its full expression (McDowell, 2000, p. 231). Both examples of opportunities for national unity, Özcan (2006, p. 8) states, provide no remarkable *national* ingredients due to the strong attachment to the tribal or *asiret*²⁰.

Due to the suppression during the 1920s and 1930s, Hassanpour (1994) argues, the nationalist struggle did not resume until after the military coup in Turkey in 1960²¹, when new reforms made it possible for leftist parties and organisations to organise and develop. Despite the more liberal period between the military coups of 1960 and 1980, the situation is characterized by recurrent crises in Turkey. There are cycles of repression, and continuing proliferation of Kurdish political and cultural groups in Kurdistan, in Turkish cities, among Kurdish workers who by then had settled in Germany and other European countries, not least

¹⁹ Mahabad is an important Kurdish city in East-Kurdistan, Iran. The Mahabad Republic was crushed by the Iranian state one year later.

²⁰ An *asiret* is an organising unit defined by the entire tribe or federation of tribes and its chieftains.

²¹ There have been three military coups in Turkey since its foundation in 1923; 1960, 1971 and 1980.

due to the increasing political leftist formations during the 1970s. The military regime following the 1980 coup was able to suppress or erase most of them.

As a result of lost national opportunities, persecution, killings, forced deportation, continuous repression, and the general socioeconomic deprivation in the Kurdish regions, large Diaspora societies have developed in Western Turkey and abroad since the 1960s (Hassanpour, 1994).

4.3 From Tribalism to Marxism

When the PKK emerged in the 1970s the tribal system in Kurdistan was still very strong. Since its foundation in 1978 and the first armed attack in 1984, the PKK has come to be the most successful movement in Kurdish history. In order to understand its popular support and how it became a significant transnational actor, a closer look at the early years of the PKK is necessary.

The aims of the early PKK were to liberate the people from oppression and to establish an independent Kurdish state. The reason why the organisation slowly gained popular support, and managed to draw youths in the Kurdish regions closer to the PKK, was the fact that the PKK resisted two major power factors in Kurdistan: the Turkish state which they regarded as a coloniser in Kurdistan, and the *aghas*. The latter were regarded as exploiters and collaborators (van Bruinessen, 1988, p. 42; see also Gunter, 1990, 1997). The PKK challenged the traditional structures of the tribal communities by targeting those who supposedly collaborated with the state. The rural Kurds and poor farmers were tied to the soil where they were born, deemed to work for the *aghas*, with few possibilities for schooling or work. In the beginning, violent attacks on *aghas*, and on the organisation's internal opponents, scared the population and made them less supportive (White, 2000). This, however, changed when it was revealed that Turkish soldiers dressed like PKK fighters committed brutal attacks on villages. The "PKK attacks" gave Turkey a needed argument to organise a system of village guards recruited among tribes that were directly in conflict with the PKK. The village guards were hired to "protect" the people against PKK.

Since the 1980s, Kurdish regions more or less continuously have been declared as emergency zones.²² This gave the military, the security police and the village guards a much-

²² The *State of Emergency* was officially declared in eight provinces in Kurdish regions (south-eastern Turkey): Cewlik (Bingöl), Amed (Diyarbakir), Eleziz (Elazig), Colemerg (Hakkari), Siirt (Siirt), Dersim (Tunceli), and Wan (Van). Later Batman (Batman) was added to the list. Other provinces were declared border zones or sensitive zones (Lange, 2006).

needed argument to keep people under constant military surveillance. The security police and the village guards, hired by the state to track down the PKK, held a firm grip on the population. Women were tied to the home and family, dependant on their male relatives and vulnerable with regards to the honour and blood feud ideology (Laizer, 1991, p. 43). For the first time a nation building party addressed the situation of the women by claiming their rights as human beings equal to men.

The PKK placed emphasis on educational issues. The young population and women in particular, were receptive to the messages of the PKK (van Bruinessen, 1988, p. 42). Its aim was to enable people to erase the image of the coloniser in their minds and develop a conscious Kurdish identity. According to one informant, this was also one of the main reasons for the later recruitment to the movement:

When we look at the progress we made, we realise that everything is somehow related to education. I am thinking of education in the sense of having a personality, developing a culture, and developing moral values and critical thinking. In that sense, we are an education movement (MI.2.2.2006).

It seems that the reason why the PKK gradually became a significant agent for political and social change in Kurdistan mainly rests on the following two factors: many Kurds regarded the PKK as a nation-building party, and a modernising project, able to promote the living conditions of the Kurds in the regions. In the following, I will explore the development of the PKK and its educational sites and activities.

4.4 The Kurdistan Workers Party

When the PKK was established in the seventies, it affected all levels of Kurdish society, shaking Atatürk's "indestructible" Turkish nation (Rugman & Hutchings, 1996, p.26). Most scholars mention that the PKK started as a radical group of students led by Abdullah Öcalan who began his career as a student of political science at the Ankara University. From a group of six, Öcalan's group would, in less than twenty years, recruit tens of thousands of guerrillas, establish camps and offices in dozens of countries attract the full attention of the Turkish state and gather support from the Kurdish masses in Turkey and Diaspora societies. Early in Kurdish history, elites who followed tribal lines fronted the revolts. In contrast to this the PKK stands out as a movement that was built up from nothing (Romano, 2006, p. 70-71). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was a brief period of progressive politics in Turkey, and this enabled Kurdish intellectuals in Istanbul and Ankara to form cultural clubs and

organisations. During the summer of 1967, mass student demonstrations broke out in 19 Kurdish cities and towns, and marchers in the Kurdish capital Diyarbakir included up to 25 000 (Kutschera, 1994, p. 12).

After a planning period of two years, the party was formally founded in the Fis village in Kurdistan in the southeast of Turkey in November 1978 (Gunter, 1990, 1997; Marcus, 2007; McDowall, 2000; Özcan, 2006; White, 2000). It started as an illegal party planning for an independent Kurdish state, and freedom for all Kurds living in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria (Marcus, 2007, p. 9). At this point, there was increasing tension on the political scene in Turkey. In 1980, Öcalan established a training base in the Bekaa valley and later also ideological camps for education (Gunter; 1990, 1997; Marcus, 2007; McDowall, 2000; Özcan, 2006; Romano, 2006; van Bruinessen, 1988, 2000a; White, 2000). Through education, determination, the ability to organise, and the willingness to take great risks, the PKK reached its main objectives: winning the sympathy of the Kurdish peasants and demonstrating the limits of state control (Romano, 2006, p. 77). The PKK's resistance against Turkish military power slowly turned the party into a political force (White, 2000) and from a group of 50 fighters in 1984 the number of guerrillas slowly increased until it reached the number of 50 000 in 1994. Özcan (2006, p. 19) argues that the PKK-led insurgency which developed from a small group of university students in the early seventies came to be the biggest challenge to the Turkish state in the twentieth century.

By the end of the 1980s, the PKK had the full attention of the state authorities and the Turkish public. The fact that two thirds of the Turkish land forces were stationed in Kurdistan shows that the PKK had become a severe threat to the state (Romano, 2006, p. 51). The ability of the PKK to engage the grass roots in education and political activities seems to have led to increasing awareness and may explain why in the first part of the 1990s the PKK became a mass movement.

Even if the PKK had massive popular support during the 1990s, it was also a decade of devastating war. The Turkish army carried out aggressive attacks. Those who suffered the most were innocent inhabitants of Kurdish cities and villagers who resisted serving the Turkish state as village guards. About 3- 4 000 villages were burnt or totally destroyed, livestock slaughtered. Many villagers were shot or imprisoned; they fled the area or were forced to leave. White found that the forced evacuation of villagers continued until 1997 and

reached about two million people by the end of that year²³ (White, 2000, p. 172). People were placed in large encampments or they managed to flee to the towns and cities in Kurdistan or to Western Turkey, facing severe problems such as housing, employment and schooling. Thousands of children were orphaned, left to a future on the streets and their only means to survive was petty-trade, begging or prostitution.

After years of fighting, the PKK sought a political solution to the conflict. This effort was underlined by the declaration of its first unilateral ceasefire in 1993. This truce was not successful as the ceasefire was broken the same year. Being committed to a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question, Öcalan again declared ceasefires in 1995 and 1998. Turkey, however, maintained their position not to negotiate with ‘terrorists’.

In October 1998, Turkey demanded Syria to expel the PKK and hand over Abdullah Öcalan. After 20 years of support, Syria abandoned the PKK. Öcalan escaped and started a journey to different European countries²⁴ hoping to be granted asylum. He was, however, systematically turned down, also by countries that were normally sympathetic to the Kurdish cause²⁵. After a stay in Nairobi, waiting for transfer to South Africa, Öcalan was abducted on his way to the airport and handed over to Turkish special forces (McDowall, 2000, pp. 442-444). From his cell on the remote island of Imrali, he later demanded a complete withdrawal of PKK forces from Turkey and the end of all military activity. A few days later, the PKK announced that it had abandoned the military struggle.

To the PKK and its members, the capture of Öcalan was a catastrophe, and motivated a restructuring of the organisation. During the PKK’s Eighth Congress in 2002, the party established its successor KADEK (Congress for Freedom and Democracy in Kurdistan). It abandoned armed struggle and regarded *Serhildan*²⁶ as its only legitimate form of action. KADEK was replaced the year after, in 2003, by KONGRA-GEL (Kurdistan People’s Congress). The reason was that KADEK’s leninistic structure was not suited to encounter a modern, democratic and ecological society. In addition, KONGRA-GEL, which is regarded as the political wing of the PKK, espoused the HPG (People’s Defence Forces). The PKK has announced several concrete initiatives for peace, but according to Yildiz & Muller (2008, p. 113): “Turkey did not recognize the unilaterally declared PKK ceasefire of June 1999, just as

²³ It is estimated that there are 3 million people are displaced because of the war. The refugees have not received properly compensation for their losses or permitted to return.

²⁴ Öcalan went from Syria to Russia, then to Italy, back to Russia and next to Greece and Kenya where he was abducted.

²⁵ Italy has been known for expressing a pro-Kurdish politics.

²⁶ Popular uprisings. These uprisings have gradually increased since 1980.

she has not recognized subsequent PKK declared ceasefires.” Turkey never responded to any calls by the Kurds for the opening of democratic dialogue on the issue.

The tragic result of the war between the PKK and Turkish military forces, accompanied by state security operations, was that thousands of Kurdish villages were destroyed. Displacement, torture, and arbitrary killings committed by the military and security forces, became commonplace (Yildiz & Muller, 2008, p. 10). In addition to huge material damages, 31 000 people lost their lives, and the infrastructure collapsed in the southeast. Also, some 3 million people were internally displaced (Gunter, 2000, p. 848). Thousands of political prisoners filled up the prisons (see article III). Popular approval peaked in 1999 with the capturing of Öcalan, an act that had a strong symbolic character and led to demonstrations and protests from Kurds all over the world. Sixty-five persons burnt themselves to death to mark their protest and sorrow (van Bruinessen, 2000a; Westrheim, 2001a; see also article II). The struggle of the PKK in all its forms represents the greatest Kurdish movement in modern times.

No matter how one considers the significance of Öcalan’s contribution to the Kurdish question, there seems to be no doubt that the PKK under his leadership actually initiated a new political consciousness among the Kurds. As the PKK gained increasing support in the population, Öcalan himself became the icon of the masses: a freedom fighter and a nation builder for a suppressed people (Westrheim, 2001a). The PKK’s ability to sustain a campaign of armed struggle against the well-armed Turkish army is one reason why it gained such power and popular support in both urban and rural Kurdish areas, as well as from the Kurdish Diaspora (Hassanpour, 1994). The perhaps most characteristic trait of the PKK movement, however, is its strong educative elements. I will therefore look into the educational profile of this kind of movement.

4.5 The PKK’s pedagogy of revolution

Abdullah Öcalan was born in the village Omerli near Urfa. Like in many other settlements in the Kurdish countryside, the village had no elementary school (Marcus, 2007). This was regarded as conscious politic from the Turkish state to keep the Kurds ignorant. On the other hand, it was in the interest of the state to provide schooling, based on the Turkish language and a nationalistic curriculum that should promote assimilation. Since it was risky, difficult and costly for small villages to set up independent schools and get qualified personnel, Öcalan, like other Kurdish schoolchildren, had to walk for hours to the nearest school

(Marcus, 2007, p. 17). These experiences may explain why Öcalan formed a political party that also functioned as a school for the people with literacy programs and political education with the Kurdish language as a main tool. Providing education in Kurdish strengthened the sense of belonging, acknowledgement and dignity. The question of language and political education has also been crucial for other liberation movements of our time. Pool refers to the Eritrean liberation movement struggling against the alien nature of the Arabic language and for the need to develop Eritrean indigenous languages (Pool, 2001, p. 69). Hammond (1998) recounts how peasant fighters in El Salvador “struggled to learn” through transformative political education. Those who had little education taught those who had none.

The majority of schoolteachers in Kurdistan are Turkish (Sauar, 1996). Turkish is also the language of instruction. Kurdish is not allowed in the Turkish classroom. Teachers are seen as state representatives and assimilation agents, and thereby considered legitimate enemies of the PKK (Sauar, 1996, s.137). During the war thousands of Kurdish villages in the southeast were burnt or destroyed by the Turkish military (Flach, 2007, p. 54; McDowall, 2000, p. 426), including schools. With many teachers deported, children had limited opportunities to learn to read and write. The educative element of the PKK was actually one of the factors that made people turn their devotion towards the PKK. During the war, educated guerrillas went to the villages to teach children and adults reading and writing (see article II). One example is how female guerrillas went to the villages to talk to women, not only to recruit them, but also to make them aware of their subordinate position in the family and society as such. This is what Paulo Freire (1996 [1972]) terms liberation through raising consciousness. The arena of education and resistance has been moved out of the traditional classroom in Turkey and into Diaspora, the mountains, the prisons, villages, and streets of Kurdistan.

A UNICEF study by Bush & Santarelli (2000), argues that education in many conflict areas can have extremely negative implications. Education is often seen as a weapon in the hands of the power holders in order to suppress culture such as traditions, art forms, religious practices and cultural values. Education serves thus to maintain inequality between social groups, denial of education becomes a weapon of war. Bush & Santarelli’s negative implications are characteristic for Turkey’s educational policy in Kurdish regions. Schools were closed in areas supposed to be supportive of the PKK. Turkish authorities only permitted Turkish teachers to teach. Other tools for keeping people in a subordinated position are manipulation of history and textbooks for political purposes, the inculcation of attitudes of superiority, and gender-based discrimination (op.cit, p. 9). It is a fact that the Kurdish regions

in Turkey have miserable schools and teachers who are not motivated. McDowall (2000, p. 435) found that in 1990, 30% of the schoolchildren never showed up at school. Also, denial of the use of mother tongue must be regarded as a tool of repression (Bush & Santarelli, 2000). Even Kurdish names containing the common Kurdish letters “w,” “x” and “q” cannot be officially recognised and used because children can only be given names that use the Turkish language’s alphabet, in which these three letters do not appear (Gunter, 2007, p. 121). Until the general election in Turkey in 2002, when the AKP²⁷ government introduced some minor reforms, Kurdish language, culture and organisations have been banned²⁸. As a result of the deprivation of linguistic human rights Hassanpour, Skutnabb-Kangas & Chyet (1996, p. 373) claim that many Kurds have limited reading and writing skills in their own language, and those who do, have learned it outside schools, often with great danger to themselves.

After the military coup in Turkey in the 1980s, thousands of Kurds were imprisoned. For Kurds and for PKK members in particular, prison has therefore become a non-formal educational site. According to Marcus (2007), PKK members in prison applied the same rigor to their activities that they had before they were arrested. They formed a central committee to run the affairs; each cell had a local committee for day-to-day affairs. They had regular meetings and formed study groups. There were lectures on history, and in the evenings, prisoners discussed the history of the PKK, international politics and power struggles. The prisoners, who were cut off from much of the party’s activities found, however, ways to smuggle information in and out of the prison (Marcus 2007, p. 112-113; see article III). The information about the PKK prisoners’ activities inside prison encouraged the struggle outside. Many Kurdish intellectuals claim that they raised their general level of knowledge, identity and consciousness in prison (see article III). According to Marcus (2007), during his imprisonment (1971-72) Öcalan listened, but seldom participated actively in the Turkish leftists’ political debates. He noticed, however, that there was no discussion on the Kurdish problem and decided that the Kurds needed their own political formation. After his release in 1972, Öcalan stated that to him prison was a site of political struggle (Marcus, 2007, p. 25). This example has striking similarities to the South African experience and the political prisoners on Robben Island. According to Dubow (2000), political prisoners at Robben Island referred to it as a ‘University’. Imprisonment was a formative political experience, creating strong bonds of trust between the prisoners (Dubow, 2000, p. 73-74). This is also mentioned

²⁷ Adalet vs. Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party). AKP and the pro-Kurdish party DTP (People’s Democracy Party), hold 95% of the voters in the Kurdish regions in southeast Turkey (election 2007).

²⁸ Also after the 1960 coup some restrictions were lifted allowing among others publication in Kurdish.

by the former mayor of Diyarbakir Mehdi Zana (1997) who also describes the relations between the political prisoners in Diyarbakir Military Prison in terms of political education.

Most political prisoners in the 1980s and onwards were men. Due to the gender politics of the PKK, however, women gradually found stronger affiliation to the movement. One trait of the PKK is the large number of female guerrillas and women's engagement in Kurdish politics and educational activities. Since women's engagement in the PKK movement is not specifically addressed in the three articles, the following section will address this issue.

4.6 Women in the armed guerrilla

The PKK became a challenge not only to Turkish authorities but also to Kurdish traditionalists who wanted to maintain the gender structure within Kurdish societies, mainly ruled by tribal chieftains and landlords. The PKK contested the traditional power structures and it never permitted chieftains and landlords into its leadership (Alinia, 2004; McDowall 2000; White, 2000). It was a struggle “directed against the haves in the name of the have-nots” (van Bruinessen, 1988, p. 42). The party realised that if it should reach ordinary people with its program it also had to appeal to women. Normally, younger women in the villages did not leave the house alone, so it was difficult for them to meet with PKK activists (Marcus, 2007, p. 172). In this study, however, some informants say that they joined the PKK after having met female guerrillas who totally altered their perception of Kurdish women as mostly silent and invisible, subordinated to men. According to Marcus (2007), the recruitment of women increased after 1989, when the PKK made inroads into universities and urban centres. In addition, the move into publishing and politics in the 1990s attracted the support of more women. The military coup in 1980, when tens of thousand of Kurdish men were detained, forced women to political action. Marcus points to the example of Leyla Zana, until recently the only woman who has been elected to Parliament from a pro-Kurdish party²⁹. She was illiterate and did not speak Turkish. After the detention of her husband, she started educating herself, participated in demonstrations and became a politician (Marcus, 2007, p. 172). Through her engagement, she soon became an inspiration and role model to thousands of Kurdish women, who followed her example. According to Alinia (2004), a new political trend is women's involvement, both in politics and as militants. During the last two decades, the PKK involved women in the guerrilla and in organised political activities (Alinia, 2004, p. 65). The PKK has in fact the largest number of female guerrillas in the world and emphasises

²⁹ Leyla Zana was elected from DEP (People's Democracy Party), and entered the Turkish Parliament in 1994.

women's rights and liberation within the guerrilla and in civil life. Education has become a significant issue, underlying the political thinking of women's organisations.

Similar features are found in other liberation movements. By referring to female fighters among the Liberation Tigers in Sri Lanka, Ann argues that these women belong to a world outside ordinary women's lives. They have taken up a life that bears little resemblance to the ordinary existence of women (Ann, 1993, pp. 9-10). Tamil female fighters to a large extent still remain under the control of male family members, and at the same time face oppression from the state. The decision to break out of this cycle of double repression is an expression and articulation of new aspirations and independence. Entering into a military training programme combined with political studies represents an important political, social and ideological move for many women (op.cit, p.18).

Not only do the PKK pay attention to women's liberation within the armed forces; there is also an ongoing debate within the organisation on how to change women's position in a male dominated society; even in the party itself, women have to educate themselves and struggle for their rights. It would be naïve to assume that Kurdish female fighters have gained this position without struggling hard, including inside the PKK, to be accepted as equal to their male comrades.

Anja Flach (2007), who joined the PKK guerrilla from 1995 to 1997, emphasises that education was crucial in order to liberate Kurdish women in general and also those who attended the armed struggle. Without the knowledge of *why* you fight, it is impossible to cope with the hard life in the guerrilla, and education was regarded as the key to the development of a stronger political consciousness among women (Flach, 2007, p. 86). In the 1990s, the majority of the women who attended were illiterate. Many of these women joined the PKK after having met female guerrillas who came to the villages to inform them about the activities of the PKK and to teach them reading and writing (article II). Female recruits from Diaspora communities often had more education and therefore were able to teach others.

The reason why so many women joined the PKK was primarily the general oppression of women in Kurdish rural areas perpetrated by the state and by the traditional family structure disfavouring girls and women on all levels of society. Flach found that several girls aged 12-14, due to the situation of females within the family, had fled their families in order to join the PKK in the mountains (Flach, 2007, pp. 63-64). During my fieldwork in the Xinere camp, I met a young woman in her early twenties who came to the mountains at the age of 10, simply having followed her older sister and her friend who escaped the bad fortune of forced marriage. The recruitment of women is a complex issue. At the beginning, women from

traditional families often fled in order to join the PKK. Later, however, many families were proud to have daughters who joined the armed forces; some were even encouraged to go.

According to Wolf, the most common motive for women choosing a life as a guerrilla is the general oppression of *all* Kurds, male and female. The oppression of women within a patriarchal Kurdish family structure seems to be a secondary, but strong underlying reason (Wolf, 2004, p. 197-198). The women who joined the PKK in the 1970s and 1980s were, according to Flach (2007), university or high school students. They were driven by a growing awareness of the oppression of the Kurds in Turkey, searching for a Kurdish identity and a socialist life model. Women fled from unprivileged positions or forced marriages. Many, who wanted revenge, joined the PKK because relatives or friends had been killed or mistreated. A significant number of the women were recruited for this reason (Flach, 2007, p. 61). In the 1990s when the PKK struggle was better organised, a huge number of politically conscious and educated women, also from Europe, attended the guerrilla. Following the capturing of Öcalan in 1999, thousands of women attended the PKK³⁰. The majority wished to support the new political course of the PKK, but primarily they attended in order to fight for the rights of the women in line with the policy of the PKK/PAJK³¹. The way female members have managed to organise themselves independently of their male comrades, has had crucial impact on their opportunity to organise both civic and politically. PAJK gradually took over the co-ordination of the ideology and education of members, focusing on gender issues as part of the overall education program (Flach, 2007, p. 53).

In many ways, the organisation of women in the PKK became a movement within the movement. The structured work of the women within and outside the guerrilla also had a crucial impact on the growth of the movement. The next two sections explore how the PKK, since the 1980s gradually developed into a social and political movement, with a transnational potential.

³⁰ According to Flach (2007), the first organisation for women was initiated in 1992 by Öcalan. In 1993 a women's organisation started in Botan area counting about 2300 guerrillas. Through TAJK (The Liberation Movement of the Women of Kurdistan) and YAJK (Association of Liberated Women of Kurdistan) Kurdish women found their expression. In the mid 1990s, the women's army had educated their own independent military leadership. From 1999, the PKK went through structural changes, in order to develop a more democratic organisation form. From then women's organisations was so well organised that they became independent of the PKK body. PAJK (The Party for Freedom of the Women of Kurdistan), took over the co-ordination of the ideology and cadre education, focusing on gender issues as part of the overall education program (2007, p. 53).

³¹ PAJK (The Party for Freedom of the Women of Kurdistan).

4.7 The PKK as a political and social movement

The development of the PKK must be also regarded in light of social and political protests in the Western world from the 1960s and onwards. Social and political movements are, in line with Findlay (1994, p. 109), a new form of political action arising in response to dramatically changing material conditions. The main route to social and political transformation in social movements is considered to be through learning processes and education (Findlay, 1994, p. 109). This view is shared by Conway (2004) and della Porta & Diani (2002), who consider social movements as informal networks, based on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilise on conflict issues. Social movements develop through social processes where actors engage in collective action in order to promote or oppose social change. Social movements are collective enterprises based on collective identity formation (Melucci, 1995). This means that the actors in the movement have to gather around common purposes and shared commitment to a cause (della Porta & Diani, 2002, p. 20). This corresponds with how the PKK organises its activities around collective actions, dense informal networks and a shared collective identity (article II and III).

In a Freirian perspective, political education takes place within the framework of popular- and political movements. This is the intellectual property of grassroot movements working for education and change, with the ambition of improving people's quality of life (O'Cadiz, Torres & Wong, 1998; Findlay, 1994). Freire turned his attention to the relationship between education and the human being as a social actor capable of changing his or her destiny by means of participating in political life and in collective movements (Cardoso, 1997). Freire insisted on situating educational activities in the lived experience of the participants. This broadened our understanding of education and how education has generated new ways of naming and acting in the world. Social and political movements have been most effective when there is 'a window of opportunity' in which to operate (Kane, 1999). Torres (1990) points out that they may even provoke a political crisis as it happened in Brazil in the wake of Freire's work in the 1960's. The same happened in South Africa, through the black consciousness movement.

Participation in popular, social or political movements, della Porta & Diani (2002, p. 85) argue, requires a gradual adaptation and internalisation of a common set of values and aspirations.

4.8 Political identity and collective action

della Porta & Diani (2002, p. 85) strongly emphasise the close relationship between collective action and identity. According to Robins, *political* identity refers to a sense of interdependence when people recognise a need for joint solutions to common problems (Robins, 1996). In this perspective, political identity is not something one has, but something one achieves through participation in political processes for common causes (della Porta & Diani, 2002). Social movements are movements of people who cohere around issues and identities they themselves define as significant. Identity in this regard does not refer to an autonomous object, nor to a property of social actors. It is rather perceived as something the actors have in common and are recognised by (op.cit, p. 85). Social movements challenge authorities and power holders as they represent alternative cultural beliefs and educational practices.

Mutual trust (article I and II), among the actors in a social and political movement is a prerequisite for surviving and for the organisation to grow stronger. Trust is the basis for collective educational activities and interaction on all levels (Biesta, 2006). In the PKK movement, mutual trust is strengthened during wintertime when the weather conditions in the mountains make it too hard for the guerrillas and staff to move. The camps become sites for individual and mutual educational activities³². As collective identity and sense of belonging depends on identification, trust and mutual support from those who share the same aspirations and values, it is often most clearly displayed in periods of intense mobilisation (see della Porta & Diani, 2002, pp. 88-89). In the case of the PKK, each member has to be able to count on help and solidarity from other members, not only in times of crisis, but also as a security factor in everyday life. Flach (2007), who shows to examples from military actions in the women's guerrilla, also mentions this.

Also, participation in the PKK requires strong motivation, as the collective lifestyle in most social and political movements calls for a transformation of identity (della Porta & Diani, 2002). Within the PKK, transformation of personality is seen as the foundation for the movement (article I and II). The decision to join a collective movement and engage in collective action, whether armed struggle or social and political protest, can be rather profound. It requires radical transformation of the individual, which often implies breaking previous social bonds, and choosing a different life style (della Porta & Diani, 2002, p. 90). Transformation of identity, or personality, as narrated by the informants in this study, takes

³² See *Licht am Horizont. Annäherungen an die PKK*. IV.6.6. Ausbildung – Egitim (1996) (Unknown author)

place within a frame of radical political changes and choices in a person's life. This process is, however, extremely difficult and requires great personal sacrifices.

Empirically speaking there must be a multitude of Kurdish identities struggling for hegemony among the Kurds. The PKK understands Kurdish identity as several articulations of Kurdishness. When the PKK took centre stage in the late 1970s, Kurdish identity had been systematically oppressed for a long time and the Kurds were very receptive to a liberation discourse of resistance, territory, culture and collective identity (Westrheim, 2005a). However, attending the PKK meant to adhere to a collective way of thinking, talking, acting and behaving. In line with Melucci (1995, p. 43), constructing a collective identity cannot occur in the absence of a collective "we". It is a process by which the individual social actors recognise themselves, and are recognised by other actors, as part of a broader totality.

The fact that the PKK, in particular from the 1980s onward, had the opportunity to operate within Diaspora communities by initiating projects and actions that linked the Diaspora members closer to the places of origin, has played a crucial role in the strengthening of the transnational struggle. In the next section, I will therefore look into the PKK as a modern, transnational movement.

4.9 Becoming Global: the PKK as a transnational Project

From a historical point of view, Turkey's legacy of violence and torture dates back to the military coup on 12 September 1980 (Karlsen, 2007, p. 3). One reason for the coup was the increasingly popular support of the PKK, which was regarded as a threat to the authorities (van Bruinessen, 1988; see article II). The PKK was hit particularly hard by the military repression (White, 2000, p. 33), as thousands of members of the PKK were imprisoned (McDowell, 2000, p. 420).

According to Eccarius-Kelly (2002), the 1980 coup proved to be a crucial event for Kurdish radicalisation in Europe. Hundreds of thousands of Turkish citizens fled to Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium to escape persecution. The more liberal Turkish constitution of 1961 was changed by limiting civil rights, freedom of the press, and reducing the influence of the trade unions in order to break the growing Kurdish resistance and nationalism. Written and spoken Kurdish was banned, so also were Kurdish cultural activities, (Eccarius-Kelly, 2002, p. 92).

After the military takeover, the violence and armed clashes between military units and the PKK escalated in the Kurdish regions in the southeast. At the same time, there was a

dramatic increase in asylum applications from Turkish citizens in particularly to Germany³³. Refugees who claimed cultural and political discrimination in Turkey were to a certain degree accepted. Those political refugees who received asylum transferred their political resistance networks to Europe. “This changed the Diasporas from predominantly a-political guest worker communities to political networks and more homeland-oriented political activism” (Eccarius-Kelly, 2002, p.93). The reorganisation of the struggle in Diaspora raised opportunities for mobilisation, recruitment, and political lobbying which strengthened the struggle (van Bruinessen, 2000b), not least in terms of different educational activities in Kurdish communities. A significant number of Kurdish youth followed the education courses initiated by the PKK.

4.10 Reorganising the struggle in Diaspora

Without the Kurdish Diaspora movement, the Kurds, also those living in Turkey, might not have developed into a topic of political interest in Europe. Eccarius-Kelly (2002) found that during the last two decades Kurdish Diaspora has gradually changed from a-political guest worker communities to a mobilised Diaspora. She noticed that German-born Kurds, many never even having learnt to speak Kurdish, see themselves as members of a Kurdish community, attracted to the notion of belonging to an ethnic community. A *mobilised* Diaspora, according to Alinia (2004), is organised around political projects and refers to the formation of transnational networks linking Diaspora to the countries of origin, and to other countries. It involves the contraction of a collective identity that is reproduced and maintained within these networks (Alinia, 2004, pp. 113-114). The large-scale migration and the establishment of transnational institutions, like Kurdish media, have led to a transnational or a diasporic space (op.cit, p. 196).

After 1984, political activities increased in Europe giving Turkey the opportunity to monitor the political networks of Kurds (Eccarius-Kelly 2002). After 1999, and the arrest of Abdullah Öcalan, the Kurdish Diaspora had to change its organisational and strategic activities in order to adjust to the new political reality. The original goal of an independent Kurdistan was changed to claiming political, cultural and linguistic rights in Turkey. The organisation used demonstrations to send messages, and political allies in Europe often attended these rallies (op.cit, p. 93).

³³ About 350,000 Turkish citizens applied for asylum in Germany between 1980 and 1990 (Eccarius-Kelly 2002, p. 93).

Organisational and strategic changes presupposed easy communication between Diaspora and the homeland. In the years to come, satellite TV and media linked Kurds together across borders. From a grassroots supported guerrilla the PKK transformed to a transnational social and political movement seeking international support.

The 1980 coup in Turkey was aimed at crushing the radical forces arising during the 1960s and 1970s. However, through the mass exodus that it caused, the state contributed to the re-organisation of the struggle abroad. Instead of eradication of the Kurdish left on a national level, the PKK became a transnational movement and Diaspora came to represent an extension of the struggle.

4.11 Becoming global through transnational activities

Martin van Bruinessen (2000b) claims that the term *transnational* refers to various types of relations and networks that transcend national boundaries. Like the term *national*, which often refers to states or to political communities that are not necessarily co-extensive with states, the term transnational may also cause confusion by conflating rather different types of situations. van Bruinessen argues that the term transnational may be appropriate when referring to the networks connecting Kurdish Diaspora communities in Europe and Turkey. As the international community does not regard Kurdistan as a nation state, Kurds are regarded as stateless. Diaspora offered an opportunity for the Kurds in this regard. As Adamson (2005) argues, globalisation creates incentives and opportunities for non-state political entrepreneurs to operate transnationally. Just as mobility of people, capital and ideas are important for building new and dynamic forms of knowledge and transnational networks, globalisation encourage political entrepreneurs to engage in political processes that stretch across national boundaries (Adamson, 2005, p. 33). Transnational activities include what Gran (2008) terms *social remittances*, which is ideas, behaviours, identities, gender patterns or social capital flowing from Diaspora communities to the country of origin. These are transferred when migrants go on return visits, but also through letters, emails, videos or phone calls. Social remittances can also refer to professional or educational skills that are acquired in Europe, and utilised in the country of origin (Gran, 2008, p. 121-122).

Kurdish Diaspora counts more than one million Kurds, and is one of the largest in the world (Özcan, 2006). The awareness among Kurds that they are a people has been strengthened in Diaspora and the notion of Kurdistan as a homeland has often been strongest in Diaspora (van Bruinessen, 2000b). In the process of defining the Kurdish identity, these

political conditions and historical events must be taken into consideration (Westrheim, 2005a, p. 108). Kurds educated abroad established the first Kurdish associations, according to van Bruinessen (2000). In Diaspora, they learned to imagine Kurdistan as their common land, and the notion of Kurdistan became a unifying political ideal.

Diaspora members often maintain close bounds to what they perceive as home and their homeland, and to relatives living in other countries. Almost every Kurd has at least one relative abroad and it is not unusual for families to have members scattered all over the world. Due to the diffusion of the Kurdish people, there is no given place all Kurds can refer to when they are facing the question of where their homeland is (Alinia 2004). The idea of a Kurdish homeland is a blend of political discourses and individual wishes, conceptions, longings and experiences. (op.cit, p. 219). Kurdish Diaspora can be seen as a space where the individual emerges more strongly and where identities are deconstructed and reconstructed (see Alinia, 2004; Hassanpour, 1994, 1998; van Bruinessen, 1999). Viewed on this background, Kurdistan can be regarded as both a reality and a mental construction. The word home is anchored in at least two dimensions. Kurdishness emerges through the image of a real place and at the same time from mental images nourished among others by Diasporic experiences (Westrheim, 2001b, 2005a). This development is now supplemented by the growth of Kurdish media and communication via TV channels (Alinia, 2004; Hassanpour, 1998). Benedict Anderson's (1991) term *imagined community* could aptly explain this notion of a state without a geographical territory.

The Kurdish Diaspora identity is expressed through the recreation of what Kurdish migrants consider as their lost territories (Westrheim, 2005a). Building on Maurice Halbwachs's (1992) idea that memory, like language, is a social phenomenon as well as an individual one, I argue that there is a cultural dimension to memory. Halbwachs further asserts that the human memory can only function within a collective context and a *collective memory*.

As many Kurds have never been to Kurdistan, the experience of "home" seems to be based on their own imagination coupled with others' narratives of the homeland. The emotional connection to a homeland has made it possible for the Kurds to "preserve" their identity under rather difficult circumstances. The Diaspora-Kurds came to identify with both their Diaspora communities as well as to what they regarded as their homeland Kurdistan (Westrheim, 2005a, p. 108).

4.12 Transnational recruitment

In modern Diaspora communities, it is possible to facilitate the process of recruiting members from the same communities into transnational organisational structures. Various studies of recruitment patterns among militant political and religious groups show that recruitment is usually based initially on friendship ties, personal acquaintances or family connections (Adamson, 2005, p. 35; della Porta & Diani, 2002). Kurds born or raised in Diaspora were a source of recruitment to the PKK (article II). The PKK also recruited members from Australia, and a significant number of European international socialists joined its forces during the war (Flach, 2007).

To Curtis (2005), second-generation migrants tend to be more nationally oriented and identify more with their historical background. He mentions three reasons *why* they are more open to recruitment. First, the difficult integration process. Diaspora-Kurds live in societies that do not want them. This makes some of them reject the host nation while looking elsewhere for acceptance, in the case of the Kurds, towards a homeland. Second-generation youth are more likely to want to return to the homeland. They often believe that the establishment of a Kurdish state will solve the problems their parents faced. It may also seem easier to idealise the homeland at a distance (Curtis, 2005; see Westheim, 2005a).

The second reason for transnationalism to evolve is that Diaspora unveils the deep resources of its members such as, according to Curtis (2005), a collective memory about a golden age, religious beliefs and a notion that they are the chosen people of an ancestral homeland. To members of Diaspora communities the homeland has been taken away, the myths and narratives, however, strengthens it and keeps the nation and the community together. More important, Diaspora communities can influence the views and actions of Kurds in the homeland (Curtis, 2005).

It is somehow difficult to imagine that young people who have grown up in Europe and who have never been to Kurdistan would join the armed struggle. Nevertheless, they did. Many Kurdish families in Europe, as well as in Kurdistan, have lost a son or a daughter who died as a *shhid*, a martyr for the Kurdish cause. The PKK tried to persuade the Kurdish Diaspora that military service in its ranks is a national duty that at least one member per family should fulfil (van Bruinessen, 2000b; see article II).

Diaspora has provided the PKK with a large group of second-generation youth (Curtis, 2005). Because recruits from Diaspora had diverse educational or professional background, they differed from the recruits coming from the Kurdish countryside. Some Diaspora recruits

had a university diploma, vocational school or at least some academic, professional or technological skills that could be of use to the struggle, which became, in line with Gran (2008), valuable social transmittances. ICT and language skills were highly approved by the PKK a point that is also emphasised by van Bruinessen (2000b). As the struggle extended, the PKK needed members who at least had the capability to read and write, but in order for the organisation to get international support, it needed educated members who were positioned in Europe and who had the necessary language skills for lobbying and political work.

The Kurdish struggle, whether it takes place in Kurdistan, Diaspora or Turkey, is regarded as *one* struggle, but with different characteristics and functions. Transnationalism provided new and enhanced educational opportunities and sites for the PKK in which to operate. Kurdish media and satellite TV became sites for knowledge and learning. In the following section, I will touch on the educative aspect of Kurdish media and ICT.

4.13 Kurdish media, culture and language

Modern communication technology, according to Romano (2002, p. 128), in different ways facilitates popular feelings of bitterness and anger into mobilisation and political action. Participation in protests, and the knowledge that similar actions are carried out elsewhere (sometimes worldwide) increases the feeling of togetherness, closeness to the group, and the feeling of fighting for a common cause. This is, as mentioned above, a prerequisite for developing a collective political identity. According to Curtis (2005), technology is the driving force in transnationalism. While ideas give reasons *why* transnationalism exists, technology is *how* it exists. Through the internet people communicate worldwide. Also within communities, communication patterns have changed. Television, radio and the internet are rapidly reshaping the connections in information-spread networks (Curtis, 2005; Hassanpour, 1998).

The PKK has actively initiated and supported the establishment of TV channels, publishing houses, newspapers and websites worldwide, in order to spread information about the organisation and its activities, and to facilitate communication between Kurds.

This has definitely strengthened the struggle in general, and contributed to increasing literacy skills among the people. As one informant stated:

The PKK has played a crucial role in educating the people. We have tried to build various education platforms for the Kurdish people all over the world in order for them to develop their language and skills. We made use of technology both in Kurdistan and Diaspora; media, our own journals, writings in other, radio and TV. Even in the

mountains we have the technical skills, we have courses for members who work in Kurdish TV or radio. Our goal has been, by the help of technology, to narrow the gap between our people and the world and to get them out of their isolation (MI, 2.2006).

As Curtis (2005) claims, national aspiration no longer needs to be local; the internet allows anyone to participate, regardless of their physical location.

Article 49(9) of the Turkish constitution still mandates that no language other than Turkish can be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at institutions of training or education, argues Gunter (2007, p. 121). Despite international pressure among others from the European Union, and minor linguistic reforms in Turkey since 2005, the prerequisite for developing the Kurdish language is not yet present. The development of ICT and the establishment of satellite TV like the current Roj-TV, however, represent extended learning tools that increase the educative possibilities and go beyond the control of the state, even if the state continuously makes efforts to close it down.

Adamson (2005) argues that the availability of satellite television links people to a virtual community that transcends geographic sites. Members of Diaspora communities are able to follow the political situation by watching Kurdish television, buying Kurdish newspapers and logging into websites. Despite being physically separate, they experience that the simultaneous flow of information creates a feeling of closeness. It is relatively easy to set up a website as a virtual gathering place for a transnational community, and to use it to market a new identity category (Adamson, 2005, p. 37). Satellite television challenges state monopolies and the articulation of a national identity. From the 1990s, Kurdish television stations had a similar effect in Turkey when they broadcast banned Kurdish-language programmes, including Kurdish language lessons from Europe. Kurdish media, and especially the satellite TV, have played an important role in the creation of a Kurdish cultural identity (Hassanpour, 1998; see also Alinia, 2004; Westrheim, 2005a). As Hassanpour et al. (1996, p. 375) argue, the Kurds have been able to build a school in the sky³⁴.

According to Curtis (2005), technology is promoting transnationalism in various ways. It is crucial especially to a stateless people like the Kurds. The Kurdish language never had the opportunity to develop, and Kurdish television and the internet have had great impact on communication between Kurds across borders. Through access to Kurdish TV and the internet a standardised Kurdish language has developed. Television, according to Hassanpour

³⁴ MED-TV was launched in 1995 in England by the Kurdish community and watched by Kurds in Europe and the Middle East (Hassanpour et al. 1996, p. 375). Its present successor is Roj-TV. The channel has been closed down several times due to political pressure from Turkey on the host counties.

(1998) is more powerful than both radio and printed press. Televised messages exceed social borders of illiteracy, regionalism, age, gender and religion. Kurds now teach themselves and their children to read and write their mother tongue, and Kurdish TV gives instructions for such training to millions of viewers and has become a powerful tool in the creation of national culture and identity.

The PKK has established alternative educational sites on many arenas. The organisation teaches and practices political education across borders, despite severe political hindrances. Two political thinkers who have emphasised the importance of political education regardless of physical borders are Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci. In the following, I will look at the PKK education on the background of their ideas.

5.0 SITUATING THE STUDY THEORETICALLY

5.1 Introduction

From the early planning of this study, the critical emancipatory perspectives on adult education and political education as described by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire have been a central motivator. Freire's perspectives resonate with how the PKK perceives education and educational activities. The main purpose of critical pedagogy is to raise the consciousness of those being oppressed because of historically situated structures tied to race, class and gender (Carr & Kemnis, 1986; Carr, 1995; Freire, 1996 [1972]; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; Kincheloe, 2005). Critical educators have helped us to see the connection between individual and societal emancipation (Biesta, 2006, p. 14). The emancipatory aspect of education is not primarily an individual enterprise but something that develops through interaction between the members of a society.

In this chapter, I intend to highlight the importance of Freire's perspectives on education and his use of concepts such as critical consciousness, transformation and critical literacy, supplemented with insights from the Italian Marxist and social theoretician, Antonio Gramsci. Freire and Gramsci may be regarded as two of most important researchers in the field of political education and political philosophy. Both were concerned about literacy and the role of the intellectual. In this chapter, I will also explore concepts related to resistance and collective action, recruitment and identity within the frame of social and political movements. Themes related to these concepts are raised in the narratives of the informants and are central in the three articles. The theoretical approaches seem fruitful in the analysis of the educational aims of the PKK, as they are constituted in the narratives of the informants.

In order to reach a deeper understanding of the narratives of the informants in the light of the concepts and theoretical underpinnings, I will here describe a Freirian perspective on critical pedagogy.

5.2 Critical pedagogy: the Freirian perspective

Critical pedagogy, as it evolves from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996 [1972])³⁵, emanates from the well-established discourse of critical theory (see Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Freire, 1996 [1972]; Gadotti, 1999; Giroux, 1988; Kincheloe, 2005; McLaren, 2003), and has its

³⁵ The first edition of this book was published in 1972. In this thesis, however, I refer to the 1996 edition.

roots in Marxist and neo-Marxist critical theory. In short, critical pedagogy represents a transformational educational response to institutional ideological domination (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 4). The scholars within critical pedagogy and the Freirian tradition are many; those mentioned here, however, have formed the tradition in significant ways (Aronowitz, 2000; Giroux, 1988; hooks, 2000; Kincheloe, 2005; McLaren, 1997, 2000a, 2003). The Freirian movement, according to Gruenewald (2003), insists that education is always political, and that educators and students should become transformative intellectuals and cultural workers capable of identifying and redressing the injustices, inequalities, and myths of an often oppressive world (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 4). Critical pedagogy also seeks to engage learners in what Freire (1996 [1972]) terms *conscientisacao* or [critical] consciousness, a term elaborated from Marxist theory of consciousness, which has been defined as learning how to perceive social, political and economic realities, and to take action against oppressive elements (Gruenewald, 2003, pp. 4-5). Transformation through consciousness is closely linked to Freire's perspective on dialectical relationships. As humans, we are not only *in* the world, but also *with* the world and have the capacity to adapt to a reality, make choices and transform reality (Au, 2007).

The informants in this study claim that they have changed as persons, and that their perception of the world has been altered after having participated in the political education and other activities organised by the PKK. Transformation, however, cannot be achieved if those who engage in these processes believe that the world cannot be changed no matter what they do. For Freire, the politics of liberation is essentially about activity or *doing* on the basis of a *language of hope* (McLaren & Leonard, 2002, p. 3). The force underpinning liberation is the desire for change and the belief that liberation is possible.

5.3 A place in the world

Whilst critical pedagogy is occupied with situating education and knowledge in the everyday lives of those being oppressed, theorists often fail to see how relationships of power and domination are inscribed in material places (Gruenewald, 2003). A key phrase in Freire's critical vocabulary is *reading the word and the world* (or the places in the world that we know). It focuses on the importance of people telling their own stories (reading the world), in a place where people may be both affirmed and challenged to see how individual stories in local communities are connected to larger patterns of domination and resistance (op.cit, p. 5). I will exemplify this by an excerpt from one of my informants:

The PKK is a result of the needs of the Kurdish people. Despite the Kurds being an ancient people in the Middle East, they have been frozen in time, place and movement. In order to make changes we worked with the farmers and the peasants in the cornfields and we said: look, you are creating all this on your own land, so you need to ask for your share, for your rights. Simultaneously we had the opportunity to discuss property, land rights; why their land was controlled by the *aghas* and the state, and how they were enslaved to work for others on a land that was originally theirs. We tried to change their minds, give them aspirations and a feeling of being able to change their lives and the place they were tied to (M, 3.2.2006).

The struggle of the PKK can partly be explained through its situatedness within a specific experienced territory and through the marginality of the people caused by Kurdish landlords and the Turkish state. Even though the PKK has transformed into a transnational movement, it continues to have its foundation rooted in a concrete physical territory termed Kurdistan. While the PKK today may have moved beyond its situatedness, the movement never has lost its local significance.

In the following, I will clarify certain concepts deriving from Freire such as critical consciousness, transformation and critical literacy. From Gramsci the following concepts are relevant to the study: collective action, the collective subject, hegemony and ‘organic’ intellectuals. The reason for this selection of concepts is that they underpin the three articles where they are exemplified through the informants’ interpretation of the educational and personal outcome from their participation in the PKK movement.

5.4 Critical consciousness and transformation

Freire was particularly concerned with conscientization³⁶ or critical consciousness, which he understood as having the power to transform or fundamentally change the perception of reality (Shor & Freire, 1987). These processes are integrated in what can be termed *transformative action*, crucial in order to change the structure of a given society (McLaren & Leonard, 2000).

The term conscientization or critical consciousness derives from Marx and is adopted and elaborated by Freire and Gramsci. Freire’s emphasises that the development of conscientization or critical consciousness and transformation are social processes. He further asserts that there is no dichotomy between human beings and the world around them (Au 2007). For Gramsci, consciousness entails critical thoughts meaning to question critically one’s conception of the world (Coben, 1998, p. 36), and starting with “[...] the consciousness

³⁶ “Conscientization” is a concept used by Freire, often translated as consciousness raising or critical consciousness.

of what one really is, and ‘knowing thyself’ as a product of the historical process which has deposited in you [...]’ (SPN, 2005, p. 324). According to Coben (1998), Freire himself describes conscientization as the awakening of critical awareness emanating from a critical educational effort based on favourable historical conditions. It is a process involving passages through different stages corresponding to different levels of consciousness (Freire, 1996 [1972], p. 36). The first passage described here involves breaking the *culture of silence* of the oppressed³⁷ (Coben, 1998, p. 72). If conscientization is the aim of the education process, Coben (1998, p. 76) argues, then Freire’s concepts of praxis and dialogue are interrelated principles on which the consciousness process rests. The process of human critical reflection on the world and taking conscious transformative action with regard to that world is what Freire terms praxis (Au, 2007). To Freire praxis is not enough, it has to be followed by dialogue, which means the encounter between people, mediated by the world, in order to *name* the world (Au, 2007, p. 77). Freire regards reflection and action as joint parts of the process of transformation of social, economic and political realities.

Critical consciousness is at the core of the educational aspirations of the PKK. Without critically questioning of the world there will be no transformation of or changes in the society. Antonio Gramsci (SPN, 2005) focuses on the significance of critical self-awareness and critical social awareness in transformation processes. As already mentioned this is akin to Freire’s term conscientization (consciousness) where he considers self-awareness as a process entailing cultural action³⁸ and the power to change the lived reality (1996 [1972]). If you want to understand the prevailing form of consciousness in any social formation, Allman (1999, pp. 37-38) argues, the place to start is with real people and their activities.

Transformation is a key concept in the education of the PKK. It is the process where the subject moves from ignorance to critical understanding of his or her suppressed situation. In line with Marxist ideology, once the people [or the class] become conscious of their own oppressed circumstances and its sources, they will revolt against the oppressors and seek to generate a qualitatively different kind of society³⁹. The struggle for liberation, which Freire terms cultural action for freedom, is carried out in opposition to the dominating power elite

³⁷ In this thesis, the term oppressed is used more generally for the subordinated position of the Kurds within Turkey. Some scholars have been critical of Freire’s universal use of the term oppression in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Coben, 1998, p. 94), especially scholars within feminist theory (hooks, 2000, p. 148), a criticism that Freire responds to in his later works (see Freire & Macedo, 2000, p. 148).

³⁸ *Cultural action* includes all products, ideas and practices of human beings.

³⁹ <http://science.jrank.org/pages/8675/Class-Marxist-Transformation.html>, downloaded November 6, 2007

(Coben, 1998, p. 97). In order to become a PKK member the individual has to transform on many levels (see articles II, and III). Without a basic understanding of the transformation process, which is rooted in praxis, it is difficult to understand the ideology and activities of the PKK as an organisation.

As conscious human beings, we can discover how we are conditioned by the dominant ideology in society (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 13). According to Gramsci (SPN, 2005) ideology can be approached through common sense discourses. It is, in Freire's words, about obtaining the capacity to be critical (Freire, 2001, p. 37). Against this background, it is possible to learn how to become free through a political struggle. This struggle arises from knowing we are not free, which is the foundation for transformation. To change the way we think about the world is to develop the power to critically perceive the way we exist in the same world and that the world is not only a static reality but as a reality that can be transformed (Freire, 1996 [1972]) In the three articles included, the informants describe how they gradually gained consciousness through praxis and critical questioning of the world and themselves as beings in the world. This growing awareness transformed the way they perceived the knowledge and identity that was imposed on them in Turkish schools. They all emphasised that before attending the PKK movement, they felt that they were no one; deprived of dignity and self respect. The education of the PKK, according to the informants, taught them to perceive life as a process of *becoming*.

According to Aronowitz (2000), genuine learning or transformation presupposes active participants who can control their own education. Changing society means through critical reflection changing one's way of thinking, behaving and acting. The foundation of Freire's work is the assumption that personal and political transformation is possible. He asserted that a structure, system, or institution of oppression must not be perceived as "[...] a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which [the oppressed] can transform" (Aronowitz, 2000, p. 31). This means that critical consciousness of the reality in which one is situated is imperative to social transformation. It is obvious from the informants' narratives in this investigation that these processes can also be facilitated through political education in a liberation movement such as the PKK.

Processes of critical consciousness and transformation are fundamental when it comes to understanding Freire's perspective on literacy and education. The educative process is never neutral. In a culture of silence, people are taught to accept what oppressive forces want them to believe. Education and literacy, based on the process of consciousness and

transformation, break the silence and make people aware of their conditions and democratic rights (Bee, 1981, p. 42).

5.5 Critical literacy: Reading the word and the world

The concept of consciousness is crucial to Freire's understanding of critical literacy and political education. He regards literacy as a form of liberation that breaks the silence of people who are taught to accept what is handed down to them. Critical literacy brings people to awareness of their conditions and of their democratic rights to participate in decision-making processes. Becoming aware of one's democratic rights, and gradually being better equipped to participate in democratic life, is also termed *political literacy* (Crick, 1998, p. 3). While Freire's concept conscientization has the connotation of consciousness-raising aiming at perceiving the world in new ways, Lister (1994, p. 63) argues that political literacy is the ability to *read* political situations. Both processes empower learners, help them acquire new knowledge, and develop new skills. This enables people to look at the political situation in the Kurdish regions with a different perspective, also in terms of participation in the rebuilding of a society that has been torn asunder by war and political conflict. According to Hanemann (2005) literacy is attributed a key role both in preventing conflict and rebuilding post-conflict societies. The dialectical approach to education, which was emphasised by Paulo Freire, signifies within a scenario of conflict or post-conflict that the education system has the potential to maintain the conditions that lead to violent conflict or to overcome and heal them (Hanemann, 2005, p. 2). When the formal educational system fails to take on the responsibility to rebuild society, this educative task has to be moved to alternative educational sites, like in the case of the PKK.

Not only did Freire establish an effective and efficient method of literacy education among the peasantry of Angicos Brazil, according to Bee (1981), he also developed a methodology and philosophy of education that was distinctly political. Indeed, this politically motivated literacy work later resulted in Freire's exile in Chile (1964-1969) which influenced the formulation of his critical pedagogy. It is important to mention that the concepts must be regarded as interrelated: there can be no transformation without consciousness. Literacy in the Freirian sense can hardly be obtained without consciousness and transformation. In order for changes to happen, all these processes have to be continuous.

Critical literacy is understood, according to Shor (2000), as learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed

within specific power relations. A critically literate person will examine his or her ongoing development and reveal the subjective positions from which the world can be understood and acted in. The process of developing critical consciousness leading to transformation depends heavily on critical literacy. Literacy processes, Giroux & McLaren (1997) argue, need not necessarily take place in formal educational institutions. The narratives of the informants' in this study state that critical literacy and political literacy may develop in informal sites: such as mountain camps, prisons and local communities.

Freire (1996 [1972]) was concerned for the vast numbers of illiterate people in Brazil and launched cultural circles in the villages and the slum areas of the city where people were mostly illiterate, and designed educational activities as unlike school programs as possible while situating knowledge in peoples' actual daily realities. A study of the problems facing villagers should lead to critical awareness of the possibilities for action and change expressed through language and action. People would realise that they are conscious beings, and therefore capable of acting upon their world and transforming it (see also Bee, 1981, pp. 39-40). This seems similar to the transformative educational practice of the PKK.

Critical literacy in this sense is opposed to the term functional literacy, which is seen by Freire as a gift or a donation to the people (Bee, 1981). In the southeast of Turkey, Kurdish children who attend school seldom reach a level above primary school (5 years of schooling). In addition, they are instructed in a foreign language (Turkish). They may learn the minimum of reading and writing, but not sufficient to become literate in the sense that they become critically and politically aware citizens able to fully participate in society. Literacy in the most basic sense does not necessarily lead into consciousness. In the early years of the PKK Turkish teachers in the region were regarded as state agents. According to the informants, they discriminated against and oppressed Kurdish children because they came to class with different cultural backgrounds and ways of speaking and acting. Freire (1996 [1972]), Fanon (2005 [1961]) and Gramsci (SPN, 2005) emphasise that the interests of the oppressors lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed. The more the oppressed can be led to adapt to the situation; the more easily they can be dominated. An informant said this about her school in Turkey:

In Turkish schools, you have to say "I'm a Turk" 200 times a year. It damages your brain. It is an oppressive education, which uses a completely different language. The teachers are always angry and sometimes beat you. They treated us [Kurdish children] as if we were mentally ill. This is why most people leave school early. Parents do not want their children to be in schools like this. After the war, it became worse. Schools

have been closed, teachers are gone. Children have to travel far to come to school. The result is that more children reject school” (FI, 6.10.2005).

Critical literacy, as it is understood here, encourages people to speak and value language as a tool for changing the society. It is important to bear in mind that literacy and consciousness in this sense not only address the illiterate part of the people, it addresses all.

5.6 Freire and Gramsci – some similarities

The PKK education is highly political, so also are the PKK members’ choices of readings. As mentioned in article II, they seek knowledge from various sources. The concepts of Freire and Gramsci are important to the understanding of education as a political enterprise. According to Allman (2001, p. 201), this kind of radical education seeks to enable people to change the suppressive situation which they experience. It involves a struggle to challenge and transform the social and epistemological relations into which people enter.

As mentioned, there is a close link between politics and education. The two thinkers experienced this through persecution leading to yearlong exile for Freire, a period that influenced and shaped his emancipatory view on education, and prison for Gramsci. His imprisonment lasted for 10 years; he was released in 1936 due to severe health problems of which he died shortly after. It is generally recognised that Gramsci developed his most original ideas in prison in the *Prison Notebooks*. During his imprisonment, he organised a prison school (*scuola dei confinati*) on the remote island of Ustica (Borg & Mayo, 2002, p. 93). Freire and Gramsci share an ideological foundation underpinning their works, and they both have a common understanding of the political nature of education (Schugurensky, 2000, p. 517). Gramsci, like Freire, claims that formal institutions have no monopoly on education. Education, according to both, takes place in a variety of collective contexts; most of which have the potential to be transformed (Allman, 1999, p. 85). Through educational projects in the mountains, in prison and in the Kurdish communities, the PKK seeks to establish a foundation for political literacy and action.

Political action, according to Hoare & Smith (2005, p. xxiii), is the means by which the single consciousness is brought into contact with the social and natural world in all its forms. This is what Gadotti (1996, p. xvii) would term transformative action. Freire and Gramsci share with Marx the notion that what we are as human beings does not exist outside or prior to our relationships with other people and our natural and social circumstances. Man’s relation to the world is always imparted through social relations and cultural means. To

Gramsci human beings are the sum of their social and cultural relations. Our individuality is the product of social relations that constantly change through praxis and new social constellations. The informants' stories are therefore closely linked to the *self*, on a collective as well as on an individual level and to the political actions in which the individual or group is engaged. This is what Gramsci terms the *collective subject* (Casey, 1996, p. 222), which is what the individual becomes when s/he acts together with other individuals who want the same changes (SPN, 2005, p. 353)⁴⁰, whether it is within a specific class, a party or as in this thesis, to members and supporters of the PKK.

Hegemony is a central term in Gramsci's writings and was developed in the Prison Notebooks⁴¹. His concept of hegemony is regarded as a major contribution to Marxist theory and a key to an understanding of his educative conception of politics.

Gramsci argues that there are two forms of hegemony that a class, a group, a party or a government can perform upon an inferior group or people⁴². The first form of hegemony is based on oppression through violence, the second through a common consent of *common sense assumptions*. Common sense is the "truth" (the accepted worldview of a group or society including values and beliefs), that people in general would agree on, a perception of the world that is in favour of the dominant or hegemonic class. Common sense assumptions, according to Fairclough (2001), are practices, and representations perceived as given and universal. Common sense assumptions are internalised through state institutions such as the school system.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony is based on the idea that a government or a state cannot enforce control over any particular class or structure unless supported by other, more intellectual methods. In short, hegemony can be understood as the political power deriving from intellectual and moral leadership, authority or consensus as distinguished from armed force. Certain groups and peoples choose armed struggle to gain what they see as their fundamental rights. Gramsci, however, argues that armed struggle cannot solve political problems in modern societies. In the case of the PKK, however, armed struggle was regarded as the only option to the political situation at the time when the organisation occurred. It has never been regarded as the only means to change the oppressed situation of the Kurds.

⁴⁰ SPN: *Selections from Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, edited and translated by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (2005)

⁴¹ Gramsci filled thirtythree notebooks in prison, and wrote numerous letters to his family and friends. His writings were filled with political ideas, arguments and critiques of the prevailing modes. The writings gave a focus to his life in prison and he continued working on them until his death (Coben 1998, p. 12).

⁴² Here, I refer to his *Prison Notebooks*.

To Gramsci hegemony can be used both negatively and positively; the latter when people become aware of hidden suppressive discourses and realise that they have the power to change their living conditions. Taking Gramsci's idea of a collective subject as a point of departure, hegemony and transformative action are central for understanding the process of transformation. It is a move from common sense to good sense that may be regarded as the "healthy" process in common sense.

In political education, a critical understanding of how the past informs the present is important in order to transform previous traces of ideologies and common sense assumptions of the dominant discourses in society (Giroux, 2002, p. 49). Breaking the hegemonic power of common sense assumptions, is important in Gramsci's writings.

According to Gramsci, the greatest challenge to political and progressive movements will be to question and change taken for granted common sense assumptions. This will always involve a new perspective on reality, the development of new values and new practices. In this process education 'from below' is an essential transformative element.

Resistance or opposition to common sense is sometimes termed counter-hegemonic actions. Related to the themes in articles II, and III, one counter-hegemonic act of the PKK is to critically question and oppose those common sense assumptions and hegemonic forces that suppress the Kurdish people, and political education and political literacy were means to achieve this goal. In order to be empowering, education had to be anchored in people's everyday lives. This transformative educational process is close to what Gramsci terms "war of position" (SPN, 2005; Coben, 1998, p. 17), which is the kind of alternative long "revolution" that mobilises institutions and people in civil society in order for changes to happen (Coben, 1998, p. 15). For Gramsci, Allman (1999, p. 106) states, hegemony is always contested; it can be used for good or ill.

The movement from common sense to good sense entails both the collective and the individual aspect or the process wherein the collective subject develops. Good sense is the power that develops through joint action. It is a form of consciousness that awakens when the actual hegemony is questioned and opposed through collective, counter-hegemonic actions. These concepts can be further investigated through the writings of Freire (1996 [1972]) and Gramsci (SPN, 2005)⁴³. This struggle is, according to Gramsci, not limited to consciousness rising but must aim at the creation of a progressive consciousness, or what Freire terms critical consciousness. According to Coben (2002), Gramsci maps the route from common

⁴³ See also Paula Allman (1999) who compares Freire's and Gramsci's work on education

sense to good sense at both the individual and the collective level. At an individual level, the development of good sense entails criticising one's own conceptions of the world. This process is individual as well as collective (Coben, 2002, p. 271). 'Man' enters into a process where social relations continuously change and as a result, the self (or the identity) changes as well. The process towards a collective good sense is envisaged by Gramsci as the formation of a collective consciousness (Coben, 2002, p. 272). The informants in this study particularly emphasise the necessity of personal development in order to achieve collective goals (see articles I, II, and III).

Gramsci's theory of hegemony aims at explaining how the dominant class⁴⁴ controls civil society through consent and acceptance of the status quo by subordinate groups. It was the popular consensus in civil society that had to be challenged through education. He believed that the most effective way to counter the cultural hegemony of the dominant group was through a change in the educational system that should relate more to everyday life and focus on reflection. If changes in the educational system were impossible; education should take place in alternative sites. In lack of formal institutions, Coben (2002, p. 263) argues that adult political education carried out within a context of a political movement [like the PKK], has to facilitate the process whereby learners move from common sense to good sense by developing critical consciousness. In Gramsci and Freire's view, this would prepare the ground for counter-hegemonic actions.

As already mentioned, Gramsci emphasised the formation of an active historical subject capable of transforming society. This, however, requires a public educational system that transforms students of subordinate groups into young men and women who are critical, conscious and disciplined (Fontana, 2002, p. 33). In Gramsci's view, the traditional intellectuals had failed to change the society in an emancipatory direction. In order for the oppressed classes to liberate themselves, people had to develop their own "organic" intellectuals rooted in the historical experiences and every day life of the people. Organic intellectuals are so called because they perform an educational and organisational role on behalf of their class [people], giving it "homogeneity and an awareness of its own function, not only in the economic but also in the social and political field" (SPN, 2005, p. 5). For Gramsci, the revolutionary party of the working class [the PKK when they claim to act on behalf of the people] acts as a "collective intellectual" (SPN, 2005, 335; Coben, 1998, p. 37)

⁴⁴ In this context Gramsci's class perspective replaces the political and military regime in Turkey, which of course is also based on class.

The intellectuals would be at the forefront in such processes in order to make the people aware of their own potential. The role of the intellectual is crucial in this regard. If students from the working classes or with a peasant background should develop into organic intellectuals, Gramsci (SPN, 2005, p. 45) claimed, they had to learn how to study and how to acquire physical self-discipline and self-control in order to catch up with students from upper classes, who had numerous advantages regarding their family environment (Borg, Buttigieg & Mayo, 2002, p. 11). These perspectives are, according to my informants, integral in the PKK education. Through processes of assimilation, the Kurds are alienated from what they perceive as their historical and cultural background. A central educative aim of the PKK was to transform the hegemonic perceptions of history and knowledge that were enforced upon the Kurds by the Turkish school system.

To conduct research in conflicting politicised fields is challenging (see article I). In the following two chapters the methodological framework and the ethical aspects of the study will therefore be described and discussed.

6.0 SITUATING THE STUDY METHODOLOGICALLY

The intention with this chapter is to focus on methodological issues of relevance for the study that has not been adequately dealt with in the three articles included: the research design as well as the research process. I will also make a closer presentation of the informants and the fieldwork.

6.1 Approaching the Field

During the work on this thesis, I have often been asked why the leadership of an organisation like the PKK has permitted me entry to one of their camps, allowing me to have my photo taken with the leaders and conducting interviews with the guerrillas. Are they not afraid of being recognised - or worried that their camps will be discovered? There are several good answers to these questions. One is that the PKK is not a clandestine organisation. It is a combat organisation fighting according to the International Humanitarian Law (IHL)⁴⁵. Moreover, its political representatives and members work openly. In order to develop, and to address the public, the PKK has to open its doors to the outside world: to journalists, political delegations, NGOs, and researchers. In doing so, they take a risk. My case was somewhat special. I already knew members of the PKK, and they trusted me, so it was easier for me to get entry to the camps.

Still, as a researcher, I was of course dependent on individuals who were able and willing to introduce me to the field. In this study a main contact, who I met at a political meeting in Europe, has functioned as the link between me as a researcher, the informants, and the interpreters participating in the study. The same contact person also made the practical arrangements concerning the fieldwork in North Kurdistan (Turkey) and South Kurdistan (North Iraq). This person is a trusted member of the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK), and his name functioned as a gate opener to the field. Obviously, good contacts are necessary when approaching sensitive fields. These persons are normally themselves deeply engaged in the work of the organisation and have the confidence of the members. On the other hand, there is of course the risk that the informants are selected with an aim of expressing the views of the organisation and that the informants' stories are heavily tainted by the organisation's ideology. These questions have been issues for reflection throughout the research process.

⁴⁵ Defend International Opinion Paper, launched 2 June 2008, Brussels. *The Kurds & International Agreements*, "The Kurds in Turkey" (First Stage). http://www.defendinternational.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=209&Itemid=129

6.2 “Tell Europe”: Reflections on observations

Marginalised groups may perceive research as an opportunity to ‘tell the outside world’ what the group is “really” like (Fielding, 2004, p. 251). This was very much the case in my fieldwork. Towards the end of one interview, one of the PKK-informants urged me to “tell Europe” the true story of their struggle. I later realised that this was actually what many of them expected when they agreed to participate in the interview. As pointed out by Fielding (2004) and Pieke (1995), people who live in areas of war or political unrest sometimes expect the researcher to act as a messenger. In this way, the research is not only of interest to other researchers, but may also be of use to the people studied. With reference to the Kurdish question, Koivunen (2001, p. 51) argues that research may serve as a tool for local people to de-contextualise the events constituting their lives and give future relevance to their society. It could even be argued that it is the moral obligation of the researcher to use the knowledge produced through research in the best interest of the people who are being researched. When Scheper-Hughes (1992) conducted fieldwork in the 1960s, she watched hundreds of children die in a Brazilian shantytown during her fieldwork. Her anthropological research became committed to the people she studied. In this respect, field of knowledge is also a field of action and academic writing can be a process of resistance (Koivunen, 2001).

My interviews with the informants in North Kurdistan confirmed this. One of them asked me to add my voice to theirs, an act of solidarity that would strengthen their message, get their opinions through and help them to move from silence to speech. On this Falla (1994) states that intellectuals [researchers] can act as intermediaries by lending their voices to those who have witnessed and lived through the “macabre” (Green, 1994, p. 230).

6.3 General methodological approach

In the previous chapters, I have presented the research questions, described and discussed the context of the study, theoretical perspectives, main concepts, and previous research. In this chapter, I will describe the methodological approach underpinning this project. Data collected through qualitative interviews and participatory observation is the empirical foundation for the three articles included. The research question as well as the theoretical perspectives adopted call for a qualitative methodological approach, which aims at revealing how the informants express and construct their reality (Dysthe, Samara & Westrheim, 2006). Qualitative interviews seemed appropriate when seeking the meaning content in the informants’ stories (Hatch, 2002; Kvale, 1997; Silverman, 2001, and in order to better

understand the context in which the study is situated and the informants' frames of reference: the mountains, the prison and the communities - participatory observation was conducted. Fieldwork in areas of political unrest is challenging, not least in terms of ethical issues. Reflections on ethical dilemmas, and how to get access to the field, are therefore discussed in a separate chapter.

In the following sections, I will explore the qualitative critical research paradigm as described by Hatch (2002, pp. 16-17) which is very much in line with critical perspectives emanating from critical pedagogy in the tradition of Paulo Freire. In this sense, methodology and theory complement each other.

6.4 Reflections on qualitative interviews

The qualitative research conversation is, according to Kvale (1997), a site of knowledge production and exchange of perspectives between two or more persons talking about a theme of common interest. There is a mutual interdependence between human interaction (the interview) and the production of knowledge. The qualitative interview contributes to the concretisation and structuring of the dialogue (Kvale, 1997, p. 26). The interview typically balances past, present and future perspectives, mirroring hopes, desires and beliefs. Interviews are time-consuming and demanding, both for the *knower*, who is regarded as the person who is seeking information and for the *known*, the person who is providing the information (Ladson-Billing, 2004, p. 266).

A main characteristic of the research interview is its dependence on the one conducting the interview, the researcher. The researcher has taken the initiative to do the interview, and the researcher is the person who is seeking knowledge in order to learn something about the informant's life-world. The researcher has to take into account the technical and human dimensions of the project, reflections on ethical implications, the researcher's role in the process, and how to master the unforeseen; those situations that cannot be planned in advance. I experienced this during my first period of fieldwork in 2004 (article I), before I realised how challenging this kind of field might be. Even though I had planned for unexpected events, things happened that I could not have prepared for. This was of course a challenge there and then, but as article I shows, these incidents also became interesting dimensions of the project, worthwhile considering for anyone who plans and conducts projects in fields of political unrest.

6.5 Qualitative research: a critical perspective

Before I describe the research design, I will briefly outline some characteristics of qualitative methodology – and more specifically – the critical perspectives of the tradition.

A characteristic of qualitative research is that it contains a set of interpretative practices. It does not belong to one scientific discipline more than another, nor does it emphasise one method above others. It embraces a range of approaches, theories and methods and must be regarded as a field of independent investigation strategies. A significant aspect of qualitative research is that there is no obvious or objective way to understand the world. What we believe we understand is filtered through our own presuppositions and prejudices. Therefore, what we believe we understand is parts or fragments of histories and information that we try to link together in order to ascribe meaning to it. In line with Berger & Luckmann (1966), the point of departure for my project is the understanding of the world as socially constructed. Qualitative research seeks to develop procedures that are suited to capture the world that the researcher is trying to understand.

Seeing research as a political act, influenced by ongoing political flows, discourses and changes, Kvale (1997, p. 62) argues that it is more important than ever for researchers to take a critical stance towards society. Kincheloe & McLaren (1994) emphasise that researchers within the critical qualitative tradition, often have an ideological approach to the field studied and seek to apply their work as a form of social or cultural critique (op.cit, p. 139). As theoretical tradition, the critical perspective within qualitative research has its roots in the “Frankfurter-School”. Critical pedagogy, developing in the wake of this tradition, regards education and school as an arena for empowerment and resistance to oppressing forces. It contains a democratic potential where teachers and students by joint effort can develop a liberating or emancipatory pedagogical framework for the activities (Kincheloe, 2005; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). As we have already seen, such ideas underpin the work of Paulo Freire, the founder of critical pedagogy. Studies located within the critical tradition often seek to unveil and confront injustice within a certain society or potential injustice in societies. Critical researchers emphasise their solidarity with the struggle for a better future, which means that many of them have a political intention with their research.

Hatch (2002, pp.16-17) terms the critical methodological approach the *Critical/Feminist Paradigm*. The trustworthiness of the critical researcher relies on his or her ability to make his or her political engagement and position transparent throughout the research process. The researcher’s self-awareness and self-critique is crucial in this regard.

For critical theorists, the world consists of historically situated structures that have impact on the life chances of the individual, which leads to differential treatment of individuals based on race, gender and social class. I will return to the critical paradigm under the section describing the analysis of data.

6.6 Culture of Silence

One aim of the critical paradigm is to unveil hidden structures of oppression in school curricula, and one reason why many Kurdish students have dropped out of school and joined the PKK.

A particular challenge when interviewing people living under oppressive conditions is that you often are reminded what Paulo Freire (1996 [1972])⁴⁶ and Franz Fanon (2005 [1961])⁴⁷ termed the *culture of silence*. Both Fanon and Freire underline in their writings how oppression, by rendering the people invisible and silent, creates an image of subordination in the consciousness of the suppressed. External changes, said Freire, are not enough to alter these conditions. It has to alter through processes of transformation. The latter, however, can hardly take place without dialogue. Through what Freire termed educational praxis, he showed the liberating potential in dialogue. Freire considers dialogue as part of the development of critical consciousness (Au, 2007). If exercised properly, dialogue could raise awareness and thereby increase the individual's possibilities for transformation and change.

Language has the potential to open up or block mutual understanding and in this study, it was crucial to establish some sort of common platform, or a *zone for deliberation* (article I) where difficult themes could be aired in order to reach better understanding. The qualitative interview can thus be regarded as a cultural meeting between informants and researchers with diverse ethnic background and language. On the other hand, transparency of the researcher's intention with the research study was crucial in order to build mutual confidence between the informants and me as a researcher. It serves to mirror the researcher's genuine interest in the informants not only as objects of the research but also as human beings.

In interview situations where the researcher and informant have different linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds, there are always underlying tensions and a possibility of misunderstanding. Lillejord (2000) emphasises that language in itself influences and facilitates action. The researcher will always have a linguistic and cultural benefit that

⁴⁶ Paulo Freire uses this term in order to describe the reality of the oppressed; whose voices are seldom heard.

⁴⁷ Franz Fanon (1924 -1961) is the ideologue of the Algerian liberation war. Fanon has played a crucial role regarding the understanding of the consequences of colonialism and to postcolonial theory.

provides her with a certain position through the mastering of the dominant culture's linguistic codes and cultural capital (Lillejord, 2000, p. 51). Therefore, it should be crucially important for the researcher, in collaboration with the informant, to be aware of and name possible subtle oppressive elements present in all meetings where the relations are asymmetric. Berliner underlines that even if the researcher has the best of intentions regarding equality and mutuality, the power aspect will always influence the meeting (Berliner, 1997). Conducting interviews in multicultural fields also carries the possibility for serious misinterpretations. Statements can be interpreted in a perspective favoured by the researcher. We often see what we want to see. Still, it is not possible to fully eliminate the power dimensions that exist between two or more persons. By naming them, however, the researcher develops a more critical awareness and thereby the chance to control them.

6.7 The interpreters and translation

As I unfortunately do not speak Kurdish or Turkish, translation was crucial in order to conduct the interviews. Preferably, in research projects the interpreter should be skilled and familiar to the ethics of translation. In this study, however, I only had limited, if any, influence on the choice of interpreter, and had to rely on the person who was chosen by the organisation.

Normally, when approaching the informants, the researcher is dependent on whether the informants want to participate or not, and if they do, they are free to withdraw from the investigation at any stage of the process. They can also refuse to talk to the interpreter chosen by the researcher. In research projects that need interpreters, the informants should have the opportunity to comment on the choice of interpreter or make their own suggestion. This would be especially important for interviews where it is expected that the informants will provide the researcher with information that is sensitive or confidential with regards to the informants' private life, political situation or any information that might harm the integrity of the informant. A reasonable solution is to let the informants choose the interpreter.

In this project, the interpreter was chosen by the PKK, and the informants and I had no influence on the selection procedure. I will probably never know whether the informants had any say at all. Given that one or more informants had problems talking to that particular interpreter, there was no way that I could have checked it or changed it and the organisation would probably not have accepted it if I hired an interpreter myself. On the other hand, working with interpreters who had inside knowledge and were accepted by the organisation,

helped me in the interviewing process. I could always ask them additional questions regarding organisational or structural issues. In addition, when misunderstandings occurred, the interpreter made me aware of this. I assume that the interpreter would never dare to misinterpret the expressions of the informants or vice versa. Choosing interpreters from their own ranks was perhaps also a way of making sure that the interpretation moved in favour of the organisation. It has to be added here that all the interpreters I cooperated with during the research process maintained a high standard when it came to language skills and professional behaviour in the interview situation.

The necessity of using interpreters of course complicated the interview situation to some extent because I did not get first hand information there and then, and could not always interfere in the conversation to ask additional or spontaneous questions. The content of the translation could now and then be hard to understand, especially when it came to nuances and details and there was a risk of losing valuable information on the way from informant to researcher. However, it was also obvious that the pauses of translation made the atmosphere more relaxed. I think this had to do with the presence of the interpreter who reduced mistrust and scepticism. Even though informants had agreed to do the interview, they might have been sceptical and nervous. However, the fact that the interpreter was hand picked by PKK and not by the researcher, made the situation more relaxed.

In this setting, the interpreter also functioned as an insider who opened and locked doors to keep the communication as fluent as possible in highly sensitive surroundings. There are, as Sauar (1996) says with reference to anthropological theory, “keys” and “locks” to communication. These are words, acts, symbols or performances that either introduce a person into communication with a group or person or expel the person from communication (Suar, 1996, p. 155). I experienced that the interpreter was aware of these locks and keys and tried to help me to find the ones that unlocked and to avoid the ones that locked the conversation. The following sections describe the collection and analysis of the data underpinning the project.

6.8 Data collection and analysis

My intention with this thesis is to get an in-depth understanding of how the informants experience knowledge outcome and personal development within the PKK organisation. Qualitative research methodology does not necessarily presuppose a huge number of informants. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p. 35) qualitative research is

rather characterised by what they term small- scale research. In this study, the sample comprised of 16 adults. 14 of the informants are still active PKK members. The majority of the informants represent those who are still devoted to the organisation, and not its critics. I am fully aware that several former members of the PKK have left the organisation for different reasons, and therefore most probably might not agree with all parts of this thesis. During my fieldwork, I also had informal conversations with former PKK members, who had left the organisation due to disagreements and conflicts. It is my overall impression, however, that the reasons they have left are linked to the policy and ideology of the PKK, and less related to the educational and personal aspects.

The 16 informants have different social backgrounds. While some have university degrees, others are functionally illiterate⁴⁸. After the capture of Abdullah Öcalan, some returned from the mountains in order to work for the organisation in local communities. Many also live under cover in Kurdish cities and villages or in Diaspora. A researcher who wants to design a study like this has to deal with a multitude of problems of access and entry to the field. The informants were therefore approached through a gatekeeper who is a person facilitating entrance to the field (Fangen, 2004, p. 63; see also article I). Since I already had a contact person who could present my study and me to potential informants, it later became easier to build confidence (article I). The informants signed no written consent; instead, I explained my study carefully and there seemed to be full approval as long as the representative of the organisation had vouched for me. This of course raises the question of representativity. As I have mentioned, the informants in this study (with the exception of two), were still active PKK members.

The informants living in Kurdistan and in the mountains (Xinere camp) seemed more cautious talking to me than informants I met elsewhere. In North Kurdistan, I had to struggle with severe mistrust before I finally reached a point where I could actually have conversations with my group (article I). Of course, living in an environment of fear does not leave you unaffected. The risks and costs of being a PKK member, a guerrilla or a supporter living in Kurdistan or Turkey are greater than living in the European Diaspora. In Europe, the interviews were carried out in more secure surroundings and in a relaxed atmosphere and there seemed to be no problem talking to me as long as my contact had vouched for me.

In order to identify similarities and differences in the informants' stories I intentionally asked my contact to select a broad sample for the interviews; I wanted diversity in age, gender

⁴⁸ Functional illiteracy means that a person has some ability to read or write. The limited ability is, however, not sufficient to cover the daily practical needs of the person.

and demography. A relatively large number of young people went to the Mountains in the early 1980s and many of them are still there after 25 years. Informants from this group were included. Even though if the informants, and also the interpreters, were approached by the organisation itself, my overall impression is that the informants were talking freely and had no problems in formulating independent opinions, even if they to a large extent were in line with what I assume was the official view of the PKK.

Even though the PKK claim that women constitute a major part of the organisation, only five of sixteen informants in this study are women. It was, however, important to have their voices expressed in the material. I got the opportunity to live and talk to many women when I visited the PKK camp, and my yearlong work on Kurdish issues has provided me with insight into the major contribution of women in the struggle.

6.9 Selection of informants

The 16 informants in this study are long-term members of the PKK who are very familiar with the ideology and the party line. There are two main criteria for the selection of the informants:

1. Informants selected by the party (13)
2. Informants selected by me (3)

Other criteria set for selection of informants were: a) age (20-55 years), b) gender (male and female), c) active members (at least two years), and d) residence (North Kurdistan or Diaspora; primarily Europe). The table below gives an overview of the informants' background, such as residence, gender, age, education, years of imprisonment, years in the guerrilla and contemporary work.

Overview of informants

Residence	Gender	Age	Education	Years Prison	Years Guerrilla	Contemporary work
Europe	M***	43	Master degree	4	0	Politician
Europe	M***	31	Under Graduate	8	4	Journalist Kurdish media
Europe	M***	32	Graduate	1	10	Asylum seeker
Europe	F***	29	Graduate	2	6	Asylum seeker and Worker
Europe	M**	27	Primary school only	0	10	Asylum seeker and worker
Europe	F**	28	Master degree	0	0	Engineer/Community work
Europe	F**	31	Primary school only	0	0	Community work
Europe	F**	37	Graduate	0	3	Community work
Europe	F**	28	Graduate	2	4	Community work
Europe	M**	52	Teacher	15	15	Politician/community work
Europe	M**	35	Graduate	8	12	Community work
Europe	M**	34	Master degree		7	Journalist Kurdish media
Kurdistan	M*	23	Primary school only	2	5	Worker/community
Kurdistan	M*	23	Primary school only	1	3	Worker/community work
Kurdistan	M*	26	Primary school only	3	3	Worker/community work
Kurdistan	M*	34	Primary school only	0	2	Worker/community work

* Informants for article I; ** Informants for article II; *** Informants for article III

In the following section, I will briefly present the informants and give an overview on how and when the empirical data was collected.

6.10 Fieldwork

The fieldwork and data collection spans three periods:

1. North-Kurdistan (Turkey), March 2004 (9 days):

Two group interviews (two days) with four male informants aged 23-34 were conducted in Diyarbakir in 2004. Two of the informants came from nearby Kurdish villages, which were burnt during the *dirty war* (1984-1999); two others came from the city. The informants, who had completed five years of primary school, had joined the armed forces for one to five years. The first encounter with the informants, the interviews and unexpected events during the two days I spent with them, provided valuable data giving direction and content to article I about researching fields of political unrest. I experienced a good deal of mistrust before I finally reached the point where I could actually have a conversation with my four informants. The first meeting took place in an election office in the city centre. Fifteen men were sitting along

the walls when I entered the room with my female interpreter. I presented my project and got no immediate response. After an embarrassing silence and a second try, one of the men suddenly got up and said, “We are ready to go”. I was then picked up by a car and taken to a flat in a 10-floor building outside the city. Having climbed the stairs in total darkness, the barrier was broken. Well settled in the living room, the informants seemed more relaxed and willing to talk.

Later, six days were spent travelling in the Kurdish regions. This appeared to me as an opportunity to get an overall impression of the political context in which the informants live their lives. I participated in two events that were particularly informative for this study. The first was my participation at the *Newroz* celebration (Kurdish New Year) March 22 and the second a visit to an area outside the city in which IDPs⁴⁹ reside.

The traditional Newroz celebration in Diyarbakir is of significant symbolic value to the Kurds. After the capturing of Öcalan, Newroz has transformed into a cultural political mass celebration, and has been crucial to the development of the popular PKK movement. By participating in mass demonstrations or celebrations, people experience that they are not alone. Faced with police attacks or military raids many locals sometimes regard the streets as safer than home, where they are probably less protected and thereby more vulnerable. From 2004, more than a million people participate in the annual Newroz celebration; dressed in Kurdish colours, waving banners and shouting slogans in favour of the PKK. Security police and the military usually closely surveil these activities, and several military helicopters watch the festival area from the air. Diyarbakir currently has more than 1 million inhabitants. During the war in the 1990s, 3-4000 villages were burnt, and more than 3 million villagers were internally displaced from their land, without any compensation. Among these nearly 100 000 are street children who have lost their families. IDPs who did not succeed in fleeing abroad sought refuge in poor areas in nearby cities. The area I visited, together with a representative from Gök-Der, the NGO working on the IDP issue, was located about half an hour outside the city centre. Several children have been killed by the heavy traffic, which passes on both sides of the settlement, as they crossed the streets to collect water. The houses were small and primitive; most families lived in one room. If they were able to earn the necessary money, they built an additional room. There was no electricity and the water system had broken down. Since children had to contribute to the family economy, many were taken out of school. One of the girls in a family desperately wanted to continue school. The family,

49 Internally Displaced Persons. As a result of the war (1984-1999) between Turkey and the PKK, there are about 3 million IDPs in Turkey.

however, could not afford it. As her father said, the schools in Turkey are not for Kurds anyway, so he thought that the daughter was better off earning money by working in the cotton fields.

2. Norway, UK and Belgium during, 2005 and 2007:

In this period, all-together twelve informants participated (four males and four females).

One individual interview was conducted in Norway (2005). The male informant (32 years) had completed high school before he joined the PKK in 1992. He stayed in the mountains for 10 years. After being seriously injured in a battle, he successfully applied for asylum in Europe.

A second individual interview was conducted in Belgium (2005). The male informant (34 years), an engineer and journalist, had previously been fighting with the *Peshmerga*⁵⁰ forces in South Kurdistan (North Iraq). He found however that the ideological foundation of the PKK was more in line with his own political standpoints, so he decided to join. This was not an easy choice, but since he regarded the Kurds as one people, regardless of which part they resided in, he decided to attend the PKK.

In the UK, two female informants were interviewed together (2005). One of them (28 years), also an engineer, used part of her spare time working for a PKK initiated community centre, teaching illiterate Kurdish women reading and writing. Even though she had never joined the guerrilla, she felt a strong devotion to the PKK, and regarded her work as a contribution to the struggle. The second female informant (31 years) had primary school and worked full time in the same centre conducting social, political and educational work.

One group interview was conducted in Belgium (2006). Four informants, two male (52 and 35 years) and two female (37 and 28) participated. They had all been PKK guerrillas and had all been imprisoned (from 2-16 years) due to their links to the PKK. The interpreter, a German woman, had also been with the PKK guerrilla for two years and spoke Kurdish fluently after her stay in the mountains.

Data from the above mentioned interviews constitute the empirical foundation for article II. The article seeks to analyse and discuss why Kurdish youth over a period of 25 years has sought to go to the mountains.

Finally, four interviews were conducted in Norway and Belgium in 2007. Among these informants (27 – 43 years), three were former guerrillas while the fourth, an academic,

⁵⁰ A Peshmerga is a member of a Kurdish guerrilla, usually associated with the Kurdish movement in South Kurdistan (North Iraq).

is a member of the organisation. The informants narrated their experiences regarding political education in Turkish prisons during the period from 1991-2004 (article III).

The interview guide (individual and groups) that underpins article I and II, includes themes such as: personal background, schooling/education, recruitment, education in the PKK, the significance of the PKK with regards to knowledge and personal development, perception of outcome and how they describe themselves as persons before- and after joining the PKK. A separate interview guide was prepared for article III. This article discusses questions regarding how prison and political education eventually came to support the struggle outside prison.

3. A) PKK Camp in South Kurdistan (North Iraq), March 2006 (four days):

In March 2006, I had the chance to visit one of the PKK camps in South Kurdistan (North Iraq).⁵¹ The Xinere camp is one of the main camps of the PKK, established after the end of the ceasefire in 2004. The particular camp I visited is primarily a site for political, ideological and cultural schooling. The camp is located near the Iranian border, and is highly exposed to aerial attacks from Iranian military aircrafts. The mountains in Kurdistan are amazing. I never imagined that rocks and mountains could have so many colours. It was early spring, some trees were already in blossom, and it was warmer than on a good summer day in Bergen. Far away, on the other side of a deep canyon, I had the first glimpse of an enormous painted portrait of Öcalan covering a hillside. Thirty minutes later, we reached the first control post. The Chief Commander's secretary, a forty-year-old engineer educated in Germany, who later was to escort me to the Xinere camp, pointed to the mountains and said proudly:

The three mountains surrounding us are called the Triangle. They are borders to Iran, Iraq and Turkey. Alexander the Great, the Roman Emperor, tried to pass these mountains with an army of 80 000 men. He failed. Until these days only the PKK has managed to climb these mountains with an altitude of 4000 metres.

This was the beginning of my four days stay in the camp. Even though it was a short stay, it gave me an understanding of the life of the guerrillas and the staff working there, that I could never have acquired through interviews alone.

Data generated through observation take the form of field notes. They are usually descriptions of contexts, actions, and conversations written in as much detail as possible given

⁵¹ Asbjørn Kristoffersen (journalist) and Ørjan Deiz (photographer), from the newspaper Bergens Tidende, were permitted to the Xinere camp at the same time, on my initiative.

the constraints of watching and writing in a rapidly changing social environment (Hatch, 2002, p. 77). Raw field notes from camp observations were partly written down during my stay in the camp, and partly after. I tried to get as much detail as possible before observations “got cold” and the raw notes were later converted into a more organised and extended field research protocol, which contains nearly 20 pages written text supplementing the interview data; a protocol written in a narrative form. It should provide a sense of being at the research scene (Hatch, 2002, p. 84). The protocol also contains non-recorded informal interviews which are structured conversations taking place at the research scene, and most questions were created on the spot. While the idea was originally to conduct individual interviews, I soon learnt that as a member of the PKK, you seldom talk for yourself. Your voice is the voice of a collective, so to have individual conversations on PKK issues was rather futile. The informants seemed pleased to have the opportunity to talk about their personal experiences and I tried not to interrupt with too many questions.

Excerpts from informal interviews in the Xinere camp have been used in article II. These informants, however, are not included in the overview as shown above. Within the critical paradigm, according to Hatch, informal interviews are often seen as opportunities to engage in transformative dialogues that serve to raise the consciousness of participants in order to promote critique and resistance (Hatch, 2002, p. 94). Since the research protocol contains my impressions, assumptions and feelings, there is a need to “bracket” them in order to be aware of biases and preconceptions.

Since I had to cross the border to Turkey after my stay in the camp, it appeared too risky to carry written documents. The main part of the raw field notes, as mentioned above, was therefore written in my hotel room in Diyarbakir and after my return to Norway. The original field notes primarily contain descriptions of activities in the camp including my reflections on what I saw and heard. I followed the daily routine, I stayed in the women’s houses, and I shared the meals with them, and had talks with the leadership. I also had informal interviews with students participating in the political education and with camp coordinators of the education program and the academy. Some of them were former university students. The informal interviews took the form of group conversations and were not recorded. I therefore decided not to refer to each person I was talking to, but rather refer to what became the research protocol. I also followed some seminars and discussions.

I was asked to give a lecture on the last day of my stay in the camp. This gave me the opportunity to introduce certain aspects of Freire’s pedagogy; especially his perspectives on literacy, dialogue, theory and praxis. About 30 persons were present in the low, dark square

room constituting the school building: students attending the PKK course, guerrillas and some commanders. I was sitting behind a desk, like in a traditional classroom. The students were sitting in rows on white plastic chairs in front of me. The walls were covered with pictures of the martyrs, young men and women who had sacrificed their lives to the struggle.

After the lecture (that turned into a one-way speech) some students asked additional questions. It was obvious that the theme engaged them, as they had no problems finding it relevant to the PKK education. At the end of the session, a young man asked me how I came in contact with the PKK. I started telling them the story of a meeting I attended in the UK in 2002. During the meeting, an enthusiastic young man told me that he was a member of the PKK. With my previous study of Kurdish students in Norway in mind, I became curious to know more of what the organisation stood for and in particular its educational program. There was something about this person, a friendly attitude that made me feel comfortable. He introduced me to the thinking of the PKK and how the struggle was linked to the overall problems of the Kurds. We kept in contact until he was killed in the mountains two years after our first meeting.

When I finally revealed the name of the person to the students, the interpretation stopped and there was a sudden silence. I looked around to see what was going on, and noticed with astonishment that the commander by the door, the interpreter and many others in the room were crying. Apparently, this person had held a special position within the PKK; he was an experienced commander and fighter and a beloved friend, missed by many. His picture was on the wall. In 2007, I met one of the students again. She told me that this event was still mentioned in the camp and by having known this person and telling the story, I had also gained a special position in their hearts.

Fangen (2004, p. 98) argues that the length of a fieldwork depends on several factors. Even if I felt that I had been in the camp for a long time, four days must be regarded as a short period of fieldwork. However, the rather tense political situation limited the possibility for a longer stay.

B) North Kurdistan (6 days)

After leaving the Xinere camp, I crossed the Habur border (near the Syrian border) to Turkey and from there I went to Diyarbakir, the capital of the Kurds, where I spent six days. The field notes from this period focus in particular on the uprising in Diyarbakir March 26-31, where hundreds of kids threw stones and Molotov cocktails at the security forces, who responded with teargas and gunfire. Several young people were killed that day, some of them quite close

to where I was standing in the street. I followed the funeral of two of them. The particulars of the incident will be described below.

6.11 Security of informants

According to Koivunen (2001), one way of protecting informants, whether you are a researcher, a journalist, a human rights observer, an NGO employee or anyone travelling to Turkey or *any* other conflict zone, is to be aware of the conditions and distribute the information you get about the situation. Otherwise, you may fail to understand the implications of the sacrifices and dangers faced by the informants.

All research fields are ripe with surprises, obstacles, challenges, joys and worries and it would be an impossible task to prepare for every foreseeable or unthinkable situation facing the researcher in the research field. Even in fields of political unrest, which are difficult to access, the researcher faces many of the same obstacles as in other research terrains - only differently. While literature on qualitative research argues that the *unforeseen* has to be taken into account by the researcher when planning the research design, it is not only the complexity of challenges in the field that causes problems or dilemmas, but rather *how* these problems are being handled by the researcher in the specific situation and particular cultural and political context (article I).

6.12 Data analysis

The narratives of my informants can be interpreted as testimonies, or as individual voices presented as from a collective self (Casey, 1996, p. 220). The qualitative interview allows those narratives to unfold, through a process of knowledge construction that develops between the researcher and the research participant (Hatch, 2002; Kvale, 1997; Silverman, 2001; article I). The individual and tape-recorded group interviews from the first and second period of fieldwork were conducted in English and German and translated to and from Kurdish and Turkish by local interpreters. Transcribed excerpts from one non-recorded interview (UK) are also referred to in this article. As mentioned above, the raw field notes from the third period were unstructured; like a “stream of consciousness” (Fangen, 2004, p. 87) containing observations and reflections that came to me there and then. The next step was to restructure and reformulate the notes into a research protocol, which primarily functioned as a source of inspiration and contextual background for the study.

On an analytic level, transcribed interviews were analysed by combining the eight steps in political analysis as described by Hatch (2002, p. 192). In the three articles included, I also build on Kvale (1997). Here I include the entire process of analysing the data collected, which is closer to Hatch's (2002) procedure for political analysis.

- First, to get the overall impression, all interviews were read several times. I reviewed entries recorded in my research protocol. Both Kvale (1997) and Hatch (2002) advice researchers to try to see the whole; 'look for the forest, the trees will not go away'.
- Being politically engaged in the Kurdish question, I had to reflect on my own political position, and how it would affect the interpretation of the data. One example: several informants talk about the general and historical oppression of Kurds in Turkey. This can be read from a political perspective and from an ideological position. I tried to ask questions like; how does systematic yearlong oppression affect a person or a people? How can I analyse it in my research? When I am politically and ideologically close to my field of research, it is easy to allow the predetermined issues to keep me from making sense of what the data are trying to tell me. Therefore, critical reflection has to follow the analysis throughout the process.
- As a third step, I tried to generalise relationships between my own concerns regarding the above-mentioned issues and what was displayed in the data.
- Next, I looked for common traits that were supported by the data. The data were then thematically categorised.
- Within the thematic categories, meaning units were then identified and excerpted. The meaning units were identified by marking them according to central concepts in the research question. The excerpts were selected to support the generalisations
- My analysis was discussed with another researcher (a colleague) who made comments and suggestions for changes. A draft of article III was read and commented on by the one informant it was possible to reach.

6.13 Validity and reliability of the data

Whether a study is valid or not has to do with the degree to which a study supports the intended conclusion drawn from the results. Silverman (2001, p. 233) argues that validity has to do with the impact of the researcher on the setting; the values of the researcher and the truth status of a respondent's account. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p. 105) underline that in qualitative data validity might be addressed through the honesty, richness and scope of the data achieved and the participants approached. In this thesis, following Creswell & Miller (2000) validity is defined as how accurately the account represents the participants' perceptions of the social phenomena and is credible to them (op.cit, p. 125). This has been particularly important in this thesis due to the vulnerable position of the informants.

Validity, in general, is to maintain a critical stance towards one's own work throughout the research process, from the planning of the study to the challenge of finding the most suitable forum for a dialogue on the validity of the results (Kvale, 1997, p. 165). The fact that

I have chosen a critical theoretical approach to the study, and have been engaged in the Kurdish question at a political level, colours my perspectives on the field. Since this study has been conducted within a highly politicised context, and since all research is political in one way or another (Carr, 1995; Hatch, 2002) it was important for me to clarify my position before the fieldwork, and to the informants. The researcher always uses a certain viewpoint or lenses for establishing validity. These lenses influence 1) the credibility of the study, 2) how the participants' realities are represented (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Therefore, external reviewers should be engaged in validity work.

Also the researcher's paradigm, assumptions or worldview shape his or her selections of procedures (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 125). Within the critical paradigm chosen for this thesis, three entrances to the validity procedures have been used. First, my own reflections in order to disclose my political positioning, biases and values regarding the research process. Second, close collaboration with the informants participating in the study. In this study, the results have been validated by some of the respondents, what (Silverman, 2001, p.233) refers to as respondent validation. Third, the results have also been discussed with other researchers (colleagues) who made comments and suggestions for changes. This is akin to what Creswell & Miller (2000) term peer debriefing where peers provide support, challenge the assumptions of the researcher and pose questions about method and interpretations (op.cit, p. 129). Three colleague researchers familiar with the research have read and commented on the thesis.

7.0 ETHICS: THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER IN CONFLICT AREAS

According to Madison (2005), conducting fieldwork is a personal experience, but at the same time, it is crucial for critical researchers to secure ethical representation of the lives and stories of those being investigated. Representation has consequences. How people are represented is how they are regarded and often treated. The researcher is accountable for the consequences of her representations, “because they matter” (Madison, 2005, p. 5). The researcher’s primary responsibility should always be to those studied. In addition, the researcher must make every effort to ensure that the work does not harm safety, dignity or privacy to the group or those near to them (op.cit, p. 111). This has been crucial in particular to this study where the ethical challenges are so profound. Some of the informants have little formal schooling, and have no possibility to read even minor abstracts presenting the project. To them oral presentations and discussion about the nature of the projects, its risks and potential benefits would be crucial to ensure consent. It takes time and presumes a genuine will from the researcher’s side to enter into dialogue and negotiate with the informants. Researcher and informants have to establish a zone, a locus or a meeting place of deliberation where they can air different and differing perspectives, and be open for potentially enhanced understanding of the subjects discussed or negotiated (article I).

In critical pedagogy and critical ethnography (Madison, 2005) it is perceived as the moral obligation of the researcher to use the knowledge produced through research in the best interest of the people who are being researched. This approach aims at producing knowledge that is inter-subjectively valid (article I). What is regarded as “true” relies on good arguments developed through dialogues and interaction. Ethical dilemmas are regarded as integral to the entire research process. The following sections seek to highlight and discuss some of these challenges.

Because of the physical closeness of researcher and informants, a characteristic of qualitative methodology is the continuous reflection on how to respect the informants throughout the entire research process (Kvale, 1997; Madison, 2005). It is crucial to have reflected on how the informants can contribute to the project and to discuss it openly with them. In this way, the informants become more like partners in the project than objects for research. In particular for people who have lived under extremely oppressive or brutal conditions, or who find themselves in a vulnerable situation, it is important to get a feeling that their stories are important also to others. The informants’ stories can sometimes be trying,

both for informants and for researcher. How the researcher relates to the informants is therefore important.

An important factor in all research is the voluntary participation of the informants. This has been the object of ethical considerations every time I met with my informants. One particular problem in this research project was that I had no control on whether they had volunteered or were chosen by the PKK. I simply had to trust the contacts who arranged the meetings. Still, I was under the clear impression that all my informants enjoyed participating in the talks and interviews.

I was of course aware that many of the persons I talked to in the PKK camp had participated in armed conflicts. The fact that some of them did not want to participate in individual conversations was probably that as a guerrilla you do not talk for yourself but for the collective group. Talking about incidents that led to the death or injury of fellow cadres is hard. There are some basic rights linked to participation in research; the right to autonomy, the right to informed consent, personal integrity, as well as confidentiality and consequences (Kvale, 1997). This means that informants who are in an extremely vulnerable position often undermine their own rights which leaves them at risk of consenting to something that they in other – more controlled - situations would reject. This also goes for confidentiality, the securing of data and ethical publication. All these are matters the researcher has to consider carefully.

7.1 Closeness and distance

As I have argued, researching fields of political unrest always leaves the researcher with the dilemma of closeness and distance. Research within an armed group is an ethical challenge. Sitting in a camp cottage listening to the testimonies of the guerrillas is a strange experience, which activates contradictory emotions of admiration, sympathy, pity and disgust (see Fangen, 2004, pp. 134-135). You listen to the narratives of the informants, and if you allow for it, the stories have a flair of romance. Here, of course, the researcher runs the risk of overlooking details of the deeper understanding of the phenomenon investigated (Madison, 2005). Viewed against this background, ethical responsibility is not a “one-sided” sympathy towards the subjects investigated; it has to be anchored in a context (article I). In the following sections, I will reflect on some ethical challenges that researchers face in fields of political unrest.

Most PKK members are young people, with aspirations, hopes and dreams, as are the informants in this study. This raises fundamental questions regarding how the research is to be conducted and presented, and how it will benefit the subjects of the research. For people living under extremely difficult life conditions, the researcher might also trigger expectations, which she may not be able to fulfil. An example from my fieldwork may illustrate this point. When I gave a lecture for the PKK cadres in the camp in March 2006, I told my audience, all young PKK students, how impressed I was by how they had managed. On impulse, and half jokingly, I said that their next step should be to establish a university. A young man immediately stood up and asked me if I thought it would be possible to do so, and what I could do to help them in this process. I had not considered that many of them dreamt about being ordinary students in ordinary schools and universities. By my statement, I had activated such aspirations, which of course, I had no possibility to follow up. For the researcher, these challenges, which in their core are political, have to be reflected on regularly throughout the research process.

Preparation to fieldwork and entrance to the field is a process of negotiation. In qualitative research, we are always negotiating access (Fielding, 2004. p. 250), and thorough knowledge of the field facilitates this process. As argued in article I, preparation before fieldwork is crucial for success, but a researcher can never prepare for every event that may occur during the time of fieldwork. In such cases, the researcher often has to improvise, and improvise creatively.

7.2 Moral dilemmas in fields of political unrest

According to Koivunen (2001), writers in a variety of fields dealing with people living under conditions of crisis, have reflected on the ethics of studying death, war, and genocide. In the following, I draw on Koivunen's reflections, comparing them to my own. Conducting research in areas of political unrest leaves the researcher with questions beyond those that are usually raised in more traditional literature on methodology. It is hard to figure out how to encounter people whose lives are dominated by fear, pain and sorrow and it most certainly challenges you both as a researcher – and as a human being.

A classical example of involvement is shown by the anthropologist and Jesuit priest Ricardo Falla, who spent six years with escaped Maya Indians deep in the rain forest of Guatemala. He argues that it is not possible to study conflicts without choosing sides. For Falla it is obvious, as it is for Koivunen (2001), that in a conflict people choose sides and

everything tends to be filtered through the same lens. For Falla (1994) as for Koivunen (2001) the truth and it is always described from someone's point of view. It is therefore fair for the researcher to say openly how she is positioned and thereby establish some kind of *mutual trust* (article I). Without trust, it is difficult or impossible to get access to the informants' personal narratives.

Choosing sides can be problematic; however, choosing *not* to take sides is perhaps even more problematic. Both positions raise the question of *transparency* (article I). The meeting with the informants in North Kurdistan highlighted this question. Sitting in the small living room ready to talk with the informants, I got the impression that to them I was the personification of a Europe that had always let them down. Well seated in the living room where the interview was supposed to take place, the four informants refused to talk to me before I had made my position clear in questions regarding Kurdish issues, my view on the PKK and my opinion on the political stance of the European countries towards the Kurdish question in Turkey. Firstly, these are big and complex issues, which are difficult to answer. Secondly, I did not, as they did, regard myself as the representative of the European Union or any other political body dealing with Kurdish issues. To the informants it was crucial to learn that my intention was not to present the informants or the PKK as terrorists. In their view, they were freedom fighters who defended their people. As a researcher however, I have an obligation to contrast and balance their perspective against others who oppose this perspective.

A problem that emerged when I talked to my informants in Kurdistan was that they wanted to address issues related to their concrete situation and how my work eventually could benefit the people. Sometimes these issues were not the ones that I wanted them to talk about. It was also difficult to explain that I was not representing an organisation and that my "only" contribution was to write about a specific part of their situation – knowledge and education. Little by little, we managed to enter into a dialogue on how education and knowledge could be part of their political and social struggle. In this way, the conversation we had became a deliberation, an exchange of positions, views and perspectives, resulting in improved understanding for both parties. I approached them as a researcher but to them research without a clear political position was not relevant. If my research could not improve their life condition, why should they bother talking to me?

7.3 Fieldwork in violent environments

The beauty of Kurdistan has overwhelmed many journalists and researchers and the hospitality of the people has to be experienced to be believed. Major parts of Kurdistan have been heavily affected by conflicts and wars since ancient times. For almost 30 years, the armed conflict between the Turkish military and the PKK⁵² has had serious consequences for the region – also for the natural environment. In addition, the war-like situation makes it difficult for researchers to move freely in the region due to surveillance and harassment, which I experienced myself. Such conditions influence the fieldwork. In situations of emergency, the researcher often has to rely completely on local organisations, for example, NGO's or local people. This creates a feeling of dependence on others and one positive outcome is that sometimes also close relationships or even friendships emerge (Koivunen, 2001).

Many researchers have reported that research in zones of political unrest often brings the researcher closer to the community and to the local people (Green, 1994, 1995; Koivunen, 2001; see article I). Observing the pain and the fear of the people often binds you as a researcher to the victims of the war (Koivunen, 2001). However, when you are that close, it might raise unforeseen expectations that you are not always able to fulfil. On this, Goffman, (1989) reminds us that there will always be a structural asymmetry between researcher and informants, because the researcher is free to leave the field while the informants are not (Fangen, 2004. p. 132).

Conducting research in war or conflict ridden areas often brings the researcher into situations that are extremely difficult to tackle. This also happened to me. As I was not a Kurd, nor a Turk, I had no other choice but to trust those directly involved in the struggle. What I experienced in Diyarbakir was the strong sense of solidarity among demonstrators and bystanders. They regarded me as a visitor and at the same time as one of them. Because they expected me to report, they felt obliged to protect me. Small children as young as 5 years of age approached me to show me how to protect myself from the teargas. An old woman gave me a slice of lemon while showing me how to protect my eyes. When the military opened fire, a young man took me by the hand and we ran into the bazaars for shelter. A child and some young men were killed this very day. In the middle of this horror, I still had a strange sense of being taken care of.

⁵² The “dirty war” was carried out from 1984 to 1999 when Öcalan was abducted in Kenya. At the same time the PKK declared unilateral ceasefire. Even so, the clashes have continued up to this day.

The next day I went to the city mosque for the funeral. Funerals in this part of the world are not only regarded as sites for public mourning, they are also political markings. About 10 000 people attended the funeral the first day, outside the mosque, and later at the burial ground. The coffins that were carried into the mosque were covered with the Kurdish colours, the PKK banner and pictures of the victims and Öcalan. The crowd wore the same symbols. The atmosphere was tense when I entered the open space and many of the guards looked at me with suspicion. We found an open space at the corner of the mosque. A man immediately came up to me, took my hand and asked me to follow him. We went into the cellar of the mosque. In front of me, on a white stone bench, was the tiny body of a little boy shot to death the day before. Next to him, a young man of 20 was being prepared for his last journey. They pointed at the bullet holes in his back, in order to show that he was shot as he tried to run away. The small group of people in the room watched my reactions; one of them said I had to report to the outside world what I had just witnessed.

I found myself caught in a moral dilemma where I had to choose whether to participate or leave. You are not able to choose the role of the neutral observer. The guards at the open space in front of the mosque were openly hostile until they decided to ascribe me the role as “reporter” to the outside world. When I was *in* the situation, it felt natural to participate. When I returned home, I realised how deeply these incidents, integral to the daily life of the people that I had met, had affected me. It is impossible not to be emotionally upset, in this kind of research, even if it contradicts the scientific claim of distance and objectivity.

During my fieldwork I constantly felt that I had to *do* something; it did not seem enough just to describe and analyse the problems, I also felt compelled to act as a human being. This feeling has of course also influenced my research.

As I have argued, it is difficult not to get involved with people or informants when the surroundings are heavily influenced by political unrest, which directly and indirectly affects the lives of people. Hammersley & Atkinson (2006) compare the challenge of the researcher’s position in the field to living in two worlds; that of objective research and that of close participation. While the first might result in a too distant position in the sense that you are in danger of losing important insight in the field, the second might bring you too close to the feeling of being ‘at home’. In the latter case, the researcher may have allowed the escape of his or her critical analytic perspective. One should never surrender entirely to the setting or to the moment, but – in principle – one should constantly be alert (op.cit, pp. 115-116). Fangen (2004) raises the question of role confusion and argues that a fieldwork leads the researcher into a set of different roles in different situations. In some situations confusion concerning the

role of the researcher might occur. On the one hand, this can be problematic, but on the other, it can provide new and different data. There are no rules saying that the researcher should avoid situations where the researcher has to take on another role. Nevertheless, it is important to reflect on the implications and consequences it might bring (op.cit, pp. 116-117). Even if there were clear, objective guidelines to how these problems should be dealt with, contexts differ and each case is different. These ethical dilemmas are revitalised in new contexts every time a researcher encounters a new field of political unrest.

8.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This chapter gives a brief summary of each of the three articles included and presents the most important empirical findings. Article I discusses certain methodological and ethical challenges in fields of political unrest. In addition, the article discusses certain constraints when researching educational practice within an organisation such as the PKK. The following two articles are in-depth studies of themes with relevance to the overall study. In article II, I show why so many young people have joined the PKK during the last 25 years and what they claim to have learned from participating. Article III highlights how prison became an important educational site in addition to the mountains and Kurdish Diaspora communities. Political education in prison had crucial influence on the broader struggle. In the discussion, I argue for the connection between the three articles and show their relevance to the theoretical perspectives guiding this thesis.

8.1 Paper I: Summary

“A Zone for Deliberation? Methodological Challenges in Fields of Political Unrest”

Article I outlines certain challenges, constraints and critical factors facing the qualitative researcher when entering fields that are either extremely difficult to access or potentially hostile towards outsiders. Problems and dilemmas in such contexts are exemplified by reference to fieldwork with four PKK members in North Kurdistan, Turkey. The theoretical foundation draws on the Freirian perspectives also labelled emancipatory or liberating research. The article discusses challenges within this particular line of research and presents the idea of a “zone for deliberation” which is an inter-subjective location for inquiry and dialogue in cases when the experiences of informants and interviewer are culturally and politically diverse.

It is argued that in this kind of field, the zone entails a political socialisation process containing an educative element, challenging the parties involved to critically re-interpret and re-formulate their political positions in order to reach improved understanding. However, this process requires a foundation of genuine, mutual respect. Processes within the zone are dialectical and dynamic and may be experienced as frustrating because of the lack of firm ground. Negotiation of agreements is a continuous process. The expected outcome of the

‘stay’ in a zone for deliberation, however, is not consensus, but recognition, and it is crucial that the parties respect the position and arguments of the other.

Certain critical factors when researching fields of political unrest are discussed in this article such as mutual trust between researcher and informants, power relations, and an individualistic approach versus collective interviewing. The article argues that the *unforeseen* is present in all research. The critical factor is, however, how the researcher deals with these events during the fieldwork. Finally, the question of closeness and distance between the researcher, the informants and the field is discussed.

8.2 Paper II: Summary

“Choosing the Mountains: the PKK as alternative Knowledge and Identity Project”

Article II examines why Kurdish youth during the past twenty years have joined the PKK movement. For thousands of youth PKK education has been crucial to their development. Educational activities are carried out in various non-formal sites, also in the mountains. The article describes important elements in the PKK education. It investigates and analyses what the informants have gained with regards to knowledge and personal development. Since its foundation in the seventies, the armed struggle has gradually adopted the characteristics of a social and political movement. The article asks if the educative aspects of this kind of movement appear to be neglected or underestimated. The intention with this article is to give a voice to PKK members, both as individuals and as part of a collective *we*. Nearly all informants were active members at the time of the interviews and clearly expressed their loyalty to the organisation. There are however examples of strong criticism posed by previous members of the organisation. This critique seems to be linked more to ideology and politics than towards the educational activities of the PKK.

The informants have various reasons for choosing the mountains. Women seem to have left home for reasons connected to gender; forced marriage and traditions of honour. Both male and female informants, however, emphasise that fighting for a bigger cause coupled with the possibility of education and personal development, were decisive for their participation.

A characteristic for how the informants regard education in a collective group is that knowledge has to be *shared*. This presupposes a sense of belonging, friendship and respect. Education seems to be more than formal knowledge; it implies a process of cultural and moral

creation and transformation, which reaches beyond their personal aspirations. The informants also emphasise that emotions are an integral part of transformative education.

The PKK claims to be an educational movement. The content of the educational programme has varied through different periods of the struggle depending of the intensity of the war. Education aims, first, at increasing the members' knowledge and also helps them to develop as critical human beings. The informants claim to have gained knowledge through a multifaceted approach to education; reading, discussing, observing others and by participating in different activities. Secondly, education prepares the members for different positions and work in the movement.

According to the informants, Turkish colonialist forces have formed the "Kurdish personality". It can however, be liberated through critically examining the world and through personal and collective struggle. This collective ethos calls for transformation of knowledge and personality, a process characterised by some informants as a *re-birth*. Personality transformation is regarded as an individual process that develops within the frames of a collective *we* meaning that the individual and the collective are regarded as interrelated. This process seems closely linked to the construction of a political identity. Self-evaluation and evaluation by others were crucial elements in the transformation process. Personality work is hard, according to the informants, and you have to *believe* in the cause in order to endure the hard life in the mountains.

8.3 Paper III: Summary

“Prisons as Sites for Political Education: Educational experiences from prison narrated by members and sympathisers of the PKK”

Education in the PKK is carried out in different sites, and serves many purposes. One is to sustain morale. Educational activities became crucial for thousands of political prisoners accused of having links to the PKK. In the aftermath of the 1980 military coup in Turkey, the members of the Turkish left were prosecuted and nearly eradicated by the Turkish military and security police. This article is based on a qualitative study focusing on the narratives of four former political prisoners who were sentenced to years of imprisonment because of their links to the PKK.

Political education in prison was organised by committees; one for each prison and one committee for all prisons. Messages were smuggled in and out of prison. Many prisoners became active members of the PKK during the years of imprisonment, and engaged in the

struggle after their release. As educational activities constitute a major part of the PKK programme, the imprisoned members continued to educate themselves and others behind the brick walls. Even though prison conditions were extremely harsh, the informants, who were imprisoned at various stages of the struggle and in various prisons in Turkey, emphasise the impact education had for their personal development and for the struggle as such. The educational system in Turkey has systematically tried to break down the students' perceptions of being Kurds. As a counter-strategy, education in prison aimed at piecing together these identity fragments.

Political education in prison consisted of two main parts; the first was education aiming at raising the general level of knowledge of the political prisoners, the second had to do with transformation of personality. Transformation processes also contain regular self-evaluation and evaluation by others. Generally, transformation is described in positive terms, but one informant also refers to examples where individuals were humiliated and psychologically damaged.

Many political prisoners were introduced to the written word for the first time, and this opened a new world to them. Here, literacy is seen as the ability to use the printed word to reshape the world. As the prisoners became literate, they were also empowered to change and to take action in the world and change it.

Education helped the prisoners to focus on issues beyond their personal situation. Faced with the experiences of their fellow prisoners, mundane problems suddenly lost importance. The informants claim that they added new perspectives to their lives and became more confident and conscious persons.

Political prisoners are in a vulnerable position and therefore susceptible to influence, both from the authoritarian prison system and from forces aiming at convincing them to work for their interests. The threat to the prisoners' integrity increases by the use of small-cell isolation. For those who are at the forefront of the Kurdish struggle, like the PKK, political prisoners represent an important target group. To those who were already members or supporters of the organisation, prison education became a means to personal development and learning. To the informants life in prison became endurable through directive education which gave them courage and hope for the future. It also gave direction and meaning to what has become a broad political and social movement in Turkey, Kurdistan, and in Diaspora. Despite the hard conditions in prison, the PKK managed to *structure* the educational activities for the prisoners, who taught each other. Even if the system was not perfect, political education in

prison recruited knowledgeable members to the PKK. These individuals later became a crucial force to the overall struggle.

9.0 GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE THESIS

This thesis has focused on educational aspects of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and how members of the organisation perceive the educational and personal outcomes of their participation. Education within the PKK must be regarded as a response to the Kurdish people's need to restore an assimilated identity, gain awareness of their oppressive situation, and to change these conditions through transformative practices. As the thesis has shown, even though members of the organisation refer to the PKK "school", education is not institutionalised but organised in the mountains, in prisons, through different media, in the communities and on the streets. This is where the Kurds learn what it means to be Kurdish. Through literacy courses, practical everyday knowledge and the development of various skills they also gain dignity and a sense of empowerment. In this respect, the PKK also serves as an educative, modernising factor in the society.

Researching fields of political unrest has certain constraints. The particular constraints of this project are thoroughly discussed in article I, and in the chapters on methodology and ethics. While these constraints were perceived as rather stressful at the time, they also turned the fieldwork into a learning process for the researcher. Engaging in a zone of deliberation with the informants gradually brought new aspects of their life and thinking to the surface, and renewed my own understanding of what education can be. In the mountains of Kurdistan I realised why schools in Norway lacked relevance for this group – and similar groups – of youngsters. In this final discussion I will not recapture issues already raised in the thesis, but I have chosen to dwell on two important findings that come out strongly in the interviews and seem to criss-cross the three articles.

In the *first* discussion, I argue that this work shows that there is a need to broaden our (western) understanding of what education is, in order to provide schooling with relevance to the many large groups of marginalised youth all over the world. In addition, this discussion will focus on the notion of transformation, which is central in the informants' narratives. The discussion is related to the themes in article I, and II, focusing in particular on education in the mountains and in prison.

In the *second* discussion I will highlight the educational aspects of collective action whether it takes the shape of a popular uprising or a peaceful political demonstration.

9.1 Education is about *becoming*

I will start the first discussion with an excerpt that seems to capture the core of what education means to informants who have been engaged as teachers in the PKK movement.

I was a teacher before I entered the PKK in the late 1970s. I was a teacher during the years I spent in prison. I was a teacher in the mountains, and I am a teacher now, in Europe, as well. Our educated members have a broad perspective on education. They are experienced; they know the psychology of their people and are able to approach them correctly. They know their individual characteristics, their feelings, how they react. We know all this - we are educated. We have studied many different educational systems; the Bolshevik school - how they were teaching. We studied the American educational system, and the Ukrainian system. We have developed a creative approach to education while constantly asking ourselves how we can be more involved with the students and how the students can become more active and eager to learn; how we can teach them to learn more and to become more (MI, 3.2.2006).

This informant has spent fifteen years in Turkish prisons. During the interview, he told me that despite his experiences of dehumanisation, torture and human suffering, he always remained loyal to his political development: [...]. “Once you give in”, he said, “you are finished as a person and your personality is ruined”. To him, education and teaching became the foundation of his life; it helped him to focus on the struggle and gave him the means to overcome physical and psychological pressure.

Also other informants underline the significance of education. The informants in this study are or have been active members. When talking about education, what they have learnt and the difference it has made in their lives, they display a positive, almost humble attitude. As there are individual differences between the informants, I suppose that not all PKK members would ascribe the same significance to education. Former members who have left the organization might even claim that education had a negative effect as it was too ideological or even close to brainwashing. The informants in this study, however, the students in the mountains and other PKK members I had the opportunity to talk to, emphasise its positive impact, even if some of them added that sometimes it was *too* much education.

According to Biesta (2006), we must keep on reminding ourselves that education is the *wider* concept that goes beyond learning as acquisition, what Freire (1996 [1972]) terms the banking-concept of education. A more dynamic understanding, according to Biesta (2006, p. 27) is to view learning as a response to a disturbance, something that needs to be explored. The educative aspect of challenges and conflicts also underpins learning processes that turn out to be *productive* (Lillejord & Dysthe, 2008). By responding to these disturbances or challenges to what is different and unexpected, the student starts to ask authentic questions

and slowly unveils the 'world'. This kind of education is problem-oriented and invites the student to explore their life conditions as something that can be transformed. Freire (1996 [1972]) would call this process "reading the word and the world", or learning to see the world in a new way. By learning to act critically upon the world, the students gradually discover how the world can be changed. This is what the informants mean by '*becoming*'. Through problem solving and educational activities that presuppose reflection and action, they gradually gain new insight about themselves and their situation and thereby develop as human beings.

In hindsight, I believe that when I met the first group of informants, I put forward a narrow sighted perspective on learning. I expected them to explain to me, in concrete terms, what they as individuals had learnt by following the educational program of the PKK. The informants described in detail the content of the courses and the organising of the political education. But when I encouraged them to tell me what education had meant to them as individuals, they first said that they had never been used to perceiving themselves as individuals, but as part of a collective. After a while, however, they started to talk passionately about friendship, how they learned to perceive women differently, how they learned to survive a hard winter in the mountains, to care for their comrades, how they learned to enjoy reading and a good discussion. They talked about knowledge and learning as feelings, trust, loyalty, belonging and the value of a collective life, while emphasising that education had changed their lives. It was fascinating to listen to their stories because they were so different from what I had expected and from what I am used to in my context where education increasingly is about national scores in PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS⁵³.

The enthusiasm of the first informants in Diyarbakir was the same that I sensed when talking to students in the mountain camp or to the former political prisoners in Europe. During these talks, I myself went through an educative process where I was reminded that education is basically a process of growth and development. Against this background, the frustration the Kurdish students in Norway had displayed in the interview for my master's thesis, suddenly made sense. Education is more than knowledge transmission; it is about *becoming* human beings. All learning is situated in the daily, practical life of the learner, although it happens in different social and cultural contexts. A perspective on learning as situated activity raises profound questions about identity, becoming and belonging. It is also a question of how to

⁵³ Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA); Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS); Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

engage in and contribute to a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave, 1997; Wenger 1998).

The PKK regards education as an activity that permeates all levels of social life. The organisation has developed into a social and political counter-movement that anchors educational elements in all its activities. In order to achieve its broad spectre of educative goals, the PKK has a wide definition of what education is and a wide range of issues that must be learnt, including organising and accomplishing of political meetings and demonstrations, developing practical skills, and literacy. Through transformative education aiming at changing the members' perception of who they are, it focuses on gender awareness, critical consciousness, cultural knowledge, and identity awareness. In addition, it is an education in becoming a well functioning member of the organisation, who will be able to teach others. Through different activities the PKK try to keep people involved and empowered. Education in the PKK is therefore also about keeping up the morale of the Kurdish people.

One of the informants told me how the students in secondary school worked politically on Kurdish language issues. For this, she was later arrested (article III). Hundreds of Kurdish students in Turkey have for the last ten years opposed discriminatory practices in formal educational institutions. Many of them were arrested or expelled from universities, and never got a university degree. The non-formal educational sites initiated by the PKK have become substitutes for the lack of relevant educational services provided by the state. To many Kurds in Turkey, formal educational institutions are also associated with the sites where the Turkish state holds a monopoly on knowledge about language, culture and history. This is also where Kurdish identity has been suppressed and Kurds led to believe that they are inferior as a people and individuals, what Freire (1996 [1972], p. 141) terms *cultural invasion*. The invader develops an educational system that suits its political and economic interests.

The notion of education as it is reflected in the narratives of the informants, is about asking fundamental questions about who we are and who we want to become through education. This is a kind of education that, according to Freire (1996 [1972], p. 65), affirms us as beings in the process of becoming, because we always seek to become *more* – a point emphasised by all the informants. One informant said that before he joined the PKK, he felt that he was no one. The stay in the PKK, following its educational activities, gradually transformed his self-image. Now he perceives himself as a person with self-respect (articles I, and II).

Over the years, Kurds with different backgrounds have looked to the PKK. In order to develop a common ground for thousands of members, goals, aspirations and meaning had to

be negotiated. Critical questions had to be posed and reflected on. New insights were turned into praxis. In order for the individual to understand and act within this reality, a deeper understanding of the enduring oppressive situation of the Kurds is needed. The crucial question was how the members could develop as human beings while simultaneously achieving the political goals and aspirations of the organisation. As in other political organisations and movements, there is in the PKK the constant dilemma of balancing the interests and goals of the organisation and the development and well-being of the individual. The notion of *becoming* has therefore always been at the forefront of the political education of the PKK. For generations the Kurds have been led to believe that they are inferior. They have been told that their culture and history do not exist. In order to change what has been assumed as a given truth, personal and social transformation became important. Questions of being and becoming are, according to Biesta (2006) about our relationship with others and about our place in the social fabric. The content and purpose of education can therefore not be separated from fundamentally political questions, argues Biesta (2006, p. 23). This discussion with a long history dating back to John Dewey (1916) is regaining relevance today.

This explains why the concept of becoming is so central in the interviews. The informants claim that because of the PKK education, they have become *more* than they were before, and therefore also perceive themselves as better persons. According to Wilcock (1999), the term 'becoming' entails the notion of transformation and is linked to ideas about human development, growth and potential. It is a dynamic process. Through participation in collective and individual educational activities, self-evaluation and evaluation by other members, the informants claim to have transformed their lives in ways that empowered them to *do* and to *be* through the process of becoming. Therefore, becoming [someone], who is capable of doing something for him- or herself and his/her people, seems to be the most important outcome of a transformative educational process.

The PKK has developed from a group of university friends in the 1970s to the present transnational social and political movement. Its expansion rests on the fact that it has managed to mobilise the people. In the second discussion, I will show the educative aspect of collective action.

9.2 Taking to the streets

A theme that is not sufficiently discussed in the three articles is the educative significance of collective action. Drawing on a wide definition of what education is, the mountains, the

prison, the communities and even the streets can be regarded as important alternative educational arenas for Kurds. Since article II, and III have discussed how the mountains and prisons may be regarded as educational sites, I will here show that the street constitutes another important and more informal educational site for the PKK.

Educational activities in the mountains, in prison, in Kurdistan and in Diaspora are inter-related with what is going on in the streets. New technology and the use of different media have become important educational tools in terms of communication, organisation and mobilising the overall struggle and binding Kurds together across borders. Simultaneous global television images fuel popular passions and reinforce action in the streets. Televised images have been proved capable of stirring up emotions, more so than print or oral communication, and they also reach the illiterate (Romano, 2002). In the context of a lack of formal educational and political arenas, the street has become a public room where Kurds learn how to strengthen the struggle through collective action.

During the last 20 years, Kurds have shown their disagreement by collectively taking to the streets. According to Melucci (1995, p. 53), one has to distinguish between the field of conflict and the actors that bring the conflict to the fore. No one could have anticipated the educative outcome of these actions, and how they would enforce, and raise, the Kurdish struggle to a new level. *Serhildans* (uprisings) have added an important dimension to the struggle, namely the force that lies in collective mobilisation, collective identity and collective memory. Even the PKK itself expressed surprise at the strength of the first uprising⁵⁴ (Marcus, 2007, p. 140). People's willingness to mobilise for a cause they believe in seems to create a strong sense of community among the participants and the collective uprisings have become an important educational site for tens of thousands. By learning how to organise, formulate claims, and show their emotions openly, people gradually develop political literacy, which is the ability to understand and react adequately in political situations and acquire new knowledge and new skills. The educative outcome of collective action seems to be an increasing political, cultural and historical awareness that also strengthens the feeling of belonging to a community regardless of physical borders (see article II).

Collective movements have an autonomy lacking in formal educational sites, as the distance between the movements and official control gives them a certain space in which to operate (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 38). Even if Turkish authorities probably monitor Kurdish

⁵⁴ It took place in Nusaybin (close to the Syrian border) in spring 1990, as a reaction to the killing of thirteen PKK guerrillas. For the first time the relatives of guerrillas claimed the bodies. The uprising, later referred to as *Serhildan*, spread to the entire region (Marcus, 2007, p. 140).

political activities, also in Diaspora, the participants who have taken to the streets feel that they can operate more freely and perhaps even more safely when disseminating their messages. Collective actions thereby seem to give strength and courage to the individual participant. What people learn by taking to the streets cannot be copied within a formal educational institution. Learning on the streets is political education aiming at changing the society (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 175). That is also the reason why the PKK has organised literacy courses in Kurdish communities. In order to master the tools necessary to “read” their reality, people have to be literate.

Acting together with thousands of others with the same goal, entails an element of excitement, touching on the emotional aspects of education. There are of course many reasons why people take to the streets showing collective protest. Emotional reactions caused by horrible experiences are stirred when people get the chance to express them - individually or collectively (article I). The importance of emotions in collective actions, according to Peterson (2001), seems to be neglected. So is, I have argued, the educational outcome of such an activity – both for the individual and for the collective.

Besides various forms of PKK demonstrations and mass mobilisation in favour of the organisation, the funerals of PKK guerrillas have become the major events of gathering and voicing the peoples’ claims whether it takes place in Kurdistan, western Turkey or Diaspora (Gokalp, 2007). Even if the political outcome of collective actions can sometimes be put into question, the participants often experience the inner dynamic of the event more than the actual outcome of it. During the funeral for the victims of the previous mentioned riot, thousands of people took to the street in order to express their collective solidarity with the grieving families. The women attending the funeral expressed their emotions by crying, beating their chests and shouting slogans. They fuelled the emotional process by giving energy to the mass. Even if people gathered in order to express their sorrow in a specific situation, the emotional atmosphere also gave space for the ‘historic pain’ of the people. In this way, collective mobilisation around an incident or a common cause often increases the participants’ critical awareness and enables them to perceive and act upon the actual social and political situation in a different way.

Popular confrontations and collective actions aiming at transforming society are laden with emotion. Peterson (2001) uses Durkheim’s term *collective effervescence*⁵⁵, to describe what takes place in collective gatherings in moments of intensely shared experiences. An

⁵⁵ Emile Durkheim developed the concept in the volume *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912).

example of collective effervescence is, according to Tiryakian (1995), the *velvet revolutions* of 1989, which swept over various East European countries. The fact that they spread from country to country shows the strong educative potential of collective action. Romano (2002) argues that people learn by the example of others. When people gather around shared beliefs or actions filled with emotions, the atmosphere often reaches a high energy level, creating a sense of emotional togetherness. In these emotional collective moments, political meaning is created and collective memory established (Halbwachs, 1992). Collective learning takes place when the participants discover the relationship between collective action, political meaning and change, and are able to transfer these experiences to the next collective event. This can be explained by Gramsci's concept 'the collective subject' (SPN, 2005). The subject learns, not solely as an individual but as part of a collective. It is the power of the collective of conscious subjects which provides the recourses necessary to act upon and to transform society.

9.3 Concluding remarks

The PKK started as a reformer of the traditional society in the Kurdish regions, and as a protest against state oppression and feudal power. As White (2000) states, even if Kurds to a certain degree have benefited from economic reforms, they have been left out of the political and economical progress in Turkey. The peasants are still landless and industrialisation and economic modernisation from the 1980s and onwards has not solved the problems in the region. On the contrary, the Kurds have been excluded from citizenship (op.cit, p. 206). Even the EU⁵⁶ has not been able to address the Kurdish issue properly and the prospects for the Kurds to shake off their historical oppression of a hostile governing regime, is gradually diminishing (Yildiz & Muller, 2008, p. 188).

From a locally based student group at the University of Ankara in the late 1960s, the PKK has developed into a significant transnational actor. As globalisation processes create opportunities for organisations and movements to operate transnationally, the PKK used the opportunity to extend and strengthen the struggle, and to facilitate the communication between worldwide Diaspora communities and Kurdistan. Through transformative political education, the PKK has systematically worked to alter the subordinated position of the Kurds.

The PKK members in this study are freedom fighters, or they conduct civic and political work at different levels and fields in the mountains, in Kurdistan or Diaspora. They have gone through dramatic learning processes, claiming to have gained new forms of

⁵⁶ As an answer to Turkey's membership bid, negotiation between the EU and Turkey started October 2005.

knowledge and new approaches to life, through the PKK education. They have become literate in a double sense. Many recruits, lacking formal education, have learnt to read and write. At the same time, they have become politically literate; they have learnt to “read” their historical, political and cultural situation differently. Some have even become what Gramsci terms ‘organic intellectuals’. It seems that educational processes have contributed to changing their previous understanding of themselves and the world. When the informants learnt to perceive their political and personal situation as *transformable*, rather than inescapable, it became possible for them to imagine a new and different reality.

Thousands of youths have joined the PKK during the last decades. The informants, regardless of educational background, clearly express that the PKK has been a school where they have gained new knowledge about a range of issues. Perhaps even more important, the organisation has also helped them to transform the image of themselves as being inferior citizens. Through a transformative education, they claim to have become someone; they regard themselves as better persons.

Because of its insistence on education, the PKK has managed to build up a strong grassroots movement of members and supporters who are willing to learn and to teach others. Practical educative activities, along with political education, have created the foundation for a dynamic Kurdish movement, which has become a school for those who participate.

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PAPER I, II & III

APPENDIX I - V