

# The Kurdish Question in Turkey

Almost three decades have passed since political violence erupted in Turkey's south-eastern Kurdish regions, where the majority of Turkey's approximately 20 million Kurds live. In 1984, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) initiated an insurgency which intensified in the following decades and continues to this day. Kurdish regions in Turkey were under military rule for more than a decade and according to the Turkish authorities, the conflict has cost the lives of 40,000 people, including soldiers, guerrillas and civilians. The complex issue of the Kurdish question in Turkey is subject to comprehensive examination in this book.

This interdisciplinary edited volume brings together chapters by social theorists, political scientists, social anthropologists, sociologists, legal theorists, and ethnomusicologists to provide new perspectives on this internationally significant issue. It elaborates on the complexity of the Kurdish question and examines the subject matter from a number of innovative angles.

Considering historical, theoretical, and political aspects of the Kurdish question in depth and raising issues that have not been discussed sufficiently in existing literature, this book is an invaluable resource for students and scholars of nationalism and conflict, Turkish politics, and Middle Eastern politics more broadly.

**Cengiz Gunes** is the author of *The Contemporary Kurdish National Movement in Turkey: From Protest to Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2012). His main research interests are in identity and nationalism, peace and conflict studies, and the international relations of the Middle East.

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**The Kurdish Question in Turkey**

New perspectives on violence, representation, and reconciliation

*Cengiz Gunes and Welat Zeydanhoğlu*

# **The Kurdish Question in Turkey**

New perspectives on violence,  
representation, and reconciliation

**Edited by**

**Cengiz Gunes and Welat Zeydanlıođlu**

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# Foreword

*Hamit Bozarslan*

This volume is a timely intervention not least because it represents the work of thirteen young scholars on the Kurdish issue. Some twenty-five years ago, a reader could hardly find a dozen books on the Kurdish issue in the English language. So, one can only be impressed by the emergence, in the 2000s, of a new generation of researchers who have a solid theoretical background, linguistic skills, and years of experience in the field. Coming from different disciplines and forming a truly 'pluralistic' community, scholars in this volume share an obvious interest in inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches. Assuming the commitment of most of them to what one could qualify as critical social sciences, they also realize a methodological and epistemological renewal of Kurdish studies. Their contributions to this collection are also valuable for a second reason: while the number of monographs on the specific topics of Kurdish history and society has reached a respectable level during the last decade, the field lacks well-informed and synthetic overviews on the Kurdish issue in different Near Eastern countries. Thanks to the sophisticated and theoretically informed contributions presented in this volume, scholars and other readers will be able to understand some of complex dynamics of this issue in the specific context of Turkey, a country which has gone through tremendous changes during the last decade.

The failure to settle the Kurdish issue peacefully continues to impede Turkey's progress towards democracy and stability. This does not mean, however, that the actors are necessarily the same as those of the 1990s, or that the modes of mobilization and action of the Kurdish movement, and the forms of domination and repression by the Turkish state, have remained static since the turn of the twenty-first century. One should remember that neither Turkey nor Kurdistan are any longer theatres in a political vacuum, as was the case some ten years ago. Instead of a fragmented political space where the military dictated its will in every field considered relevant for 'national security', today one has to take into account a solid hegemonic power constructed by the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan with the help of the religious community of Fethullah Gülen. While the Kurdish political space tried, painfully, in the beginning of the 2000s to overcome the trauma of the

capture and arrest of Abdullah Öcalan, today his party, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK), imposes itself as the main actor of the Kurdish movement in Turkey, broadly speaking. And the Peace and Democracy Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*, BDP), which one can neither consider an organic legal emanation of the PKK, nor as totally separated from it, occupies an almost hegemonic position in Kurdistan, Turkey. The state's vision of 'Kurdishness' has also changed. The AKP government has officially accepted the existence of the Kurds, if not of the Kurdish issue in Turkey, thus ending the country's policy of denying the existence of the Kurds as a separate ethnicity. As a counterpart to this recognition, however, it has invited the Kurds to accept being 'at the service of the Turkish-Islamic nation', emphasizing the 'unbreakable brotherhood' between Kurds and Turks, thus further radicalizing an already autonomized Kurdish political space. The AKP's coercive policies, particularly since 2009, have also become a source of further radicalization of large sectors of the Kurdish society.

Finally, within the last ten years, the regional context has also dramatically changed, not only once, but twice. In the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War, Turkey expressed strong opposition to any viable form of regional government within Iraqi Kurdistan, and it has been a part of an unofficial but efficient alliance with Syria and Iran. Turkey's episodic clashes with Israel and the United States have also contributed to the reinforcement of this alliance, which remained fundamentally anti-Kurdish in spite of Ankara's later rapprochement with the Iraqi Kurdish authorities. Turkey's almost decade-long alliance with these two profoundly anti-Western Middle Eastern states came to an end in the summer of 2011 when Ankara's relations with Bashar al-Assad's regime took a highly conflictual, and even a violent, u-turn. In 2012, the Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokratik*, PYD), a Kurdish Syrian party close to the PKK, was able to benefit from the retreat of al-Assad forces from the Kurdish areas. Ankara has described this evolution as a 'threat' to its own security, but cannot manage the situation through military measures, as it would have done in the past.

Only a careful reading of institutional evolutions and discourses, and also of concrete practices, as the authors of this volume have undertaken, can allow us to have an insight into the new aspects of the Kurdish issue in the AKP's Turkey. The first two authors of the book focus specifically on the changes that one observes in the ideological constructions and representations of the Kurds and the Kurdish issue. Derya Bayır focuses on the state's legal discourse concerning the Kurds and Kurdish question in Turkey in the past decade. As shown by the banal use of the concept of 'terrorism' to describe Kurdish actors, the 'security-based' categories of the former 'regime of understanding' have not been abandoned. The chapter examines the indictment of the ongoing Union of Kurdistan Communities (*Koma Civakên Kurdistan*, KCK) case to show the similarities between the state's legal

discourse and the AKP government's political discourse. Bayır situates the KCK trial within the context of the ongoing ideological contest between the AKP and the PKK and the broader Kurdish national movement, and shows how legal instruments are deployed by the state to marginalize the ideas and claims of equality that are articulated by the Kurdish movement in Turkey.

In her contribution, Derya Erdem concentrates on analyzing the representation of the Kurds and Kurdish political actors in the Turkish mass media, known for their extremely pointed and speculative headlines. Here again, the former official discourse of ordinary denial has been replaced by a discriminatory and paternalistic one, picturing the 'Kurd' as repressed and manipulated by 'cynical political actors', or rather by one single 'hidden hand' whose aim is supposed to be to harm Turkey as much as the 'innocent Kurds' themselves. These descriptive schemes are neither entirely new, nor specific to the Turkish media; throughout the world dominant discourses have always depicted any kind of resistance of a subaltern or subordinated group as the outcome of a wide-scale manipulation of 'internal' or 'external' enemies. What is new, however, is that the pro-AKP media, i.e., the media of a political force which has itself been ostracized for decades by the self-labeled 'secular Kemalist' elite, is now using the same vocabulary of discrimination and accusation against Kurdish actors and in responding to Kurdish demands.

Three other articles of the volume shed a new light on the concrete forms of Kurdish militancy and mobilization in Turkey. The first, written by Delal Aydın, depicts how *Newroz*, the beginning of the spring, which is considered a moment of rebirth among many peoples in the region, has become a truly mobilizing myth in Kurdistan. As the author shows, the process of politicizing the 'New Year' that one can observe step-by-step from the 1960s to the present, is also a process of constructing a 'counter-hegemony' that challenges the state's official holidays, which, not least through their frequency, regulate the country's collective life and 'national memory'. But as a time marker, *Newroz* is also a key instrument in the invention of an alternative Kurdish time, through which the 'national' mobilization reaches its annual peak. The chapter by Ramazan Aras also deals with Kurdish mobilization in the context of a well-orchestrated policy of fear, which is partly a traumatic consequence of decades of state coercion, massive destruction, and violence, and partly an intrinsic part of symbolic violence exerted by state and mass-media discourses. Well beyond its psychological or psychoanalytical definitions, fear appears here to be a technique used by state for purposes of social and political engineering. The author shows that religion and nationalism have become sources of Kurdish resistance against this 'empire of fear'. The last article in this section, co-authored by Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya and Joost Jongerden, brings the debate on Kurdish militancy and mobilization to another level: that of the 'radical democracy' promoted by Abdullah Öcalan and his party, PKK, for more than a decade now. Developed as an alternative both to the party's former program of 'national liberation', and to the

'liberal democracy' advocated by the contemporary world system, this new orientation has provoked tremendous changes in PKK's political discourses and praxis, namely in its approach towards issues of gender equality and environmental protection.

A third category of articles in the volume concerns those actors who, in spite of their fragile and precarious status, are strongly present in the Kurdish movement. Necla Açıık's contribution explores paradoxical features of women's participation in the Kurdish mobilization. One can in fact easily observe that, in sharp contrast to the Turkish one, the Kurdish political space is largely feminized. This fact is quite easy to understand: while only two generations – those known as the '68ers' and those known as the '78ers', i.e. those who were politically active around 1968 and 1978, respectively – have been formed through past militant mobilizations in the Turkish political space broadly speaking, Kurdistan has witnessed the emergence of younger political generations that one could call the '88ers' and '98ers'. This continuity in militancy, which frustrates the state's discourse defining Kurds as a 'backward and feudal' community leaving no room to women's emancipation, creates unexpected participatory avenues for the Kurdish women, and allows intergenerational transmission of political experiences. Still, as the author shows, Kurdish militancy, as many others throughout the world, has remained in a rather classical framework and continues to fix 'gendered roles' to men and women within the 'national struggle'.

Kariane Westrheim deals with yet another main actor of the Kurdish movement, which bears the generic name of a place: the street. Since the 1960s, the 'street' has played an important role in the Kurdish urban space, and in the 1990s the *serhildans* (urban uprisings) constituted peak moments in Kurdish mobilization. The 2000s, however, attested both to an almost permanent state of urban mobilization, and to the transformation of the street into a 'site of alternative education' or for 'critical pedagogy'. This change leads inevitably to a radical switch from spontaneous mobilization, as happened during urban riots, to a more structured political mode of action. This 'structuration', means, in turn, the emergence of intergenerational mechanisms of regulation and social control of the youth's axiological field, in particular.

The last article in this category, written by Ozan E. Aksoy, deals with the reconciliation efforts of Kurdish and Turkish musicians and with their contribution to the process of finding a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question. Contrasting with the very weak place they occupy in society, intellectuals, particularly those coming from a left-wing tradition, have always played an important role in Turkey, and they have had a place at the forefront of many democratic battles. They have also shown that, in spite of the heavy balance sheet of three decades of violent conflict, some common spaces could be invented, or at least preserved, between the Kurds and the Turks. The field of artistic creation appears thus to be the birthplace of new forms of Kurdish and Turkish dreams and deceptions, anger and hope, and

of their hybridization, commonalities, and process of socialization. The case of musicians, but also of filmmakers, poets, novelists, and to some extent scholars, shows that the political margins of a given society can play a positive role in the invention a common space of civility, or even of solidarity.

The four remaining articles of the volume are at once analytical and prospective, and they aim to understand the dynamics and the logic behind the obstacles to a peaceful solution to the Kurdish issue. One should remember here that, on the one hand, the AKP government is hesitating between an outraged repressive policy and negotiations, which creates important limits on maneuver, and, on the other, the PKK is by and large undetermined between the alternatives of continuing the armed struggle, or adopting an exclusively pacifist political combat. The first article on this issue is authored by Welat Zeydanhoğlu, and it is on Turkey's language policy. He shows that the language issue also plays a decisive role in the construction of 'Kurdishness' by the state's discourses and policies. Obviously, the AKP government has been much more open-minded than any previous government in Turkish history in this field; it has for example established an official Kurdish TV channel and re-published the famous Kurdish epopee of Ehmed-i Xani, *Mem-û-Zin* (1695), which was banned in the past. But these signs of 'overture' have been systematically presented as 'gifts' of the state's paternalist policy, for which the Kurds in return should be grateful and not formulate any demands linking the linguistic issue to broader political, regional, or administrative demands, such as the right to public education in their mother-tongue.

The second article on this theme is authored by Zelal B. Kızıllkan Kısacık, which analyses the impact of Turkey's candidacy to the European Union. Written in a context in which Turkey's accession to membership becomes more and more hypothetical for a variety of reasons, it suggests that the implementation of the legal reforms required by the European Union to improve minority rights in Turkey depends, before everything else, on the policies adopted by the authorities in Ankara. One should in fact recognize that, since 2005, the date Ankara's candidacy to the EU was accepted, Turkey has been going through tremendous changes, which considerably reduce the impact of any kind of European pressure on Turkey. As the governing power in the 17th richest country in the world, the AKP has in fact developed a cult of an 'autonomous' power (or even of becoming a 'regional super-power'), pushing it towards pragmatic, yet largely independent, policies both domestically and internationally.

The contribution by Cuma Çiçek allows us to articulate Turkey's changing Middle Eastern policies, particularly since the appointment of Ahmet Davutoğlu, a professor of international relations and an advocate of a globalized world order, as well as AKP's internal and regional Kurdish policies. In both cases one observes the coexistence of long-term and reflexive strategies and constantly improvised short-term readjustments, or even day-to-day decisions that create a feeling of vertigo. The long term strategies consist of

redefining Middle Eastern Islam on the basis of Turkish superiority and ‘Turkishness’ on the basis of an openly outspoken conservative Islamic identity. To some extent, Abdülhamid II and some of the main thinkers of his period, such as Cevdet Pacha (1822–95), were the first to propose such an identity-equation; the well-known *Aydınlar Ocağı* (Hearth of Intellectuals) and the religious community of Fethullah Gülen had or still has similar aims. This doctrine, however, also faces a constant paradox, particularly since the 1990s, a decade during which it appeared that it was no longer possible to deny the existence of the Kurds: how to ‘resolve’ the Kurdish issue through the recognition of the Kurds as a historical community, and yet to ‘integrate’ them into the ‘Turkish and Islamic’ nation? It is obvious that AKP’s political engineering has not yet found the ‘magic formula’ to overcome this impossibility; thus it has no other solution but to combine two contradictory policies, i.e., those of astonishing ‘overtures’ and massive repression.

Finally, the last article, written by Cengiz Gunes, is a reflection on a possible political solution to the Kurdish issue through the invention of a new, pluralistic Turkey, that would legitimize its internal conflicts, starting with the most important among them, the Kurdish question. Through this article one can see, *in fine*, that the possible formulae for the resolution of the Kurdish conflict have long been discussed in Turkey, and with the exception of Devlet Bahçeli’s far-right Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), the positions of the major political parties have evolved into less rigid ones throughout the last few years. Yet, one can also think that the capacity of a political formation such the AKP to build, thanks to the support of some 50% of the electorate, an uncontested hegemonic bloc in the society, constitutes in itself an obstacle to a political solution in a quite similar way to the military’s official ‘security doctrine’, which hindered any positive evolution in the past. Obviously, some negotiations, mediated by international actors, among them the British and the Irish, took, and continue to take place between Ankara and PKK, but they have so far been unsuccessful in preventing the cycle of the escalation of state coercion and guerilla warfare. In a Middle East where many areas are experiencing a kind of ‘state of violence’ and where the artificial inter-state borders, namely those dividing Kurdistan, have once again become a theatre of intense violence, both Ankara and the PKK play a strategic game going beyond Turkey’s own framework. Only the recognition of the Kurdish issue both as a domestic and as a regional issue, and of the Kurdish actors as legitimate both domestically and regionally speaking, could thus open the way for a peaceful solution of this conflict which has cost some 45,000 lives since 1984.





# Introduction

## Turkey and the Kurds

*Cengiz Gunes and Welat Zeydanlıoğlu*

Almost three decades have passed since conflict and political violence erupted in Turkey's south-eastern Kurdish regions, where the majority of the country's approximately 20 million Kurds live. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK) initiated an insurgency in 1984 and the conflict intensified during the 1980s and 1990s, which continues to haunt Turkey to this day. The Kurdish regions in Turkey were under emergency rule throughout this period and, according to the Turkish authorities, the conflict has cost the lives of more than 45,000 people, including soldiers, guerrillas, and civilians. Turkish and international human rights organisations estimate that between 3 and 4 million people have been internally displaced as part of the state's scorched-earth counter-offensive operations against the PKK, which included the forced evacuation of nearly 4,000 Kurdish rural settlements (Çelik 2005; Ayata and Yüksek 2005; KHRP 2005; Jongerden 2001). The unilateral ceasefires that the PKK has declared since the 1990s have significantly reduced the violence in the past decade, and the Islamist-leaning Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) government, which has governed since 2002, has initiated legal reforms that have granted limited cultural and linguistic rights to the Kurds; however, these have so far failed to result in a satisfactory and lasting solution to the conflict. Consequently, since the end to the PKK's ceasefire in 2004, Turkey has witnessed an escalation in violence. Therefore, the 'Kurdish question' continues to be a central issue in Turkey and the neighbouring Middle Eastern region. Turkey's success in its bid to become a member of the European Union (EU) is closely linked to its successful institution of a pluralistic democratic framework that offers representation to the Kurds and accommodates their political and cultural demands.

The significant decrease in hostilities during the past decade, the existence of various political actors in Turkey that campaign for a political solution to the conflict, the recent developments in Iraq and the emergence of the Kurdistan Federal Region of Iraq as an actor in the region, the EU-Turkish relations and its likely impact on Turkey's democratization – all these indicate that the demands for a solution will be intensified. Hence, it is highly likely that the Kurdish question will occupy an even more central position in

the public debate in Turkey in the near future. These developments suggest that a possible solution is on the horizon and that a comprehensive new investigation of the Kurdish question in Turkey is therefore needed at this important juncture.

The Kurdish question in Turkey has been attracting ample academic interest, and in the past numerous books have been published on the subject (Lowe and Stansfield 2010; Ibrahim and Gürbey 2000; Barkey and Fuller 1998; Kirişçi and Winrow 1997; Olson 1996). These books remain valuable sources on the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state. By utilising new theoretical and conceptual frameworks to assess extensive primary sources, each chapter in this volume aims to make an important contribution to the growing field of Kurdish studies and the study of the Kurdish question. Written by established scholars whose primary specialism is on the Kurds and the Kurdish question in Turkey, each chapter presents an extensive empirical account that supplements and extends the existing analysis.

### **Kurdish political activism in Turkey: an overview of the contemporary period**

The transition to multi-party democracy in Turkey, the rise of the Kurdish national movement in Iraq (especially the return of Mullah Mustafa Barzani in 1958 to Iraqi Kurdistan and the subsequent reinvigoration of the Kurdish struggle in Iraq), and the emergence of a new generation of politically active Kurds influenced the politicisation of the Kurds in Turkey during the 1960s and led to the re-emergence of the Kurdish national movement (Bozarslan 2008: 344–46). The limited freedoms allowed by the democratic regime instituted with the 1960 constitution made room for oppressed voices to be heard and political opposition to harness its struggle. The Kurds were able to express some of their demands and concerns. Consequently the 1960s witnessed the proliferation of Kurdish cultural activities leading to an increase in discussion of the Kurdish question. A series of events in Turkey during the late 1950s and early 1960s also played a significant role in bringing the Kurdish question back into the political arena. In particular, it was the arrest and trial of 50 Kurdish students and activists in December 1959 for organizing a protest meeting against the Turkish nationalist politician Asım Eren, who openly advocated revenge attacks on Kurds in Turkey as retaliation for attacks on Turkomans in Kirkuk, Iraq. This was an important event because the protracted prosecution and media coverage of the case rekindled public interest in the country's almost forgotten Kurdish question. The activists were prosecuted on charges of 'taking part, with the aid of foreign states, in activities to weaken the unity of the state and separate parts of the territory of the state' and 'taking part in activities to weaken the unity of the nation' (Kutlay 1994: 7–11). Political repression of Kurds continued with the arbitrary arrest and detention, after the coup d'état in May 1960, of 485 Kurdish tribal leaders and other high profile personalities, and the subsequent exile of

55 of them to southern and western Turkey. This was followed by the arrest and detention of 23 Kurdish activists in September 1963 (Gunes 2012: 51–52).

The 1960s also witnessed a significant increase in Kurdish cultural activities, primarily the publication of cultural magazines and their dissemination to a wider public. Numerous magazines were published; including *İleri Yurt* (1959), *Dicle Fırat* (1962), *Deng*, *Rêya Rast*, *Roja Newe* (1963) and *Yeni Akış* (1966). In addition, a Kurdish grammar book was published in 1965, and the epic *Mem û Zîn* was translated into Turkish in 1967 and made available to the reading public as well (Kendal 1993: 66–68). Invariably, such activities revived Kurdish culture and created a space where Kurdish rights came to be discussed. During the 1960s, Kurds increased their involvement in Turkish left-wing organizations, such as the Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP). Left-wing student organisations gave them an institutional base to voice their grievances. The TİP offered Kurds a platform where demands could be discussed. In fact, pressure from Kurdish members participating in the 4th TİP congress in 1970 brought open acknowledgement of the Kurds in Turkey (Kirişci and Winrow 1997: 109). Through involvement in left-wing organisations, Kurds began to develop and disseminate an alternative interpretation of social reality challenging the official ideology of the state in Turkey. Debate, especially within the left-wing parties and organisations, gradually led to the re-conceptualisation of Kurdish identity. From its original conceptualisation as a case of underdevelopment of the Kurdish regions during the 1960s, the Kurdish question became increasingly articulated within the Marxist discourse as a national problem and a case of colonialism (Bozarslan 2008: 347). In addition to the left-wing Kurdish movement, a separate conservative-leaning movement formed with the establishment in 1965 of the Kurdistan Democrat Party of Turkey (TKDP), which served to bring various sectors of Kurdish society together, including urban notables, craftsmen, and students, marking 'a new stage in the autonomisation of the Kurdish movement in terms of the worker and student movements' (Bozarslan 1992: 98–99).

The nascent Kurdish movement started to attract mass support, as was evident at the 'meetings of the East' (*Doğu Mitingleri*) organized in the main Kurdish towns and cities between 1967 and 1969, and during which Kurdish demands were publicly expressed (Gündoğan 2011). Such activities led in 1969 to the emergence and growth of the Revolutionary Cultural Centres of the East (*Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları*, DDKO) movement, which formulated its program on popular issues, such as underdevelopment and the lack of state investment in the Kurdish 'eastern' regions. However, the military coup in 1971 intensified political oppression, closing down the DDKO and prosecuting its leaders and members. Many Kurdish political activists were released following the general amnesty in 1974, and consequently the mid-1970s witnessed a resurgence in Kurdish political activism and the emergence of numerous new Kurdish left-wing political groups, which

intensified the Kurds' separation from the Turkish socialist movement. During the second half of the 1970s the following organisations were in existence: Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan (*Türkiye Kürdistan Sosyalist Partisi*, TKSP), Liberation (*Rizgari*), Flag of Liberation (*Ala Rizgari*), Kurdistan National Liberationists (*Kürdistan Ulusal Kurtuluşcuları*, KUK), Kurdistan Workers Party/The Revolutionary Cultural Associations of the East (*Kürdistan İşçi Partisi/Devrimci Doğu Kültür Dernekleri*, KİP/DDKD), PKK, KAWA, Dengê Kawa (Jongerden and Akkaya 2011: 125; Gunes 2012: 74). In varying degrees, all were committed to the Kurdish struggle and to socialism; however, the 1970s saw a period of intensified conflict and fragmentation within the Kurdish movement. From 1980 onwards, the main Kurdish challenge to the state in Turkey was provided by the PKK. Since then, it has managed to mobilise a significant number of the Kurds in Turkey and elsewhere to become the hegemonic force in Kurdish resistance in Turkey.

The PKK was formally founded in November 1978 as a clandestine organisation and its initial political objective was to unify the 'people of Kurdistan' in an independent, united, and socialist republic. The PKK's discourse of 'national liberation' prepared Kurds to challenge Turkey violently. However, soon after its establishment the PKK was involved in violent political struggles with rival Kurdish groups and traditional tribal elites, especially in the province of Urfa. The tribal elites were seen as legitimate targets participating in the oppression of the Kurdish working class and peasantry and for cooperating with the Turkish state in assimilating the Kurds. On 15 August 1984, the PKK embarked on its guerrilla insurgency against the Turkish state with attacks on military posts in the towns of Eruh and Şemdinli, near the Turkey-Iraq border. In 1986 it organised the People's Liberation Army of Kurdistan (*Artêşa Rizgariya Gelê Kurdistan*, ARGK) and fought a guerrilla war that continued until 1999. During the late 1980s and early 1990s the PKK gathered support and increased its influence. That popular support was demonstrated in the spring of 1991 and 1992 when large numbers of Kurds took part in popular uprisings, known as *serhildan*, across Kurdish towns. Shop closures and boycotts were organised by many Kurds in most towns of the Kurdish region, especially in Diyarbakır, Batman, Şırnak, and Siirt. However, with the forced evacuation of rural Kurdish settlements, the Turkish state cut off logistic support to the PKK. As a result, the PKK weakened militarily during the mid-1990s and onwards.

In addition to gaining widespread Kurdish support, the PKK-led Kurdish rebellion was the most radical and has lasted the longest in the history of the Kurds in Turkey. In addition to its military activities, the PKK established a complex, well-organised political network through the National Liberation Front of Kurdistan (*Eniya Rizgariya Netewa Kurdistan*, ERNK), established in 1986 and active in the Kurdish region as well as in Western Europe. In its fight against the growing PKK insurgency, the Turkish state introduced the Village Guard System (*Korucu Sistemi*) in 1985, employing various Kurdish

tribes to create an autonomous paramilitary force of 100,000 militiamen (Bozarslan 2000: 24). Refusal to enroll in the Village Guard System usually led to eviction and destruction of villages (Human Rights Foundation of Turkey 1997). In 1987 the Turkish state also declared a State of Emergency Rule (*Olağanüstü Hal*, OHAL), bringing 13 Kurdish provinces – the majority of the Kurdish region – under emergency rule and vesting the ‘Super Governor’ with extraordinary powers. While the military conflict seriously undermined state rule, it also devastated the regional economy, especially during its peak in the early 1990s. The military controlled the flow of information from the region, and independent observers and journalists were barred or significantly restricted from entering. Systematic human rights violations were reported, including torture, rape and deaths in detention, disappearances and extrajudicial murders. In addition, the conflict had other significant social, political, environmental, and economic ramifications, including mob violence against Kurdish civilians, and a corresponding rise in Turkish ultra-nationalism during the 1990s.

Due to its military losses in the battle-field and the period of stalemate that the conflict entered, from 1993 onwards the PKK has attempted to bring an end to its armed struggle and declared repeated ceasefires to initiate a process that would eventually lead to a negotiated solution to the conflict. It moderated its aims and suggested that a form of extensive autonomy would be acceptable. It toned down its Marxist-Leninist rhetoric and emphasised Kurdish rights, democratic consolidation, and peaceful co-existence. In September 1998, large numbers of Turkish armed forces were moved to the Syrian border threatening invasion if Syria continued to shelter the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. On 9 October, 1998, Öcalan left Syria for Europe. In February 1999, he was caught in Nairobi, Kenya and brought to Turkey. Subsequently, he was tried and sentenced to death, which, as a result of diplomatic pressure and fear that the conflict might descend into civil war, was reduced to life imprisonment. Since Öcalan’s imprisonment, the PKK has undergone a number of organisational and ideological transformations. In August 1999, the PKK withdrew its guerrillas from Turkey to Iraqi Kurdistan and declared a permanent ceasefire. In 2002, the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (*Kongreya Azadî û Demokrasiya Kurdistanê*, KADEK) was established, which in 2003 changed its name to People’s Congress (*Kongra-Gel*). Until 2004, the PKK remained more or less dormant militarily, and it maintained its guerrilla units as a defence force. But from June 2004 onwards, citing the lack of dialogue and initiatives toward resolving the Kurdish issue peacefully, the PKK resumed attacks on the Turkish military.

Kurdish national and cultural demands have also been articulated by legal pro-Kurdish political parties. In 1989, Kurdish politicians on the Social Democratic People’s Party (*Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti*, SHP) list were elected to the Turkish national assembly. In 1990, 11 of the MPs resigned from the SHP and founded the People’s Labour Party (*Halkın Emek Partisi*,

HEP) – the first independent legal pro-Kurdish political party in Turkey. HEP was active until July 1993. The party was outlawed and shut down. The Democracy Party (*Demokrasi Partisi*, DEP) was founded to continue the mission. DEP was closed in 1994. On its heels, People’s Democracy Party (*Halkın Demokrasi Partisi*, HADEP) was established and became the focal point of legal Kurdish political activism until it too was closed in March 2003. Subsequently, between November 2005 and December 2009, the pro-Kurdish political challenge was carried out by the Democratic People’s Party (*Demokratik Halk Partisi*, DEHAP) and the Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, DTP), and it is currently led by the Peace and Democracy Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*, BDP) as the main pro-Kurdish political party on the Turkish political scene. Despite the organizational changes and endemic party closures, the pro-Kurdish democratic movement’s aims and objectives have retained a significant degree of stability. Finding a peaceful political solution to the conflict, recognition of Kurdish national demands in Turkey, such as the free use of the Kurdish language, and official recognition of the Kurdish identity and culture within a democratic framework have been the central political goals of the pro-Kurdish parties.

While participation in the democratic process in Turkey has enabled the pro-Kurdish democratic movement to construct a wide ranging organisational network, they have not been as successful in gaining representation to the National Assembly because of the 10-per-cent election threshold that was introduced after the 1980 military intervention. In the April 1999 national general election, HADEP managed to gain 4.76 per cent of the national vote, and in the November 2002 elections, which DEHAP contested under a unity platform established with other left wing and pro-democracy parties, DEHAP obtained nearly 2 million votes, or 6.23 per cent of the votes cast. In the 22 July 2007 general election, the DTP managed to find representation in the Turkish Parliament by choosing to support independent candidates. Twenty-one were elected and joined the DTP to form a political bloc in the Turkish Parliament. The pro-Kurdish parliamentary representation has continued after the most recent national elections on 12 June 2011, with 35 MPs from the independent list elected. In addition to the traditional pro-Kurdish heartlands in the majority Kurdish regions, independent candidates in Istanbul, Adana, and Mersin were also elected to the National assembly in 2011.

### **Representation of the Kurdish question in Turkey**

The representation of the Kurdish question or the ‘Kurdish problem’ (*Kürt sorunu*), as it is known in political and popular media discourses, is central to understanding the current chronic difficulties Turkey is facing in developing a peaceful solution to this complicated ethno-political problem. This is primarily because the representation and interpretation of the Kurdish question has naturally also had a defining impact on its ‘treatment’ as an

'issue'. As various chapters in this book highlight, the representation of the Kurdish question in Turkey contains, on many levels, an ideological bias that serves the purpose of delegitimizing Kurdish claims.

What is the Kurdish question then? Is it purely an ethno-political problem? Is it the division of the homeland of one of the largest nations in the world that does not have its own state? Is it the problem of lack of democracy and multiculturalism in Turkey? Is it the denial of the Kurds' right to self-determination? Or is it a problem of separatist terror that can only be dealt with by military means? Can it be understood through the Turkish nationalist framework, and be seen as an artificial problem created by 'imperialists' to weaken existing nation-states in the Middle East that have geo-strategic locations and plenty of natural resources? As these questions suggest, what is termed the 'Kurdish question' has the potential to be construed and interpreted in diverse ways. Although this may be the case nowadays, for many decades the way of representing the Kurds and the Kurdish question remained very static, dominated and completely under the control of the nation-state(s) and various ideological and military apparatuses. This 'status quo' on the definition of the Kurdish question was also generally accepted internationally, and states with large Kurdish populations had a free hand to 'integrate' their Kurdish 'minorities' as they wished. In Turkey, the paradigm dominating the representation of the Kurds and the Kurdish question prevailed for almost a century, and it continues to define and influence the way Kurds as a people, Kurdistan as their homeland, and the Kurdish question as a constellation of complex problems, are understood and dealt with today.

Understanding the dominant representations of the Kurdish question in Turkey requires a quick assessment of the making of the new modern Turkey as a homogenous nation-state of Turkish speakers, and of the integral elite-led policy of cancelling, negating, and suppressing the Kurdish ethnic identity in any shape or form. Various scholars have shown that the humiliating and painful fragmentation and final collapse of the Ottoman Empire during the late 19th and early 20th centuries strongly influenced the nationalist bureaucratic and military cadres that established the Republic of Turkey and defined the fundamental rules of the country's political life for decades to come (Ahmad 1993; Üngör 2011; Taspınar 2005; Akçam 2004; Yıldız 2001, Ersanlı 2003). As part of this heritage, all kinds of differentiation, whether ethnic, ideological, religious or linguistic, were viewed not as a natural state of a society, but as a weakness open to external manipulation and therefore a potential threat to national unity and development. The Kemalists, named after the nationalist founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, attempted to replace Islam, which had previously functioned as 'social glue' among various Muslim ethnicities, with secular Turkish nationalism as a new transcending bond to establish a new cohesive identity after many years of war and uncertainty. In short, a multi-ethnic and linguistic space was being fixed around a monolithic and closely guarded official identity based on an

ethnic definition of ‘Turkishness’ that denied other identities and represented them as a threat, and which oscillated between assimilation and exclusion. Therefore, behind its civic facade, Turkish nationalism has also always had a racist and ethnicist face, as exemplified in the 1925 blunt speech by Atatürk’s successor and Turkey’s second president, İsmet İnönü:

We are frankly [ ... ] nationalists and nationalism is our only factor of cohesion. In the face of a Turkish majority other elements have no kind of influence. Our duty is to turkify non-Turks in the Turkish homeland no matter what happens. We will annihilate those elements that oppose Turks or Turkism. What we are looking for in those who are to serve the country is above all that they are Turkish and Turkist.

(İnönü quoted in Yıldız 2001: 155–56, our translation)

As the largest non-Turkish ethnic group in Turkey, the Kurds have not fit comfortably into this new Kemalist vision of Turkey as a homogenous and unified nation-state of Turkish speakers, and they have ardently resisted this nation-building project through successive rebellions. Thus, it has been a primary aim of the Turkish authorities since then to ‘suppress’ and ‘integrate’ the Kurds into the system, more often by brute force, state terror, and manipulation, rather than persuasion. The stigma projected on to the Kurds as a hindrance to achieving complete homogeneity became even more pronounced with the elimination of the majority of Armenians and other ethno-religious minorities at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although prior to the establishment of modern Turkey, the Kurds had generally been considered as a natural component of the Muslim Ottoman nation and their ethnicity was not denied, in the following decades, there followed a systematic policy of assimilation and denial against the Kurds as the Turkish nation-building process intensified. This was despite their crucial contribution to the liberation of Anatolia from occupying powers during the First World War. The whole *raison d’être* of the Turkish nation-building process was transformed into the suppression and eventual elimination of ethnic differences and identities as part of becoming a western and secular homogenous singular unit dominated by ‘Turks’; forgetting, ignoring, silencing, dominating, and rejecting while usurping the Kurdish internal ‘other’ has been a ‘natural’ and ‘necessary’ outcome of this process. This has been exemplified in the three constant ‘T’s’ of the Turkish-nation-building project: namely, ‘civilise’ (*temeddün*), ‘assimilate’ (*temsil*), and ‘punish’ (*tenkil*). As a crucial aspect of this project, only the Turkish state could hegemonically ‘represent’ the Kurds. Any other representations of the Kurds that deviated or posed a threat to the official discourse on the Kurds and the Kurdish question were heavily suppressed and silenced. While oppression of opponents and any alternative discourses became an integral part of the Turkish nationalist policy, various ‘frames’ have been used to characterise and represent the Kurdish



question and to create an internal coherence for the state's representation of the Kurds and their socio-political demands.

***Turkification: The Kurds as (mountain) Turks***

The primary and paradigmatic strategy through which the Turkish state has represented the Kurds has been to deny the existence of the Kurds as a separate ethnic group in Turkey or the Middle East, but instead to articulate and prove their 'Turkishness'. By proving the 'Turkishness' of the Kurds, the Turkish authorities have hoped to prevent the development of Kurdish nationalism and, therefore, the justification for the establishment of a separate Kurdish nation-state, which the Kurds were promised in the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), but were denied with the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). Thus, it has been strategically indispensable for the Turkish authorities to represent the Kurds as anything but Kurds, and the Kurdish question as anything but an ethno-political problem. If Kurds are Turks, then there can be no Kurdish problem, no Kurdish claims to nationhood, and also no place called Kurdistan. Instead, well into the 1980s, Kurds came to be officially referred to as 'Mountain Turks', who had forgotten or were in denial of their 'Turkishness.' This construction obviously contained a major contradiction. As van Bruinessen has cogently queried: 'the embarrassing question why it was necessary to turkify a people who were said to be Turks already was never answered' (2000: 80).

In order to achieve the colossal task of denying the ethnic identity and language of a significant section of the society, immense resources and effort have been put into the forced assimilation, or turkification, of the Kurds for the past century. This has naturally prevented Turkey from developing into a stable, democratic, and prosperous country. Among the main methods employed in this century-long project has been to ban the Kurdish language, changing the names of Kurdish towns, villages and settlements; to ban, alter, or destroy maps and any other documents that refer to or mention Kurds or Kurdistan; as well as to destroy publications about Kurds or in the Kurdish language. Historical artifacts or monuments that in any way indicated a Kurdish presence have also been destroyed. Importantly, various laws closed all traditional religious schools in the Kurdish regions, which effectively banned the teaching of Kurdish (Sadoğlu 2003). Names and surnames were turkified through the Surname Law of 1934 which did not permit 'non-Turkish' names. Mountains, streets, official buildings, and schools have since been adorned with symbols of Turkish nationalism and its slogans, such as 'How happy is he who says I am a Turk' (*Ne mutlu Türküm diyene*), to remind the citizens to forget that they may have once been something else. Nationwide 'Citizen, Speak Turkish' (*Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş*) campaigns urged everyone to learn and speak the new modern Turkish language, and to forget their mother tongues or the local vernaculars they spoke.

Moreover, Kurds have been forcefully displaced and resettled to other regions of Turkey in order to weaken their social cohesion, and Kurdish children have been separated from their families in order to be assimilated into Turkish society. Boarding schools have also played an important role in helping Kurdish children ‘un-learn’ their ethnic identity and language while being indoctrinated in Turkish nationalism in an environment separate from their cultural milieu (Üngör 2012: 141–45). The policy of assimilating Kurdish children through the national education system generally, and through the boarding schools more specifically, while the Kurdish language remains banned in all educational environments with no possibility for Kurdish being passed on to the next generation through education, continues to this day (for figures see Yeğen 2006: 68). Article 42 of Turkey’s current constitution, as well as various other pieces of legislation, continue to ban the instruction of a language other than Turkish as the mother tongue of Turkish citizens.

The policy of annihilating the ethnic identity of a large section of the society has meant that the Kurdish regions have been and continue to be ruled under emergency rule, or like an ‘internal colony’, for the majority of the modern history of Turkey. In order to legitimise these policies, ideological and ‘scientific’ justifications have had to be manufactured. Accordingly, a new glorious national history was written in the 1930s that also ‘proved’ that Kurds were indeed Turks. Thus, ‘studying’ and ‘knowing’ the ‘East’ went hand in hand with its cultural and linguistic colonization.<sup>1</sup> These ‘scientific’ race theories justified the ‘Turkishness’ of Anatolia, the greatness of the Turks as a ‘civilizing race’, and the turkification of Kurds, and came to dominate how the Kurds and the Kurdish question was approached and understood well into the 1980s, and it continues to influence perspectives on the Kurds and the Kurdish question even today.

The systematic policy of representing the Kurds as Turks, and also making sure that the facts on the ground reflected the official discourse, reached its peak with the 1980 military coup that saw a brutal turkification program implemented in the Kurdish region. The presence of hundreds of thousands of soldiers secured the prohibition of Kurdish cultural and historical representations of any kind. Kurdish-leaning newspapers, publishing houses, charitable organizations, and NGOs were also shuttered. Books about Kurds, Kurdistan, and Kurdish nationalism, including distant historical accounts, were seized and destroyed. Such practices were enhanced by the discourse of Kemalism as a ‘home-grown ideology’ and Communism and Kurdish nationalism as ‘alien’ or imported ideologies and these co-operated with medical discourses that constructed Kurdishness (*Kürtçüülük*) as a ‘sickness’ and ‘contaminating the citizens’ of the Republic, only to be cured with the medicine of Kemalism (Altınay and Bora 2002: 153). The direct projection of this representation of the Kurdish question could be seen through the shocking and brutal torture which incarcerated Kurds were subjected to in the Diyarbakır Military Prison, where Kurdish politicians and intellectuals

were ‘cleansed’ and ‘purified’ through ‘torture as Turkification’, where Turkish nationalism was to literally be beaten or ‘inscribed’ into the prisoners’ bodies and minds (Zeydanlıoğlu 2009). As can be understood, in this environment it became extremely difficult and risky to express the Kurdish identity, and there were no free channels through which alternative representations of the Kurds and the Kurdish question could be expressed and discussed in Turkey.

What was taking place in the prison was the reflection of that which had been ‘proven’ theoretically, scientifically, and legally. Throughout the 1980s, the Turkish Language and Turkish History Institutes promulgated the idea that the Kurds were simply another branch of Central Asian Turks. In particular, various studies from the Institute for the Study of Turkish Culture (*Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü*),<sup>2</sup> ‘proved’ the ‘Turkishness’ of the Kurds by arguing that Kurds were of Turkish origin. As had been done in the early decades of the republic, the state produced and disseminated ‘knowledge’ about Kurds through academic research, and thereby largely determined what could be ‘known’, ‘said’, and ‘thought’ about the Kurds in this period, while prohibiting the circulation of alternative knowledge.<sup>3</sup> According to this paradigm, Kurdish was a ‘rootless’ language made up of elements taken from other languages, and this was the reason ‘Mountain Turks’ did not have a literature, adding that Kurdish daily speech did not use more than three- to five-thousand words, and that Kurdish literary output had been weak due to its isolation from the Turkish language. The onslaught on the Kurdish language and identity was also entrenched in the law, with Law 2932, for example, banning publishing and broadcasting in the Kurdish language (annulled in 1991), and Law 1587 banning Kurdish names for children. As late as 1997, Orhan Türkdoğan, who was awarded an honorary title by the Turkish Parliament in 2008, could argue in his work titled *Ethnic Sociology (Etnik Sosyoloji)*:

There is no such thing as the Kurdish people or nation. They are merely carriers of Turkish culture and habits. The imagined region proposed as the new Kurdistan is the region that was settled by the proto-Turks. The Sumerians and Scythians come immediately to mind. The Eastern problem as it is sometimes called shows itself to be solely the game of the imperialists, played when it suits with [*sic*] the Armenians, when it suits with [*sic*] the Iranians.

(Türkdoğan 1997:119–20, quoted in Houston 2001: 99–100)

From the early 1990s, the official discourse on Kurds as Turks became more difficult to maintain, although it continued to be pursued in military and staunchly Kemalist circles. With the rise of the Kurdish nationalist movement and mobilisation, a serious blow was dealt to the Kemalist myth of an ethnically homogenous country made up only of ‘Turks’ and Turkish speakers. The Kemalist policy of turkification through denial and repression

of the Kurdish ethnicity has without any doubt contributed both to the assimilation of millions of Kurds into mainstream Turkish society, but also to the politicisation and radicalisation of millions of Kurds in defence of their political, linguistic, and cultural rights. The re-emergence of Kurdish nationalism, in the form of the longest and most widespread Kurdish insurrection in modern Turkish history in the 1980s and the claims of identity this energised in the 1990s, has revealed the representation crisis of Turkish modernity in maintaining its state-centric discourse. Indeed, the rise of Kurdish nationalism remains an undeniable and unforgettable traumatic reminder that Turkey has not successfully completed the making of a homogenous nation-state of Turkish speakers.

### ***The Kurdish question as ‘separatist terror’ (bölücü terör)***

A paradigmatic lens through which the Kurdish question has been systematically represented in Turkey has been what has been called the ‘Sèvres Syndrome’. As mentioned earlier, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, the following occupation of the remaining Anatolian lands by the victorious European powers, and the War of Liberation fought against this occupation, left a deep scar on the minds and collective memory of both the late-Ottoman, and later the Kemalist, ruling military and bureaucratic classes. This is especially the case with regard to the Treaty of Sèvres, signed on 10 August 1920 between the victorious European colonial powers and the defeated Ottoman government, which formalised the division of the Empire, which granted independence to Armenia and autonomy to Kurdistan, causing what has been termed ‘Sèvres Syndrome’, a resilient trauma in the Turkish psyche. Although the treaty was never acted upon and was superseded by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which formally established the current borders and sovereignty of Turkey, following the successful War of Liberation fought by Atatürk’s nationalist forces against the occupying powers, the perception arose that foreign powers were continuously and persistently conspiring to divide Turkey along ethnic lines. Thus, these events established the most persistent explanatory tool in state discourse, namely, that the aim of unspecified ‘foreign powers’ is to dismember Turkey. This paranoid mindset has systematically been disseminated through the national education system and media, but also in all other spheres of society in Turkey, colouring the whole spectrum of political discourse (Guida 2008).

Not surprisingly, this perception played an immense role in the way the Kurdish rebellions were perceived and represented. To this day the Sheikh Said rebellion is still propagated to have been a British provocation, despite the fact that British archives clearly show that there was no British support for the rebellion (van Bruinessen 1992: 291–92; Taspınar 2005: 80–81). For example, the head of the Independence Tribunal, established in 1925 to punish Sheikh Said and his followers, was convinced that the rebels had acted out of ‘personal interests,’ ‘political greed’ and ‘foreign instigation’

(Yeğen 1999: 130). This mindset did not necessarily change with Turkey's transition to multi-party politics after 1945, and it found instead fertile ground during the Cold War, where Turkey functioned as a 'front' against the Soviet Union. Being surrounded by hostile countries further enforced an isolationist mentality, enhanced with the military coups that took place roughly every decade against 'internal enemies', with the chauvinistic militarist discourse rooting itself ever deeper in all segments of the Turkish society. During the 1960s and the 1970s, the Kurdish question as 'foreign incitement' was easily incorporated into the larger discourse of the 'Communist threat' and coexisted fluidly with other modes of representing, and thereby controlling, rising Kurdish demands and mobilisation. More recently, with the global 'War on Terror' and the Iraq War in 2003, fears and suspicions have intensified, with rampant conspiracy theories over 'internal' and 'external' threats to Turkey fanned on by a hysterical official and media discourse and through various publications and popular media (Demir and Zeydanlıoğlu 2010; Guida 2008). This imaginary has become a fundamental aspect of the Turkish political psyche and dominated the official discourse on the Kurdish question as a case of terrorism supported by various insidious powers.

As the Kurdish question became more internationalised with the rise of the PKK and its armed struggle for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state, and with the Gulf War in 1991 leading to the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq, the dominant state discourse on the Kurdish question gradually shifted from 'denial' to 'terrorism'. In other words, the Kurdish question was still said to be originating as a result of 'foreign meddling', but Kurdish 'marauding bandits' became instead 'blood-thirsty terrorists'. The Anti-Terror Law of 1991 (Act No: 3713) defined terror in such a broad way that it included almost all activities connected with the promotion of Kurdish rights, language, and culture, and it has since been used to imprison thousands Kurdish activists, intellectuals and politicians. Although the state less and less directly denied the Kurdish ethnicity in the 1990s, the limited 'recognition' of the existence of the Kurds has not since automatically resulted in the recognition of their rights, but has instead resulted in its 'suffocation' through the discourse of terrorism. The existence of 'terror' has been used as an 'excuse' or an 'obstacle' in order not to initiate democratic reforms, or, when they have been initiated, so as not to implement them. In short, 'terrorism' has been the single most important concept used in shaping Turkey's perception, both domestically and internationally, of the Kurds and the Kurdish question. The representation of the Kurdish question as a threat and strictly a 'security concern' and a problem of 'terrorism' has historically led to the rejection of Kurdish demands and a failure to engage with the Kurds constructively, and has been the main barrier to finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. However, the exclusion and denial of the Kurdish identity in the past have not achieved the desired outcome of assimilation. In fact, the inflexible attitude vis-à-vis Kurdish

demands that successive governments have maintained, including the current AKP government, has resulted in the exacerbation rather than containment of violence.

### **Organisation of the book**

Empirically, each chapter in this volume takes issue with the Kurdish question in Turkey and focuses on the post-1980 period. This important socio-political question is addressed from a plurality of perspectives and disciplines. In this way, not only will each chapter complement the others by closely examining a key aspect of the Kurdish question, the specific sets of issues that each chapter engages with means that overall a comprehensive overview is offered. In order to explore some of the issues raised in the above section, we start with a sequence of chapters that analyses the discursive construction and representation of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey by examining the legal and mainstream media discourses. Furthermore, to provide a broader description of the violence in the region during the past 30 years, and to understand at a deeper level the conditions that brought it about and the impact it had on the population, the volume includes chapters that provide an account of that conflict and violence, and of the Kurdish national movement's mobilisation of the Kurds during the 1980s and 1990s. Finally, it examines the prospects for political reconciliation.

In Chapter 1, Bayır provides an analysis of the representation of the Kurds and the Kurdish question in the Turkish state's legal discourse in the past decade. The substantial increase in Kurdish political activism during the second half of twentieth century has meant the judiciary needed to develop a 'suitable' legal discourse that was reflective of the dominant political order in Turkey to represent the Kurdish challenge and its multifarious manifestations. Through an examination of the legal claims brought forward in the indictment of the ongoing Union of Kurdistan Communities (*Koma Civakên Kurdistan*, KCK) trials, this chapter discerns the legal frames used by Turkey's judiciary in its interpretation of Kurdish demands since the PKK's strategic transformation from 1999 onwards. By examining Turkey's political context, the chapter highlights the important connection that exists between the AKP government's political discourse on the Kurdish question, and the state's legal discourse that has been expressed in the KCK indictments.

This is supplemented with Erdem's analysis in Chapter 2 of the representation of the Kurds and the pro-Kurdish DTP in mainstream Turkish media between 2008 and 2009, particularly concentrating on important events such as the local and general elections in which DTP took part. More specifically, it critically examines and deconstructs news articles, headlines, images, and TV programs, as well as different discursive strategies by various Turkish media, to offer an evaluation of the representation of Kurds and DTP in Turkey. The basic hypothesis of this chapter is that mainstream

Turkish media use discriminatory language in news about Kurds and DTP to reproduce the hegemonic statist discourse and maintain antagonism, disagreement, and polarization that inhibits the emergence of a political solution to the Kurdish question. Although the empirical focus is on the period from 2008 to 2009, the chapter's evaluation and conclusions are highly relevant to the contemporary period and the experiences of past political parties, as well as the current pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) that continues to face immense pressure.

In Chapter 3, Aydın analyses the role of the Newroz myth in the process of representing the Kurdish identity and the mobilization of the Kurds in Turkey. It claims that Newroz is utilized as an ideological tool in order to construct and represent Kurdish cultural or national unity. The chapter traces the process of construction, in the discourse of the Kurdish organizations and dominant political actors, of the Newroz myth as a myth of Kurdish origin and resistance, and it highlights the role the myth played as a narrative of the Kurds' origin and its use in the construction of Kurdish national identity. Part of the political struggle that the Turkish state waged against the Kurdish national movement involved appropriating the Newroz myth into the dominant political order in Turkey and, in doing so, turkifying its contents. This was done to weaken the appeal of Kurdish nationalism and its representation of the Kurds as a separate nation. In analyzing the contestation over the Newroz myth, this chapter also highlights the ideological aspects of the struggle between Kurdish and Turkish nationalisms.

In Chapter 4, Aras provides an ethnography of political violence in Turkey. By drawing on the recent theorisation of bio-power (Foucault) and the 'state of exception' (Agamben), Aras explores how the emotion of fear, used as a technique by the state, persists through pervasive and systematic forms of violence, documenting how shared stories, news and rumours about violence, torture, murder, disappearances, and other forms of cruelty homogenize the effects of fear of the state as a collective experience. Notwithstanding the omnipresence of fear of the state, people find ways of resisting its traumatic effects. This chapter explores the ways in which religion (Islam) and ideology (nationalism) operate as two influential phenomena in manufacturing a culture of resistance. To illustrate this resistance, Aras draws on analyses of the narratives of Kurdish subjects who have been suffering from state violence in Turkey.

In Chapter 5, Açıık offers an evaluation of the representation of women within the Kurdish national struggle and unravels the contradictions between claims of emancipation and its underlying gendered discourses. The chapter focuses on the dominant discourses of the 1990s as reflected in the main Kurdish women's magazines *Yaşamda Özgür Kadın*, *Jin û Jiyan*, *Roza*, and *Jûjin*. It argues that a comprehensive analysis of the discourses disseminated in these publications is crucial for an understanding of the mass mobilisation of the Kurdish women by the Kurdish national movement and for

uncovering the construction and justification of the gendered roles that women have been expected to play in the national struggle.

By utilising theoretical perspectives drawn from critical pedagogy and the works of Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Friere, Westrheim examines in Chapter 6 social and political transformation through learning processes and education. The chapter argues that, since its foundation in 1978, the PKK has put major emphasis on political education. The PKK established numerous non-formal educational sites in order to offset the negative impact of the lack of sufficient educational opportunities in Turkey for Kurds. The chapter argues that instances of collective mobilisation, such as demonstrations, celebrations, and even funerals of Kurdish political activists, have become major events for voicing Kurdish political demands. Therefore, the street has become a public room, the chapter argues, where Kurds learn how to strengthen the struggle through collective action.

In Chapter 7, Zeydanlıoğlu discusses the various ‘turkification’ strategies of the authorities in Turkey and provides an in-depth historical overview Turkey’s Kurdish language policy. The chapter concentrates on the recent developments and the current government’s reform attempts as part of Turkey’s EU candidacy. The article reflects, however, that whilst looking good on paper, these reforms have had little impact in reality, and Kurdish speakers in Turkey are still systematically denied their basic human and linguistic rights.

In Chapter 8, Akkaya and Jongerden provide an assessment of the PKK’s ideological reorientation in the past decade from ‘national liberation’ towards ‘Radical Democracy’. The political and theoretical discussions within Western Marxism since the late 1970s evolved into a more thorough theorisation of ‘Radical Democracy’, which is presented as an alternative to liberal democracy. By directing its focus on the role of Kurdish agency and the dominant discourses, this chapter explores the content of this new project and its practical implications, and it seeks to analyse and explain the significant political transformation that the PKK as a movement has been experiencing in the past decade. In particular, it provides an analysis of the PKK’s radical democracy project and highlights the alternative institutional framework it has been proposing to develop in Turkey.

In Chapter 9, Kızıllan-Kısacık explores the protection of minority rights within the context of the Kurdish question and assesses its role in Turkey-EU relations. Since the Helsinki EU Council decision in 1999, on beginning negotiations with Turkey regarding full membership in the organisation, Turkey has made many legal amendments improving human and minority rights with the aim of responding to both domestic and European demands for finding a democratic solution to the Kurdish question. However, such reforms are not linear and persistent, but are characterized by ups and downs, depending on the willingness and calculations of the governments in power. In this respect, the main research question is to determine the



conditions under which the EU can positively influence the improvement of political and cultural rights of Kurds in Turkey.

In Chapter 10, Aksoy demonstrates that, despite the ongoing civil war in Turkey in the 1990s, there has been significant progress in the musical scene in terms of linguistic, religious, and ethnic plurality in the cultural expressions of Turkish and Kurdish musicians. Through an analysis of the emergence of Kurdish and other non-Turkish music produced and disseminated in Turkey, it is claimed that the late 1990s witnessed encouraging productions and collaborations among musicians from different ethnic backgrounds. Turkish and Kurdish musicians have contributed to reconciliation between both sides to some extent, in particular the band *Kardeş Türküler* (Ballads of Solidarity), which was established on the ideal of living together in solidarity and taking a firm stand against polarization and conflict. This solidarity has been one of the most significant contributions to the multicultural environment of the musical scene of Turkey.

In Chapter 11, Çiçek assesses the governing AKP's attempts to find a political solution to the Kurdish conflict. During the second half of the 2000s, the government showed more willingness than in previous years or that of its predecessors to move beyond the state's security paradigm and explore the possibility of a negotiated settlement. This intensified with the commencement of the 'Democratic Initiative' in July 2009. However, the government soon after started to move away from its reconciliatory tone. Çiçek highlights the influence of Turkish nationalism in AKP's policy choices, the lack of deep-rooted democratic values in the political tradition that it represents, and a weak administrative capacity about the Kurdish issue, as important factors that have brought about a significant unexpected shift in AKP's policy on the Kurdish question.

Finally, in Chapter 12, Gunes explores and evaluates Turkey's recent attempts at political reconciliation to end the Kurdish conflict. Given that previous attempts at political reconciliation have been marred by various difficulties, the research focuses on highlighting the key factors that have so far prevented the process from taking root and what steps can be taken to overcome the impasse. The current political environment in Turkey has been highly polarised, preventing the emergence of the much needed national consensus to generate dialogue with Kurdish representatives. The existing literature does not analyse in any significant detail the proposals that various political parties and movements have been putting forward to construct a democratic and plural society and to institute a new framework and overarching 'common identity' to manage diversity and pluralism in Turkey, which is central to ending the conflict. By analysing the proposals put forward for political reconciliation, and setting out the difficulties that prevent the development of a process of conflict resolution, this chapter aims to fill a void in the current literature and highlight the full complexity and the multifaceted dimensions of political reconciliation in Turkey.

**Notes**

- 1 Besides the traditional and dominant state discourse of the Kurds as Turks, there has also always subtly been a tradition of representing the Kurds as backward, uncivilised, tribal, ignorant, poverty stricken ‘Easterners’. As an integral part of this, the Kurdish question has also often been represented as a problem of regional underdevelopment, a problem of tribal resistance, reactionary religious sects, a problem of ‘integration’, or the lack of state authority in pre-modern ‘tribal lands’ etc. The discourse of ‘Easterners’ (Kurds) as backward has also systematically been deployed to deny the ethno-political nature of the Kurdish question and instead to represent it as the problem of unruly barbaric tribes or fanatical religious leaders resisting the modernity and authority of the secular state. As such, the Turkish state discourse has often re-produced and projected a Turkish version of a localised internal orientalism and a ‘White Turkish Man’s Burden’, which has gone hand in hand with establishing its rule in Kurdistan as an undeclared internal colony (for a more detailed discussion of the reconstruction of orientalist discourse in Turkey and its use in framing the Kurds and Kurdish question, see Zeydanlıoğlu 2007 and 2008; and, Demir and Zeydanlıoğlu 2010).
- 2 For a comprehensive list of publications ‘proving’ the Turkishness of the Kurds published by the institute, see Beşikçi (1990: 217–22).
- 3 The best example of this is the case of the Turkish sociologist İsmail Beşikçi, whose work on the Kurds drastically diverged from the state/academic discourse on the Kurds. As a result of his alternative Marxist sociological discourse on Kurds, Beşikçi spent the best part of three decades behind bars with most of his scholarly work banned in Turkey. For an overview of Beşikçi’s life and work, see van Bruinessen (2005).

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