Minorities in West Asia and North Africa

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The Forgotten Years of Kurdish Nationalism in Iran

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This book is dedicated to the memory of women and men who died defending Kobane against the domination of evil (September 2014–March 2015). They will be remembered for their courage, humanity and selfless love of freedom.

Preface

This book investigates the historical specificity of Kurdish nationalism in Iran from the fall of the Kurdish Republic to the advent of the Iranian revolution, 1947–1979, a crucial but seriously understudied and underresearched period in the history of Kurdish nationalism in Iran. The Kurds of Iran constitute an ethnic-linguistic community of approximately 12 million people living in Eastern Kurdistan (Rojhelat), their historical habitat in the north-western sector of the country, bordering the Kurdish territories in Iraq and Turkey. Kurdish has been a suppressed language and denied identity in Iran ever since the consolidation of the modern state under the Pahlavi rule in 1930s, which gave rise to the Kurdish nationalist opposition and struggle for recognition, culminating in the formation of the Kurdish Republic in January 1946. The Republic, the first autonomous Kurdish administration in modern times, was short-lived. Its fall in December 1946 led to a rupture in the development of the nationalist movement. The central government's politics of restoration and consolidation of sovereign power in the Kurdish community forced the Kurdish nationalist opposition into exile, to reappear on the scene only during the revolutionary rupture that led to the triumph of the Iranian revolution in 1979.

Although nationalist landmarks such as the rise and fall of the Kurdish Republic and the resurgence of the movement in the revolutionary conjuncture of 1978–1979 have attracted the attention of historians and social and political scientists in recent years, little is known about the three decades of Kurdish nationalism in exile, its political and ideological formation, organisational structure and leadership. They are the forgotten years

of Kurdish nationalism in Iran. In fact, this book is the first systematic attempt to study the period, not only in English and other European languages but also in Middle Eastern languages, Kurdish and Persian included. It thus addresses a significant gap in the existing scholarship, shedding light both on the historical specificity of the phenomenon of nationalism in exile and the subsequent configuration of the political forces and relations in the revolutionary conjuncture in Kurdistan, and on the political processes and practices defining the development of Kurdish nationalism in the post-revolutionary era.

The absence of informed academic studies and systematic research into this period is not least the consequence of a tendency to rely on unreliable sources. Such information as is available at present is based almost entirely on two types of source: first, autobiographies written, mostly in the 1990s, by a few political personalities, with the benefit of hindsight; and second, accounts of major political processes and events contained in the literature of the political parties and organisations active in the movement at the time. While the first category is intensely subjective and personal, the second is distinctly ideological. As a result, fragmented, subjective and ideological accounts have too often replaced informed argument, objective analysis and balanced interpretation. This study aims to rectify these shortcomings. It draws on a range of primary and secondary sources in order to develop a comprehensive analysis of the nationalist movement and the political specificity of the phenomenon of exilic nationalism in these three decades.

Key sources include, firstly, extensive unstructured interviews with some of the leading figures in the Kurdish nationalist movement in exile, who played crucial roles in shaping events within and outside party organisations during this period. These are complemented by further unstructured interviews with prominent non-party political and cultural personalities in exile, who had the opportunity to observe and at times comment on the power struggle and the formation of the right and left oppositions in the leadership of the movement. These interviews were conducted over a long period of time, roughly from the early 1980s to the late 1990s, in anticipation of and preparation for writing this book; the recordings remain in my possession.

Secondly, I have drawn on the publications of political parties and organisations in exile from 1947 to 1978, including party programmes, proceedings of conferences and congresses, statements, bulletins and circulars in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the Eastern Bloc (especially Baku, Prague

and East Berlin), and transcripts of major clandestine radio broadcasts. I have also consulted autobiographies written by prominent members of these organisations in exile or in retirement after the advent of the second exile, beginning in the early 1980s.

A third source is the literature published by political activists in various European countries, including pamphlets, booklets and journals. These publications are mostly associated with radical left-wing student groups without party or organisational affiliations during the period 1965–1979; they are held variously in the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, the British Library, the Library of Congress and private collections. Although very irregular and limited in circulation, these publications provide an invaluable source of information for the understanding of important emerging trends in the political and ideological fields, as well as for the evaluation of official party publications.

Finally, I have drawn on the secondary published sources in Persian and English, mainly historical, economic and political studies of Iran under the second Pahlavi rule (1941–1979), which proliferated especially after the 1979 revolution. These sources have been used chiefly to construct the historical context of the major political and ideological trends pertaining to the formation and development of Kurdish nationalism in exile during the period under consideration. The interaction between the social, economic, political and cultural structures of the Kurdish community and the wider structures of the state, economy and society in Iran at large were also a focus of the investigation.

It should however be emphasised that these materials, primary or secondary, archival or published, do not define the structure or direction of the narrative of the book; they are not a substitute for political and theoretical analysis and argument, but rather serve to illustrate or support the main political and theoretical arguments and analyses in various phases of the genealogy of sovereign domination and Kurdish resistance. This study adopts a theoretical-political mode of investigation, the fundamentals of which are explained in my previous writings on the formation and development of the Kurdish question in Rojhelat/Eastern Kurdistan (Vali 2011, 2017). The discursive strategy deployed in the construction and presentation of the theoretical and political arguments is genealogical, an approach which tries to identify the key elements in the complex and multifaceted process of social transformations in the Kurdish community and to lay bare their internal dynamics, by focusing on the articulations of economic, political and cultural relations in the context of an ongoing

struggle against sovereign domination. This struggle constitutes the nexus of a dialectics of domination and resistance traversing Kurdish history in Rojhelat.

The genealogy of sovereign domination and Kurdish resistance is therefore primarily concerned with an investigation of the lineage of elements constituting the violent nexus of this dialectical relationship in modern Iran. The narrative of this lineage is constructed in terms of the formation and working of sovereign power, which suggests that the strategies and techniques deployed by sovereign power to secure domination over the Kurdish community in various phases of their encounter operate as a force threading them together in an ascending process connecting the past to the present. The process in question here lacks a unitary causal logic and dynamics, for it is set in motion by power and is constantly grounded and interrupted by it. It is torn apart and joined together, reshaped and started again by strategies of domination and control. The historical process conceived as such is not given to the analysis; it is an effect of power as 'relations of force' in the political and cultural field. The strategies and policies deployed to ensure the subjugation of Kurdish community change over time, thus traversing the episodes of this process, underpinning its progression and ascent. In this sense, therefore, the present study should be seen as another phase in the 'ontology of the present' in Foucauldian terms, that is, another stage in the 'history of the present' constituted by this struggle for domination and its significations in the political, cultural and military field.

In a wider theoretical perspective this study uses the discursive construction of the concept of 'local minority' and its constitutional representation under the Pahlavi rule (1926–1979) to problematise the concept of minority and its role in the 'othering' of the ethnic-linguistic communities in the framework of the nation-state. The case in point here is the legal/constitutional recognition of the existence of ethnic-linguistic communities and their political suppression and exclusion from the political process, that is, a situation signified by the concept of 'sovereign ban' in contemporary poststructuralist philosophical-political discourse. This concept, referring to the function of the concept of minority as a mechanism of exclusion by inclusion, further resonates in the constitution of the Islamic Republic, Articles 15 and 19. It lies in the nexus of a dialectic of domination and resistance perpetuating the violent relationship between the Islamic state and the Kurdish community that has continued since the 1979 revolution.

In this study, as in all my writings on the Kurdish question in Iran, the term Kurdistan denotes an ethnic-linguistic community under Iranian sovereignty. It lacks specified contiguous geographical boundaries. Nor does it have a juridical-political unity as a cohesive provincial administrative entity. It lacks the authority to issue uniform administrative and social and cultural processes and practices. Modern nation-state and sovereign power have deprived Kurdistan of its territorial and political unity as a single contiguous province within Iran. The territory has been divided and subdivided into smaller and mostly unviable administrative and geographical units attached to adjacent provinces by different governments, first under the Pahlavi rule and then by the Islamic state. The community is now territorially dispersed, with parts located in different provinces and subject to their diverse administrative and legal jurisdictions. The territorial division of the community, however, has not affected its ethnic and linguistic unity and cultural cohesion. The ethnic and linguistic unity of the Kurdish community in Iran is constituted by its otherness, and hence its differences with the sovereign identity. In this sense, therefore, the sovereign identity is constitutive of the Kurdish community, and the processes and practices which reproduce Kurdish otherness also at the same time define its unity and cohesion.

The primacy of ethnic-linguistic difference in the construction of the Kurdish community means that Kurdish ethnicity and language were already principles of political legitimacy defining the terms of its encounter with the sovereign power before the advent of the Kurdish Republic in 1946. That sovereign power had already targeted ethnic-linguistic difference, and Kurdish resistance to the strategies of domination and control was expressed in terms of a struggle for the defence of ethnic and linguistic rights. This defence of Kurdish ethnicity and language in terms of a discourse of rights (natural rights) meant that they were already being invoked and deployed as principles of political legitimacy in the Kurdish community. This argument has important implications for the conceptualisation of ethnicity and the nation in this study. It means that ethnicity is primarily a political construct, and that the political import of ethnicity in nationalist discourse and practice depended primarily on its role as the principle of political legitimacy in the community. It means by implication that ethnic relations in their pre-political mould were no more than a means of individual identification, essentially devoid of historical significance. The idea that ethnicity is not self-significatory, in turn, means that it always needed

a political force outside it to animate it, to set it in motion in the historical process of nation formation. This force is nationalism.

Nationalism does not only link ethnicity with rights, but also connects rights with power. But if nationalism is constitutive of ethnicity as a principle of political legitimacy, if it serves to forge a conceptual relationship between rights and power in the process of nationalist struggle, it follows that the outcome of this process too must be constituted by nationalism. This amounts to saying that the nation should also be perceived, analysed and theorised at the level of nationalism: a theoretical argument which underpins the analysis of the relations of force and its outcomes in the discursive and political field in this study.

In the process of researching, planning and writing this book I have had many long conversations with numerous people; friends, acquaintances and colleagues have shared their time, knowledge and opinions with me. I am very grateful to them for their interest and help, which have greatly enriched the book. They mostly wish to remain anonymous, but some have been mentioned in the endnotes. Some too have passed away since our conversations; I was fortunate to be able to draw on their memories, and I remember them with gratitude. I know that many of those I have spoken with will disagree with me about the conclusions I have drawn from our conversations, and will dispute many of the arguments in this book, but I nonetheless wish to thank them for their input. I remain solely responsible for the arguments and views expressed in the chapters of this book.

English translations from the Kurdish originals (oral and written) are all mine, unless otherwise indicated.

Barcelona, Spain Abbas Vali

Acknowledgements

In the process of researching, planning and writing this book I have had many long conversations with numerous people; friends, acquaintances and colleagues have shared their time, knowledge and opinions with me. I am very grateful to them for their interest and help, which have greatly enriched the book. They mostly wish to remain anonymous, but some have been mentioned in the endnotes. Some too have passed away since our conversations; I was fortunate to be able to draw on their memories, and I remember them with gratitude. My special thanks go to my friend Hassan Ghazi, whose extensive knowledge of the Kurdish movement in the region, especially in Rojhelat/Iranian Kurdistan, has been a source of reference and information in the process of the completion of the book over the years. I am indebted to him. I also thank Katharine Hodgkin for her unfailing editorial assistance in the process of the writing and presentation of the book. Kamran Matin suggested including this book in Palgrave's new series on Minorities in the MENA Region, of which he is a co-editor. I am grateful to him.

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Modernity and the Emergence of Popular Politics in Iranian Kurdistan (Rojhelat)

The Kurdish Republic, which was established on 22 January 1946, was a turning point in the modern history of the Kurds in Rojhelat. Although short-lived, it had far-reaching implications for the development a democratic political culture and the national identity it nurtured in Rojhelat and other parts of the Kurdish territory in the Middle East. The Kurdish Republic marked the advent of popular politics in the Iranian Kurdistan. The emergence of the institutions of political representation, political parties, trade unions, civil defence organisations, women and youth organisations, and numerous other civic bodies signified not only the existence of a vibrant civil society and an active public sphere but also the entry of the people into the Kurdish political field (Vali 2011). The people were the 'subject' of popular politics in Kurdistan, which was expressed in terms of the articulation of popular demands for national rights and civil and democratic liberties in an expanding political field mainly defined by resistance to sovereign domination. The strategies of sovereign domination in Kurdistan presupposed the denial of Kurdish national identity and the suppression of its discursive representation, which, in effect, meant that Kurdish ethnicity and language were objects of sovereign violence, embedded in the founding act of the state and codified in its constitution—the 'performative' and 'interpretative' violence of the state respectively, to use Derrida's analytics of sovereign violence (Derrida 1992). The violence against the Kurdish community was sanctioned by law, indicating that the

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Kurds existed outside the law, consigned to a murky zone of 'juridical indistinction' where sovereign power had a profoundly violent profile (Agamben 2005).

The Kurdish community under Pahlavi absolutism was the site of the formation of Kurdish national identity, which flourished under Kurdish rule in the Republic. The prominence of Kurdish ethnicity and language in the construction and representation of Kurdish identity in popular discourse meant that the boundaries of the people and the nation overlapped significantly. They were indeed largely coterminous, often used interchangeably in popular discourse in the nascent public sphere and in the community at large. In practice this unity of the people-nation was expressed clearly by the nationalist character of popular politics in Kurdistan during 1941–1946. Throughout this period the constituent elements of Kurdish identity, primarily Kurdish ethnicity and language, defined the boundaries of a political field in which the encounter with sovereign power took place. The fall of the Republic did not mean the disappearance of the Kurdish people from the political field. Nor did the politics of restoration of sovereign domination and the new waves of concentrated violence and repression mean the end of popular politics in Kurdistan. On the contrary, the concept of the people was reconstituted in the public discourse in a distinctly nationalist mould, denoting the subject of national resistance to sovereign domination.

The identity of the people/nation was reaffirmed by its persistent quest for the recognition of its civic and democratic rights under the 'redeployed absolutism' presided over by the second Pahlavi monarch in the 1950s. The following three decades, from the 1953 coup to the revolutionary rupture of 1978–1979, saw a decline in and suppression of popular politics in Iran in general and Kurdistan in particular. Aside from the brief period preceding the introduction of the royal reforms, the so-called White Revolution, in 1962, there was hardly any manifestation of popular democratic politics in Iran. It was only in the revolutionary rupture and the resumption of popular protests nationwide that the people resurfaced in the national political field, asserting themselves as bearers of rights, demanding recognition and justice. The events leading to the revolution in 1979 witnessed the re-emergence of the people as the subject of popular democratic politics. In Kurdistan too the resurgence of the people and the assertion of its pivotal role in the political field followed the same general pattern as the rest of the country, with some notable exceptions related to the historical specificity of Kurdish national identity. Here the boundaries

of the political field were defined by Kurdish ethnicity and language, the objects of sovereign suppression and denial, and popular democratic opposition to sovereign power was articulated in the popular demand for the recognition of Kurdish national identity. I shall return to this point later in this study.

This brief account entails basic elements for the theoretical construction of the concept of the people/nation as the subject of popular politics in Kurdistan. The concept of the people is a political construct. It is constructed by the discourses and practices which define the terms and conditions of popular democratic opposition/resistance to sovereign power (Laclau 2007; Ranciere 1999). The people is the subject of popular democratic politics only in so far as it is the object of sovereign domination. It therefore owes its existence as the subject of popular politics to its opposition to sovereign power. The people as such is a counter-power, it is the other of sovereign, the constituent power, to use Negri's concept (Negri 1999; Vali 2017). The argument that the people is a product of popular democratic politics is also at the same time the affirmation of its modernity, its modern identity as a political force, internally differentiated by social and economic relations but politically united by its opposition to sovereign power. This historical connection with modernity also reveals the identity of the sovereign power in opposition to which the identity of the people is defined. The sovereign in question, the object of the people's opposition and resistance, is the juridical power historically associated with the constitution of the nation-state in Iran. In this sense therefore the emergence and the modality of the development of the people in Kurdistan were defined by the turbulent relationship between the Kurdish community and the Iranian nation-state after 1905, represented in terms of sovereign domination and Kurdish resistance. This relationship was articulated in the historical formation of modernity in Iran in its official guise: the discourse and practice of authoritarian modernisation (Vali 1998).

The emergence of the people and the formation of popular democratic politics in Iranian Kurdistan were defined by the historical specificity of the Kurdish community, and its interrelationship with the wider society in Iran. In this respect the decisive factor, the turning point in the relationship, was the advent of modernity in Iran, which culminated in the constitutional revolution, and after a lull lasting two decades re-emerged in the form of authoritarian modernisation carried out by Pahlavi absolutism. The historical specificity of Kurdish society, so deeply rooted in its class structure, was also influenced in no small measure by its complex

relationship with the Iranian state. The relations of domination affected the wider political and cultural structures of Kurdish society far beyond the immediate domain of class relations, but above all they defined the boundaries of the political field and the configuration of the political forces and relations within them. The relations of domination as such always reflected the changing relationship of sovereign power with the Kurdish community at large. Modern Kurdish history in Iran bears witness to this argument (Vali 2011).

In the constitutional era Kurdish society was marked by the predominance of rural over urban life and a near to total absence of popular forces in the political and cultural fields. The latter was dominated by the landowning class, which, in collaboration with an underdeveloped and dependent mercantile bourgeoisie, defined and controlled the form and character of Kurdish participation in the new popular political processes initiated by the constitutional movement. The active participation of the bulk of the Kurdish tribal lords in the opposition to the constitutional movement and then in the failed attempts to restore Qajar despotism were more than conservative measures to safeguard their power and privilege in Kurdistan. It also signified the absence in the social structure of the Kurdish community of active forces to generate and engage in popular politics. In so far as the advent of popular politics and the active participation of 'the people' is concerned, Kurdistan lagged behind central Persian and Azeri provinces by a few decades. In fact, it was not until the fall of Reza Shah's rule in 1941 that the people entered the political field in the Kurdish community and popular political process began appearing in main Kurdish urban centres. This process reached its culmination in the political and cultural conditions leading to the formation of the *Komalay Jiyanaway Kurdistan* (Society for the Revival of Kurdistan) in 1942 and then the Republic in 1946.

That in the constitutional era Kurdistan lagged behind more developed regions of Iran in political and cultural terms signified more than just a historical hiatus, a gap created by the specific articulation of the sovereign power and the landlords' regime in the region. The absence of the political and discursive conditions of the formation of popular politics also signified a rupture in the historical process of the formation of modernity in Kurdistan, setting it apart from the rest of the country in terms of its character and outcome. The historical character of modernity in Kurdistan, its process and outcome, I have argued elsewhere in my writings, was fundamentally different (Vali 1998). This was not due to its belated beginnings alone, but also, and more importantly, due to the specific process of the

formation and consolidation of the nation-state and national identity in Iran and its political and cultural effects on the Kurdish community. The advent of modernity in Kurdistan, in so far as it amounted to the use of reason in the social, economic, political and cultural organisation of the Kurdish community, coincided with the suppression of Kurdish identity and its forced expulsion from the discursive and political spheres. In this sense, therefore, modernity became publically identified with sovereign power and with a set of discourses and practices intended to secure sovereign domination over the Kurdish community, albeit in a more rational, calculated and organised manner.

This public perception of modernity, the identification of modernity with the forms of instrumental rationality associated with the authoritarian modernisation pursued by the absolutist state during 1926–1941, was common throughout Iran. In Kurdistan, however, there was a fundamental difference from the general public perception prevailing in Iran. Here, in order to ensure sovereign domination, the articulation of sovereign violence and forms of modern institutional rationality entailed in the discourse and practice of modernisation required the suppression of Kurdish identity. In fact, the systematic suppression of Kurdish identity was the dialectical nexus of the articulation of sovereign power and the landlords' regime in Kurdistan. It was, in other words, the intersection of the political-military-security relations of Pahlavi absolutism and large landed property and the associated rental relations of exploitation that ensured sovereign domination. The suppression of Kurdish identity was a strategic objective of the politics of authoritarian modernisation in Kurdistan in so far as it forged a direct link between modernity/modernisation and sovereign domination over the Kurdish community. This was the case at least after 1935, when the systematic suppression of Kurdish ethnicity and language was implemented to ensure the effective working of the policies of authoritarian modernisation and absolutist domination.

The suppression of Kurdish identity was the dialectical nexus of relations of domination and subordination which was presupposed and reproduced by the politics of authoritarian modernisation in Kurdistan. It was as such both a condition of existence and support of the politics of authoritarian modernisation pursued by Pahlavi absolutism. It informed the process and outcome of the politics of modernisation by defining the means and mechanism of sovereign domination in Kurdistan, including and especially the processes and practices deployed to impose sovereign Iranian/Persian identity on the Kurdish community. This specific feature of

sovereign domination in Kurdistan, which in effect set it apart from the rest of the country, had a decisive impact on the formation and development of popular politics, its subject and its locus.

In historical terms the advent of popular resistance to sovereign domination, reproduced largely by the discourse and practice of authoritarian modernisation carried out by the absolutist state, was also at the same time the genesis of the people as the subject of popular politics in Kurdistan. This was also true of the formation of the new Kurdish intelligentsia, which, unlike the traditional Kurdish intelligentsia, hailed from the ranks of the urban middle classes and was largely a product of universal education and the bureaucratic and military processes and practices associated with the modern centralised state and authoritarian modernisation. In this sense, therefore, both the people and the intelligentsia were products of specific popular political-cultural demands arising primarily from the suppression of Kurdish identity, more specifically the suppression of Kurdish ethnicity and language. Popular demands for the recognition of Kurdish ethnicity and the use of Kurdish language were expressed in terms of rights, both individual and national, thus constituting them as objects of popular protest and popular politics. The processes and practices ensuring this crucial transformation, however, required a degree of development of civil society and the public sphere, in the absence of which popular demands, especially the popular quest for the recognition of national and communal rights, remained dormant but alive, waiting to find expression in popular politics in the community.

This latter point refers to the crucial connection between the formation of civil society and the rise of popular politics, an essential prerequisite of the emergence of the people as the subject of modern politics. In Kurdistan this connection was complex. Given the suppression of Kurdish identity, here the object of popular politics, which was at the same time the object of popular resistance, had been effectively placed under the 'sovereign ban', to use Agamben's notion, and the popular demands for the recognition of Kurdish identity and rights were illegal (Agamben 1998). This meant that popular politics germinated outside the legally delineated domain of politics. It was unconstitutional, illegal and hence illegitimate. It continued to develop in and flourish outside the domain of law, acquiring a clandestine existence. This was the case before and after the Kurdish Republic. The development of civil society and the public sphere under the Republic was the foundation of the popular democratic politics, which

became the hallmark of its historical identity as an institution of government and self-rule.

The rise of popular politics under the Kurdish Republic was nonetheless seriously constrained by forces and relations rooted in the historical development of the Kurdish community in the economic, political and juridical frameworks of Iranian sovereignty since the early nineteenth century. The predominance of tribal landlordism in the political and military organisations of the Kurdish community and the political infancy and cultural incoherency of the urban social classes were both notable in this respect. They were both structural effects of the chronic backwardness of economic forces and relations in the Kurdish community, but their constraining effects always filtered through their diverse relationships with the sovereign power in the centre and almost always through the processes and practices ensuring its domination in Kurdistan. In this sense, therefore, the structural constraints of popular democratic politics in the Kurdish community always involved relations of sovereign domination. They worked in tandem through political and legal processes and practices grounded in pre-capitalist relations of production, ensuring the unity of the power bloc in the large landlords' regime in the country at large.

The structural unity of the internal-Kurdish and the external-sovereign constraints in the power bloc and their active participation in the political and institutional conditions of popular politics were clearly evidenced in the events leading to the fall of the Republic. The Republic, despite all its political-administrative and technical-rational deficiencies in governing, was a popular institution. It had the genuine support of the overwhelming majority of its people, whom it had helped to bring into the political process. After the fall of the Republic and the disappearance of the last vestiges of popular rule in Kurdistan, Kurdish people too withdrew from the political scene, returning to the safety of their homes, closing in on themselves in the ethnic confines of their community, where they could only hear the growling voice of their own anger and despair. But neither their withdrawal from the political scene nor their silence spared them the wrath of the sovereign. Sovereign power had already experienced the force of the people's sudden eruption into the political arena in the brief but decisive decade following the fall of Reza Shah's rule not only in Kurdistan but in Iran at large. The peoples of Iran, Kurds included, had now acquired a political existence. They constituted a decentered being, socially differentiated and culturally fragmented with a shared political identity, expressed in terms of popular discourses and practices questioning the conduct of the sovereign power in a public sphere.

The nascent public sphere lacked essential forms of legal protection. It was the fragile locus of popular political dissent exposed to sovereign violence.

That the political existence of the people was expressed in opposition to the sovereign meant that the legal and political unity of the sovereign power depended on the containment, suppression and control of popular opposition. The emergence of the people as an active political subject, its eruption in life as a force conscious of its rights, was a new development in a society in which power was seen to emanate from sovereign will. The exclusion of the people from the political process, perpetuated by the relentless suppression of its voice in the domain of power, was the sine qua non of the politics of authoritarian modernisation under the Pahlavi rule. The re-emergence of the people and the struggle to assert popular will changed the established 'norms' of political conduct between the sovereign and the democratic opposition in the years that followed Reza Shah's abdication. The restructuring of Pahlavi absolutism, therefore, required more than just a reorganisation of the power bloc grounded on the large landlords' regime. A substantial change in the mode of exercise of power to ensure the continuation of sovereign domination in the face of increasing popular opposition challenging the legal unity and political legitimacy of the sovereign was required.

The continuation of sovereign domination was insured by the change in the rationality of power which expressed itself in terms of the modernisation of the state apparatuses, especially the military and security apparatuses of the state. The matrix of rationality informing the working of power in the state apparatuses was closely tethered to the 'security problematic of the state', to use Foucault's terms (Foucault 2003). Henceforth the security considerations of sovereign power defined not only the conceptual structure of the official discourse, but also the strategic objectives of the state in the economic, political and cultural fields, at home and abroad. This crucial development in the conduct of sovereign power signified above all the conservative ethos of the modernisation of the state in the aftermath of the 1953 coup. The 'redeployed absolutism'—a concept used to define the character of the regime in the decade following the coup—was the paradoxical outcome of this process. Governed by the new security considerations, the conduct of the regime was driven by its primary aim to stop the return of the people to the political field and the public representations of popular democratic demands.

The predominance of the security problematic and the associated order of governmental rationality outlived redeployed absolutism, continuing to

define the repressive ethos of sovereign power in the fateful years between the 'White Revolution' and the 'Islamic Revolution' (1962–1979). The expulsion of the people from the national political field, the destruction of the means and conditions of popular representation, constituted the strategic objective of sovereign power from 1946 to the revolutionary rupture of 1978–1979. The restructuring of the power bloc and the reconfiguration of its forces and relations under the hegemonic sign of the sovereign following episodes of national crisis were prompted and defined by the conservative and defensive ethos of this strategy. The reasons of the state had given way to the logic of sovereignty: security geared to sovereign domination.

Kurdistan was paramount in the order of sovereign domination that followed the consolidation of power under royal dictatorship. The decade preceding the revolutionary rupture in 1978 witnessed the intensification of the royal repression and further centralisation of the means and mechanisms of opposition to popular democratic politics, targeting its subject within and outside the juridical realm of power and politics. The relentless application of this policy, compounded by unconstrained use of violence, undermined civil society and politicised the economic and cultural fields in the community. The contradictory effects of the royal repression in Kurdistan were more striking than in the rest of Iran, for in Kurdistan it resulted not only in a radical political field but also in debilitating economic backwardness. The two continued to enforce each other within the ethnic confines of a repressed civil society, leading to the dislocation of nationalist politics and the strategic predominance of armed struggle in the Kurdish resistance movement in Iran. The present study addresses this issue, exploring its structural unity and political and cultural diversity. It is concerned with the development and transformation of Kurdish nationalism from the fall of the Kurdish Republic to the revolutionary rupture in 1978–1979.

CHAPTER 2

The Restoration of Sovereign Order and the Kurdish Resistance

The collapse of the Kurdish Republic in December 1946 was followed by the disintegration of its maker, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI hereafter). The institutional structure of the Kurdish Republic was largely based on the organisation of the KDPI, which had been established in August 1945; the two were interwoven both in the process of policy and decision-making and in the sphere of executive and administrative conduct. After the collapse of the Republic the KDPI lost its leadership and organisational cohesion, mainly through the executions and imprisonments carried out by the Iranian army.[1] The army brought the region under military rule, and the commander of the 2nd army, stationed in Mahabad, ruled it as a land reconquered by force. The political repression which followed the reconquest of the territory was instrumental in the pacification of the Kurdish population and the restoration of state power in both urban and rural areas. But the restoration of the sovereign order and the domination of the Iranian state in each case assumed a different form, involving different political and military processes and practices.

Kurdish urban centres were the main foci of state repression in the years that followed the collapse of the Republic. This was due mainly to the fact that they had been centres of nationalist politics at least since September 1941, when the Allied invasion resulted in the collapse of Reza Shah's rule and the first widespread resumption of democratic politics in the country at large, Kurdistan included, since the Constitutional era. But the concentration

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of state repression on the urban centres had another and equally important motive: to regain full control over the state bureaucracy, which for a brief but decisive period had been taken over and restructured by the Kurdish administration. The Kurdish administration had changed not only the direction of the Pahlavi bureaucracy in major towns in its jurisdiction, but also its ethnic composition, especially the higher echelons of civil administration which, as a rule, had been occupied by non-Kurdish—Persian or Azeri—personnel appointed by the central government in Tehran. The exclusion of the Kurdish personnel from the higher echelons of state bureaucracy, especially from the positions of regional policy and decision-making, in Kurdistan under the Pahlavi rule was an added measure to the technologies of domination and control deployed by an already over-centralised administration. It was intended to assert the Persian identity of political power in Kurdistan and to ensure its hegemony in the state bureaucracy in the face of the destabilising effects of the Kurdish identity of the overwhelming majority of its employees, the lower- and middle-rank civil and public servants, who were drawn from the local population. The reassertion of the power of the state in the bureaucracy thus required a return to the previous order, in which the administrative command ran on ethnic lines so as to ensure the subordination of the Kurdish identity.

The regional bureaucracy thus became the primary site of struggle for the reassertion of sovereign domination, which began as a concerted effort to suppress once again Kurdish ethnicity and language in the administrative processes and practices, especially those emanating from or associated with the ideological (juridical and educational) apparatuses of the state. Administrative command here required more than mere compliance to ensure domination; it also presupposed the exclusion of Kurdish ethnicity and language from the administrative processes in the regional bureaucracy. This exclusion, we know, was the effect of the predominance of military power in the structure of domination, which served to reinforce the crucial linkage between Iranian sovereignty and Persian ethnicity and language underpinning Iranian identity in the official discourse.

In Kurdistan, the state had largely dispensed with the need for the ideological legitimation of domination. Juridical or cultural relations, other than those related to the justification of the uniform historical origins of Iranian national identity and its extension to the Kurds as the 'genuine\ authentic Iranians descending from the common ancient Aryan stock, were seldom used to support or justify the conduct of sovereign power in Kurdistan. These feeble attempts rarely achieved their intended objectives.

They were drowned in the silent rage and rejection of the Kurds, who perceived them as banal tactics/efforts to justify or gloss over the suppression of their language and denial of their identity. The political efficacy of cultural and juridical relations and their contribution to the imposition and exercise of political domination reached its lowest level in the period of restoration when the already powerful effects of the suppression of Kurdish ethnicity and language were compounded by arrests, incarceration and public executions in Mahabad and other major Kurdish cities. In fact, the violent practices deployed by the state to restore its domination over the Kurdish community had immediate and drastic consequences for the working of the ideological apparatuses of the state, both juridical and educational-cultural. The sudden disappearance of the juridical façade of power, the collapse of the boundaries separating law from violence, meant that violence was the only effective means for the restoration of sovereign order and the consolidation of domination over the Kurdish community.

In Gramscian terms, the politics of restoration signified a new phase in the turbulent relationship between the state and the Kurdish community, marked by the prominence of force and the correlative marginalisation of the technologies of power rooted in civil society (Gramsci 1971). The use of force to secure domination became the strategic objective of the state in Kurdistan in the decades to come. Sovereign power had shed its juridical-cultural mantle. This shift in the mode of exercise of power and the resulting identity of sovereign power with military violence and repression, it will be shown in the following chapters, had a decisive effect on the discourse and practice of Kurdish resistance to domination. The preponderance of violence justified the call to arms to wage a frontal attack on the state. Armed struggle, thus, became the most effective, if not the only, mode of resistance to sovereign domination by a state reduced to a political society grounded in force.

The Dissipation of Civil Society and the Formation of the Clandestine Public Sphere

The regional bureaucracy, important as it was, constituted only one of the means deployed by the military to restore domination over the Kurdish community. Nor was it the only site of the confrontation of power and Kurdish urban middle classes. The scope of domination, and hence the suppression of Kurdish ethnicity and language, was much wider, encompassing

the bulk of urban population which had lived under the Republican administration. But outside the apparatuses of regional administration, the Kurdish public sphere was the main object of state repression. The case in point here is the nascent field of discourse and practice which emerged in 1941 soon after the collapse of Reza Shah's rule, flourishing under the Republic to become the primary site of critical approach to sovereign power. Critique of sovereign power, its past history and present conduct, was in fact the unifying element of a wide array of political, historical, cultural and literary discourse operating in this field, delineating outer boundaries of the public sphere under the Republic. The critique of sovereign power defined the public character of discourse and practice, and hence the designation of their locus as the public sphere under the Republic. Public discourse as such followed two objectives: first, exposing sovereign domination and its exclusionary effect on the Kurdish community, and, second, defending the rights of the Kurds to self-government in their own territory. These objectives amounted to the justification of the resistance against sovereign domination to defend and protect the ethnic boundaries of the Kurdish community. They also stood for the rejection and termination of sovereign domination as a precondition for the realisation of the democratic rights to Kurdish self-rule. The public discourse under the Republic, as it has been discussed elsewhere in my writings, remained ambiguous on whether or not resistance to and removal of domination as a democratic right also presupposed renouncing Iranian sovereignty. This ambiguity was the hallmark of public discourse under the Republic. It reflected a main anomaly in the official discourse of the Republic, its perennial vacillation between the two poles of political sovereignty and regional autonomy. This ambiguity, we know, continued to persist under the Republic, and the conflation of ethnic with national identity in the official discourse was replicated in the public sphere. Just as in the case of official discourse, here too it was difficult to draw a clear line between ethnic and national identities mainly because they were both constituted by sovereign violence. The latter was the constitutive outside of ethnic and national identities in the same way as it defined the boundaries of the Kurdish community and the Kurdish public sphere within it (Vali 2011).

The urban middle classes, modern and traditional, formed the social structure of the Kurdish public sphere under the Republic. The middle- and lower-ranking bazaar merchants and traders, along with sectors of the modern petty-bourgeoisie, mostly government employees working in the regional bureaucracy, and middle-ranking clergy and students of religious

seminaries attached to main mosques were the main subject of public opposition to sovereign domination in the public sphere. This was primarily due to the fact that urban middle classes by comparison had the largest number of literate individuals in their ranks, and education, traditional and modern, was the primary means of access to and participation in the public sphere. Class relations in this case filtered through the personal status of the subjects, as education and literacy distinguished them from the illiterate majority in urban Kurdistan. They were thus able to voice their opposition to the sovereign domination and express their criticism of its conduct in Kurdistan in a discursive field legally delineated and protected by the Republican government.

The public sphere was in this sense the voice of the urban middle classes, which, as we have seen, constituted the core of popular support for the Republic. It was a legally delineated and protected field of discourse geared to the critique of sovereign power, challenging its domination of the Kurdish community. After the collapse of the Republic the public sphere disappeared and the urban middle classes lost the medium for the expression of their opposition to the sovereign. The voice of the Kurdish middle classes was lost in the vortex of military repression which marked the politics of pacification and restoration of sovereign domination and order in major urban centres in the territory. But the suppression of the public sphere and the mounting repression in Kurdish cities did not end the opposition of the urban middle classes to sovereign domination. They only changed its locus and mode of operation.

The period of restoration witnessed the formation of a clandestine public sphere, a rapidly expanding and vibrant field of discourse and practice focused on opposition to sovereign power and domination. This field, by virtue of being clandestine, escaped the gaze of the sovereign and the reach of juridical power. It functioned outside the domain of law and was as such overly exposed to sovereign violence, which defined its form and boundaries as well as its mode of operation. In this sense therefore the emergent clandestine public sphere was the true reflection of the form and the character of the relationship of sovereign power to the Kurdish community in the period of restoration. Here too sovereign violence did not only regulate the relationship of the public sphere to the sovereign but also delineated and defined its boundaries. Sovereign violence was the constitutive of the clandestine public sphere and defined the identity of the agents operating within it. The clandestine public sphere as such was the dialectical nexus of the Kurdish struggle, the point of the articulation

of sovereign violence and Kurdish resistance to it. Kurdish resistance now operated in a clandestine field which by definition presupposed the absence of law, which in turn meant that those who chose to resist state repression were objects of sovereign violence. They were, to paraphrase Agamben, abandoned to sovereign violence in the zone of 'indistinction', where law is suspended and the exception is the rule (Agamben 2005).

The clandestine public sphere did not only signify an extra-juridical field of discourse and practice to resist sovereign domination; rather it also proved essential for the resumption of nationalist politics after the Republic. It provided the new generation of Kurdish nationalists who had escaped state repression due mainly to their youth, mostly former members of the youth organisations of the KDPI and Republican political and cultural institutions, with the ground to act, to transform their resistance to active opposition to sovereign domination. This transformation involved interaction: dialogue, cooperation and opposition with other forces, movements and organisations, Kurdish and non-Kurdish, within and outside the Kurdish community in Iran, whose declared political and ideological positions ran counter to the strategic aims and interests of the sovereign within and outside Iran, ranging from the Tudeh Party to leading forces in the Kurdish movement in Iraq. The clandestine public sphere, nurtured by interaction with such forces within and outside the Kurdish community in Iran, thus became the locus of urban resistance to sovereign domination and the ground for the revival of the nationalist movement after the collapse of the Republic.

In the countryside the process of pacification and restoration assumed a different form. Here the restoration of the order and sovereign domination revolved around the reincorporation of the Kurdish landowning class and tribal leadership into the political power structure of the country at large. The aim was to restore the forms of clientalism which had so effectively served the status quo in Kurdistan under the Pahlavi rule. The detribalisation pursued by the Pahlavi state, as has been noted in an earlier study, mainly targeted the political organisation of the Kurdish tribes, undermining the military power of the tribal leaders and hence their capacity to challenge the authority of the central government in the countryside. The local foundations of the economic and political power and prestige of the tribal chieftains, both in town and in country, were left intact, thus enhancing their active cooperation with the Pahlavi state in maintaining and reinforcing order and stability. The central government ensured the power and prestige of the large landlords and tribal leaders in

return for their active cooperation in maintaining the status quo—an arrangement which formed the basis for an active political alliance and, centred on that alliance, an expanding network of clientalism.

The collapse of state power and the subsequent demise of central governmental authority in Kurdistan and the advent of the Kurdish Republic had an uneven effect on the complex relationship between the state and the Kurdish landowning class. While it disrupted the operational structure of clientalism in the Kurdish countryside, the foundations of the political alliance between the central government and the larger part of the Kurdish landlords and tribal leaders remained in force, albeit in a tacit form. Thus the downfall of the Republic effectively meant the 'normalisation' of the relationship with this sector of the Kurdish landowning class, which had remained essentially loyal to the Pahlavi state and its main foreign backers, Britain and the United States of America. In this sense, therefore, the bulk of the Kurdish landowning class was party to the politics of pacification and restoration of order in the territory. It regained its power and prestige as the Iranian army reconquered the Kurdish towns and restored the domination of the state in the territory.[2]

The main thrust of the policy of pacification and restoration in the countryside was concerned with those disaffected landlords and tribal leaders with avowedly nationalist allegiances who had actively cooperated or sympathised with the Kurdish administration. They were few in number but influential in the community, especially in towns, where they were respected for their nationalist orientations and anti-government positions. The attitude of the Iranian government towards disaffected and hostile landlords and tribal leaders was, on the whole, reconciliatory, with the aim of ending their disaffection and discontent and inviting their cooperation in the process of pacification and restoration. The intent, in other words, was to reincorporate them into the political power structure of the country. The most active and outspoken were singled out for punishment, often a prison sentence, and the rest were persuaded, by means of threats and rewards, to shift their allegiances to the central government and maintain their local power base. Broadly speaking, the military command in Mahabad and other Kurdish towns adopted a selective approach to the pacification of the disaffected and hostile landlords and tribal leaders, which varied according to their political standing and economic power in the community as a whole. But whatever the means and the conditions of the state's policy of pacification and integration, it hardly concerned the economic conditions of existence of the landlords and tribal leaders.

The process of pacification and restoration of the authority of the state in the countryside, by persuasion or coercion, excluded the sphere of property relations, for expropriation of agricultural landed property on a large scale would have seriously undermined the fundamental logic of the politics of restoration. In Kurdistan, as elsewhere in Iran, landed property formed the economic structure of the state-landlord alliance in the countryside. It was the main integrative factor in the economic structure of political power before 1962.[3]

Furthermore, the restoration of the power and domination of the state, and hence the conditions of the political alliance with the landowning class, depended in no small measure on the political position of the mass of Kurdish peasantry. The peasantry, with minor exceptions, had remained inactive, playing little or no role in the rise and fall of the Republic. Although this political passivity signified the chronic weakness of national consciousness and identity among the overwhelming majority of Kurdish peasants, it also had another, no less important, cause: the absence of any effective political organisation capable of mobilising the mass of the peasantry in support of the Republic. The KDPI, as was seen, paid little attention to the fate of the Kurdish peasants, and its programme did not contain any notion of agrarian reform. The pivotal position of the landowning class and the tribal leadership in the military organisation of political power in the Republic meant that the prevailing structure of property relations in agriculture were to be left intact. The KDPI did nothing to improve the economic conditions of existence of the peasants or to mobilise them in support of its programme. The harsh conditions of tenancy and labour, the high rents and exorbitant interest rates, which had been relentlessly perpetuated by the state-landlord alliance for decades, continued unabated under the Republic. The Kurdish administration had in effect taken the place of the Iranian state in the structure of the alliance which suppressed the peasants, reproducing archaic relations of domination and subordination in agriculture. The mass of the Kurdish peasants did not discern a meaningful difference between the Iranian state and the Republican administration in so far as it concerned the perpetuation of the structure of economic exploitation and domination in the countryside. This was a significant factor accounting for the stark weakness of national consciousness among the Kurdish peasantry. The relationship between the Kurdish administration and the landowning class defined the discourse and practice of the KDPI and the Republic on agrarian relations and the conditions of reform and change in the countryside, and it failed to provide for the

articulation of ethnic and class relations in the nationalist political process. The perpetual disarticulation of the ethnic and the agrarian class relations underpinned the weakness of national consciousness among the Kurdish peasantry, impeding its development.

The downfall of the Kurdish administration and the return of the Iranian army to the region could hardly affect the economic conditions of existence and reproduction of the Kurdish peasantry. The overwhelming majority of Kurdish peasants had seen no reason to identify with the nationalist cause, remaining aloof from a political process which was almost entirely urban. This aloofness had been effectively exploited by the landlords and tribal leaders to maintain their power and dominance in the countryside. The absence of peasant support for the Republic and the correlative lack of active opposition to the state facilitated the swift restructuring of the state-landlord relationship which underpinned the politics of restoration in the territory.[4] The Kurdish countryside thus came under the control of the landlords and tribal leaders, who paved the way for the return of the central government. The Iranian rural police, the infamous Gendarmerie, notorious for its excesses under Reza Shah, returned to the territory to maintain order and reinforce the power of the state, but only with the active support of the local landlords and tribal leaders. Although the rural police in Kurdish villages personified sovereign power and was as such a clear constraint on the local autonomy of the Kurdish landowning class, Kurdish landlords were resigned to this arrangement. The loss of local autonomy seemed a little price to pay to protect their economic power and political prestige.

But despite the active support of bulk of the landowning class and the majority of the urban notables of landlord-bourgeois persuasion, the state was not entirely successful in restoring its power in the territory, at least not for a decade. There were a number of obstacles to a successful restoration of sovereign domination over the Kurdish community at large. In purely normative terms, the politics of restoration lacked popular legitimacy; a state which had destroyed a popular Kurdish administration and executed and imprisoned its leadership could not claim legitimacy from a largely nationalist population who revered the Republic and its founders. To many Kurds the Iranian army was a force of occupation which had ended the dream of generations of nationalists. This lack of legitimacy meant an increasing reliance on the use of force and coercion in the process of restoration, which could have been effective had the state possessed the necessary means and mechanisms of repression.

There was another and more significant reason related to the capacity of the state to secure effective domination. In the late 1940s the Iranian state did not have a uniform and centralised apparatus of repression, with specialised knowledge and techniques of surveillance, persecution, terror and control, to aid the process of restoration. It had to rely on the army and the police, which performed this crucial task but without the requisite knowledge and efficiency. Consequently, the repressive policies and practices of the state often fell short of their aims, leaving sizeable holes in the network of terror and control which accompanied the process of restoration in Kurdistan. The army counter-intelligence, the infamous Rokn-e Do (Second Column), was the main force in charge of state security before the foundation of the notorious Sazman-e Ettela'at va Amniat-e Melli-e Iran (SAVAK, Organisation for the Information and Security of the Country) in 1957. The latter brought technical knowledge and administrative efficiency to state repression, signifying the emergence of a new mode of rationality in the conduct of power, presupposing not only the centralisation of security functions of the state but also their predominance in the civil and military apparatuses of the state.[5]

The dominance of the army in the state security apparatuses, and its control over the processes of policy and decision-making, was another reason for the inefficiency of state repression and restoration, for the Iranian army in the late 1940s was far from being a homogeneous professional force with an undivided loyalty to the monarchy. The officer corps, especially the lower- and middle-rank officers, had been substantially influenced by the political and ideological forces and tendencies competing for hegemony in the increasingly turbulent post-war conditions. Although the bulk of the officer corps in the armed forces were still loyalist, holding allegiance to the person of the monarch, the Tudeh Party, espousing Soviet Marxism and its global strategic vision, was the chief 'external' political and ideological influence. It had managed to infiltrate the armed forces on various levels and to influence the processes of decision-making and execution, especially on issues related to intelligence, counter-intelligence and the security of the state in general. The military organisation of the Tudeh Party proved significant in this respect, particularly in the years preceding the nationalisation of oil and the coup d'état of August 1953, when political divisions and ideological conflicts in the armed forces were at their clearest and sharpest. Incidents of Tudeh officers aiding and abetting Kurdish nationalists before their arrest and during incarceration lend credence to the view that political and ideological divisions within the armed forces were also significant in limiting the wave of state repression in the process of restoration.[6]

The most important obstacle to the process of restoration, however, was the acute political crisis which had gripped the Iranian state since 1941. The fragmentation of the political field which followed the collapse of Reza Shah's government and the Allied occupation continued unabated in the post-war period, leading to increasing chaos in the conduct of the government. The result was the widespread political instability which characterised the post-war regime, militating against the feeble efforts by successive administrations to consolidate power in the centre.[7] Although Kurdistan was effectively under military rule, the prevailing political instability in the country at large and the growing weakness of the central political authority had serious repercussions both for the conduct of the army in the region and for the Kurds' perception of the state and its capacity to determine the course of events in Kurdistan. The army had been entrusted with the task of restoring the authority of a government unable to stabilise the political field, showing increasing confusion and lack of direction in policy-making and execution in the face of mounting pressure by the Marxist left and centre-left nationalist forces. The deepening crisis of political authority in the centre only enhanced the functional autonomy of the military command in Kurdistan, sanctioning the overt use of coercive measures in the maintenance of order and security. But the increasing violence of the security apparatuses, arrests, detentions and exiles did little to transform the popular perception of the declining authority of the state. For the majority of urban Kurds, who had been seriously politicised by the Republic, the state lacked both the will and the power to rule the country without the active support of its foreign backers. The popular perception of the state as the lackey of foreign imperialist powers further undermined the legitimacy of the army and reinforced the view that it was a force of occupation, to be resisted and opposed by all possible means.[8]

Resistance: Reviving the KDPI

The necessity of resistance to oppression was the implacable logic of the clandestine efforts to revive the organisation of the KDPI in major towns barely two years after the collapse of the Republic. These efforts, largely local in scope, were hastened by the prevailing political crisis. The revival of the nationalist movement and the reorganisation of the KDPI were significantly aided by the nationalists' access to 'external resources', that is, the operational and logistic support provided by Kurdish nationalists living in exile in Soviet Azerbaijan and Iraqi Kurdistan, and later on in

different countries in the former Eastern bloc. These exiled groups were generally maintained by their respective host governments; the exception was Iraqi Kurdistan, where they depended on the political and logistical support of the local Kurdish forces, principally the Barzani-led Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), before they established working relations with the Iraqi regime in the mid-1960s. The relationship between the exiled groups and their 'hosts' and the political and ideological conditions which governed their cooperation were to prove decisive in the future development of nationalist discourse and practice in the Iranian Kurdistan.

But the 'external' influences on the discourse and practice of the KDPI were almost always filtered through the wider structure of the political and ideological relations of the Cold War. The Cold War had already defined the status of Kurdish nationalism in the post-war political and ideological spectrum, and within the emergent configuration of political and ideological forces and relations in the country. The early association of the Kurdish movement with the Soviet Union was used to represent Kurdish nationalism as a communist-inspired movement, and the attempts to revive the organisational structure of the KDPI after the collapse of the Republic as a premeditated communist strategy devised and directed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and its Iranian branch, the Tudeh Party. The perception of the Kurds as communist and foreign-inspired secessionists, often framed in the discourse of Iranian national identity and sovereignty, was actively encouraged by the Pahlavi state and the nationalist press. It not only stigmatised the Kurdish nationalist movement but also helped to isolate it in the political field, aligning it with the Tudeh, whose subservience to the Soviet Union compromised its claims to patriotism.

The discourse and practice of the Cold War, and the constellation of right-wing and centre-right nationalist and religious political and ideological forces and relations which aimed to exclude the Tudeh Party from the political field, were instrumental in strengthening KDPI-Soviet relations after the collapse of the Republic. The reinforcement of this relationship, which had previously been substantially weakened following the Soviet withdrawal from the Kurdish territory in May 1946, was due mainly to the isolation of the Kurds in the Iranian political field and their increasing dependence on the political, ideological and logistic support of the Tudeh Party.[9] When it was eventually revived and reorganised, the KDPI had a pronounced Tudeh identity, especially after the 1953 coup d'état, as its dedicated young cadres increasingly began to see the world from a distinctly Soviet perspective. The Soviet conception of Kurdish nationalism,

intrinsic to the acquired Tudeh identity, was instrumental in engendering and fostering a self-perception of the KDPI as the 'local' branch of the Tudeh Party, a pioneering force spearheading the struggle against imperialism in Iran.

The Soviet perception of the Kurdish movement in Iran, however, had hardly changed since the collapse of the Republic. In fact, the rapid disintegration of the Kurdish administration in the face of an ill-equipped and ramshackle Iranian army seems to have confirmed Moscow's earlier assessment of its historical character as an essentially underdeveloped urban petty-bourgeois movement with a strictly local power base in a predominantly feudal society. The nationalist movement, it was believed, was at best local, incapable of challenging the political power and status of the Kurdish landowning class and tribal leaders or mobilising the mass of the Kurdish peasantry in support of a nationalist programme. In other words, the Soviet view emphasised a discrepancy between the perceived historical character of the movement and its political potential; a structural weakness which militated against the nationalists' efforts to realise their strategic objectives, rendering their programme baseless. But whatever the theoretical validity of this characterisation, it had little if any bearing on the processes of policy and decision-making regarding the Kurdish movement in Iran in the CPSU. In fact, as the course of events in subsequent decades clearly showed, in practice it was the political exigencies of the wider Soviet strategy in the region, and in particular its relationship with the Iranian government, which determined Moscow's position on the Kurdish question in Iran. The Kurdish question never acquired any political or discursive autonomy in Soviet strategy in post-war Iran, which was for the most part filtered through the political and ideological medium of the Tudeh Party.

Although the most important external/non-Kurdish political force, the Tudeh Party was by no means the only channel of Soviet influence on the organisational structure and ideological formation of the Kurdish movement in the process of its revival in the late 1940s. As early as January 1948, barely a year after the collapse of the Kurdish Republic, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, who had sought refuge in the Soviet Union after failing to reach an agreement with the Iranian government to remain in Iranian territory, resumed political activity in exile. A major objective of his political programme, Barzani claimed, was to revive the nationalist movement in Iranian Kurdistan. To this end he co-opted a number of Kurdish exiles from Iranian Kurdistan, principally young nationalist activists who had

been sent by the Kurdish government to Soviet Azerbaijan to study modern science and technology, and had chosen to remain there after the collapse of the Republic.[10]

Clearly the resumption of political activity by Barzani had the approval of the Soviet Union, which wanted to be seen to support a Kurdish initiative without committing itself to a specific political strategy on the Kurdish question. Barzani's initiative was part of the general Soviet strategy in the region, the broad objectives of which defined the range and limits of its activities within and outside Kurdistan. The initiative thus lacked political and functional autonomy; it was partly designed to revive and boost the fortunes of the KDPI, but in the context of a broad alliance of pro-Soviet forces in Iran and in the region, namely, the Tudeh Party, the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan and the communist parties of Iraq and Turkey. This alliance, which was the linchpin of Soviet strategy in the region, provided logistic and organisational support for the Kurdish initiative only within the shifting boundaries of Soviet foreign policy. In other words, Soviet foreign policy and its global and regional determinants defined both the dynamics and the limitations of Kurdish political activity in exile, as this was filtered through the organisation and command structure of the pro-Soviet forces.

Notes

1. For the list of the KDPI and Republican activists arrested, imprisoned or executed by the Iranian army in Kurdish towns and countryside, see Hussami (1997) and Blurian (1997).
2. For the names of the Kurdish tribal leaders and landlords collaborating with the government in Tehran, see Hussami (1997), Blurian (1997), Eagleton (1963). Of the collaborators, Emer Khan Shikak, the head of the Shikak Confederacy, and Nouri beg and Rashid beg of Herki tribes were the most prominent.
3. After the collapse of the Republic the central government set out to punish the disaffected landlords, especially those who had collaborated with the Republican government. A decree was thus issued to confiscate the property of the 'motajaserin', the rebellious elements, active participants in the movements in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. It is however not known to what extent the decree was put in practice in these provinces. I have seen no evidence of concrete cases of confiscation in the Kurdish territory. The bulk of the insider information on this issue was provided by Hassan Ghazi (Sundsvall January 1993).

4. I have discussed this issue extensively in my work on the social structure of the Republic (Vali 2011). My analysis is backed up by the developments in the Kurdish countryside in the period of the restoration of sovereign domination, especially by the events in 1953 resulting in the peasant unrest in Mukrian region and the landlords' opposition and collaboration with the state. The peasant rebellions which gripped the region for a year, it will be shown in the following chapter, testified to the primacy of class consciousness/identity in the structure of social relations in the Kurdish countryside.
5. This issue invokes Foucault's theoretical argument (1981, 1988, 1991, 2003) about the centrality of the rationality of power to changing modes of domination in society. They are as such intersections of power and technical-scientific knowledge in society defining the modality of the working of power to secure domination. Although indispensable for understanding state repression, historians and social scientists writing on modern Iranian history, society and the state have overlooked this crucial issue. I will elaborate on this issue in the following chapter.
6. The Tudeh Party had successfully established a clandestine organisation in the Iranian armed forces composed mainly of middle and lower rank officers whose basic objective was to occupy positions of command in order to serve the cause of the party. The military organisation survived the party after the 1953 coup and was only exposed when the bulk of the Tudeh leadership had left the country for exile in the Soviet bloc. The Tudeh officers were stripped of their military ranks and tried for treason, the main figures were executed while others were given long sentences in 1954–1955. There is a disagreement as to the exact political-military significance of the organisation, its membership and strategic objectives, especially in the crucial years leading to the coup. The security organs of the coup d'état government, especially the military governorate of Tehran led by General Taymour Bakhtiar, who presided over the interrogation and trial of the Tudeh officer, exaggerated the overall political significance and the real status in the Tudeh-Soviet strategy in Iran (Anonymous 1334/1995). This approach, variously reiterated by the government-controlled press and media in the following years, signified the predominance of the Cold War ideology in the conduct of the Iranian government. The Tudeh Party, on the other hand, often responded to this exaggerated official account by defensively downplaying the role attributed to its infiltration of the military in its publications, but more systematically in a pamphlet published in the heydays of the party after the revolution in Tehran in 1980; see also various references to this issue in Kianouri's Q&A sessions and in issues of (Donya, April and June 1980, Omid-e Iran April 1980), and his memories (Kianouri 1993; also Javanshir 1980). In the Kurdish context, however, the organisation seems to have been rather active

in establishing working relations with specific individuals on the left of the KDPI in the process of latter's revival and consolidation, as testified by Hussami (1997 op. cit.) and Blurian (1997 op. cit.) in their memories. When I asked his opinion about this issue, Ghassemlou, unlike Hussami and Blurian, downplayed the significance of the military organisation of the Tudeh in Mukrian in general (Interview London Dec. 1983). For general accounts, see Abrahamian (1981) and Behrooz (2000).

7. On the political situation during the decade following the fall of Reza Shah, see Azimi (1989, 2008), Keddie (1981) and Abrahamian (1982).
8. The idea of the illegitimacy of the state and its exteriority to the Kurdish community was widespread in the Kurdish community in the aftermath of the fall of the Republic, nurtured by the execution of its leadership and the suppression of civil and democratic rights and liberties in the region. The idea and the popular sentiment engendered by it were significant in driving the younger generation of Kurdish nationalists towards the Soviet Union, subscribing to its international outlook and regional strategy represented by the Tudeh Party. The hostile conditions generated by state repression helped enhance the fortunes of the Tudeh in Kurdistan in the decade following the fall of the Republic. The surviving members of that generation who subsequently occupied important positions in the leadership of the KDPI, including Hussami, Blurian, Seraji and Ghassemlou, were unanimous on this notion.
9. The Kurdish question signifying the discourse and practice of a suppressed identity and its quest for recognition of rights and liberties had no place in the discourse of the centre and centre-right forces. There was, it is safe to say, a total discursive closure on this issue. The general approach of such forces was to perceive and represent the Kurdish question as a foreign conspiracy against the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iran. When they were forced to acknowledge the conditions of the Kurds as an oppressed minority, as with the centre-left organisations and the press, the question was attributed to the lack of democracy in Iran and that the oppression of the minorities will end with the dawn of democracy in Iran. This position is still prevalent in the discourse of the nationalist centre-left in Iran; see Chehabi (1990), Abrahamian (1981), Katouzian (2002) and Azimi (1989).
10. For the circumstances of Barzani's life in exile and the conditions, affiliations and aims of the young Kurdish activists in the Soviet Azerbaijan, see Hussami (1997) and Blurian (1997). These issues also feature in general histories of the Kurdish movements in the Middle East (e.g. McDowall 1996; Jwaideh 2006).

CHAPTER 3

The Revival of the Nationalist Movement

The discourse and practice of Kurdish resistance to the reassertion of sovereign domination over the Kurdish community, as was indicated in the previous chapter, originated in the clandestine public sphere which was at the same time the locus of opposition to the state in the Kurdish community. The clandestine public sphere thus became a fertile though still quite nascent ground for the articulation of resistance and opposition revolving around attempts to revive and activate the KDPI. These efforts involved a wide range of forces and relations, including individuals, organisations and movements, both internal and external to the Kurdish community in Iran. The discourse and practice of the revival of the nationalist movement, internal or external, converged on the fledgling clandestine public sphere centred on Mahabad, which thus became the dialectical nexus of resistance and opposition to sovereign domination. Given the intensity of state repression in the Kurdish community, it was only logical for the early initiatives to start abroad, in Kurdish communities in exile in Soviet Azerbaijan and the southern Kurdish territory in Iraq.

The Barzani Initiative

I have already referred to Barzani's attempt to revive the movement shortly after he began his life in exile in the Soviet Union. In Baku, Barzani seems to have intended to form a new political party with a broad populist programme for Greater Kurdistan at large. The organisation of the new party,

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it is said, involved Kurds from Iran and Iraq who aspired to a nationalist programme under the leadership of Barzani. 'The Party', as Barzani referred to it, was to become the springboard for the formation of the 'United Front for the Liberation of the Motherland', a popular democratic and anti-imperialist organisation with a nationalist ideology and pro-Soviet stance on regional and international politics. The political programme of this party and its strategy for the realisation of its broad objectives were set out by Barzani in some detail in a meeting in January 1948 in Baku, attended by a number of prominent Kurdish exiles from both Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan.[1]

The programme entailed a plan for the liberation of Greater Kurdistan, the first stage of which concerned Iranian Kurdistan. The initial aim of the party, Barzani stated, was to liberate Iranian Kurdistan, reviving the Kurdish Republic and mobilising the masses in support of the wider objective: the gradual liberation of the remaining parts, in accordance with a popular democratic strategy which included non-Kurdish forces on the national and regional levels. The latter was a veiled reference to the Azerbaijan Demokrat Firghesi, the Tudeh Party of Iran and the communist parties of Iraq, Syria and Turkey. In Barzani's stated programme of liberation, the sole criterion of inclusion of non-Kurdish forces in the struggle, and hence of the conditions of its transformation from a Kurdish nationalist party to an Iranian or regional popular democratic liberation front, was allegiance to the Soviet Union, its official ideology and global strategy.

Aside from this general requirement, which in effect would have placed the proposed party in an anti-imperialist alliance led by the Soviet Union, there is no reason to support Barzani's argument that the immediate or long-term interests of the Kurds and the non-Kurdish forces in the structure of the proposed united front were compatible at all. On the contrary, the brief history of an earlier attempt to form such a front under Soviet auspices, that is, the bitter experience of the relationship between the KDPI and the Azerbaijan Demokrat Firghesi, clearly belied Barzani's position. The conflict of interest and territorial disputes with the Azeri republic, as I have shown elsewhere in my writings, had effectively prevented the formation of a united front against the central government in Tehran (Vali 2011). The Azeri quest for regional hegemony and denial of the political autonomy of Kurdish national rights and identity, actively supported by the Soviet Union and the Tudeh leadership, seriously weakened the authority of the Kurdish Republic in the course of the crucial negotiations for regional autonomy with the Iranian government, thus hastening its

eventual demise. Nor did Barzani's proposed government in Iranian Kurdistan, reviving the Kurdish Republic, have any specific identity, vacillating as before between national sovereignty and regional autonomy. The ambiguous identity of the proposed Kurdish entity was strictly in keeping with his contradictory positions regarding the future relationship between this entity and the Iranian government, which varied entirely according to the assumed changes in the character of political power in Tehran.

Although the call for the formation of a popular front in Barzani's proposed programme seems to be more than a general statement in favour of cooperation on the regional level, its failure to address such crucial political and organisational issues as leadership, strategy and ideology confirms that it was to be an alliance of pro-Soviet forces in the region, controlled and directed by Moscow. In fact, Barzani's speech is a remarkable evidence of Soviet political and ideological influence, without parallel in the discourse of the Republic itself. It is an unambiguous public declaration of allegiance to his powerful host and protector and to its official ideology and global strategy. While this may in part be seen as sheer political expediency on Barzani's part, arising out of the circumstances of his forced exile and residence in the USSR as well as his precarious and disrupted relationship with his traditional power base and constituency of support in Kurdistan, there are other and equally compelling reasons for his seemingly hasty 'conversion' to Soviet political and ideological positions.

Barzani's speech also signified a compromise: the advent of a working relationship between two social systems with opposing world outlooks—Soviet Marxism and Kurdish tribalism—articulated in a political programme which ensured his own leadership of the Kurdish movement under Supreme Soviet patronage. The political programme, as was seen, envisaged a united popular democratic front to lead the movement in a prolonged process of national liberation struggle, in which the establishment of a Kurdish government in Iranian Kurdistan was to serve as launching pad for the liberation of Greater Kurdistan and the creation of a united Kurdish state. In Barzani's proposed scheme the agent of liberation is the Kurdish nation, represented by a nationalist party with a nationwide political strategy and programme of action under his leadership. This programme is grounded in a class conception of contemporary Kurdish society, which is divided into six classes and strata whose boundaries are defined by their respective positions in the process of economic production. The introduction of the social class perspective, though important, serves a very limited purpose in Barzani's analysis: it does no more than

demonstrate the heterogeneous economic composition of Kurdish society and emphasise its transitional—semi-feudal and semi-bourgeois—character. It does not account for actual political diversity among the Kurds; no political positions or attributes are derived from the stated economic diversity of contemporary Kurdish society.[2] In fact, the concept of social class has no bearing on the subsequent political analysis in Barzani's speech, which revolves almost entirely around a uniform and undifferentiated cultural-ethnic notion of the Kurdish nation. Notions of the Kurdish nation and Kurdish society are used by Barzani interchangeably, denoting the same phenomenon; the ethnic boundaries of the Kurdish nation are coterminous with the geographical boundaries of Greater Kurdistan.

Thus, despite Barzani's emphasis on the class character of Kurdish society, class relations are clearly subordinated to ethnic relations, playing no role whatsoever in the analysis which precedes the elaboration of his political programme. Witness his discussion of the Kurdish landowning class and tribal chiefs. Although the power and privileges of the Kurdish landlords and tribal chiefs clearly arise from landownership, which is the foundation of agrarian production and class exploitation in the countryside, Barzani reminds his audience that 'at present the Kurdish nation in general respects its own national customs and traditions. For this reason the Kurds respect their chiefs; in particular they genuinely obey those among their chiefs who have made sacrifices for Kurdistan and refused to bow to the enemy' (Hussami op. cit., p. 40, my translation). This pronouncement, it should be borne in mind, is less a simple affirmation of respect for custom and tradition in the Kurdish community than a political statement, addressing a political issue in a strictly political context. Barzani's statement is primarily a veiled defence of the political position and property rights of the Kurdish landowning class and tribal chiefs in a critical historical juncture in modern Kurdish history. This claim is borne out by the fact that Barzani's political programme, which addresses the problems of an admittedly 'transitional' society with a predominantly pre-capitalist/feudal character, does not contain a single reference to agrarian reform and the redistribution of landed property. Land reform and the transformation in the structure of property relations in Greater Kurdistan in general and Iranian Kurdistan in particular seem to have been excluded from consideration altogether, playing no role in the assumed process of transition to a bourgeois order (ibid.). There is in Barzani's discourse no criticism of the existing forms of landed property and property relations on which this mode of production and distribution is based.

Barzani's discourse is dominated by a strong strain of 'ethnic populism' which defines the contours of his political programme for the nationalist revival in Kurdistan. It is the overriding force in his discourse, easily subordinating class relations to its effects. Little wonder, therefore, that Barzani's class conception of Kurdish society entails no notion of economic exploitation; it is an empty shell, without the requisite socio-economic and political content. In his scheme of Kurdish society, social classes exist, but have no economic or political identity; they are social collectives, with conflicting economic interests but uniform political identity, defined by their common Kurdish ethnicity. Although Barzani does not deny the existence of class interests and conflicts in Kurdish society, he nonetheless wishes to put an end to class struggle and enhance peaceful coexistence and national harmony by means of a simple political decree. In Article 31 of his political programme he states boldly:

> Our party is the defender of the interests of all social classes of the Kurdish nation. For this reason it encompasses all classes, including landlords, peasants, merchants, workers, intellectuals, small landowners and small craftsmen [artisans?], and organises them in a united front for the liberation of the motherland, which is the defender of the interests of all social classes. Under the leadership of this party, struggle among social classes in Kurdistan is not permitted. (Ibid., p. 43, my translation)

Barzani's argument here, in particular his audacious but absurd banning of class struggle in Kurdistan, is symptomatic of the populism which underpins his overarching pseudo-socialist ethnic-collectivism. In a characteristically populist manner he advocates the introduction of 'new legal measures for a fairer distribution of produce between the landlords and their peasants, as well as a labour law in which workers' rights are protected and their wages and working hours are specified'. He further advocates the 'founding of consumers' cooperatives' to prevent hoarding and profiteering, and an 'agricultural bank to free the peasants from indebtedness' (ibid., p. 41, my translation).

Barzani's populist measures are, in a general sense, reminiscent of the agrarian populism of the Komalay JK. They both propose ethnic nationalist strategies of revival and action, advocating social reformist programmes with a strong subjectivist mould and overlooking structural relations, especially property relations, in their representation of the processes and practices designed to ensure their envisaged transformation in Kurdistan.

But the similarities between the two hardly extend beyond these general points; they belong to two different traditions and presuppose different discursive and political conditions of existence and realisation. The discourse of the Komalay JK, as I have shown elsewhere in my writings (Vali 2011), entailed no Marxist class categories, and its agrarian populism was founded on a concept of the Kurdish people which excluded the landowning class from the nationalist political process. Barzani's discourse, by contrast, is informed by Marxist class categories which are deposited with traditional ethnic relations. His populism results precisely from this assimilation of class relations and identities in a uniform ethnic relation and collective ethnic identity. This element of ethnic populism, bolstered unevenly by the language of Kurdish tradition and of Soviet anti-imperialism, is the intersection of populism and tribalism in Barzani's discourse.

Barzani's preoccupation with Soviet Marxism and Marxist class analysis was short-lived; it was never a matter of ideological conviction so much as sheer political expediency. Nor did Soviet authorities take him to be anything other than a Kurdish tribal chief. They too used him to their own ends, helping him to revive his political activity in exile, but only within the limits of their own political agenda. In this sense, therefore, the text of his proposed programme as well as the conceptual formation of the preceding analysis can also be taken to represent the Soviet view of Kurdish society and politics in general, and of Barzani's leadership and movement in particular.

The perception that contemporary Kurdish society was predominantly pre-capitalist/feudal in character, as has been seen, underpinned the Soviet approach to Kurdish nationalist politics. The persistence of pre-capitalist relations, and in particular the predominance of the tribes and tribal leadership in the political and military organisations of Kurdish society, were held to demonstrate both the immaturity of the nationalist claim to independence and the legitimacy of the alternative quest for regional autonomy. This is not to say, however, that the Soviet approach to the Kurdish question was closely guided by informed theoretical argument. Rather, it used theoretical argument to justify an official policy which denied any discursive or political autonomy to the Kurdish question at all and was always ready to subordinate it to other and more 'progressive' causes, such as Azeri nationalism during the crucial years of 1941–1947, and the socialism of the Tudeh Party thereafter.

There was therefore sufficient ground not only for a temporary compromise but also for long-term cooperation between the Soviets and the

Kurdish exiles led by Barzani. The Soviet perception of the historical character of Kurdish nationalism and its political potential could find little to disagree with in Barzani's ethnic populism. Barzani's standing in the Kurdish community was a counterweight to the tribal character of his authority, which might have been ideologically unpalatable to the more doctrinaire Marxists in the Communist Party of Azerbaijan who had to deal directly with him. Barzani too welcomed Soviet patronage and support, for it enhanced his position not only in the nationalist community in Greater Kurdistan, but also in the expanding circle of Kurdish exiles in the USSR, whose loyalty and cooperation were of more immediate concern to him.

The exile community in Baku was heterogeneous politically and ideologically, and the prevailing differences easily overshadowed Barzani's ethnic-populist perspective, escaping the diminishing reach of his authority and leadership. The diverse political and ideological differences among the Kurdish refugees often found a regional focus; primordial and local groupings remained strong. The most sustained opposition to Barzani's leadership came from the left, especially the Marxist left, in which the Kurds of Iran were prominent; they were suspicious of Barzani's intentions and resented his close relationship with the Soviet authorities. This latter issue seems to have been the main point of contention, given the extent to which the fate of Kurdish politics in exile, its revival and survival, depended on the goodwill of the Soviet Union and its logistic and political support. The Kurds of Iran played a particularly significant role in the left opposition to the Barzani leadership, for two reasons: first, the pivotal status of Iranian Kurdistan in Barzani's plan for the revival of the nationalist political process, and secondly, their close relationship with the Azeri democrats in exile, who had the ear of the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Azerbaijan and could thus influence Soviet attitudes towards Barzani and his initiative.[3]

The left opposition to Barzani was active but mute, seldom breaking ranks in public and strictly observing the exigencies of the formal consensus in the exile community required to ensure Soviet support. But the Soviet authorities, especially the key elements of the communist leadership in Baku, were well aware of the existing differences within the Kurdish leadership and exploited them to further their own interests and perception of the Kurdish question in Iran. Little wonder, therefore, that when Barzani and his circle fell from favour, the prominent members of the Iranian Kurdish contingent in the left opposition to him hastily joined the

Azerbaijan Demokrat Firghesi, and the political project for the revival of Kurdish nationalism was nipped in the bud.[4]

Informed opinion on the fall of Barzani from favour and the collapse of his initiative for the revival of nationalist politics in Kurdistan is scarce to non-existent, providing ground for much speculation by both critics and admirers. Some maintain that he withdrew from the project before it was put into practice; although no precise explanation is given for Barzani's withdrawal, it is nonetheless implied that increasing disagreement with and pressure by the Soviet authorities were the most likely reasons. Others lay the blame more directly and unequivocally on the Soviet authorities, holding them responsible not only for Barzani's withdrawal but also for the failure of the nationalist political project in exile, identified with him alone. Yet another view points to specific institutions or personalities in the Communist Party of Soviet Azerbaijan who allegedly undermined Barzani's initiative, resulting in his political isolation and deportation to Kazakhstan. This view, which in a characteristically apologist manner attempts to differentiate the Soviet regime from the conduct of leading figures in its central or regional administrations, seriously overestimates the functional autonomy of these administrations and overlooks the fact that the Barzani initiative was not an independent nationalist political project, but was designed to conform to the aims and requirements of Soviet foreign policy in the region.[5] These views, despite their apparent diversity, share the same assumptions: first, that Barzani's initiative in exile was an autonomous nationalist project pursuing autonomous political objectives, and second, that the Kurdish leadership in exile was a uniform political bloc, pursuing uniform nationalist objectives. These assumptions, as we have seen, cannot be sustained.

Barzani's initiative was a half-baked scheme occupying a minor place in the overall Soviet regional strategy in the early and rather fluid phase of the Cold War. The rise and fall of the initiative, and indeed the significance of Barzani in the Soviet regional strategy, were defined by the exigencies of an instrumental political rationality which underpinned it. The rigid Stalinist ethos of the Soviet strategic thinking left no room for a kind of political idealism often attributed by some nationalist writers to this initiative and more generally to his political activities in Exile. His deportation to Kazakhstan could have been the beginning of a long and silent death in relative political obscurity. The events culminating in the 1958 upheaval and the fall of the Hashimate monarchy in Iraq rescued Barzani and his clan from political obscurity, from becoming another sad chapter in the

annals of modern Kurdish history. It was the explosive force of Arab nationalism in Baghdad which propelled him to the centre stage of Iraqi history, assigning his fate to its wild currents. Barzani's resurgence in Iraqi politics was as an accident of history, as some would argue today with the benefit of hindsight.

But what of the 'real' achievements of the Kurds of Iran associated with the Kurdish leadership in the USSR and their contribution to the revival and development of nationalist politics in Iranian Kurdistan? In practical political terms, the Kurdish leadership achieved little of immediate significance regarding the revival of the KDPI, its organisational structure and membership. Political and logistical impediments were immense, and the rising tide of military repression and control, along with the lack of organisational support on the ground, sapped much of its operational resources and energy. The Kurds of Iran in the leadership, for the most part on the left, and with close ties with the Azeri democrats in exile, managed to publish a one-page broadsheet under the name of *Kurdistan* on an irregular basis, which often found its way to Mahabad and other major urban centres in Iranian Kurdistan, though with considerable delay. The new *Kurdistan*, which apparently continued until 1965, was intended to fulfil the functions of its illustrious predecessor, that is, to act as the official organ of the KDPI and to promote the Republican tradition in Iranian Kurdistan.[6] As the party organ its main task was to help revive the clandestine organisation by linking up the dispersed and dispirited members who were mostly in hiding, and to provide a focus for their political activity in Iran at large. In its role as the guardian and interpreter of the nationalist political tradition it was avowedly ideological, expounding the virtues of the Republic, its political programme and achievements, but within a new political context defined by the conditions of life in exile in the USSR.

The new *Kurdistan*, despite its irregular appearance and clandestine circulation, seems to have had a wide reception and readership in the nationalist circles in Iranian Kurdistan, making a significant contribution to the clandestine public sphere. It not only represented the authority of the KDPI, but also became a symbol of nationalist resistance to oppression, exemplified by Barzani and his successful flight from the Iranian army, crossing the Orexis to Soviet Azerbaijan in June 1947. The new generation of nationalists who subsequently spearheaded the revival of the KDPI in Kurdistan were undoubtedly influenced by the new publication and its political and ideological orientations. *Kurdistan* in exile was a pro-Soviet publication with a populist-socialist ethos, advocating the formation

of an anti-imperialist front of progressive forces in the region, including the KDPI. The nationalism of the KDPI was thus subordinated to the exigencies of the anti-imperialist struggle, which also defined its prime strategic objective in Iran and hence the order of its priorities in Kurdistan. The new *Kurdistan* argued for the political primacy of anti-imperialist struggle in Iran not only as a general political objective but also as the essential condition of the possibility of the nationalist programme; an argument which contained the guiding principles of the KDPI's policy for the years to come.

This point is particularly significant if we bear in mind the international political context of the Cold War, and the political and ideological conflicts between the Soviet Union and the West for hegemony and control. Viewed from this standpoint, the notion of anti-imperialist struggle acquires a different meaning to that implied by the discourse of the new *Kurdistan*. It means little more than conformity with and subservience to the fundamentals of Soviet foreign policy and strategic interests, articulated in the discourse and practice of its appointed regional and national representatives in a global framework. The authors of the pro-Soviet discourse had already joined the Azerbaijan Demokrat Firghesi (ADF), and the dissemination of their publication in Kurdistan, however irregular and slow, could only pave the way for the supremacy of the Tudeh Party in the organisational structure and the ideological formation of the KDPI in the early 1950s.

The Struggle for a New Beginning

Attempts to revive the national movement, as was said, centred on the reconstruction of the KDPI in Kurdistan. This process began almost simultaneously with the renewal of political activity in exile. There are different and at times conflicting accounts of the actual process and the conditions of the revival of nationalist politics in Kurdistan after the collapse of the Republic.[7] But despite their differences, the authoritative accounts of the period are in accord on a number of important points. It is agreed that the process was initiated and sustained not by those remaining cadres of the KDPI who had in one way or another managed to escape the mounting tide of repression, arrest, deportation and detention, but by the new generation of Kurdish nationalists, who were too young to hold a position in the party or the Republican administration. The political zeal and commitment of the new practitioners of nationalist politics, who

subsequently occupied commanding positions in the institutional structure of the KDPI, were however not matched by their organisational skills and theoretical knowledge. This crucial gap between their political convictions and theoretical and political knowledge, widening with the mounting state repression and the growing complexity of the clandestine political process, was rapidly filled by other political forces within and outside Iranian Kurdistan, specifically the Tudeh Party and the KDP of Iraq, led by Barzani. These remained the two major influences on political and ideological trends in the KDPI at least up to 1973, when in its Third Congress the party for the first time since 1945 adopted a uniform programme and a strategy of action. Before this date the KDPI lacked a specific political programme with a definite strategy. Its politics were entirely reactive, with an external dynamics located in the changing relationships between the Iranian state and the Tudeh Party and Barzani's KDP, its main supporters and protectors in the regional political arena. The KDPI had no autonomous political identity before 1979, when it was to be beaten into shape by another revolutionary upheaval that shook Kurdish society to its very foundations.

The new practitioners of nationalist politics who sought to revive the nationalist political process and reorganise the KDPI frequently invoked the recent nationalist past, especially the experience of the Republic, to claim legitimacy for their discourse and practice.[8] Proclaiming themselves the heirs of the Republic and its leadership, they pledged to continue their path. This uncritical acclaim of the national past, often verging on religious reverence, was not confined to the young KDPI enthusiasts; it included nationalists who were known for their ambivalent reception of the Republic and criticism of its leadership. The political composition of the small group of political activists who published *Rega* ('The Path') in Suleimania clearly illustrates this point.[9]

Rega, said to have been circulated in Mahabad in the early months of 1948, is generally regarded as the first Kurdish publication after the collapse of the Republic.[10] It was managed and edited by a small band of nationalists from the town of Mahabad, now gathered in Iraqi Kurdistan attempting to revive the nationalist political process abroad. Initially, this group also included Abdul Rahman Zabihi, a founding member of the Komalay JK and the editor-in-chief of its newspaper *Nishtiman*. Although the leading political and intellectual figure in the group, his role in the publication of *Rega* remains ambiguous. Some leading commentators, mainly his contemporaries in the small but growing circle of the political

activists in exile, imply that he was a founding member of the journal; others maintain that he broke away from the group for political and ideological reasons before the publication of *Rega* in January 1948, and that his opposition to the political project and strategic objectives of *Rega* was the main reason for his departure.

It is widely agreed that Zabihi had never publicly approved of the KDPI and its political project for regional autonomy in Iranian Kurdistan, remaining essentially committed to the territorial nationalist perspective of the Komalay JK. He had therefore been sidelined by the leadership of the KDPI and effectively excluded from prominent political and administrative positions in the Kurdish government. Consequently, Zabihi chose to maintain a non-committal and at best ambivalent position towards the Republic and its leadership from the outset; he endorsed them without identifying with them. Zabihi's ambivalence in this respect is taken by his contemporary admirers to mean that he remained essentially faithful to the nationalist objectives of the Komalay JK, waiting for an appropriate occasion to declare his opposition to the leadership of the KDPI, especially to the person of Ghazi Muhammad, whom he allegedly saw as his main rival and the usurper of his legitimate rights to the leadership of the movement. It is thus implied that Zabihi's aim was to initiate a new organisation to lead the movement along the path already charted by the Komalay JK.[11]

Although there is a certain truth in this argument, it should not be generalised or exaggerated. The fact that Zabihi neither held an important post in the administration of the Republic nor ever gave it public support may be taken to mean that the experience of the Republic and the changing political and ideological conditions in Kurdistan did not affect his outlook significantly. But it should not be taken to imply an uninterrupted continuity in his discourse and practice from the formation of the Komalay JK in 1942 to his mysterious disappearance and presumed death in 1980.[12] The evidence of his conduct in exile and his activity in Iranian Kurdistan upon his return after the Iranian revolution of 1979 only confirm his unwavering opposition to the KDPI and its leadership, casting serious doubts on the alleged continuity of his earlier commitment to a territorial nationalist project for the Greater Kurdistan.

The paramount influences on the discourse of *Rega*, by contrast, are the experience of the Republic and the political programme of the KDPI, which tends to support the argument that Zabihi was not part of the small editorial collective. The editorial of the first issue (out of only two published) states, '*Rega* is the organ of the Komalay Jiyani Koord, the

Association for the Existence of the Kurds, whose aim is to form a new political party, Hizbi Jiyani Koord, the Kurdish Existence\Life party.' Although the name and the stated aim of the new association were reminiscent of the Komalay JK, in which Zabihi played a leading role, the strategic objectives of the proposed party were radically different. It argued for the right of self-determination for the Kurdish nation, but within the juridico-political framework of a democratic Iran. This objective, it is further maintained, can be achieved only by relying on the 'invincible force of the freedom-loving nations of Iran and of Iranian constitutional law'. In the discourse of *Rega* national sovereignty is displaced in favour of regional autonomy. The editorial is unambiguous on this crucial change:

> Once again we say this very openly: we want the right of self-determination for Kurdistan and the Kurdish nation within the present borders of Iran, under the supervision of a democratic government in Iran, and according to the Iranian constitutional law and the rule of common sense.[13]

The emphasis on regional autonomy in the discourse of *Rega* signifies the specificity of the authors' perceptions of the Kurdish nation and of national identity in Iran, which bear a remarkable resemblance to those entailed in the discourse of *Kurdistan*. In both cases the notions of the Kurdish nation and national identity lack the requisite discursive autonomy; the political conditions given in the concept of autonomy cannot ensure their independent existence. Similarly, the strategy envisaged for the realisation of the nationalist objective depends on specific political conditions in Iranian politics, that is, the existence of a democratic government and the active support of other nationalities, which are external to it and effectively undermine its functional independence. References to the Iranian constitution of 1906 as the proposed juridico-political framework of Kurdish autonomy are also remarkably similar; here too the constitution is invoked without due consideration for the institutional provisions necessary to ensure the juridico-political conditions of the proposed Kurdish autonomy.

As far as the project of regional autonomy and the necessity of remaining within the juridico-political framework of the Iranian national sovereignty were concerned, *Rega* had no misgivings; both the emblem and the editorial were in Persian, emphasising the specifically Iranian context of its strategy, and hence an explicit acceptance of the political fragmentation of Greater Kurdistan and the political diversity and autonomy of the existing

fragments. But although the discourse of *Rega* was unequivocally autonomist, it also insisted on the right of self-determination for the Kurds. This inconsistency, as was seen, was also endemic to the discourse of *Kurdistan* under the Republic, underlying the ambiguities entailed in its representations of the Kurdish nation and national identity (Vali 2011).

Rega was short-lived; it was discontinued after only two issues for logistical, rather than political, reasons.[14] However, the general outline and the fundamentals of its political strategy and programme did not merely survive, but came to dominate the discourse and practice of nationalist politics in the coming decades, albeit in a more developed and elaborate form. There were three main reasons for this dominance, rooted in both the past history and the future developments of the nationalist movement: first, the political and ideological affinities with the Kurdish Republic and its founder, which the journal repeatedly invoked, not only as the source of legitimacy but also as a model to be reconstructed in the future; second, the increasing influence of Soviet Marxism and especially the Tudeh Party, which in principle reduced the Kurdish question to a quest for regional autonomy within the territorial integrity of a sovereign Iran; third, the growing influence of the KDP under Barzani, especially after 1958, which strove for regional autonomy in the juridico-political framework of Iraqi national sovereignty. The last two influences came together in the organisational structure of the KDPI, initially as complementary trends and later on as opposing forces vying for supremacy in the struggle to lead the party.

When the first issue of *Rega* reached Mahabad in early 1948, attempts to revive the organisation of the KDPI in Kurdistan were already underway. The clandestine process was spearheaded by the Komalay Lawan, the Youth Association, a group of young nationalists organised in an association with a number of small local branches especially in the countryside. Surviving members provide different and at times conflicting views on the nature and outcome of the activities of the Komalay Lawan. The association, according to one account, was a loose grouping of young and dedicated Kurdish nationalists, with strong but immature communist inclinations, identified with the Soviet Union. The young nationalists were fired by the bitter experience of the Republic and the desire to recreate it in the future on more judicious and egalitarian grounds. The association, it is further suggested, was formed in a rather ad hoc manner, without an organisational charter or operational plan. Working clandestinely in major Kurdish cities, it eventually revived the local branches of the KDPI, first in Mahabad and then in Sardasht, Saqqiz and Neghadeh. This account

is rather vague on the fate of the association, implying that it was dissolved as it accomplished its main task; with the revival of the KDPI in the region it lost its reason to survive. The members of the association thus became the members of the KDPI in their own localities, forming the bedrock of its future leadership.[15]

Another surviving member maintains that the Komalay Lawan was a grassroots organisation with a primarily rural membership (hence its proper name Komalay Lawani La Deh, the Association of the Rural Youth), and that although the association lacked an organisational charter and operational plan, it was far more than an ad hoc gathering of like-minded youth bent on reviving the glory of the recent nationalist past. Rather it was a nationalist organisation, pursuing an objective wider than the revival of the KDPI. This second view also downplays the influence of Soviet communism on the leading members, emphasising instead their nationalist convictions. The most important difference between the two, however, lies in their explanation of the end of the association and the outcome of its clandestine activities in Kurdistan. According to the second account, rather than being dissolved, the Komalay Lawan was incorporated into another organisation, Komalay Kommonisti Koordistan (the Communist Association of Kurdistan), in October 1948 (Hussami op. cit. 1997).

The Communist Association of Kurdistan is said to have been founded in July 1948 in the town of Mahabad.[16] Little is known about this association, its founders and the precise nature of its objectives and activities in Kurdistan. Nor are the reasons precipitating a merger with the Youth Association known to us, though it is likely that the growing Marxist and pro-Soviet tendencies in the Lawan, resulting primarily from the increasing influence of the Tudeh Party in national and regional politics, were its main cause. This is borne out by the subsequent direction and activities of the Communist Association of Kurdistan, which is said to have taken an increasingly pro-Soviet position, emphasising class relations and class struggle in Iran at large at the expense of national oppression and the right of self-determination in Kurdistan.[17] The Association, it is believed, played an important role in the revival of the KDPI, but directed it chiefly along the Soviet lines, thus facilitating its subsequent political and ideological domination by the Tudeh Party. The existing accounts, however, are silent on the eventual fate of the Communist Association, suggesting that it was indeed the catalyst, if not the instrument, of the transformation of the KDPI to the Kurdish branch and operational arm of the Tudeh Party in Kurdistan.

The growing pro-Soviet tendency among the young Kurdish nationalists was effectively utilised by the Tudeh leadership, which by then had increasingly come under attack by the security forces and was trying to expand its clandestine activity and establish an active base in Kurdistan. The Tudeh Party had thus far been relatively unsuccessful in its bid to establish an active organisational and operational base in Kurdistan on a par with that in Azerbaijan or Isfahan Provinces. There were evidently important obstacles, deeply rooted in the historical development and political formation of Kurdish society, to the Tudeh's drive for propaganda and recruitment. Kurdish society was still predominantly rural, and its relatively underdeveloped urban culture was incapable of fostering a sizeable middle strata susceptible to the call of a modern political organisation which claimed legitimacy primarily from the Iranian working class. The middle strata, the main recruiting ground for the Tudeh Party, was both small in size and nationalist in political orientation, which posed a double problem for the Tudeh Party. It had to not only overcome the ethnic divide but also accommodate the nationalist claim to self-determination, not an easy task for a constitutional party committed to the notion of a unitary Iranian nation-state, the very source of political authority and legitimacy in the Constitution of 1906.

But if historical backwardness had hindered the Tudeh's progress in Kurdistan, it had also deprived the Kurdish nationalists of the requisite political culture and organisational knowledge. Their high political zeal and passion for action were not matched by their lack of ideological sophistication and scanty organisational skills; they were admittedly in dire need of assistance in both spheres.[18] The Tudeh leadership promptly responded to their request for assistance, skilfully manipulating their passionate opposition to the Iranian regime and dedication to the nationalist cause. The Tudeh's primary aim was to overcome the ethnic divide, which could have made it difficult for a non-Kurdish party to acquire legitimacy in a Kurdish political milieu. It used the authority and legitimacy of the Soviet Union among the new generation of Kurdish nationalists, now significantly enhanced by Barzani's presence in Baku, to refashion the contours of Kurdish politics in line with the exigencies of a general strategy inextricably tied to the notions of a uniform Iranian nation-state and national identity. In this endeavour the Kurdish communists were the Tudeh's main allies, and together they strove for a policy which rested on the marginalisation of Kurdish national identity in discourse and practice. The mutual dependency of the Tudeh Party and the Kurdish nationalists thus signalled the genesis of a long though rather uneasy political alliance

within and outside Iran, whose terms and conditions were to change only after the Iranian revolution of 1979.

Kurdish political activists were too weak and unprepared to withstand the Tudeh's superior intellectual and organisational powers. The essential weaknesses which had initially led them into unequal partnership with the Tudeh also precipitated their subordination to it. The Tudeh Party began its clandestine activity in Mahabad in early 1950 with the willing participation of the local political activists, mostly former members of the Lawan with raw and uneducated communist inclinations (some had made their way to politics after a brief schooling in the Communist Association). They were instrumental in reviving the local committee of the KDPI in Mahabad before the oil crisis began to gain momentum later that year. The Mahabad committee, though of great symbolic value, lacked discursive and political autonomy; most of its principal founders and members had already joined the Tudeh Party, adopting its discourse and practice on domestic and international politics.

The Mahabad committee gave little weight to the national question; the struggle for Kurdish national rights and identity were subordinated to class struggle in the domestic sphere and campaign against imperialism in the international arena. This was particularly true of some more intellectually inclined members on the left of the committee who, by contrast with the more traditional wing, believed facets of Kurdish ethnicity were the only legitimate defining principles of political discourse and practice. The latter group was larger in number but less significant politically, due mainly to the rising tide of political radicalism in Iran, spearheaded, though in quite different ways, by the Tudeh Party and the heterogeneous body of centre-left nationalists congregated around Mosaddeq, the core of the National Front of Iran formed in 1949. The construction of a working relationship with the radical forces in the Iranian political field, implicit in the quest for regional autonomy advocated by the left, presented a major dilemma to the traditional ethnic nationalists within the KDPI. Unable to have an autonomous nationalist political stance, they were forced to seek allies among the more radical and democratic forces in the Iranian political field, a position which did not sit easily with their ethnic perspective in politics. The balance of forces between the traditionalist right and the more radical left in the KDPI began to change only after the coup d'état of 1953, when the latter lost its patron in the Iranian political field, while the former gradually gained ground in the clandestine organisation, increasingly led from a growing base in Iraqi Kurdistan. The position of the traditional right within the party was further strengthened with the

return of Barzani to his homeland soon after the military takeover of July 1958 in Iraq. Barzani, as will be seen, actively aided the ascendancy of the traditional right, ensuring their dominance in the leadership of the KDPI. He became the political boss and paymaster of the KDPI, controlling its organisation and defining its political agenda for nearly two decades.

The radicalisation of the political field which followed Mosaddeq's premiership in 1951 also strengthened the relationship between the radical left in the KDPI and the Tudeh Party. It was no longer an alliance of two organisations with independent programmes, but a complete merger; the fledgling organisation of the KDPI became indistinguishable from the Tudeh Party, increasingly identifying with its political programme in the spurt of semi-clandestine activity that followed Mosaddeq's government. The conduct of the Mahabad committee of the KDPI in the course of the 17th Majlis elections in 1951 clearly illustrates this point. The Tudeh Party did not have local representation in Mahabad and other Kurdish towns which had been in the jurisdiction of the Republic. The committee acted as the local branch of the Tudeh Party, fielding a Tudeh candidate and fighting for the Tudeh programme. The election campaign was conducted in social class terms, and references to class domination and exploitation of the masses by the landlords and mercantile bourgeoisie in Kurdish society defined the major contours of the committee's stance on Kurdish politics.[19] The KDPI's attack on landed property and economic exploitation elicited a swift and effective response from the Kurdish landlords and their allies among the mercantile bourgeoisie, not only in Mahabad but also in other major urban centres such as Bukan, Naghadeh, Saqqiz and Sardasht, where local committees were already established. The Kurdish landlords in the area, in particular the Dehbokri Aghas, responded to the KDPI's campaign by rallying around the government candidate, a clergyman of Azeri origin who had never lived in Mahabad and was alien to the local Kurds. In the event he was 'elected' to represent the people of Mahabad in the 17th Majlis after the ballot was rigged by the military commander of the district to ensure the defeat of the Tudeh-KDPI candidate, despite heavy polling in his favour.[20]

The Tudeh leadership and the organisers of the Mahabad committee of the KDPI were stunned by the surge in popular support for their candidate during the Majlis elections and by the heavy-handed reaction of the military authorities in Mahabad. No less stunning was the overt cooperation of the Kurdish landlords with the military authorities and their participation in the suppression of the Tudeh-KDPI activists, who were almost entirely local Kurds from well-known families in the area. These develop-

ments were bound to influence the political positions of these two forces and redefine the prospects of their future cooperation in Kurdistan. For the Tudeh leadership the events leading to the election, especially the active support of the Dehbokri landlords for the central government and its 'chosen' candidate, lent further credibility to their argument that in the present circumstances in Kurdistan class relations and contradictions reigned supreme and had to be given their due primacy over the national question both in discourse and in practice. The Tudeh thus moved to consolidate its organisation in Southern Kurdish cities such as Sena and Kirmanshah, where, as in other parts of Iran, it had retained political and functional autonomy, relying on its expanding semi-clandestine local membership. The KDPI had a very rudimentary organisation in these cities and its minimal presence in the political field depended largely on the political and logistic support of the Tudeh Party. In the north, the surge of popular support had not only endorsed the local alliance but also provided the party with a clear mandate to dominate and control its local committees, especially in such traditional centres of nationalist politics as Mahabad, Bokan and Naghadeh—a policy which was subsequently actively pursued in the critical years leading to the coup d'état and the collapse of Mosaddeq's government in August 1953.[21]

The new developments in the political scene had different effects on the fortunes of the fledgling KDPI. The active support of the local landlords and tribal leaders for the 'official' government candidate had damaged the credibility of the ethnic nationalists vis-à-vis the left, casting serious doubts on their argument for the primacy of ethnic relations in the discourse and practice of the KDPI during the election campaign. The shrinking band of ethnic nationalists, who had occupied an increasingly precarious position in the right wing of the local party administrations, was opposed to the subordination of its policy and practice to the local and national requirements of the Tudeh Party. They were particularly opposed to the Tudeh's class discourse, which, from their point of view, was divisive and counterproductive in the process of nationalist mobilisation. But the recent developments in the political scene had clearly turned the tide against them. They found it increasingly difficult to argue for a united Kurdish stance against the central government, particularly in view of the conduct of the Dehbokri landlords, who betrayed ethnic and national solidarity without remorse. They were now more isolated than ever before in the local party committees, increasingly controlled by the left, who in view of the recent developments were arguing for closer cooperation with the Tudeh Party in Kurdistan and Iran in general.[22]

The ascendancy of the left in the local organisation of the KDPI signified the increasing influence of the Tudeh Party in the structure of the alliance between the two organisations. The Tudeh used the popular mandate to consolidate its influence by restructuring the KDPI, remoulding its local organisation on its own image. It was in pursuit of this objective that the young Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou was dispatched to Mahabad early in the spring of 1952 to take charge of its expanding Kurdistan committee. The decision to send Ghassemlou to Mahabad was significant, showing a degree of political foresight on the part of the Tudeh leadership. Ghassemlou was born to a middle-ranking landowning family in a 'peripheral community' centred on Urmiya. The community scattered on a large stretch of land on the Lake Urmiya basin, the north-western sector of the Kurdish territory, and shared its Kurdish ethnicity and Sunni religion with the core Kurdish community in the Mukrian region. The Kurdish inhabitants of this peripheral community were predominantly Azeri speakers, with Kurdish occupying a secondary position in the daily conduct of life. Given his ethnic and linguistic background, Ghassemlou was well placed to make a significant contribution to the furthering of the Tudeh cause in Kurdistan, for he could not only supersede the ethnic wall hindering its direct and unmediated operation and expansion in the 'core' Kurdish community in the all-important Mukrian region, but also help consolidate its organisation in the Azeri-speaking 'peripheral' Kurdish communities of the Lake Urmiya basin, where traditionally the KDPI had fought a rearguard battle for influence against the Azerbaijan Demokrat Firghesi. A consideration of this issue requires a brief discussion of the ethnic, linguistic and religious complexities of the greater Kurdish community in Iran.

But before proceeding with the discussion, I should clarify the concepts of core and periphery and their precise significations in this study.

Kurdish Community: The Ethnic-Linguistic Core and the Religious Periphery

It should be clear by now that the concepts of core and periphery here do not denote specific geographical or demographic entities, but rather they are discursive constructs referring to the conditions of the constitution of these communities, in particular their 'constitutive outsides' that account for their constitutive difference from their 'other' communities at any specific time. So while the constitutive difference in the core community was Kurdish ethnicity, in the periphery by contrast, Azeri language predomi-

nated, defining its boundaries. The relationship of the peripheral community as such to the Azeri community is fundamentally different. In this case the constitutive difference is Kurdish ethnicity, which having filtered through Sunni Islam defines its boundaries vis-à-vis the Azeri community. The situation however was different when the relationship with the dominant Persian community was considered. Just like the core Kurdish community, in this case too, Kurdish ethnicity predominated. It was the constitutive difference defining the boundaries of the peripheral community. The constitutive status of Kurdish ethnicity in both cases was defined by their opposition to sovereign power, their resistance to sovereign domination of the Kurdish community at large.

Before the advent of Reza Shah's rule and the rise of Kurdish and Azeri nationalisms in the region, communal boundaries were defined not so much by ethnicity as by religion and language, which also marked the inner core of their identities as distinct social and cultural entities. The communal identities so defined had remained fairly stable over time, at least since the military conflicts and dislocations of the early Safavid period, except when they were shaken by the political upheavals which periodically engulfed the region. Shaikh Ubaidallah's movement in 1880–1882 and Semko's rebellion some 40 years later both affected communal boundaries by highlighting ethnic difference in the heightening intercommunal tension. In both cases, the ensuing conflict was still expressed in religious terms, although ethnicity had also found its way into intercommunal relations, beginning to influence the shifting boundaries of the Kurdish and Azeri identities.

Before the advent of modern nationalist discourse and practice, the Kurdish community in the area was predominantly a community of language, with Sunni Islam defining its relationship with the wider structures of political and cultural relations in a primarily Shi'i society. In this sense, therefore, the articulation of Kurdish language and Sunni religion defined the inner core of Kurdish communal identity in the pre-nationalist era. But the outer boundaries of the Kurdish community were wider, encompassing collective entities which could not be articulated in its inner core due mainly to religious or linguistic differences: Shi'i Kurds, both orthodox and heterodox, Azari-speaking Sunni Kurds, Sunni Azeris and Kurdish-speaking Shi'i Azeris inhabited a space between the inner Kurdish community and the wider Azeri community, whose inner core was defined by the articulation of the Azeri language and Twelver Shi'ism. This expanding religious-linguistic space characteristically had an ambiguous

identity, changing constantly depending on the mode and the conditions of the articulation of religion and language.

Politics as relations of force in pursuit of power and domination, more than any other factor, defined the conditions of this articulation in the fringes of the Kurdish community. The relationship with the central political authority and its formal and informal representations in the community were often the main reason behind the politicisation of religious and linguistic differences in the fringes of both Kurdish and Azeri communities, often leading to acute inter-communal conflicts in the area. These conflicts were bloody but short-lived, seldom losing their predominantly religious character. In pre-modern times, religion easily subsumed ethnic and linguistic differences in the fringes of the Kurdish and Azeri communities. Sunni-Shi'i conflicts often flared up in the urban centres, seldom extending to rural areas, where kinship above all defined communal identities. In the fragmented universe of tribal identities, language rather than religion was the main cohesive force. The Kurdish language transcended tribal boundaries; articulated with kinship, it defined the outer boundaries of this fragmented world in a fairly stable manner. This articulation of kinship and language, often mediated through the political and military organisation of the tribal confederacies, in practice was not dissimilar to ethnic relations. It traversed the fragmented universe of tribal identities, extending beyond its boundaries into the urban networks of the Kurdish community at large, but almost always in response to specific political conditions created by confrontation with the central political power and its local representatives.

The advent of modern nationalist discourse and practice in the early 1940s changed the fundamental traits of Kurdish identity both in the central sector and in the peripheral areas of the community, but in quite different ways. In the central sector religion was displaced by ethnicity, which, along with language, became the main defining element of Kurdish identity in the emergent nationalist discourse, delineating its boundaries vis-à-vis the modern Iranian national identity. In the peripheral areas the situation was quite different. Here Kurdish nationalism was confronted by the rise of Azeri nationalism, spearheaded by the Azerbaijan Demokrat Firghesi, which was steeped in Soviet Marxism. The changing contours of Kurdish identity were influenced primarily by the developments in the Azeri community, specifically the revival of Azeri language and culture, and the nationalist emphasis on Azeri ethnicity. The nationalist revival in the peripheries of the Kurdish community did not target religion, largely

bypassing the highly contentious issue of religious difference in inter-communal relations. The Marxist-Leninist underpinnings of Azeri nationalist discourse effectively marginalised the hitherto pivotal role of Shi'ism in its reconstruction of the Azeri national identity.

In a wider context, the marginalisation of religious difference was reinforced by Reza Shah's drive for secularisation. Despite the constitutional status of Shi'ism as the official religion, it was hardly promoted by the state, certainly not as a constituent element of the uniform Iranian national identity in the official discourse. The authoritarian modernisation carried out by Reza Shah had already turned the Shi'i clergy into a major force in the ranks of the popular opposition to the state, and religious difference lost its significance in the definition of the national identity in the nationalist discourse, both official and non-official ethno-centrist writings of the secular intelligentsia. The Azeri nationalist discourse reinforced this trend in the periphery, and the corresponding developments in the Kurdish periphery clearly reflected the changes in the periphery of the Azeri community. Here too the spread of nationalism began with an emphasis on language, and the knowledge of Kurdish became the main means of identification with the growing nationalist movement in the centre.

Although the rise of nationalism led to the decline of religious difference in inter-communal relations in the periphery, it did not end inter-communal tension and conflict, but merely gave a new form to them. Communities were now defined in ethnic and linguistic, rather than religious, terms. The political significance of ethnic and linguistic relations was further consolidated by the ongoing territorial dispute between the nationalist administrations in Tabriz and Mahabad, both claiming jurisdiction over the three major urban centres of Urmiya, Khoy and Salmas in the Kurdish periphery. This dispute, as has been shown elsewhere (Vali 2011), helped undermine the authority of the Kurdish administration in relation to the central government, thus contributing in no small measure to the change in the discourse of the Republic after the collapse of the autonomy negotiations in Tehran, especially with regard to the representation of Kurdish identity.

Crossing the Ethnic Line

Urmiya, where the Azerbaijan Demokrat Firghesi and the KDPI vied for influence in the community (especially among the younger generation, who had already crossed the religious divide and were more susceptible to

nationalist political agitation), was thus a significant place for Ghassemlou's initial political schooling. Although little is known about his early political life, his organisational affiliation and ideological commitments in the early 1950s suggest that Soviet Marxism was the main influence in the formation and development of his political career at least up until the late 1960s, when he began to distance himself from the Tudeh Party and its leadership. Ghassemlou remained an active member of the Tudeh Party for nearly two decades. The divisive ideological disputes which rocked international communism in the aftermath of the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956, and the subsequent emergence of radical Maoist groups within and outside the Tudeh Party in the early 1960s, did not affect his allegiance to the 'official' line in the Tudeh leadership. It was primarily the change in the leadership of the Tudeh Party following the removal of Reza Radmanesh in 1969 which eventually led to his departure from it. Ghassemlou seems to have departed from the dominant political position in the leadership of the Tudeh in the crucial years leading to the Third Congress of the KDPI in 1973, although he tried to maintain an amicable relationship with the new chairman Iraj Eskandari, a moderate among the hawks on the left, who were on the rise in the political bureau of the party, encouraged and supported by the strategic decision-makers in the CPSU. Although Eskandari, like Radmanesh before him, is said to have been well disposed towards the Azeri and Kurdish members in the leading apparatuses of the party and the incorporation of their demands for the recognition of ethnic identity and rights in the party programme, the bulk of the leadership was opposed to policies and positions which, if given primacy, would break the ranks of the people in the struggle against imperialism. Eskandari's removal from the leadership of the party in March 1978 at the onset of the revolutionary rupture signalled the marginalisation of the so-called national question in the discourse and practice of the party. The Tudeh's policy after the revolution also helped end Ghassemlou's lingering doubts about the differences between the position of Tudeh leadership and the Soviet strategy in Iran. The conduct of the Tudeh under the leadership of Kianouri (1978–1983) had shown beyond a shadow of doubt that such differences were imaginary.

The new leadership, headed by Nouraddin Kianouri, was strictly committed to the uniform Iranian identity enshrined in the Constitution of 1906. For them Iranian national identity was uniform and indivisible; it was ancient and as such intrinsically tied to the territorial integrity of the country. The leading members of the new leadership, especially the new

chairman, found it difficult to accommodate Azeri and Kurdish identities in the discourse and practice of the party. Ethnicity thus became a bone of contention in the party, and Azeri and Kurdish members who dared to emphasise the multinational and multicultural character of Iranian society and raise the 'national question' in the 'official' party discourse were quickly sidelined and excluded from positions of policy and decision-making within the party organisation. Ghassemlou's break from the Tudeh followed the rapid marginalisation of the national question in the party discourse. Those major Azeri and Kurdish figures who were closely associated with the former leadership, or who had held influential posts in the party hierarchy in exile since the 1950s, were removed or sidelined if they failed to follow the new leadership.[23]

Ghassemlou's affinity with the Azeri nationalists, and especially the attraction of their 'scientific' ideology, facilitated his conversion to the Tudeh. But he soon became aware of their differences, as the growing rift between the two parties on policy issues superseded their allegiance to a common ideology.[24] The Tudeh leadership found it increasingly difficult to come to terms with Azeri nationalism. Azeri identity, from the Tudeh point of view, was ethnic, and as such hardly merited the political distinctiveness accorded to it by Azeri nationalists. Nor did it agree with the position of the Azeri leadership during the autonomy negotiations with the central government. The Azeri position, the Tudeh leadership believed, was not realistic; it failed to appreciate the complexity of Iranian politics, the balance of internal and external forces, and the predicament of the central government in trying to assert an authority which was being undermined by the imperial court and its supporters and cronies within the state apparatuses and in the national political field in general. But while the Tudeh's apparent unease with Azeri nationalism stemmed from its commitment to Persian nationalism, its irritation with the conduct of the leadership of the Azerbaijan Demokrat Firghesi, especially the apparent political ineptitude and intransigence of its chairman, Seyyid Ja'far Pishevari, had another motive.

The Tudeh leadership was deeply worried about the fate of the Sadchikov-Ghawam agreement of 4 April 1946, which arranged for the Soviet evacuation of Iran by mid-May and the formation of a joint Irano-Soviet oil company with an extendable 50-year lease (Azimi op. cit. 1989; Abrahamian op. cit. 1982). The Soviets were eager to assure Ghawam that they viewed the Azerbaijan question as an internal Iranian issue, to be resolved peacefully and in a spirit of goodwill towards the population of

the province.[25] The Tudeh had long campaigned for the realisation of the Soviet demand for oil concessions in the north and considered the Sadchikov-Ghawam agreement as a major achievement, which enhanced both Soviet power and its own influence in the post-war political scene. It thus argued tirelessly for the ratification of the agreement by the Majlis, which would have effectively ensured its implementation. The Soviet Union seemed to believe that Ghawam was willing and able to deliver the oil concessions and was thus instructing the Tudeh leadership to cooperate closely with Ghawam to enable him to overcome the opposition masterminded by the court and supported by the British. The Tudeh leadership was aware that support for the Azeri democrats, however measured and muted, would weaken Ghawam's position vis-à-vis the organised right both within and outside the Majlis, thus undermining both the Soviet cause and its own credibility. The Azerbaijan question became a major political headache, if not a real liability, when the Tudeh leadership on Ghawam's invitation joined the government.[26]

The Tudeh leadership thus began to distance itself from the Azerbaijan Demokrat Firghesi and its demands for regional autonomy, though rather unsuccessfully. The Soviets, who had been encouraged by the conclusion of the Firuz-Pishevari agreement in 13 June 1946, were now urging qualified support for the Azeri leadership.[27] The agreement, they seemed to believe, had significantly reduced the destabilising effects of the Azerbaijan question on Ghawam's government, and many of the earlier reservations about the conduct of the Azeri leadership now seemed baseless. The Tudeh leadership followed Soviet advice and gave public support to the Azerbaijan Demokrat Firghesi, despite its deep misgivings about the nationalist convictions of the latter's leadership. The resulting ambivalence in the position of the Tudeh, and the apparent discrepancy between its public discourse and private conduct towards the Firghe, led to increasing mistrust and tension between the leadership of the two organisations. The Tudeh leadership tried to undermine the position of the hardliner nationalists in the leadership of the Firghe by cultivating opposition among the more moderate elements in the party hierarchy, who were seen to be less hostile to the Tudeh. Its efforts to mobilise support for Salamallah Javid within and outside the Firghe were part of a concerted plan to undermine Pishevari's authority in the party and restructure its leadership, to bring it in line with the Tudeh's own position and interest in the wider Iranian political scene.[28]

The Azeri regime was short-lived. Its turbulent life was ended abruptly on 10 December 1947, when the Iranian army moved into Azerbaijan and reoccupied Tabriz. Although the ADF managed to retain a rudimentary clandestine organisation in Azerbaijan, its expulsion from the political scene created a vacuum which was swiftly filled by the Tudeh Party. In the peripheral zone where the ADF had fought a successful battle for dominance against the KDPI, the Tudeh's entry into the political and ideological fields was even more forceful. It came in the wake of the Republic, when the political vacuum created by the disintegration of the KDPI's local organisation was compounded by the forced retreat of the ADF from the political scene. The ADF had lost its political leadership and cohesion. Its remaining local membership operated through a ramshackle network of clandestine communication, increasingly vulnerable to the state repression which was steadily tightening its grip on the Azeri community. The clandestine organisation of the party had become dependent on the Tudeh for its survival, receiving a good deal of logistical support from its burgeoning local branches, though mainly due to Soviet advice and pressure. The members and supporters of the KDPI fared worst in the periphery. Mounting state repression and lack of organisation meant that they could not rely on active local support. Nor could they compete with the local organisation of the ADF for Soviet logistic and organisational support. The ADF was regarded by the CPSU as a client party, with long-standing and well-established political and ideological ties with Moscow going back to the early days of the COMINTERN (Third Communist International). By contrast Moscow had never believed in the legitimacy of Kurdish national rights or the feasibility of the Kurdish demand for regional autonomy in Iran; and its attitude towards the KDPI and its leadership, both before and after the Republic, was marked by a political expediency which verged on cynicism.

Nor did the Tudeh Party, which followed the Soviet lead in its long and complex relationship with the KDPI, pretend to respect the political and discursive autonomy of the Kurdish question in Iran as it actively entered the Kurdish political scene in 1951. The Kurdish question, it declared unreservedly, was an ethnic issue with parochial foundations, which had to be subordinated to the wider interests of the popular democratic forces in Iran in general. The Tudeh organisers and activists in Kurdistan relied on the Soviet theoretical arsenal and its international political and moral prestige to support and advance their claims among the Kurds, especially the younger generation, who proved more susceptible to the Tudeh's 'scientific politics'. But the most powerful weapon in the Tudeh's arsenal was

the chronic poverty of Kurdish political culture, perpetuated by the near-total absence of a modern intelligentsia or intellectual tradition to inspire the younger generation of Kurds eager to join the clandestine movement. And while the leadership of the KDPI was painfully aware of the static character and chronic backwardness of Kurdish political culture, it was too deeply entrenched in tradition to be willing or able to change it. The Tudeh leadership thus thrived on the poverty of Kurdish political culture, its entrenched traditionalism and its obsession with ethnicity, which the educated youth found unpalatable, if not totally repulsive. The Tudeh Party outmanoeuvred the KDPI, emphasising the modern ethos of its own ideology and the politics which it served to explicate and legitimise, manipulating the consciousness among Kurdish nationalists of their poverty-stricken and stagnant political culture and their hankering for modernity. Its modern socialist alternative proved irresistible to the young and the eager.

Ghassemlou was one of those young men eager to get involved in politics. He came from a small but established landowning family, which provided him with a good secondary education; his family had wanted him to continue his education abroad when he chose to join the Tudeh Party. For him the Tudeh Party, with its rationalist world outlook, egalitarian ideology and modern political programme, represented all that was so strikingly absent from the chaotic scene of Kurdish politics.[29] The Tudeh Party, he believed, represented modernity; its claim to truth was firmly grounded in reason and bolstered by the political and military might of the Soviet Union, as well as by its internationalist ideology, which had acquired a new universal legitimacy in the aftermath of the defeat and destruction of fascism in Europe. Although the precise date and circumstances of his initial involvement with and membership of the Tudeh Party are unknown, he had already made a name as a young activist and expositor of party ideology when he was despatched to consolidate and expand the party organisation in Mahabad and the surrounding area.

Ghassemlou's presence in Mahabad enhanced the dominance of the Tudeh Party in Kurdish politics. He was an able speaker and a skilful propagandist, who used the rising international prestige of the Soviet Union and its positivist historical and political outlook to quell the moribund nationalist opposition to the Tudeh, along with any lingering doubts in the ranks of the Mahabad committee about the merits of its class discourse. The committee, which was the most important planning and operational organ of the KDPI in the Mukrian area, lost the last vestiges of its

political and discursive autonomy. It openly stood for the Tudeh's position on the Kurdish question, which was in principle incompatible with the political and cultural exigencies of Kurdish identity. By August 1952, at the point when simmering peasant unrest in Mukrian erupted in open rebellion, the Mahabad committee and the associated party organisation in the area were no more than a vehicle for advancing the Tudeh's cause in Kurdistan.

Peasant Unrest in Mukrian

The peasant rebellions which engulfed parts of the southern and north-western regions of the Kurdish territory originated in Mukrian, more specifically in the larger and more prosperous villages and hamlets in the vicinity of the towns of Bokan and Mahabad.[30] The majority of the rebellious peasants were share-croppers holding land in tenancy from the Dehbokri and Faizallahbagi Aghas, under conditions which were among the worst in the country.[31] The rebellion had primarily economic causes, arising from the monopoly ownership of agricultural land by the Kurdish landowning class: insecure tenancy and exorbitant rents were sustained and reinforced by the shortage of arable land on the one hand and the abundance of landless labourers on the other, and together perpetuated the chronic poverty of the Kurdish peasants on an ever-expanding scale. Peasant protest at injustice and resistance to oppression, though a common feature of social relations in rural Kurdistan, was often sporadic and localised, enabling the landlord to isolate the unrest and evict the peasants from the land. But eviction and banishment from the village at times led to small-scale armed resistance, often degenerating into brigandage, which either was crushed with the aid of the state or faded away in the isolation of the inhospitable mountains. Seldom in living memory had peasant unrest erupted in open rebellion, challenging not only the economic power of the landlords but also its very foundation, the institution of private property in land. The main reason for this apparent peasant 'quietism' in Kurdistan, as in Iran in general, was rooted in the structure of agrarian production.[32]

The overwhelming majority of the Kurdish peasants were share-croppers, who for the most part had little contact with the commodity market for agricultural produce. Exorbitant rents, the conditions of tenancy and perpetual indebtedness to the landlords and local money-lenders absorbed the bulk of their share of the produce, leaving them with little or

no surplus to engage in exchange relations. The peasant unit of production was therefore hardly involved in commodity relations, and the mass of Kurdish share-croppers remained a largely undifferentiated labour force, working for subsistence.

The Kurdish landowning class, by contrast, was substantially involved in commodity relations, exchanging its growing economic surplus for money in local, provincial and national markets, at prices which were increasingly pushed up by higher demands for agricultural goods. The landlords' response to the rising market demand was to increase production, but without reinvesting any part of their income in the process of production. This could be achieved only by raising the rate of exploitation, which was usually effected in two ways: increasing the landlords' share of the produce and reducing the size of the peasant plot. Both required redefinition of the terms and conditions of tenancy, which became increasingly prevalent. Kurdish share-croppers worked more and earned less, and the new and more repressive labour conditions inhibited not only their involvement in commodity relations, but also their ability to provide for their subsistence.[33]

The changing structure of class relations in the countryside and the increasing destitution of the mass of Kurdish peasants were at the heart of the growing rural unrest in the Mukrian basin. The impetus which turned it into peasant rebellion with an overt class character nonetheless came from the outside. It was provided by the legislation introduced by the Mosaddeq government in August 1952, which aimed to modify the existing terms and conditions of the division of the crop and the extraction of the corvée and other labour dues from the peasants. The share-croppers interpreted the new legislation as the government's recognition of their plight and their long-standing grievances, and as proof of the legitimacy of their demands for justice. It seemed the government for the first time had decided to take their side and draw a line between the government and the landowning class—a line, however thin and obscure, which showed that they were not identical. This legislation undoubtedly enhanced Mosaddeq's popularity among share-croppers throughout the country. Kurdish peasants were no exception.[34]

The purpose of the government legislation, which was modified and adopted in November 1952, was to curb the simmering unrest in the countryside by alleviating the unbearable harshness of peasant life and labour. The bill stipulated that 20% of the landlord's share of the crop must be returned to the village, half to be redistributed among the share-

croppers and half spent on development projects in the village. The bill, in effect, addressed two fundamental causes of rural destitution and peasant unrest, namely high exploitation and under-investment, though only as excesses to be remedied by legislation. The conservative ethos of the bill was indicative not only of the political orientation of its authors, but also of their recognition of the political power and influence of the landowning class in the civil and military apparatuses of the state. The landowning class had traditionally controlled the legislature and used it to protect and promote its own political and economic interests; it was largely identified with the state. As the mainstay of the state and the bulwark of its stability and continuity, it could not be expected to remain quiet in the face of government attempts to reform agrarian relations, the foundation of its political power and prestige in society.

Large landowners in Kurdistan, especially those with established records of collaboration with the Iranian regime, had already voiced their opposition to Mosaddeq's proposed legislation when the first signs of active peasant unrest surfaced in the Mukrian region, especially in lands owned by the Dehbokri and Faizallahbagi Aghas located around the towns of Mahabad and Bokan. Stunned by the unfamiliar sight of peasant disobedience, the initially defensive posture adopted by these Aghas soon gave way to active opposition, as the unrest escalated and the government failed to restore law and order in their private domains. The Kurdish Aghas took the matter into their own hands, determined to nip the rebellion in the bud. Adopting a rejectionist stance, they refused to negotiate with the peasant councils, popular democratic bodies which had sprung out of the situation and were gradually spreading in the area affected by the unrest. The Debokri and Faizallahbagi Aghas were actively supported by the military representatives of the state in the region, who, at the same time as denying the existence of peasant rebellions, were encouraging them to refuse to make any concessions to the peasants to end the unrest. But this persistent refusal only hardened the peasants' resolve, and the continuing rebellion led inexorably to the radicalisation of their demands. When the government, after a period of hesitation and deliberation, eventually adopted a revised version of the earlier proposal in November 1952, peasant demands had already assumed an overtly class character. The rebellious peasants were no longer asking for redress, but rather demanding the abolition of landlords' property rights in favour of peasant ownership of agricultural land.[35]

The peasant quest for the transfer of ownership rights, though still quite sporadic, ended the landlords' hesitation about resorting to collective violence to crush the rebellion. The landlords had already been alarmed by the emergence of peasant councils and the role that these played in the organisation of peasant protest on their private domains. The councils, they were convinced, were created by the communists, the Tudeh Party and the KDPI local committees now controlled by the left, with whom they had been involved in an open conflict since the Majlis elections in the previous year. This conviction had been fostered in no small measure by the class discourse of the Tudeh Party and the KDPI local committees, which targeted the landlords, especially after the Majlis elections. The Tudeh Party and the KDPI had both been outlawed by the government and were the targets of state persecution and repression, though for quite different reasons and in different ways. This of course meant that in addition to the usual charge of communist infiltration and agitation, with all its potent political and religious connotations, the Debokri and Faizallahbagi Aghas could easily use the pretext of treason and conspiracy against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state to crush the peasant rebellions throughout the region. But they initially hesitated to embark on such a course to restore their political authority and economic dominance, chiefly because they received contradictory signals from the central government and its military representatives in the territory. The central government was after all the author of the 20% bill which had helped ignite the peasant rebellions in the first place.[36] It was urging caution; it seemed to favour a peaceful solution to the crisis, whereby the restoration of order did not mean the end of the new legislation. Determined to implement the bill and restore order, it lacked the power and authority to do so. The military authorities in the region, by contrast, were urging action and promising to help bring law and order back into the region. They were clearly not happy about the new legislation, dreading its destabilising effects on the Mukrian region, which, they believed, had provided the communists and the nationalists with a long-awaited opportunity to infiltrate the Kurdish countryside.

The Kurdish landlords for their part had been aware of these differences for some time and knew of their political and ideological roots within the government and the state apparatuses as well as in the general political field in the country at large. The peasant unrest in the Mukrian region had clearly helped highlight the regional specificity of the existing

political and ideological factionalism in the centre, in particular the ongoing struggle between the royalist and the National Front forces, exposing their respective representatives and constituencies of support in the processes of policy and decision-making in the provincial administration. Although the landlords' sympathies lay clearly on the royalist side, they had been reluctant to commit themselves unequivocally to the royalist forces in the regional administration, knowing that the final outcome of the factional power struggle had to be decided by developments in the centre. But the radicalisation of the peasant demands, especially the quest to abolish landlords' ownership rights over agricultural land, ended their hesitation. Thus after nearly seven months, the Debokri and Faizallahbagi Aghas declared an all-out war on the peasants, throwing their lot in with the royalists even before the outcome of the political power struggle in the country at large was decided.

The assault on the peasants' councils, and the eviction of the insubordinate and rebellious share-croppers from the land and the village, was only the final act of the conflict, which had been going on for no less than eight months. It was the culmination of a political process which had acquired an unmistakably class character. The rebellious peasants raised class demands, fought the landlords in class terms and lost the battle on class grounds. For the landlords too, the conflict had a specifically class character: it threatened their class position, they fought the peasants in class terms and won the battle on class grounds. In a sense they perceived it as the continuation of the struggle they had fought against the Tudeh Party and the KDPI local organisations during the election campaign earlier in 1951. But both the Tudeh Party and the KDPI had failed to respond to the situation, faltering in the face of unfolding events in the Mukri countryside. In fact, the persistence and progressive radicalisation of the peasant rebellion, as well as the class character of its demands, had exposed both the superficiality of the Tudeh's class discourse—the gaping hole separating it from its crude populist politics—and the anomalies of the KDPI's painfully adopted class politics. But if the Tudeh was using the KDPI as a frontline organisation to enhance and consolidate its own position in an unfamiliar territory, the KDPI had to protect its interests in its own traditional political backyard. It had clearly failed to do so, alienating both the landlords and the peasants. The Kurdish landowning class, always suspicious of the KDPI, deeply resented its class discourse and feared its growing impact on peasant unrest. The peasants, on the other hand, were largely well disposed to the KDPI and identified with its class discourse,

hoping for political leadership and logistic assistance, which did not materialise. The rebellion did not surpass its local foundations. It was strangled in isolation.[37]

The KDPI had already gained the hostility of the landowning class and lost the sympathy of the peasants when the nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Petroleum Company plunged Iranian politics into turmoil. The political lines in Kurdistan had been clearly drawn as the crisis reached its climax in the spring and summer of 1953. In Kurdistan, as elsewhere in Iran, the locus of the nationalisation crisis was primarily urban, involving social classes and strata in major urban centres. The crisis and the gradual disintegration of the centralising functions of the state had shifted the boundaries of Kurdish politics, presenting fresh opportunities for political activity, unprecedented since the collapse of Reza Shah's rule in September 1941. The KDPI tried to exploit the new conditions, but its political and organisational resources lagged behind, failing to meet the requirements of a less restrained and more open political process. The alliance with the Tudeh had already taken its toll. The crucial Mahabad committee, the organisational hub of the party in the Mukrian region, was firmly under the control of the Tudeh Party, which had also set up and controlled the Sena and Kermanshah local committees. The party's influence over its committees in Urmiya, Khoy and Salmas was waning, as the newly revived ADF missed no opportunity to claim jurisdiction over the disputed territory (Blurian op. cit. 1997). The opportunity to revive the national question was lost again.

Notes

1. For Barzani's speech and the new party programme, see Hussami (op. cit. 1997, pp. 33–45). Hussami's reading of the speech is rather uncritical, avoiding reference both to the Soviet influence and to the contradictions and inconsistencies in the speech and the proposed programme. He attributes the failure of the initiative solely to Bagherov and his clique in the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, overlooking the decisive influence of the Soviet strategy in the region, especially its approach to the Kurdish question in Iran and Iraq at the time.
2. Barzani's exposition of the existing class structure of Kurdish society shows clearly the paramount influence of the Soviet official discourse; see Hussami (op. cit. 1997, pp. 41–42).
3. The three main figures among the Kurds of Iran who were prominent in the growing left-wing opposition to Barzani and believed to have been

active in his fall from favour in exile in the Soviet Union were Rahim Saif Ghazi, Ali Galawej and Aziz Shamzini; all three were part of a group of Kurdish students sent by the Republican administration to study in the USSR. Aziz Shamzini was from an influential Shaikhly clan with substantial following in Kurdistan, whose best-known member was Shaikh Ubayyed Allah Nahri, his great-grandfather, who led a well-known rebellion against the Ottoman state in 1881–1882. Aziz's father, Seyyed Abdullah Afandi, was active in the nationalist politics in the Iranian Kurdistan and took part in the events leading to the formation of the KDPI and subsequently the Kurdish Republic. He is said to have had a long-standing conflict of interest and rivalry with Barzani and the hostility between the two was widely known to their peers in the nationalist circles in Kurdistan. Shamzini's perception of Barzani and his place in the Kurdish national movement is clearly reflected in his book (Shamzini 1998).

4. A few joined the Firghe including Rahim Saif Ghazi and Ali Galawej. This issue was discussed with Hassan Ghazi, in an early interview in Sundsvall in December 1994.
5. Hussami's account of the failure of Barzani's initiative is a clear example of the first kind of approach. For him Barzani was a genuine nationalist whose initiative to revive the nationalist political project fell victim to power struggle within the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (Hussami op. cit. 1997). Hussami overlooks the exigencies of the Soviet strategy in Iran and the region and its consequences for the Kurdish question. The late Nushirvan Mustafa Emin holds a different view, casting doubt not only on the nationalist credentials of Barzani altogether but also on his aims and intention to plan and accomplish a genuine nationalist project for the greater Kurdistan at any time in his political career (Emin 1997). Emin, however, characteristically overstates the Soviet influence at the expense of other and especially internal processes and practices, as in his account of the rise and fall of the Kurdish Republic in Iran (Emin 1993) and my critique of this position (Vali op. cit. 2011).
6. I owe this information to Hassan Ghazi. He also mentioned during our discussions in Sundsvall that the Kurdish leadership in exile started a radio programme in Kurdish aiming to cover Iranian Kurdistan. The Kurdish radio programme in exile most likely was only a short slot in the Azeri radio managed and directed by the Kurdish members of the Demokrat Firghesi in Baku. For the conditions of publication and the fate of Kurdistan in exile, see (Hassanpour 1992).
7. Ghassemlou (op. cit. 1985), Blurian (op. cit. 1997) and Hussami (op. cit. 1997) provide different views on the process and conditions of the revival of the nationalist politics after the Republic, giving different weights to internal/Kurdish and external/non-Kurdish factors in the reconstruction of the organisational structure of the KDPI in the region.

8. The only surviving original issues of *Rega* were at the time in possession of Karim Hussami, part of his vast and valuable personal collection. *Rega*, states Blurian, was produced by Hassan Ghizilji and himself in Sitak in Kurdish and Farsi. They called it 'Organi Komalay Jiyani Kurd', the 'Organ of the Association of Kurdish Life', rather than the organ of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, in order not to encourage the Iranian government to intensify its already harsh treatment of Kurdish Republican activists in Iranian prisons (Blurian op. cit. 1997). I am grateful to Hassan Ghazi for providing me with copies of both issues of *Rega* obtained from Hussami.
9. Memories, autobiographies, and personal accounts and recollections of the leading members of the KDPI, although at times intensely subjective and personal, are nonetheless invaluable sources for the study of the revival of the nationalist movement after the fall of the Republic. In addition to Blurian, Hussami and Ghassemlou already cited, there are also memories of the former secretary general of the KDPI (Hassanzadeh 1995; Said Kaweh (Kostani) 1999), a former senior member.
10. See Hussami (op. cit. 1997) and Blurian (op. cit. 1997).
11. Ali Karimi's book is the prime example of this mode of approach attributing an uninterrupted continuity to Zabihi's discourse and practice as an uncompromising all Kurdistan/territorial nationalist (Karimi 1999, esp. the preface). The late Amir Hassanpour in his introduction to the same volume further elaborates this view, locating it in a broader global and regional context of the rise and development of socialist revolutionary movements. His historicist account, though largely devoid of Karimi's political generalisations, is beset by another and no less intractable problem. Hassanpour attempts, in a characteristically Hegelian-Marxist fashion, to assign a socialist revolutionary spirit to Zabihi's political career, whereby his discourse and practice not only are influenced by the revolutionary movements of the time but also express their socialist essence. Hassanpour's Hegelian essentialism would have been consistent in its own terms had he provided us with some plausible medium of historical reductionism such as social class relations or even expressed ideological commitments to socialism by Zabihi. Instead he attempts to extract this assumed socialist essence from his own interpretation of the meanings given to selective vocabulary by Zabihi in his dictionary. It is true that all meaning is subjective and therefore ideological, but it is also true that words and concepts are fundamentally different. It would be a mistake to look for evidence of ideological relations in dictionaries, especially for a learned linguist, as he admittedly was. Zabihi might have been, and indeed was, a socialist, but his socialism never surpassed the political and economic limits of the agrarian populist collectivism which characterised the discourse of the Komalay JK. Admirable as this is in the political and cultural circumstances of Kurdistan in the 1950s, it hardly

qualifies him as the Kurdish subject of a global revolutionary socialist movement in the manner perceived by Hassanpour.

12. The assertion by Ezzadin Mustafa Rasoul concerning the publication of *Nishtman* in exile suggests that Zabihi continued the path already charted by the Komalay JK unabated. The alleged issue no. 10 of this publication, however, is a mystery; it has not been seen by anyone else among Zabihi's surviving contemporaries. Blurian, a co-editor of *Rega*, in his recollections in the same volume dismisses the point, as do the other contributors. It is at best the word of one man against another, and in the absence of any evidence, one is inclined to conclude that Ezzadin's assertion and the supporting statements are simply personal. See Karimi (op. cit. 1999).
13. All citations from the editorial of *Rega*, no. 1. English translations are mine.
14. The dearth of intellectual and financial resources seems to have been responsible for the closure of *Rega*, although the lack of an active political organisation in exile also encouraged some of its founders and contributors to return to Iranian Kurdistan. See Ghani Blurian, memories cited in Note 9, and Shapasand interview in Karimi (op. cit. 1999).
15. See Blurian (op. cit. 1997). It should however be noted here that Blurian's account is most likely coloured by his ideological affinity with the Marxist left, and hence his emphasis on the communist inclinations of the membership and their sympathy towards the USSR. He refers to the organisation simply as the Lawan, implying that it did not have a well-defined and specific status among the practitioners of clandestine politics.
16. Hussami emphasises the transitional character of the Komalay Kommonisti Kurdistan, representing a stage between the Komalay Lawan and the new Tudeh-dominated KDPI (op. cit. 1997, pp. 65–66).
17. According to Hussami, after the merger with the Lawan, the leaders of the Communist Association of Kurdistan approached the Soviet authorities in Iran asking for help to establish a communist party in Kurdistan. The Soviet authorities, he further maintains, refused to help, indicating that there was already a communist party in Iran and another would be superfluous. The Soviet authorities in Tehran further advised the Kurdish communists to reorganise themselves as the KDPI but on the Tudeh lines, thus emphasising the primacy of social class relations and struggles over ethnic and national oppression and the right of self-determination in the discursive representation of their party programme. Hussami contends that the leaders of the Communist Association duly followed the Soviet advice, hence turning the revived KDPI into the operational branch of the Tudeh Party in Kurdistan, especially in 1950, when the Iranian oil crisis began to gain momentum (Hussami op. cit., pp. 65–66). Whatever the wider political significance of Hussami's account, it has implications for his own narrative,

highlighting inconsistencies in his representation of his own position in the process of the revival of the KDPI, for, on the one hand, he emphasises his central role in the formation of the Lawan and its clandestine nationalist activity, and on the other hand, he downplays his own well-known pro-Soviet, and some say pro-Tudeh, sympathies in the process of the revival of the KDPI and its subsequent domination by the Tudeh Party. Hussami is also silent on his position in the process of the merger between the Lawan and the Kurdish Communist Association, implying that he was almost an outsider and was carried by the course of the events at the time. If this is correct, then one cannot but conclude that, contrary to what he wanted us to believe, he was not such a central figure in the clandestine organisation of the Lawan and as such could not have played a leading role in the process of the revival of the KDPI.

18. Blurian clearly admits that poor ideological knowledge and organisational skills were the main reason for their initial approach to the Tudeh Party; they approached the party leadership to ask for help after they were given cold shoulder by the clandestine organisation of the Azerbaijan Demokrat Firghesi (Blurian op. cit. 1997). A similar argument is implicit in Ghassemlou's account of the revival of the movement after the collapse of the Republic, though he does not dwell on his own role as the first and principal Tudeh agent charged with the crucial task of incorporating the Kurdish nationalist movement in the Tudeh Party (Ghassemlou op. cit. 1367/1988). Hussami, on the other hand, is characteristically evasive; he tries to remain an active insider from the outside and a passive outsider from the inside; an impossible task especially as he tries rather unsuccessfully to separate the Soviet foreign policy from the position of the Tudeh Party, thus identifying with the former as an insider and dissociating from the latter as an outsider (Hussami op. cit. 1997).
19. This issue is variously considered in the memories of the leading figures of the KDPI cited above, of which Blurian's account is particularly significant since he was a member of the Mahabad committee, which was instrumental in the representation of the party's position in the election campaign (Blurian op. cit. 1997).
20. This event is explained in some detail by both Hussami and Blurian. They are unanimous on the swift response of the Kurdish landlords and their alliance with the central government against Sarim al-Din Sadeq Vaziri, the Tudeh candidate, but lay different emphases on the active presence and role of the Tudeh Party in the process. Blurian, who is less apologetic about his Tudeh past, has no qualms about the decisive role of the party in the campaign. Hussami, on the other hand, tries to save face by referring to a small band of 'independent' men in the Mahabad committee who, according to him, influenced the course of events during the election cam-

paign. The identity of this band of independent men however remains undisclosed. Blurian's account seems more akin to the actual course of events leading to the integration of the KDPI local structure in the expanding organisation of the Tudeh, as was explained above. But the crucial point latent in both accounts is the widening rift in the organisation of political authority in Mahabad, between the civilian governor and the military commander of the district, who pursue quite different methods and at times have diverse objectives during the election campaign, reflecting the growing political rift and factionalism in the Iranian state spreading from the centre to the provinces. Blurian and Hussami overlook this crucial point and its implications for their analyses of the situation at the time; see Blurian (op. cit. 1997) and Hussami (op. cit. 1997).

21. The 1953 coup d'état proved to be more than just an event, however colossal, in the annals of struggle for democracy in Iran. Rather it turned out to be a process, dynamic and multifaceted, with a multiplicity of effects on the social, economic and political development of Iranian society for decades to come. The role of the Tudeh Party and its political position in the crucial years leading to the coup and after have been extensively discussed, especially after the 1979 revolution. The coup and its consequences will be considered in some detail in the following chapter.
22. Abdullah Ishaqi, alias Ahmad Towfigh, who subsequently became the secretary general of the party in exile in the Iraqi Kurdistan, was a prominent example of this trend in the party at that time. He was clearly unhappy with the increasing domination of the Tudeh-inspired left and planned to respond and curtail it, as the course of events leading to the displacement and exile in Iraqi Kurdistan subsequently showed.
23. Detailed interviews and discussions with Ghassemlou in numerous occasions about his membership of the Tudeh, especially interviews in February 1982 in Paris and January 1985 in London. He was often reluctant to talk about his role as the Tudeh member and organiser in Mahabad and later on in Tehran, but was quite keen to talk about the internal relations and power struggles and the existing or evolving systems of political patronage in the party. Ghassemlou talked extensively about the Tudeh leadership, their political opportunism and lack of principles, especially during the exile years in Prague and Berlin, which he thought was directly related to its opportunistic support for the hardliners in the Shi'i leadership in the Islamic Republic after the revolution. He clearly expressed his hostility to the Tudeh leadership, the members of the political bureau and especially its chairman, Kianouri, his arch-enemy, who, according to him, was largely responsible for ousting Eskandari from the leadership of the party and the current anti-KDPI position in the Tudeh Party. Throughout these inter-

views he remained silent about his close association with Radmanesh and Eskandari, preferring not to discuss it publicly.

24. Interviews and discussions with Ghassemlou cited in Note 23.
25. As the course of the events subsequently showed, Ghawam had successfully led the Soviets to believe that he genuinely supported their quest to obtain oil concessions in the north if only to strike a balance with the British in the South. The main objective of Ghawam's skilful diplomacy was to secure the Soviet withdrawal from Iran and pacify her support for the Azari and the Kurdish democrats (Azimi op. cit. 1989; Abrahamian op. cit. 1982).
26. According to Azimi, the Tudeh Party gave up its opposition to granting concessions to foreign powers in order to accommodate the Soviet demand, and some in the leadership like Tabari went as far as arguing for the 'renewal of negotiations to grant oil concessions not only to the Russians but also to the British and the Americans' (op. cit. 1989, p. 109). It should however be indicated here that the Tudeh leadership was divided on the issue of participation in the government, some expressing strong doubts and misgivings about its rationale, likely outcome and long-term benefits for the party. The issue was quickly settled by the Soviet intervention strongly advising the leadership to leave aside doubts and hesitations and join Ghawam's cabinet (Azimi, ibid., pp. 149–179).
27. The Firuz-Pishevari Agreement of 13 June 1946 went a long way to deal with most of the contentious issue in the ongoing negotiations between the central government and the Azeri regime. The Agreement had the approval of the Soviet Union and the support of the Tudeh Party. The latter welcomed the Agreement after having waited for it impatiently for some time. For the details of the agreement, see Azimi (ibid., p. 152).
28. Ghassemlou seems to favour this approach, for he too believed Javid held more moderate views on the main issues of dispute with Ghawam's government and was generally better disposed towards the Tudeh's political position. He nonetheless was not quite certain about the Soviet support for the Tudeh's attempts to help organise an anti-Pishevari faction within the Firghe to engineer his downfall. Interviews cited in Notes 23 and 24.
29. Although Ghassemlou liked to show that he always had strong doubts about the Tudeh, especially its policy regarding the Kurdish question, it was nonetheless clear that he was wholly committed to the political programme and ideological position of the Tudeh when he joined the party and for many years after. It was only in mid-1960s in Eastern Europe that first doubts set in and he began to question the Tudeh Party's position and his own association with it. In the course of the interview several times he came close to saying that the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring in August 1967 and the Tudeh's unequivocal support for the military invasion of Czechoslovakia were the turning points in this respect.

30. This important event in contemporary Kurdish history is often referred to in passing or just overlooked by scholars and commentators. Historians and social scientists writing about social and political movements in contemporary Iran are not only oblivious to it; they simply do not know about it. For them the boundaries of Iran as the object of their investigation are defined by Persian ethnicity and language. Ervand Abrahamian and Farhad Kazemi's essay on the reason for the absence of a large-scale peasant movement in Iran is a prime example of such scholarship (Abrahamian and Kazemi 1978). Ali Galawej, a prominent Kurdish personality in the leadership of the Tudeh Party, writing about the Iranian peasants and their struggle for liberation, makes no reference to the peasant movement in Mukrian in the 1950s; Hezb-e Tudeh Iran: Cheh va Penj sal Peykar-e Khasteginapazir Dar Rah-e Sazmandehi va Raha-ye Dehghanan-e Iran, 13366/1987; see also his Monasebate Arzi va Frupashie Nezame Ashire'ie Dar Kurdistan, 1360/1982. Hemin in his Tarik u Roun, Binkay Peshawa 1353/1974 refers to the movement but only marginally, as does Hussami (op. cit. 1997). Amir Hassanpour's work is the notable exception in this respect. His pioneering and sympathetic study, based on primary sources, oral histories and archival material, focuses on the socio-economic causes and political consequences of the peasant movement in Mukrian, highlighting some hitherto unknown aspects of the rebellion in the wider social and political context of the Kurdish community in Iran. Hassanpour is said to have planned an extensive historical project comprising three volumes, the first of which had been completed just before his untimely death last July. A detailed outline of his research project was recently published in the first issue of Dervwaze 'Raparini Werzerani Mukriyan le 1952–1953: Projey Lekolinewyek, May 1, 2017. My account of the peasant rebellion in Mukrian and the analysis of its development and outcomes are benefited largely from an earlier version of this project which he wrote soon after the completion of his field research (oral history) in 1995–1996. I remain deeply indebted to him for giving me a copy of this draft paper before the construction of the final version of his project. Hassanpour's project proved influential in inspiring a number of Kurdish historians and political activists to write about the Mukrian rebellion; see, for example, Sultani, A. Raparini Sali 1953 khalki Bokan u Werzerani Nawchey Faizollahbegi, Gzing, no. 36, 2002, and Asri, M.O. Raparini Werzeran La Nawchey Mukrian, Gzing, No. 37, 2003.
31. Agrarian relations, forms of landed property and property relations, the process and relations of production and conditions of tenancy, and mechanisms of extraction of surplus in rural Kurdistan did not vary from other parts of Iran significantly (Vali 1993). For a detailed examination of the agrarian relations and the terms and conditions of tenancy in rural Iran at

large before the land reform of 1962, see Lambton (1953, 1963), Keddie (1963) and Soudaghar (1979).

32. On this issue see Vali (1980) and Vali (op. cit. 1993). Abrahamian and Kazemi attribute the absence of large-scale peasant rebellions to the low level of the development of class consciousness among the Iranian peasantry (Abrahamian and Kazemi 1978). This essentialist approach is informed by a subjective conception of class and class political action supposedly derived from uniform class consciousness, much in the same way as E. P. Thompson explains the formation and development of English working class in terms of the development of working-class consciousness while structural conditions are relegated to the background as mere supports of this historical process (Thompson 1968). Thompson's Marxism is the decisive theoretical influence on Abrahamian's historiography of modern Iran. In the case of Iranian peasants the use of such an essentialist concept of social class creates further theoretical problems if the structural fragmentation of the peasantry as a social entity is taken into consideration, thus making it difficult to qualify it as a social class in Marxist terms. The case in point here is the social differentiation of the peasantry, which is said to undermine the peasants' structural unity, and hence the difficulty of theorising them as a social class and attributing uniform class consciousness, class position and action to them in Marxist theory. Marxist theoreticians have generally attributed the social differentiation of the peasantry either to the level of the development of commodity relations in agriculture and engagement of the peasant household in production for market, or to the degree of the employment of wage labour by the peasant unit of production (Kautsky 1976; Lenin 1967). The social differentiation of the peasantry has been a subject of intense theoretical debates and political controversies among the Marxist theoreticians in Western Europe and Russia before the Bolshevik Revolution and after in the years leading to the collectivisation of agriculture in the Soviet Union (Hussain and Tribe 1981). In Marxist theory as such the variegated political consciousness among the mass peasantry and related forms of political position and action are defined by the level of structural dynamics of peasant economy and society. Hassanpour is right to criticise approaches such as those taken up by Abrahamian and Kazemin in their essay for their overwhelming subjectivism and overall theoretical poverty, but his own explanation in blaming the Tudeh Party for the organisational weakness and strategic failure of the Mukrian movement comes close to falling into the same subjectivist trap. For an intelligent analysis of the peasant movements in the twentieth century emphasising the pivotal role of the structural relations, in particular the level of the development of commodity relations in agriculture, see Wolf (1973).

33. In this respect the conditions in Kurdistan were not significantly different from others parts of Iran where increasing involvement of the landowning class in commodity relations had also resulted in the redefinition of the term and conditions of tenancy and the intensification of exploitation. Kurdish share-croppers experienced relatively harsher conditions mainly due to the harsher conditions of tenancy which traditionally prevailed in Kurdistan. See the works of Vali (op. cit. 1980, op. cit. 1993, especially chap. 7) where the agrarian relations and in particular the terms and conditions of tenancy and the division of the produce between the landlord and the share-croppers are discussed in detail. See also Lambton (op. cit. 1953, op. cit. 1969), who also notes the harsher conditions prevailing in the Kurdish countryside.
34. For accounts of Mosaddeq's legislation regarding the conditions of tenancy, the division of the crop between the landlord and the share-croppers, and the level of exploitation in rural Iran, see Lambton (op. cit. 1953), Keddie (op. cit. 1963) and Soudaghar (op. cit. 1979).
35. See Asri (op. cit. 2003).
36. The Kurdish peasants came to refer to the government legislation regarding the conditions of tenancy and the division of the crop as the 20% bill. See Molla Omar Asri (op. cit. 2003).
37. I visited Erbil in April 2004 hoping to meet with Haji Ghassem and discuss the peasant movement with him, to ask his opinion about its causes, social structure and political formation, and the reasons for its fall. I found my way to his shop in the town centre, in a roundabout opposite the heavily fortified Parezga (the governor's office), only to be told by his brother that Haji Ghassem passed away nearly a year ago, in 2003, shortly after the fall of the Ba'th regime and liberation of Kurdistan by the Peshmerga. Haji's brother agreed to have a chat rather than an interview about the peasant rebellion and Haji's role in the movement. The bulk of the information provided by him is reflected in this chapter. The old man was still running his tailoring outfit actively and efficiently. He had not abandoned the old Marxist radicalism. He reminisced about the past, retelling the story of the rebellion in distinctly social class terms; it was to him a theatre of class war with clear lines drawn in blood. Hemin, the prominent Kurdish poet and political figure, laments the suppression of the movement in moving terms (Hemin 1974).

CHAPTER 4

Coup d'État and Exile

In the critical year of 1952–1953, the Mahabad committee, the only remaining part of the KDPI still active in the region, was no more than a frontline organisation for the Tudeh Party; its discourse and practice were defined by the Tudeh politics. In the political field, it followed the Tudeh line pursuing its strategic objectives, which had already proved incompatible with the exigencies of the nationalist project even in its modified form, the regional autonomy programme inherited from the Republic. The KDPI had lost its organisational independence, and with it the will and power to pose the Kurdish question on the new political and ideological domains created by the deepening national crisis. The local leadership of the Mahabad committee had succumbed to the anti-imperialist discourse of the Tudeh Party thoroughly articulated in a vision of the world depicted by the Soviet representation of the Cold War. Like their ideological mentors, the Tudeh leadership in Tehran and Tabriz, they revelled in the glorification of the Soviet power, the stalwart champion of the oppressed in Kurdistan and the bulwark against the imperialist domination of Iran. The membership of the anti-imperialist bloc led by the Soviet Union on the international stage was taken to be synonymous with the struggle for socialism on the national scene. They both were, it was believed, dialectical negations of the relations of exploitation and domination originating from the structural dynamics of global capitalism, which came together in the proletarian character of the Soviet state. The small band of Kurdish

A. Vali, *The Forgotten Years of Kurdish Nationalism in Iran*,
Minorities in West Asia and North Africa,
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activists ardently believed in the truth of this view not only as a political argument but as an article of faith. They frequently invoked it not only to justify the Soviet conception of the Cold War, vision of a bipolar world led by the two antagonistic forces of capitalism and socialism vying for supremacy, but also to support their shared conviction that socialism was the prerequisite for a democratic resolution of the Kurdish question in Iran. But, while the Tudeh discourse used the argument to justify its blind obedience to the Soviet Union, the fledgling Kurdish Marxist-nationalists invoked it to account for their own subordination to the Tudeh line in the Iranian political field.[1]

The military coup d'état of August 1953 dealt a severe blow on the organisational structure and the leadership of the Mahabad committee of the KDPI, which was for all intents and purposes an 'ethnic' Tudeh outfit. According to Hussami (op. cit. 1997), only three members of the committee survived the repression that accompanied the restoration of sovereign order in the Mukrian region and beyond. The surviving members of the regional organisation of the KDPI, who had managed to escape prison and captivity, attempted an assessment of the political and organisational policies and processes leading to the debacle so soon after the bitter experience of the Republic. These efforts culminated in the First Party Conference of the KDPI in the spring of 1954. The party's much-maligned relationship with the Tudeh was the main focus of the meetings and discussions in the conference. The conference resolved to sever relations with the remaining/surviving clandestine Tudeh organisation inside Iran. This was, by all accounts, an act of damage limitation, a pragmatic measure prompted by short-term political and security considerations, especially the mounting fear about the infiltration of the clandestine organisation of the Tudeh Party following the discovery of its military branch shortly before the conference.

In political terms, the critical thrust of the conference's appraisal of strategic alliance with the Tudeh concerned the latter's analysis of the historical character of Mosaddeq's government, the socio-economic character of the National Front of Iran and its strategy in the crisis of the nationalisation of Iranian oil. The KDPI's critique of the Tudeh remained remarkably silent on the growing political and ideological influence of the Tudeh on the course and direction of the party since the Republic. Nor did it involve an assessment of the Tudeh's conception of the Kurdish question which had been gaining ground in the local organisations due mainly to their conversion to its economic populist reformism and anti-imperialist

discourse. The conservative ethos of the conference's critique of the Tudeh Party and its discourse and practice in the critical years leading to the military coup was further reinforced as it refused to relate the party's much-noted 'historic error' to the exigencies of the Soviet foreign policy in Iran and the Middle East in general. In fact, Soviet foreign policy, its determinants and objectives, its ideological justification and theoretical representation central to the Tudeh's propagation of the anti-imperialist discourse, and hence the basis of its alliance with the KDPI, was not questioned at all.

On the contrary, the conference did not only refuse to attribute the historic failure of the Tudeh leadership to Soviet strategy in Iran but attempted to exonerate the CPSU by making a clear distinction between them. This was expressed by the request to contact the Soviet Union directly in Europe skipping the agency of the Tudeh leadership in and outside Iran. The conference thus resolved to entrust this task to Ghassemlou, to send him to Europe to function as a contact between the KDPI and the Soviet Union excluding the medium of the Tudeh leadership. To ensure this, the conference instructed Ghassemlou to terminate his relationship with the Tudeh before departing for Europe to carry out the mission. This mission, alas, was not accomplished, evidence suggests. Ghassemlou was dispatched to Europe bearing a letter addressed to Soviet authorities, asking for recognition and support and proposing cooperation. He refused to deliver the letter to the Soviets; instead, he submitted it to the Tudeh leadership in exile. Ghassemlou's refusal to accomplish the mission was a calculated move. It was not only a refusal to believe in the political autonomy of the Kurdish question in Iranian politics but also an indication of his commitment to the Tudeh Party. Given the weight of evidence/opinion, it is hard to refute the logic of this argument. It seems for all intents and purposes Ghassemlou had already given up on the remaining organisation of the KDPI in Iran, and he may have used the letter to establish himself as the foremost personality within the KDPI in exile. The idea, it seems, was to rebuild the party as a Marxist organisation with a distinct Soviet orientation using the resources available to him as an active member of the Tudeh Party. That this strategy was paradoxical is clear: to construct an autonomous Kurdish-nationalist enclave within an obsolete political bureaucracy nurtured by an obsolete ideology was more than an uphill struggle. It was a foolish idea at best and a dangerous self-delusion at worst. The truth is evidenced by the vicissitude of Ghassemlou's political career which proved to be a ceaseless struggle against the imposing force of this paradox.

The influence of the Tudeh Party, its strategic thinking and ideological stance, on the new generation of the KDPI activists was too strong to be eradicated with conference resolutions and committee statements. To them, especially those who formed the growing Marxist grouping within the ramshackle party organisation such as Ghassemlou himself, the Tudeh leadership abroad represented the truth of the CPSU signifying 'scientific socialism' par excellence. The persistence of this belief, often expressed in their reverence of the CPSU and the Soviet regime, represented a world view in which there was little room for critical thought and political dissent. The young Marxists within the ranks of the KDPI were not dissenters. Dissention was alien to their political make-up, granted. But they never questioned, not even for once, the legitimacy of the Tudeh leadership to pronounce on the Kurdish question in Iran, despite the latter's commitment to the fundamentals of an ethnic (Persian) conception of Iranian nationalism and national identity. In fact, despite the decision to end cooperation with the Tudeh, political and ideological supremacy of the Tudeh remained unquestioned and unopposed by the left in the ranks of the KDPI, which in mid-1950 consisted of the majority of the active members in various committees in major Kurdish towns and Tehran. Personal accounts of the period provided by prominent members of the Marxist grouping in the KDPI in exile in Western Europe testify to the continuous predominance of the political and ideological positions of the Tudeh Party on the Kurdish, Iranian and International relations on the discourse and practice of the KDPI (Hussami op. cit. 1997; Blurian op. cit. 1997; Ghassemlou 1988). The Marxist grouping/tendency remained totally subordinate to the Tudeh leadership. The crass populist radicalism of the Soviet-inspired anti-imperialist discourse reigned supreme less than a decade after it made its appearance in the pages of *Kurdistan* under the Republic (Vali 2011 op. cit.).

The publication of *Kurdistan* in the spring of 1954 in Tabriz was a clear indication of the loss of political autonomy by the KDPI. The paper was printed in Tabriz in the clandestine printing press of the Azerbaijan Demokrat Firghesi (ADF) which had resumed activity in major urban centres in Azerbaijan during the political crisis. The publication of *Kurdistan* in Tabriz was organised and managed by a small group of the KDPI activists, leading figures in the Marxist grouping in the party, namely, Ghassemlou, Sadeq Anjiri, Aziz Yousefi and Ghani Blurian. Although the ADF provided the logistics, political support and indeed sponsorship are said to have come mainly from the Tudeh. This was clearly reflected in

the predominance of the Tudeh's Marxism, its rendition of the Soviet world view and above all the standard Tudeh analysis and explanation of the contemporary Iranian politics. In fact, Hussami and Blurian both agree issues of *Kurdistan* printed in Tabriz were little more than a Tudeh-inspired paper, lacking editorial independence and discursive autonomy, especially with regard to its representation of the political developments in Kurdistan after the coup d'état (Hussami op. cit. 1997; Blurian op. cit. 1997).[2]

Hussami and Blurian, both active participants in the Kurdish-nationalist political process in the period under consideration, provide somewhat different accounts of the events after the coup. The narratives of the events told in their memories suggest that in the period under consideration the dynamics of the political process in *Kurdistan* was outside it, residing mainly in the processes and practices of the Tudeh Party in Tehran, and that the KDPI Conference was prompted by the uncovering of the secret organisation of the Tudeh in the military and security apparatuses of the state in 1954. They nonetheless disagree on the precise date of the conference and some of the details regarding its proceedings. According to Blurian, the party conference took place not in 1954 as Hussami and a number of other activists suggest but a year later in the spring of 1955. He further states that eight issues of *Kurdistan* were published in Tabriz with the circulation of 2000, which goes against other accounts which usually put at five issues with smaller circulation.

The restoration of order and sovereign domination after the coup d'état was followed by the consolidation of the state power in the country at large. The politics of consolidation was multifaceted using different processes and practices but essentially focused on two basic spheres: social and political. They were both grounded in and interconnected by the economic and financial relations ranging from the consolidation of large landed property, to the protection of industrial and commercial profit, to the acquisition of financial aid from the United States. In the social sphere the consolidation of power followed strictly class lines. The state reinforced the relations of production in agriculture and redefined the limits of exploitation on the old foundation. The consolidation of large landed property was thus followed by the abrogation of Mosaddeq's 20% law regarding the conditions of tenancy and crop sharing and assurances about the sanctity of private and the continuity of the conditions of labour and production. The large landlords were, however, rewarded for their unwavering support of the institution of monarchy and the person of sovereign

throughout the period of crisis by buttressing their entrenched positions in the executive and legislative apparatuses of the state. The steady increase of the large landlord representation in the Majlis from 49% in 1952–1953 to 51% in 1956–1960 was an index of the consolidation and expansion of the large landlords' regime under the revived and reinvigorated absolutism (Abrahamian 1982 op. cit.; Keddie op. cit. 1981; Lambton 1953 op. cit.; Shajie 1965).

Kurdistan was no exception to this rule. Here too the consolidation of the entrenched power and privilege of the landlords followed the path already charted by the state in the period of restoration following the downfall of the Republic. Like the Iranian landowning class at large, the Kurdish landlords remained loyal to the Pahlavi monarchy in the period of the crisis. There are no known cases of support for the National Front government or for Mosaddeq himself among the large landlords and the urban-based landlord-merchants, the small but powerful band of so-called bourgeois-feudals, in the Mukrian region. In fact, as was seen in the case of the peasant unrest in the Mukrian basin, Kurdish landlords, for the most part, remained staunch supporters of the monarchist regime and cooperated rather actively with the army and gendarmerie for the preservation of the status quo in the Kurdish countryside. The cancellation of the 20% law for which they had fought a war against Kurdish peasants was an attractive incentive to ensure the sovereign power's commitment to an alliance which had served the interests of the state and the landowning class so effectively for so long. The landowning class remained the mainstay of sovereign power up until the land reform of 1962 (Lambton 1953 op. cit., 1963; Keddie op. cit. 1960, 1963; Soudaghar op. cit. 1979; Vali 1980, 2003).

In the industrial and commercial sphere, the consolidation of state power began with process of pacification deploying a combination of coercive and juridical methods. For aside from the restoration of order, here the state had to move to pacify the labour force, eradicating the last wastage of political radicalism and industrial militancy in the workplace, which was largely the making of the Tudeh-inspired and Tudeh-driven trade unions. The frequency and force of labour unrest and industrial strikes in the preceding decade and the manifest inability of the state to deal with organised labour and trade union power had scared and dismayed the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie seriously undermining their trust in the state as the protector of their person and property. The consolidation of power did in part depend on the restoration of 'order and security' to

restore the confidence of the upper echelons of the business community, the dominant factions of the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie in Tehran and other major cities. The state had to display its power, the capacity to make rules and enforce them, to assure the sceptics and vacillators in the business community, the bedrock of urban support for Pahlavi absolutism, that it is willing and able to establish order and security to defend their interests and privileges. Law had already been suspended, and now violence behind it had to come out to restore order and security. Violence and repression were the means of exercise of sovereign domination in the period of restoration and after. Sovereign power, to paraphrase Foucault, continues to show its historical obsession with death, both of human body and of civil society. The exercise of power of death, to paraphrase Foucault, was the fundamental rationale of processes and practices aiming to restore sovereign domination in the dark years following the 1953 coup d'état.[3]

The eradication of political radicalism in the industrial and commercial sphere, pacification of the organised labour and the subsequent decline in the number of industrial strikes and labour unrest in the years following the coup d'état took place against a background of massive repression of political opposition in the society at large. Closure and purging of trade unions and labour syndicates, guilds and other trade and professional associations, along with the suppression of the university students' organisations, closure of free press and associated professional and cultural bodies and, above all, the suppression of all civic and democratic rights and liberties—all these resulted in a serious assault on the civil society and suppression of the public sphere, which had developed since 1941, turning to a rich, vibrant and multifaceted site for the exercise of public reason distinguished by its critique of sovereign power and defence of civil and democratic liberties which more often than not entailed opposition to juridical and extra-juridical processes and practices used to sustain sovereign domination. In this sense, therefore, the forms of political alliances between the social forces required for the consolidation of power, including and especially alliances with the landowning class and powerful sectors of the business community, in practice presupposed suppression of civil society and the public sphere in the country at large.

It was above all specificity of the social structure of political power under Pahlavi absolutism which made the suppression of civil society and public sphere indispensable to the consolidation power and restoration of order after the coup d'état. This general causal relationship between

sovereign power and repression/unfreedom only affirmed the pivotal role of state violence, juridical and extra-juridical, to ensure sovereign domination over the society at large. Violence constituted the dialectical nexus of this causal relationship which posited repression/unfreedom a condition of possibility of sovereign domination. It was an invariant of sovereign domination throughout the Pahlavi rule, its form changed in accordance with the change in the social structure of the alliance. The political and economic processes and practices which led to the land reform of 1962, as will be seen later on in this study, resulted in the exclusion of the landowning class from the social structure of political power, thus ending the predominance of the large landlords' regime in Iran.[4]

Ahmad Towfiq and the Consolidation of Ethnic Nationalism

Abdullah Ishaghi, alias Ahmad Towfiq, was the most prominent figure in the small and increasingly shrinking faction of the Kurdish nationalists in the Mahabad committee who were opposed to the strategic 'alliance' with and the subordination of the KDPI to the Tudeh Party in the national and regional political processes. Before the historic failure of the Tudeh in 1953, the opposition to the alliance was dormant, largely confined to a 'private' clique in the administration of the Mahabad committee who seldom expressed their disagreement with the party line openly. This quietism signified more than mere political caution and prudence on the part of the opposition; it was also a recognition of their political and intellectual weakness and dependence on the Tudeh. The party conference of 1954 ended the political isolation of the opposition and the security setbacks and arrests, which followed the loss of the military wing of the Tudeh Party in 1955, provided Towfiq with the long-awaited opportunity to assert his dominance over the Mahabad/Kurdistan committee and redefine its discourse and practice on a more traditional-ethicist grounds.

Towfiq's rise to prominence marked the beginning of the shift in the locus of the KDPI's activity from the Iranian to the Iraqi Kurdistan. The shift was reactive but not abrupt; it took place over a period of four years, largely in response to the increasing state repression which followed the rationalisation and centralisation of the security and coercive processes and practices of the redeployed Pahlavi state after the 1953 coup. The impending security considerations in Kurdistan gave Towfiq organisational

autonomy and tactical independence, enabling him to wrest the local administration especially the Mahabad committee from the influence of the Tehran committee where the ideological dominance of the left and hence of the Tudeh Party was still strong. The Tehran committee, still perplexed by the stunning success of the state security apparatuses in discovering and smashing the organisational structure and leadership of the military wing of the Tudeh Party, was hardly in a position to exercise control over the remaining party organisation in Kurdistan and challenge Towfiq's ascendency. Politically incapacitated, the Tehran committee was hoping for outside help to revitalise its moribund organisation, that is, the political and logistic aid which Ghassemlou had been instructed to secure from the Soviet Union without going through the medium of the Tudeh Party. External aid did not seem to be forthcoming for the simple reason that the Soviet Union never believed in the autonomy of the Kurdish politics in Iran and was in no way prepared to treat the KDPI as an autonomous political force, independently of the Tudeh Party. Ghassemlou, who had remained fiercely faithful to the logic of the Soviet conception of Kurdish politics and the KDPI, resumed his political career as an active member of the Tudeh Party upon his arrival in Eastern Europe. Towfiq had precious little to worry about and his position was becoming increasingly unassailable within the moribund but steadily reviving organisation of the party.[5]

In view of the prevailing conditions in the Iranian Kurdistan, the rationale of the decision to move the command structure of the party to the Iraqi Kurdistan was strategic: to secure the safety of the command and enable it to use Iranian Kurdistan as an operational field, less constrained by security and logistical considerations—that is, a notion which has since underpinned the strategic thinking of the KDPI uninterrupted, with the notable exception of the crucial years of 1979–1981, when the command structure and the party organisation were united in the political field. But strategic considerations notwithstanding, factionalism and long-term personal political interest also played an important role in Towfiq's calculations. Towfiq wanted to build an organisation that would satisfy his obsessive drive for domination and control, a power base capable of quelling his mounting insecurity vis-à-vis the Marxist left within and outside the party. Although he had already achieved some success in reviving the moribund party organisation in the Mukrian region, the increasing security risks and mounting state repression culminating in the SAVAK backlash of 1959 heavily weighed against systematic organisational work in Iran.[6]

However, it was primarily Barzani's return to his homeland in 1958 and the subsequent developments in the Iraqi Kurdistan which determined the course and the direction of the events within the KDPI for the next 15 years. In fact, the government backlash of 1959 had been precipitated largely by Barzani's return; a pre-emptive strike, so to speak, to thwart its destabilising effects on the precarious structure of security and order in Iranian Kurdistan. Ahmad Towfiq had already established an operational base in Iraqi Kurdistan before Barzani's return. The base had only a rudimentary organisation centred on the person of Towfiq, an emergent network of political patronage, which lacked political identity and direction. This rudimentary organisation soon developed into a cumbersome apparatus whose political objectives were heavily coloured by the personal interests of its leader. The development of the KDPI in Iraqi Kurdistan, its organisational structure, political stance and ideological orientation, at least from 1959 to 1969, was defined almost exclusively by Towfiq. It was little more than his personal fiefdom closely mirroring his political creed and convictions which hinged on the reverence of Kurdish ethnicity on the one hand and the pathological hatred of the left on the other.

Towfiq was the quintessential political activist who thrived on the anonymity and secrecy of clandestine organisational work and the sense of insecurity and distrust associated with it. He was a shrewd political operator of considerable acumen but lacked the intellectual power and ideological knowledge to redefine the ethos of the party and assign it a new political identity. Towfiq was an ardent ethnic nationalist with a basic and almost instinctive commitment to Kurdish ethnicity, which, like all ethnic nationalists, he did not hesitate to perceive as a historical antiquity with legitimate rights to statehood. For him this commitment was the supreme political virtue which he often invoked in his rhetoric, directed mostly at the surviving elements of the fragmented left within the party. But Towfiq's ethnic nationalism was an article of personal faith rather than a political principle grounded in an active ideology. It was never assigned a strategic position in the discourse and practice of the party under his leadership, to function as a basis for the ideological reorientation of the party after the eclipse of the left and its class discourse. The underlying reasons, however, were not entirely personal.

Towfiq was deeply entrenched in the traditional Kurdish political culture, whose pervasive ethos was profoundly ethnic. He was too conservative in outlook to appreciate the political significance of modern nationalism and the mobilising power of its democratic discourse. Nor could he

accommodate the organisational requirements of nationalist discourse in an authoritarian structure of command centred on his person within the party. Furthermore, Towfiq was committed to the political legacy and objectives of the Republic including the regional autonomy project which had acquired prominence under Ghazi Muhammad's leadership. The party had remained committed to autonomy which was the central plank in its political discourse, accepted by both the right and the left as a rational and practical solution to the Kurdish question but without being systematically discussed or elaborated in the party political programme. In fact, the autonomy project was not only the common ground between Towfiq and his left-wing opponents but also his main weakness vis-à-vis the left. The discourse and practice of the left in the party was better suited to this objective than Towfiq's plainly ethicist outlook which found it difficult to accept any political arrangement amounting to submission to Iranian sovereignty except as a temporary compromise. But it was Towfiq's subsequent association with Barzani which decisively tipped the balance against the left.

Towfiq's relationship with Barzani, which commenced soon after the latter's return to Iraq, was the single most important influence on the political and ideological development of the KDPI in the 1960s, on a par with the influence of the Tudeh Party a decade earlier. The relationship began on an unequal footing, on a conventional clientelist line defined largely by personal devotion nurtured by an amalgam of religious and political authority traditionally associated with Barzani's position in the Kurdish community. But it soon developed to total submission whereby personal devotion could no longer be distinguished from political expediency. Towfiq needed Barzani's political patronage and financial support to survive and continue his operation in Iraqi Kurdistan. Barzani's power and prestige, national and regional, his public or illicit association with major political actors in the region, especially his standing with the Soviet Union in the early 1960s were invaluable to Towfiq. Barzani had managed rather skilfully to balance his contemptuous relationship with the left within his own party with a cordial, though quite an ambiguous, relationship with the Shiyoui'is, the Iraqi Communist Party, which was little more than the instrument of Soviet foreign policy in Iraq.

The relationship with the Soviet Union was the medium through which Barzani maintained this balance, enabling him not only to play the two sides against one another but also to check their excesses particularly when they seemed to fall out of line with his tacit or declared aims and intentions.

Towfiq wished to emulate Barzani in his relationship with the left which by the early 1960s was beginning to show signs of discontent with his leadership of the party. He thus attempted to differentiate the Soviet Union from its Tudeh or pro-Tudeh followers within the party, both in the Iraqi Kurdistan and Eastern Europe. Towfiq never extended his vociferous opposition to the Marxist left in the KDPI to the discourse and practice of the Soviet Union, at least not publicly. But he lacked Barzani's political prestige and clout, nor did the Kurds in Iran have the status accorded to the Kurds of Iraq in the Soviet foreign policy. Thus Towfiq's strategy, his efforts to secure Soviet support for his organisation in the Iraqi Kurdistan and disarm the left did not pay off, leading to his increasing isolation from and rejection of the small but active KDPI committee in Eastern Europe. The Soviets were set to support the KDPI left in exile, if only because it had by now become part of the Tudeh set-up in Eastern Europe, forsaking the claim to an autonomous Kurdish political organisation with a specific political programme for the Kurds of Iran. In the circumstances Towfiq sought refuge in the safety of Barzani's patronage.

Although Towfiq's insecurity was the prime cause of his submission to Barzani, the latter for his part actively encouraged the expanding clientelist network in the KDPI. For Barzani the KDPI was little more than a pawn, a bargaining chip in a volatile but increasingly important relationship with Iran which, he believed, was the vital link with the United States which could prove decisive in the event of a change in the strategic alliances underpinning his quest for regional autonomy in Iraq. He thus wanted to secure not only a controlling influence over the KDPI and its cross-border operations but also a determinant role in the process of policy and decision-making in the party. Barzani thus used Towfiq to refashion the organisational structure of the KDPI, to reshape its leadership on his own image, turning it to an instrument of his will in the political process. Like Towfiq, Barzani remained averse to the East European operation of the KDPI if only because it escaped his direct control and manipulation.

There was also a reasonable ground for a shared perception of Kurdish politics between the two men. Barzani and Towfiq were both traditionalists with an entirely pragmatic and almost instrumentalist attitude towards modern political process and party organisation, which they effectively overlooked in favour of informal processes and practices embedded in primordial relations. Primordialism also defined the framework of their nationalist outlook which was thoroughly ethnic and antiquarian. The

profound ambiguity of ethnic nationalism, and its characteristic appeal to history for the legitimation of national rights, made it possible for them to advance and justify what was otherwise an innately paradoxical position combining uncompromising nationalist claims with a thoroughly regional autonomist political project.

Towfiq therefore had no reason to decline Barzani's patronage. He did not hesitate to surrender the KDPI to Barzani when the latter began consolidating his power base upon his return to the Iraqi Kurdistan. Under his leadership, the party became entirely dependent on Barzani, politically and financially. Barzani was effectively the leader and paymaster of the party in exile and controlled its political activity both within and outside the organisation. Towfiq actively encouraged this dependency which was only matched by personal subservience to Barzani. He revelled in the security of Barzani's patronage drawing power and prestige from his special relationship with the master. The clientelist network which stemmed from this relationship came to dominate the formal organisation of the KDPI in Southern Kurdistan, not so much a parallel set-up competing with and at times overriding the existing chain of command and channel of flow of authority within the party, as a substitute turning to the locus of an increasingly centralised power controlled from the outside the party. Towfiq actively encouraged this informal set-up which was centred on his relationship with Barzani, and helped extend its primordial underpinnings beyond the institutional structure of the party to the political community in the Iranian Kurdistan.

Towfiq encouraged the Barzani cult in the party primarily in order to protect his own position in the leadership, for Barzani's patronage shielded him from the left opposition which, having become subsumed under the Tudeh Party, enjoyed the support of the Soviet Union and her satellite parties in the Arab Middle East. It also enabled him to conceal the anomalies of a confused leadership striving to disguise an incoherent autonomist politics in the language of an assertive primordial nationalism. The reverence of Barzani, which had been elevated into a nationalist political principle by the mid-1960s, was therefore a convenient ground which provided Towfiq with the means to remedy the two acute deficiencies of his leadership. But this arrangement did not last long and the foundations of Towfiq's vacuous primordialism began to crumble when Barzani's absolute authority was questioned within and outside the KDP.

However, the major blow to Towfiq's authority, effectively undermining the credibility of his primordialist nationalism and revealing its intrinsic

weakness and lack of purpose and direction, came from within Iran. The land reform of 1962 was instrumental in this respect. It signalled the onset of a process which culminated in the structural transformation of the Kurdish countryside. The transformation in the structure of property relations and the resulting change in the organisation of class relations had radically shifted the balance of forces in the countryside. The initial phase of the land reform, which was marked by a radical redistribution of large feudal landed property and creation of peasant proprietorship, swiftly removed some of the major obstacles to the development of the commodity relations in agriculture. The destruction of the economic foundation of the large landlords' power resulted in a serious reduction in their pivotal weight in the national political field. The large landlords who had traditionally been the mainstay of political power and prestige mainly lost their predominance in the legislative and the executive apparatuses of the state. Some blessed with royal favour and with direct access to the Shah and the royal family retained their power and prestige in the political arena, though mostly reincarnating as bourgeois-landlords progressively involved in forms of economic activity grounded in the capitalist relations of production. The progressive break-up of large agrarian property also provided for the emergence and proliferation of peasant holdings whose increasing involvement in commodity markets and exchange relations ushered in a process of development leading to the development of the social differentiation among the peasants and the expansion of capitalist farming.

Although the initial phase of the land reform set the course for the development of peasant capitalism in Iranian agriculture at large, the two subsequent stages pursued a different objective. They were designed to slow down this process and change its direction to ensure the landlords decisive role in the developing capitalist agriculture. The aim was therefore to consolidate the landlords' estate on a commercially viable basis albeit on a new capitalist foundation, that is, to leave them private estates large enough to ensure large-scale production for markets, commercial profit, expansion and growth. This, in effect, meant less land for redistribution and smaller peasant plots, mostly unviable economically, unable to generate sufficient economic surplus to engage in market relations. The shift from peasant to landlord capitalism, which was initiated during the second phase and accomplished in the third phase of the land reform process, signified a crucial change in the balance of power in the ruling bloc within the state in favour of conservative forces led by the monarch and the royal court. The reformist prime minister and the small but competent band of

reformist technocrats and bureaucrats mostly with nationalist or communist past, who were the main architects of the land reform, lost ground to the conservative forces before the initial phase of the reform was completed. This crucial change in the form and direction of capitalist development in the Iranian agriculture had important long-term structural consequences for the configuration of political forces and balance of power in the countryside, contributing in no small way to the processes culminating in the revolution of 1979. A detailed discussion of the modality of capitalist development in agriculture and its long-term social and political consequences, important as it is, is beyond the scope of this study. It would suffice here to refer briefly to the impact of landlord capitalism on the emergent social differentiation among the mass of the Iranian peasants and the agrarian social structure.[7]

The predominance of the landlords in the process of commodity production and their involvement in and control of the commodity markets for agricultural produce effectively curbed the dynamics of the social differentiation among the masses of Iranian peasants. The process of agrarian class formation, which had been given a tremendous boost in the initial phase of the land reform, was significantly slowed down during the second and third phases of the land reform. The size of the holding and the amount of the working capital available to the peasant household were the two key factors in this respect. They determined, though in different ways, the size of the marketable surplus in the peasant unit of production, and hence the mode and the conditions of its involvement in commodity relations, both in terms of hiring in and out of labour and purchase and sale of agricultural products. This meant that in the post–land reform era the means and the conditions of access to land and working capital had become the primary foci of the political and economic power struggle between the peasant proprietors and the capitalist landowners in the countryside. The state which had already played a decisive role in the onset of these struggles by defining the size of peasants' holdings continued to exert more influence on their outcomes by controlling the means and the conditions of their access to the money and credit market. In other words, political power defined not only the juridico-political framework of the class struggle in the countryside but also its economic and social foci. In the struggle for land and profit which marked the development of capitalism in agriculture in the post-reform era, the state had taken side. It stood firmly on the side of the capitalist landowners and against the middle and poor peasants, bolstering the former's drive for the concentration of land, which

effectively undermined the economic dynamics of the process of social differentiation, and hence of class formation in the countryside. The predominance of landlord capitalism was the main cause of the slow process of social differentiation and class formation. Land hunger, rather than commodity relations, was the prima causa of the peasant migration to towns, which reached an alarming proportion in the following decade.

Although the predominance of landlord capitalism held back the process of social differentiation and class formation among the peasants, it did little to alter the underlying trend in Iranian agriculture. The destruction of pre-capitalist forms of landed property, especially the progressive break-up of large feudal estates on the one hand, and the creation of peasant proprietorship on the other, had unleashed new social forces and relations which were rapidly changing the political scene in the Iranian countryside. The secular opposition to the state, especially the Marxist left, old and new, found it necessary to respond to the emerging social and economic conditions in the countryside and assess their immediate and long-term political and ideological consequences, hence Marxist characterisations and analyses of the socio-economic development in the countryside, which proliferated soon after the advent of the land reform. Marxist characterisations, which as a rule were informed by a universal schema of the historical development of human societies, were unanimous on the capitalist character of the land reform which automatically qualified it to be denounced and rejected. This rejectionist stance was further justified by the view commonly held by the Marxist left that the land reform was merely an act of political engineering induced by the imperialist masters of the corrupt monarchy in order to prolong its precarious existence. The Marxist left, both the Tudeh Party and the Organisation of the Peoples Fadayin of Iran, attached more importance to the global political strategy of the Kennedy administration than the structural dynamics of Iranian economy to account for the land reform. This inordinate emphasis on the assumed structural role of the American imperialism, a hallmark of the dependency theory ardently espoused and vociferously propagated by the Marxist left, fostered an aggressive populism whose moral critique of capitalism seriously obscured its ability to appreciate the long-term strategic consequences of the land reform.[8]

This general outline of development and change precipitated by the land reform of 1962 did include Kurdistan in its every major aspect. Kurdish countryside too underwent structural changes with similar short- and long-term effects on the configuration of social forces and balance of

power in the region. The dissolution of the old pre-capitalist and the emergence of the new capitalist social forces and relations had radically changed the contours of the political field which had hitherto been the general framework of reference for the political analysis and calculations of the KDPI. The new conditions in the countryside demanded an urgent response from the party. But this was hardly an easy task for Towfiq to accomplish. The KDPI had never had a programme for land reform in Kurdistan, for political and ideological reasons. It had, ever since its formation in 1945, been dependent on the landowning class for political and logistical support (Vali 2011). The tribal leadership, which had controlled the logistics of military power in the Republic, continued to exert significant influence on the clandestine activity of the KDPI defining its operational limits in the countryside after 1947. Throughout the 1950s, the KDPI relied on the logistical support of the considerable number of influential tribal leaders, from the Gewerk and Mamash and to a lesser extent Mangur aghas, for its clandestine activity which, as was seen, proved essential for its revival and development in and outside the territory. This continued dependency on the tribal leadership proved decisive in the party's failure to lend an active support to the peasant rebellions in the Mukrian region in the early 1950s. Towfiq strengthened the party's links with the sympathetic tribal leaders in order to bolster his links with the territory. He was aware of the fact that such links, especially the ability to maintain an operational field in the Iranian Kurdistan, depended in no small measure on the logistical support provided by them. A cordial relationship with the tribal leadership was thus essential to the survival and credibility of his otherwise ineffectual leadership.

However, the land reform and its consequences had already become an issue in the party, looming large in the internal discussions and debates both in Iraqi Kurdistan and in Eastern Europe. The internal debates and discussions for the most part revolved around the central question of political strategy, its credibility and efficacy in the light of the changing conditions and the emerging balance of forces in the countryside. The Marxist left, though divided and disorganised, played a prominent role in this process, effectively turning it to a critique of Towfiq's leadership of the party. In fact, opposition to Towfiq's leadership was the main, if not the only, common ground uniting the Marxist left within the party, giving it some internal cohesion and direction. The distinctive feature of the emergent Marxist analysis of the Kurdish countryside and assessment of the party strategy was its reference to the wider framework of Iranian

history and historical development. The analysis of the changing conditions and the character and direction of the new forces and relations were, to a large extent, derived from the general structural tendencies of Iranian society which was perceived to be transitional, making a passage from feudalism to dependent capitalism. The common historical framework thus served to ground the KDPI's strategy in an Iranian political context and ensure a burgeoning working relation with the Iranian left, which in one way or another subscribed to a similar historical-political perspective.[9]

Towfiq was forced to respond to the land reform and the resulting developments in the Kurdish countryside when they were taken up by the left in the party and became an issue in the internal power struggle which was beginning to revive after a period of lull. The left, both in Eastern Europe and in the Iraqi Kurdistan, latched on it, turning it into a strategic issue in the party. The KDPI in Eastern Europe, as was seen, had no autonomous political and organisational existence; it was a loose ethnic grouping within the Tudeh Party essentially towing its line on all issues related to policy and programme. Like the Tudeh, its appreciation of the land reform and the resulting developments in the Kurdish countryside was heavily biased by its blind opposition to the Iranian regime. Nor did its fierce loyalty to the Soviet leadership and ideology allowed it to take on board more radical positions which had of late emerged among the younger generation of the Marxist political activists, both in Iran and abroad, who defined their theoretical and political positions in opposition to Soviet Marxism and the Tudeh Party. The left in the organisation of the KDPI in Iraqi Kurdistan, though mainly under the political influence of the Tudeh Kurds in Eastern Europe, enjoyed a relatively more political and functional autonomy than the grouping within the Tudeh Party in Eastern Europe. Opposition to Towfiq's leadership, especially his subordination to Barzani, and closer contacts with the remnants of the KDPI inside Iran, both in Kurdistan and in Tehran, had provided this loose grouping of the left-wing members and associates with a wider organisational and functional space within the party which they could use to question the course and direction of party policy and strategy. Voices from inside Iranian Kurdistan too demanded recognition of the change and its articulation in the party programme, thus lending credence to the growing disquiet in the party.

Towfiq for his part felt uneasy about the possible formation of an active left-wing opposition to his leadership, especially in his own backyard which he had effectively secured with the active help of Barzani. Nor did he like

the specifically Iranian thrust of the emerging theoretical-political orientation within the party which did not only show the direct influence of the Iranian opposition but also effectively reviving, albeit on more logical grounds, the historical and strategic connection between the Kurdish question and the democratic struggle in Iran, a position which he identified specifically with the Tudeh Party. But the fear of a growing opposition to his leadership, made up of the two segments of the left with an active support from inside the Kurdish territory, forced him to act. Towfiq had a difficult task in hand: he had to acknowledge the rural socio-economic change and its consequences for the party programme and strategy without succumbing to the political and organisational demands of the left. The new party programme thus did not only have to outline a credible course of action in the Iranian Kurdistan but also, and more importantly, to isolate and disarm the growing opposition to his leadership. This, Towfiq knew, can only be achieved with the active support of Barzani who shared his dislike of the Marxist left in the KDPI and was opposed to their rise within the party. The left's declared wish to reconstruct and reactivate the party's clandestine organisation in Iran and radicalise its political stance in exile, he thought, would undoubtedly jeopardise his valuable ties with the Iranian government which, in view of rapidly deteriorating political situation in Iraq, had become increasingly essential to his survival. Barzani had already obliged Towfiq by helping him to undermine the efforts of the Reconstruction Committee created earlier by the left. The prominent members of the committee were discredited, arrested or forced to leave Iraqi Kurdistan in order to secure Towfiq's leadership. Barzani was willing to oblige again to ensure his hegemony in the KDPI.[10]

It was in these circumstances that the Second Congress of the KDPI was held in November 1964. The Congress, its proceedings and resolutions on organisation, tactics or strategy, bore the mark of Towfiq's insecure authority and his attempt to defend it against the political and ideological criticism of the left within and outside the party. The curious amalgam of traditional and modern, conservative cultural outlook and radical political position, in the discourse of the Second Congress signifies his concerted attempts to articulate the modern political and ideological exigencies of a radical agrarian populism grounded in modernity in the traditional foundations of a political authority legitimised by the emotive language of a sterile ethnic nationalism. The new party programme therefore had to address the recent developments in Iran in general and in the Kurdish scene in particular but in a manner which would preclude the

analyses and strategies proposed by the Marxist left, especially the Tudeh Party and the Kurdish grouping within it. In other words, Towfiq's strategy was to emasculate the Tudeh left and neutralise their support within the KDPI by radicalising its programme and political stance to involve discourses and practices beyond the limits of their political and ideological tolerance. But adopting a radical programme for political expediency rather than conviction, urging action without the will or power to act, can be perilous for a traditional leadership fighting a rear guard battle against the bulk of the rank and file in an increasingly radicalised condition. It was in fact the gaping chasm between the discourse and practice of the party leadership after the Second Congress which precipitated a small band of radical left to embark on armed action against the Iranian state in 1967. The advent of the armed struggle in Kurdistan was a premature act of desperation by a small group of left-wing members who challenged Towfiq's leadership on grounds already articulated in the party programme at the Second Congress. Armed struggle was the adopted strategy of the KDPI since 1964 for which Towfiq was chiefly responsible.[11]

Towfiq set out to accomplish the arduous task of emasculating the left opposition and consolidating his declining authority on new radical foundations by arguing for a radical change in strategy. The term strategy here referred to the method of the realisation of the party programme which had been formulated by the leadership of the KDPI in 1945. It argued for regional autonomy under Iranian sovereignty, which in effect implied that the Kurdish people-nation were part of the Iranian nation-state, at least juridico-politically if not historically. Towfiq's proposed change of strategy did not concern this objective, but the method of its realisation required a change of regime in Iran. In other words, the forcible overthrow of the regime in Iran was perceived as the precondition of the Kurdish autonomy which the party had to strive to achieve. In this sense, therefore, the proposed strategy was akin to the one adopted by the left in the Third Congress in 1973 which predicated Kurdish autonomy on the formation of a democratic regime in Iran, but with a few major differences. First, the change of strategy and the argument for armed action to overthrow the monarchy drew on the triumph of popular democratic revolutions in Cuba and Algeria, emphasising the central role of the Kurdish peasantry in the process of the revolutionary struggle. Secondly, the new strategy argued for a revolutionary alliance with popular democratic forces in the wider context of Iranian politics, but principally with the National Front of Iran,

perceived as the leading force in the struggle against dictatorship. These differences both showed the anti-Tudeh ethos of Towfiq's leadership.[12]

The Second Congress laid a great emphasis on the countryside as the foci popular democratic struggle in Kurdistan. The centre of struggle had shifted to the countryside, it argued, and the Kurdish peasantry was the mainstay of the revolutionary struggle of the KDPI. In fact, in the discourse of the Second Congress it was the rural transformation and the new conditions in the countryside which mainly justified the proposed change in strategy. Although the argument for the new strategy was in effect a positive affirmation of the socio-economic change in the countryside, the Second Congress refused to appreciate the land reform, the very cause of the rural change in Iran. In fact, the Congress was unanimous on this issue. The land reform was not evaluated in its own right, that is, as a policy with specific transformative effects on the structure of the feudal property relations in agriculture, but rather as a desperate measure to prop up the Pahlavi dictatorship, to give it a new lease of life in the face of an impending popular uprising in the countryside. The Second Congress shared this conception of the land reform with the populist left which was gaining ground in the 1960s in Iran. The populist critique of capitalist development in agriculture remained central to the subjectivist ethos of the strategies of armed struggle in the post-reform era espoused by the left in Kurdistan and Iran at large.

But Towfiq's populist radicalism, however expedient, forced his primordial nationalism to its limits, revealing its deep-seated ambivalence towards Marxism and the Marxist left. This ambivalence surfaced in full force as the vehemence of his uncompromising opposition to the Marxist left within the KDPI was seriously undercut by his radical populist discourse which often overlapped with their stated views and positions on the prevailing socio-economic issues in contemporary Iran. The political affinity with the Marxist left, which subsequently became increasingly prominent in his discourse, especially in relation to the fledgling radical left in Iran, who for the most part defined their identity in opposition to the Tudeh Party, seriously threatened the primordialist ethos of his nationalist outlook. But Towfiq's nationalism was too entrenched in tradition to allow this growing political affinity to obscure his carefully nurtured strategic differences with the Marxist left in the party. The occasional, though significant, lapses to the primordial relations and ethnic categories witnessed in the programme of the Second Congress are above all ill-conceived attempts by him to retreat from the class-based political analysis, to redraw

the demarcation line with the left in the party, albeit at the expense of discursive incoherence and political confusion.

Thus, like his Marxist opponents within the party, Towfiq argued for a radical land reform involving a genuine redistribution of the agricultural land in Kurdistan. He thus appealed to the Kurdish peasants to reject the land reform, not to succumb to its short-term gains. This would only harm their real interests which can be secured by following the revolutionary path carefully charted by their true representative, the KDPI. But the argument for a radical land reform also had radical consequences for the formulation of the party strategy which, unlike the Marxist left, Towfiq was unable to accept, namely, the dispossession of the landowners of the land and their disappearance as a class. He could not accommodate such an avowedly radical measure in the new party programme. It militated against the principal tenets of his primordial nationalism in which ethnicity rather than politics defined the boundaries of national identity and national community. The inclusion of class discourses and practices in the party programme would not only obscure his differences with the left, but also ran the risk of undermining his relationship with tribal lords with known nationalist sympathies whose help had proved so vital for conducting the clandestine operations of the party across the border. It had to be modified.

The Second Congress thus deemed it necessary to address the Kurdish landlords and their status in the countryside in view of the changing socio-economic conditions in the countryside. But this was not an easy task, bearing in mind the hatred of the mass of Kurdish peasants for their overlords and their overt enthusiasm for the land reform, the cause of their emancipation from centuries of bondage, exploitation and humiliation. Towfiq was clearly asking for too much, but the left had to oblige, largely because it was disunited and lacked institutional cohesion and political clout to challenge him and his patron Barzani. Barzani had thrown his weight and power behind Towfiq and unequivocally supported his stance in the Congress. In fact, Towfiq's word carried Barzani's authority which the left could not challenge but at the expense of being expelled from the party. But Towfiq too had to pay a high price for these expulsions in the years to come when Barzani's authority was challenged within his own party, and the outcome of political factionalism and power struggle within the Tudeh leadership in Eastern Europe enabled the bulk of the Kurdish grouping within the party to assert its independence from it.[13]

The reference to the landlords in the party programme thus was not a measure of compromise between the right and the left within the party

but an indication of Towfiq's influence on the Congress and its agenda. The programme thus included, alongside the call for a radical land reform to uproot rural exploitation for good, a plea to the Kurdish landlords to defy the government and its land reform programme and await the dawn of democratic order to be instituted by the KDPI. This modification, which may have been intended to cajole the Kurdish landowning class, manipulating their discontent with the central government, easily surpassed the bounds of political pragmatism in Kurdish politics. It showed above all the grave confusion and serious misapprehension on the part of the party leadership about the land reform, the resulting socio-economic developments and their political outcome. This lack of political vision and judgment dominated the discourse of the Second Congress, inundating its programme and proceedings. The paradox of a radical land reform with the active participation of the landowning class showed the predicament of a traditional leadership ill at ease with modern politics. The paradox was not of policy alone but also of ideology which allegedly informed the discourse and practice of the party. It was a paradox of primordial nationalism which defined Towfiq's world outlook.[14]

The course of the events that followed the Second Congress of the KDPI testified to the failure of Towfiq's strategy to consolidate his position. The Congress had clearly failed to serve his intended purpose. The mounting radicalism among the left and his increasing use of violence against the opposition within the party were above all indicative of his declining authority. The radical objectives of the new party programme demanded radical policies which he could not initiate without undermining the very foundation of his authority so firmly dependent on his relationship with Barzani. Towfiq's inaction, increasingly required by the growing cooperation between Barzani and the Iranian regime, further increased the gaping chasm that already existed between the discourse and practice of his moribund ethnic nationalism. The quest for armed action, the celebrated cause of the assumed peasant rebellion initiating the revolutionary struggle to end the Pahlavi rule in Kurdistan in the party programme, though it never carried any conviction with him, was anathema to his patron and protector. This ideological hiatus in the very heart of his leadership and the resulting political conservatism could not but fuel the radicalism of the left within the party inaugurating new and increasingly expanding fields of discourse marked by the immediacy of revolutionary action, the urgency of the frontal attack on the autocratic state as the only legitimate mode of political practice in Kurdistan in the circumstances.

Notes

1. This chapter is in part based on information derived from unstructured interviews and detailed conversations with Ghassemlou (Paris, 1982, London 1984, 1985), Karim Hussami (Stockholm 1994, 1995), Muhammad Amin Seraji (Stockholm 1994, 1995) and Hassan Ghazi (Sundsvall 1994, 1995, 1996), most of which were taped. Three former senior members of the KDPI residing in Sweden were also interviewed during my stay in that country in 1998–1999, but they wished to remain anonymous. It should, however, be emphasised that the interviewees are in no way responsible for the analyses and the conclusions in this chapter. The interpretations and analyses of the political and ideological events, trends and developments forming the structure of the narrative in this chapter are all mine.
2. Hussami and Blurian give different accounts of circulation and number of issues: the former puts the issues at 5 and the latter at 8 with a circulation 2000, but in the absence of evidence there is no way to verify their claims. This information was not available to me when I interviewed Ghassemlou on several occasions in Paris and London. I did not therefore ask him to comment on this issue or the related political processes discussed by Hussami, Blurian, Muhammad Amin Seraji, Hassan Ghazi and a couple of other figures in the left\Marxist sector of the KDPI.
3. See Foucault (1977 op. cit., 2003 op. cit.).
4. The land reform was part of a package of reforms meant to reconstitute political power on a more modern, broad and stable social foundation. The redistribution of landed property among the mass of Iranian peasants was intended to create a new class of property holders in the countryside, numerous and loyal to the sovereign and supportive of the bid to overhaul the power structure. In urban Iran the sovereign sought to broaden and consolidate the social base of political power among the modern middle classes, especially the increasingly large sector with tertiary education and technical rational outlook, who for the most part identified with liberal democratic ideals of individual liberty, equality of opportunities, and meritocratic government, by embarking on reforms such female franchise and the national campaign to eradicate illiteracy. It also attempted to draw on the support of the industrial working class by implementing a number of attractive reforms affecting the existing structures of inequality in income distribution. The royal reforms were followed by attempts to change the form and modality of exercise of political coercion to secure sovereign domination in the country at large. This process which marked the onset of a new phase in rationalisation of power, its institutional structure and public conduct, was interrupted by the advent of royal dictatorship reaching its climax in 1974–1975 when the sudden quadrupling of oil revenue and the

resulting confidence ended the sovereign attempt to restructure the social foundations of sovereign domination.

5. As was noted in Chap. 3, Ghassemlou was understandably reluctant to accept he was still an active member of the Tudeh when he left Iran for Eastern Europe, though did not deny association with and the influence of this organisation on his political and intellectual formation.
6. The SAVAK operation, according to recent research, led to 250 arrests in the Mukrian region. In addition, 200 fled to the Iraqi Kurdistan, mostly joining the ranks of the KDPI. Hussami writing about this issue states the Kurdistan-Mahabad committee had been busy re-establishing the organisational network after the 1953 debacle when it was attacked by the SAVAK (op. cit. 1997).
7. For theoretical discussions of this issue, see Kautsky (1976 op. cit.), Lenin (1967 op. cit.), Chayanov (1966) and Hussain and Tribe (1981 op. cit.).
8. This mode of argument subsequently became central to diverse and competing political analyses informing Marxist positions on the conditions of struggle against the Pahlavi autocracy in the post–land reform period, both non-Kurdish and Kurdish. In the Kurdish case, the arguments were grounded in a general schema of the historical development of Kurdish society derived from Marxist periodisations of Iranian history. The Iranian and Kurdish struggles were tied together by their common form; anti-imperialist national liberation movements with a common pre-capitalist origin and common socialist end. The political upshot of this argument and its theoretical underpinnings are clearly expressed in the statements of strategy which became the hallmark of the radical Marxist discourse after the advent of armed struggle in 1967 in Kurdistan. See, for example, Ali Galawej article in Donya, no. 5 1995, and in a quite different political context, this argument was central to the proceedings of the Second and Third KDPI Congresses (KDPI 1964 and 1973). Such characterisation of the causes and consequences of the land reform was a common feature of the discourse of Marxist-Leninist organisations in the 1960s and 1970s, despite their much-publicised differences on political strategy (see Jazani 1975, 1979; Ahmadzadeh 1970; Pooyan 1970; Javanshir 1980).
9. The Committee for the Reconstruction of the KDPI which had been founded earlier was reactivated to become the focal point of the left opposition in the party. Hussami documents this event, though he does not seem to provide an exact date for the reactivation of the committee and its administration (op. cit. 1997).
10. The bulk of the information on the Committee for the Reconstruction was gathered from the interview with Ghassemlou and various discussions with Hassan Ghazi already cited in this study. On this, see also Hussami (1997 op. cit.).

11. The Second Congress began by reciting the Quran before it was formally inaugurated by Ahmad Towfiq, a clear indication of the traditionalist ethos of his approach to Kurdish nationalism. The above-mentioned interviews and extensive discussions especially with Ghassemlou and Ghazi and recent interview with Salah Mohtadi conducted by Kawe Amin in Rudaw TV in 2014 are the main sources used in this section of the present study https://youtu.be/iCMjOuHkn98 and https://youtu.be/iCMjOuHkn98. They highlight the complexities of the issues dominating the discussions in the Congress especially power struggle in the party, the incorporation of armed struggle in the party programme and its overall radicalisation.
12. The Second Congress of the KDPI took place in the shadow of important national and international events such as the 1953 coup, the revival of the National Front in Iran in the early 1960s, the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the subsequent political and ideological division in the communist bloc, and the triumph of the Algerian and Cuban revolutions. Towfiq tried to exploit these developments in the national and international scene against the left opposition enhancing his standing in the party, and hence his praise for Mosaddeq as the national leader and hero of popular struggle against autocracy, and insistence on the inclusion of the strategy of armed struggle in the party programme. The radical stance of the programme is widely attributed to him, although some believe that in fact it had been written by Sadeq Anjiri, a prominent member of the political bureau who was assassinated in 1969. The circumstances of his assassination remain unknown to date. For documents regarding Towfiq's leadership and his relations with Barzani, see Barzani (2003).
13. In this respect, Ghassemlou and Salahaddin Mohtadi were the prominent figures in the opposition who were expelled by Towfiq. Ghassemlou, discussing the developments in the aftermath of the Second Congress and the attempts by Towfiq to suppress internal dissent and consolidate his position in the KDPI, admitted that he was expelled from the party due to his long-time opposition to Towfiq and his subordination of the KDPI to Barzani. Ghassemlou further elaborated on Towfiq's strategy to cleanse the party from the left laying the blame largely on Barzani's harmful patronage. Mohtadi on the other hand states, in the above-cited interview, that despite increasing deterioration of his relationship with Towfiq, he was not expelled but decided to leave the KDPI in order to form a new political party. He further states that he along with his cousin, Mohammad Elkhanizadeh, attempted to form this party under the name of Komalay Rizgari Kurdistan (KRK) in 1964. The KRK's manifesto, written jointly by them, defined it as an ethnic nationalist organisation committed to the liberation of the Greater Kurdistan. Although the manifesto seems to have reached Iran, the impact on the nationalist political field seems to have

been insignificant, if at all. Hassan Ghazi recalls being invited to a meeting in 1964–1965 in Tehran to establish a branch/committee of the Komalay Rizgari along with Ismail Sharifzade, Sware Elkhanizade, Ahmad Moftizade and a few other interested Kurds residing in Tehran at the time. The participants established the committee which disintegrated before becoming active in the clandestine political field. The disintegration of the Tehran committee of the Komalay Rizgari, Hassan Ghazi further maintains, was followed by mass arrest of political activists in the Kurdish community. Salahaddin Mohtadi returned to Iran in 1965 remaining free for two years before being arrested by the SAVAK in connection with the advent of armed movement by the Revolutionary Committee of the KDPI in 1967.

14. See clause 39, subsection 9, Part 6, of the programme adopted by the Second Congress; see also Hussami (op. cit. 1997, p. 163).

CHAPTER 5

Armed Action in Rojhelat

Armed action in Kurdistan was short-lived, lasting 18 months, from early 1967 to mid-1978. It is widely agreed that armed action against the state was a premature act rather than a calculated political strategy. It lacked a coherent political programme, effective military organisation and logistical support (proceedings of the Third Congress of the KDPI 1973). The decision to take up arms was imposed on the movement by the prevailing conditions of nationalist politics in exile, a fact which also defined its brief existence and unhappy fate. These conditions have also contributed to the ambiguity surrounding the event, its formation, structure and organisation.[1]

The advent of the armed struggle is largely attributed to the Revolutionary Committee of the KDPI. The actual circumstances of the formation of the 7 men Revolutionary Committee of the KDPI, and subsequently 21 men New Revolutionary Committee of the KDPI, are not known. Nor is there an agreement on the identity of their founding members. Some attribute the founding of these organisations to Sulaiman Moeini, who was a leading member of the Revolutionary Committee, but this view was disputed by prominent figures in the leadership of the KDPI, including Ghassemlou.[2] The decision to wage armed action against the regime was not premeditated and cannot as such be attributed to the intentions and aims of a specific subject, individual or collective. Rather, it was defined by the growing conflict in the KDPI after the Second Congress, filtering through the increasingly expanding cycles of power struggle centred on the opposition to Barzani's domination in the KDP in Southern Kurdistan in Iraq.

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Prelude to Armed Struggle

Ahmad Towfiq radicalism, as was pointed out in the previous chapter, was tactical, with a fundamentally conservative ethos. It was precipitated by the developments in the political field in the crucial years leading to the Second Congress. He was acutely aware of the political and organisational pitfalls of his tactical radicalism, but his attempts to curb the rising tide of opposition in the party were less than successful. The political and ideological conditions which directly or indirectly had nurtured and sustained the conservative foundations of his authority within the party and in the Kurdish political scene were now rapidly changing, both in Kurdistan and in Iran at large. The rise of a new Marxist left in Iran increasingly drawn to taking up arms against the state and the subsequent radicalisation of the political field against a background of socio-economic transformation and changing balance of class forces in town and countryside had lent an unprecedented credence to the left opposition to his leadership in the party. The left, in Eastern Europe as well as in Kurdistan, could now draw on a wider field of radical discourse and practice to support its argument. The middle and small landlords in Kurdistan, the erstwhile supporters of Towfiq's leadership and the mainstay of his dormant nationalism in the countryside, were no longer prepared to support his empty rhetoric.

Nor could he rely any longer on the chronic conservatism of the Tudeh leadership to attract the Kurdish members and sympathisers of the new trend and contain their growing radicalism. International communism had been affected by the growing rift between Moscow and Peking, and the communist organisations and movements worldwide were experiencing internal discord and divisions, and the Tudeh Party was no exception to this general rule. Although the Maoist tendencies within the Tudeh were not so strong or widespread as to lead to a serious political and ideological rift in the organisation, the leadership in exile could not remain indifferent to the radicalisation of the political and ideological fields in Iran. In fact, the Tudeh Party, both the leadership and rank and file, remained largely unaffected by the recent developments in international communism, showing little interest in the emergent 'revolutionary Marxism' propagated by Peking. The main differences in the leadership, culminating in the internal power struggle which led to the populist reorientation of the party in the early 1970s, were strategic. They concerned the party's position on the recent developments in the political and ideological fields precipitated by the politics of consolidation of state

power on the one hand and the emergence of the radical left, both secular and religious, challenging the authority of the Pahlavi regime on the other. The political differences aside, the Tudeh leadership was anxious to adopt a more proactive policy within and outside Iran, to dispel the charge of conservatism and partisan inaction which had been levelled at it by its opponents and critics since its defeat and expulsion from the Iranian political scene during 1953–1955, a charge which had currently gained a more powerful resonance against a background of mounting political and ideological radicalism in the opposition, especially the Marxist left which almost invariably defined its revolutionary identity in contrast with the Tudeh revisionism. The Iraqi Kurdistan offered an effective operational field to the Tudeh leadership not only because of its geographical proximity to Iran but also owing to the recent changes in the Iraqi politics and its immediate consequences for the Kurdish-Iraqi relations. The Tudeh leadership was therefore willing to help activate the Kurdish grouping within the party, the bulk of which was closely linked with the left opposition to Towfiq within the KDPI in Iraqi Kurdistan. The new development, though amounting to no more than a positive orientation in the Tudeh leadership, contributed to the political process which enhanced Ghassemlou's return to the centre of KDPI politics in Iraqi Kurdistan culminating in his rise to leadership of the party in the following decade.

But Towfiq still had the support of Barzani, his patron and guide for nearly two decades, who had already proved a formidable operator in the Iranian Kurdish political scene. He had the power and authority to influence the course of the events within the KDPI and help Towfiq out of his predicament in the party. Barzani had always been the main force behind Towfiq's leadership, eager to sanction his personal crusade against the left within the KDPI in exile. He shared Towfiq's disdain for the left and its tendency to privilege reason over tradition and modern party organisation over primordial loyalties. But now in the aftermath of the Second Congress, Barzani not only was prepared to oblige his old protégé but also had a personal stake in crushing the left opposition in the KDPI. The call for armed action against the Pahlavi state, vociferously voiced by the left after 1965, proved detrimental to his rapidly expanding relationship with Iran which formed the cornerstone of his quest for Kurdish regional autonomy in Iraq. The persistence of the military solution practised by successive Iraqi governments had created a major opportunity for the Iranian state to intervene in the Kurdish-Iraqi relations. The military leadership in Baghdad were aware of the strategic role of Iran. That the fate of military

campaigns against the Kurds depended above all on the ability of the Iraqi army to seal the borders with Iran and stop the flow of logistical and military supplies to bolster Barzani's war effort. The Iranian government was happy to oblige, to stop supporting Barzani's campaign but at a cost which the Iraqi leadership was not prepared to pay. Although the Iranian government seemed content to continue to undermine the political and military foundations of the Iraqi state by supporting Barzani, it also wanted to use its power to terminate the organisation of the KDPI in Iraqi Kurdistan which it knew was almost entirely dependent on his political and financial support. It thus began exerting pressure on Barzani to close down the KDPI, put an end to its operations in his domain. The Iranian monarch wanted Barzani to arrest the leadership of the KDPI in Iraqi Kurdistan altogether and deliver them to his security services over the border. Although the KDPI had been too weak and disorganised to challenge the Shah's authority in Kurdistan in any significant way, the destruction of its organisation and leadership in exile would have been another victory for him in his crusade against the Soviet communism and its allies in the region. As far as Barzani's strategic objectives in Iraqi Kurdistan were concerned, sacrificing the KDPI would have been a small price to pay to ensure Iranian support. He could have met the Iranian demand with no qualm, but for some long-term political considerations.

Although Barzani was at the time widely regarded as a national hero, the symbol of Kurdish national resistance against oppression with a mass following in Greater Kurdistan, the foundations of his political authority and legitimacy were still mainly traditional; tribal lineage and heterodox Sunnism, confined largely to Iraqi Kurdistan especially the Badinan region. It was however his appeal to Kurdish ethnicity which had enabled him to extend his authority beyond the narrow confines of Iraqi Kurdistan, especially since his cross-border operations and daunting escape to the Soviet Union in 1947. Kurdish ethnicity as such helped articulate the traditional basis of his authority in wider political and cultural processes across political boundaries in the territory and assign it a nationwide if not a national character. This is because Kurdish ethnicity was also central to the Kurds' self-perception as a divided nation; it was its common and unifying core superseding territorial divisions and political boundaries. This in effect meant that the range and efficacy of Barzani's authority and legitimacy among the Kurds in Greater Kurdistan depended largely on his commitment to the ethnic foundation of the common Kurdish identity and respect for its 'transnational' character, that is, on his ability to supersede

regional and parochial identities and differences in discourse and practice. This conformity/correspondence with the exigencies of Kurdish identity was essential if he was to command authority and claim legitimacy among the Kurds living beyond the political boundaries of Iraqi Kurdistan, especially the urban population of the main Kurdish towns across the Kurdish territory which formed the active core of his constituency of support in the region. But this meant that Barzani's appeal to the common Kurdish ethnicity to extend the basis of his traditional authority and legitimacy across the political boundaries in Kurdistan was contingent upon specific political and cultural conditions; it depended largely on the nature of the political and cultural processes in which it was articulated. He could not, however much he may have wanted, meet the Shah's demand completely: to suppress the KDPI and deliver its leadership to his security forces across the border. This would have undermined his legitimacy as a perceived national leader leading a national movement with nationalist objectives, a perception created by the Kurdish intelligentsia in Greater Kurdistan in tandem with its own self-perception as the vanguard of the struggle against national oppression, thus laying bare his true identity as a traditional Kurdish tribal leader with regional interests leading a regional movement with specifically autonomist objectives. The Kurds in Iran, especially the nationalist intelligentsia, traditional and modern, who had been instrumental in mobilising support for Barzani and his autonomist movement would have to blame themselves for creating a false image, an illusion to fit their own illusions.

Barzani's strategic alliance with the Shah of Iran posed intractable problems for the legitimacy of his claim to represent the national aspiration of the Kurds of Iran. The Kurds of Iran, on the other hand, could hardly underestimate the significance of this alliance to Barzani's movement in Iraq. For them, therefore, the legitimacy of his claim depended not on abandoning the alliance but rather on his ability to maintain a balance between his relation to the Shah on the one hand and the KDPI on the other, to ensure the continuation of the Iranian support without jeopardising the KDPI and its organisation in his domain in the South. But in view of the circumstances, especially the mounting Iranian pressure and the deepening political crisis and factionalism in the KDPI, it was becoming increasingly difficult for Barzani to maintain such a balance. It seemed as if his seemingly boundless pragmatism had eventually encountered its limitations in the ethnic foundations of the fragmented Kurdish identity. Barzani faced a dilemma which was deeply rooted in the geopolitics of the

Kurdish autonomy project, a dilemma resulting from the growing discrepancy between the regional character and the nationalist form of the autonomist movement, the chasm separating the conditions of ethnic identity from those of the national identity in Kurdish politics. The geopolitics of the autonomy project which underpinned Barzani's predicament in the 1960s continued to persist after the failure of his movement in 1975. It became endemic to Kurdish politics throughout Kurdistan in the following decades.[3]

Barzani and the Left Opposition in the KDP

There was, however, another and no less compelling reason for Barzani to respond to the developments in the KDPI, namely, the political crisis in the leadership of the KDP and the emergence of a left-wing opposition to his authority in his own backyard. The crisis was the culmination of a series of increasingly serious disagreements with a number of left-wing personalities in the leadership of the party, notably Ibrahim Ahmad and Jalal Talabani, the general secretary and a member of the political bureau respectively, which surfaced soon after Barzani's return to Kurdistan in early 1959. The long-standing conflict between Barzani and the 'political bureau', as it subsequently came to be known, was, in its various manifestations, a struggle for power and dominance in the Kurdish movement in Iraq. Political power was the driving force and the strategic objective of the conflict which was initially focused on the administration and control of the party organisation. It came to define the configuration of the political forces and relations and the range and limits of their discourse and practice within the Kurdish movement in Iraq, at least since January 1966 when the Ahmad-Talabani front broke away from the KDP to form an active opposition to Barzani and his leadership. The formation of the Ahmad-Talabani opposition led to a division in the leadership of the movement in Iraq which has, in one form or another, persisted to date. The struggle for power and supremacy in the Kurdish movement assumed new dimensions after the 1975 debacle, Barzani's departure from the political scene and the formation of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan led by Talabani in 1978. It has since played a significant role in the political and ideological fields at times defining the boundaries of the Kurdish question and the conditions of its articulation in Iraqi politics, and hence the form and the conditions of the relationship between the contending Kurdish forces and the central government. The power struggle which was

set in motion with Barzani's return to Kurdistan deprived the Kurdish question of its political and discursive unity, undermining its pivotal status in Iraqi politics.

It was above all the momentous popular support for the 1959 autonomy programme of the KDP which had ensured the political and discursive unity of the Kurdish movement, leading to victory over Ghassim's government before the Ba'th coup ended his life in February 1963. The popular support for the movement had clearly enhanced Barzani's standing in Kurdish politics at the expense of the power and prestige of his traditional enemies and modern contenders. The former, hostile tribal chieftains and disgruntled leaders of rival religious orders, had either been marginalised by force or won over by tactical alliances involving attempts to change the fledgling socialist identity of the KDP and reduce the power and operational basis of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP hereafter) in Kurdistan. The latter, the left opposition in the leadership of the party, had been the main target of Barzani's efforts to take over the KDP and remould it after his own image, which meant changing not only its ideological orientation but also its very ethos from the vanguard of the Kurdish movement to an adjunct of a traditional leadership centred on his authority. His initial efforts to oust the Ahmad-Talabani faction and eradicate its base within the KDP were overshadowed by the growing difficulties in his relationship with Ghassim on the one hand and the ICP on the other. The fall of Ghassim's regime now had given him the opportunity to put his house in order, to oust the left from the party and stamp his authority on it. Barzani was prepared to make concessions to the new rulers in Baghdad to achieve this end.

Peace was the precondition for a rapprochement with the new regime in Baghdad. But the Ba'th government lacked political unity and organisational cohesion to make peace with Barzani on its own accord and without the active consent of the Iraqi armed forces. The army held the key to peace and the Ba'th leadership, divided as it was, had a rather tenuous control over the command structure of the army which consisted mainly of nationalists and Nasserites. Aware of the discord and division in the government, Barzani decided to bid his time, awaiting the conclusion of a power struggle which had already extended beyond the narrow confines of the leading apparatuses of the state in Baghdad. Thus when in November 1963 the nationalist officers in the government informed him of their aim to wrest the reins of power from the Ba'th, he did not hesitate to consent. The coup opened the way for rapprochement eagerly awaited by Barzani, culminating in February 1964 in a peace accord with the nationalist

government of Abd al-Salam Arif. The accord was Barzani's concession to Baghdad, rather than a means for the realisation of the 1959 autonomy programme for which the war had been fought. The timing and the contents of the accord signified its tactical nature very clearly, especially in view of the background of a widely expected military victory over a regime seriously weakened by war and internal political strife. The peace accord was a means to a different end.[4]

The February 1964 peace accord was above all an indication of Barzani's hegemony in Kurdish politics. It carried the seal of his personal authority as the leader of the Kurdish movement in Iraq. The KDP and its political bureau had been excluded from the peace process which followed an agenda different to the 1959 autonomy plan. The accord spoke of specific rights and privileges pertaining to the administration of the 'Northern Region' as distinct from other regions of Iraq. But neither the nature of the difference nor its pertinence to the specific rights of the people living in the northern region was specified in the provisions of the peace accord. The peace accord remained conspicuously silent on the issue of Kurdish identity and its geographical locus, Kurdistan. This silence and the omission of Kurdish identity may in the first instance be interpreted as a sign of the increasing power and dominance of the nationalist government and its ability to impose its will on Barzani, to force him to retreat from the stated positions of the KDP on Kurdish autonomy, if not abandon the plan altogether. Such an interpretation, however, overlooks the temporary and tactical nature of Barzani's deal and the precise place of an autonomy plan in the order of his priorities on his political agenda in 1964.[5]

In fact as the fate of the peace accord with the nationalist government and the subsequent events clearly showed, the omissions, silences and ambiguities entailed in the peace accord were above all a sign of Barzani's growing hegemony in the Kurdish political scene, and hence of his ability to make concessions from a position of strength, overlooking immediate political gains in favour of less urgent political issues with long-term effects on the organisation of power and authority in the Kurdish movement. He wanted to use his power and popularity to undermine and marginalise, if not destroy, the left opposition and its main constituency of support, the institutional structure of the KDP, especially the political bureau and the bulk of the middle- and lower-rank party cadres mostly urban based with secondary education, some holding positions of authority and command in the Peshmarga force in the frontline against the Iraqi army. But Barzani's political manoeuvre, however astute in conception, failed to achieve its

intended objectives in practice. It did not destroy or marginalise the left opposition within the movement. Rather it helped dislodge the leadership of the left from the KDP, thus laying the foundation for the emergence of a rival political organisation and splitting the Kurdish movement in Iraq in the following years.[6]

The peace accord could hardly satisfy the left opposition in the political bureau who had fought for Kurdish autonomy specified in the 1959 party programme. But given the circumstances their rejection of the peace accord and opposition to Barzani's leadership only exacerbated their isolation in the political field. The failure of the Sixth Congress of the KDP, held on Ibrahim Ahmad's initiative in April 1964 in Mawat, barely a month after the peace accord, to mobilise opposition to the peace accord testified to this isolation. The left opposition faced a formidable power bloc sealed by the peace agreement between Barzani and the nationalist government bolstered by the active support of the majority of the senior officers in the command structure of the Iraqi army on the one hand and the bulk of the Kurdish landowners and tribal leaders on the other. In the face of such an opposition, the Ahmad-Talabani group had no choice but to retreat; it had to abandon some of their positions within the party organisation in order to avoid direct confrontation with Barzani, who, encouraged by the failure of the Mawat Congress, wanted to wrest the control of the apparatuses of policy and decision making from them. The struggle for the domination of the KDP was already well on the way when Barzani moved to stamp his authority on the party in the Qala Diza Congress in July 1964.

The Qala Diza Congress did not only signify the domination of the organisational structure of the KDP by Barzani but also signify the limitations of his traditional authority in a society which was being progressively gripped by the institutional requirements of modern popular politics. He had clearly won the battle against his opponents in the political bureau and could abolish the primary seat of their power and influence without much ado, if only to pre-empt the emergence of another opposition to the traditional foundations of his authority and legitimacy by the educated townsmen who had formed the overwhelming majority of the party membership since its formation in 1946. But this was an option which he could not afford to follow, for the popular democratic political forces and relations which had been unleashed by the advent of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq required specific representational processes and practices which were historically associated with modern political party, the very conditions

which had precipitated the formation of the KDP in the first place. The change of regime in July 1958 had bolstered their fortunes within the movement considerably, thus enhancing the democratic functions of the KDP and reinforcing its role as the vanguard of a national democratic movement in the political field. The KDP had come to represent the national democratic ethos of the Kurdish movement, its political form and institutional structure in practice, mediating between a tribal leadership and a largely urban-based rank and file both in the civilian and in the military organisations of the movement. It could not be abolished without severing this crucial function on which the leadership's claim to represent the democratic ethos of the movement was based. The KDP was synonymous with the movement.

The KDP was both the source of strength and weakness of Barzani's traditional leadership. On the one hand, it gave democratic legitimacy to his authoritarian leadership which, given the political and ideological claims of the movement, was crucial to his authority. On the other hand, it militated against the arbitrary character of his authority and the traditional processes and practices he deployed to exercise his authority over it which effectively bypassed the formal channels of policy and decision making in the party. But all in all, the ideological role of the KDP and its legitimation functions weighted heavily against its potentially disruptive political functions. Barzani needed to sustain and promote this ideological function of the KDP, especially in view of the predominantly urban social structure and cultural formation of the movement and the potential threats which they posed to his hegemony in the Kurdish political scene. It was a necessary evil, and it had to be maintained but under his strict personal control, as an instrument of his authority geared to serve the aims and objectives of his leadership, which in effect meant a thorough overhaul and restructuring of the party and redefinition of its status in the political field. The purges and organisational changes which followed the Qala Diza Congress ensured Barzani's dominance over the party. The KDP survived the vicissitude of power struggle in the political field but only at the cost of undergoing a radical transformation altering its role in Kurdish politics in Iraq. It lost its discursive and institutional autonomy as an institution of political representation becoming an adjunct of Barzani's authority providing institutional and ideological support for his leadership.[7]

The Qala Diza Congress also marked the end of the Arif-Barzani peace accord, all the more emphasising its tactical nature as a de facto anti-KDP alliance designed to isolate and expel the left opposition from the party.

The extensive purge of the central committee had undermined Ibrahim Ahmad's constituency of support in the leading apparatuses of the party while Talabani and his loyal peshmargas had been pushed over the border to Iran. The alliance had achieved its principal objective and the peace accord lost its reason to exist. Barzani thus moved to radicalise the political field and escalate the conflict by renewing his demand for Kurdish autonomy. The growing rift in the ruling clique in Baghdad and agitation by the restive nationalist officers made it easy for Barzani to change course and wear the mantle of the opposition. The struggle for autonomy was a popular and highly emotive cause for the bulk of the educated young Kurds whose growing awareness of their national rights ensured extensive mobilisation and participation. The resumption of the war in May 1965 gave a new twist to the power struggle in the Kurdish movement, shifting the foci of the conflict from the organisational framework of the KDP to the Kurdish political field at large.

The unceremonious return of Ahmad and Talabani to the ranks of the KDP at the onset of the hostilities, though at the time widely perceived as a patriotic act by their followers, had other and more compelling political reasons. They both believed that the role of the KDP as a modern political party, and hence of a left opposition within it, will radically change in an autonomous Kurdistan. The party will regain its discursive and political initiative as an organ of popular political representation, if it is allowed to play a leading role in the administration of the autonomous Kurdistan. The active popular participation in the political process, envisaged by the autonomy programme, could ensure a rapid revival of the representative functions of the KDP, thus enabling them to wrest it from the crippling dominance of Barzani and the closed circle of his trustees in the party. This modernist argument was further supported by a partisan observation of the major developments in the political field concerning Barzani's external relations—that is, his growing distance from the USSR, which had now turned into an active opposition to communism, and his increasing reliance on Iran which had become the linchpin of his changing relationship with Baghdad. These trends, they thought, would contribute to the further marginalisation of the ICP in the Kurdish political field, a welcome development enhancing their attempts to reoccupy positions of power and influence in the Barzani-dominated KDP.

The strategic relationship with Iran was in the heart of Ahmad's and Talabani's decision to rejoin Barzani's KDP. They had initiated and fostered this relationship earlier on when they held leading posts in the political

bureau, and now wanted to use it to their own advantage, to strengthen their positions vis-à-vis Barzani who had become increasingly dependent on it. While in exile in Iran Talabani seems to have tried to cultivate a direct working relationship with the Iranian authorities to present himself as a more willing and reliable alternative to Barzani. The Iranian authorities, on the other hand, were not quite willing to jeopardise their increasingly cordial relationship with Barzani, the dominant figure in the movement, who had defied the Soviet Union and was actively seeking support from the West, especially the United States. For them the ethnic identity of the Kurdish movement in Iraq and the traditional-tribal ethos of Barzani's leadership were intertwined, at least in so far as the parochial nature of their strategic aims and objectives were concerned. Barzani leadership therefore ensured the continuation of an order which was best suited to the Iranian policy objectives: to promote the destabilising effects of the Kurdish movement on the Iraqi politics while containing its transnational impact destabilising Kurdish communities in the neighbouring countries. The Iranian government continued to support Barzani and bolster his fortunes in the Kurdish movement, but without severing contacts with the opposition within the KDP. The relationship with the opposition was overshadowed by the exigencies of an increasingly close cooperation with Barzani. The Iranian government, therefore, acknowledged the Ahmad-Talabani opposition and its political potential within the Kurdish movement. It maintained contact with Talabani but without registering or encouraging his opposition to Barzani's authority within the movement, a policy which clearly fell far short of his expectations.[8]

The return of the left opposition to the ranks of the KDP was short-lived. The uneasy truce with Barzani ended in a bitter conflict leading to a decisive split in January 1966. The split, which soon developed into open hostility, was the beginning of a new era in Kurdish politics in Iraq marked by the bifurcation of authority and leadership. The Kurdish movement in Iraq had lost its structural cohesion and political unity for a long time to come. The Ahmad-Talabani opposition, regrouped in a new organisation called the True KDP, joined forces with the government of Salam Arif who had opted for the military solution proposed by the bulk of the powerful officers in the ruling alliance. An earlier attempt by the premier Al-Bazzaz to find a political solution for the Kurdish conflict had been dashed by the military in the government who now controlled the cabinet. The military government in Baghdad armed and financed the Ahmad-Talabani opposition against Barzani in the hope of undermining his war effort which thus

far had proved unassailable. But this alliance had only strengthened Barzani's resolve to fight which in effect meant increasing political and military reliance on Iran. By the middle of April, when Salam Arif suddenly departed from the scene and was replaced by his brother, Abdul Rahman, the Iranian government was already providing full logistical support for Barzani's movement. Iranian support had become indispensable to his survival. Barzani seems to have been aware, perhaps better than anyone else in his administration, of the potential pitfalls of this dependency. He was nonetheless prepared to play the 'Iranian card' in an increasingly dangerous political game in which the logistics of military power decided the outcome.

The logistics of military power and hence Iranian support became essential to the maintenance of Barzani's authority as the older Arif defied Bazzaz's calls for a political solution to the conflict. Abdul Rahman Arif was the compromise candidate of a ruling alliance in which the nationalist officers held the dominant position. He thus insisted on the continuation of the war in order to please the military leadership and consolidate his power base in the alliance. But it was once again the logistics of military power rather than the political will of the nationalist officers which defined the limits of the military solution. The June 1966 autonomy proposal, which brought the war to a halt, was not an indication of Bazzaz's triumph over the military in the government. Rather, it signified the failure of the army to meet the logistics of a military campaign which was being increasingly determined from the outside: the Iranian and, later on, Israeli interventions in the war had redefined the limits of the military solution to the Kurdish question in Iraq. The nationalist officers, having recognised this, had consented to Bazzaz's autonomy proposal, but only temporarily. They wanted to continue the war not only to avert the increasingly public notion of a military defeat in the hands of the rebellious Kurds, precipitated by Bazzaz's political compromise, but also to consolidate their position in the government, occupy positions of power and dominate the political process. The resumption of the war soon after Bazzaz's forced resignation in early August signalled the supremacy of the military in the state; they controlled the political process.[9]

The formation of the Ahmad-Talabani front and consequent bifurcation of political authority in the Kurdish movement in early 1966 seems to have been an important factor in Naji Talib's decision to resume the war. The emergence of an armed opposition to Barzani, ready to cooperate with the government, had undoubtedly strengthened the position of the

nationalist officers in the government. But reversion to the war proved disastrous. It created a military stalemate which was to continue for nearly a decade. The Iranian intervention had altered the logistics of the military power and hence the conditions of military action against the Kurds. The Iraqi army, the principal actor in the political scene, was unable to win the war and unwilling to make peace. Barzani, on the other hand, was able to continue the war against major odds and without any military compulsion to modify his political stance on Kurdish autonomy. The resulting military stalemate had significant effects on the political process, seriously undermining the possibility of a workable political solution. In this sense, therefore, the stalemate had created the political and military conditions of its own self-perpetuation: the Iraqi government's pursuit of military solution and Barzani's recourse to external military and political assistance were mutually interdependent.[10]

This mutual interdependence defined the parameters of a political conjuncture in which the Iraqi and the Iranian governments were the principal actors. The relationship between the two governments determined the logistics of Barzani's military power, and hence the material foundation of his political authority in the movement. It also played a decisive role in defining the nature and the modality of the development of his relationship with the left opposition in the Kurdish movements both in Iraq and in Iran. Although opposition to Barzani and his authority formed a potentially fertile ground for political alliance and cooperation between the Ahmad-Talabani front and the growing number of left-wing dissidents in the KDPI, their active participation in such an alliance depended on a number of political and ideological factors, especially their relationship to the Iranian and Iraqi governments. Barzani had been assured of his paramount position by the Iranian authorities, but he feared Talabani may now use his position in Baghdad to instigate Iraqi support for the recently formed Revolutionary Committee of the KDPI. The prospect of armed guerrilla bands operating across the border, conducting raids on the Iranian military installations behind his supply lines, though daunting was not difficult to contemplate. The Second Congress of the KDPI had already sanctioned armed action against the Iranian regime and Ahmad Towfiq's waning authority was hardly an effective deterrent against the rising enthusiasm for a strategy with an increasingly strong appeal among the new left in the region and in the international communist arena at large. Barzani, it seemed, had more than just a personal interest in helping Towfiq maintain the status quo in the KDPI. The containment of Marxist

dissent and the eradication of armed resistance in the organisation were central to the constellation of internal and external forces and relations which sustained his authority in the wider political field and beyond the immediate reach of tribal lineage and religious affinities.

Although the general contours of Barzani's assessment of the internal developments within the KDPI and their implications for his strategic relationship with Iran were by and large accurate, his fear of the imminent formation of a large-scale armed movement in the Iranian Kurdistan was vastly exaggerated, exhibiting a kind of political paranoia which was characteristic of Towfiq's approach to the Marxist left in the party. It was this fear that prompted him to give an ultimatum to the KDPI in order to curb the rising tide of radicalism in the organisation and subvert the idea of armed action which had gained ground among the left. The leadership of the KDPI thus was told in no ambiguous terms that they should abandon their bases in Iraqi Kurdistan and return home if they were to engage in armed action against the Iranian regime across the border. But should they decide to retain their bases in Iraqi Kurdistan, they must abandon the strategy of armed action in Iranian territory altogether. The crux of Barzani's ultimatum was not to emasculate or gag the KDPI but to terminate its autonomous existence as a political organisation. He wanted to assimilate it in the organisational structure of the KDP which had been thoroughly purged of dissent and opposition to his authority and shaped into an instrument of his will. The plight of the left in the KDPI could only assure Barzani that his ultimatum will be heeded. They were well aware that they could not survive state repression without an operational base in Iraqi Kurdistan, should they decided to burn their bridges and embark on armed action against the Pahlavi regime. The apparent threat of armed action had provided a practical solution to Barzani's dilemma, a means to meet the Iranian demand without undermining the legitimacy of his movement across the border. But this was not to be.

Armed Action

Barzani's ultimatum which was meant as a pre-emptive measure only produced the opposite effect; it created an atmosphere of intense uncertainty and fear within the KDPI which propelled the radical elements of the left into premature armed action. The advent of armed struggle in Kurdistan marked the onset of a new trend in the opposition to the Pahlavi autocracy which was soon to dominate the discourse and practice of the radical left

in Iran, both Marxist and Islamist, in the fateful decade that preceded the revolution. This pioneering movement, short-lived as it was, lacked the populist subjectivism characteristic of the mainly urban guerrilla movements which subsequently sprang up in other parts of Iran. For unlike those movements it was not predicated on the necessity of armed action as both the means and the conditions of its existence and survival, that is, the subject and object of the revolutionary process under the Pahlavi repression. Rather, it resulted from political circumstances governing the virtual disintegration of a major regional political party with a significant popular following, which had already adopted a strategy of armed action in its programme. The strategy, as was seen, was precipitated by the socio-economic impact of the agrarian reform on the Kurdish countryside, and identified Kurdish peasantry as the fundamental social class and the subject of the revolutionary armed struggle. In other words, the party programme envisaged a process of organisational work, political education and agitation to precede the revolutionary armed struggle of the peasantry. Theoretically, at least, the strategy of armed struggle was predicated on this process and presupposed it. It was the means rather than the condition of the perceived revolutionary struggle which were to derive from the objective conditions of the existence of the Kurdish peasantry.

The theoretical emphasis on the revolutionary struggle of the Kurdish peasantry, on the other hand, has been the source of a popular misconception about the ideological orientation of the guerrilla movement in Kurdistan. This misconception, common among the Iranian left, identifies the guerrilla movement and its leading proponents with Maoism. Although Maoism was an influential ideological trend on the left, it was by no means a defining ideological force among the heterogeneous body of political activists who formed the armed movement. The bulk of these activists originated from the Revolutionary Committee of the KDPI, which had been formed in 1965 in opposition to Towfiq's leadership. They were still largely associated with the leading figures in the Tudeh leadership in exile, especially the prominent members of the Kurdish grouping within it, and deeply imbued with their interpretation of Marxism which had little in common with Mao and his representation of revolutionary Marxism in the 1960s. The political activists who had mainly stood on the left of the Revolutionary Committee now occupied the widening political and ideological space created by the growing discrepancy between the radical discourse of the Second Congress and the conservative practice of Towfiq. This increasingly radical political and ideological space, though susceptible

to intervention, manipulation and domination by Maoism, remained in the expanding domain of the pro-Tudeh and Soviet-Marxist influence, owing mainly to the political weakness and organisational infancy of Maoism in Kurdistan and Iran at large.

Furthermore, the fortunes of the Kurdish grouping within the Tudeh Party had improved due mainly to the recent changes in the orientation of the party towards the Kurdish question. The party programme adopted by the Third Congress in 1966 emphasised the 'necessity to eradicate national oppression' and hence recognised the 'rights of the peoples of Iran to national self-determination'.[11] This new orientation, which represented the most radical statement of the Tudeh's position on the national question since its Second Congress in 1948, signified the ascendency of the more moderate elements in the leadership of the party who were willing to depart from the established orthodoxy. The joint Radmanesh-Revolutionary Committee statement in Baghdad was the culmination of the new orientation in the Tudeh leadership. The joint statement entailed two major resolutions: first, it recognised the peculiarities of the Kurdish national struggle in Iran, thus reiterating the primacy of the Kurdish peasantry as the driving force of the national liberation movement in Kurdistan; second, it emphasised the general national democratic and anti-imperialist character of the Kurdish movement, hence linking it inseparably to the democratic struggle of the Iranian peoples against imperialism and Pahlavi dictatorship. Although the Radmanesh-Revolutionary Committee statement was never adopted by the Tudeh Party, its resolution regarding the specificity of the struggle in Kurdistan, especially its emphasis on the revolutionary role of the Kurdish peasantry and the legitimacy of the armed action, had a considerable impact on the fortunes of the radical left in the KDPI, for it clearly supported the radical resolutions of the Second Congress which had so clearly pitted them against the conservative bloc of Barzani and Towfiq in the struggle for the soul of the party. The developments in the Tudeh leadership and subsequent radicalisation of the Kurdish grouping within the party did not only pave the way for Ghassemlou's rather swift ascendency, but also pre-empted the formation of a Maoist faction within the KDPI. The protagonists of the armed struggle were not Maoists; their glorification of the revolutionary zeal of Kurdish peasantry was a conviction which was not matched by a comparable devotion to Peking, in discourse or practice. They were above all political activists who aspired to more radical interpretations of Soviet Marxism which was beginning to take root among the radical elements on

the left of the KDPI who rose to take over the leadership of the party in the following decade.[12]

The armed movement in Kurdistan had already started when Sulaiman Moeini, Mohamad Amin Seraji and Karim Hussami representing the Revolutionary Committee of the KDPI met with the Tudeh Party represented by Radmanesh and Ghassemlou in Baghdad.[13] It was, as was indicated above, premature and miscalculated. It was precipitated by the prevailing political circumstances rather than a premeditated political strategy. This, more than any other factor, accounted for its profound political and military weakness. But it was not the political and ideological weakness of the movement which sealed its fate; there were other and more important reasons which critically enhanced the impact of government's calculated overreaction to the movement. Despite its avowedly military character, the movement lacked operational initiative in the military field. Its initial offensive thrust across the border, announcing its presence in the Kurdish territory in Iran, soon gave way to a series of defensive battles for survival. This defensive ethos did not only define the outcome of its fateful encounters with the Iranian army but also its relationship to the social forces in the Kurdish countryside in the course of its brief existence. The relationship to the rural social classes, especially the differentiated mass of the Kurdish peasantry, proved particularly crucial to the continuation of the armed movement, both in political and economic terms. In political terms, the survival of the movement depended on its ability to mobilise the Kurdish peasants and recruit from their ranks, especially the mass of the poor peasants and the landless labourers who dominated the countryside. In economic terms, however, the middle and rich peasants held the key to the survival of the armed movement which depended entirely on local support and resources.[14]

Although Kurdish peasantry, especially the middle and the rich peasants, were initially rather well disposed towards the fledgling armed movement and did not deny it logistical support, their economic capacity to provide for it in the long run depended primarily on the level of the economic surplus available to their households. The predominance of landlord capitalism, which effectively impaired the involvement of the middle peasants in commodity relations, left the peasant households with little, if no, economic surplus over and above their subsistence. The middle peasants, who were being progressively squeezed out of their plots by both the enterprising landlords and the rich peasants, could not therefore provide for the armed movement without effectively undermining their own

subsistence. An active involvement in the provision of logistical support for the armed movement would clearly encroach upon the reproduction of their households, making it increasingly difficult to retain the ownership over their plots, particularly in the face of the fierce competition for the agricultural land unleashed by the second phase of the land reform in Kurdistan. The exigencies of the struggle for the land, which defined the fundamental configuration of the political forces and relations in the Kurdish countryside in the aftermath of the land reform, also underpinned the position of the middle peasant households towards the strategy of armed action in general. Little wonder, therefore, if the middle peasants showed a clear reluctance to get involved in the complex process of the logistics of the armed struggle. Nor did they heed the call to take part in the mobilisation of support to bolster its fledgling ranks when it came under heavy attack by the government forces in the summer of 1967.

The rich peasants who were better equipped to aid the armed movement were fewer in number and more conservative in outlook. Although those with more pronounced nationalist leanings had traditionally supported the KDPI's fledgling clandestine organisation in the countryside, they now seemed less enthusiastic to commit themselves to the revolutionary cause of a small band of left-wing guerrilla fighters at war with the central government. Their perception of Kurdish national identity was essentially primordial, whose popular political renditions remained entirely closed to the class rhetoric of the armed movement seeking support from the amorphous mass of the poor and landless peasants who formed the bulk of the agricultural wage labourers working on their lands. Ideological considerations aside, the fear of government reprisal, intensified by the massive deployment of military power in the region, was the major deterrent, clearly undermining the nationalist enthusiasm of the willing and the able among the rich peasants. Government reprisal could have also provided the Kurdish landlords with the long-awaited opportunity to move against the peasant owners, evict the dissenting households and repossess their lands for aiding the armed movement, and hence regain some of their lost privileges. The memories of the bloody repression, evictions and exiles which descended on the countryside in the wake of the state-landlord suppression of the Mukrian risings were still fresh in the minds of the majority of the Kurdish peasants. It struck terror in their hearts.

Nor did the amorphous mass of poor peasants and landless labourers, who historically formed the bulk of the rural inhabitants in Kurdistan, show much enthusiasm for an armed movement confined to a small band

of ill-equipped guerrillas fighting for their survival. The ideological rhetoric of the movement, promising liberation from the twin evils of capitalist-landlord exploitation and imperialist domination of the masses, did not appeal to the poor peasants and landless labourers, largely because it was not enforced by an organised political force capable of challenging the military might of the state in the region. Although the avowed political and military weakness of the movement and its total dependence on the local logistical support were important reasons for its failure to mobilise the bulk of the poor and landless peasants in support of its cause, there was another and more general reason. The land reform of 1962 had, despite its conservative ethos, altered the major parameters of political discourse and practice in the countryside. The change in the direction of the reform, the attempt to promote and consolidate landlord capitalism by the Pahlavi regime after 1965, slowed down the process of the social differentiation of the Kurdish peasantry but did not change the general political orientation of the peasants significantly. The bulk of the Kurdish peasants who had been affected by the proliferation of peasant ownership and commodity production, directly or through their involvement in the provision of the wage labour and, to much lesser extent, working capital, still largely looked to the state for support. The state was still being viewed as an ally, though an increasingly reluctant one, against the landlords in the shrinking field of struggle for agricultural land and capital. The forms of economic poverty, social dislocation and political discontent, leading to waves of peasant migration to towns in the mid-1970s, were not yet widespread in the Kurdish countryside. The rapid process of the consolidation of landlord capitalism and the correlative slow rate of social differentiation among the peasants had not created the social and economic space for radical political discourse and practice among the mass of the Kurdish peasantry. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that in the late 1960s when the armed movement began, the bulk of the dispossessed landlords and tribal leaders whose private holdings had been redistributed among their peasants and tenant farmers in the first phase of the land reform, along with the landless peasants/agricultural labourers, were the only significant sector of the rural population who genuinely opposed the status quo in the countryside. But despite their opposition to the regime, the disgruntled landlords and tribal leaders could hardly support the class discourse of the armed movement calling for a more radical programme of land redistribution ending the reign of private ownership and the class exploitation.

The armed movement in Kurdistan was short-lived. It was crushed in the summer of 1969 in a series of sporadic confrontations with the military forces of the Pahlavi state, before gaining ground in the countryside. The political impact of the movement was nevertheless immediate and far-reaching, superseding its brief and torturous existence in the military field. It soon became a landmark in the national memory of the Kurds, another summit on the landscape of resistance to national oppression, evoking raw emotion and political passion in the community which overwhelmingly identified with it. The tragic fate of the movement, the sheer absurdity of its political project and the striking immaturity of its confused leadership were all noted by the people, but almost always in a tone of admiration rather than criticism or disavowal. The political immaturity and military weakness of the movement were held to account not only for the failure of the movement but also the nationalist zeal and courage of its members embarking on armed action against all the odds. The ideological formation of the leadership, the self-professed Marxism of its leading figures, however, was largely played down, if not totally ignored, in the popular political discourse which emphasised its nationalist credentials to the exclusion of all else. The popular political perception of the movement was unambiguously nationalist; it was perceived as the latest phase in the historical process of Kurdish nationalist struggle for the recognition of their identity and rights.

In the Kurdish political field, however, the situation was quite different. Here, it was the Marxist stance and the radical credentials of the nonconformist members in the leadership of the movement rather than its nationalist identity which proved decisive. Their action, however unsuccessful and tragic, had enhanced the fortunes of the Marxist left in the party giving an added impetus to its disunited opposition to Towfiq's authority in the party. The left could now intensify its struggle to depose him and his supporters in the party organisation without risking Barzani's wrath and retaliation. The course of the events in Kurdistan had begun to undermine the conservative foundations of Barzani-Towfiq patron-client relationship, leaving the latter without a protective shield against the rising threat of the left. The increasing popular support for the armed movement which had openly defied Barzani's authority was, in effect, a stark rejection of the legitimacy of Towfiq's leadership of the KDPI. The quest to restore the political and organisational autonomy of the party, to detach it from the exigencies of Barzani's relationship with the Iranian government was becoming increasingly audible in influential political circles in Iranian

Kurdistan. It could hardly be ignored by a leadership whose authority was being challenged from within. Perhaps it was for the first time in the course of his leadership that Towfiq felt the need to distance himself from Barzani. It was his flirtation with the anti-Barzani opposition, namely, the ICP and Talabani, which left him unprotected. His old patron and political mentor was now his main enemy driving him out of his sanctuary into the arms of the Ba'th in Baghdad. When he eventually disappeared in 1972, while still in the protective custody of the Ba'th, the Marxist left had already taken over the party. Towfiq's primaeval nationalism, however, survived his leadership, becoming the stuff of disputes and controversies which were to rage among the contending forces of the left in the leadership of the KDPI in the decades to come.

Notes

1. Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (Iran) September 1973.
2. Ghassemlou and Ghazi disputed this view in their accounts of the formation and development of the armed struggle in Rojhelat. Sulaiman and Abdullah Moeini joined the committee after it had been founded, they both maintained. The common view, however, is that the Revolutionary Committee was formed in response to the developments in the Kurdish politics in Iraq, namely, the increasing political and military cooperation between the KDP and the Iranian government and the latter's influence on the process of policy and decision making in the leadership of the Kurdish movement at the time. This meant increasing pressure was brought to bear on the KDPI, specially its chairman Ahmad Towfiq, to marginalise if not expel the radical elements, in particular those with a standing and following in the party, who were, in the aftermath of the Second Congress, agitating for armed action against the monarchist regime in Iran. Sulaiman Moeini's arrest by the KDP and his summary execution on Barzani's direct order should be seen in this context. His growing stature among the radical elements in the party who were opposed to Towfiq's leadership and disliked his subservience to Barzani was further enhanced by his attempts to unite the left within and outside the KDPI in Iraqi, and form a broad political front with the Iranian left, especially the Tudeh Party led by Reza Radmanesh in 1967.
3. In a wider political context this development and the shift in Soviet policy is centred on the formation of a working alliance between the Kurds and the Iraqi communists to form a block against the Iraqi regime which, though not as harsh as its predecessor, the first Ba'th government, still

insisted on persecuting the Iraqi Communist Party members in the state apparatuses and in society at large (Farouk-Slugglet 1990; Tripp 2000; Batatu 1978). The well-known meeting in Baghdad between Radmanesh and Ghassemlou representing the Tudeh Party and Sulaiman Moeini and Mohammad Amin Seraji representing the Revolutionary Committee in Baghdad should also be seen in this context.

4. See sources cited in note 3.
5. Ibid.
6. This however is not to say that the left opposition was the passive spectator of the political scene which was being single-handedly manipulated by Barzani. On the contrary, they were active contributors to the political processes which led to the 1966 split and the formation of the PUK in the following decade. The conflict had already come to head before the peace accord; see Batatu (op. cit. 1978), Tripp (op. cit. 2000), Farouk-Slugglet (op. cit. 1990), Jwaideh (op. cit. 2006) and McDowall (op. cit. 1996).
7. It should be noted that this turbulent episode was followed by attempts to reconstruct the KDP starting with the formation of the National Council for the Direction of Revolution followed by the purging of the central committee, and the transformation of its social composition including the deployment of the ex-ICP members to replace the departed. It is interesting to note that these measures, politically important as they were, did little to fill the gap in the structure of domination in the KDP, that is, the distance between the tribal leadership and the predominantly urban rank and file and executive staff with modern education and a rudimentary democratic political culture. The gap continued to persist after the reconstruction albeit in a different form; see Batatu (op. cit. 1978), Tripp (op. cit. 2000) and McDowall op. cit. 1996).
8. There is a view that Talabani and his associates were dislodged from Iran due to the pressure exerted on the Iranian government by Barzani, and hence their return to the KDP; see, for example, McDowall (op. cit. 1996). Given the increasingly close relationship between Barzani and the Iranian government such an opinion does not seem to be unfounded, although in my view the main reason for their return lay mainly in the course and direction of the development in Kurdish movement in Iraq and also the fact that Talabani had not been able to make a clear and decisive break from the KDP and was still emotionally tied to the movement and its history. Fereidoun Qaradaghi, Talabani's personal secretary when he held the office of the president of Iraq, recalls a private conversation with him whereby Talabani tells him about his complex and very confused feelings regarding his decision to break away from the KDP. According to Qaradaghi, Talabani had been overcome by a strong feeling of regret and deep sense of sorrow when he and his associates crossed the border to Iran.

He told Qaradaghi he paused and wept remembering his life and times in the KDP (conversation with Qaradaghi, December 2013 in Beirut).

9. For details of the 12-point autonomy proposal, see Batatu (op. cit. 1978). McDowall refers to it as 15-point autonomy proposal (op. cit. 1993).
10. Two factors helped break this cycle: first, the signing of the 15-year friendship treaty with the USSR in 1972 which ensured military supplies to the Iraqi army, and second, the Algiers Agreement of March 1975 with Iran which resulted in the exclusion of Iran from of the scene. The 1975 debacle and the acceptance of defeat by Barzani ended the stalemate.
11. The Tudeh Party of Iran, Party Programme, p. 29, 1966.
12. The wider political context of the Baghdad meeting was explained in note 3. The initiative, it is said, came from the Iraqi Communist Party in late 1967/early 1968, contacting Sulaiman Moeini, Muhammad Amin Seraji and Karim Hussami, prominent members of the Revolutionary Committee, and asking them to travel to Baghdad secretly to meet with Reza Radmanesh and Abdulrahman Ghassemlou. This meeting took place in early February 1968, resulting in an accord between the Tudeh Party represented by Radmanesh and the Revolutionary Committee of the KDPI represented by Sulaiman Moeini, Muhammad Amin Seraji and Karim Hussami. They resolved to work together for the destruction of the Pahlavi monarchy and its replacement by a democratic republic ensuring the Kurds rights to an autonomous regional administration. Although the accord is often referred to as the Radmanesh-Ghassemlou Accord, the existing evidence casts doubt on this perception. Ghassemlou, the evidence suggests, did not represent the KDPI. He was part of the Tudeh delegation headed by its secretary general Radmanesh. The meeting, the accord and the related resolutions have been discussed in detail in Hussami's memories Vol. 3. Stockholm 1988, pp. 94–97.
13. The Revolutionary Committee had already started armed action in the Kurdish territory against the Iranian state, and Sulaiman Moeini on the way to join his comrades on the border was arrested by Barzani's peshmarga and sent to his headquarters in Dilman. He was charged with aiding and abating the Ahmad-Talabani break-away forces as well as working for the Iraqi government and was executed on Barzani's direct order. His body was handed over to the Iranian government as a proof of Barzani's loyalty to the Iranian regime. Given his reputation and standing in the Kurdish movement on both sides of the border, Moeini's body was a priceless offering. It was put on public display; tied to a ladder, it was driven around the town of Piranshahr to assert the brutal fate of a revered Kurdish rebel and the permanence of sovereign domination. The spectacle of Moeini's bullet-ridden body induced more than fear and submission in the mind of the Kurdish spectators; it also inscribed forcefully in the collective memory of

the Kurds the painful reality of Kurdish treason, of an identity fragmented by politics and power breading primordial loyalties and parochial interests. Barzani's treason became a landmark in the tormented memory of the Kurds in Rojhelat, a cause of Kurdish humiliation and shame for decades to come. This account draws on a discussion of this event and related developments in the Kurdish movement in exile leading to the advent of armed action in Iranian Kurdistan with Hassan Ghazi and a former member of the central committee of the KDPI who wished to remain anonymous. A detailed eye witness account is provided by Muhammad Khizri; A short Biography and Remembering Moeinis, published online with no date. See also Kurosh Lashaie's and Iraj Kashkouli's accounts of these events in discussion with Hamid Shoukat (Shoukat, 1382/2003 and Shoukat 1380/2001). I am grateful to Hassan Ghazi for sending me print copies of Khizri's and Shoukat's texts. Barzani's direct involvement in Sulaiman Moeini's execution is also documented in a recent book published by the Institute of Political Research of the Islamic Republic about the history of the KDPI (Naderi 1394/2015). The defamation of the KDPI and rejection of its legitimacy to represent the Kurds of Rojhelat define the ethos of Naderi's book.

14. The Kurdish landowning class had lost its political cohesion after the land reform. Kurdish landlords responded differently to the armed action in the countryside, taking up different positions. Some disaffected landlords with serious economic and political grievances resulting from the implementation of the land reform showed guarded sympathy for the armed movement, albeit privately, especially in the Mukrian region. A few Gewirk and Dehbokri aghas were arrested by the state security allegedly for aiding the guerrillas, hosting and providing logistical support. Majority of the landlords remained cautiously indifferent, though in private were quite worried about the outcome. There were, to my knowledge, no cases of collaboration with the state, and fighting was largely carried out by the gendarmerie force with the help of the army units under the command of General Owaissi.

CHAPTER 6

The Rise of the Left and the Search for a New Identity

The Third Congress of the KDPI, held on 22 September 1973 in Baghdad, signified the triumph of the Marxist left in the party.[1] It was the culmination of a process of power struggle which began in the early 1950s in the town of Mahabad in Mukrian and continued throughout the 1960s in the organisation of the KDPI in exile in Iraqi Kurdistan and the countries of the Soviet bloc, especially Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The contending forces, the Marxist-nationalists and the 'traditional-nationalists',[2] formed the two poles of a political and ideological spectrum whose shifting boundaries were defined by the relations of force in the wider political and discursive fields in which it was located. These wider political and discursive fields were not just frameworks of reference for the Marxist left and their traditional ethnic nationalist adversaries but also the changing contexts of their oppositional relationships to the party organisation and in the political scene at large. While the Pahlavi state and the gamut of political and cultural apparatuses at its disposal were the invariants of the wider political and discursive fields, the articulation of the Marxist and ethnic collectivist discourses and practices involved other political and ideological forces and relations. The Tudeh Party and Barzani's KDP, as was seen, were the two most important political and ideological forces defining the formation and development of the Marxist and the ethnic nationalist positions in the KDPI. They remained decisive influences not only on the competing constructions of

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Kurdish nation and national identity in the discourse of the KDPI but also on the different strategies of action proposed or pursued by the contending forces in the leadership of the party throughout this period.

The Consolidation of the Regional Autonomy Project

The Marxist left and the traditional ethnic nationalists were both territorial autonomist, demanding regional administrative and cultural autonomy for the Kurds in the juridico-political framework of Iranian sovereignty. But despite their autonomist political programme, they extensively used modern nationalist modes of legitimation of political action: repeatedly invoking the notion of Kurdish nation as the uniform sources of political authority in order to legitimise their discourse and practice. The discourse and practice of the Kurdish Republic provided the point of reference for the Marxist left and the traditional nationalists who laid claim to its legacy to justify their respective positions often with relative ease, for the ambiguities of the Republican discourse on political authority and legitimacy provided a fertile ground for such diverse interpretations often helping to conceal the incoherency of the Marxist and traditional nationalist discourses and the inconsistency of their political positions.[3] The emotive use of terms and symbols associated with the Republican legacy and repeated invocation of the memories of struggle against national oppression and the culture of martyrdom were the fundamentals of the public representation of the party policy and programme, invariants of its public claim to legitimacy in the conditions of exile and isolation from its constituency of support. But Ahmad Towfiq's association with the suppression of the armed movement had broken this causal link that existed in the national memory between the Republican legacy and discourse and practice of the traditional ethnic nationalist leadership of the KDPI. The traditional ethnic nationalist leadership had lost the basis of its claim to the Republican legacy considerably. They were defenceless against the Marxist left who claimed the armed movement and used its immense popularity to legitimise their own rise to power in the party.

Towfiq's departure from the political scene marked the decline of traditional nationalists as a political force in the organisational structure of the KDPI and in the community at large. His followers nonetheless remained within the party organisation, but only as an informal network of middle- and lower-rank activists lacking political clout and organisational cohesion.

This was in part due to the deterioration of their relationship with Barzani, which had effectively deprived them of a major source of political and financial support, thus helping undermine their status in the party hierarchy. In fact, the loss of Barzani's patronage was a serious blow to the fortunes of traditional nationalists in the party, for Barzani had been more than a mere patron in the conventional sense of the term; he had also acted as an effective means of political representation, helping articulate their interests and aspirations in the wider political and ideological fields in Kurdistan. They were now isolated rapidly losing ground to the Marxist left which was vying for hegemony in the party.

The demise of Towfiq was a turning point in the development of the Kurdish movement in Iran. It did not only ensure the ascendancy of the Marxist left in the KDPI, but also created the conditions for factionalism and political discord in its disunited ranks. The Marxist left began moving into a political and ideological space created by the radicalisation of the KDPI's political agenda after the Second Congress and the failure of Towfiq's conservative leadership to respond to its requirements. The widening gap between the discourse and practice of the leadership under him enabled the Marxist left to return from the brink of a humiliating defeat to occupy the strategic positions of policy- and decision-making in the party. But the assumption of the political leadership was not without a cost; it required radical changes in the political strategy and ideological orientation of the Marxist left in the KDPI.

The Marxist left had to radicalise the political and ideological fields in order to marginalise and oust its opponents in the party. This development could have crucial implications for the two fundamental traits of its identity: the Republican legacy and the Tudeh-Soviet Marxism, questioning the limits of their radicalism in practice. Could they accommodate a political agenda/programme which was more radical than the political programme of the Second Congress? Neither the Republican legacy nor the Marxism of the Tudeh Party could stand the test of such political and ideological radicalism, nationalist or revolutionary socialist. But the Marxist left could not abandon the fundamental facets of its own identity and legitimacy in favour of a radical agenda, even though it may become the basis of its own party programme in the near future. So, when the left assumed leadership, it had to retreat to a safer position in order to revive the autonomist agenda albeit on a new social reformist basis. It was this retreat from the stated radical positions and the resulting gap between the discourse and practice of the Marxist left in the leadership of the KDPI

which provided the ground for the emergence of a radical left with a revolutionary Maoist agenda in the Kurdish movement. The formation of the Komalay Shoreshgeri Zahmatkeshani Kurdistani Iran in the late 1970s, it will be seen, was in part a response to this curious development in the political struggle in exile.

The political programme of the Third Congress of the KDPI was an affirmation of the strategy outlined in the proceedings of the Tudeh and the Revolutionary Committee of the KDPI meeting, erroneously known as the Radmanesh-Ghassemlou meeting, in Baghdad in February 1968.[4] The fundamental points of the Baghdad statement—commitment to the armed insurrection and the termination of the Pahlavi rule and the creation of a popular democratic regime, including an autonomous Kurdish regional government—had already been reiterated in the discourse of the Provisional Leadership Committee of the KDPI, established in the Third Conference in March 1970 and headed by Ghassemlou. Although the Provisional Leadership Committee was mainly composed of the left, Ghassemlou was instrumental in redefining the ideological stance of the party on unequivocally Tudeh-Marxist foundations. The publication of *Kurdistan*, which had already been resumed in January 1970, gave the Provisional Leadership Committee the means to reclaim the lost ground and consolidate its position in the organisational structure of the party at home and abroad. The discourse of *Kurdistan* was unambiguously regional autonomist; it did not question or reject the sovereignty of the Iranian state over the Kurdish territory but the legitimacy of the Pahlavi regime to rule it in the name of the Iranian nation. However, the argument for an autonomous Kurdish government was not predicated on the rights of the Kurds to self-rule alone but also, and more frequently, on the necessity of putting an end to the imperialist domination and exploitation of Iran. It immediately assigned a radical anti-imperialist character to the Kurdish struggle for regional autonomy, representing it as the negation of the exploitative ethos of the Pahlavi regime, hence the statement of the Provisional Leadership Committee that the 'autonomous Kurdish government was contrary to the very principle of the monarchy in Iran'. The dependent capitalist character of the Pahlavi regime, its subordination to the global political and economic interests of US imperialism, justified the KDPI's participation in a popular democratic front committed to its forced destruction. The prominence of the anti-imperialist discourse in the legitimation of the Kurdish struggle for autonomy was reminiscent of the early 1950s, when the discourse and practice of the KDPI was defined

by the Tudeh Party. The KDPI was again presented as an Iranian force with a specifically Kurdish regional identity. Marxism of the Tudeh Party was the paramount influence on the ideological formation of the Provisional Leadership Committee. It defined the main contours of the KDPI's strategy in the forthcoming party congress.

The influence of the Tudeh notwithstanding, there was another and no less significant factor influencing the discourse of the Provisional Leadership Committee, namely the rise and the popularity of the radical left which had significantly changed the terms and conditions of political discourse and practice in the opposition. The radical left, as was seen, had already influenced the internal developments in the KDPI, rapidly affecting the field and boundaries of the power struggle between Towfiq and the heterogeneous body of his left-wing opponents within and outside the party organisation. Towfiq had been quick to realise the political and ideological significance of the new guerrilla organisations and the challenge that they posed to the Tudeh Party and its interpretation of Marxism in Iran. He had thus tried, though quite unsuccessfully, to take on board elements of their radical strategy in order to combat the Tudeh left and marginalise their influence in the party. The left opposition to his leadership who subsequently formed the active core of the Provisional Leadership Committee, too, had been influenced by the radicalisation of the political and ideological fields in Iran in the late 1960s, but mainly through their association with the Tudeh leadership and the growing factionalism and power struggle in its ranks in exile. Although the Kurdish contingent within the Tudeh Party in exile was quite heterogeneous, the bulk of its active members were closely associated with the growing reformist tendency in the Tudeh leadership. The proponents of reform in the Tudeh Party did not only acknowledge the radicalisation of the political and ideological fields in Iran but were also eager to respond to the conditions which had been created by the discourse and practice of the urban guerrilla organisations by adopting a more active and interventionist policy in Iran. Their attitude towards the radical left in Iran was one of qualified support; they were sympathetic to the call to arms to overthrow a 'dependent capitalist regime serving the global interests of US imperialism', but rejected the wholesale 'populist subjectivism, political voluntarism and disdain for political and organizational work among the working masses' propagated relentlessly by the new Marxist left.[5] But political sympathy aside, the proponents of reform in the Tudeh leadership had another and more important reason to support a radical and interventionist position.

Unlike their more conservative opponents in the leadership who shunned the radical left for fear of being associated with Maoism, the reformists were well aware of the long-term import of the new radicalism and the changing structures of political discourse and practice in Iran. They wanted to be party to this process, to be able to influence the course and direction of the events rather than remain an outsider in an opposition already fraught with discord. The growing fear of marginalisation more than a genuine desire for change informed the argument for reform in the Tudeh Party.[6]

But in an ossified political party the quest for strategic change, whatever the motive, engenders internal opposition often distorting its course and direction. The conservative backlash in the Tudeh was swift and effective. It seemed to have the support of the CPSU which was at the time unhappy with changes jeopardising its relationship with the Pahlavi regime. The internal opposition to the new policy led the reformers to modify their positions and retreat from their stated aims and objectives. The Tudeh-KDPI(RC) agreement, the so-called Radmanesh-Ghassemlou agreement, mapping out the basic principles of a joint programme for action, fell victim to the internal political feuding in the Tudeh Party. Broadly speaking, Reza Radmanesh (1948–1969) and his successor Iraj Eskandari (1969–1978) both belonged to the reformist-modernising faction in the Tudeh Party whose distinctive trait was to wrest the party from the moribund safety of a blind obedience to the Soviet Union and gradually restore a degree of organisational and political autonomy to it. The subordination of the party to the exigencies of the Soviet foreign policy on Iran, they believed, seriously undermined its ability to respond to the changing political and ideological conditions in Iran. The party had to shed its conservative image and adopt a more radical position if it were to appeal to the new generation of political activists in Iran and abroad. But the reformists, however eager or willing, could not supersede the national and international exigencies of the Soviet strategy in the region. The Soviet strategy defined the boundaries of political discourse and practice in the communist parties of the Middle East. They therefore had to wait for an opening.[7]

The opening had been provided by the advent of the second Ba'th regime in Iraq in 1968 and the subsequent developments in Soviet-Iraqi relations culminating in the friendship treaty of 1972. The warming of the relationship between the Soviet and Ba'th regimes enhanced the prospect of a growing cooperation on specific regional issues of common interest. The Soviet and the Iraqi regimes both wanted, though for quite different

reasons, to use the KDPI to bring pressure to bear on the Iranian government. This gave the Tudeh reformists the much-needed opportunity to pursue a more active policy on the Kurdish question, to bring it in line with the exigencies of a radicalised political and ideological field in Iran. The policy seems to have had Soviet approval as the Tudeh leadership was unanimously behind it; the reformists did not anticipate or encounter opposition within the party, hence the quest to meet with the prominent personalities in the Revolutionary Committee of the KDPI and the subsequent inclusion of the strategy of armed struggle and the leading role of Kurdish peasantry in the process of the revolutionary struggle in the joint Tudeh-KDPI(RC) statement which differed significantly from the general principles of party strategy entailed in the political programmes of the party adopted in 1960 and 1964. Furthermore, unlike the party programme, here the anti-imperialist discourse was used to legitimise the proposed strategy of armed struggle, the linchpin of the proposed joint plan for cooperation between the two organisations. The Baghdad statement emphasised the distinct popular democratic character of the Kurdish struggle for autonomy in Iran but without referring to the issue of national oppression and the Kurds' national right to self-determination. This was more than just an oversight, a simple omission of the reference to the national rights of the Kurds specific to the given context. Rather it marked the onset of a closure which subsequently became a permanent feature of the Tudeh discourse on the Kurdish question in the years to come especially under the leadership of Kianouri (1979–1983) after the Iranian Revolution of 1979.[8]

The so-called Baghdad agreement was a freak event, an aberration in the Tudeh Party's relationship with the KDPI. The joint statement was not in tune with the Tudeh's general strategy for political change in Iran. It had to be discarded in favour of the party line on the Kurdish question which derived the legitimacy of Kurdish struggle from its participation in the common struggle of the peoples of Iran against the Pahlavi regime and its imperialist supporters. The party's stance under Eskandari and the reiteration of the intrinsic link between Kurdish autonomy and democratic rule in Iran in the Tudeh discourse, therefore, did not indicate a change of position but merely a reassertion of the party strategy. Although Eskandari was known as a moderate and believed to command respect and support of the reformists and modernisers within the party circles, his ability to define or interpret party programme was seriously limited by the party strategy, the fundamental principles of which were determined by the

exigencies of the Soviet foreign policy on a global level—that is, the exigencies of the Soviet power in the global contest against US imperialism and its lesser allies in the Western world, hence the primacy of anti-imperialist struggle in the Tudeh strategy, which defined the form and character of popular democratic politics in the party discourse. Global struggle against US imperialism was the supreme principle of the Tudeh Party's strategy; it was the means for distinguishing friends from enemies, and the discursive device articulating the popular democratic struggle of the oppressed in the international socialist strategy led by the Soviet Union.

The argument for the interrelationship between Kurdish autonomy and democratic rule in Iran, as was seen, is as old as the KDPI itself (Vali op. cit. 2011). It has since been deployed variously to emphasise their mutual interdependence, as conditions of possibility of one another in the political process. The argument, however, has varied as to the exact nature of this seemingly dialectical relationship; what exactly causes this mutual interdependence between Kurdish autonomy and democratic rule in Iran? In other words, what is the precise means and mechanism of their articulation in the political process? Different explanations of this causal relationship involve different notions of political power and legitimacy, especially with regard to the KDPI's quest for regional autonomy in the juridico-political framework of Iranian sovereignty.[9]

In the discourse of the Republic this issue is dealt with in a heterogeneous manner, a reflection of its confused approach to political power and legitimacy which haunted its identity throughout its brief existence. The quest for regional autonomy here was perceived as a democratic right, resulting from the collective will of the Kurdish people, on a par with their right to national self-determination. In fact, in the discourse of the Republic they were, more often than not, treated as identical in character and different in form; they were different manifestations of the same democratic right to free and independent existence and development. According to this perception, therefore, the Kurdish quest for autonomy was intrinsically democratic and as such required an appropriate juridico-political framework for realisation and existence: a government which represented the popular democratic will of the sovereign, the Iranian nation of which the Kurdish people were an inseparable part. This double emphasis on democratic rights as the form and the conditions of existence of both Kurdish autonomy and Iranian national sovereignty sufficed to account for their mutual interdependence. In the discourse of the Republic the legitimation of the Kurdish struggle for self-rule and regional

autonomy was internal to the process of the struggle; it required no external frame of reference for legitimation (Vali 2011, 2017).

After the collapse of the Republic, the mode of legitimation of the Kurdish struggle for autonomy changed as the remnants of the KDPI began to revive and reorganise in the shadow of the Tudeh Party. The shift of emphasis from the democratic struggle for national rights to the anti-imperialist struggle in the discourse of the KDPI was an index of its domination by the Soviet-Tudeh ideology. This mode of argument, which was identified with the left in the KDPI, continued to persist under Towfiq, albeit in a less pronounced manner. But, with the revival and ascendency of the left in the early 1970s, it became a distinctive feature of the party's strategic thinking, defining its 'friends and enemies' in the national and international political and ideological fields. The prominent figures in the left, in particular Ghassemlou, who were keen to move the party to the left and give it a Marxist identity, were instrumental in promoting the Tudeh's redefinition of the discourse of Kurdish autonomy. Imperialism had already become an integral part of the conceptual structure of the discourse of *Kurdistan* when preparation for the third party congress was under way. The Kurds rights to self-rule in an autonomous region thus had acquired an 'external' source of legitimation: their legitimacy now depended on the active participation of the Kurds in the struggle against imperialism.[10]

This definition of the Kurdish autonomy project specified the strategic outlook of the left in the third party congress. Ghassemlou's formulation of the strategic slogan of the KDPI was firmly grounded in anti-imperialist discourse whereby the armed struggle to overthrow the dependent capitalist state was both the means of articulation of Kurdish autonomy in the democratic political process in Iran and the source of its legitimacy in the juridico-political process of Iranian sovereignty. For the left in the congress, this formulation of the strategic objectives of the party provided the necessary theoretical means for reconstituting it as an Iranian political force with Kurdish/ethnic identity, a fact which, they believed, had been seriously obscured by the political and ideological developments in the party since the collapse of the Republic. This view, emphasising the Republican pedigree of the party's strategic outlook, also reflected a long-standing conviction of the left that the autonomous republic of Kurdistan signified the very essence of the Kurdish national ideal, that is, the democratic republic of Kurdistan. From the point of view of the left, however, the democratic character of the autonomous Kurdish Republic derived not only from the anti-imperialist nature of the Kurdish national struggle

but also from its commitment to socialism. The Third Congress thus declared the party's unequivocal commitment to a 'just and democratic socialism' originating from the 'theory of social evolution', a common euphemism for Marxism in the literature of the left in Iran. The unanimous endorsement of 'democratic centralism' as the guiding principle of the political organisation, and the role of the party as the 'vanguard of the oppressed Kurdish masses', the revolutionary object of the 'double class and national exploitations', further highlighted the unambiguously Leninist character of the proposed Marxist-socialist ideology.[11]

The reconstitution of the KDPI as a regional Marxist-Leninist organisation owed to Ghassemlou more than anyone else in the emergent socialist leadership. His efforts to assume the leadership of the party were considerably enhanced by a number of factors of which his close association with Eskandari, the secretary general of the Tudeh Party (1969–1978), and the Barzani-Ba'th autonomy agreement of March 1970 were the most important. The former not only enhanced Ghassemlou's fortunes but also at the same time increased the political and functional autonomy of the Kurdish contingent in the Tudeh Party, at least during the first few years of his leadership leading to the Third Congress of the KDPI in 1973. The latter, on the other hand, paved the way for the expulsion of Towfiq from the party in December 1971 and the consolidation of Ghassemlou's position in the Provisional Leadership Committee before the advent of the third party congress. Barzani did not oppose the consolidation of the socialist leadership in the KDPI owing largely to the role played by the Soviet Union and the ICP in the changing balance of forces in Iraq at the time. But neither Ghassemlou's cordial relations with Eskandari nor Barzani's rapprochement with the Soviet Union survived the abrogation of the autonomy agreement by Ba'th in late 1972. The course of the events which followed the resumption of the war in Kurdistan in November 1972 provided the ground for Ghassemlou to distance the socialist KDPI from its erstwhile ideological mentor, the Tudeh Party. The organisational ties between the two parties reached a breaking point when the socialist leadership of the KDPI began to question and challenge the Tudeh's interpretation of the 'Marxist truth'.

The relationship between the Tudeh Party and the KDPI was strained when the latter began to assert itself as an autonomous socialist organisation in discursive and political fields after the Third Congress. The socialist grouping in the KDPI had thus far lived in the shadow of the Tudeh Party, seldom questioning the truth of its interpretation of Marxist-Leninism,

whether as an abstract philosophical doctrine or as a guide to political practice. The theoretical hegemony of the Tudeh Party, as was seen, was perpetuated by the organisational dependence of the KDPI on it, for a good deal of its existence both in Iran and abroad. This unequal relationship was sustained and reproduced by the Soviet Union which never accorded political or discursive autonomy to the Kurdish question in Iran. From the Soviet point of view, the KDPI was a regional organisation with regional strategy and should as such remain an integral of the organisational structure of the Tudeh Party and subordinate to it, politically and functionally, if it were to survive as a viable political force representing the political aspirations of the Kurds of Iran. The Tudeh leadership was adamant to defy the efforts made by the socialist leadership of the KDPI, in particular its secretary general Ghassemlou, to establish a significant measure of discursive and organisational autonomy, to function outside the limits set by the exigencies of its general strategy, and hence of the Soviet foreign policy, for a more autonomous and self-reliant KDPI would have above all wanted to re-evaluate its strategy, the conditions of formulation and the means of realisation of the party programme, in the light of the new developments in Iran and Iraq. This would have in turn had serious consequences for the Tudeh Party's strategy and the Soviet foreign policy in the region, denying the Kurdish question both political and discursive autonomy.

Ghassemlou was aware of the fact that the KDPI's identity was intrinsically linked to its representation of the Kurdish question which involved the ideological formation of the party and hence its relationship to the Marxism of the Tudeh Party. In other words, the reconstruction of the KDPI's identity as an independent socialist organisation and the strategic reformulation of its approach to the Kurdish question required above all a radical rethinking and redefinition of its relationship to the Tudeh Party, the Tudeh's interpretation of Marxism and the hegemonic status of the anti-imperialist struggle to which the Kurdish question had been politically and discursively subordinated. But Ghassemlou was also aware of the dependent and reflective character of the Tudeh Party's ideological representation of politics: the fact that the hegemonic status of the anti-imperialist discourse in the Tudeh Party's world outlook was a consequence of its adherence to the Soviet global strategy and was inseparable from it. Ghassemlou thus faced a dilemma: how to wrest the KDPI from the political and organisational dominance of the Tudeh Party without offending the Soviet Union and losing its patronage and support. The

need to assert the organisational and functional autonomy of the KDPI, and hence to resolve this dilemma, was being increasingly felt especially in view of the radicalisation of the political and ideological fields in the early 1970s in Iran.

The Tudeh Party's cynical response to the tragic collapse of the Kurdish movement in Iraq in March 1975 gave Ghassemlou the mandate to denounce its leadership for being entirely oblivious to the plight of the Kurds. The Tudeh leadership, according to him, had moved from qualified political opposition to overt political cynicism attributing the Kurdish movement to American imperialism, thus denying its popular democratic mass foundations. The crux of Ghassemlou's argument here was the failure of the Tudeh Party to differentiate the leadership of the Kurdish movement from its social structure, identifying the popular democratic aspirations of the Kurds of Iraq with the vested interests of an archaic leadership. Ghassemlou's argument, which was further echoed by his colleagues in the leadership of the KDPI in the issues of the *Kurdistan*, had much wider theoretical and political implications concerning the strategy of the Tudeh Party and the status of the democratic rights and liberties in it, for the Tudeh's position on the Kurdish movement in Iraq was an integral part of its overall strategy in which democratic rights and liberties had no discursive or political autonomy and were subordinated to the exigencies of the party's struggle against American imperialism. In fact, a populist rendition of Lenin's 'theory' of imperialism formed the conceptual structure of the Tudeh's Marxism whereby struggle against imperialism was the means of articulation/disarticulation of civil and democratic rights and liberties in the political process, that is, depending on the characterisation of the state apparatus in the Tudeh discourse. This in effect meant that the relationship of a given regime to the US imperialism and its client states in the region qualified it as a popular democratic or repressive dictatorial regime.[12]

Conversely, the main plank in the Tudeh discourse was the relationship of these regimes with the Soviet Union which qualified\disqualified them as progressive 'peoples' democracies' or repressive dictatorships. The Ba'th regime in Iraq was therefore considered as popular democratic, especially after the signing of the friendship treaty in 1972 with the Soviet Union which seemed to place it firmly in the anti-imperialist camp. This sufficed to qualify the Ba'th as a progressive regime with socialist orientation, despite the avowedly repressive character of state power and the authoritarian and racist nature of official nationalist ideology which seemed

to be entirely irrelevant to its suppression of the Kurds. This was a clear reflection of the general Soviet strategy-theory known as the 'non-capitalist path to development' which was also applied to the Iranian conditions after the 1979 revolution. The Tudeh's critique and denunciation of the socialist leadership of the KDPI and its struggle for Kurdish autonomy, too, were grounded in this general theory-strategy whereby the only reason for the socialist orientation of the Islamic regime was its vocal opposition to the United States. This ostensibly anti-imperialist character of the Shi'i theocracy indicated its popular democratic nature which had to be recognised and defended by all progressive forces in post-revolutionary Iran. The Tudeh Party, as will be seen in the following section, deployed this argument to deny the legitimacy of all civil and democratic rights and liberties which did not conform with or were opposed to such a characterisation of the Shi'i theocracy and the nature of clerical power in Iran. The KDPI's struggle for Kurdish autonomy was therefore legitimate only if it conformed to so-called anti-imperialist policies of the Islamic regime in Iran. The theoretical foundation of the Tudeh Party's essentialism and the associated concepts of 'real' and 'formal' democracy will be considered in some detail in the following chapter.

But in 1975 the critical thrust of Ghassemlou's and his KDPI colleagues' attack on the Tudeh leadership primarily concerned its 'anti-Kurdish' discourse, in particular its identification of the Kurdish movement with American imperialism and hence the denial of its popular democratic character. They did not extend their criticism to the theoretical foundation of the Tudeh's strategy, even less to its political and ideological source and framework of reference, that is, Soviet Marxism and the global communist strategy. This is despite the fact that Soviet Marxism defined the discursive boundaries of the Tudeh-KDPI controversy over the nature of Kurdish movement in Iraq, its leadership and ideology as well as the reasons for its rapid disintegration in the face of the Algiers Treaty of March 1975. Neither the Tudeh's denial of the primacy of the Kurdish national rights nor the KDPI's defence and assertion of its priority and legitimacy superseded the theoretical boundaries of Soviet Marxism. The ensuing conflict between the two organisations therefore did not assume a specifically ideological character, turning instead into a localised political dispute confined to certain elements in their leadership.

The political dispute was nonetheless intensified as the leadership of the KDPI, in particular Ghassemlou himself, continued to distance the organisation from the Tudeh Party and assert its autonomy by insisting on

policies which were specifically proactive and required access to political organisation and military force in Iranian Kurdistan. Ghassemlou's discourse and practice after March 1975 was more in line with the political strategy and outlook of the radical Marxist organisations in Iran than the Tudeh Party's conventional approach to political and organisational work in the opposition. This, in effect, created a considerable hostility on the part of the Soviet and other East European authorities fearing that an independent KDPI not restrained by the Tudeh leadership could easily jeopardise their cordial relations with the Iranian government. The expulsion of Ghassemlou from Czechoslovakia, his country of residence in exile, barely a year after the collapse of Barzani's movement, was a clear indication of the increasing Soviet displeasure with his conduct. The resolutions of the first plenum of the KDPI, held in May 1976 in Varna shortly after his expulsion, marked Ghassemlou's response to the further deterioration of the relationship with the Tudeh leadership in Berlin. The plenum thus resolved to return to Iran to form underground political and military units (Gelaley Siyasi-Nizami) in selective Kurdish urban centres in preparation for armed confrontation with the Pahlavi regime. Ghassemlou's resolutions signified not only the urgency of political and organisational independence from the Tudeh Party but also the growing need in the KDPI to respond to the radicalisation of the political and ideological fields in Iran. The KDPI's call to arms under his leadership effectively signalled the ending of his long-standing association with the Tudeh Party.[13]

Ghassemlou had managed to resolve the dilemma he faced at the outset of his leadership but only partially. He had succeeded to distance the KDPI from the Tudeh Party giving it a significant measure of organisational and functional autonomy before the 1979 revolution. This was undoubtedly an important achievement for which he had to pay a price, for his attempts to reconstruct the KDPI as a modern socialist party and redefine its discourse and practice had substantially strained his relationship with the CPSU, undermining his standing in Eastern Europe. The CPSU was still insisting on the subordinate status of the KDPI and the Kurdish question in Iranian politics, thus advising its leadership to work within the theoretical and political framework of the Tudeh strategy. An independent Kurdish party with an autonomous political and cultural identity, however socialist or Marxist, could not be easily accommodated in Soviet strategic thinking on Iran. Ghassemlou's refusal to conform to the exigencies of the Soviet strategy brought him opposition at home and isolation abroad. The external isolation he remedied by relying increasingly on the political

and logistical support of the Ba'th regime in Iraq which was forthcoming in abundance especially after 1975. While the fear of betrayal by an internal pro-Tudeh faction inside the KDPI who were unhappy with his treatment of the Soviet Union continued to haunt him throughout his leadership.[14] The dependence on the Ba'th and the lack of internal unity and cohesion, the two fundamental anomalies of Ghassemlou's leadership, were rooted in this partial resolution of the dilemma.

Throughout his leadership, Ghassemlou remained acutely aware of this dilemma and its paradoxical consequences for the discourse and practice of the KDPI. He nonetheless tried to draw a demarcation line between the Soviet Union and the Tudeh Party, thus walking the tightrope of supporting the former and fighting against the latter. Ghassemlou was raised in Soviet Marxism and valued Soviet patronage and wanted the Marxist KDPI to be part of the growing 'forces of socialism and peace' on the world stage. This was invariably reiterated in the official discourse of the KDPI under his leadership, but most notably in the proceedings of the various party congresses where detailed analyses of the national and international economic and political conditions were produced to support the proposed strategy and programme of action. The party slogan calling for the struggle against American imperialism which adorned the pages of *Kurdistan*, the official organ of the party, was similarly an expression of its commitment to the Soviet global strategy in the Cold War. Although such expressions of allegiance to the Soviet Union were in part tactical, intended to placate a powerful Tudeh faction well entrenched in the leadership, they helped undermine Ghassemlou's efforts to dissociate the KDPI from the Tudeh Party by blurring the political and ideological differences which defined its new independent identity.

In the wider political perspective of Iranian politics, anti-imperialism was the dominant trait in the discourse of the radical opposition to the emergent royal dictatorship in the early 1970s, within and outside the country. It not only united a wide array of Marxist and centre left political forces but also defined the main element of their common identity in the struggle for liberation. The KDPI shared this identity which enabled it to have access to the growing ranks of the radical forces in the political field on the one hand and the expanding clandestine public sphere on the other. In both cases, however, the KDPI's long-standing relationship with the Tudeh Party appeared to delimit its efforts to enlist active political support for its political programme to form new alliances or consolidate existing ones on its proposed regional autonomy plan. In fact, the course of the

events following the triumph of the revolution showed that the KDPI's revamped radicalism, its polished anti-imperialism and programmatic commitment to the strategy of armed struggle to overthrew royal dictatorship, had done little by way of establishing a popular revolutionary credential for the organisation in an increasingly radicalised 'clandestine public sphere', the fertile ground for recruiting educated young Kurdish men and women. Nor had its programmatic commitment to the creation of a democratic political order as the means and condition of the realisation of its regional autonomy project succeeded to enhance its fortunes in a radical political field increasingly dominated by the left and centre left political forces, secular and Islamist. The radical youth in the clandestine public sphere and potential allies in the opposition disliked the conventional and dated ethnic nationalism and ossified Soviet Marxism underpinning the regional autonomy project eschewing KDPI's call to form a broad democratic alliance centred on a commitment to a democratic political order in Iran. Ghassemlou and his comrades in the leadership of the party had found it difficult to shake off the old image after three decades of absence from home.

The relative isolation of the KDPI and the inefficacy of its message were more striking in the clandestine public sphere, the focal point of the political activity of younger Kurds in main urban centres in Iran at large, in particular the growing student body whose numbers in universities had increased significantly since the mid-1960s. They were for the most part attracted to radical interpretations of Marxism offered by the coarse but increasingly influential theoretical machinery of the nascent guerrilla groupings which defined their revolutionary identity in no small measure in opposition to the Tudeh Party and its 'revisionist masters' in Moscow. They looked for guidance and inspiration to Cuba and China learning from Che Guevara and Mao Zedong and their articulations of class and popular democratic categories in the process of global anti-imperialist struggles. The political outlook of the new generation of political activists in the clandestine public sphere was by no means uniform, but subjective readings of selective texts of Leninism nurtured by dependency theory provided the diverse and at times opposing factions and tendencies with a common framework of reference for their otherwise diverse discourse and practice. The new generation of Kurdish political and cultural activists, too, shared this common political-theoretical framework which they used to articulate their radical 'non/anti-nationalist' approach to the Kurdish question. The immediate consequence of the new Marxist radicalism was

a shift in the strategic locus of the Kurdish question in the discourse of struggle for liberation.

The crucial decade before the revolution witnessed a rapid transformation in the discursive representation of the Kurdish question in the radicalised clandestine public sphere marked by the increasing displacement of the ethnic nationalist notions by class categories. This was informed by two arguments: first, by identifying ethnic nationalism with the economic position and political aspirations of Iranian bourgeoisie of which Kurdish bourgeoisie formed a regional faction, and second, by identifying Iranian proletariat as the subject of a historical process in which national liberation was preceded by socialist revolution. Although Kurdish proletariat was the perceived agent of national liberation in this two-staged theory of revolution, it only acquired such a status by being part of the larger entity of the Iranian working class. In other words, the new Marxist orthodoxy in the clandestine public sphere denied the political autonomy of the Kurdish proletariat as a social class, and its historical role was instead derived from its being part of the Iranian working class. The Iranian working class, it was thus asserted, was an autonomous political force capable of playing a historical role in line with its pivotal position in the expanding networks of social division of labour in Iranian society. The theoretical shift which marked the contours of revolutionary Marxism in the clandestine public sphere not only redefined the strategic locus of the Kurdish question but also changed its conditions of possibility, both with important political consequences for the configuration of the Kurdish political forces in the events leading to the revolutionary rupture of 1977–1979 and after.

The new Marxist orthodoxy espoused by the majority of the young Kurdish political and cultural activists in the years leading to the revolutionary rupture of 1979 denied Kurdish question discursive and political autonomy. For them socialism was the primary cause of the revolutionary struggle in Kurdistan and the condition of possibility of a genuine solution to the Kurdish question. This representation of the relationship between national liberation and socialist revolution, however, was justified by recourse to the dependency theory. The prevailing characterisation of the Iranian state as 'dependent capitalist' underpinned the primacy of imperialism in the discourse of the opposition. The new generation of Iranian Marxist political activists, Kurds included, thus argued for the primacy of the people-imperialist contradiction in the process of struggle for liberation. This argument, represented in different ways in the markedly populist discourse of the new generation of the Kurdish political activists not

only justified the strategic displacement of the Kurdish question but also its subordination to the wider objective of socialism in Iran.

Ghassemlou and his comrades in the political bureau of the KDPI had good reasons to worry about the consequences of the new developments in the political and ideological field inside the country. The clandestine public sphere, the main hub of political activities of the radical opposition and the site for the recruitment of young members and dedicated cadres, was being wrested away from them before their very eyes. But they were at the same time aware of the fact that in the circumstances they had little by way of influence on the course and direction of the developments taking place in the clandestine public sphere. Kurdish ethnicity, the potent means traditionally deployed to mobilise the wavering young, had lost the cutting edge. It was no longer a potent emotive force in a political and discursive field increasingly dominated by populist interpretations of Leninism revolving around the concepts of imperialism and dependency. Ghassemlou and his colleagues therefore hesitated to confront the emergent political and discursive reality, while at the same time acknowledging the gravity of the situation created by the deepening economic and political crises of the royal dictatorship.[15]

The key to Ghassemlou's political hesitations, it was noted briefly, was the declining appeal of the KDPI's brand of ethnic nationalism and socialism to the younger generation of the actual and would-be Kurdish political activists, especially young Kurdish men and women of predominantly urban petty-bourgeois origin with tertiary education and strong predisposition towards revolutionary Marxism which was often expressed in terms of a strong sympathy and support for Iranian Marxist organisations and their populist discourse. Years of exile marked by subservience to Barzani's ethnic nationalism and the Tudeh Party's stultified Marxism had drained the soul out of the increasingly bureaucratised body of the party. This increasingly significant social grouping was deeply rooted in the national and regional political and ideological developments since the 1960s which, as was seen, was characterised by a commitment to the armed opposition to and revolutionary overthrow of the Pahlavi regime. The revolutionary turmoil and armed action which preceded the change of regime in February 1979, though brief and relatively uneventful, helped reaffirm a long-standing romantic populist anti-capitalism among the more active members of this social grouping who perceived revolutionary violence not as a tactical means but as a superior political virtue inextricably linked to their emotional devotion to socialism widely cherished as the only

legitimate alternative to the ancient regime. Although the primacy of socialism and the commitment to popular democratic anti-imperialist politics were the invariants of the revolutionary populist outlook of the politically active segments of the younger generation of the Kurdish urban petty-bourgeoisie, their position on Kurdish identity and rights varied considerably. This variation, it will be shown, proved decisive in defining the ideological contours of the subsequent political configurations on the left of the political spectrum in Kurdistan after the revolution.

Notes

1. See Kongre-ye Sev'om: Hezb-e Demokrat-e Kurdistan (Iran), Mehr Mah-e 1352 (The Third Congress of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, September 1973). The report to the central committee, 55pages, most likely written by Ghassemlou, attempts to define the position of the party under the new leadership by contrasting it with the 'conservative' leadership of Ahmad Towfiq on the right and that of the Tudeh Party on the left. It further indulges in a detailed critical evaluation of the armed struggle of 1967–1968 as a premature and miscalculated but also admirable move and invaluable experience by those who disagreed with the conservative leadership. The report, however, is remarkably silent on Barzani's role in the event other than referring to the unfavourable conditions in Iraqi Kurdistan.
2. The Marxists and traditionalists within the KDPI shared the same ethnicist conception of Kurdish nation and nationalism. Although in economic terms they were both collectivist, their conceptions of economic collectivism varied widely due mainly to the different emphasis they laid on the role of autonomous government in the management/administration of the economy on the one hand and the place of private property and free enterprise in the economic structure of the proposed autonomous administration on the other. The different conceptions of economic collectivism and political communalism as such reflected their different approaches to Cold War and representation of the political stance of the Soviet Union in the international and regional relations. These differences are clearly reflected in the discourse of the Second and Third Congresses of the KDPI and their respective party programmes.
3. Anomalies and ambiguities in the KDPI's discourse in detail, especially with regard to the character of political authority, in Vali (2011 op. cit.).
4. As was mentioned earlier, the meeting of February 1968 in Baghdad was not between Radmanesh and Ghassemlou; rather, it was between the representatives of the Tudeh Party and the Revolutionary Committee of the KDPI. Ghassemlou did not represent the KDPI; he was part of the Tudeh

delegation accompanying Radmanesh, the secretary general of the party, who held negotiations with the leadership of the Revolutionary Committee represented by Sulaiman Moeini, Mohammad Amin Seraji and Karim Hussami. Radmanesh subsequently travelled to Kurdistan to meet with Mulla Mustafa Barzani to consult with him about the recent developments in Iraq as well as his relationship with the Iranian state. This meeting might have influenced Barzani's decision to act against the leadership of the Revolutionary Committee of the KDPI leading to Moeini's murder upon his return from Baghdad. For a detailed account of the Baghdad meeting, see Hussami, Memories Vol. 3, 1988, pp. 37, 94, 95, 96.

5. See, for example, Jevanshir, F. M. Cherikha-ye Fedaie-ye Khalgh Che Miguyand: Barrasi Enteghadi Jozavati ke Cherikha-ye Khalgh Neveshte-and, Entesharate Arani, Shahrivar-e 1351 (What Do the Fedaiyn-e Khalq Say: A Critical Review of Their Writings), Ara'ni Publications, September 1972; Peyam be Cherikh-ye Fedaie, Donya, No. 5 Aban 1353/1974 (A Message for the Fedaiyan Khalgh, Donya, No. 5, October 1974).
6. Power struggle was a persistent feature of the leadership of the Tudeh Party since its inception, often leading to long and protracted conflicts between competing factions vying for supremacy in the party. Inter-factional conflicts in the leadership were often prompted and nurtured by long-standing and intense personal animosity among the leading figures in the party, although almost always they were hidden under the cover of ideological explanations used to express disagreements over policy and strategy within the party. Power struggle in the leadership was intensified considerably in exile as the competing factions tried to enlist Soviet support by becoming the protégé of a powerful personality or a clique or faction in the political bureau of the CPSU. Power struggle and inter-factional conflict in the leadership of the CPSU more often than not had a profound influence on the form, process, direction and outcome of factionalism and power struggle inside sister parties living in exile in the Soviet bloc. The Iranian Tudeh was no exception to this rule. Memories of the prominent figures in the Tudeh leadership in exile, especially the last two secretary generals Eskandari (1969–1978) and Kianouri (1978–1983), testify to the importance of internal power struggle in the party and factional fighting and personal relations in this context. The rise to power of the Kianouri faction, known for his subservience to Moscow and long-standing opposition to political and institutional reform in the party, on the eve of the Islamic Revolution in February 1979 showed Moscow's assessment of the post-revolutionary politics and anticipation of the need for an authoritarian populist line in the party. See Iraj Eskandari (1366/1987) and Eskandari Paris (1365/1986); Nuraddin Kianouri (1372/1993); see also Abrahamian (op. cit. 1982), Ladjevardi (1985), and Behrooz (2000).

7. Ghassemlou discussing internal developments in the Tudeh Party in exile variously referred to the determining influence of the Soviet foreign policy and its strategic interests on the discourse and practice of the communist parties in the region in the framework of the Cold War. Various interviews specially December 1983 in London.
8. See Tudeh Party of Iran, Barnameh va Asasnameh-ye Hezb (The Programme and Regulations of the Party) 1960 and Barnameh-ye Hezb-e Tudeh-ye Iran (Programme of the Tudeh Party of Iran 1964).
9. For a detailed theoretical discussion of this issue, see Vali (1984). The issue of regional autonomy and autonomous governance was recently revisited in an interview with Agos (Vali 2011); see also Vali (2016, 2017).
10. The Soviet-Tudeh take on the Leninist concept of imperialism, adopted in the 1950s and promoted in the 1960s and 1970s by the left in the KDPI, subsequently became the focal point of a fierce political struggle in the party when the pro-Tudeh opposition in the party tried to appropriate and use it to displace the primacy of the struggle for regional autonomy soon after the revolution. Following the Tudeh Party, they invoked the concept emphasising the global primacy of the popular democratic struggle against imperialism in order to criticise and oppose the mainstream in the party led by Ghassemlou arguing for the primacy of the struggle for regional autonomy which brought it into direct confrontation and war with the new regime. The conflict inside the KDPI reached its climax in the Fourth Congress of the party in 1980 when the pro-Tudeh faction broke away, emphasising its opposition to the party's misconception/misrepresentation of the revolutionary anti-imperialist character of the Islamic regime. The disarticulating effects of the Soviet-Tudeh interpretation of the people-imperialist contradiction in post-revolutionary era, disarming the bulk of the left and democratic forces and ensuring their submission to the leadership of Khomeini specially by the occupation of the US Embassy and the detention of the staff in early November 1979, greatly helped the consolidation of power under the leadership of the hardliners in the Islamic republic.
11. Commitment to socialism as a social and economic project for the reorganisation of society and economy characterised by a centralised economy based mainly on public ownership along with a limited market and free enterprise and the persistence of anti-imperialist discourse and unequivocal support for of the Soviet Union in the bipolar view of the world central to the Cold War ideology on the one hand, and commitment to the Leninist conception of the vanguard party founded on democratic centralism on the other, were the common feature of all KDPI party programmes since the Third Congress in 1973. See kongraey Sevvmi Hizbi Demokrati kordistani Eran (The Third Congress of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan) Mehr 1352/September 1973.

12. See *Kurdistan* No. 37, August 1975, and also Hussami (op. cit. 1997). Anti-imperialism subsequently became the bedrock of the Tudeh's political and theoretical approach to Iranian politics after the revolution and the means of legitimation of political discourse and practice, and hence the means of inclusion in and exclusion from the process of popular democratic politics; see, for example, *Mardom*, No. 136. 1975, Ali Galawej's contribution to *Donya* No. 5 1975, and Iraj Eskandari's article on the eve of the revolution in *Donya* Nos. 10–11 1978, and after the revolution Reza Shaltuki in *Donya* No. 6 1980 and Kianuri's various statements about the Kurdish question in his question-and-answer sessions, for example, in 1980 and 1981.
13. The formation of the Gela'ley Siyasi-Nizami soon after Varna was widely considered to be the turning point in the relationship between the KDPI and the Tudeh Party. Ghassemlou (London 1984–1985) and to a lesser extent Hussami (Stockholm 1997) emphasised this point, although in practice the organisation did not amount to an effective political-military force in Kurdistan.
14. See contributions of Ali Galawej and Mohammad Ghizilji, two prominent Kurds in the Tudeh Party, to issues of *Mardom* and *Donya* in the early 1970s. The former in article entitled 'Doshmanan va Dustan-e Khalgh-e Kurd' (Enemies and Friends of the Kurdish People) in *Donya* no. 5. Aban 1353/October 1974 uses social class as the criteria to define the friends and enemies of the Kurdish people in the Iranian political field. Also Navid's article 'Kordestan in Suy-e Marz' (Kurdistan on this side of the Border) in *Donya* no. 6. Azar 1354/November 1974.
15. The ambivalence of the KDPI leadership towards the new developments in the political field and the radicalisation of the clandestine public sphere, specially their hesitation to take up a clear and positive stance on the new anti-Tudeh orthodoxy, along with their strong defence of ethnic nationalism as the essence of Kurdish resistance and opposition to the royal dictatorship, repeatedly surfaced in discussions with Ghassemlou, Seraji and Hussami, although they refused to see such an ambivalence and still less to discuss its causes and consequences for the KDPI's position in the political and ideological fields in the years leading to the Iranian revolution.

CHAPTER 7

The Formation and Structure of the Komalay Shoreshgeri Zahmatkeshani Kurdistani Iran (The Revolutionary Association of the Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan)

The emergent radical left was not homogenous politically and ideologically. But the diverse ideological tendencies on the left of the political spectrum soon consolidated around two distinct groupings, each holding a different view of Kurdish identity and rights in the process of the struggle for socialism in Iran. The first group believed that the Kurdish question was a product of the subordinate status of the Kurds as an oppressed ethnic minority in a dependent capitalist state, and its resolution was dependent on the conditions and outcome of the national struggle for socialism in Iran at large. Although regional autonomy was their preferred solution to the Kurdish question, they were seriously sceptical about the commitment of the leadership of the KDPI to the supreme cause of socialism in Iran, which to them was inextricably tied to the exigencies and outcome of the ongoing anti-imperialist struggle in the national and international political and economic arena. This group soon found themselves in the burgeoning ranks of the radical left, especially the Organisation of the Peoples' Fedayin (Sazemane Fadaiyan-e Khalq-e Iran) and the Tudeh Party, as the ideological disagreements with the leadership of the KDPI over the class structure and anti-imperialist character of the ruling faction of the Islamic regime began to override their political and cultural vacillations about Kurdish identity of the popular democratic struggle in Kurdistan. The political and cultural formation of the younger generation

A. Vali, *The Forgotten Years of Kurdish Nationalism in Iran*,
Minorities in West Asia and North Africa,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16069-2_7

of Kurdish urban petty-bourgeoisie in the two decades preceding the revolution, considered in some detail in previous chapters, played a decisive role in concluding this uneasy transition.

The second group was larger and relatively more cohesive culturally; its members for the most part showed a stronger commitment to Kurdish culture and identity. Their differences with the KDPI revolved around ideological issues but mainly concerned its alleged bourgeois reformism and allegiance to Soviet revisionism, which they rejected from a revolutionary Marxist standpoint. The ideological opposition to the KDPI therefore was not extended to disagreements regarding the class structure and the political orientation of the Islamic regime, on which they were broadly in agreement, especially with the dominant socialist faction in the leadership of the party. The idea that the Islamic regime was backward-looking, reactionary and deeply ingrained in capitalist exploitation and imperialist pillage of the people and the country was widely shared by them. In fact, this uncompromising opposition to the Islamic regime helped counterbalance their initial ambivalence towards Kurdish identity and rights despite the pivotal influence of anti-imperialist populism of the Iranian left on their political outlook. It charted a different route to the left of the political spectrum, whereby claim to revolutionary Marxism not only involved a rejection of the bourgeois revisionism of the KDPI but also bypassed the growing anti-imperialist consensus on the left. The bulk of the younger generation of the Kurdish men and women who subscribed to such views were soon to form the backbone of the Komalay Shoreshgeri Zahmatkeshani Kurdistani Iran (the KSZKI hereafter), the second-largest Kurdish political organisation after the KDPI in post-revolutionary Iran.

The existing evidence on the formation of the KSZKI is scanty, and in fact, as it has been pointed out elsewhere in my writings, the organisation has not thus far produced a history of its formation and development (Vali op. cit. 2011). Information about the formation of the organisation is for the most part based on personal accounts and hearsay revolving around events and personalities, and the narrative is highly fragmented and very subjective, lacking structure and coherence (Vali, ibid.). It is however agreed that before the 1979 revolution the KSZKI existed only as an idea, a concept, in the mind of its makers, all ethnic Kurds from various parts of the Kurdish territory in Iran, who were intent on forming a revolutionary Marxist alternative to the bourgeois reformist KDPI.[1] The concept of a revolutionary alternative as such was a familiar feature of the discourse of the Kurdish radical left in the clandestine public sphere

before the revolutionary rupture of 1977–1979. The rise of popular protests, the opening up of the political field and the marked decline in the efficacy of the security apparatuses of the state are said to have laid the conditions for the formation of the organisation, although the exact date of the founding of the organisation and the identity of the key founders remain unclear to this very date. Despite the lack of precise information, it is safe to say that the organisation which came to be known as the KSZKI was born on the eve of the revolution, when the struggle for the destruction of the royal dictatorship had reached its final and decisive phase.[2] A consideration of the discourse and practice of the organisation, its ideological formation and political programme would therefore require one to fast forward the analysis, to shift its focus from the period leading to the revolutionary rupture of 1977–1979 to those following from the collapse of royal dictatorship and the triumph of the revolution and the brief but decisive phase in the process of consolidation of clerical rule and theocratic power.

The KSZKI and the Political Field in Kurdistan

The persistent tension between ethnic and class categories in the discourse of the KSZKI and the subsequent drive towards communist orthodoxy were also influenced, in no small measure, by the developments in the political and discursive fields in Kurdistan and in Iran at large. In the Kurdish scene, the KSZKI's struggle for the recognition of Kurdish identity and rights was being carried out in two distinct political and ideological fronts defined, respectively, by the 'marxified' nationalism and social reformism of the KDPI, on the one hand, and the emerging anti-imperialist consensus in the ranks of the non-Kurdish Marxist left, on the other. The shift of emphasis from the earlier Maoist grounds to the anti-populist communist orthodoxy after the Second Congress, as was seen, was in large part due to the combined pressure brought to bear on the organisation by the increasing popularity of the non-Kurdish Marxist left, in particular the Tudeh and the Fadaiyan-e Khalq in major Kurdish urban centres. The KDPI, as was seen, was weak and ill-prepared to respond to the growing radicalism among the younger generation of the Kurdish urban petty-bourgeoisie and the middle strata, who were joining the ranks of the non-Kurdish Marxist organisations in significant numbers. The KSZKI's new radicalism, the reassertion of an unequivocal commitment to revolutionary communism, along with the rejection of the authority of the Islamic

regime, on the other hand, proved more attractive to the radical sector of the Kurdish urban petty-bourgeoisie dabbling in Marxism and revolutionary politics. The stream of new recruits to the ranks of the organisation, especially after the military invasion of August 1979, boosted the confidence of its relatively inexperienced leadership, hastening their resolve to challenge the populist revisionism of the Tudeh and the Fadaiyan-e Khalq on more orthodox grounds. But the KSZKI's political radicalism, its claim to be the standard bearer of revolutionary Marxism not only in Kurdistan but in Iran at large, was met with fierce opposition by its Kurdish competitor and non-Kurdish opponents in the political field.

In the Kurdish political field, as was seen, the discursive boundaries of the power struggle with the KDPI were defined primarily by Kurdish ethnicity, and the competing claims to represent the struggle for regional autonomy overshadowed the Marxist class categories. In the struggle for Kurdish autonomy, the discursive representation of the Kurdish rights involved questioning/opposing the ethnic/national identity of sovereign power, and the terms of the struggle against the Islamic regime were profoundly ethnic/national. There was therefore little, if no, ground for the operation of the KSZKI's class discourse, except on the rhetorical level, whereby references to the bourgeois character of the KDPI and the revisionist nature of its ideology served to reaffirm its own orthodox Marxist credentials. The persistence of the struggle for regional autonomy meant that ethnic categories defined the boundaries of the Kurdish discourse and practice, and the assertion of the Kurdish rights, be it grounded in social reformism of the KDPI or revolutionary Marxism of the KSZKI, necessarily opposed the uniform ethnic (Persian ethnicity, language) identity of the Islamic regime and resisted its imposition on Kurdistan, as was clearly demonstrated by the debates surrounding the preparation and ratification of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic in December 1979.[3]

The KSZKI's claim to revolutionary Marxist orthodoxy fared differently with the non-Kurdish Marxist forces which had already established active operational bases in Kurdistan. The Tudeh Party and the Fadaiyan-eh Khalq both were intent on exploiting the political vacuum created by the KDPI's theoretical poverty and rigid ethnic nationalism. In this sense, therefore, the KSZKI challenged them not only on ideological grounds but also, and more importantly, in the political field, as they attempted to recruit the disaffected segments of Kurdish urban petty-bourgeoisie and channel their radicalism in the direction of the emergent anti-imperialist consensus on the left of the political spectrum in the early phase of the

power struggle after the revolution, especially in the events leading to the occupation of the American Embassy by radical Islamists and the subsequent fall of the provisional government on 4 November 1979—hence, the Tudeh's increasing hostility towards the KSZKI and its anti-populist revolutionary rhetoric, which initially echoed the critical thrust of the prevailing Soviet response to the Maoist charges of revisionism and social imperialism in the international communist arena. The Fadaiyan-e Khalq, who initially disagreed with the Tudeh's perception of the Soviet state and its claim to represent international Marxism, were equally scathing of the KSZKI's Maoism, rejecting its rural populism and sectarian politics. The discursive contours of this conflict were soon to change as the course of events in the summer in Kurdistan shifted the focus of the conflict to the social character of the Islamic regime and the conditions of an anti-imperialist struggle in post-revolutionary Iran.

The course of events in 1979, the military invasion of Kurdistan in August, followed by the seizure of the American Embassy in November, which changed the contours of theoretical and political discourse on the left, also exposed a fundamental problem, a persistent weakness of the KSZKI: a provincial Kurdish organisation with a revolutionary communist ideology arguing for socialism in Iran. For the KSZKI's opposition to the growing anti-imperialist consensus on the left, its radical rejection of the Islamic regime further pushed the organisation back onto its narrow ethnic basis, thus exposing more than ever the existing gap between its radical communist discourse and its parochial/provincial practice. The KSZKI's predicament was further exacerbated by the advent of the war between Iran and Iraq on 22 September 1980. The war significantly increased the operational and logistical bases of the organisation, but siding with Iraq against the Islamic regime only accentuated its ethnic identity. The surge of Iranian nationalism precipitated by the war seriously delimited the KSZKI's options to pursue its strategic objective in the Iranian political field. Although the KSZKI had become stronger and more popular in Kurdistan, its capacity to spearhead a revolutionary communist movement in Iran was more limited. In fact, the political basis of the KSZKI's ethnic populism in Kurdistan grew in an inverse ratio to the political basis of its communist class discourse in Iran. It was the grim realisation of the widening gap between the communist class discourse and the ethnic populist practice of the KSZKI which led its leadership to seek allies in the Iranian political field.

The leadership of the KSZKI needed a communist ally not only to help it found a genuine revolutionary vanguard for the Iranian proletariat, its much publicised political and ideological objective, but also to provide it with theoretical grounding and knowledge to explain and defend its overwhelmingly sectarian class politics against the populist left in the tense and overcrowded post-revolutionary political field—for the ongoing contest with the Tudeh and the Fadaiyan-e Khalq had clearly exposed the self-confessed theoretical weakness of the leadership of the KSZKI and the fallacy of its populist conviction that correct theories arise out of the practical experience of the organisation. Three years since the formation of the organisation and this fundamental weakness was still staring at its face, undermining its claim to ideological orthodoxy and flying in the face of its long-cherished aspiration to represent the Iranian proletariat in the struggle for socialism. The Communist Party of Iran, resulting from an organisational merger with the Etehad-e Mobarezan-e Komonist (the EMK hereafter; the Union of the Communist Combatants) in September 1983 was more than a mere tactical step in the direction of the realisation of KSZKI's declared strategic objective. It was also a response to the chronic theoretical poverty of the KSZKI, hastened by the suppression of their common ideological foe, the Tudeh Party, earlier in May 1983 by the Islamic regime. In this sense, however, the KSZKI's merger with the EMK was prompted by the same need which had driven the KDPI to the arms of the Tudeh Party 30 years earlier. The arrival of the EMK on the Kurdish political scene, which had already been anticipated/ushered in by the KSZKI's drive towards ideological orthodoxy after its Second Congress, was a turning point in its brief history. It almost immediately shifted the balance of forces in the organisation, displacing Kurdish ethnicity in favour of Marxist class categories, thus signalling the end of the KSZKI's direct engagement with the Kurdish question for years to come. Like the KDPI before it, the KSZKI was destined to pay a heavy price for the political inexperience, theoretical poverty and ideological dogmatism of its leadership.

Vacillations of Ethnic-National and Class Identities

The KSZKI was formed in late January 1979 as a Marxist-Leninist organisation committed to revolutionary socialism. The revolutionary rupture and the subsequent upheaval in the political field in the country, as was said, were instrumental in the realisation of the idea held in common by

the small group of Kurdish university students who subsequently formed the founding core of the organisation. They had started as the founders of a clandestine Maoist organisation inspired by the radical though short-lived developments on the left of the Kurdish movement in Iraqi Kurdistan leading to the formation of the Komalay Ranjberan in the late 1960s. Like the leadership of the Komalay Ranjberan in Iraqi Kurdistan, whom they so closely emulated, the founders of the Kurdish Maoist group in Iranian universities subscribed to a world view inspired by the teachings of Mao and his interpretation of revolutionary Marxism in the age of the struggle for global mastery between US imperialism and Soviet social imperialism. Iran, from their point of view, was a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country passing through the stage of democratic revolutions characterised by the popular struggle for liberation from imperialist domination and feudal exploitation.[4]

Although the fledgling Kurdish group did not produce any statement of its political and ideological positions before the revolution, commitment to revolutionary socialism and the primacy of the struggle for the liberation of the Iranian workers and peasants from the twin evil of capitalist exploitation and imperialist domination were invariants of a radical discourse which was subsequently adopted and reiterated by the KSZKI.[5] This commitment, according to them, was not at variance or incompatible with their commitment as Kurds to the eradication of national oppression in Iran, for they were convinced that socialist revolution in Iran was the means and condition of the 'democratic' resolution of the Kurdish question. This political position, by no means novel or unfamiliar, was characteristically expressed by the notion of *setam-e moza'af* or 'double oppression', a political euphemism rather than a theoretical concept inspired primarily by Stalin's popular pamphlet on the *National Question*, which was commonplace in the literature of the Marxist left on the national question since the mid-1960s. It was seen as an ingenious means of articulating national democratic relations in class relations. But given the primacy of the concept of social class and the overriding force of class determinations, double oppression clearly signified the subordinate status of the national question in the discourse of the Marxist left. In practice however the notion served to disguise the persistent theoretical tension at the very core of the Marxist-Leninist approaches to the national question—that is, the theoretical tension between class determinations and national democratic relations which surfaced to great political effect whenever ethnicity came to define the boundaries of political discourse and practice.

The KSZKI was no exception to this general rule. It inherited this fundamental and destabilising tension, which constantly exposed the growing hiatus between its discourse and its practice in the political field.

Soon after the revolution the leadership of the KSZKI moved to shed the crude Maoism of their formative years, thus abandoning the flawed and outdated characterisation of Iran of the 1970s as a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society. But this change did not affect the rural populist ethos of its discourse. Political statements of the organisation, few and infrequent as they were, and the public speeches and utterances of its enthusiastic but novice leadership continued to be dominated by the vocabulary and imagery of a radical rural populism, the focus of which was the prevailing social and economic relations in the Kurdish countryside. In fact, the populist quest for socio-economic equality and the structural transformation of the organisation of production and distribution in the Kurdish countryside, reiterated variously by leading personalities, formed the dialectical nexus of an uneasy relationship between class and national liberation struggles in the discourse of the early KSZKI. Broadly speaking, Kurdish ethnicity defined the boundaries of the KSZKI's political practice, and class categories were given a distinctly ethnic colouring, which in effect seriously undercut its claim to representing class forces and relations outside the Kurdish territory. This meant that, despite its Marxist class discourse, the KSZKI retained a Kurdish ethnic exterior to its identity in the political field.[6]

This ethnic exterior, though the main reason for the rapid popularity and legitimacy of the organisation with the Kurdish public, helping it to draw a clear demarcation line with non-Kurdish Marxist organisations in the political field, was soon to become a thorn on the side of the bulk of the leadership, who did little to hide their disdain for this pronounced ethnic exterior, rejecting its unifying force as an obstacle to their efforts to establish an Iranian proletarian identity for their organisation. This anti-ethnic streak continued to persist in the discourse of the KSZKI, looming large in attempts to emphasise the revolutionary Marxist identity of the organisation. For a regional organisation with predominantly ethnic constituency of support, it was tantamount with slow self-destruction on a grand scale, reaching its climax in the metamorphosis of the organisation to the Communist Party of Iran in 1982. Now, some 30 years after that debacle and several catastrophic splits in the organisation, all directly related to this issue, the bulk of the leadership of the splinter groupings claiming the revolutionary legacy of the KSZKI are still averse to Kurdish

ethnicity and ethnic identity, albeit in varying degrees. Their response, diverse as it is, is far from being ambiguous, ranging from denial to tacit acceptance of the status of Kurdish ethnicity in the representation of the identity of their breakaway organisations. It is not an overstatement to say that they are still blowing their trumpets from the wrong end. I shall return to this point later on in this study.

But despite the Marxist prejudices of the bulk of the leadership the ethnic identity of the KSZKI played a decisive role in its formative phase when the fledgling organisation was thrown into the deep end of an increasingly volatile political field suffering from the aftershock of the revolutionary rupture and the collapse of the royal dictatorship. Kurdish ethnicity in fact was instrumental in defining its status in the political field both as a radical alternative to the KDPI and as a Kurdish competitor to the Iranian Marxist organisations operating in Kurdistan, especially in so far as the crucial issue of recruiting from among the expanding ranks of the new generation of the Kurdish urban petty-bourgeoisie was concerned—for the Kurdish identity of the organisation and its populist political underpinning served to conceal the growing hiatus between the theoretical foundations of its discourse and practice, that is, between the class determinations of a radical Marxist discourse and the ethnic framework of a populist political practice respectively. This hiatus manifested itself most vividly in the KSZKI's two principal but mutually exclusive political objectives: the creation of a genuine revolutionary communist party for the Iranian working class on the one hand and an autonomous government for the Kurdish people on the other. Aware of the contradiction apparent in the articulation of the political and economic conditions of possibility these objectives, the leadership of the KSZKI, in an early policy statement, hoped that the Iranian working class will express a lifelong commitment to the struggle for the rights of the peoples of Iran and the civic democratic liberties in Iran. But as the course of events after the revolution proved, in the real world of Iranian politics, the resolution of this contradiction needed a lot more than a mere hope for the goodwill of the Iranian working class.

The KSZKI's early position on the Kurdish question was marked by confusion, showing a clear lack of direction in the leadership of the organisation. The Maoist assertion that correct theoretical positions arise out of the living experience and revolutionary practice of the people, reiterated in the first policy statement of the organisation after its inauguration in late January 1979, was more than a mere revolutionary rhetoric. It was also a

veiled admission of the lack of policy and programme; the KSZKI was proposing to develop a theoretically informed and comprehensive programme specifying its policy positions on fundamental political issues, including the Kurdish question, in the course of participation in the unfolding political process. But despite this naïve populist empiricism, the statement contained the essentials of a regional autonomy project all but in name, albeit as a tactical phase in the process of struggle for socialism. In other words, the creation of a genuine autonomous administration in Kurdistan was perceived not a consequence but a preparatory stage in the liberation of the society under the leadership of the Iranian proletariat. This 'tactical' approach to Kurdish autonomy appeared to be in tandem with the theoretical presuppositions of the KSZKI's communist orthodoxy, which sat in an uneasy relationship with the avowedly rural populist character of the discourse of this confused but important statement.[7] The statement repeatedly invoked rural populist notions using emotive egalitarian language in order to define the socio-economic content of Kurdish autonomy, which in effect interrupted the seemingly logical relationship between regional autonomy and socialism in the KSZKI's discourse. For the quest for peasant revolution in the countryside and bolstering the fortunes of the national bourgeoisie in towns, the two proposed objectives of the transition period in Kurdistan in the statement, radical as they may be, could hardly pass the stringent economic class criteria of an orthodox Marxist political scheme. The incoherency apparent in the KSZKI's Marxist discourse became increasingly pronounced in the following months, especially in view of the developments in the political and discursive fields following the fall of the provisional government in Tehran.

The developments in the political field, in particular the rapid consolidation of the anti-imperialist consensus among the Marxist forces in the political field after the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran and the fall of the provisional government, hastened the KSZKI's resolve to come to terms with the inconsistencies apparent in its discourse and practice. The increasing necessity of an ideological demarcation line to distinguish its positions from both the KDPI in Kurdistan and the non-Kurdish Marxist organisations in the wider political field in Iran was the decisive factor in this respect. The former involved a reassessment of the concept of national bourgeoisie and its role in the process of struggle for Kurdish autonomy, and the latter a redefinition of the social character of political power in the Islamic Republic. The Resolutions of the Second Congress of the KSZKI in Farvardin 1360 (March–April 1981) thus admitted that

its position on these issues had been mistaken, deviating from the fundamentals of communist orthodoxy. This deviation, the document further stated, was due mainly to the influence of a populist reading of Lenin's discourse on imperialism which predominated the ideological position of the organisation in its early phase. This was signified by the primacy of the 'people-imperialist contradiction' at the expense of 'class contradiction' between labour and capital as an international system of production and exchange. Iran, it was thus concluded, is a capitalist society and the Islamic state a bourgeois institution whose aim is to ensure the reproduction of the imperialist super-profit.[8]

The KSZKI's break with populism was neither complete nor final. The organisation was to return to this issue over and over again in the course of the next few years. Although the forceful statements arguing for the primacy of class over popular democratic contradiction and the insistence on the bourgeois character of the Islamic regime provided the organisation with a strong platform to oppose the growing anti-imperialist consensus on the left of the political spectrum, they cannot be taken to account for the eradication of populism in the KSZKI's discourse and practice. True, Lenin's discourse on imperialism with its emphasis on national liberation movements had a powerful populist undercurrent, but the persistence of populism in the KSZKI's discourse had another and equally powerful source: Kurdish ethnicity, which while defining the boundaries of the KSZKI's political practice frequently pushed it towards nationalism, especially in areas of conflict and contestation with the KDPI mainly associated with Kurdish autonomy and civic and democratic rights. Kurdish ethnicity not only informed the organisation's positions in this ongoing conflict but also drew an unspoken though recognised discursive boundary around the Kurdish programme of the organisation by working through the structure of the counterarguments used to defend them against the KDPI's alleged bourgeois reformism in the political and ideological fields. The fact that the KSZKI defended a regional autonomy programme using Marxist class categories meant that Kurdish ethnicity automatically defined the locus and the range of efficacy of these categories. Further, given the fact that the KSZKI shared the KDPI's opposition to the anti-imperialist consensus on the left organised and bolstered by the Tudeh Party as well as its rejection of the Tudeh's characterisation of the Islamic regime, the organisation's appeal to the primacy of class relations and contradictions always fell short of achieving its intended objective. The KSZKI's political and ideological battles with the KDPI had to be

fought on nationalist grounds, and the route from Marxism to nationalism, from class to national identity, always passed through the populist territory: the recognised and much trodden ground for the public representation of the social and economic content of its Kurdish programme. So, what had started as a noisy Marxist attack on entrenched populism of the organisation did not go very far. It returned back to populism, albeit by a roundabout way, as the Marxist class categories used to criticise and refute the KDPI and other class enemies of the Iranian proletariat lost their bearings operating in the ethnic framework of the KSZKI's programme for the liberation of Kurdistan.[9]

The KSZKI's much publicised struggle against 'populist deviation' in the organisation also concerned its approach to the Kurdish question. Clearly the organisation's critique of the populist readings of Lenin's imperialism and the rejection of the progressive role of the national bourgeoisie in the process of democratic revolution to reassert its orthodox Marxist credentials had radical implications for its approach to Kurdish rights and the concept of regional autonomy. In fact, a radical approach devoid of 'bourgeois reformism' required, above all, a comprehensive autonomy programme with necessary socio-economic and political provisions to ensure the realisation of Kurdish rights within the class framework of the new anti-populist communist orthodoxy in the organisation. In other words, the KSZKI was required to produce a socialist programme for Kurdish autonomy, in which social class relations not only defined the conditions of realisations ethnic rights, but also, and more importantly, ensured their contribution to the final socialist victory. This, in effect, meant assigning class character to ethnic rights, and ultimately explaining the national rights to self-determination in a strictly class perspective, theoretically and politically. This was a colossal task which had hitherto eluded Marxist theoreticians worldwide for almost as long as the history of Marxism itself.[10]

The lure of ideological purity soon forced the KSZKI into this impasse, plunging it into the deep end of a crude class reductionism which was just as hopeless as its populism. The discourse of the KSZKI was now plagued by another incoherency running through its statements and resolutions with unprecedented ease, since the Second Congress did not produce an autonomy programme to match its claims to Marxist orthodoxy, save for the obligatory radical rhetoric about the Kurdish people's resistance movement. The Resolutions of the KSZKI's Second Congress were inundated by lofty praises for the 'Kurdish revolutionary and democratic resistance

movement against the ruling bourgeois dictatorship in Iran' but without any comprehensive analysis of the aims and objectives of the organisation in the region. Instead, the Resolutions focused on the 'limitations' of the Kurdish movement, castigating it for lacking a 'uniform class base, and hence unable to be the agent for the transformation of the relations of production and victory for the proletariat'. It was, the Resolutions went on, a 'defensive movement' incapable of turning into a countrywide movement for the seizure of political power in Iran. The KSZKI's analysis of the 'causes' of the Kurdish movement carried the discussion of its alleged limitations to its logical conclusion, thus depriving it of any political autonomy by subordinating it to the historical process of the development and political and organisational exigencies of the proletarian movement in Iran.

'The [Kurdish] resistance movement is not the continuation of the conscious struggle of the [Iranian] working class, it has not been initiated according to the latter's plan. This movement has come into existence in specific objective conditions: the political weakness of the Iranian proletariat [which], lacking a conscious and vanguard party as well as a strong and independent constituency in the political scene, has been unable to influence the general course of the struggles in Iran directly and consciously.'[11]

The reason underlying social and political limitations of the Kurdish movement as well as the cause of its quick and forceful revival after the revolution was conveniently attributed to the political and organisational weaknesses of the Iranian proletariat. This meant that the suppression of Kurdish identity and rights in Iran was not the historical effect of the domination of the Kurdish community by modern state power. In fact, the discourse of the Second Congress of the KSZKI denied not only the discursive autonomy of the Kurdish question but also its existence as a historical-political phenomenon in Iran. The suppression of Kurdish identity and rights and hence the advent of the Kurdish question seem to be totally incidental to the history of the formation and development of the modern state in Iran. Historically the Kurdish question is an effect of the formation and consolidation of the modern nation-state and national identity in Iran. The argument that the Kurdish question in Iran is an effect of sovereign domination over the Kurdish community is central to the Kurdish struggle for recognition and freedom from sovereign oppression, and the exclusion of this argument from the discourse of the Resolutions of the Second Congress wiped out its historical specificity altogether, thus erasing a gamut of insurmountable theoretical problems

entailed in the conceptualisation of ethnic-national repression in Marxist discourse. This exclusion may have been a theoretical oversight or even a discursive strategy to overlook insurmountable theoretical problems; in either case it could hardly escape their political consequences for the discourse and practice of the KSZKI. This oversight or exclusion showed above all the political naivety of the leadership and the theoretical limitations of its conception of Marxist theory and theoretical practice, for problems related to the historical specificity of the Kurdish question, the political-cultural nature of sovereign domination and its effects of the Kurdish community resurfaced immediately after the Second Congress, returning in force to haunt the organisation in the years to come.

The political implications of the KSZKI's approach to the Kurdish question, its total disregard for the historical specificity of sovereign domination in Kurdistan, are clear: the creation of a genuine revolutionary communist party to organise and lead the Iranian proletariat in the process of struggle for socialism would suffice to ensure the resolution of the Kurdish question not by realising the national democratic rights of the Kurdish people but by subsuming them in an all-Iranian socialist programme and rendering them superfluous. The KSZKI's analysis entailed in the proceedings of its Second Congress as such surpassed the discursive bounds of Marxist class reductionism, in theoretical and political terms. It had entered the arena of pure historical fatalism. It was not just a simple case of political reason giving way to ideological dogma, but that of ideological dogma giving way to an article of faith as the gaping gap between the ideological discourse and the political practice of the organisation turned the communist ideal to a paradise unattainable by worldly means. The historical fatalism of the Second Congress had planted the seeds of the dogmatic workerism in the Third Congress when the overwhelming majority of the delegates voted for the termination of the KSZKI and its replacement by the Communist Party of Iran (CPI hereafter), deemed to lead the Iranian working class to communism, a move which proved to be no less than a wilful political suicide. It is, however, interesting to note that at the time, none among the novice perpetrators of this infantile radicalism ever wanted to question the wisdom of terminating an active Kurdish political organisation, erasing its ethnic identity and replacing it with an all-Iranian political party whose proletarian identity is derived not from its political practice but from an imaginary representation of the Iranian proletariat. But it was hardly the first time for Marxist political activists to find the truth of proletarian class representation in their ideol-

ogy, the religious belief that their ideology gives them 'natural' rights to represent the proletariat even if they have no organic political and organisational relationship with this class. This is held true about the new CPI, as the subsequent farcical developments in the organisation showed clearly.[12]

The flawed logic of this fatalism culminated in the Resolutions of the Third Congress in April 1982. National oppression, the KSZKI declared, was an adjunct of naked bourgeois oppression in capitalist society and can be eradicated only by socialist revolution. National democratic and class struggles were thus integral parts of a revolutionary process which was to be carried out in two successive stages, popular democratic and socialist. While the active presence of the organisation in the Kurdish political field was deemed sufficient to assign a revolutionary direction to the democratic struggle in the first stage, the socialist stage required a revolutionary communist vanguard, a genuine proletarian party, to lead the struggle to victory. The proceedings of the Third Congress thus variously reiterated the KSZKI's intention to lay the foundation for the creation of a revolutionary communist vanguard. The expression of this intention was by no means new in the discourse of the organisation. In fact, the representation of KSZKI as the vehicle for the creation of a revolutionary communist party for the Iranian proletariat was central to its self-image as a radical communist force. It remained a defining feature of its identity, reiterated to emphasise its differences both from the Kurdish KDPI and the non-Kurdish Marxist organisations in the political field in Iran at large.[13]

The logical outcome of this communist orthodoxy was a perception of the national question as transitory politics, inextricably tied to the predominance of the capitalist mode of production and bourgeois rule in society, which were to be superseded by socialism. This erroneous perception of the national question ran through the discourse of the Communist Party of Iran, underpinning its reductionist approach to the Kurdish question during its short and turbulent existence. The reductionist approach was symptomatic of a profound misconception in the heart of its discourse on of historical formation of the nation-state in Iran in particular the character of political power in the Islamic republic. The CPI had nothing to say about the materiality of the Islamic political discourse, that is, its immense capacity to articulate popular demands in political and cultural processes and practices within and outside the institutional structure of the state and use them to consolidate its grip over the political field and define the shifting boundaries of the popular democratic struggle in the

post-revolutionary conjuncture. Nor did it have anything to say about the ideological function of the Islamic political discourse, its organising and mobilising effects ensuring the dominance of the Islamists in the discursive and political fields following the revolutionary rupture of 1979. The sweeping class reductionism of the Third Congress went largely unnoticed by the leadership, who largely missed the point about the disastrous consequences of articulating a political class identity on the basis of an imaginary class representation. In the absence of any theoretical grounding and conceptual explanation, the legitimacy of the CPI as the vanguard of the Iranian proletariat depended entirely on this imaginary representation. That the assumed representation of the self-appointed vanguard of the Iranian proletariat had no foundation in the existing structure of social and political relations, and could not as such be grounded in the relations of force in the political field, did not seem to bother the delegates, who for the most part were satisfied with the outcome of the congress. The bulk of the participants were mostly resigned to accept the proposed change with a sense of relief, thinking that it can provide a revolutionary solution to their long-standing dilemma, enabling them to put an end to their erstwhile vacillation between Kurdish and communist identities. The enthusiasts on the other hand were ecstatic, eager to shed their Kurdish identity and embrace communist orthodoxy. They did so expressing a renewed conviction in communism along with a pronounced sense of guilt and remorse for their past deviations, their regrettable commitment to bourgeois nationalism and petty-bourgeois populism. Those who were dissatisfied with the outcome of the congress and opposed the brutal marginalisation of the Kurdish identity of their organisation were in minority. They either had to accept the outcome or leave the organisation. Either way they were ineffective, with little hope of reversing the outcome. Knowing this, some retired from active politics to southern Kurdistan, and others started the long journey to exile in Europe, but both with a deep sense of confusion about the course of events and their outcome.

The conception of the national question entailed in the 'Resolutions' outlived the Third Congress. It was the decisive influence in the construction of the 'Programme for Kurdish Autonomy' approved by the Fourth Congress of the Sazeman-e Kordestan-e Hezb-e Komonist-e Iran-Komala (The Kurdistan Organisation of the Communist Party of Iran-Komala), constituted by the same congress to replace the KSZKI in February 1983. The Programme expressed the CPI's commitment to the doctrine of national rights to self-determination, but in a characteristically reductionist

vein, tied it to the victory of socialism in Iran. The socialist revolution was not only the historical condition of possibility of the 'bourgeois' doctrine of national rights but also the legitimate means of its realisation. The double function assigned to the socialist revolution as both the conditions of possibility and the means of realisation of the concept of the national rights to self-determination was seriously flawed, especially in regard to the causal relationship between socialism and the national/Kurdish question.

The CPI's commitment to the doctrine of the national rights to self-determination, the key element in its approach to the national question in general and the Kurdish question in particular, was no more than an unfounded assertion. It was neither theoretically grounded nor conceptually explained. The leadership of the CPI simply took it for granted that the doctrine is a Marxist construct and as such needs no further theoretical grounding and conceptual explanation. They paid no attention to the discursive construction of the doctrine and its theoretical origin in the bourgeois political philosophy since the eighteenth century, long predating Marx and Marxism. They failed to see that the doctrine is juridical construct grounded in democratic theory and as such requires conditions of possibility which go beyond the relations of production and antagonistic class relationships, and that they are essential to ensure the realisation of rights to self-determination in any given social formation. Nor did they understand the theoretical consequences of the inclusion of the democratic doctrine in a Marxist-Leninist party programme constituted by the primacy of class relations. To be more precise, they failed to appreciate the theoretical effects of the national political, legal and cultural conditions of the possibility and realisation of the doctrine on the theoretical structure of their Marxist party political programme. That is, the theoretical conflict and tension arising from the operation of two different forms of causality entailed in class relations and national relations, undermining the discursive coherency and logical consistency of the party political programme.

The commitment to the democratic doctrine of the national rights to self-determination in the party programme did not amount to a solution, and the tension in the heart of classical Marxist discourse between social class categories arising from the relations of production and ethnic-national relations effectively undermined the coherency of the communist programme. This tension cannot be ignored or eradicated by resorting to class reductionism grounded in the teleology of communism. The teleology of communism which underpinned the discourse of the reconstituted Komala clearly pushed the boundaries of class reductionism to new limits,

for it reaffirmed not only the bourgeois and hence the transitory character of the national question and national rights in toto, but also the political impossibility of their realisation in capitalist society. The latter, however transitory, could provide the conditions for popular democratic struggle for regional autonomy, should the people want to articulate their concrete historical demands in the wider context of the proletarian struggle for socialism, the programme further maintained.[14]

This argument thus informed the Komala's programme for autonomy, which was also at the same time reaffirmed entirely by the fifth party congress in March 1985. That the programme clearly involved a distinction between national and ethnic rights, associated with self-determination and autonomy respectively, did not seem to concern the guardians of communist orthodoxy in the party. Nor did the organisation's programmatic commitment to the struggle for ethnic rights posed a problem for the struggle against the remnants of ethnic populism in the party. The overarching class reductionism of the discourse of the CPI simply overlooked the conceptual difference between the national and ethnic relations, representing the latter as a variant of the former, albeit a less developed form associated with the early and more radical phase of the popular democratic struggle when national bourgeoisie had not yet been able to define the course and direction of the national movement. The Komala thus proposed to lead this movement; radicalising its democratic content to protect it from nationalist domination by the Kurdish bourgeoisie represented by the KDPI and directing its revolutionary thrust against the bourgeois dictatorship in the Islamic Republic by incorporating it in the strategic project of the struggle for socialism in Iran.[15]

This was easier said than done, as the Komala was to find out soon at its own peril, for the party's relentless drive towards Marxist orthodoxy, its pretentious communism compounded by its celebration of workerism in politics and class reductionism in theory quickly exposed the glaring anomalies in its autonomy programme. The precarious balance between ethnic and class relations was quickly undermined once the organisation's commitment to the two-staged revolutionary strategy fell victim to the rising Trotskyist workerism, which had by now become the hegemonic theoretical and political tendency in the leadership of the CPI. The new workerist tendency, bent on the revolutionary communist aspirations of the Iranian proletariat, could not appreciate the limited tactical value of an autonomy programme whose underlying reason was clearly at odds with the historical logic of a communist teleology driven by class antagonism and conflict.

The consolidation of the communist orthodoxy which followed the formation of the CPI thus witnessed a rapid decline in the fortunes of Kurdish ethnicity and ethnic-national categories in the discourse of the reconstituted Komala. Kurdish ethnicity and ethnic identity were not marginalised, but rather effectively expelled from the discursive field, becoming entirely incidental to the political practice of the organisation, which sought to assert the proletarian class identity of the party. The Komala, as was seen, had already shed its Kurdish identity before a defensive reaction to the hegemonic workerist tendency in the party began to surface in the organisation. In fact, the subsequent opposition, conflict and factionalism in the leadership of the CPI, culminating in a major split in the organisation and the formation of the Workers' Communist Party of Iran (WCPI) in 1991, were all expressed in terms of class position and interests of the Iranian proletariat based on competing claims to revolutionary Marxist orthodoxy. Kurdish identity and ethnic/national political affiliations were ideological charges everyone was anxious to deny and avoid.[16]

Notes

1. This view is clearly expressed in a one-page circular announcing the formation of the KSZKI on the eve of the 1979 revolution. The circular defines the political position and ideological stance of the organisation in contrast to those of the existing political parties and organisations in the political field in the revolutionary conjuncture of 1978–1979 in Kurdistan and in Iran at large. The Marxist-Leninist identity of the organisation is clearly expressed in a Maoist tone, highlighting its ideological orientation. The document does not carry the date or place of publication. I am grateful to Ali Karimi for providing me with the copy of this important statement. See also interview with Sa'ed Vatandust (Marsta, Sweden, May 1999) and Yousef Ardalan (Paris, June 2004, and Erbil, September 2006). They both were of the opinion that the KSZKI was founded by a small group of young Kurdish men from different parts of the Kurdish territory sharing the same Marxist-Maoist convictions in the final phase of the revolutionary rupture of 1978–1979. This view has been variously confirmed by a number of other former members residing in different west European countries since the late 1980s. See also Ayubzadeh, E. Chep la Rojhelati Kurdistan: Komala u Dozi Nasiyonali Kurd (Left in Eastern Kurdistan: Komala and the Kurdish National Objective/ideal) Vol. 1. 2002.
2. According to the official publications, the KSZKI was founded on 26 January 1979, which is celebrated every year. However, Abdollah Mohtadi, a founding member of the KSZKI and the current chairperson of the

Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, clarifying the official view, argues that the KSZKI was by no means born on this date, and that the organisation predated the revolution by more than nine years. In a recent meeting in Washington DC (11 June 2018) he reiterated this view, disagreeing with my account of the formation of the KSZKI. Hussein Moradbegi and Iraj Farzad, both founding members who subsequently broke away to join the Workers' Communist Party of Iran, dispute Mothadi's view of the formation and development of the KSZKI. According to them the KSZKI was officially formed during its First Congress on 26 January 1979, evolving out of an earlier organisation which had been founded in 1348/1969. The latter, the Tashkilat, as it was called by its founders, was a Marxist-Maoist grouping with no specific ethnic identity, Kurdish or otherwise. It had non-Kurds among its founders and had no specific programme for Kurdistan. The Maoist identity of the Tashkilat was emphasised to assert its difference to both the KDPI and the Tudeh on the one hand and the radical Fedaiyan-e Khalq on the other. The KSZKI was formed by the Kurdish members and adopted a Kurdish name, operating in the Kurdish territory. There was therefore no continuity between the Tashkilat and the KSZKI, politically and organisationally (see Ayubzadeh op. cit. 2002, pp. 18–22). This view is corroborated by the Statement of the Administrative Committee of the KSZKI in Shorish, the official organ of the organisation, No. 1 Fall 1979.

3. The KSZKI and the KDPI both rejected the new draft of the constitution prepared by the revamped assembly of experts dominated by the hardliner Islamist bent on incorporating the doctrine of the Welayat-e Faghih as the primary source of power and codification of rules. They refused to take part in the referendum for the ratification of the constitution. For a detailed analysis of the struggles revolving around the production and ratification of the constitution, see Schirazi (1998).
4. The founding members who took part in the First Congress of the KSZKI were as follows:

   Foa'd Mostafa Soltani, Mohammad Hossein Karimi, Abdollah Mohtadi, Tayeb Abbas Ruh Illahi, Mohsen Rahimi, Ibrahim Alizadeh, Sa'ed Vatandoust, Hussein Moradbagi, Omar Ilkhanizadeh and Iraj Farzad. See Iraj Farzad in Ayubzadeh's (op. cit. 2002).
5. Shorish (op. cit. 1979).
6. It is only in the Second Congress that the leadership of the KSZKI attempted to take up a clear all-round critical stance on populism while restating its commitment to the creation of a socialist society under the leadership of the Iranian proletariat. Populism is thus defined as a deviation from the true Marxist path and is attributed to the influence of revisionism and the three worlds theory, the latter being a euphemism for Maoism in

the literature of the left in Iran in general. Resolutions of the Second Congress of the Revolutionary Organization of the Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan, March 1360/1981. The break with Maoism was completed in the Third Congress of the KSZKI when the organisation reasserted its orthodox Marxist identity; see The Resolutions and Messages of the Third Congress April 1361/1982.

7. See Note 1.
8. The document identifies economism as the source of deviation and claims to try to eradicate it from the organisation, but it makes no reference to political Islam in the characterisation of the state in post-revolutionary Iran. The state is thus characterised as the bourgeois institution of class domination. Political Islam is treated as totally incidental to the institutional form of political power in post-revolutionary Iran. This strikingly reductionist perception of the state and the relationship between political Islam and political power casts serious doubts on the KSZKI's understanding of the concept of economism in Marxist discourse and its significance in the discourse and practice of the organisation. Economism and class reductionism, it is widely known, are inseparable. The latter presupposes the former.
9. See, for example, 'Komala va Masa'le-ye Melli dar Kordestan' (Komala and the National Question in Kurdistan) Pishrew. No 2, Mehr Mahi 1360/1981 also 'Jonbesh Moqavemat-e Khalgh-e Kord va Masa'la-ye Melli dar Kordestan (Kurdish People's Resistance Movement and the National Question in Kurdistan) Pishrow no. 2. Appendix 4, Mehr Mah-e 1360/1981.
10. On the complexities of the conceptualisation of the relationship between class and ethnic-national categories in Marxist theory from the classical age to the present, see, for example, Nimni, E. Marxism and Nationalism: The Theoretical Origins of a Political Crisis, London 1994. For a discussion of this issue in the context of the Kurdish movement in Iran, see Vali (op. cit. 2011).
11. See the Resolutions op. cit. 1360/1981, pp. 15–17 (my translation).
12. The formation of the Communist Party of Iran in 1983, though a planned and organised onslaught on the ethnic identity of the KSZKI, by no means eradicated its influence, and Kurdish ethnicity continued to destabilise the new proletarian identity from inside the organisation. But the ideological cohesion of the new Communist Party was undermined most effectively by the growing hiatus between the national/Iranian basis of its ideological claims and the provincial-local/Kurdish field of its political practice, increasingly exposing the imaginary nature of its proletarian identity. This tension remained central to the ideological disputes, political conflicts and splits marking the development of the Communist Party from its inception

to date. For a general survey of the earlier phase, see Ayubzadeh (op. cit. 2002). Vatandoust (op. cit. 1999) and Ardalan (op. cit. 2006) also discussed the conditions of formation of the Communist Party in great detail. Vatandoust insisted on the necessity of the formation of the Communist Party on orthodox Marxist lines in a tone reminiscent of the position which dominated the Third Congress. Ardalan on the other hand provided a more critical view of the event, less sympathetic to the leadership in the critical political climate of the Third Congress and immediately after.

13. See the Resolutions and Messages of the Third Congress op. cit. April 1983. The discussions of the Third Congress have been entirely recorded by some members who were at the time displeased with the direction the organisation was taking and subsequently left the KSZKI, refusing to be witness to its painful metamorphosis into the Communist Party of Iran. I am grateful to T. K., who put the tapes at my disposal. He wishes to remain anonymous. The bulk of my discussion of the Third Congress and its outcomes draws on the information contained in these tapes.
14. See Barnameh-ye Komala baray-e Khodmokhtari-ye Kordestan: Mosaveb-e kongre-ye 4, Bahman 1362/1983.
15. See Jambandi-ye Mabahes-e kongre-ye Panjom, Ordibehesht-e 1365/April 1986.
16. The WCPI did not last long, and after the death of Mansour Hekmat, its founding leader and ideologue in July 2002, it was split, and the defectors formed WCPI-Hekmatist in 2004.

CHAPTER 8

The Revolutionary Rupture and the Political Field in Kurdistan: A Brief Survey

Of the political forces active in the wider political field in Iran before the revolution only the Marxists commanded some local support in Kurdistan. This was mainly due to the ideological position of the Marxist-Leninist political organisations on the national question: their recognition of the ethnic and national difference and the respect for the rights of national self-determination, which had proved attractive to the political segments of the emergent Kurdish middle classes, namely the modern urban petty-bourgeoisie and the middle strata, since the collapse of the Republic in 1946. But, despite the ideological attraction of Marxism-Leninism, Kurdish support for the Tudeh Party and the Fadaiyan-e Khalq had remained parochial, which, in effect, meant that these organisations had failed to surpass the ethnic boundaries of Kurdish politics before the revolution. This situation could hardly explain the sudden surge of support for these organisations after the revolution, especially in view of their increasingly ambiguous approach to the Kurdish national identity and rights as well as their support for and cooperation with the ruling Islamists, who were adamant to deny the existence of a Kurdish question in Iran. In fact, the Marxist-Leninist organisations seemed to have managed to overcome the obstacle after the revolution, eventually bypassing the ethnic shield against formidable odds.

The reasons for this curious development in Kurdistan were primarily internal, arising mainly from the specificity of the political and cultural formations of the Kurdish society. The chronic intellectual weakness of

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Minorities in West Asia and North Africa,
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Kurdish nationalism, which had initially pushed the radical members of the KDPI towards the Tudeh Party, was still a compelling reason for non-conformism, especially among the educated and more politicised segments of the modern middle classes. The burgeoning Kurdish modern middle classes, having undergone a long schooling in the socialist and democratic countercultures of opposition to the Pahlavi dictatorship, were averse to this chronic intellectual poverty, which had been forcefully emphasised after the disintegration of state repression and the subsequent emergence of a highly politicised public sphere in urban Kurdistan. But the politicised segments of the Kurdish urban middle classes could not escape the expanding cycle of this cultural and intellectual poverty without defying the authority and legitimacy of Kurdish political forces, especially the KDPI. The two were interconnected by Kurdish ethnicity and language. The defiance of the KDPI and its political message seemed to be the precondition for a radical departure from the prevailing political and cultural backwardness in the stagnant ethnic nationalist circles.

The intellectual poverty of Kurdish nationalism, more than any other factor, accounted for the non-ethnic political orientation of the radical segments of the modern Kurdish middle classes, especially the educated youth, whose relationship to Kurdish nationalism had always been mainly emotional rather than ideological and political. They crossed the ethnic line rather quickly, going over to the predominantly Persian Marxist-Leninist parties without much hesitation or regret. It was primarily this development which enabled the Tudeh Party and the Fadaiyan-e Khalq to bypass the ethnic shield: to enter the Kurdish political field without having to cross its ethnic boundaries. In fact, both organisations attempted to give ethnic colouring to their activities as they subsequently established 'Kurdistan branches' with local bureaus in major Kurdish urban centres.[1] The main aim of the 'Kurdish branches' of the Tudeh and the Fadaiyan, however, was not to boost the Kurdish identity of their local Kurdish members, but rather to enhance their own claim to legitimacy in the ongoing contest for power and influence with the KDPI and the KSZKI. The local activities of the 'Kurdistan branches', heavily laden with the crass anti-imperialist populism of the prevailing Marxist-Leninist discourse, did in practice inflict considerable damage on the political and ideological cutting edge of Kurdish ethnicity, in particular after the Fourth Congress of the KDPI in February 1980, when the battle lines with the Tudeh Party were drawn more clearly than ever before.[2]

The Fourth Congress of the KDPI was a turning point in so far as the configuration of the political forces and relations in the political scene in Kurdistan was concerned. It was held a year after the triumph of the revolution but in a critical conjuncture defined by the after-effects of the seizure of the US Embassy in Tehran by the Islamist students known as the followers of the Imam's line, the adherents to Khomeini's revolutionary stance, on 4 November 1979. The occupation of the embassy, planned and supported by the hardliners in the regime, though resulting in long-term political isolation and economic loss with long-term structural effects for the country, was nonetheless an effective means used to shift the balance of forces and facilitate their dominance over the opposition, secular and Islamist, within the regime and in the wider political and ideological fields. The impact on the secular political forces, especially the Marxist left, was immediate and decisive as the ongoing organisational controversies and disagreements on the revolutionary and anti-imperialist character of the radical Islamists led to political discord, factional confrontations and organisational splits. The supporters of the takeover in the ranks of the Marxist left, namely, the Tudeh Party, who had long been trying to establish the progressive anti-imperialist character of the Islamist hardliners with reference to their alleged petty-bourgeois class origins, now found a case to present their naïve class reductionism as subtle theoretical argument and astute political analysis. The Islamist hardliners in the regime were the radical democrats, the leading force of the popular democratic struggle against imperialism, paving the way for the non-capitalist development of post-revolutionary Iran according to the Tudeh Party's Soviet-inspired discourse. The Tudeh pursued this line of argument relentlessly after the occupation of the US Embassy, becoming the pivot of an 'anti-imperialist consensus' bolstered by the split in the Organisation of the Iranian People's Fadaiyan in June 1980.

The Tudeh-engineered split in the organisation of the Fadaiyan-e Khalq was already in the making when the KDPI began preparing for the Fourth Congress. Ghassemlou and his circle in the leadership of the KDPI were aware of the sensitivity of their position in the highly charged and radicalised political field and did not want to give in to the pressure being brought to bear by the Tudeh to join the emergent anti-imperialist consensus on the left—for aside from the long-term political consequences of supporting the Islamic regime for an organisation which had refused to endorse its constitution and recognise its legitimacy, it would have meant giving up the struggle for Kurdish autonomy, a decision which was

tantamount with political suicide. The utterances of the Tudeh leadership, along with the conduct of the Tudeh and pro-Tudeh members in the central committee of the KDPI, left him in no doubt that Kianouri would settle for nothing less than a political merger, which would in effect wipe out the Kurdish-nationalist identity of his party. Ghassemlou thus opted to distance the KDPI's anti-imperialist stance from the Tudeh's demand to declare support for the Islamist regime. The Fourth Congress thus resolved to lend support to the Islamist militants' occupation of the US Embassy but short of giving up the struggle for Kurdish autonomy and joining the growing ranks of the anti-imperialist front on the left. In order to quell the pro-Tudeh agitation in the party, the congress thus resolved to continue with the quest to end the military conflict and pursue a negotiated settlement of the conflict with the regime. This was not an effective means to quell the growing pro-Tudeh opposition in the party, actively backed up by the Tudeh leadership in the political and discursive fields. The growing tension reached its climax in late May when seven members of the central committee signed a letter criticising Ghassemlou's leadership. The language of the letter was unmistakably Tudeh, repeating issues already raised in the Tudeh's numerous attacks on the leadership of the KDPI. The signatories criticised Ghassemlou for his grave strategic miscalculation, giving primacy to the struggle for Kurdish autonomy over the anti-imperialist struggle and waging armed action against the anti-imperialist and popular democratic regime in Iran.[3] The Tudeh-inspired and Tudeh-organised anti-imperialist consensus was completed in June 1980, when the Organisation of the Iranian People's Fadaiyan announced a major split in the organisation, leading to the formation of the minority faction, which remained opposed to the conversion of the majority to the Tudeh's strategy. Although divisions in the ranks of the Fadaiyan-e Khalq had already been discussed in the organisation's official organ in early April, its public announcement was a major victory for the Islamist hardliners in the regime.[4] The majority renounced the armed struggle and reconstituted itself as an independent Marxist-Leninist political party on 1 May before merging with the Tudeh Party in March 1981.

Kurdistan continued to be a major centre of resistance to the Islamic regime and the Kurdish political forces openly defied the call to join the growing anti-imperialist alliance to support it. Kurdish resistance had a significant support in the community, which refused to accept the legitimacy of Khomeini's authority. The popular legitimacy of the resistance increased the political weight of the region, assigning a strategic importance

to it in the security considerations of the regime. Similarly, the restoration of sovereign domination and marginalisation of Kurdish political forces loomed large in the political calculations of the secular backers of the Shi'i regime, in particular the Tudeh Party and the Fedaiyan-e Khalq. They intensified their efforts to penetrate and dominate the political field in Kurdistan. Their objective was to reconstitute the boundaries of the political field by redefining the terms and conditions of legitimate discourse and practice. This had already turned Kurdish cities to centres of a fierce conflict for domination and control. The Kurdish political organisations did not fare quite well in this contest. The KDPI and the KSZKI both failed, though with varying degrees, to stop the Tudeh Party and the Fadaiyan-e Khalq from encroaching upon their recruiting grounds and poaching their potential members and supporters, largely because they failed to give an appropriate political form and discursive expression to Kurdish ethnicity by reconstituting it on modern nationalist foundations. Kurdish ethnicity remained a cultural category in the discourse of the Kurdish political forces, especially the KDPI, which suffered more than its rising rival, the KSZKI, from the surge of the radical urban middle-class support for non-Kurdish Marxist-Leninist parties. The reasons for this are complex and concern the discursive foundations of the KDPI and the KSZKI and their respective political programmes and identities after the revolution.

The intellectual poverty of the Kurdish political forces was compounded by the absence of a nationalist discourse capable of defining the boundaries of the political and ideological fields in Kurdistan after the revolution. The preponderance of the politics of Kurdish autonomy in the discourse and practice of the KDPI, on the one hand, and the communist discourse of the KSZKI, with its characteristic misapprehension about and denial of Kurdish ethnic and national identity, on the other, contributed to a confusion which informed the Kurdish political and discursive fields in the early phase of the post-revolutionary upheaval. The KDPI had re-emerged from the relative obscurity of a long and largely ineffectual residence in exile with a political programme committed to Kurdish autonomy within the framework of a free and democratic Iran. The KDPI's political programme, which had been adopted by the Third Congress in 1973, insisted on the strategic significance of democracy not only for the successful implementation of the Kurdish autonomy project but also for the independence of Iran as a whole. But, as was seen, the political programme of the KDPI was grounded in a socialist framework which, despite its ambiguous social class character, was remarkably clear on its commitment to both the

primacy of the popular democratic struggle against US imperialism and the concomitant allegiance to the Soviet leadership in the national and international political arenas. This double political commitment, in effect, tied the strategic objective of the KDPI to the national and international exigencies of the anti-imperialist struggle, and hence to the aims and directions of the Soviet foreign policy in Iran. The social and political determinants of the KDPI's proposed programme for Kurdish autonomy were, in other words, located outside its perceived/designated strategic fields of action both in Kurdistan and in Iran at large.

That the discursive primacy of the people-imperialist contradiction was incompatible with the political commitment to Kurdish regional autonomy did not seem to concern the party leadership at all. For, as was seen, the KDPI's emphasis on the primacy of the struggle against US imperialism was not a mere discursive strategy signifying the popular democratic ethos of its ideology. Rather, it defined the party's political identity in the national and international arenas, its adherence to the Soviet power, which was essential to its survival in exile, both in Iraq and in Eastern Europe. In theoretical terms, however, like its intellectual mentor the Tudeh Party, the leadership of the KDPI subscribed to an economic-substantive notion of democracy rooted in Marxist-Leninist theory whereby economic equality differentiated the formal from the real liberty and democracy. This notion of democracy and the underlying economic essentialism were thus used to justify the subordination of the struggle for democracy in Iran to the political and ideological requirements of a global struggle against US imperialism led by the Soviet Union. The primacy of the people-imperialist contradiction, and hence the strategic status of the relationship with the Soviet Union, in the discourse and practice of the KDPI defined not only the boundaries of a common political and ideological ground with the Tudeh Party but also the conditions of its representation of the Kurdish rights to regional autonomy in Iran after the revolution. It was a pivotal issue not only lingering at the core of an increasingly turbulent relationship between the two parties but also informing the political and ideological factionalism and organisational divisions which marked the subsequent development of the KDPI in the course of the following decade.

The KDPI was haunted by the past. Decades of exile and political isolation abroad and vagaries of state repression and clandestine activity at home had taken a heavy toll on the party. It was weak and disorientated, lacking institutional and social support. The socialist grouping which had assumed the leadership of the party in 1975 was shaped by the party's long

existence in exile and its perception of political reality at home, more often than not, filtered through a complex network of diverse and at times opposing political and cultural processes and practices emanating from its association with and dependency on the Soviet bloc and, since the early 1970s, the Iraqi Ba'th regime. Ghassemlou and his lieutenants in the leadership of the KDPI were a motley crew united around the party political programme which provided for the two principal elements of their political outlook: Kurdish ethnic nationalism and Soviet Marxism, exemplified by their common commitment to Kurdish autonomy and the popular democratic struggle against American imperialism respectively. The quest for Kurdish autonomy in a democratically governed Iran, however, remained the stated objective of the KDPI since its Third Congress.

Although after the revolution the democratic struggle for Kurdish autonomy was ostensibly presented as the strategic objective of the party, in practice however, it was the partisan interpretation of its allegiance to Soviet Marxism and the Soviet global strategy which held the fragmented organisation together, giving its diverse and competing factions an internal unity in the face of external threat and opposition. The 'Soviet factor' played an important role in the early phase of factionalism in the KDPI when political differences with the party were still largely dormant and the contending factions on the left tended to identify with the authority of the Soviet state in order to claim revolutionary legitimacy. This was especially true of a relatively small but increasingly active faction consisting of some prominent elements of the left who had had their schooling in the Marxism of the Tudeh Party in and out of the Shah's prisons since the mid-1950s. The more orthodox elements of this faction, who had long perceived the KDPI as the Kurdish branch of the Tudeh Party, were being increasingly dissatisfied by the hostile attitude of Ghassemlou and his associates in the leadership towards the Tudeh Party and their rejection of its policy of active cooperation with the hardline Islamists in the post-revolutionary regime. They thus frequently invoked the importance of the 'Soviet friendship' in the history of the KDPI, reiterating its leading role in the struggle of the oppressed against imperialism. The aim of the Tudeh left in the KDPI was to undermine Ghassemlou's fledgling authority within the party by showing that his increasingly anti-Tudeh policies were in fact directly opposed to the Soviet global strategy for socialism and revolution, and hence to the exigencies of the party's stance on the primacy of the popular democratic struggle against imperialism.[5]

Although the left's opposition to Ghassemlou's leadership, which became increasingly vocal after the events leading to the military invasion of Kurdistan in August 1979, was strictly tactical, the concerted attempt to redefine the direction of the party on Tudeh lines led to the subordination of its quest for Kurdish autonomy to its stated aim of struggle against imperialism. In fact, the factional infighting and power struggle in the KDPI, between the socialist leadership and the Tudeh-left opposition, seldom focused on the political, economic and cultural specificity and feasibility of the party's proposed programme for Kurdish autonomy. The internal debate on Kurdish identity and rights and the conditions of their realisation in an autonomous Kurdistan, and hence arguments about the strategic issue of democratic governance in Iran at large, in so far as they could be heard outside closed party circles in Mahabad and other major urban centres, were defined by a growing left-wing consensus on the primacy of the people-imperialist contradiction in the national and international political and economic arenas. The strategic objective of the KDPI was rapidly losing its discursive autonomy and political primacy within the party.

In fact, the position of the Tudeh faction within the KDPI was reinforced by the rapid development of the anti-imperialist consensus in the national political field in Iran at large. This development, which was largely a response to the discursive hegemony of the radical Islamism of Khomeini and his leading followers in the regime, enabled the Tudeh elements to regroup within the party, incorporating some prominent figures from among the socialist leadership of the Third Congress in exile in their ranks.[6] Their common aim, perceived though not stated, was to revive the old relationship with the Tudeh Party and redefine it on new political and social foundations provided by the new consensus on the left. This relationship included submission to the Tudeh strategy, its theoretical foundation and political objectives, but above all the Soviet theory of the non-capitalist path to development which was being steadily introduced to the rank and file in the party, targeting especially the better-educated and often more receptive cadres. The Tudeh leadership used this theory to justify its unequivocal support for Khomeini and the radical Islamists in the regime, who were thus deemed as the vanguards of the popular democratic struggle against the US imperialism. For, as was seen, according to this theory, the democratic struggle of the peoples of Asia and Africa against the US imperialism was the precondition not only of their political independence but also of their successful transition to socialism, and hence

the Soviet characterisation of the anti-American regimes as 'popular democracies with socialist orientation' led by 'revolutionary democrats of petty-bourgeois origin', which, in the Iranian context, was deployed by the Tudeh Party to define the character of the Islamic regime, especially after the violent takeover of the American Embassy in November 1979. The Soviet theory gave the Tudeh strategy and its discourse and practice a revolutionary baptism and an aura of legitimacy, which enhanced its populist appeal as a potent unifying factor, thus bringing together pro-Tudeh elements which still lacked political unity and organisational cohesion in the KDPI. The Tudeh faction existed in all but name long before the fateful split in the Fourth Congress in February 1980.

The rise and grouping of the Tudeh left within the party had pushed Ghassemlou and his faithful associates and followers in the leadership and among the rank and file onto a defensive position. Ghassemlou was aware of the political consequences of the emergent anti-imperialist consensus on the left for the KDPI in Kurdistan and in Iran at large. He seemed to know that the conversion of the leadership to the Tudeh strategy would affect not only the daily conduct of the party but also, and more importantly, the legitimacy and the conditions of the possibility of its programme.[7] The conversion to the Tudeh line would require a radical change in the strategic objective of the KDPI after the revolution, in particular the subordination of its programme for Kurdish autonomy to the political exigencies of the popular democratic struggle against imperialism in the discourse and practice of the party. This would in effect undermine the KDPI's distinctiveness, its most valuable asset, that is, its Kurdish identity. Furthermore, Ghassemlou was also concerned about his own position in the leadership of the party, for the consolidation of the Tudeh elements as an ideologically cohesive political grouping in the leadership would evidently threaten his claim to authority and legitimacy in the party as a whole. In fact, as was subsequently shown by the course of events after the military invasion of Kurdistan, the political processes and practices which defined the limits of the discourse of autonomy also defined the limits of Ghassemlou's authority in the party, and in this sense the two remained coterminous at least until the Fourth Congress and the pro-Tudeh split in November 1980.

But despite his acute awareness of the growing threat to his authority, Ghassemlou was initially unable to subvert the formation of the Tudeh faction within the party. Nor was he able to avert the rising trend towards left-wing radicalism in the party, which had assumed the particular form of

an increasing inclination, especially among the educated cadres from urban middle-class background, towards the growing anti-imperialist consensus in the general political field. Ghassemlou's political past had returned to haunt him with a vengeance. His long membership of the Tudeh Party, decades of schooling in Soviet Marxism and especially his close association with the left, which had been instrumental in his rise to prominence in the party, meant that he could not clearly dissociate himself from the new developments in the party, which still largely lacked political and organisational cohesion in 1979. Ghassemlou's opposition to the growing pro-Tudeh tendencies in his party was therefore measured and mostly qualified. Although he never espoused the Soviet theory of the non-capitalist path to development, he was reluctant to denounce it publicly. Nor could he make a clear stand against the growing anti-imperialist tendency in the party. For aside from his own ideological convictions, he also entertained high hopes of active Soviet support for the cause of Kurdish autonomy in Iran, a fact that is borne out by the leadership's political and programmatic discourse before the revolution such as the proceedings of the Third Congress, especially the KDPI's programme of which he was the main author. Little wonder, therefore, if Ghassemlou's initial defensive posture was riddled with ambiguities, bereft of political direction and conviction.

The KDPI's discourse and practice also contributed to the dangerous ambiguities which marked the political field in Kurdistan before the midsummer of 1979. Ironically, however, it was the military invasion of Kurdistan which helped end Ghassemlou's vacillations. By the end of August he had come to abandon any hope of a democratic change within the regime. The ruling Islamists, the Tudeh Party's so-called revolutionary democrats, were now bathing in Kurdish blood. Ghassemlou was now able to dissociate himself from the Tudeh left in the party. He could legitimately argue for Kurdish autonomy without giving up his claim to the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle in the party as well as the general political field. The political events had shifted the discursive field in Kurdistan. The stage for a political power struggle in the KDPI was now clearly set.

But in order to be able to confront the pro-Tudeh threat to his leadership on the one hand and to ensure the predominance of the autonomy project in the KDPI on the other, Ghassemlou needed to broaden his constituency of support in the party, in particular in the ranks of the independent left, mostly junior and middle-rank activists and cadres, products

of the expansion of the Kurdish urban middle classes under the Pahlavi rule. The independent left in the party was quite small in number; Ghassemlou and his trusted lieutenants had to look outside in order to bolster the socialist support in the ranks of the party. A successful recruitment from among the growing ranks of the radicalised sectors of the modern middle class in major urban centres alone could tip the balance against the pro-Tudeh tendency in the party. An active socialist support from the radicalised sectors of the urban petty-bourgeoisie and the intermediate strata was essential to the survival of the Kurdish autonomy project in the KDPI, especially in view of the increasing significance of the anti-imperialist agenda in the wider political field, which was effectively boosting the fortunes of the pro-Tudeh left in the party. The political field in Kurdistan in the interregnum was dominated by a complex and multifaceted struggle for the political soul of the Kurdish urban middle classes and the intermediate strata. This multifaceted struggle encompassed a range of forces, from the contending factions in the embattled leadership of the KDPI to the Tudeh Party, the Fadaiyan-e Khalq and the new but growing KSZKI in the political field.

In the initial period of its open activity, the party was clearly unable to attract the radicalised segments of the modern middle classes to a Kurdish autonomy project grounded in an ethnic nationalist-regionalist discourse and practice which characteristically lacked a revolutionary identity. The active elements of the Kurdish urban petty-bourgeoisie and the intermediate strata were being increasingly drawn to the left of the secular political spectrum, and the leadership of the KDPI was unable to slow down this trend, let alone stop it in any effective manner. In fact, in the early phase of the party's legal existence and overt political activity, Ghassemlou and his allies in the leadership of the KDPI found themselves stranded in the hiatus emerging between the stated strategic objectives of the party and their conditions of possibility in the existing discursive and political fields. The threat to Kurdish autonomy did not come from the Islamist refusal to recognise and respect Kurdish identity and rights alone. The radicalisation of the political and discursive fields, the emergence of an anti-imperialist alliance on the left of the political spectrum and its increasing convergence with the Islamist political agenda were undermining the internal political cohesion and external efficacy of the KDPI.

The KDPI had played a little, if no, role in the mobilisation of the urban masses in the revolutionary rupture of 1978–1979, and was largely alien to the emergent revolutionary conditions and the constellation of

active political forces which set the political agenda. It lacked revolutionary appeal, commanding little authority among the highly politicised urban population in Kurdistan, especially the young generation of the modern middle class and the intermediate strata, who, having been steeped in the radical culture of opposition, showed an increasing appetite for more radical politics, and hence a growing tendency towards the discourse and practice of more radical forces in the political and ideological spectra. The discourse of autonomy and the social reformist outlook of the KDPI were major obstacles to its endeavours to break into the growing field of radical politics in Kurdistan, especially because of the progressive erosion of the ethnic boundaries of conventional Kurdish oppositional politics by the combined force of the Marxist and Shi'i populisms after the revolution. The popular democratic ethos of the discourse of Kurdish autonomy and rights was seriously overshadowed by its ethnicist external thrust, which, in the absence of a radical nationalist political foundation, looked conformist and conservative. The KDPI's discourse of Kurdish autonomy and rights ran the risk of severing all political links between Kurdish identity and the revolutionary discourse and practice in the political field in Kurdistan, at least before the military invasion of August 1979. The military violence unleashed on Kurdistan and the suppression of Kurdish identity changed the political and discursive fields: Kurdish ethnicity was grounded once again in radical foundation as the KDPI spearheaded the armed opposition to occupation. The ethnic boundaries of the politics of recognition and the quest for rights were being revived and redrawn in the military battlefields in Kurdistan.

Notes

1. Kianouri, the chairman of the Tudeh Party: 'we have decided to create the independent organization of the Tudeh party in Kurdistan' in Porsesh va Pasokh (Questions and Answers) 1358/1980.
2. The Fourth Congress of the KDPI was held in February 1980 in the critical political and ideological juncture defined by the takeover of the US Embassy by the Islamist students known as the followers of the Imam's line, the adherents to Khomeini's revolutionary stance, on 4 November 1979. The bulk of the information about the developments in the KDPI leading to the Fourth Congress and the subsequent conflict and tensions resulting in the split is derived from extensive discussions with Ghassemlou, Seraji, Hussami

and Hassan Ghazi and two more participants, both former members of the central committee of the KDPI on various occasions.

3. The Tudeh opposition in the central committee of the KDPI was actively backed up by the Tudeh leadership in the political and discursive fields. The growing tension reached its climax in late May when seven members of the central committee, namely, Ghani Blurian, Mohamad Amin Seraji, Rahim Sayfi Ghazi, Fawziya Ghazi, Navid Moeini, Farouq Kaykhusrow and Ahmad Azizi, signed a letter criticising Ghassemlou's leadership. The language of the letter was unmistakably Tudeh, focusing on issues already raised in the Tudeh's numerous attacks on the leadership of the KDPI. The signatories criticised Ghassemlou for his grave strategic miscalculation, giving primacy to the struggle for Kurdish autonomy over the anti-imperialist struggle and waging armed action against the popular democratic regime in Iran. They further accused him of treason for collaboration with the Iraqi aggressors and helping their war effort against Iran in order to advance his own cause. Ghassemlou and his followers in the party reacted by branding the signatories as collaborators (ja'sh) and expelling them from the party. Ghassemlou denied the authenticity of the documents released by the breakaway group of seven and attributed it to a Tudeh plot to remove him from the leadership and take over the party. Hussami, a prominent member of the central committee at the time, also disputed the authenticity of the documents implicating Ghassemlou in treason. Seraji too criticised Blurian for publishing the letters, although he did not go as far as rejecting their authenticity. Hussami, disagreeing with their reason to oppose the leadership of the party and forming a Kurdish opposition to Ghassemlou in the Tudeh Party, was at the same time critical of the latter and his close circle of followers and devotees in the central committee for expelling the signatories, accusing them of collaborating with the Islamic regime and branding them as ja'sh. See also McDowall (1996, pp. 272–274).
4. Kar No. 62, 21 Khordad 1359/11 April 1980.
5. This issue was extensively discussed with Ghassemlou, Hussami and Seraji in various interviews when the perennial issue of the relationship with the Tudeh Party and the significance of the Soviet support kept coming up, especially in relation to the internal conflict and power struggle in the party leading to and after the Fourth Congress. My extensive discussions with Hassan Ghazi have also been illuminating in this respect given his in-depth knowledge of the working of the KDPI and his extensive contacts with various personalities in the higher echelons of party leadership. He was at the time an active member of the KDPI and participating in the party meetings.

6. See Note 2.
7. Although Ghassemlou insisted that he was in command and the main apparatuses of the party, especially the crucial Peshmarga force, were under his direct control, and that he was not much worried about the remaining pro-Tudeh elements in the central committee, he could not conceal his fear of the political schemes and machinations of the Tudeh leadership, especially Kianouri, its secretary general, to wrest the leadership of the party from him. On a number of occasions he referred to Kianouri's speech, asking him to give up the leadership for six months and help to reduce conflict and tension in the KDPI (Porsesh va Pasokh March 1981), as a clear sign that his leadership was the only obstacle to the planned Tudeh takeover of the party. The Tudeh's plan, and more generally its influence on the KDPI, Ghassemlou suggested implicitly, depended on the Soviet support. The Tudeh's relationship with the Soviet Union loomed large in his thoughts about the conduct of the Tudeh Party after the Fourth Congress. Interview with Ghassemlou in London, November–December 1983 and December 1984.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusions: Genealogy of Violence—Sovereign Domination and Armed Resistance in Rojhelat

This study has dealt with a specific period in the development of Kurdish nationalism in Iran, namely, the three decades between the fall of the Kurdish Republic in 1946 and the advent of the revolutionary rupture of 1977–1979. These turbulent decades marked a crucial shift in the relationship between the Kurdish community and sovereign power. Although the suppression of Kurdish ethnicity and language, which began under Pahlavi absolutism in the 1930s, remained the strategic target of sovereign domination throughout this period, there were significant changes in both the form and mechanism of sovereign domination and the forms of Kurdish resistance to it in the discursive and the political fields. These changes, it was argued, signified mutations in the mode of the working of sovereign power, reflected in its juridical, political and institutional representation in Iranian society at large. In Kurdistan, sovereign power was articulated in the strategies, policies and practices deployed by the state to suppress Kurdish ethnicity and language, in order to ensure continued domination over the Kurdish community in the face of the changing conditions in power relations in the country and the region at large. The strategies of domination and control deployed by various governments to ensure the subjugation of the Kurdish community by sovereign power, and the political, military and cultural means and techniques used to implement them, have thus formed the foci of the analyses in this study.

The strategies of sovereign domination and the forms of popular resistance to them worked under specific historical conditions which affected

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not only their operation but also their outcome in Kurdistan. Of these we considered the preponderance of the pre-capitalist relations of production, grounded in large landed property owned principally, though not exclusively, by the tribal leadership, who were, at the same time, represented in the executive and legislative apparatuses of the state. Kurdish landowning class, tribal and non-tribal, rural and urban, remained the linchpin of sovereign power under Pahlavi absolutism. Pre-capitalist landed property, in its various forms, continued to provide for the articulation of the economic and the military relations in the structure of sovereign domination in Kurdistan throughout the period of restoration, beginning with the return of the Iranian army to Mahabad in mid-December 1946 and continuing, with a brief interruption during 1951–1953, up until 1959–1960. In this sense, therefore, the political and military processes and practices deployed by the absolutist state to restore sovereign domination in Kurdistan also reaffirmed the economic and political dominance of the Kurdish landowning class in the Kurdish community. This class remained the mainstay of Pahlavi absolutism throughout the period of restoration of order.

The politics of restoration of order was not only an all-out attack on Kurdish nationalism and national identity, but also a systematic effort to maintain and consolidate the old social order in the Kurdish community. The restoration of sovereign order gave a new impetus to the pre-capitalist relations of production, and hence to the persistence of land hunger, insecure peasant tenancy and exorbitant rents in the Kurdish countryside. The rise and spread of peasant unrest in the Mukrian region around the same time testified to the intensification of the relations of exploitation in rural Kurdistan in the period under consideration. The restoration of sovereign order in Kurdistan was grounded in the consolidation of large landed property and the landlords' regime. The Kurdish landowning class remained an integral part of the relations of domination underpinning and reproducing Pahlavi absolutism both in its primary form under Reza Shah, and subsequently in a 'redeployed' mode under his successor Muhammad Reza Shah before the 1962 land reform. The final dissolution of the large landlords' regime was the precondition for the transition from 'redeployed absolutism' to the 'royal dictatorship' which was brought to an end by a popular revolution in February 1979.

The restoration of the sovereign order following the fall of the Kurdish Republic also marked the advent of 'exilic nationalism' in Iranian Kurdistan. Exilic nationalism signified not only a shift in the locus of

nationalist politics from the inside to the outside of the Kurdish community in Rojhelat, but also, and more importantly, in the centre of gravitation of the political forces which shaped the course and direction of development of nationalist politics during the subsequent decades. The Kurdish territory in Iran, in particular urban centres in the Mukrian region, witnessed the emergence of a new trend in nationalist politics. Kurdish political activists, especially the younger generation of urban petty-bourgeois origin, who had their schooling in the nationalist politics under the Republic, began seeking refuge abroad. Exilic nationalism was not a calculated proactive organisational move or a strategic decision to relocate, regroup and recommence opposition on fresh and more systematic political and discursive foundations. Rather it was a reactive response to the intensification of sovereign repression in the period of restoration, which continued, in different forms, pace and intensity, up to the 1979 revolution. Although the revolution proved a temporary respite from repression for the Kurdish community in both civil and political sectors, a new and more systematic use of concentrated violence and savage repression by the newly installed theocratic regime soon reignited exilic nationalism, now on a much larger scale.

The advent of nationalist politics in exile was also the beginning of the armed resistance to sovereign domination in Kurdistan. Although armed opposition to the state has a longer history than Kurdish nationalism, the modern/nationalist form was fundamentally different in character. Unlike the pre-modern/traditional forms, Kurdish armed resistance after the fall of the Republic was closely connected with the rise of the people as a political force, with popular participation in politics and with the institutions of popular political representation. Armed opposition to territorial centralism and loss of local autonomy, often led by princely families, heads of Tarighats (prominent Sufi orders) and disaffected tribal leaders, was replaced by armed resistance against sovereign domination carried out by modern political organisations claiming popular representation. The change in the form of armed action as such testifies to its modernity. The pivotal role played by the people and the popular political processes and practices in the formation and development of armed resistance is also at the same time its historical link with nationalist politics in general and exilic nationalism in particular. This structural linkage and political interconnection between nationalism in exile and the advent of modern armed resistance indicates clearly that they have a common history, traversed by the modes of sovereign domination and Kurdish resistance. This common

history is the intersection of domination and resistance, the ground for their articulation. In this sense therefore the analysis of the conditions of formation of exilic nationalism and the genealogy of violence are interrelated. I shall return to this issue later on in more detail.

Before the 1979 revolution, nationalism in exile represented an uneven trend in Kurdish politics in Rojhelat. It appeared in phases, mostly made up of individual acts rather than as a uniform and steady process precipitated by strategic or organisational decisions. This uneven trend rose in the periods of restoration of sovereign power which usually followed episodes of political crises, disorder and instability. The steady intensification of sovereign violence and concentrated coercion and rationalisation of surveillance and control in the three decades following the fall of the Kurdish Republic meant that exilic nationalism remained the most common, if not the only, form of overt political activity available to actual or aspiring political activists in the Kurdish community in Iran. In fact, given the increasing intensity of sovereign repression inside the community and the correlative weakness of civil society in Kurdistan, the unique status of exilic nationalism as the only available political outlet led to a serious exaggeration of its actual political weight in nationalist politics before the 1979 revolution. Throughout this period, concentrated state violence and juridical and extra-juridical repression perpetrated on the Kurdish community remained the raison d'être of exilic nationalism and nationalist politics outside the Kurdish community in Iran.

Although exilic nationalism was a response to the change in the mode of exercise of sovereign domination over the Kurdish community, its dynamics resided outside it, mainly in the complex relationship it cultivated with the existing political forces and institutions in the 'host' society/community. These were principally governments and ruling communist parties in the Soviet bloc and Kurdish political organisations in Iraqi Kurdistan, and later on the Ba'th regime in Iraq. This relationship, multifaceted and diverse as it was, usually filtered through a complex network of existing political and ideological relations in the host society/community, both formal and informal, which affected not only the organisational structure and the configuration of political forces and factional politics within exilic nationalism, but also the general course and direction of policy- and decision-making. The study of the development of the KDPI in exile was a clear illustration of this argument. Its relationship with the ruling political and ideological apparatuses in the Soviet bloc, with Barzani's

KDP and later on with the Iraqi Ba'th regime, party and government defined not only the process of policy- and decision-making within the party but also its strategic objectives and the means and mechanisms of their realisation in practice. The states and political organisations offering hospitality, refuge and protection to the KDPI in various periods of its existence in exile, it was seen, did so in order to preserve and bolster their own interests and consolidate their positions in an unstable regional political field inhabited by political actors with changing interests and shifting loyalties.

The relationship between the KSZKI and the PUK after the Iranian revolution of 1979 is another case in point. The KSZKI was formed with the active financial and logistical support of the PUK, which sought to create a left-wing organisation, with Maoist-rural populist leanings, to counterbalance the influence of the KDPI in the Kurdish community in the midst of the revolutionary rupture in Iran. But, like its local competitor the KDPI, it soon turned into a client organisation of the Ba'th regime, as it was forced to leave Iranian territory and seek refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan under military pressure by the Iranian regime in 1983–1985. The Ba'th patronage continued well into 1990s, and throughout this period the KSZKI maintained a cordial relationship with the PUK which, alongside the Iranian Revolutionary Guards was fighting against the Ba'th regime. The KSZKI has since suffered various splits lacking political and organisational unity. But all factions, regardless of their name and ideological claim, have been living under the PUK patronage, enjoying political protection and financial and logistical support, despite the latter's active cooperation with and reliance on the political and at times military support of the Iranian regime, before the fall of the Ba'th regime and the creation of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in 2003 and after, right up today.

The loss of political and operational autonomy in the field of struggle against the Shi'i theocracy is the price the KDPI and KSZKI, both split to opposing factions, had to pay to be able to survive under the tutelage of the KRG since 2003. The latter in turn had to extract this price not only to cover its financial and logistical backing, but also, and more importantly, in order to protect itself against the political pressure and military incursions of the Islamic regime. The security authorities in Tehran had to be convinced that the extension of support and protection by the KRG to their brethren from Rojhelat in the time of need was only a humanitarian gesture involving no threat to the security and territorial integrity of the Islamic Republic. Political and operational dependency was the condition

of existence of exilic nationalism geared to the strategy of armed struggle. The structural logic of this went far beyond any single political party and organisation in Kurdistan. It was embedded in the foundations of the strategy of armed struggle under conditions of acute social and economic backwardness.

Armed struggle and the resulting clientelist dependency has largely defined the political and institutional specificity of nationalism in exile, a trend which continues to the present day, taking different forms depending on the character of the 'host' state/organisation. The KDPI succumbed to the vagaries of clientelist dependency resulting from the strategy of armed struggle taken up in the 1960s in exile no less readily and fully than the KSZKI did two decades later. In the case of the KDPI two demeaning decades of subservience to Barzani, followed by subjugation to his sworn enemy the Ba'th regime in Iraq, illustrated the unholy cycle of this clientelist dependency. This change in the pattern of loyalty, drastic as it was, took another and more dramatic twist after the establishment of the 'safe haven' in part of the Kurdish territory in Iraq in 1991, when the KDPI opted to maintain the patronage of the Ba'th regime in Baghdad while at the same time seeking and securing the patronage of Masoud Barzani's KDP. That the two patrons were at war with one another did not seem to upset the political calculations on which this clientelist approach was based. Similarly, the KSZKI was forced to walk the tightrope of double patronage balancing the demands of the Iraqi Ba'th against the requirements of Talabani's PUK in order to survive in an increasingly shrinking political field for a decade before the fall of the Ba'th regime in 2003.

Nationalism in exile generated a volatile political field which was fundamentally geared to the struggle for survival rather than offensive tactical action to consolidate and expand political influence and efficacy vis-à-vis the Iranian state. Neither ethnicity nor any other facet of Kurdish identity defined the changing boundaries of this volatile political field. Although issues of *Kurdistan* in exile carry numerous articles justifying the opportunistic ethos of this clientelist dependency, as a rational and realist policy to protect the movement from relentless sovereign aggression and to enhance its fortunes, the political outcomes point towards a very different reason. It has been shown time and again that the fundamental, if not the only, reason for the Kurdish political organisations to embark on this survivalist course of action is to protect themselves and especially their leadership against sovereign violence and in the face of inter-factional conflict and

internal power struggles. The main thrust of the arguments put forward by these organisations to justify their conduct is invariably populist, emphasising the inseparable unity of the nation, the movement and the party. The conduct of the party, including and especially the decisions made by the leadership, is deemed to represent the essential core of this imaginary unity.

The imaginary unity of the nation and the party underpinning this justification is central to the discourse of Kurdish political parties and organisations from the advent of the KDPI in 1945 to the present. The notion, deployed in different ways in the discourse of Kurdish political parties and organisations, echoes the general characteristics of the Hegelian-Marxist conception of class-party as the revolutionary subject-object of history, albeit in a Leninist mould which was inherited from the Iranian Marxist organisations, primarily the Tudeh Party. In the Kurdish context, however, there is a change in the identity of the subject-object of history, although the mechanism of the identification remains the same. That is, the concept of class-party is replaced by the notion of the nation-party, while at the same time a reflective notion of consciousness (national consciousness reflecting the uniform essence/will of the Kurdish nation represented by the party) functions as the fundamental mechanism of their essential identity. This reflective conception of national consciousness, always assumed rather than theorised or substantiated, is the source of the imaginary unity of the nation and the party in the discourse of exilic nationalism.

This imaginary unity and the associated form of political legitimation are as old as exilic nationalism itself. They are tellingly present in every party programme issued by the Kurdish political organisations since the 1950s. But the history of exilic nationalism in the region offers little by way of affirmation or justification. In fact, in the short and bloody history of exilic nationalism, the people/nation has mostly been a passive spectator. Dramatic events have unfolded before their despairing eyes, while they are left counting the cost of political decisions of which they have not so much as been informed, let alone had a voice in making. That Kurdish popular memory is defined by the traumas of violence, loss, displacement and homelessness testifies not only to the futility of the political decisions taken by the party leadership in the name of the nation but also to the price that the people have to pay for them. The constant exposure to violence of the other and the experience of loss and displacement are so frequent and widespread that the sequence of events takes on the appearance of a solid and uninterrupted process, almost like the natural course of life.

The geopolitical situation of Kurdistan, the division of its territory among four sovereign states often in conflict with one another, seems to have sanctioned the colossal opportunism of exilic nationalism as political pragmatism, governed by the ancient wisdom 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'.

The sheer opportunism of this Kurdish rendition of the pragmatic spirit of the ancient wisdom was hardly lost on the leadership of the KDPI, and indeed on other Rojhelati political organisations in exile, as they subscribed to it so often as to turn it to a sacred political principle, an invariant means and a condition of their existence in exile. But, as they almost never joined alliances with enemies of their enemies from a position of political and strategic strength, they ended up with arrogant paymasters oblivious to their long-term interests rather than dedicated friends ready to oblige. This metamorphosis of friend to paymaster and protector was the only lasting logic of a kind of the 'politics of the possible' which informed, and still informs, nationalism in exile often with tragic results. The paymasters demanded loyalty and cooperation, which meant in practice interference in and control over the political agenda, the institutional structure and above all the processes of policy- and decision-making in the KDPI. The KDP, the CPSU and its Iranian proxy the Tudeh Party, it was argued, were defining influences on the political and ideological formation of the KDPI in exile. The KDPI was thrown into the midst of a vicious power struggle in the revolutionary conjuncture of 1978–1979, while its haggard and bloodless body was deeply scarred by three decades of subservience to its illustrious hosts and allies. The political and cultural damage sustained during these years far outweighed any benefits gained from these pathological relationships, which nurtured dependency and subservience. The loss of political, organisational and functional autonomy was a high price to pay for the safety of life in exile, as the course of events proved after the revolution.

The debilitating impact of decades of exile on the organisational structure and conduct of Kurdish political forces in the aftermath of the revolutionary rupture of 1978–1979 was profound and far-reaching. It was evident before they lost the military ground to the Islamic regime at home and were forced out of their territory to start another indeterminate period of exile in Iraq in 1983, primarily in two ways: first, in the internal power struggle inside the organisation, and second, in the struggle against the non-Kurdish political forces vying for domination of and control of the political and ideological field in Kurdistan. These were predominantly the

Iranian Marxist left, with the Tudeh Party of Iran, the Organisation of the Iranian People's Fadaiyan and the Etehad-e Mobarezan-e Komonist (Unity of the Communist Fighters), the EMK, the most prominent. In fact, factionalism, power struggle and subsequent sectarian splits within the KDPI and KSZKI were precipitated and defined by the Tudeh Party and the EMK, respectively. Ideological affinity with and influence over leadership of the two Kurdish organisations, historical or conjunctural, was the main instrument of political domination, as is shown in the representation of the internal power struggle and the justification of the organisational split and subsequent purges and expulsions in the discourse of the KDPI and the KSZKI after the revolution.

In the discourse of the Tudeh and the EMK, Kurds as a community, along with their identity, rights and interests, are marginalised to make way for categories revolving around anti-imperialist and class contradictions and relations. The subordination of the Kurdish ethnic-nationalist discourse to the variants of Marxist discourse articulated by the Tudeh Party and the EMK, it was argued, signified the truth of a disaster looming on the political field in Kurdistan: Kurdish political forces, both the KDPI and the KSZKI, had failed to protect their organisation and domain of influence against a steady but relentless encroachment by their erstwhile allies in the political and ideological field in Kurdistan. The ethnic and linguistic wall protecting the Kurdish forces against 'external' intrusion by non-Kurdish forces in the political and ideological field had been breached with remarkable ease. The increasing dominance of Marxist categories in the discourse of the KDPI and the KSZKI represented a widening gap between their stated ideological positions and their political commitment to Kurdish national identity. The distance reached a breaking point when internal power struggle in the two organisations culminated in sectarian divides and splits. The pro-Tudeh split in the leadership of the KDPI in 1980, and the wholesale capitulation of the KSZKI to the EMK and its rapid metamorphosis into a new and seemingly nationwide Marxist-Leninist organisation, the Communist Party of Iran, in 1983 purporting to represent the Iranian proletariat from its base in exile, in Kurdish mountains in Iraq signified culmination of this trend in the Kurdish political field in Rojhelat.

These splits, though different in form and outcome, shared a common ground: they signified the political immaturity and ideological dogmatism of the leadership of the two leading Kurdish organisations reared in the specific conditions of life in exile and clandestine political activity in Iran,

especially in the Iranian universities, the bedrock of the Marxist-Leninist and later on Islamist opposition to the royal dictatorship. In both fields Marxism, in its bureaucratised positivistic Soviet and theoretically impoverished Third Worldist versions, defined the political and ideological universe of the Kurdish political activists. They looked at the Kurdish question, Kurdish identity and the struggle for the realisation of Kurdish rights through the ideological prism of these stultified Marxisms which subordinated Kurdish identity and the struggle for the realisation of Kurdish civic and democratic rights to the exigencies of anti-imperialist and class struggles. The historical backwardness of the Kurdish community furnished the ground for the articulation of the ideological subordination and political dependency of the Kurdish political forces witnessed by the unfolding of the events after the revolution.

This brief excursion into the developments in Kurdish politics in the crucial decade leading to the revolutionary rupture of 1977–1979, and their consequences for the defining years of post-revolutionary politics, is intended to highlight some of the lasting features of Kurdish politics, in exile or under sovereign repression in Iran. These features, structural, political and ideological, played a decisive role in the configuration of forces and relations defining the articulation of sovereign power and Kurdish armed resistance, and hence the genealogy of violence, to which I shall shortly turn.

Sovereign power, geared to the security requirements of an absolutist state redeployed on a new institutional structure to meet the challenge of the post-1953 coup and political crisis, redefined not only the political form of Kurdish nationalism but also its strategic considerations. Exilic nationalism and armed struggle were both born of the sovereign violence perpetrated on the Kurdish community to ensure domination under redeployed absolutism, and they stood in tandem at crucial junctures of modern Kurdish history, when the popular will to resist oppression and cast off domination met with another wave of sovereign violence. The perpetual encounters between sovereign power and the Kurdish community as such began and ended in violence. Violence formed the intersection of a binary relationship of domination and resistance, intertwined but mutually exclusive poles of a dialectics traversing the stages of this bloody history. The dialectics of violence and resistance, defining the nature of this complex relationship between the Kurds and the sovereign, traversed modern Kurdish history not just in Iran, but also in Greater Kurdistan in general. The working of sovereign power and the form of domination obtained

varied widely, nationally and locally. The variations as such were defined by a number of factors, of which two were decisive: first, the means or mechanisms deployed by the state to ensure domination, and second, the character of the existing socio-economic and cultural relations supporting the technologies of sovereign domination on national and local levels. The conditions of existence and the working of the violence in the intersection of this dialectical relations were reproduced by the relations of domination and resistance. This point should be further elucidated.

The increasing predominance of the security outlook in the conduct of sovereign power not only shifted the locus of nationalist politics but also changed its organisational structure and form in the aftermath of the fall of the Kurdish Republic. The Kurdish territory in the Rojhelat, the Kurdish territory in Iran, in particular the Mukrian region, began losing its pivotal position as the centre of gravity of nationalist politics as mounting repression forced political activists to seek refuge outside Iranian national jurisdiction. This development marked the advent of the exile nationalism, which subsequently became a salient feature of Kurdish politics in the Rojhelat for the past 70 years. This shift in the locus of the nationalist politics, from the inside to the outside of the Kurdish community, also signified the increasing importance of the security considerations in the politics of restoration and consolidation of sovereign power in Kurdistan. In fact, as was shown, the predominance of military-security considerations in the process of policy- and decision-making and the subsequent changes in the methods and mechanism used to implement them were the main reason for the change in the character and working of power, especially the means and mechanisms used to secure domination over the Kurdish community.

The transition to redeployed absolutism witnessed in the early phase of Muhammad Reza Shah's rule was precipitated by the failure of sovereign power to secure domination during and immediately after the political crisis in 1951–1953 in the country at large. The US-UK inspired and planned coup d'état in August 1953, which reinstated the Pahlavi monarch with the direct help and participation of the large landlords, sectors of the mercantile bourgeoisie and the bulk of the armed forces, also exposed significant shortcomings in the structure of sovereign domination and the working of power on local and national levels. This transition, which began with the rationalisation of political repression, its objectives as well as its means and mechanism, and culminating in the introduction of the notorious SAVAK in 1957, was set in motion by the coup: the

moment of exception signified by the decision to suspend the law/the constitution to restore law and order in the country, to paraphrase Schmitt's much-used definition (Schmitt 1986).

Although the decision on the exception, the very act of the coup, had a fundamentally conservative ethos, its outcome had revealed what may be called a serious 'security deficit' in the heart of the state. The security and the means and mechanism at the disposal of sovereign power were not sufficient to secure domination over society and sustain the regime. The pressing need to restructure sovereign domination on new economic and political foundations and the quest for the rationalisation of repression were born of the new order of rationality, geared to the survival of the regime as an integrated system of domination focused on society as a whole. The consciousness of this need defined not only the conservative ethos of the 1953 coup but also its long-term consequences. The return of the absolutist monarch to the throne was more than a restorative act for the continuation of the old regime. Rather, it was also the prelude to redeployed absolutism: reconfiguration of the sovereign power on a new institutional structure geared to the security consideration of a fragile state trying to leave behind an acute national political crisis. There was a need to change the logistics of sovereign power, to redefine the rationale and the objectives of its military and security apparatuses which, given the chronic economic backwardness of the country, were still the most extensive and effective means of sovereign domination.

The landlords' regime and its economic and juridical foundations, hitherto the active mainstay of Pahlavi absolutism, was now an obstacle to changes aimed at the restructuring of sovereign domination in the country at large. The landlords resisted the change in the relations of sovereign domination in so far as it affected the institutional representation of their political supremacy in the coercive apparatuses of the state, and the administration of repression and security in their domain of power and influence. Their response to the centralisation of the command and the operation of the gendarmerie force (the rural police), and its closer cooperation with the office of the provincial governorate and local military command following the 1953 coup and the pacification of the countryside in Kurdistan, is a prime example. The bulk of the Kurdish landowning class, while welcoming the suppression of the Tudeh Party and the KDPI by the state, and actively supporting the efforts by the local security forces to persecute and eradicate their clandestine organisations in the territory, were at the same time opposed to the centralisation of the repressive and security

apparatuses in the territory. The large tribal landlords, who had hitherto actively supported the repressive measures of the state, were now critical of the new and more interventionist approach to local security issues for impinging on their long-held local functional autonomy.

The dual attitude of the Kurdish landlords towards the absolutist state was widespread in the country at large: the Iranian landlords for the most part relied on the state for protection and advancement of their power, property and prestige, but shunned its centralising functions and interventionist practices encroaching on and violating their local autonomy. In fact the intensification of exploitation, through extraction of higher land rents and evictions and insecure tenancy, was their preferred method to readjust the precarious structure of sovereign domination. This had proved an effective method to readjust relations of domination, widely practised for centuries throughout the country, in fact so widely as to become part of rural class relations. But now in the aftermath of the coup, with the evidence of rural unrest and the experience of communist political activity, readjusting rural class relations was no longer a safe and reliable way to restructure sovereign domination. The method had become increasingly untenable, if not obsolete.

The apparent contradiction between Pahlavi absolutism's need for political and administrative rationalisation and the preservation of the class interests and position of the large landlords in the power bloc was resolved in a typically conservative way: restructuring the military and security apparatuses of the state without changing the social and economic foundations of political power. This solution meant reforming the working of the government, modernising military and security apparatuses to increase their efficiency by restructuring their command and rationalising their operation, but without affecting the foundations of the regime. Redeployed absolutism, which defined the character of political power after 1955, albeit for a brief period, was an outcome of the alliance between the reinstated sovereign and his backers within and outside the state apparatuses on the one hand and the bulk of the landowning class and traditional sectors of the commercial bourgeoisie on the other. The active support of the foreign backers of the regime for the sovereign and their commitment to maintain the regime in the context of the raging Cold War in the region was essential for the formation and working of this alliance. Redeployed absolutism was thus a curious political form, without precedent in Iranian history: an amalgam made up of a modern state increasingly geared to new norms of rationality defined by the security requirements of sovereign

power, and a pre-capitalist economic structure grounded in large landed property and commercial profit. The instrumental rationality of the sovereign security, working through the institutional organisation of the state, especially the repressive apparatuses, aimed to ensure sovereign domination on a more efficient foundation. It was Pahlavi absolutism refashioned to ensure the efficacy of sovereign domination, but without changing the economic and juridical foundations of sovereign power. On this new basis the landlords' regime remained in force until 1962, when it was displaced by the land reform.

The crisis of sovereign power culminating in the 1953 coup, and the subsequent repression leading to the reorganisation of the institutional structure of the state and centralisation of the means and mechanisms of sovereign domination, thus hardly affected the economic structure of political power. This is despite the fact that land revenue generated by landed property had been gradually losing economic ground to commercial profit since the late 1940s, and the relations of production reproducing the landlords' regime were already in a state of flux that signalled the coming of capitalist production in agriculture. The persistence of the landlords' regime in the 1950s meant that under the redeployed Pahlavi absolutism sovereign power was reproduced primarily through the pre-capitalist relations of production and that there was a huge and growing disparity between the socio-economic structure and the institutional organisation of sovereign power. The latter, it was noted, was restructured in response to the security requirements of the state after the 1953 coup. The increasing preponderance of the 'security problematic', to use Foucault's phrase, in the calculation and conduct of sovereign power required forms of instrumental rationality which were more often than not at odds with the functional requirements of the landlords' regime in the social, political and cultural fields.

The strategic considerations of political power under redeployed absolutism involved an ethnic-nationalist (Persian) definition of the security concerns of the state, informed by the official definition of Iranian national identity reiterated in the official discourse and the nationalist media. A notion of national security so defined was opposed to the popular perceptions of the nation, national identity and citizenship among the non-Persian sectors of the Iranian society especially the Kurds. The increasing preponderance of the 'security problematic' in the strategic calculations of sovereign power under redeployed absolutism, therefore, meant the intensification of repression and the violation of civil and democratic rights and

liberties in the Kurdish community. The new shift in the strategic focus of sovereign power after the 1953 coup, as was argued, had dire consequences for the Kurdish community and politics. The centralised repression, surveillance and control, especially after the establishment of SAVAK in 1957, targeted the Kurdish community with unprecedented precision and intensity. The cutting edge of sovereign repression centred on the politically active sectors of the community, especially the urban petty-bourgeoisie and the middle strata, who were being increasingly drawn to nationalist politics, encouraged by the revival of the nationalist movement in Iraqi Kurdistan after July 1958. The mounting popular anger and despair, precipitated by the increasing state repression, also helped boost the fortunes of Kurdish nationalism in terms of recruitment and popular legitimisation of the cause, both within and outside the territory.

The waves of detentions and arrests resulting from the SAVAK's discovery of the KDPI's clandestine organisation in the Mukrian region in 1959 were particularly revealing in this respect. The majority of those who were arrested, incarcerated, banished or forced to flee the territory were of the second generation of the nationalists, almost all coming from urban petty-bourgeois background with tertiary education in state institutions. They were mostly salaried state functionaries working in the civil service or the ministry of education in major towns in the region, especially Mahabad, the locus gravitas of Kurdish nationalism in Iran, at least before the 1979 revolution. This showed that the social structure of Kurdish nationalism had undergone a steady change, gravitating towards popular classes in urban areas, especially the urban petty-bourgeoisie and the salaried middle classes, while the social status and hence the capacity of the landowning class and the urban landlord-bourgeois clans had declined, especially in terms of effective political representation and active participation in the power bloc in the country. These social trends, deeply interwoven with the structure of sovereign domination and the conditions of the exercise of sovereign violence on the Kurdish community, signified an underlying historical process at work since 1953. This process, whose general features were outlined above, placed armed resistance on the agenda of Kurdish nationalism in exile some ten years later, when the socio-economic consequences of the royal reforms began making their impact on the Iranian political field at large.

The genealogy of violence in Kurdistan attempted in this study places the historical development of the Kurdish community in the nexus of the dialectics of domination and resistance, referring at the same time to the

double role played by the pre-capitalist forces and relations of production in the perpetuation of violence. Pre-capitalist relations were indispensable for the working of sovereign power, just as sovereign power was indispensable for the survival of pre-capitalist relations. This interdependence meant that pre-capitalist forces and relations in the Kurdish community were simultaneously 'support' and 'effect' of the structure of sovereign domination. The double function of pre-capitalist relations as such contributed in no small measure to the perpetuation of the historical backwardness of the Kurdish community before the advent of land reform in 1962. But the land reform and the resulting change in the character of the dominant relations of production in the sphere of agriculture did little to change or slow down the historical backwardness of the community. For the sovereign drive for concentration of power and the subsequent rationalisation of the centralising functions of the state, informed by the exigencies of the 'security problematic' of the state, seriously constrained the structural effects of the capitalist relations of production. The progressive structural effects of capitalist relations of production on the political and cultural formations of the Kurdish community, unleashed by the so-called White Revolution, as it was branded in the official discourse in the 1960s, were significantly curtailed by the economic, political and cultural requirements of the security problematic of the state increasingly dominating the strategic calculation of sovereign power. The result was the reversal of the very rationale of the royal reforms, which had been to bridge the gap between the regime and the popular classes, thus creating a popular social base for political power, both urban and rural. On the contrary, the regime and the popular classes were growing apart by the day in the early 1970s. Sovereign repression was no longer an effective means of survival, but an instrument of its social isolation and political demise. It was undermining the social foundations of the regime.

The oil boom and the unprecedented rise in the financial power of the state practically sanctioned this reverse trend, with profound consequences for the structural development and political orientation of social forces and relations in the decade leading to the revolution. The modern bourgeoisie with its western outlook, widely expected to replace the landowning class as the mainstay of the regime, fell far short of fulfilling this expectation. Instead, it was transformed into an economic force nurtured by oil rent, structurally dependent on the state and with no access to political power. The rentier character of the bourgeoisie and its structural dependency on the state was an important consideration in the strategic

calculations of the sovereign to refashion the political field after its own image when it opted for a single party system of government in 1975. The sovereign decision, taken after an earlier hesitation and refusal to adopt a one-party system proposed by his advisors, led to a further centralisation of a legally constrained political field under his direct command. The rentier bourgeoisie was no longer the force which would shore up state power and drive the country forward in a time of crisis, but rather an adjunct of sovereign power, politically emasculated and lacking in will and vision.

The formation of the Hezb-e Rastakhiz-e Melli (National Resurgence Party) in 1975 signified the total subordination of the political field to the security requirements of the state, defined not by the 'reasons of the state' but by sovereign will and the exigencies of sovereign domination. The sovereign had now become power personified, in its unity and totality. The formation of the Rastakhiz was more than a symbolic act to refashion the government in a political field unified by sovereign will. Rather it was the founding act of the 'royal dictatorship', announcing not only the total autonomy of sovereign power from the society it ruled but also and more importantly the closure of the popular political field and the expulsion of the popular classes from the sphere of politics. The transition from the redeployed absolutism to the royal dictatorship was now complete. The process which began with the 'White Revolution', the so-called Revolution of the Shah and the People, ended with the dictatorship of the Shah over the people. The royal dictatorship, seen from the standpoint of civil society and pluralist politics, was not only a sign of absolute power of the sovereign, but also a monumental testimony to his failure to comprehend the requirements of the popular classes in impending crisis, or to influence the course and direction of forces shaping the events culminating in the revolutionary rapture which sealed the fate of his regime a few years later. The mounting repression geared to sovereign security had alienated the popular masses. The modern middle classes, supposedly the mainstay of sovereign power in the era of the 'new civilisation', had been abandoned to their fate by the sovereign. They were left floating aimlessly in an increasingly polarised political field, in which the dividing line between 'friend and enemy' had become distinctly murky and confused (Schmitt 1996).

The White Revolution and the ensuing capitalist development did little to boost the fortunes of civil society and democratic political process in the country. The decline of civil society was accelerated by an unprecedented expansion of the centralising functions of the state under the royal dictatorship. The sovereign quest for the centralisation of power not only

encroached upon civil society, pushing its boundaries back to their bare limits, but also seriously curtailed the autonomy of the governmental apparatuses, especially in the process of policy- and decision-making. The articulation of rentier capitalist relations and the economic and military requirements of sovereign security exacerbated the middle class dependency on the state, seriously constraining the conditions of possibility of popular participation in politics. Under the royal dictatorship the majority of the population was excluded from the 'legally-officially delineated' political process, and the membership of the state signified by the concept of subject-citizen, so defined by the constitution of the state, no longer ensured membership of the political community. Popular social forces were left outside the law exposed to sovereign violence which cut across the legal relations tying the identity of the subject-citizen to the identity of the sovereign in the constitution of the state. The distance separating the two was filled with more violence, which, given the exclusion of legal relations, was the only means left to the state to ensure obedience. The preponderance of the security problematic of the state in the daily conduct of sovereign power had changed the divide between law and violence. The bulk of the citizens/subjects which remained outside the legitimate order of politics so-called were thus excluded from the domain of law, moved to the domain of violence, where power is force and law can no longer signify. Sovereign power had an increasingly violent profile under the royal dictatorship. Sovereign violence and the shrinking order of law were the primary cause of the perennial decline and chronic weakness of civil society and the political emasculation of the popular classes especially the modern middle class.

The fact that the political development of Iranian society lagged behind its economic development in the last two decades of Pahlavi rule points to a growing hiatus in the historical process of the formation of civil society—that is, a break in the process of the historical development of Iranian society, with grave consequences for the democratic opposition, Kurdish opposition included, to royal dictatorship. The growing distance between the economic and the political, as was seen, was the effect of the structural requirements of the security problematic of the state. It helped reproduce not only the authoritarian and repressive tendencies embedded in the structure of rentier modernisation, but also the obstacles to the formation of a common ground which might enable the scattered forces of opposition to converge, to link up to form a tacit alliance for common action in the civil society. This common ground was essential for the formation of a

democratic front among the forces of opposition to royal dictatorship which lacked specific political identity. The outcome of this historical hiatus was the political fragmentation and weakness of the popular classes and their lack of ideological cohesion in the political field, a historical phenomenon which subsequently played a decisive role in the formation of the revolutionary rupture of 1977–1979, and its end product: the Islamic Republic. The authoritarian modernisation driven by the royal dictatorship and fuelled by the articulation of oil rent and political repression eradicated the last vestiges of the democratic opposition in the years leading to the revolution of 1979. The royal dictatorship had redefined the violent thrust of the dialectics of denial and resistance in Kurdistan. The expanding cycles of violence reproduced the conditions of repression, exclusion and denial which had historically linked sovereign power with Kurdish armed resistance. The historical weakness of civil society persisted unleashing repressive forces and relations which remained active in the nexus of the dialects of violence (Balibar 2015).

These theoretical-political reflections on the causes and consequences of the structural weakness and underdevelopment of civil society hold true for all communities in Iran before the revolution. Kurdistan is no exception to this rule. In Kurdistan, however, the chronic backwardness of civil society was further exacerbated by factors related to the historical specificity of sovereign domination over the Kurdish community. Here the strategic objective and the means and mechanism used to ensure domination differed significantly from the rest of Iranian society, in particular from the main Persian-speaking hinterland. This was for reasons related to the ethnic and linguistic specificity of Kurdish national identity, which were at the same time the constitutive differences of the sovereign identity in the official discourse. To be more precise, it refers to the exercise of 'interpretative violence' in the discursive field, in addition to the use of 'performative violence' in the political field to ensure domination, to invoke Derrida's analytics of sovereign violence already used in this study (Derrida 1992). Derrida's analytics are used to conceptualise the violence of the 'founding act' of the state/sovereign which continues to exist in the structure of juridical power. The interpretative violence here refers to the suppression of the Kurdish language by the sovereign and its exclusion from the field of discourse. Derrida uses the concept of 'silence' to explain this suppression and exclusion of the non-sovereign language by sovereign power, whereby sovereign power builds up a wall of silence around the non-sovereign language. Derrida's argument entails two crucial theoretical

points: first, the interpretative violence generated by the founding act continues to persist in the structure of sovereign power; and secondly, the silence walling up the non-sovereign language is not external to the structure of the sovereign language, the language of power. The silence is perpetuated in and by the sovereign discourse, and as such turns to an instrument of domination alongside performative violence, targeting the being of the non-sovereign subject. Violence, not law, defines the profile of the sovereign power in the non-sovereign community. It is the means and mechanism of subjectification as subjection (Derrida, ibid.).

This trend reached its climax under royal dictatorship when sovereign violence, operating in the discursive and political fields, was bolstered by the oil boom and the sudden increase in the financial resources of the state. The social effects of sovereign domination on the Kurdish community spilt over to the political field, flowing in opposing directions: unprecedented growth in the ranks of popular classes, especially the modern middle classes, on the one hand, and the decline of the field of discourse and practice historically associated with civil society, on the other. An increasingly narrow field of discourse, hitherto remaining outside the reach of interpretative violence, was reduced to its limits by mounting state repression. The outcome was an unprecedented expansion of the clandestine public sphere, already noted in this study. Increasing numbers of the Kurds, mostly from modern middle class backgrounds, with university education and secure jobs in the governmental apparatuses, were drawn into the clandestine public sphere under royal dictatorship.

The foregone analysis has been attempted to show the necessity of a genealogy of violence constructed in terms of the modality of the development of the relations of domination between sovereign power and the Kurdish community, so often neglected by the current critiques of armed struggle in Kurdistan, both liberal-constitutionalist and humanist-subjectivist. Modern Kurdish history is the product of this violent relationship, a history traversed by domination and resistance. The genealogy as such presupposes the unpacking of the contradiction in the intersection of the dialectics of suppression and resistance, laying bare the dynamics of its violent history in terms of the working of power and the means and mechanism required to secure domination over the Kurdish community. Critiques of armed struggle and the political use of violence, liberal-constitutionalist (Arendt 1970, 1973) and humanist-Marxist (Trotsky 1973; Debray 1977; Althusser 1977), are essentially counterarguments against the arguments aiming to justify violence, as just means to a just end, variously deployed by

Kurdish political forces conducting armed resistance and their supporters. But these counterarguments which try to problematise the notion of justice entailed in the means-ends relationship are largely ineffective (Benjamin 1968). Their analysis can seldom go beyond humanist concern for the human and material cost of violence, or question the strategic futility of armed resistance. This is because the advocates of armed struggle and their critics share the same theoretical ground: they both adopt an ahistorical approach attributing armed resistance to the aims and intentions of Kurdish political organisations or specific cliques and individuals in their command structure and leadership.

For all critical approaches to violence grounded in means-ends arguments share a circular discursive structure. The forms of instrumental rationality entailed in these arguments leave no room for the consideration of factors external to their circular structure. The historical conditions of the formation of violence, therefore, do not feature in the critical assessment of its relationship with the end held to justify it. The crux of the argument here is that violence is historically constituted; it has historical conditions of possibility and efficacy. A consideration of the historical specificity of violence is essential not only for a genealogical approach to its functioning and reproduction but also for deconstructing the instrumental rationalist structure of the means-ends argument deployed by the sovereign and Kurdish opposition to defend their strategic use of violence and counter-violence to further their cause.

Epilogue

The Kurdish question resurfaced in the Iranian political scene as the new regime began to assert its authority over the country and the population in the name of the sovereign, ostensibly the Iranian nation, whose revolutionary will it claimed to represent. The Kurds revived their demand for the recognition of their national/ethnic identity and rights in the framework of a democratic constitution. The Kurdish demand was initially met with hostility, and then opposition and denial. The autonomy negotiations between Kurdish political forces and the provisional government failed in early summer, paving the way for the subsequent military invasion of Kurdistan in August 1979. The unprecedented violence, terror and destruction which followed the suppression of Kurdish identity and disbanding of Kurdish political organisations was a stark reminder of the persistence of the Kurdish question in post-revolutionary Iran. The dialectics of denial and resistance grounded in the apparent opposition between Iranian sovereignty and Kurdish identity continued to define the relationship between the Kurds and the state in much the same way as it had since the early 1940s. The revolution had changed nothing; it was the same old wine in new bottles. The Kurdish forces, notably the KDPI and KSZKI, were once again forced out of the legal-political process into an extra-juridical political field the boundaries of which were defined by violence perpetrated on the community by military apparatuses of the new sovereign. Violence returned to the scene in force to become once again the regulator of the relationship between the sovereign and the Kurds.

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Although Iranian sovereignty remained constitutive of the Kurdish question, under the Islamic regime, by contrast with the monarchist rule, the identity of the sovereign was notably ambiguous. This ambiguity, which principally arose from the existence of two diverse and mutually exclusive conceptions of political authority and legitimacy in the official discourse, was clearly manifest in the terms and conditions of official policy and practice regarding the Kurds' demand for the recognition of their identity and rights. The 'democratic' and 'divine' conceptions of sovereignty, advocated by opposing bands of Islamists vying for supremacy within and outside the political process, involved different conceptions of ethnic and national identity and rights, and hence different approaches to the Kurdish question. But this ambiguity in the identity of political power and the lack of unity and direction in the process of policy and decision making on the Kurdish question, which marked the working of the regime in the early days of the Islamic Republic, was rather short-lived. It came to an end with the collapse of the provisional government in early November of 1979 under pressure from the Islamist hardliner in the regime who began rallying around Khomeini's doctrine of *Welayat-e Faqih* in the events leading to the formation of the Assembly of Experts (Majlis-e Khobregan) and the ratification of the constitutional law in December of that year.

The ratification of the constitution of the Islamic Republic which followed the seizure of the American Embassy and the collapse of the provisional government was a turning point in the process of the consolidation of power by the hardliners within the regime who had now regrouped in the *Hizb-e Jomhori-e Islami*, the Islamic Republican Party, poised for the final assault on the last vestiges of the secular democratic forces and relations in an increasingly authoritarian political process. But the constitution was also marked by the hegemony of the doctrine of *Welayat-e Faqih* and the associated divine conception of sovereignty. The Kurdish question was thus expelled from the political process; it was confined to an extra-juridical political-military field governed by sovereign concern for national security. The ominous linkage between the Kurdish question and the national security meant that once again violence became the regulator of the relationship between the Kurds and the sovereign.

The constitution of the Islamic Republic branded ethnic and linguistic communities as local minorities who were so defined by virtue of being different from the majority who bear the identity of the new sovereign. The recognition of non-sovereign ethnic-linguistic differences, however,

did not constitute a basis for the representation of non-sovereign identities in the political process as they were not accorded with rights or the means and mechanism of realisation of rights. The concept of minority remained devoid of legal grounding, and the sovereign identities could not be qualified as legal-political subjects without submitting to sovereign identity which defines not only the conditions of citizenship but also the boundaries of legitimate political process and legal-political conduct in the Islamic Republic. The apparent legal recognition accorded to non-sovereign identities in the constitution, the so-called minoritisation of ethnic, linguistic and religious communities, to use a fashionable notion, is no more than a 'sovereign ban', a mechanism of exclusion by inclusion, a means of suppression of non-sovereign identities and subjectivities.

The concept of sovereign ban, borrowed from Giorgio Agamben, is used to refer to a curious constitutional conundrum created by the concept of minority in the Islamic Republic—that is, legal recognition without political representation, and hence the concept of exclusion by inclusion referring to the functioning of the concept of minority as a mechanism of legal recognition and political denial of ethic, linguistic differences in the constitution. It is a mechanism for the suppression of the voice of the other in the juridical structure of the constitution. It denies the non-sovereign other the means and conditions of political representation. Legal recognition–political denial subverts the condition of the formation and realisation of ethnic and linguistic rights and liberties. It works as a mechanism simultaneously stating and interrupting the process of the constitution of the non-sovereign other as a political subject in the sphere of rights.

The specific political and institutional processes and practices necessary to ensure political representation of the non-sovereign are neither incorporated in nor anticipated by the constitution of the Islamic Republic. They are simply omitted, and the omission is a discursive strategy to ensure the legal and political unity of sovereign identity in the political process. The discursive strategy as such highlights the necessity of the concept of sovereign ban and the strategic role played by the concept of minority in the construction and representation of the legal and political unity of sovereign identity. The concept of minority as such resembles a legal measure, a juridical provision which exists but does not signify—like an event which happens in not happening, to use Derrida's apt expression.

In the wider political field, however, the divine conception of sovereignty and associated policies and practices filtered through the contending

populist discourses, both secular and Islamist, distinguished from one another principally by their convergence with and divergence from the emergent anti-imperialist consensus/alliance on the left. This rapidly burgeoning consensus, which was being increasingly identified with Khomeini's radical Shi'ism, the so-called *Maktab* in the discourse of the Islamist hardliners and their secular allies in the political field, thus became the main vehicle for the articulation of his doctrine of *Welayat-e Faqih* and the underpinning conception of sovereignty in the political field. The opposing discourses and practices, Islamist or secular, on the other hand, were effectively identified with imperialism and counter-revolution. They were marginalised or expelled from the political scene, and when they chose to abandon the relative safety of political quietism for active opposition to the regime, they were brutally crushed. This, in effect, meant that after the revolution the anti-imperialist consensus functioned as the main instrument for the articulation of the doctrine of *Welayat-e Faqih* and divine sovereignty in the political field on the one hand and the disarticulation of democratic identities and rights on the other. The political forces which formed the anti-imperialist consensus did not only sanction the Islamic identity of political power but also its essential unity and indivisibility. It amounted not only to the end of secularism but also to the death of political reason; political dissent amounted to more than opposition or treason; it was tantamount with waging war on God. The Kurds who chose to defy the sovereign demanding the recognition of their identity and rights had committed not only treason but also unpardonable blasphemy; they were the *Mortad*, the apostate, already condemned to death by the *Shari'a*. The story of their resistance and struggle for recognition under theocratic sovereign should be told on another occasion.

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