CHAPTER 13

REFLECTIONS ON KURDISH SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN ROJHELAT: AN OVERVIEW

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Situating the 'Reflections'

In this chapter I offer a series of reflections on the historical specificity of the Kurdish community in Iran (Rojhelat). The focus of these reflections on the social forces and relations and their effects on the working of power and domination in contemporary Rojhelat, I believe, makes it a fitting tribute to Robert Olson's contribution to Kurdish studies, honored in this collection. Olson's scholarship has always involved the writing of political history with a keen eye for the social, and similar concerns underpin my discussion here. However the dynamics of my analysis seek theoretical answers to questions posed in the political domain. The discursive strategy deployed in the construction and presentation of the theoretical and political arguments of this essay is genealogical, an approach which (as I have explained in previous writings) tries to identify the key elements in the complex and multifaceted process of social transformations in the Kurdish community and to lay bare their structural dynamics, by focusing on the articulations of economic and political relations in the context of an on-going struggle against sovereign domination. This struggle, as I have argued elsewhere in my writings on the historical specificity of the Kurdish question, constitutes the nexus of a dialectics of domination and resistance traversing Kurdish history in Rojhelat and has shaped the historical development of the Kurdish community in modern times.

In writing this chapter I draw on materials gathered in the course of my research into the Kurdish question in the Islamic republic, for my planned book *In the Shadow of the Absolute Sovereign: The Kurdish Question in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (the final book in the trilogy 'Modernity and the Stateless: the Kurds in Modern Iran')[1]. Given the subject matter of the book and the dearth of reliable primary sources outside Iran, a considerable part of the preparatory work for this book, especially the sections dealing with social and economic relations and institutions, draws on field research and archival (press) research conducted by graduate students at universities in Tehran and the provinces, and by independent researchers (mainly active, retired or disqualified journalists) with a keen interest in the social, political and cultural relations of the Kurdish community in contemporary Iran. I have been fortunate to be privy to some of this research. I have also benefited from the research produced by small but active groups, mostly in major Kurdish towns, operating in a semi-clandestine manner to avoid suppression and incarceration. These groups are few in number. They are mostly composed of unemployed graduates, disqualified university lecturers, convicted human rights activists and banned journalists and bloggers, motivated by their common 'will to knowledge', to learn, to empower themselves and to uncover the truth behind sovereign domination over their community. Working individually or in groups, these researchers are ardent subjects of knowledge; they are active participants in a field of discourse and practice which I have termed the 'clandestine public sphere' elsewhere in my writings[2]. Their work constitutes not only a subaltern critique of sovereign domination in the Kurdish community, but also a concerted attempt to dismantle the 'regimes of

[1] The trilogy consists of the following: *The Kurds and the State in Iran: The Making of Kurdish Identity* (I.B. Tauris 2011) focusing on Kurdish history, society and politics in Rojhelat from 1905-1947; *Plotting the Nation in Exile: The Forgotten Years of Kurdish Nationalism in Iran (1947-1979)* (Avesta Istanbul, forthcoming); and *In the Shadow of the Absolute Sovereign: Kurdish Question in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (I.B. Tauris, forthcoming).

[2] See Vali, *Plotting the Nation in Exile*.

(un)truth' produced by the apparatuses of knowledge deployed by sovereign power.

Over the years these researchers have consulted me for guidance on theoretical and conceptual issues, and in so doing they have also made me privy to their research projects, sharing their findings with me as their projects developed and took shape. I often felt I had become an active participant in the clandestine public sphere, increasingly involved in its culture although from a long distance. In writing this essay, I have accordingly drawn on the work of these researchers working inside the country, especially on issues relating to developments and changes in social and economic relations in the last two decades. In this sense therefore I have used aspects of these research papers and their outcomes as primary source materials for the articulation, explanation and theorization of the social and economic issues and arguments presented in this essay. In describing this chapter as an overview, my aim is to define the objective of the essay and the complex diversity of its sources and generality of its theoretical arguments, which under these circumstances inevitably evade conventional forms of proof and verification. But the title also represents an acknowledgement of this collective voice. My friends and colleagues in Iran are informed of the research plan for this essay and have expressed their consent. I appreciate their trust and confidence in me and my work. I remain indebted to them and I am saddened that I cannot openly acknowledge them and their contribution.

Kurdish Community in Rojhelat

The Kurds are the second largest ethnic-linguistic community in contemporary Iran. Although there is no statistical data on the actual size of the Kurdish population, the latest estimated figures range from 10% to 16% of the total population of approximately 75 million. The Kurdish community in Iran is predominantly Muslim, the majority Sunni belonging to the Shafeie school, and the minority Shia subscribing mainly to the mainstream Ithna A'shari or Twelver shi'ism. There are also smaller heterodox Shi'i sects as well as the Yarisan or the Ahl-e haq, which for the most part live on the margins of the religious community. There are no precise figures indicating the exact size of these orthodox

Sunni and Shi'i groupings and heterodox sects in the complex religious makeup of the community at present. Kurdish is the language commonly spoken by the community; the majority speak the Sorani dialect, although the Kurmanji and Hawrami (Gorani) dialects are also spoken by smaller groupings in the south west and southern sectors of the territory respectively. The dialectal variation does not affect the uniform linguistic structure which, along with ethnicity, is the invariant of the Kurdish identity throughout the geographical domain historically inhabited by the Kurds in Iran.

The boundaries of the historical habitat of the Kurds in contemporary Iran were defined five centuries ago, when the Ottoman state in the course of its eastward expansion collided with the newly founded Safavid state. The Safavid defeat in the battle of Chaldrin in 1514 resulted in the division and loss of Kurdish territory to the Ottoman state, and the military arrangements subsequently ratified in 1639 by the Treaty of Zahab between the two states defined their common borders, which have remained intact in their basic outlines to the present day. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 and the subsequent formation of the new state of Iraq, which included the Vilayat of Mosul in its territory, did not change the 1639 borders with Iran in any significant way. These borders in effect defined the outer boundaries of Kurdish territory in Iran, separating it from Kurdish territories in Iraq and Turkey.

Territorially Iranian Kurdistan lacks specified contiguous geographical boundaries at present. Nor does it have a juridical-political unity as a cohesive provincial administrative entity. It lacks the authority to issue uniform legal rules and administrative ordinance initiating autonomous regional, social and cultural processes and practices. The 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 Pahlavi rule and then by the Islamic state. The community is now territorially dispersed, with parts located in different provinces and subject to their administrative and legal jurisdiction. The province offi-

cially designated Kurdistan at present by the Islamic state is only a small part of the territorial expanse forming the historical habitat of the Kurdish community in Iran.

The term Kurdistan used in this study therefore denotes an ethnic-linguistic community under Iranian sovereignty. The territorial division of the community has not significantly affected its ethnic and linguistic unity and cultural cohesion. This, however, does not hold true for the processes of social and economic development and change in the Kurdish community. In fact, the territorial segmentation of the Kurdish community and the incorporation of its segments into adjacent communities with different economic, social and administrative dynamics have considerably affected the pattern of rural development and migration, the degree of urbanization and the processes of class formation and social mobility. The Kurdish community at present bears the mark of the social and economic diversity created by the division and sub-division of the Kurdish territory and the introduction of modern administrative and financial processes and practices to sustain the centralizing and unifying functioning of the modern nation-state.

Historical Development of the Kurdish Community in Rojhelat: The Nation-State and its Other

Before developing this analysis of aspects of the structural transformations in the Kurdish community in contemporary Rojhelat, I turn to a brief consideration of the history and historical development of this community, highlighting the specificity of the social and political forces and relations. My focus here is thematic rather than chronological.

For the best part of its history over the last five centuries the territory inhabited by the Kurds was ruled by semi-autonomous principalities, maintaining a tributary relationship with the Iranian state, at the apex of which stood the absolute sovereign. The political status of the Kurdish princes was defined by an articulation of their positions in the tributary structure of power and land ownership sustained by military force, composed of regular armed retinues and tribal contingents. The Kurdish principalities were undermined and eventually destroyed by the combined effects of internal political decay and external pressures exerted on

them by the centralizing processes and practices of the Qajar state in the late 19th century. The political vacuum created by the fall of the Kurdish principalities was filled by tribal confederacies and, to a lesser extent, Sunni religious orders, whose relationship with the state was very different: the tributary structure characteristic of the principalities was replaced by direct fiscal relations involving payment of taxes levied on agrarian property to the state. This relationship was founded on the articulation of tribal lineage and land ownership. It ensured not only the predominance of the tribal landlords in the socio-economic structure and political organization of the Kurdish community, but also their pivotal status in the large landlords' regime which dominated state power for five decades after the Constitutional Revolution in 1905.

The Constitutional Revolution marked the advent of the modern state, characterized above all by constitutional limitations to the powers of the absolute sovereign, separation of powers, periodic elections and secular rule. It nonetheless took three fateful decades for the modern state to consolidate its power on new foundations and exercise sovereignty over its territory effectively. The processes and practices deployed by successive governments to consolidate sovereign power were effectively undermined by the debilitating effects of the chronic financial crisis of the state, exacerbated by the military intervention and occupation of the bulk of the country during the First World War. The Kurdish territory became the battleground for Ottoman and Russian armies, and the community was devastated by the famine which followed the end of war. The rise of Reza Shah to power in 1926 marked the advent of the modern state in earnest. It signified the real founding act of the modern sovereign state, for it endowed the juridical concept with the force necessary to function. It enabled juridical/sovereign power to establish political domination effectively for the first time after the Constitutional Revolution in 1905. Territorial centralism and the discourse and practice of the construction of a uniform national identity became the twin pillars of Reza Shah's authoritarian modernization.

The process of construction of a uniform national identity, relentlessly pursued by the state, was of paramount importance

for the non-Persian ethnic and linguistic communities, including and especially the Kurdish community. This is because the construction and representation of a uniform national identity in the official discourse, national press and educational texts for the first time in Iranian history gave a definite ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural identity to sovereign power. This identity, which was defined in terms of Persian ethnicity and language and Twelver Shi'i (Ithna Ashari) Islam, had to be shared by all subjects-citizens in order to qualify for membership of the state, and hence to have the right to participate in the national political process. The rationale for a uniform national identity shared by sovereign power and the subjects-citizens alike was fundamentally security. It was intended, above all, to unify the population as the object of political calculation and fiscal planning driven ostensibly by the "reasons of the state". The political and economic management of the population was therefore perceived as integral to the security and juridical unity and territorial integrity of the state. The uniform national identity imposed on the homogenized population was tethered to the "security problematic" of the state, as security considerations became the guiding principle of policy and decision making in the process of authoritarian modernization under Reza Shah.

The nation-state is the political form of modernity. It presupposes the ethnic and linguistic unity of the sovereign and the body of citizens in the polity without which the political and cultural boundaries of the nation cannot be coterminous. In theoretical terms, this meant that other ethnic, linguistic and religious communities remained outside sovereign identity as its others, defining its outer boundaries in relation to non-sovereign identities. The othering of the non-sovereign and the suppression of the host of differences defining its identity was not only an affirmation of the constitutive status of the "sovereign difference", but also an index of the other's interiority to the construction of sovereign identity. The discursive representations of the ethnic and linguistic identity of the subordinate communities thus threatened the discursive unity of the sovereign identity, and hence the legal unity and territorial integrity of the state which it signified. These non-sovereign identities had to be suppressed, excluded, silenced and denied in order to bolster the security

consideration of the state, making the construction of a uniform national identity an essential part of the process of the formation of the nation-state.

The consolidation of sovereign power with a definite ethnic, linguistic and religious identity under Pahlavi rule (1926-41) was a turning point in the relationship between the Iranian state and the Kurdish community. This is because for the first time in the history of this turbulent relationship Kurdish ethnicity and language became targets of sovereign power, objects of sovereign domination over the Kurdish community. The suppression of Kurdish ethnicity and language were deemed necessary to secure sovereign domination and ensure the discursive unity of sovereign identity. Conversely, however, this meant that sovereign difference now was the "constitutive outside" of Kurdish identity and as such defined its inner core, its constituent elements. The crux of the argument here is that the rise of the nation-state in Iran and the subsequent change in the identity and the mode of conduct of sovereign power under the Pahlavi rule during these years (re)constituted the boundaries of the Kurdish community on ethnic and linguistic lines, which was also at the same time coterminous with the boundaries of the Kurdish identity. The decisive factor in this respect was the historical linkage of sovereign power with Persian ethnicity, language and culture in the constitution of the modern state in Iran. Prior to the rise of the nation-state and the construction of the modern national identity in Iran, the Kurdish community was a community of language and religion. Sovereign power had no definite ethnic and linguistic identity and sovereign domination over the Kurdish community did not require suppression of Kurdish ethnicity and language. It was only with the advent of the modern nation-state that Kurdish ethnicity and language, and more specifically Kurdish identity, were suppressed and denied in order to ensure sovereign domination over the Kurdish community.

Furthermore the change in the mode of domination also led to a radical change in the mode of Kurdish resistance to the suppression and denial of Kurdish identity. The birth of modern Kurdish nationalism and the quest for the recognition of Kurdish identity and rights which ignited the nationalist movement after the collapse of Reza Shah's rule was also an outcome of this his-

torical process. Modern Kurdish nationalism in Iran, from its beginning in 1942 to the present, has also undergone fundamental changes in social structure and political form. These changes, as will be seen, are reflected in its discourse and practice. The complex and multi-faceted relationship of the Kurdish community to the Iranian state has been the prime mover of its history, defining the modality of its development and change since the early 16th century. Modern Kurdish history is a history of a non-sovereign subaltern community traversed by the modes of sovereign domination and the relations of force defined by them. Modes of sovereign domination define the dynamics of modern Kurdish politics in Iran, its resistance against oppression and its struggle for recognition.

Social Structure and Political Relations

Although the Kurdish community in Iran is an ethnic-linguistic formation, it is nonetheless grounded in definite networks of social and cultural forces and relations, often superseding ethnic-linguistic boundaries and extending their reach to Iranian society and to other neighboring territories, especially Iraqi Kurdistan. In this sense therefore these social and cultural networks have defined not only the structural development of the Kurdish community but also its relationship with Iranian society at large. Social and cultural interconnections with Iranian society have expanded significantly in modern times, especially since the advent of the modern state, as successive Iranian governments have tried to centralize power and bring the Kurdish community under tighter political and cultural control. The influence of Iranian social and cultural relations on the Kurdish community has been immense, though seldom immediate or direct. Iranian influence, like most other external forces and relations, has always worked through complex networks of indigenous Kurdish social and cultural processes and practices, often in reciprocal efficacy. The outcome has borne the mark of this complex articulation.

The fundamental feature of the social structure of the Kurdish community in Iran was the prolonged predominance of the landowning class, mainly tribal, in agrarian production, which was the dominant form of economic activity before the Land Reform of 1962. Agrarian production was carried out by the

Kurdish peasantry, largely landless, paying exorbitant ground rents to the landlords for the right to use their land. The economic predominance of the landowning class was cemented by political power, mainly through its articulation in the structure of political power in the large landlords' regime which dominated the Iranian state till the late 1950s. Throughout this period the Kurdish landowning class was an integral part of the power structure in Iran. It functioned as the linchpin of state power in the Kurdish community, even though Reza Shah's pursuit of territorial centralism significantly undermined the political organization of the Kurdish tribal confederacies, subjugating them to the state by the force of arms. But Reza Shah's policies did not target the economic conditions of the existence of the landowning class. On the contrary, the trend towards the concentration of land and the expansion of large landownership, which had started in the final decades of the 19th century throughout Iran, was accelerated under his rule. The bulk of the Kurdish tribal landlords who submitted to Reza Shah's authoritarian modernization were incorporated into the power structure, forming the mainstay of Pahlavi absolutism in the Kurdish community.

The prolonged economic and political dominance of the landowning class resulted in the underdevelopment of commodity relations and internal markets, and hence the chronic weakness of the mercantile bourgeoisie in Kurdish towns, which was another feature of the social class structure of the Kurdish community. The historical weakness of the commercial bourgeoisie and its economic and political dependence on the tribal landowning class resulted in the underdevelopment of urban life and a generic urban culture. Although the large landlords' regime, bolstered by Reza Shah's absolutism, was the main cause of the historical backwardness of the Kurdish community, his authoritarian modernization centered on the construction of the institutional organization of a modern state and became the instrument of transformation and change in the region. For the processes and practices of the construction of a modern nation-state and national identity led not only to the politicization of Kurdish ethnicity and language but also to major changes in the social structure and cultural formation of the Kurdish community in the crucial decade of the 1940's.

The case in point here is the rise of a modern petty bourgeoisie and middle strata in major Kurdish urban centers, a product of modern universal secular education, a national conscription army, and uniform fiscal processes. Influenced by the positivist modernism of the official ideology disseminated and underpinned by universal education, the upper and middle layers of this expanding social force possessed a largely rational, technical and scientific outlook. A largely salaried class, many employed in the expanding state bureaucracies in the Kurdish region, the modern urban petty bourgeoisie played a pivotal role in the formation of modern nationalist discourse and practice in the Kurdish community. This process culminated in the establishment of the Kurdish Republic centered on the town of Mahabad in January 1946, a landmark in the history of Kurdish nationalism in the region in general.

The Kurdish Republic was short-lived: it collapsed in mid-December 1946. The fall of the Republic was followed by the restoration of sovereign order in the Kurdish community, and the mounting repression forced a generation of Kurdish nationalists into exile. The politics of pacification and restoration of order which followed the return of the imperial army made it difficult for the erstwhile members and sympathizers of the Republic to live a 'normal' life in Kurdistan. A wave of involuntary emigration from Kurdistan to Tehran thus began. The emigrants were largely the younger generation of Kurdish political activists, including prominent figures in the literary and journalistic fields, and for the most part active members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), who left Kurdistan to live in anonymity in the main Iranian urban centers. Others chose a life of exile abroad, especially in Iraqi Kurdistan and then in the Soviet bloc, depending on the time and circumstances.

While the fall of the Kurdish Republic initiated this process of exile, however, it was one which continued for decades afterwards. The growing Kurdish diaspora, both displacement and involuntary emigration, is the result of waves of state repression and political violence perpetrated on the population, and at times by war and military occupation of major Kurdish urban centers, to break down and eliminate organized and active Kurdish opposition to the state. However the internal diaspora is also a product

of modernity, resulting from the confrontation of the Kurdish community with the modern state's targeting and suppression of Kurdish ethnicity and language.

The internal and external diaspora thus grew in waves, often precipitated by Kurdish resistance to the implementation of new and more effective repressive measures by the state to enhance domination and control over the community. The rationalization of the processes of repression marked by the advent of the SAVAK (*Sazeman-e Ettela't va Amniyat-e Keshvar*) in 1957 was part of the centralization of power which followed the 1953 coup d'etat and the restoration of the absolutist order. The Kurdish community became a primary target of the new security processes and practices of the state, and the new techniques of surveillance and repression resulted in new waves of forced internal emigration and external exile. Further waves of arrests and incarcerations following the discovery of and assault on the clandestine organization of the KDPI in Mahabad in 1959, and the failure of the armed movement in the Mukrian region in 1968, both resulted in further forced exile and involuntary emigration in and outside Iran. On the eve of the 1979 revolution the organized Kurdish opposition to the state was almost entirely living abroad, in various locations in the Eastern bloc and Iraq.

Nationalism in exile marked a new process in Kurdish politics. This process, which came to an end only in 1978-79 with the onset of the revolutionary rupture in Iran, had a profound effect on the development of the discourse and practice of Kurdish nationalism, as was witnessed in the aftermath of the fall of the Pahlavi rule in 1979. The decades following the fall of the Kurdish Republic and the advent of nationalism in exile also saw the rise of Marxism-Leninism and its development as a potent force in nationalist politics. The influence of Marxist-Leninist discourse and practice on the Kurdish nationalist movement, closely reflecting its development in Iranian politics in general, reached its climax in the first few years of the Islamic Republic, and began waning after the military defeat of the Kurdish movement in 1985 and the advent of the second exile in Iraqi Kurdistan, continuing to the present day.

The historic event which had the most decisive impact on the development of social structure and cultural relations in the

Kurdish community was the introduction of Land Reform in 1962. Land Reform transformed social relations in the countryside throughout Iran, ending the predominance of large landed property holdings and along with them the economic and political supremacy of the landowning class. It ushered in the political demise of the landowning class and its organic relationship with political power. The Kurdish landowning class was no exception to this rule. The breakup of large landed property and distribution of agricultural land among the landless laborers and tenant farmers signaled the end of landlord power in Kurdish society and the acceleration of commodity relations in agriculture. This process, although significantly slowed down in the third and most crucial phase of the implementation of the reform, also marked the onset of peasant migration to towns, accelerating the rate of urbanization and rapidly changing the ratio of urban to rural population.

Urbanization is thus another factor that has substantially reshaped economic and social relations in the Kurdish community. The population of the Kurdish countryside has been in steady decline since the late 1960's, when the first wave of peasant migration to towns began. In rural Kurdistan, as in rural Iran in general, the majority of the inhabitants were landless peasants; land hunger, insecure tenancy and exorbitant rents were common features of agrarian relations in the countryside before 1962. The Land Reform of 1962 and the subsequent development of capitalist commodity relations was the main factor behind peasant migration to towns: Kurdish peasants left their hamlets and villages in search of new employment opportunities. This general trend, which was significantly intensified after the oil boom of 1974 in the country at large, led to the growth of shanty towns around major urban centers, inhabited by urbanized peasants who subsequently played an important role in the revolutionary upheaval of 1979. These social and economic developments in the Kurdish countryside left a deep imprint on the social structure of the Kurdish community, changing the class composition of the expanding urban centers in Kurdistan. The process of urbanization continued unabated after the revolution, following a temporary lull during 1979-83 caused by the revolutionary rupture, the subsequent Kurdish armed uprising and the violent paci-

fication of the Kurdish community by the newly established Islamic state. At present, however, the majority of the Kurdish population, exceeding two-thirds, is reportedly living in urban centers. The Kurdish community was already predominantly urban before the revolutionary rupture in 1978-79. The oil boom had effectively completed the process which had been set in motion by the Land Reform. Capitalism had firmly taken hold of the Kurdish community by the time the volcano of the revolution began to erupt, and Kurdish nationalists started returning home from exile.

The Kurdish community was at the forefront of the revolutionary upheaval which gripped the country in 1978-79. The popular masses in major Kurdish towns were first to seize control of military and security apparatuses of the state, disarm garrisons, dismantle local political administrations and replace them with popular revolutionary committees. In Kurdistan too revolution was overwhelmingly urban, and the countryside was not significantly affected by the waves of popular unrest and uprising. The Kurdish countryside was drawn into the political-military conflict only in August 1979, when the negotiations between Kurdish political forces and the provisional government in Tehran broke down and the army invaded Kurdish territory to reestablish sovereign domination over the Kurdish community. The apparent reluctance of the Kurdish countryside to get involved in the revolutionary upheaval was not so much due to the lack of radical revolutionary consciousness or political apathy on the part of the rural inhabitants as to the fear of change and its unforeseen consequences. In fact, the collective lack of interest was a calculated political decision on the part of Kurdish peasants and farmers, mostly small and medium land holders, for they feared that the destruction of the monarchy might mean the return of the old landlord regime and the loss of what they had gained in the Land Reform. The course of events after the revolution showed that their fear of the restoration of the landlords' political and economic power on the old pre-reform foundations was baseless, as the Islamic regime came to assign a different role to the Kurdish landlords in line with its security considerations in Kurdistan. This, as will be shown, required the revival, albeit partial, of the political organization of Kurdish tribes and

their incorporation into the security apparatuses of the state in the region. The tribal landlords owe their recent political clout and economic privileges to their status in the security organization of sovereign domination in Kurdistan.

The Kurdish landowning class, mainly tribal in formation, was seriously downsized after 1962, losing much of its economic power and political prestige. It lacked structural cohesion, hardly constituting a potent political force capable of influencing the course of events in the countryside during the revolution. Like the majority of the rural inhabitants landowners feared the revolutionary change and its long-term consequences in the countryside, although for different reasons. The prevailing radical political climate in the urban centers in the region, and the likelihood that revolutionary politics would spread to the countryside and radicalize the rural inhabitants, presented a daunting prospect to the Kurdish landlords, already weakened by the land reform just over a decade earlier. They saw no place for themselves in the revolutionary politics engulfing the urban centers, and isolated efforts by a few tribal lords to reestablish the old regime, or to join the ranks of the royalist forces operating in Kurdistan, proved unsuccessful. A few with nationalist credentials joined the ranks of Kurdish nationalist forces, especially the KDPI, which was more favorably disposed towards the ethnic nationalism espoused by the more traditional segments of the political community. Their active cooperation with nationalist organizations was often short-lived, however, and their political fortunes waned fairly quickly as they took positions in the internal power struggles, often expressed in terms of controversial strategic issues. They were often marginalized and eventually excluded from the processes of policy and decision making by the increasing radicalization of nationalist politics, which saw factionalism, power struggles, and the eventual political ascendancy of the left forces within the organization in the revival of popular politics in 1979.

While the tribal leaders were unable to achieve dominance in organized political forces after the revolution, the Islamic regime, as noted above, succeeded in co-opting some of the prominent Kurdish tribes to its security structure and securing their active cooperation in maintaining its domination over the

Kurdish community. In so doing it has created an active indigenous security-military force, tasked with maintaining security and order in Kurdish cities and combating any nationalist military threat to sovereign domination and control over the Kurdish countryside. The tribal militia, the so-called Muslim Peshmerga (or *Jash*,"little donkey", as it is generally called in the Kurdish community), is a salaried force recruited locally from the collaborating tribes, among which the Mangur tribe is prominent. It is organized into contingents armed and trained by the revolutionary guards corps stationed in the Kurdish territory. Although the exact number of the tribal militia is not known, it is said not to exceed 25,000, including the auxiliaries, in Kurdistan at large. Local observers in the Mukrian region, however, estimate it at 5,000-7,000 regular and 2,000-3,000 auxiliary troops at present. Nor is there any precise information regarding the foundation and the organizational structure of the Muslim Peshmerga. It is widely believed that this force was created soon after the onset of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980. Whatever the exact date of the formation of the Muslim Peshmerga force, it was already present on the military scene during 1983-85, playing an important role, alongside the Barzanis' Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) peshmergas and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, in the defeat and expulsion of the KDPI and Komala forces from the Kurdish territory in Iran. The Muslim Peshmerga in Eastern (Iranian) Kurdistan performs the same function as the infamous *Jash* in Southern (Iraqi) Kurdistan and Koruci in Northern Kurdistan (Turkey). They are native collaborators, indigenous instruments of sovereign domination in their respective parts of greater Kurdistan.

The Muslim Peshmerga is a heterogeneous force in terms of its tribal formation and origin, its organizational structure and its security function. In the central Mukrian region, including the two important towns of Mahabad and Bokan, the overwhelming majority of the Muslim Peshmerga are drawn from the Mangur tribe, whose leadership, especially Ali Agha Nowzari, are significant figures in the security organization of the Islamic state in the area. In the southern sector of the territory, around Naqada, Ushno and Piranshahr, the bulk of the Muslim Peshmerga are recruited from among the Mamesh tribe in the area. In the mili-

tary-security field, the Muslim Peshmerga have a double function, both related directly to maintaining sovereign domination in Kurdistan: fighting Kurdish insurgency on behalf of the state, and legitimizing the military presence of the state in Kurdistan. But the legitimation function of the tribal militia has been significantly undermined by its use of the official Islamist discourse of the regime to justify its anti-nationalist politics. In this sense, therefore, while the tribal militia has become the native face of sovereign power in the Kurdish community, however effective it may be in the military-security field, it has failed to bolster the legitimacy of sovereign domination in Kurdistan. Despite its apparent success in the military-security field, the Islamic regime has proved unable to supersede or even bypass the ethnic divide in Kurdistan. The mounting repression and continuous denial of Kurdish identity and rights, especially during Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005-13), has consolidated the constituting status of Kurdish ethnicity and language in the inner core of Kurdish identity and the outer boundary of Kurdish community. Since the early phase of the post-revolutionary era the two have come to coincide more closely than ever, thus effectively excluding sovereign identity and the destabilizing effects of official Islamic discourse from the local Kurdish discursive field.

The security function of the tribal militia is not confined to rural Kurdistan. In fact, at present the bulk of the Muslim Peshmerga force involved in state security resides in towns, where significant numbers of them work in various branches of provincial and local governmental administration. This trend has been steadily on the rise since the decline of armed opposition and the consolidation of military control over the Kurdish countryside in the early 1990's. The sector of the tribal militia deployed in civic administration, the auxiliaries so to speak, are not incorporated into the organization of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. Rather, they constitute a separate semi-autonomous grouping in the civic administration, performing specific tasks and duties which may or may not be directly related to the security objectives of the Islamic state. The auxiliaries, who often wear local Kurdish attire, are usually middle and lower ranking civil servants in the provincial and local administration, which is headed by senior members of the Revolutionary Guards corps appointed

by the central command in Tehran or in provincial capitals. The Revolutionary Guards hold positions of policy and decision making, especially on military and security issues. This is particularly true of the senior staff in provincial government administration. While according to official records ethnic Kurds constitute 40 percent of the total population of Western Azerbaijan province, for example, only 2 out of 165 senior administrative positions are occupied by ethnic Kurds. The auxiliaries deployed in the civic and governmental administration as such represent another aspect of the overall policy of the Islamic state to sustain its domination in Kurdistan by using local/indigenous tribal forces. The security consideration of the Islamic state in Kurdistan, involving the use of the Kurdish tribal contingents in town and in the countryside, has in effect resulted in a re-tribalization of the political space, thus reversing the trend set in motion by the land reform in 1962. City councils in local municipalities and Provincial and District Associations in provincial governorates throughout the territory are thus largely run by men drawn from collaborating tribes such as Mangur and Mamesh, who function as the executive arm of the security apparatuses of the state, tasked with maintaining sovereign order in Kurdistan.

The active presence of the Muslim Peshmerga in the provincial and local administration, and their control over local governorates, municipalities, city councils, trade and commerce chambers and other business and professional organizations in key Kurdish urban centers, signifies not only their political clout but also their rising economic fortune in the community and beyond. The Muslim Peshmerga working in governmental and civic administration have used their political status to access economic and financial resources as a means of financial gain and privilege, including and especially landed property and real estate, commodity and credit markets in the Kurdish region. Their status in the economic field as such is a function of their access to political power, backed up by juridical and extra juridical violence required to maintain sovereign domination. Their economic gain and financial privileges assume the specific form of rent, which is an effect of the articulation of tribal lineage and political power in the security organization of the state in the region. The active involvement of the tribal militia in rental rela-

tions means that it is directly linked with the new rentier bourgeoisie in Kurdistan on the one hand, and the military-security-financial triangle/oligarchy on the other, in the structure of sovereign power in the Islamic republic.

Contraband trade is another factor which has had a significant impact on the changing social structure of the Kurdish community in recent years. Contraband trade across the border with Iraqi Kurdistan has always been a major feature of the economic life of the Kurdish community in Iran. However this age-old phenomenon has increased significantly since the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 2003. Major Kurdish towns such as Mahabad, Bokan and Sena (Senendaj) are main trading centers, attracting customers as far afield as Tehran, Isfahan and Shiraz. Adverse economic conditions in the Islamic Republic have reinforced this upward trend, giving a further impetus to the development of contraband trade in the Kurdish region. Contraband trade is not only a major source of employment and income for sectors of the Kurdish population, especially the young generation of urbanized peasants who work mainly as couriers, but has also swelled the ranks of the Kurdish business class. Contraband traders at present constitute a powerful and increasingly active faction of the Kurdish commercial bourgeoisie.

The economic activities of this faction at times overlap with those of a new rentier bourgeoisie in Kurdistan, whose access to economic resources and commercial profit is a function of their business relationship with local and regional/provincial representatives of the Iranian state in the Kurdish community, especially the command structure of the revolutionary guard corps, which has been effectively running the affairs of the community from its bases in military garrisons and outposts since the early days of the revolution. A small but powerful sector of the contraband businesses work with the state representatives in the region, in a relationship governed by mutual interest: they share part of their commercial profit with the state representatives in the region in exchange for political protection and legal institutional facilitation. Although largely politically dormant, these two increasingly powerful factions of the Kurdish commercial bourgeoisie function as channels of tacit local support for the inflow of sov-

ereign power, enhancing its operation in major Kurdish urban centers.

Urban social structure in the Kurdish region has thus undergone major changes since the revolution. The process of social transformation is marked, above all, by the economic decline and the increasing social marginalization of the old commercial bourgeoisie. This once pivotal social force, which also included in its ranks traditional landlord-bourgeois families, large real estate owners and property developers, creditors, usurers and money lenders in major towns such as Mahabad, Bokan, Saqiz, Ba'ne and Sena, has been displaced by the new rentier bourgeoisie, closely tied to the regional representatives of the ruling power bloc in the Islamic regime. Although the leading families and personalities of the old commercial bourgeoisie played an important role in local and municipal politics in major towns, albeit within the limits sanctioned by the state, the nature of their relationship with the state differed substantially from the one between the state and the new bourgeoisie in the Islamic republic. Political influence, often the prerogative of select families and personalities, was used for financial gain and social standing in the community, but the practice was not as widespread and common as it is under the Islamic rule. Their relationship with political power, complex and multi-faceted as it was, seldom involved institutional processes and practices corresponding to the clientelist patterns characteristic of rentier relations in the Islamic republic.

Clientelist structures nurturing rentier relations are often initiated for political considerations related to the security of the state. They are informal networks of power and influence involving rent relations often based on the exchange of economic reward for political loyalty and support. The clientelist rent, varying widely in form, is constituted by the articulation of economic and political influence circumventing the formal institutional structures of power and influence in society. Clientelist structures as such thrive on an underdeveloped civil society and public sphere, and are sustained by the lack of a democratic culture of accountability and transparency in the society. Clientelist networks belong to the informal domain of power, and the extra-juridical character of the rentier structures on which patron-client

relations are based means that they are unstable. They are liable to be destabilized by new developments and shifts in the informal political and economic fields, which in turn are often related to changes in the balance of forces in the power bloc or in the wider political field in the country.

The relationship between the rentier sectors of the Kurdish commercial bourgeoisie and the regional and provincial representatives of the ruling power bloc in Kurdistan seem to conform with this pattern of development. Under the Islamic regime, especially in the past two decades, the massive expansion of the informal economic field and the subsequent increase in rentier relations has led to the development and consolidation of vast clientelist networks in the Kurdish community. These consolidated networks form a parallel structure of power and influence, constituted by the articulation of the political and economic domains, and nurtured by the informal economic field. The existing clientelist relations are of a specific type; they do not only represent exchange of economic reward for political support and loyalty, as is the case in conventional forms of clientelism. In addition to such a reciprocal relation between the patrons and clients, here the patrons, the regional agents of sovereign power in Kurdistan, are also involved in the rentier relations, taking a share of the rent created in the informal economic sector. The active participation of the agents of sovereign power in the rentier relations in the informal economic sector assigns a particular character to the prevailing clientelist structure in Kurdistan. It enables the patron-client relationship to override the linkage between sovereign security and Kurdish identity. Kurdish ethnicity and language, the primary targets for both sovereign repression and nationalist resistance in the Kurdish community, do not play a significant role in the production and appropriation of rent in the informal economic sector. The depoliticization of Kurdish identity in the informal economic sector is tantamount to the desecuritization of rentier relations. It is as such an essential condition of existence of rent in Kurdistan. It is essential for the perpetuation of clientelist structures involving the rentier sectors of Kurdish commercial bourgeoisie and sovereign security forces alike.

The emergence of a sizeable rentier bourgeoisie with considerable political clout is a new development in the Kurdish

community in Iran. The active presence of this new social force in the political and economic life of the community generates more clientelist networks, informal market relations and endemic corruption. The depoliticization of Kurdish ethnicity and language in the informal economic field, and the consequent change in their status in the security considerations of sovereign domination in the Kurdish community, signify a radical break from the Pahlavi era in the relationship between the Kurdish commercial bourgeoisie and the state. Before the 1979 revolution the Kurdish commercial bourgeoisie, though internally differentiated, nonetheless represented a more cohesive social force. This is because the factions of the Kurdish commercial bourgeoisie were internally united by their common relations with the formal market for commodity, money and services. Informal economic relations, important as they were, never predominated in the economic reproduction of the commercial bourgeoisie as a class. Rent relations, a developing feature tied to the growing informal economic sector especially during the oil boom, fell short of forming consolidated clientelist networks of power and influence in the Kurdish community. The pivotal status of Kurdish identity in the security considerations of the Pahlavi rule was the main obstacle to the development of a rentier clientelist structure in Kurdistan. The persistence of the interconnection between the security requirements of sovereign domination and Kurdish ethnic and linguistic identity also contributed to the strengthening of nationalist tendencies in the political position of the factions of the Kurdish commercial bourgeoisie. Kurdish identity functioned as a unifying factor, bringing together various factions of the commercial bourgeoisie and giving cohesion to their political position on the eve of the revolution.

This crucial interconnection is now absent in the relationship between the rentier bourgeoisie and the regional representations of sovereign power in the Kurdish community. It has been undermined by the massive growth in the informal economic sector, the consolidation of rentier clientelism, and the subsequent depoliticization of Kurdish ethnicity. The Kurdish rentier bourgeoisie and the sovereign power have a common interest in maintaining and fostering the depoliticization of Kurdish ethnic and linguistic identity. For aside from its importance for the de-

velopment of informal economic sector and rentier relations, it helps undermine the structural cohesion of this class, undercutting nationalist tendencies in its growing ranks.

Kurdish Opposition

As noted earlier, in Kurdistan as in other parts of Iran the 1979 revolution was primarily an urban phenomenon. In the two decades leading to the revolutionary rupture urban life had been transformed by a number of important social developments and cultural trends. These social developments and cultural trends not only played decisive roles in the making of the revolutionary process; they also continued to influence the course and direction of the events after the revolution. The crucial development in this respect was the expansion in the ranks of the modern urban petty bourgeoisie and the middle strata in the Kurdish community, motivated by rapid economic development, the expansion of state bureaucracies requiring salaried state functionaries, and also the rapid expansion of modern tertiary education, with an increasing number of educated men and women entering job markets fostered by the oil boom. This numerically dominant social force was also the main bearer of the modern political and ideological discourses and practices in the community, specifically, modern nationalism and Marxism-Leninism.

The modern urban petty-bourgeoisie was also the agent linking the Kurdish opposition with the Iranian secular opposition to the Pahlavi monarchy, a crucial link which had been created and fostered in a "clandestine public sphere" in the country at large; that is, a clandestine field of discourse and communication, the boundaries of which were defined by opposition to sovereign power expressed in the vocabulary and idiom of secular ideologies, especially radical readings of Marxism-Leninism in both Chinese and South American versions. Opposition to sovereign power and subscription to revolutionary Marxism were the two factors uniting the diverse social forces and political organizations involved in this clandestine public sphere, including the younger generation of Kurds mostly engaged in education in Iranian universities. They proved decisive in shaping the revolutionary process in the Kurdish community and in defining the main contours of the political ideological discourse and practice

of the Kurdish opposition in the revolutionary rupture, especially before the active presence and participation of the Kurdish political parties and organizations on the scene.

After the revolution this younger generation of Kurdish political activists continued to play an important role, as founders or leading members of the Kurdish political parties and organizations. Throughout the revolutionary upheaval, and in the crucial decade following the triumph of the revolution, the ethnic-linguistic identity of the Kurds remained the main criterion defining the boundaries of revolutionary politics in the Kurdish community, functioning as the means of participation, of inclusion in and exclusion from the revolutionary political and cultural processes. In so far as the defining role of the Kurdish identity in the political and ideological process after the revolution is concerned, the political position and ideological allegiance of the new generation of Kurdish political activists proved decisive. Their ideological commitment to specific readings of Marxism-Leninism centered on the primacy of the people-imperialist contradiction in the process of the revolutionary struggle for liberation. This was widely viewed as the benchmark of revolutionary discourse and practice in the political field after the revolution by significant sectors of Kurdish political activists within Kurdish political parties and in the community at large, and it seriously undermined the ethnic and linguistic boundaries separating Kurdish politics from Iranian politics. The wall, which had been erected by Kurdish ethnic linguistic identity around the political and ideological field, was breached by the Marxist-Leninist groupings from inside the movement. Kurdish nationalist politics lost its discursive autonomy, and the Kurdish political field was opened to non-Kurdish political forces with non-Kurdish political agendas such as the Tudeh Party, the Organization of the People's Fedayin of Iran and assorted smaller organizations with left-wing tendencies.

Kurdish political parties and organizations in Rojhelat have struggled for self-rule in the autonomous Kurdish region since the advent of the Kurdish republic in 1946. They have argued for regional self-rule in the framework of a democratic political system in Iran, be it republican or federalist, parliamentary or presidential. The quest for self rule has been presented as a democ-

ratic right providing a political-legal framework for the recognition of Kurdish identity, and hence a democratic solution to the Kurdish question in Rojhelat within the legal-political framework of Iranian national sovereignty. But the pursuit of Kurdish self-rule, be it regional autonomy or federalist scheme, has proved seriously problematic. This is because the quest for autonomy, couched in terms of democratic rights associated with Kurdish ethnicity and language, rests upon conditions which are not given to the concept of regional autonomy or the federalist rule. The boundaries of Kurdish projects for self-rule are defined by Kurdish identity, that is by Kurdish ethnicity, language and culture. These conditions refer to political and cultural processes and practices which are external to the ethnic-linguistic boundaries of the autonomist project, and consist fundamentally of non-Kurdish forces and relations in the framework of the Iranian nation-state. The coherence of the Kurdish projects for political and cultural self-rule is undermined by their external conditions of possibility, that is, the non-Kurdish forces and relations whose participation in the regional autonomist/federalist projects is deemed essential for their realization. In other words, there is a serious discrepancy in Kurdish autonomist politics between the discursive representation of the autonomist rights and the political and cultural conditions of their possibility/realization. This point requires further explanation and elucidation.

The conditions of possibility for the realization of the regional autonomist/federalist projects proposed by Kurdish political parties in Rojhelat at various historical junctures from 1946 to the present are defined mainly by their regional base and ethnic character, albeit in negative terms. For these conditions indicate in no ambiguous terms that in order to succeed, Kurdish autonomist projects should supersede their narrow regional foundation and ethnic-linguistic boundaries and reach out to wider sectors of Iranian population from among other ethnic-linguistic communities; in effect, that a democratic solution to the Kurdish question should be sought in the broader context of Iranian society at large. This means that the realization of such projects, incorporated into regional autonomy or federalist party programs, presupposes above all a genuine democratic pluralism, signified by a political process capable of ensuring free and

equal representation for all ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural identities, and a concept of citizenship which is civic in construction and far removed from any ethnic-linguistic and religious-cultural consideration. Aside from a genuine democratic regime, the realization of the Kurdish regional autonomy or federalist political programs requires a strong popular-democratic opposition with a pluralist political program, capable of recognizing and respecting ethnic and linguistic difference and the associated rights and liberties, in order to provide for the articulation of Kurdish projects for self-rule and their representation as fundamentally civic and democratic demands. This would enable Kurdish political parties to articulate their autonomist demands in a broad nationwide democratic program geared to the creation of a democratic consensus for a united opposition to the state. The conditions of the realization of the Kurdish political program and the condition of the construction of the democratic consensus coincide in the process of democratic opposition to the state.

Autonomist political party programs have been given credence by the fragmentation of Kurdish territory, community and identity, historical features of the Kurdish community in modern times. The success of the Peoples Democratic Party (HDP) in the elections of June 7, 2015 in Turkey testifies to the necessity of superseding the ethnic-linguistic boundaries of the autonomist political project. Articulating Kurdish political and cultural demands in a wider political program as part of the democratic opposition in Turkey helped the HDP to pass the 10 percent threshold and enter the parliament as a political party, a success which had previously eluded Kurdish political parties, mainly due to their regionalist commitment to the ethnic-linguistic boundaries of Kurdish politics. Conversely, the repeated failures of the Kurdish regional autonomy projects in Iran and Iraq as well as the current precarious status of the KRG in the Iraqi state show the failure of the ethnically based Kurdish projects in the absence of a genuine democratic political process in the sovereign state.

Kurdish self-rule projects are products of Middle Eastern history; they are sanctioned by the historical conditions which have led to the fragmentation of Kurdish territory, community and identity. They were perceived as the means to ensure Kurd-

ish ethnic and linguistic rights without changing the political map of the region. According to this perception Kurdish autonomy and sovereign security presupposed each other, but only within a genuinely liberal democratic state. Although a democratic regime is the condition of realization/possibility of Kurdish autonomy, its availability depends fundamentally on the security of sovereign power; that is, on the strategic calculation of the state in the national, regional and international political fields. While the non-sovereign views liberty as a condition of security, sovereign power by contrast perceives security as a condition of liberty. This reversal of the relationship between liberty and security, an essential component of the strategic calculations of sovereign power in the political field, always renders the realization of liberty for the Kurds conditional upon sovereign will, in other words, upon the strategic calculation of the state geared to the supreme objective of security. This tendency, embedded in the analytic structure of the concept of regional self-rule/autonomy, undermines not only its discursive coherence but also its viability as a democratic solution to the Kurdish question.

The crux of my critique of the Kurdish autonomist/federalist party political programs thus concerns the exteriority of their conditions of possibility/realization in the political and cultural field. These conditions, I have argued, remain external to the discursive constructions of these programs, which depend essentially on the nature of political power and the relations of force in the wider political and cultural fields in Iran at any given time. This means that the realization of the civic and democratic rights grounded in Kurdish ethnic-linguistic identity depends on the possibility of their articulation in the political programme of a genuinely democratic opposition committed to plurality of identities and their related rights and liberties in the political and cultural fields. For only a democratic bloc consisting of both Kurdish and non-Kurdish forces can challenge the sovereign power and its intrinsic tendency to protect and promote the unity and singularity of sovereign identity. The exteriority of the conditions of realization of these party programs, as was argued, undermines their political viability as reliable solutions to the Kurdish question in Iran. This is witnessed by the history of

Kurdish movements in modern Iran, from the Kurdish Republic to the present.

Although the Kurdish Republic of 1946 had an ambiguous identity, vacillating between political independence and regional autonomy, it is fair to say that the bulk of its political discourse, especially in the last six months of its brief existence, was regional autonomist, arguing for the resolution of the Kurdish question in the political-legal framework of Iranian sovereignty. The Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), the main force behind the republican administration and the sole political party representing Kurdish nationalist politics in Iranian Kurdistan before the 1979 revolution, pursued the goal of regional autonomy under the strategic slogan of "Democracy for Iran and Autonomy for Kurdistan" for nearly six decades. It opted for a federalist political program for a democratic Iran to replace the Islamic republic only in 2004. The quest for a federal Kurdish region within a democratic federalist Iran was inspired by the success of the Iraqi Kurds, who abandoned their regional autonomist program and accommodated their national demands within a federalist framework, whereby Arabs and Kurds would enjoy equal rights articulated in a democratic non-ethnic non-religious concept of citizenship in the new Iraqi constitution. The KDPI has undergone political factionalism and organizational splits since 2003, but both factions hold to this federalist program to date. Power struggle and sectarian strife do not seem to have diminished their commitment to the federalist project. Although the recent political crisis and conflict in Iraq have encouraged some in their leadership to rethink the federalist project and cast doubt on its feasibility in the post-Islamic Republic of Iran, no concrete steps have been taken to change it.

The second largest political organization in Iranian Kurdistan, the *Komalay Shoreshgari Zehmatkeshani Kurdistani Iran* (KSZKI or the Revolutionary Association of the Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan), a Marxist-Leninist organization formed on the eve of the Iranian revolution by a group of young Kurdish political activists with Maoist leanings in Iranian universities, also changed its political program from regional autonomy to federalism soon after the formation of the KRG in 2003. In the early phase of the formation of the organization, the KSZKI remained

ambiguous regarding its proposed solution to the Kurdish question, though it continued pouring scorn on the KDPI's regional autonomy program as a bourgeois-liberal compromise. It took a couple of years and a great deal of political and ideological wrangling for the organization to come to terms with regional autonomy, though apparently for the want of a better option. The Leninist reading of the democratic doctrine of national self-determination was often used to justify adoption of this seemingly bourgeois concept and the quest for regional autonomy was legitimized by emphasizing the organization's commitment to the right of the Kurdish community to cessation. In the discourse of the KSZKI regional autonomy was legitimized by the ultimate goal of independence as a universal democratic right. The regional autonomy project survived the vicissitudes of time, despite initial criticism and subsequent reluctant adoption and incorporation of it into the party program. The concept underwent changes in the course of power struggles and various sectarian splits inside the organization. The KSZKI was transformed into the Communist Party of Iran (CPI) in 1983, embracing Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy in discourse and practice. The CPI proposed an orthodox program for socialist transformation of Iran informed by class categories, thus subordinating the Kurdish question to the exigencies of the process of transition to socialism in Iran at large.

The CPI soon suffered an internal split on issues related primarily to the political and ideological identity of the organization, including and particularly the status and representation of the Kurdish question in its discourse and practice. The radical faction left the party to form the Workers' Communist Party of Iran (WCPI), emphasizing commitment to Marxist orthodoxy and communism in opposition to their adversaries in the party, who were thus branded as bourgeois ethnic-nationalists masquerading as communists. The CPI continued its political-ideological opposition to the newly formed WCPI, only to succumb to internal disputes and strife which once again focused mainly on the perennial issue of the relationship between Marxism and ethnic nationalism, and centered on the conceptualization of the Kurdish question and the predominantly Marxist class based discourse of the party. The dissenters, branded as national-

ists by their more orthodox adversaries in the CPI, now chose to shed their communist identity and return to the original formation of the KSZKI. The rejuvenated KSZKI thus attempted to reclaim the lost Kurdish identity and ground it in more democratic foundations. The discourse of the new KSZKI, though less ambiguous on the primacy of the Kurdish question in its program, contained a conception of regional autonomy with a tenuous relationship to the doctrine of national self-determination. The organization soon abandoned Kurdish regional autonomy altogether in favor of the federal solution, that is, a Kurdish region in a federal Iran to be established after the removal of the present regime. However, it did not take long for the new KSZKI to succumb to sectarianism and suffer a split within the organization. But the two factions emerging out of the KSZKI after the formation of the KRG both favor the federal solution. They seem to have remained committed to the federal project, despite suffering further splits, which make it rather difficult to make sense of their actual political programs and ideological positions at present.

The political organizations of Rojhelat have been in exile in Iraqi Kurdistan ever since they lost the military ground to the Islamic Republic and were forced out of the Kurdish territory in Iran. Financial and logistical dependence and political factionalism and ineptitude have left them at the mercy of the KRG and the exigencies of a complex relationship between its constituent forces, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and the Iranian military and security apparatuses. The political parties and organization of the Rojhelat have thus lost political and functional autonomy in the discursive and political-military fields. Three decades of exile, isolation and inaction have turned them into ineffective forces, opposition in name only some would say, with tenuous relations with the community they claim to represent. Regional factors also played an important part in the decline of the power and influence of the Kurdish political parties. The consolidation of power in the Islamic republic after the war with Iraq and the restructuring of sovereign domination in Kurdistan, followed by the fall of the B'ath regime in Iraq and the subsequent increase in Iranian power and influence in the region in general and Iraq in

particular, effectively undermined the regional conditions of possibility of nationalist politics in exile. Extra-territorial regional conditions are decisive when the nationalist force in question is committed to the overthrowing of the state by means of arms, and armed struggle is the chosen strategy for liberation. The history of the Kurdish movements in the region in the modern Middle East testifies to the truth of this argument.

The political organizations of Rojhelat in Iraqi Kurdistan have not formally terminated their commitment to armed struggle; the KDPI, KSZKI and their various offshoots all maintain peshmerga forces at a considerable financial cost, suggesting that they have not abandoned the strategy. Nor could they do so without radically changing their strategic objective, centered on the overthrowing of the Islamic regime in Iran. This, in effect, means that the strategy of armed struggle is bound up with the determination of the objective of the struggle and whether it involves the armed removal of the Islamic Republic. However, the political organizations of Rojhelat at present face a dilemma regarding the strategy of armed struggle. Although they have not abandoned this in principle, and continue to emphasize their commitment to the destruction of the Islamic regime in Iran in their official discourse, they have almost never resorted to armed action against the state in the past two decades. The strategy seems to have been put aside as a viable means to political ends, in view of the unfavorable national and regional conditions. In other words, it has become increasingly evident that the strategy has lost its conditions of possibility and realization in Iran and the region at large. In the present circumstances armed struggle is viewed as a measure of last resort, which could be deployed if the Islamic regime entered a situation of terminal crisis and signs of rapid disintegration were clear enough to risk the national and regional consequences of large-scale military engagement with the regime[3].

[3] The discussion of the Kurdish opposition here does not include the *Partiya Jiyana Azada Kurdistane* (PJAK) or the Party of Free Life in Kurdistan. The party was formed in 2004 by a group of Kurds from Rojhelat, erstwhile active members and sympathizers of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The formation of the PJAK was precipitated by the decision of the leadership of the Kongra Gel (the PKK) to downsize

its membership, and to encourage its members and sympathizers from other parts of Kurdistan to form their own parties. Although organizationally autonomous, the PJAK remains committed to the ideological formation nurtured by PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's thought. Democratic Confederalism, feminism and political ecology constitute the main planks of its ideology which it shares with the PKK in Turkey and the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria. The PJAK is committed to pursuing the armed road to liberation, and its armed wing, the East Kurdistan defense Units (YRK) carries out military action against the military and security apparatuses of the Islamic regime stationed in the Kurdish territory in Iran, although rather irregularly. The PJAK is relatively new, a late comer to the Rojhelat political scene, so there is a dearth of independent research and non-organizational information available to the public about it.