EXETER STUDIES IN ETHNO POLITICS

The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey

From protest to resistance

Cengiz Gunes

ROUTLEDGE

The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey

This book provides an interpretive and critical analysis of Kurdish identity, nationalism and the Kurdish national movement in Turkey since the 1960s. By raising issues and questions relating to Kurdish political identity and highlighting the ideological specificity, diversity and the transformation of Kurdish nationalism, it develops a new empirical dimension to the study of the Kurds in Turkey.

Cengiz Gunes applies an innovative theoretical approach to the analysis of an impressively large volume of primary sources and data drawn from books and magazines published by Kurdish activists, political parties and groups. The analysis focuses on the specific demands articulated by the Kurdish national movement and looks at Kurdish nationalism at a specific level by disaggregating the nationalist discourse, showing variations over time and across different Kurdish nationalist organisations. Situating contemporary Kurdish political identity and its political manifestations within a historical framework, the author examines the historical and structural conditions that gave rise to it and influenced its evolution since the 1960s. The analysis also encompasses an account of the organisational growth and evolution of the Kurdish national movement, including the political parties and groups that were active in the period.

Bringing the study of the organisational development and growth of the Kurdish national movement in Turkey up to date, this book will be an important reference for students and scholars of Middle Eastern politics, social movements, nationalism and conflict.

Cengiz Gunes holds a PhD in Politics from the University of Essex, UK. His main research interests are in Identity and Nationalism, Democratic Theory and Post-structuralist Political Theory.

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Abbreviations

ADYÖD	*Ankara Demokratik Yüksek Öğrenim Derneği* (Ankara Democratic Higher Education Association)
AKP	*Adalet Ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party)
ARGK	*Artêşa Rizgariya Gelê Kurdistan* (Kurdistan People's Liberation Army)
BDP	*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi* (Peace and Democracy Party)
CHP	*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People's Party)
DDKD	*Devrimci Demokratik Kültür Dernekleri* (Revolutionary Democratic Cultural Associations)
DDKO	*Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları* (Revolutionary Cultural Hearths of the East)
DEHAP	*Demokratik Halk Partisi* (Democratic People's Party)
DEP	*Demokrasi Partisi* (Democracy Party)
DP	*Demokrat Parti* (Democrat Party)
DTH	*Demokratik Toplum Hareketi* (Democratic Society Movement)
DTP	*Demokratik Toplum Partisi* (Democratic Society Party)
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EMEP	*Emek Partisi* (Labour Party)
ERNK	*Eniya Rizgariya Netewa Kurdistan* (The National Liberation Front of Kurdistan)
FKF	*Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonu* (Federation of Thought Clubs)
HADEP	*Halkın Demokrasi Partisi* (People's Democracy Party)
HEP	*Halkın Emek Partisi* (People's Labour Party)
HÎK	*Herekata Îslamiya Kurdistanê* (Islamic Movement of Kurdistan)
HPG	*Hêzên Parastina Gel* (People's Defence Forces)
HRFT	Human Rights Foundation of Turkey
HRK	*Hêzên Rizgariya Kurdistan* (Kurdistan's Liberation Forces)
İHD	*İnsan Hakları Derneği* (Human Rights Association)
KAB	*Kürdistan Aleviler Birliği* (Union of Alevis of Kurdistan)
KADEK	*Kongreya Azadî û Demokrasiya Kurdistanê* (Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress)
KCK	*Koma Civakan Kurdistan* (The Council of Communities of Kurdistan)

KDP	Kurdistan Democrat Party (Iraq)
KİP	*Kürdistan İşçi Partisi* (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
KKK	*Koma Komalan Kurdistan* (The Council of Associations of Kurdistan)
KNK	*Kongreya Netawa Kurdistan* (Kurdistan National Congress)
Kongra-Gel	*Kongra Gelê Kurdistan* (People's Congress of Kurdistan)
Kon-Kurd	The Federation of Kurdish Associations in Europe
KPSK	*Komaleya Partizanen Sor an Kurdistan* (Union of Kurdistan's Red Partisans)
KUK	*Kürdistan Ulusal Kurtuluşcuları* (National Liberationists of Kurdistan)
MGK	*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu* (National Security Council)
MHP	*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (Nationalist Action Party)
MKM	*Navenda Çanda Mezopatamya* (Mesopotamian Cultural Centre)
NDR	National Democratic Revolution
OHAL	*Olağanüstü Hal Bölge Valiliği* (Governorship of the Region Under Emergency Rule)
ÖDP	Freedom and Solidarity Party
PAJK	*Partiya Azadiya Jin a Kurdistan* (Freedom Party of Women of Kurdistan)
PÇDK	*Partiya Çareseriya Demokratik a Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party – Iraqi Kurdistan)
PJA	*Partiya Jina Azad* (Party of Free Women)
PJAK	*Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê* (Party of Free Life – Iranian Kurdistan)
PKK	*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PSK	*Partiya Sosyalista Kurdistan* (Socialist Party of Kurdistan)
PSSK	*Peşmergeyan Sor en Şoreşa Kurdistane* (Red Peshmergas of Kurdistan's Revolution)
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan – Iraq
PWD	Patriotic and Democratic Party of Kurdistan
SHP	*Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti* (Social Democratic Populist Party)
SR	Socialist Revolution
TAK	*Tayrêbazên Azadîya Kurdistan* (Liberation Falcons of Kurdistan)
TİHV	*Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı* (Human Rights Association of Turkey)
TİİKP	*Türkiye İhtilalci İşçi Köylü Partisi* (Revolutionary Party of Workers and Peasants of Turkey)
TİP	*Türkiye İşçi Partisi* (Workers' Party of Turkey)
TKDP	*Türkiye Kürdistan Demokrat Partisi* (Kurdistan Democrat Party of Turkey)
TKSP	*Türkiye Kürdistanı Sosyalist Partisi* (Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan)
UDG	*Ulusal Demokratik Güçbirliği* (Union of National Democratic Forces)

YEK	*Yekîtiya Êzîdiyan Kurdistan* (Union of Yezidis of Kurdistan)
YJA Star	*Yekitiyen Jinen Azad STAR*
YJWK	*Yekîtiya Jinên Welatparêzên Kurdistan* (Union of Patriotic Women of Kurdistan)
YKWK	*Yekîtiya Karkerên Welatparêzên Kurdistan* (Union of Patriotic Workers of Kurdistan)
YTP	*Yeni Türkiye Partisi* (New Turkey Party)
YXK	*Yekîtiya Xortên Şoreşgerên Welatparêzên Kurdistan* (Union of Revolutionary Youth of Kurdistan)

The KİP and the PKK both have the same names when translated into English. However, they are two separate organisations. The full name for the KİP originates from Turkish and the full name for the PKK, from Kurdish.

Introduction

The Kurdish question in Turkey

The re-emergence of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey from the 1960s onwards and, more specifically, the subsequent conflict has become a significant political problem that Turkey found particularly difficult to deal with constructively. The Kurds' early attempts during the 1960s and 1970s to seek a remedy through legitimate channels and by raising their demands democratically were suppressed, leading them to seek other avenues to address their demands. The most vital expression of the Kurdish question in Turkey has been the guerrilla insurgency by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, PKK) and the conflict that started in 1984 and this has had major social, political and economic consequences, including significant loss of life. The limited recognition of Kurdish identity and cultural rights in the past decade indicates that the Kurdish challenge has succeeded in bringing about a discussion on the need to reconceptualise the uniform Turkish national identity. The significant reduction in the military activities of the PKK since the withdrawal of its guerrillas and the declaration of a permanent ceasefire in August 1999 has significantly contributed to this change in Turkey's Kurdish policy. Overall however, the Kurdish question remains still without a permanent solution and the conflict is ongoing, with periods of relative tranquillity followed by intensification of antagonisms and escalation of violence.

The consolidation of the democratic regime in Turkey is closely linked to the successful institution of a pluralist democratic framework that is capable of including representation from the country's significant Kurdish minority. The Kurds constitute the majority of the population in the 'South-East' and the 'East' Anatolian regions; however, due to internal displacements during the 1920s and 1930s, and during the 1990s as part of the counteroffensive against the PKK, and due to voluntary migration during the 1960s and 1970s, currently they are dispersed and it is quite common to find them residing in almost all major towns and cities in Turkey.[1] Additionally, since the 1980s there has been a steady increase in the Kurdish refugee communities in many of the West European countries. Whereas the exact number of the Kurds is unknown, their population is estimated to be between 15 and 20 million constituting roughly 20 to 28 per cent of Turkey's population.[2] Hence, the position of the sizeable Kurdish minority within the Turkish society, the linguistic and cultural oppression that they

were subjected to, and their challenge during the past 40 years to the sedimented 'Turkish' identity that foreclosed the possibility of any other national identification, continues to be a major social and political issue for Turkey and it clearly shows the weaknesses and limitations of Turkish democracy.

The construction of the political system in Turkey as a unitary and highly centralised republic, the definition of the national identity as exclusively Turkish and such that it prohibited the public expression of minority cultural differences was the result of the oppressive practices that Turkish nationalists pursued in the first half of the twentieth century to annihilate their political opponents, rather than the superiority or better suitability of the republican model to Turkey's reality. The reconstruction of the post-Ottoman political space in the Middle East into highly authoritarian nation states followed the failure of attempts to reform the Ottoman Empire and its *ancien regime* in the mid nineteenth century. As an attempt to modernise and westernise the Empire, the Ottoman reformers formulated the doctrine of Ottomanism as a 'supranational ideology'.[3] This doctrine proposed a uniform conception of Ottoman citizenship to replace the previous legal designations used for the subjects of the Empire under the *millet* system, which granted the Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities extensive powers to exercise self-rule. Hence, the political reforms sought to centralise the Empire and integrate the Christian and non-Turkish nations and ethnic groups, and resulted in the abolishment of local autonomy and all the associated privileges that the Kurds became accustomed to, which incited a series of Kurdish rebellions during the nineteenth century.[4]

A significant development during the end of the nineteenth century was the development of nationalism among Muslim nations and the establishment of the Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in 1889.[5] The CUP played a leading role in the Young Turk revolution of 1908. Initially, 'under the banner of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, and Justice" ', the revolution offered hope that a 'constitutional monarchy founded on the rule of law' and parliamentary democracy will replace the absolutist monarchy.[6] However, instead of the institutionalisation of a new form of citizenship that respected pluralism and fostered fraternal relations among the Empire's many nations, the subsequent regime instituted by the CUP resulted in further centralisation and the reversal of the recognition of religious and cultural differences that the minorities enjoyed under the Ottoman *millet* system and that to a lesser extent the nineteenth century Ottoman reformers were keen to maintain.[7] Although support for Ottomanism among the non-Turkish and non-Muslim deputies of the re-instituted Ottoman Parliament remained strong, from 1909 onwards it became clearer that it was losing its appeal among the Turkish deputies as a more exclusive and aggressive form of Turkish nationalism started to dominate the CUP. Following the proclamation of the republic, the Turkish republican nationalism or *Kemalism* became the official state ideology and the guiding principle behind the widespread sociopolitical reforms.[8] However, instead of creating the desired homogenous Turkish nation, the strict application of Kemalist policies resulted in Kurdish nationalist backlash and conflict.

Although the Kurdish Question has acquired the centre stage in the political debate in Turkey only in the past three decades, it has been a perennial feature of the country's politics throughout the twentieth century. The transformation of a multinational empire to a nation state required comprehensive social and political reforms, which were introduced by the nationalist elite in the early years of the republic and carried out with an uncompromising zeal to build the 'westernised', 'secular' and 'homogenous' Turkish nation. Hence, in stark contrast to the Ottoman Empire, Turkey adopted a completely different attitude to ethnocultural difference and diversity with a policy of integration through assimilation of what remained of the Empire's minorities forced through in a top-down fashion.[9] The widespread destruction that the Armenian and Greek communities experienced during World War I and the years that immediately followed it had significantly altered the demographics of the new republic and left the Kurds as the main non-Turkish national group in Turkey.[10] Consequently, the modernisation and assimilation policies the state pursued from the 1920s and 1930s onwards brought the Kurds into conflict with the authorities. The Kurdish demands for the recognition of their national and cultural rights were brutally suppressed. The subsequent demands by the Kurds for the constitutional recognition of their identity and rights has continuously been rejected by the state and the Kemalist regime on the basis that such demands promote 'separatism', and contradict the uniform conception of national identity and citizenship and the principle of the 'indivisible unity of the nation and the state' that the constitution has been set out to defend.

However, the rise of the contemporary Kurdish national movement in Turkey since the 1960s has provided a sterner challenge for the Kemalist regime. With the rise of Leftist, Islamist and Turkish nationalist oppositional movements in the same period, Turkey has been experiencing widespread social and political polarisation especially since the 1980s. A number of political proposals have been put forward by different political groups during the 1990s and the 2000s to overcome the political polarisation, reform the republican institutions and build a new overarching 'common identity' in Turkey. One such proposal by President Turgut Özal during the early 1990s attempted to re-conceptualise the national identity to make it more sensitive to cultural differences while at the same time emphasising the communalities such as the Islamic and the Ottoman heritage.[11] As steps towards raising the democratic standards in Turkey and to meet the EU membership criteria, the current Justice and Development Party (*Adalet Ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) government have also been carrying out political reforms that have resulted in the limited recognition of Kurdish identity and demands. Again, the Islamic and Ottoman heritage is emphasised as the basis of the new common identity. As an alternative – and as I elaborate on in greater detail in my research – the pro-Kurdish democratic movement has been formulating a radical democratic political project to construct a democratic and plural society and institute a new framework to manage diversity and pluralism in Turkey.

The research question

The main questions that my research seeks to answer relate to Kurdish political identity and the ideological specificity, diversity and transformation of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. I draw on the post-Marxist discourse theory and discourse analysis framework, as articulated in the seminal works of Laclau and Mouffe, amongst others, to conduct my research.[12] As I elaborate in greater detail in Chapter 2, this framework allows me to offer a holistic approach to, and an extensive account of, the contemporary Kurdish national movement in Turkey since the 1960s. I analyse an extensive amount of primary sources that the Kurdish activists and political groups and parties have published in this period. My choice and analysis of the primary sources and data, including a discussion of selection criteria and the geographic spread and availability of the sources, is discussed under the 'Methodology and Sources' section also in Chapter 2.

As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 1, the academic discussions of Kurdish identity converge around two dominant positions: either they assume an ethnicist, pre-given and essentialist conception of Kurdish identity, such as Hassanpour (2003) and Izady (1992),[13] or the validity of the Kurds' claim to be a 'nation' is questioned on the basis that they do not meet the necessary 'objective' conditions for nationhood, such as White (2000) and Kirişci and Winrow (1997).[14] Although questions of Kurdish identity, such as whether the Kurds are a 'nation' or not, are highly political, by occupying the position of an 'objective' truth-teller, academics provide a technical answer that is deemed devoid of any political concerns. Instead of situating my research within one of the existing approaches, that is, either trace the evolution of an essentialist Kurdish identity, or try to determine the status of the Kurds by engaging in questions about whether they are a 'nation', I utilise the discourse theory framework to transcend the existing polarities. By essentialist conception of identity I mean any account of political identity that treats identity as pre-given and posits the claim that it contains a stable authentic core that has remained the same throughout the time.[15] Against such a claim, as Chapter 2 explores more fully, discourse theorists highlight that all forms of identity are contingent and constructed within political discourse.

From the 1960s onwards Kurdish political activists started to challenge, once again, Kemalism and the set of relations of identity and difference instituted by it. The Kemalist understanding of Kurdish identity – or the denial of Kurdishness – was inverted by an alternative understanding of Kurdish identity and political subjectivity that instituted a new set of relations of identity and difference in its place. I analyse the discourses of the Kurdish activists and political organisations during the 1960s and early 1970s to provide the background to the emergence of the 'national liberation discourse' during the mid 1970s. It is important to note here that the discussions and elaborations that I offer of 'national liberation' are confined specifically to the Kurdish context in Turkey and do not attempt to posit general claims. The play of identity and difference takes place on two separate levels: one, on the level of Kurdish nation and national identity, and two, on the level of the organisations that contest the

Kurdish identity. I reflect this in my analysis by highlighting the political and ideological debates that took place among numerous Kurdish political parties and groups during the 1970s. My analysis of the post-1980 period pays special attention to the discourses of the PKK as it has been the hegemonic force in Kurdish resistance in Turkey.

It is now accepted by many, especially by the Kurdish national movement, that any possible solution of the Kurdish question involves the deepening of democracy in civil society, respect for cultural and national diversity, and the further development of, and changes to, the democratic institutions in Turkey. The pro-Kurdish representation in Turkish politics dates back to 1990 and there is vast political experience at the local as well as the national level, which can shed important light on the experience of democracy in Turkey. By analysing the discourses of the pro-Kurdish political parties that existed since 1990 and focusing on the articulation of Kurdish rights and demands within the discourse of democracy, my research develops insights into the nature of democracy that is proposed and how will it be developed as well as highlighting the possible problems or setbacks for democracy in Turkey. This allows me to draw substantial conclusions about the deepening of democracy in Turkey, including the role the Kurds will play in this process, and my analysis offers normative and critical purchase for democratic theory in general and radical democracy in particular. Hence, the political challenge formulated by Kurdish nationalism against the Kemalist regime raises the following interesting questions, which are the central questions that this book examines:

- How was the category of 'Kurd' produced and reproduced within the two discourses deployed by the Kurdish nationalists? In particular, how are *difference* and Kurdish subjectivity being constructed within each discourse?
- What kind of political project is proposed by the Kurdish National Movement? How has it changed over time?
- What is the relationship between the assertion of Kurdish identity and the official Turkish (Kemalist) identity?
- Why and how did the discourse of democracy replace the previous 'secessionist' discourse of national liberation?
- What is the character of this discourse of democracy? How or to what extent does it address questions of pluralism, both within and outside the Kurdish community?
- To what extent has this discourse of democracy challenged the dominant conceptions of democracy in Turkish society at large?

By answering these questions, I delineate the way in which Kurdish nationalist discourse transformed a previously dormant ethnic identity into a dynamic political identity by:

- fostering a new understanding of Kurdish identity;
- transcending the given identity of the 'Kurd' as the 'other' of the 'Kemalist' identity by challenging it and proposing to change it;

- stabilising Kurdish identity by redefinition and reconfiguration of 'being Kurdish';
- tackling the Turkish hegemony and representation of the Kurds within the dominant order through constructing and presenting its own notions of Kurdish community and citizenship.

Outline of the book

In order to elaborate on the research question in greater detail, Chapter 1 critically engages with the literature on the rise of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey to show its limitations and draw out the important questions and issues that are not addressed in the existing literature but find an answer in this book. In Chapter 2, I discuss more fully the theoretical and methodological resources that I draw upon in conducting this research. To highlight the organisational growth and evolution of the Kurdish national movement and provide an account of the political parties and groups that have been active in the period, the analysis of the empirical material is spread over six chapters with each chapter examining a particular period and a relevant set of issues and questions. This enables me to give the overall picture of the Kurdish national movement in Turkey, and the background to its emergence, evolution and transformation.

Chapter 3 explores the emergence of Kurdish political activism in the 1960s by examining the discourses and activities of the Kurdish activist intellectuals. It elaborates on the political context within which the debate on the 'Eastern question' was taking place, including the trials of the leading Kurdish activists, which played a significant role in raising the awareness of the Kurdish question in Turkey. It analyses the contents of the magazines that they published and the public debate that they generated. Initially during the 1960s, most of the Kurdish activists took part in the activities of the Workers' Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TİP), and the Kurdish demands for equality and socio-economic development were articulated as part of broader demands for equality and socialism in Turkey. Additionally, we witness the emergence of an autonomist movement in the form of the Kurdistan Democrat Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Kürdistan Demokrat Partisi*, TKDP). The activities of the Kurdish intellectuals found a strong resonance among the Kurdish population and succeeded in mobilising a considerable number during the 'Meetings of the East' in the late 1960s. Then on, however, the Kurdish activists started to demand the establishment of separate Kurdish political organisations and founded the Revolutionary Cultural Hearths of the East (*Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları*, DDKO). This gradually led to the Kurds' separation from the Turkish left-wing movement and the emergence of the Kurdish socialist movement in the early 1970s, which is examined in Chapter 4. Additionally, I provide an account of the numerous Kurdish socialist groups and political parties that came into being in the 1970s, and the articulation of Kurdish identity and demands within the Marxist discourse, which resulted in the constitution of the Kurdish national liberation discourse during the mid 1970s.

Chapter 5 elaborates on the Kurdish national liberation discourse more fully and gives an account of the process of ideological condensation of the discourse. In particular, the problematisation of the national fragmentation and oppression that the Kurds suffered as a result of Kurdistan's division and disunity, and of the economic exploitation that the Kurdish working class and the peasantry experienced, is discussed. It also highlights the construction and deployment of the *Newroz* myth in political discourse as a myth of origin to construct and represent an ethnicist conception of Kurdish identity. The political practices that the national liberation discourse fostered, and the PKK's organisational growth during the 1980s and 1990s, are discussed in Chapter 6. Specific attention is paid to the PKK's construction and deployment of a contemporary myth of resistance to mobilise the Kurds during the 1980s and 1990s. The PKK's reinvigoration of Kurdish culture and music is also discussed in relation to the role it played in the Kurds' mass mobilisation.

Chapter 7 gives an account of the numerous dislocations that the PKK experienced together with the political practices that they fostered, such as the attempts to find a peaceful solution through ceasefires and the strategic transformation towards democracy. An account of the PKK's difficulties, how it has been attempting to overcome them via political renewal and an evaluation of its democratic discourse since 1999 are provided to show the rearticulation of the Kurdish question and the construction and representation of Kurdish identity and difference within it. Chapter 8 provides an account of the pro-Kurdish democratic movement in Turkey since its emergence in 1990. It focuses on the discourses and activities of the main pro-Kurdish political parties, their attempts to build a broader pro-democracy movement in Turkey, and their proposals for political reconciliation through democratisation and institution of a plural and participatory democratic framework.

1 Deconstructing Kurdish identity and nationalism in academic discourses

Introduction

The lack of academic institutions to coordinate and fund research into Kurdish history and society meant that surprisingly little research about the Kurds was carried out until the 1980s.[1] For many years the denial of the existence of a separate Kurdish 'nation' was pursued as an official policy and the Kurds were described as 'Mountain Turks'; in this way, the state restricted the scope of studies on all aspects of Kurdish society and culture. Unsatisfied with such restrictions, the state sponsored, produced and disseminated research, which had the aim of proving the 'Turkishness' of the 'Kurds' and was used to justify their forced assimilation.[2] Additionally, academic debate and research on the Kurds was suppressed as a result of the hegemonic representation of the Kurdish question in the state's discourse as a case of 'reactionary politics', 'separatism' or 'terrorism'.[3] This classified research on the Kurds as undesirable and created barriers for researchers by preventing them from questioning the 'official' representation of the Kurds in the state and popular media discourses or from engaging with the pertinent questions of Kurdish identity.[4] From the 1960s onwards, the state's discourse on the Kurds and the Kurdish question started to face a challenge from Kurdish activists.[5] Such a political critique was supplemented by ethnographic research carried out by sociologist İsmail Beşikci, who has been the main proponent of the critical studies of the Kurds in Turkey.[6]

The gradual emergence of the Kurdish national movement and the increase in Kurdish political activism in Turkey from the 1980s onwards witnessed a corresponding increase in books and articles on the Kurds and Kurdish nationalism. Overall these studies address a diverse range of issues and focus on different periods and aspects of Kurdish society and politics. Whereas the overwhelming number of these studies focuses on the historical origins and development of Kurdish nationalism in the Middle East,[7] with the intensification of the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army and the security forces during the 1990s, numerous conflict analyses and political history accounts of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey have also been published.[8] This is unsurprising given that with the intensification of the conflict during the 1980s and 1990s, the Kurdish question acquired a central stage in Turkish politics, and had a huge impact on Turkey's

domestic politics and on her relations with the European and Middle Eastern states. More recently studies that have a narrower focus on the PKK and the contemporary Kurdish national movement in Turkey have also been published.[9] However, in comparison with conflict and political violence, the Kurdish democratic and legal form of political engagement in Turkey has received relatively little attention. This chapter analyses the current literature to see how the issues and questions raised by my research – namely those pertaining to Kurdish nationalist ideology, and identity and mobilisation – are addressed.

The Kurds and the Kurdish question in Turkey: conflict analysis and political history literature

Predominantly the political history literature focuses on the re-emergence and evolution of Kurdish nationalism from the 1960s onwards and the conflict between the PKK and Turkey during the 1980s and 1990s. The causal explanation provided by the political history accounts, such as Taspinar (2005), McDowall (2000) and Van Bruinessen (2000), highlight the significance of the social and economic changes that took place in the Kurdish society as a result of the modernisation process in Turkey – in particular increased urbanisation, higher levels of educational attainment and increased contact with the wider world during the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly, the conflict analysis literature as exemplified in the works of Gürbey (1996; 2000), Kirişci and Winrow (1997), Barkey and Fuller (1998), Gunter (1990; 2008) and Ibrahim (2000) examine the conflict between the PKK and Turkey within a historical framework. They trace its origins and evolution and highlight the contributing social, political and economic factors, such as economic backwardness, underdevelopment and migration.

The discussion of Kurdish political activism during the 1960s in the political history and conflict analysis accounts designates a significant role to the new generation of activists and mentions the activities they have engaged in, especially the publication of magazines. However, this descriptive account does not examine the contents of the magazines that Kurdish intellectuals published.[10] Not only would such an analysis appropriately provide detail on the specificity of the demands that Kurdish activists were raising during the 1960s, but it would also draw attention to their conceptualisation of Kurdish identity and difference, and the cultural and political issues that they discussed in their magazines. By shedding light on how the Kurdish issue and demands were constituted in the discourses of the new Kurdish activist, such an analysis – as provided in this book – would allow us to formulate a better understanding of the process of self-reflection and self-understanding during the 1960s that the Kurdish intellectuals fostered among the Kurds, which in later years led to the re-conceptualisation and re-interpretation of Kurdish identity and its articulation through the discourse of Marxism.

The main focus of conflict analysis and political history accounts is the conflict and the evolution of the Kurdish national movement from the 1970s

onwards. In particular, the PKK's hegemony over the Kurdish resistance is discussed; for example, Van Bruinessen cites the PKK's relations with other political groups and states in the Middle East, such as Syria, as a significant factor.[11] Conversely, Taspinar argues that what enhanced the PKK's appeal amongst the Kurds was the state's excessive and often indiscriminate use of force and repression, which was most acute during the military rule between 1980 and 1983, and included the use of indiscriminate violence against ordinary people and widespread torture against activists.[12] Barkey and Fuller, on the other hand, attribute the PKK's dominance to its ability to fight the Turkish military and survive against the efforts to eradicate it. It is argued that the PKK exploited and benefited from the existing tribal rivalries and established and maintained 'a broad infrastructure that facilitates its recruitment campaign'.[13] Bozarslan (2000) also draws attention to the role that the 'state's coercion' played in the PKK's use of violence. He argues that the construction of the Kurds and the Kurdish identity demands as a threat to national security made the integration of Kurdish demands into the Turkish political arena difficult.[14]

Although an overview of Kurdish politics in Turkey since the 1970s is provided in the political history and conflict analysis literature, the ideological specificity of Kurdish nationalism and the demands articulated by the Kurdish national movement have received insufficient attention. This is because the above-mentioned studies do not incorporate into their analysis the vast amount of primary sources and political and ideological literature produced and disseminated by the Kurdish movement. In fact, there is either very little or only superficial discussion on the ideology and discourses of the Kurdish national movement. The lack of sustained attention on ideology and discourses of the Kurdish movement creates certain barriers to understanding the nature of the conflict and antagonism between the Kurds and Turkey. For example, the discussions provided by Gürbey (1996), Taspinar (2005) and Barkey and Fuller (1998) accept the form of antagonism between the Kurds and Turkey as *given* and draw attention to the conditions that made antagonism possible. They describe the subjection of the Kurds to state violence and persecution that made them react and oppose such practices. However, none of them focus on *how* the Kurds interpreted or saw their experience as *oppression* and how they proposed to challenge it.[15] More specifically, they do not elaborate on *how* the relations of oppression were constructed within the discourses of the leading political groups and how this construction of antagonisms, in a particular way, implicates Kurdish identity in Turkey. Although most Kurds would have been victims of indiscriminate state violence, especially during political crises and military rule, many chose assimilation instead of resistance, whilst others chose to support Turkish left or Islamist groups. Hence, there were other avenues that could and were used to channel Kurdish discontent but the following relevant questions are not discussed in political history and conflict analysis literature: How did the Kurds interpret and formulate the solution to their oppression? And what made the Kurdish identity and demands articulated by the Kurdish national movement *more appealing* than the alternatives?

Ideology and identity

As stated above, in general there is insufficient discussion of the ideology and discourses of the Kurdish national movement. In fact, the specificity and ideological diversity of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey are ignored and the issues of identity, especially how Kurdish identity is constructed within the hegemonic discourses that have been articulating Kurdish national demands, are not raised. For example, scholars often refer to the PKK as a Kurdish nationalist organisation without clarifying what is presupposed by this definition and without examining the key demands the PKK articulates. Such a characterisation creates confusion particularly when the PKK's national liberation discourse is analysed. Barkey and Fuller set out to determine whether the PKK is a 'nationalist' or a 'socialist' organisation. They state:

> The PKK's program mirrored the slogans of the extreme Left: Kurdistan with all four of its segments, controlled by Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, represented the weakest link in "capitalism's chain" and the fight against imperialism was a fight to save Kurdistan's natural resources from exploitation.[16]

Despite acknowledging the PKK's socialist credentials and the influence of the 'extreme left', in discussing the PKK's discursive transformation, they argue:

> In fact, *behind the left-wing rhetoric*, the PKK had always been a nationalist movement. Its promise to save the exploited of the Middle East notwithstanding, its very formation represented a break with the Turkish Left and abandonment of the 'common struggle'.... Hence, its assumption of a nationalistic image is in fact not just in keeping with the times but also *a return to its real self*.[17]

Furthermore, Barkey and Fuller state: 'Although the PKK is primarily a nationalist organisation, it would be wrong to assume that it has completely abandoned the political Left. Its discourse is that of a national liberation movement dedicated to the construction of a socialist state.'[18] We do not know what Barkey and Fuller mean by 'nationalist movement' as they do not offer any definition but they presuppose that a national movement cannot use 'left wing rhetoric' or it cannot remain nationalist if it does so. As I argue in Chapter 2, it is very difficult to define a movement as 'primarily nationalist' because nationalism is strongly connected to other political ideologies and nationalist movements are involved in some other aspect of political demands. This is evident in the Kurdish case because since the creation of Turkey, Kurdish national demands were articulated within various discourses; initially, within the Islamist-conservative discourse (the early 1920s), as a modernist discourse (1920s and 1930s), underdevelopment (1960s), Marxist-Leninism (1970s and 1980s), and, finally, democracy (1990 onwards). Therefore, it is possible to articulate Kurdish national demands within a Marxist or socialist discourse and doing so would not mean that claims of social equality, as traditionally articulated by Marxism or socialism, are

diminished; however, such an articulation changes the meaning of Kurdishness by altering the nature of the national demands. Also, instead of interpreting the PKK's ideological and discursive changes as a 'return to its real self', focusing on how the articulation of Kurdish demands within different political projects conceptualises Kurdish identity in a specific way would help us towards a better understanding of the contemporary Kurdish political identity.

The discussion of the ideology and discourses of the PKK provided in White (2000) also suffers from similar limitations and simplifications. Without making *any* attempt to understand the ideological complexity of the PKK and the key claims that it has been articulating over the years, he argues: 'The PKK claims to be Marxist and Leninist, but its ideology, strategy and tactics are a mixture of Stalinism and nationalism.'[19] Furthermore, in his discussion of the PKK's strategy and tactics, he again makes the connection to 'Stalinism':

> In theory, the PKK remains formally wedded to a Stalinistic two-stage theory of revolutionary strategy, in which the first stage is the achievement of a united democratic and independent Kurdistan (including the current Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria), via a 'national democratic revolution'.[20]

White's assertion is a serious simplification of the PKK's discourse as it does not seek to understand the specific claims and demands articulated by it. The specific articulation of Kurdish rights and demands and what conceptions of Kurdish identity emerge within the discourse of the PKK do not feature in his account. Hence, White's account fails to provide a sufficient discussion on the processes of identity formation and does not discuss the contours of the contemporary Kurdish political identity as has been constructed within the discourse of the PKK or other Kurdish organisations.

The debates on Kurdish identity in the political history and conflict analysis literature converge around two dominant positions: they either deploy an ethnicist and subjective conception of Kurdish nation and national identity, or they question the claim that the Kurds are a nation. Izady (1992) is a good example of the former and he reconstructs the entire history of the Kurds and Kurdistan dating far back to the ancient period, covering geography, history, language, culture, economy and national identity. He defines the Kurds rather generally as 'a multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-racial nation, but with a unified, independent, and identifiable history and culture'.[21] Furthermore, he treats the category 'Kurd' as something that has always existed and has been internally constituted and, consequently, the interpretation of Kurdish identity demands or its representations does not feature in his study. Hassanpour (2003) also deploys a subjective understanding of nation and defines the Kurdish society as 'the population that identifies itself as Kurds' and Kurdish identity as 'the feeling, idea, or experience of belonging to a collective entity called "Kurd"'.[22] He examines the pre-twentieth century historical and literary discourses to trace the expression of this 'distinct' Kurdish identity; however, he does not offer any dis-

cussion of how the Kurdish collective entity is defined or re-interpreted by the Kurdish national movement in the contemporary period.

Conversely, the scholars that question the categorisation of the Kurds as a nation do so on the basis that the Kurds do not meet the necessary 'objective criteria', such as 'a well-defined state', 'a single economy', 'common legal rights and duties for all members' and 'a shared language'.[23] Kirişci and Winrow (1997) argue that 'it would seem inappropriate to allocate to "the Kurds" a particular label … it would seem that the Kurds are an amalgam of Turkic, Armenian and Assyrian and more dominant Indo-European groupings. The origins of the Kurds are hence somewhat obscure.'[24] White (2000) offers a similar exploration of Kurdish identity and draws attention to the difficulties of achieving 'scholarly unanimity' on 'who the Kurds are' and reviews the academic discussions on the origins of the Kurds and those that seek to *define* them.[25] He highlights the linguistic and religious diversity prevailing in Kurdish society and gives it as evidence that 'there is no single, universally agreed-upon meaning for the term Kurd'.[26] Furthermore, White's account contains some highly controversial claims: 'the so-called "Alevi Kurds" or Kızılbaş of Anatolia are arguably no more Kurdish than another minority people in Anatolia to whom they are closely related, the so-called "Zaza Kurds." '[27] He suggests that the Alevi Kurds and Zaza Kurds have 'a common ancestor in the Dailamites' and they are not Kurdish.[28] Such assertions are ill-advised, highly problematic and difficult to sustain. This is because, generally speaking, the Alevi Kurds consider themselves Kurdish, and the great majority, perhaps 70 per cent, speak *Kurmanci* – the mainstream Kurdish language – making them linguistically and culturally closer to the Kurds rather than the Dailamites.

In fact, White's and Kirişci and Winrow's discussions of Kurdish identity raise an important issue that has faced Kurdish nationalism since its inception, namely the fragmentation of Kurdish society, which is further deepened by religious, linguistic, tribal and regional differences. However, neither White nor Kirişci and Winrow offer any details of the Kurds' identity claims or the conception of Kurdish identity as articulated by the Kurdish national movement. They do not explore the practices that have been important in stabilising the meaning of Kurdishness. Instead they focus on the Kurds' local, regional, religious and tribal identities (the sub-national identities) rather than *the* Kurdish political identity as has been contested by the Kurdish national movement in Turkey. Every nationalist movement provides their nation's long history depicting their presence in the region and how the nation came into existence. This may include, for example, national myths and important historical events. A discussion of Kurdish nationalist historiography and the myth of origins, and the significance of such beliefs in enhancing the power and appeal of nationalism among the Kurds, are missing in their accounts.

Within the available literature there are some studies that analyse the Kurdish identity in ways that elucidate its specificity or highlight the processes at work in its transformation. Vali (2003) provides a theoretical critique of the primordialist and ethnicist theorisation of Kurdish identity and draws our attention to the