



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The radicalization of the left in Turkey and Iran in the 1970s and a comparative analysis of activist women's experiences

Cakir Kilincoglu, S.

Citation

Cakir Kilincoglu, S. (2019, December 18). *The radicalization of the left in Turkey and Iran in the 1970s and a comparative analysis of activist women's experiences*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/82455>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/82455>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/82455> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Cakir-Kilincoglu, S.

Title: The radicalization of the left in Turkey and Iran in the 1970s and a comparative analysis of activist women's experiences

Issue Date: 2019-12-18

5. Framing the Contention and the Roads to the Arms

political culture - the values, norms, practices, beliefs, and collective identities of insurgents - was not fixed but evolved in response to the experiences of the conflict itself, namely, previous rebellious actions, repression, and the ongoing interpretation of events by the participants themselves.²⁹³

The developments on two levels of analysis, national and international, played significant roles in the transition from peaceful to violent repertoire of action in the cases of a number of leftist organizations in Turkey and Iran. While the developments and trends on the international level inspired and influenced the perceptions and strategies of these groups more or less in similar ways; the political opportunity structures in the two countries presented the activists with completely different settings in which they had to operate and transform accordingly. Ted Gurr (1970) argues that the diffusion of normative and instrumental justifications, which are based on historical and political context, facilitates the use of political violence.²⁹⁴ Normative justifications could be ideological and ethical, and were presented with references “to resistance, marxism-leninism or maoism, to anarchism, or to theories of liberation”. Instrumental justifications, however, stemmed from the belief that there is ‘no other way out’.²⁹⁵ In the cases of armed left-wing organizations in Iran and Turkey, the legitimization worked on both levels. First, they viewed violence as necessary and unavoidable in the line of world revolutions because of their ideological commitments. Second, the diffusion of guerrilla struggles in the Latin American revolutions and liberation movements, as well as the brutal repression of peaceful protests, convinced them that the violence was the only way out with a potential to succeed. Therefore, in the following parts, first, the framing processes will examine the ideological formation of the leftist thinking in Turkey and Iran under the influence of international developments in the socialist states and revolutionary discourse emanating mostly from anti-imperialist liberation movements of the period. Second part will

²⁹³ Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) 19.

²⁹⁴ Gurr, *Why men rebel*.

²⁹⁵ Sommer, “Revolutionary Groups after 1968,” 84.

track the roads which led a number of activists in both countries to resort to violence as a result of certain events and dynamics in their domestic politics.

5.1. Turkey's roads to Revolution

A comprehensive overview of the diverging positions, intellectual products and activities of each and every leftist group and organization in Turkey even when limited to the most significant ones is beyond the scope of this study. The programs, declarations, tactics and strategies of all the leftist groups, which far outnumbered those in Iran with a ratio of at least 2:1, most of the time with minor variations could create a plethora to work on especially during the 1970s. Still same also goes for the case of Iran. Therefore, for the sake of the purposes of this study, I define and explain some of the most significant currents and events playing a significant role in the formations and transformation of the main organizations to have a basic understanding of how those in the left framed their contention throughout the two decades. In the same vein, I only focus on the most significant currents and events, locally and globally, shaping and being shaped by the left-wing contention during this period.

The most resonant master frames²⁹⁶ of the period were anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and liberation and independence of the suppressed people of the Global South, in addition to more specific ideological currents such as a socialist revolution, national democratic revolution and world revolution. Naturally, they took different shapes and more specific forms according to different national and historical contexts of each country; however, the concerns of the activists and radical intellectuals worldwide seemed to converge specifically on couple of issues in this period such as Vietnam war, plight of Palestinian people, and the Third World liberation movements. Naturally, the left in Turkey and Iran was heavily influenced by these events and master frames formed around them, but what is called a

²⁹⁶ For the usage of 'master frame' in social movement studies literature see Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements."

‘frame alignment’ process²⁹⁷ in the social movements theory took place as a result of some regional and national crises hitting close to home and their successful association with the greater causes of the period by the left. Despite slightly diverged on ideological, tactical, and strategic aspects of the struggle, leftist opposition of the period agreed on what motivated many Third Worldists around the world: an equitable distribution of land, nationalization of natural resources, controlled foreign investment and trade. Anti-Americanism and anti-fascism too emerged as a result of an alignment of global frames to local context.

Anti-Americanism was one of the defining characteristics of the left-wing politics in the 1960s.²⁹⁸ For the leftists who blamed the West’s capitalist expansion and imperialist exploitation for most of the problems in the world, as well as in Turkey, the United States, being the leader of the Western world, had already stood out as the number one enemy. Bosi describes the way Red Brigades in Italy framed the political contention as “a global imperialist counter-revolution to the international revolutionary forces ... In this scenario, the Italian state was portrayed as the agent of the imperialist bourgeoisie for class domination and exploitation”²⁹⁹. A very similar framing was also used by the left-wing opposition in Turkey. The interventionist foreign policy of the US, both in the world and in the region contributed to this perception. Domestically, however, anti-Americanism can be dated back to acceptance of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan and eventual joining of Turkey to NATO. Yet, it took a dramatic turn and became much more widespread with the Cyprus crisis in 1963-64 when the US sided with Greece and went as far as forbidding Turkey to use military force as a NATO member state. Perceived as an intervention in the domestic affairs of Turkey, and thereby its national independence, the act of the US created an outrage in public. The events in the following years, such as the US intervention in Vietnam, the 1967

²⁹⁷ See David A. Snow et al., “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation,” *American Sociological Review*, 1986, 464–481.

²⁹⁸ Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, 141.

²⁹⁹ Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 66.

war in the Middle East, opium production ban³⁰⁰ imposed by the US on Turkey in 1971 only exacerbated anti-American feelings in the society in general and among the politically active youth in particular.³⁰¹

The more Turkey's dependency on American financial assistance increased and NATO's presence in the country became visible, the more the anti-American feelings among the youth and opposition became widespread during the 1960s and 1970s. Anti-Americanism did not only influence the discourse of the left but also determined the targets of its most popular protests as well as its violent attacks. While the calls for an 'independent' or non-aligned Turkey were made by the leftist intellectuals and the TLP in an increasing manner throughout the period, the youth organized the largest demonstrations against the American Sixth Fleet in every occasion during and after 1968. Furthermore, the US military personnel became the target of the radical leftist organizations' violent operations, such as kidnappings and attacks.

The Third Worldist socialist journal *Yön* (Direction) was the prominent publication in the leftist circles in the first half of the 1960s, gathering and giving a platform to a range of left leaning ideas. It "promoted an independent, anti-imperialist, nationalist, state-led industrialization as the only viable direction for Turkey"³⁰² and praised Kemalism for its achievements³⁰³. What distinguished *Yön* from the line of the TLP was indeed its commitment to Kemalism and suggestion of a 'third way', which was supposed to be nationalist and revolutionary, as the right way to development of Turkey, instead of a

³⁰⁰John Berbers, "Nixon Says Turks Agree To Ban the Opium Poppy," *The New York Times*, July 1, 1971, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/07/01/archives/nixon-says-turks-agree-to-ban-the-opium-poppy-turkey-will-ban-the.html>; Joseph L. Zentner, "THE 1972 TURKISH OPIUM BAN: NEEDLE IN THE HAYSTACK DIPLOMACY?," *World Affairs* 136, no. 1 (1973): 36–47; "The United States, Turkey and the Poppy - ProQuest," accessed May 21, 2019, <https://search.proquest.com/openview/df2f748137128bc7b7c0b46d472e5c64/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=1821138>.

³⁰¹ Ulus, *The Army and the Radical Left in Turkey*, 108, Emin Alper, "Student Movement in Turkey From a Global Perspective, 1960-1971," *Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, Boğaziçi University*, 2009, 271.

³⁰² Emin Alper, "Protest Diffusion and Rising Political Violence in the Turkish '68 Movement: The Arab-Israeli War, 'Paris May' and The Hot Summer of 1968," in *Dynamics of Political Violence: A Process-Oriented Perspective on Radicalization and the Escalation of Political Conflict*, ed. Lorenzo Bosi, Chares Demetriou, and Stefan Malthaner (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 259.

³⁰³ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 254, Ersan, *1970'lerde Türkiye solu (Turkey's Left in the 1970s)*, 22.

capitalist or communist method of development. To achieve this, Yön advocated for cooperation with those who they defined as nationalist revolutionary forces or Kemalists³⁰⁴.

The second half of the 1960s, however, witnessed an ideological diversion among the leftists and two main currents began to dominate the ideological and practical sphere of the left-wing opposition. First one is represented by the advocates of theory of the ‘national democratic revolution’; and the second one consisted of the supporters of a ‘socialist revolution’ (SR). The division originated in the TLP’s declaration of itself as a socialist party after its success in the 1965 elections. While in the first half of the 1960s, the discourse of “the non-capitalist road to development” had been enough to unite various groups of the leftist movement, from the TLP to Yön and to Society for Socialist Culture; Aybar’s clear statements regarding the TLP’s new direction towards socialism and its difference from other leftists who accepted to operate in the capitalist system created its discontents within and outside of the Party. The main opposition to Aybar’s ‘socialist revolution’ thesis came from the advocates of the ‘national democratic revolution’, which suggested “a two-stage revolution in Turkey: first the national-democratic revolution and only then socialist revolution”,³⁰⁵ and were led by Mihri Belli, Hikmet Kıvılcımlı, Resat Fuat Baraner, who were the old members of the Communist Party of Turkey (CPT). They proclaimed that Turkey is still a feudal society in which the proletariat was too weak to initiate a revolution; therefore, it could only be done by a coalition of intellectuals and officials. This idea became very popular especially among the youth and in the military. One of the critical differences concerning the theses of ‘socialist revolution’ and the ‘national democratic revolution’ actually originated in the role they attributed to the military in the revolutionary struggle. The Nationalist Democratic Revolution advocates claimed that Kemalist army and intellectuals are the natural allies of the workers in initiating a nationalist democratic revolution.

³⁰⁴ Ersan, *1970’lerde Türkiye solu (Turkey’s Left in the 1970s)*, 25.

³⁰⁵ Lipovsky, *The Socialist Movement in Turkey 1960-1980*, 24.

The increasing popularity of the view of ‘national democratic revolution’ represented the growing influence of the CPT, which clearly supported this ideal for Turkey,³⁰⁶ among the leftist opposition in the late 1960. This was to grow even more in the second half of the 1970s despite their disappointment in the army after March 12 coup d’état in 1971; it also represented the demise of the TLP.

Meanwhile, the main faction of the TLP under Mehmet Ali Aybar advocated that Turkey was ripe for a ‘socialist revolution’ (SR) but this should be achieved through democratic means, in other words, within the limits of a parliamentary opposition. Nevertheless, the TLP was able to keep different factions under its umbrella until 1969, afterwards international events, such as the Soviets’ invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Sino-Soviet split, and internal ideological disagreements especially among the leadership of the TLP polarized the groups. Also, the competition and power relations too seem to have played a substantial role in the demise of the TLP and SR thesis.

Just as for their counterparts in other parts of the world, the period between 1968 and 1970 represented a threshold in the history of the Turkish left. The worldwide events of 1968, namely the Tet offensive in February, the French May, and finally the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August, had a tremendous impact on the student activists. In addition to the domestic factors and experiences convincing the left of the impossibility of peaceful and democratic road to socialism, at the international level too, inspirational sources of the left, both intellectually and politically, were not calling for a democratic movement culture. While the success and diffusion of guerrilla struggles in Latin America were the source of inspiration; in a fierce bipolar international order, the criticism towards the policies of the Soviets and China were seen as the propaganda of the US for a long time. They had every reason to be suspicious about the US’s intentions; for example, the CIA sponsored military coup in 1973 in Chile during which the democratically elected socialist Salvador Allende was overthrown did not only confirm their suspicion but also

³⁰⁶ Lipovsky, 37.

consolidated their commitment to political violence. For those, Allende example displayed the weaknesses and the fate of the attempts of a parliamentary left.

Also noteworthy is the theoretical eclecticism of the radical groups leading the leftist contention and resorting to armed struggle during 1971-72, the period known as the years of guerrilla struggle. Bringing together quite disparate ideological currents, analyses and theses from Marxist-Leninist or Maoist essential texts to the guerrilla warfare theories of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Carlos Marighella to the Third Worldist arguments of Doğan Avcıoğlu, Mihri Belli and Hikmet Kıvılcımlı, they were more concerned about justifying their already made decisions rather than being theoretically consistent³⁰⁷. Especially the advocates of armed struggle described the Turkish regime as having a revolutionary potential but only sustaining thanks to an artificial stability, a persistent ‘fascism’ and a secret invasion.

The eclecticism of the guerrilla warfare was to be followed by a loss of interest and a practical lack of knowledge in theory by the next generation of revolutionaries who found themselves preoccupied with the day-to-day developments of very dynamic popular politics and anti-fascist struggle in the second half of the 1970s. Thus, the student protestors of the 1960s, or 1968 generation as they are commonly referred in Turkey, were distinguished from their followers in the 1970s for having the opportunity not only to read the essential texts of the leftist thought, engage in discussions and make their choice accordingly, but also to enjoy art, literature and life in general.³⁰⁸ Whereas, the 1978 generation in Turkey, came of age in the middle of a conflict-ridden, polarized political environment in which they had to pick sides without much time to contemplate; and such intellectual concerns were considered luxury or petit-bourgeois.

³⁰⁷ Ergun Aydınoglu, *Türkiye Solu, 1960-1980 : “Bir Amneziğin Anıları” (Turkey’s Left, 1960-1980: Memoirs of an Amnesiac)* (İstanbul: Versus, 2007), 311.

³⁰⁸ Mentioned in many memoirs and interviews by the activist of the period, See, for example: Erdal Öz, *Gülünün Solduğu Akşam (The Night His Rose Faded)* (Can Yayınları, 2014).

Meanwhile, counter-framing and countermovement efforts by the governments and right-wing groups was based on the threat of communism and Russian imperialism. Prime Minister Demirel and others often stressed the danger of “too much freedom” provided by the 1961 Constitution and the abuse of those freedoms by ‘certain ideological movements’ to threaten the regime; so, he proposed the amendment of the constitution³⁰⁹. The overall policy of the government of the JP towards the left during the 1960s was two-fold: a constant anti-communist propaganda and harassment of leftist movements. The polarizing discourse of the JP was based on the marginalization of the leftists of any sorts; even though it might have brought success in the elections against its rivals, it also contributed to the radicalization of these groups and an eventual breakdown of the political system. People were arrested and brought to trial for publishing or translating socialist texts. “[W]ith the help of the infamous MİT (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*, or National Intelligence Organization), [...] continuous pressure was exerted on left-wing organizations and individuals”³¹⁰. The government created a riot squad, so-called ‘Community Police’ (*Toplum Polisi*) to deal with demonstrators but even the most extreme measures did not bring stability but instead outraged the protesters further. Turkish political actors during the 1960s proved to be incapable of bringing political turmoil into an end and the use of repressive police force and counter-guerrilla tactics made it only worse as we will see in the following parts.

5.2. The Necessity of Armed Struggle in Iran

From the constitutionalists at the turn of the 20th century to famous fifty-three intellectuals and Jalal Al-e Ahmad of the 1960s, the majority of famous Iranian writers and intellectuals have always been anti-regime, secularist and leftists of different convictions.³¹¹ The youth of the 1960s and 1970s grew up under the influence of stories and books like Samad Behrangi’s *The Little Black Fish*, Al-e Ahmad’s *Garbzadegi* (Westoxification), and Bozorg Alavi’s *Scrap*

³⁰⁹ Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, 199.

³¹⁰ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 251.

³¹¹ Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 184.

Papers of Prison. Even though the themes like anti-imperialism and saving Iran from the Western dominance were recurrent since the late 19th century, until the 1960s, most of the Iranian intellectuals adopted a Westernist and modernists position to the problems of the Iranian society in their writings. Therefore, it should be noted that until after the 1953 coup, the West and Western civilization had an overwhelmingly positive connotation in Iranian culture, especially among the middle class intellectuals.³¹² Only with the intensification of ‘Westernizing despotism’ and Western interference, the themes revolving around Western intrusion and imperialism began to spread and became most popular topics among the Iranian critical thinkers. Resistance to the West dominated the popular dissident culture during the 1960s and 1970s and best represented by the term of *gharbzadegi*, coined by Jalal Al Ahmad in his book of the same title published in 1962, in which he criticized Iranian economic, political and cultural subjugation to the West. Literally meant struck by the West, *gharbzadegi* signifies both the resentment in public vis-a-vis conspicuous Westernization policies of the Shah as well as the popular culture. It also represents the reactionary feelings against the Western influence and presence in their country. Anti-imperialism and cultural nationalism become amalgamated and turned into “the core element of an Iranian version of mid-twentieth-century Third Worldist ideologies of resistance to imperialism.”³¹³ Of course rapid socio-cultural changes associated with rapid urbanization and growing income inequality in this period played a significant role in the transformation of Iranian literary and political thought.

As we have mentioned the history of Socialist and Communist ideas can be traced back to the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909, which continued first in the line of Communist Party of Iran after the WWI and then that of the Tudeh party after the WWII, whose main line of politics was pro-Soviet. Only with the 1960s some leftist groups who identified as guerrillas rejected the line of the Tudeh party and advocated and adopted armed struggle to change the regime. Why

³¹² Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*, 44.

³¹³ Afshin Matin-Asgari, “From Social Democracy to Social Democracy: The Twentieth-Century Odyssey of the Iranian Left,” in *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran* (Routledge, 2013), 45.

and how they decided to take such a radical turn is related to, besides the relational dynamics between various political actors, the evolution of leftist political thought in Iran and the influence of international ideological conflicts especially between the communist bloc countries.

Therefore, the rise and demise of the radical leftist thought in Iran should be analyzed against the backdrop of the national context, the international developments and the evolution of the leftist ideology in this period. Both the dynamics resulting from the state of domestic politics in Iran and the developments at the international level equally contributed to the radicalization of the Left especially in the 1970s.

Even though varied from country to country, the 1960s in general brought about the demise of the old orthodox communist parties and their ideological proposition. Instead, the new generation of the 1960s were after new methods and strategies for the type of drastic transitions and transformation they sought both in political and social arena. As we have mentioned above regarding the case of Turkish revolutionaries, in Iran too those who were interested in a regime change were especially inspired by the victory of liberation movements around the world in general, and Chinese, Cuban, Algerian, and Vietnamese revolutions in particular. “Revolutionary fervor was in the air [...] from Front de Liberation Nationale in Algeria, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the PAIGC in Guinea, and Qavam Nekrumeh’s Pan-African movement, to full-fledged liberation wars in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Dhofar (Oman).”³¹⁴

One of the first issues the revolutionaries of the period had to tackle with was the description of their society, whether it was a feudal, dependent, or a capitalist one, in order to legitimize their prescribed strategy for the revolutionary struggle. Second, their position vis-a-vis the international conflict between the Soviet Union and other communist countries also had an impact on their ideological stance. Finally, and closely related to the previous points, was the organizational challenges such as the character and form of the organization, type of their

³¹⁴ Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 13.

struggle, and strategic and tactical approaches they were willing to adopt were all source of tension and disagreement among the revolutionaries just as was the case in Turkey.

What united the 1960s' generation of revolutionaries in Iran is, I think, more worthwhile to mention since Iranian revolutionaries had to unite to be able to survive under the extreme pressure of the Shah's dictatorship as opposed to those in Turkey had the luxury to diverge, disagree and compete in a relatively free political environment. This difference between the political regimes of Iran and Turkey was to have long lasting and critical repercussions not only in the intellectual and organizational issues but also in the everyday experiences of the revolutionaries as we will see in the following chapters. First of all, there was a consensus on the fact that Iran's economic system was a dependent capitalist one which relied on state dictatorship and a capitalist class, or what they would call 'a comprador bourgeoisie'. Second common factor was their courage and willingness to fight against incomparably powerful actors, —the state, imperial powers, or the security forces— by using even extreme means when necessary, but more importantly, by also risking their own lives. Finally, even though many in the left was exposed to currents of international ideological contention, the majority adopted the general revolutionary discourse of anti-imperialism, dependent capitalism, neocolonialism and armed struggle. By the mid-1960s, they were all convinced that the regime would not allow any sort of peaceful and legal opposition to challenge it and the only way to change the regime had to involve armed struggle one way or another for the reasons we will analyze below.

As another similarity between the Turkish and Iranian cases the approaches of the most of the Iranian leftist groups were eclectic combinations of popular ideas and revolutionary ideologies of their time. The armed organizations that began to emerge in the 1960s “drew their inspiration from theories of guerrilla warfare developed in Cuba, Nicaragua, Vietnam, Palestine and China. Che Guevara's manuals were particularly popular [...]; translated and widely distributed in Iran in the 1960s.”³¹⁵ What made the new Iranian Left also a product of their time was that they too

³¹⁵ Adib-Moghaddam, “What Is Radicalism?,” 279.

obtained “a distaste for theorizing, an impatience at intellectual and analytical work, and a preference for a rather narrowly defined ‘practice’”³¹⁶ like other contemporaneous Maoists, anti-imperialists, and New Leftists in a number of countries including Turkey. In this vein, it is only understandable that they came to reject the gradualist approach of old orthodox communist parties. The conservatism of the old left, in the Iranian case it was Tudeh and to a certain extent nationalist National Front, led to the first breakaway and eventual radicalization of younger generation of leftists, who were unsatisfied with their moderate and parliamentary stances; and at the same time lacked alternatives in the face of the repressive regime. Anti-Americanism was also not something specific to Iranian new left but a global sentiment, as we have seen in the case of Turkish revolutionaries too. Furthermore, America’s direct interference in 1953 into the domestic politics of Iran by staging a coup was of course still fresh in the memories of that generation, thereby, causing further threat attribution in their perceptions.

There were more striking parallels between the leftist thinking in Turkey and Iran during the late 1960s especially in their emphasis on the ‘national’ character of their prescribed models for development, industries and economy. Bizhan Jazani, one of the founders of the guerrilla organization, Fadaiyan, like many Turkish leftist leaders at the time, suggested a ‘national democratic revolution’ and ‘national political rule’ in the face of imperialism and dependency on the West.³¹⁷ However, just like in Turkey, the notion of ‘national democratic revolution’ was dismissed and instead ‘people’s democratic revolution’ was advocated during the attempts to start the armed struggle as soon as possible³¹⁸.

For the guerrilla groups active during this period the “analysis of Iranian society,” “the methods of struggle,” and “definition of the revolutionary stage” remained as the most controversial topics, and their position on each issue determined the theoretical and

³¹⁶ Moghadam, “Socialism or Anti-Imperialism?,” 9.

³¹⁷ Moghadam, 12.

³¹⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, “The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963-1977,” *MERIP Reports*, no. 86 (March 1, 1980): 7.

strategical approach of their organization. For instance, Fadaiyan initially decided to pursue both rural and urban guerrilla activities at the same time. While the Ahmadzadeh-Pouyan group took the cities, the Ashraf group took the rural areas; and they began their activities in Tehran, Mashhad, Tabriz, and Rasht. However, in 1966, the Jazani group concluded that the land reform transformed Iran from a feudal to a dependent-bourgeois society, and consequently peasants lost their revolutionary potential. Thus, they shifted their focus to the city as the base of the armed struggle.³¹⁹ Meanwhile, after Ahmadzadeh-Pouyan group “rejected the Maoist assessment of Iranian society as semifeudal-semicolonial [by 1968, it] turned to Latin American revolutionary literature. Members read Che Guevara, Regis Debray, and the works of Tupamaros.”³²⁰

The essential intellectual sources of the guerrilla movement were predominantly written by the founding leaders of Fadaiyan. For example, Amir Parviz Poyan’s *The Necessity of Armed Struggle and the Rejection of Theory of Survival* (Zarrurat-e Mobarezeh Moslahaneh va Rad-e Teory-e Baqa), Masud Ahmadzadeh’s *Armed Struggle: Both a Strategy and A Tactic* (Mobarezeh-e Moslahaneh: Ham Estratezhi Ham Takteek), and Bizhan Jazani’s *Armed Struggle: The Road to the Mobilization of the Masses* (Mobarezeh Mosalahaneh: Rahaie Baseejeh-e Tudeh-ha) were widely read and discussed by the members and sympathizers of the organization. What is striking in the case of Fadaiyan is that in spite of the multiplicity and diversity of opinions among its leaders with regards to either analyses of the Iranian society or the methods of struggle, tactics and strategies, they did not directly lead to factionalism; on the contrary, the organizers could set aside those differences and act collectively on the grounds agreed by the majority even if it means adopting different strategies during different periods. How democratic these decision-making processes were, is of course open to debate; however, even the mere fact that factionalism among the Iranian New Left was scarce is a characteristic that sets it apart from its counterparts in other parts of the world, where, as we have mentioned,

³¹⁹ Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 19.

³²⁰ Vahabzadeh, 22, 23.

the New Left was almost characterized by factionalism. This was also one of the main differences between the Turkish and Iranian cases.

For example, the most influential texts of the organization especially in the early years of its operations was *The Necessity of Armed Struggle and the Rejection of Theory of Survival* written by one of the founders of Fadaiyan, Amir Parviz Poyan. As can be understood from its title, he explains in this concise pamphlet why armed struggle is the only way for revolutionaries to achieve their goals under current circumstances which he describes as an absolute despair resulting from the perception of the invincibility of the regime. He argues that this predominant perception among people can be challenged only through armed attacks to the strategic targets to show people that the regime is not invincible. Once the vanguard organization achieved this goal, the revolutionary forces among the population will join the struggle and pave the way for a successful revolution. What is rejected as a theory of survival was the position of Tudeh, which was criticized for abandoning the armed struggle in order to survive and prioritize the strategic interests of the Soviet Union. Tudeh was commonly accused of opportunism and revisionism.³²¹

In addition to Poyan's theory, Ahmadzadeh's *Armed Struggle: Both a Strategy and A Tactic* was also popular among the Fadaiyan and led them in the early years of their activism. Under the influence of Regis Debray, Ahmadzadeh describes in his book that armed struggle is a means through which both political and military objectives could be achieved at the same time. Armed attacks do not only target the state's military structure but also serve a propaganda purpose; thereby drawing people to the ranks of the armed struggle. Thus, it is both a strategy and a tactic.³²² Yet, by 1976, after suffering a great number of losses at the hands of SAVAK and other security forces, the Organizations had to give up on the lines of Poyan and Ahmadzadeh and adopt Jazani's theory which emphasized the political side of the struggle rather than focusing solely on the armed operations. The difference originated in the way they described the political

³²¹ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 208.

³²² Massoud Ahmadzadeh, *Armed Struggle, Both a Strategy and a Tactic* (New York: Support Committee for the Iranian Peoples' Struggle, 1977).

regime in Iran and the revolutionary conditions. While Ahmadzadeh argued that the US imperialism, which installed the Shah's regime in the first place, was responsible for the main problems in the country and the objective conditions were present; whereas, Jazani insisted, without denying the role of imperialism, that Shah had some autonomy and his reforms transformed the socio-economic structure. Therefore, he claimed that the objective conditions were not present in Iran anymore; however, through political activities of the vanguard party, the proletariat and other lower classes can be mobilized and organized until the revolutionary conditions arise once again.³²³

As Vahabzadeh (2010) observes, in addition to the revolutionary discursive elements of the time from Marxism-Leninism to the guerrilla theories of Che Guevara and Carlos Marighella, Fadaiyan could successfully use the discourse of national liberation to mobilize a new generation of youth and intellectuals by bringing together two dominant schools of thought in the modern Iranian intellectual thought; on the one hand, the secular leftist ideas introduced mainly by Tudeh and on the other hand, the nativist cultural movement pioneered by Jalal Al-Ahmad. This discourse was based on a couple of premises as follows: the regime in Iran is a dictatorship, it is backed by the imperial powers, and Iranian society was undergoing a transformation from a feudal society to a 'dependent' capitalism. However, there were some differences too among the theorists of Fadaiyan. For example, while Pooyand and Ahmadzadeh believed that the objective conditions of revolution existed in Iran, Jazani claimed otherwise and suggested a two-step approach. According to Jazani, the first step was to establish a vanguard organization which would use armed propaganda; and only in the second step a people's army would be formed to represent mass-based revolutionary movement.

Finally, one needs to keep in mind, as Behrooz (1999) states clearly in his seminal book, that "[t]he activists of the armed struggle had clearly come to the conclusion that no other avenue remained open. The theoretical justification for armed struggle came after this initial practical

³²³ Bizhan Jazani, *Armed Struggle in Iran: The Road to Mobilization of the Masses* (London: Iran Committee, 1976).

step. Right or wrong, the advocates of violence believed that inaction [...] was unacceptable.”³²⁴ Similarly, even though the ideological, strategic, and tactical approaches of the radical left was laid out in detail in the main sources mentioned above and diverged from each, it was not these intellectual materials that convinced the youth to participate in the ranks of guerrilla struggle. The pull and push factors motivating the youth in Iran to self-recruit to the guerrilla groups had more to do with a general understanding of the Iranian society, the regime, and the left as well as their capacity and responsibilities in particular. As one of the former guerrillas puts it: “I was just looking for an opportunity to join the guerrillas and I was almost going to participate in the ranks of Mojahedin, my only concern was that they were too religious. Luckily, I came across with someone from Fadaiyan and I joined them.”³²⁵

5.3. Escalation in Turkey

The TLP, the DİSK and the FKF represented the pioneering organizations, as well as mobilization networks, for the intellectuals, workers and students respectively and led the leftist contention throughout most of the 1960s. The gradual shift from the conventional moderate forms of protests, such as support for workers’ movement and student demonstrations, to more disruptive ones like university occupations and finally to violent attacks on political targets took place in a political environment closing down for left-wing opposition towards the end of the 1960s. By 1970, both the universities and the factories “were paralyzed by student agitation and violence and [...] by worker militancy and strikes” respectively³²⁶. For the reasons that will be detailed below, by 1970, this relatively organized movement had already been divided into several groups and organizations. The most prominent of these organizations emerged in the midst of the chaos of the late 1960s and became well known by their abbreviations: THKP-C (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi Cephesi* – People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey), THKO (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu* – People's Liberation Army of Turkey),

³²⁴ Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 50.

³²⁵ Mina (pseudonym), interview by Author, 20.07 2014.

³²⁶ Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, 201.

TİKKO (*Türkiye İşçi Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu* – Liberation Army of the Workers and Peasants of Turkey). They all came from the ranks of Dev-Genç, were led mostly by the student leaders of the 1960s and differed from each other by small ideological nuances. As the very first radical leftist organizations, these three organizations claimed “that only ‘armed propaganda’ [...] and an armed guerrilla struggle could bring about a revolution”³²⁷. However, assuming that they came to this conclusion as a result of one or two factors that depend on either their ideology or tactical choices would not only be misleading but also ignoring all the other dynamics preparing the ground for such a radical turn. Instead, several significant mechanisms played key roles in this process of escalation: diffusion, delegitimization, attribution of threat, attribution of opportunity, repression and decertification.

First of all, from the TLP’s formation onwards what was being witnessed in an escalating pace was a stream of contention or cycle of protests which were formed by consecutive and continuous occurrences of causal mechanisms and processes shaping the character of popular politics of the country. For example, one of the recurring mechanisms was diffusion. It is defined as “any transfer of information across existing lines of communication”; however, in the context of contentious politics it refers particularly to a “transfer in the same or similar shape of forms and claims of contention across space or across sectors and ideological divides”³²⁸. It is effective both on domestic and international levels as well as both in behavioral and ideational categories.

During the 1960s, the mechanism of diffusion among the leftist in Turkey occurred in both levels and categories. On the one hand, the protests and repertoires of European students have diffused among those in Turkey after the May 1968 demonstrations in Paris. Alper³²⁹ stresses the role of diffusion, on the Turkish ’68 movement, of the forms and frames employed by the student movements beginning in the mid-1960s in the Western countries against the war in Vietnam

³²⁷ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 256.

³²⁸ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 68.

³²⁹ Alper, “Protest Diffusion and Rising Political Violence in the Turkish ’68 Movement.”

first, and then gradually gaining a general anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist character throughout the world.

On the other hand, before widespread anti-colonial and anti-imperialist ideas diffused worldwide among the leftist opposition in the period, already present anti-American and nationalist feelings among the Turkish students had culminated into a full-fledged anti-imperialist discourse with the Cyprus crisis in 1964 on the local level. Therefore, by 1967, anti-imperialism and solidarity with the Vietnamese people had already been common causes among the leftist student activists; however, the war in Vietnam had not resonated with the Turkish public as did the Arab-Israeli War. As Alper³³⁰ also points out that the anti-imperialist protests in Turkey following the Arab-Israeli War in 1967 represented what anti-Vietnam War protests did in many Western countries. The students who were frustrated over the US's interference in the Cyprus issue, embraced the frame of anti-imperialism enthusiastically more than ever; and the emotions of embarrassment by a government that was still committed to the alliance with the US played a very important role in their activities.

In the midst of this collective resentment, the presence of the Sixth Fleet of US Navy served as a popular target for the protestors as an embodiment of the American military existence in the region. Furthermore, the government, which had long lost its legitimacy in their eyes, used excessive police force to suppress anti-Sixth Fleet demonstrations causing further delegitimization of its role as a neutral political authority, let alone a nationalist political actor that was supposed to be on their side in their fight against imperialism. The repercussion of delegitimization of state on the radicalization of protestors is emphasized by Della Porta (1995). She states: “the repressive measures these governments took often produced the opposite effect: they delegitimized the state by creating ‘injustice frames’”³³¹.

³³⁰Alper.

³³¹ Della Porta, *Social movements, political violence, and the state*, 163.

Escalation of youth or student movement in Turkey materialized mostly during the episode of demonstrations against American sixth fleet, especially through two critical events as a result of which three students were killed. Generally, the killing of peaceful demonstrators by security forces represents a threshold in the radicalization of social movements via a cognitive mechanism changing the perception of the protestors. While the dead gains the status of a revolutionary martyr inspiring others to further commit themselves to the cause, it also convinces them that the regime and its security forces are the enemy attempting on their lives. There are many examples of this phenomenon among contemporary the left-wing activists in countries like Germany, Italy and the US. As the most well-known example, in Germany a student protestor, Benno Ohnesorg's killing by the police on 2 June 1967 resulted in the emergence of an armed group called the June 2 Movement.³³²

The first event took place on July 17, 1968, when the police raided a dormitory of Istanbul Technical University and threw a student, Vedat Demircioğlu, out of the window. He died in the hospital a week later and his death represented a threshold in the conflicts between the police and the students. He was seen as the first martyr of the revolution but certainly not going to be the last student activist killed by the police or the fascist groups whose violence police turned a blind eye to. At least 7 more students were killed in the student protests during 1968 and 1969³³³. The second turning point came to be known as "Bloody Sunday" which took place on February 16, 1969, when the 'Worker's March against Imperialism and Exploitation' organized by 72 student organizations was attacked by the right-wing groups in collaboration with the police. While two leftist students were killed by fascists carrying clubs and knives more than 200 were wounded³³⁴. Next day, a picture showing one of the two killed students being stabbed next to a police officer was published in the daily newspaper, *Hürriyet*; this can be seen as the last straw in the delegitimization of the police in the eyes of leftist students.

³³² See Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 39,49. and Della Porta, 2006

³³³ Karadeniz, *Olaylı yıllar ve gençlik (The Tumultuous Years and the Youth)*, 151.

³³⁴ Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, 381.

The natural outcome of extremely repressive policies of the government towards the protestors, excessive use of police force, unfair treatment from the police towards the left-wing protestors while overlooking similar activities of the right-wing groups, if not favoring them, was a growing perception of threat by the left-wing activists. Increasingly oppressive political environment had not left much room for maneuver; as a result of shrinking political opportunities activists felt more and more constrained on their actions; moreover, the violent attacks of the right-wing groups attained such a systematic manner and frequency that the attribution of threat by the leftist activists reached an unprecedented degree in Turkey by 1970. What deserves a special mention is the need for self-defense that the violent attacks of the right-wing groups created among the leftist activists. Defending oneself on the face of right-wing violence was usually the initial and most common cause among left-wing activists legitimizing violence as a means.

In parallel to the attribution of threat, another cognitive mechanism, attribution of opportunity, was also at play in the unfolding of the political opportunity structure in Turkey by 1970. It is defined as “(a) invention or importation and (b) diffusion of a shared definition concerning alterations in the likely consequences of possible actions”³³⁵. In this vein, it can be confidently said that armed propaganda or armed struggle was seen as an opportunity to overcome all the problems and shortcomings on the way to revolution for the aspiring revolutionaries i.e. student activists. It was appealing for several reasons: ideological, contextual and historical. As I mentioned earlier, the way they framed their struggle - a revolutionary fight aiming to defeat imperialist and capitalist encroachment and establish a fully independent socialist country-, the way they define the state of revolutionary conditions in their country, as well as the inspiration they drew from the widespread guerrilla struggles around the world against the colonialists and imperialist interests of western powers, all singled out only one method which was promising success to achieve their aims; and it was armed propaganda or armed struggle.

³³⁵ Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 95.

Armed propaganda conventionally aims to show people that the enemy is vulnerable and there are various ways to resist. The attacks are highly symbolic and target property rather than civilians. In its various uses it might also aim the punishment of certain actions which are considered “anti-worker” and “the exposition of state connivance with capitalist centers of power”³³⁶. For example, Bosi mentions that among the objectives of armed propaganda attacks of Red Brigades were “sparking the workers’ struggle to come out of its shell in the battle against the management for the control of production and profits” as well as raising “the consciousness of working class”³³⁷. For the cases of armed propaganda tactics adopted by Turkish revolutionaries, violence was justified on the grounds that as a force it would trigger conflict between the state establishment and the citizens gradually creating the conditions for a revolutionary situation. Instead of waiting for the revolutionary conditions to become ripe, they decided to initiate or trigger the revolution through provoking the environment by means of mass agitation and attacks to the regime to show its weaknesses to the workers thereby encouraging them to take an action.

The mechanism of repression characterized the dynamics of the relations between the protestors and the state mostly through its security forces, i.e. the police and the army in Turkey. Repression as one of the most important mechanisms is defined as “efforts to suppress either contentious acts or groups and organizations responsible for them”.³³⁸ However, there is a whole literature about the role of state repression on the social movements³³⁹; and it is not possible to determine a simple definite response by protestors in the face of state repression. Instead, various factors concerning the character of the state, protestors and the context need to be considered. In this vein, the most salient features of the Turkish state’s repression in this period, which was marked by an excessive use of violence against the protestors, can be described as unjustified

³³⁶ Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 67.

³³⁷ Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, 67.

³³⁸ Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 69.

³³⁹ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, ch.4.; Della Porta, *Social movements, political violence, and the state.*; Christian Davenport, Hank Johnston, and Carol McClurg Mueller, *Repression and Mobilization* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

and indiscriminate. As stated before, the police's favorable treatment of the right-wingers, while indiscriminately suppressing the leftist protestors of any sort, occasionally causing their death, created a sense of injustice, as well as martyrs, among them. So, in this context, state repression can be seen as a mechanism contributing to the radicalization of the left-wing groups in Turkey rather than their demobilization. Also, although varied widely in terms of intensity throughout the two decades before the coup in 1980, the state repression had never reached to a level of total prohibition of mobilization and activism, like had been the case for example in Iran before the Revolution. However, they were not allowed to mobilize, organize and challenge the political authorities freely either; therefore, in addition to injustice frame they came to develop a sense of what has been defined as 'no other way out'³⁴⁰ than resorting to violence.

Among the developments that had led the left to this conclusion were the two law amendments showcasing decertification³⁴¹ of the legal left by the state authorities. One was in electoral law and the other in labor law. The first amendment targeted the TLP and abolished the electoral system that allowed the Worker's Party to win 14 seats in the parliament in 1965 by getting 276,000 votes accounting for %3 of the total. The 1969 elections represented the peak of disillusionment with a parliamentary road to any solution of the political crisis, let alone to socialism for the majority in the left. The fall in the votes and the representation of the TLP in the parliament, mostly due to the change in electoral law ending the national remainder system, confirmed the decisions of those who had already been in search for extra-parliamentary methods. The amended law eliminated any prospect of electoral success for TLP as proved by the 1969 elections in which the Party could only win 2 seats even though it had gotten 243,000 votes, %2.7 of the total. In many sources, the 1969 elections

³⁴⁰ See Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) for a detailed discussion of several revolutionary movements in the global South during the Cold War reaching the same conclusion and adopting armed struggle.

³⁴¹ As all the other mechanisms, decertification is also contingent and may refer to slightly different scenarios. While McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 204. defines it as the withdrawal of "validation of actors, their performances, and their claims by external authorities"; I adapt it to a scenario in which the political authority withdraws recognition and commitments of future support, while often threatening with repression. Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*.

was presented as a failure for TLP and its policies in the eyes of left-wing opposition; however, what actually failed was the political regime in Turkey which opted deliberately to exclude the legal left from the parliamentary system. Naturally, as a result, those on the left lost their belief in a parliamentary left's chance to succeed, and eventually, the distrust in the parliamentary road to socialism, which had already been making its way among the leftist youth, was confirmed and multiplied after the 1969 elections. Only then, not all but many of TLP's supporters began to look for alternative methods and eventually the left began to be divided into several groups proposing various strategies and tactics as the best solutions for Turkey's problems. This split was the first of many that were to mark the Turkish left in the following periods; initially four main groups emerged but many more splits were to follow suit and result in what Sommer³⁴² calls "schizogenesis" or fractionalism in the left movements of many countries after 1968. I will discuss this phenomenon in detail below, but for now it is worth noting that the state's repression and decertification of the legal left played as much of a role as did the power relations and leadership ambitions of leftist activists in this process of schizogenesis in Turkey's leftist movements in the post-1968 period.

Second amendment aimed to curb the power of DİSK with changes in the Unions Law and brought membership quotas for labor unions to be able to operate. As mentioned above, this amendment, which was passed in the parliament secretly on June 12, 1970, with collaboration of the JP and the RPP, was seen as a direct attack to workers' legal rights and they took to the streets in unprecedented numbers on June 15 and 16. Eventually resulting in the government's declaration of state of emergency in order to suppress the workers' protests, the two-day episode represented the end of an era in the left's thinking and perception. First, at the request of the government the army forces joined the police to suppress the protestors and fire at them. For those in the left believing the revolutionary role of the army, mostly the supporters of the 'national democratic revolution', this was a real disappointment, but the army was to show its

³⁴²Sommer, "Revolutionary Groups after 1968."

real face even more with an intervention in less than a year. Also, these two amendments meant for the most on the left that all the legal ways for a revolutionary struggle, -parliamentarian, syndicalist even popular-, were to be repressed by all means possible. This was the conclusion that many on the left had reached by 1970, right at the time several groups adopted political violence and organized armed operations to attack political targets. Feeling justified as a result of these mechanisms of attribution of threat and opportunity, repression, delegitimization, and decertification several Turkish left-wing militant groups like their counterparts in many other countries in that period “decided to take their struggle to the next level of intensity and lethality, further legitimizing resorting to violence as a means of resisting attacks, while also striving to destroy the capitalist state once the state was under an alleged ‘authoritarian regression’”³⁴³.

5.4. Formation of a Guerrilla Organization in Iran

While the 1960s for the left in Turkey was a story of escalation, in Iran it was one of a revival in a different form after almost a total elimination. The year of 1963 was a turning point in the perception of the leftist groups in several senses. Before 1963, even despite the catastrophic 1953 coup, the secularist dissenting groups had been able to sustain a level of hope for the possibility of a peaceful, legal, and conventional opposition through either the revival of the Tudeh or the transformation of the NF. Especially the activities of the Second National Front during the 1961 free election campaign was promising. However, by June 1963 all the hopes for nonviolent conventional means of opposition was depleted and the political opportunity structure for the leftist activists were defined by the consequences of the Shah’s successful consolidation of power on various levels and arenas from domestic politics to foreign policy.

Most of the mechanisms that were mentioned above to analyze the escalation in Turkey were also present in Iran one way or another, especially in shaping the perceptions of the activists. For example, we can begin with one of the most effective mechanism, the attribution of

³⁴³ Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 70.

threat, among the Iranian leftist dissenters which resulted from a number of developments and structural changes in Iranian politics. By 1963, as we have mentioned, the Shah has eliminated the opposition through every means possible from repression to co-optation and appropriation. Nothing with substantial potential was left of the Tudeh, the NF, workers' movement and student organizations inside the country. The rest of the 1960s witnessed the Shah's consolidation of power. Also guaranteed the support of the US, the Shah could achieve good relations with the Soviets and eventually China too. Not bound by any sort of national or international legal and political commitments, SAVAK was free to operate and exert unlimited pressure on the oppositional attempts. SAVAK's relentless repression of all opposition throughout the 1960s culminated in a perception among the left-wing opposition that they need to do something immediately or all prospects of change will be vanished forever. In Iran the adoption of armed struggle did not originate as a defensive strategy against the violence of right-wing groups as it was the case in Turkey. However, the state's use of brute violence during 1953 and 1963, as well as the violent repression of each and every opposition attempt raised the attribution of threat among the activists to such an extent that they were convinced that "[c]ombating the shah's regime empty-handedly was a type of suicide."³⁴⁴ So, it was ever a self-defensive strategy it was only against the security forces of the state; but of course that was not the whole story.

It was in that gloomy political environment that a number of students and intellectuals began to form clandestine groups either simply to discuss Marxist-Leninist literature and find solutions for the problems of their society or to organize an underground movement to resist and change the Shah regime. A number of armed resistances with ethnic origins took place in the 1960s, such as the Qashqai uprising and the Kurdish uprising; but they were mostly sporadic and put down by the regime immediately. Also occurred splinter armed groups such as the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party of Iran (ROTPI) which was established by a dissent group in Tudeh living in exile in 1963 and one of its members attempted to assassinate the Shah

³⁴⁴ Behrooz, "The Iranian Revolution and the Legacy of the Guerrilla Movement," 197.

unsuccessfully.³⁴⁵ However, the emergence of a persistent guerrilla movement in Iran had its origins mostly in the proliferation of small Marxist cells during the first half of the 1960s and their formation of a coalition in the second half of the decade.

The most important and influential secular leftist guerrilla organization was formed from a merger of three groups from Tehran, Mashad and Tabriz known by the names of their leaders: Jazani-Zarifi, Ahmadzadeh-Pouyan and Dehqani groups. They eventually took the name *Sazman-e Cherkha-ye Fadai-ye Kalq-e Iran* - The Organization of Iranian People's Fadaï Guerrillas (OIPFG) but also known as either *Cherkha* (guerrillas), *Fadaii*, *Fadaiyan* or *Fadaiyan-e Khalq*.³⁴⁶ The members of the groups were mostly originated in either the National Front's or the Tudeh's youth organizations. They advocated for armed struggle with slightly different interpretations depending on their source of inspiration from Latin American revolutionary literature to Maoist writings and to the revolutionary struggles in Cuba, Vietnam and Palestine. All of its original founders were either executed or killed in clashes with the police forces. The words of Hamid Ashraf, one of the founders of the organization sums up best their perception of the current conditions and the why they came to the conclusion of 'no other way out' other than an armed struggle as follows:

After much deliberation we reached the conclusion that it was impossible to work among the masses and create large organizations since the police had penetrated all sectors of society, We decided that our immediate task was to form small cells and mount physical assaults on the enemy so as to destroy the repressive "atmosphere" and to show the people that "armed struggle" was the only way to liberation.³⁴⁷

Ahmadzadeh-Pouyan group was initially formed to discuss social issues and study Marxism. The members of the Ahmadzadeh-Pouyan group were coming from more religious backgrounds than

³⁴⁵ Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 8.

³⁴⁶ As mentioned before, there were other guerrilla organizations in the 1960s and 1970s, such as MKO, RO, Paykar. Besides, there were also small unnamed guerrilla groups, splinter groups, or Kurdish guerrillas operating during this period. Moreover, many scattered small groups identified themselves with Fadaïyan or acted independently; however, due to the lack of sources about their activities, it is impossible to document all of them. Still, people active during that period confirm the existence of numerous small and secret groups operating in that period. For a brief list see Abrahamian, "The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963-1977," 4. and Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 5-12.

³⁴⁷ Quoted in: Abrahamian, "The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963-1977," 6.

those of Jazani group; they were also less experienced both in practice and in theoretical training, whereas more radical in their program of action.³⁴⁸ Fourteen members of the Jazani-Zarifi group including them were arrested and sentenced to long years of prison term in 1968 thanks to SAVAK agents among them before they were able to take any armed action. A few the remaining members fled the country and joined the Palestine movement where they obtained both training and arms; while Hamid Ashraf remained in Iran to restore the group and recruit new members.³⁴⁹ Thanks to the activities of these few members, the Jazani-Zarifi group could revive and joined forces with Ahmadzadeh-Poutan group to initiate the armed struggle in Iran.

The Tabriz group included Behrooz Dehqani and Samad Behrangi. Behrangi was a teacher and author who became well-known for his short stories the most famous of which was *The Little Black Fish*. Behrangi was drowned in a river in 1968; his sudden death was attributed to SAVAK by famous intellectuals of the period such as Jalal al-Ahmad and this raised him to the level of a martyr. Unfortunately, the accidental nature of his death was not revealed by the members of Fadaiyan who knew it from the beginning because the guerrillas needed a martyr figure to draw attention to their cause and SAVAK's atrocities, as it was later confessed by a number of former guerrillas.³⁵⁰

The OIPFG shared the criticism of many previous leftist Iranian intellectuals regarding the West and Iranian economic and cultural dependency on it. However, there were two divergent views among the leaders of the organization concerning the characteristics of the relationship between the regime and the West. While Ahmadzadeh viewed "the Shah's regime [as] a puppet of imperialism, created and maintained by it"; Jazani "believed that his regime was a personal dictatorship [with] a certain amount of independence." Therefore, Jazani suggested the slogan 'Down with the Shah's dictatorship and his imperialist protectors' as an alternative to 'Down with imperialism and its running dogs', which was adopted by Fadaiyan following

³⁴⁸ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 208.

³⁴⁹ Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 44.

³⁵⁰ Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 23.

Ahmadzadeh's line of thought in the first years of the armed struggle.³⁵¹ Even though seems like a minuscule detail, this difference is significant in understanding the prevailing perception behind Fadaiyan's anti-Shah armed struggle, which was heavily influenced by the period's anti-imperialist discourse and in search of ready-made solutions; because clearly Jazani's more elaborate and nuanced analysis of the regime and socio-economic conditions was calling for a long-term gradual process of struggle.

In February 1971, as a response to the capture of one of its members by the gendarme in Siahkal, the OIPFG launched its first armed operation, what was later called the Rastakhiz-i Siahkal, or the Resurgence of Siahkal and accepted retrospectively as the beginning of the armed struggle in Iran. The operation resulted in the death of all the members involved partly because the local population was indifferent to the guerrillas and cooperated with the regime forces. Almost all the founding members were arrested and imprisoned in the following months. Even though the operation was a disaster in military terms it was regarded as a propaganda victory by the Organization and celebrated as such. While the dead guerrillas were declared as the martyrs of the revolution, the new recruits replaced them enthusiastically in the fight against the regime. For example, in late 1972, 'violent and aggressive' student demonstrations took place in Tehran, Ahwaz, Tabriz and Isfahan protesting the regime's Siahkal incident. The large number of protestors were executed or imprisoned.³⁵²

Siahkal operation represented a turning point in the history of the Left in Iran for several reasons. First, this moment of crisis was seen as an opportunity by some leftist intellectuals and activists. The overreaction of the Shah to Siahkal incident, for instance, led to a thinking that the left-wing groups can indeed destabilize the country and challenge the regime to an extent that it has to resort to extraordinary measures. Those who believed that they can create a revolutionary spirit

³⁵¹ Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 55.

³⁵² Nozar Alaolmolki, "The New Iranian Left," *Middle East Journal* 41, no. 2 (1987): 223.

and struggle from these crises felt encouraged and perceived it as an opportunity too to pursue armed struggle.

Second, Siahkal triggered the activation of another mechanism called boundary activation. Defined by Tilly and Tarrow as the “increase in the salience of the “us-them” distinction separating two political actors”³⁵³, boundary activation is important for the organizations in order for them to distinguish themselves and their strategies from the previous or contemporaneous actors. As we have mentioned earlier, in Iran, the divergence from the line of Tudeh was stressed both during the establishment as well as the following phases of Fadaiyan; Siahkal can be seen as the main landmark of the boundary between the old leftist activism of Tudeh and the guerrilla warfare adopted by Fadaiyan. The boundary activation can be also related to the mechanism of identity shift as was the case with Iranian activists: Siahkal incidence accelerated the speed of transition in the self-identification of the activists from students and intellectuals to guerrillas and contributed to the radicalizations of those activists.

Just like in Turkey, for the advocates of armed propaganda, armed operations also had strategical uses. For example, they were seen as a propaganda tool to make people aware of the existence of Fadaiyan and attract new recruits. Furthermore, instead of waiting for the revolutionary conditions to become ripe, Fadaiyan decided initiate and trigger the revolution through provoking the environment by means of mass agitation and attacks to the regime to show its weaknesses to the workers thereby encouraging them to take an action. Yet, more importantly, political violence began to be “used in an offensive manner in order to establish the vanguard-underground organization”; in this vein, it was also used as a form of punishment against the ‘enemy of the people’, or support for the other oppositional groups.³⁵⁴

From the Siahkal operation until the summer of 1978, Fadaiyan undertook more than 2000³⁵⁵ acts of resistance and lost a great number of its members during these operations, especially in

³⁵³ Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 70.

³⁵⁴ Behrooz, “The Iranian Revolution and the Legacy of the Guerrilla Movement,” 197.

³⁵⁵ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 210.

the shootouts with the police, as well as in prison due to torture, suicide, and maltreatment.³⁵⁶ Out of 368 guerrillas died during this period 172 were from Fadaiyan and the rest belonged to Mojahedin and other Marxist and Islamic groups. Almost all of them was coming from middle-class backgrounds and majority was college students and professionals. Also noteworthy was that women constituted 11 percent of the death guerrillas, as a sign of their participation in guerrilla struggle in high numbers. By the end of 1976, all the original leaders of Fadaiyan was dead, except Ashraf Dehqani, and most of its members were imprisoned. For example, Poyan was killed during a shootout with the police in 1971, Ahmadzadeh was executed in 1972, and Jazani was assassinated in prison in 1975 with eight more leaders of the movement.

By 1978, Fadaiyan had carried out a series of armed operations such as bank robberies, assassinations of police informers, an industrialist, and the Chief Military Prosecutor, as well as the bombing of the embassies of Britain, Oman and the US, and the police headquarters of Tehran, Tabriz, Rasht, Gurgan, Mashad, and Abadan.³⁵⁷ Despite losing its original leadership, high number of casualties, and never ending SAVAK pressure, Fadaiyan continued to grow and recruit members to its ranks until and after the revolution.

Yet, of course, it was not a straightforward process and had ebbs and flows, as well as waves of diffusion and withdrawals; yet it is worth to keep in mind that “there was never one Fadai group but many. Fadaiyan could not have survived without being continually replenished by small, self-motivated militant cells of students and intellectuals”³⁵⁸. For example, between 1963 and 1971, a different sort of diffusion was at play as we have mentioned in the form of scattered small clandestine groups around the country which eventually culminated into the formation of Fadaiyan. Between 1971 and 1974 we can talk about the diffusion of the guerrilla movement pioneered by Fadaiyan; especially in 1975 the group experienced an unprecedented expansion to an extent that even the OIPFG did not know what to do with the high number of recruits. Second

³⁵⁶ Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*, 102–4.

³⁵⁷ Abrahamian, “The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963-1977,” 8.

³⁵⁸ Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 46.

half of the 1970s, however, brought about a number of quantitative and qualitative changes. “[B]y 1976, many of the members no longer believed in guerrilla warfare.”³⁵⁹ In 1977, the OIPFG went through an ideological transformation and rejected the primacy of armed struggle advocated by Pouyan and Ahmedzadeh; instead it adopted Bizhan Jazani’s view on the importance of organizational strength and role, which meant renunciation of Maoism.³⁶⁰ The reasons for the ebbs and flows and waves of diffusions will be explained in the next chapter through the relevant mechanisms that were effective during the episode of guerrilla warfare in Iran.

5.5. Conclusion

As we have seen, anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist, Third Worldist discourse was the main frame or the narrative of the period which shaped the worldview of Turkish and Iranian revolutionaries even though both countries had never been colonized and due to the presence of powerful regimes the influence of imperialism had been limited. The revolutionaries inspired by these dominant discourses tried to appropriate the main arguments and strategies, and adapt them to the conditions of their countries. Therefore, trying to define their targets and objectives, they used the terminology of the anti-colonialist literature rather than targeting directly their undemocratic governments and adopting a reformist agenda. The theories and strategies that they were advocating for were based on the conditions of other geographies; trying to adjust them or picking the best one to apply to their own country seem to have caused more than usual splits among the leftists. This could be one of the main reasons for many of the disagreements and immoderate fractionalism among the leftist groups in this period.

³⁵⁹ Vahabzadeh, 49–51. It is still controversial among both the members of Fadaiyan and the scholars working on the subject whether the majority still supported armed struggle as a method or not by 1976; and due to the clandestine nature of their organization it is impossible to reach a definite conclusion.

³⁶⁰ Alaolmolki, “The New Iranian Left,” 223.

There is no doubt that the global revolutionary *Zeitgeist*, both in discursive and practical realms, convinced the revolutionary activists in Turkey and Iran to the legitimacy and prospective success of the armed struggle. As if to reinforce this conviction of theirs, the internal events and developments too concomitantly contributed to the inevitability of the use of arms either to defend themselves or to break the perception about the invincibility of the regime in Turkey and Iran respectively, which eventually also contributed to their further radicalization. In addition to the domestic political environment which was marked by an overwhelming threat attribution either due to right-wing attacks or SAVAK's clamps down; the internal dynamics of the left in Turkey and Iran were primarily determined by two mechanisms. First was the identity shift representing the transformation of their identification from leftist intellectuals and students to armed revolutionaries; and second was the boundary activation taking place vis-a vis the old left that was represented by the parliamentarian TLP in Turkey and the Tudeh in Iran.

However, the dynamics and mechanisms paving the way for radicalization and persistence of armed groups developed in characteristically different ways in the two countries. The reasons for the differences, however, did not originate in the ideological variations between the armed groups, as it has usually been attributed to both in the leftist and academic literature, but were mostly results of the relational, cognitive and environmental mechanisms that were at play between a number of actors in the political and social arena. The next chapter, takes a deeper look into the workings of the dynamics of relations between various actors and prominent mechanisms influencing the perception and actions of the activists, as well as the other actors.

In the next chapter, the process of radicalization will be teased out through the mechanisms explaining the relationships between the main actors mentioned so far. Some of them have already been introduced, such as de-legitimization, repression, threat attribution and identity shift; they have continued to exert a great deal of influence in the following periods too. Yet, with the escalation of contention in Turkey and existence of an armed guerrilla organization in Iran, some new mechanisms have begun to bear upon the relations, reactions, strategies and other characteristics of these radical leftist organizations; namely competition, emulation,

disillusionment, retaliation, vigilantism, encapsulation. Before beginning to analyze the experiences of women in those organizations, it is vital to determine and understand the working of these mechanisms to be able to compare Turkish and Iranian cases.