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

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4. The Leftist Opposition in Turkey and Iran

This chapter analyzes the political, economic and social structural changes in Turkey and Iran, — a new constitution, rapid industrialization, urbanization, and land reform, rapid development, institutionalization respectively— as well as the opportunities and threats that paved the way for the emergence of a new left-wing opposition. The mobilization networks on which the left-wing activism relied to organize during the 1960s, and also before when it is relevant, will constitute the framework of the chapter. It will be followed by a chapter covering the framing processes through which the activists perceived and made sense of these threats and opportunities, and how they put them into action. Following Tarrow and Tilly²⁰⁷ I conceptualize this period as the ‘new coordination process’ which was comprised of three main mechanisms: *brokerage*, *coordinated action*, and *diffusion* in Turkey; and *repression*, *institutionalization* and *disillusionment* in Iran. In order to explain each mechanism, I identify the political actors who played critical roles for each mechanism, emerging collective identities that created solidarity among the activists, and finally the repertoire of action that they adopted to challenge their regimes.

In parallel to the workings of these mechanisms, I identify the mobilizing structures that helped especially coordination and diffusion of left-wing collective action through student organizations and labor unions in the second half of the 1960s in Turkey, as well as a mighty student organization of Iranian students abroad and small clandestine groups of intellectuals and students in Iran. In the same vein, to explicate their choice of repertoire of actions, I give an account of the evolution of the streams of contention from more conventional methods of contention including strikes, demonstrations, and boycotts, to more disruptive ones such as university occupations and finally to the use of violence.

4.1. Turkey

²⁰⁷ Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*.

While during the 1960s the leftist opposition was composed of four pillars: a vigorous labor party, progressive labor unions, socialist intellectuals and politically active students; the political contention in the 1970s, however, was dominated by a radical and mighty labor union federation (DİSK), five impotent legal leftist parties, and numerous militant leftist organizations and movements, several of which had considerable popular support. The raise of legal parliamentary left ended by the end of the 1960s and was followed by a short period of guerrilla struggle at the beginning of the 1970s. After an inactive period from 1972 to 1974, especially second half of the 1970s witnessed a gradual increase in the political violence in the forms of armed conflict between the extreme right and leftist groups, as well as armed attacks, bombings, bank robberies, gunfights, kidnappings and assassinations. Strikes, demonstrations and protests continued too. The conflicts in the form of street fights between revolutionary left-wing groups and right-wing groups accounted for most of the violence²⁰⁸. Among the dead, students and workers constituted the half, while the security forces 8.4 percent²⁰⁹. The two decades from 1960 to 1980 is a unique period for the leftist movement in Turkey, “considering that prior to 1960 [...] a legal socialist movement actually did not exist, and that after 1980 it was again forbidden to operate within the law”²¹⁰. In the following two chapters, I will explain and analyze the characteristics of the leftist contention in Turkey in this period by using the relevant concepts and approaches of the social movement studies.

a) The Turkish Labor Party: Brokerage and a New Coordination

During the Cold War, the left-wing opposition in Turkey found a fertile ground in the socio-political structuring of the country: The social conservatism, crisis-prone economic liberalism and political authoritarianism of the Democrat Party during the 1950s as well as the RPP’s inability to offer an alternative or viable opposition provided a breeding ground for left-wing

²⁰⁸ In 1969: 9, in 1970: 19, in 1971: 22, in 1972: 22, in 1973: 15, in 1974: 27, in 1975: 37, in 1976: 108, in 1977: 319, in 1978: 1095, in 1979: 1362, and in 1980 before the coup d’état on September 12: 1928 people died in the events of political violence. Most of the deaths took place in major cities such as Istanbul, Adana, Ankara and Gaziantep. Keleş and Ünsal, *Kent ve Siyasal Şiddet (City and Political Violence)*, 35, 36.

²⁰⁹ Keleş and Ünsal, 56.

²¹⁰ Lipovsky, *The Socialist Movement in Turkey 1960-1980*, 2.

opposition of various sorts. The foreign policy of Turkey, which had been transformed after the WWII as a result of the US's increasing interests and influence in the region, also contributed to this process. Turkey became an official US ally and American influence in Turkish politics began to be felt increasingly with economic and military aids received from the US through the Truman Program and the Marshall Plan, Turkey's entry into Korean War and the NATO membership. The emerging opposition was not only discontent with rising inflation or shortage of goods but also increasing American influence and presence in the country, which eventually caused anti-Americanism and anti-imperialism to become one of the main frames of the oppositional thought in the 1960s and 1970s. From the first military intervention in 1960 until the last one in 1980, which crushed down the left ruthlessly, Turkey experienced cycles of left-wing protests spreading and escalating in the course of two decades and representing the most serious challenge to the state authority in Turkey's modern history.

The military coup which took place in 1960 ironically represents a threshold in the history of the left mostly due to the new constitution it brought about. Article 1 of the 1961 Constitution proclaimed the Turkish Republic to be a "social state" in addition to its being a secular and democratic one according to 1924 Constitution. Furthermore, President Cemal Gürsel stated that the article "meant that Turkey was open to socialism".²¹¹ What gave the new constitution its progressive character was actually the fact that it was drafted by the university professors, for the first and last time in Turkey's history. Other than defining Turkey as a social state, the new constitution also guaranteed unprecedented civil liberties and political rights, including freedom of thought, expression, association and publication²¹²; thereby, providing the opposition and protestors with the legal grounds for a political activism. Liberalization of political life after the adoption of the 1961 Constitution, which was the most democratic constitution in Turkish history, provided the socialist groups and the worker's rights activist with an environment in which they could organize and

²¹¹ George S. Harris, "The Left in Turkey," *Problems of Communism* 29, no. 4 (1980), 28.

²¹² Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, 130.

disseminate relatively freely. If the growing number of workers prepared the ground for socialist movements, the legal structure based on the principle of rule of law and democracy facilitated their flourishing. These legal and political openings in the Turkish regime were the first signs of political opportunities assisting the emergence of a left-wing contention. However, we cannot say the same thing about the socio-economic structure of the country which could not be changed overnight. The large land-owners, the urban upper-middle class, ex-DP members and religious functionaries were still holding on to their powers after the politics returned to normal²¹³.

This is exactly why the beginning of the 1960s is a good example of how the perceptions of activists matter as much as, and maybe even more than, the conducive structural conditions in the emergence of social movements as McAdam et al. and other contemporary scholars argued in their theories of contention²¹⁴. Despite the lack of a substantial change in socio-economic structure, the rights and freedoms guaranteed by 1961 Constitution were viewed as an opportunity to initiate a political opposition; and the establishment of the TLP in 1961 could be seen as a proof of the mechanism of attribution of opportunity by the activists.

The process which would best conceptualize the contentious episode in the 1960s in Turkey is new coordination.²¹⁵ According to Tilly and Tarrow (2015), the process of new coordination consists of mainly three mechanisms: brokerage, diffusion and coordinated action; and combination of the three usually leads to an upward scale shift in contentious politics²¹⁶ just like in the events following the establishment of the TLP. The mechanism of coordinated action usually takes place first and refers to a situation in which “two or more actors signal their intentions to each other and engage in parallel making of claims on the same object”²¹⁷. If this mechanism could be followed by the other two mechanisms then we can talk about a new

²¹³ Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*,14.

²¹⁴ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*.

²¹⁵ Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*,35.

²¹⁶ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 333, Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

²¹⁷ Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 34.

coordination. A similar line of developments can be observed during the early years of the 1960s in Turkey. The turning point in the left's critical role in the Turkish politics came with the constitution of a new political actor: the TLP, which was established in March 1961 by a group of union leaders. This coordinated action by the union leaders, who brought Mehmet Ali Aybar, a prominent lawyer, to the Party's presidency in 1962, quickly diffused among the intellectuals, students and workers. Even though there had always been socialist and communist groups in Turkey since the last century of the Ottoman Empire, they had never previously played such a critical role in the history of the country. Aybar's TLP did not constrained itself to be a labor party only and could also become "the party of the people" by including Kurdish tribal figures and wealthy landowners²¹⁸, alongside workers, intellectuals and students into its ranks. The party program of the TLP argued that "economic progress was only possible through a non-capitalist path of development [...] and the Kemalist tenet of populism, with its denial of class differences allowed the growth of a comprador capitalist class, which acted in the interest of international capital, not the Turkish people"²¹⁹. This was a very serious open challenge to one of the founding principles of Kemalist Turkish state paused by a political party. The TLP continued to be the gravitational center of all the leftist of all sorts until 1969 and what brought its demise later on was a combination of factors concerning the internal dynamics of the party as well as in its relations with its constituency and the state.

The TLP has a special place in the history of the Turkish Left for many reasons but mostly for its role as a broker in the popular politics. Brokerage is a mechanism that is defined as "the linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites"²²⁰. The TLP, for the first time in Turkish history was able to connect unionists, intellectuals, and students by facilitating a coordinated action among them; and demonstrated that they could have a leverage in the politics of the country. It was not

²¹⁸ Harris, "The Left in Turkey," 29.

²¹⁹ Brian Mello, "Political Process and the Development of Labor Insurgency in Turkey, 1945–80," *Social Movement Studies* 6, no. 3 (December 1, 2007):220.

²²⁰ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*,26.

only able to bring labor union leaders and left-wing intellectuals together under the Party roof, it could also mobilize students who had hitherto been dormant or isolated from politics through the intellectual clubs (*Fikir Kulüpleri*) and student organizations in the universities. In order to understand the importance of the role the TLP played, we can take a further look at the evolution of labor and student movements in the 1960s in parallel to the TLP's increasing role in the politics.

b) The Labor Movement in Turkey: Diffusion of the Leftist Ideals

Workers had been discouraged to get involved into politics under Atatürk's presidency. Indeed, "the Kemalist fiction of a 'classless, casteless unified society,' showed a paternalistic interest in the problems of labor"²²¹. The 1936 Labor Law had strictly forbidden strikes and it was not until 1947 that the government allowed the right to establish trade unions; it had only been three months since RPP closed down "socialist parties and 'dangerous' union organizations" with a martial law decree issued in December 1946.²²² By 1952, the trade unions were able to establish a federation called *Türk-İş* (Turkish Labor); however, their activities were still restricted and kept under strict surveillance by the DP government during the 1950s. Despite its initial rhetoric supporting workers' rights, the DP, just like RPP before it, suppressed workers' mobilization under its rule²²³.

The 1961 Constitution guaranteed the right of workers to organize, to establish unions and even strike. This open political opportunity was coincided with the new leverage that the workers achieved as a result of rapid industrialization and drastic increase in their numbers in the 1960s. These collectively brought about a more assertive political actor: The Confederation of Revolutionary Labor Unions (*Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu* -

²²¹ Ronnie Margulies and Ergin Yıldızoğlu, "Trade Unions and Turkey's Working Class," *Middle East Report* 121 (1984):16.

²²² Mello, "Political Process and the Development of Labor Insurgency in Turkey, 1945-80," 214.

²²³ Yıldırım Koç, *Workers and Trade Unions in Türkiye* (TURK-İŞ, 1999),37, <http://yildirinkoc.com.tr/usrfile/1325425564b.pdf>.

DİSK), which was to play a key role in the politics of the country until the 1980 coup²²⁴. The workers constituted one of the most important political actors in the 1960s and 1970s through active labor unions and federations, prolonged cycles of protest, strikes and factory occupations. They were mostly concerned about rising prices, low wages, working conditions; however, the two federations they established, Türk-İş and DİSK, were also concerned about more general political and economic problems of the country.

Turkey made its first leap towards the planned economy with the creation of State Planning Organization (SPO) in 1960; it was another product of the 1960 coup and the new constitution. The main aim of the planned economy was a rapid industrialization via import substitution model. With the help of favorable global economic environment, Turkish economy grew by 7 per cent throughout the 1960s; thereby, changed its character and that of society to a great extent by the end of the decade. The most significant change in the economy was the unprecedented growth of the private industrial sector. Its share in the GNP reached that of agriculture which had dominated Turkish economy with a small state-supported industrial sector up until the 1960s²²⁵.

The fast industrialization resulted in great structural changes in society: first through rapid urbanization, and then with the emergence of a working class in such high numbers for the first time in Turkey's history. By 1970, "173,000 workers, 20 percent of the industrial work force, worked in factories employing more than 1,000 workers," and the number of unionized workers had reached one million²²⁶. In short, political, economic and social changes occurring almost simultaneously during the 1960s had a great impact on the development of labor movement and its relations with the state and other actors of the social movement sector.

²²⁴ Ümit Cizre-Sakallıoğlu, "Labour and State in Turkey: 1960–80," *Middle Eastern Studies* 28, no. 4 (October 1, 1992): 712–28, Koç, *Workers and Trade Unions in Türkiye*; Mello, "Political Process and the Development of Labor Insurgency in Turkey, 1945–80."

²²⁵ Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, 133,134.

²²⁶ Margulies and Yıldızoğlu, "Trade Unions and Turkey's Working Class,"16.

During the 1960s, among the demands of Türk-İş were a fair distribution of land, limited foreign investment, and the nationalization of natural resources and foreign trade²²⁷. In the atmosphere of the period, however, these demands and other policies of Türk-İş were found too moderate by more radical members of some trade unions in the Federation. Also, on several occasions Türk-İş failed to meet worker's expectations by prioritizing maintaining good relations with the government²²⁸. A group of trade unions eventually broke away from Türk-İş and established a new federation called DİSK, in February, 1967. DİSK refused Türk-İş's principle of staying out of politics and declared its support for the TLP, which was also established by the leaders of trade unions, and commitment to class struggle by asking for complete redistribution of land and extensive nationalization of more sectors. Until its suspension by the 1980 military regime, DİSK played a very important role in the labor movement as well as in the politics of Turkey; and was revered by the workers and left-wing organizations alike.

In addition to escalated student activism and intellectual radicalism, the competition between the two union federations led to an increased number of strikes and conflicts with the police at the end of the decade²²⁹. Thanks to sustained and well-organized strikes by DİSK, workers became more successful in achieving their objectives. Especially with the economic crisis felt at the gate, political authority wanted to hinder the diffusion and strengthening of the labor movement led by DİSK, so the parliament met to make an amendment in the Unions Law on June 12, 1970, which required a trade union to represent at least one-third of the workers in a specific branch of industry for it to be able to organize at national level. The minister of labor announced that “unions which have become tools of ideological movements [i.e., DİSK-affiliated unions] will automatically be abolished as soon as the law is passed”.

²²⁷ Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*, 92.

²²⁸ Margulies and Yıldızoğlu, “Trade Unions and Turkey's Working Class,” 17.

²²⁹ Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*, 94.

The response of the workers came as a surprise to the government as well as to the leftist organizations: “Hundreds of thousands of workers blocked the Istanbul-Ankara highway. Armed with clubs, they fought pitched battles with police and soldiers on June 15 and 16. Three workers were killed; many other workers and police were injured”²³⁰.

Despite tried hard, the military regime after 1971 coup could not suppress the workers’ mobilization and soon after the unionization, DİSK politicization and strikes picked up from where they left off: 1974 witnessed a record number of workers going on strike; and 1977 a record number of days lost on strikes. The May Day demonstrations turned into a show-off for workers, half a million of whom were gathering in Taksim Square, in Istanbul, every year from 1976 to 1978. What is significant as far as the activism of the workers in this period is concerned is that as opposed to what was argued by the radical leftists who assumed the vanguard of the revolution, the workers, under DİSK leadership, were politically more of an influential actor than any other revolutionary movement or organization during the 1970s. Therefore, the relationship between the radical leftist activists and the workers could not exceed the limits of a romantic attachment and turn into a real cooperative or mutually supportive system, with some minor exceptions. The repercussion of this isolation of the revolutionary activists, i.e. radical leftist organizations, from the revolutionary subject, i.e. workers, will be discussed below in the context of dissociation mechanism.

c) The Students: Boundary Formation and Creation of a Collective Identity

In addition to the rapid industrialization and massive migration to urban areas transforming the socio-economic structure of Turkey, an increase in the number of educated population had a substantial influence on society especially on the youth activism during this period just like in most of the other Third World countries.²³¹ In parallel with the worldwide trends, the number of university students in Turkey increased substantially in the second half of the 20th

²³⁰ Margulies and Yıldızoğlu, “Trade Unions and Turkey’s Working Class,” 17.

²³¹ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 344–72.

century; from 44,461 in 1960 to 73,228 in 1970²³². Of course, these were the ones who could make it to the university; the high school graduates were even more numerous and it was a source of great grievance not being able to enter university among the youth. However, the universities were not without problems either. Crowded classes, inadequate university facilities, populous dormitories were the first causes for discontent among the students²³³. Students had been protesting the poor conditions in the universities during the 1950s too, but only with the 1960s student protests gained a more general character. Gradually, in addition to educational concerns, political and socio-economic issues began to occupy a significant place in student demonstrations, slogans and declarations.

The first step in the formation of the students' mobilization network, thanks to the new rights and freedoms provided by the new 1961 Constitution, was the creation of the political debating societies (*Fikir Kulüpleri* -FK, or 'idea clubs') in the major university campuses. Rather than focusing on solely educational issues, the FK were set up to discuss Turkey's problems and possible solutions in the first half of the 1960s; thereby, contributed to the politicization of the students. The popularity of the left and leftist ideas among university students was illustrated by a study as early as in 1964-5. According to this study, 80% of student leaders and 63.4 % of regular students read leftist dailies, overwhelmingly focusing on news and articles about political issues. Most of these students thought that socialism is a fairer system²³⁴. However, especially in the first half of the 1960s, activist students were overwhelmingly defining themselves as progressive or *Atatürkçü* (followers of Atatürk and his ideals) rather than as socialist; and their fight against reactionaries and obscurantism. Moreover, being called a communist was regarded as an insult and they were insisting that they had nothing to do with communism.²³⁵ It was only by 1965 that the vocabulary of the

²³² Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*, 31.

²³³ Landau, 32.

²³⁴ Landau, 33-35.

²³⁵ Harun Karadeniz, *Olaylı yıllar ve gençlik (The Tumultuous Years and the Youth)* (Istanbul: May Yayınları, 1975), 33-43, 51.

student movement was expanded and their slogans and declarations began to include words like exploitation, fascism and imperialism²³⁶. One campaign seems to have particularly contributed to their transformation and approaching to a more socialist agenda; it was the nationalization of oil campaign which was organized in 1965 by a student organization protesting the high price of oil and higher share of international oil companies²³⁷. Students were accused of being communists or propagating communism in the course of this and other demonstrations and campaigns. The need to respond to these accusations and find solutions to offer for the problems they were concerned about and protesting, as well as the political environment let them to improve their intellectual knowledge and gradually approach to socialism.

The most important development in the politicization of the youth came with the establishment of the Federation of Idea Clubs (*Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonu* - FKF) in 1965. Soon becoming affiliated with the TLP, the FKF attracted a large number of students and played the most important role in the student movement until 1969. It was the FKF organizing most of the student demonstrations that marked the 1968 movement in Turkey, such as the protest against the Sixth Fleet in Istanbul and the burning of American ambassador's car at Middle East Technical University. The events that brought the students to the center of socialist opposition movement had begun with the boycott on June 10, 1968 in Ankara University. It rapidly spread to the other big universities and evolved into an occupation in Istanbul University; the university occupations also spread to the other universities.

During the demonstrations and occupations, students' demands included but were not limited to university reform, criticism of policies of the government and the police. The police were particularly targeted for the repressive policing of protests by the left-wing groups, whereas favoring and turning a blind eye to the right-wing groups' activities. The government was

²³⁶ Karadeniz, 44.

²³⁷ Karadeniz, 68-76.

criticized too on domestic and foreign policy choices; students were also concerned about more global issues such as colonialism and imperialism of the Western powers in general and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Vietnam war in particular. The left-wing political literature popular in the world was translated into Turkish and made available in cheap editions. Increased accessibility of the global leftist and revolutionary literature, relative freedom of left-wing press in the country, and availability of international broadcasting of Radio Moscow, Peking Radio and others from Europe and America led to the diffusion of revolutionary ideas as well as repertoires of action on an unprecedented scale throughout the decade.

By 1970, boycotts and occupations became commonplace in all the major universities in Istanbul and Ankara; they were marked by the conflicts between students and police who were invited by the university presidents. However, the protests and student activism could not be contained in the university campuses; the growing sense of anti-Americanism let students also to attack American personnel and the buildings of American Cultural Center, Pan-American Airlines, and American News Agency²³⁸.

With some exceptions, from mid-1968 until 1969, most student protests were democratic and generally about the university reforms that they were demanding from the university administrations. Most often, negotiations were interrupted and the conflicts were escalated by the police's use of force and violence. However, they could not easily be suppressed by the state's using force and repression for two reasons. First, students in Turkey were following the student protests in Europe and other countries; therefore, they were beginning to see themselves as a political actor. Second, students also noticed their disruptive power and influence in politics during these protest movements and they started to attribute a revolutionary character to themselves. Therefore, rather than dissuading students and, thereby, demobilization of their movement, police violence confirmed their belief in the

²³⁸ Vehbi Ersan, *1970'lerde Türkiye solu (Turkey's Left in the 1970s)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2013), 2-13, 29.

significance of their role in the road to revolution. Gradually, other dynamics too, such as competition among the student leaders and organizations and the attacks of the right-wing militants, began to play a part in escalating and radicalizing students' movement. However, it is important to note that what pushed the protestors into adopting radical strategies and tactics in the first place was mostly the initial repressive policies of the state.

Moreover, macro level developments of the period, such as the diffusion of disruptive performances or protest actions in Europe, guerrilla struggles in Latin America and Vietnam, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist liberation movements in the Middle East were compounded with the writings and calls of contemporary revolutionaries and intellectuals including Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, Fanon, Carlos Marighella, and Regis Debray, and contributed to the legitimization of the use of revolutionary violence against the suppressors of various sorts in the eyes of leftist activists. For example, the Tricontinental conference in Havana in 1966 was significant for many revolutionary organizations all around the world, where Che Guevara called for "two, three, many Vietnams" which became widespread slogan for the 1968 protest movements. Many radical leftist groups in the West too "adopted the premise that the objective conditions for a revolutionary uprising could in many cases only be created by guerrilla tactics, which would engender the necessary revolutionary consciousness"²³⁹. As another very influential figure on the leftist youth in that period, Regis Debray, wrote a book titled *Revolution in Revolution* to describe "[t]he task, role and function of this guerrilla activity" at the request of Fidel Castro. In a way it was announcing the subversion of the Old Left. It was derived from the example of the Cuban revolution and "call[ed] for the establishment of groups of guerrillas ("foci") in Latin America to form the backbone of the armed struggle of an avant-garde"²⁴⁰. Hüseyin İnan, the leader of the People's Liberation Army of Turkey (THKO), the first organization adopting guerrilla struggle, was heavily influenced by Debray's book; as evident in his booklet *Türkiye Devriminin Yolu* (The Path of

²³⁹ Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, "Transformation by Subversion?," *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the US in the 1960s and 1970s* 3 (2010): 161.

²⁴⁰ Gilcher-Holtey, 161.

Turkey's Revolution)²⁴¹ In short, while the state and its repressive methods became the push factors for the activists' transition from using conventional and peaceful means to more disruptive and violent ones in the course of the time, the diffusion of a rich disruptive repertoire of actions and the *Zeitgeist* legitimizing violent means became the pull factors.

The FKF was re-named as Dev-Genç (an abbreviation for *Devrimci Gençlik* or Revolutionary Youth) as a result of the domination of the adherents of the 'national democratic revolution' (NDR) in the 1969 congress of the Federation. From then on, it was all downhill to violence with the help of several mechanisms which were at play in the student movement. Especially three of them played a significant part in the transition of students to become one of the most important political actors of the period; they were social appropriation, boundary activation, and identity shift. Tilly and Tarrow (2015) define social appropriation as a mechanism through which "nonpolitical groups transform into political actors by using their organizational and institutional bases to launch movement campaigns"²⁴². This mechanism defines exactly what was happening during 1968 and 1969 in the major university campuses in Turkey. Students used university buildings and campuses to organize and protest. As a result of recurring boycotts of classes and occupations of university buildings, educational activities in many universities in Ankara and Istanbul halted for several months. It was during these boycotts and occupations that most students were recruited to the movement.

Another mechanism influencing student movement was boundary activation which is described as "creation of a new boundary or the crystallization of an existing one between challenging groups and their targets"²⁴³. What is also called 'us-them division' between the students first occurred in the face of increasing attacks of the right-wing students. The constant fights with the right-wing groups, first in the campuses then in the streets, polarized

²⁴¹ Kürkçü, "Türkiye Sosyalist Hareketine Silahlı Mücadelenin Girişi (The Entry of Armed Struggle to Turkish Socialist Movement)," 498.

²⁴² Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 36.

²⁴³ Tilly and Tarrow, 36.37.

the sides to an unprecedented degree. ‘Anti-fascist struggle’²⁴⁴ and the need to defend against the violent attacks of these far-right militants kept many protesting students occupied and even transformed the character of their movement. This division led the emergence of another mechanism in the transition of student movement to a political actor: identity shift. Defined as the “formation of new identities within challenging groups whose coordinated action brings them together and reveals their commonalities”²⁴⁵, identity shift could be observed clearly in the way the leftist students began to identify themselves as revolutionaries, or even professional revolutionaries by 1970. In addition to the relentless attacks of the *Bozkurtlar*, there were also other factors, as will be detailed below, in the emergence of this new revolutionary identity among the leftist students such as the competition between different groups and disillusionment with the legal and parliamentary ways. All contributed to the creation of a militant identity which was based on the notion of who was the most revolutionary. It was in the way to prove their true identities as revolutionaries that many were to resort to the means previously unthinkable. Acceptance of violence only as a self-defense method first against the right-wingers eased their way to a more substantial change. In short, the identity shift of students as non-political actors to revolutionaries, one of the most contentious political actors, took place in a processual and causal manner in reaction to and as a result of various interactions with other actors.

²⁴⁴ The terms ‘anti-fascist struggle’ and ‘fight against fascism’ were commonly used both by the activists, the parties and the intellectuals of the radical and mainstream left-wing politics in Turkey during the 1960s and 1970s to describe the political and social struggle against the activities and policies of far-right and ultranationalist parties, namely the NAP and paramilitary groups associated with the NAP. The author is naturally aware of the origin, historical and political connotations of the term fascism and acknowledges the differences between the usages. However, both to be able to reflect the authentic discourse of the period and also to follow the example of other scholars using the terms in this very context (For example, see Zürcher 2013, 263, 283) the terms such as fascist and anti-fascism are used to refer to the above-mentioned groups and the struggle against them throughout this study. Also noteworthy is that some scholars prefer to call the very groups and the party as ‘neo-fascist’ instead (See for example: Ahmad 1993, 151; Sayari 1987, 26).

²⁴⁵ Tilly and Tarrow, 37.

4.2. Iran

Opposition to the Shah's modernization is conventionally divided into two camps: Secular and religious, the latter receiving the most attention and credit in the mainstream studies on Iran. I focus on the secular one for two reasons: first, the religious, or clerical, opposition has been studied and analyzed thoroughly from various perspectives and methodologies for its role and following success after the revolution. So, there is a clear teleological²⁴⁶ bias that needs to be balanced in the literature. Second, women in the ranks of secular opposition outnumbered those in the religious camp. Also, for the reasons that I explained above regarding my choice of Iran and Turkey for a comparative study, it is more relevant to limit my focus on the secular opposition and its radicalization in this period.

While the beginning of the 1960s provided the leftists in Turkey with new opportunities, conversely in Iran it brought about the consolidation of regime's repression and naturally an increasing threat attribution by the Iranian leftists. After the uprisings in 1963 was brutally crushed down by the regime, the small groupings of intellectuals and students in different parts of the country began to come to similar conclusions regarding the necessity of armed struggle as detailed below. However, it was not only the shrinking opportunities that led the leftists to this conclusion but also the evolution of the left-wing politics in general in the first half of the 20th century. The emergence, mobilization and repression of the popular movements of various stripes from the post-war era until 1963 had a decisive influence on the form and strategies of the radical leftist groups in the following periods. Therefore, this part is devoted to the history and evolution of the secular left in Iran.

a) **The Legacy of the Tudeh Party and the National Front: Disillusionment**

The history of the Left in Iran can be traced back to the Constitutional Revolution, 1905-1909. The ideals promoted by Democrat Party during the Revolution, such as freedom of press, speech

²⁴⁶ Only recently some studies have begun to challenge this mainstream teleological reading of Iranian history. See, for example: Afshin Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah* (Costa Mesa, Calif: Mazda Publishers, 2002), 3.

and organization, the workers' right to organize and strike, universal male suffrage, and land reform²⁴⁷, were in line with the socialist ideals of the period. The party played an important role in terms of giving the new constitution a progressive and democratic character, however, its influence could not be persistent due to the outbreak of the WWI, which resulted in the occupation of Iran by the British and Russian forces.

The Bolshevik Revolution in international arena and the formation of Reza Shah's modern central state in the domestic arena determined the larger context for the Iranian Left in the 1920s and 1930s. Although the formation of the Communist Party in 1920 and the declaration of Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, in Gilan in 1921 presented a promising outlook at the beginning of the period, Reza Shah's regime proved its might by defeating the revolutionaries in Gilan first and then suppressing all kinds of independent political actors. The left was targeted by the Shah's regime from its beginning. The 1931 law, which banned all forms of collectivist²⁴⁸ ideology, was used to imprison intellectuals, as well as activists, with communist and socialist leanings. "The first political prisoners in Qasr were from the Communist party. [...] Some two hundred communists were arrested in 1929–30 soon after organizing a series of strikes—in an Isfahan textile mill, in the Mazandaran railways, in the Mashed carpet workshops, and, most sensational of all, in the British-owned oil Industry."²⁴⁹

The Reza Shah's autocracy came to an end with the occupation of the country by the British, Russian and American forces during the WWII. Between 1941 and 1953 was the period, for the first and the last time in Iranian history, during which the political opportunity structure was the most favorable for the emergence and mobilization of various social and political movements. First and foremost actor, acting also as a broker, was the Tudeh Party which mobilized various social groups such as workers, intellectuals and youth. Benefitting from the diffusion of popular politics, the second most prominent actor, the National Front coalition in the Parliament under

²⁴⁷ Janet Afary, "Armenian Social Democrats, the Democrat Party of Iran, and Iran-i Naw: A Secret Camaraderie," in *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (Routledge, 2004), 79–96.

²⁴⁸ By collectivist ideology it was actually meant communism.

²⁴⁹ Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*, 28.

the leadership of Mohammad Mosaddeq, was a nationalist popular movement which was actually composed of different groupings. Later, student movements and certain intellectual and ulama figures also joined among the prominent actors of popular politics in the following periods during the Cold War.

The “Fifty-three” intellectuals, who were imprisoned by Reza Shah in 1937 for propagating socialism and communism were released in 1941 right after Reza Shah’s abdication. Some of them, led by Iraj Iskandari, coalesced with intellectuals who were educated in Europe to establish a broad-based political party appealing to “to socialist, patriotic, democratic, and even constitutionalist sentiments”.²⁵⁰ This is how the Tudeh Party (*Hezb-e Tudeh* - Party of the Masses) was established in 1941. Known for its pro-Soviet line, the Tudeh party could grow during the war years in the north with the support of Russia but also in other big cities with textile or oil industry.²⁵¹ In their first party program, they declared: “Our primary aim is to mobilize the workers, peasants, progressive intellectuals, traders, and craftsmen of Iran”.²⁵² Indeed, trade unions began to operate freely with the encouragement of the Tudeh by 1942, and by 1946 became as strong as to achieve legal rights through the new labor law.²⁵³

The Tudeh was one of the most important political actors in the history of Iran in other senses too such as the level of popular support it received from ‘modern urban middle and working classes.’²⁵⁴ Also, it was able to create first mass organization in Iran’s history with hundreds of thousands of sympathizers in labor and craft unions as well as youth and women’s organizations.²⁵⁵ The Tudeh propagated for social rights such as ‘the redistribution of Crown lands, labor law reforms, equal pay and voting rights for women’²⁵⁶ to hitherto an unprecedented degree. It had not started as a communist party but a broad coalition of democratic and

²⁵⁰ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 108.

²⁵¹ Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 106, 107.

²⁵² Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 108.

²⁵³ Moghadam, “One Revolution or Two?”

²⁵⁴ Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*, 42.

²⁵⁵ Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*, 81.

²⁵⁶ Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*, 42.

nationalist oppositional groups; however, by 1944 the militant Marxists dominated the Party.²⁵⁷ The leadership of the party was composed mainly of the new generation of young Iranian intellectuals coming from privileged backgrounds.

The Tudeh party achieved its goals impressively by 1946, by not only securing six parliamentary seats and three cabinet ministries, but also by reaching a membership of 150,000, having branches in all the major towns and finally leading a successful campaign against the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). Thanks to a general strike organized among the workers of the oil industry, the AIOC had to grant most of the modern labor rights from the eight-hour day to better housing and higher wages. Furthermore, the first comprehensive labor law in the Middle East was passed in the Iranian Parliament, *Majles*, thanks to Tudeh's endeavors.²⁵⁸

What divided the nationalists and leftists in the ranks of the Party and served as a setback in its popularity began first when the Tudeh defended the Soviets' demand for an oil concession during the War. Furthermore, the Tudeh also supported the autonomy movements in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. By the end of the War, both issues were resolved by the central regime. Moreover, taking advantage of an assassination attempt on him in 1949, the Shah restored his authority by declaring martial law, outlawing the Tudeh and increasing his royal prerogatives.²⁵⁹

The Tudeh's decline by the end of 1940s paved the way for the emergence of another popular movement: The National Front (NF - *Jebe'eh-e Melli*) under the leadership of Mohammad Mosaddeq. With the end of the war and the occupation of Iran by the Russians and the British, the issue of nationalization of oil began to dominate the political scene thanks to Mosaddegh who introduced a bill forbidding foreign concessions, which passed the Majles in December 1944,²⁶⁰ and advocated for the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Leading the National Front, which was a coalition of socialist, nationalist and other middle-class oppositional

²⁵⁷ Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*, 78.

²⁵⁸ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 110.

²⁵⁹ Abrahamian, 112.

²⁶⁰ Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, 72.

groups, Mosaddegh also aimed to curb the Shah's powers and restrict them to those of a constitutional monarch. Initially he seemed to achieve both of his goals, first with the nationalization of the oil and then by becoming the prime minister; however, with a CIA backed coup d'état in 1953, the Shah could restore his power base and get rid of both Mosaddegh and the National Front once and for all. Yet, the repercussions of the 1953 coup transcended its spatial and temporal limits at least in two ways. First, the legacy of Mosaddegh outlived not only in Iran but also in the Third World countries even beyond the Middle East and influenced new generations of nationalists and revolutionaries. Furthermore, by toppling down a democratically elected prime minister as early as 1953, and instead supporting a dictatorial Shah, the US taught a significant lesson to not only the revolutionaries of the region but also the political leaders about its prospective politics in the region. The anti-American feelings of the 1960s and beyond was not so baseless after all.

The members of the Tudeh Party and the National Front had to go into exile or operate clandestinely under extreme pressure by the regime after the 1953 coup d'état. The notorious intelligence agency of the Shah, SAVAK, brought all sorts of political activity in the country under extreme surveillance. Yet, it was the Tudeh which suffered the most; forty party officials were executed when their safe houses were discovered, and fourteen others were tortured to death, 3000 rank-and-file members were arrested, 200 of them were sentenced to life imprisonment.²⁶¹

Eventually, the 1950s in Iran represented the defeat of the leftist and democratic nationalist oppositional movements, and was marked by the consolidation of the regime's power in the face of opposition. The repressive policies of the Shah's regime and the SAVAK's brutal clamp down on Tudeh members played a significant role in this result. However, Tudeh also lost its popularity among the youth, and therefore its chance to be a reliable opposition in the following periods, due also to its own mistakes — especially for failing to support Mosaddegh during the

²⁶¹ Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, 45.

1953 coup. Its Stalinism and pro-Soviet policies led to demise of its legitimacy in the public perception and especially among the oppositional youth. Despite all, the Tudeh's influence on political culture as well as on the intellectuals of the following periods continued unabated; and it left an enduring legacy to the next generation of revolutionaries, even though it sometimes meant one of disappointment and disillusionment. Therefore, even though Tudeh pioneered the introduction of the concepts and notions that had previously been unheard of in the leftist circles, and the mobilization of various sectors in society; eventually it could not escape to become a disappointment, at least in the eyes of the young generation of activists, for its insistence on legal and parliamentary means in challenging the regime, as well as for propagating a wait-and-see tactics while the national and international context was calling for urgent political action.

In the beginning of the 1960s and during 1970s Tudeh experienced brief comebacks; it also went through several splits in these periods. The first one took place in 1964, some Kurdish intellectuals left the Tudeh and established the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran. The second split came in 1965, related to the Sino-Soviet dispute, several members of the central committee established the Tofan Marxist-Leninist Organization (*Sazman-i Marksist-Leninist-i Tofan*) and accused the Tudeh for unconditionally following the Soviet line and disregarding the Maoist teachings. And finally, in 1966, a group of youth members left the Tudeh with similar accusation made by Tofan group, and founded Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party (*Sazman-i Inqilab-i Hizb-i Tudeh*). Clearly, both the Tofan and the Revolutionary Organization defined themselves as Maoist, the latter also favored armed struggle in rural areas, but had generational differences.²⁶² After a brief period of popularity and even going through further splits, both of these Maoist groups lost their support when China established diplomatic relations with the Shah regime.²⁶³

²⁶² Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 452–54.

²⁶³ M. Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century: A Political History* (Boulder; London: L. Rienner Publishers, 1989), 207.

The National Front too experienced a revival in between 1960-63, with the formation of the Second National Front (NF II) by the coalition of three organizations including the Socialist Society of Khalil Maleki, who was the founder of the Third Force (*Niru-ye sevvom*) in the 1948. The NF II was very active among the students, teacher's union activists and intellectuals. It demanded free elections and reforms, opposed unconstitutional Amini government, and the Shah's dictatorial imposition of the reform program.²⁶⁴ However, the regime's June 1963 crackdown on protestors eliminated the NF II and marked a critical turn in the perception of the leftist opposition. As a result, majority in the left concluded that the possibility for a nonviolent political transformation under the current regime was nonexistent. Yet, it was not only the repressive policies of the regime that led the leftists to this conclusion. The disillusionment with the policies and position of liberal National Front and the Tudeh also contributed to their radicalization. In addition to Tudeh's unflinching pro-Soviet line of politics, the National Front too disappointed the leftists at critical times in their struggle against the regime. For example, they prevented students from holding demonstrations in September 1963 after the National Front leaders were released from prison. This came after the National Front expelled ninety leftist students from its youth organization.²⁶⁵ Disillusioned with the conventional oppositional political movements, the Iranian leftists, like their counterparts in many other countries, saw no other way out than resorting to unconventional means.

By the end of the 1960s, the level of political repression in Iran reached a level that left no room for moderate popular politics. The Shah came out triumphant in his battle with the moderate opposition. On the one hand, he co-opted their cause by adopting and materializing, for instance, the social reforms the opposition had been asking for; and on the other hand, he went too far with the authoritarian policies rendering any sorts of moderate reform demands futile and meaningless.²⁶⁶ The two decades before the Revolution in Iran,

²⁶⁴ Maziar Behrooz, "The Iranian Revolution and the Legacy of the Guerrilla Movement," in *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left*, ed. Stephanie Cronin, 2004, 192.

²⁶⁵ Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, 170.

²⁶⁶ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in the Twentieth-Century Iran*, 1997, 169.

therefore, witnessed the emergence and rise of urban guerrilla struggle as the only opposition viable in the face of ever increasing pressure coming from the Shah regime as well as the economic and social hardship people were suffering from due to the rapid but uneven transformation.

Mainly two types of radical opposition emerged in this period: the first one consisted large and small secular Marxist-Leninist guerrilla groups and the second Islamic Marxist guerrilla groups. In each set of groups one organization stood out as the most prominent: Fadaiyan-e Khalq and Mujahedin-e Khalq²⁶⁷ respectively. Coming from the tradition of Tudeh and Marxist wing of National Front, Fadaiyan represented Iranian wing of the global turn to the guerrilla warfare among not only the Third World revolutionaries but also radicalized student movements in the West, or the new left as it is conventionally called. Therefore, my focus will be particularly on this organization in the following chapters.

b) The Labor Movement in Iran: A Story of Institutionalization

Working class in Iran grew with a steady pace from the beginning of the 20th century, when the majority, around 90 per cent, of the labor force was in agriculture. By the end of the 1970s, this figure dropped to 33 percent and the number of workers employed outside of the agriculture sector increased to 6.8 million.²⁶⁸ Despite the numerical strength the working class could achieve since the 1940s, it was not allowed to play an independent political role under the Pahlavi regime from its establishment on with the exception of short intervals. All labor activism was put an end with the abolition of all trade unions in 1928. As mentioned before, during the 1941-53 period, the labor union activism was at its best under Tudeh Party's leadership, with widespread strikes, one of the most important being a three-day strike in July 1946 over pay and working conditions.²⁶⁹ What must be mentioned about the worker's activism in that period was the role they played during the nationalization of oil.

²⁶⁷ For a detailed analysis of the organization of Mojahedin-e Khalq see Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (Yale University Press, 1992).

²⁶⁸ Halliday, *Iran, Dictatorship and Development*, 173.

²⁶⁹ Halliday, 200.

Particularly oil workers, the largest category of industrial workers in Iran, spearheaded the campaign for the nationalization of oil from 1946 on with their demands from the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company which were not limited to the workers' rights but extended to the political concessions. For example, in addition to paid holidays, the striking workers demanded the AIOC not to interfere "in Iranian political affairs and cease instigating Arab tribes against union workers".²⁷⁰ In another wave of strikes, oil workers in Abadan, where the vast majority of oil workers were located, struck against British ownership of Iranian oil and British influence in Iran. When the army was ordered to put down the strikers, the clashes erupted between the army and the workers during which nine workers were killed and sixty injured. More clashes followed suit in 1951 in which the army killed thirty more workers and put hundreds in prison.²⁷¹ Despite the pressure and casualties, the workers continued to support Mosaddeq, after the nationalization of oil as well, in his struggle against the Shah. During the anti-monarchy demonstrations, after Mosaddeq's resignation, around 800 workers were injured or killed.²⁷² Of course twelve year of activism and relative success came to an end with the 1953 coup, which crushed all the trade unions. The yellow unions quickly took over the Confederation of Trade Union. Eventually, highly centralized, anti-democratic and autocratic nature of the second Pahlavi regime rendered the rise of autonomous class organizations impossible²⁷³.

The 1959 Labor Law was designed to control labor activism through state-run unions; then the White Revolution brought profit sharing system²⁷⁴ for workers; and finally, SAVAK closely monitored and governed the union structure with its officials located in critical factories. Through these unions, workers were not only provided with the welfare rights such as insurance, housing, pensions, etc.; could they also be mobilized to create legitimacy to the

²⁷⁰ Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, 132.

²⁷¹ Parsa, 134.

²⁷² Parsa, 135.

²⁷³ Moghadam, "One Revolution or Two?"

²⁷⁴ Halliday, *Iran, Dictatorship and Development*, 193–97.

regime — with pro-Shah demonstrations both during the turmoil in the early 1960s and in 1978— as well as increase productivity.²⁷⁵ As a consequence, with the exception of the teachers' strike in May 1961, the workers did not participate the uprising of 1963 and stayed mostly docile during the whole period until 1978. In addition to the promise of profit sharing and benefits, the workers and white-collar employees had nothing against the other reforms that the White Revolution brought about such as women's rights and land reform; on the contrary, they had already been demanded by the political movements that they were historically associated with: the Tudeh and the National Front.²⁷⁶

After 1973, with the oil price rise and rising inflation, the number of independent strikes increased once again; however, the regimes policy was always one of two scenarios: either their demands were immediately met and they went back to work; or the strikers were put down with extreme police force killing and wounding many if necessary.²⁷⁷ In 1974, a law was passed to punish "industrial saboteurs" and create the Office of Security Affairs to monitor all activities in major industries. "Under the law, industrial saboteurs could be sentenced to fifteen years in prison or even be put to death.²⁷⁸ In short, the regimes ability to satisfy the workers' economic needs, as well as its willingness to use violent repression in the case of resisting strikes, allowed it to keep workers under control up until 1978.

c) The Students at Home and Abroad: No Other Way Out

The repressive political environment did not try suppress only the workers but also the other groups who conventionally spearheaded opposition in Iran: intellectuals and students. While the intellectuals usually played a significant role in the establishment and mobilization of the oppositional political movements such as Tudeh Party and the National Front; the students presented the most prominent opposition to the regime by not only participating into the oppositional organizations but also organizing their own demonstrations and protests during

²⁷⁵ Halliday, 199, 200.

²⁷⁶ Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, 141.

²⁷⁷ Halliday, *Iran, Dictatorship and Development*, 207.

²⁷⁸ Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions*, p, 167.

the most critical stages of the period from 1953 until 1978. For example, during students' the protests of the US Vice president Richard Nixon's visit to Iran at Tehran University campus security forces opened fire and killed three students, wounded many and arrested hundreds in December 1953.²⁷⁹ Since then up to present, 7 December is celebrated as the Student Day in Iran. Similar violent clashes also took place during the period between 1960-1963, letting the police and SAVAK put the university campuses under extreme surveillance. Since then, the Shah tried to maintain order in universities by forbidding political activities on campus and through the presence of campus guard and office of "Student Affairs" with alleged links to SAVAK²⁸⁰.

A strong culture of dissent dominated by the leftists of all spectrums: secular, Islamist, pro-Soviet communist, pro-China Maoist, Third-Continentalist, nationalist, etc., flourished during the 1960s and 1970s due to socio-political transformations in the country. Just like in many other countries in the global south in this period, industrialization, migration to the cities, the rapid urbanization and the increase in the number of university students were the most significant social structural changes experienced in Iran from the 1950s to the 1970s which caused similar repercussions. In two decades, urban population rose from 31 percent to 47 percent of the total population (from 6 to 16 million). Overcrowded cities, such as Tehran, Shiraz, and Tabriz hosted the most of the university students as well. The expansion of higher education gave an unprecedented chance to the students from lower classes to mobilize. The number of students in higher education rose from 22,882 in 1961 to 160,000 in 1978, more than half of it being in Iran.²⁸¹ University and dormitory environment provided the foundational network for mobilization among students. The university students constituted the largest social base of the opposition and the two decades before the revolution

²⁷⁹ Manijeh Nasrabadi and Afshin Matin-asgari, "The Iranian Student Movement and the Making of Global 1968," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties* (Routledge Handbooks Online, 2018), 444.

²⁸⁰ Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions*, 101.

²⁸¹ Parsa, 100.

witnessed the outbreak of several militant protests by the university students despite being brutally and systematically suppressed each time.

The most prominent student organization was the Organization of Tehran University Students (OTUS), which was formed in 1960 and had 10,000 members. In the early 1960s, the OTUS regularly organized sit-ins and demonstrations inspiring others to follow suit and initiating a wave of strikes which brought down the prime minister in 1961. The OTUS was also very active during the referendum for the Shah's reforms, known as the White Revolution in 1963; and the students' reaction was embodied in their slogan: "Reforms Yes, Dictatorship No!".²⁸² Yet, like others, their activities inside the country were put an end by June 1963.

What was unique in Iran's case was that the number of university students studying abroad, especially in the US and Europe, which numbered as many as those in the country. Also because Iran had begun sending students abroad early in the 20th century, the leadership cadres of the most important political movements, such as the Tudeh and the National Front, came from those European-educated intelligentsia.²⁸³ The influence of the Iranian students abroad, however, was greater than just providing the intelligentsia and political movements with cadres. Especially the CISNU (Confederation of Iranian Students - National Union), which was formed in 1962 by the unification of the Iranian student organizations in Europe and the US with the support of OTUS, had a tremendous influence in the formation and activities of domestic opposition to the Shah's regime. As an umbrella organization uniting mostly leftist but also Islamist and nationalist dissident groups, the CISNU acted not only as the proxy of Iranian opposition at the international arena but also as the headquarters of the opposition which could not operate under the close surveillance of SAVAK.

²⁸² Nasrabadi and Matin-asgari, "The Iranian Student Movement and the Making of Global 1968," 445.

²⁸³ Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*, 10.

What also made the CISNU an important actor in the domestic politics was that it was following the events in Iran closely and reacting immediately. All the discussions related to the ideological and strategical transformation of the opposition in Iran were also taking place among the ranks of the Confederation with direct repercussions for organizations inside the country. Just like FKF in Turkey but located abroad; the CISNU went through similar transformations and splits and reached the same conclusion with regard to the necessity of the armed struggle. For example, in its Third Congress in December 1963, it was declared regarding the June 1963 events that “the shah speaks the language of bullets, one must speak to him in his own language.”²⁸⁴ Under the influence of the rising Maoist ideas, the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party joined the CISNU’s leadership in 1966. With the increasing appeal of Chinese and Cuban revolutions, and the successes of armed struggles in countries like Algeria inspired the Tudeh dissents and NF leftists in the CISNU, and it began to advocate for armed struggle in Iran.²⁸⁵

When the CISNU became convinced by 1967 that the only way to defeat the Shah’s dictatorship was through armed struggle, it had to have serious implications on the domestic politics. We will analyze how the guerrilla organizations inside the country were formed and began to operate in the following parts; yet now, we can briefly mention the developments contributing to the CISNU’s reaching this conclusion for they had the same impact on those organizations. First of all, the internal repressive environment in the post-1963 era and a revolutionary sprit in the international arena were clearly the initial triggers. Beside these, there were also other factors such as the disappointment with the popular nationalism and legal politics to bring about any change. Also, with both the US and the Soviet Union coming to terms with the Shah’s regime, they felt isolated and left out. Moreover, the Tudeh and the National front both proved that they did not have much to offer in the post-1963 period; the

²⁸⁴ Matin-Asgari, 72.

²⁸⁵ Matin-Asgari, 78–81.

High Council of the NF the ‘policy of patience and waiting’²⁸⁶ while the Tudeh was discredited for its pro-Soviet line especially given the fact that the Soviets and the Shah were on good terms.

On 7 December 1961, 15,000 students participated to demonstrations at Tehran University; then similar protests spread to the universities of Abadan, Ahvaz, Esfahan, Mashhad, Shiraz, and Tabriz. University students’ demonstration continued until the police and paramilitary groups entered Tehran University to intervene on 21 January 1962. However, the intervention was so violent that it left hundreds of students injured and 200 hospitalized.²⁸⁷ Some parts from the resignation letter of the president of Tehran University in the aftermath of the intervention gives a clue about the atrocities that the security forces committed:

Mr. Prime Minister,

Pursuant to our conversation at 11:00 a.m., soldiers and paratroopers occupied Tehran University. There was no reason or excuse for the violation of rights and regulations of the university.

After entering (the campus), soldiers and paratroopers indiscriminately attacked boys and girls ... many of who were beaten to the point of death.

I have never seen or heard of so much cruelty, sadism, atrocity, and vandalism on the part of government forces. The soldiers criminally attacked some of the girls in their classrooms.

Inspecting the university, it seemed as if an army of barbarians had invaded an enemy territory.

Books were torn, shelves were broken, typewriters smashed, laboratory equipment stolen or destroyed; desks, chairs, doors, windows, and walls were vandalized by the troops fighting unarmed students, while their commanding officer just stood by.²⁸⁸

Tehran University students were among the main participants of the 1963 uprising and also those that were crushed by the regime. The importance of the 1963 events for the students was that it was the final blow for the open and peaceful social mobilization and the student activism was driven underground taking a more revolutionary and violent form. From then on, oppositional students, in different parts of the country began to gather in small groups to read the revolutionary literature and discuss the case of Iran and their options under the current circumstances. It was these small groups leading to the establishment of guerrilla

²⁸⁶ Matin-Asgari, 69.

²⁸⁷ Matin-Asgari, 55, 56.

²⁸⁸ Matin-Asgari, 56.

organizations by the end of the 1960s. As an implication of this transition, the commentary published in the newspaper of the OTUS on the occasion of the assassination of Prime Minister Mansur in January 1965 can serve a good example:

The ruling clique must know that since all the classes and groups in Iranian society are mercilessly repressed, it should expect events such as Mansour's assassination. This results from the actions of those who have closed every path to the Iranian people, while making every effort to conceal this fact. However, the people do not forget that the ruling clique itself began the terror against the nation.²⁸⁹

After being brutally repressed in 1963 and being quiet for some time, another wave of student protest could not revive until 1967-68; but when it finally did it spread to all the campuses in big cities: Tehran, Tabriz, Shiraz, Isfahan, and Mashhad. By that time, most of the groups inside and outside of the country had reached the conclusion that the only available form of opposition in the face of unrelenting repression of the regime is armed struggle. Yet the most militant forms of demonstrations could only begin in 1970 with the students' protesting government's raising of the public transportation fares. After the beginning of guerrilla operations in 1971, the student protests gained a new momentum and diffused at every opportunity. Thus, it is fair to say that, until 1977, it was the student movement in Iran and abroad, which represented the main source of opposition and posed the principle challenge to the Shah's regime especially by providing the most fertile ground for recruitment to the guerrilla organizations.

Students support for the guerrilla organizations was well known to the government of the Shah too. The Iranian Student Association in the US (ISA-US), with more than 5000 registered members supported Fadaïyan both ideologically and financially.²⁹⁰ As early as 1971, the Shah had to announce an unscheduled vacation in Tehran's universities in fear of a student insurgency in support of the Fadaïyan's fight taking place in Siahkal to no avail.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ Matin-Asgari, 77.

²⁹⁰ Val Moghadam, "Socialism or Anti-Imperialism? The Left and Revolution in Iran," *New Left Review* 166 (1987): 10 [n. 10]. Financial assistance coming from the CISNU and ISA-US was confirmed by several of my interviewees.

²⁹¹ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 448.

Moreover, in 1976, in the face of intense student demonstrations for the Fadaiyan martyrs, the Shah even ordered the closure of two major universities of Tehran, only to take it back fearing an even bigger backlash.²⁹²

4.3. Conclusion

By the 1960s, the gap between the Turkish and Iranian regimes widened and the differences became more apparent especially in terms of the political opportunity structures, which came to be formed quite differently for the leftist politics, labor and student movements. While the 1960s began in Turkey with the adoption of a new democratic Constitution and the foundation of a dynamic labor party; in Iran, all attempts to challenge the undemocratic tendencies were quickly and brutally repressed by the Shah once and for all in 1963. During these episodes of collective action, the dominant mechanisms that were at play in Turkey were brokerage, diffusion and coordination; whereas in Iran those shaping the landscape of collective politics were repression, institutionalization and disillusionment.

The political opportunities provided by the 1960 constitution in Turkey were well seized by the TLP; and then, the leftist ideas and discourse quickly diffused to the other social movement sectors, namely students and workers, under the leadership of a student organization and a confederation of unions respectively. Despite the legal obstructionism of the right-wing governments, excessive use of police force, violent attacks of the right-wing groups and a coup d'état by the military both the student and workers movements persevered throughout the 1970s and continued to pose the biggest challenge to the regime in Turkey. Yet the character and the form of this challenge could turn violent in the cases of a number of groups and organizations in these movements. The next chapter analyzes the developments, causal dynamics and ideological thinking paving the way for this transition from peaceful conventional repertoires of collective action to unconventional violent ones.

²⁹² Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions*, 100.

Meanwhile, the leftist activism in Iran had started and experienced its peak well before Turkey during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Under Tudeh's leadership, the country experienced a lively labor activism around the nationalization of oil campaign influencing its foreign and domestic policy. After all the leftist and democratic nationalist movements were put an end by the 1953 coup, the Shah regime started to consolidate its power in every sector of the society. Neither the leftist nor the democratic nationalist parties could gather their strength fully afterwards, while the labor movement was institutionalized by all the peaceful and violent means possible. The students too were held under close surveillance by SAVAK's presence on the university campuses; as well as the violent interferences of the army whenever they found an opportunity to protest. The only collective network that could operate and pose a challenge to ever increasing authoritarian policies of the Shah could be founded abroad by the Iranian students in Europe and the US. Deprived of any alternative means to operate inside the country and influence domestic politics, CISNU began to propagate for armed resistance to the dictatorial regime as early as the beginning of the 1960s. Even by sending members to the country to initiate an armed struggle, the ideas, help, and support of CISNU played a significant role in the initiation and persistence of the guerrilla movement in Iran. Even though many small and scattered groups with leftist revolutionary ideas began to be formed and strategize clandestinely in the second half of the 1960s, only the Iranian People's Fada'i Guerrillas could emerge and persist into the 1970s as we will see in the following chapters.