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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

Cakir Kilincoglu, S.

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Author: Cakir-Kilincoglu, S.

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6. The Dynamics of Radical Leftist Contention in Turkey and Iran

[W]hy did the movement of this new social group of students, [...] opt for a radicalism of the Left?³⁶¹

In this chapter, I move on to take a closer look at the 1970s and conceptualize the period as the radicalization and persistence of the armed struggle as an outcome of both the contention during the 1960s and the causal mechanisms influencing the process during the 1970s. An outcome in the context of social movements is described by Tilly and Tarrow (2015) as “changes in conditions at or across the sites that are plausibly related to the contention under study, including transformations of political actors or relations among them”³⁶². Following its emergence, growth and diffusion, the outcome by the end of 1960s was an escalation, or better put, radicalization of left-wing contention in Turkey and Iran, rather than a demobilization through possible means conventionally used by states such as institutionalization, co-optation, selective or indiscriminate repression to end contentious mobilization. During the 1970s, the armed contention either diffused among the students or at least sustained in the face of police repression or right-wing attacks. This period of the leftist contention in Turkey was characterized mainly by two developments: the clashes with the right-wing radical groups and an acute form of competition between the radical leftist organizations in Turkey; whereas, in Iran the armed struggle ironically both diffused and dissociated further from the masses due to extreme repression of the SAVAK.

The first wave of guerrilla warfare in Turkey, which emerged right after the adoption of armed struggle by the three major organizations, lasted only five months from the end of 1970 until May 1971 and the operations were limited to couple of bank robberies, kidnapping of a businessman, four American military personnel and British technicians, kidnapping and killing of the Israeli Ambassador and shootouts with the police. The military regime after the March 12 coup, chose to annihilate the activists completely by killing the leadership cadres though

³⁶¹ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 299.

³⁶² Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 318.

executions, in tortures, or during the skirmishes. This brutal repression of the first attempts not only contributed to the creation of a legend around these 'revolutionary martyrs' and their heroic sacrifices, but also inspired and encouraged many more young people to self-recruit to the ranks of radical leftist organizations as the testimonies of the activists of the period prove. The rank and file activists, or simply people who participated only in a couple of demonstrations were arrested and held in prison for years until the 1974 amnesty. The time served in prison has been commonly referred as 'educational' by the activists and for many just itself the cause for radicalization for the reasons from ill-treatment by the prison administration to political environment and its polarizing effects among the inmates.

Eventually, after they were released in 1974, as a result of the amnesty granted by the RPP government, the leftist revolutionaries were more divided and ideologically radicalized than ever. The period from 1974 until 1980 have seen more than 50 leftist organizations, a more active labor movement, further diffusion of popular movement and also the escalation in political violence, especially between the fascist and leftist groups. Most of the leftist organizations formed clandestine branches to undertake underground activities including the CPT which became very active in the second half of the 1970s. Almost all the groups claimed to be anti-imperialist and anti-fascist while the splits were mostly based on different interpretations of the works and actions of the previous generation of revolutionaries. Finally, the political violence, which initially targeted the regime in the form of armed struggle or propaganda in the first years of the 1970s, began mainly to be used in the anti-fascist struggle against the radical right which had become a real threat by the second half of the decade, as well as in the conflicts among the different left-wing groups.

During what is commonly referred as the period of guerrilla struggle, from 1971 to 1978, as reported by Abrahamian, SAVAK killed 341 members of guerrilla organizations; 177 of them died in gun battles, 91 were executed, 42 were tortured to death, 15 'disappeared', 7 committed

suicide, and 9 were shot ‘trying to escape’.³⁶³ Among the dead, 172 was from the OIIPFG; majority was from upper and middle classes; and 22 of the dead Fadai guerrillas were women.³⁶⁴ A large number of small and big organizations from various ideological and political convictions were established before and during this period; they adopted or advocated armed struggle against the Pahlavi regime.

In short, to be able to make a systematic analysis of this period, I focus on four main areas of interaction between the radical leftist organizations and other political actors; and identify the mechanisms and sub-mechanisms playing a significant role in these areas by following the outline that Alimi et al.³⁶⁵ propose in their comparative study of various radical armed organizations. For that purpose, I pay an extra attention to the radical leftist organizations’ relations to the state and its security forces, fellow organizations, counter-movement organizations, and its constituency. In order to analyze and explain the implications of these relationships, I employ mechanisms and sub-mechanisms causing and contributing to the radicalization processes. To be more specific, in four arenas emerged one main and a couple of sub-mechanisms facilitating the radicalization of left-wing organizations: 1) amongst SMOs; 2) between the state, its security forces, and protestors, 3) between counter-movements organizations and SMOs; 4) between social movement and its constituency.³⁶⁶

The reason for breaking the left-wing contention into arenas of analysis is three-fold: First, this way interactive and dynamic relationship between two or more political actors could be better analyzed. Second, the mechanisms do not work chronologically but simultaneously, continuously or intermittently. Therefore, without losing touch with initial conditions and general context, focusing on each arena of interaction individually let us examine the causal relational mechanisms that are most effective in the process of radicalization. Third, this method

³⁶³ Abrahamian, “The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963-1977,” 3.

³⁶⁴ Abrahamian, 4,5.

³⁶⁵ Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*.

³⁶⁶ See Della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* for a detailed analysis of each mechanism in the radicalization process.

enables us to compare and analyze the similarities and dissimilarities between the leftist contention in Turkey and Iran. The repercussions of these similarities and differences in the process of radicalizations in these two countries, particularly on the recruitment and experiences of women in these radical left groups will be the topic of following chapters.

6.1. Repression: Escalating Policing & SAVAK

Repression by the state is seen as an important factor in the radicalization of oppositional movements by many scholars.³⁶⁷ The state repression has long been proved to be detrimental to social movement mobilization as SMS literature has demonstrated in various cases, but it also triggers the move towards more violent means of protests among some activists.

Policing strategies of protests also plays an important role in the evolution and strategies of SMOs. The characteristics of the policing depend on the qualities of the police force, such as “their military versus civil organizational structures, the police culture, the type of training, and the degree of professionalization and specialization”³⁶⁸. Policing style has a great influence on the direction that movements take and the repertoires of action they adopt. While an indiscriminate use of violence by the police creates a sense of solidarity among the non-violent protesters with the violent ones; police’s unfair treatment of protesters —tolerating counter-movement organizations but repressing SMOs—, definitely causes delegitimization of the police in the eyes of SMOs and further radicalization. The image of unfair state from the perspective of the protestors is created by the police’s use of excessive force and violence, or taking sides among the protestors;³⁶⁹ with the escalation of conflicts, this image transforms and turns into that of an illegitimate entity or even an enemy for the protestors. This, in turn, legitimizes for at least some activists the use of violence against the state.

³⁶⁷ Davenport, Johnston, and Mueller, *Repression and Mobilization*; Della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence*; Sommer, “Revolutionary Groups after 1968”; Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*.

³⁶⁸ Donatella Della Porta, “Research on Social Movements and Political Violence,” *Qualitative Sociology* 31, no. 3 (July 15, 2008): 224.

³⁶⁹ Della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence*, 284.

Even though it is beyond the limits of this study, there is a clear need for studies on the characteristics of the policing and their repercussions during the contentious episode of the 1960s and 1970s in Turkey.³⁷⁰ Nevertheless, it is still possible to observe and analyze the methods of repression and how they were perceived by the activists, which makes a big difference in the ways in which they react to repression. As already mentioned, the use of force by the police against the left-wing protestors had been perceived as being unjust, disproportionate, and indiscriminate. We can give some specific examples and analyze their repercussions. In this direction Alimi et al. (2015) point out a main mechanism, outbidding, defining the characteristics of the relations between the security forces and protestors and three sub-mechanisms constituting its dynamics as follows: repression by proxy, delegitimization, and provocation.

The outbidding mechanism begins to play a substantial role when movement activists start to perceive the present repertoires of action are not effective and a need for different and possibly extreme forms of contention are necessary to achieve their goals. As mentioned above amongst Turkish leftist activists, by the end of the 1960s, the majority had become convinced that the older means of contention, including non-violent demonstrations, legal trade-unionism and parliamentary politics, proved ineffective in the face of the political regimes they were dealing with. Confronted with increasing repression by security forces, many among them were drawn to more aggressive and radical strategies and tactics which resulted in violent actions on the ground. This in turn led to counter-actions by security forces equally or usually more violent in form thereby paving the way for “an interactive spiral of violent moves and countermoves”³⁷¹.

In addition to the police repression, the role of counter-movements, in the form of right-wing militants, is crucial in the radicalization process of left-wing organizations, especially when they are believed to be in complicity with the police forces, just like in the case of Turkey’s left-wing

³⁷⁰ For one of the very few studies on the police subculture in Turkey see Biriz Berksoy, “Devlet Stratejilerinin Bir Tezahürü Olarak Polis Alt-Kültürü: 1960 Sonrası Türkiye’de Polis Teşkilatında Hakim Olan Söylemlere Dair Bir Değerlendirme (Police Sub-Culture As a Representation of State Strategies: An Evaluation of the Mainstream Discourses in the Police Force in Turkey after the 1960s),” *Toplum ve Bilim* 114 (2009): 98–130.

³⁷¹ Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 73.

contention. The conflict with the right-wing militants, especially when it takes place on a daily bases, caused other problems too, such as object shift, but it is another mechanism which will be analyzed below. In terms of their role in the outbidding mechanism, however, it can be said that right-wing organizations justified left-wing activists' taking up arms to defend themselves in the face of their ever-increasing assaults, to which security forces were turning a blind eye. It is called *repression by proxy* and it is a relational sub-mechanism that is defined "as informal outsourcing by the state actors to non-state actors of law-and-order activities". Thereby, some groups in security forces could employ right-wing militants as their foot soldiers in undertaking "dirty repressive measures as an instrument of "counter-mobilization"" against growing Left-wing activism.³⁷² For example, paramilitary units were regularly used by the Shah's regime to manipulate, agitate and directly attack the protesting students in the 1960s. For example, on 24 January 1963, paramilitary units who were dressed as "workers and peasants" attacked the students; and as a result, "hundreds of students and professors [...] were arrested".³⁷³

The examples of Italy and Turkey are very similar in this sense. The left-wing organizations and communism were considered a threat to the security of these countries, whereas the same was not the case for the Right-wing organizations and their ideologies. Instead, they were seen as allies by the Italian and Turkish states. For the case of Italy, the Right-wing militants "benefitted from the complicity of the parts of the Italian establishment as well as the United States, the CIA, and NATO, in terms of resources. ... [F]ear, disinformation, psychological warfare, agent provocateurs, attempted coup d'états, and false flag political violent actions that were then blamed on the Left" were used to manipulate the public opinion, polarize the conflicting sides and suppress the Left³⁷⁴. In Turkey, the use of the 'contra-guerrilla', which was established in 1959 with the help of America against a communist takeover, by the state to suppress the left has

³⁷² Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, .75,76.

³⁷³ Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*, 66.

³⁷⁴ Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 77.

immensely contributed to its radicalization. The members of contra-guerrilla were selected among the right-wingers, and armed and paid by the army³⁷⁵.

The complicity between the Right-wing organizations and the police forces in turn intensified the deep sense of mistrust among the Left-wing activists towards the state and eventually amounted to the de-legitimization of the state in their eyes. As a cognitive sub-mechanism, delegitimization is “defined as a decrease in positive and popularly resonating representations of actors and their actions”³⁷⁶ and was the result of illegitimate conducts of the state and its security apparatus. Consequently, in the view of Left-wing actors, any means to defend and fight against a delegitimized state had been justified, which in turn speeded up their radicalization.

What contributed delegitimization of the state in the eyes of leftist activists was not only the police complicity with the fascist paramilitary groups but also the excessive use of violence against the university students which reached a new high in January 1971 when the JP government permitted the security forces to enter into the university campuses and conduct extensive operations. During these operations in most of the major university campuses, the universities were closed, dormitories were raided and the students were beaten. The bloodiest of all was the operation that took place in March 5, 1971, in the Middle East Technical University’s student dormitories which were surrounded by the gendarmerie and the police. They opened fire against the dormitories leaving the buildings tormented with bullet holes. 3 students were killed in the operation, 15000 were arrested and only 5 rifles could be found³⁷⁷.

Furthermore, the second military intervention, which took place on March 12, 1971, and its exclusive repression of the left-wing activists eroded what was left of the thrust that the revolutionary activist had for the regime and its actors, including the army; thereby, further contributing to the delegitimization process. The coup was allegedly staged to stop the violence that had taken various forms from armed bank robberies, bloody clashes between the police and

³⁷⁵ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 259.

³⁷⁶ Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 77.

³⁷⁷ Ersan, *1970’lerde Türkiye solu (Turkey’s Left in the 1970s)*, 32.

university students or workers, bombing of public buildings, kidnappings of 5 American servicemen, etc. The army accused also the government of not being able to cope with the violence. However, it too had to extend the state of emergency several times which had started a year before the coup. Ephraim Elrom, the Israeli Consul-General in Istanbul, was kidnapped by the Turkish People's Liberation Front in May after the military intervention. The hunt for and execution of armed extremists continued at least for a year under the military rule and according to an official White Paper distributed by the authorities in April 1972, 687 people were sentenced by military courts³⁷⁸.

Contrary to the expectations of many leftists, the military coup in 1971 has contributed to delegitimization of the state, as well as the army, in the eyes of revolutionaries by its various implementations including the systematic torture of the leftists, the execution of revolutionary leaders, the amendment of the 44 articles of the 1961 constitution to make it less liberal — with the support of right wing parties in the parliament, and the establishment of 'state security courts' (*Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemesi*), which tried more than 3000 people until 1976³⁷⁹. "Thousands of people, principally suspected leftists, were detained, arrested, tortured, tried and jailed. These included prominent writers, journalists, trade unionists, party leaders and officers. The TİP was disbanded by court order, and its leader, Behice Boran, was arrested and sentenced to fifteen years in prison"³⁸⁰. The most notorious of the sentences imposed by the military regime was the execution of Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnan and Yusuf Aslan, ingraining a bitter memory in the minds of not only contemporary activists but also in the collective memory of the future generations. Also, those numbers do not include the activists killed in the operations after the coup, such as the killing of Mahir Çayan, the leader of THKP-C, and his friends.

By the beginning of 1973, the leading cadres of the radical leftist organizations were either killed or executed; while the rank-and-file members were arrested, tortured and put in prison. However,

³⁷⁸ Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*, 45.

³⁷⁹ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 260.

³⁸⁰ Ulus, *The Army and the Radical Left in Turkey*, 18.

despite the crackdown on the activists, closing down of the youth organizations, and commitment to socio-economic reforms which had been advocated by the left, the military was not able to end the violence and activism of the radical groups among the students and workers. Especially with the release of the prisoned activists with the 1974 amnesty a new phase of radicalization has started out.

The left-wing organizations interpreted the repression of the state, which had already been delegitimized in their eyes, as a revelation and embodiment of its true authoritarian nature and suggested that political violence should be used to awaken the working classes and the masses, and to make them realize the need for armed struggle to topple down the regimes through a revolution. Known as armed propaganda, this strategy of the Left-wing organizations was implemented through a relational sub-mechanism called provocation, which is defined as “acts initiated by one actor with the intention of inciting the response of another actor”³⁸¹.

Implementation of armed propaganda operations instigated harsher responses from the police and other security forces, gradually entrapping both sides in a spiral of mutual raising of the stakes.

While political violence was adopted initially as a defensive strategy by most of the left, some groups, such as Mahir Çayan and his followers also believed that armed propaganda could awaken the masses and help raise awareness among them.³⁸² This approach help transformation in the use of violence form a confining defensive strategy to a more open ended and speculative provocation tactic. Thereby, the extent and the aim of the legitimate use of violence for the left could be expended. Once one or two groups had already raised the bar in the revolutionary struggle in such a way, with the influence of other mechanisms, which will be detailed below, such as diffusion, competition and emulation that were very influential among the revolutionaries of that generation, the escalation of violence was inevitable. Once the use of violence was legitimized one way or another in the perception of activists, just like opening the

³⁸¹ Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 75.

³⁸² Mahir Çayan, *Kesintisiz Devrim (Permanent Revolution)* (Ankara: İlkeriş yayınları, 2008).

Pandora's box, it becomes almost impossible to either put contents back into where they came from or contain them within the borders of one sphere of influence, such as within the limits of a defensive strategy. The next area where political violence was to spread was the interactions between the leftist organizations and groups which already come to be characterized as competitive and conflictual.

State repression is most relevant in understanding and explaining the ways in which leftist guerrillas organized, operated and formed their organization in Iran too. In order to understand and explain the radicalization in student movement or left in general, we have to keep in mind the two major events: the removal of democratically elected Dr. Mosaddegh from power by a coup d'état in 1953 and government's brutal repression of opposition in 1963 eliminating almost all institutional means for opposition. Consequently, the youth of the 1960s and 1970s came of age during and under the regime that the Shah established in the post-coup period. The cultural landscape in Iran was gloomy and depressive. The dominant feeling was one of despair and defeat. It was this perception which shaped the worldview of the next generation and contributed to the conclusion that some of them were to arrive soon as we have mentioned before: there is no other way out. Even though repressive policies of the Shah regime, which wiped all non-violent opposition off the political sphere by 1963, could be interpreted as the sole reason for the new generation of dissidents' resorting to violent means i.e. armed struggle, understanding the workings of other mechanisms helps us see the dynamics contributing to their commitment and perseverance, such as outbidding and delegitimization.

Outbidding in the case of Iran did not play a definitive role in the radicalization process but certainly in preserving their commitment to and perseverance during the contention.³⁸³ Obviously, Fadaïyan's commitment to armed struggle provoked further repression from the state security apparatus. In return, the need for retaliation right after they suffered a loss, as

³⁸³ Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions*, 245.

well as feeling of revenge became prominent among the activists and very much contributed to their persistence on the armed attacks. Siahkal operation and the wave of repression afterwards exemplify best the repressive nature of the Shah regime and triggering of outbidding mechanism between the security forces and the guerrillas. The regime “sent the entire Gilan Gendarmerie Regiment, hundreds of police forces, and several helicopters to suppress the eight guerrillas.” Then, on March 16, 1971, thirteen guerrillas were executed. Once the news spread that thirteen guerrillas were executed students came out to support the guerrilla movement. In response, “police [...] arrested over one thousand dissident students.”³⁸⁴ In retaliation, Fadaïyan targeted prominent political or military figures who were known for their role repression such as Gen. Zeinolabedin Farsiu, head of the military tribunal responsible for political trials, who was assassinated in 1971.³⁸⁵ During the first year after Siahkal, Fadaïyan lost 42 members and 300 people were arrested for having relations with Fadaïyan. Meanwhile, they also undertook some operations both to give a political message and to provide financial resources to the organization such as the bombing of the offices of the American oil companies and the robbery of Bank Saderat branch in Tehran.³⁸⁶ Also targeted were the members of ruling classes especially those who became infamous for their treatment of workers such as Muhammad Sadeq Fateh-yazdi, a factory owner who caused the death of striking workers. Of course, the main target of Fadaïyan’s assassination attacks was notorious SAVAK torturers: the killing of first Alinaqi Nik-tab in 1974 and then of Abbas Shahriari in 1975 were big blows to the heart of the regime. Until 1976, “a kind of psychological contest existed between the Fadaïyan and SAVAK whereby every attack by one side was answered in kind by the other. The Shahriari assassination, which was preceded by others, was followed by the assassination of Jazani in prison.”³⁸⁷

In the same vein, delegitimization of the regime in the eyes of Iranian guerrillas also occurred as a product of the closely-knit network of SAVAK, brutal torture practices and a

³⁸⁴ Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 28–30.

³⁸⁵ Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 62.

³⁸⁶ Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 34.

³⁸⁷ Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 63.

massive prison system. For example, in 1968, SAVAK infiltrated into Jazani group and arrested almost all the members. They were tortured and then either executed or sentenced to lifetime imprisonment. They have not committed even a single armed action by then. This should not only be considered the last straw in a range of events proving, in the eyes of activists, the futility of the peaceful activism as well as the dangers of it, but also a warrant of the illegitimacy of the regime.

The most pervasive security instrument of the Shah's dictatorship was the intelligence agency SAVAK whose main task went beyond the identification and destruction of anyone and everyone who dared to oppose to the Shah's regime. SAVAK was not merely secret police; first of all, it had a public face as it was intended by the regime to be known and feared by all the Iranians. While SAVAK buildings and houses were known by the public, the students were sure that its agents spying among them constantly, and suspected each other for being one occasionally. Second, SAVAK was also the agent of censorship in Iran, the media outlets received instructions from SAVAK almost weekly with regard to what could be safely published. Finally, it "also run[ed] the 600-odd government trade unions and SAVAK officials ha[d] offices in some factories; again, they d[id] not just repress strikes, but also mediate between workers and owners"³⁸⁸.

Shah's dictatorship in Iran was also well known for its notorious prisons and 'advanced' torture technics used in these prisons; the most famous of which were in Tehran —Qasr, Evin, and Qezel Qale— but other cities did not lack their very own infamous prisons in which SAVAK tortured inmates. With the beginning of the 1970s the Shah's regime started to use torture in its prisons on political prisoners.³⁸⁹ What the regime aimed to obtain as a result of torture was not only information about the organizations and their members but also

³⁸⁸ Halliday, *Iran, Dictatorship and Development*, 81.

³⁸⁹ Abrahamian's work on the use, extent and objectives of torture on the political prisoners both before and during the 1970s is primary. He also explains why the torture in prisons in Iran in 1970s was unprecedented, and the abuse that was experienced by the previous prisoners was minor compared to the brutal treatment that the prisoners in the 1970s were subjected to. See Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*.

public recantations by the revolutionary activists. Aiming to kill two birds with one stone, the regime tried to both discredit the revolutionary organizations and increase its legitimacy in the eyes of general public through these recantations. Iran was not the first or the only country using public recantations for the same purposes but rather its methods resembled to those in Stalinist Russia and Maoist China both in format and content.³⁹⁰

Especially after Siahkal, interrogators were sent abroad to receive training to prevent unwanted deaths during torture and brute force was replaced by new technics of torture, such as “the bastinado; sleep deprivation; extensive solitary confinement; glaring searchlights; standing in one place for hours on end; nail extractions; snakes (favored for use with women); electrical shocks with cattle prods, often into the rectum; cigarette burns; sitting on hot grills; acid dripped into nostrils; near-drownings; mock executions; and an electric chair with a large metal mask to muffle screams while amplifying them for the victim. [...] Prisoners were also humiliated by being raped, urinated on, and forced to stand naked.”³⁹¹ While SAVAK was free to arrest and detain any person without being constrained by any legal measures; all political trials were held before military tribunals in which the judges were either army officers or SAVAK officials. Almost no case of a defendant was being acquitted.³⁹²

As another example, in 1972, during the trial of Masoud Ahmadzadeh, one of the founders of Fadaian, who was arrested by SAVAK, a French Lawyer observed the traces of torture on his body after he took off his pullover: “The whole of the middle of his chest and his stomach was a mass of twisted scars from very deep burns. They looked appalling ... His back was even worse, there was a perfect oblong etched into it, formed by a continuous line of scar tissue. Inside the oblong, the skin was again covered in shiny scars from burning.”³⁹³ Ashraf Dehqani, a women guerrilla in Fadaian, who escaped from prison explains in her memoirs

³⁹⁰ Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions*, 6.

³⁹¹ Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions*, 106.

³⁹² Halliday, *Iran, Dictatorship and Development*, 85.

³⁹³ Halliday, *Iran, Dictatorship and Development*, 87.

how she was tortured and raped by SAVAK. The stories of similar nature in which the guerrillas were put through the most notorious torture methods should be considered in explaining the radicalization of the youth and the reasons for their participation into Fadaiyan in great numbers between 1971 and 1975.

In addition to the notorious torture tactics and a high number of prisoners kept in terrible conditions, as a result of which a number people died; during the years of from 1970 to 1977, SAVAK also killed and executed at least hundreds of people. While an unknown number of people were killed during the shootouts, SAVAK executed over 300 people after they were sentenced by the military tribunals.³⁹⁴

6.2. Competition

The need for new strategies and tactics seemed pressing for the left-wing movement organizers in the face of weakening position of the legal left in Turkish politics, increasing threat attribution and a simultaneously growing popular support for the left in general. These developments prepared the ground for competition for power among the leaders and organizations of the left-wing movement because in part the question of whose tactics and strategies were to be adopted for the revolutionary struggle depended on the outcome of this competition. Once the legal or parliamentary way in the revolutionary struggle was dismissed for those in the radical branch of the movement, disagreements regarding the new tactics and methods became the main cause for competition; which in turn let to further factionalism among them. This mutually sustaining relationship between radicalization and competition was called schizogenesis by Sommer (2010). Competition for power among different groups and organizations had a unique effect on the radicalization process and the use of violence had a distinctive role to play in this competition. Sommer's (2010) observation regarding the radical left-wing organizations in Europe, the US and Japan in the same period can be extended to their counterparts in Turkey:

From the moment they were formed, the organizations of the new left were subject to fissures, tensions, splits and expulsions, most of which revolved around the same question: who was the

³⁹⁴ Halliday, *Iran, Dictatorship and Development*, 89.

most revolutionary. Furthermore, the question of violence became integral to the measurement of revolutionary commitment, paving the way for the emergence of a plethora of armed left-wing groups.³⁹⁵

The leftist movement in Turkey was composed of different groups and organizations during the 1960s, including labor unions, associations, student clubs, and parties. What made them a part of the same movement was their objection to the political regime, its capitalist character and oppressive policies, as well as its alleged complicity with the imperialist powers. What divided them, especially by 1970s, however, is more complicated. Their positions on 1) the international developments and disputes between the socialist states, 2) the use of violence (whether for self-defense, armed struggle or propaganda), 3) the form of organization, strategy, tactic, to be adopted to achieve the revolution, 4) the characteristics of social, economic and political system in Turkey. Ideological, strategic and tactical dissimilarities, as well as conflicts, between all the leftist organizations of various sizes and effect, stemmed from the different positions that they adopted regarding these four areas.

The initial sub-mechanism playing an important role in the competition for power is disillusionment. It is a cognitive sub mechanism and refers to the “decline in the commitment of individuals or political actors to previously sustaining beliefs”³⁹⁶. As mentioned before, disillusionment was resulted mainly from the disempowerment of the TLP after the 1969 elections and its unfailing commitment to parliamentary democracy. In the face of this threat, the militant leftist students were triggered to innovate new strategies and tactics to prove that they are more committed to revolution as well as more capable to spark it. In this endeavor, the willingness to resort to violence was seen as the measurement of one’s commitment to the revolutionary activism.³⁹⁷

By the end of 1960s, most of the left-wing activists were already convinced that socialism could only be achieved through a revolution. Çetin Altan, a popular journalist and once a TLP member,

³⁹⁵ Sommier, “Revolutionary Groups after 1968,” 73.

³⁹⁶ Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*.

³⁹⁷ Ömer Laçiner, “THKP-C: Bir Mecranın Başlangıcı (THKP-C: The Beginning of an Adventure),” *Toplum ve Bilim* 78 (1998): 11.

was one of the most outspoken supporters of extra-parliamentary opposition and had influenced many, particularly young, people. As a result, the idea of extra-parliamentary opposition spread among the intellectuals, the youth as well as some junior officers³⁹⁸. It was the character of the revolution, whether a nationalist democratic or a socialist one, was what they could not reach a consensus on and this was going to create fractions among the leftist opposition.

In this vein, first, in August 1969, a radical revolutionary group took over the FKF and established *Dev-Genç*, abbreviated from its Turkish: *Türkiye Devrimci Gençlik Federasyonu*. Among the initial objectives of Dev-Genç were raising socialist awareness, making connections with workers and peasants in revolutionary struggle, and fighting against imperialism. Soon, the leaders and publications of Dev-Genç began to pronounce that the way to revolution and regime change in Turkey goes through armed struggle. From then on, the in-group arguments revolved around the timing and method of the armed struggle. Indeed, Dev-Genç was an umbrella organization and consisted of various groups of different ideological stances which were acting independently on a local level. All the well-known active revolutionary organizations of the later period were born out of Dev-Genç as a result of schisms. The disagreements among various groups in Dev-Genç resulted usually from their different interpretations of Marxism and its applicability to Turkey. There was, however, no doubt among them about the necessity and inevitability of the revolution.

First organization emerging out of the ranks of Dev-Genç was called *Sosyalist Aydınlik* (Socialist Enlightenment) and consisted of the followers of ‘national democratic revolution’ (NDR) conceived by Mihri Belli, a veteran communist, ex-TLP member and a prominent leftist thinker, influencing most of the left-wing groups in that period. A split from this group was a more extreme group called the Revolutionary Proletarian Enlightenment (PDA–*Proleter Devrimci Aydınlik*), which was to establish Revolutionary Workers and Peasants Party of Turkey (TİİKP–*Türkiye İhtilalci İşçi Köylü Partisi*), soon after, also known as rural guerrillas. It was led by

³⁹⁸ Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*, 38.

Doğu Perinçek and known to be a Maoist organization. They had a very limited experience of guerrilla struggle in Aydın lasting only couple of weeks without any significant consequences. Yet, many of its members went to Palestine to receive guerrilla training and fight against Israel.³⁹⁹ A splinter group under the leadership of İbrahim Kaypakkaya founded the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist (TKP/ML) in 1972 and organized rural guerrilla attacks in the eastern cities such as Tunceli, Malatya and Elazığ.

The other famous revolutionary organizations of the period were also originated within the circles of Dev-Genç: The People's Liberation Army of Turkey (THKO) and People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey (THKP-C). THKO was also known as 'supporters of guerrilla warfare' or in short "guerrillas" established by mostly the students of the Middle East Technical University in 1970; its leader was Deniz Gezmiş. Some of its members too were trained in Palestine, at the camps of the Fatah.⁴⁰⁰ It was the most eager organization to start the guerrilla struggle, to gather money and arms for that purpose, they begin with the armed robberies, killing of two policemen and kidnapping of a US sergeant⁴⁰¹.

THKP-C was led by Mahir Çayan and was also known as Çayanists. Its monthly journal was *Kurtuluş - İşçilerin Köylülerin Gazetesi* (Liberation - the Magazine of Workers and Peasants), and called the Turkish and Kurdish people to unite against imperialism. They accused the members of PDA of being "Maoist of the campus" only to be accused back by them of being "adventurous", "anarchist" and "isolated from the masses"⁴⁰². Even though mutual accusations of similar sorts and disparaging were commonplace among the leftist organizations, they rarely turned into violent attacks against each other before the mid-1970s.

The second sub-mechanism playing a significant role in the competition for power is emulation, "collective action modeled on the actions of others".⁴⁰³ As its name suggests it is the repetition of

³⁹⁹ Ersan, *1970'lerde Türkiye solu (Turkey's Left in the 1970s)*, 55.

⁴⁰⁰ Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*, 41.

⁴⁰¹ Alper, "Student Movement in Turkey From a Global Perspective, 1960-1971," .467,468.

⁴⁰² Ersan, *1970'lerde Türkiye solu (Turkey's Left in the 1970s)*, 53.

⁴⁰³ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 335.

a strategy or tactic of certain organizations by other organizations. Especially in the case of successful strategies and tactics, it is commonplace among the SMO of the same or different movements whether they are competing, cooperating or unrelated to each other. However, in situations of competition, emulation and competition between the organizations mutually reinforce each other⁴⁰⁴ .

Both emulation and competition⁴⁰⁵ mechanisms played an important role in the first attempts to initiate a guerrilla struggle in the beginning of 1970s. Originated in the same youth movement and having small variations in terms of both ideological inspiration and tactical methods, THKO, THKP-C and TKP/ML all resorted to violence one after another to show how serious revolutionaries they were. It is understandable and expected, given the characteristics of their young age which was compounded by the characteristics of the period's romantic revolutionary figure whom they were all aspiring to become: competitiveness, unselfishness, and bravery. Also, the urging sense of responsibility and the pressure of having to "do something" in the face of growing social opposition pushed the young revolutionaries, who had stood out as the only viable actor of the radical politics after the disempowerment of the TLP, to resort to "an easy recipe" of guerrilla warfare one after another emulating, as well as trying to prevail over the others⁴⁰⁶.

What did differentiate THKP-C, THKO and TİİKP from each other? As one observer states, they were all 'bookless'⁴⁰⁷ in the sense that the examples they were inspired by and following, such as Latin American guerrilla movements, liberation movements in Africa, PLO, and guerrilla resistance in Vietnam, had not yet produced intellectual works to outline

⁴⁰⁴ Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 87.

⁴⁰⁵ Aydinoglu claims that since the armed operations of THKO were received with sympathy in public, THKP-C channelled its efforts to conduct similar operations. See Ergun Aydinoglu, "*Sol Hakkında Her Şey*" *Mi? (Is It Everything about the Left?)* (İstanbul: Versus, 2008), 173.

⁴⁰⁶ Aydinoglu, 174.

⁴⁰⁷ Taymaz Merih, "Merih Cemal Taymaz ile Söyleşi: Türkiye'de Sol ve Silahlı Mücadele Bir Muhasebe (An Interview with Merih Cemal Taymaz: An Evaluation of the Left and Armed Struggle in Turkey)," *Birikim*, no. 271 (Kasım 2011): 48.

their strategies, tactics and theories. Following their footsteps and guided by a perception of threat and opportunity, the first armed operations by these groups in the first years of the 1970s were more reactionary and out of impatience rather than strategically well-planned or based on a theoretical approach. Therefore, their essential texts such as THKO's *Türkiye Derviminin Yolu* (The Path of Turkey's Revolution), and THKP-C's *Kesintisiz Devrim* (Permanent Revolution) revolve more around the analyses about social, economic, political and historical characteristics of Turkish society rather than the military strategies or rural guerrilla warfare.

The result of this rushed decision to resort to violence which was born also out of competition and emulation, was sensational but not-well thought or planned armed operations. The adventurous guerrilla operations usually resulted in the arrest or killing of especially the leadership cadres of these organizations. For example, Kızıldere massacre, during which almost all the activists were killed, was one of the most obvious examples of the lack of experience and planning on behalf of revolutionaries, as well as the state's unrelenting repression. THKO had carried out several high profile attacks before, but the most striking of them was the kidnapping of three NATO engineers in 1972, an operation they conducted in cooperation with THKP-C, in order to prevent the execution of their founders: Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan and Hüseyin İnan. The guerrillas tried to hide in a village called Kızıldere but were soon found and surrounded by the security forces. In the shootout the hostages and all but one of the activists were killed. After the execution of Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan and Hüseyin İnan on May 6, 1972, both THKP-C and THKO were dissolved in practice. TKP/ML too was dissolved after İbrahim Kaypakkaya was killed during torture in the prison and the last members of the leadership were arrested in 1973.

All but few of the prominent revolutionaries of the 1968 generation lost their lives in the armed operations of similar sorts or as a result of the tortures and executions by the military regime between 1970-73. Most of the remaining rank and file members and followers, or as Zileli calls

them ‘disciples’,⁴⁰⁸ did not have time and opportunity to contemplate and analyze the past mistakes. Instead, they interpreted their legacy as more responsibility and obligation to complete what the pioneers were not able to do. Moreover, the new generation with less theoretical and intellectual knowledge, were recruited through friend networks that happen to be close to this or that group. Therefore, competition and emulation, along with other mechanisms continued to play even a more of a significant role for the ever-multiplying organizations that were established and stayed active after 1974.

From the remnants of the organizations active before and during the military regime emerged numerous small and medium-sized organizations. *Dev-Yol*, *Dev-Sol*, *Kurtuluş*, *Halkın Kurtuluşu*, *MLSPB*, *TKP/ML*, *TKEP*, *TİKP* were the most widespread and widely supported left-wing organizations among many others in the second half of the 1970s. The use of violence in this period by the leftists against each other during the conflicts between for example the Maoist and the followers of the Soviets or between *Dev-Yol* and *Kurtuluş* was a novelty of the period and ranked second among the reasons for death due to political violence after the conflicts with the radical right. It is hard to determine how many people died in the conflicts between the leftist groups but according to a study at least 62 radical leftist activists lost their lives⁴⁰⁹. What was remarkable, however, was the level of animosity between some of the leftist groups amounting to or even surpassing the one that was felt against the ultra-nationalists. For example, 6 out of 15 militants of *TKEP* who lost their lives during the armed conflicts were killed by the members of *Halkın Kurtuluşu* in feud-like manner: each time one side killing a member of the other in turn⁴¹⁰.

Neither state repression nor indiscriminate attacks by the ultra-nationalists could bring about a sense of unity or prospect for it among various leftist groups. The so-called ‘safe havens’ from right-wing or police violence were created in certain districts and were under the control of one

⁴⁰⁸ Zileli, *Havariler*.

⁴⁰⁹ Aydınoglu, *Türkiye Solu, 1960-1980*, 399.

⁴¹⁰ Ersan, *1970’lerde Türkiye solu (Turkey’s Left in the 1970s)*, 157,158 fn.4.

or the other left-wing group; and even the members of other leftist groups were not allowed. Consequently, the constant competition between different organizations and effort to overcome each other contributed to a competitive and combatant movement culture which was already strengthened by the anti-fascist struggle as we will see in the next part.

We cannot talk about the role of a competition in the formation of guerrilla groups during the 1960s or as a radicalization mechanism in Iran, because this mechanism presupposes some sort of a free movement sector as we have seen in the example of Turkey; the remnants of such an environment ceased to exist completely after 1963. Instead what can be observed among the new generation of leftist activists in the face of SAVAK's repression was a co-operative and compromising attitude as the unification of the three groups with quite different approaches to form Fadaïyan and persistent participations to the organizations illustrated. The lack of a competitive movement sector in Iran is also pointed out by other observers: "The relations between Fadaïyan and Muslim Mojahedin-e Khalq (OIPM) demonstrated mutual support and respect, despite ideological differences."⁴¹¹ It can be claimed that an environmental mechanism, an acute repression, in the case of Iran prevented the emergence of another mechanism, competition, which is a very common phenomenon especially among the leftist organizations of the period in other countries as we have mentioned for the case of Turkish leftist organizations through the concept of schizogenesis. Instances of competition particularly among some important figures of the guerrilla movement or certain groups became more prevalent during and after the revolution when the repressive political environment began to loosen up. Therefore, we can say that competition among the guerrilla organizations was not a contributing factor in the radicalization of the leftist contention in Iran. The only split from Fadaïyan before the revolution took place in 1976 by a group called *Munshaeb* (Split) who joined the Tudeh party arguing that

⁴¹¹ Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 48.

armed struggle is not working in Iran under the current conditions and the priority should be given to nonviolent revolutionary activities such as political education of the working class.⁴¹²

Yet, emulation mechanism can account for the widespread adoption of armed struggle by a number of small clandestine groups who were invited to join to Fadaiyan during the 1970s. For example The People's Democratic Front, which also believed in armed struggle, joined the organization in 1973.⁴¹³ Under the circumstances that Iranian dissents had to operate, diffusion of the armed movement and emulation mechanism were very much interrelated; therefore, instead of social movement organizations emulating the tactics and strategies of each other, what was witnessed was the idea of armed struggle disseminating among the youth and thereby encouraging them to self-recruit to the guerrilla organizations.⁴¹⁴

The lack of competition in the social movement sector during this period in Iran did not guarantee the emergence of a democratic movement culture in Fadaiyan. Especially under the leadership of Hamid Ashraf, Fadaiyan was managed like a Stalinist organization as it is claimed by at least one observer.⁴¹⁵ The facts that the internal purges of some members from Fadaiyan turned out bloody and that some others were executed for “wanting to leave the underground life” should be seen as a proof of its dogmatic character and strict hierarchical structure. Yet, it is difficult to obtain information with regard to the details of the organizational workings of Fadaiyan as the main actors died long time ago and the vow of secrecy taken by the activists still prevents them to provide such sensitive information.⁴¹⁶ Finally, what prevented the emergence of a competitive environment—an authoritarian, repressive regime—curiously gave way to the emergence of another phenomenon: emulation of the state's surveillant and disciplinary methods by guerrilla organizations⁴¹⁷. Vahabzadeh discusses in detail the repercussions of this adaptation

⁴¹² Sepehr Zabih, *The Left in Contemporary Iran: Ideology, Organisation, and the Soviet Connection* (London, Croom Helm; Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 132.

⁴¹³ Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 64.

⁴¹⁴ Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 156.

⁴¹⁵ Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 65–67.

⁴¹⁶ Behrooz, 67, Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 63–65.

⁴¹⁷ Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 226–44.

for the lives of guerrillas, I also analyze its effects on women in the organization in the last chapter.

6.3. Object Shift: ‘Anti-fascism’⁴¹⁸, Survival and Retaliation

There are numerous examples of encounters between the state and the movements producing radicalization. Civil rights movements in the US, ethno-nationalist movements in Spain and Northern Ireland, left-wing groups in Italy, Germany, France experienced similar escalation of violence in their encounters with the state. The emergence of right-wing radical counter-movements usually coincides with the increase in tension between the state and left-wing movements. The use of fascists groups and radical right as a counter guerrilla strategy against the growing influence of communist movements in this period was already documented in the countries such as Italy. The mechanism of object shift operates in the arena of interaction between the movement and the counter-movement through the influence of two sub-mechanisms: vigilantism and retaliation. As a result of increased conflict with the extreme right on a daily basis, the radical left-wing organizations become preoccupied with the anti-fascist agenda which gradually replaced their original objectives taking up arms in the first place. While vigilantism is defined as “the initiation of provisional law-and-order activities by a non-state actor outside the control of its government and security forces”; retaliation is “reprisals by an actor of wrongs experienced by the actor or members of its constituency”⁴¹⁹. In addition to the efforts to compete and conflict with the other radical leftist groups and organizations, the radical leftist activists were also absorbed by vigilant and retaliatory activities against the right-wing militants or security forces in most of the 1970s. The overly competitive and conflictual environment not only contributed their radicalization, but also help create an aggressive and belligerent movement culture.

The radical right, convinced that a communist threat is real in Turkey, had been further threatened by the popular support the left acquired through protests, demonstrations and

⁴¹⁸ See footnote 244.

⁴¹⁹ Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 93, 94,96.

workers' movement in the 1960s. In response, they adopted counter-insurgency measures including attacking the left-wing activists in the streets and intimidating their supporters in schools, universities and elsewhere. The most active fascist organization, as mentioned before, was the NAP's youth organization, Grey Wolves became notorious for their attacks initially at the university students but then all the striking or protesting groups of any sort, as well as murdering numerous people with leftist leanings. They were responsible for the most of the killings as a result of political violence but almost always favored and never investigated by the government. They have also collaborated with certain sections of the security forces while the police and the courts turned a blind eye to the crimes they committed. In the face of these deadly right-wing attacks, which accelerated after 1975, initially only a few left-wing organizations stressed the need to adopt self-defensive strategies and retaliatory actions while others objected. Without being able to decide the right course of action, the leftist organizations drifted towards the vicious cycle of mutual violence and away from their original objective of achieving a democratic and autonomous university⁴²⁰.

We have already mentioned the police's unfair treatment against the left-wing activists, clamping down on each and every demonstration by them during the 1960s. From 1974 until 1980, "the police and security forces [...] remained heavily infiltrated by fascists who shielded and protected the Grey Wolves"⁴²¹. The first and second Nationalist Front governments after 1975, consisting of small religious fundamentalist and fascist parties in a coalition with the right-wing Justice Party, encouraged the fascist movement as a counter-movement strategy against the growing influence and popularity of the left in society. Prime minister and the head of the JP, Demirel's infamous statement that "you cannot make me say that the right wingers are committing murders" after Maraş massacre in 1979 was only one of the evidences proving the regime's encouragement of the radical right's attacks and activities against not only the radical

⁴²⁰ İletişim Yayınları, *Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi (Encyclopedia of Socialism and Social Protests)*, Sosyalizm Ansiklopedisi, 8v. (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988), 2244, [http://hdl.handle.net/2027/\[u\]:mdp.39015042231459](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/[u]:mdp.39015042231459).

⁴²¹ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 263.

left but also other groups on the opposition such as striking workers, teachers, leftist police officers, students, Alevi people, etc. In addition to its countermovement mission to intimidate and suppress the leftist movement, the radical right under the NAP had also contributed to the creation of instability and chaos in the country especially after 1978 when Ecevit of the RPP became prime minister, thereby entailing an intervention by the military to repress the left and the worker's movement for good.⁴²²

Anti-fascist struggle or armed resistance to the threat of fascism became of the utmost importance for the organizations on the radical left. However, it must be noted that what they understood from the threat of fascism was not only the countermovement activities and attacks of the Grey Wolves or idealist commandos. Infiltrated into the security forces and were favored and encouraged by the political authorities, the objectives of the Grey Wolves were naturally associated with those of the regime in the eyes of leftists of any sort. Therefore, the radical left's preoccupation with the anti-fascist struggle in this period was born out of pressure and was a natural outcome of the state's policy of 'repression by proxy'. In short, the anti-fascist armed struggle of the second half of the 1970s was still targeting, even though indirectly, the regime in Turkey.

What is called object shift in the contentious politics was also experienced by the Iranian leftists yet in a different way than what took place in Turkey. While Turkish revolutionaries saw armed activism as a defensive strategy and legitimized it as only out of necessity, Iranian guerrillas claimed to use it to protect themselves against the police's violent attacks. Yet, rather than a gradual shift from a revolutionary armed activism towards an anti-fascist struggle as was the case in Turkey, in Iran the main purpose of the revolutionaries turned gradually into an objective of survival. It should not be confused with "the theory of survival" of which the founders of Fadaiyan accused Tudeh; instead, it became an operational obligation due to the necessities of functioning in a brutal dictatorship. At least, this was the rationale behind the organization's

⁴²² Aydınoglu, *Türkiye Solu, 1960-1980*, 404.

undemocratic and centralist policies.⁴²³ Consequently, Fadaiyan had to focus more on the survival of the organization, even more than the members, and design the everyday activities accordingly. Therefore, instead of working for and undertaking activities to trigger the revolutionary situation, especially after 1971, they had to spend most of their time and energy on the ways to keep the underground organization safe and intact. They had to even take extreme measures in order to survive SAVAK's extreme clampdown such as meticulously disguising the safe houses they were living, going deeper underground to protect the cells, and operating in great secrecy. One of the extreme measures the members had to take, for example, was carrying cyanide capsules in their mouths all day long when outside of the house in order to be able to kill themselves in case of an arrest by the police. This measure had to be taken after several members spoke under torture and revealed the safe houses causing more to be captured. As one organizational pamphlet suggested "a guerrilla must know that death is preferable to being captured."⁴²⁴

Justifiably, Vahabzadeh (2010) draws the attention to the consequences of the obsession with the survival of the organization especially among the leadership cadres at the cost of individual freedoms, as well as lives, and a democratic structure. "The survival of the organization required total submission to organizational surveillance and control."⁴²⁵ Reminiscent of Che Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare*, and Marighellas's *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*, Fadaiyan published *Instructions for Urban Guerrilla Warfare* around 1972 and advocated for the surveillance of "details of members's lives including their relationships, contacts, and movements".⁴²⁶ After the ultimate objective became the survival of the organization, even the most restrictive and demanding tasks and expectations from the members could be justified.

What also contributed to the radicalization of Iranian guerrillas and to the continuing commitment to the armed struggle as well as what motivated them to retaliate with more

⁴²³ Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 234.

⁴²⁴ Vahabzadeh, 235, 237.

⁴²⁵ Vahabzadeh, 236.

⁴²⁶ Vahabzadeh, 234,235.

violence was the emotional reaction —mostly in the form of revenge— they gave after losing many comrades in armed conflicts with SAVAK or under torture. Many reported that even after they lost their belief in armed struggle as a way to achieve revolution, they stayed engaged out of the responsibility they felt towards the fallen comrades.⁴²⁷

6.4. Encapsulation

The fourth arena of interaction contributing to the process of radicalization through various mechanisms is between the SMOs and its broad constituency. The sub-mechanisms contributing to dissociation of militants during the radicalization process are decertification, marginalization and encapsulation.⁴²⁸ The general assumption is that the increased intensity and spread of violent actions usually result in the loss of support for the movement actors not only in general public but also among the left-wing constituency. During the periods of intense political violence, the popular support for revolutionary actions gradually diminishes whereas the support for the counter terrorism measures increases. In parallel to this, however, is “the more involved in the clandestine life a militant was, the more extreme the militant's dissociation from reality”⁴²⁹ The conflict with the security forces and the lack of links with or the approval of the society contributes the emergence of a collective militant identity.⁴³⁰ Defined as the actors’ isolation from the society, encapsulation has tremendous repercussions on especially everyday lives of militants because more the organizations become isolated from the society the more they behave like sects.⁴³¹ As mentioned earlier, the strict clandestine conditions that the guerrillas of Fadaiyan were subjected to, created the conditions of encapsulation. The ever growing need to focus on the objective of survival for the Iranian guerrillas played the greatest role in their encapsulation, yet progressive encapsulation was a characteristic shared by the radicalization processes of other radical leftist organizations, such as the Weathermen in the US or the Red Brigades in Italy.

⁴²⁷ Author’s interviews with ex-guerrillas.

⁴²⁸ Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 175.

⁴²⁹ Della Porta, *Social movements, political violence, and the state*, 186.

⁴³⁰ Davenport, Johnston, and Mueller, *Repression and Mobilization*.

⁴³¹ Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 93.

Decertification, as defined earlier, is the lack or withdrawal of validation or recognition by an external authority. It usually occurs also a legal left-wing party refutes and propagates against radical left. This mechanism seems to have played a role in the radicalization of Turkish student movement when the main opposition party, the RPP, who had previously supported the student movement, renounced it for endangering the democracy and contributing the chaotic environment on June 12, 1969. This renouncement came right after one of the major conflicts between student activists and police had taken place on June 10, during which students had used Molotov cocktails and sound bombs for the first time⁴³². The decertification of the student movement through the RPP's renouncement contributed the radicalization of the leftist students not only by denying them of a legal official support but also by encouraging the further state and paramilitary violence towards them.

A similar mechanism of decertification was also experienced in the second half of the 1970s. While Ecevit's RPP was able to turn the popular support for the leftist ideas and policies among the masses, and especially among the workers who were going through the most active period under the leadership of the DİSK, into electoral successes, it repeatedly declared and demonstrated its disapproval of the activities of radical leftist organizations. While both the DİSK and the CPT supported Ecevit and the leadership of the RPP in the fight against the right-wing assault on the workers and leftist activists, Ecevit even refused to cooperate with the legal leftist parties against 'the threat of fascism'⁴³³. The last straw in the decertification of the socialist left by RPP came with Ecevit's declaration of martial law after the Maraş massacre in December 1978. Instead of a positive response or at least an open support for the campaign to legalize the CPT, Ecevit's government preferred to increase the repression of the CTP's youth and women's branches, while simultaneously declining to investigate the NAP and its Grey Wolves' role in the massacre; thereby, legitimizing their activities against the leftists on several

⁴³² Ersan, *1970'lerde Türkiye solu (Turkey's Left in the 1970s)*, 29, 30.

⁴³³ Ersan, 67.

occasions⁴³⁴. Although, it is not uncommon for a left-wing government to apply more pressure on the leftist movements and show less sympathy to their demands when in power than a right-wing government, under these circumstances in Turkey, Ecevit's full dismissal had a more damaging and radicalizing effect on the left.

Barred from all the legal means to do politics, the radical leftist groups became more and more engrossed into the ideological and technical details of the best revolutionary struggle that suits to the conditions in Turkey. Furthermore, polarization between the socialist states in the international arena also contributed to not only the competition between the different leftist organizations but also their further encapsulation into the details of highly theoretical and ideological discussions. This sort of an ideological encapsulation was commonplace among their counterparts in the new left of many European countries⁴³⁵. The smallest differences in the positions of different organizations concerning even the issues irrelevant to Turkey became the reasons for the fiercest conflicts between them, which warranted further isolation from the masses and their problems.

Yet, there had still been many leftist organizations and groups supporting and participating in the workers' demonstrations, strikes and movements, as well as working among them to organize and recruit them into their movements. Also, in Turkey, unlike in Iran, the police repression and fascist attacks could never reach to the extent that would totally sever the links between the workers and the leftist activists and necessitate a full-fledged isolation under complete clandestine settings. Even during the martial law, even the most radical illegal leftist organizations could enjoy the popular support of their advocates. In short, other than a couple of isolated cases, the radical leftist activists in Turkey, did not experience a total isolation from the general public or their constituency. Whereas in Iran, Fadaiyan became so isolated from the society, by the time demonstrations that were to lead to the revolution broke out, they were

⁴³⁴ Ersan, 140, 141.

⁴³⁵ Della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence*, 208-210.

initially not even able to join them as an organization. The level of dissociation from the society became a source of internal criticism too.⁴³⁶

6.5. Similarities and Differences

Having analyzed the origin and formation of the radical leftist organizations in Iran and Turkey my main argument is that even though originated in the Middle East, the experiences and strategies of these left-wing organizations cannot be fully explained in the context of, for example, other liberation movements in the Global South or guerrilla movements in the Latin American countries. Instead, I argue, they should be seen as a part of the “new radical left” that came into being in Europe and the US in the same period and represented by the organizations such as RAF, Action Direct, Red Brigades and the Weather Underground, because they share many characteristics in common with these organizations including a process that is called ‘radicalization’. In the same vein, the concept of radicalization can help us not only see the similarities between the radical leftist organizations in Turkey and Iran and the new left movement in the Western countries, but also compare and contrast the experiences, evolution and conceptions of Iranian and Turkish revolutionaries throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

What distinguishes Iranian and Turkish cases from their counterparts in the Global South and make them similar to their Western counterparts is not solely the process of radicalization per se but mostly the ways in which the mechanisms were combined and shaped the emergence, development and outcomes of this contentious period. The origin of these movements, socio-economic background of their members, the framing of their arguments, and the identity shift they experienced as a result of relational mechanisms had more in common with the new left movement in countries like Italy, Germany and France. Just like their counterparts in the Western countries, the radical leftist organizations in Turkey and Iran evolved from the student movements in the previous decade and went through a process of radicalization as a result of a number of factors such as state repression, schism, competition, etc. Similarly, their members

⁴³⁶ Hajebi Tabrizi, *Dad-e bidad: nakhostin زندان-e زنان-e siyasi (Memoir of Iranian Women Fedai Guerrillas)*.

were mostly coming from middle class families, intelligentsia, and university students rather than working classes and peasants as it was the case with most liberation movements of the period. Similar events played resembling roles in the radicalization of activists in both clusters of the new left; for example, the killing of a fellow activist by the security forces brought about the concept of ‘martyr of revolution’ and triggered the same response from the sympathizers. Just like Benno Ohnesorg’s killing in Germany, the death of Vedat Demircioğlu, a university student during a police raid in Turkey, and Samad Bahrangi’s drowning in Iran represented a point of departure from conventional means of protest and tendency toward armed resistance.

My argument that the radical left-wing social movement organizations in Iran and Turkey in this period belonged to the wave of social movements originating in the 1968 student uprisings in Western countries is a very rare, if not nonexistent, observation among the scholars of Turkey and Iran. This is mostly due to the fact that the general perception has been shaped by the focus of Turkey and Iran being categorized and indeed compared to the other countries in the global south such as Nicaragua, Philippines and Egypt. Especially Turkish scholars tend to compare Turkey with Latin American countries. Also, the 1979 Revolution in Iran diverted the attention from the radical left-wing activism in the 1970s and led many to contextualize Iran in the limited geography of the Middle East.

The period in which radical leftist organizations emerged and evolved in Iran and Turkey could better be analyzed and understood as a process of a contentious episode in the history of these countries rather than an era of terrorism or revolution in making. Given the fact that Iran experienced a revolution at the very end of the decade and Turkey a coup d’état under the pretext of stopping the spread of terrorism in the society, my argument might seem unusual; and as stated above the period in the two countries has so far been accounted for within these paradigms especially by structuralist theories. However, structuralist conceptualizations have exhausted their potential to explain the period for both countries and therefore we need alternative approaches to expend our understanding of the period. In line with the recent discussions and approaches in social movements studies, I prefer to define the

period as one of radicalization, to account for especially the evolution of left-wing opposition movements in Iran and Turkey. I use the term radicalization to define the gradual process from their origination in non-violent movements to their transition to underground activism resorting to political violence, by acknowledging the thresholds and stages instead of proposing a smooth linear progression. Furthermore, focusing on mechanisms constituting the unique radicalization process in each country allows me compare these different countries, rather than remaining stuck in the structural, political and socio-cultural differences setting these cases apart and creating obstacles for a comparative approach.

In this direction, Alime et al. (2015) point out three aspects of the formation of mechanisms which explain similarities and dissimilarities between different cases of radicalization. First, in addition to the main mechanisms which a process of radicalization consists of, there are also sub-mechanisms forming each mechanism; therefore, differences in sub-mechanisms can explain dissimilarities between the different cases of radicalization. For example, they explain, in the case of the Red Brigades in Italy, outbidding emerges through a set of different sub-mechanisms such as de-legitimization, provocation, and repression by proxy. Second, the variety in the combination of mechanisms can also be a reason for dissimilarities between two cases of radicalization. It takes place in two ways: either in the sequence in which mechanisms emerge, or in the total number of mechanisms, in other words, one or two mechanisms that might be missing or extra in one can be the cause for difference. Finally, not every mechanism is equally salient in each case; relative salience of one or the other mechanism for different cases of radicalization can explain dissimilarities. From this outline, we can point out and also explain the reasons for the similarities and differences between the Turkish and Iranian processes of radicalization.

If we begin with the similar mechanisms, as we have seen above, boundary activation through disillusionment can be detected both in Turkey and Iran by the end of 1960s. The new left emerging in many European countries in the 1960s took a critical stance against the policies and position of their national communist parties in the 1960s and 1970s and adopted more radical

positions.⁴³⁷ However, CPT had never been able to occupy a similar position in Turkish politics; instead, what can be called as the ‘old left’ in the Turkish context was represented by two main trends in the 1960s: the first consisted of the advocates of the idea that socialism could be achieved through a parliamentary struggle. They gathered around Mehmet Ali Aybar (1908-1995) and represented by TİP. The second one contained the leftists supported the ideal of ‘national democratic revolution’. However, disillusionments with both positions brought the young leftist in Turkey to similar conclusions reached by the new radical left in the Western countries: the old left was unable to offer a viable solution in the face of new problems and more importantly against the crashing repression of the state. Whereas in Iran there was a definitive disillusionment with the policies of Tudeh Party, among the youth, especially after 1953 coup toppling popular nationalist Prime Minister Mosaddeq. Tudeh’s relations with the Soviets too was a great source of criticism particularly when the Soviets improved its relations with the Shah regime during the 1960s, Tudeh lost all of its potential to challenge the regime and Fadaïyan was established as a reaction to and by accusing Tudeh of being reformist. Therefore, boundary activation with the old-left, in the sense it was experienced by the new left in the Western countries could only be observed in the Left in Iran, where the radical left mostly emerged as a reaction to the Tudeh Party. Whereas for the left in Turkey, if there is a reactionary aspect, it was against the parliamentary left which proved to be unsuccessful in the previous period. In that sense, Turkish experience is closer to the German new left while the Iranian one to the Italian radical left.

There are many other parallels that can be drawn between these organizations in the Western countries and Turkey and Iran such as the role of state repression. However, since the main reason that I examine the similarities and differences between the radical leftist organizations in Turkey and Iran is to be able to analyze and compare the experiences of women in the radical leftist organizations in the two countries, hence I only focus on those that potentially influenced their experiences most. At this point readers might ask why the details and characteristics of

⁴³⁷ Della Porta, *Social movements, political violence, and the state*.

radicalization of the Left in the two countries are important for the experience of women in the left-wing organizations; or in more general terms, what a relational perspective to contentious politics can tell us about the gendered experience of contention. A short answer to these questions, as I will go into the details in the following chapters, is, I argue, that the similarities and differences in the relational mechanisms constituting the radicalization processes in the two countries could also explain the similarities and differences in women's experiences in the radical left-wing organizations. For example, competition among the movement organizations was more intense in Turkey than in Iran. This highly competitive movement environment, combined with the patriarchal culture, created the conditions that are inimical to women's equal participation. Similarly, regular violent conflicts with right-wing counter-movement organizations in Turkey contributed the formation of a more militaristic and masculine movement culture. This too impaired the conditions for women's equal participation. However, both of these mechanisms were not present in the case of Iranian radical left with obvious implications for the everyday experiences of activist women. Therefore, in order to prove my argument, first I briefly summarize them in this part; then, in the following parts, I will give relevant examples from the lives of women in various stages of their participation into these movements with a particular focus on their recruitment processes and everyday lives during high-risk activism based on the oral history interviews I have conducted with them.

The first difference between Turkish and Iranian cases concerning women's experiences took place in the arena between the state and the activists and was related to outbidding mechanism. As we have seen in the previous chapters, even though the activists both in Turkey and Iran were subjected to heavy state repression, the political environment in Iran left no room for legal opposition and the only possibility was underground activism in which strict clandestinity became necessary as a result of increasing state repression. Whereas the relatively relaxed political environment in Turkey allowed the growth of varied forms of oppositional organizations, both legal and illegal. This provided the activists in Turkey with more room to maneuver and consequently a semi-clandestine formation was possible and preferred by the

majority of the organizations. This initial difference in the level of repression brought about other differences which consequently impacted the social movement sector as well as the experiences of women. For instance, the number of Turkish radical leftist organizations could be higher than their Iranian counterparts in the period⁴³⁸, which brings us to the second most important difference between the cases of Turkey and Iran: competition between the radical leftist organizations.

In the same vein, the organizational characteristics of the radical leftist organizations in the two countries varied. While Fadaiyan in Iran had to declare itself as a guerrilla organization from its foundation and adopted strict urban guerrilla tactics due to the level of state repression; in Turkey there was a great diversity among the radical leftist organizations as far as underground activism is concerned as well as a relative flexibility in having links to aboveground activism. For example, in Fadaiyan, all the daily activities of guerrillas living in safe houses were planned according to a program determined by the central committee, time to get up, work out and sleep was the same in every safe house. There were specific times slots in their daily schedule which were allocated to organizational activities such as reading, discussion, maintenance of organizational materials and weaponry. Even the most mundane everyday activities such as household chores from cooking to cleaning were shared in a daily plan written by those living in the house. Yet, in Turkey, even though there was almost a pressure to form an underground branch and obtain guns in order to prove one's commitment to revolution, mostly resulting from the competitive movement culture; the underground activism consisted of a wide range practices from robbing banks, stealing cars, carrying guns to use in the fights with right-wing groups to establishing only a couple of cells where copies of banned revolutionary literature were read and pamphlets were produced to disseminate. There were also groups which preached armed struggle yet did not actually undertake any

⁴³⁸ In Iran, there were 14 guerrilla organizations at the time in various sizes, the OIPFG being the biggest and the most effective. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 481. Also see footnote 5. In Turkey, there were 23 radical leftist organizations and unlike in Iran several of them were prominent in the radical politics of the period. See Ersan, *1970'lerde Türkiye solu (Turkey's Left in the 1970s)*, 427.

armed operation; as well as those which resorted to arms on and off for a limited period of time. This brought about a great diversity as well as arbitrariness in the organizational discipline and conduct, thereby leaving women more vulnerable to personal decisions and preferences of their male comrades and leaders in most cases.

In addition to the lack of centrally enforced organizational rules and regulations to be observed uniformly, the radical leftist activists in Turkey also did not have to sever their links with society to the extent that Iranian guerrillas were obliged to. Therefore, thanks to their continuing activities among the masses, for instance among factory workers, the traditional and cultural rules of conduct, including the expectations deriving from patriarchal gender roles, continued to exert a greater impact on their behavior compared to what was experienced by Iranian guerrillas. Thus, along with its moderating role, persistent links with constituency, at least in our case, also calls for more conformity to its traditions and customs. Consequently, even women coming from more egalitarian socio-cultural backgrounds had to observe more traditional gender roles during their activism in the radical leftist organizations in Turkey. Furthermore, there were many examples in which male leaders or comrades trying to legitimize their arbitrary actions and decisions based on “the values of the masses.”

In a similar vein, the differences between repression strategies of the states in Turkey and Iran had diverse implications in everyday lives of activists. As we have seen in the Turkish case the mechanism of *repression by proxy* was a part of counter-guerrilla activities and began as the right-wing nationalist thugs, the Grey Wolves, attacking every leftist demonstration. Eventually, after the leftist activists began to strike back regular violent confrontations, vigilantism, and gunfights dominated the daily activities of the radical leftists and turned into the main activity of many leftist organizations under the banner of anti-fascist struggle. Whereas the outbidding mechanism taking place between SAVAK and the guerrillas in Iran necessitated hit-and-run tactics such as assassinations and bomb placements, which required more planning and less confrontation. Of course, these two different contexts influenced the experiences of women in diverse ways. For example, while women alongside men in Iran received military training and

carried guns because they had to engage in shootout in case of a SAVAK raid on a safe house. In Iran, the guerrillas preferred to die rather than to be captured SAVAK because this could most probably be worse than a sudden death. Also, because they did not want to give any information under torture. However, in Turkey, being arrested by the police did not have the same connotations; therefore, neither men nor women were trained to engage in armed conflict with the police at least not as systematically as the Iranian guerrillas were. Furthermore, the conditions of anti-fascist struggle as I described above inhibited women's equal participation into not only the violent conflicts taking place on a daily basis but also organizational affairs in general.

Finally, the process of radicalization and continuous commitment to armed activism continued in an interactive and relational manner through the mechanisms listed above until the end of the 1970s. One of the consequences of violent struggles taking place on a daily bases for these organizations was creation a more militant, competitive or dogmatic but certainly retaliatory movement culture, which in turn, not only inhibited their original revolutionary objectives to take priority, but also influenced the micro-relations between and among the activists. Some of the mechanisms had greater implications for micro-relations and everyday life of activists such as competition, object shift and encapsulation. These implications on the experiences of women and gender relations in these organizations will be discussed in the following chapters.