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Political conjuncture, intended audience and the 'Historiography' of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorist organisation

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ABSTRACT

While the literature on the relations between historiography and politics is usually state-centred, literature on the relation between terrorist organisations and historiography is still being formulated. While this literature has studied terrorist organisations such as the IRA and ISIS, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has not been examined sufficiently. In this research, conducting document analysis, we see how Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK, uses historical facts in his texts addressed to varying interlocutors at different times. When these facts are assessed based on their themes, it is established that such titles as 'Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, National Pact, and Republic' are at the forefront. It is observed that the mentioned historical facts are being used to create a perception that the PKK is the continuation of the Kurdish movement from the early twentieth century and to foster the political motivation of its cadres and audience. This paper concludes that Öcalan used historical references to create an image of the state with an unchanging character from the past in order to prove that the organisation's recent political aims are legitimate and necessary.

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Introduction

The fundamental objectives of this study are to describe the content of the Kurdistan Workers' Party's (Partiya Karkaren Kurdistane-PKK)[1] historiography and to explain its functions. This paper examines the founder and leader of the organisation, Abdullah Öcalan's texts which have been published as books since the 1980s. These texts have intensive historical content and the characteristics of the texts change according to the PKK's political needs at different times. He uses an historical discourse which changes according to the intended audience and his interlocutors. He dealt with history in a flexible manner according to the changing intended audience in the foundational era of the PKK; its period of power concentration; and in the post-2000 period after his arrest and conviction in Turkey. In this context intended audience means the cadre of the PKK, Turkish public opinion, official authorities and international actors.Existing researches on propaganda primarily focuses on state propaganda. For example, some studies have argued that

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China's popular nationalism is deeply rooted in the government's history propaganda (Huang & Liu, 2018) and some studies about Russia state that political propaganda of a historic nature has formed an essential part of communication policy in Russia (Linan, 2010). As an alternative approach, this study expands this literature to include terrorist organisations. In particular, the study will contribute to our understanding of how history propaganda relates to aims of a terrorist organisation by studying the PKK case. While PKK terrorist organisation are often the subject of research in security studies, this essay contributes an original approach to examining the PKK by deviating from this approach.

The sources used in this paper consist of the speeches and writings of Öcalan. Texts written during the foundational period include *The Road of Kurdistan Revolution (The Manifesto)* (1993) and *Speeches of the Founding Congress of the PKK* (1982). Texts belonging to the era of power concentration include *Perseverance at Socialism is Perseverance to be Human* (1998) and *Selected Interviews, Volume II* (1995). Mehmet Ali Birand's interview with him in 1988 and İsmet İmset's interview with him at the Bekaa Valley in 1991 and Michael Gunter's interview with him in Damascus in 1998 and Chris Kutschera's interview with him in 1998 in Rome are also texts that belong in this power concentration period. Texts belonging in the post-2000 period, when A. Öcalan was arrested and convicted, are *From the Sumerian Clerical State to Democratic Civilisation* (2001), *Defending a Nation* (2004), *Problems of Democratisation in Turkey* (2011) and *İmralı Notes* (2016).

Methodology and limitations

This research is based on qualitative descriptive analysis. Qualitative methods are needed to provide a more flexible framework when investigating questions such as how phenomena are caused, how they arise and in what situations. In this respect, the intended audience and the historical themes to which he often appeals are examined by transferring historical references in Öcalan's texts with direct quotations.

This paper does not try to advance historical scholarship by adding something to what the source material contained.[2] Öcalan's texts are functional on account of the clues it gives for this study. We read Öcalan's texts with some questions in our mind What themes does Öcalan broach? What does Öcalan want his texts to convey? What do such sources tell us about past reality? We then tried to understand the theoretical background to these questions. Finally, this paper discusses 'how' and 'why' in the conclusion by utilising the theoretical framework. In addition to this, the extent to which the PKK's texts coincide with theoretical templates is discussed.

Cordes also plays a guiding role in the methodology of this article. He considers it necessary to use primary sources written or spoken by terrorists to understand the mindset and self-perceptions of terrorists 'By using the primary materials provided by the terrorists themselves … much information about the terrorist mindset and decision-making process can be gleaned' (2001, p. 151). From this point of view, this study uses a variety of material written and spoken by A.Öcalan because ' … not only do terrorists throw bombs, but they often have to write' (Cordes, 2001, p. 155). Therefore, we use the document analysis method, described below.

Document analysis is particularly suitable for qualitative case studies. Its ability to be used in studies that are conducted to reveal an organisation or program shows that it

is an appropriate method in terms of this study. It is also suitable for monitoring change and development in the object of analysis and provides a suitable basis for those who want to repeat and examine the review. The interested researcher can study the same documents (Bowen, 2009, pp. 29–30). The object of analysis is examined with the themes, that is, the unit of analysis (Giarelli & Tulman, 2003; p. 951 as cited Baş & Akturan, 2008, p. 121). In other words, thematic analysis is a form of pattern recognition within the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006 as cited Bowen, 2009, p. 32). This method is particularly functional as a stand-alone research method when direct interviews and observations are not possible (Bowen, 2009, p. 31).

There are some limitations in the article. A criticism can be levelled that since this study is built on Öcalan's texts it could be argued that we have reduced the PKK to Öcalan. However, it should be noted that the PKK's ideological and theoretical structures are based on his speeches and writings. At this point, all Öcalan's texts that can be accessed through open sources have been examined for validity and reliability. In this respect, it should be emphasised that the findings below have not been arbitrarily selected. The fact that the findings repeat themselves in many texts can be established by any researcher. What is more, for the temporal limitations of the study, only facts that pertain to the period between the first and second world wars have been dealt with.

Theoretical framework

A striking aspect of history-writing is that the historical debate is often overshadowed by political considerations. In other words, historical insight seems to function as a means rather than an end (Paul, 2019, p. 125). However, the nature of the relation with the past is determined by the aim: 'The relation with the past is characterised by one or more goods that people hope to acquire in that relation. This may be knowledge of human nature or insight into casual connections, but also pleasure or profit'. In this context, Herman Paul tries to answer the questions 'What kinds of relations with the past do we have? … We can distinguish at least five relations epistemic, moral, political, hecticetic, material'. According to him 'the relations with the past are never found in isolation' (2019, p. 68). In other words, 'the political relation with the past, includes both crude historical legitimization of contemporary power relations and historical inspiration for present-day processes of decision-making' (2019, p. 71).

Historical thought is never free of politics. This makes it all but impossible to draw a line between historical inquiry and propaganda (Paul, 2019, p. 140). For example, Laurent Wirth states that history bears the quality of 'something [that] can be misused', arguing that this abuse 'can be done by anyone'. Wirth qualifies that the propaganda function is 'a central danger to abuse' with regards to history. Wirth, who mentions 'the mobilization of the masses via propaganda and indoctrination of the youth', states that these practices are one of the fundamental specifications of a totalitarian structure. As a matter of fact, Wirth underlines the fact that history is being exploited by organised groups and will continue to be exploited by them (2003, p. 25). In line with this approach, he does not directly say 'terrorist organizations', but he points to them by emphasising the terms 'totalitarian structure' 'propaganda' and 'organized groups'.

Another scholar who has assessed the abuse of history is Michel-Rolph Trouillot. Trouillot suggests analysing the 'process of emerging the narrative' (2015, p. 178), and claims

that thinking the importance attributed to fact or event does not stem from their specific gravity is incorrect (2015, p. 41); stating that historical narratives are related to political stances (2015, p. 178). He points out that even if none of the facts are ignored, some facts are remembered more than the others (2015, p. 80).[3]

In this context, this study emphasises the question What kind of relations do terrorist organisations build and develop with the past? Surely this question is so broad and this article is a case study. And also, to reach a general answer, we need comparative studies focusing on multiple cases. However, in this theoretical framework there are some answers to this question and these are given below.

Some works are worth mentioning in order to understand how terrorist organisations establish a relationship with historiography. Khachig Tololyan, who studies The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) terrorist organisation, has claimed that he developed an historical discourse based on ASALA's references to Armenian history using the notions of reflective discourse and regulative biography. He points out that in discourses, not only the story of the past is narrated, but also reflective narratives, which act to map out the future, are built on stories. In this way, he emphasises that personal lives are formed on transcendent collective values (1987, pp. 95–100).

Alastair Reed and Jennifer Dowling's article, 'The Role of Historical Narratives in Extremist Propaganda', presents the most clear and contemporary opening concerning the relationship between terrorist organisations and historiography. Historical narratives are used for strengthening the proposed 'solution' to an issue, reinforcing group identity, and attributing legitimacy to an organisation. The authors built their study on the data collected from terrorist organisations such as the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) and the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The basic assumption of the article is that historical narratives function as leverage for effective propaganda (2018, pp. 81–83).

Assaf Moghaddam's book, 'The Roots of Terrorism' sheds some light on historical discourse's function for terrorist organisations. It also shows that it is possible to speak about historical images of terrorist groups. He claims that historical narratives affect the foundation, nature and continuity of a terrorist organisation, that terrorist organisations are influenced by events that happened in the past as well as today and can be reflected in their discourses on terrorism. According to him, terrorist organisations symbolise historical events. He argues that in order to better understand the origin of terrorism, it is important to know the sensitivity of a community to historical events (2006, pp. 96–97). However, differentiating from this claim of Moghaddam, we think that the roots of terrorism are not directly in history and that history is instrumentalised. We try to show this through the PKK example in the study.

N. Ali Özcan mentions, though in a limited way, the relationship he identified in the PKK's use of historiography. According to his analysis, history is the basis of the PKK's program, but its organisational aim is not to write a history, rather to find and transform sympathisers (1999, p. 61). Likewise, the PKK's training program also provides important data for the article. In the PKK's indoctrination camp, which is named the 'political training program', the fact that there are titles such as 'History of Kurdistan', 'History of the Party', and 'The Enemy' draws attention to the objectives of the organisation (1999, pp. 423–424). Much of this material addresses the inter-war period. Although these issues are

not directly discussed in the study, we consider them as critical details showing the functionality of history for the organisation.

Hüseyin Alptekin, who drew comparisons between the IRA, Euskal Ta Askatasuna (ETA), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the PKK, indirectly mentioned terrorist organisations' relationship with history. According to him, terrorist organisations attempt to build ethnic identity around a trauma,[4] which is chosen from history or a popular agony, in order to continue its existence in the direction they desire in order to sustain activism through exploitation of this 'agony', and to obtain militants, financing and logistical support from the ethnic masses, which they influence through propaganda. Alptekin underlines that terrorist organisations strive to keep their ethnic groups' memories alive to foster a sense of victimisation in order to maintain their organisational existence (2018, pp. 14–18). In the study, we tried to show that Öcalan is also trying to construct a historical trauma.

According to Cordes, terrorist communication can be examined in two ways. First is the view defined as the 'propaganda aspect', which concerns how intended audiences are persuaded (or intended to be persuaded). The second is the 'auto-propaganda aspect', which concerns how terrorists persuade themselves (, Cordes, 2001, p. 155).

Çevik also states that in terrorist organisations, just as an outward-oriented campaign is conducted to convince the public, an inward-oriented process targets cadre (2008, p. 42). In this regard, Alptekin's emphasis on the fact that propaganda has an internal ideological function must be underlined (Alptekin, 2018, p. 133).

Cordes and Çevik take part in this study to indicate the internal persuasion processes of terrorist organisations. This is because the terrorist organisation conducts persuasion efforts towards the people it regards as its internal body as much as it does to the public.

Thematic analysis from the texts

In this section, we seek to answer the research question through themes in the PKK texts – this may be called the horizontal plane – and try to analyze themes in a vertical/temporal context. Vertical/temporal analysis examines the organisation in three stages. In other words we are talking about three periods the establishment period of the PKK, the period of power concentration and the period after 2000/after the capture of Öcalan.

The establishment period refers to an era in which the organisation was relatively weak; unknown enough in Turkey and in the world, when fighting with other similar organisations. During this period, the PKK aimed to organise among the Kurds in the southeast region of Turkey. This period can be said to cover the years from late 1970s to the early 1990s.

The power concentration period was the period when the PKK was known (not de jure recognition) by foreign states. It covers the period from the early 1990s to 1999. The post-2000 period includes the ideological revision and politicisation process of the organisation. The PKK was listed as an international terrorist organisation by the U.S. and the EU in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The organisation's communication with its cadres and audience, Turkey and international public opinion has changed in each period. We try to show this change through the following themes.

Usage of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Republic and nationalism themes

Conscious attempts to serve political ends by historical means are always present. Many historians may be led by political considerations in their choice of subject. But Öcalan is not an historian. From the early days of the PKK, Öcalan seemed to be serving the organisation's political aims in his historical texts. There are two initial texts which are focused Atatürk, the Republic [the State], 'Kurdistan', Nationalism, 'Colony' themes. One of the initial works of Öcalan's organisational activities that is examined here is the book *The Road of Kurdistan Revolution,* which is also called *The Manifesto*. The other resource from which this article draws is *Speeches of the Founding Congress of the PKK*.

Öcalan defines Kemalist nationalism[5] as the foundational mixture for the Republic of Turkey and states that 'Kemalist nationalism intended to create a Turkish nation which is "a unity with its country and nation" within the borders of the "National Pact"'. He argues that 'the nations and minorities that contradict this end are going to be annihilated by being melted into the Turkish nation building movement'. However, by pointing out that this is an economic issue, he claims that 'due to its economic weakness, it is essential that the Republic of Turkey's policy over Kurdistan must start firstly with the military sphere' (1993, p. 82). Hence, he begins his thesis that 'Kurdistan is a colony'

> The Turkish Bourgeoisie, who is aware that it cannot develop colonization in the political, cultural and economic spheres without realizing the occupation of a tight military structure over Kurdistan, embarked on a strong military occupation between 1925 and 1940, … This occupation movement was attempted to be reflected as 'the civilizational movement of the Republic against the violent Kurds … . (1993, p. 82)

The 'Kurdistan is a colony' discourse directly relates to the founding years of the modern Turkey. In order to convey the value of this discourse for the PKK, Öcalan frequently states that 'I began my organizational works with two words'. They are 'Kurdistan' and 'colony' (Özcan, 2014, p. 150). Hence, when the foundations of the PKK were being established historical facts were exploited and history was instrumentalised.The saying, 'Kemalist poison' is also another oft used phrase in Öcalan's work. Öcalan, who mentions that 'there are heads in which Kemalism has infiltrated to their tiniest cells', presents his methodological attitude by saying that 'in order to show the realities to these heads, it is essential to clear these heads of the Kemalist poison, to crash heads that this poison is not yet poured into' (1993, p. 112).

İmset's Öcalan interview is useful in order to comprehend his approach to the Republic. Öcalan, by bringing together the past and the present in the interview, states that

> … During the Republican regime of 70 years, the problem was always looked at through the approach of always annihilating the tiniest movement and eradicating the Kurds from history. This is the method that was developed after the foundation of the Republic. And it is something that was adopted by any government or party attached to the principles of the constitution. (1994, p. 368)

Later, he ties the '*raison d'être*' of the PKK to the historical moment of the 1920s

> In the period between 1925 and 1940, Kurdish identity was suppressed without any hindrance. The history after that time was founded on pressures in the economic, social relations and political fields. In sum, the PKK's reaction is to oppose this policy. The PKK is against this wrong policy. (1994, p. 368)

Öcalan, who launches the organisation he founded as an 'historical obligation', casts state institutions and ideology as unchanging. In doing so, he ignores changing tendencies and policies in both the bureaucracy and in the representative organs of the Turkish state. Öcalan's thesis of an unchanging Republic forms the basis for his propaganda for both the PKK cadres and the larger public.

The other text in which Öcalan made intensive historical claims was *Perseverance at Socialism is Perseverance to be Human*. In this book, Öcalan was interviewed by a retired American diplomat, David E. Korn (1995), and Makarinco Vadim from the *Novoe Vermya* newspaper (1995), who provides important data. According to A. Öcalan, Mustafa Kemal, who acted with the motivation of position and rank, headed the War of Independence accidentally. In this scope, it can also be said that Öcalan's speeches are an attempt to discredit Atatürk.

> … After landing in Samsun … 'The Anatolian public is searching for a leader, this leader can be me' he says. He considers this after he leaves Istanbul. Before, when he was in Istanbul, Mustafa Kemal did not have any opinion on national independence. … Before he begins his travel to Samsun and after, especially until he sees the situation, the final situation, there is not one word, one organization, one plan of his concerning the independence of the Anatolian public. After the concrete situation is understood, he turns into the national independence hero. (1995, p. 272)

Turkish nationalism is among the matters that Öcalan mentions. In the scope of Turkish nationalism, it should be emphasised that in Öcalan's narratives the expression 'Turk' is used in an ethnic sense, and it should be remembered in this framework that among the primary aims of the PKK is to change the content of the expression Turk

> … Turkish nationalism is a nationalism of some nobles arriving from Caucasia, the kids of a few Pashas or Beys that were rooted out of the Balkans. … Also, it is disputable how those who developed this nationalism are Turkish. … They are not Turkish, but they need an ideology. What is this need? The state will have such an ideology that it could state the interests of all of them. (1995, p. 277)

The article, based on the interview carried out by Michael Gunter with Öcalan on 13–14 March 1998 and published in the *Middle East Quarterly* dated June 1998, also presents data concerning the question of the research. In the interview, to the question, 'If Atatürk were alive now, what would he do to solve the Kurdish question?', Öcalan's answer was 'two Atatürks can be stated for before and after 1925, the previous Atatürk was more positive towards the Kurds, but after that date he was in favor of a more negative policy'. In addition, Öcalan claims that if Atatürk were alive now, he would change the policy in question (Gunter, 1998).

Mehmet Ali Birand is a famous journalist who interviewed Öcalan. In the interview, Öcalan underlined that between 1919 and 1921 Mustafa Kemal was very careful to set up a positive relationship with the Kurds, but after the Independence War, the Kurds felt disappointed (1992, p. 40). What is more, in the interview, Öcalan said that the first steps towards the PKK were taken in 1973 at Ankara. The Çubuk Dam meeting was the first approach to create an organisation (Birand, 1992, p. 84). In the meeting, Öcalan and his friends discussed the history of Kurds and Kurdish revolts in the early period of modern Turkey (Güner, 2014).

*Problems of Democrat*isa*tion in Turkey* also addresses Atatürk. Öcalan, who claimed in the previous texts that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was neither republican nor nationalist, and that he decided on national independence only after he landed on Samsun based on his observations, updated his view in this text. Öcalan, who accuses the Republic of an ethnic bias and many massacres, argues that the Republic has to be 'truthfully analysed'

> … Just like the question, "Against what and how did the Republic come out?", the question of "On which universality was it based?" is still standing at loose ends and not addressed. Was it a democracy or not, in a word? If not, why have we arrived at this point? These are the true fundamental questions to be answered. Conceiving the problem of democracy deficit that locks whole of life in today's Turkey is only possible with the analysis of the truths under these questions. (2011, p. 38)

The representation of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Öcalan's texts transforms over time. For instance, he says that the 'responsibility concerning the Kurds' is not on Atatürk

> In the assessment of the hegemonic process, holding Mustafa Kemal responsible causes ignorance of the real reasons. Mustafa Kemal played the historical role sufficiently in the prevention of the occupation and in the declaration of the republic. However, he could not preserve the democratic alliance of the republic, … the Turkish Grand National Assembly adopted the founding of a parliament for the Kurds based on autonomy in a secret ballot with 373 for and 63 against in 1922. Mustafa Kemal personally mentioned in his speeches at the beginning of 1924 the solution that could bear meanings of democratic autonomy for the Kurds.
>
> Exclusion of the Kurds is connected to the provocations that the British developed with the supporters of Sultanate in order to leave Mosul-Kirkuk outside the border despite the National Pact, rather than Mustafa Kemal's decision of conscious ethnic cleansing. … The result were sorrows that last to present, material losses and the fact that the Republic has always shrunk antidemocratically. (2011, pp. 39–40)

After using 'extreme nationalism' in a pejorative sense, Öcalan declares his transformed opinions from the previous eras concerning Atatürk. In this respect, an emphasis on bureaucracy emerged

> The period that comprises the years between 1926 and 1950 can be characterised by a one-party authoritarian bureaucratic oligarchy … The hegemonic power that controls the process from abroad between 1925 and 1945 is basically the British Empire. (2011, pp. 45–46)
>
> It is seen to be more important than any kind of democratic step that the nation-state in the Republic of Turkey is being carried out with an extreme nationalism. … Mustafa Kemal is not in the forefront of this experience … There was nearly nobody to combat this tradition except Mustafa Kemal. … the primary fraction of the military and civilian bureaucracy … were thorough followers of that tradition … . (2011, p. 41)

In the above passage, Öcalan, who states that the 'responsibility' for the Kurds is not on Atatürk, fills its place with the term 'bureaucratic oligarchy'. The interesting point here is the connection established between the British Empire – as the other entity in charge – and the bureaucratic oligarchy.

> The faction whose position is the most critical and tragic against the bureaucratic oligarchy is the Kurds, … as the policy of de-Kurdization was experienced, the revolts between 1925 and 1938 were also connected to this policy. … It can be said that there existed a harsh strife between the cadres controlled by Mustafa Kemal and İsmet İnönü [Pasha], that the fact that the Republic was dragged to the right, antidemocratic position played a role in this,

> that against Mustafa Kemal's pro-Soviet and independent attitude the other side was in a sophisticated relationship with the British Empire. (2011, p. 47)

The following statements express the perception that there is an ongoing crisis with historical continuity and point out an execution shown 'obligatory' by the 'historical role' discourse.

> How it is going to be exited from this most significant crisis of the history of the Republic, which is still continuing with all its might and being experienced both in the state and in the society, is going to be determined by the available forces' attitudes. … The Kurdish question is the primary issue in this case. … The period between 1920 and 1925 is being lived again like a CYCLE as the most interesting period from this respect, … but for re-building the democratic republic which could not be founded. The thin line between history and now and its comment as cyclicality gives the opportunity and the chance to conceive this fact and to play historical roles (Öcalan, 2011, p. 48).

Usage of the National Pact theme

Öcalan's references to the National Pact are also remarkable. In the meeting where *The Manifesto* was discussed he pointed out that *The Manifesto* rejects the National Pact

> The National Pact is this: … It is a border system that bayonet power established completely and inside which every kind of national and class pressure could flourish. We do not take this for granted as data. We cannot accept the establishment of a republic over these borders … . (1982, p. 8)

Öcalan defines the National Pact and the Republic's foundational period in the following words

> If we draw a rough picture of history, the history in Kurdistan … never has ever been seen such an exclusion from civilization, from history. The period that is being experienced today is the peak of depersonalization, exclusion from history, and of course exclusion from humanity. (1982, p. 8)

Öcalan saw the relationship that Mustafa Kemal established with the Kurds not as 'tactical but an entrenched relationship' in most of the historical texts. In *Selected Interviews Volume II*, the same position is adopted, with additional references to the National Pact.

> … The National Pact is absolutely not a limit based on one Turkish nation. … This is so when the Turkish Grand National Assembly was first founded also. … All come and speak Kurdish, they say "our nation" … Indeed, Mustafa Kemal himself is sensitive to this issue. (1995, pp. 94–95)

His references to the National Pact in this text are the start of Öcalan's attempts to create a basis for his own political pursuits originating from the National Pact. Likewise, where Öcalan's previous references to the Pact were uniformly negative, in the following reference he writes about the Pact with a degree of positivity, suggesting it had some legitimate content

> In the National Pact … There was Turk-Kurd fellowship. … Supporting the National Pact is not the total eradication, destruction of the Kurd. If there is anyone claiming so, I would prove them wrong. If you say that this is "true", I say let's give its real sense … . (1995, p. 179)

Öcalan's approach signifies the beginning of the shift. In his previous texts, the National Pact is portrayed as an enemy: 'we will have to combat against this'. But here, he sought to give the National Pact its 'real sense'.

Problems of Democratisation in Turkey is an important statement, along with the data it presents concerning the First Parliament and the Constitution of 1921 along with the National Pact. The First Parliament and the Constitution of 1921 come to the forefront as the historical mainstay of Öcalan's thought in the post-2000 era, when the preparation of a new constitution was under discussion.

> The years between 1920 and 1922 are a revolutionary process predominantly violent and military. … This period presented an important opportunity in terms of democratization. With the declaration of the Republic in 1923, this opportunity continued. However, the fact that with the Constitution of 1924, it lagged behind the Constitution of 1921, the fact that a plurality in the Turkish Grand National Assembly was suppressed with the 1923 elections … reversed this historical opportunity, and a hegemonic one-party system was preferred. (Öcalan, 2011, pp. 38–39)

In the text named *İmralı Notes*, Öcalan makes a lot of historical comments on the National Pact theme. In an era when the relationship of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) – an offshoot of the PKK which grew stronger during the process experienced during the civil war in Syria or the PKK's Syrian franchise (Balcı, 2017, p. 467) – was being formed, it is worthy to note that he tried to persuade Turkey to positively approach the PYD over the theme of the National Pact 'I also told them to make an alliance in Syria. … Their only request is that Kurds do not become a powerhouse there. … I suggested *the National Pact Commission*. The National Pact starts from north of Aleppo' (2016, p. 182).

> The breakup of the National Pact after 1925 is actually the Kurdish breakup. … When we say a Middle Eastern Confederation, we mean a revival of this. (Öcalan, 2016, p. 41)

> [Meaning the conference planned to be held in Iraq-Irbil at that time] … It is very important that they should approach it from the framework of the National Pact. … I do not mean the change of borders. … It would be flexible like the border between the Netherlands and Belgium. (Öcalan, 2016, p. 53)

Öcalan's letter, read by Sırrı Önder who was deputy and member of People's Democratic Party at the Nowruz program in Diyarbakır in 2013, is also important due to the references to the National Pact.

> … The truth that our common past puts before us is that it is essential that we set up our future together. The spirit at the foundation of the Turkish Grand National Assembly today enlightens also the new era. We are experiencing a more up-to-date, complex and deepened derivative of the National Independence War, which took place under the leadership of the Turks and Kurds in the framework of the National Pact just as exactly in the recent past … . (2016, pp. 465–466)

From the 1980s to 2010s, Öcalan's approach about the National Pact is very different. It can be seen that the National Pact was represented as a devil in the 1980s texts. But in the 2010s the National Pact was launched as the main part of the 'solution'.

Usage of the Lausanne Peace Treaty theme

The Lausanne Peace Treaty does not exist in Öcalan's historical references. The fact that Öcalan, who is closely interested in the history of the Republic of Turkey and devotes ample space to it in many texts, somehow neglected the Lausanne Peace Treaty, certainly raises questions. First, it is useful to follow the tracks of the discourse on the Lausanne

Peace Treaty and the Republic in the minutes of the meeting, in which *The Manifesto* was discussed, in order to understand the approach of the PKK in its foundational period. He begins with an emphasis on 'imperialism'

> The most notable characteristic of the program is that it treats the fact that how Kurdistan was divided by the imperialists and the colonizing powers who came to terms with them after the 1st Imperialist War, … how the imperialism and colonialism ignored the interest of the masses of the people in Kurdistan, … (1982, p. 7)

Later, he mentions the tensions and reconciliation between the U.K. and Turkey over 'Kurdistan'

> Especially the Turkish bourgeoisie had harsh conflicts and reconciliations with the English. This is so in Lausanne; this is so in Sèvres. Later on in 1925 during the Mosul issue, this is so. All of these are the events of historical significance that took place in the recent history of Kurdistan and caused the formation of today's Kurdistan. (1982, p. 8)

These determinations and his statement that ' … we are facing with a situation of not accepting that these historical, political events drawing a Kurdistan' indicate that they could not accept the given situation.

> The status of a Kurdistan drawn by imperialists, colonialists and feudalists is not a status to be accepted by us. … this is not a status that enables the nation to achieve its political, economic and cultural development independently … . (1982, p. 8)

In short, he declared that they did not accept the Lausanne Peace Treaty and the Republic of Turkey.

In *The Manifesto*, he argues that in the Lausanne negotiations, the 'Kurdistan issue was again laying on the operation table', and says that the Kurds 'were used back and forth' during the negotiation process as 'a pawn between these two powers'

> … The division of Kurdistan's most fertile soils as such has been pursued until now by confirming it in Lausanne. In Lausanne, as such, while Turks introduced themselves to all of the world's nations, they partitioned the Kurds - from whom they received the closest support in their national independence war - and their homeland with the imperialists. (1993, pp. 79–80)

After his interpretation of Lausanne, he returns to the issue of colonialism, which reflects the character of the 1970s. The title in the book is 'Republic of Turkey Colonizing Kurdistan' (1993, p. 80). Öcalan argues that the 'new regime has a chauvinist character' and states that 'both minority rights, and any rightful demand expressing Kurds' interests will be suppressed by force' is the indicator of that period (1993, p. 80). Öcalan, in the texts he wrote after his capture by Turkey, 'recalls' the Lausanne Peace Treaty. Whereas, in the period after *The Manifesto*, the Lausanne Peace Treaty barely appears in Öcalan's historical comments.

In Rome, shortly before he was caught, Öcalan tried to persuade Europe public opinion and decision makers to help him against Turkey by emphasising the Treaty of Lausanne. In other words, he accuses Europe of 'eliminating of the Kurds'

> … Europe is responsible for the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), it owes the Kurds a revision of this treaty. … He also stated that 'I am in Europe to remind it of its responsibilities [Öcalan refers to responsibility for the Treaty]. But Europe is hiding itself as if I was not here. It is for this reason that it gave up organising a trial. (Kutschera, 1998)

Then, as an answer to Chris Kutschera's question 'Don't you think that the Treaty of Lausanne belongs to ancient history?', he stated that 'And the elimination of the Kurds today, is it also part of ancient history? Should history repeat itself? It is terrible. It is a history of treasons and genocides' (Kutschera, 1998).

Öcalan's pleading, which he presented to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and was published in *Sumerian Clerical State to Democratic Civilisation*, however, put emphasis on the Lausanne Peace Treaty and 'Kurdish Historiography'

> If Kurds revolt and seek their rights, there is a kind of bitter result; if they do not seek their rights and stay where they are, worse is experienced … If the Kurdish Historiography is of any use, definitely it has to resolve this. (2001, p. 106)

He continues to argue how 'the Republic [can] divert from a historical mistake', from historical facts such as 'historical fellowship', 'National Forces', and 'Lausanne'.

> It should be everyone's aim that Kurd-Turk relations vector into a historical fellowship route … This attitude is actually also a requirement of the National Forces' spirit that laid the foundations of the Republic in the 1920s. … While Europe endorsed the republic in Lausanne and İsmet İnönü discussed the Kurdish issue and while making assessments such as "we the Turks and Kurds together … ", what is natural is that at least Kurds' cultural demands would not be ignored anymore. Therefore, the Republic would divert from a historical mistake. (2001, p. 325)

In the text that he presented to the ECHR and published as *Defending a Nation*, he attempted to ground many different issues in history. However, the Lausanne Peace Treaty is mentioned to a limited extent. It is cast as an 'endorsement of cultural and political annihilation'. On the other hand, no obvious attitude of rejection like in *The Manifesto* is observed.

> Kurds are a nation outside the scope of national and international law. … This understanding has been preserved since the Lausanne Treaty. … Endorsement in Lausanne has been achieved in exchange for Republic of Turkey's adoption of capitalism as a system … This approach means overlooking the eradication of the Kurds culturally and politically, if not physically … . (2004, p. 491)

Conclusion

The relationship that the PKK terrorist organisation established with historiography reflects the framework drawn from Trouillot, Çevik, Cordes, and Reed and Dowling. Reed and Dowling outline the relationship of terrorist organisations with historiography through four principles (1) linking available events to larger historical orbits to magnify the 'crisis' perception; (2) the use of historical narratives in order to strengthen the context concerning the suggested 'solution'; (3) reinforcing group identity; and (4) relating the legitimacy of the organisation's existence to historical needs. As a matter of fact, the emphasis that Öcalan placed on the continuity and stability of the state appears compatible with the historical orbit principle. Likewise, Öcalan's approach, 'that the Republic is based on the rejection of the Kurdish identity', signals the principle of reinforcement of identity. Then, he builds a trauma and motivates his supporters over this trauma. Öcalan's approach, 'that the PKK's reaction is to oppose policies starting in the period 1925–1940 and continuing since then', can be assessed as an attempt to tie the existence

of the PKK to 'historical needs'. Grounding the suggestion of developing a relationship with the PYD – the Syrian off-shoot of the PKK – on the National Pact is the most concrete example of him using historical narratives for the 'solutions' he offers to contemporary policies. Reed and Dowling's theoretical approach is useful for understanding the PKK example.

On the other hand, originating from Cordes and Reed and Dowling, the historiography of terrorist organisations can also be understood as historical propaganda. Persuasion efforts intended for the organisation are called auto-propaganda, while efforts related to those outside the organisation are termed propaganda. In this sense, the historiography of the terrorist organisations can also be qualified as a work of persuasion due to their communicative content. In addition, when historical narrative is also seen as leverage for effective propaganda, it is fair to define the historiography of terrorist organisations as historical propaganda.

The PKK's historiography of Turkish history and the Turkish Republic is key. Its interpretation of Turkish history is central to its ideology and to the organisation's propaganda as a whole. A historical narrative that transforms and shifts in different periods and to address different interlocutors, but which does not lose its original intensity, defines the PKK's propaganda and demonstrates the fundamentally opportunist character of the organisation.

The PKK, in its foundational period, when it addressed its cadre and audience used views that claimed Kurdistan was a colony, that the National Pact was rejected, that it was essential to pull the 'Kemalist poison' out of people's heads was solidified as fact, and 'that the Republic is an annihilation movement'. Auto-propaganda had weight in this era. A. Öcalan strove to compose a group identity by producing common sorrows and chosen traumas through a pejorative narrative destined for its cadre and audience and to build a discourse that attempted to show how Kurds' identities since the National Pact were corroded, 'that Kurdistan is a colony', and 'that Kemalism is a poison infiltrating to minds'. The PKK was cast as a reaction to 'all these'. He attempts to build an identity on fictive traumas and an 'enemy'.

In the power concentration period, when the organisation was more visible in Turkey and world public opinion, Öcalan argues that there were two different Atatürks – before and after 1925 –, that the Kurds had been a critical element since the foundation of the Republic, and that it was essential to give the 'real sense' to the National Pact. In this era, the first signs of the shift from rejecting the National Pact to instrumentalising it took place. It must be emphasised that auto-propaganda was often used in addition to propaganda.

Öcalan strives to show that the state's ideology, and its policies towards the Kurds were unchanging, by neglecting changes in government and in bureaucracy, in order to reinforce a group, the PKK-defined Kurdish identity and to influence other constituents in his audience. Öcalan's claim of an unchanging Republic to eradicate the Kurds, is just one example of his attempt to construct historical continuity between the inter-war period and the present era. What is more, in the power concentration period, a détente occured in Öcalan's position towards Atatürk. In this process, Öcalan based his political claims on Atatürk.

In the post-2000 era, when Öcalan prepared pleas to the courts and held talks with official authorities, he distanced 'responsibility' from Atatürk concerning the Kurds and

replaced it with an emphasis on 'Unionist-minded bureaucratic oligarchy'. Öcalan attempts to ground his offer of a Middle Eastern Federation on the National Pact. Likewise, there are attempts to persuade Turkey to establish a favourable relationship with the PKK's constituents in Syria by using the National Pact. In that period, auto-propaganda remains in the background whereas propaganda is widespread. It is apparent that there is a clear difference in his historical approaches in the post-2000 era, in the foundational and in the power concentration era. It can be assessed here that Öcalan's effort to change his imprisonment status and his concern for persuasion in talks held with the state were effective.

The intended audience has been concretised as the cadre and the audience of the organisation, Turkish public opinion, decision-makers and international actors. What is more the differences between the elements that make up the target audience have disappeared in some periods. For instance, a text that was presented to the court in the post-2000 era bears simultaneously the quality of a message to national and international public opinion, an instruction to the cadre and audience, and an effort to influence decision-makers over the official authorities. A text in the foundational period can similarly interpreted. It can be said that aside from being an instruction to the cadre and audience of the organisation, it is an attempt to introduce itself to national and international public opinion.

Lastly, it should be stated that the approach in Trouillot's historiography, that some facts are recalled more than the others, is confirmed in Öcalan's historical comments. While many historical facts were remembered in the organisational texts there is a tendency not to remember the Lausanne Peace Treaty. The Treaty, which was openly rejected in *The Manifesto*, is not mentioned by Öcalan until the 2000s. However, in the post-2000 period, the Lausanne Peace Treaty is defined as the 'annihilation endorsement' of the Kurds. The Lausanne Peace Treaty, which is one of the foundational treaties of the Republic of Turkey, is downplayed and dismissed by the PKK in their historiography.

Notes

1. The PKK is recognized as a terrorist organization by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union (EU), the United States of America (USA), and many other countries. For more detail and other approaches, see Mahmut Aytekin (2019). On the other hand, academic literature often describes the PKK as an insurgency (Onat & Çubukçu, 2019; Gutaj & Al, 2017; Güneş, 2017; Gürses & Öztürk, 2020). Actually, insurgency and terrorism can be seen as practically the same phenomenon. The term of terrorism includes violence to shock and influence population. Their methods and objectives are both unacceptable. But 'we regard insurgents' methods as unacceptable, but their grievances are often seen as legitimate, provided they are pursued peacefully' (Kilcullen, 2005). Put differently, 'Terrorism is a politically loaded term and is dependent on the subjective opinion of the observer, illustrated by the adage that one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter' (Boeke, 2016). To solve this problem, we prefer 'violence to population' as main criteria. Accordingly, the PKK is a terrorist organization (Masullo & O'Connor, 2020).
2. This paper is not a review of the early Republic era. These issues have already been covered by various authors (Lewis, 1961; Findley, 2010; Mardin, 2006).
3. Trouillot is arguing about how certain types of voices are silenced in the writing of national histories. In fact, Trouillot's argument has greater application regarding how minority groups are written out of national histories. In addition to this, while Trouillot is arguing about how

certain types of voices are silenced in the writing of national histories, he underlines power's role. In this context, Öcalan is the unique power, he is the only academic-politic authority in the PKK, and he decides how to write history. So Trouillot's 'process of emerging the narrative', 'historical narratives are related to political stances' etc. arguments are functional to understand the PKK's historiography.

4. For the details of the notion, see Volkan (2001).
5. Kemalism/Ataturkism is the founding ideology of the Republic of Turkey based on secularism and Turkish nationalism. The foundations of Kemalist Ideology include the goals, principles and reforms that Atatürk sets out with his thoughts and practices. See Zürcher (2017, pp. 182–184).

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