'Keep your mouth shut in the day and your door shut at night.' Intra-Kurdish Violence in the Shadow of the State: The case of Hizbullah in Kurdistan of Turkey

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Abstract

This article focuses on the main three limitations of the current studies on Hizbullah, an Islamist organisation in Turkey operative during the 1990s: the lack of historicisation of the trajectory of Hizbullah and its members, the lack of consideration of the spatial dimension of its spread and the absence of grounded studies about how it has functioned at the local level. Taking the case of Silvan, a small town in the province of Diyarbakir, the article investigates and analyses Hizbullah's repertoire of action in the shadow of the state, the degree of coercion it achieved in different spaces, its targets, and its conception of the world. The paper argues that the extremism and intensity of the PKK-Hizbullah violence is said to have expressed a completely new type of intra-Kurdish conflict within the long intra-Kurdish conflict history.

Keywords: *Conflict studies; Diyarbakir; Hizbullah; Intra-Kurdish conflicts; Internal war; Kurdistan; PKK; Silvan; Situations of violence; Turkey*

Abstract in Kurmanji

'Bi roj devê xwe, bi şev deriyê xwe bigre'

Şiddeta di navbera Kurdan de ya li ber Siya Dewletê: Meseleya Hizbilla ya li Bakûrê Kurdistanê

Ev gotar li ser sê kêmasiyên sereke yê vekolînên heyî yê li ser Hizbilla hûr dibe ku, ew rêxistineke îslamî ye û di salên 90'î de li Tirkiyê di fehliyetê de bû: kêmasiya dîrokîkirina boçûna Hizbilla û endamên wê, kêmasiya lêfikirîna li ser rehenda mekanî ya belvabûna wê û tunebûna vekolînên bingehîn yê ku li ser wî tiştî bisekine ku were fêm kirin bê ev rêxistin di warê herêmî de çawa dixebitî. Gotar bûyerên li Farqîna Amedê qewimîne wek mînakekê digre û repertuara kiryarên Hizbilla, yê di bin siya dewletê de bûn, lêpirsîn û analîz dike. Wê heta çi radeyê li mekanên cûda, zora xwe dabû qebûl kirin, hedefên wê çi bûn, û fêmkirina wê ya cîhanê çawa bû? Ev xebat îddia dike ku ev tîrbûn û zêdebûna şiddeta PKK-Hizbilla tê wê wateyê ku bi vê pevçûnê di dîroka pevçûnên di navebera Kurdan de şêweyeke pevçûnê ya bi temamî nû afirî.

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38 *'Keep your mouth shut in the day and your door shut at night.'*

Abstract in Sorani

'le rojda demit dabxe û dergakeşit le şewda dabixe':

Tundutîjî nawxoy kurd le jêr sêberî dewlletda: keysî hîzbulla le kurdistanî turkya

Em witare sernic dexate ser sê sinûrdarî serekî ke le twêjînewekanî êsta leser hîzbulla hen, ke rêkxirawêkî îslamîye le deyey 1990 da le turkya çalak bû: kêmasî bedîrok kirdnî rêçkey hîzbulla w endamekanî; kêmasî le leberçawgirtnî rehendî cêgeyî billawbûneney hîzbulla we 'xiyabî twêjîneweyekî binerretî derbarey çonîyetî karkirdnî rêkxiraweke le astî lokallîda. Be leberçawgirtinî keysî sîlvan, ke şaroçkeyekî biçukî parêzgay diyarbekre, babeteke le kerestey karekanî hîzbulla lesêberî dewlletda dekollêtewe legell radey ew zoremilêkirdney le şwêne ciyawazekanda encamî dawe, amancekanî we têrrwanînî bo cîhan. Perraweke argumêntî ewe dekat ke degutrêt tundrrewî û çirrî tundutîjî pekeke-hîzbulla derbirrîne bo derkewtinî corêkî tewaw niwêy milmilanêy nawxoy-kurd lenaw mêjûy milmilanêy dûrudirêjî nawxoyî kurdîda.

Abstract in Zazaki

'Peroj fekê xo, peşewe keyberê xo bigîre'

Sîya Dewlete de Şîdeto Mîyankurdkî: Kurdîstanê Tirkîya de Mesela Hîzbullahî

Na meqale giranî dana hîrê kêmasîyanê bingeyênan ser ke no dem cigêrayîşê derheqê Hîzbullahî de, rêxistinêka Tirkîya ya îslamîste ke serranê 1990an de fealîyet kerdêne, estê: kêmîbîyayîşê tarîxkerdişê raygehê Hîzbullah û endamanê ci, kêmîhesibnayîşê rehendê cayî yê vilabîyayîşê ci û kêmbîyayîşê cigêrayîşanê bibingeyan derheqê gureyayîşê ci yê hêremî de. Bi nimûneyê Sîlvanî, şaristanêkê qezaya Dîyarbekirî yo qij, na meqale repertuarê Hîzbullahî yê aksîyonî binê sîya dewlete de, dereceya îcbarî ke Hîzbullah cayanê cîya-cîyayan de reşto ci, hedefê Hîzbullahî û fehmkerdişê Hîzbullahî yê dinya, înan ser o cigêrayîş û analîz kena. Nuşte de munaqeşe beno ke zereyê tarîxê dergî yê lejanê mîyankurdkîyan de ekstremî û giraniya şîdetê PKK-Hîzbullahî kerd ke tewirêkê lejê mîyankurdkî yo nîp-newe vejîyo meydan.

Introduction

This article looks at the violence of Hizbullah, an Islamist organisation in Turkey operative during the 1990s. It focuses on the case of Silvan, a small town and county in the province of Diyarbakır, in the south-east of the country. Against the background of a bloody war between the state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK), there was a violent upheaval in this small town with urban uprisings (*serhildan*) and their repression that lasted for nearly four years during the early 1990s. This turmoil included violence in the form of an intense intra-Kurdish conflict between Hizbullah and the PKK in the context of the *situations-limites*. Its impacts still linger to this day, in the local memories and in everyday life. Although the collective memory of the 'years of fire' – *salên şewatê* in Kurmandji, an expression commonly used by witnesses to describe the period – is often identified with state violence and its devastating consequences, these climaxed with and were transcended by the emergence of Hizbullah and its intense conflict with the PKK as both organisations sought to dominate the public sphere.

Despite its evident ties to the state, however, Hizbullah's existence and influence in the 1990s cannot be simply reduced to its (effective) role in the counterinsurgency war. In fact, the rapid emergence and expansion of the organisation during the 1990s remains largely unexamined. Hizbullah in Turkey is rather much a 'black box', whose opening is therefore pursued here.

In this article, I first establish a socio-historical narrative that locates or spatialises the development of Hizbullah. Then, I provide a description of the forms of violence at the peak of the conflict between the members of Hizbullah and the other inhabitants of the Kurdish region where the organisation managed to establish itself. A specific focus is placed on the polarisation resulting from the conflict between Hizbullah and the PKK, and its consequences for the social climate in the region. Finally, I present an anthropological approach with regards to subjectivities developed within Hizbullah. The source material for this comprises songs written by members of this community. To my knowledge, apart from some comments made by Mehmet Kurt (e.g., 2017), these have so far been neglected in studies on Hizbullah. The paper concludes with a reflection on the radical nature of the conflict between the PKK and Hizbullah, which does not appear to fall within the usual pattern or traditional interpretation of intra-Kurdish violence. Rather, I therefore argue, the extremism and intensity of the PKK-Hizbullah violence is said to have expressed a completely new type of intra-Kurdish conflict within the long intra-Kurdish conflict history.[2]

In fact, cleavages and conflicts between the Kurds are as many as they are varied. This article focuses on the study of one of the most violent of those, the one arising from the emergence of a new violent actor in the area in the 1990s, Hizbullah. The aim is to shed an investigative light on it precisely through its various ruptures and continuities with the preceding intra-Kurdish cleavages and conflicts.

The *victimo-mémoriel regime* and concealment of intra-Kurdish conflicts

A significant portion of the academic efforts in the field of Kurdish studies are, consciously or otherwise, motivated by a national construction perspective. These studies aim to show the existence and unity of the Kurdish people as well as criticise the abuses committed against them. Mainly dominated by macro approaches, meanwhile, many of the contemporary studies tend to emphasise the prism of inter-ethnic conflict, which has two consequences for the 'Kurdish issue': the emergence of a '*victimo-mémoriel*' regime[3] based on state violence and the extinction or at least minimisation of Kurdish heterogeneity.

While the *victimo-mémoriel* regime prevalent among Kurds is mirrored in many academic works focusing on state violence, the relative silence of researchers on the subject of intra-Kurdish conflicts is striking. Nevertheless, there are a few studies constituting an exception to the general limitations of a more macro approach, with its lack of interest in intra-ethnic cleavages. Mehmet Orhan's (2015) work was one, focusing on intra-Kurdish violence in Turkish Kurdistan. Studies by Cuma Çiçek (2016), Mustafa Gürbüz (2016) and Mehmet Kurt (2017) were three more important books on intra-Kurdish conflict. Although the intra-Kurdish cleavages were not at their heart, other papers providing useful insights and information have included those by Beşikci (1970), van Bruinessen (1992), Arslan (1992), Bozarslan (1997), Tejel Gorgas (2007), Üngör (2011), Jongerden (2012), and Jongerden and Verheij (2012) .

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[2] This research, originated from my PhD dissertation (Çelik 2018), is based on a literature comprising local and national press articles, academic research, and reports and files, to support and frame my field experience as a researcher, following ethnographic and oral history methods. In addition to many informal conversations and casual observation, this study is based on a corpus of 106 formal interviews, mostly conducted between 2012 and 2017. The majority of these interviews took place in Diyarbakır city and three of its provincial districts or counties: Kulp, Lice and Silvan; a few were conducted in Istanbul and Paris.

[3] The notion of a *victimo-mémoriel regime* is taken from the philosopher and political scientist Johann Michel. The *victimo-mémoriel* regime operates as a binary with a plural or fragmented conception, logically dependent on the other and carried by particular, minority or minoritised groups, transmitting the memory of violence or denial to which their members have been subjected (Michel 2015, 10).

It is important to stress the density and diversity of conflicts in Turkey's Kurdish region in the 20th century, conflicts themselves reflected by the pervasive presence of fratricide and treason in the *mémoriel regime* and representations of Kurds. The *birakujî* (Kurmandjî, lit.: 'fratricide') is a dominant subject in daily conversations and political speeches, as well as in Kurdish oral culture, mythological narratives, literature and music. In this regard, poets, writers and musicians should be given credit before sociologists, anthropologists and historians for paying attention and giving voice to a great number and wide range of cases depicting the *birakujî* theme. It is not a coincidence that the long *divan* written by the famous Kurdish poet from Iraq, Abdulla Peşêw, during his brief return from exile in 1994 is entitled '*Birakujî*' (Peşêw, 2014).

It could be argued that the term '*birakujî*' refers precisely, with a strong moral and dramatic charge, to what we qualify in more socio-ethnological terms as 'intra-Kurdish' conflict. The dynamics of these internal conflicts are indeed crucial in Kurdish society. They pre-date the better-known struggles that have sprung up between Kurds and other social and political entities, although those are also part of the multiple and complex interrelations that can hugely compromise attempts at clear identification of the primary dynamics as distinctly 'internal' or 'external'.

The 1990s: A subject matter too often reified

Clarifying the Hizbullah-PKK conflict requires us to take a step outside the dominant conceptual frame employed for the description, analysis and writing of the history of the 1990s. By presenting this period as exceptional, many writers make it stand alone, apart from previous historical narratives, as if this decade were self-enclosed by its unique character. Obviously, with its acts of violence implemented in the framework of a counter-insurgency war, the grammar of the *victimo-mémoriel* regime has been rightly privileged in the interpretation, remembrance and memorialisation of the 'years of fire', whether in the context of human rights and civic practice, in literature, cinema and contemporary art, or in testimonies and academic works. Here, though, I will follow the approach of works such as that of Bahar Şahin Fırat (2004), who, without denying the specificities of the 1990s, insists on the need to study them in respect of the structural and thematic continuities of their configurations with those of previous periods.

I will also add that the tendency to present this decade as a 'block' leads to a concealment within that of its multiple, dynamic and complex causal and interrelated patterns and their relations to what went before and came after. Typically, in reconstituting the different historical sequences of the decade, we notice the peak of the conflict, that moment when all forms of violence and arbitrariness are concentrated, corresponds more or less and with some local variations to the period 1993-96. These four years tend to thus represent the whole decade, displacing and relegating the period as a whole to a secondary level in individual memories as in different historiographies, moving these out to the 1980s and even early 1990s. The four years not only become characterised as the climax of the broader period dubbed as the 'revolutionary popular struggle' but also include the feeling of imminence of 'the victory of Kurdish people'.

Studies on Hizbullah usually suffer from related limitations that result in a similar effect, with a strong focus on the most extreme aspects (mostly of the violence) and conceptual frames (mainly theoretical), to the detriment of efforts to historicize and concretely integrate the

context at the local level. This presents major obstacles to proper analysis and assessment, which a micro approach may afford opportunities to partly remedy. Arguably, the main three limitations of the current studies on Hizbullah are the lack of historicisation of the trajectory of Hizbullah and its members, the absence of consideration of the spatial dimension of its spread, and the dearth of grounded studies about how it has functioned at the local level.

In this context, the years 1980 and 1990 can be jointly taken into consideration as constituting an essential historical sequence, the main element of which is the deployment of war between the PKK and the Turkish State. The 1980s are important to understand what dynamics fed on for what would, in the 1990s, become a 'total war' (an increased degree and intensity of violence). During this period, the PKK, which at the beginning of the 1980s was just a marginal and relatively isolated actor, became the main agent driving the multifaceted construction of a counter-hegemony scaled up through the idea and ideal of 'Kurdistan' at the beginning of the 1990s. The establishment by the state of the 'Temporary Village Guard System' (*Geçici Köy Koruculugu Sistemi*, or *koruculuk*) to fight the PKK, which involved the incorporation (payment and arming) of certain Kurdish civilians into the security system, was without doubt the most important event in terms of intra-Kurdish conflicts from the mid-1980s.

This was far from being the first instance of Kurdish recruitment into a paramilitary system effected by the central state to fight other Kurds. Furthermore, binary readings of the increasing recruitment of village guards during these two decades are standard, made according to the traditional split between *friend* and *enemy* or *loyalty* and *treason* dominant among the main belligerents fighting for the hegemony in Kurdistan, the Turkish State and PKK. Yet, this would fail us in our desire to understand the reality. That is, an in-depth understanding of this phenomena is not possible if one conceals the diversity of motivations and contexts that pushed some individuals or entities (families, tribes, villages) to commit to and withdraw from the system (and sometimes to recommit), or the diversity of forms and actual practice of this commitment. In this respect, a dual prism of the micro-local and a long-term perspective turns out to be a valuable observation tool.

We should also take into account the new dynamics of the 1970s and, more generally, the ruptures, continuities and transformations affecting intra-Kurdish cleavages since the end of the Ottoman period, to describe and explain the processes that overlapped and combined in its last quarter. We then see the linkage of different forms of violence that had spread out across the Kurdish space– specifically, the state violence against Kurdish actors, sheikh-led tribal and other rebellions, violence among Kurdish organisations and political groups (the 1970s is emblematic here with its clashes between 'factions') – and the violence that those groups inflicted against Kurdish civilians. It is essential here also to ensure that the dynamics of the clashes and the nature of the targets of the violence we qualify as 'intra-Kurdish' should neither be seen independently of the state violence nor totally linked to it. Whether, in the case of clashes between the *korucu* or Hizbullah and the PKK or in the case of violence employed by any of these against civilians, the dimension of an instrumentalisation of actors by the state within the framework of paramilitarisation and the counter-guerrilla coexists with the endogenous intra-Kurdish dynamics.

Hizbullah: Black box of the years of fire

Despite the research on Hizbullah in Turkey– also referred to as 'Kurdish Hizbullah' and 'Turkish Hizbullah'– especially since the 2000s, years which coincide with the reorganisation of its partisans in the civilian field after the death of their leader, Hüseyin Velioğlu, this organisation remains one of the more important 'black boxes' of the 1990s. Its linkage with third parties (in particular the Turkish and Iranian states) and development of an extreme urban violence (especially between 1992 and 1995) remain obscure. I will first present a summary of the state of available knowledge on Hizbullah, and then a review of aspects often neglected in works on the organisation, mainly its sociological background and the spatial context of its emergence and its expansion (albeit without claiming anything definitive in regard to these). Subsequently I will investigate original sources – including some that are rather different than the ones usually mobilised – drawing on songs and testimonies produced by this movement in order to reconstitute parts of its regime of subjectivity as well as the social climate it has installed via its attempts to take control of daily life in its entirety through the governmentality of bodies and lifestyles.

Historical and political roots of Hizbullah

Other than journalistic files and interviews conducted by certain magazines and newspapers or reports prepared by the security forces, there was no work done on Hizbullah during the 1990s. It was after the death of its main founder and leader, Velioğlu, on January 17th, 2000 in a special police-forces ambush, that a wave of publications emerged on Hizbullah. Based on the official indictment of the Hizbullah trial, these journalistic works (Bulut and Faraç 1999; Çiçek 2000; Demirel 2000; Çitlioğlu 2001; Çakır 2011; Çetinkaya 2011) and police trainee memoirs from the police academy (Gürtekin 2008; Yıldırım 2012) tend to repeat information filtered by security agents. Apart from these sources, a small number of academic works (Dorronsoro 2004; Gürbüz 2013; Kurt 2017; Işık 2020) and publications on Hizbullah itself (Yılmaz, Tutar and Varol 2011; Bagasi 2014) were also published.

Hizbullah could be considered as an emanation, in exaggerated form, of a trend with deep historical roots in Kurdish society, one that takes Sunni Islam as the main component of its identity. During the Sheikh Said Rebellion in 1925, in alliance with Kurdish nationalists and with some of the traditional elites who mobilised in order to safeguard their power vis-à-vis state centralisation efforts, this 'Kurdish Muslim movement' rebelled openly for the first time against the Kemalist regime in the new republic. This came as a response to the secularist shift of the young Turkish republican elites, expressed in the abolition of the caliphate, the ban of madrasas and brotherhoods and the attempt to impose Westernisation in the new country. After the brutal repression of Sheikh Said and his followers, this tendency would survive in many social areas, albeit in a marginalised fashion, like all expressions of political Islam in Turkey. One part was derived mainly from the two Islamic movements, Nakshibandi and *Nurcu* (followers of Nursi). Most groups and individuals in this category did not originally distinguish between Turkish and Kurdish identities and forged alliances with the major Turkish-nationalist, right-wing (and extreme right-wing) political parties. Attracted by the conservatism of these parties, the Sunni Kurds were co-opted by their administrations and bureaucracies.

Throughout the century, this tendency was also observed in the madrasas, which continued to operate underground in Turkish Kurdistan at least until the 1970s (c.f. Bruinessen 2000;

Şengül 2009; Yüksel 2011). At the end of the 1970s, however, a division emerged in this trend. The majority of Muslim Kurds, traditionally linked to the Nakshibandi sect (*tariqa*) or the Qadiriyya but now affiliated with the Nursi religious community (*Cemaat* of *Nurculuk*), remained integrated into the Turkish national political parties by voting or by being elected into one of the main, legally recognised, parties. However, the remaining Muslim Kurds, although small in number, were deeply influenced by the movement of the Islamic Revolution rising in neighbouring Iran.

It is therefore worthwhile following the path and the influences of the cadres of Hizbullah in this context. At the national level, among numerous associations fighting communism and driven by the state since the beginning of the Cold War, the Associations for Fighting Communism (*Komünizmle Mücadele Dernekleri*) brought together 'idealists' (Turkish far-right nationalists, *ülkücü*) and Islamists, who played a central role in the creation of two of the networks behind Hizbullah, the National Turkish Student Union (*Milli Türk Talebe Birliği*, MTTB) and the Raiders Association (*Akıncılar Derneği*). The former would become home to many future state cadres of the incarnating Turkish-Islamic synthesis, such as ex-president Abdullah Gül and the current Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan – and also Hüseyin Velioğlu, during his university years at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Ankara. At the end of the 1970s, Velioğlu had founded a group named the 'Community of Islamic Scholars' (*Cemaata Ulemayên Islâmî*), which worked for the establishment of an Islamic State in Turkey (Kurt 2017, 19). The two organisations (MTTB and Raiders) were both influenced by the writings of the Muslim Brotherhood, in particular those of the radical and reactionary Islamists Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, which they helped to disseminate in Turkey.

The fight against communist subversion, the *leitmotif* of the shift to right-wing politics in Turkey following the trend all around the world at that time, was a common *topos* between the authorities in power and the different movements of political Islam. Simultaneously, the victory of the Islamist revolutionary movement in Iran inspired a revival of Islamist ideology on a global level, far beyond the Shiite world. In Turkish Kurdistan, this major event coincided also with the 'final crisis' of madrasas, which looked set to disappear under the joint battering of two decades of competing alternative systems in the fields of education and religion. The school education included the development of public schools (*mektep*) in Kurdistan, while in the religious field the competition had been doubled since the 1950s with both the state vocational schools for imams (*İmam Hatip*) and the development of *cemaat*s as a new religious form.

By the end of the 1970s, a reorientation took place of the players and networks created during years of clandestine madrasa activities as related to the Kurdish and statist political fields. The cleavage between those coming from a madrasa religious education (*medreseli*) and those educated in state schools (*mektepli*) contributed to the constitution of a restricted circle of 'orphans of the *Ummah*'. This group was always going to be receptive of the fundamentalist and radical thesis of Hizbullah, in particular of Hüseyin Velioğlu (himself educated in Turkish public schools), seeking in the first place to recruit from the old madrasas circle. This seemed to them to embody, in the image of Iranian revolution, a possible reconciliation and alliance between the Muslims with a Quranic educational background and those who had studied in modern schools (Kurt 2017, 86).

In sum, the socio-political situation emerging in the late 1970s and especially the 1980s, under the dual influence of regional (international) and Turkish (internal) evolutions provided a suitable context for Hizbullah's organisation as a militant Islamist group. On the global scale, there was the encouragement of Islamist and conservative movements within the framework of an anti-communist and anti-Kurdist struggle between the 1950s and 80s, while on the local scale, there was the promotion of Kurdish Islamist movements within the framework of the ideology of a Turkish-Islamic synthesis in the south-east of the country after the coup d'état in 1980. These comprised the double engine behind the emergence and spread of organisations such as Hizbullah. In the Kurdish region, moreover, one must add the vacuum left by the extinction of the madrasas as among the local factors that facilitated radical Islamist organisations.

Velioğlu founded his organization in 1979 with three of his old madrasa instructors (*seyda*). The name 'Hizbullah' would be adopted later on. Many young *seyda*s influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood joined Hizbullah from the start, during its first years (Kurt 2017, 21). The Brotherhood would keep close relations with the Iranian regime until the end of the 1980s, despite the unease created in Velioğlu's mind by the Hama massacre in 1982, when Iran gave its tacit support to the Syrian state's brutal crushing of a rebellion by the Muslim Brotherhood there. The Hama massacre was a key event in the orientation of Hizbullah's ideology towards clandestine and violent action, particularly in the repressive Turkish political context following the 1980 coup and imposition of military control. Notably, the massacre convinced Mullah Ahmed of the need for an armed struggle against the 'infidel' (*Kafir*) regimes; Ahmed was a member of Muslim Brotherhood who had taken refuge in Mardin in south-east Turkey and was known to strongly influence Velioğlu (Uslu 2007; Kurt 2017).

At the same time as blocking democratic political activities was regarded as antithetical to and thus threatening the secular state, the regime that emerged from the 1980 coup and subsequent political developments also secretly encouraged Islamist movements as a ploy to counteract the left and prevent any resurgence of the annihilated leftist and Kurdish movements (as well as, to a lesser extent, those of the far-right). The encouragement of state-sponsored 'white terror' was continued through the 1980s with the emergence and extension of the PKK in the eastern part of the country. Clearly, this was a political context that particularly favoured the emergence of an organisation like Hizbullah.

Territorial (geo-social) context: geography of Hizbullah

Hizbullah did not appear just anywhere, but in a quite precisely defined area of south-east Turkey (Kurdistan): The Batman-Diyarbakır-Mardin triangle.[4] Without forcing an artificial causality, we can see how a conjunction of factors might have contributed to make of the area a choice location for Hizbullah since the triangle is characterised by the convergence of at least three geo-demographic particularities. First, it was in that area where urban and demographic development was highest in the entire Kurdish region, with spectacular economic and population growth in a very short period of time. Second, it was there that the civil rebellion (*serhildan*) movement was the largest and had erupted earliest, which could be linked also to the topographic character of the area with its vast plains, poorly suited for the development of guerrillas. Third, this was the only area in Turkish Kurdistan where a small

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[4] Along with a very small development in the Bingöl and Tatvan region (before 1995).

non-Muslim community (Yezidis, Syriacs, Armenians) had survived. The worldview of Hizbullah members indicates the importance of this last factor.

As indicated, the rapid urbanisation of this triangular territory had been supported by economic factors. Primarily, these were the early development of intensive agriculture in the easily irrigated land there alongside the presence of a thriving industry (oil refinery in Batman), which encouraged further capital development and the concomitant need for a workforce. The populations here had largely imbibed a Kurdish politico-cultural ideal. For example, it was in Silvan that the first of the protests dubbed the 'eastern rallies' (*doğu mitingleri*) was organised – and during which the Kurdish sensitivity of the local *medreseli* played a central role. In the context of the development of the Kurdish movement, the civil protest actions in this area were massive and early.

The PKK initiated numerous hunger strikes, staged guerrilla funerals and engaged in symbolic actions such as boycotting schools and the protest performance of closing shutters (*kepenk kapatma*); thus, these forms of engagement became the favoured modes of action of the *serhildan* in the early 1990s. In the lowland cities, where there was little support for violent propaganda and the use of weapons, the PKK placed greater emphasis on mobilising civilians in collective protest against state policies. Cities such as Silvan, Nusaybin, Cizre, Batman and Diyarbakır were at the heart of the first wave of *serhildan* in March 1990 (cf. Güneş 2013).

Then, the uprooting and disintegration of traditional ties due to the rural exodus (urban migration) intensified and extended in the wake of the armed conflict, which saw the rural base of the PKK targeted and thousands of villages emptied by the Turkish state forces (cf. Jongerden 2007). This brought together tens of thousands of displaced persons in the counties of Diyarbakır, Silvan, Batman, Mardin, Nusaybin, Kızıltepe and Cizre, forming a large social base that was supportive of the guerrilla movement. But the newly urbanised youth of this mass emigration also provided a recruitment pool for Hizbullah.

Hizbullah's recruitment was in fact quite homogenous, consisting mainly of young men (15 to 25 years old) with a secondary but not university education (except for Velioğlu), and coming from middle-class families recently settled in the city. In fact, from a sociological point of view, as the involvement of the (former) *medreseli*s decreased after the first five years within the organisation – many *seyda*s who had joined Hizbullah left it due to increasing disagreements with its functioning and newly violent orientation – we can talk of a 'double recruitment'. That is, the bulk membership of the organisation now came to be composed of two broad categories as specified by class: on the one hand, there were employees, tradesmen and civil servants (middle class), and on the other, landless peasants/smallholders and the recently urbanised youth (working class) (Dorronsoro 2004, 11).

Switching to armed violence: polarisation of the PKK-Hizbullah conflict

Before exploring the role of third parties – namely, the Turkish state – in the deployment of Hizbullah in the Kurdish conflict, we should briefly turn our attention to the 1970s, where we can find roots for the confrontational mindset that would unfold among the Hizbullah as well as PKK supporters. A contest among different revolutionary Kurdish factions had flourished in the first half of the 1970s – factions that competed both ideologically and materially, including for recruitment and thus development of a social base in Kurdistan. This began to take a violent and fatal turn in the second half of the decade (Orhan 2015). Whilst the

confrontations in the majority of Kurdish towns tended to be polarised between two or three leftist factions with very close ideologies, in Batman, the fight that crystallised was between two political poles, each on one side of a political spectrum. There was revolutionary Kurdism, represented by the faction that would become the PKK, at that time known either as the 'Revolutionaries of Kurdistan' (*Kürdistan Devrimcileri*) or '*Apocu*' after their leader, Abdullah Öcalan – and on the other side, there was the Islamist conservative trend, represented by the local branch of the MTTB.

Recalling this period, Velioğlu testified that the MTTB, long established in the city, reacted to the arrival of this Kurdish leftist and nationalist activism, which had managed to quickly create a base among young workers and landless peasants, by becoming more politically active. They started to work at street level to intensify their propaganda and recruitment efforts. PKK and MTTB supporters thus fought to occupy the field, occasionally mobilising their militants in tense clashes, particularly between 1977 and 1979. Then, in 1979, the assassination of the newly elected pro-Kurdish mayor of Batman, Edip Solmaz, triggered a deadly wave of PKK violence against the Raman tribe, which collaborated with the state and had been responsible for Solmaz's assassination. Although primarily intended to avenge the killing of Solmaz, this violence was also aimed at gaining attention (hence sympathy and generally broadening the social base of support) and presenting a show of strength (consequently establishing a monopoly on violence in the city and province). We will see how much this defeat contributed to Velioğlu's understanding of the founding role of violence and to his decision to use it himself, this time for the benefit of the cause of Islam.

During this time of intra-Kurdish conflicts resulting from political fragmentation and ideological hostility, Hizbullah also did not shy away from using violence against its immediate competitors, namely other Islamist groups. In the end of 1980s, aggression against leaders of other religious groups became a preferred mode of action for Hizbullah. Many former *seyda*s, who had joined and then left, were threatened. In the 1990s these attacks became deadly: 22 local imams were killed by Hizbullah between 1990 and 1993, probably because of their resistance against the monopolisation of Hizbullah in their mosques. Grouped after 1983 around its bookstore in Diyarbakır named *İlim* (lit.: science, knowledge), Hizbullah was sometimes referred to as such, as distinct from the other two locally influential Islamist groups, *Menzil* (Range) and *Vahdet* (Unity) (Çakır 2011; Kurt 2017). But these last two would gradually be eliminated. Thus, Hizbullah has, like the PKK, also succeeded in becoming a dominant player in its ideological field (Kurt 2017, 16).[5]

In the early 1990s, and despite the counter-insurgency war led by the Turkish army and supported by a plethora of special (security, paramilitary) organisations and tens of thousands of *korucu*, the Kurdish movement was at its peak. The networks and dynamics built during the previous decade had led to a massive mobilisation, while the guerrilla controlled vast 'liberated zones' in mountainous territories and enjoyed dense networks of supporters and militia in cities. Employing and furthering this territorial and social control, the PKK implemented 'revolutionary violence' against 'traitors', 'collaborators' and 'agents' through its 'people's courts'. The sense of an imminent and irreversible historical victory of the Kurdish people was widespread, and there was a great respect, with admiration and fear interwoven, for the

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[5] In 1993, when the Menzil leader Findan Güngör criticised Hizbullah's violent policies and killing of civilians as well as its open war with the PKK (after all, the PKK was an organisation, albeit an enemy, fighting against the secular regime, which was 'outside Islam' [*tağuti rejim*]), Hizbullah killed him and more than 150 other members of the Menzil group (Çakır 2011; Faraç 2002).

male and female guerrilla fighters. Overall, the process of monopolising legitimate oppositional violence in the name of the Kurdish people was successfully accomplished by the PKK. In that period, the 'triumphant regime of subjectivity' that had characterised the PKK since its beginning spread among the population, carried along by a kind of euphoria of struggle. The more state repression intensified, with its 'scorched earth' and the 'dirty' counter-insurgency methods, the more the PKK struggle was morally raised (relatively, justified) and gaining the (Kurdish) public's sympathy as well as prestige (for its material success). Symbolically if not militarily (since this was a high point from which it was brought down by state power), the PKK was becoming hegemonic in Kurdistan. This situation was unacceptable for Hizbullah supporters, whose political projects and world vision were so opposed.

The escalation towards deadly violence first developed symbolically. At the peak of the *serhildan*, Hizbullah members began to ostensibly challenge the PKK in public spaces, refusing, for example, to join the collective action of lowering their shop shutters. The PKK went on the offensive, confident in its power and given the nature of this oppositional organisation, perceived as reactionary, fanatical and instrumentalised (or just created) by the state. On May 17th, 1991, an attack was aimed at Şerif Karaaslan, a Hizbullah official in İdil, nowadays a district of Şirnak (Karaaslan escaped but his parents were killed). A few months later, in the same city, on December 3rd, 1991, Hizbullah responded by killing Mikhail Bayro, a PKK official of Syriac origin. From that date on, reciprocal assassinations took place, with 13 killed in the following month (Çelik 2018, 583).

The first assassination carried out in Silvan, the area under study here, was conducted by Hizbullah in February 1992. Before that date, the townsfolk had generally regarded the few members of Hizbullah there as *sofik* (diminutive of '*sofu*', meaning 'bigot' and denoting a certain contempt with a touch of humour). In response to the killing, however, the spontaneous reaction of ordinary people, of traders and suchlike banding together, was to chase after the armed men as a lynch mob (the men were caught but not killed). The first deadly retaliation by the PKK took place on March 31st, 1992, with the assassination of the local Hizbullah leader, Hacı Biçer. After that, the county of Silvan especially and province more generally became a battlefield. If an assassination were committed by one of the organisations in the morning, there was generally a response in kind from the other party by the afternoon.

On June 26th, 1992, following a series of civil assassinations initiated by Hizbullah in the cities, the PKK started an attack in the Silvan village of Sûsa (Yolaç). Ten men were killed while leaving a mosque that was also claimed to be used as a Hizbullah organisational base and arms warehouse.[6] The 'Sûsa massacre' was a turning point for Hizbullah. According to my interlocutors, far from being intimidated, they radicalised their challenge and displays of power, and decided to install the 'rule of ten for one' supposedly from the Quran, according to which each death in their camp should be avenged by ten in the enemy's. Hizbullah's room for manoeuvre in what was now its back base of Sûsa was such that it constructed cemeteries in tribute to its martyrs there and initiated pilgrimages for them every 26th of June.

In nearly all the counties where Hizbullah had a militant base, the following four years saw bloody conflicts and civilian deaths. We do not have the exact numbers, but according to

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[6] *Serxwebûn*, July 1992, n° 127, p. 24.

Rusen Çakir (2011, 70) over 700 hundred people were killed (some 500 were PKK-affiliated and 200 Hizbullah). According to my observations on the ground, however, the number must be much more than that. In Silvan alone, there were over 300 people killed during this conflict (c.f. Parlak 2014). Mehmet Kurt (2017, 31) states that the accurate number should rather be in the thousands. In the urban areas concerned, where it was difficult to get the regular army or the *korucu* involved against thousands of mobilised civilians, the climate of terror built with these murders escalated rapidly to bring a sharp end to the *serhildan* protest movement.

The collaboration of Hizbullah with the Turkish state became expressed as '*Hizbul-kontra*' and considered by the pro-Kurdish movement as a fact of public notoriety. The systematic impunity enjoyed by those responsible for murders, who were captured and yet released by the police, was highlighted by all my interlocutors who witnessed or were victim of Hizbullah violence. It remains unclear and officially unproven exactly which sector(s) of the state and counter-guerrilla forces were directly involved in this collaboration, but there was little doubt in the public mind as a whole (and certainly among Kurds and leftists) that material assistance and information sharing were provided by the various (official, semi-official, and clandestine) security forces to Hizbullah supporters, as argued by various journalists and researchers (e.g. Bulut and Faraç 1999; Çakır 2011). Some officers and officials from the Turkish state have themselves mentioned 'the use of Hizbullah against the PKK' (Işık 2020, 81-82).

Certainly, we cannot understand the transition to violence and rise to prominence of Hizbullah, which is an ultra-minority in Kurdistan, without taking its state support into account. Nevertheless, it would be simplistic to consider Hizbullah as a pure creation of the Turkish state. As we have seen, long-term historical dynamics were also at the root of the organisation's emergence, and the conflict that broke out in the 1990s did reflect an internal divide in the Kurdish society. Hizbullah had its own political agenda, which was also *in fine* hostile to the Turkish state, as evidenced by the aftermath of these events – a feeling that was mutual insofar as the Islamist movement was antithetical to the Kemalist regime of the Republic, still in place at the heart of governance. The reality is rather that the instrumentalisation was reciprocal; each used the other for its own, essentially unrelated purposes.

Hizbullah's subjectivity regime and its consequences for daily life

Beyond the geopolitical dimension of the conflict and instrumentalisation of Hizbullah by the Turkish state in its own 'dirty war' against the Kurdish movement, it seems important to insist also on the social climate generated by Hizbullah practices and the nature of the hostility it developed against the PKK. Regarding the first point, there are several particularly gruesome testimonies that attest to the social climate generated, from which just a few examples will suffice. On the second point, oral sources will be employed to investigate Hizbullah's world (especially its sense of identity and relationship to Kurdishness) in light of the perception it conveys in particular about non-Muslims.

'Keep your mouth shut in the day and your door shut at night!'

The places where Hizbullah supporters managed to organise themselves and make their influence visible gradually expanded and diversified. First, it was able to use weddings. These were perfect vehicles not only as social (family) occasions that could give concrete form to the Hizbullah vision of the world in the public arena, but also for recruiting young people.

Celebrated in the Hizbullah style, weddings drew the lines of a renewed and more radical vision of Islam (prohibition of dances in which men and women hold hands, with musical instruments such as the *davul* (drum) and the *zurna* (a shrill, reeded pipe) removed in favour of the tambourine alone, replacement of traditional songs by religious songs (only) and a specific dance move on the refrain '*İnşallah, Maşallah, Hizbullah*' ('Godwilling, Glory of God, Follower of God').

In the Silvan region, these traditional novelties were initiated in the village of Sûsa (Yolaç), then in Bilbil (Gündüz) before spreading to other villages. Then, in mosques, through a combination of threats, violence and sometimes murder, Hizbullah managed to create an atmosphere of fear among the imams, who stopped resisting its recruitment efforts (in Diyarbakır, for example, Hizbullah activities spread from a handful of mosques at first to almost all of them by the mid-1990s (Kurt 2017, 129-30). Finally, in junior and high schools, Hizbullah supporters organised themselves to be in the same classes, some voluntarily repeating a school year so as to organise the newcomers of the following year. They targeted in particular the students' lifestyles, mostly through threats and physical sanctions. Girls regarded as wearing improper clothes or behaving inappropriately were targeted. A t-shirt leaving arms uncovered or conversations with boys would lead to 'warnings', or worse (one punishment was the throwing of corrosive acid into the faces of recalcitrant girls). Boys as well as girls would be reprimanded for displaying attitudes that were too casual, either in terms of gender relations or towards religion. In Silvan, Hizbullah activists gradually succeeded in dissuading a large number of families from sending their girls to school.

The expression 'the time when you had to keep your mouth shut during the day and your door shut at night' was used on various occasions and in various forms by my interlocutors in Silvan. This expression seems an excellent metaphor for the atmosphere created by Hizbullah. Even though it was the civilian leaders of the PKK who were the first to be fatally targeted in Silvan, this violence then spread to ordinary people who had been politically active since the 1970s: doctors, teachers, municipal employees, clergymen critical of Hizbullah, ordinary people, in fact, along with women considered to be dressing too openly (*açık*, unveiled, and/or in clothes considered 'indecent', 'shameless' or 'provocative'). Even a misplaced gesture could transform into an act punishable by death. The expansion of the political targets of this wave of violence nearly paralysed daily life in the town, with Hizbullah practices including anonymous threats on the phone, tracing signs on house doors, tracking individuals, intimidating certain people or families to leave the city, and confiscating property and houses for the benefit of its members. Neighbours distrusted one another; anyone might be an informant.

The testimonies collected for the period 1992-97 recall ideal-typical descriptions of the civil war. Extreme facts are found, such as a son, a member of Hizbullah, who hanged his father because he 'did not live as a true Muslim', or a father who refused to attend his sons' funerals, or brothers in the same family killing one another for their respective commitments to the PKK or Hizbullah, leaving widows forced to continue to live together. According to the responses in my interviews, everyone locked themselves in their homes by four o'clock in the afternoon (i.e., before dusk in the winter). The number of times the expression 'from fear' (*korkudan*) appeared in the testimonies of my interlocutors in Silvan is striking (e.g. 'terrified, no-one came to the funeral'; 'out of fear, my uncle did not dare to take me to the hospital'; 'petrified, no-one wanted to give blood [for a blood transfusion to a young high school girl

who had been attacked by her Hizbullahcı classmates]'; 'we were so frightened that we didn't even go to visit her grave'; 'no one greeted me because they were afraid,' etc.).

Hizbullah's *modus operandi* has left its mark on people's memories with its brutality and its high level of organisation and its professionalism. Its preferred methods of execution were to shoot the victim with a single shot to the head (with a Takarov pistol), or sometimes to club the victim to death with a machete (*sator*). The risk of being beaten or killed was sometimes perceived as preferable to that of being kidnapped and held prisoner in underground dungeons dug by Hizbullah in its military base in Sûsa, where people were interrogated and tortured. It should also be noted that there is a recurring reference to a 'blacklist' drawn up jointly by the state and Hizbullah with the names of those who were to be disappeared, characteristic of the climate of that era. In the public eye, Hizbullah was associated with the Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-terrorism Service (*Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele*, JİTEM), therefore to the State.[7] This added to the feeling of extreme fear, of helplessness, and perhaps explains the low proportion of individual revenge killings following the murder of relatives, contrary to the tradition of vendetta among Kurds. As one witness from Silvan put it: 'If you take revenge, the Hizbullah people [*Hizbullahçı*] are confident in the support of the state and destroy you and your family'.

'You send the girls to the mountain for the Yezidis and the Armenians'

In this last part, attention is drawn to a neglected aspect of Hizbullah ideology: the particular antipathy – hatred, revulsion, despising – displayed towards PKK supporters as part of a particular framework of interpretation. Here, we see political enmity as religious fundamentalism of a moral nature as much as a religious racism based on identity. This thus requires a reading of political opposition whose roots are centuries old. The study of the lyrics of some songs produced by the Hizbullah movement afford us a gateway into this.

The form and content of the artistic or aesthetic productions of or linked to a movement may contain valuable indicators to its world view. In the absence of other oral, or even written sources for the 1990s, the song recordings left by Hizbullah allow us greater access to the more emotional and subjective dimensions that helped to mobilise its supporters. Here, I will focus on the way in which the organisation perceived and defined itself with regards to the major question that inflames the region: Kurdishness. Excerpts from songs dedicated to the Hizbullah 'martyrs' of Silvan are used, as well as two songs specifically composed for Abdullah Öcalan, namely, 'Hey, Servant of Armenians' (*Ey xulamê Ermeniya*) and 'Sergeant/Foreman of the Workers' (*Çawîşê Emela*).

The songs/chants selected come from two series of albums named 'Martyrs' Caravan' (*Şehitler Kervanı*) and 'The Gospel of Islam' (*Mizgîna Îslam*) produced by Hizbullah. The two series consist of about fifteen albums containing over a hundred songs. These particular songs have been chosen for their relevance to this fieldwork, as the 'heroism' of some members from Silvan is mentioned, and because Hizbullah's emblematic discourse on the PKK is a repeated theme.

Here is an extract from the song Martyr Salim (*Şehid Salim*), dedicated to Salim Fidancı, killed in Sûsa by the PKK on April 3, 1992:

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[7] See (Söyler 2015; Işık 2019) for this paramilitary organisation.

> Oh, the communist traitor, the corrupted infidel […]
> They dishonoured Muslims for Christians and Yezidis,
> They turned villages and mountain caves into brothels.

And a few lines from the songs written against Öcalan:

> You follow the Yezidis and the Armenians, you work for Europe,
> You send the girls to the mountains for the Yezidis and Armenians,
> At night you go on rampage for the Yezidis and Armenians,
> Never will the Yezidi and Armenians be our masters,
> No-one has ever seen you kill a Yezidi or an Armenian,
> The Hizbullah of the Kurds, Kurdistan arisen to extract the Yezidi and Armenian seed,
> For the Yezidi and Armenians, you deluded the Kurds with a web of lies [...]

It is evident that the PKK is here associated with everything that damages Islam: communism, atheism, immorality (the 'girls' in the mountains transformed into 'brothels', lies), the West ('Europe'), and, above all, with almost obsessive redundancy, the Yezidis and Armenians. This emphasis contrasts strongly with the lack of observation on the subject in the literature. For example, Mehmet Kurt (2017), the first author of a seminal book on Hizbullah, mentions antisemitic elements in the perception of this movement but the author does not elaborate enough on religious racism (i.e. prejudice against other, non-Sunni sects and ethno-religious minorities).

For Hizbullah, the general perception of the PKK under Öcalan's leadership is manifestly that of an evil organisation that persecutes Muslim Kurds in favour of the infidel interests. Hizbullah's Sunni identity takes precedence over any other sense of belonging and identity. Kurdishness is rendered invisible through this Sunni-centred prism. For Hizbullah, a Kurd is a Sunni Muslim. Yezidi, Alevi, Christian or Jewish Kurds are (or would be) an impossibility, unconsidered, unimagined even.

These excerpts are quite representative of the samples located. In many songs on the lives and deaths of militants, the words 'Yezidi' and 'Armenian' are used as insults to express hatred, contempt and enmity. This emphasis echoes three historically and geographically rooted processes. First, the social hierarchy of the Ottoman period was established according to religious affiliation. The equation of Muslim with Sunni, and the idea of the superiority of Sunnis over non-Muslims, accompanied by the supposed nineteenth-century 'treason' of non-Muslims, has, among other things, justified the 1915 genocide. Then comes the layer added by the Republic of Turkey since its War of Independence in the 1920s.

While the first Kurdish nationalists were attempting to claim an independent Kurdistan in Sèvres (where the new map for control of the ex-Ottoman lands, including Anatolia, was drawn), the Kemalists, from their side, mobilised most of the region's elites by wielding the threat of a treaty that would 'transform Kurdistan into Armenia' (Karabekir 1960, 14) (thus provoking the first and most sustained intra-Kurdish divide of the contemporary period). This fear drew implicitly on the register of guilt about the role of the Kurds during the genocide, and the subsequent confiscation of Armenian property from which they benefited (Bozarslan 2015, 473-474). This psycho-discursive register was reactivated each time Kurdism gained ground. Notably, when the PKK declared war on the Turkish state, the state propaganda missed no opportunity to bombard public opinion throughout the 1990s with alleged links

presented as facts that connected the PKK and the Armenians – and this after initially presenting the PKK as a branch of the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) (Hoffmann 2002; Sengul 2014).

It is therefore in the context of a *longue durée* historical heritage, in perfect harmony with the representations disseminated by the central state, first Ottoman and then Turkish, that the hateful Hizbullah representations of Christians/Armenians need to be placed. Similarly, the PKK is reported as 'Marxist', 'communist', 'atheist' and 'in the service of these Armenian dogs'. Hizbullah's discourse presents the PKK as led by 'the Yezidis and Christians'. However, this addition of Yezidis to the hate speech is a specificity of Hizbullah and linked to the demographic particularity mentioned above regarding the Batman-Mardin-Diyarbakır triangle, one of the regions of Kurdistan where, as mentioned, non-Sunni populations continued to live (namely those who escaped the 1915 genocide and subsequent 'cleansing' policies). Syriacs (*Süryani*), despite persistent discrimination and violence throughout the twentieth century, maintained their community as well in this triangle, with Mardin as their center.

The members of these groups, though in much smaller numbers, provided a concrete base for the ordinary hatred accumulated in the daily practices of the majority Sunni neighbours. This presence was used as a political lever by Hizbullah, especially when the PKK began to propose a multicultural, historical and political approach (insisting on the coexistence of different communities in the Kurdish area since antiquity). From that point of view, it is no coincidence that three of Hizbullah's first victims were a Syriac (Mihail Bayro), Yezidi (Hüseyin Pamukçu, killed in the Yezidi village of Feqîran, in Batman) and Armenian (Yakup Yontan, Armenian dentist killed in Kızıltepe).

Many other remarks and observations may be studied in this broad context, particularly regarding the perception and the construction of the 'self' and the 'other' in the subjectivity deployed by Hizbullah. One interest here derives from the common points with successive state ideologies that the organisation used to ensure the completion of their shared politics of division within different minoritised entities under their domination. Another is that some of these representations continue to be shared by considerable portions of Kurdish society in Turkey, which, in their own nationalism, cannot pull away from an exclusive, excluding and sometimes racist vision (in its ethnic or religious plan), or from the country's construction as if there were no models other than that implemented by the Republic in the making of the Turkish nation state.

Years of fire: matrix of an *absolute hostility* in intra-Kurdish conflicts

I end the main work of this piece with some reflections that aim to place the Hizbullah-PKK conflict in the more general framework of the intra Kurdish divides of the twentieth century to show it as a radically new form of hostility. I will skip here, despite its founding nature, the first major intra-Kurdish divide of the century (the one that positioned the first Kurdish nationalists around Şerif Pasha as opposed to the majority of the Kurdish elites who had joined Mustafa Kemal during the negotiations of the Sèvres and Lausanne treaties). This preceded the foundation of the Republic, and the division mainly involved some members of the exiled elites and thus did not, strictly speaking, split Kurdish society.

For the republican era, three moments may be identified as particularly potent for the entry of a new dimension in intra-Kurdish conflict. Sheikh Said's revolt in 1925 was the first. The Kurdish players then were divided for the first time on the question of loyalty to or rupture with the Turkish State and Kemalist elites, with whom they had unanimously stood alongside during the War of Independence. The fundamental fact of importance here is the representation of a basic division in Kurdish society that is still operative today: on the one side the rebellious, on the other one the statists.

The second major moment of rupture cannot be positioned so precisely, for it took place somewhere in the 1970s, when the configuration of intra-Kurdish conflicts appears to have been completely transformed. Politicisation within the factions illustrates this transformation: new forms of loyalty appeared; they were no longer rooted in concrete interdependencies and community relations (tribe, village, family, etc.) but rather focused on abstract causes. The principle of membership, despite an overlap with previous cleavages, was above all individualistic. Moreover, still under the influence of politicisation, many cleavages were made explicit and were reinforced. The 'Kurdish cause' no longer allowed for neutrality; unity was not possible between Kurdish revolutionaries and right-wing Kurdish nationalists.

It is in this narrative context that the third major rupture occurred, with the emergence of Hizbullah in the 1990s. While the ideological divide underlying the conflict in which the members of this organisation were involved – primacy of religious identity versus primacy of ethnic identity – was far from new, the intense and extreme violence of the clash reveals the emergence of an absolutely new form of intra-Kurdish conflict. We can describe this with Schmitt's (2007) categories around the notion of a *war of partisans*. In this model, the conflict involving Hizbullah is the first appearance of a hostility of a more *absolute* type (as opposed to *real* hostility, which can be used to describe the conflicts, 'partisans' in the Schmittian sense, of the Kurdish factions in the 1970s). Between the PKK supporters and members of Hizbullah, violence manifested itself in the form of an internal/civil war that fragmented social units to the smallest degree (to the level of individual dwelling and person), recalling historical and philosophical descriptions of situations of *stasis* (cf. Agamben 2015). In contrast, the conflict between the PKK members and people engaged as *korucu* should be dealt with differently.

Relatedly, clashes between the factions were not of incompatible interpretations of the world, and dialogues between them and the transfer of members from one to the other were possible. When we analyse the reciprocal discourses and behaviours of *korucu* and the PKK members towards each other, we see that these were not of an *absolute hostility* (and sometimes not even a *real* hostility). Recognition of the circumstantial nature of the commitments and the emphasis on the burden of constraint appear repeatedly in the interviews conducted in the course of the research for this study. Contrary to the situation of the *korucu*, there was often enough a quite apparent difficulty experienced on the part of interlocutors attempting to explain their commitment to Hizbullah. Consciously or not, they would tend to address this intra-Kurdish conflict in a specific way, but the multi-factor considerations they invoked when it came to talking about a variety of commitments generally just disappeared in the case of Hizbullah in favour of monocausal explanations (Hizbullah as a paramilitary actor created from nothing by the Turkish State, or as an embodiment of religious fanaticism whose success could only be understood through the mental pathologisation of its members).

The traumatic memory that arises when mentioning just the name 'Hizbullah', makes it evident that the word operates as a signifier for horror and death. This is the case in Kurdistan far beyond the geographical area where Hizbullah members were active. There was a relative easing of the conflict at the end of the 1990s, and since the 2000s new dynamics emerged – in particular the reorganisation of the Hizbullah movement in the civil sphere, with its legal party (Hüda-Par), together with the reorientation of the PKK movement towards a 'confederalist' project aiming above all at democratisation and concerning itself with the organisation of the civil society (a project where it also reached out to former members of Hizbullah). Yet, these have not given rise to a real work of confrontation with the past on the Hizbullah side, nor of recognition and self-critique vis-à-vis the violent practices of the 1990s. On the contrary, at each moment of tension, the organisation has not hesitated to use the memory of these practices as more or less veiled threats.

As we saw in October 2014, during demonstrations in support of the city of Kobanê besieged by Islamic State forces and against the Turkish government accused of supporting the jihadists, in a situation of crisis this memory can be reactivated instantly. We can interpret the fact that Kurdish demonstrators went to the offices of pro-Hizbullah associations and attacked individuals and that Hizbullah militants there used their weapons to shoot demonstrators as instantiating and emblematic of a sudden, apparently instantaneous reactivation of the *habitus* of the partisan war of the 1990s, even after some 15 years of apparent calm. Despite the efforts made by both sides to move the conflict to a lower threshold of intensity, the perception of the other as an *absolute* enemy easily resurfaces in the absence of *memory work*, of facing, making conscious and coming to some sort of reconciliation with the wounds and hatreds of the past. In such moments of crises this intra-Kurdish divide all too easily returns to the irreconcilable character in which it was conceived, a quarter of a century earlier.

Conclusion

This article has challenged the existing tendency in the literature to de-historicise and de-spatialise the emergence of Hizbullah, as if this organisation suddenly just materialised in Kurdistan in the 1980s from out of nowhere and was located nowhere in particular. Rather, it emanated from the politicized Kurdish Islamist sphere, identified primarily as three spaces of socialisation under the secular Republic of Turkey: the clandestine madrasas led by sheikhs attached to one of the two *tariqa*s Nakshibandi and Qadiriyya, with the new confraternal forms represented by the *cemaat*s, notably those of the *Nurcu* movement from the 1950s, and the parties and organisations of the Turkish right and extreme right, in which Islamism developed in the second half of the 20th century.

Then, Hizbullah emerged at the end of the 1970s from an interplay between internal and external dynamics. This involved the ideas and practices of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1960s and the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 along with the madrasa crisis in Turkey, the rise of a Kurdish movement (anchored on the left) and the tacit encouragement of the Islamist groups by the 1980 coup regime to block this movement, all of which paved the way for the propagation of Islamist activism. In the case of the two principal Islamist groups that managed to create a social base in Kurdistan (Menzil and İlim/Hizbullah groups), the new class of *mektepli* formed within the Turkish Right (notably the MTTB *and Akıncılar*) outmanoeuvred part of the *medreseli*s, following the example of what had occurred a few years earlier among

the leftist Kurdish factions. As in the case of the Kurdish left, rivalry between the Islamist factions led to a process of the monopolisation of violence by one of them.

These three factors facilitated the emergence and spread of Hizbullah in a relatively limited region, identified as the Batman-Mardin-Diyarbakır triangle. This is the area where the most rapid urbanisation and demographic increase took place in Kurdistan, which, consequently, created a suitable recruitment pool for Hizbullah. Due to the topographical character of the region, the Kurdish guerrilla could not perform guerrilla warfare in this zone and mostly operated through *serhildan*s, most of which were quelled by the mobilisation of Hizbullah's violence. Lastly, non-Muslim communities (Yezidis, Syriacs, Armenians) had remained in this region until the early 90s, unlike in any other part of Turkish Kurdistan.

Taking Silvan in the 1990s as a focus, this article investigated and analysed Hizbullah's repertoire of action, the degree of coercion it achieved in different spaces, its targets, and its conception of the world. The specific focus on music recorded by Hizbullah in that period, especially the lexical fields used, has shown how Hizbullah depicted itself in relation to others, which evidences the importance of a long-held, deeply rooted ethno-confessional dimension. By identifying PKK with non-Muslims (Armenians, Yezidis, Syriacs), Hizbullah reactivated a century-old hatred and reproduced the state discourse about non-Muslim minorities. Hizbullah's discourse turned into a more explicit expression of hatred and anger towards these communities as well as the PKK and its leader partly as a result of the PKK's attempted de-Sunnisation of the historiography of Kurdistan by including non-Muslim groups. The abundance of the use of '*Yezidis*' and 'Christians' (especially Armenians - *filleh*) as insults in these songs and accusations of the PKK spreading Christian and Western values are also indications of the nature of this hostility.

Finally, I have argued that the war between Hizbullah and PKK in the 1990s resulted in a new form of intra-Kurdish conflict. To conceptualise this new type of conflict, I have utilised the Schmittian concepts developed in the *Theory of the Partisan* (2007). In previous intra-Kurdish conflicts, as I have explained, the level of hostility had not exceeded the 'real' enmity, but the escalated violence and notorious executions by Hizbullah turned this hostility into an 'absolute' enmity. The physical field of the battle was extended to all areas of daily life. The micro-climate of terror created by this fragile and fraught situation together with the widespread distrust between neighbours, even between family members and certainly the presence of informants, led to self-censorship and self-limiting of even the slightest gesture. Thus, under these circumstances, it was better to *close your mouth during the day and your door at night* to be able to maximise one's chances of survival.

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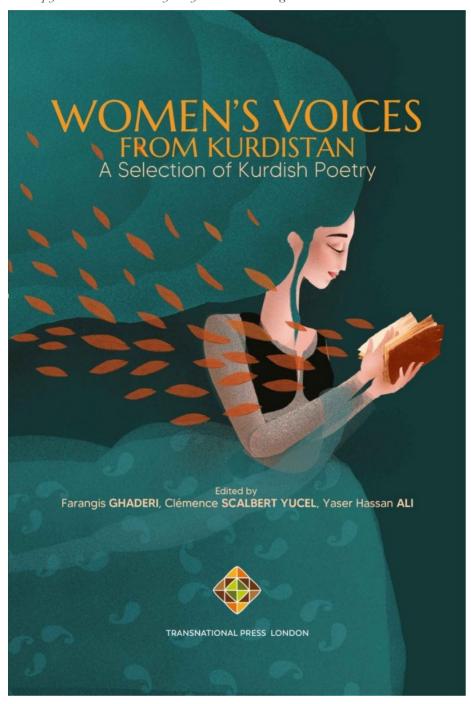
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