

Abstract

The central investigation of the thesis concerns the nature of revolution in the Kurdish freedom movement, i.e. the social movement affiliated with the guerilla organization, the PKK. The main argument forwarded is that revolution in the Kurdish movement should be understood as intimately connected with and defined by martyrdom. The thesis argues that martyrdom not only informs participants in the movement about what counts as revolutionary practice and discourse, but also that the martyrs structure the very hierarchies and social order of the movement itself, both in present reality and in its utopian project. Shortly summarized, the thesis sets out to prove that revolution and martyrdom are two sides of the same coin in Kurdish freedom movement. The thesis makes its argument in nine chapters, and builds on 21 months of fieldwork in Iraq, Turkey, and Germany from 2015 to 2017.

The first chapter summarizes the main argument of the thesis, and argues for the importance of examining the Kurdish freedom movement on its own terms, taking its ‘otherness’ seriously. It argues against placing the Kurdish movement in matrices for measurement that are already pre-defined prior to the investigation. The chapter claims that pre-ordained frameworks for analysis not only over-write what the people in the movement say and do, but also that the perspectives might actually do harm to the movement it has set out to study; by already having a definition of revolution ready before the movement is examined, it precludes an attentiveness to ‘the new’ that the movement strives to achieve. Moreover, the chapter argues, such pre-defined notions also preclude an attentiveness to the emic categories in the movement that make up its cosmology, which the thesis sees as the locus for how the movement is driven forward.

In chapter 2, the thesis explores how revolutions may be conceptualized analytically, and how one may figure out *where* a revolution may be said to take place. The thesis contends that contrary to certain perspectives on multi-sited fieldwork, it would be fortuitous to consider revolution as an open-ended and mutable logic, which is located both everywhere and nowhere, emerging rather than available. Such a perspective, the thesis contends, opens up for examining revolution ethnographically, since it encourages attentiveness to practices (or modalities of practices) as they unfold in time, and may also draw attention away from *place* towards *time* as the prime mover in conceptualizing a field.

From this methodological consideration, chapter 3 concerns the conditions for the Kurdish movement’s ‘otherness.’ The chapter charts a history of the state’s logic of violence in

Turkey, and explores what ramifications this has had for different Kurdish movements (particularly, the PKK). Despite various economic reforms and governmental changes, the chapter argues that the Turkish state's relationship to the Kurdish population has been characterized by an *eradicative logic*, originating with the Şêx Saîd rebellion of 1925. The chapter shows that although the technologies and organization of violence has changed, the logic by which it has been exerted cannot be said to derive from any particular economic configuration, but rather from the state's particular identitarian constitution.

In chapter 4, the historical perspective is continued, but considers the formation of the PKK specifically. The chapter shows how the history of the PKK's formation is intimately linked not only with the Turkish left, but also with a particular configuration of martyrdom. In the PKK's period of party formation, the chapter argues that the martyrs were central figures for creating an 'inversionary logic of violence,' namely a means of turning relationships of violent exchange into interactions generative of a cosmological alterity. The revolutionary project of the PKK and its incipient cosmology must be seen as departing from and being built upon a commitment to the martyrs, the chapter argues, which has previously been partially under-examined.

Chapter 5 considers what utopian order the martyrs structure, as exemplified and embodied in the cemetery of the PKK's high-seat, the Qandil mountains. Through examining the structure of the cemetery as well as its context, the chapter argues that three types of martyrdoms may be distinguished, which all serve different purposes in assisting PKK affiliates in relating to the world. The chapter shows how the martyrs generate a complex set of sacrificial gift and debt relations both to each other and to the venerating PKK affiliates, which it argues impels speech and action in the world, in the places where the logic is actualized.

Chapter 6 goes on to examine the order of the martyrs as a mediator in social life. It charts the places where the 'mythical' world of the martyrs becomes mapped onto the everyday and how; where the revolutionary cosmology is brought to bear on the lived structures and lives of people. Taking the revolutionary PKK refugee camp 'Maxmur' in Iraqi Kurdistan as a point of departure, researched in 2016, the chapter illustrates how the martyrs intercede and govern aspects of private and public life. The chapter contends that the people become 'martyrial' in their practices and outlook, and that measuring and enacting 'martyrdom' becomes the measure of hierarchy, and the foundation for Abdullah Öcalan's utopian 'new life.'

Chapter 7 concerns itself with the role of the martyrs in producing and reproducing revolutionary time, as exemplified in the Newroz festival in the Qandil mountains and Maxmur in 2017. Considering the festival's ritual and historical properties, the chapter forwards the argument that the martyrs are central to (re)creating the new time of the revolution as well as the new time of the Kurds. It argues that the martyrs are the instigators and perpetrators of a revolutionary time where movement is premised upon a cycle of self-abnegating sacrifice.

Chapter 8 provides an ethnographic description of the anatomy of the Kurdish movement as it existed and worked in Wan, Turkish Kurdistan, in 2015. Under conditions of violent repression, the chapter shows, the effects that the martyrs had on people were more ambiguous and subject to contention. Although people felt committed to the martyrs, the chapter contends, they were left in a state of aporia where, on the one hand, they negotiated personal safety and risk-taking, and on other, they felt committed to not 'shame' the martyrs.

Chapter 9 examines what the limits of this martyrial system are. In the diasporic PKK-affiliated community in Berlin in 2016, the chapter contends that maintaining the efficacy and meaning of the martyrs became a difficult task for the PKK-affiliated leadership. As young refugees from Kurdistan with PKK affiliations attempted to create a life in Germany, the chapter shows that what the martyrs were understood as a testifying to, and how efficacious they were in directing action, became gradually diluted. As the martyrs were both territorial and de-territorial figures, the chapter contends they were re-shaped to such a degree that they transcended the PKK's ideological frame for them, and in some cases, transcended the very frame of martyrdom itself.

The purchase of the thesis is threefold. Firstly, the thesis is an ethnographic study of revolution, which is arguably a novel anthropological challenge in itself. Secondly, the thesis engages with other social movement literature in a way so as to encourage an attentiveness to the cosmology of revolution. Thirdly, the thesis seeks to supplement both a popular and academic discourse on the nature and the people of the Kurdish struggle, by adding a comparative, multi-sited perspective.