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The Kurdish Struggle in Turkey as a “Total Social Movement”, 2013-2015

Elsa Tulin Sen*

Abstract

The Kurdish movement’s decision to operate within and in opposition to the Turkish state reached a peak between 2013 and 2015. Three major events took place during this time period: the launch of the 2013 peace process, the 2014 presidential elections, and the June 2015 general elections. The principal driving force behind these campaigns was an important project put forward by Kurdish activists, which they termed as *Türkiyelileşme* [Turkeyfication]: an inclusive definition of national identity, which accepted being an integral part of Turkey while at the same time belonging to an ethnic group other than Turkish.

Basing the argument on the Kurdish activists’ capacity to combine civil society activism and their promotion of democracy with the articulation of a national identity, this article considers the dynamics of the Kurdish movement along the lines of a “total social movement” between 2013 and 2015. Put forward by the sociologist Alain Touraine, a total social movement is a three-dimensional movement with social, political and national levels of action. It embodies fierce opposition between adversaries, but does not opt for violence no matter what the challenges are.

Keywords: Touraine; Total Social Movements; the Solidarity Movement; Ethnicity; Kurds, Turkey

Introduction

The Kurdish movement – from 2013 through to 2015 – developed into a total social movement that wished to stay within a reformed Turkish polity. According to Alain Touraine, a “total social movement” can be qualified as a three-dimensional pro-democracy and civil society movement with a national character. Social actors who participate in a total social movement demonstrate a strong will to change their society through peaceful actions, refusing violence as well as the monopoly of an ideology, organisation, group or state, no matter what the challenges and difficulties are.¹

My intention is to demonstrate the renewed relevance of Touraine’s total social movement theory through the study of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. The Kurdish movement reached its culminating “total” point with the 2015 Turkish general elections during which it had become the spokesperson for the majority of the progressive forces in Turkey. From October 2015 onwards, however, a difficulty imposed itself on this total social

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movement: first came the bombings of Ankara on 10 October, in which numerous members of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and other democrats lost their lives; then the snap elections of 1 November 2015, in which the Justice and Development Party (AKP) regained its constitutional majority, causing the HDP to lose 21 deputies compared to the previous elections, therefore considerably reducing their parliamentary representation. Furthermore, there was a resumption of armed clashes between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Turkish government forces while civilians in the Kurdish regions suffered under curfews and violence. The question then is whether the events that have occurred since October 2015 have called into question the total social movement quality of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. These considerations do not invalidate the argument in view of the originality of the main idea with regard to Touraine. In fact, a total social movement can only live under a peaceful climate. Therefore, the absence of violence is an essential criterion for the emergence and consolidation of total social movements.

Firstly, this article introduces the theory of the total social movement through the original example of the Polish Solidarity movement, upon which Touraine had initially developed his theory in 1980. Secondly, it explores the civil-society activist, democracy-advocating and national aspects of the Kurdish movement between 2013 and 2015, according to which it can qualify as a total social movement in this time frame. Finally, the limits of the Kurdish case as a total social movement are discussed.²

The Original Example of the Total Social Movement Theory: The Polish Solidarity Movement

In 1980, Touraine and his colleagues carried out an in-depth research, a sociological intervention, on the causes and dynamics of the Solidarity movement in Poland. This method brings together social actors and provides a collective platform where they can confront each other and debate their cause, providing the sociologist an opportunity to analyse the meaning that social actors attribute to their actions from close up. The study on the Solidarity movement included direct involvement of its rank-and-file militants as well as organisers, known as the National Committee. The researchers observed that Solidarity militants and leaders were committed to obtaining workers' rights, putting forward aspects of their national identity and yearning for democracy. The combination of their aspirations led Touraine and his colleagues to determine the contours of a total social movement in the Polish context of 1980 (Touraine 1983: 2).³

Solidarity came into being during the strikes of Polish workers in August 1980 but rapidly garnered national and democratic significance (Touraine 1983: 37). The most crucial aspect of the movement was that it was three-dimensional, "...it encompassed and incorporated national and democratic aspirations as well as those of class, and that these [were] fused and inseparable" (Martel and Stammers 1996: 129). Touraine argued that Solidarity was clearly a trade-union activity initiated by self-confident workers who went on strike, protested against low-wages, expressed solidarity with fellow workers, and fought back against state repression. But it was also a national fulfilment movement as the militants of Solidarity pressed their national authority to detach Poland from the influence of the Soviet Union. Inspired by representative democracies elsewhere, Solidarity was also a struggle for

the goal of reaching democratisation in Poland. On these grounds, Touraine and his colleagues wanted “to discover why and how these three levels of action – trade union, democratic and national – combine in Solidarity to form what may be called a total social movement aiming to change all aspects of public life” (Touraine 1983: 2).

The Emergence of a Total Social Movement

When analysing Solidarity, it is important to bear in mind that it was born in a country of the Communist Bloc, governed by a one party-state, or, in Touraine’s formulation, a “Party-as-Police”. Although Poland had become independent in the aftermath of the Second World War, the country remained under the shadow of the Soviet regime (Touraine 1983: 44). Thus, by the 1980s, the Polish national liberation struggle was different from the more traditional national liberation agendas across America and Asia. Solidarity aimed to fight the status quo imposed by an outside totalitarian system rather than by a domestic state authority (Touraine 1983: 4). The articulations of a Polish national identity played an important role in this struggle, and subsequently in the evolution of Solidarity toward a total social movement.

Drawing on Touraine’s empirical evidence, the Polish people believed that their collective identity can be found in their language, history and the Catholic faith. From this perspective, it could be argued that the Polish people have historically relied upon objective varieties of nationalism such as language, common history and religious affiliation to strengthen their collective identity. Evidence of this can be found in the publications of Solidarity, whose militants collaborated with numerous dissident writers and critics of Polish origin to revise school material and restore Polish history. In terms of religious affiliation, the Catholic Church occupied a predominant place in the national perception of the Polish people. For example, the majority of Solidarity workers, who were Catholic, had a history of oppression under the Protestant Prussians in the past. With Solidarity, they were able to express their allegiance to God, and not to the Party, especially before they started work every day. Thus the Polish militants clung onto their national unity through the strengthening of the Polish language and the Catholic faith as a way of breaking away from their de facto dependency on the Soviets.

Nevertheless, Solidarity cannot solely be reduced to its national dimension. Touraine and his colleagues defined its broad objectives in terms of the overall dynamics of the Solidarity movement rather than national cohesion only. Through the voices of the men and women they observed in the factories and interviewed, the authors conveyed the idea that dominant social and economic forces do not – and, as engaged post-Marxist sociologists, should not – determine the future. Social actors, however subordinate they may appear, possess the capacity to produce a history of their own through various forms of struggle. They have the will to bring about change and create momentum.

Although Solidarity emerged and consolidated itself in the factories, it surpassed the activation of working-class consciousness among workers. The issues at stake between the participants of Solidarity and the party regime went beyond the regulation of wages and conditions of employment. The workers wanted to cast aside the Party rule and establish an independent trade-union which could operate freely and defend not only workers’ but everybody else’s rights in the country (Touraine 1983: 97), which can be seen as one of the

highest criteria of democracy. Therefore, another noteworthy aspect of Solidarity was that it “appeal[ed] openly to the values of democracy, human rights and political pluralism” (Touraine 1983: Introduction).

In Touraine's thinking, a total social movement does not resort to violence. Neither should it engage in a purely nationalist, socialist, revolutionary or any ideological rhetoric to survive. Ideologies care less about social justice and democracy, leaving their adherents to realise what they consider to be their historic destiny (Touraine 1992). A total social movement remains an organised and preferably non-violent campaign, and relies on its own original dynamics no matter what the circumstances are or might become.⁴

It can be argued that every socio-political movement contains plural dynamics like Solidarity, without necessarily qualifying as a total social movement. Since Solidarity drew most of its strength from self-emancipated workers, it could have become a proletarian movement, confining its demands to the workplace. Moreover, the militants of Solidarity were not short of national attachments: like other nations, they took pride in their common history and language to reject foreign domination. Therefore, it could also have rapidly mutated into a strictly nationalistic struggle against the Soviet Union, inciting people to violence in the name of a Polish nation, for example. In such a scenario, Solidarity would not have found it difficult to mobilise the Catholic Church's support in order to co-opt large segments of a religiously-devoted population in this hypothetical fight. Last but not least, as the type of democracy that was promoted had not been implemented and its ramifications were as yet unknown, Solidarity could have also shifted its orientation from democracy to some other ideal. However, what secured Solidarity its legitimacy as a total social movement was the way in which its militants managed to remain committed to not allowing a specific group or ideology to monopolise or modify their initial objective – which was to change the orientation of the society in which they lived through social, peaceful, and democracy-rewarding activities.

Applying Touraine's Total Social Movement Theory to the Kurdish Case

Despite potential challenges and limitations, I aim to bring Touraine's total social movement theory into discussion with the Kurdish movement, testing it as an example placed outside of the Western context in which this theory had initially been incubated. The Kurdish movement in Turkey having traditionally been a movement for the liberation of the Kurds, it attained neither independence nor autonomy as opposed to similar national movements in modern history. The closest it has come to achieving its objectives in this regard is the Turkish state's official recognition of a “Kurdish reality” from the early 2000s onward.

The Kurdish movement, as are many other movements with identity claims, is usually seen as a regional movement, or at least geographically delimited. This view is also commonly shared by those who see the Kurdish movement as a strictly nationalist movement. My definition of the Kurdish movement is that while it carries geographical and national aspects, it also has the capacity to turn into a total social movement with audiences supporting its cause not only in the Kurdish regions but also in other parts of Turkey.⁵ This article further considers the Kurdish movement in Turkey comprising a whole with different actors, both politically engaged and armed, including the PKK, several Kurdish political

parties and non-governmental organisations operating in the region as well as many ordinary citizens and activists.⁶

From 2013 through to 2015, the claims for a Kurdish identity increasingly suggested a willingness to work within the existing political system in Turkey, albeit calling for significant change to it, including the re-evaluation and redrafting of the Turkish constitution (drafted after the military coup of 1980) as well as the decentralisation of executive and legislative power across Turkey. During this timescale, the Kurdish movement has become simultaneously democracy-advocating and civil-society activist while remaining national.

There were three major turning points for the transformation of the movement. First, a long-winded Kurdish struggle resulted in peace talks attended by the Turkish government, the PKK and its jailed leader Abdullah Öcalan, with a direct impact on the Kurdish grassroots in Turkey. By no means did these talks mean that opposition between the Kurds and the Turkish state ended. In fact, the Kurdish movement insisted on changing the overall orientation of Turkish and Kurdish societies while the government gradually drifted toward authoritarianism. The second development in this timescale was Turkey's 2014 presidential elections. For the first time in the history of the Turkish Republic, a Kurdish candidate presented himself for the President's office on behalf of a political party with a long history of oppression, closure and opposition because of its explicit Kurdish political agenda. The third development was the environment in which the June 2015 legislative elections took place. This was when the Kurdish movement appeared to have reached its peak as a total social movement. For the first time in decades, the Kurdish party presented itself as a political party rather than nominating independent candidates, despite the high Turkish electoral threshold of 10 percent of the national vote to be allowed representation in Parliament, a threshold which still applies today.

What exactly made the Kurdish movement "total" in Touraine's sense was its project of *Türkiyelileşme* [Turkeyfication], which enjoyed the support of large segments of the population, including Turks and Kurds. *Türkiyelileşme* put forward an inclusive aspect to the national identity of the Kurdish movement. Its democracy-advocating performances broadened to the inclusion of women, minorities (i.e. ethnic, religious and sexual) and other disadvantaged groups in political representation, while new horizons were reached, and concerns widened to all aspects of public life, including the economy, infrastructure and the environment. Not a single day went by without a specific campaign:⁷ a street protest denouncing the incarceration of political activists and the rolling down of shutters by shopkeepers; a collective gathering against the construction of new military headquarters in the Kurdish regions; a press conference held by representatives of human rights associations; a collective prayer session in Kurdish language to contribute to the public use of their mother tongue;⁸ or a silent sit-in in memory of those disappeared at the hands of previous Turkish governments.⁹ As such, the Kurdish movement united social, political and national claims and the necessity to release a "social space"¹⁰ for themselves, in which they could fight for their rights through legal means, which were traditionally undermined by the drawbacks of a homogeneous, unitarian and oppressive political system.

The Peace Process That Was

In 2013, the Turkish state's treatment of the Kurdish agenda was brought into sharp focus by the peace negotiations among the PKK, Öcalan and Turkish government officials.¹¹ The trajectory of Turkey's Kurdish movement envisaged the normalisation of relations, however precariously, with the Turkish state (Calışlar 2014; Chase 2013). The peace process provided a possibility to address the Kurdish issue through non-violence as a matter of human rights and a critique of state oppression. The withdrawal of the majority of Kurdish armed groups from Turkey further produced a tangible effect on the trajectory of the Kurdish movement that was now coming to the fore with its peace-rewarding activities.¹² A record number of 778 civil society organisations from across the region issued a common declaration in support of the peace process (Karabağlı 2013). The president of the Human Rights Association's Diyarbakır branch shared the following with the public:

The peace process... created a conducive environment for peace and the resolution of our problems. Öcalan's call to withdraw the PKK's military out of Turkey is the most important step in this regard. As the regional civil society organisations, we wholeheartedly support this process (Diyarbakır Bulletin 2013: 50).¹³

A "delegation of eminent people" was created on 4 April 2013 to further disseminate aspects of the peace process to the public (Gürsel 2013). The main opposition to this came from the Turkish ultra-nationalist National Action Party (MHP), and to a lesser degree, the Kemalist/secular nationalist Republican People's Party (CHP), who opposed the peace process with the PKK on the grounds that it aimed to eliminate the territorial integrity of Turkey – the heritage of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.¹⁴ The delegation included political actors, artists, singers, writers, intellectuals, and labour unionists; in short, those respected by both the Turkish and Kurdish public for what they have achieved professionally. Visiting citizens in their homes and workplaces, even in the most forgotten corners of the country, the delegates did not represent a political party or a specific ideology. They discussed the peace initiative with the public, emphasising the serious socio-economic problems created by the Kurdish-Turkish conflict and the importance of stability and peace.

Neighbourhood Councils

This atmosphere led to the further strengthening of civil society organisations in the Kurdish regions. Both ordinary and activist Kurds operated mainly within the "neighbourhood, provincial and regional councils and assemblies", where they would periodically draw up their voluntary action plans (Hürbakis 2014). Based on this practice, Akkaya and Jongerden made a case for a Kurdish version of democratic confederalism and radical democracy which "refers to a societal organisation that can be characterised as a bottom-up system for self-administration, organised at the levels of village (*köy*), urban neighbourhood (*mahalle*), district (*ilçe*), city (*kent*), and region (*bölge*)" (Jongerden 2015). A Kurdish version of radical democracy¹⁵ was tied with the principle of democratic confederalism, as Akkaya and Jongerden argue, and it "referred to self-governance of communities, where the aim was not to create a state, but to build a democratic society" (Jongerden 2015). Kurdish activists

believed that democratic confederalism provided autonomy for local communities and endowed them with resources and the ability to challenge the political, cultural and economic institutions in place. In this regard, Turkish journalist Pinar Ögünç provided concrete evidence about how a direct democracy worked in the Kurdish context (Ögünç 2014). Based on her findings, the neighbourhood councils in the Kurdish regions were conceived as the smallest unit of the democratic autonomy model with no paid employees but many volunteers.¹⁶ They were run by co-chairs, a man and a woman, elected by the residents of neighbourhoods. The latter were directly involved in the process of decision-making on issues ranging from routine problems to reconciling family disputes to where new garbage containers were to be placed.

Religion and Politics: A Balancing Act?

Particularly from 2011 onward, Kurdish political party representatives and grassroots activists started to appear in large-scale religious demonstrations such as the “holy birth week”.¹⁷ They attended these rallies in the first ranks and carried posters of Kurdish religious figures and rebels in history. This was a time when the Kurdish movement enhanced its political claim-making profile through what many analysts have termed “the religious opening of the Kurdish movement” (Ekinçi 2014). In solidarity with the campaigns of civil disobedience in the region, the Association of Religious Scholars and Solidarity (DİAY-DER), a faith-based organisation whose members define themselves as “patriotic imams” spearheaded Civil Fridays; a series of powerful public collective prayers performed in Kurdish, rather than in Turkish or Arabic as is the custom. The prayers took place every Friday at a public square throughout the entire region. They brought together the faithful and activists, religious as well as political Kurdish leaders. Remarkably, at the end of every public prayer session, demands for democracy and constitutional recognition would gain ground over religiously-oriented demands.¹⁸ Lasting for more than thirty months, Civil Fridays marked an important change in the Kurdish movement’s political agenda in the post-2011 period, constituting a perfect example of the civil society activism within the Kurdish movement. The role of politically motivated religious mobilisation in the Kurdish case brings to mind the Solidarity movement in Poland and its close relations with the Catholic Church, which was considered as the main vehicle for resistance against communist rule.¹⁹

On another level of analysis, the Kurdish movement’s take on religion could also be understood within the framework of its desire to radically change the orientation of society – the core idea in Touraine’s total social movement theory – by challenging Turkish state authorities on every possible level with the goal of keeping the ruling AKP from appealing to the Kurds. It is not a surprise that the AKP, with its promotion of Islam, has been able to address Kurdish audiences and earn their collaboration in many Kurdish cities in the East and Southeast regions of the country. By combining their political agenda with that of the faith-based organisations, Kurdish activists gradually and pragmatically abandoned a purely secularist/non-religious discourse within a conservative community of “faithful Kurds” while politically defending the concept of fraternity from a religious viewpoint.²⁰

Unfolding Issues Other than Ethnic Identity

A total social movement can be qualified as unfolding issues other than ethnic identity. Within the same context, the Kurds tried to develop a broader perspective to integrate the rights of other disadvantaged categories of Turkey's population into a constitutional or legal framework from a more functional and participatory democracy aspect. For instance, women were provided with more opportunities to present themselves as candidates in the elections on equal terms with their male counterparts. An active presence of women in politics, in what is believed to be a patriarchal society,²¹ aims to transform not only the traditional aspects of the society in which they live, but also to challenge the prevailing political system in Turkey – confirming Touraine's idea of societal transformation – where women, as in many other parts of the world, are still subject to diverse forms of discrimination.²²

This logic can also be applied to the case of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) activists, Turks and Kurds alike, and other equity-seeking groups in Turkey that were given a voice within the Kurdish movement.²³ In this regard, Kurdish activists and representatives brought up the issue of LGBT community rights during both street demonstrations and several parliamentary sessions. The same logic can furthermore be applied to members of other minorities such as the Assyrians, Chaldeans, Armenians, Yezidis and Alevis who were also given a voice within the legal Kurdish party to present themselves as candidates in Turkey's national elections (Güsten 2014; Inadina Haber 2015; Nahapetyan 2015). This demonstrated the Kurdish movement's effort to appeal to a wider audience but, more importantly, to provide opportunities to those minorities whose identities were not represented politically or institutionally. The Kurdish movement, by integrating other minorities in its body politic, proposed a new concept of identity encompassing Turkey's diverse communities.²⁴

The 2015 Elections

McAdam and Tarrow emphasise the importance of elections in social movements, a dimension which has been overlooked by social movement scholars in general. Their argument is that elections are an important part of the political process in which social movements, and, in this case, total social movements, evolve. Electoral outcomes help determine the dynamics of social movements (McAdam and Tarrow 2013: 326) because as Hutter and Kriesi additionally and rightly argue, "social movements are integrally related to mainstream politics" (Hutter and Kriesi 2013: 292). Historically, a Kurdish exclusion from elections at a group level has proven to be no remedy for Turkey's flawed democracy and the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question.

The June 2015 elections were, therefore, of utmost importance in enabling the Kurdish movement to anchor itself permanently within the Turkish political system, both in local governance and the Parliament. It was also an important opportunity for Kurdish activists to test the viability and credibility of their goal of *Türkiyelileşme*. When the HDP decided to present itself as a Party, rather than as independent candidates, unlike in 2007 and 2011,²⁵ it received positive feedback from Turkish civil society, including intellectuals and political activists (T24, Radikal, Evrensel 2015).²⁶ From the perspective of the project of

Türkiyelileşme, the essence of their message was clear: the HDP must be backed regardless of one's political affiliation because this would open the way for minority representation in the Parliament, which is a necessary development in advanced democracies.

The June 2015 elections finally proved to be a historic landmark for the Kurdish movement: the HDP passed the 10 per cent threshold (a requirement for parliamentary representation), scored over 13 per cent of the total vote, and earned 81 parliamentary seats, becoming the third biggest political party in the Parliament. It doubled its overall vote on the national level,²⁷ and the number of people who voted for the Kurdish party increased from 3 million – its record before 2015 – to over 6 million.²⁸ Such a return to the parliamentary arena was fundamental to the growth of the Kurdish total social movement.

The National Aspects of a Total Social Movement

The national, as one of Touraine's main pillars for a total social movement, is seen in the Kurdish total movement through the project of *Türkiyelileşme*. Between 2013 and 2015, the Kurds advocated a common and “dignified”²⁹ co-existence of both Kurds and Turks within a democratic, multi-ethnic but united Turkey. This could be seen as opting for a more integrated way of mobilising and leaving behind, to a very large extent, the armed struggle as well as revolutionary/separatist nationalist rhetoric.

Constitutional recognition of Kurdish national identity emerged as the ultimate priority of the Kurdish struggle. It was also the key to the realisation of the demands of Kurdish activists such as achieving administrative local autonomy, mainly through democratic channels. Turkey's administrative system is highly centralised and dismissive of the country's regional diversity and provincial nuances. The Kurdish movement insisted on the possibility of developing a decentralised system representative of all regions of Turkey, where, for example, governors can be elected locally rather than centrally appointed from the capital Ankara.

The right to education in their mother tongue and its official use in public remained another crucial topic among Turkey's Kurds. After long debates in the Parliament, a law regulating legal defence in one's mother tongue was approved in early 2013, permitting Kurdish-speaking prisoners to plead in Kurdish if they wished (Al Jazeera Turk, *Hürriyet Daily News* 2013). At the turn of 2015, a state television channel broadcasting since 2009 entirely in Kurdish (and its various dialects) was renamed from TRT-6 to TRT-Kurdî [TRT-Kurdish]. These regulations and many others, however, have fallen short of the demands of Kurdish activists. In 2012, the International Crisis Group reported that the majority of Kurds in Turkey refuse to compromise on the right to full education in their mother tongue.

From the perspective of the project of *Türkiyelileşme*, it can be argued that during this time frame, Kurds have also experienced an identity shift from belonging to a separate Kurdish ethnicity that was forcefully integrated into Turkish citizenship to belonging to a distinct Kurdish ethnicity, which would willingly integrate into a *Türkiyeli* community (meaning to originate from Turkey). The Turkish grammatical rule applied to specific regions (for example, *Konyalı* for someone from the city of Konya) was applied to the country as a whole: calling people from Turkey as *Türkiyeli* and not necessarily as Turks. Passing from

“Turk” to “*Türkiyeli*” facilitated debates on the resolution of the Kurdish issue as Kurds would belong to a (shared) territory and not to a (dominant) *ethnie*.

Interestingly, it can be argued that this has tentatively led to Ernest Renan’s concept of nation defined as ‘a soul [and] a spiritual principle’ (Renan 1887). According to Renan’s spiritual theory of nation, what makes a nation is a common or shared history in conjunction with the current consent of the people to live together as a whole: the presence of a historical collective memory is as important as ‘the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of heritage’ (Renan 1887). This desire to live together and the will to perpetuate the value of heritage can be perceived to transcend real differences in language, religion, race, interests and geography. Renan’s conceptualisation of what makes a *Türkiyeli* community would diverge significantly from the more traditional conceptualisation of ethnic nationalisms as a political doctrine based on racial, linguistic, religious or geographical specificities. Renan’s insistence on nations as a spiritual force, a foundation or cornerstone of national unity, goes to exemplify the desire of the Kurds for unification as members of a *Türkiyeli* community, perhaps leaving behind past traumas.

Türkiyelileşme Found Support among the Turks

A feeling of mistrust has always existed towards the Kurds or the Kurdish movement among diverse segments of Turkish society. The opposite is also true. Many Kurds assert that they do not trust Turkish society and the Turkish state. Additionally, despite its democratisation discourse, the Kurdish movement has not completely dismissed violence at different stages of its existence. The latter phenomenon has been particularly striking to observe when legal Kurdish representatives in Turkey failed to coordinate between different moves coming out of İmralı Island where Öcalan is kept, and Qandil Mountains in Northern Iraq – which is the primary base of the executive committee of the PKK.

Turkish public opinion on these matters has been varied. Whereas some perceived the Kurdish movement as a real or potential threat to the territorial integrity of the Turkish state, and therefore rejected any formulation with an ethnic dimension – with the fear of it being “uncontrollable” in the future – others proved to be more receptive to the plight of the Kurds, and sometimes even defended Kurdish rights on different platforms. This spectrum of views in public opinion ranged from considering the Kurds as the weakest link in Turkey’s progress to the belief that the Kurds are the utmost guarantor of possibly attaining a fully functioning democracy in Turkey despite their potential shortcomings.

From the peace process through to 2015, there had been a significant change in perception within Turkish society *vis à vis* the Kurds or the Kurdish movement – resulting in more resonance and support for Kurdish rights (Akyel Collinsworth 2013; Uras 2015; Jégo 2015). The democratisation discourse adopted by Kurdish activists and political representatives (within the context of a total social movement) found an echo within the wider Turkish public and civil society. This has led to what one might call a change in mind-set toward the Kurdish people and their struggle, laying the ground for many Turkish democrats, leftists, labour activists and intellectuals alike to better question the paradigm of a homogeneous and nationalist Turkey and how this has never quite embraced the Kurds as a people. Indeed, it would have been more difficult to imagine (ethnic) Turks supporting the

Kurdish movement had they continued to perceive of the Kurds as a violent entity, seeking Turkey's territorial disintegration.

Another perfect example for perception changes followed prior to the presidential elections in August 2014. Both the 2013 *Gezi Park* protests³⁰ and the 17-25 December 2013 corruption scandal³¹ had diminished the people's faith in their government, increasing distrust against "moderate Islamists" (i.e. the AKP). This political polarisation, coupled with the general uncertainty about the Kurdish peace process as well as the perceived incapacity of mainstream Turkish opposition parties in terms of dealing with the country's political affairs, sparked off other dynamics in Turkey's political arena. Selahattin Demirtaş – a Kurd and co-president of the HDP (previously the Peace and Democracy Party, BDP) – presented himself as a presidential candidate with the promise of building an "alternative" Turkey. It turned out that nearly 10 per cent of Turkey's voters cast their ballots for the Kurdish candidate (Ete 2014), making this presidential campaign one of the highest stages of a total social movement and its visionary project, *Türkiyelileşme*. For the first time in decades, the Kurds, via their representatives, were able to address wider Turkish audiences, conveying their demands for constitutional recognition, which they deemed was finally possible in a transformed Turkey.

The Limits of the Kurdish Case as a Total Social Movement

From 2013 onward until 2015, the Kurdish total social movement underwent several important and ostensibly paradoxical phases.³² At times it has been a movement with nationalist overtones, concentrating all its efforts on strict identity politics and the salvation of the historically oppressed Kurdish lands and identity. This became extremely visible every time national and legislative elections took place as well as in the aftermath of the detention or arrest of Kurdish political activists for their alleged support for or links with the PKK (Bianet 2010, 2014). The hardcore nationalist dimension of the movement could also be observed during guerrilla or civilian funerals, by the slogans protesters chanted, and the symbols, flags and pictures they displayed. These events seemed to impact the Kurds' "wounded" national sentiments deeply (Associated Press 2011).

Nevertheless, the 2013 peace process was able to develop based on a fragile but mutual consensus, for a period of two years, giving the impression that military options could finally be gradually eliminated. While such discourses were being pronounced, other trends could also make their voice heard under the roof of the same movement when proponents of military solutions publicly praised the Kurdish armed campaign and the imperative for continuing to challenge the state mechanisms strictly with this mind-set. Whether it was the public praise for Kurdish armed insurgency or merely the continuing presence of armed groups that led to such contradictory discourses within the movement is debatable, but it is certain that this created great confusion within the Kurdish total social movement parameters, particularly at the grassroots level, but also from the perspective of observers.

What distinguishes the Kurdish movement from classical cases of total social movements (e.g. the Polish Solidarity movement) is indeed its particular historical and current context, infused with unfulfilled nationalist aspirations as well as the element of militancy in terms of the armed struggle component of the movement. The impact of the

Kurdish armed struggle, which cannot be overlooked, on the mobilisation of “above-ground” activities³³ of the Kurdish movement is a particularity which might not be found in other total social movement contexts, and therefore an amendment to the general literature on total social movements can be suggested.

The impact of Kurdish military activities has proved to be vital in the Kurdish movement, and has often constituted the driving force of grassroots social movement participation. To cite one example, and as mentioned earlier, the most important mobilisation of the Kurds in the region can be seen to take place in the aftermath of a clash between the Turkish army and Kurdish guerrillas on the occasion of guerrilla funerals. Thousands of people gather in what is but a single, disorganised, random meeting. People in large numbers including men, women, elderly and youth, seemingly highly organised, with colours, flags, and slogans, demonstrate that they are a committed side in this conflict.

In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to think of the aforementioned social movement performances as being fundamentally animated with the same political spirit as that of the PKK, its affiliated organisations, supporters and sympathiser communities. This can be explained by two interrelated reasons. The first stems from the PKK’s perceived credibility as a resistance movement in Turkish jails in the 1980s as well as its armed insurgency in the Kurdish mountains, villages and towns since then. The second is that other Kurdish groups in the region seem to have failed to address the Kurdish grassroots as effectively as the PKK. Therefore, it would be wrong to look at the dynamics of the Kurdish movement irrespective of this context, in which the PKK is the main actor.³⁴ Yet, this is the very point where a generic total social movement theory can be put to the test: the total social movement in the Kurdish case seems to grow in the shadow of the PKK.

Considering these aspects, this article challenges the total social movement theory. On the one hand it is possible to argue that the Kurdish movement between 2013 and 2015 can be characterised by its non-violent, civil practices as a total social movement, yet on the other hand, its performances have seemed to be motivated, and often times determined, by the PKK’s political agenda and the cycle in which they all operate. For instance, although unemployment, poverty, lack of infrastructure and services has remained exceptionally high in the region, Kurdish activists did not seem to mobilise specifically on these issues. This phenomenon can be called “the failure of the social” in the Kurdish total social movement. However, a way to overcome this challenge would be to examine the hidden factors driving Kurdish activists and ordinary citizens to mobilise with the idea that social actors do not solely act on behalf of a political agenda. They take to the streets in the pursuit of change. Kurdish activists definitely add new dimensions to the movement in which they participate, with their own personal stories of poverty, unemployment or discrimination.

The three major events studied in this article have drawn attention to tell an important story: the Kurdish movement in Turkey remains extremely mobilised and organised. While parts of the Kurdish movement continue to keep their faith with the mountains and the necessity to have armed power, others are completely immersed in civil society and Turkey’s legal politics. The latter allows us to conclude that Kurds are a stakeholder in Turkish society and state mechanisms. Evidence of this includes the otherwise very rare occurrence of Turkish flags during public gatherings and rallies organised by Kurdish activists in their regions and across Turkey, both prior to and in the aftermath of elections (Milliyet 2015). For

long years, advocating for the Kurdish cause meant rejection of all forms of belonging to Turkish identity. The appearance of Turkish flags in various Kurdish demonstrations epitomise the path taken by the Kurdish movement in its quest for *Türkiyelileşme*.

Conclusion

This article has focused on the Kurdish movement from a total social movement perspective between 2013 and 2015 when the Kurdish decision to operate within and in opposition to the Turkish state reached a peak with three major events: the declaration of the 2013 peace process between the Turkish state, the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan; the candidacy of a Kurdish activist to run for Presidency; and the breakthrough by Kurdish candidates from the HDP in crossing the world's highest and most undemocratic electoral threshold in the June 2015 Turkish general elections.

Central to Touraine's approach, as it has been to mine, is the process in which social actors identify themselves with their claims and demands in opposition to an adversary as part of a historical project. When this project contains three interrelated dimensions – social, political and national – Touraine posits the emergence of a total social movement. He draws his theory from the case of the Solidarity movement that emerged in Poland in early 1980s. Solidarity presented itself as a total social movement by being: (a) simultaneously trade-unionist with the strikes of workers whose numbers had reached 10 million; (b) nationally-driven as Solidarity's goal was to cast aside the party regime at the national level against the Soviet Union; and (c) democracy-advocating as it insisted on the creation of independent unions, freedom of speech and freedom of association. According to Touraine's logic, this movement was able to survive between 1980 and 1981 as it also stayed loyal to its original dynamics, and resisted committing to an overarching strict ideology whilst also opting for non-violent resistance.

Based on Touraine's theoretical framework, this article has argued that, particularly from 2013 through to 2015, the Kurdish movement in Turkey functioned as a total social movement by virtue of its capacity to combine civil society activism and the promotion of democracy with the articulations of a national identity, the nucleus of which had never disappeared. During this time frame, the Kurdish movement engaged in a peace process, channelled its energy into civil society activism and broader electoral campaigns, promoted the idea of a fully functioning democracy, and ultimately an inclusive understanding of national identity for all the components of Turkish society, and not just the Kurds, via a project of *Türkiyelileşme*. After the snap elections of November 2015, this context has shifted. There was a resumption of violence between the Turkish forces and the PKK, which spilled into urban areas, undermining the Kurdish movement's overall position as a total social movement. Touraine stresses that violence is a red line in the criteria to qualify as a total social movement. In the 1980s, the Solidarity movement had succeeded in its objectives against the authoritarian communist government in Poland. By way of contrast, the Kurdish total social movement in Turkey was crushed following the resumption of violence in 2015 and the ensuing growth of Turkish state authoritarianism.

Notes

1. The concept of a total social movement is inspired by the vast social movement literature which exceeds the scope of this paper. However, in order to get a glimpse of traditional social movements, we can, once again, refer to Touraine for whom the three principles of *identity*, *opposition* and *totality* should be present. In its broadest sense, identity in a social movement can be defined as the act of participants identifying themselves through the movement. Touraine qualifies identity through a Marxist prism, positing that this sense of identity is determined by the social conflict i.e., not in positive terms but rather in opposition to something else. This process further involves a certain degree of rationality as social actors are believed to define and assume their role against an oppositional adversary. Thus, the first principle, identity, is intrinsically linked to the second, opposition. In order to effectively organise itself, a social movement must define its opponent. As for the third defining aspect of social movements, Touraine theorises that social activists are capable of renegotiating any aspect of society or social organisation through their struggle. In order to achieve this renegotiation, however, social movement participants embrace the principle of totality, which is the will for radical social transformation and self-production of society. For more details, see Touraine (1977).
2. This manuscript has been largely inspired and informed by the author's own doctoral research conducted between 2012 and 2015.
3. For a secondary source, see Martell and Stammers (1996).
4. In December 1981, in a primary attempt to destroy the union, the government in Poland declared martial law. Then, an economic crisis was declared to be under way. In response, Solidarity did not compromise on its non-violent, national and democracy-advocating nature. The militants of Solidarity reached a common ground, in a relative way, between trade-union activity and political action.
5. By way of example, we may note the increase of votes for the (pro-Kurdish) HDP in the 2015 Turkish elections.
6. The PKK is included in this definition for the times during which it has renounced the armed campaign in order for the Kurdish movement to be able qualify as a total social movement à la Touraine.
7. This observation is mainly based on the author's doctoral fieldwork in the province of Diyarbakır, Turkey in 2013.
8. Here I refer to Civil Fridays, a civil disobedience campaign launched by the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in 2011. For more details, see Başer (2011).
9. In the words of a Turkey analyst, "[o]ne of the darkest legacies of the Turkish state's fight against the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the 1990s is the large number of enforced disappearances that took place in the predominantly-Kurdish southeast region. Human rights workers in the region believe some 1,000 people to have disappeared by suspected state actors during that time" (Schleifer 2012).
10. I borrow the term "social space" from Alain Touraine.
11. It is important to note that a team of Turkish intelligence and several PKK representatives sat at a preliminary negotiation table in the Norwegian capital, Oslo before the announcement of the peace process in 2012. The recordings of the Oslo talks were

revealed to the media in September 2011 by unspecified sources. These recordings remain available on YouTube to this day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hpuUakmcKM>.

12. For a literary account of conflict perceptions in Turkey's Kurdish regions, see Kinzer (2006).
13. Author's translation from Turkish.
14. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is the founder of the Republic of Turkey.
15. At its most basic form, radical democracy advocates the inclusion and acceptance of differences that are absent in a universalist system to the detriment of particularities; in socialism at the detriment of political freedoms; in capitalism with its strict applications creating inequalities; and in liberalism with its inability to correct the aforementioned. For a further reference on radical democracy as applied to the Kurdish case, see Tekdemir (2018).
16. Ögünç conducted interviews with the co-chairs and a sociologist member of the Şehitlik Council, as well as a delegate from the Kurdish Democratic People's Congress (DTK).
17. The holy birth week refers to the birth week of the Prophet Muhammad, celebrated between 14-20 April.
18. This information is gathered by the author during a focus-group activity on 5 December 2013 in the premises of DİAY-DER in Diyarbakır, Turkey.
19. For a quick summary on the mobilisations of the Polish Solidarity movement, see Bartkowski (2009).
20. For more details, see Nûbihar Komele (2012).
21. A "Women Unit of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality" was established on 8 March 2012 with the objective to fight patriarchal mentality at institutional levels.
22. For a thorough study on the effects of conflict on women and their increasing predominance in Turkey's political life, see Demokratik Gelişim Enstitüsü [Democratic Progress Institute] (2011).
23. For more details, see İzci (2013); Lowen (2015).
24. For more details, see Burç (2018).
25. The HDP was initially founded in 2012 after a merger with the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in the aftermath of the municipal elections of March 2014. It should also be noted that the idea of establishing a Kurdish political party for all peoples of Turkey came initially from Öcalan. The BDP's campaign during the 2014 elections had primarily focused on Kurdish rights within a constitutional framework. This strategy might have secured the Kurdish nationalist vote but perhaps represented a risk for the Kurdish movement to marginalise itself in the long term. Following the 2014 elections, Öcalan called upon the BDP to organise under a new party that would not refer to a specific ethnic identity but address all of Turkey's concerns. The HDP has thus come into existence with an aim to establish a platform encompassing all the opposition forces and individuals or groups who had previously been disadvantaged *vis à vis* the dominant majority (politically the AKP or ethnically the Turks). The HDP consisted of Kurdish activists of all stripes but also appealed to a wider civil society, including segments of the non-Kemalist Turkish left. For more details on the HDP as an indispensable actor in Turkish politics, see Göksel and Tekdemir (2018); Tekdemir (2016).

26. For the information of the reader, Fazıl Say, a distinguished Turkish pianist and composer, and, Adalet Agaoğlu, a renowned Turkish author and playwright were among those who publicly declared support for the HDP.
27. Turkish election results are available at <http://secim.haberler.com/2015/>.
28. Turkey's election performance index is available at <http://secim.aa.com.tr/index.html>.
29. The emphasis on the term “restoring dignity” was made by the author’s interviewees during doctoral fieldwork in 2013 in Turkey. For a further reference, see Okçuoğlu (2015).
30. Initially caused by the government’s urban development plan that would demolish Istanbul’s Gezi Park in May 2013, the Gezi protests turned out to be a large wave of demonstrations asking for more civil liberties. For more details, see Göksel and Tekdemir (2018).
31. The 2013 Turkish corruption scandal refers to a criminal and bribery investigation involving key people in the government and their relatives.
32. For more details in the literature of instrumentalism for understanding paradoxes in a movement’s discourse and practices, see Zuckerman (2009).
33. I borrow this term from Gay Seidman.
34. For more details, see Yegen (2017).

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