

give it practical application in several countries, thus targeting students of political science and researchers. However, the attempt of drawing artificial lines between the three types of audience appears slightly exaggerated in the book, which might peter out the flair of Taagepera's model.

Overall, Taagepera's book is an interesting piece of reading – which still fails to address all of its target audience to the same extent. While the practitioners will probably find the extensive mathematical models tiresome, and will probably focus on the bullet-pointed summaries; the students and researchers of political party systems are likely to find these models interesting, yet they are likely to be dissatisfied by the conclusions the model proposes, as these hardly offer anything pristine. A further setback of the model is its way of dealing with the problem of endogeneity, whereby politicians decide on an electoral system which eventually reproduces the party system and congeals it in a certain form (p.7). Although Taagepera constructs a two-way relationship between the electoral system and the political parties, his model fails to consider the exogenous variables that could disturb this two-way relationship. As such, it has a higher value in description of the existing electoral systems than in analyzing or predicting the outcomes of fluctuations within those systems. Yet, as announced by the author, this model is only one stage in finding a better formula for more complex deliberations. This is likely to

occur after the adjunction of variables, which Taagepera considers important denominators for more precise predictions. Most readers of *Predicting Party Sizes*, thus, will be keen on finding out how the model develops with the inclusion of new variables.

**Aliza Marcus (2007).** *Blood and Belief, the PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence.* New York and London: New York University Press, pp. 395

**Ali Kemal Özcan (2005).** *Turkey's Kurds, a theoretical analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan.* London and New York: Routledge, pp. 310

Author: Joost Jongerden  
Assistant Professor  
Social Sciences Group-Wageningen  
University & Research  
joost.jongerden@wur.nl

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) is one of the most important secular insurgent political movements in Kurdistan<sup>2</sup> and maybe even the Middle East. Unlike most Kurdish political parties, which adopted a rather conservative outlook and were organized around tribal leaders and structures, the PKK originated in the 1970s from the radical left in Turkey and drew its leaders, members and militants from the disenfranchised. Its

---

<sup>2</sup> Kurdistan refers to a geographical region in the Middle East covering large parts of Southeast Turkey, Northern Syria, Northern Iraq, and Northwestern Iran.

undisputed leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was born in 1947 to a poor family in Ömerli, a village in the southeastern province of Urfa, bordering Syria. The PKK's fierce stance, strong convictions, and disciplined but decentralized organization contributed to a steady rise and growing effectiveness of the party through the 1980s. After years of training, the guerrilla war for the political liberation of Kurdistan and a social revolution in Kurdish society was initiated with simultaneous raids on the gendarmerie stations and officers' apartments in the Eruh and Semdinli districts of Hakkari on the night of August 15th, 1984. When the PKK began its guerrilla campaign, the organization had no more than a couple of hundred armed fighters—within ten years this number had increased to 15,000–20,000. Today, the party is believed to have a guerrilla force of about 6,000 men and women, but its political influence on the Kurds and politics in the region exceeds this number. The PKK has been seriously understudied,<sup>3</sup> but recently two books on the PKK have been published.

*Turkey's Kurds, a theoretical analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan* written by Ali Kemal Özcan takes as its starting point the question of how the PKK turned from a group of university students into a mass movement. Özcan wrote his book with inside knowledge. He received PKK educational training

in both London and the Party Central School at the Mahsum Korkmaz Academy in the Beka'a valley in Lebanon. As a trainee he interviewed Abdullah Öcalan twice. In Syrian-Kurdistan he spoke with family members of PKK guerillas who had lost their lives, and for his study in political sciences at the University of Kent he did field work Turkish-Kurdistan.

Özcan starts his analysis with a brief history of the PKK before it assumed its name, roughly the period 1971-1978. He discusses Öcalan's initial sympathy for the People's Liberation Party of Turkey THKO and the process underlying the formation of a party for the liberation of Kurdistan. This is followed by a rather extensive discussion of the PKK's political discourse and objectives, and alleged changes in these, during the two-decade period from the party's establishment in 1978 to the abduction of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. A brief comparison of two party programs, that of 1995 and 2000, leads the author to the conclusion that the PKK has gone through a metamorphosis (p. 135). Özcan concludes that in this period the PKK emerged from (not to say threw off) its Workers Party of Kurdistan heritage, fundamentally transforming from a party of Kurdistan to a party of Turkey. This represents a profound shift indeed, certainly a metamorphosis, implying a recognition of Turkish national sovereignty (within which the claim is made for regional autonomy), rather than a fight for national independence (for what is currently Turkish

---

<sup>3</sup> An exception is Paul White, *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers, the Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, London & New York, Zed Books.

Kurdistan). However, such a conclusion needs more support than some evidence obtained from a comparison of two party programs. Moreover, this so-called political turn is already present in interviews with Öcalan from as early as 1993. This implies that the so-called metamorphosis is not a radical turn in politics following the detention of Öcalan, as is argued.

The discourse analysis is followed by a brief discussion of the relationship between the individual and the PKK, which revolves around the concept of ideology and party organization. The PKK, Abdullah Öcalan argues, is primarily a movement of articulating an ideology, and through this ideology the people is created. In the PKK, the Party Leadership, an abstraction referring to Abdullah Öcalan, is the ideological center. The great challenge and task every member and militant of the PKK faces is to understand Öcalan, and through him 'becoming PKK'. Ideological commitment thus becomes subordination to Abdullah Öcalan. The relation between the individual and the party is also treated through the strong commitment expected from party members. PKK membership is *all-day membership*, as it is termed, which, rather more than the name suggests, goes beyond full-time membership, abolishing the difference between public and private. Unfortunately, the author does not go beyond raising the issue. There are other points where Öcalan stops just as the discussion becomes interesting. For example, he mentions incidentally that when

husband and wife join the party, the responsibility for children is taken over by the PKK, and various arrangements exists for 'party children', depending on the condition in a particular country (pp. 158, 289). But this is all he says, no further elaboration on the kind of arrangements, the particular conditions, how the party takes over responsibility and the way these 'party-children' grow up.

Although the author has interesting data and raises interesting issues, *Turkey's Kurds* is ridden with incomprehensive language and bold generalizations. In addition to assuming, for example, that tribes are historically unchanged phenomena, the author also simply states several times that the PKK is a Marxist organization. The PKK's relation to Marxism has always been complex and it is a simplification just to hold up the PKK as Marxist. The long exposé on nation and nationalism in the beginning of the book and intended as a theoretical framework lacks clarity and focus, and only takes us to simple assertions such as: a nation is 'the population of a modern state' (p. 32) (while the fact that there is a Kurdish issue itself proves that a nation is not just the population of a state) and a nation 'is made of ethnicity' (where there is general consensus among scholars that nations are defined by culture) (p. 45).

Pertinently, Ernest Gellner, one of the leading scholars on nationalism and referred to several times in *Turkey's Kurds*, overtly rejects the idea that the

nation is an updated version of the 'ethnos', arguing to the contrary that nations depend on the abolition of the ethnos, with two empirical exceptions on this rule, the Somali's and the Kurds. This would have made an engaging starting point for analysis, but is passed over. All in all, it is to be regretted that Özcan put so much effort into summarizing different notions of nations and nationalism, which keeps on popping up in the book, rather than putting more effort into building up a case from his potentially rich empirical data.

*Blood and Belief* is written by Aliza Marcus, former international press correspondent who covered the PKK for more than eight years, first as a freelance reporter for the Christian Science Monitor and later as staff writer for Reuters. Through the eyes of participants, Marcus discusses PKK milestones, including: the foundation of the party in 1978 in a village called Fis, in the district of Lice, north of Diyarbakir; the struggle in Hilvan, where the PKK engaged in a fight with a tribe loyal to the state, but disliked among the local population; and the assault on Mehmet Celal Bucak, a high-ranking member of the conservative Justice Party and exploitive landlord in Siverek. The planned assassination was not only a spectacular example of propaganda-of-the-deed, in this case to announce the establishment of the PKK, but also revealed much about the PKK philosophy and *modus operandi*. It was a declaration of war against the *comprador*, the landlord class

collaborating with the Turkish state. Somehow missing, unfortunately, is a treatment of the killing of Haki Karer, in his student years a housemate of Abdullah Öcalan. Not a Kurd but a Turk from Ordu, Haki Karer belonged to the small group of confidants from which the PKK emerged. He was killed in Antep in 1977, allegedly by members of a rival Kurdish group. In the party's historiography, the death of Haki Karer is related to the decision to deepen and strengthen the struggle and to establish a party: the PKK. Yet his brother and co-founder of the PKK, Baki Karer, later claimed his brother had been killed after a disagreement with Abdullah Öcalan.

Even though *Blood and Belief* includes a small section treating the period 1999-2007, the book actually ends in 1999. This explains why the split of the PKK-Vijin group led by Mehmet Şener and Sari Baran is discussed, in interesting detail, but an internal struggle within PKK-KADEK in the period 2000-2004 is unfortunately not. The latter saw some high ranking PKK cadres trying to reform the party from within, and end the situation in which Abdullah Öcalan directed the party from the prison-island of Imrali through meetings with his lawyers. Following their failure to reform the party, this group of PKK cadres left the party – among them Nizamettin Taş, Central Committee member since 1986, and after Sari Baran's departure the highest commander of the ARGK and Osman Öcalan, the brother of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. They established a

new party called the Patriotic Democratic Party (PWD).

Most striking is the section on the course of the war after 1993, when the army changes its strategy and the PKK begins to lose ground, literally. The new approach, referred to as the 'field domination doctrine' implied, among other things, that the armed forces would abandon the approach of garrison-line-of-defense and went instead for hot-pursuit. This new doctrine was also associated with the evacuation and destruction of thousands of rural settlements, according to many experts a constitutive part of the counter-insurgency of the Turkish Armed Forces. Quoting guerilla commanders at that time, Marcus gives ample evidence of how the new war strategy of the Turkish armed forces changed the relations in the field. Not only was the guerilla cut off from its support and supplies, the units were also immobilized. The PKK couldn't move around as easily as before (p. 223). Yet Abdullah Öcalan wanted his fighters to speed up the fight and increase the size of battalions to create liberated areas. The conditions of war have changed, however, and this strategy only resulted in more losses (p. 241) Not before PKK commanders have commented on this phase of the war, making their reflections among the most important in the book.

Aliza Marcus got most of her data from PKK dissidents. The list of interviewed dissidents is impressive, among them activists who already had joined the

organization before it became the PKK in 1978, and field commanders of the PKK's armed wing, the ARGK. The interviews with these dissidents are an important source of information and it may be a good idea to publish their transcripts, perhaps as an annex to the book in a second edition. If it comes to recommendations, a map of the Kurdistan region indicating the location of some of the frequently mentioned places, such as the Haftanin or the Lolan camps, would have been rather useful (in addition to the map of Turkey already included). A shortcoming for a book about the PKK is that no (senior) PKK member loyal to the party has been interviewed (e.g. Murat Karayılan, Duran Kalkan, Ali Haydar Kaytan, Zübeyir Aydar, and Cemil Bayık)

*Blood and Belief* has a clear structure, telling the story of group and party-formation, development and growth, and the major set-backs the PKK experienced. Nevertheless, the book does not follow a simple 'rise and fall' pattern. On the contrary, Marcus discusses how the PKK again and again succeeds in reinventing itself, coming back after virtual defeat. To its merit, the book is a good read, compelling and vivid, mainly because Marcus approaches her subject through the stories of those who once played a role within the PKK. As a result, *Blood and Belief* is a rich source and valuable contribution to the social and political history of the PKK in particular, and to the Kurdish national movement and Kurdish studies in general. Notwithstanding the omissions, it is

highly recommended to all those interested in the PKK and its wider context, guerrilla politics and the ongoing situation in the region.

Finally, the publication of these two books brings to our attention the fact that so little is written about the PKK in English. This is an enormous demerit of Kurdish and Turkish (and Middle Eastern) studies, since the PKK has been and still is one of the most important secular insurgent movements in the region.