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Solidarity beyond Borders
***The Relationship Transformation Process between the
Kurdish Movement and the Radical Left in Germany***

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Abstract

During the 2014 Siege of Kobanê, an unprecedented global solidarity movement with the Kurdish struggle emerged, primarily composed of (radical) left groups. This critical juncture in the fight against the 'Islamic State' (IS) significantly influenced the Kurdish movement and was, in part, a product of these solidarity mobilizations. This thesis investigates the genesis, history, and dynamics of this transnational solidarity movement. Focusing on the German case, it examines the process of relationship transformation between the PKK-led Kurdish movement and the radical left within a relational framework. It employs a mechanism-based research strategy to identify mechanisms and their constituent sub-mechanisms in different arenas of interaction, and to compare the evolving dynamics of relationship transformation across different temporal phases, spanning from the early 1980s to the beginning of 2020. This thesis addresses two key research gaps: theoretically, it contributes to the underdeveloped conceptualization of relationship transformation across borders and among movements, synthesising insights from contentious politics, transnationalism, diaspora politics and coalition building literature. Empirically, it investigates an entirely unexplored social movement with a 40-year history. Employing a mixed-method, diachronic-comparative approach, data collection and analysis draw upon multiple methods, including 40 semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participatory observation. Ultimately, the thesis proposes three pathways of relationship transformation: the attribution of similarity, the attribution of threat and the formation of a transnational space. In sum it traces the solidarity movements with Kurdistan as a process of relationship transformation between a diaspora movement and the alliance system, elucidating their mutual relational dynamics.

Keywords: Contentious Politics, Solidarity Movements, Kurdish Movement, Radical Left, Transnationalism, Diaspora Mobilization

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Chapter I. Introduction

Internationalists fighting and dying in guerrilla combat, delegation trips to stop arms exports, mobilizations triggering diplomatic incidents, international brigades constructing hospitals, joint demonstrations with up to 200,000 participants, occupations and militant campaigns, mass repression, clashes with the police and fascists, terrorist proceedings, fundraising for weapons, adaption of ideologies, the formation of solidarity committees, feminist alliances, polarization, and metropolitan chauvinism. These are but a series of buzzwords from the over 40-year history whereby the relationship between the Kurdish diaspora and the radical left in Germany underwent numerous fundamental transformations. In spite of the significant impact of the solidarity movement with Kurdistan on an international, national, and inter-movement level, there has been a dearth of scholarly research or discussion on the topic so far. Accordingly, this PhD thesis shall fill this empirical gap by answering the question of how the relationship between the PKK-led Kurdish movement and the radical left movements in Germany have been transformed from the 1980s until 2020. In order to answer this question, this research shall put the literature of contentious politics, transnationalism, diaspora politics and coalition building into a dialogue with one another. Therefore, the thesis contributes to the hitherto underdeveloped theoretical and empirical understanding of (transnational) solidarity movements.

Empirically, there is almost no research on the German solidarity movement with Kurdistan so far, except for three studies: the first study, conducted by Ricardo Kaufer, is a content analysis of the foremost anarchist groups in Germany, who have organized solidarity events protesting the Turkish military invasion of Afrin¹ in 2018 (Kaufer 2019). Secondly, the collected edition by Hunt (2021a), deals with the solidarity of ecological movements with Kurdistan, investigating among others, the transnational mobilization against the Ilisu Dam (Dissard 2021) and the 'Make Rojava Green Again' (MRGA) campaign (Hunt 2021b). The latter campaign, in particular, shall be included in my investigation. The third is my own Master's thesis (Reinhardt 2016), which traces the history of solidarity with Kurdistan in Germany by conducting, among others, a frame resonance analysis of radical left journals. Other scholars mention the German solidarity movement at different points in time (Casier 2011a; Faist 1998), however they often make claims without any empirical basis (e.g. Mertens 2000). More broadly, there are a few studies on the solidarity movement within Turkey (Casier et al. 2011; Gambetti, Jongerden 2015), Kurdayetî, as pan-Kurdish Solidarity (Gourlay 2018) and feminist alliances in Turkey (Al-Ali, Taş 2018; Erengöz 2022; Küçükırca 2018). Zarnett compares different Western solidarity movements and argues that a politicized and mobilized diaspora is less likely to trigger a broad solidarity movement, while a small or "unmobilized diaspora has a greater chance of attracting the support of Western solidarity activists" (Zarnett 2015: 198). Specifically regarding the Kurdish diaspora, he argues that "few, if any, Western solidarity organizations exist dedicated specifically to supporting the Kurds" (Zarnett 2015: 200). I will empirically demonstrate that this statement is not tenable and argue that Zarnett's hypothesis is overly simplistic. In short, this PhD thesis shall explore an under-researched social movement that has nevertheless been developing over the course of the past four decades. Accordingly, the scope of this thesis is primarily exploratory.

¹ Afrin. See Chapter V. 1.3.

Analytically, by relying on a relational perspective, this thesis will trace the relationship transformation process between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany and compare this dynamic process along three temporal phases by means of a mechanism-based research strategy. Most importantly, it will contribute to the literature on coalition building, which often focuses on the formation of coalitions (van Dyke, Amos 2017: 10), by applying a mechanism-process approach and tracing the entire process of relationship transformation, starting with the stage of formation, maintenance, and finally the stage of relationship break-up. In doing so, the different factors identified in the literature on coalition building (van Dyke, McCammon 2010b) will be set into motion, and the dynamics of different mechanisms in different phases and in different arenas will be traced. Furthermore, adding to the literature on diaspora mobilization, I argue, in line with Coma Roura and Quinsaà (Coma Roura 2016; Quinsaà 2016), that the dynamics of diaspora movements are intertwined with the evolution of their alliance systems, and vice versa. Finally, I will compare different mechanisms involved in transnational relationship transformation, adding to the literature on transnational solidarity movements by tracing reoccurring mechanisms.

The thesis will be conducted as a mixed-method, diachronic comparative analysis of processes of relationship transformation. The data collection and analysis will be carried out with a triangulation of methods including semi-structured in-depth expert interviews (Della Porta 2014b; Meuser, Nagel 2009), document analysis (Bosi, Reiter 2014; Mosca 2014), and participatory observations (Balsiger, Lambelet 2014). In numbers, the analysis is based on 40 semi-structured interviews with activists from the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany, 621 documents from the respective movements and 214 media documents, and 18 field notes from demonstrations and conferences. Through the triangulation of different data collection methods, I was able to obtain information about the 40 years of relationship transformation under investigation, however, with a small bias towards the present.

The following section shall clarify the units of analysis, key concepts, and the periodization of the temporal phases. Given the meso-level focus, the main actors investigated in the thesis are not individual activists, but social movement organizations (SMOs) from the radical left in Germany and the PKK-led Kurdish movement. SMOs vary in size, formality, professionalization, and durability (Della Porta, Diani 2006: 140) and change over time, for instance, dissolving or institutionalizing (Della Porta, Diani 2006: 150). SMOs often deal with “recruitment, fundraising, discourse and development of claims, coordination of collective actions, and even protest itself” (Walker, Martin 2019: 169), as well as with relationship transformation and coalition formation. Consequently, this research considers a very diverse set of actors, including parties, associations, and grassroots groups, that are capable of forming relationships or engaging in boundary activation. While the focus shall be largely on SMOs, individual activists will also be included when considering periods of latency or states of abeyance (Alsahi 2018).

The Kurdish movement is a misleading term that is often used for a variety of actors. Some scholars use the term to refer narrowly to the ‘Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê’ (PKK)², whereas others use it in a broader sense to refer variously to armed groups, parliamentary parties or the multi-layered social movement (O'Connor 2017: 2–3). Following the second logic, this thesis

² Kurdistan Workers' Party.

defines the *PKK-led Kurdish movement*³ as the network of organizations and militants which relate positively to the struggle for freedom in Kurdistan initiated by the PKK as well as the ideology of Abdullah Öcalan. I use the term PKK-led Kurdish movement, or the Kurdish movement in short, throughout this thesis, instead of only the PKK, to define the transforming structure comprising movements, parties, civil society organizations and armed groups in Kurdistan and in the diaspora. The term *PKK-led* refers to the Kurdish political bodies that ideologically follow Öcalan, but which have transforming structures, ranging from democratic centralism to Democratic Confederalism. In more concrete terms, the PKK-led Kurdish movement, its history, and its transforming organizational structure will be outlined in Chapter V.

Concerning the radical left in Germany, the question must first be answered as to why the radical left should be considered at all. Firstly, the radical left is one of the strategic partners of the PKK-led Kurdish movement and the radical left is significantly involved in the solidarity movement with Kurdistan in Germany. Secondly, the Kurdish movement's lobbying with more moderate and international actors has already been studied (Berkowitz, Mügge 2014; Casier 2011b; Eccarius-Kelly 2002). Similar to the Kurdish movement, I consider the *radical left* in Germany not as something clear-cut or defined by specific characteristics, but rather based on the self-definition of certain SMOs as 'radical left'. Accordingly, I will consider groups or activists who identify themselves with the radical left or struggle towards a fundamental restructuring of the existing social, economic, and political order (Hillmann, Hartfiel 2007: 505). In contrast to the term left-wing extremism, which intends to marginalize the respective group, Haunss argues that left-wing radicalism is

“a politically and scientifically more substantial term, ... which refers to the fundamental claim for change of the activists belonging to the left-wing radical currents, which is therefore incompatible with the existing [order].” (2008)

More concretely, the radical left consists of SMOs, inter alia belonging to the autonomous, anti-imperialist, feminist, anarchist, communist, Trotskyist, ecological, and antifascist currents. Marginally, I occasionally deal with groups and parties who have both a moderate and a radical wing, such as the Green Party in the 1980s or 'Die Linke'⁴. Efforts at relationship transformation and the joint mobilization of SMOs from the PKK-led Kurdish movement and the radical left are henceforth labelled as the *solidarity movement with Kurdistan*. Here, the universe of all events conducted with a positive reference to the struggle in Kurdistan are considered as part of the solidarity movement with Kurdistan.

In this thesis, the term *solidarity* will be used when referring to the usage of the research subject or solidarity movements as a general empirical phenomenon (Rucht 2001). However, I will refrain from introducing solidarity as an academic concept for two reasons: Firstly, solidarity itself is a contested and changing term in the movements under investigation. Since my research focuses on the how rather than the why question, solidarity conceptualization will be investigated in the analysis when mentioned by the respondents as relevant for the relationship transformation process. Secondly, solidarity refers in the philosophical literature (Bayertz 1999) and within Social Movements Studies to a wider range of phenomena and concepts, in the latter from means of

³ Credit goes to Yasin Sunca for providing me with the term during a joint writing process.

⁴ The Left. Successor party to the 'Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus' (PDS) | 'Party of Democratic Socialism'.

mobilization (Hirsch 1986: 379), shared feelings about a specific group (Barker 2001; Benford 2013), and commitment (Gamson 1991), to political altruism (Passy 2001). In the absence of a coherent conceptualisation of solidarity, thus adding another layer of analysis, the theoretical conceptualization will focus on mechanisms of relationship transformation. In short, instead of introducing an empirical and theoretical contested concept, solely the understanding of solidarity in the movements is examined at the relevant points for the transformation of relationships.

The *period of investigation* will be limited from the beginning of the 1980s, where the Kurdish movement started to be active in Germany, until 2020. The periodization of the temporal units is done in three phases following the development of the PKK-led Kurdish movement in Kurdistan, since firstly, solidarity movements between North and South tend to depend on developments in the South, and secondly, since the Kurdish diaspora in Germany is also directly oriented to these dynamics. Consequently, the research adopts the following periodization: Phase I lasts from 1980 until the abduction of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, marking the end of high intensity confrontations between the PKK and the Turkish state. Phase II continues from 2000 until the war in Kobanê at the end of 2014. Phase III starts with war in Kobanê and lasts until the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, since I assume that thereafter, due to restrictions of movement and especially cross-border travel, new dynamics occur (Della Porta 2021).

Additionally, several remarks regarding names and translation used throughout the thesis are necessary: In Northern Kurdistan, the forced Turkicization of all names and the prohibition of the Kurdish languages have been an element of the forced assimilation and denial of the Kurdish existence over the past decades. A similar process took place in Rojava. Kurdish civil society has therefore fought, among other things, for the establishment of bilingualism for place names (HK 2019: 11). For this reason, I use the Kurdish names of places and organizations: for example, I will use Bakûr to refer to the part of Kurdistan located in Turkey, Rojava for the part in Syria, Başûr for the part in Iraq, and Rojhilat for the part in Iran (Appendix D). Initially, I will provide the original name of, for example, a social movement organization in the original language and an English translation in a footnote. A list of all relevant organizations, including translations and abbreviations, is provided in the appendix. Exceptions include quotations from interviews or texts, where the names used by interviewees or authors have been unaltered. Since English is not the language used by the research subjects, almost all citations, names and texts have been translated by myself. Therefore, the translations included here are my own, unless otherwise stated, while problems concerning translation shall be dealt with at respective points in the text.

Finally, I want to provide an overview of the content and chapters of the thesis. Chapter II. Theoretical Approach, shall introduce relationship transformation, as the main concept, and the mechanisms-process approach, as the main framework for the analysis. After defining relationship transformation, I will engage with the literature on factors for coalition building and the qualities of ties, and on a critique on these approaches, introduce the mechanisms-process approach. Following a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the approach, I introduce the concepts of sub-mechanisms and arenas of interaction. Next, I identify the relevant mechanisms along the three arenas of interaction, namely the Transnational Arena, National Arena, and Inter-Movement Arena. Chapter III. Research Design shall be dedicated to a discussion of research ethics and my own positionality. Next, the data collection and data analysis methods

will be elaborated, centring on semi-structured expert interviews, document analysis and participatory observation. Chapter IV. Historical Analysis: Solidarity Movements in (West-)Germany, will trace the history of different solidarity movements in Germany, in order, firstly, to introduce key actors and secondly, to begin with the analysis of central mechanisms of relationship transformation. Subsequently, Chapter V. Historical Background on the Kurdish Movement, in the first step will sketch the history of the PKK-led Kurdish movement in Kurdistan, and then analyse the dynamics of the diaspora's mobilizations in Germany. Chapters VI, VII, VIII, represent the main empirical analysis along the three temporal phases indicated earlier. Each chapter begins with a focus on the Transnational Arena, followed by the National Arena and finally the Inter-Movement Arena. Chapter IX. Conclusion and Comparison, presents a comparison of the three temporal phases and then a comparison with the preceding solidarity movements introduced in Chapter IV. At the end of the comparison, general pathways of relationship transformation are proposed. Finally, the conclusion shall outline the empirical and theoretical contributions of this PhD thesis, and provide an outlook.

Chapter II. Theoretical Approach: Pinning Interacting Targets

This PhD thesis investigates the question of how the PKK-led Kurdish movement and radical left movements in Germany transformed relationships from the 1980s until 2020. Several concepts need to be theoretically elaborated in order to address this question. In the first part of this chapter, I shall propose my own definition of relationship transformation and situate it in the literature. After discussing the strengths and shortcomings of the literature on coalition building and the qualities of ties, I will introduce the mechanism-process approach as the main theoretical framework that will inform the empirical analysis. This approach was selected in particular since it allows me to historically trace a 40-year process, and compare different phases of relationship transformation. After discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the mechanisms-process approach, I will introduce the adjustments of sub-mechanisms and arenas of interaction.

In the second half, I consider the mechanisms of relationship transformation along three arenas of interaction. In the first subsection, focusing on the Transnational Arena, I discuss the concepts of transnationalism and diaspora, as well as their particular mechanisms. I elaborate on mechanisms that transcend national borders, and argue that the dynamics of diaspora movements are intertwined with the evolution of their alliance system, and vice versa. In the following subsection, I examine the National Arena and address the ‘repression/protest paradox’ by focusing on the attribution of threat mechanism. In the final subsection, concerned with the Inter-Movement Arena, I summarize mechanisms along the stages of relationship formation, relationship maintenance and relationship break-up.

1. Relationship Transformation

In the context of this research, I define *relationship transformation* as the *process by which two or more organizational distinct actors establish inter-organizational ties*. The process of relationship transformation consists of different mechanisms and sub-mechanism combining into sequences, which are conceptualized as pathways of relationship transformation in the final chapters of this thesis. The term relationship indicates a durable tie, whereas the term interaction is reserved for more contingent and faster changing (Diani, Mische 2015: 308–09), or more hostile contacts. The ties which develop in relationship transformation consist of different changing elements or qualities that change, which indicate relevant mechanisms. I conceptualize the process of relationship transformation along a temporal axis in three *stages*:

- 1) *relationship formation* refers to the stage where a relationship begins
- 2) *relationship maintenance* refers to the stage where the relationship is sustained
- 3) *relationship break-up* refers to the stage at which the relationship falls apart

The stages do not necessarily have to neatly follow one another: for instance, a brief relationship formation stage might be immediately followed by a break. Nevertheless, a certain chronological order is suggested, since a relationship break-up will not be followed neatly by a phase of

relationship maintenance. I expect different mechanisms to be relevant at different stages of the relationship transformation process.⁵

Hence, there is a need for a thorough theoretical elaboration, grounding in existing literature, and justification of the approach I propose. To accomplish this, I will delve into the literature on factors that influence coalition formation and qualities of ties. Additionally, I will introduce the mechanism-process approach, which serves as the theoretical framework underpinning my argument. The main rationale behind introducing the process of relationship transformation lies in the literature, which often examines relationships between SMOs primarily in the context of coalition formation. However, this literature is mostly concerned with identifying factors that influence the formation of coalitions, with limited attention to the entire process of coalition building. Furthermore, this approach struggles to elucidate the mutual interaction between various factors and analyse the dynamics and developments within coalitions. I contend that coalitions are just one visible form of relationships between SMOs⁶, and by introducing the concept of relationship transformation, I am to capture the evolution from one form of relationship to another. Nevertheless, the coalition building literature provides valuable empirical analyses and insights into mechanisms of relationship transformation.

An alternative conceptualization of relationships between social movements and SMOs can be found in network approaches. These approaches excel at assessing the quality of ties within a broader relational structure but encounter difficulties when it comes to addressing temporal evolution and hostile ties. This critique of existing conceptualisations brings me to the core of my theoretical framework: the mechanism-process approach. In contrast to the factors influencing coalition building, the mechanism-process approach offers a lens through which we can focus on the relationship development, recurring mechanisms, and their interplay. In contrast to network approaches, the mechanism-process centres on the temporal dimension and can integrate interactions with countermovements. However, within the literature on contentious politics, the transformation of relationship between movements is typically conceptualized through a variety of mechanisms, which only partially address aspects of the relationship transformation process, primarily the stages of relationship formation and break-up. Therefore, in order to comprehensively examine the entire process, I have introduced the concept of relationship transformation. I will now elaborate on this argument in detail.

1.1. Factors of Coalition Formation and Qualities of Ties

In Social Movement Studies, the prevalent conceptualization of relationship transformation between social movements organizations and other actors is that of social movement coalitions. The following overview of factors for coalition formation is largely based on the work of Van Dyke and McCammon, who advanced the research on coalition formation in recent decades. Coalitions

⁵ For example, in the relationship formation stage, brokerage or the attribution of threats might be salient, while in the stage of relationship maintenance, political learning and negotiation might be important, and in the relationship break-up stage, competition and repression might be most relevant.

⁶ Coalition, as the “creation of new, visible, and direct coordination of claims” (Alimi et al. 2015: 30), is just one, but certainly the most common form of cross-movement relationship transformation. However, relationship transformation might also occur in non-visible forms, when claims and goals are developed, or if visibility is not relevant to a specific relationship. For example, informal exchange or relationships forged for political learning might never materialize into a visible project or campaign, but are nevertheless crucial for long-term relationship transformation.

are usually analysed along one or a combination of temporal, numerical, spatial, or organizational axes. These range from short to long-term coalitions, partnerships between two actors to complex networks of many social movement organizations, coalitions spanning local, national and transnational scales, and loosely organized or highly formal relationships (Brooker, Meyer 2019: 253–57; van Dyke, McCammon 2010a: xiv–xv). Coalitions are often characterized as occupying the space between the poles of these axes. While they tend to have more routine communications than most networks, they are however distinct from mergers, since the partners maintain their organizational independence (McCammon, Moon 2015; Wiest 2010: 51; Zald, Ash 1966). This strand of literature explains coalition formation, and only recent longevity and success by reference to factors such as *organizational structures*, *ideologies*, *social ties* and *histories of interactions*, *political opportunities* and *threats* as well as *resources* (van Dyke, Amos 2017: 3–9). Since these factors shall structure the empirical analysis of relationship transformation by helping to identify relevant mechanisms, they will be briefly summarized here.

Social ties and history of interactions are frequently mentioned in the literature on coalition formation (Brooker, Meyer 2019: 259–60). Often coalition formation is explained as the outcome of the work of coalition brokers or bridge builders, individual activists who have already established relationships to more than one organization or movement (van Dyke, Amos 2017: 3). The presence of brokers influences which groups join a coalition (Corrigall-Brown, Meyer 2010) and facilitates the overcoming of boundaries (Grossman 2005). Conversely, the absence of social ties has also been used to explain why groups do not engage in coalition formation (Ferree, Roth 1998). Furthermore, these social ties have a history of their own, which can influence whether a coalition materializes or not (Wiest 2010: 59; Wood 2005).

Organizational factors and *structures*, such as multi-issue goals and more formal organizational structures, including the division of labour and professional leaders, have been identified as factors facilitating coalition formation (van Dyke, Amos 2017: 4). SMOs with a broader range of goals are more likely to engage in coalition formation compared to single issue organizations (Heaney, Rojas 2011; Obach 2004; van Dyke 2003). A division of labour makes it possible to assign personnel to handle coalition building (Borland 2008), while organizations which practice non-hierarchical and joint decision-making face difficulties in working in coalitions (Arnold 1995). In particular, coalitions between professional and more informal, non-hierarchical organizations are difficult to maintain (Kleidman, Rochon 1997).

One of the most decisive factors for the formation of a coalition is that of *ideological congruence* (van Dyke, Amos 2017: 5). SMOs that share ideologies and common interests are more likely to form coalitions (Bandy, Smith 2005: 234; McCammon, Moon 2015). Ideological differences can inhibit social movement coalitions, as one would not expect social movement organizations with conflicting goals to cooperate (Barkan 1986; Gerhards, Rucht 1992). Rarely do coalitions occur between groups and movements that hold diametrically opposed ideologies, as in the 1980s in the United States, where feminists and conservatives fought together against pornography (West 1987). Significantly, ideological shifts by one group may lead to ideological convergence with other groups, thus enabling cooperation (McCammon, Campbell 2002: 237; McCammon, Moon 2015: 328). Conversely, other scholars warn against overstating the importance of ideological congruence for coalition formation, since broad coalitions of organizations with diverse ideologies do nevertheless occur (Haydu 2012: 106). When the differentiation of tactical (short-

term, issue-specific) and strategic (long-term and broader, shared goals) cooperation are added to the analysis, it becomes clear that ad-hoc coalitions between ideologically heterogeneous groups are in fact possible (Guenther 2010; van Stekelenburg, Boekkooi 2013), while a deeper interaction over a longer period requires more ideological congruence (Beamish, Luebbers 2009; van Dyke, Amos 2017). This is all the more true for transnational social movement coalitions, since social ties between groups operating in different countries may be weaker or less dense than between groups at the national level, and that consequently, ideological differences only become effective over time (Herkenrath 2011: 65; Maney 2000).

Consistent with the broader social movement literature, *political opportunities and threats* can facilitate and hamper coalition formation (van Dyke, Amos 2017: 6). Numerous studies suggest that threats have a stronger influence on coalitions than opportunities (Dixon, Martin 2012; Dolgon 2001; Meyer, Corrigall-Brown 2005; van Dyke, McCammon 2010a: XX). In this context, threats may range from unfavourable governmental policy decisions to the rise of countermovements, to repression, which in turn can have different effects and are therefore considered separately here. Political and economic threats due to “unwanted public policies” are described in the literature as an important factor for coalition building (Almeida 2010: 171). Accordingly, restrictive legislation can allow ideological differences and other reservations to be overcome and encourage SMOs to seek allies and form coalitions (Okamoto 2010: 147). Similar considerations apply to *countermovement threat*. Racist mobilizations, such as those expressed in increased violent attacks in the U.S. against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, have led to an increase and strengthening of coalitions of affected people (Okamoto 2010: 159–60). However, there are limits to coalition building, and the identification of a common adversary, on its own, is unlikely to allow for major ideological differences to be overcome for a longer period of time (McCammon, van Dyke 2010: 294). *Repression* can both create and foster coalitions and prevent or destroy them. The fact that coercion and violence by state regimes against SMOs can either lead to the reinforcement or the suppression and decline of protests is discussed in the literature as the “repression/protest paradox” (Brockett 2015: 266–68). On the one hand, research on the South Korean democracy movement, for example, found that repression by the government led to increased coalition building even when there were fewer protest events (Chang 2008: 670). On the other hand, even the mere threat of repression can be enough to prevent coalition building. For instance, “selective repression”, might inhibit moderate actors to form relationships with the radical wing of a movement (Koopmans 1993: 645). Concerning opportunities, if organizations and activists believe that political success is achievable, they will engage in more coalition work to enforce and secure success (van Dyke, McCammon 2010a: XX). For example, the overruling of abortion bans led the pro-choice movement in the USA to form coalitions to take advantage of the more open political situation on the issue (Staggenborg 1986). However, McCammon and Campbell point out that a *political opportunity* is often not seized as quickly or appropriately enough because of the institutional inertia of organizations (McCammon, Campbell 2002: 232). Meanwhile, other studies suggest that a combination of political threats and opportunities trigger coalition formation (Almeida 2010; Kay 2005; Reese et al. 2010; van Dyke, Amos 2017: 7).

Resources, such as money, infrastructure, personnel, or information, can matter for coalition formation in four ways. First, the pooling or exchange of resources creates an incentive for the

emergence and maintenance of movement coalitions (van Dyke, Amos 2017: 7). A major advantage of forming coalitions for SMOs is the cost savings that are generated when resources are shared (Herkenrath 2011: 59–60). For example, Chung (2001) found that Korean immigrants and African Americans formed coalitions, partly since one group brought financial resources to the table, while the other provided crucial organizing skills and organizational ties. Second, however, resources can also be a factor in preventing coalitions if they require too many resources to maintain. Coalitions incur financial and personnel coordination costs, which is particularly true in the context of transnational coalitions. The logistical challenges involved in organizing coordination meetings, high expenses for travel, and high time costs for international communication can be a deciding factor for groups with few resources not to join a coalition (Herkenrath 2011: 61). Even at the local level, the amount of time that must be invested in coalition work sets limits on groups. In congruence with Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), the limited availability of resources hinders coalition formation (Barkan 1986; Cullen 2005), whereas an abundance of resources may have the opposite effect (Borland 2008; Hathaway, Meyer 1993; Obach 2004). Third, groups that are in competition for the same resources can be discouraged from joining a coalition (Okamoto 2010: 149). Joining a coalition risks diluting the sharpness of an organization’s profile and weakening its capacity to compete for the same funds or members (Meyer, Corrigan-Brown 2005: 331). Finally, the imbalance between resource-rich and resource-poor SMOs can create two kinds of potential tensions: “on the one hand, the large organizations’ concern about an unfair distribution of the burden of contributions, and on the other hand, the smaller organizations’ fear of being dominated by the more powerful partners” (Herkenrath 2011: 63). Especially in transnational coalitions between movements from the North and the South, this imbalance can lead to a power imbalance that intersects with other lines of domination, thus hindering effective cooperation. In sum, SMOs usually have a shortage of resources and consequently can only form a limited number of coalitions, while coalition can also provide new resources and opportunities.

In a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) of 24 studies on social movement coalitions, McCammon and Van Dyke (2010) suggest that a compatible ideology combined with resources are among the most important combinations of factors in coalition formation.⁷ The research identified six trajectories to a movement coalition, whereby ideological alignment or the presence of a threat are needed to trigger coalition formation (McCammon, van Dyke 2010: 305). While ideology and the presence of a threat are a sufficient condition for coalition formation, they usually unfold in a combination with other factors. For example,

“movement organizations with congruent ideological orientations are likely to begin working together in a coalition when resources in the broader environment are more plentiful, when a scarcity of resources does not compel groups to compete with one another for material or human resources.” (McCammon, van Dyke 2010: 310).

Certainly, those studies have provided numerous important insights about the factors of coalition building, while usually focusing on the formation of coalitions. More recently, however, the

⁷ Accordingly, 19 studies found that SMOs entering coalitions shared similar ideologies. Threats were considered to be relevant in promoting coalition formation in all but one study. 17 studies analysed the salience of resources with the finding that “82 percent of these investigations found a positive role for the availability of resources” (McCammon, van Dyke 2010: 302–03). Prior social ties were found to have a positive impact on coalition formation, however, only in 14 of the 24 studies. Political opportunities were found to lead to more mixed results, and these were considered to be least relevant.

longevity and outcomes of coalitions have become a research interest (van Dyke, Amos 2017: 8–10; Zajak, Haunss 2021). In addition to the aforementioned factors which influence the coalition maintenance and break-up, shared ideologies and strategies, commitment and trust have been identified as important factors for sustaining a coalition over a longer period (Dixon et al. 2013: 331; Krinsky, Reese 2006: 626). Additionally, the quality of interpersonal interactions are important for coalition maintenance (Herkenrath 2011: 281; Obach 1999; van Dyke, Amos 2017: 9).

Nevertheless, a lot of work remains to be done in this strand of research in order to explain the whole process of coalition building. Furthermore, these studies have struggled to clarify the mutual interaction between these different factors or to analyse the dynamics and developments within coalitions, and in general, tend to be more oriented towards classical social movement approaches. In particular, the dynamics and temporal developments are either ignored or conflated with other factors, which, unsurprisingly, result in different outcomes. In any case, the factors of organizational structures, ideological proximity, political opportunities, and threats as well as resources indicate relevant mechanisms.

The Quality of Relationships

In the next step, I will briefly summarize other conceptualizations of coalitions in social movements studies, focusing on the quality of the relationships. Network approaches, particularly those employed by Mario Diani and his colleagues, have also considered the relevance of inter-organizational alliances and ties (Crossley, Diani 2019; 2015; Diani, Mische 2015). Similarly, these studies demonstrated that ideological and value homophily, similar goals, and trust develop through previous social ties and are important in the configuration of alliances and their resulting network structure (Atouba, Shumate 2010; Di Gregorio 2012).

The advantage of the network approach is that it is capable of assessing the quality of a tie within its overall relational structure. Ties are considered to be connections between two nodes, however, the precise meaning of a social tie is often, once again, put into a black box (Diani, Mische 2015: 310; White 2012). Most prominently, the idea of weak ties and strong ties was introduced by Granovetter (Granovetter 1973). Diani and Mische single out four different types of ties, namely direct relationships, co-membership in organizations, co-presence at events and ideological and tactical proximity (Diani, Mische 2015: 310–11). On an organizational level the quality of direct ties — assessed by the density or durability of these ties — can be analysed by indicators such as “the frequency of interactions, their emotional intensity, the amount of shared risks and resources” (Diani 2015: 52), the volume of information flow (Diani, Mische 2015: 309) or the content of the link. Additionally, the extent to which different types of ties overlap or influence each other can be explored (Diani, Mische 2015: 311). Moving from single ties to the whole field of interaction, Diani proposes the concept of “modes of coordination”, which refer to

“the relational processes through which resources are allocated within a certain collectivity, decisions are taken, collective representations elaborated, and feelings of solidarity and mutual obligation forged” (Diani 2015: 13–14).

Combinations of two broader mechanisms — resource allocation and boundary definition — constitute four types of modes of coordination assessed by the density of network exchange: the

social movement mode (intense resource exchange and intense boundary work); the *organizational mode* (limited resource exchange, limited boundary work); the *coalition mode* (intense resource exchange, limited boundary work) and the *subcultural mode* (limited resource exchange, intense boundary work) (Diani 2015: 15–25). These ideal types refer to analytical categories, while empirically different modes can be found in the same episode of contention (Diani 2015: 17). In the next step, I will formulate a critique of this approach, related to my research question and not to the network approach as a whole.

The main problem for the analysis of the relationship transformation between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany is that a temporal dimension is missing in the network analysis and in most cases, these are mere snapshots of a relationship transformation processes. Diani admits that temporal dynamics and network evolutions are rarely investigated in network analysis (Crossley, Diani 2019: 159–60). However, more recently, two ways of furthering this line of research have been proposed, namely by focusing on network changes across the cycle of protest and the trajectories of activist cohorts. For example, in different stages of a protest cycle, different relations or modes of coordination might develop (Diani, Mische 2015: 318–21). In any case, the necessity of a temporal dimension will be crucial for my investigation and is not the strength of this approach.

A second problem arises from the first, namely that the dynamics of the process of relationship transformation are conflated with variables or “conditions” that facilitate tie formation (Diani, Mische 2015: 315). Instead of considering how goals are negotiated, these approaches perceive proximity in agendas as a facilitating factor; instead of retracing ideological transformation and political learning, they look at ideological proximity as bringing actors together; instead of investigating processes of power relations, they perceive heterogeneous organizational models as leading to asymmetric alliances and homogenous groups creating symmetric ties (Diani, Mische 2015: 315–16). Recently, Diani and Misch admit this problem and seek to comprehend the “processes by which relations are built, activated, nurtured, sustained, suppressed, and severed over the course of movement development” (Diani, Mische 2015: 317). In general, one can state that the network approach is able to explain the *why* of relationship formation as the result of pattern interaction within the whole collective action field, however it has difficulties in grasping *how* the process of relationship transformation unfolds.

A third problem with these approaches concerns their treatment of the context and their neglect of the role of hostile relationships. Diani and Mische rightly observe that ties vary in different (political) contexts and phases of protest (2015: 316). Yet they admit that open or closed opportunity structures lead to quite ambiguous reactions and tie formation. However, instead of tracing the mechanism of sectarianism, with its own sub-mechanisms such as competition over resources, they put them into the context characterized by high sectarianism, which prevents tie formation (Diani 2015: 24). Additionally, the context sometimes appears to be a residual variable for everything that cannot be explained. For example, the political traditions of different cities can explain polarized interaction, and the process of how exactly these cities developed different relationship patterns is an important question to answer (Diani 2015: 117). More importantly, Diani overlooks threat as an important mechanism of relationship transformation. Even though Diani admits that adversarial ties may be worth investigating (Diani 2015: 53), there is no thorough treatment of the relationship with power holders, countermovements, and other

possible hostile actors. In addition, other threats, such as negative political decisions, are only treated as a reason to renegotiate interorganizational collaboration in a social movement mode of coordination (Diani 2015: 19). In sum, network approaches are fruitful in explaining tie formation in a friendly context despite their inadequate theoretical treatment of threats and hostile interactions.

In summary, this review of the relevant literature has the following implications for this research. Firstly, the factors influencing coalition building provide valuable hint regarding potential mechanisms of relationship transformation. Therefore, it is crucial to consider factors such as threat and ideology in addition to organizational structures, social ties, political opportunities, and resources when examining relationship transformation. Secondly, network approaches emphasize that relationships can possess various qualities, and that these qualities may evolve over time, and shedding light on relevant mechanisms. These qualities encompass the frequency of interactions, the (emotional) intensity of these interactions, the degree of commitment, and the allocation of resources. However, both the coalition-building and network approaches have their limitations. The former often focuses on the formation of coalitions while struggling to clarify the mutual interaction between various factors and analyse the dynamics and developments within coalitions. The latter encounters challenges in addressing the temporal dimension and dealing with hostile ties. In the next stage of the analysis, I will introduce the mechanism-process approach, which offers a promising way to overcome some of these limitations.

1.2. Mechanisms and Processes

In the *Dynamics of Contention*, Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly (MTT) aimed to produce “nothing less than a conceptual and methodological reorientation of the study of non-routine politics” (McAdam, Tarrow 2011: 5). This reorientation included the widening of the scope of forms of contention, the utilisation of a relational perspective and a combination of historical and comparative methods into one framework. To a large extent, this thesis adopts this framework in order to analyse the relationship transformation process between the Kurdish movement and the radical left movement in Germany, by means of the mechanism-process approach. In the next sections, I will define the main concepts of the mechanism-process approach, clarify the new aspects of the reorientation, outline the main advantages and criticisms, and finally arrive at some adjustments to the mechanism-process approach. In short, the aim of this chapter is to define the theoretical framework on which the analysis of relationship transformation and therefore this PhD thesis is grounded.

Going beyond a narrow lens that is limited to analysing social movements, contentious politics

“involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on other actors’ interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties” (Tilly, Tarrow 2015: 7).

Therefore, MTT have broadened their perspective to contentious politics, of which social movements are a subgroup. The concept of contentious politics links together the interrelated concepts of *contention*, namely whereby subjects make claims which impact others’ interest, *collective action*, that is, coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests, and *politics*, that is, interaction with a government (Tilly, Tarrow 2015: 7–9). Broadly, contentious politics unite

different phenomena of collective struggle under one framework of investigation (McAdam et al. 2001: 5). In particular, MTT defined a series of processes and mechanisms through which collective action develops over time as a series of patterned interactions (Tarrow 2012: 21–23). In order to analyse these contentious politics in a dynamic, relational and comparable way, MTT define an *episode* of contention as consisting of interrelated *processes*, which themselves consist of sequences and combinations of *mechanisms* (Alimi et al. 2012: 28). Mechanisms are defined as a “delimited class of changes that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations” (Tilly and Tarrow 2015: 29), and take the form of *environmental mechanisms* (external influence), *cognitive mechanisms* (individual and collective perceptions) and *relational mechanisms* (social interaction). In sum, the framework aims to identify generic mechanisms and processes which unfold across different contexts and forms of contention (McAdam et al. 2001: 4).

In order to be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the mechanism-process approach, it is important to situate this reorientation within the debates in Social Movement Studies. Firstly, MTT expand their research focus beyond social movements to a variety of forms of contention such as “revolutions, strike waves, nationalism, democratization, and more” (McAdam et al. 2001: 4). Additionally, by looking beyond the horizon of Western reformist movements, they have also included non-Western societies (McAdam, Tarrow 2011: 1). Therefore, an advantage lies in the possibility of understanding actors which are usually outside the conceptual scope of social movements in Western societies. Secondly, to explain contentious politics in a dynamic way, MTT attempt to go “beyond the traditional structuralism of the social movement field by calling for ... more attention to agency through a distinct focus on the mechanisms and processes of contentious politics” (McAdam, Tarrow 2011: 3). The classical social movement research agenda, such as those discussed above, arranged its analysis along the factors of social change, mobilizing structures, political opportunities and threats, framing process and repertoires of contention (McAdam et al. 2001: 41). This rather static model reduced many of the complex dynamics to “underspecified arrows” (McAdam et al. 2001: 18). MTT sought to unpack those arrows by identifying the combination of mechanisms that these arrows consist of. With regard to the factors of coalition building, instead of only looking at ideological congruence, I will be able to examine the role of ideological transformation, attribution of similarity, and political learning. Rather than focusing solely on (pre-existing) social ties, I will consider the function of brokerage and the (intergenerational) transmission of social ties. Instead of focusing on threats and opportunities, I will investigate how threats and opportunities are perceived. Rather than considering resources in a static manner, attention will be devoted to (strategic) resource exchange in coalition building and resource allocation within coalitions.

The authors position themselves in a relational tradition and call for a greater emphasis on the meso-level and for “attention to dynamic social patterns and practices” (Alimi et al. 2015: 24–25). Relational theorists rejected the notion of “pre-given units such as the individual or society as ultimate starting points” (Emirbayer 1997: 287) and instead opted to focus on the “centrality of the content of interaction” (Alimi et al. 2015: 24–25). Accordingly, the relation itself gives rise to the aforementioned social units and is likewise formed by them in a “continuing and fluid state of production and reproduction, or change and continuity” (Alimi et al. 2015: 25). Ontologically, a relational view implies a focus on networks of interactions, defined as the whole of interactions, which are not reducible to the sum of its parts (McAdam et al. 2001: 23). Epistemologically, MTT

seek to identify recurrent mechanisms, which are produced in similar sequences, and combine to have similar outcomes. While they do not attempt to posit the existence of any covering laws, instead, their approach acknowledges that “historical and cultural setting in which contention occurs” matters significantly (McAdam et al. 2001: 23–24). Consequently, in certain settings, similar mechanisms or similar sequences of mechanisms can combine with a certain process, whereas in other settings they may not. In doing so, MTT develop a framework that allows for the comparison of recurrent mechanisms and processes, and their analysis over time and space, by considering episodes as open-ended, and by exploring the interactive mechanisms that determine whether particular contextual features will lead to mobilization or demobilization. At the same time, they avoid producing deterministic explanations that suggest that mechanisms trigger the same process in every case. In short, through this approach, mechanisms and processes become comparable across very diverse episodes of contentious politics. MTT emphasize the dynamic, interactive, processual and constructionist as important characteristics and virtues of their approach.

Despite its advantages, the Dynamics of Contention approach has drawn criticism. This section shall engage with these debates, which in turn, will shape the theoretical framework for the analysis of relationship transformation. The major points of critique have concerned, firstly, the role of governments, secondly, the conceptualization of mechanisms and processes, and thirdly, the measurement of mechanisms. Following these critiques, this section shall discuss extensions or modifications to the mechanism-process approach.

Firstly, as defined above, contentious politics are political struggles, in which an asserted claim involves a government “as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties” (Tilly, Tarrow 2015: 7). However, this definition of contentious politics has frequently attracted accusations of a political or “statist bias” (Edwards 2014: 107). It has been argued that including governments in the analysis risks excluding social movements which challenge cultural norms (Edwards 2014) or movements which bypass governments and directly target corporations or other actors promoting neoliberal economic policies (Soule 2009). Additionally, Cinalli and Giugni argue that in the Global South, the distinction between state and civil society is often blurred and a conceptualization of the state and social movements as opponents might be misleading (2014). MTT acknowledge this critique (McAdam et al. 2008a: 361–62; McAdam, Tarrow 2011: 5) and in recent works have made a considerable effort to demonstrate why “the presence or absence of governments in contention makes a difference” (Tilly, Tarrow 2015:8).

Tilly and Tarrow argue that the people who control the government – even when it is weak - hold an advantage over people who do not, since governments structure contention and have substantial coercive means (Tilly, Tarrow 2015: 8–9). To be clear, governments are not necessarily the direct target or creator of a claim, however in a world structured by nation states, contention which does not in some way affect a government is rare. However, this definition, for example, would exclude religious movements that aim only at affecting individual internal change. In fact, in the context of relationship transformation between social movements in general and (radical) leftist movements in particular, the role of governments is a crucial one, since governments repress, channel, and amplify relation transformation processes. Notably, the role of the state is central when considering the transformation of relationships between

movements who fight against colonialism and social movements from the Global North. This is why the analysis will include governmental actors in the arenas of interaction.

Additionally, the proliferation of a vast number of mechanisms, introduced in the last decades, has posed a challenge for scholars who have sought to employ them in comparative analysis (Flacks 2003: 101). MTT later addressed this problem and stated that there were “too many mechanisms, too casually invoked” (McAdam, Tarrow 2011: 5). In general, the second part of this chapter is dedicated to identifying mechanisms which might be reoccurring in relationship transformation processes. However, beyond the proliferation of mechanisms stands an epistemological problem which cannot be addressed only by defining a certain mechanism more precisely. Jennifer Earl proposed the following criteria for the analysis of a mechanism, namely that “the same process would alter relationships between these elements identically or similarly in a variety of situations” (Earl 2008: 356). In the same vein, scholars have criticized the fact that mechanisms are not described consistently across different episodes of contention, and that diverse concatenations of mechanisms can plausibly explain the same outcome across different episodes of contention and vice versa (Alimi et al. 2012: 9). MTT responded to these critiques by observing that mechanisms always work in the same way, but that they do not always have the same effect, because “they never ... exist in a vacuum” (McAdam et al. 2008b: 363). Mechanisms interact with contexts and with other mechanisms, producing “indeterminate – but not random – outcome[s]” (McAdam et al. 2008b: 364). According to MTT, similar mechanisms or similar sequences of mechanisms can produce a certain process in one setting, while in another, they may not. However, epistemologically, MTT insist that mechanisms do not vary as such (McAdam et al. 2008b: 365).

In contrast, other scholars call for epistemological stringency and posit that the social world is too complicated to expect a process to be constituted by similar mechanisms. The conceptualization of mechanisms can schematically be described as $\langle X \rightarrow Y \rangle$, “where $\langle X \rangle$ is an initial condition, $\langle Y \rangle$ the altered social units, and $\langle \rightarrow \rangle$ stands for the ‘delimited class of events and occurrences’ that constitute $\langle Y \rangle$ ” (Alimi et al. 2015: 28–29). What is problematic, according to Alimi, Demetriou and Bosi, is precisely the notion that events, which are constitutive of $\langle Y \rangle$, are similar and have a constant form across a variety of empirical contexts. In conformity with the conceptualization that mechanisms constitute the same processual outcome across a variety of empirical cases, they suggest that the same criteria should apply for mechanisms and their constitutive events (Alimi et al. 2015: 28). Their solution for this problem will be addressed below in the paragraph on sub-mechanisms.

Finally, the framework has been questioned due to challenges implicated in measuring mechanisms. Even if one does not consider mechanisms as unobservable (Mahoney 2001: 581), MTT initially remain unclear about the methods that scholars could use to identify mechanisms. For instance, how might the researcher empirically identify, for example, an instance of brokerage? This issue, once again, was addressed by McAdam and Tarrow who themselves acknowledged this as a shortcoming of the approach: “it was a mistake to call for an empirical revolution ... without paying serious attention to the daunting methodological challenges” (McAdam, Tarrow 2011: 5–6). In fact, MTT describe a wide range of strategies which are compatible with a mechanism-process approach in the study of contention, such as *direct measurement* (systematic events, data analysis or field-ethnographic methods) and *indirect*

measurement (indirect statistical measures or again, field-ethnographic methods) (McAdam et al. 2008a: 310–11). The methodological pluralism of the mechanism-process approach therefore suggests the need for a mixed-method approach or the triangulation of methods. Even though mechanisms and their constituting mechanisms should be identified during the research process, the comparison of mechanisms should be disciplined through a “deductively informed mode of investigation” (Alimi et al. 2015: 51). This is why the second part of this chapter will explore different mechanisms of relationship transformation. The precise methodological approach will be laid out in Chapter VI Research Design, but will, generally speaking, consist largely of semi-structured interviews, document analysis and participatory observation.

Adjustments: Sub-Mechanisms and Arenas of Interaction

Building on these critiques, the next part shall summarize the contributions of Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou and their adjustments to the mechanisms-process approach: sub-mechanisms and arenas of interaction.

In their relational framework of radicalization, Alimi et al., enhance MTT’s conceptualization by arguing that any given mechanism can be broken down into constituent parts, referred to as *sub-mechanisms* (Alimi et al. 2012: 9). Accordingly, any given mechanism is constituted by a variety of concatenations of sub-mechanisms (Alimi et al. 2015: 31). In this way, mechanisms become “portable” from one context to another (Falleti, Lynch 2009: 1145), while maintaining their particularities. Concerning conceptualization, Alimi et al. note that “any given mechanism, like any given process, [should] be defined by its constituted outcome (Y), not as the package $\langle X \rightarrow Y \rangle$ ” (Alimi et al. 2015: 28–29). For example, the mechanism of polarization⁸ is not the result of a predefined sequence of events, but only refers to the constituted outcome of polarization. Thus, it does not matter whether polarization is triggered by a concatenation of personal interactions and mass media coverage or by another sequence of events, since it refers to the occurrence of polarization itself (Alimi et al. 2012: 9). According to Alimi et al., the advantages of stressing the constituted outcome as a product of the constitutive event lie, firstly, in clarifying and making the epistemology of processes coherent (Alimi et al. 2015: 29). Agreeing with the assessment that social reality is too complicated for parts or even a chain of parts to neatly constitute a given whole, Alimi et al. suggest that this applies to processes as well as mechanisms. Precisely, because an identifiable set of mechanisms cannot exhaust all the constitutive elements of a process respectively, and since a process can be triggered in different episodes through a variety of different mechanisms and concatenation of these mechanisms, the same should apply for these mechanisms themselves (Alimi et al. 2012: 9). Therefore, any given mechanism can be broken down into constituent sub-mechanisms (Alimi et al. 2012: 9; Falleti, Lynch 2008). Accordingly, any given mechanism in a process is constituted by a variety of concatenations of sub-mechanisms (Alimi et al. 2015: 31) and consequently become comparable. In sum, a given process is constituted by a combination of mechanisms and their sub-mechanisms, which vary from episode to episode.

The second modification made by Alimi et al. concerns the critiques of definition, conceptualization, and measurement. In recognition of the constitutive relationship between mechanisms and their context, the authors introduce the concept of *arenas of interaction* which

⁸ See Chapter II. 2.3.

are defined as “sites and frameworks of interchanges, communication, bargaining, and negotiation” (Alimi et al. 2015: 41). Arenas of interaction are not structures strictly speaking, since they “can be very fluid” (Alimi et al. 2012: 9), and reflect the “roles and positions of power” of relevant interacting actors (Alimi et al. 2015: 41). So, instead of positing an implicit ‘movement-environment arena’, the scholar can theoretically and empirically decide which movement-context relation is worthy of investigation. For instance, Alimi et al. identified five arenas of interaction relevant to processes of radicalization.⁹ Arenas of interaction are conceptualized as interlinked, with their corresponding mechanisms mutually affecting each other (Alimi et al. 2015: 54). Each of them tends to correspond with one main mechanism that is most central to the relational dynamics in the arena.

Such adjustments to the conceptualization provide a number of advantages. First, it solves the problem of including the government as a key participant in contentious politics by considering different arenas of interaction, which can be structured more or less by a government. For instance, the arena of movement activists and security forces can be heavily structured by a certain government, whereby the public arena could vary depending on the episode, whereas the within-movement arena might be only minimally affected by the government. Thus, instead of assuming that governments always have a constituting effect on contentious politics, the relevance of such structures can be critically considered. Second, this conceptualization structures the way in which the analysis of processes and their constituting mechanisms and sub-mechanisms is conducted. Particularly when processes in different periods or sites are compared, an analytical structure becomes indispensable while also facilitating the measurement of mechanisms. Third, mechanisms, as the key units of comparison, can now be analysed in a combined comparison of similarities and differences (Alimi et al. 2015: 31). This allows the researcher to identify cross-episode similarities without ignoring historical specificities. In other words, it becomes possible to find the “dissimilarity in similarity” (Alimi et al. 2012: 8). Dissimilarities can be conceptualized as varying sub-mechanisms constituting a given mechanism, the concatenation of mechanisms or the relative salience of mechanisms to each other (Alimi et al. 2015: 51–53).

Besides the many advantages of such a framework, certain problems are apparent. Firstly, it is a trade-off to emphasize dynamics and complexity by introducing constituting sub-mechanisms to mechanisms, since the sub-mechanism might once again become an analytical ‘black-box’. In fact, the notion of sub-mechanisms places causality at a deeper level of analysis, without necessarily solving the contradiction of epistemological causality and historical and contextual specificity. Secondly, arenas of interaction can be interpreted rather differently depending on the research object and question. This flexibility can become a disadvantage when comparing studies, since different scholars can define and employ the concepts quite differently. This raises further questions including: how many arenas should be conceptualized, how is the interaction between the arenas defined, which kind of power relations are considered, and how are they conceptualized? Nevertheless, arenas of interaction are useful as a heuristic concept which guides the analysis.

⁹ These arenas consist of: the movement and the political environment, the movement activists and the security forces, the actors within the movement, the movement and the broader public, and finally the movement and the countermovement (Alimi et al. 2015: 42–49).

In sum, a relational mechanism-process approach breaks with the assumptions traditionally made by social movement scholars, by approaching episodes of contention as open-ended, allowing for the black-box of causality to be unpacked. A relational approach is suitable for my research design given its dynamic, interactive, and processual characteristics. In contrast to the factors of coalition building, the mechanism-process approach offers the possibilities to focus on the development of relationships, (re-)occurring mechanisms, and their mutual interaction. All these mechanisms will be analysed within their respective arenas, which make the (shifting) context a central part of the investigation.

2. Arenas of Interaction

As indicated before, the analysis of mechanisms is characterized by the difficulty of tracing a large number of intangible mechanisms and sub-mechanisms within each individual process. Therefore, the question of what qualities ties have and how they are changing or stabilizing needs to be theoretically elaborated. I will set guidelines for my analysis of mechanisms along three distinct arenas of interaction, whose respective mechanisms will be described shortly.

Based on the five arenas identified by Alimi et al. for the process of radicalization, I will structure my research along the Inter-Movement Arena, the National Arena, and the Transnational Arena. The reasons for only focusing on three arenas of interaction are, on the one hand, parsimony, since the three temporal phases of investigation multiplied by three arenas already result in nine empirical sub-chapters. On the other hand, these three arenas are where the main interactions that are relevant for the object of investigation have occurred. The *Transnational Arena* concerns a wide variety of spaces and conflicts, and accordingly the discussion touches on the interaction between the Kurdish movement and states in the West Asia, the dense transnational space that the Kurdish movement has built between Europe and Kurdistan, as well as the history of transnational cooperation of the radical left in Europe with Kurdistan. The *National Arena* covers the interactions between the German state (including local institutions and actors), the general public (especially national media), countermovements, and the interactions between the Kurdish movement and the radical left with regard to the National Arena. The *Inter-Movement Arena* is concerned with the relationship between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany. Therefore, all arenas deal with the relationship transformation between the movements, but in the context of the interaction with other actors. The interaction between these arenas will be elaborated in Chapter VI, VII and VIII. As stated above, mechanisms and their constitutive sub-mechanisms should be identified during the research process; however, the comparison of mechanisms should be informed by a “deductively informed mode of investigation” (Alimi et al. 2015: 51). Accordingly, I will theoretically elaborate on the three arenas in greater detail which mechanisms are most likely to be salient in each of the three arenas under investigation. To illustrate this, a first example is given here:

- **Transnational Arena:** *Diffusion mechanism*, defined as an adaptation or transmission of organizational forms, collective action frames or targets from one actor to another across borders, without necessarily a direct connection between these actors (Della Porta, Tarrow 2005a: 3–4).

- **National Arena:** *Repression mechanism*, defined as actions by authorities that increase the actual or potential cost of an actor's claim-making (Alimi et al. 2012: 16); can trigger relationship break-up or relationship formation.
- **Inter-Movement Arena:** The relational *brokerage mechanism*, defined as the "production of a new connection between previously unconnected or weakly connected sites" (Alimi et al. 2012: 12); likely to consist of sub-mechanisms such as *attribution of similarity*, the mutual identification of actors as similar to justify common action.

In the course of a relationship transformation process, mechanisms in different arenas can become more salient in particular stages and phases, and have little relevance in others. For instance, the repression mechanism in the National Arena could trigger relationship formation between the Kurdish Movement and the radical left while having little relevance during the stage of relationship maintenance. Next, I will elaborate on the different arenas by starting with the widest and following the order of the empirical analysis.

2.1. Transnational Arena: Transnationalism and Diaspora

Within the Transnational Arena, I will deal with the concepts of transnationalism and diaspora and their respective mechanisms. Firstly, *transnationalism* refers to processes that transcend international borders (Faist 2010: 13; Vertovec 2009). In particular, the analysis will pay attention to the mechanisms of transnational diffusion, transnational brokerage, transnational coalition building and the formation of a transnational space. Secondly, I understand *diasporas* as the "outcomes of transnational mobilization activities" engaging in more particularistic identity construction (Adamson 2012: 26). I assume that the dynamics of diaspora movements are intertwined with the evolution of their alliance systems, and vice versa (Quinsaas 2016: 1015). Following the empirical research of Coma Roura and Quinsaas, my basic assumption is that the histories of diaspora and non-diaspora movements are interwoven as they interact and influence each other over the course of political contention. In order to introduce mechanisms that are likely to occur in the Transnational Arena, I will first define the concepts of transnationalism and diaspora, and from this basis, derive the mechanisms of transnationalism and the mechanisms of diaspora mobilizing.

The literature on diaspora and transnationalism has grown rapidly over the last decades. Thomas Faist characterizes the relationship between the two as one of "awkward dance partners":

"Although both terms refer to cross-border processes, diaspora has been often used to denote religious or national groups living outside an (imagined) homeland, whereas transnationalism is often used both more narrowly – to refer to migrants' durable ties across countries – and, more widely, to capture not only communities, but all sorts of social formations, such as transnationally active networks, groups and organisations." (Faist 2010: 9)

This means that diaspora could be a subset of transnationalism as well as the other way around. In the next step, I will discuss both concepts separately, before elucidating their relationship at the end of this sub-section.

Transnationalism and related concepts to it, such as transnational spaces, fields, and formations, all variously refer to processes that transcend national borders (Faist 2010: 13; Vertovec 2009).

In migration studies, the concept of transnationalism was developed to focus on the processes by means of which immigrants build social fields that link their country of origin with their country of settlement (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992: 2). Likewise, the research on transnationalism tended to focus not on the continuous relations of nation-states, but rather on “non-state agents, among them prominently but not exclusively migrants” (Faist 2010: 14). Migrants, their country of origin, and their country of destination tend to be conceptualized in a triangular relationship (Sheffer 2003:192–199). These relationships do not form randomly, but represent the “circular flow of persons, goods, information and symbols” (Faist 1998: 214) that is triggered by labour migration and refugee flows in particular, but which are more generally formed by international relations, capital flows, military alliances, and (geo-)political domination. Importantly, the Transnational Arena has historically been structured by the political, economic, and military relationships between nation-states.

First and foremost, the concept of *transnational social spaces* accurately grasps the dynamics of cross border by non-state actors, such as diasporas. Faist defines transnational spaces as “relatively stable, lasting and dense sets of ties reaching beyond and across borders of sovereign nation-states” (Faist 2010: 13). Such interactions comprise “social and symbolic ties, positions in networks and organisations, and networks of organizations” (Faist 1998: 216; Faist 2000). These lasting ties are not to be understood as static, but as dynamic social processes that are shifting and (re-)creating themselves. Along the dimensions of formality and duration, Faist provides a topology of transnational space that includes diffusion, small kinship groups, issue networks, communities, and organizations¹⁰ (Faist 2004), with diasporas falling into the last category. Faist uses the concept of a feedback loop to illustrate flows and ties in a transitional space: an armed conflict produces refugees, who migrate to other nation-states. In the country of settlement, the refugees mobilize as a diaspora, (re-)creating ties and sending (material) resources back to the country of origin, which changes the conflict itself. The solidarity of supporters moving from the country of origin, for instance, via delegation trips, brings the feedback loop to the start (Faist 1998: 233). Besides larger structural political and economic regulations which variously hinder or facilitate the formation of transnational spaces, technological developments in long-distance travel and communications are generally regarded as factors conducive to transnationalization (Della Porta, Tarrow 2005a: 7; Faist 1998: 223–25). In sum, transnational spaces are border-crossing processes of tie building among (migrant) actors structured by international relations.

Diaspora is a relatively older concept (Sheffer 2003: 32–48), whereby the Jewish and Armenian diaspora have been considered as an archetypal mobilized diaspora (Armstrong 1976). Since the 1970s, the concept has undergone an extensive elaboration (Brubaker 2005) and, at the same time, inflation in its application and interpretation (Faist 2010: 12). Faist summarized this change from older concepts to the newer ones along three axes of usage: the first relates to the cause of migration, ranging from an older usage referring to forced dispersal (for instance, the Jewish or Palestinian experience) to any kind of dispersal, such as trade diasporas or labour migration diasporas (Faist 2010: 12). The second usage relates to the cross-border relationship: it ranges from the older notion of a return to the (imagined) homeland (Safran 1991) to “dense and

¹⁰ *Diffusion* (low formality, short duration): e.g., fields for the exchange of goods, capital, persons, information, ideas, and practices. *Kinship groups* (highly formalized, short duration): e.g., households, families. *Issue networks* (low formality, long duration): e.g., networks of businesspeople, epistemic networks, advocacy networks. *Communities and organizations* (highly formalized, longer duration): e.g. religious groups, enterprises (Faist 2004:Table 1.1.).

continuous linkages across borders” (Faist 2008: 21; Faist 2010: 12–13). The third usage relates to the topic of the ‘integration’ of migrants: it ranges from the older usage referring to diaspora members’ inability to fully integrate in their country of settlement¹¹ to newer approaches deconstruct the notion of assimilation by questioning the concepts of cultures as distinct or separated. A parallel debate is concerned with diaspora actors as either moderate (peace-builders) or radical actors (peace-wreckers) (Smith, Stares 2007), but newer approaches are going beyond that dichotomy (Koinova 2017). In sum, Faist claims that the term diaspora “always refers to a community or group” and that transnationalism refers to processes that cross borders (Faist 2010:13).

What is missing in this overview of changes in the conceptualization of diaspora is the discussion regarding the essentialism of ethnicity. Already in 1998, Floya Anthias problematized the existing concepts of diaspora, suggesting that “focusing on transnational process and communalities, does so by developing a notion of ethnicity which privileges the point of ‘origin’ in constructing identity and solidarity” (Anthias 1998: 558). In doing so, it obscures trans-ethnic commonalities and relations. Regarding essentialism, diaspora is therefore a contested concept, ranging from traditional (essentialist, restrictive), pluralist (essentialist yet expansive) to constructivist approaches (Adamson 2012: 27). The last approach in particular highlights the political dimension when pointing to the process of forming diasporas through the construction of transnational imagined communities (e.g., national, ethnic or religious) (Adamson 2012: 32; Anderson 1991). Along these lines, Fiona B. Adamson conceptualizes transnationalism as a continuum ranging from particularistic identities to more universalistic ideologies (Adamson 2012: 32). Diaspora lies at one pole of the continuum because it often relies on the construction of particularistic national or ethnic identities as boundary markers. In this sense, diasporas are the “outcomes of transnational mobilization activities” engaging in more particularistic identity construction (Adamson 2012: 26). When analysing the Kurdish diaspora in Germany, I will follow this concept of Adamson. Diaspora politics are therefore among other processes of boundary formation where diaspora organizations and other agents are creating mobilized communities on the basis of religious, ethnic, or national identities.

In sum, diaspora can be understood as a subset of transnationalism since it deals with the making of communities, whereas transnational approaches connect to all sorts of social formations, such as networks of businesspersons and social movements (Faist 2010: 21). Both concepts will be analysed as processes with their respective mechanisms and sub-mechanisms. In more concrete terms, the research shall investigate the making and unmaking of diasporas (Waterbury 2010) and the mechanisms involved in the formation and maintenance of a transnational space.

Transnational Mechanisms

This section shall focus on cross-border mechanisms by engaging with social movement studies literature, much of which deals with various kinds of transnational social movements (Della Porta et al. 1999; Della Porta 2014a; Della Porta, Tarrow 2005b; Juris, Khasnabish 2013; Keck, Sikkink 1998; Snow et al. 2013; Teune 2010b). Teune points out that though transnational context and cross-border flows matter for social movements, it “does not mean that transnational exchange

¹¹ Among others, due to boundary making and maintaining of the majority (discrimination) and the diaspora (segregation). Full integration – that is, politically, economically, and culturally – understood in this vein as assimilation into the host society would imply the end of the diaspora (Faist 2010: 13)

is a natural thing to happen” (Teune 2010a: 3). In general, the processes of transnationalization are often identified with mechanisms such as transnational diffusion, internationalization¹², externalization¹³, global framing¹⁴, transnational coalition formation, and transnational collective action (Della Porta, Tarrow 2005a: 2). Based on this literature, I expect transnational diffusion, transnational brokerage, transnational coalition formation, and the formation of a transnational space to be the most relevant mechanisms in the Transnational Arena. Therefore, these mechanisms are elaborated hereafter.

Firstly, *transnational diffusion* is the relational mechanism that most obviously corresponds with the idea of cross-border flows. Tarrow identifies three pathways of diffusion: relational, mediated, and non-relational diffusion (Tarrow 2005: 105). He begins by tracing the process of transnational diffusion with a localized action, which, if perceived as successful, might spread across national borders due to internationalization¹⁵ and communication (Chabot 2010: 101). From this point, diffusion may occur along three pathways that develop: along the attribution of similarity mechanisms¹⁶, actors receive information along established channels and adopt actions or forms of organizations (*relational diffusion*). Actors with few or no social ties engage in theorization ranging from highly sophisticated explanations to simplistic schemes (*non-relational diffusion*). Finally, *mediated diffusion* works through brokers, who connect previously unconnected actors. All pathways produce emulation (collective action modelled on the actions of others) and non-localized action (the spread of repertoires beyond initial settings) (Tarrow 2005: 103–106).

Secondly, *transnational brokerage*, like its non-transnational counterpart, links previously unconnected organizations, movements, or networks to one another. Yet, within a transnational context, actors are not only organizationally but spatially separated too. In fact, actors are separated “by geographical distance, lack of trust, lack of resources, or simply because they are unaware of each other’s existence” (Bülow 2011: 166). Transnational brokers, the actors responsible for the connective work, range from single persons, organizations to programs (McAdam et al. 2001: 142). Transnational brokers create ties between a place of residence and, for example, a conflict region and trigger symbolic and material flows, such as material resources, expertise, and recruits (Adamson 2013: 68–69). Brokerage can be a “purposive strategy” utilized purposively by institutionalized actors (Bülow 2011: 167) or be mere coincidence. Transnational brokerage is not concerned with relationship maintenance or the continuity of the transnational relation, but only with its formation.

In contrast and thirdly, *transnational coalition formation* concerns both the formation and the maintenance of transnational relationships. The mechanism of coalition building is defined as

¹² *Internalization*: The process during which local or national collective actions are carried out in response to international issues or external threats (Tarrow 2012: 205).

¹³ *Externalization*: the process by which the political opportunities of international institutions are employed to intervene in domestic issues (Della Porta, Tarrow 2005a: 5–6). International institutions, such as the EU, might put pressure on national governments through monitoring, censoring, or sanctioning (Tarrow 2011: 254).

¹⁴ *Global framing*: refers to the “framing of domestic issues in broader terms than their original claims would seem to dictate” (Tarrow 2011: 252). One example is the framing of domestic inequalities as connected to worldwide injustices and broader processes, such as neoliberalization.

¹⁵ *Internationalization* refers to regular channels for communication across national borders, whereas new forms of communication, such as the internet, are accelerating this process (Tarrow 2005: 103).

¹⁶ See below.

“the creation of new, visible, and direct coordination of claims between two or more previously distinct actors” (Alimi et al. 2015: 30) across borders. Importantly, transnational coalition concerns the form of transnational relationship that emerges, which aims at transnational mobilization or other forms of visible expression of claims. Based on the work of Levi and Murphey, Tarrow discusses five factors that are relevant in forming and maintaining transnational coalitions, including transnational framing, the establishment of trust, the capacity to maintain commitment and resolve tensions, all of which are more complicated on a transnational than a national level (Tarrow 2005: 165–66). Along the axes of duration and degree of involvement, Tarrow proposes a typology of four transnational coalitions, ranging from instrumental coalitions (short time, low involvement), event coalitions (short time, high involvement), federations (long time, low involvement) to campaign coalitions (long time, high involvement) (Tarrow 2005:167). Importantly, campaign coalitions, despite their long-term and intense character, are conceptualized by Tarrow as predominantly single issue, whereas federations are suggested to have a broader thematic scope. Maintaining transnational cooperation over-time, according to Tarrow, is marked by the mechanisms of opportunity spirals, institutionalization, and socialization (Tarrow 2005).¹⁷ In short, through different concatenations of mechanisms, an event coalition can transform into a transnational issue specific campaign coalition.

Fourthly, given the already transnational character of the Kurdish movement, transnational coalition formation is just one visible form of sustainable transnational tie formation. In fact, I assume that along the transnational space of the Kurdish movement, the alliance system might form a transnational space. This transnational space formation extends beyond the scope of a campaign coalition as defined by Tarrow, since it persists for a long time, is broader in thematic scope, and is sustained by a variety of both formal and informal ties. Based on Faist’s conceptualization of transnational spaces, I introduce the following mechanism: the *formation of transnational space* is defined by the creation of stable, lasting, and dense sets of ties that span across the borders of nation-states. In general, the formation of a transnational space consists, inter alia, out of migration, the flow of remittances, and the diffusion of mobilization. For social movements, this might include the creation of a constant exchange of information, resources, and activists between spatially and/or organizationally distinct movements. Different mechanisms might transform these transnational spaces based on the process introduced by Faist. The *intensification* of a transnational space refers to the “acceleration of transnational interactions and processes”, due to new communication technologies and cheaper transport (Faist 2004), or critical events. The *densification* of a transnational space refers to the growing number of ties, for example because of migration or transnational brokerage. *Extensification* refers to expanding influence of this space to new spaces or players that have previously been marginal. This could include new places and previously unaffected actors who engage, willingly or not, in the formation of relationship transformation or the flow of ideas, capital, persons, or material. The *institutionalization* of transnational spaces refers to the increase in the degree of

¹⁷ *Opportunity spirals* are coalitions’ responses to a changing context, such as strategic shifts and the creation of new opportunities, whereas *institutionalization* refers to the formalization of transnational ties. Importantly, *socialization* is an essential element of transnational collective action, which refers to the “discovery and solidarity that is experienced when people with very different backgrounds, languages, and goals encounter one another around a broad global them” (Tarrow 2005: 178).

formalization, whereby formalization refers to the internal characteristics of a group in terms of formalized relations such as hierarchies and control (Faist 2004). Importantly, a multitude of transnational brokerages and transnational coalitions can combine to form a transnational space.

In short, transnational diffusion refers to a border-crossing flow between movements, transnational brokerage to the formation of new transnational relationships, transnational coalition building to visible forms of transnational claim making, and the formation of a transnational space is marked by a constant exchange of information, resources, and activists. In order to arrive at such empirical distinctions, it will be necessary to quantitatively trace the frequency of relationship formation or transnational coordinated actions, and to qualitatively trace the durability of relationships and a recreation of the transnational flows. However, when relationships end soon after an initial connection, it is an indicator for transnational brokerage.

Diaspora Politics and Mechanisms

The following will discuss the relevant literature on diaspora politics in order to introduce mechanisms most likely to occur in the relationship transformation of diaspora movements. Whereas diaspora politics do not neatly fit in the Transnational Arena, the dynamics and mechanisms described here will be relevant for other arenas also.

The literature on diaspora politics often draws on concepts from Social Movement Studies in order to explain diaspora mobilization (Adamson 2013; Fair 2005; Lyon, Uçarer 2001; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Sökefeld 2006; Wayland 2004). The results indicate that, like other social movements, diaspora mobilization is influenced by the interaction between shifting political environments, the particular constellation of actors and organizations, and the construction of collective identity (Adamson 2012; Quinsaat 2016). Diaspora mobilization hinges on “the strength of relations between the host and homeland states, the degree of political organization in the migrant community, the scope of international attention given to the conflict, and the intensity of communal identity and diasporic consciousness” (Quinsaat 2016: 1016). Diasporas mobilize for two main reasons, to maintain the community in the host country and to support the movement in the homeland (Sheffer 2003: 26). In general, scholars employing a combination of social movement and diaspora theories tend to emphasize the agency of diasporas (Brinkerhoff 2016; Koinova 2017: 2). Notably, Fiona B. Adamson makes a strong point against the assumption of diasporas as unitary actors who support conflicts as ‘natural’ and stresses the interaction of mechanisms in explaining processual dynamics within episodes of contention (Adamson 2013: 87–88). Accordingly, Adamson identified several mechanisms of diaspora mobilization along the case of the Kurdish diaspora:

- *Strategic framing*: the frames of a diaspora organization need to resonate with the diaspora community as well as their alliance system. For the first, diaspora organizations might deploy “notions of national belongings and duty or ‘kinship’”, whereas others could draw on guilt (Adamson 2013: 70) or trauma (Toivanen 2021: 33–35).
- *Ethnic and sectarian outbidding*: outbidding refers to attempts to outdo other parties or actors on ethnic, political, national, religious, or other grounds, leading a conflict into a cycle of polarization. This might include rhetorical measures, pressure, and the use of violence, and may increase power and legitimacy for the diaspora organization (Adamson 2013: 70–71).

- *Resource mobilization*: concerns the mobilization of material and immaterial resources, however in the case of diaspora mobilization, resources tend to be channelled to support actors in the country of origin (Adamson 2013: 72).
- *Lobbying and persuasion* refer to the externalization of movement actors by reaching out to actors outside the nation-state in which the conflict takes place. Whereas institutional actors' lobbying of diaspora has been the focus of research (Berkowitz, Mügge 2014; Keck, Sikkink 1998), the persuasion of non-institutional actors has received relatively less attention (Zarnett 2015).

It is important to emphasize the significance of the alliance system within diaspora communities, an aspect that has been frequently overlooked in the existing literature (Bob 2005: 44). A notable exception is Zarnett, who compares various diasporas and their alliance systems, suggesting that larger and more mobilized diaspora are less likely to form relationships with Western solidarity activists compared to smaller diasporas (Zarnett 2015: 198). By comparing the Palestinian and Kurdish diasporas, he proposes two causal mechanisms, both of which I challenge in this thesis. First, Zarnett argues that larger diasporas tend to focus on maintaining their community and allocating resources for their homeland, while smaller diasporas are compelled to establish relationships with non-diaspora actors (Zarnett 2015: 198). Secondly, drawing on the above-mentioned peace-builders vs. peace-wreckers discussions, Zarnett claims that larger diasporas are often perceived as “troublemakers” and their frames are considered less universal, thus resonating less with non-diaspora activists (Zarnett 2015: 205–09). Similarly, Al compares the success of the EZLN with the PKK and attributes it to the PKK's framing as a terrorist movement (Al 2015: 2). Al argues that the more inclusive framing strategy of the EZLN, “facilitates stronger transnational solidarity networks” (Al 2015: 2), while the PKK's framing hinders it (Al 2015: 12–15). In contrast, I argue the frame resonance of diaspora movements with non-diaspora movements is influenced not only by the framing strategies of the movement itself but also by those other potentially hostile (state) actors. Moreover, the dichotomy between the universality and particularity of struggles is more flexible and adaptable, especially when movements operate in different languages. While I acknowledge the importance of framing strategies in relationship transformation between a diaspora movement and local movements, I will demonstrate through empirical analysis that these mechanisms interact with others and are often overshadowed by factors not considered by Zarnett. Additionally, I will show that the existence of a large and mobilized Kurdish diaspora in Germany has led to relationship formation with the radical left due to different mechanisms not accounted for by Zarnett.

In fact, the dynamics between diaspora and non-diaspora movement are more complex than claimed by Zarnett. Based on the work of Quinsaat and Coma Roura, I assume that the dynamics of diaspora movements are intertwined with the evolution of their alliance system and vice versa (Quinsaat 2016: 1015). The alliance system here refers to the whole set of relationships of the diaspora organizations with their constituents. “Conscience constituents” (McCarthy, Zald 1977: 1222), such as (transnational) solidarity groups, can create opportunities, provide resources, and establish connections that diasporas can utilize for collective action purposes (Quinsaat 2016: 1015). In the following, I summarize these studies, in which the relationship between diaspora and non-diaspora movements are conceptualized. Coma Roura provided evidence of diasporas'

processes becoming embedded in local contexts through the interplay of the mechanisms of abstraction and materialization (Coma Roura 2016), whereas Quinsaats identified several mechanisms of solidarity relation building such as political socialisation, normalization, legitimisation and institutionalisation (Quinsaats 2016: 1028).

Joan Coma Roura analyzed the continuity of an almost 30-year solidarity movement with the Palestinian people in Barcelona. Importantly, Coma Roura remarked how Palestinian solidarity became “something almost quotidian in the daily life” (Coma Roura 2016: 6). In Barcelona, the Palestinian solidarity movement became strongly embedded in the local network of grassroots activism, NGOs, and movements. Coma Roura traces the process of how a political issue that is socially distant for certain groups, such as the concerns of the Palestinian people, become embedded in a local activist milieu (Coma Roura 2016: 3). In order to grasp the dialectics of externalisation and internalisation (Della Porta, Tarrow 2005a), he proposes an *abstraction mechanism*, whereby a particular idea becomes universalized, and a *materialisation mechanism*, whereby an issue becomes localized through particular actions (Coma Roura 2016: 9–10). More concretely, the translation work includes speeches of Palestinian activists in Barcelona, events in Palestine triggering protest, delegation trips to Palestine, and the framing of shared issues in order to link distant places to one another (Coma Roura 2016: 13–14). Here, particularistic notions are universalised and vice versa; the local becomes transnational and again local. It is a roundtrip through the continuum suggested by Adamson, and contradicts Zaretts dichotomy of frames. As a side note, non-diaspora actors took a leading position in the solidarity movement for Palestine, because of their privileged positionality within the host country. These actors will be referred to as *solidarity cadres* in this PhD thesis. In sum, diaspora mobilizing abroad, despite the assumed particularity of the issue, may generate sizable foreign solidarity by becoming embedded in the local milieu of activism, shaping not only the mobilization of the diaspora but the local movement too (Coma Roura 2016: 15).

Further, Sharon Madriaga Quinsaats observed the diaspora activism of Filipinos in a country with a small diaspora: the Netherlands. The research provides evidence of a process and the relevant mechanism of the relationship transformation between the diaspora and the host country’s social movements. Here, the catalyst for diaspora mobilization was the formation of movement adherents. At the beginning, the Filipino diaspora had almost no structure in the Netherlands, and the local social movements acted as an “initiator movement” (McAdam 2013) to constitute themselves into a diaspora (Quinsaats 2016: 1017). Several mechanisms triggered the mobilization of the Filipino diaspora against the dictatorship of Marcos from 1965 to 1986. Initially, a *socialization mechanism* played a crucial role when Dutch expatriates became integrated into the communities of resistance and became solidarity activists (Quinsaats 2016: 1019–20). Thereafter, the diaspora movement developed in the Netherlands and was shaped intensively by Dutch activists who provided “structures of political opportunity” in the country, established networks and organizations, and socialized the diaspora in the local field of contentious politics (Quinsaats 2016: 1015). In the aftermath, a *normalization mechanism* was perceptible, whereby a discourse regarding the culpability of the Marcos regime became widespread within the social movement in the Netherlands, and which was accompanied by a *legitimation mechanism* whereby the diaspora organizations were recognized as the legitimate representatives of the national liberation movement worthy of support (Quinsaats 2016: 1026).

Quinsaas stresses the role of free space for the diaspora to become a movement community by forming an identity around a transnational imagined community. In the final stages, a *mechanism of institutionalization* transformed the disparate networks into one coherent transnational constituency (Quinsaas 2016: 1029).

Based on these studies, my basic assumption is that the histories of diaspora and non-diaspora movements are interwoven as they interact and influence one other in the course of political contention. For Coma Roura, the continuous process of localization and universalization can be grasped with reference to the mechanisms of materialisation and abstraction. For Quinsaas, the relationship transformation process between a diaspora and local movement can occur through the mechanisms of normalization, legitimization, socialization, and institutionalization. However, an empirical research gap remains, as in studies, the research focus lay squarely on the evolution of the diaspora itself, whereas the effect of local social movements has received scant attention. In sum, by engaging with the literature on transnationalism and diaspora, I have introduced the key mechanisms relating to transnationalism and diaspora mobilization. Importantly, I argued that the dynamics of diaspora movements are intertwined with the evolution of their local alliance system and vice versa.

2.2. National Arena: The Repression/Protest Paradox

Within the National Arena, I will draw on the scholarly debates regarding the “repression/protest paradox” mentioned above. This body of literature concerns itself with the frequently observed phenomenon, that in certain cases, repression is conducive to the formation of coalitions, whereas in other cases, it can prevent or undermine them (Brockett 2015: 266–68). I argue that this paradox can be resolved by considering the *attribution of threat mechanism*. In order to unpack this paradox, this section briefly introduces the attribution of threat mechanism and identifies the different mechanisms of repression that trigger relationship formation and break-up.

The mechanism of *attribution of threat and opportunity* is defined by MTT as follows:

“It involves (a) invention or importation and (b) diffusion of a shared definition concerning alterations in the likely consequences of possible actions (or, for that matter, failures to act) undertaken by some political actor. Threat-opportunity attribution often emerges from competition among advocates of differing interpretations, one of which finally prevails” (McAdam et al. 2001: 95).

A key part of this mechanism are the disputes over perceptions of threats and opportunities within social movements or SMOs. The disputes may lead to one particular interpretation prevailing, or ultimately even lead to an internal split. Finally, the attribution of threat might trigger relationship formation or boundary activation. The question that arises, however, is precisely what kind of threat triggers what kind of attribution of threat and a corresponding relationship formation or break-up. I will discuss these different mechanisms, triggering different outcomes of these disputes along three axes of repression, proposed by Abby Peterson and Mattias Wahlström: the functional axis, the institutional axis and the scale axis (2015).

The *functional axis* concerns the severity of repression, ranging from soft forms of policing to hard, coercive means (Fence 2005; Linden, Klandermans 2006) and its scope. With regard to

forms of repression and in order to be parsimonious with the number of mechanisms, I will focus on the repression and stigmatization mechanisms.¹⁸ Firstly, the *repression mechanism* has been defined by Alimi et al. as actions by authorities that increase the cost—actual or potential—of an actor’s claim making (Alimi et al. 2012: 16). In their conceptualization, repression may trigger a shift in the strategies and tactics of organized actors, including radicalization, the “stiffening resistance on the part of threatened communities”, and often leads to their successive demobilization (McAdam et al. 2001: 69). Boykoff differentiates between ten action modes of repression utilized by the state which lead to demobilization (Boykoff 2007: 151–52).¹⁹ For example, the fabrication of false reports directly aims at the fragmentation of movements and “prevent solidarity between social movement organizations” (Boykoff 2007: 291). Certainly, drawing attention to the variety of modes of repression on demobilization is an important achievement by Boykoff, however ignoring the impact of repression on mobilization leaves out an important part of the picture. For example, prison resistance, despite the immense costs assumed by the individual, may trigger mobilization. In fact, different forms of repression might trigger different attribution of threat.

Concerning the scope, MTT argue that repression has “relatively predictable effects”: *selective repression* isolates more radical actors from more moderate ones and *generalized repression* triggers coalition building between moderate and radical groups (McAdam et al. 2001: 69). Selective repression isolates more radical actors, since the threat perception by moderate parts of the movement results in the attribution that a relationship-break up with the more radical parts may shield the more moderate parts from state repression. Even the threat of repression can be enough to prevent coalition building (Koopmans 1993: 645). Conversely, when *generalized repression* impacts broader sections of a social movement, the attribution of threat may change the strategy of the moderate parts into relationship transformation with more radical organizations, because the threat is perceived as targeting the movement’s own structures and few options remain. In the case of the Kurdish movement and the radical left, generalized repression refers to the targeting of repression—actual or potential—against both movements, whereas selective repression refers to the targeting of just one movement.

Secondly, Koopmans has argued that “repression is an act of strategic communication in the public sphere” (Koopmans 2005: 159). Therefore, violent repression is only one instrument among a differentiated mode of action that authorities use in order to oppose challengers (Tilly, Tarrow 2015: 36). The analysis will refer to the repression mechanism whenever material relations are concerned whereas whenever discursive dynamics are concerned, they will be

¹⁸ Boykoff identified four mechanisms of repression, consisting of different modes of action that trigger demobilization, namely resource depletion, stigmatization, divisive disruption, and intimidation (Boykoff 2007: 287).

¹⁹ *Direct violence* is often carried out first-hand by the respective regime via the military, police and intelligence agencies, or by proxies. *Public prosecutions* may lead to the incarceration of dissidents or the discouragement of bystanders. *Employment deprivation* refers to political activism leading to the loss of one’s job as a consequence of state laws (for instance, professional bans) or the decisions of employers (Boykoff 2007: 289–90). Anthony Giddens distinguishes between *direct surveillance*, such as spying and observation, and indirect surveillance “as the accumulation of ‘coded information’” (Giddens 2002: 14–15), which are carried out by police, intelligence agencies and other state institutions. *Infiltration* refers to the deployment of “informants who engage in intelligence gathering, create internal dissension, and/or incite illegal activities” (Boykoff 2007: 290–91). Instead of the term ‘black propaganda’, which carries racist connotations, I opt for the term *false reports*. *Harassment* includes the arrests of activists for (false) minor charges, or the use of laws and regulations that are generally used against the general population. *Extraordinary laws* are often employed by states in exceptional times in order to suppress movements, and nowadays often come in the guise of terrorist laws (Boykoff 2007: 291–92).

analysed with reference to the mechanism of stigmatization. Boykoff defines the mechanism of *stigmatization*²⁰ as the attachment of discrediting attributes “to the character, nature, or reputation of an individual or group based on perceptions of that individual or group” (Boykoff 2007: 296). Stigmatization refers to the linkage between a negative attribute and a social stereotype, and often includes boundary activation of insider-outsider relationships. In particular, the mass media (re-)produce stigmas by employing negative framings, such as violence frames, disruption frames or freak frames²¹ (Boykoff 2006), or additionally, by using racist, sexist or chauvinist frames. Importantly, stigmatization places targeted actors on the defensive path of “self-explanation, justificatory back-tracking, and damage control” (Boykoff 2007: 297). For Boykoff, stigmatization results, inter alia, in the victimization and isolation of the affected community or social organization. The latter is especially important for the relationship transformation of social movements, “since social movement adherents must attempt to simultaneously overcome the stigma relation”, while creating new relations and fighting for social change (Boykoff 2007: 297). Importantly, stigmatization unfolds over a long time span: even in times when the stigma is not reproduced in the media, it nevertheless tends to stay firmly etched in the memory of bystanders and social movement activists.

I assume that the mechanisms of repression and stigmatization will affect the attribution of threat and the corresponding relationship formation or relationship break-up differently. For example, stigmatization is unlikely to trigger relationship formation, but rather boundary activation. In contrast, generalized repression is more likely to trigger the attribution of threat and relationship formation, since in order to minimize the threat of repression, social movement actors engage in coalition building and even the downplaying of differences. In turn, selective repression triggers different attribution of threat in moderate and radical actors.

The *institutional axis* relates to the differences of the actors enacting repression or causing the threat, ranging “from actors more or less tightly linked to the national government to private security and civil society actors that act more or less independently of any state” (Peterson, Wahlström 2015: 634). Whereas the mechanisms mentioned above are appropriate for analysing forms of state repression and media stigmatization, the threat of a countermovement might trigger different attributions of threat. The interaction between the movement and countermovement includes face-to-face interaction, attempts to gain the support of bystanders, actions striving to prevent the mobilization of the other or even violent outbidding (Dillard 2013: 2; Zald, Useem 1987). Furthermore, there is a “conflict of representation” between the movement and the countermovement, both inwards as concerns the community, and outwards towards the general public and authorities (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003: 65–66). Concerning diaspora organization and non-diaspora organizations, the attribution of threat on the actions of countermovements and corresponding strategies might differ, leading to tensions or even relationship-break-up. For example, the Kurdish movement might feel threatened by Turkish fascists in Germany, while the radical left is not even aware of the existence of Turkish fascists

²⁰ Boykoff's introduces two action modes of repression for stigmatization: mass media manipulation, which refers to story implantation via media contact, and to press (self-)censorship, which refers to the prevention of publishing of unwanted information. Secondly, the mass media deprecation means biased reporting on activists and their organizations (Boykoff 2007: 292–93).

²¹ Freak frames refer to frames that focus on “the non-mainstream values, beliefs, and opinions of these dissidents, as well as their age and appearance” (Boykoff 2006: 216).

organizations. In the empirical analysis, special focus will be given to framing contests between the movement and countermovement, and the effects of (violent) outbidding on the national public and strategic tensions. In sum, movement-countermovement dynamics influence how a movement and its potential allies attribute threats and the possibility of dissonance in threat attribution.

Besides this well-established mechanism and findings, I expect that the particular attribution of threat and possible *dissonance in threat attribution* also depends on scale of repression, the degree and stage of relationship transformation between movements and the duration of repression. Firstly, concerning the scale axis of repression, I will elaborate on one explicitly spatial mechanism. Space²² can be analytically separated from place, since the first “spans various territorial locations” (Faist 1998: 217). Various contradictions may arise in spaces dispersed across different places, with varying tensions and dynamics, since these places are structured by their respective regimes in different ways. Turning the argument on its head, that members of diasporas can promote violence in their country of reference without risking their lives in these countries (Adamson 2013: 65), I argue that there might be a dissonance in threat attribution between diaspora organizations and local social movements in the country of residence. Repression is likely to be perceived differently, for instance when a comrade, activist or family member are targeted by a threat, when an ideological relationship to the targets of repression has been established, as opposed to when no such relationship exists. Major disputes might occur around this divergent evaluation of threats, and such dissonances in threat attribution might lead to different strategies or even to a relationship break-up.

Secondly, in addition to the scale of repression, time matters too. Concerning the state of a relationship, already established and close relationships are more likely to manage repression attempts and their attribution of threat will likely be the same or similar, while relationship break-up or boundary activation might occur in newly established relationships or relations marked by tensions. Finally, with regard to the effects of repression over time, both groups which are directly affected by repression and those which are not, are subject to a “habituation effect” (Vörkel forthcoming). The introduction of new laws for policing movements might immediately trigger the attribution of threat through broader movement currents and mobilization, whereas years later, the application of the same law may not necessarily trigger the same attribution of threat. Long term and constant repression therefore tend to lead to a habituation to this repression, or to the formation of long-term and institutionalized anti-repression coalitions.

In sum, the analysis of the National Arena will focus on the attribution of threat mechanism, which either triggers relationship formation, or leads to relationship break-up and boundary activation. I assume that stigmatization will usually trigger boundary activation, that generalized repression will trigger relationship formation with more moderate actors, and that selective repression will isolate more radical actors. I will also consider dissonance in threat attribution concerning countermovements, the scale of repression, the stage of relationship transformation and the duration of repression.

²² Space doesn't refer only to a three-dimensional room but to other dimensions structuring this room, as, for example, opportunity structures or meanings (Faist 1998: 217).

2.3. Inter-Movement Arena: Mechanisms of Relationship Formation, Maintenance, Break-Up

Within the Inter-Movement Arena, following the leads from the literature of coalition building and qualities of ties, I will introduce several mechanisms of relationship transformation ordered along the stages of relationship formation, maintenance, and break-up. Most mechanisms in the literature fall in the first and last stage, whereas those focusing on relationship maintenance tend to receive less attention. Finally, I will highlight several mechanisms which deal with changes of social movements over time.

Regarding the stage of *relationship formation*, the most relevant mechanisms which shall inform the analysis include brokerage, coalition formation, attribution of similarity, and attribution of opportunity. As the former two were already introduced in the Transnational Arena, here only the latter two will be explained. As a reminder, brokerage is not concerned with relationship maintenance, or the continuity of the relations, but only with formation, while soon after, the mechanism of coalition formation might be triggered.

- *Attribution of similarity* refers to “the mutual identification of actors in different sites as being sufficiently similar to justify common action” (McAdam et al. 2001: 334). This similarity can be assessed on ideological, organizational, tactical, social, or cultural similarities. For McAdam and Rucht, institutional equivalence, class, language, and open identities are factors that facilitate the attribution of similarity in the case of cross-national diffusion between the U.S. and German New Left movements (McAdam, Rucht 1993: 71). Importantly, such connections do not occur automatically but require an active social construction of similarity (McAdam, Rucht 1993: 60–63), since the actors need to be aware of the existence of one other and at least receive certain information, which they might attribute similarity to.
- The counter mechanism to attribution of similarity, is *boundary activation*, defined as the “creation of a new boundary or the crystallization of an existing one” (Tilly, Tarrow 2015: 36), or the sharpening of the us-them distinction between different actors (Alimi et al. 2012: 15). Essentially, this mechanism deals with the process of how actors draw boundaries between each other. It concerns how actors determine whether a coalition or a relationship are a part of the movement, and how they decide who is excluded or to be kept at a distance. Importantly, these boundary drawing activities change over time and actors might be excluded at one point and included at other points in time. The sub-mechanism of *borrowing* involves the importation of a boundary-cum-relations package already existing elsewhere and its installation in a local setting (McAdam et al. 2001: 143).
- Often accompanied by the attribution of threat, *the attribution of opportunity*, is an activating mechanism which involves “(a) invention or importation and (b) diffusion of a shared definition” (McAdam et al. 2001: 95) of an opportunity. Consequently, there is no objective definition of opportunity, since it needs to be “visible to potential challengers and ... perceived as an opportunity” (McAdam et al. 2001: 43). An opportunity might be a specific goal that is achievable for a coalition, for instance the possibility to strengthen one’s own position or to engage in an exchange of resources. However, the attribution of opportunity should not be misunderstood as a completely rational cost-benefit

calculation, since it includes feelings of hope, fascination with the capabilities of other movements and a willingness to learn from the way that other movements organize.

Relationship maintenance, as such, is not very present in the literature. However, certain important mechanisms have been identified, such as Anne Mische's research on coalition-building processes between Brazilian student groups which has traced conversational mechanisms (Mische 2003: 276–77). While this micro-level conversational mechanism is not the focus of my research design, I will instead focus on political learning, scale shift, resolving tensions, emulation, and resource allocation.

- *Political learning* has been defined as actors acting “in accordance with lessons drawn from relevant, often past, political experience” (Falleti, Lynch 2009: 1150) or—as in this case—lessons from and about other social movement actors. I assume that while actors may not necessarily require a great amount of knowledge about their potential partner for an initial relationship formation to occur, the forming of enduring relationships over a long time span requires participants to engage in deeper political learning. This includes learning about the other movement's history, ideology, strategy, as well as modes of organizing and mobilizing. In the literature, political learning is often located within the figure of a broker or within the already overstretched diffusion mechanism. In contrast, by relying on the mechanism of political learning, I seek to grasp the whole work of knowledge transmission between movements, including translation, conferences, the publication of texts, workshops, and similar educational events.
- *Scale shift* has been defined as “a change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities” (McAdam et al. 2001). Importantly, Tarrow defines *coordination* as “the joint planning of collective action and the creation of instances for cross-spatial collaboration” (Tarrow 2005: 122). Accordingly, coordination involves the joint development of actions or campaigns out of shared interest and their implementation either in different localities or as regional, national, or transnational mobilizations.
- *Resolving tensions*, according to Tarrow, is the “most difficult aspect” of relationship transformation, especially when movements are separated by national borders (Tarrow 2005: 35). For a coalition or a relationship “to survive, there must be mechanisms for resolving tensions” (Levi, Murphy 2006: 658). Tensions might be triggered by differences concerning ideology, strategy, tactics, the exchange of resources, modes of communication and decision-making. Within coalitions there “must also be procedures put in place that permit all representatives to express their voices in ways that could influence the outcome” (Levi, Murphy 2006: 658) or otherwise tensions are unlikely to be resolved. In general, tension resolution is facilitated by trust building, negotiations, and ensuring commitment. Mische argues that in order for collaboration rather than competition to occur, mechanisms such as the downplaying of differences or the definition of a common goal are necessary (Mische 2008:18-19; 187-188)

- While *emulation* has been rather narrowly defined as “collective action modeled on the actions of others” (McAdam et al. 2001: 335), my expanded definition of this mechanism includes the adoption of ideas, ideologies, strategies, cultural practices, as well as modes of organization and mobilization by a receiver. In order to detect an emulation mechanism, it is not sufficient to identify the same modes of action taking place at different sites, since it is necessary to provide evidence for a transmission pathway between the actors. Each adopter may alter the idea or practice to some extent to fit their specific context, however, ultimately the core remains the same (Chabot 2010: 103).
- Resources are crucial for social movement mobilization in general, and for relationship maintenance in particular. Diani defines *resource allocation* as “the whole set of procedures through which decisions are taken regarding the use of organizational resources – from choice of agendas, strategies and tactics to selection of leadership and resource mobilization” (Diani 2013: 150–52). The resource allocation mechanisms focus on the way that relationship partners decide on how to exchange resources, to what end these resources are pooled and how tensions are resolved. The exchange of resources involves the transaction of different kinds of resources such as money, infrastructure, personnel, information, or legitimacy. These exchanges can range from formal to informal arrangements. As indicated during the earlier discussion of factors facilitating coalition building, maintaining commitment over a longer period of time between informal and formal SMOs might be challenging, drain the resources of coalition parties, and potentially lead to relationship break-up.

Concerning the stage of *relationship break-up*, the literature includes among others the mechanisms of *polarization* and *competition*, while several other mechanisms or their counter mechanism have already been mentioned above. These include boundary activation, failure of resolving tensions or the attribution of defeat.

- As mentioned above, scarce resources might lead to *competition* between organizations. “Competitive relations” between SMOs, result “from the fact that they depend on scarce resources to survive and to be able to engage in protest activities” (Bosi et al. 2014: 21). They tend to occur between movements and SMOs that share similar goals and which target the same constituent groups. Differentiation, polarization or fragmentation are mechanisms that are often triggered by competition (Bosi et al. 2014: 21). Additionally, competition can manifest in already established relationships such as coalitions, and imbalances among partners, in terms of commitment or the degree to which they share resources, might trigger relationship break-up. While “self-enforcing penalties” or “promises or binding commitments to contribute resources” are ways of resolving these tensions (Levi, Murphy 2006: 658), failure to do so often results in relationship break-up.
- Finally, *polarization* has been defined as a complex process that “involves widening of political and social space between claimants in a contentious episode”, which combines the mechanisms of opportunity/threat spirals, competition, category formation, and brokerage (Tilly 2005: 222). Polarization leads “uncommitted or moderate actors” to move to one side of the conflict (McAdam et al. 2001: 322). In an already polarized arena,

the borrowing mechanism can amplify polarization and trigger a recomposition in already existing coalitions.

Temporal Mechanisms

Until this point, I have introduced relational mechanisms that are likely to occur in the process of relationship transformation between social movement organizations from different movements. Finally, I will shortly introduce two specific temporal mechanisms which do not fit in the Arenas of Interaction. Relationship transformation processes do not usually start from zero, but gradually shift over time, both shaping and shaped by history. Yet, since time matters for social movements in general and for relationships between social movements in particular, the question arises of how the temporal dimension can be grasped more consciously. Therefore, two specific temporal mechanisms will be introduced, namely generational and cohort change as well as (de-)synchronization.

The mechanism of *generational change* is defined as the replacement of one generation of a movement by another. Likewise, the *cohort change* mechanism refers to the replacement of one micro-cohort by another. To differentiate between the two mechanisms, the duration of the change is crucial: whereas a cohort change unfolds over the span of one or two years, a generational change takes much more time. The analysis of generational and cohort replacement is important for understanding relationship transformation, and relationship maintenance in particular. The pace varies with the number of recruitments, organizational structures, and the power struggles between veteran activists and new recruits (Whittier 1997). Depending on different sub-mechanisms, such as conflict, recruitment, and the preceding stage of relationship formation, with every new cohort, relationships might be passed on, need to be rebuilt or simply break up. Generational gaps might occur especially in times of latency and low recruitment (McNeil, Thompson 1971). Generational gaps may function as break-ups, or as a restarting of formerly strained relations. Finally, the different pace of generational or cohort replacement between different movements might affect the mechanism unfolding in the relationship transformation process. For example, a movement with a rather slow rate of generational change and well-established inter-generational exchange may lose an interest in constantly rebuilding its relationships with movements affected by high turnover and low inter-cohort exchange.

Synchronization and *desynchronization* are two often overlooked mechanisms in the research on coalition formation, as well as in mechanism process approaches. I define *desynchronization* as the growing temporal discrepancy between temporal regimes or arenas of interaction, and/or temporalities of different actors or social movements, and synchronization as their convergence. More concretely, in conditions of synchronization, actors are more likely to participate equally in coordinating events, scheduling, agreeing on the same pace of interaction, and deciding on the duration of campaigns and alliances. Conversely, desynchronization refers to arrhythmical relations between movements. In other words, while one movement might be in a phase of mobilization, another, especially in a different spatial setting, might be in a state of abeyance (Alsahi 2018) and consequently might trigger different relationship transformation pathways. I argue that *asynchronicity* is often the default setting that movements must contend with when engaging in relationship formation. In particular, concerning relationship transformation

between different social movements, it is unlikely that movements will have similar rhythms or be in the same stage of mobilization.

In sum, there are certainly mechanisms which are applicable for the analysis of the process of relationship transformation, including formation, maintenance, and break-up. Therefore, in the Inter-Movement Arena, my attention shall be directed precisely to this process and its constitutive mechanisms and sub-mechanisms.

3. Summary

In this chapter, I have defined the central concept of *relationship transformation* as the process by which two or more organizational distinct actors establish inter-organizational ties. This process of relationship transformation consists of different mechanisms and sub-mechanisms, which I will trace along the stages of relationship formation, relationship maintenance and relationship break-up.

In order to establish this concept, I entered an examination of the literature on factors for coalition building and qualities of ties. On the basis of a critique of this literature, I introduced the main framework for the analysis of the relationship transformation process between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany: the mechanism-process approach. Based on a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the approach, I have introduced the concepts of sub-mechanisms and arenas of interaction, which have been recently advanced in the literature. The arenas of interaction, namely the Inter-Movement Arena, the National Arena, and the Transnational Arena, will structure the empirical investigation. I have introduced relevant mechanisms for each arena, which shall serve as tools for the empirical analysis.

Chapter III. Research Design and Methodology

This thesis was conducted as a mixed-method, diachronic comparative analysis of the processes of relationship transformation, with a central focus on a cross-time comparison along three temporal phases. The triangulation of data collection and analysis methods relied on a combination of semi-structured in-depth expert interviews (Della Porta 2014b; Magnusson, Marecek 2015; Meuser, Nagel 2009), document analysis (Bosi, Reiter 2014; Mosca 2014), and participatory observations (Balsiger, Lambelet 2014). Since little is known about the particular research object – a long-term process of relationship transformation evolving over four decades – the scope of the research is thus primarily exploratory. An in-depth cross-time comparison of a single unit is the most appropriate and suitable for the aim of answering the question of how a long term-process emerged and transformed (Della Porta 2010: 217–18). First and foremost, the research design is explicitly diachronic, that is, “based on the collection of data at several points in history” (Della Porta 2010: 218), which is analysed and compared across three temporal units (Phases I-III). The research does not primarily aim at creating hypotheses on the case, but in a “deductively informed mode of investigation” (Alimi et al. 2015: 51), seeks to identify the mechanism of relationship transformation. Following a comparison of the phases, I identify similar pathways of relationship transformation, which are generalizable for the solidarity movement with Kurdistan in Germany. However, on the basis of the analysis of other solidarity movements in Germany, and the findings from research on movement coalitions, I propose that the same pathways of relationship transformation might be generalizable for other solidarity movements too.

Initially, a cross-city comparison in a most-different case selection was intended, however, due to the unavailability of data for certain phases in some cities, this comparison was excluded. Nevertheless, the cities – Berlin, Hamburg, and Munich – set the boundaries of the data collection process and influenced case selection. The main independent variable, along which the cases on the cross-cities comparisons were selected, were the quantity of persons belonging to the (mobilized) Kurdish diaspora in the respective cities. This was because of the contested question in the literature, of whether a large and mobilized diaspora triggers different kinds of relationship formation compared to a small one. In consequence, Berlin (featuring a large Kurdish diaspora), Hamburg (a mid-size Kurdish diaspora) and Munich (small Kurdish diaspora) were chosen as cases.²³ These cities reflect similar quantities of persons belonging to the radical left, based on the local Constitutional Protection Reports as well as my own assessments: Berlin (larger) Hamburg (middle) and Munich (small).²⁴ Finally, while the size of the cities varies, Berlin, Hamburg and Munich are the three most populated German cities. To emphasize once again, the city comparison was excluded due to missing data for all points in time, however the initial case selection continued to structure the selection of interviewees and the focus of the empirical analysis.

²³ Numbers of Kurds in the diaspora are difficult to accurately reproduce (see Chapter V). Ammann estimated the number of Kurds during Phase I in Berlin to be around 50,000, in Hamburg 28,000 and in Munich around 10,000 – 19,000 (Ammann 2001: 140–43). For Phase III, Derince estimates the total number of Kurds in Berlin to be between 100,000 and 120,000 (Derince 2020: 18). The local Constitutional Protection Reports contain the following figures for different points in time: Hamburg: 500 (1995), 600 (2005), 600 (2015); Berlin: 800 (1995), 1,050 (2005), 1,100 (2015); Bavaria: 2000 (1995), 1800 (2005), 1800 (2015).

²⁴ Hamburg: 1995 (1355), 2005 (1,500), 2015 (1,090); Berlin: 1995 (2,200), 2005 (2,330), 2015 (2,640); total Bavaria: 1995 (3,640 individuals and 42 organizations), 2005 (3,290 individuals and 28 organizations), 2015 (3,610).

Next, I will address research ethics and my positionality towards the field, before describing the different methods of data collection, and finally the data analysis.

1. Research Ethics and Positionality

Research on social movements often faces complex ethical questions and difficulties (Gillan, Pickerill 2012). Among the many challenges I faced during the research process, I will address here the most central and imperative ones: namely the high risk of repression faced by the participants, the question of whom the research should benefit, and my own positionality towards the research object.

In particular, my research was carried out in a context where different states have and continue to practice various forms of repression against the research object, namely the PKK-led Kurdish movement, the radical left in Germany, and their relationship transformation. In particular, the German Office for the Protection of the Constitution has regularly remarked on the cooperation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement in Germany in some of its yearly reports (e.g. BfV 2019: 29–30). Consequently, I needed to make sure that the data I collected was not usable for police work. Firstly, there was a need to avoid collecting data which might be harmful to the participants or myself in the first place. For instance, an initial exercise in participatory mapping (Guldi 2016) or network analyses which were recommended by colleagues could not be performed, since these methods would have produced a fine-grained, non-public data, illustrating relationships between actors, which would be explicitly interesting for the Constitutional Protection or police agencies. In order to reduce risk, the data was only collected from sources which were either publicly available, or were marked as publishable by the interviewees. Before each interview, participants were instructed not to disclose any information that could be useful to the repressive authorities, and the interviews were sharply divided between public and closed parts. Secondly, encryption software and other tools helped to ensure that my data was not accessible to anyone but myself (Grimm et al. 2019). Thirdly, after the empirical analysis was written and before it was given to further persons, part of the recapitulation consisted of a safety check, including erasing personal names or other references to the interviewees.

Secondly, following the tradition of participatory action research (Kindon et al. 2007), the question of whom the research should matter to (Milan 2014), was answered by the aspiration that the research should benefit the participants. This “ethics of immediate reciprocation” (Gillan, Pickerill 2012: 136) is common in social movement research, since it seemingly offers an easy solution to this ethical contradiction. However, Gillan and Pickerill, highlight several issues, such as careerism, the bias towards leftists movements, dishonest legitimization for gaining access to the field, and finally, the real usefulness of the research to participants (Gillan, Pickerill 2012: 136–37). The final point in particular was a central concern from the beginning of the research process. To address this issue, I spoke with gatekeepers in both movements, and we agreed to publish certain interviews in activist media and conducted workshops on the theme of the thesis. Since no history of the solidarity movement with Kurdistan in Germany has been written so far, this time-consuming work could be taken over by me and provide the activists with a possibility for reflection and a starting point for their own further historiography. After the completion of the PhD thesis, a book or brochure will be created for and with the movements, which will deal

with the history of solidarity with the Kurdish freedom movement in Germany, with the mechanisms of relationship transformation, as well as the concepts of solidarity and internationalism, and the contradictions contained therein.

Finally, I will address my positionality towards the field, since conducting research in an ethical manner which recognises my position as a researcher towards the field, while “seeking to reflexively critique and adjust that positionality” (Gillan, Pickerill 2012: 140). The reader needs to be aware of the relationship towards the field, which may have shaped their interpretation (Balsiger, Lambelet 2014: 165). However, awareness of one’s positionality and claims to reflexivity seem insufficient for addressing these issues, and some methodological solutions will be proposed at the end of this section. Before, I will shortly summarize some biographical points, which are relevant concerning the relationship transformation between the Kurdish movement and the radical left. I was socialized in the radical left scene in Berlin from the age of 16 and have continuously been active in political groups since that time. Most importantly, my interest in researching the solidarity movement with Kurdistan arose during my Master’s studies, when I was puzzled by the sudden emergence of the Kurdish movement as the most important topic among the radical left, particularly given the fact that only a few groups had dealt with the topic before. Suddenly, groups which were concerned with completely different issues prioritized internationalism, and what seemed to me an unexpected solidarity movement evolved. I went to solidarity events and meetings, participated in a delegation trip to Kurdistan, and was once deported from Turkey when trying to participate in one delegation. I organized solidarity events, held lectures, and helped with publishing texts. During this time, I wrote my Master’s thesis on this topic (Reinhardt 2016). However, since moving to Florence and starting my PhD thesis, and for the duration of the research, I have not been active in the solidarity movement. During the research process, a somewhat critical distance towards the Kurdistan solidarity movement emerged, which was not primarily triggered by the research, but by my own political development. Nevertheless, I still have a genuinely positive disposition towards the solidarity movement, the Kurdish movement, and the radical left.

This closeness to the research object comes with certain advantages, however, it also raises serious problems which need to be addressed. On one hand, an obstacle that social movement researchers must often overcome, is the general scepticism of the activists they conduct their research on or with, which is particularly acute among the German radical left. However, I was able to gain access to the field in a relatively easy, transparent, and open manner and overcome certain scepticisms. Importantly, my own prior activism in the radical left provided me with certain credentials without which the research likely could not have been conducted, at least as far as the interviews are concerned. Additionally, my relatively good inside knowledge of the radical left, its modes of actions, cultural norms and contradictions provided me with an intimate understanding of what problems, events or jokes interviewees referred to, and the kinds of norms they might be underpinned by. In contrast, this is not true for the Kurdish movement, which I have never been part of. Additionally, I speak neither Kurdish or Turkish, which is why certain sources were not available to me.

At the same time, developing a close affinity with the research subject presents several problems. These include the potential introduction of analytical biases towards a specific movement or faction. This may manifest in an uneven distribution of descriptive attention in the text, overly

critical or uncritical analysis, an overemphasis on certain actors' interpretations or on a certain aspect of the relationship, inadvertently highlighting a particular interpretation of tensions, issues, or contradictions, as well as the risk of generalizing personal experiences within radical left or the solidarity movement. To the final point, one might add, the risk of assuming an equivalence between my participants' and my own perspectives. However, merely acknowledging the inherent bias in all research endeavours (Balsiger, Lambelet 2014: 165), and thereby asserting reflexivity is insufficient. To comprehensively address these concerns, I aim to maintain methodological transparency and rigour, and to openly address any challenges and shortcomings encountered during the data collection phase. Likewise, the same considerations and requirements in terms of systematic treatment and reflexivity need to be remembered during data analysis. It is essential to maintain this transparency for the reader by clearly delineating between empirical descriptions derived from the data, interpretations originating from the participants themselves, and my subsequent analytical deductions. In essence, historical analysis needs to critically and systematically examine "the credibility, representativeness, and meaning of primary sources" (Bosi, Reiter 2014: 117). Consequently, in each analytical sub-chapter, I assess the validity of the particular analysis based on the number of sources available, provide reasons for the choice of particular cases in the description of a mechanism, and identify gaps and contradictory statements in the data. At the same time, I refrain from making any political conclusions or assessments.

2. Data Collection and Methods

Throughout the thesis, the analysis of the relationship transformation process is achieved through the triangulation of diverse primary and secondary data sources, which are subject to analysis through a triangulation of qualitative methods. Concerning data, I combine primary semi-structured interviews and field notes taken during participatory observation with secondary documents produced by the solidarity movement and the media. The following three sections shall present the methods of data collection: semi-structured expert interviews, document analysis and participatory observation.

Expert Interviews

The *semi-structured expert interviews* conducted for this thesis largely followed a conceptualisation and research process proposed by Michael Meuser and Ulrike Nagel (2002; 2009). Indeed, interviews with activists from the respective movements were the primary method for obtaining data on the relationship transformation process between the radical left and the Kurdish movement. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended to allow me to identify novel or contradictory mechanisms and sub-mechanisms.

During expert interviews, the emphasis shifts away from the personal biography of the interviewee, and instead, centres on the specialized knowledge within a "functional context" (Mey, Mruck 2007: 254). The concept of expert, in contrast to laypersons, ties in with the sociological distinction between general and specialized knowledge (Meuser, Nagel 2010: 376). Through the acquisition of functions and experiences within a socially institutionalized environment, individuals can be construed as experts due to their possession of "special knowledge" that is deemed essential, as well as their assumption of responsibilities in decision-making processes (Meuser, Nagel 2009: 468). Expert knowledge can also be "generated in non-

professional contexts”, which explicitly concerns volunteers and political activists who have acquired specialized knowledge through their involvement in such contexts (Meuser, Nagel 2010: 377). The special knowledge conveyed by an expert, can encompass an understanding of the challenges, potential solution pathways and decision-making structures of an institutional context (Meuser, Nagel 2009: 469), or in the case of this research, the relationship transformation process between different SMOs. The interviewees do not necessarily have to be “discursively” aware of their special knowledge themselves, since expert knowledge can also be reconstructed from interviewees’ answers (Meuser, Nagel 2010: 377). On the one hand, my objective was to acquire *operational knowledge* concerning the social movement organizations to which the experts, frequently long-standing members, or cadres, belong or used to belong. On the other hand, I sought to collect *contextual knowledge* pertaining to the modes of action and processes within the respective social movements in which these experts participated (Meuser, Nagel 2009: 471). The semi-structured interview proved to be an appropriate data collection instrument for these purposes.

The interview guide was divided into three parts (see Appendix). Prior to the interview, participants were informed about the objectives and subject, the terminological framework, as well as about voluntariness, privacy, security, and anonymity. The first part of the interview inquired about personal political history. Often, the experts had knowledge about more organizational contexts than was originally assumed. The second part delved deeper into the rationales underlying solidarity and the factors driving relationship formation. The third part investigated the relationship and dynamics between the PKK-led Kurdish movement and the radical left through an initial open-ended question. Specifically, I asked “How would you describe the relationship between the left in Germany and the Kurdish movement at the moment?” and subsequently asked how it changed, in order to be able to later reconstruct the process of relationship transformation. Subsequently, an additional question was posed regarding the formation, maintenance, and break-up of relations, in cases where such aspects had not yet been addressed by the interviewees. Furthermore, situational “confrontation questions” (Mey, Mruck 2007: 262) were asked by presenting opinions, demands or interview quotes from other interviewees, to which interviewees were expected to respond to. The script was used flexibly in order to avoid “guideline bureaucracy” (Hopf 1978: 101) and allow an unexpected topic by the interviewees to come to the front (Meuser, Nagel 2010: 378). At the end of each interview, time was allocated to explore topics and aspects that the expert considered significant or important but had not yet been broached during the interview.

At the start of the participant selection process, the accessibility of experts was the decisive criterion, since radical left-wing and Kurdish groups are generally rather closed to outsiders and are often sceptical of researchers due to repressive pressure from the state. Therefore, the emphasis was on individuals with whom I could establish personal contact, either through direct communication, correspondence or by leveraging my existing contacts in the movements, following the snowball principle (Della Porta 2014b: 241). The second criterion involved comprehensively including the diverse spectrum of SMOs as far as possible, represented by experts affiliated with either the Kurdish movement or the radical left, who had previously been engaged in the solidarity movement with Kurdistan. I started with the most accessible experts, who tended to be located in Berlin and were mostly active during the end of Phase II (2000-2014)

or in Phase III (2015-2020). Through recommendations, I accessed other cities and people who were also active during Phase I. I conducted interviews via official requests on only two occasions. Thirty-seven interviews were conducted during several phases of field work between 2019 and 2020, two of which were conducted in 2021. Initially, an international chapter was planned, resulting in five interviews being conducted in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay and one via Skype with a participant located in the United States. Due to constraints related to both the lack of systematic data and time considerations, I made the decision to exclude the international chapter, and only interviews pertinent to the German-Kurdish context were retained, requiring the exclusion of the aforementioned five interviews. However, I opted to include eight interviews from my 2016 Master's thesis, as they addressed the same research questions, followed a similar interview guide, and were centred around the city of Berlin. In total, the data analysis considered a pool of 40 interviews.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face at the location chosen by the participant. Interview locations varied, ranging from organizations' facilities to more neutral cafés, rooms I arranged, or homes of the interviewees. One interview was conducted from my own home, given restrictions due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Among the interviews, those conducted in public cafés were the only ones where the setting had a detrimental impact. The public setting introduced distractions, and in one case, caused a temporary interruption when an unrelated individual entered, prompting the interviewee to pause and subsequently resume the interview later. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and six and a half hours, with an hour and 55 minutes on average. During five interviews, two persons were interviewed and reported from the same SMO. I found these two-to-one interviews exceptionally interesting, since the experts discussed and reflected on one another's testimonies, and added additional detail to certain narratives. These interviews were nevertheless counted as one since they were concerned primarily with one SMO. The interviews were usually conducted in German, however one was run in English and another in a mix of German with translation from Turkish with the aid of a translator. In terms of gender distribution, there was a small bias towards male participants (22), partly skewed due to the inclusion of interviews from my Master's thesis. Given that my interviews explicitly targeted experts with knowledge of (autonomous) women organizations, I do not consider this small bias to be decisive.

More significantly, two problems emerged from the diachronic design of the research, one spatial and one concerning a bias towards the present. Starting with the latter, I interviewed people who have been active since the 1980s, as well as younger activists. However, among the interviewees, only four could provide first-hand accounts of the 1980s, 14 possessed direct experiences from the 1990s, 28 offered insights into Phase II (2000-2014), and all 40 contributed information related to Phase III (2015-2020). It is worth noting that the eight participants interviewed during my Master's thesis could only provide information up until 2016. Consequently, older activists are overrepresented in the analysis, since they could report on all phases. In any case, there is a bias towards the present, since the data corresponding to Phase III is more plentiful and represents a greater diversity of SMOs. Furthermore, responses pertaining to Phase I exhibited a tendency towards vagueness, sometimes affected by factual inaccuracies or instances of confusion. Notably, errors were evident in the recall of dates, as well as occasional disarray in the chronological sequencing of events and the identification of key actors. In order to address this

problem related to the “unreliability of memory” (Bosi, Reiter 2014: 131) and the bias towards Phase III, I decided to introduce document analysis into the research design, and in particular, collected data on Phase I as a countermeasure. The reliability of the information collected for the description of the general process of relationship transformation was enhanced by cross-checking interview transcripts with materials obtained from other sources, such as mass media and social movements (Bosi, Reiter 2014: 277). Furthermore, a congruence between the narratives present in the documents and those provided by the experts regarding the evolution of the solidarity movement with Kurdistan adds to the reliability of the data.

Second, while the majority of the interviews were supposed to be carried out on SMOs based in Berlin, Hamburg, and Munich, this was undermined by the fact that almost all activists had experiences with SMOs in other cities and regions, and consequently provided information on these contexts. Cadres and central activists tended to be highly mobile, active in several cities in Germany during the same phase, and travel to Kurdistan for extended periods of time before returning to Germany. Therefore, while experts on the one hand had a rich knowledge of different cities, they could on the other hand seldom report on a particular SMO across the whole relationship transformation process. Interviewees often disclosed their lack of knowledge pertaining to a certain period of relationship transformation, especially regarding Phase I. In addition, activists reported on central processes occurring in other cities, which in turn had an influence on the solidarity movement as a whole. Consequently, I also included examples from other cities, provided that they were central to the relationship transformation process. These are the primary reasons for excluding the city-to-city comparison since the documents rarely provided the information necessary to bridge gaps relating to the internal processes within the respective SMOs, while at times, the dynamics of other cities sometimes took precedence.

Due to the diachronic research design, it is difficult to assess how many interviewees corresponded to the Kurdish movement or the radical left, and how many were from Hamburg, Berlin, and Munich. Two fictional yet representative examples can illustrate the problem. Should the following individuals be counted across all relevant categories, or considered as a single case? One is an individual with a German passport, who initially joined an anti-imperialist group in Munich in the 1980s, later participated as a guerrilla in Kurdistan, and for the last two decades was primarily active in a Kurdish association in Hamburg. Another is an individual with a Kurdish migration background, socialized mainly in Berlin’s radical antifascist context during Phase II, but who also worked in the Kurdish student association in Hamburg during Phase III. In fact, the interviewees are moving targets, reflecting the complexity of the relationship transformation process between the Kurdish movement and the radical left. One solution would have been, thus, to precisely trace these different life paths and present them here. However, given the strict necessity of anonymity, this cannot be done without exposing the interviewees to serious risk. This is also why no reference to a specific interview is given. Only a compilation of the organizations that interviewees were originally inquired about can be provided, which certainly does not represent all the SMOs from which I have obtained information. To address these issues, I will include pertinent contextual information, indicating the organization or movement the interviewee was associated with, whenever citing from interviews. An organization clearly absent from this selection is ‘medico international’, which as a human rights organization rather stands

at the margins of the research field, but which was active in Kurdistan both in Phases I and III.²⁵ The List of Interviews (see Appendix B) presents the name of the social movement organization for which the interviewee was engaged, the SMO's spatial focus, its movement sector (radical left, Kurdish movement or solidarity movement with Kurdistan), and the specific phases of the transformation process that the interviewee was able to report on. The interviews are sorted chronologically. One SMO was never public and remains unnamed here, due to security considerations. In summary, the 40 expert interviews represent the core source of data for the empirical analysis, illustrating a bias towards the present which is offset through the analysis of secondary documents.

Document Analysis

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I collected two types of documents: organizational documents produced by social movement organizations or individuals active in the solidarity movement, and news media documents. The document analysis was carried out with two aims: first, the data was often used to cross-check the interview data, in order to identify contradictions, or provide more detail for a specific event in order to enhance the reliability of the information collected. Secondly, I also obtained social movement documents, especially for Phase I, which provided additional insights into the dynamics of the solidarity movement and therefore, balanced the bias towards Phase III. While document collection and analysis continued in parallel to the different stages of the research, it was particularly useful during and after conducting the interviews, since interviews often served as a catalyst for further investigation, and since interviewees occasionally provided me with documents which would otherwise be inaccessible through other alternative sources such as archives.

A total of 835 documents were collected, of which 621 can be counted as social movement documents and 214 as media documents. A list of all documents used in the analysis are included in the references. The collection of the media documents was primarily driven by the necessity to acquire supplementary information pertaining to events indicated by the interviews or social movement documents. Consequently, it was not assembled for analytical purposes guided by a systematic selection process, and was therefore not subjected to coding. The media documents are considered, on the one hand, as sources providing factual data regarding events, addressing the fundamental 'w-questions': where, who, when, what and why? On the other hand, within the National Arena, the mass media becomes part of the analysis as an actor, influencing the relationship transformation of the radical left and the radical left. Here, the documents become evidence for a mechanism, which, however, mainly rests on the findings of studies conducted by other scholars and the frame analysis conducted in my Master's thesis.

In contrast, the social movement documents figure more centrally in the document analysis, and the selection of documents needs to be justified more thoroughly. The main aim was to collect a variety of documents produced by different relevant SMOs, especially for Phase I. One strategy consisted of online and archival research while the other consisted of asking for and obtaining documents from interviewees or SMOs. Initially, I searched libraries and online antiquarian

²⁵ It was only after the end of the field work that I became aware of the fact that 'medico international' was also active in Phase I. However, since human rights organizations are not central to the objective of the research, I refrained from conducting an interview.

bookshops and obtained several biographies or diaries produced by activists from the solidarity movement, the Kurdish movement, or the radical left. A central part of this strategy of data collection, however, consisted of archival research in “free archives” (Bosi, Reiter 2014: 118–29). The ‘Informationsstelle Kurdistan’ (ISKU)²⁶ in Hamburg, a non-professionalized but relevant archive for the solidarity movement with Kurdistan, provided me with several brochures and books concerning all three phases. Additionally, they provided references to relevant online documents, especially the ‘Nadir’ collective²⁷, which has hosted relevant internet pages from the late 1990s onward. Moreover, the ISKU possesses a full collection of ‘Kurdistan Report’, the already digitized version of which is included in my data collection. However, there is a substantial gap for the period from 1993 until 2005, the exact period of time for which I needed to find more data. I started to scan one year of ‘Kurdistan Report’. However, after a week of scanning I found only two articles which were relevant for my research question, and decided to concentrate on another journal, the ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’²⁸. The ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’ was, during Phase I, one of the central papers of the solidarity movement with Kurdistan, published every two weeks, and dealt, among other developments in Kurdistan, with the solidarity movement in Germany. One interviewee indicated the journal to me and indicated its importance. While the ‘Kurdistan Report’ focused much more on the development in Kurdistan, the ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’ also included important data, such as summaries of meetings of the solidarity movement or the addresses of solidarity committees. The publisher of the ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’, the GNN²⁹, had neither a digitalized version of the ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’ nor any way of accessing it. The only archive I found storing a sufficient number of the ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’ was the free archive ‘Papiertiger - archiv & bibliothek der sozialen bewegungen’³⁰ in Berlin. In total, I scanned 292 issues from 1988 until 2001, ranging from 4 to 16 pages each, plus some special issues. There were several missing issues³¹, however, without any strong gaps or bias. Regarding the ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’, I obtained documents corresponding to a longer period of time, for which more factual data was missing, since a systematic analysis was also possible given its regular publication. The ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’ was a journal that the solidarity movement with Kurdistan initiated, through which the solidarity movement communicated, and which itself can be seen as an outcome of the relationship transformation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement in Phase I. In the empirical analysis, different phases in the editorial work will be mentioned, as far as they are communicated in the journal. Several other brochures and journals were collected from the archive ‘Papiertiger’, for which, however, mostly only single issues were available.

The second strategy, involving inquiries to interviewees about material resources, likewise proved beneficial. Through this method, I collected books, leaflets, and photographs relevant to the specific SMOs, phase, or cities discussed by interviewees. One activist even had a private

²⁶ Kurdistan Information Centre.

²⁷ Nadir, founded in 1993, is a leftist cross-current online project. See Chapter VI.

²⁸ Kurdistan Newsletter.

²⁹ Gesellschaft für Nachrichtenerfassung und Nachrichtenverbreitung | Society for News Gathering and Dissemination. See Chapter VI.

³⁰ Paper Tiger - archive and library of social movements.

³¹ Missing issues, which were not available in the archive: 1991(17), 1991(22), 1994(16), 1995(07), 1995(09), 1995(10), 1995(11), 1995(13), 1995(14), 1995(15), 1995(16), 1995(18), 1995(19), 1995(20), 1995(21), 1995(22), 1996(09), 1996(10), 1996(13), 1996(16), 1996(17), 1996(19), 1996(21), 1997(05), 1997(08), 1997(10), 1997(13), 1997(18), 1998(01), 1998(02), 1998(04), 1998(07), 1998(12) to 1998(15), 1998(19) to 1999(03), 1999(05), 1999(11), 1999(15), 2000(19), 2001(4), 2001(5).

archive in his flat, albeit only partially concerned with Kurdistan. I also included my own transcriptions of relevant podcasts, radio programs, and videos featuring activists of the Kurdish movement, the solidarity movement, or the radical left. One of the richest sources, which was pointed out to me by an interviewee, was an interview by ‘Radyo Azadî’ with Robert Jarowoy, a long-term activist in Hamburg from the solidarity movement with Kurdistan, which followed themes similar to those contained in my interview guide (2020).

In sum, document collection provided the opportunity to gather data from diverse social movement organizations and media sources. This was particularly valuable regarding Phase I, where factual data proved to be unreliable and where gaps were evident in interviewees’ responses. In particular, the documents collected from the ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’ provided me with a rich set of comprehensive and longitudinal data, which could confirm or contradict the information gathered through other methods.

Participatory Observation

The information gleaned from interviews and secondary documents, was supported by a limited *participatory observation* (Balsiger, Lambelet 2014). As MTT claimed, “ethnographic fieldwork is the method perhaps best suited to the demands of a mechanism-based approach to the study of contention” (McAdam et al. 2008a). By employing this method, I wanted to gather first-hand data from solidarity events, especially demonstrations, information events and congresses. However, since participatory observation could only create data for parts of Phase III, it is the least relevant method.

In the role of an “observer-as-participant” (Jones, Watt 2010: 111), I observed the interactions between movements during demonstrations for brief periods of time, and witnessed certain contradictions occurring during public meetings. Importantly, the aim was not to establish access through participatory observation or to become absorbed in movements (Balsiger, Lambelet 2014: 160). My aim was to collect data which could complement the interviews and documents, that could not be collected by other methods or that could confirm or falsify the statements or narratives of the other sources. For example, this encompassed activities such as observing interactions between movement and countermovement during demonstrations or to detect instances of emulation during public meetings or demonstrations. The selection of events followed a set of criteria, namely openness, relevance to the solidarity movement, and parsimony. First, I limited my field note-taking to events that were explicitly open to the public, such as demonstrations, public meetings, or congresses. During the fieldwork, I did attend events that were not open to the public; however, I refrained from taking field notes in consideration of security concerns, and out of sincerity towards the activists in the field.

Second, concerning relevance, certain events, for example information events of the solidarity movement, seemed to be less important for answering the research questions than demonstrations through neighbourhoods marked by a countermovement or public congresses including debates about Kurdistan solidarity. Finally, since participatory observation was the method least central to the thesis, I only attended events when I already happened to be in the same city, apart from two cases where I travelled to another city with the sole purpose of participating in a specific event. I took field notes during my field work in 2019 and 2021. In total, I produced 18 field notes, mostly from Berlin, but also from Hamburg and Munich, in each case

two. Finally, I attended one national conference of the solidarity movements. The field notes were taken after the event, noting objective details such as time, place, title of the event, and organizers. The primary focus, however, was directed toward capturing interactions between the radical left and the Kurdish movement, as well as interactions with the countermovement, and noteworthy performances or actions observed during the event.

In sum, participatory observation offered the possibility of collecting first-hand data on interaction in the field. However, it is important to note that the participatory observation was only feasible during a specific period in Phase III, and given that this thesis primarily constitutes a diachronically comparative study, participatory observation is considered the least relevant data collection tool.

3. Data Analysis

The processes of data collection and data analysis were not conducted sequentially but iteratively (Balsiger, Lambelet 2014: 163). However, following the culmination of the field work, the following phase involved the retrieval of any missing documents, with a heightened focus on data analysis. During this phase, the primary objective was to identify the constituent mechanisms and sub-mechanisms governing the process of relationship transformation between the Kurdish movement and the radical left. In order to explain a complex social process, Tilly and Tarrow suggest dividing the task into three steps:

“(1) description of the process, (2) decomposition of the process into its basic causes, and (3) reassembly of those causes into a more general account of how the process takes place” (2015: 28).

During the empirical analysis, since there was no already existing literature on the process of relationship transformation between the Kurdish movement and the radical left, I needed to describe the process first on the basis of the collected data, then identify different mechanisms and sub-mechanisms, and finally, in the comparison between phases, reassemble these mechanisms in order to identify pathways of relationship transformation. More concretely, the data analysis followed the order of transcription, coding, thematic comparison, sociological conceptualization, and to a very limited extent, the theoretical generalization suggested by Meuser and Nagel (Meuser and Nagel 2009: 476).³² In the following, I will shortly summarize these steps.

The *transcription* of the interviews relied on a “simple transcription system” (Dresing and Pehl 2013: 21) that corrected the language, since the epistemological interest was not in the form of what was said but in the content statements from which the data were obtained. Almost all interviews and some audio documents were transcribed by myself, while a select few—only those already in the public domain or explicitly intended for publication—were transcribed using the software Trint, which then had to be cleaned and corrected. Thereafter, interview transcripts, the gathered documents, and the field notes were imported into the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA.

³² The paraphrase was excluded since it was deliberately intended to use quotes from the interviewees and documents, which results in less distortion and gives the groups themselves a direct voice.

The different kinds of data collected from different sources, now in text form, were subjected to several rounds of *coding*, which were, however, often overlapping and repeating. The coding strategy followed several rounds: firstly, the data was coded by ordering the testimonies along the temporal axis (years and phases), the spatial and arena axis (cities, Inter-Movement Arena, National Arena, and Transnational Arena) and the organizational axis (SMOs of the Kurdish movement and radical left). During the second round, I coded the data along the stages of relationship transformation. In the third round, which already incorporated a blend of deductive and inductive approaches to accommodate sociological conceptualization, mechanisms derived from established theoretical frameworks were introduced as codes. Finally, in a fourth round, all pertinent narratives concerning processes that were not already coded underwent re-evaluation, and new codes were created for novel, emergent mechanisms.

Following these initial rounds of coding, the *thematic comparison* phase was initiated. The logic behind the thematic comparison aligns with that of coding; however, this stage involves the grouping together of thematically comparable text passages from different sources for the purpose of cross-textual analysis (Meuser, Nagel 2009: 476). For each temporal phase, arena, and social movement organization, the data was compared, necessitating a continuous verification process for accuracy, comprehensiveness, credibility, and validity. In the case of factual data on events, this thematic comparison involved cross-checking statements pertaining to timing, names, the number of participants, and interview locations with media documents. Notably, the media documents were not imported into MAXQDA, but rather collected subsequently as the need arose for cross-checking particular events. Generally, a high degree of congruence was observed among the different sources, with discrepancies primarily found in the interviews, particularly for Phase I, where factual errors or mix-ups were identified.

To facilitate the description and reconstruction of the process of relationship transformation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement, it was necessary to apply distinct analytical approaches tailored to the different types of data. Firstly, the interviewees contribute to the establishment of *operational knowledge* concerning specific organizations and provide *contextual knowledge* (Meuser, Nagel 2009), or narratives encompassing the broader context in the entire solidarity movement. The experts are recognized for possessing profound insights into the intricate processes of certain SMOs concerning relationship transformation. The operational knowledge about how a relationship started, how it was maintained, and how it dissolved is often used in the analysis, often serving as a description of a single case. The data from different sources on the description of relationship transformation seldom contradicted one another, however occasional gaps for certain historical periods were evident. The contextual knowledge provided by experts, on the other hand, comprises narratives about the solidarity movement, often featuring hypotheses or arguments regarding specific developments. Secondly, during document analysis, it was imperative to contextualize the collected documents:

“If we understand documents as accomplishments, as products with purpose, then it naturally follows that analysis should seek to locate documents within their social as well as textual context” (Coffey 2014: 370).

Contextualization of the documents was achieved by providing information on the key actors, time of creation, and the intended function of each specific document. In the case of social movement documents, it was necessary to clarify the document’s producer, date of production,

publication method, and underlying purpose. To illustrate, the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief' can be considered as both an exchange and communication platform for the solidarity movement, as well as an instrument for mobilization during its era. An evaluation text produced by a failed coalition reveals a tendency to echo the perspectives of specific factions within the coalition, with the intended audience typically limited to particular segments of a movement. The contextualization will be carried out in the relevant sections of the analysis where these documents are utilized. In order to facilitate comparisons among diverse sources, the congruence between independent sources is considered as a means of enhancing the reliability of the description of processes or narratives, whereas incongruence or contradiction warrants cautious consideration. The credibility and accuracy of these different sources often required evaluation, frequently drawing upon the reliability of corroborating statements made at different points in time. In sum, the thematic comparison frequently provided examples that could be employed to illustrate a specific relationship transformation process, necessitating a justification for their inclusion.

During the *sociological conceptualization*, the coded mechanisms were sorted, with an aim to select the most pertinent mechanisms for each temporal period, arena, and stage. Furthermore, relevant sub-mechanisms were identified. Notably, this phase represented a challenging aspect of the analysis, distinctly marked by my interpretive input into the processes. The selection of mechanisms and sub-mechanisms hinged upon several criteria, including the frequency of mentions across diverse texts, the congruence of the statements, and the comparison between different phases. The different mechanisms are summarized as figures at the conclusion of each empirical sub-chapter.

To a limited extent, an effort was made for *theoretical generalization* within the context of the solidarity movement with Kurdistan in Germany. This was achieved by comparing the distinct processes of relationship transformation across temporal phases and assessing the varying degrees of influence exerted by different mechanisms within different arenas. This comparative analysis facilitated the discovery of distinct pathways of relationship transformation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement.

In summary, the research aims to identify mechanisms governing the transformation of relationships between the radical left and the Kurdish movement through a comprehensive cross-temporal comparison between three distinct temporal units. Throughout the analysis, I will aim to be clear in delineating between "description, narration, and interpretation" (Della Porta 2014b: 251), whether originating from the interviewees, documents, or myself as a researcher.

4. Summary

In this chapter, the research design has been presented as a mixed-method, diachronic comparative analysis of the processes governing relationship transformation. The first section addressed ethical considerations, such as the heightened risk of research triggering repression for participants. Proposed solutions included data security measures, and the refrainment from collecting security-sensitive data. Concerning the benefits of the research, it was argued that the participants should derive some advantages, with some practical steps outlined, while also raising ethical questions around immediate reciprocation. Finally, my own positionality within the field was explicated, acknowledging my prior activism and my generally favourable

disposition towards the solidarity movement with Kurdistan. I highlighted potential issues arising from this positionality, and proposed strategies, emphasizing methodological systematicity and explicitness.

The second section outlined the data collection process, encompassing three distinct methods: semi-structured expert interviews, document analysis, and participatory observation. The rationale behind each data collection method was explained, alongside the identification of potential problems. Finally, the data analysis phase was explicated, which has the goal of identifying the constituent mechanisms and sub-mechanisms shaping the process of relationship transformation between the Kurdish movement and the radical left. This analytical journey, encompassing transcription, coding, thematic comparison, sociological conceptualization and, albeit to a limited extent, theoretical generalization (Meuser and Nagel 2009: 476), was delineated, accompanied by a discussion of associated issues and potential remedies within the analysis.

Chapter IV. Historical Analysis: Solidarity Movements in (West-) Germany

This chapter wants to give an overview of the history of the radical left in Germany by means of the history of different solidarity movements in Germany. On the one hand, this chapter provides the context in which the solidarity movement with Kurdistan developed. Among others, I will introduce relevant groups and currents that will reappear in the solidarity movement with Kurdistan. On the other hand, this chapter is already a limited part of the cross-time comparison and provides us with contrast cases and their mechanisms. A limited comparison will be conducted in the conclusion of this thesis.

In the following sections, I will describe the radical left currents most relevant in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) from the 1950s onwards, and their international solidarity practice. Afterwards, I will analyse the mechanisms and processes of the transformation of solidarity movements in Germany, mainly based on the work of Balsen and Rössler (1986), Olejniczak (1999) and Hierlmeier (2006) and Haunss (2008), while some material concerning the autonomous movement will be supplemented by data obtained from my own interviews. Necessarily, there are many solidarity movements, aspects and organizations missing in this analysis, such as Nicaragua and El Salvador. I will concentrate on the most salient solidarity movements – Algeria, Vietnam, Chile, Chiapas, Palestine, and Israel – and leave out smaller instances such as the Irish Republican Movement, the Iranian revolution, Mozambique, Greece. Cuban solidarity is left out of the analysis, since the complex interconnectedness of East German and West German solidarity would require a thesis of its own. Even though one can speak of a “zero hour of internationalism” (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 31–42) of solidarity movements in the FRG after the Second World War, one should not forget the extensive and transnational proletarian internationalism preceding the war.

To highlight it, each analysis necessarily only represents fragments of the complex processes of relationship transformation between the radical left and a distant struggle or a mobilized diaspora, and a comprehensive and more systematic analysis is much needed. Nevertheless, I consider this limited analysis to be fruitful and necessary in order to be able to detect similarities and differences between these solidarity movements and the solidarity movement with Kurdistan.

1. 1950s – Peace Movement and the Algeria Solidarity: Zero Hour of Internationalism

After the Second World War, there was nothing left of the proletarian internationalism of the communists and socialists during the Weimar Republic. This hour zero of internationalism was just one aspect of the state of the left in Germany: leftist organizers and politicians were murdered in concentration camps or forced into exile, the organizations and traditions were crushed and analysis of imperialism and colonialism forgotten (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 38). In the FRG, the first tendency of anti-imperialist agitation can be found in the small ‘Ohne-Uns Bewegung’³³ which contested the remilitarisation of Germany (Legrand 1987) and the ‘Kampf dem Atomtod’³⁴ campaign against the nuclear armament of the FRG (Rupp 1984). In terms of

³³ Without-Us Movement.

³⁴ Fight the atomic death campaign.

solidarity, there was rather a standstill than a movement (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 43–62). The first small solidarity movement in the FRG developed around the Algerian War.

From 1954 until 1962 the 'Front de Libération Nationale' (FLN)³⁵ fought a guerrilla war against the French occupation. The French army answered with a scorched earth policy, massacres, systematic tortures, napalm bombs and enforced disappearances. Due to a military weaker position, the FLN pursued a strategy of internationalisation of the war and operated in France as well as in other countries such as Germany. Even though contested, the FLN promoted a pan-Arabic, social-revolutionary agenda (Revere 1973), which led to the creation of solidarity committees around the world (Byrne 2016: 41). In Germany, Algerian Solidarity became not the main focus of the left, but rather a continuation of the peace movement. In total, no more than 300 people were actively engaged in Algerian solidarity (Leggewie 1984) coming from different currents, ranging from the tradition of proletarian internationalism followed by communists, socialists and Trotskyists, to the humanitarian and pacifist approach of Christians and intellectuals. Likewise, the main groups responsible for organizing international solidarity varied widely from the 'Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund' (SDS)³⁶, the 'Naturfreundejugend'³⁷, and 'Die Falken'³⁸ to the base committees of the trade unions. Leggewie differentiated between the groups of supporters: propagandists, activists and brigadists (Leggewie 1984: 172). The propagandists were journalists who reported the atrocities of the Algerian War in the national media. A newspaper called 'Freies Algerien'³⁹ was created, which published 23 issues from 1959 until 1962 and published FLN documents, reports of the war and articles concerning the involvement of the FRG in the war (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 82–83). Other parts of the repertoire included awareness-raising work such as a travelling exhibition or the translation of theoretical work, such as those produced by Fanon⁴⁰. In 1960 and 1961, the 'Algerian Days' took place, where information events and other actions were organized in different cities.

Yet, while there was rather little intellectual work and analysis conducted on the Algerian liberation movement, it enjoyed significant direct support. The activists consisted of people engaging in direct support for Algerians, as well as their French supporters. They organized accommodation, cars and weapons, smuggled refugees, deserters and material resources over the German-French border. This practical work included the collection of donations for an Algerian trade union organization, as well as the smuggling of French deserters to Germany and infrastructural support for the FLN meetings, where actions in France were planned.⁴¹ One of the

³⁵ National Liberation Front.

³⁶ Socialist German Student League.

³⁷ Naturefriends Youth. One of the biggest NGOs worldwide. Originating from the workers' movement, oriented to democratic socialism, is an environmental, cultural, recreational and tourist organization.

³⁸ Socialist Youth of Germany - The Falcons. Children's and youth association related to the SPD.

³⁹ Free Algeria.

⁴⁰ During the liberation struggle, in 1961 one of the most important theoretical works of anti-colonialism came into being: Frantz Fanon's 'The Wretched of the Earth' (1963). Jean-Paul Sartre summarized the proposed third world solidarity as follows: "This is what Fanon explains to his brothers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America: we must achieve revolutionary socialism all together everywhere, or else one by one we will be defeated by our former masters." (Sartre 1963: 10). It was not until much later, with the 1968 movement, that Fanon was more broadly recognized by the left in Germany and became one of the most important liberation theorists for the radical left in Germany (Hierlmeier 2006: 39).

⁴¹ The fight in the metropole's strategy of the FLN was to attack the French national economy by sabotage of infrastructure and supply chains. This led to the first terrorist process in the FRG, where a counterfeit money campaign was discovered, which should have targeted the French currency circulation and was supposed to cause a financial crash in France (Leggewie 1984: 129).

most effective campaigns was the 'Rückführungsdienst'⁴²: Over 100,000 Germans had fought for the French Foreign Legion, and since 1954, also in Algeria. They had to do the 'dirty work' and were themselves treated inhumanely. Building on this dissatisfaction, solidarity activists in Germany built up a conspiratorial campaign for desertion. Soldiers who had deserted provided activists with the field addresses of German foreign legionnaires. Activists composed personal handwritten letters, explaining how foreign legionnaires could escape. The deserters were welcomed at German airports and reported the atrocities of the war. Over 20,000 letters were written during this campaign with 4,000 German legionnaires deserting (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 75–78). Finally, the brigadists were the people who smuggled weapons for the FLN to Algeria or Morocco or were skilled workers who went to Morocco to build up arms production for the FLN. In general, there was a relatively open opportunity structure in Germany for the Algerian Solidarity. Officially aligned with France, the German government tolerated the political leadership of the Algerian liberation movement on German soil. The FLN even maintained an unofficial office in the Tunisian embassy. The actions of the solidarity groups were implicitly tolerated, provided there was no violence (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 78).

Mechanism in the Solidarity with Algeria

Leggewie mentions two impulses to form solidarity groups with Algeria: Firstly, there were 4,000 to 6,000 Algerians in the diaspora in Germany, among which were a considerable number of cadres of the FLN (Leggewie 1984: 171). The already *mobilized diaspora* agitated in Germany, sought allies and support. Secondly, the role of the FRG as a *hinterland* for the support groups of the FLN in France came about due to mere spatial proximity and the relatively open opportunity structure (Leggewie 1984).

One important mechanism concerning the Transnational Arena is *internalization*. In their propaganda work, solidarity activists denounced Germany's role in supporting and maintaining the Algerian War. The propagandists often highlighted the financial support to France, the deportations of Algerians to France, the rejection of asylum for members of the liberation movement and the German state's financial recognition of services carried out in the Foreign Legion. The solidarity groups criticized the German government not only to support the Algerian liberation movement, but also to stand in opposition to the conservative state with its anti-communist doctrine (Leggewie 1984: 180). Additionally, in times when class struggle stagnated or even decreased in Germany, the building of relationships with the Algerian liberation movement provided an *attribution of opportunity*, or the hope that revolutionary change could be possible.

In the Inter-Movement Arena, *ideological tensions* evolved around the use of violence. The costly struggle granted the Algerian liberation movement a heroic image elsewhere in the postcolonial world (Byrne 2016: 2). In contrast, German solidarity groups did not engage in such romanticization. However, tensions arose between their own policy of strictly rejecting violence in Germany and the support of a liberation movement, which even used terrorist means against uninvolved citizens (Leggewie 1984). In the face of their own war experiences, most leftists were or became pacifists, while recognizing the right of the liberation movement to protect itself. The ideological tension was temporarily resolved by the regionalisation of the question of violence

⁴² Return Service.

and the strategy of non-compliance with the internal affairs of the liberation movement. Regionalisation meant that in the east-west relations non-violence was demanded, whereas in the context of the North-South relationship, violence was legitimated (Leggewie 1984: 181). The non-compliance strategy with the internal affairs of the liberation movement meant an orientation towards direct aid. Nevertheless, this strategy resulted in a shock after liberation, since fierce in-fights broke out within the liberation movement. The result was a complete break-up of solidarity relations (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 87). Instead of recognizing, analysing, and disputing the internal debates and conflicts of the Algerian movement, their possibilities and limitations, an impenetrable black box was created. Even though Algeria became the centre of the Non-Aligned Movement, nationalized key industries and supported the 'Frente Polisario' in Western Sahara, Algerian solidarity was never an important topic for the left in Germany afterwards (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 92–93). Nevertheless, Algerian solidarity paved the way for solidarity movements such as Vietnam. In sum, Algerian solidarity was a medium of the "de-provincialization" of the FRG (Leggewie 1984: 169) and the "prototype of West German internationalism" (Leggewie 1986: 3).

2. 1960s – '68 Movement and Vietnam Solidarity: The Internationalist Awakening

With the Vietnam solidarity movement, internationalism became a relevant factor in the left in Germany again. It became the crystallization point or even a myth (Wischermann 2018) for a new politicized youth. Throughout the 1960s, within the peace and student movements, internationalism gained theoretical and practical relevance. Even more so: internationalism and the '68 movement formed a unity and must be analysed together (Hierlmeier 2006: 23). The solidarity movement with Vietnam gave rise to an anti-imperialist movement, which found its peak in the 1970s (Haunss 2008).

The starting point of the Vietnam War was French colonial rule. After the First Indochina War from 1946 to 1954, although the French colonial army capitulated, the 'Việt Minh' had to agree to a division of the country (Olejniczak 1999: 96). After the defeat of the French colonial regime, the USA took control of South Vietnam. In December 1960, the 'National Liberation Front' (NLF)⁴³ was formed in South Vietnam, known in the West simply as the 'Vietcong'. In 1964, the United States of America (USA) began bombing North Vietnam and the number of US troops stationed in Vietnam increased rapidly, from 50,000 to more than 500,000 three years later (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 134–35). In 1973, the US administration was forced to sign a peace plan, however the war and terror continued. Finally, on the 30th April 1975, the capital of Sài Gòn was captured by the NLF. The first phase of the anti-Vietnam War protests in Germany took place between 1965 and 1969. The solidarity movement with Vietnam in the FRG rested on two pillars from the domestic opposition: First, students and especially the SDS⁴⁴ and, secondly, the 'Ostermarschbewegung'⁴⁵, which fought against militarisation, nuclear armament and later against the emergency laws. In both movements, activists from the Algerian solidarity movement were active (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 116), complementing and strengthening one another. The 'Ostermarschbewegung' was a

⁴³ Mặt trận Dân tộc Giải phóng Miền Nam Việt.

⁴⁴ See above. The SDS was originally founded as a student organization of the 'Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands' (SPD) | 'Social Democratic Party of Germany'. Yet, with growing anti-imperialist self-understanding, the SDS broke away from its mother party. The SDS became the centre of Critical Theory and Marxist analysis (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 121–23).

⁴⁵ 'Easter March Movement', later 'Kampagne für Abrüstung' | 'Campaign for disarmament' and finally 'Kampagne für Demokratie und Abrüstung' | 'Campaign for democracy and disarmament'.

single purpose movement in its beginning, but parallel to the increasing numbers of demonstrators, from 1,000 in 1960 to 130,000 in 1965, the number of issues addressed by the movement widened (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 117–19). In 1966, the first Vietnam committees were founded in order to create a broad unity of action with liberals and social democrats (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 119–20). The second pillar of Vietnam solidarity was the SDS. In 1965, the SDS decided at its 20th general conference to give students the opportunity to respond to the war in Vietnam (Olejniczak 1999: 95–96). Stepwise, during the first phase of the Vietnam solidarity movement, new forms of actions were introduced, including a sit-in strike in front of the America House in Berlin, teach-ins, ‘happenings’, and illegal poster campaigns. These actions were criminalized by the public and politicians. The students’ Vietnam solidarity finally reached its peak with the ‘International Vietnam Congress’ held in February 1968 with 5,000 participants from almost all over Europe (Olejniczak 1999: 99). Thereafter, the SDS was dissolved, among other reasons, due to the fact that many activists joined the newly founded ‘K-groups’.

After the Vietnam Congress, the programmatic commitment to anti-imperialism formed an ideologically unifying bond among all groups of left-wing radical provenance in the 1970s in Germany (Haunss 2008: 511). The discussions about anti-imperialist strategy became increasingly relevant and triggered the development of different currents and eventual fragmentation.⁴⁶ The following section introduces the popular front strategy, the people’s war strategy, and the urban guerrilla strategy (Haunss 2008), since they were the most relevant and partly relevant in the Kurdistan solidarity.

The Popular Front Strategy: The supporters of the ‘Ostermarschbewegung’, opted for a broad-based alliance of action in solidarity with the Vietnamese liberation struggle. A broad coalition was formed, which included trade unionists and social democrats, Christians of the Protestant Church, the ‘Deutsche Kommunistische Partei’ (DKP)⁴⁷ as well as young people from youth associations such as the ‘Initiative Internationale Vietnam Solidarität’ (IIVS)⁴⁸. In order to preserve its “broad alliance capability” (Olejniczak 1999: 103), only individual members organized themselves in the IIVS, since parties and organizations could not become members. Due to its international contacts, the IIVS became an important supporting organization of the Vietnam liberation movement. At the end of 1969, it initiated a Vietnam Day, in which 40,000 people participated (Werkmeister 1975: 93–96). The IIVS followed an anti-imperialist popular front strategy, which strived for a unified socialist world system, an international working class and national liberation movements against imperialism. In the metropolises, the main aim was to expose the imperialist character of the USA and the FRG, and to organize solidarity with the national liberation movements (Haunss 2008: 512). This alliance’s actions targeted the government and were public-oriented, including calls for US soldiers to desert, Vietnam hearings and information events. The IIVS was also connected to the Vietnamese students and organized trips for delegates of the liberation movement (Haunss 2008: 512). A growing number of Vietnamese students (approximately 1,500 in Germany) joined the protest movement, became

⁴⁶ Additionally, more human rights-oriented groups emerged: influenced by the pictures from Vietnam, many people saw the need to practically assist the victims of the war. As a result, new organizations and initiatives emerged during this period, such as the German section of ‘Terre des Hommes’, the ‘Oberhausen Peace Village’ and ‘Hilfsaktion Vietnam’ | ‘Relief action Vietnam’. They focused on material and medical aid, rejected US politics and were open-minded and friendly towards the NLF.

⁴⁷ The German Communist Party.

⁴⁸ Initiative Internationale Vietnam Solidarität.

a target of the migration regime of the FRG and the regime in South Vietnam, and consequently formed a 'Komitee zur Wahrung der Rechte der Vietnamesen in der BRD'⁴⁹ (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 230–31). The solidarity movement peaked in 1972, when 100,000 people were mobilized in the FRG in opposition to the US Army's bombing campaign in Vietnam, and its use of mines in the country's harbours. The IIVS continued their work until the signing of the peace agreement in 1973, even though the war continued until 1975.

People's War Strategy: In the beginning of the 1970s, disillusioned by Soviet socialism, new Maoist organizations emerged, such as the 'Kommunistische Bund Westdeutschlands' (KBW)⁵⁰ and 'Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands-Aufbauorganisation' (KPD-AO).⁵¹ The so-called K-groups, were regionally-oriented, hierarchically-organized, and often expected a high level of commitment and discipline from its members. The KBW had a maximum of 7,000 members, while the whole movement at its peak in 1977 included 20,200 activists (Haunss 2008: 525). They pursued the people's war strategy, which, based on Mao Zedong's three worlds theory⁵², not only characterized the Soviet Union as a form of socialist imperialism, but also imputed to the USSR an aggressive role in world politics similar to the USA (Haunss 2008: 512). As a consequence, the groups understood themselves as part of the proletarian world army against "imperialism, colonialism and hegemonism" (Haunss 2008: 512). In 1972, the 'Liga gegen Imperialismus'⁵³ was formed, a mass organization of the KPD-AO with the slogan "Everything for the victory of the fighting Vietnam". The 'Liga gegen Imperialismus' claimed to have had 200 Vietnam Committees in the FRG, which organized demonstrations and congresses (Haunss 2008: 513). Contrasting understandings of anti-imperialism were a central distinguishing feature between the organizations, and consequently tensions arose with other groups. The fragmentation of Vietnam solidarity became visible on the occasion of the visit of the South Vietnamese dictator Thiệu in 1973: The KPD-AO, split from a demonstration and occupied the city hall of Bonn and hoisted the flags of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the NLF on the building (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 235). All other organizations distanced themselves from this action, including the Vietnamese negotiating delegation in Paris, triggering massive repression against the 'Liga gegen Imperialismus'.

Urban Guerrilla strategy: Anti-imperialism and the case of Vietnam can be understood as both the founding and the justification process of the 'Rote Armee Fraktion' (RAF)⁵⁴ in the early 1970s (Haunss 2008: 513). In 1972, the group targeted, among others, the headquarters of the Fifth US Corps in Frankfurt, while the letter confessing responsibility for the action ended with Ernesto Guevara's call to 'Create two, three, many Vietnams!'. In the beginning, the urban guerrillas linked the Vietnamese liberation struggle with its criticism of US-imperialism and derived the legitimacy of the armed liberation struggle from this. The task of a "revolutionary youth movement" was seen in the struggle against imperialism which implied the struggle against NATO as well as West German imperialism (Olejniczak 1999: 100). Anti-imperialism was also central for

⁴⁹ Committee for the Defence of the Rights of the Vietnamese in the FRG.

⁵⁰ Communist League of West Germany.

⁵¹ Communist Party of Germany - Assembly Organization.

⁵² The People's War Strategy was actually proclaimed by Lin Biao, while the Three Worlds Theory was canonized after Mao's death, proclaiming an alliance between the Third World and the Second World (including Europe) against US-Imperialism and the social-imperialism of the USSR (Böke 2007: 99).

⁵³ League Against Imperialism.

⁵⁴ The Red Army Faction.

the other two larger urban guerrilla groups, the 'Revolutionäre Zellen (RZ)'⁵⁵ and the 'Bewegung 2. Juli'⁵⁶. The latter organized a failed attack against US-facilities in 1972, to protest against the resumption of the bombing in Vietnam. After the first generation of the RAF were arrested, solidarity with Vietnam receded into the background, while armed actions undertaken by the following generations were directed toward the release of prisoners (Haunss 2008: 514).

The fragmentation between the different strategies weakened the Vietnam solidarity movement, since there were no discussions between the currents, let alone joint actions. Even more, the groups and organizations declared each other the 'main enemy' and hindered one another's activities. Although the K-groups were still actively organizing actions and events on the subject of Vietnam until the signing of the peace agreement in 1973, these attracted considerably fewer activities than before (Olejniczak 1999: 102). As the Vietnam solidarity movement wound down, the left in the FRG was fragmented and Vietnam later played no role whatsoever in the German solidarity scene, since from 1973, attention began to be directed towards Chile (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 237).

Mechanisms within the Vietnam Solidarity Movement

In the Transnational Arena, as the example of Vietnam shows, the phases of the escalation of a conflict in a region and the mobilization of solidarity are not necessarily convergent. Rather, they require a readiness to pay attention to the situation in another region. Importantly, in the case of Vietnam solidarity, it was the *diffusion* of the conflict *via mass media* that triggered the solidarity movement. The first impulses for the interaction with the Vietnam War were triggered by a writers' plea in the weekly news magazine 'Spiegel', and the images of atrocities broadcast daily on television (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 127). The dependency on mass media was a crucial factor in triggering solidarity with Vietnam and in determining its form: for whom and on which scale a solidarity movement forms, is triggered by the spread of information via state owned or private media organizations. Without the diffusion of the war in Vietnam through mass media, the formation of a solidarity movement with Vietnam would have been unthinkable. As a reflection of this dependency, a recurring repertoire of solidarity movements is the establishment of alternative media, especially region or country specific newspapers.

The second important mechanism of Vietnam Solidarity in a Transnational Arena was the *internalization* of seemingly external conflicts. Vietnam was a catalyst that allowed for power relations in the FRG to be reconfigured (Siepmann 1984: 125). By means of the Vietnam War, political and social contradictions were discussed, which were no longer seen as political mistakes, but as structural contradictions.⁵⁷ In 1965, the Vietnam action week was organized with the title 'Was kümmert Meier der Mekong?'⁵⁸ – inquiring about the relation between Germany and the Vietnam War. Vietnam was a trigger and amplifier for contention within the FRG. Notably, Vietnam remained an issue for the non-parliamentary opposition for a time, since all

⁵⁵ The Revolutionary Cells.

⁵⁶ The 2nd June Movement.

⁵⁷ In particular, the contradictions between the Western freedom pathos of the liberal tradition and the repressive measures under the anti-communist global strategy became efficacious. This included the US-American intervention in Vietnam, as well as the non-recognition of the results of the Second World War (Otto 1982: 145–46). There was a complete reinterpretation of the history of the Cold War and the responsibility of Western politics for this confrontation (Otto 1982: 120).

⁵⁸ Literally translated as "What does Meier care about the Mekong?", whereby Meier is the name of an archetypical German proletarian figure.

parties represented in the Bundestag⁵⁹ supported the US Vietnam War politically, morally, and economically. Even the unions and the church were uncritical and gave their tacit consent towards the war in the beginning (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 126). It is important to note, that the internalization of an external conflict did not necessarily imply that there were no connections between the FRG and the South Vietnamese regime. However, the connection first had to be made visible.

Thirdly, in the Transnational Arena, the solidarity movement with Vietnam in the FRG was part of a worldwide movement. From the mid-1960s, considerable efforts were dedicated to *transnational brokerage* and the *transnational coalition formation* of the solidarity movement. The West-German student movement soon built relations with the opposition movement in the US, and invited its representatives to actions in Germany (Klimke 2010). One reason was to counter allegations of ‘anti-Americanism’ which were raised against the students. The ‘Westeuropäische Studentenkomitee für den Frieden in Vietnam’⁶⁰ was formed, which by 1967 already had 26 student organizations from almost all West-European Countries (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 150–51). The World Conference for Vietnam in Stockholm was attended by participants from 63 countries and increasingly served as an international hub for coordinating the anti-war movement (Wischermann 2018: 102). Moreover, the cooperation of the SDS with the Vietnamese Liberation Front was at that time organized through the NLF office in East Berlin, which facilitated the campaigns against the war (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 154).

In the National Arena, the *repression* from state forces, the countermovement, and the media was a trigger that ignited the solidarity movement. In the beginning, the actions of the SDS, such as exhibitions, film evenings, and discussions, were primarily designed to influence public discourse (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 144). In February 1966, direct violence was used by police forces against an anti-war demonstration in Berlin, during which demonstration eggs were thrown against the Amerika-Haus⁶¹. The press and politicians initiated a massive campaign against the students. This is what Boykoff (2007) calls mass media deprecation in the form of negative framing. The protesters could not understand why eggs thrown against the Amerika-Haus in Berlin were interpreted as a declaration of war against the USA, while the use of napalm in Vietnam did not cause any outrage (Olejniczak 1999: 96). Additionally, the CDU and their youth organizations organized a solidarity rally with the USA. The CDU demonstrators beat long-haired students to the train station, forced them to buy tickets to East Berlin and dragged them by the hair to the platform (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 149). This direct violence by political parties showed – from the perspective of the extra-parliamentary opposition – the fascist potential of the establishment. From January 1967, the repression intensified, and students were subjected to house searches. Finally, on 2nd June 1967, during a demonstration against the state visit of the Iranian Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the protester Benno Ohnesorg was shot by a German policeman (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 157–58). The harsh repression led to a *radicalization* of parts of the solidarity movement. First militant actions took place, such as two arson attacks on department stores in Frankfurt on 3rd April 1968, marking the starting point of the RAF. These

⁵⁹ The Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Free Democratic Party (FDP), and the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

⁶⁰ Western European Student Committees for Peace in Vietnam.

⁶¹ Amerika-Haus Berlin, was founded after the Second World War in order to provide information about the culture and politics of the USA.

actions were justified with reference to the “indifference of society towards the killing in Vietnam” (Olejniczak 1999: 100–01).

In the Inter-Movement Arena, the *attribution of similarity* became salient, between the NLF and the solidarity movement. Werkmeister argues, that there was a symbiotic relationship, since both strived to create the preconditions for socialist revolutions in the periphery as well as in the centres (1975: 266). However, soon after, the *fragmentation mechanism* within the Vietnam solidarity movement came about. Sectarianism, competition within the solidarity movement and a process of differentiation were characteristic of the movement in the second phase. The internationalism of these fragmented groups soon became functionalized and tailored “to the group needs, reflecting often the foreign policy of certain countries, such as the USSR, China or Albania” (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 221). Several ideologically-fuelled in-fights between different groups occurred, and even though they had formed Vietnam committees in the same city, they seldom worked together or formed action alliances (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 223–24). As an example, the question of the most appropriate slogan became the decisive question of *boundary activation*. The demand for “Peace for Vietnam,” as called for by the liberation movement in Vietnam, was held up by the IIVS, in order to maintain their broad alliance, while the Maoist groups opted for the slogan “Victory in the People's War!”. A noteworthy sub-mechanism was the *diffusion of ideologies* from Global South to North during the period of Vietnam solidarity. Ideologies, strategies and frames spread from the periphery to Western countries, “whereby this ‘diffusion of movement ideas’ only took place in the direction of the Third World liberation theorists and movements towards the student movements and not vice versa” (Juchler, Klein 1997). Different groups followed the ideas of Mao, adopting the people’s front strategy, while others, following Guevara, drew on focus theory and urban guerrilla tactics.

Finally, in the literature, the complete break-up of solidarity relations after 1975 is often associated with *projection* (Balsen, Rössel 1986; Wischermann, Will 2018). In contrast to a political learning process, the mechanism of projection refers to a non-recognition of the contradictions and limitations of other political movements and the transfer of one’s own ideology and desires to another movement. Throughout the thesis, I will discuss this mechanism critically. Concerning the Vietnam solidarity, the schematic division of the world into imperialist and revolutionary actors often forced the left to filter out unwanted information. The consequence of this approach was, among other things, the over-identification with liberation movements, without the necessary political learning about the contradictions and limitations of the respective movement. Occasionally, contradictions and criticism were not only faded out, but that some were actively suppressed. For example, in a translation of a text by Lê Duẩn⁶², published by the KPD-AO affiliated ‘Rote Fahne,’⁶³ passages discussing the weaknesses and deficiencies within the party were censored. In particular, the “appearance of bureaucracy, drill and functionary affectations” disappeared, because similar criticisms were raised against the KPD-AO (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 236–37). Yet, the projection in the peak phase of the solidarity movement led to an all too rapid condemnation of the developments in Vietnam after liberation. There was hardly any discussion of the problems, contradictions and possibilities that had

⁶² Cadre of Communist Party of Vietnam during the Indochina and Vietnam wars and later General Secretary of the Central Committee.

⁶³ Red Flag.

developed historically and were caused by the war (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 240). According to solidarity activist Peter Schneider, the “internationalism was always maintained only as long as it served the affirmation of one’s own ideas and conceptions” (Wischermann 2018).

3. 1970s – The Anti-Imperialist Movement and Chile Solidarity: Internationalist Fragmentation

In the 1970s, the anti-imperialist movement developed different “country solidarities”, including Chile (1973-1976), Portugal (1974-1975), Angola (1975-1977), Zimbabwe (1976-1980), and Kampuchea (1978-1980) (Haunss 2008: 511). This section will focus on the Chile solidarity movement, since it also included a mobilized diaspora. The anti-imperialist movement continued until the end of the 1980s, however, without the people’s war strategy. In the 1980s, an ‘anti-imp’⁶⁴ scene developed, which supported the hunger strikes of the RAF and followed the RAF’s strategy of forming a “West European anti-imperialist front” (Haunss 2008: 515). An important anti-imperialist congress took place in 1986 in Frankfurt. However, the anti-imperialist movement was increasingly replaced by the autonomous movement and came to an end with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In Chile, from 1970 to 1973 Salvador Allende was the first socialist to be elected to the presidential office through free elections. His election was made possible by the merger of the left-wing parties into an electoral alliance, the ‘Unidad Popular’⁶⁵. In particular, the nationalization of foreign companies initiated by Allende, sparked the protest of the German government, and led to interventions by the USA. Finally, on 11th September 1973, the Chilean socialist experiment ended with a military coup, during the course of which 3,065 people were murdered and over 40,000 arrested and tortured. 200,000 Chileans went into exile, with a large proportion fleeing to Europe. During the time of the dictatorship, the resistance continued. In the beginning, the ‘Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria’ (MIR)⁶⁶ was one of the few political organizations that engaged in militant resistance against the regime on a larger scale. During the Pinochet dictatorship, Chile became a laboratory for neoliberal politics. The Pinochet dictatorship ended when a plebiscite in 1988 initiated a transition to democracy, however the constitution from that era exists until today.

Before and during Allende’s government, only a few groups in the FRG, such as the ‘Sozialistische Büro’⁶⁷, had dealt actively with Chilean politics. In the summer of 1973, a delegation travelled to Chile and initiated the first small actions to support the ‘Unidad Popular’. In June 1973 the delegation founded the committee ‘Solidarität mit Chile’⁶⁸, however major mobilizations were not achieved (Olejniczak 1999: 125). Following the coup against Allende in 1973, a broad solidarity movement with Chile emerged: Already on 12th September, over 150,000 people protested in 64 towns in the FRG. The protests were also joined by people outside the organized left. Thus, shortly after the coup, Chilean committees were founded in about 50 West-German cities. The newspaper ‘Chile Nachrichten’⁶⁹ experienced its heyday at the end of 1973 and sold

⁶⁴ Anti-imperialist.

⁶⁵ Popular Unity.

⁶⁶ Movement of the revolutionary left.

⁶⁷ Socialist Bureau.

⁶⁸ Solidarity with Chile.

⁶⁹ Chile News.

4,800 copies per issue (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 323). Yet, the unity of left-wing forces crumbled soon after. The solidarity movement split along different anti-imperialist strategies into the 'reformist' bloc of DKP solidarity pursuing the people's front strategy, and into the 'non-reformist' solidarity, in which a wide spectrum of groups ranging from 'Spontis'⁷⁰ to hierarchical Maoists were subsumed. Strategically, some of the solidarity groups identified the main objectives of solidarity work in the FRG to lie in challenging the exertion of economic pressure on the Chilean government and providing support to workers and their trade unions. For other groups, support for the armed resistance in Chile seemed unavoidable (Olejniczak 1999: 127). Concerning the urban guerrilla strategy, the Rote Zellen (RZ) became visible for the first time following an attack against a US company⁷¹, in solidarity with the Chilean people and the MIR. In 1974, the RZ also attacked the Chilean Consulate in Berlin (ID-Archiv im IISG 1993). Subsequently, the Chilean solidarity movement was strongly characterized by competition among the fragmented left (Olejniczak 1999: 126). Only a few Chile Committees advocated support for all groups, parties and individuals persecuted by the military regime.

Soon, refugees from Chile — members and supporters of diverse groups within and beyond the 'Unidad Popular' — came to the FRG. The already mobilized diaspora became engaged in competition over analysis and strategy: for instance, over the question of whether emphasis should be given to supporting the armed resistance of groups such as the MIR, or to efforts to internationally isolate the Pinochet regime. Consequently, the existence of a diaspora did not mean a unified or homogenous force. However, most of the Chileans in the FRG were organized within the 'reformist' committees (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 354). The mobilized diaspora in the FRG also shaped the solidarity movement culturally. In particular, the movement of 'Nueva Canción', a form of political song in Latin America, characterized the solidarity movement with Chile in Germany. Music groups such as 'Inti-Illimani' and 'Quilapayún' were on tour in Europe at the time of the coup and later often performed in West Germany (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 348–50). The solidarity movement and especially the German supporters consumed, sang, and adopted many of the songs.

The year 1974 marked the peak of Chilean solidarity with a multitude of solidarity actions, such as political night prayers, blood donation campaigns, Chile action weeks in schools, actions during football games of the Chilean national team and trade union observation delegations to Chile. Despite fragmentation, the national meeting of the Chilean committees mobilized for a joint demonstration and in September 1974 over 30,000 activists came together in Frankfurt to protest against the Junta (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 345). Since there was no short-term change in the political situation in Chile, long-term strategies had to be developed. Thus, the Chile committees had discussed support for political prisoners on the one hand, and for the diplomatic, political, and economic isolation of the Pinochet regime on the other. Despite the attempts to develop a long-term strategy, the Chilean solidarity movement increasingly disintegrated (Olejniczak 1999: 126–28). At the end of the 1970s, larger Chile committees were replaced by diverse groups, partly in order to avoid the competition and disputes in the larger committees. The groups provided

⁷⁰ Literally: spontaneous. A loose movement within the extra-parliamentary left in Germany, who regarded the "spontaneity of the masses" as the revolutionary element of history.

⁷¹ International Telephone and Telegraph was active in the copper mining sector. The CIA advised the company on the transfer of large sums of money to the electoral campaign of the conservative presidential candidate and later, managers of the company even presented an 18-point program to overthrow Allende.

concrete assistance for the Chilean resistance, for political prisoners and the persecuted, as well as for the refugees living in the FRG. It was not necessarily political strategies and ideologies that shaped this form of solidarity, but rather the moral and human rights-oriented criteria (Olejniczak 1999: 128).

Mechanisms of Solidarity in the Chilean Solidarity Movement

The non-solidarization before the coup d'état can be linked to boundary activation and non-diffusion. Firstly, some currents of the left were characterized by ideological distance or boundary activation: K-groups argued that Allende's course was too reformist, and instead of implementing socialism by legal means, they demanded revolutionary strategy with the armed struggle at the centre (Olejniczak 1999: 125). Additionally, the lack of coverage of the situation in Chile in the German media hindered the development of a broad solidarity before the coup (Olejniczak 1999: 125). In other words, there was no diffusion of information about the political process in Chile via the mass media. The solidarity movement with Chile emerged once *diffusion via mass media* began to occur, and local actors began to attribute similarity in a changed context. Reports broadcasted on television, of torture, executions, and massacres, caused a strong emotional outrage. Similar to Vietnam, the dependency of the left in the FRG on mass media diffusion becomes evident. This lack of access to the mass media was, again, in part countered through the production of alternative newspapers and magazines. Additionally, the condition for an *attribution of similarity* was now given which allowed for a clear separation of friend and foe: on the one side, there was the Pinochet regime, with its brutal repression, human rights violations, and the massive support it enjoyed from the US-administration, and on the other, the socialist government of Allende, with its significant social achievements. Even more, in the FRG, conservative politicians, entrepreneurs, and the media welcomed the coup, satisfied with the end of the socialist experiment in Chile. For a short time, the fragmented left had a common object of attribution of similarity, namely the socialist movement in Chile.

Since the Chile solidarity of the left was based on the hope of a massive military resistance against the dictatorship and moral outrage at the brutal repression of the regime, new strategies had to promptly be adopted when an early success failed to materialize. In this process of maintaining relationships, *fragmentation* again became salient. In the Inter-Movement Arena, on the one hand, competition occurred between different groups active in the Chilean solidarity committees, which made a permanent effort to differentiate their own positions from those of the others. The KBW and the Trotskyist 'Gruppe Internationale Marxisten' (GIM)⁷² influenced and dominated many of the Chilean committees. The internal group conflicts hindered solidarity work and discouraged many politically unorganized activists (Olejniczak 1999: 126). Additionally, almost every West-German organization soon found its partner organization in the diaspora. The fragmented diaspora contributed, on their part, to the fragmented solidarity movement. Nevertheless, this mobilized diaspora was essential for the *mediated diffusion* of information. Among other reasons, due to the information provided by the diaspora, the discussion about Chile in the committees was conducted on a higher level, in contrast to, for instance, Algerian

⁷² Group International Marxists. Trotskyist party in the 1970s and 1980s. Merged into the 'Vereinigte Sozialistische Partei' (VSP) | 'United Socialist Party'.

solidarity. However, a more critical discussion failed to materialize because of the fragmented positions of the Chilean party organizations in exile (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 331–32).

In the National Arena, an *object shift* occurred, whereby a part of the struggle of the solidarity movement shifted to contention around the migration regime. The goal of the social-liberal government in West Germany was to allow only a limited number of selected Chilean refugees to enter the country, while the selection process was inter alia made on the basis of political criteria. The Chile Committees sent a letter of protest to Chancellor Willy Brandt, demanding that “Chilean refugees be allowed to enter through all German embassies”, and that asylum be granted without political delay (Balsen, Rössel 1986:328). The more human rights-oriented groups engaged in direct aid for the Chilean refugees in FRG.

The break-up of the solidarity relations can be summarized with reference to two key mechanisms, namely the *non-attribution of opportunity* and *strategic tensions* between solidarity with Chile and foreign policy positions. Since the Pinochet regime soon stabilized its power base, opportunities for success and effective support were seen as increasingly unlikely. The absence of spectacular victories posed a significant barrier for the resistance in Chile to mobilize broad sections of the left or the population in the FRG. Parts of the solidarity movement, for example the GIM, put aside the topic of Chile and turned towards Portugal and Spain, which seemed more urgent and promising. In addition, groups that were oriented to the foreign policy of a country increasingly faced contradictions between their solidarity actions, and the actions of the aligned nation-state. Especially the Maoist KBW, whose political role model was the People’s Republic of China, soon faced hardly solvable political tensions. In contrast to other socialist states, the People’s Republic of China had never broken off its diplomatic relations with Chile. After the coup, Chilean-Chinese economic relations even intensified. In the Chile committees, which demanded the breaking-off of the relations between the FRG and Chile, the Maoist groups faced considerable difficulties in finding convincing explanations. From 1975 on, the KBW made a political turnaround and denounced the boycott, which it had earlier demanded, as a “deviation to the right”. In Berlin, to secure the existence of the Chile Committee, the members of the KBW were expelled. Other committees broke up, among other reasons, due to these tensions (Balsen, Rössel 1986).

4. 1980s – Autonomous Movement and Zapatismo: From Anti-Imperialism to Alter-Globalisation

In 1980, an anti-militarist demonstration in Bremen, against a public swearing-in of Bundeswehr recruits, which turned into a riot, is often mentioned as the birth of the autonomous movement (A.G. Grauwacke 2019: 12). The central line dividing the anti-imperialist, left-wing radicalism of the 1970s and the autonomous movement of the 1980s, can be seen in first-person politics (Haunss 2008: 517). The subjectivist politics of the autonomous movement was pursued, according to Haunss, on three levels: the politicization of social relations, the rejection of representative politics and subcultural orientation. Following the second wave feminist slogan, that the personal is political, individual social relationships were politicized. Gender relations were often discussed internally, and autonomous women’s and lesbian groups were formed. In the autonomous movement, a congruence between political beliefs and one’s own living practices was strived for, often in the form of communes, squatted houses or similar projects

(Haunss 2008: 517–18). In particular, during the 1980s, the squatting movement served as a mobilizing structure for demonstrations and campaigns. Representative politics were rejected, to avoid the risk of speaking on behalf of groups, such as workers. Additionally, militancy and an internally-oriented focus on one's own local scene were characteristic of the autonomous movement. Organizationally, Haunss characterizes the autonomous groups as "grassroots and anti-institutional", which can be seen as an alternative to the hierarchical model that K-groups opted for (Haunss 2008: 526). Importantly, only in the 1990s, with the 'Antifaschistische Aktion/Bundesweite Organisation' (AA/BO)⁷³ was a more formalized, nationwide organizational approach attempted, which lasted for several years. Thematically, the autonomous movement has engaged in gender, anti-racist, anti-gentrification, anti-fascist, ecological and internationalist struggles.

Concerning internationalism, the autonomous groups engaged in the solidarity movement with Nicaragua and El-Salvador, which spanned a broad political spectrum from radical left to social democratic positions. Importantly, the tradition of the internationalist brigade was reinvented in this solidarity (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 441–43) and about 30,000 people from Germany went to Central America in order to support different kinds of movements, as coffee harvesters, workers for infrastructural projects or as members of guerrilla units.⁷⁴ In contrast to the anti-imperialist solidarity with Chile, the working class no longer served as a point of attribution of similarity (Haunss 2008: 514–15) and the ideological focus of the autonomous movement shifted from anti-imperialism to alter-globalization. The revolutionary subject moved away from the working class or the people to a broader and voluntaristic concept of the oppressed, or the movement from below. In consequence, attention moved "away from the politics of national liberation elites in the tricontinental world and toward the uprisings, hunger demonstrations, and looting in mass revolts" (Haunss 2008: 515). In the 1980s, the internationalist praxis of the autonomous movement consisted of summit protests, such as the action against the World Economic Summit in 1985 in Bonn, or the IMF Summit in Berlin in 1988 (Haunss 2008: 516). Importantly, during the IMF protest, anti-imperialism remained the master frame for the broad mobilization coalitions (Gerhards, Rucht 1992: 576). Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union however, anti-imperialist ideology lost its influence among the radical left in terms of informing internationalist praxis, and feminist, post-colonial and post-structuralist theories, particularly anti-globalization frames⁷⁵, became dominant within the autonomous movement. From the 1990s onwards, the main orientation point for the autonomous movement became summit protests and solidarity with the 'Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional' (EZLN)⁷⁶.

The uprising of the Zapatistas in the Mexican state of Chiapas on the 1st of January 1994, originated in the indigenous population and addressed its appeals to the globalization-critical left worldwide. Indeed, Olesen suggests that "the transnational interest generated by the Zapatistas is matched by no other comparable movement in the post-cold war period." (Olesen 2013: 1277).

⁷³ Antifascist Action/Federal Organization.

⁷⁴ The solidarity movement with Nicaragua grew after the victory of the revolution on 19th July 1979, and in its heyday during the mid-1980s, it consisted of over 450 active, autonomous groups. These were joined by church and trade union groups, as well as an increasing number of groups promoting town twinning.

⁷⁵ In my Master Thesis, I differentiate between ideology transformation, which is a process over a longer period, including political learning, socialization and usually is transmitted via organizations and frame transformation, which is a faster process, and is usually transmitted via mass media (Reinhardt 2016).

⁷⁶ Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

Soon a transnational Zapatista Network developed (Olesen 2004: 89). In 1996, the EZLN organized an 'Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism' whose goal was to encourage networking among groups that reject neoliberalism, and share the Zapatistas' concept of self-determination. Autonomous groups from Germany mobilized to participate, leading to a European preparation meeting in Berlin attended by 1,000 activists from 26 West European countries (Dietze 2017:150–151; Peters 2014: 236). The transnational solidarity movement included three broad currents, ranging from organizations with a focus on human rights, organizations with concrete projects, to organizations of the radical left, especially those informed by anarchist and autonomous ideology (Olesen 2013). A great number of mainly European, and US-based civil society actors engaged in the transnational relationship transformation, leading to the formation of the transnational network 'Peoples Global Action' (PGA) (Olesen 2013). In Germany, however, the PGA was weakly integrated in local grassroots movements and among autonomous groups (A.G. Grauwacke 2019: 361). The 'Ya Basta' network was formed in 1996, connecting individuals and groups working in the field of Zapatista Solidarity (Gruppe B.A.S.T.A. 2021). In the 'interim', an important clandestine journal of the autonomous scene, after 1994, EZLN was widely supported (Dietze 2017: 452). While articles discussing the EZLN steadily declined over the 1990s, it remains as one of the most enduring internationalist topics in the journal and individual contributions to Zapatismo can be identified up until 2006 (Dietze 2017: 152). While it is difficult to speak of international solidarity with the EZLN as a persistent movement, the topic has become normalized into the reference canon of the radical left in Germany. In the following years, solidarity was mainly expressed by buying coffee from cooperatives in Chiapas. Individual activists often went to Chiapas for short-term stays, which was, however, criticized by the radical left as political tourism. It was only in 2021, when a large delegation of different indigenous groups from Mexico came to Europe, under the slogan 'La gira por la vida'⁷⁷, that the movement gained a small upswing.

In the 'interim', the number of calls for protests against summits increased sharply over the course of the 1990s, while international solidarity became less relevant by the turn of the millennium. The autonomous movement mobilized for summit protest⁷⁸ in Cologne, Prague, Goteborg and Genoa, without necessarily engaging in relationship transformation or coordination through coalitions (A.G. Grauwacke 2019: 363). However, this kind of 'Gipfelhopping'⁷⁹, and the repeated mobilizations against summits without a clear long-term strategy or programme beyond anti-neoliberalization, have drawn frequent criticism (Peters 2014: 245). In 2007, the anti-G8 protest in Germany, was the main mobilization event, over the course of which, the post-autonomous 'Interventionistische Linke' (IL)⁸⁰ emerged, today consisting of around 1,000 activists in around 30 local groups. From the beginning, the IL developed out of loose exchange, and over structured discussion into a binding organizational structure (Deycke 2021: 396). Additionally, the anti-national and post-autonomous '...Ums

⁷⁷ The tour for life. The aim was to forge alliances for an 'International of hope' against the neoliberal system.

⁷⁸ Summit protests are a strategic adaptation of the social movement repertoire to the double-shifting of decision-making power to the international arena: Firstly, the powers of national parliaments are overridden by the European Union or by multilateral international agreements, and secondly, summit meetings serve as key events where neoliberal programmes are deliberated (Della Porta, Teune 2022).

⁷⁹ Summit-hopping.

⁸⁰ Interventionist Left.

Ganze! Kommunistisches Bündnis' (uG)⁸¹ was formed over the course of the G8 protest and which is still active until today. Post-autonomous groups, in contrast to other more clandestine autonomous groups, tend to be engaged in more personalized public relationship work. The IL, for instance, works in a broader coalition with civil society actors and encourages civil disobedience instead of militant actions.

Mechanisms of Solidarity in the Solidarity Movement with the EZLN

In contrast to the other solidarity movement, it is harder to detect mechanisms, since there are often limited or partial analyses of autonomous internationalism and the solidarity movement with the Zapatistas in Germany. Therefore, these mechanisms only can be interpreted as first suggestions, and must be verified on the basis of new analysis and studies. Some of these mechanisms include the *projection* of the Zapatista movement (Deycke 2021: 397) and *coalition formation* "across power differences by critiquing existing power dynamics" (Andrews 2010: 148).

In the Inter-movement Arena, the autonomous movement quickly *attributed similarity* with the Zapatista movement. In the 'interim', the Zapatista uprising was seen as a new phase of internationalist, revolutionary mobilization: "the first post-Bolshevik uprising ... and thus marks a milestone in the development of worldwide revolutionary movements" (Dietze 2017: 150). Thus, the Zapatista uprising was a signal of hope, which was also reflected in books published at the time, such as 'Chiapas and the International of Hope', which reported the 'Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism' in the German language (REDaktion 1997). Their attempt to put emancipatory ideas into practice and to locate their own conditions globally made the Zapatistas internationally connectable. The Zapatista understanding of politics includes an anti-avant-garde attitude, as well as a rejection of hierarchical organization, state-oriented reformism, the party as a form of organization, and the pursuit of state power (Steger 2014). In particular, it advocated for the establishment of autonomous self-government on the basis of council democracy, which resonated with grassroots understandings and the rejection of representative politics among autonomous groups. Additionally, the slogan 'preguntando caminamos'⁸² captured the autonomous prioritization of practice over ideological work. In sum, "loose organization, emphasis on actionist politics, and little theoretical foundation" (Dietze 2017: 152) were the main points of attribution of similarity. Importantly, at least within the autonomous movement there was a *normalization* of solidarity with the Zapatistas and in contrast to other solidarity movements, there did not appear to be any fragmentation.

In the context of this study, relations between the Zapatista and PKK solidarity movements have been characterized by *competition*. In the 'interim', the journal of the autonomous scene, in the beginning of the 1990s several articles directly supported or at least discussed the PKK. However, after 1994, the attention shifted in favour of the EZLN (Dietze 2017: 452). One long-term solidarity cadre recalled their comrades shifting from Kurdistan to Zapatista solidarity:

"In '94, there was the Zapatista rebellion ... You also quickly noticed that there were somehow shifts in the field of solidarity. That suddenly people of the Kurdistan solidarity movement broke away quite a lot ... I found that quite shocking at the time."

⁸¹ ...to the Whole! Communist Alliance.

⁸² While asking we walk.

Even though they have declared solidarity with one another and later also formed deeper relationships, competition between the Zapatista and PKK solidarity movements in the FRG emerged. Reasons for this competition and the shift towards solidarity with the EZLN, were seen by my respondents in the lack of resources and projection. Firstly, the *limited resources* and attentiveness of the autonomous movement encourage competition. While the autonomous movement was able to mobilize relevant numbers for summit protests, it was frequently criticized internally, as well as by other radical left currents for its ‘nomadic character’, which had the tendency of moving from one protest to the next, without creating lasting organizations. Concerning internationalism, the network structure of the autonomous movement, with its higher fluctuation, was able to form relationships with the Zapatistas by delegations or political travel, without, however, being able to maintain these relationships beyond ‘fair trade’ cooperation. Secondly, in contrast to the Kurdish movement, solidarity with the Zapatistas had no direct consequences for the activists in the FRG, such as repression. The same solidarity activist argued:

“Here the repression was high and suddenly a movement in Mexico revived, and they were now the ne plus ultra ... Sure, the [Zapatista] movement is good and important, but we're not at a soccer game, changing our team when another is winning.”

The existence of the mobilized diaspora created the possibility for direct relationship formation but also triggered the threat of direct repression and the emergence of political tensions. A Kurdish cadre argued:

“Perhaps it is easier to show solidarity with [the Zapatistas] than with Kurdistan because they don't live in your country, you can romanticize and idealize and project everything, all your ideas there. With the Kurds [this] is the case, they also live here in Germany, they are your neighbours. And then you also see that they are also normal people like everyone else. They strive for ecology, freedom, and democracy, but they have contradictions too. And that is an important factor. You see them more realistically, or see contradictions.”

In other words, the possibility of *projection* might be greater, when there is no mobilized diaspora, according to the activist. This aspect of the mechanism of diaspora mobilization and relationship transformation will be discussed further in the empirical analysis. To sum up, in the autonomous movement, solidarity with Kurdistan and the Zapatistas has been a source of competition, with the EZLN receiving increasingly more attention than the PKK-led Kurdish movement.

5. 1990s – Antideutsche and Israel Solidarity: Internationalist Polarization

While anti-Zionism had been the prevailing ideology throughout the 1970s and 1980s in the left in West-Germany, new pro-Israeli voices such as the Antideutsche⁸³ current appeared during the 1990s, criticising anti-Semitism among the German Left (Wyss, Moghadam 2018). Even though the Antideutsche current eventually declined in the mid-2000s, it affected the character of internationalism among the radical left well into the second decade of the twenty-first century. In this respect, the German Left is almost unique among its European counterparts, where pro-Israel voices are seldom heard (Wyss, Moghadam 2018: 2), except for small currents in Austria

⁸³ Anti-German.

and Sweden. In contrast, pro-Palestinian solidarity movements have emerged e.g., in Italy, France, Denmark, Great Britain, Catalonia and the United States.

The relationship towards Israel experienced two major ideological shifts after the Second World War. I will here only briefly mention the first shift, focusing on the mobilized Palestine diaspora in the FRG, and concentrate on the second ideological shift. In the years immediately following the Second World War, the issue of Zionism was largely ignored by Germany's political Left (Wyss, Moghadam 2018: 3). In the beginning of the 1950s, however, the attitude of the German Left toward Jews began to favour generally pro-Israeli attitudes. Ten years later, however, increasingly more voices criticizing Israel emerged among the West German Left (Prestel 2019). For a large part of the student New Left, the Six-Day War marked a radical turning point in Israeli politics. Already in September 1967, the SDS was one of the first organizations to undergo a radical anti-Zionist transformation. Over the course of 1969, a close alliance between left-wing students and Arab Fatah supporters living in the FRG developed into an integral part of international solidarity (Kloke 1994). In the FRG, political repression was increasing, triggered by the Palestinian 'Black September Organization' (BSO)'s⁸⁴ deadly attack on the Israeli Olympic team in Munich in September 1972. The deportation of hundreds of alleged or actual supporters of the Palestinian liberation movement, as well as the ban on Palestinian Student and Worker unions,⁸⁵ decreed by the Federal Ministry of the Interior in October 1972, was perceived by the radical left as a warning signal to all workers (Kloke 1994). The repression of the German authorities pushed the left to engage in extensive relationship formation and legal aid, which were accompanied by demonstrations, press releases and the distribution of agitation brochures. In early October 1972, several thousand people demonstrated in Dortmund against the tightening of the law on foreigners⁸⁶ (Kloke 1994).

In the late 1980s, the influence of the traditional pro-Palestinian groups had begun to wane (Wyss, Moghadam 2018). Until this point, the anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian activism persisted, but were challenged by criticism of anti-Semitism. With the Antideutsche, a left-wing current arose, for which anti-Semitism and support for Israel would become a core tenet of their ideology. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and growing nationalist mobilization, the Antideutsche emerged as part of the Left's campaign against German reunification (Hanloser 2004). Its membership derived on the one hand from the remnants of the KBW, and on the other hand from 'Radikale Linke'⁸⁷, which emerged in early 1989 in Hamburg and stood in opposition to the Green Party's plans to join the governing coalition (Wyss, Moghadam 2018: 12–13). Adherents of the Antideutsche current warned that a reunited Germany, with a resurgence of German nationalism and neo-Nazism would pave the country's way to regain its hegemonic position, which might lead to the establishment of a Fourth Reich (Hagen 2004: 11–19). Demonstrations such as 'Nie wieder Deutschland'⁸⁸ held in Frankfurt am Main on the 12th May 1990, drew a crowd of 10,000 people from the wider leftist movement. During the 1990s, small

⁸⁴ Munazzamat Aylül al-aswad.

⁸⁵ The 'Generalunion Palästinensischer Studenten' (GUPS) | General Union of Palestinian Students and the 'Generalunion Palästinensischer Arbeiter' (GUPA) | General Union of Palestinian Workers.

⁸⁶ Ausländergesetze.

⁸⁷ Around 1989, leftists from the Green Party, KBW, and members of the editorial staff of the newspaper Arbeiterkampf (Class struggle, Today: Analyse und Kritik | Analysis and critique) and the magazine konkret came together to form the Radikale Linke (Lee 2009).

⁸⁸ Germany – Never Again.

groups associated with the Antideutsche emerged all over unified Germany. However, within the radical left in Germany, they were never more than a larger minority (Peters 2014: 95), which nevertheless has had a long term influence, in particular, on the internationalism of the autonomous movement. Over the years, the Antideutsche refined their ideological position by dissenting from the dominant opinion of the radical Left. The Gulf War of 1990/1991 helped to consolidate the Antideutsche current around the perceived failure of the left to side with Israel. In 1997, the communist daily newspaper 'Junge Welt'⁸⁹, split over the direction of the newspaper and the Antideutsche weekly newspaper 'Jungle World' was formed. In sum, the 1990s were largely marked by a general polarization on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

The outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000 revived the radical Left's involvement with the conflict. As a result, the German radical left split in the dispute over the Israel-Palestine conflict and left-wing antisemitism into Antideutsche and anti-imperialist tendencies. The anti-imperialist analysis – on the one hand – identified Israel as an imperialist state whose colonialism provoked Palestinian acts of resistance. The Antideutsche current, on the other hand, countered this position with a call for “unconditional solidarity” with Israel (Wyss, Moghadam 2018: 14). Antideutsche journals such as 'konkret' and 'Bahamas' later denounced every criticism against Israel as anti-Semitism, and observed a widespread anti-Americanism among the radical left in Germany. Parts of the Antideutsche current, in particular some of its younger activists, romanticize or even fetishize Israel and especially its armed forces (Wyss, Moghadam 2018: 20). While the Antideutsche have remained relatively few in number, they expanded their influence in the early 2000s, leading to a rising polarization in the radical left in Germany. Peaking around the mid-2000s, however, the impact of the Antideutsche has decreased, mainly due to internal disagreements and factionalization. Peter Ullrich⁹⁰ identifies at least three different groupings among radical Left in the mid-2000s regarding the solidarity with Israel or Palestine. Whereas the movement of the Antideutsche represents the main bastion of pro-Israel solidarity within the radical Left in Germany, opposition to Israel and pro-Palestinian sympathies remain the norm within the Left in general and are associated with what Ullrich calls the position of the traditional left (Ullrich 2008: 108–09). In between the traditional left and the Antideutsche lies a third current composed of activists that do not identify with or stand in solidarity with either the Palestinians or Israel. This current, which adopts an anti-national position, according to Ullrich, is critical of both Israel and the Palestinians (Ullrich 2008: 150). Such positions condemn Israel's occupation, while critiquing the Palestinians for their use of terrorism (Wyss, Moghadam 2018: 18). Ulrich describes their position as a “post-anti-Zionist complexity” that “sees good and evil on both sides and reflects on the dangers of left-wing solidarity with the Palestinians sliding into the trap of anti-Semitism.” (Ullrich 2008: 4). In the 2010s, solidarity with Israel and Palestine were topics that were not often engaged with in daily leftist work in order to not cause tensions. Nevertheless, the Boycott, Divestment Sanctions (BDS) campaign has brought the issue back to the surface: In a striking declaration, the Bundestag forbade all federal institutions from providing any funding or room for groups associated with the BDS campaign. A bigger strand of the left criticized such forms of repression, however fragmentation persisted too: For example, during

⁸⁹ Young World. From 1947 until 1990 the central organ of the 'Free German Youth' (FDJ) in the GDR.

⁹⁰ Not to confuse with Ulrich Peters, who also wrote on the topic of Antideutsche.

the Radical Queer March in 2019 in Berlin, a BDS block was cut out of the demonstration, leading to debates within the radical left scene.

Mechanisms of Solidarity in the Israel Solidarity

A striking double ideological transformation took place within the radical left: Gradually a change from pro-Israeli position could be observed, which by 1969 led to a complete transformation to an anti-Zionist ideology (Kloke 1990: 65–81). Later, the anti-Zionist ideology was challenged by an ideology which criticized the former position as anti-Semitism. Moreover, anti-Semitism was partly declared the main contradiction and other classical ideological strands such as anti-capitalism and anti-colonialism diminished in importance or were spurned completely. Wyss and Moghadam argue that Germany's complex relationship with Israel and Palestine is rooted in and deeply influenced by the relationship that the German post-World War II generation has with the crimes of the Nazis (Wyss, Moghadam 2018). That the most systematic and technologically advanced genocide in history was committed by the Nazi regime and supported by overwhelming parts of the German population, clearly affected Germany's post-war generation. Up until the mid-1960s, the predominant manifestation of this historical burden was philosemitic attitudes (Wyss, Moghadam 2018), while after 1967 the politics of "revolutionary innocence" became predominant (Kloke 1990: 130). Henceforth, young anti-Zionists emphasized their own innocence by locating the responsibility for the Shoah solely with the previous generation (Wyss, Moghadam 2018). The relationship with Israel and the double ideological transformation is inescapably affected by its own past: Peter Ullrich, who conducted interviews with members of the radical left, found that the thematic complex of the German past is the key reason why leftists in Germany afford such great importance to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Ullrich 2008: 190–91). Both currents project their own needs and identities onto the conflict parties, rather than conducting an analysis of the power relations in the region.

In the National Arena, the ban of two Palestine organizations in 1972 by German authorities and the deportation of Palestinians was an effort to weaken the pro-Palestine diaspora. Yet it backfired, since in the coming years an even more intensive cooperation between Palestine and German radical left organizations began (Wyss, Moghadam 2018: 7). The repression against the Palestinian *mobilized diaspora*, often enforced through asylum laws, had the effect of triggering solidarity from other currents of the radical left that began to engage more with anti-racism. Importantly, within the solidarity committees for Palestine, relationship formation between the radical left and the diaspora took place. In contrast, when parts of the Palestine community mobilized later, Antideutsche mobilized for counter demonstrations, and other radical left currents refrained from participating.

The disputes surrounding the question of solidarity with Israel or Palestine led to a severe *polarization* among Germany's radical Left. This peaked in the 2000s when there were physical confrontations between the different currents, often triggered by showing the flags of Israel, the USA or Palestine. This polarization weakened the already low internationalist practice with other peoples or groups, except for the Zapatistas. In the radical Left in general one could observe a severe polarization along the lines of Anti-Imperialists and Antideutsche, whereby small groups in the same district or city did not want to cooperate with each other, but partly fought against each other. Spatially, some cities became strongholds of the one or the other pole. One anti-imperialist active during the 1990s recalled:

“And that's where the Antideutsche faction came up strongly ... At events, you somehow only had disputes, at demonstrations you had disputes, disputes among each other ... And they also took over important points, like local radios, the media, the 'Junge Welt' was divided, for example.”

This fragmentation developed later towards a pluralistic field of positions towards Israel and Palestine, which did not lead to a critical solidarity movement for either side, but towards a general disengagement with the conflict. In general, the tone of criticism against Israel has become more moderate, particularly in comparison to other leftist movements in Europe (Wyss, Moghadam 2018: 18).

6. Summary

Ideologically, the base of internationalism in the radical left in Germany has transformed considerably over the past century. From the proletarian internationalism of the First and Second Internationals, under the slogan “Workers and oppressed peoples of all countries unite!”, internationalism was supplemented with anti-colonial struggles. Thus, besides the working class of the industrialized countries, the colonially dominated people emerged as a revolutionary subject. The Cold War gave birth to anti-colonial liberation movements worldwide, supported and armed by the Soviet Union or China, fighting against US military regimes or colonial regimes. In solidarity with the liberation movements, solidarity movements emerged in the FRG, among others with Algeria, Vietnam, and Chile. In particular, the anti-imperialist strategies of the people's front, the people's war, and the urban guerrilla strategy, have put forward the thesis that the revolution will come from the periphery and that the radical left in Germany has the task to support these liberation movements. With the emergence of the new social movements, the crisis of the real socialist states and repressive tendencies in national liberation movements that came to power, another transformation in the revolutionary subject occurred: the class-neutral 'movement'. The autonomous movement in Germany put forward alter-globalization and anti-neoliberal frames, engaged in solidarity with the Zapatistas and mobilized for summit protests. In a sense, the autonomous movement is post-ideological, since most forms of decision-making and organization are used for evaluating alliance partners.

Organizationally, solidarity movements in West Germany have often been organized in the form of solidarity committees, that is, coalitions consisting of social movement organizations and individuals. As part of their coordination and diffusion work, specialized movement journals have emerged. Occasionally, the committees have been organized by national coordination groups. Their repertoire of action has ranged from public letters, demonstrations, civil disobedience to violent attacks and assassinations. Concerning informational diffusion, the repertoire has included classic formats, such as talks, conferences, and tribunals, to more inventive awareness raising actions, such as sit-ins, protests at football games, or street theatre. Often, the mobilization targeted the FRG's international relations with the respective region, including its involvement in arms exports, economic relations, and political support. The 'Rückführungsdienst', as an exception, directly targeted the capacity of the French colonial regime, whereby activists assisted German foreign legionnaires in deserting. Transnationally, delegation trips were organized for relationship transformation, fact finding, and protection. In the case of Nicaragua and El Salvador, international brigades helped directly in the construction

of infrastructural projects or worked in agriculture. Furthermore, Balsen and Rössel summarize the characteristics of the solidarity movements until the end of the 1980s along several recurring problems: solidarity work often becomes an escape from the political reality in the FRG; the objects of solidarity are interchangeable at any time; military conflicts are overemphasized; the 'purity of doctrine' is more likely to be preserved far away than in one's own country; while the opposite of projection is often interference and paternalism; revolution is good, but it is better if others do it for us (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 531–39). Throughout the empirical analysis, some of these problems, contradictions and tensions will reoccur in the Kurdistan solidarity and will be further discussed.

The solidarity movements of the radical left in the FRG have been marked by several recurring mechanisms. In the phase of relationship formation, solidarity movements were often triggered by the *diffusion* of news about atrocities or coups *through mass media*. The Vietnam and Chilean solidarity started, when news about a massacre or considerable threats for leftist movements were reported daily in the mass media. Radical activists recognized their dependency on bourgeois media and attempted to counter it by establishing alternative media, created specifically for a certain solidarity movement. Shortly after the diffusion, an *attribution of similarity* took place. The similarity of the struggles was asserted by the radical left groups, not in the form of sameness, but as alliance partners in the fight against imperialism, neoliberalism, or antisemitism. For example, the Vietnamese people were seen as pioneers in the fight against imperialism, the Chilean people were interpreted as victims of U.S. imperialism, the Zapatistas were considered to be at the forefront of the revolt from below, and Israel was perceived as a safe haven for Jews from anti-Semitism.

During the period of relationship maintenance, the mechanisms of internalization, political learning fragmentation and diaspora mobilization can be frequently identified. The early phase of the solidarity movement was most commonly marked by *internalization*, especially when considering the case of Vietnam. Here, solidarity activities aimed at delegitimizing the FRG governments. It is important to note that the internalization of an external conflict does not necessarily imply that there were no political relations between the FRG and the respective regime, but that these connections needed to first be identified and exposed. Importantly, whether the solidarity movement was more concerned with the situation in the FRG or in Vietnam (Wischermann 2018) the strategic solution often preferred was one of trying to combine the fight against imperialism with local struggles and concerns in Germany.

In contrast to the often-claimed power imbalance of North-South relationships or the one-way road of solidarity (Herkenrath 2011: 20–21), there was a considerable diffusion of theories from the South to the North, indicating *political learning*, and implementation. During the '68 Movement, Fanon, along with Lin Biao and Ernesto Che Guevara, became the most important liberation theorists for the radical left in Germany (Hierlmeier 2006: 39). For example, the formation of movements in the Global North that adopted Maoist ideas to inform their organization and strategic practice illustrated the influence.

Despite the Algerian and the Zapatista solidarity movement, there was a serious *fragmentation* among the radical left, which was divided by differing internationalist strategies and forms of mobilization. Radical left groups pursuing the people's front, people's war and the urban guerrilla

strategies often did not cooperate or even compete with one another. In the case of the Antideutsche movement, the fragmentation even became a *polarization*, that is, not only competition between actors about strategies, but the emergence of completely opposed political assessments of a conflict. Within the autonomous movement, major splits occurred, leading to infights, and even physical confrontations. These groups' different understandings and practices of internationalism served as the boundaries dividing them from other currents in the radical left movement.

When there was a *mobilized diaspora* in the FRG, the relationship maintenance mechanisms operated differently than in times when there was no politically mobilized diaspora. First, a mobilized diaspora offered possibilities of relationship transformation, with fewer costs. Secondly, the diffusion of information from the respective country was mediated through the diaspora and sometimes triggered a deeper political learning process. Thirdly, since most mobilized diasporas were repressed by the migration regime, an objective shift occurred, where solidarity additionally had to contend with the tightening asylum system in the FRG. Finally, fragmentation within the diaspora was sometimes borrowed by the radical left, triggering similar divides in the radical left.

Finally, the relationship break-up was often triggered by the *projection mechanism*, and the related fragmentation of the radical left. As with other social movements, solidarity movements have often passed through a cyclical process, with phases of mobilization, demobilization, and latency. However, sharp breaks often occurred in the solidarity movement when the liberation movements came into power. In contrast to a political learning process, the mechanism of projection refers to a non-recognition of the contradictions and limitations of other political movements. In contrast, their own ideologies and strategies were projected onto another region, with the effect of sometimes suppressing or ignoring unwanted or inconvenient information. The "purity of the doctrine" (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 538) triggered break-up of relations when contradictions of the practices could no longer be denied, such as, when a new exploiting class emerged, instead of distributing surplus value between the wage-earners.

In short, while this chapter has served as a broad overview of solidarity movements in the post-war FRG, it does not aim to provide an exhaustive investigation but to detect key mechanisms and processes which will theoretically inform the subsequent analysis of the relationship transformation between the radical left and the PKK-led Kurdish movement. In Chapter IX, based on the presented cases, a small comparison will be conducted, and pathways of relationship transformation will be proposed.

Chapter V. Historical Background on the Kurdish Movement

This chapter outlines the history of the PKK-led Kurdish movement in Kurdistan across three temporal phases. The first section overviews the central processes within the Kurdish movement and introduces key organizations. This section relies on existing literature and emphasizes aspects pertinent to the solidarity movement with Kurdistan in Germany. However, the sections concerning the PKK's internationalism draw from my own analysis of party documents, interviews, and other sources. The second section traces the history of the Kurdish Diaspora in Germany, adhering to the same temporal structure. In contrast to the first part, the section supplements research gaps with data analysis, integrating it into the empirical analysis. Notably, this chapter also introduces elements of the interaction between the Transnational and National Arenas.

1. The History of the Kurdish Movement in Kurdistan

Many studies and books have extensively examined the PKK-led Kurdish movement, with particular emphasis on the PKK (Brauns, Kiechle 2010; Eccarius-Kelly 2011; Özcan 2006; White 2015), while a growing number of studies have also applied social movement theories to this context (Gunes 2012; O'Connor 2014; Romano 2006; Romano 2017). However, this section narrows its focus to the Kurdish movement in Bakûr and Rojava. The history of the Kurdish movement in Iran and Iraq is deliberately omitted from this discussion, as the solidarity movement in Germany shows little concern for the conflicts in these regions of Kurdistan.⁹¹ The following section shall outline key processes within the Kurdish movement, encompassing organizational and ideological transformations, the formation and transformation of the women's movement and the internationalism of the PKK.

1.1. Phase I: Striving for National Liberation

The Kurdish question (re-)emerged in the late 19th and early 20th century in the context of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. During this time, the Young Turks movement sought to establish a homogeneous Turkish nation-state, which involved committing what has been described as "genocidal ethnic cleansing" against various minority groups, including Armenians, Greeks and others (Dirik 2021: 20), while simultaneously subjecting the relatively larger Kurdish population to assimilation policies. Following the First World War, the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 initially included provisions for the creation of a separate Kurdish state, however this project was overturned after Mustafa Kemal Pascha led a successful war of independence, culminating in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (Romano 2006: 31–32). The Treaty, signed by the Kemalists and the Entente, divided Kurdistan among the nation-states of Turkey (Bakûr), Syria (Rojava), Iraq (Başûr), and Iran (Rojhilat) (see Appendix D).

Later, İsmail Beşikçi characterized Kurdistan as an international colony that lacks even an official name, a characteristic that distinguishes it from classic colonies (2004). Kurdistan exists without a designated name and with unclear borders, while the identity of the Kurdish people is forcibly suppressed. This colonial oppression manifested and evolved differently in each of these four

⁹¹ In 2022, with the uprisings in Iran, Rojhilat became a focus point. Importantly, the PKK reached Rojhilat relatively late, and is least organized in this region (Dirik 2021: xix). In any case, the history of the Kurdish movement in Rojhilat and Başûr, especially the internal Kurdish conflict with the 'Patriotic Union of Kurdistan' (PUK) and the 'Kurdistan Democratic Party' (KDP) is inseparable from the history of the other parts of Kurdistan.

nation-states, but it can be summarized as involving over-exploitation, assimilation, disenfranchisement, and in some cases, annihilation. As Burç succinctly puts it: the Kurdish experience can be characterized by “statelessness, status-lessness, denied citizenship and precarious minority” (2020: 3). In Turkey, aligned with the ideology of Kemalist nationalism, only a homogenous Turkish identity was permitted (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 36), and all aspects of Kurdish identity, language, and organizations were banned in order to promote the Turkicization of the Kurdish population (Romano 2006: 32). Kurdish uprisings against these colonialist policies ensued, but they were invariably suppressed with military force. The Dêrsîm⁹² uprising in 1937/38, for instance, was crushed, leading to what is often termed a ‘cemetery peace’. The military annihilation, coupled with policies of assimilation and denial, coerced large segments of Kurdish society into renouncing or concealing their language, identity, and culture.

The roots of the PKK-led Kurdish movement can be traced back to the burgeoning ‘68 student and labour movement in Turkey, coinciding with the successes of various anti-colonial and national liberation movements. In 1973, a group of students, predominantly from lower-class backgrounds and including both Turks and Kurds, coalesced around Abdullah Öcalan in Ankara (Dirik 2021: 25). This group brought forth the notion that Kurdistan is essentially a colony, leading to the belief in the imperative struggle for the self-determination rights of the Kurdish people. With the national liberation of Kurdistan, they also wanted to achieve a socialist Turkey. The group ventured into the villages and cities of Kurdistan, often recruiting new members through “one-on-one debates” (Marcus 2007: 35), union networks and teachers’ organizations (O’Connor 2014: 109–10).

Ultimately, on 27th November 1978, the PKK was officially established. In its founding declaration, the PKK defined Kurdistan as a colony that had to first be liberated in the initial phase of a ‘national democratic revolution’ in order to enable independent development (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 46–47). The PKK aspired to build a classless society, although the specifics of this vision remained largely abstract (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 77). According to the PKK’s analysis, Turkish colonialism was supported from the outside by imperialist forces, and from the inside by a ‘feudal-comprador’ elite. As a result, the movement sought to initially overcome this colonialism through a people’s war, forming a worker-peasant alliance and employing armed struggle as a fundamental means, before aiming to transition directly to a “socialist revolution” (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 46–47). Consequently, local feudal lords (Ağhas) and fascists were among the primary targets of attacks in the early years. Additionally, there was a background of violent outbidding with rival leftist and Kurdish organizations (O’Connor 2014: 112–13), all set within a context in Bakûr, marked by escalating political violence. During these formative years, the PKK managed to successfully mobilize significant segments of Kurdish society through dual strategy of “legal and extra-legal strategies, such armed actions and self-defence (O’Connor 2014: 124).

Following the military coup of 1980, numerous (alleged) PKK members were incarcerated (McDowall 2004: 421–22) and the resistance subsequently shifted, with one aspect manifesting within the confines of prisons, and the other transpiring in Syria and Lebanon, where a phase of intensive education and military training began (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 51–53). Initial contacts

⁹² Tunceli.

were forged with Palestinian organizations⁹³, and their resources were utilized to train guerrilla fighters for an armed struggle in Turkey. Meanwhile, PKK members also participated in fighting against Israel during the 1982 Lebanon War. This cooperation paved the way for the establishment of a permanent training camp in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Plain (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 51–52). The presence of non-Kurdish fighters among their ranks, coupled with their experiences in Palestine, is often cited by PKK members as evidence of the organization’s early internationalism.⁹⁴ Within Turkey, a pivotal moment occurred with the “great prison resistance” and death fast in the Amed prison⁹⁵ in 1982, marking the PKK’s transformation from a revolutionary group into a people’s movement (Dirik 2021: 32). In 1984, the guerrilla forces known as ‘Hêzên Rizgariya Kurdistan’ (HRK)⁹⁶ initiated their first attacks on military positions, and each successful action bolstered the PKK’s credibility and garnered greater recognition among the Kurdish population (Romano 2006: 85).

Subsequently, the rural insurgency expanded to the extent that the PKK established hegemony over the broader Kurdish movement and formed a guerrilla force comprising more than ten thousand fighters (O’Connor 2014:145, 194). In response to the PKK’s growing influence, the Turkish state adopted a dual-pronged strategy. On one front, they sought to combat the guerrilla militarily, while on the other, they aimed to intimidate the Kurdish population to deter support for the struggle (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 56). To implement the latter strategy, the Turkish state established the village guard system, which involved arming and financially compensating villagers who supported the Turkish state. These paramilitary units swelled to 76,900 village guards by 1996 (Akkaya, Aydin 1998: 72). The PKK declared the village guards and their families as targets of attack. While this was depicted as barbarism by the Turkish media, parts of the Kurdish population viewed these attacks as actions against collaborators (Romano 2006: 86–87). The PKK later admitted, with self-criticism, that the murder of the families of village guards was a mistake (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 60). Similarly, towards the end of the 1980s, there were incidents of intra-party murders of alleged informants and provocateurs. The PKK acknowledged in 1995 that these actions were serious mistakes (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 61).

In October 1986, during the 3rd Congress of the PKK in Lebanon, Öcalan consolidated his control over the party and charted the course for what he described as the transformation into “a party within the framework of national liberation” (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 57). This transformation entailed a call for party members in the guerrilla to sever ties with their own families and undergo ideological training within a rigid system of criticism and self-criticism (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 62). Furthermore, the party resolved to intensify its public relations efforts, which were to be carried out through the newly founded ‘Eniya Rizgariya Neteweyî ya Kurdistanê’ (ERNK),⁹⁷ which served as the popular front organization and was also active in Europe (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 59–60).

⁹³ Such as the Marxist-Leninist orientated ‘Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine’ (DFLP) and later the ‘Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine’ (PFLP).

⁹⁴ In fact, during the 1990s there were at least Turkish, Arab, Armenian, Persian, Lazi, Azerbaijani, Russian and German internationalists fighting with the PKK (Anonymous 1996/1997:IV. 3.).

⁹⁵ Diyarbakır.

⁹⁶ Freedom Forces of Kurdistan, later ‘Artêşa Rizgariya Gelê Kurdistan’ (ARGK) | ‘People’s Liberation Army of Kurdistan’ and finally, ‘Hêzên Parastina Gel’ (HPG) / ‘People’s Defence Forces’.

⁹⁷ National Liberation Front of Kurdistan.

During the phase of the collapse of real socialism, a de facto stalemate occurred between the Kurdish movement and the Turkish state, where neither side could decisively defeat the other (White 2015: 44). Consequently, there was an escalation of guerrilla activities along with increased repression by the Turkish state. This repression led to popular uprisings known as ‘Serhildan’⁹⁸. One such uprising was triggered when special forces of the Turkish army opened fire on thousands of grieving Kurds participating in a funeral for fallen guerrillas (Marcus 2007: 140–44). Starting in the late 1980s, the Turkish regime initiated a scorched earth policy which aimed at depopulating the war zone, resulting in entire villages being forcibly evacuated and destroyed. By 1999, the Turkish army destroyed approximately 4,000 villages, displacing several million people (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 60). In response to civilian protests, the Turkish state resorted to extrajudicial killings by “unknown perpetrators”, often linked to the informal gendarmerie secret service JITEM⁹⁹ and the Sunni counter-guerrilla Hezbollah¹⁰⁰. During the 1990s, these death squads were responsible for the deaths of an estimated 3,500 to 17,500 people (Brauns, Kiechle 2010:60; 69-70). As a result, the Turkish military systematically dismantled the guerrilla’s support network (Akkaya, Jongerden 2011: 147) forcing the guerrillas to retreat further into the Iraqi Qandil Mountains (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 138). In this context, discussions took place between Turkish President Özal, who even publicly contemplated a federal solution, and Öcalan, who for the first time shifted away from maximalist demands for an independent Kurdish state. However, after Özal’s unexpected death in April 1993, military operations escalated once more between the Turkish military and the guerrillas (Marcus 2007: 211–14). The Kurds who had fled to Europe during the phase of the scorched earth policy and the pre-existing Kurdish diaspora in Europe intensified their activities (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 74–75).

In 1995, a significant development took place with the founding of the ‘Yeketiya Azadiya Jinên Kurdistan’ (YAJK)¹⁰¹ during the first official Women's Congress. This organization was established as an autonomous political, social, and military entity within the Kurdish women’s movement. Autonomy was embraced not only within the social sector across all four regions of Kurdistan and within the diaspora, but also within the guerrilla, where women’s structures were developed. During this period, discussions centred around the break-off theory and the ideology of women’s liberation (HK 2019: 28–29). The break-off theory argued for the necessity of autonomous women’s decision-making bodies and structures as a means to break away from patriarchal power structures. The objective was to create new structures and spaces free from patriarchal influences — a break-off in the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional sense. Throughout the 1990s, the struggle for gender liberation within the movement intensified. Despite opposition from a large proportion of male members who deemed women’s liberation and a permanent women’s organization superfluous, the organized women of the YAJK insisted on continuing the struggle for women’s liberation and proceeded with the planned establishment of a women’s party, supported by Abdullah Öcalan. In March 1999, during the Women’s Congress of the

⁹⁸ Serhildan is composed of the Kurdish words ‘ser’, which means ‘head’, and ‘hildan’, which means ‘to raise’. Serhildan literally means ‘to raise one’s head’ and refers to uprisings or revolts.

⁹⁹ Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele | Gendarmerie Intelligence Organization.

¹⁰⁰ Completely separate from its Lebanese namesake.

¹⁰¹ Association of Free Women of Kurdistan.

Kurdish movement, 140 delegated women founded the ‘Partîya Jinên Karkerên Kurdistan’ (PJKK)¹⁰², which was oriented by the principle of democratic centralism (HK 2019: 30).

Regarding the internationalism of the PKK, the understanding articulated during the 5th party congress in 1995 is elucidated here.¹⁰³ The PKK advocated for the establishment of a new socialist international, alongside broad regional and international anti-imperialist alliances as its overarching goals (Anonymous 1996/1997:IV.3.). Recognizing that the relations of exploitation and oppression in colonized Kurdistan were deeply rooted in global contexts, the PKK understood that solving its particular national problem required international cooperation. The common adversary, imperialism, and a shared history of oppression formed the basis for the PKK’s internationalist approach in West Asia. In broader terms, pursuing an isolated anti-imperialist struggle for socialism would have been inherently contradictory, leading the PKK to seek allies on a global scale (Anonymous 1996/1997).

The PKK perceived its struggle for national liberation in Kurdistan as a means to support the broader universal socialist struggle, believing that a national revolution without solidarity from other (socialist) movements, and without the scope of global socialism, would be doomed to failure. To translate this commitment to international solidarity into practice, the party aimed to “take the steps to establish and lead a revolutionary socialist international” (Anonymous 1996/1997:V.). This encompassed fostering cooperation at the country, regional, and continental levels with groups and movements, whose “objective attitude oppose[d] imperialism.” In a narrower sense, all independent-democratic and socialist forces willing to contribute to their revolution and socialism were considered potential allies, and the PKK was open to providing support by offering the mountains of their country for this purpose (Anonymous 1996/1997:V.). While the PKK asserted its leadership in this international context, it did not adopt a paternalistic stance, and instead, its focus was on ideological work, with the aim of achieving ideological unity among coalition partners (Anonymous 1996/1997:IV. 1.5). While an institutionalized form of a revolutionary socialist international never fully materialized, the internationalism of the PKK during Phase I was nonetheless marked by its outreach to revolutionary movements, facilitating exchange and political learning, driven by ambition of forming a broad coalition with the Kurdish movement. The PKK’s programme in Phase I emphasized that a solution to the particular Kurdish question was inseparable from universal resistance to imperialism. Consequently, internationalism was a core concept for the PKK, entailing the pursuit of regional and global allies and asserting leadership within these relationships.

By the late 1990s, it became evident that the “strategic balance” previously achieved by the guerrilla could not transition into an “offensive to liberate Kurdistan” (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 86). The provisional cessation of hostilities was marked by the abduction of Abdullah Öcalan in Kenya in 1999 (Romano 2006: 57). During his trial, Öcalan extended apologies to the relatives of the Turkish soldiers killed in the conflict with the guerrilla, but simultaneously emphasized the legitimacy of the Kurdish struggle and conveyed a rejection of a military solution to the Kurdish

¹⁰² Women’s Workers Party. Later, Partîya Jina Azad (PJA) | Party of the Free Women.

¹⁰³ Here, I rely mostly on the translation of a group of solidarity activists who visited the PKK in 1995, and produced a book about the PKK (Anonymous 1996/1997). This source is suitable, since, at least, the internationalism of the PKK towards the solidarity movement in Germany is transmitted. A fine-grained analysis of the development of the PKK’s internationalist theorization is out of scope here, however it represents an important gap in the literature.

question for both sides (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 89). Öcalan also dismissed the notion of a separate Kurdish state and advocated for the establishment of a democratic republic (Öcalan, Peach 2000; Özcan 2006). While Öcalan received a death sentence, it was not carried out due to pressure from the European Union (EU) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), and subsequently, his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Even after his arrest, the PKK leadership continued to align itself with Öcalan's strategic and philosophical concepts, although tactical decisions were made independently (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 91–93). The enduring significance of Öcalan for the Kurdish movement remains undiminished, as demonstrated in a passage from the resolutions of the 7th Party Congress of the PKK in 2000:

“The conditions of imprisonment of our leader are an expression of the conditions in which the Kurdish people must live. His right to life is also the right to life of the Kurdish people, and his freedom is also the freedom of the Kurdish people” (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 91).

Öcalan emerged as a symbol representing the extent of oppression faced by the Kurdish people. From this point of view, the central role of his persona and the development of a personality cult around Öcalan can be comprehended in the aftermath of his imprisonment. Prior to this, Öcalan's authoritarian leadership had drawn criticism from dissenting members within the party (O'Connor 2014: 162). However, Öcalan himself later engaged in self-criticism, acknowledging that the reverence to him had assumed religious characteristics (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 67).

1.2. Phase II: Ideological and Organizational Transformation

While incarcerated, Öcalan called for an end to the armed struggle to facilitate democratization within Turkey, an initiative initially adopted by the party leadership. The PKK's transition from the armed struggle for national liberation to a programme of Democratic Confederalism led to the departure of numerous prominent guerrilla fighters (Marcus 2007: 268–91). During this 'time of crisis', three distinct lines of thought emerged, sparking intense debates and, at times, open conflicts. The first line, championed by Abdullah Öcalan, advocated for the democratic reorganization of the party based on the principles of Democratic Confederalism. The second line, representing the left, insisted on maintaining the traditional centralist structure, while the third line, positioned on the right, advocated an alliance with the USA, the KDP and the PUK (HK 2019: 34). In winter of 2003, a faction led by Osman Öcalan, Abdullah Öcalan's brother and a proponent of the right-wing perspective, broke away from the organization (Marcus 2007: 305). These internal disputes contributed to a period of clarification and stabilization within the reconfigured PKK, which, with the adoption of the ideology of Democratic Confederalism, emphasized its radical democratic and feminist elements while discarding pro-imperialist ideas (Brauns, Kiechle 2010:108, 117). Consequently, a process of democratization was initiated within the PKK's structures (Akkaya, Jongerden 2011: 148–50). Starting in 2004, the PKK resumed its armed struggle (Çakır 2018: 345).

An increasing number of scientific publications have delved into the ideological and organizational transformation that occurred within the PKK and the broader Kurdish liberation movement (Akkaya, Jongerden 2012; Brauns, Kiechle 2010; Dirik 2021; Özcan 2006; Schaber 2020). These publications, alongside the writings of Öcalan himself (Öcalan 2010; Öcalan 2012), will serve as foundational sources for this section.

The shift in ideology within the PKK and the Kurdish liberation movement unfolded notably after Öcalan's arrest. Öcalan outlined this transformation primarily in his defence writings (Öcalan 2003a; Öcalan 2003b; Öcalan 2010; Öcalan, Peach 2000) and his writings from prison (Öcalan 2007; Öcalan, Happel 2011). In these texts, the earlier focus on the national liberation struggle was discarded in favour of a radical democratic project (Akkaya, Jongerden 2012: 2). The dissolution of the Soviet Union has been interpreted as the main trigger for "questioning two central struggles encoded in real socialism: class against class and national liberation against imperialism" (Sunca 2022: 4). This paradigm shift began in the 1990s as "a long and difficult, conflict-ridden process of discussion and contention and is still ongoing" (Dirik 2021: 56). For many PKK supporters and sympathizers, the abandonment of the pursuit of an independent Kurdish state, in whose place Öcalan put Democratic Confederalism, was a profound and unsettling change. In the development of Democratic Confederalism, Öcalan drew heavily from the experiences of the Kurdish freedom struggle and other radical left movements. Additionally, Öcalan was influenced by the writings of Wallerstein, Braudel, and Bookchin (Bookchin 1987; Bookchin 1991; Jongerden, Akkaya 2013: 176).¹⁰⁴

Öcalan's ideology of Democratic Confederalism rejects the nation-state, advocates the grassroots organization of society with direct participation, and calls for the recognition of the plurality of the Middle East in particular (Öcalan 2012: 34–35). It is characterized by eight paradigms: gender liberation, youth, legitimate self-defence, ecology, democratized economy, social plurality, education and political organization (Knapp 2015: 101). I will outline the ideology of Democratic Confederalism across three primary dimensions: first, the conceptualization of capitalist versus democratic modernity; second, the critique of the nation-state; and third, patriarchy and women's revolution. Finally, I will present the strategic implications that arise from the ideology of Democratic Confederalism.

Firstly, Öcalan's writings delineate two dialectical currents in human history: 'monopolistic civilization' and 'democratic civilization', which have evolved over a span of 5,000 years. These currents manifest today as conflicting forms of capitalist versus democratic modernity. Capitalist modernity is characterized by the monopolization of economic, political, military, and ideological domains, resulting in systemic totality. It is marked by an increasing "institutionalization of power through sexism, colonialism, liberalism, imperialism, nation-state, positivism, industrialism, and ecological catastrophe" (Dirik 2021: 70). In contrast, democratic modernity is grounded in "a multitude of liberationist legacies", but must be consciously constructed and reconfigured through ongoing struggles (Dirik 2021: 71). Öcalan encapsulates this dialectical relationship in his work 'Sociology of Freedom':

"To put it more concretely: the civilization with monopolies cannot continue to exist without the civilization without monopolies. However, the reverse is not the case. That is, democratic civilization as the systematic historical flow of moral and political society can continue its existence unhindered and undisturbed without official civilization" (Öcalan 2020: 198).

¹⁰⁴ Öcalan also engages in the debate on radical democratization which ranges from Luxemburg (Luxemburg 2000: 512), via Laclau and Mouffe (Laclau, Mouffe 2001) to Hardt and Negri (Hardt et al. 2013: 102). This shift in the left-wing political debate towards a radical democratic system aims to develop "politics beyond the state, political organization beyond the party, and political subjectivity beyond class" (Badiou 2002: 95–97).

In short, modernity is the result of historically traceable struggles between the monopoly-seeking capitalist modernity and the bottom-up resistance of the components of democratic modernity (Sunca 2019).

Secondly, the PKK's departure from the goal of a united Kurdistan is rooted in Öcalan's critique of the nation-state. Öcalan identifies the transition from the matriarchal Neolithic society to the patriarchal Sumerian priestly state in the 4th century B.C. as the "Original Sin" of humanity (Akkaya, Jongerden 2012: 5). In this transition, the emergence of the state coincided with the oppression of women and the introduction of hierarchical structures into society (Öcalan 2010: 19–23). Building upon this analysis, Öcalan views the state not as something to be conquered, but as something that must become obsolete through democratization (Jongerden, Akkaya 2012: 5), asserting that "democracy increases to the extent that the state decreases" (Öcalan 2010: 289). Öcalan presents several arguments against the nation-state which developed alongside capitalism. These include the maximum concentration of power, anti-societal bureaucratization, and the homogeneity of the nation-state, which "has often led to the physical annihilation of minorities, cultures or languages or to forced assimilation" (Öcalan 2012: 10–13). Öcalan rejects both the "nationalism of the ruling nation as well as the local primitive nationalism among the Kurds", as these serve as the ideological basis of the nation-state (Öcalan 2002: 83). In essence, the ideology of Democratic Confederalism is founded on the analysis of the nation-state and its subsequent rejection.

Thirdly, the struggle against patriarchy occupies a central position within this new paradigm. Öcalan posits that "the degree of freedom in a society ... is determined by the degree of freedom of the women in it" (Öcalan 2010: 466–67). As observed by Dilar Dirik,

"with the new paradigm, women were no longer simply 'half of the nation' or 'a section' of the community but rather, alongside the youth, the driving force of the liberation of society, the radical left-wing in the democratic confederal system" (Dirik 2021: 57).

Öcalan traces the development of patriarchy back to the defeat of communal-matrial society by the Sumerian state, where gender inequality emerged in parallel with class inequality (Schaber 2020: 63–64), arguing that in several 'major sexual ruptures', women were increasingly suppressed. Consequently, Öcalan contends that true liberation is unattainable without the liberation of women, and that a new 'major sexual rupture' must be initiated to challenge male dominance:

"Indeed, to kill the dominant man is the fundamental principle of socialism. This is what killing power means: to kill the one-sided domination, the inequality and intolerance" (Öcalan 2013: 51).

Since the patriarchal and feudal structures of Kurdish society were also reproduced within the guerrilla, autonomous women's structures were developed from the early 1990s, particularly with the introduction of the break-up theory (Flach 2003). Additionally, a gender quota became mandatory in all mixed Democratic Confederalist structures. Finally, the concept of Jineolojî, described as the science of women and life, was introduced during the paradigm shift. It is presented as a "women's science, that encompasses also feminism and that seeks solutions to global social issues towards liberation" (Dirik 2021: 76). The goal of Jineolojî is for women to discover their knowledge and experiences, rewrite history, and simultaneously initiate

knowledge production encompassing an ideology, a set of methods, and a “struggle for means-giving, and an organizational effort” (Dirik 2021: 77). In essence, the fight against patriarchy becomes central to overcoming capitalist modernity, with women emerging as the driving revolutionary force.

Finally, three strategic dispositions are derived from this ideological transformation (Jongerden, Akkaya 2012: 6). The concept of the *Democratic Republic* emerges directly from the idea that the nation-state should not be conquered, but rather that democratization should be promoted, and rights guaranteed in order to create a space in which Democratic Confederalism and Democratic Autonomy can thrive (Knapp 2015: 104). Accordingly, the aim is not to achieve secession from Turkey and Syria, but rather to promote democratization within these nation-states. *Democratic Autonomy* involves the establishment of council structures independent of state institutions (ISKU 2012a). These structures can also exist within a nation-state (Akkaya, Jongerden 2012: 7). *Democratic Confederalism* can be described as a bottom-up system of self-government (Jongerden, Akkaya 2013: 172):

“This project builds on local self-government, which is organized in the form of citizens' assemblies, municipalities, local councils, local parliaments and people’s congresses” (Öcalan 2011: 34).

The cooperation of these council structures transcends national borders (Knapp 2015: 103) and aligns with the concept of “libertarian municipalism” described by Bookchin as a network of councils (Bookchin 1990). Consequently, Democratic Confederalism culminates in an “alternative confederation of communities, movements, and alliances, a ‘commune of communes’ against the world system based on nation-states” (Dirik 2021: 71–72).¹⁰⁵

Due to the ideological transformation, the understanding of *internationalism* within the PKK-led Kurdish movement also changed. The significance of internationalism following the ideological transformation is summarized by Rizan Altun, Member of the Executive Council of the KCK, as follows:

“International solidarity is undoubtedly very important. The freedom movements and the freedom struggles in the different parts of this world must definitely support each other. Everyone must lead the struggle for freedom in their respective places. Ultimately, we have to change the entire world” (Altun 2019: 44).

The dialectical relationship between particular struggles and a universal perspective, marked by mutual support among different movements and the strategic necessity of uniting forces across various localities, constitutes a recurring theme in the PKK’s conceptualization of internationalism. However, following the ideological transformation, the Kurdish movement shifted its focus from building relationships exclusively with anti-imperialist or socialist movements to engaging with “anti-systemic forces” in a broader sense:

“We attach great value to all currents that, on the basis of freedom and equality, oppose capitalism, any monopolies, and all forms of exploitation. Whether they are large or small is

¹⁰⁵ In Öcalan’s writings, the meaning of the mode of production remains open: on the one hand, the liberal strand of argumentation takes on the appearance of being corporatist and cross-class conciliatory. On the other hand, there are just as many anti-capitalist elements, aiming at an abolition of the profit-based and monopolistically organized capitalist mode of production towards a cooperative and communal economy focused on need satisfaction (Kayserilioğlu 2017).

not decisive. For us, they all represent anti-systemic forces and parts of democratic modernity” (Altun 2019: 40).

Thus, in the context of the dichotomy between capitalist modernity and democratic modernity, the Kurdish movement now seeks to establish relationships with any movement that opposes capitalist modernity. This includes movements that are fighting against the monopolization of economic, political, military, and ideological spheres. Imperialism has been replaced by capitalist modernity, both of which are seen as components of monopolizing and expanding capitalist world systems.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the struggle for national liberation has been superseded by the pursuit of (global) Democratic Confederation. To put it more concretely, Altun identifies the various currents with which the Kurdish movement aims to strategically cooperate, as these currents are all striving for democratic modernity:

“With regard to the feminist movement, it can also be said that, except for a current of liberal feminists, all other feminist groups are anti-capitalist. The youth is also in a similar situation. An incredible anti-capitalist potential emerges if we also include in our consideration the various nations, the Marxists, the anarchists, the Trotskyists, the land movements, the religious and confessional movements. In our opinion, it is up to all of us to recognize this situation and use it for something positive, to develop a force against capitalism” (Altun 2019: 40).

Therefore, radical left groups encompassing feminists, Marxists, anarchists, Trotskyists, and other similar movements, even if they are relatively small, are considered potential relationship partners for the Kurdish movement. This is crucial for my research question, as these currents are considered by the Kurdish movement as strategic allies. Altun contends that these anti-systemic forces often exhibit a tendency towards fragmentation (Altun 2019: 41). In contrast to this fragmented international left, the Kurdish movement promotes an internationalism that is based on mutuality and recognition of differences among struggles. A key aspect of this new internationalism is a transformation of relationships, that develops through political learning, joint actions, and trust-building, ultimately forming an alliance for democratic modernity, in contrast to the above-mentioned fragmentation:

“The first condition is definitely to stop rejecting and negating my counterpart, who is also committed to the struggle against the system, and to build relationships with him. We must build relationships with each other without wanting to impose our own views on the other person or seeking in him only that which resembles ourselves ... It is inevitable that the anti-systemic forces from all the different sectors should wage joint struggles, carry out joint educational work, all engage in joint work, develop positive relations with each other, and turn all this into joint organizing in order to develop and build an alternative system” (Altun 2019: 41).

To emphasize this point: the Kurdish movement’s perspective does not stop with simply forming relationships between SMOs that have different ideologies and strategies. Instead, following the

¹⁰⁶ The differences between the concept of imperialism and capitalist modernity are beyond the scope of this chapter, however some initial discussion can be found in the book “Building Free Life - Dialogues with Öcalan”. In particular, see the contribution of Gills (Internationale Initiative Freiheit für Abdullah Öcalan - Frieden in Kurdistan 2019; Gills 2019). Duran Kalkan, Member of the Executive Council of the KCK, continues to use the word imperialism to indicate a specific period of capitalist modernity: “Democratic Confederation represents the solution model for the social problems created by capitalist modernity in the era of imperialist global finance capital” (Kalkan 2014).

initial recognition of these differences, it advocates for a process of relationship transformation that aims to eventually develop a shared paradigm against capitalist modernity. In contrast to its earlier understanding of internationalism during Phase I, the PKK now rejects the prospect of holding a hegemonic position within a “new internationalism” (Kalkan 2014). Importantly, most of the Kurdish cadres I interviewed emphasized that the PKK’s transformed internationalism rejects relations of dominance among coalition partners in the struggle for democratic modernity, and instead, that these relationships should be based on principles of mutual solidarity. In essence, the PKK recognizes the necessity for mutual cooperation among anti-systemic forces given the global dominance of capitalist modernity.

Since 2005, the ideology of Democratic Confederalism has been put into practice with the formation of the ‘Koma Civakên Kurdistan’ (KCK)¹⁰⁷. The KCK serves as the umbrella organization for all groups and organizations in Kurdistan and the diaspora that aim to implement Democratic Confederalism. The parliamentary assembly of the KCK is called the ‘Kongra Gel’¹⁰⁸, which convenes once a year in the Qandil Mountains. The self-administration of the Kurdish people based on popular councils has been primarily established and implemented in Bakûr and later in Rojava.

The Kurdish women’s movement played a central role in this organizational transformation process. In 2004, at the 5th Women’s Congress, the ‘Partiya Azadiya Jinê ya Kurdistanê’ (PAJK)¹⁰⁹ was newly founded as a militant, cadre party, since the analysis of the women’s movement recognized the necessity of such a structure¹¹⁰. Simultaneously, female fighters within the HPG organized autonomously as ‘Yekîneyên Jinên Azad ên Star’ (YJA Star)¹¹¹. Civil society women’s organizations were also reorganized in all four regions of Kurdistan and in the diaspora (HK 2019: 34–35). The implementation of this differentiated organizational model faced challenges due to the lack of a binding coordination structure and the absence of direct involvement of women from mixed-gender fields of work. Consequently, in 2005, the General Assembly of the women’s movement decided to organize all working areas of the women’s movement within the KCK under the umbrella of the ‘Koma Jinên Bilind’ (KJB)¹¹². In 2014, at an extraordinary congress, the KJB transformed into ‘Komalên Jinên Kurdistan’ (KJK)¹¹³, with the task of organizing the autonomous women’s confederal system and building coalitions worldwide. The female co-president of the KCK is elected by the KJK, and both complementary structures are allowed to criticize each other, however only women can intervene in the general structure through the use of a veto (Dirik 2021: 57).

In Turkey, the strategy of Democratic Republic and Autonomy led to efforts to establish municipal councils in mayoral offices held by the ‘Demokratik Toplum Partisi’ (DTP)¹¹⁴. However, these

¹⁰⁷ Kurdistan Communities Union.

¹⁰⁸ Kongreya Gelê Kurdistanê | Kurdistan People's Congress.

¹⁰⁹ Party of the Free Woman of Kurdistan. Not to be confused with the PJAK, the ‘Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê’ (PJAK) and a sister organization of the PKK in Rojhilat.

¹¹⁰ PAJK was not intended to function as a hierarchically superior authority, but rather as an organizational structure which can act as a driving force for the development of the women’s movement through ideological work, training, and perspectives in all areas of struggle.

¹¹¹ Free Women’s Units.

¹¹² Union of Proud Women.

¹¹³ Kurdistan Women’s Communities.

¹¹⁴ Democratic Society Party. Its successor, the ‘Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi’ (BDP) | ‘Peace and Democracy Party’.

efforts were met with constant arrests and repression, which culminated in the KCK trials and resulted in a high turnover within the confederal structures. This turnover hindered learning processes and the development of a more stable organization (Knapp 2015: 105). Between 2009 and 2011 alone, approximately 9,000 Kurdish activists were arrested (HK 2019: 54–55). In 2012, the ‘Halkların Demokratik Partisi’ (HDP)¹¹⁵ was formed, representing a close alliance of left-wing organizations in Turkey, with the overarching goal of the democratization of Turkey. This project opened up new opportunities for the Kurdish and socialist movements in Turkey to anchor themselves in different social strata and strengthen their organizing efforts (Çakır 2018: 372–73). A new peace process was initiated in 2013, accompanied by a ceasefire that lasted for almost three years.

1.3. Phase III: Implementing and Defending Democratic Confederalism

In 2014, as IS fighters were attacking Kobanê, Turkey initially prevented Kurdish Peshmerga fighters from coming to the aid of the defenders. Öcalan threatened to break off the peace talks, and Turkey finally relented and allowed the fighters to cross the border. Following this, and with significant political shifts in Turkey, ‘Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi’¹¹⁶ (AKP) witnessed a drastic loss of votes, while the HDP passed the 10 percent electoral threshold in the June 2015 parliamentary elections, drastically altering the government’s course (Jongerden, Akkaya 2013: 164; White 2015: 132–35). The AKP government, under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, shifted towards a more aggressive stance and opted for military action and snap elections to regain power¹¹⁷. After a series of IS suicide attacks, including one in Suruç on the 20th July 2015 which targeted a delegation of the socialist youth organization SGDF¹¹⁸ and killed 32 people, the PKK carried out several attacks on Turkish police officers in response. The Turkish government responded with air strikes against the PKK and launched a wave of repression against the Turkish and Kurdish left.

In the months following the de facto annulment of the results of the June 2015 elections, several Kurdish cities and neighbourhoods declared their Democratic Autonomy, effectively governing themselves independently of state power. This period was marked by intense conflict, often referred to as the ‘city war’, which included the destruction of entire Kurdish cities and massacres of the population (Knapp 2016; Civaka Azad 2016a). Following the November 2015 elections, which reinstated the power of the ruling AKP bloc, the city war intensified.¹¹⁹ On the 16th June 2016, a faction of the Turkish military attempted a coup, which ultimately failed, leading to a counter-coup.¹²⁰ In 2017, Erdoğan succeeded in establishing a presidential system. As of now, the

¹¹⁵ People’s Democratic Party.

¹¹⁶ Justice and Development Party.

¹¹⁷ The reasons for the escalation of the conflict can be found in the AKP’s crisis of hegemony (Zirngast, Işıkara and Kayserilioğlu 2016), indicated by foreign policy defeats (Çakır 2018: 364–65), the rapid changing power transformation in Syria (Savran 2020) and internally, the Gezi uprisings and the electoral loss of the AKP.

¹¹⁸ Sosyalist Gençlik Dernekleri Federasyonu | Federation of Socialist Youth Associations of Turkey.

¹¹⁹ According to the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TIHV), during the city war, at least 58 curfews in 7 provinces and 22 provincial districts were declared, affecting a population of more than 1,642,000 people. At least 310 civilians were killed. At least 355,000 people have reportedly been forced to migrate (Kayserilioğlu 2016). The ‘Death Cellars of Cizîr’ are a particularly infamous example, where more than 177 people were burned alive or shot by security forces (ANF News 2020a).

¹²⁰ Erdoğan’s government suspended over 130,000 state employees, closed hundreds of media outlets, imprisoned military personnel, and thousands lost their jobs. However, the leftist opposition was also targeted: according to a HDP interim report from 2020, 16,490 HDP members, including party co-chairs, deputies, county chairmen, and rank-and-file party members have been detained, and 3,695 HDP members arrested since the June 2015 parliamentary elections (Küpeli 2022). Additionally, the Turkish government had replaced almost all Kurdish civilian administrations with forced administrators.

press in Turkey has been largely brought under state control, there have been attempts to ban the HDP, and the Turkish army has invaded areas in Rojava and Başûr several times.

In recent years, Rojava has become a contested symbol of the Kurdish movement and a focal point for international solidarity (Zeller 2014), particularly due to its struggle against the IS. Various studies have emerged that explore different aspects of the Rojava Revolution, such as its historical development (Schmidinger 2016; Schmidinger 2018; Sunca 2021), women's liberation (Burç 2020; Shahvisi 2018), its portrayal in Western media (Şimşek, Jongerden 2021), economic aspects (Jongerden 2022), and its geographical context (Kaya, Whiting 2017).

In Syria, despite the massive repression against the Kurdish movement, the 'Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat' (PYD)¹²¹ was clandestinely founded in 2003 (Lowe 2014: 227). The party is a member of the KCK and upholds the ideology of Democratic Confederalism. When the uprisings in Syria began in 2011 and opponents of the government started to arm themselves, the PYD initiated the covert establishment of the 'Yekîneyên Parastina Gel' (YPG) and 'Yekîneyên Parastina Jin' (YPJ)¹²² in Rojava within just six months (Flach 2015: 80–81). The PYD adopted a 'third way' strategy, distancing itself from the Ba'ath regime supported by Russia, the moderate opposition backed by the US, as well as the strong Islamist forces within the opposition supported by Turkey and other regional actors (Lowe 2014: 227; Sunca 2021: 119). However, this approach led to accusations from various sides that the Kurdish movement was strategically allied with either the Ba'ath regime, or later, the US, allegations that the PYD repeatedly rejected (Sunca 2021: 120–21).

The Rojava Revolution began in Kobanê on the night of 18th June 2012 (Flach 2015: 84). YPG/YPJ units secured access roads and the population began to seize or reorganize state institutions. In the ensuing weeks, the revolution spread to the oil wells around Kobanê, and cities including Dêrika Hemko and Efrîn¹²³ were liberated (Flach 2015: 84–90). The 'Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk' (TEV-DEM)¹²⁴, founded in 2011 with the goal of organizing Syrian society under a Democratic Confederalist system, took a leading role in establishing and coordinating communes and councils.¹²⁵ In January 2014, organized through TEV-DEM, the Autonomous Self-Government was proclaimed in three cantons, and the 'Charter of the Social Contract' was signed, guaranteeing fundamental rights, including gender equality. Rojava was conceived and institutionalized as a multiethnic, multilingual, and multireligious region (Kayserilioğlu 2017).

In counter the PYD's growing influence in Syria, the Al-Nusra front, with support from Turkey, launched attacks on the Rojava cantons in the summer of 2012 (Flach 2015: 92). In 2013, the IS emerged as a significant actor in the Syrian civil war and captured Mosul in the summer of 2014. The IS launched attacks on Kurdish areas, leading to the rescue of the Yezidis in Şengal¹²⁶ by the HPG/YJA STAR, preventing a genocide. Notably, the intense battle of Kobanê at the end of 2014,

¹²¹ Democratic Union Party.

¹²² People's Defence Units and Women's Protection Units.

¹²³ al-Malikiya and Afrin.

¹²⁴ Movement for a Democratic Society.

¹²⁵ The council system was structured from the bottom-up and consists of four levels, which are linked to each other by delegates with imperative mandates. At the lowest level are the communes, which consist of 30 to 150 households. Above them are the village or district councils, consisting of seven to 30 communes, which in turn send delegates to regional councils. (Ayboğa 2015: 138–42).

¹²⁶ Sinjar.

where lightly armed Kurdish forces defended the town against heavily armed and undefeated IS troops for 133 days, garnered significant international attention and sympathy, caused a considerable influx of members into the YPG and YPJ (Gunes, Lowe 2015: 6–10). With the assistance of US airstrikes, the IS was pushed back, the cantons of Kobanê and Cizîrê were united, and further military successes were achieved (Civaka Azad 2015a, 2016c). In 2015, the ‘Syrian Democratic Forces’ (SDF) were established, consisting of YPG, YPJ and various non-Kurdish groups, with the aim of including all ethnic and religious groups in Rojava. In 2017, the SDF, with support from the international coalition, liberated ar-Raqqa from the IS, and in 2019, finally achieved a military victory over the IS by liberating Deir-ez-Zor. As a result, additional regions with Arabic majorities, including the regions of Minbic¹²⁷, Tabqa, al-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor, became part of the area operating under the Democratic Confederalist system (RIC 2019: 11).

In March 2016, the ‘Rêveberiya Xweser a Bakur û Rojhilatê Sûriyeyê’ (NES) or the ‘Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria’ (AANES) was proclaimed, emphasizing the rights of women, the special role of youth, and the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of the project (Civaka Azad 2016b). This new political system, according to the Rojava Information Center, comprises three major bodies. Firstly, the AANES itself is structured around a council system¹²⁸, ranging from local commune to inter-regional levels, with each level featuring committees focusing on specific areas of work. The AANES administrates the seven regions through elected bodies and ministries, adhering to the principle of subsidiarity. Secondly, the Syrian Democratic Council, comprising political parties, representatives from civil society, the AANES and key individuals, provides a political framework for diplomatic efforts. It is the political body to which the SDF reports, and it also coordinates internal Syrian dialogue as well as international relations (RIC 2019: 32). Thirdly, TEV-DEM has a new role in organizing civil society, primarily through unions (RIC 2019: 37). TEV-DEM acts as an umbrella organization for civil society, functioning as a counter-power to the AANES by observing and intervening when necessary. All three of these mixed-gender bodies operate with parallel and organizationally autonomous women’s systems and implement the co-chair system at all levels (RIC 2019: 18–19). Decisions made within the autonomous women’s structures are binding for corresponding mixed-gender structures at all levels (Burç 2020: 333). ‘Kongreya Star’¹²⁹, the congress of the women’s movement in the AANES, holds conferences every two years, devolving decision-making power to its various committees and member bodies (RIC 2019: 44).

Rojava and later the AANES have encountered significant challenges over their decade-long history. Most importantly, they faced military attacks: while the SDF, in collaboration with the anti-IS coalition, was able to counter the IS’s territorial control with heavy losses, the Turkish

¹²⁷ Manbij.

¹²⁸ The basic unit is the commune, generally made up of 150 to 1,500 inhabitants. While some have achieved a high level of collective organizing, others remain less active (RIC 2019: 22). Councils exist on every level, despite the communes, and are elected and operate through standard committees. “Councils are the representative bodies which discuss and make decisions about societal issues, formulating necessary policies and representing the will of the people” (RIC 2019: 24). The regions fulfill the role of coordination, communication, and the redistribution of resources. There are ‘common laws,’ which apply to the entire AANES, and ‘special laws,’ which apply only to specific regions. At the inter-region level, the focus lies on coordinating between the regions, and is structured into General, Executive, and Justice Councils. The General Council takes on a legislative function, unifying the laws between regions, while the Executive Council fulfils the executive function through seven offices and ten commissions. Meanwhile, the Justice Council administrates the work of the tribunals and coordinates the justice systems (RIC 2019: 30).

¹²⁹ Star Congress.

army and the Islamist groups under its control invaded Cerablûs¹³⁰ in 2016, Efrîn in 2018 and Girê Sîpî¹³¹ in 2019. In January 2018, Efrîn was invaded, over 300,000 people were displaced, and in March, the SDF was forced to withdraw. Additionally, the withdrawal of US troops from Syria in 2019 resulted in the occupation of the region between Serêkaniye¹³² and Girê Spî, and over 200,000 civilians were displaced, and 450 civilians killed (RIC 2019: 10). Thereafter, Turkey repeatedly murdered civil representatives from the AANES with drone strikes, and used fire and water as weapons. In addition to severe military threats, Turkey, Syria, and the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq imposed an embargo on the region. On the political front, the task of building a commune system with broad participation remains a challenge, particularly in the new regions, and the new political culture needs further development to encourage engagement (RIC 2019: 26). Additionally, the economic, ecological, and juridical systems also present challenges and contradictions. However, despite these immediate threats and contradictions, Rojava and the AANES, with their council-system and women's revolution, inspire hope for many leftist movements around the world.

In sum, after the ideological and organizational transformation, the Kurdish movement has taken on a multifaceted organizational approach that is neither a purely grassroots democratic or rank-and-file movement, nor an authoritarian movement controlled by a cadre party. More precisely, the Kurdish movement combines several organizational models including the guerrilla as a collectivist military unit with a command structure, grassroots units, and councils, cadre parties and mass organizations. This diverse approach allows the movement to be present in people's everyday lives, engage in guerrilla warfare, and lead the revolution in Rojava effectively.

2. The Kurdish Diaspora in Germany

The Kurdish movement is often described as the most well organized diasporic community in Europe (Başer 2013b). The number of studies investigating the Kurdish diaspora have increased since the 1990s, following a gap in the 2000s (Ammann 2001; Başer 2011; Başer 2012; Başer 2013a; Başer 2015a; Başer et al. 2015; Eccarius-Kelly 2002; Eccarius-Kelly 2008; Eccarius-Kelly 2011; Grojean 2011; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Wahlbeck 1999), with a significant number of studies focusing on the German context in particular (Başer 2012; Başer 2014; Ceylan, Holtz-Ersahin 2017; Eccarius-Kelly 2019; Engin 2019a; Sirkeci 2006). However, empirical research on Kurdish migration in Germany is notably scarce, particularly in terms of quantitative studies, although there have been some recent exceptions (Derince 2020). The description and argumentation contained in this section draws heavily on the work of Bahar Başer. She asserts that Germany has its own Kurdish question, much like other countries with a Kurdish diaspora. However, in Germany, this issue is especially relevant due to the country receiving the largest number of migrants from the Kurdish region, and given that Kurdish contention has become highly visible in the German public (Başer 2015b: 2). Başer goes on to argue that the "Kurdish conflict did not just randomly spill over to Germany, but there is a reason why the Kurdish diaspora has chosen certain strategies from a grand repertoire of actions" (Başer 2015b: 2). According to Başer, the evolving strategies of the Kurdish diaspora are influenced by "Germany's

¹³⁰ Jarabulus.

¹³¹ Tall Abyad.

¹³² Ras al-Ain.

relations with Turkey, and Germany's approach to the Kurdish migrants as well as the course of events back in Turkey" (Başer 2015b: 2).

In the following, I will provide an overview of the history of the Kurdish movement in Germany, emphasizing crucial mechanisms and processes, while also outlining the socio-economic context, major diaspora organizations and their transformation. While much of the information is drawn from existing literature, I will supplement areas where there are research gaps, such as the early stages of Kurdish self-organization, with insights from my own interviews and available data.

2.1. Phase I: Mobilization, Repression and Stigmatization

Germany emerged as the primary European destination for Kurdish migration in the early 1960s during the 'Gastarbeiter'¹³³ migration period from 1961 to 1973. This influx of Kurds to Germany was driven by economic hardships and natural disasters (Başer 2013b: 7). Following the recruitment halt in 1973, migration shifted towards family reunification, resulting in approximately 1.2 million registered Turkish citizens in Germany by 1978 (Engin 2019b: 10). However, the (main) cause of Kurdish migration changed in the late 1970s and 1980s during a second phase, as more asylum seekers fled from Turkey and sought refuge in Europe, particularly in Germany (Engin 2019b: 15). This phase of migration was primarily motivated by political reasons¹³⁴, with events such as the Maraş massacre perpetrated by the Grey Wolves in 1978 serving as a clear indication to many leftists of Turkey's descent into fascism. Subsequent developments, including the declaration of a state of emergency, the military coup d'état in 1980, and the ensuing repression (Eccarius-Kelly 2002: 91) forced numerous leftist individuals and revolutionary groups into exile (Civaka Azad 2018: 3).¹³⁵ The 1990s marked a third phase of migration, driven by the war in Kurdistan and the Turkish army's scorched earth policy, resulting in a substantial increase in Kurdish refugees. By 1998, it was estimated that between one-quarter to one-third of the 2.1 million asylum seekers from Turkey in Germany were Kurdish, with many of them expressing sympathy for the PKK (Castles, Miller 1998: 266–67).

During the first phase of migration, the primary pull factor for Turkish and Kurdish migrants was the labour shortage in Germany, which coincided with a period of robust economic growth. Many of these migrants were workers and peasants with limited education and resources (Skubusch 2000: 111). The Gastarbeiter migration effectively created a reserve army of labour that could easily be made redundant in response to economic fluctuations. While this arrangement was advantageous for companies seeking low-cost labour, it subjected Kurdish migrants to

¹³³ "Guest worker" or foreign workers.

¹³⁴ Blaschke argues that Kurdish migration was always driven by a combination of economic reasons and flight from discrimination and political persecution (Blaschke 1991: 4), while Ammann adds that this was especially true for Alevis and Yezidis (Ammann 2001: 129). The change of Kurdish migrants' legal status is thus not necessarily connected "to a historical change in the characteristics of the Kurds arriving in Europe", but to the change of the migration regime (Wahlbeck 2019: 414–15). Before, it was often easier for political refugees to apply for labour migration, instead of a long and complicated asylum process. In the 1980s, asylum procedures became the primary pathway of migration to Europe and therefore also became an increasingly relevant part of the diaspora's work (Wahlbeck 2019: 415). Nonetheless, following the coup d'état in 1980, the escalating confrontation between the PKK and the Turkish state triggered a considerable emigration of political refugees from Kurdistan to Germany.

¹³⁵ Additionally, in 1988, the Anfal campaign of the Iraqi Ba'ath regime, targeting rural Kurds and leading to the deaths of between 50,000 to 100,000, forced many Kurds to flee. In particular, the poison gas attack on the city of Halabja, killing around 5,000 citizens, received international attention and became a symbol representing the genocidal politics practiced against Kurds. In contrast to the first wave, the Kurds fleeing during the second phase usually perceived themselves as Kurds and began to organize accordingly (Ammann 2001: 136).

overexploitation and institutional racism within Germany (Sarbo 2022: 50–51). Overexploitation manifested as lower wages and subpar working conditions, while institutional racism was evident through crowded accommodation, the curtailment of civil liberties, and subsequently, the legal establishment of preferential treatment for German nationals in employment. In the early 1990s, approximately 40 percent of individuals holding Turkish passports in Germany lived in poverty (Arslan 2009: 27). Many of the Kurds who were initially recruited as labourers and their families resided in large cities and industrial hubs, often concentrated in working class neighbourhoods (Ammann 2001: 140–43). The second phase of migration saw the arrival of highly politicized and more educated migrants from Turkey (Ammann 2001: 154). However, during Phase I, only a small academic elite among the Kurds emerged, as the majority were employed as physical labourers or worked in social professions (Ammann 2001: 378). Notably, the rise in unemployment, which directly affected the migrant labour force, led to the emergence of Kurdish small businesses, which were predominantly concentrated in the trade and service sectors, and often took the form of family-owned businesses (Ammann 2005: 1013).

During the early stages of this migration, German authorities considered Kurds to be a subset of Turkish migrants and thus paid little attention to their distinct concerns (Başer 2014: 7). This was partly due to the fact that Kurds had initially organized themselves in Turkish structures and associations (Başer 2013b: 17). However, concurrently with the establishment of the PKK in 1978, the first steps towards self-organization within the Kurdish movement abroad were taken (Civaka Azad 2018: 4). In contrast to Turkish organizations, which were relatively well-established within the working class, Kurdish groups lacked financial resources. One veteran Kurdish cadre provided insight into the early stages of the PKK-led Kurdish movement in Germany:

“We were nothing. We had no money. We didn’t have a club. We were five or six people. First, we met in Cologne, at Ebertplatz. We used to meet at the bushes. Then I said: ‘one or two of us must work. We must have some financial means to move’. Then I went to work at a building company here in Duisburg ... All the other left groups had magazines, could publish leaflets, but we didn’t have these possibilities. With my work in the construction company, I earned 1,200 marks a month, we could do a lot with it. Now we had a bit of opportunity to move from Duisburg to Cologne or from Aachen to Cologne.”

As a first action, the group in Duisburg collected donations for the victims of the Maraş massacre. Following the military coup in 1980, many new refugees arrived in asylum accommodations and the group grew. The same veteran cadre remembered:

“Then there were discussions here, because in the first place we said, such associations are for opportunists ... we are revolutionaries. But [within] these asylum accommodations ... you can’t organize people ... We slowly started our first association in Cologne in 1980 in March or April. It was a small room, 40 square metres. Then we had a second club in Duisburg Beeckerwerth.”

Soon, the first hundreds of adherents of the Kurdish movement became thousands, and despite initial concerns, the first associations were founded in 1980 in Cologne, Duisburg, Bochum, and Nuremberg. These associations played a pivotal role in organizing Kurdish migrants and fostering the development of Kurdish media outlets (Civaka Azad 2018: 4). Indeed, as a young Kurdish cadre observed:

“Yes, it has increased ... Today there are 80 clubs in Germany, back [in the early 1980s] there were maybe 20, and in the mid-1990s there were more and more.”

Initially, this formation process took place in Germany and gradually spread to other countries, starting with the Netherlands, Sweden and France (Marcus 2007: 66). Already in this early phase, the Kurdish movement considered the diaspora as an important and potentially fruitful space for organizing. The veteran Kurdish cadre related:

“The movement also supported us a lot in terms of personnel. Many of them went abroad. Then, of course, we have also been more conscious of our political work ideologically, politically, and organizationally.”

From the beginning, a transnational space emerged where Kurdish refugees and migrants settled in Europe, established political structures, sent remittance to Kurdistan and organized protests in support of the struggles in Kurdistan. Already in 1980, the PKK-led Kurdish movement in Germany conducted a hunger strike and occupied the Turkish consulate in Essen. Simultaneously, during a period of significant resistance inside the Military Prison in Amed, a 35-day hunger strike was carried out by diaspora organizations in Duisburg. In 1984, the first umbrella organization ‘FEYKA Kurdistan’¹³⁶ was founded. ‘FEYKA Kurdistan’ organized two long marches to Bonn¹³⁷ (Civaka Azad 2018: 7), established the ‘Kurdistan Report’ as a German-language press outlet, and organized cultural events. From 1985, the ERNK also began to participate in coordinating activities in Europe. In November 1987, the first autonomous women’s organization was founded in Hanover, the ‘*Yekîtiya Jinên Welatparêzên Kurdistan*’ (YJWK)¹³⁸. *This organization focused on discussions and educational work concerning the situation of women, the role of families and the triple oppression of Kurdish women (HK 2019: 25). In 1991, the ‘Yekîtiya Xwendekarên Kurdistan’ (YXK)¹³⁹ was formed, comprising over 75 students from 16 universities in the FRG and other European countries.*

Similar to the violent escalation and polarization in Turkey before the coup, the interaction between PKK-led Kurdish movement, the Turkish fascist countermovement, and rival Turkish and Kurdish left organizations in Germany was marked by violent outbidding and counter-framing. While the situation de-escalated in most regions during the 1990s, it still led to stigmatization in the national public and boundary activation by leftists SMOs. One of the PKK’s goals was to outbid their rivals in order to establish hegemony and gain acceptance and legitimacy (Başer 2015b: 9). This involved outbidding inner-movement rivals within a growing movement against the colonization of Kurdistan, and simultaneously intensifying the Turkish-Kurdish divide in order to increase ethnic awareness among Kurds (Başer 2015b: 9). Concerning the inner-Kurdish divide, in the 1980s and early 1990s, occasional violent confrontations occurred between the PKK and KOMKAR¹⁴⁰ activists (Lyon, Uçarer 2001: 936–37). KOMKAR was perceived by activists from the

¹³⁶ Föderation der patriotischen Arbeiter- und Kulturvereinigungen aus Kurdistan in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V. | Federation of Patriotic Workers and Cultural Associations from Kurdistan in the Federal Republic of Germany.

¹³⁷ Then the capital of the FRG.

¹³⁸ Union of Patriotic Women of Kurdistan. The YJWK was the predecessor of TAJK, which became later YAJK.

¹³⁹ Association of Students from Kurdistan.

¹⁴⁰ KOMKAR (Federation of Associations from Kurdistan in Germany) was founded in 1979, and was closely aligned with the ‘Partiya Sosyalîst a Kurdistan’ (PSK) | Kurdistan Socialist Party. According to Civaka Azad (2018), the first victim was an activist from Mardin, who was killed in 1982 while distributing Serxwebûn at a Newroz celebration. However, another source could not be found to verify this claim. Furthermore, KOMKAR accused the PKK of the murder of Ramazan Adigüzel in 1987 in Hanover, who was a member of the federal board of KOMKAR (Voges 1987) and his murder was investigated during the Düsseldorf Trials.

PKK-led Kurdish movement as contributing to the stigmatization against the movement.¹⁴¹ However, by the late 1990s, the PKK had established hegemony over the Kurdish movement both at home and abroad (Başer 2015b: 7). Concerning the inner-leftist divide¹⁴², for example, Dev-Yol¹⁴³ initiated a campaign against the PKK's "liquidation policy" (Appen 2001) after the murder of Dev-Yol member Kürsat Timuroğlu, which German courts attributed to the PKK. The Green Party, which had already established contacts with Dev-Yol, took a very negative stance, and in some cases, a hostile attitude towards the PKK. Turkish fascists were active in intimidating unionized Turks and represented the largest fascist movement in Germany.¹⁴⁴ As a Kurdish cadre observed regarding the confrontations in the 1980s:

"The Grey Wolves had it under control everywhere. The [Turkish] left-wing organizations were not allowed at that time to distribute leaflets at weekly markets or in front of the factory ... because they were always attacked. So ... we Kurds are good at street fighting without weapons [laughter] ... We were able to lead this street struggle well. That's when we started, we distributed our leaflets and that also created courage. This group, this movement, they are achieving something ... That also helped a lot."

In the 1990s, clashes between Kurdish activists and Turkish fascists erupted in cities like Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt, and others. The Kurdish movement was successful in reclaiming public space from the Turkish fascists, a move that helped to legitimize the Kurdish cause within the diaspora. The strong emphasis on Kurdish identity and the determination of Kurdish cadres played a significant role in rapidly politicizing and fostering ethnic self-awareness among the Kurdish diaspora (Engin 2020: 20–21). As a result, the proportion of migrants identifying as Kurdish increased from 20% in the 1980s to 76% in the 1990s as a result of the PKK's mobilization efforts and the influx of asylum seekers (Brieden 1995: 111).¹⁴⁵ However, it is important to note that these violent confrontations fuelled the stigmatization of the Kurdish movement in Germany and were used to justify increasing repression.

According to Mehmet Demir¹⁴⁶, although channels of communication with politicians were established and the PKK was briefly seen as a legitimate political organization fighting for Kurdish rights, the German police began targeting the Kurdish movement as early as 1982. The German authorities increasingly turned towards repression, and Kurdish activists perceived the opportunity structure as closing (Civaka Azad 2018: 5). In contrast to the existing literature, I argue that the criminalization of the Kurdish movement in Germany began no later than 1986. In

On the other hand, a PKK sympathizer was shot dead at a Newroz festival organized by the KOMKAR in Munich (Voges 1987), while in several German cities, KOMKAR offices were attacked (Spiegel 1987).

¹⁴¹ See Chapter VI. 2.

¹⁴² Following the military coup in 1980, many cadres of Turkish leftist organizations fled to the FRG, since various organizations and associations were already established there (Çakır 2018: 271–72). After 1980, all major Turkish leftist organizations were active in Europe (Çakır 2018: 274–75; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003: 49–50). In particular, due to the migration and re-organization of cadres and intellectuals, a diffusion of the polarization of these groups took place, including the polarization with the PKK.

¹⁴³ Devrimci Yol | Revolutionary Path.

¹⁴⁴ The Grey Wolves (Bozkurtçular) or self-designated idealists (Ülkücüler) are a fascist movement from Turkey. Their political organizations are the 'Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi' (MHP) and later the 'Büyük Birlik Partisi' (BBP), which follow an anti-communist and anti-separatist agenda (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003: 51). The rise of the countermovement in Germany, known as 'Türk Federasyon' (Almanya Demokratik Ülkücü Türk Dernekleri Federasyonu) (ADÜTDF) | 'Federation of Turkish Democratic Idealist Associations in Europe', was initially part of a cooperation against communism, inter alia supported by Franz Josef Strauß, Minister-President of Bavaria (Brauns 2016).

¹⁴⁵ Importantly, Başer contends that while the Kurdish identity is predominant in Sweden, in Germany, identification with the PKK prevails among the second generation due to the interaction with the Turkish diaspora (Başer 2012: 215–16).

¹⁴⁶ Former Chairman of YEK-KOM.

1986, during the Newroz celebration and the first-year anniversary of the ERNK, a major festival was held in Duisburg, which the police attempted to prevent by closing motorway access, conducting bus searches, and engaging in other forms of harassment. One Kurdish activist highlighted this event as the moment when the Kurdish movement became certain that the German authorities were shifting their course towards repression. In 1988, German police arrested Kurdish activists, prosecuted them under paragraph 129a¹⁴⁷, and in 1989 the largest ‘terrorist trial’ in German legal history up until that point began. The so-called ‘Düsseldorf Trial’ was a clear sign for the Kurdish movement that the German state was aligning itself with Turkey (Başer 2015a: 8). The lack of official recognition of their identity, closed lobbying channels and increasing repression eventually led the Kurdish movement to perceive the political opportunity structure as closed (Başer 2015a: 7).

Due to increasing repression in Germany, the escalation of the conflict in Turkey, and Germany’s extensive international cooperation with Turkey¹⁴⁸, the PKK declared Germany as the “second enemy” at the start of the 1990s (Başer 2015b: 9). Hüseyin Çelebi, a key activist in the diaspora who was persecuted during the Düsseldorf Trial, summarized this situation:

“The FRG is a party in this dispute. It is a party on the side of ... the ruling class in Turkey. The FRG is concretely involved at all levels of the conflict. It is its interests that are the targets of the liberation struggle ... It must be clearly seen that the FRG takes and represents the most reactionary position in the attempt to develop a [Kurdistan] policy. Many try to pacify Kurdistan by hugging and crushing, but the FRG tries to do it by direct attack” (ISKU 1990).

It became clear for the PKK that the Kurdish movement needed to challenge both states in order to achieve its goals (Başer 2015b: 9). This declaration of hostility was primarily directed against Germany and manifested in intense mobilization efforts within Germany, in stark contrast to other countries. The strategy of confrontational actions was viewed as a matter of survival (Başer 2015b: 9–12), even though it was understood that such actions would further stigmatize the movement. The PKK found itself in a phase of ‘total war’ where the struggle in its homeland was perceived to have “existential consequences”, leading to more aggressive actions in the host country (Başer 2015b: 5). This collective angst (Wohl et al. 2014), combined with the perceived opportunity to establish an independent Kurdistan, drove the adoption of violent tactics. These tactics aimed to draw media attention to the atrocities committed by the Turkish army (Başer 2015b: 8) and exert pressure on the German government.

During the early 1990s, there was a significant surge in organizing within the Kurdish diaspora in Germany, leading the PKK to become a mass movement in Europe as well. By 1994, Kurdish movement offices, often referred to as ‘Kurdistan committees’, were established in almost every West-European capital, including Cologne, Geneva, Brussels, Vienna, Paris, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Helsinki, Oslo, Rome, London, Athens, Copenhagen and Madrid (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994e). This mass mobilization brought between 100,000 to 200,000 people to the streets in 1993 (Brauns, Kiechle 2010: 73).

¹⁴⁷ See Chapter VI. 2.

¹⁴⁸ In fact, on a military level, Germany was one of the biggest arms suppliers for Turkey, and on a political level, the successive German governments displayed an interest in Turkey’s alignment with Europe. Economically, Germany has been one of the main sources of foreign investments in Turkey.

In 1993, the German government enforced the ‘ban on PKK activities’ (hereafter, referred to as the ‘PKK ban’) and initiated a massive wave of repression against Kurdish structures and supporters (Eccarius-Kelly 2002: 91), which led to further escalation. The impact of the repression related to the PKK ban will be discussed further in Chapter IV: 2. It is important to note here that the ban proved ineffectual, since the Kurdish movement was able to rebuild its organizational structures. New associations were founded, often with a German activist serving as chairman, and the umbrella association ‘Yekitîya Komalên Kurd li Elmanya’ (YEK-KOM)¹⁴⁹ was established in 1994. Additionally, the Kurdish movement was still able to mobilize. For instance, on the 17th June 1995, in the capital Bonn, between 100,000 and 200,000 supporters of the PKK participated in a demonstration (Lyon, Uçarer 2001: 940). In fact, the PKK ban unintentionally led to increased legitimacy for the PKK and “further building of cohesiveness within the Kurdish diaspora” (Lyon, Uçarer 2001: 943).

In mid-1996, the strategy of the PKK in Germany underwent a significant change when Öcalan publicly condemned the violence of the past as a mistake and opted for a peaceful, political dialogue between the PKK and the German government (Lyon, Uçarer 2001: 941). This resulted in a slight easing of the repression in the FRG. However, another peak of Kurdish protests and repression occurred shortly after Öcalan was abducted in 1999. The Kurdish movement mobilized worldwide, including organizing demonstrations, occupying Greek and Kenyan consulates, taking consular officials hostage, staging hunger strikes, and self-immolations (Küçük: 62–63). On the 17th February 1999, in front of the Israeli Consulate in Berlin, Israel security forces shot four Kurds and injured 13 others, some critically. Başer highlights that there was a feeling of “helplessness” and “uncertainty about the future,” which contributed to such incidents (Başer 2015b: 12).

To sum up, during this phase, it is important to underscore that the Kurdish movement formed a transnational space between Germany and Kurdistan. According to Ammann, self-organizations with transnational networks and organized connections to Kurdistan characterize the European Kurds as a transnationally structured diaspora (2001: 163):

“Newspapers, faxes and telephone, video and music cassettes, letters and discussed cassettes, films, joint television programs, travel, money transfers, etc. tie the diaspora Kurds to Kurdistan and to each other” (Ammann 2001: 162).

The transnational dimension of the Kurdish movement becomes more evident when examining the structures established in Europe, such as the Kurdish media network¹⁵⁰, which includes satellite television channels, as well as the considerable financial support¹⁵¹ received from the diaspora.

During Phase I, the Kurdish movement was able to mobilize the diaspora and emerged as one of the most influential leftist forces in the FRG. Despite facing heavy repression and stigmatization by German authorities, the PKK-led Kurdish movement became firmly rooted in every major West-German city, garnered significant support from the Kurdish diaspora, and established a transnational space connecting Europe with Kurdistan.

¹⁴⁹ Federation of Kurdish Associations in Germany.

¹⁵⁰ Kerem Schamberger empirically demonstrates that “the Kurdish media network functions as a non-state ... and transnational network that exists across national borders in the form of flexibly interconnected nodes” (Schamberger 2022: 260).

¹⁵¹ About 20 million Deutsche marks in the 1990s (Mertens 2000: 188).

2.2. Phase II: Ideological, Organizational, and Generational Transformation

In the following section, I will highlight four key processes within the mobilized Kurdish diaspora which were salient during Phase II: a generational transformation, an ideological and organizational transformation, a shift towards non-confrontational strategies, and a process of Europeanization. However, it is worth noting that the socio-economic dimensions of the Kurdish diaspora have received limited scientific attention and remain largely unexplored (Schleimer 2019).

Firstly, what is conceptualized in the literature as a process towards a 'post-migrant society' (Foroutan 2019), also applies to the Kurdish diaspora: Kurds living in Germany who have a migration background but lack personal migration experience¹⁵², representing the second or third generation of Kurdish migrants, are often regarded as 'post-migrants'. These 'post-migrants' see themselves as fully integrated into German society (Ammann 2019). Indeed, during Phase II, the mobilized Kurdish diaspora increasingly advocated for equal citizenship rights and an end to specific anti-Kurdish racism. More Kurds became involved in political parties like 'Die Linke', pursued higher education, or engaged in various other organizations. Further aspects of this generational shift within the mobilized Kurdish diaspora will be explored in Chapter VII. 3.

Secondly, an ideological and organizational transformation also unfolded within the diaspora. One younger Kurdish activist related the lengthy nature of this ideological transformation within the diaspora:

"I mean, my father has totally taken a long time to understand why. His beginning was for a nation-state, and he fought hard for it. And he had to flee for it. And then, after 15 years, he realized now there is a radical change. And he has to decide for himself if he wants to continue with his principles. Are these still his wishes? And this upheaval was not only in the movement, but also in the community.¹⁵³ And it took a long time. So, it is understandable that it took a long time. To this day I can say that there are still people who still think 'Yes, we want a Kurdistan' ... But how difficult it is ... In 2005, Democratic Confederalism was officially declared, and now it is still being discussed after 15 years. In the councils and in the associations today there are education about it. What is meant by it at all? How can that look in practice?"

Within the mobilized Kurdish diaspora in Germany, facilitated by the associations, councils and bystanders, the ideological transformation was disseminated through educational events, discussions, and the publication of books. However, this transformation was not limited to a theoretical level; it had tangible consequences for the structures of the Kurdish movement in the diaspora. Organizationally, the Kurdish movement shifted from being a party based on the principles of democratic centralism to adopting a council system. In the diaspora, the organizational structures became more decentralized. As one Kurdish activist explained:

"Here, restructuring is taking place. In Germany, vertical structures were abandoned, and more horizontal structures were established with the paradigm shift."

¹⁵² During Phase II, there was no new phase of migration. Until 2011, Turkey continued to be one of the main countries of origin for refugees, albeit with significantly lower total numbers compared to earlier years (Engin 2019b: 12).

¹⁵³ Community is a term frequently used by young Kurdish activists to refer to the (mobilized) Kurdish diaspora.

From 2005 onwards, the council system was established step by step. Another Kurdish activist explained the council system in the diaspora in more concrete terms:

“In Germany, the Kurdish structures are organized in so-called community centres¹⁵⁴, people’s council structures¹⁵⁵, and there are commissions on various points. Then there is a co-chair system, there is an autonomous women’s council, always [corresponds] in each case to these community centres, which once again independently makes their decisions.”

For example, the first autonomous women’s council and people’s assemblies were founded in Hamburg in 2005. The organizational transformation extended to the diaspora, and some observers characterize it as a shift from the PKK being a militant organization to becoming a social movement (Eccarius-Kelly 2002: 92). In fact, this transformation is reflected in the formation of various associations dealing with women, youth, children, and advocacy networks (Başer 2015b: 12). For example, the practical implementation of Democratic Confederalism in Rojava led to the Kurdish movement intensifying its public relationship work. In 2012, ‘Civaka Azad – Kurdisches Zentrum für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit e.V.’¹⁵⁶ was initiated by a group of politically engaged Kurdish activists who aimed to establish a Kurdish counter-public. They forged connections with a “wide range of Kurdish political actors”, young Kurds who had grown up in Germany, and numerous individuals in the solidarity movement (Civaka Azad 2019). Throughout Phase III, they provided information about the Kurdish movement and focused on publishing dossiers on relevant topics, targeting journalists and the solidarity movement.

Thirdly, there was a shift from confrontational to non-confrontational strategies within the diaspora, which sometimes even employed a dual strategy (Başer 2015b: 12). However, in general, the mobilization process became less militant in Germany. Activists agitated against the criminalization of the PKK and advocated for equal civil rights for Kurds in Germany (Başer 2015b: 12–14). However, this shift towards non-confrontational strategies did not lead the German authorities to reduce the repression against the PKK-led Kurdish movement; instead, repression remained high and even increased from 2010 onwards. This repression, coupled with use of migration regulations against the PKK-led Kurdish movement deterred some Kurds from actively participating in the movement (Başer 2015b: 13). The repression and its consequences will be further discussed in Chapter VII. 2.

Fourthly, a process of Europeanization took place, which refers to the Kurdish movement’s utilization of the political opportunities created by European integration (Başer 2013b: 34–38; Casier 2011b; Eccarius-Kelly 2002: 95; Eccarius-Kelly 2008). Especially, due to Turkey’s application for EU-membership, and also during the peace process, Kurdish activists perceived more opportunities on a European level compared to the 1990s. Therefore, a significant portion of the diaspora’s efforts were directed towards international organizations such as the European Court of Human Rights, the European Parliament, or the Council of Europe. These efforts can be analysed as part of an externalization mechanism. Additionally, events in other European countries triggered mobilization. For example, the murder of three Kurdish activists in exile, Sakine Cansız, Fidan Doğan and Leyla Şaylemez at the Kurdistan Information Office in Paris on

¹⁵⁴ Gesellschaftszentren.

¹⁵⁵ Volksräte.

¹⁵⁶ Free Society - Kurdish Center for Public Relations (registered association).

the 9th January 2013, allegedly supported by the Turkish MİT¹⁵⁷, created outrage throughout Kurdistan and the Diaspora. Organizationally, in 2014, YEK-KOM was renamed NAV-DEM¹⁵⁸.

In summary, corresponding to processes occurring within Kurdistan, the Kurdish diaspora also experienced an ideological and organizational transformation, leading to a more decentralized organizational structure. The mobilization efforts shifted towards advocating for equal citizenship rights and the lifting of the PKK ban, pursued via a largely non-confrontational approach, while the German authorities continued to maintain a high level of repression.

2.3. Phase III: The Kobanê Generation

In the following, I will suggest two developments within the mobilized Kurdish diaspora, which are however, only suggestions since current studies are missing: the emergence of a Kobanê generation and increasing international legal success for decriminalisation. Finally, I will provide an overview of regular mobilization of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany.

In Phase III, the threat around Kobane played a significant role in mobilizing and strengthening the Kurdish diaspora communities in Europe, particularly in Germany (Toivanen 2021: 5). Toivanen traces the process of the formation of a ‘Kobanê Generation’ (2021: 15) along with the mobilization of the diaspora in France and the politicization of many young Kurds. A similar process is indicated for the Kurdish diaspora in Germany. An activist from the Kurdish student association YXK related that the group had “grown larger through the resistance of Kobanê and Rojava ... I believe it is larger than ever before”. Likewise, young Kurds began visiting Kurdistan for the first time as part of YXK delegations or at least experienced the Kurdish movement through such trips in 2015.

Additionally, a fourth Kurdish migration phase to Germany started with the Syrian War in 2011 and peaked in 2016, with around 77,000 Kurdish refugees registered from Syria alone. From 2011 to 2018, at least 200,00 Kurdish refugees came to Germany (Engin 2019b: 8). Additionally, the cessation of the peace process between the Turkish State and the PKK in 2015 and the coup attempt in 2016 led to a rise in the number of refugees from Turkey. This newly politicized Kurdish population, along with partly organized refugees from Kurdistan, added to a mobilization base for the PKK-led Kurdish movement.

In 2015, during the elections in Turkey, the Kurdish diaspora in Germany effectively cooperated in the campaign for the HDP and contributed to its success (Başer et al. 2015: 141–42). Moreover, with regard to arms supplies to Turkey and, in particular, due to the EU-Turkey Agreement, which regulates the repatriation of unauthorized refugees from Greece to Turkey, the passive role of the EU and Germany was severely criticized (Civaka Azad 2015c). Most importantly, during Turkey’s military invasions in the AANES, in Bakûr and Başûr, the Kurdish diaspora mobilized both in Germany and Europe-wide. Organizationally, NAV-DEM was renamed KON-MED¹⁵⁹ in 2019 and claims to represent 250 Kurdish institutions, foundations, and associations, including youth and women’s organizations.

¹⁵⁷ Millî İstihbarat Teşkilâtı | National Intelligence Organization.

¹⁵⁸ Navenda Civaka Demokratîk ya Kurdên li Almanyayê | Democratic Social Center of the Kurds in Germany.

¹⁵⁹ Confederation of Communities of Kurdistan in Germany (registered association).

In Phase III, German security authorities continued their persecution of the Kurdish movement, using anti-terrorist laws, association bans, and restrictive asylum laws. Roland Hefendehl conducted a study on the activities of the PKK in Germany that were relevant under criminal law. He mainly analysed suspected PKK-related crimes in Germany between 2010 and 2020, based on the complaint statistics¹⁶⁰ of the Federal Criminal Police Office. The results showed that almost 50 percent of these 11,000 cases were violations of the law on associations, 16 percent involved damage to property, 10 percent were cases of personal harm, and 9 percent were offences against the law on assemblies. Other cases involved prosecution due to “Landfriedensbruch” (breach of the peace) and resistance against authority. Hefendehl concluded that both in terms of quality and quantity, these offences were not comparable to the offences that were used to justify the PKK ban in 1993 (ANF News 2022b). Lukas Theune, who defended individuals in PKK-related cases, assessed that since the largest share of suspected PKK cases involved violations of the Law on Association, the ban creates a circular argument, which, according to the Federal Constitutional Court, should not occur.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, repression against the Kurdish movement continued and became increasingly indiscriminate, including the implementation of a symbol ban (see Chapter VIII. 2).

The Kurdish movement continued to strive for a decriminalization of the movement, especially on an international level. In September 2017, a Belgian court of appeal ruled that the PKK was not a terrorist organization, but a legitimate party in an internal armed conflict in Turkey. The court concluded that in this internal armed conflict, the PKK and the HPG/YJA Star were to be regarded as one side of the conflict, rather than as a terrorist organization (Gössner 2019). This ruling was confirmed in March 2019 by the Belgian Court of Cassation in Brussels. Consequently, there would be no more trials against individuals active in and for the PKK in Belgium. However, the immediate consequences on a European and international level were limited. On a similar, but different international level, in 2014, a lawyers' collective in the Netherlands filed an objection on behalf of Murat Karayılan and Duran Kalkan¹⁶² against the PKK's inclusion in the EU terror list. These proceedings ended with a decision by the European Court of Justice in 2018, stating that the PKK's listing for the period 2014-2017 was unlawful (Spiegel 2018). However, the PKK was placed back on this list during different in-camera sessions of the EU Council of Ministers. In response, the lawyers filed a new complaint with the European Court of Justice each time. As of the time of writing, these decisions were used also by German lawyers in 129a/b trials, however they have not had any legal impact in the National Arena in Germany. In short, despite some legal victories at the international level, repression against the PKK-led Kurdish movement in Germany remained high and even increased during this phase.

Finally, to provide an overview of recurrent mobilizations within the Kurdish diaspora, highlighting significant historical and contemporary themes: since 2013, a substantial demonstration convenes annually in Paris on the 6th January to commemorate the assassination of three Kurdish activists. In February, Strasbourg, France, hosts a larger demonstration in

¹⁶⁰ Only criminal investigations are listed here, but not their outcomes. Consequently, an increase or decrease merely indicates that more investigations were initiated.

¹⁶¹ Special criminal provisions that were directed solely against associations as such are not to be considered with regard to bans on association according to Article 9 (2) of the Basic Law. Otherwise, the freedom of association would be at the disposal of the legislature (BVerfG 13.7.2018 - 1 BvR 1474/12, BVerfGE 149, 160).

¹⁶² Murat Karayılan, commander-in-chief of HPG; Duran Kalkan Member of the Executive Board of KCK.

remembrance of Öcalan's abduction anniversary, often preceded by a long march advocating Öcalan's freedom. Since the 1980s, March sees nationwide large-scale rallies celebrating Newroz, the Kurdish New Year, with local variations of these festivities. In May or July, Germany observes the Mazlum Doğan Youth Festival, now known as the International Kurdish Cultural Festival. Since 2004, Germany has also hosted the Zîlan Women's Festival each June. Furthermore, since 1992, Germany hosts a Kurdish International Cultural Festival in September, recently situated in Maastricht, often drawing tens of thousands of participants. Finally, November witnesses the mobilization of demonstrations against the PKK ban.

2.4. Summary

In conclusion, the Kurdish diaspora has played a crucial role in the overall mobilization of the Kurdish movement. The mobilization efforts of the Kurdish diaspora can be viewed as a transnational component occurring in parallel to those in Kurdistan. The diaspora's activities are closely tied to developments in Kurdistan but are also influenced by Germany's relations with Turkey and its treatment of Kurdish migrants. Various events and commemorations throughout the year serve as focal points for mobilization and solidarity within the diaspora, highlighting the transnational nature of the Kurdish movement. In Phase I, shortly after the foundation of the PKK, there were first attempts to organize in the diaspora in Germany. In the 1980s, similar mechanisms played out in the German context, such as the violent outbidding with the countermovement or inner-leftist or inner-Kurdish rivals. However, the repressive approach by the German governments to the Kurdish diaspora also led the Kurdish movement to choose a confrontational strategy towards the FRG, which resulted in further repression and stigmatization. In Phase II, the ideological and organizational transformation was also adapted in the mobilized diaspora. Additionally, new generations of Kurdish activists grew up, who were socialized in Germany, raised their voice against anti-Kurdish racism and for equal citizenship rights. Finally, Phase III, saw the emergence of a Kobanê generation, which is characterized by high mobilization and influx in Kurdish organizations, but whose long-term effects need to be empirically investigated.

Chapter VI. Phase I: 1980–1999

In this chapter, I will investigate the relationship transformation between the PKK-Led Kurdish movement and the radical left firstly in a Transnational Arena, secondly, in a National Arena, and, thirdly, in an Inter-Movement Arena. Chapter VI deals with Phase I, lasting from 1980, where a military coup took place in Turkey until the abduction of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. This, and the upcoming two chapters, contain the main empirical analysis and a comparison will be conducted in Chapter IX.

1. Phase I: Transnational Arena

In the Transnational Arena across the three temporal phases, I will trace the process of relationship transformation between the Kurdish movement and the radical left considering the interaction between the Kurdish movement and states in the West Asia, the dense transnational space that the Kurdish movement has built between Europe and Kurdistan, as well as the history of transnational cooperation of the radical left. The main argument pertaining to Phase I is that the *asynchronicity of internationalist struggle* provided an unfavourable starting condition for transnational relationship transformation, however that *transnational brokerage* between the (radical) left, and the Kurdish movement nevertheless emerged in the form of delegation trips and internationalists joining the PKK. The reoccurring sub-mechanisms underlying these dynamics were *transnational diffusion* and *political learning*. However, these transnational relationships were in their nascent stage and did not develop to a point where one could speak of the formation of a transnational space.

1.1. Asynchronicity of Internationalist Struggles

In the following sections, a brief summary of Chapters IV and V is given. In the beginning of the 1990s, the PKK-led Kurdish movement entered into a phase characterized by the most intensive warfare with the Turkish army witnessed up until that point. In this time, the “liberation of Kurdistan by the PKK had become not at all unthinkable” (Jongerden 2007: 43) and a stalemate was fought. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, most leftist and communist movements worldwide entered into a major crisis, and as an internationalist argued, “the only ones, who came out almost unscathed, were the Kurdish movement.” The Turkish state responded with a scorched earth policy, depopulating the war zone, eliminating the Kurdish opposition through murders by unknown perpetrators. Meanwhile, the war in Bakûr escalated, and the strategies used by the diaspora reflected these dynamics. The Kurds who had fled to Europe during this phase and the already mobilized Kurdish diaspora intensified their activities in Europe. In the words of Duran Kalkan¹⁶³, the Kurdish movement entered into a phase of “total war” (Başer 2015b: 10). In all of Phase I, but especially in the 1990s, the PKK-led Kurdish movement recognized the necessity of forming coalitions with anti-imperialist actors and indicated its willingness to form relationships transnationally.

Anti-imperialist groups in Germany, which were the first to form relationships with the Kurdish movement in the 1980s¹⁶⁴, fell into a major crisis in the beginning of the 1990s. During the transition from the 1980s to the 1990s, many anti-imperialist groups disintegrated or lost their

¹⁶³ See Chapter V.

¹⁶⁴ See Chapter VI. 3.

relevance due to four interlinked reasons: firstly, anti-imperialist ideologies were delegitimized since some of the liberated nation-states themselves transformed into repressive regimes. In particular, the people's war strategy in the FRG was delegitimized given that it was supported by regimes such as Pol Pot's Cambodia. Secondly, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, many of the anti-imperialist and communist groups disintegrated and a great disorientation spread. A Kurdish activist recalled:

"In 1989, there was the collapse of real socialism, the GDR collapsed. [In the 1980s,] the New Left was still emerging, and you had a lot of red groups. And that's when all the left groups collapsed, the big Marxist-Leninist groups all over Germany and also internationally."

According to the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, 64,000 people were classified as 'left-wing extremists' in 1987, whereas in 1989 the figure had fallen to 40,000, and by 1991, amounted to only 26,500 despite reunification (BfV 1988; BfV 1990; BfV 1992). Many organized activists withdrew into private life, the movement fragmented, and the urban guerrilla groups dissolved. Thirdly, in addition to the crisis of the anti-imperialist groups, another current came onto the stage in Germany, initially formed under the label of Antideutsch and taking a fundamentally opposite stance to groups adhering to anti-imperialist ideologies. The Antideutsch movement, through polarization and in-fights in the broader autonomous movement, contributed to a reduction of internationalist activities in the radical left. In short, the delegitimization of the anti-imperialist ideology, the disintegration of communist and anti-imperialist groups, and the emergence of the Antideutsche current plunged the radical left in the FRG into a crisis in terms of its internationalist ideology and practice. Finally, the emerging solidarity with the Zapatista movement, from 1994 onwards, led to a weakening of the solidarity movement with Kurdistan. On the one hand, this was due to the competition for attention and resources between the solidarity movement with the PKK and with the EZLN, and on the other due to the fact that activists in the FRG faced fewer consequences for solidarity actions with the Zapatista movement, in contrast to the Kurdish movement.

When considering the developments of the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany, one can therefore speak of an *asynchronicity of internationalist struggles* in the Transnational Arena. The radical left in Germany had entered into a crisis regarding its anti-imperialist and internationalist practices in the beginning of the 1990s, while the Kurdish movement entered into what was to be the peak or most intense period of guerrilla warfare and mobilization in Kurdistan and in the diaspora up until that point. The Kurdish movement can be characterized as an anti-cyclical movement (Anonymous 1996/1997:IV. 3.), compared to other national liberation movements, as well as other radical left movements worldwide in general. Globally, the Kurdish movement could neither rely on a wide range of potential cooperation partners internationally, such as state actors, nor on transnational movement organizations, such as communist parties or other anti-imperialist organizations. Locally, in Germany, both the GDR as a self-designated 'anti-imperialist state' and the anti-imperialist movement in the FRG were at a low point or had been dissolved. In other words, the asynchronicity of internationalist struggles created a difficult basis for building and maintaining relations within the Transnational and Inter-Movement Arena.

1.2. Transnational Brokerage

However, the asynchronicity of internationalist struggle was counteracted by the transnational brokerage between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany. *Transnational brokerage* refers to the linking of hitherto unconnected organizations, movements, or networks across borders. In this context, transnational brokerage signifies the initiation of relationship formation between actors, while the terms *transnational coalition building*, or the *formation of a transnational space* denote their maintenance, albeit in varying degrees of intensity.

During Phase I, the recurring sub-mechanisms of transnational brokerage were *political learning* and *transnational diffusion*. I will exemplify both sub-mechanisms with reference to two repertoires of action which were most salient during Phase I, and which contributed to the formation of transnational relationships: delegation trips and internationalists joining the PKK. These examples were selected since delegation trips were the most common form of transnational relationship formation, and internationalists joining the PKK the most intense. Importantly, both sub-mechanisms can be identified in each repertoire, however, in order to maintain thematic unity and understanding, each sub-mechanism will be illustrated with reference to one repertoire. I demonstrate that delegation trips repeatedly established new transnational relationships between hitherto unconnected actors, but that usually the relationships were not maintained. In contrast, attempts at reconstituting and maintaining these relationships can be traced in the phenomenon of internationalists joining the PKK, however due to the limited number of internationalists, these relationships did not develop to a point where one could speak of the formation of a transnational space.

1.2.1. *Transnational Diffusion: Delegation Trips*

Delegation trips are one of the most common forms of transnational action, which create ties along and beneath the relationship of nation states, facilitating the diffusion of information, support for the movement on the ground, and the political learning of the participants. From the end of the 1980s, delegation trips were a staple of the repertoire of the transnational solidarity movement with Kurdistan, although they tended to be organized by different actors with different purposes. One of the first trips I identified was a delegation of German lawyers¹⁶⁵ to a process against accused PKK members in Amed¹⁶⁶ in 1983 (Klawitter 1983). During the 1990s there was a “veritable train of delegations” (Faist 1998: 233), which included members of parliament, activists, unionists and NGOs (Hocker, Liebe-Harkort 1996: 338–63). Almost all delegations travelled from the FRG to Kurdistan, usually with a specific purpose and for a short period of time. A small selection of delegation trips mentioned in the ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’ and other documents can illustrate their variety: in 1992, the Kurdistan Solidarity committees organized a delegation for media representatives (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1992a); in 1992, a human rights delegation, including Member of the Bundestag Ulla Jelpke¹⁶⁷, was deported from Turkey (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1992c); in 1993, a small delegation published eyewitness accounts of the destruction of a village in Bakûr (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1993a); in 1993, a union delegation met with the trade union Petrol-İş in Batman (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1993c) and in 1998, a delegation

¹⁶⁵ Vereinigung Niedersächsischer Strafverteidiger | Association Criminal Defense Attorney in Lower Saxony.

¹⁶⁶ Diyarbakır.

¹⁶⁷ Ulla Jelpke was a member of the Bundestag over three decades, for the Greens, PDS/Die Linke, and has been an advocate for the lifting of the PKK ban from the beginning.

travelled to observe the process of Eva Juhnke¹⁶⁸ (Freundinnen v. Uta 2010: 89–90). The delegation trips were usually organized by the Kurdish movement and occasionally by solidarity groups, such as the ‘Freunde des Kurdischen Volkes’¹⁶⁹ from Hamburg:

“All in all, we counted at some point, we took 250 Germans from Hamburg alone with us on our travels over the course of time, and they got to know the reality of Kurdistan and not what some people told them” (Radyo Azadî 2020).

The delegation trips in Phase I were directed towards at least three functions: the diffusion of information, protection, and the political learning of the participants. I will shortly summarize these functions and highlight the diffusion mechanism, then, in a second step, trace the possibilities of transnational relationship transformation.

Especially during the early phases of the solidarity movement, the delegation trips often aimed at gathering information and diffusing it to the FRG. Information about repression, torture and trials in Turkey was not widely disseminated within the German national public and access to direct sources was not consistently available. In addition, the information provided by neutral or non-Kurdish activists was often attributed with more credibility by the German public. The gathered information, in the form of press conferences, written reports, and information events, was circulated among the international and German public. The information was reported in the ‘Kurdistan Report’, the ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’, and other, usually leftist newspapers, and sometimes in the broader national media. In particular, during the 1990s, the delegation trips served as fact-finding missions to gather proof that the Turkish Army used weapons from the former GDR, delivered free of charge by Germany, in the war against the Kurds. On several occasions, the German government was compelled to temporarily suspend arms exports, following revelations that the National People’s Army (NVA) weapons were used in contravention of the NATO Treaty (Hahn 1992).¹⁷⁰ An activist from the Munich Kurdistan Solidarity committee reported on one of these efforts:

“There we were just a Munich group of 10 people with Eva-Bulling Schröter¹⁷¹ as a member of the Bundestag ... We were constantly on the road with police escorts, so we took a lot of pictures. Also of the German tanks, these wheeled tanks from the National People’s Army that they delivered to Turkey. That was always our escort, that in the back window of our cab

¹⁶⁸ An internationalist who was arrested in Başûr by Turkish special forces. In Van, she was charged with “membership in the PKK” in front of the Turkish State Security Military Court (DGM) and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. In 2004, she was released (Freundinnen v. Uta 2010: 89).

¹⁶⁹ Friends of the Kurdish People. See Chapter VI. 2.&3.

¹⁷⁰ On the 8th April 1994, arms deliveries from Germany to Turkey were interrupted following the publication of photographs which showed German weapons being employed against Kurds. Earlier in March, several Newroz Delegations, from human rights, peace, and Kurdistan solidarity delegations, documented the use of German weapons and tanks: “The delegation members were greeted with the fascist Grey Wolves sign by the crews of the BTR 60 tanks that passed through Cizre” (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994b: 8). Yet already by the 4th May 1994, Federal Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel ordered the resumption of arms deliveries to Turkey. The Federal Government confirmed that the materials of a Newroz delegation and a local election delegation in 1994 were noticed and the result of the examination was submitted in writing to the attention of the Foreign Ministry and the Defense Committee of the Bundestag (Bundesregierung 1994). Despite the considerable photographic evidence obtained by the delegations, the German Government did not acknowledge a breach of the treaty in the utilization of the weapons, notably the BTR-60 armoured personnel carrier. The position was rooted in the argument that the same types of vehicles were also supplied by Russia, albeit in significantly smaller quantities (Brauns 2010). Ultimately in 1995, the German government finally decided to end the arms exports to Turkey in their existing format, which involved the free provision of decommissioned equipment and, subsequently, arms transfers were exclusively conducted through commercial arrangements (Weick 2001: 201–02).

¹⁷¹ Member of Die Linke. From 1994 to 2002 and from 2005 to 2017 she was a member of the German Bundestag.

... And then they deported us ... That was all accompanied by the press here [in Germany]. We had a press team here in Munich ... That has come into the public, the fact, that Germany supplies the weapons for the suppression of the Kurds.”

Even though the German governments re-established the arms exports to Turkey after a short time, they were under considerable public pressure to justify further exports, since documentation obtained by solidarity activists and journalists overwhelmingly indicated that Turkey was violating the NATO treaty. Indeed, one of the greatest achievements of the Kurdistan solidarity movement during the 1990s was the ability of its delegations to gather information within Kurdistan, ensure the dissemination of this information in the German news media, and subsequently, to exert additional pressure on the German governments to discontinue one of their international linkages.

Secondly, the delegation trips had a *protective function* for the movement on the ground. In general, authoritarian regimes tend to have little interest in arresting foreign citizens for an extended period of time, especially in the case of public figures, given the risk of international backlash. This protective role was often fulfilled through election observations, with the underlying strategy predicated on the logic that the presence of foreign delegations monitoring the election process in various locations served to enhance the democratic nature of elections, as repressive measures by the Turkish regime were deterred by this heightened scrutiny. The delegation to Bakûr, however, faced repression, as did the majority of delegations during the 1990s. This repression spanned a spectrum, encompassing surveillance, deportation, and even physical violence. Most delegations were followed by law enforcement or military personnel, and some members were apprehended and later deported. One DKP member related:

“In 1994, there was a delegation to observe of the local elections in Turkey.¹⁷² ... [The police] arrested us at the airport, the whole delegation ... And they did it quite brutally ... A plane came specially for us to take us to Istanbul, and then we had to go to the plane, across the tarmac, and then you had to go through a line of civilian police, and they were beating on us. That was unbelievable.”

At the same time, other delegation trips were able to carry out their task of monitoring elections to a limited extent. The delegations attempted to use their European citizenship status in order to create partial protection, diffused reports of their observations to Germany, and attempted to trigger pressure along German-Turkish international relations. Additionally, delegation trips were utilized to counter international repression: in 1997, there was a planned ‘Peace Train’ from Europe to Kurdistan, however it faced a ban in Germany due to international pressure exerted by Turkey. Nevertheless, a delegation proceeded to Kurdistan under the label of ‘European Peace Flight Musa Anter’.¹⁷³ There was massive repression by the Turkish state against the Peace Flight, including the blockade of the delegation with German tanks. In turn, the solidarity movement used this repression to put pressure on the German government. For example, parliamentarians from the PDS and the Greens submitted a minor interpellation, inquiring about the actions of the Federal Government concerning the Peace Train and Flight, and the utilization of German weapons by the Turkish military against it (Bundesregierung 1997b; Bundesregierung 1997a). As

¹⁷² Turkey held local elections on the 27th March 1994.

¹⁷³ Also known as Apê Mûsa, Musa Anter was a Kurdish writer and intellectual who was murdered by JITEM in 1992 in Amed.

this example shows, the German delegations to Kurdistan, triggered by international repression, were able to enter Kurdistan and compelled the Turkish government to use repressive measures, which were in turn then used to put pressure on the German government. Here once again, the citizenship status of EC/EU-countries was leveraged to carry out a political action which otherwise would not have taken place without the involvement of foreigners.

Thirdly, the delegations triggered a *political learning process* amongst the participants and the groups they represented. Most interviewees in Phase I, reported about political learning before, during and after the delegation trips, and these excursions were frequently cited as pivotal moments for the acquisition of both practical and theoretical knowledge:

“The trip was an important experience: it gave a much deeper understanding of the reality of the Kurdish liberation struggle. It showed us the political and social dimension of this resistance, the importance of which goes far beyond an independent and self-determined Kurdistan. Their resistance is a struggle for humanity” (Arbeitskreis Internationalismus Bonn et al. 1991).

In the case of delegations of rank-and-file union members from Hamburg to Êlih¹⁷⁴, an organizer described the process of political learning as follows:

“And when we started with the solidarity, most of them had heard through Karl May of the ‘Wild Kurdistan’¹⁷⁵ or something. But they had no idea at all what the reality in Kurdistan was like. And also, that the PKK movement was not a sinister Stalinist party, but a people’s movement. You had to get to know all this on the ground, and you had to get to know these people and their resistance, their everyday resistance” (Radyo Azadî 2020).

This particular process of political learning, characterized by exchanges amongst the rank-and-file, fostered one of the few enduring, long-term relationship transformations (see below).

Concerning transnational relationship formation, delegations linked hitherto unconnected organizations and can therefore be seen as instances of *transnational brokerage*. Where possible, participants of the delegations met with various organizations on the ground. One activist reported, “we had talks, for example with representatives of Özgür Gündem’s¹⁷⁶ newspaper”. As an exception, a few delegations from Germany even travelled to the PKK headquarters in the Beqaa Valley. A solidarity activist described one of these delegations as follows:

“And we were invited in 1992¹⁷⁷ with a small group in Lebanon, in the Beqaa Valley, in the Mahsum Korkmaz¹⁷⁸ Academy, where Abdullah Öcalan was too. We met him, went there for a week, and we discussed with different comrades. We also met our good friend Sakine

¹⁷⁴ Batman.

¹⁷⁵ Karl May ‚Durchs wilde Kurdistan‘ (May 2001) (1892). The Saxon writer Karl May, who, as is well known, never visited the Middle East himself, described the Kurdish people as “noble savages” in contrast to other groups of the population, and was most influential in the framing of Kurds in Germany during the 20th century. He also introduced the Yezidis to German-speaking readers, positively portrayed as pious, albeit world-weary believers, or “devil worshippers” (Brauns 2019). In sum, an archetypical orientalist stereotype.

¹⁷⁶ This was a Kurdish-Turkish daily newspaper, founded on 30th May 1992. Due to repeated bans on publication, the newspaper changed its name several times.

¹⁷⁷ The delegation actually occurred in 1991 (ANF News 2021c).

¹⁷⁸ Mahsum Korkmaz (Nom de guerre: Agit), member of the central committee of the PKK and one of the leading figures at the start of the armed struggle on 15th August 1984. He died in 1986 in Gabar (Cansız 2015b: 47), most likely assassinated by Feyzi Aslan (Selim).

Cansız¹⁷⁹, who had just been released from prison after ten years, who was also there. And so we spoke with many comrades there, which was certainly a great impetus for us to further develop the solidarity work” (Radyo Azadî 2020).

These delegations were among the most comprehensive form of political exchange with the central cadres of the PKK. The results of these particular discussions were collected in the brochure “Serfirazkin – Wir werden siegen”¹⁸⁰, which the delegation produced and published for German-speaking audiences (Arbeitskreis Internationalismus Bonn et al. 1991). However, the activists did not usually engage in transnational relationship maintenance with Kurdish activists or organizations. The delegations frequently assumed the character of unidirectional and one-time transnational activities. In fact, the goal of the majority of delegation trips was the diffusion of the gathered information from Kurdistan to Germany, and seldom entailed the maintenance of relationships with organizations or activists from the Kurdish movement. Nevertheless, the delegations were critical for strengthening solidarity work in Germany, including local relationship transformation, the organization of material support, and in some cases, the maintenance of transnational relations.

First, some solidarity activists reported an increase in engagement with the Kurdistan solidarity movement, and in some cases, a deepening of the relationship with the Kurdish diaspora thanks to the delegation trips to Kurdistan:

“So, I was in Northern Kurdistan very often. I went there two, three years in a row, and I actually needed that. I find the work, the political work in Northern Kurdistan, the people incredibly impressive, because under these absolutely repressive conditions, what they have achieved, how they have organized the population, how they have built up projects, how they have discussed, I found that incredible. And that was always such an energy factor to recharge my batteries for the work here.”

Thus, the delegations and interactions with the movement in Kurdistan provided the motivation for activists to commit to the solidarity work in Germany. At the organizational level, in 1994, a nationwide meeting of Newroz Delegations took place, gathering approximately 150 to 200 participants, who had previously visited Kurdistan. These participants evaluated their reception in the general public as a great success, and claimed that the German government “came under heavy legitimation pressure” (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994c). Nevertheless, the delegations’ lack of preparation was sharply criticized, and a professionalization was planned, involving the inclusion of more lawyers, trade unionists, journalists, and photographers. Campaigns were initiated and the preparation of upcoming delegations was to be coordinated by a “ständiges Newroz-Büro”¹⁸¹ (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994f). In this case, the delegations recreated themselves and the Newroz Büro organized visits at least until 1997 (Koordinationsbüro Newroz 1997). Nevertheless, the sustained maintenance of relationships with SMOs in Kurdistan often proved elusive, and a

¹⁷⁹ Sakine Cansız was one of the founding cadres of the PKK, imprisoned and tortured, and when released, a forerunner of women’s liberation. Assassinated in Paris in 2013 alongside Fidan Doğan und Leyla Şaylemez, allegedly with the involvement of the Turkish intelligence agency MİT. Her diaries were translated into German and widely disseminated during Phase III (Cansız 2015a; Cansız 2016; Cansız 2015b).

¹⁸⁰ Serfirazkin - We will win.

¹⁸¹ Permanent Newroz office.

recurring two-way exchange, which is essential for the formation of a transnational space, failed to materialize.

Secondly, delegation trips also triggered the creation of relationships with regard to material support. For instance, following a delegation trip to Şirnex¹⁸² in 1992, the city was destroyed in August of the same year by the Turkish army. Consequently, the population fled to Başûr and formed the Mexmûr Camp, and another delegation later went to visit the camp:

“We ... talked to the doctors who work there. Now we are collecting. There is a non-profit association that we founded back in 1993. It is called ‘Kurdistan Hilfe’¹⁸³ and ... there we have collected money since 1993 for humanitarian projects” (Radyo Azadî 2020).

In fact, according to its website, the ‘Kurdistan Hilfe’ was founded in 1992, initiated with the goal of organized, direct, humanitarian aid. Here, activists from the radical left, with contacts in unions and civil society, formed long-lasting relationships with Kurdistan, maintained through humanitarian projects and delegation trips. Other human rights oriented projects were established by ‘medico international’¹⁸⁴ and the ‘Initiative für den Aufbau einer Gesundheitsstation in Cizre’¹⁸⁵ in Freiburg. The latter collected over 80,000 Deutsche Marks to establish a health station for people without health insurance in Cizîr (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1991c).

Finally, and to a very limited extent, the delegation trips also fostered the formation of relationships that extended beyond transnational brokerage and developed into continuously maintained transnational relationships. In a few cases, the delegation trips were repeated and long-term relationships with local organizations were established:

“And we then started doing this delegation trip in 1993. Also, very much on a trade union basis. Above all, we had established contacts with Petrol-İş¹⁸⁶ and the Kurdish comrades who worked in the oil industry in Batman, Êlih, and we were invited by them. We went there with 30 people. And several times we also invited them to Hamburg, which has also worked. However, every time we came back to Batman, one or the other had been shot. And that was a very difficult thing in that respect” (Radyo Azadî 2020).

In cases such as the one described above, the delegation trips lost their one-way character, since the Kurdish workers were invited to Germany and relationships were maintained through regular trips.¹⁸⁷ Through this worker solidarity between SMOs, a transnational space was formed to a limited extent, although since these often rested on interpersonal relationships, they were sometimes disrupted by the murders of Kurdish activists. Occasionally, delegations of Kurdish organizations or political parties visited the FRG. For instance, in 1994 a delegation of the DEP¹⁸⁸ met with major German parliamentary parties, however it is worth noting that this visit was

¹⁸² Şirnak.

¹⁸³ Kurdistan Aid.

¹⁸⁴ In 1994, medico international organized an “international North-West Kurdistan” conference in Brussels with the Kurdistan Human Rights Project (KHRP) where Öcalan delivered a proposal for a possible solution to the Kurdish question (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994h).

¹⁸⁵ Initiative for the construction of a health station in Cizre.

¹⁸⁶ Petrol-İş represents employees in the oil, chemical and rubber industries.

¹⁸⁷ Likewise, a student partnership between Amed and Cologne was announced, with attempts to facilitate information exchange and mutual visits (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1992d). However, evidence of a sustained, long-term implementation could not be found.

¹⁸⁸ Demokrasi Partisi | Democracy Party. Existed from 1993 until its ban in 1994. Leyla Zana was the prominent leader.

organized by the Kurdish groups themselves, rather than the solidarity movement (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994i).

In sum, the delegation trips during the 1990s were numerous and served at least three purposes. By gathering and diffusing information, the activists were able to put considerable pressure on the German governments and even managed to temporarily suspend arms exports. The delegation trips also had a protective function, whereby activists took advantage of the privileges afforded by their citizenship status, triggered repression, and diffused information about this repression back to Germany, in order to create international pressure. Finally, the delegation trips also had a political learning function for the individuals involved. Importantly, participation in delegation trips increased activists' engagement in Kurdish solidarity efforts, contributed to the generation of material support, and in some instances, facilitated the sustenance of transnational relations. During Phase I, these delegation trips served as evidence of transnational brokerage between the Kurdish movement and the radical left within the pre-existing transnational space of the Kurdish movement. However, despite the considerable quantity of delegation trips, they did not trigger enduring transnational relationships or even the establishment of a transnational space. Typically, the transnational brokerage concluded following the delegation trip itself.

1.2.2. Political Learning: Internationalists

In addition to international delegation trips, activists from the German radical left joined the PKK or the guerrilla in Kurdistan in the 1990s. I define internationalists as activists who have been socialized within other movements, who subsequently joined the Kurdish movement for extended periods of time. In this section, I will trace the transnational brokerage of these internationalists by examining the evidence of political learning mechanisms within the Kurdish movement and the influence of these internationalists on the radical left back in Germany.

The PKK itself offered internationalists from different revolutionary movements around the globe the opportunity to participate as guerrillas. On the 1st May 1989, the prisoners' council of the PKK¹⁸⁹ called on the progressive people and organizations of the world to build Internationalist Brigades, following the example of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, in order to support the struggles in Kurdistan (Vorbereitungskomitee 2017: 2).¹⁹⁰ Consequently, the Kurdish movement made considerable efforts to integrate internationalists as recalled by an anonymous internationalist:

“Dealing with those who have finally decided to participate as internationalists in the Kurdish liberation struggle – even if only for a certain period of time – is first of all characterized by great openness, respect, goodwill and also care” (Anonymous 1996/1997:IV. 3.).

In general, the Kurdish movement encouraged internationalists to come to Kurdistan and support the struggle, offered the opportunity of political learning and the possibility for personal development, while expecting these internationalists, in congruence with the PKK's understanding of internationalism, to eventually return to their home countries and advance the internationalist struggle in their respective localities.

¹⁸⁹ The PKK had about 10,000 prisoners in Turkish prisons at the time.

¹⁹⁰ However, it is important to note that the number of internationalists in Kurdistan never came even remotely close to the scale of the International Brigades in Spain between 1936 and 1939.

During Phase I, the number of internationalists from the German radical left who followed this path was estimated by journalists to be around 30 (Brinkbäumer, Mascolo 2000). A Kurdish cadre believed the number to be even higher: “We looked once and counted three dozen people from Germany alone who were there. Now only leftists out of solidarity.” Here, I will draw on four cases of internationalists from the radical left during the 1990s, whom I interviewed or obtained extensive written material about.¹⁹¹ It can be affirmed that for internationalists from Germany, none joined the PKK based on organizational decisions to establish a relationship with Kurdish organizations, nor did they do so from a position of strength. Rather, during the 1990s, the move to Kurdistan appeared to stem from a motivation to escape from defeats, repression, and from a lack of perspective. Then again, the Kurdish movement attracted internationalists for several reasons, including the attribution of opportunity with the anti-cyclical movement, and the attribution of similarity with women’s liberation. It is worth highlighting that tensions existed between the strategies of going to Kurdistan, learning from the Kurdish movement there, and implementing these acquired skills in Germany, as opposed to the immediate need to build new organizational structures in Germany. One internationalist recounted these discussions:

“And the other thing was then, of course, that the friends or comrades here said: ‘What do you want there? We must do something here.’ And I replied: ‘Then let’s go. Then you can think about it well.’ They replied: ‘We have to do it here.’ I argued: ‘Yes, we have been here for many years. And what have we built up?’ So, I made this decision more or less for me. Already a relatively individual standpoint.”

During the discussion between the different localities and over which strategy should be given priority, some activists close to the Kurdish movement decided to keep organizing in Germany instead of participating as guerrillas. The tension between strategies for transnational or local work, as well as different arguments for the prioritisation of one or the other, has been a recurring discussion in transnational solidarity with Kurdistan and will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter VI. 3.

The majority of internationalists reported experiences of political learning and personal transformation during their time with the PKK. I will focus here on the aspects that the internationalists aimed to diffuse within Germany. It is important to note that the learning process was not solely a goal of the internationalists, but was also encouraged by the PKK, which opened party schools for internationalists. These party schools, characterized by a structured educational curriculum and rigorous military discipline, often marked the beginning and the conclusion of internationalists’ journeys within the PKK. The education in these school was not primarily directed towards military training, but centred on ideology, history, and self-analysis:

“The party chairman suggests that we use the time to deal with German history and the tasks of the left in Germany. I was not prepared for this, since we left there to get to know a different reality” (Flach 2019b: 27).

Importantly, Öcalan directed the attention of the internationalists not towards the PKK’s ideology or guerrilla strategy, but towards a reflection on their own history and the situation in Germany.

¹⁹¹ The most famous fighter was Andrea Wolf (Ronahî), who was murdered in Çatak in Bakûr together with six other fighters following their arrest by Turkish soldiers (Die Redaktionsgruppe 1999: 7). There are two published books on internationalists (Freundinnen v. Uta 2010; Flach 2019b).

In fact, the primary aim for the internationalists did not appear to consist of supporting the PKK in its practical organization or warfare – which would have been in any case very limited – but rather to gain insights from the PKK's mode of organization and to reflect on an appropriate revolutionary strategy for Germany.

Already, during their time with the PKK, the internationalists sought to act as brokers, albeit with considerable limitations, since communication from the war zone in Kurdistan with Germany was only possible by means of fax machines or letters (Die Redaktionsgruppe 1999: 126). Sometimes, the internationalists were able to write texts for Kurdistan solidarity media. Accordingly, one internationalist observed that

“there were not so many letters. Today, the technology makes contact easier. There was occasionally a letter that I wrote, or the ones I received from Europe, from Germany, from friends. There was only very sparse information.”

In contrast, during Phases II and III, during the time that the internationalists stayed in Kurdistan, the possibilities of establishing a transnational space were constrained due to the limitations of communication technologies. Before departing from the PKK, the majority of the internationalists had a final stay in the party school, and some of them had discussions with Öcalan regarding their departure and their roles and responsibilities in Germany.

“One afternoon, as we sit together with our German group in a discussion group, Serok¹⁹² suddenly comes by with some security guards. We stand up to greet them. ‘Ah, our German PKK’ ... A ‘German PKK’ – that is what the task of the revolutionary left in the FRG would be. To build an organization that, like the PKK, slowly and steadily grows from a small group into a force that faces the burning problems ... Can we contribute experiences to this? Can we make the methods, principles, and goals of the PKK applicable to us, free ourselves from the lack of perspective and defeatist attitude of the left?” (Flach 2019b: 280).

In the following, I will examine the impact of the internationalists upon returning to Germany, which indicates, following their initial role as transnational brokers, efforts to maintain transnational relationships. I will summarize the outcome of the internationalists work as transnational brokers along five points: firstly, the internationalists introduced the topic of Kurdistan into the groups they came from. An example is provided by a former antifa activist who related:

“But Kurdistan was also an important topic in our group. From our antifa group, people have joined the guerrilla. This back and forth ... the meetings with these friends who joined the guerrilla and then came back to Germany ... and the discussions with them were very, very important for me in my life and my character.”

Some of the internationalists even engaged in the diffusion of the ideology and discussions directly, but needed to do so in a clandestine way, since repression against internationalists was considerable. An activist who was then part of a radical left group:

“And then we had also made seminars again and again, over several days, where ... a person from us, who had joined the guerrilla, met with us, where we talked about the developments

¹⁹² Leader. The term is used as a synonym for Öcalan, the party chairman. Later, this name changed into Rêper, which means enabler or pathfinder.

of the Kurdish freedom movement in the PKK and so on. These seminars we had to organize in a more clandestine way. The people were of course also always massively shadowed and needed to have different places for the seminars.”

Secondly, the internationalists were central in forging new relationships and the establishment of solidarity committees. For example, as one internationalist related, his departures led to discussions about Kurdistan solidarity within his organization:

“But as I then came to know my departure, a lot has changed in the circle from which I came ... They organized here [in Germany], simply built-up contact with Kurds ... built Kurdistan solidarity groups.”

Thirdly, some radical left groups in Germany, in consequence, also engaged in transnational activities, such as the organization of delegation trips. An activist who had recently joined the solidarity movement reported:

“We had then quite quickly thought that we should also make a delegation trip to Northern Kurdistan. At that time, usual Newroz delegations were organized ... mainly human rights delegations ... to observe the human rights situation ... We said ... we'll make our own. And then we organized our own small autonomous delegation group.”

Fourthly, the internationalists who had already travelled to Kurdistan acted as brokers for prospective internationalists:

“A German friend was staying with the guerrillas at the time. When he returned to the FRG after a year in 1994, he suggested that we go to the mountains¹⁹³ ourselves for some time. Through his contact, we had the opportunity to get to know comrades from the PKK in the FRG” (Flach 2019b: 20–21).

Thus, to a very limited extent, the transnational relationships which the internationalists had formed began to reconstitute themselves in the 1990s. Contacts with internationalists who had been to Kurdistan and joined the guerrillas made it easier for activists to take the same step. Andrea Wolf described this transnational brokerage in a letter:

“Through the group that is now already down, a real access to your [the Kurdish] struggle has been created that was not there before. Sure, I was always in solidarity, but it had not had a real attraction for me until now, as for so many others here” (Die Redaktionsgruppe 1999: 99).

Fifthly, during this period, the role of Şehîds¹⁹⁴ began to develop, particularly after the murder of Andrea Wolf, one of the first internationalists who was killed in Kurdistan in 1998. Andrea Wolf became widely recognized as a symbol for the internationalist struggle during Phases II and III, because she was the first of the radical left to be killed in the war in Kurdistan. Already in the years 1998 and 1999 there were events to commemorate her. A solidarity activist reported:

“The first one I participated in, '99 on the first anniversary of Andrea Wolf's murder. There was a big event in Hamburg at that time ... in a big hall ... with quite a lot of contributions,

¹⁹³ ‘Going into the mountains’ is a euphemism frequently used by the Kurdish diaspora and the solidarity movement to refer to joining the guerillas.

¹⁹⁴ Martyrs or fallen. See Chapter VII. 1.

with music and poems and speeches and so. That was also very impressive. It was actually not only about Andrea but also about a big massacre at that time.”

A support group, in collaboration with Andrea Wolf’s family, demanded that Turkey clarify the circumstances of her death, as well as the deaths of the PKK members who were with her (Seibert 2011).¹⁹⁵ According to another solidarity activist, following her death, Andrea Wolf acted as a transnational broker, since her texts and her reports were read and disseminated:

“For me personally, it was important at the time that Andrea Wolf, whom I did not know at all ... but just the fact that she was as a German somehow in Kurdistan. And then I read the things that she wrote. They were published at that time in ‘Interim’¹⁹⁶ or something. I always found it interesting ... There’s certainly a racist matrix in which one swims, but it has a different weight when a German eyewitness says something than when Kurdish women tell you that.”

The death of an activist from the radical left movement in Germany sparked significantly more activity within the solidarity movement compared to the death of an activist from the Kurdish or Turkish left. For example, in the case of Cengiz Ulutürk¹⁹⁷, Kurdistan solidarity activists, ostensibly in cooperation with the German offshoot of the DHP, organized a single commemoration event, as one solidarity activist noted:

“And with [the DHP], for example, we organized a joint trip to Buchenwald¹⁹⁸ in memory of Cengiz. And that was just really crassly roughed up by the cops. We had three buses: one from Cologne, one from Berlin and one from Hamburg. We were held up by riot units on the highway, and our bus was already in Weimar shortly before the memorial.”

However, apart from this commemoration event, within the radical left in Germany, Ulutürk has not been widely remembered or acknowledged. The role of Şehîds will be further discussed in Chapter VIII. 1. However, it can be stated that Wolf’s and Ulutürk’s deaths did not trigger widespread relationship formation with the Kurdish movement or encourage other internationalists to join the PKK.

In sum, the primary aim of the PKK and the internationalists when joining the Kurdish movement was political learning, particularly focused on analysing the situation in Germany, and receiving ideological and organizational education to build an anti-imperialist movement in Europe. While the internationalists initially acted as transnational brokers by establishing relationships with the Kurdish movement across borders, their impact went further. They influenced other activists to become involved in Kurdistan solidarity, who in turn, organized transnational activities, and recruited again new internationalists to join the cause and travel to Kurdistan. In this way, the

¹⁹⁵ The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg condemned Turkey in 2010, declaring that there had never been a serious investigation into the incident (Seibert 2011).

¹⁹⁶ Left-wing autonomous magazine in Berlin. See Chapter IV.

¹⁹⁷ Cengiz Ulutürk was a member of ‘Antifaşist Gençlik’, a migrant antifascist group in Berlin, which was formed in the environment of the Kurdish association in Neukölln and Kreuzberg in 1988, due to the increasing nationalist wave and later pogrom-like attacks on migrants (AK Wantok 2014). In April 1992, after the far-right politician Gerhard Kaindl was fatally stabbed during a clash with antifascist youth in a restaurant in Berlin-Kreuzberg, the Antifaşist Gençlik, its political environment, and especially Ulutürk himself were subject to intensive scrutiny (Flach 2021). Cengiz Ulutürk travelled from Germany to Kurdistan, where he joined the PKK. During his time there, it was proposed that he also join the ‘Devrimci Halk Partisi’ (DHP) | ‘Revolutionary People’s Party’, which he agreed to. Ulutürk was later killed in June 1996, on the way to Dêrsim, when his group was ambushed (Flach 2021).

¹⁹⁸ Buchenwald Concentration Camp was one of the largest concentration camps on German soil.

internationalists went beyond transnational brokerage and sought to form a transnational space between the radical left and the Kurdish movement. However, due to the very limited number of internationalists in Phase I, a stable transnational space failed to materialize, since their small presence could not generate significant flows of people, information, and resources.

1.3. Summary

Phase I: Transnational Arena

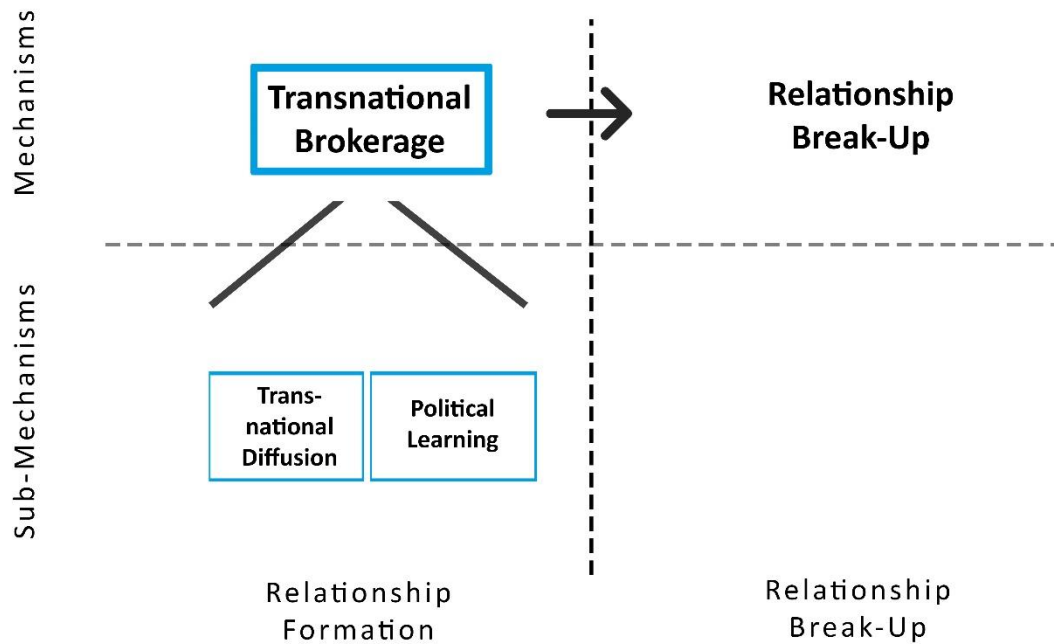


Figure 1: Diagram of Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms in the Transnational Arena in Phase I

In Phase I, the PKK's internationalist efforts were marked by a willingness to form transnational coalitions and a clear alignment with leftist movements in Europe. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the PKK-led Kurdish movement intensified its struggle in Kurdistan and increased mobilization efforts in Germany. However, this period also witnessed a significant crisis in the internationalist struggles of the radical left. Not only was the anti-imperialist ideology partially discredited, but many groups and organizations with internationalist and anti-imperialist ideologies dissolved, with a new current emerging within the radical left that challenged the previously dominant anti-imperialist ideology. Additionally, the Kurdistan solidarity movement entered into competition with the emerging solidarity movement in support of the Zapatistas from 1994 onwards. In other words, this *asynchronicity of internationalist struggles* in the early 1990s, created unfavourable conditions for building transnational relationships between the radical left and the Kurdish solidarity movement.

Nevertheless, within the Transnational Arena, *transnational brokerage* between the radical left and the Kurdish movement occurred. There was a "veritable train of delegations" (Faist 1998: 233) from Germany to Kurdistan by different actors and with different purposes. The main sub-mechanism was the *transnational diffusion*. Activists aimed to expose Germany's involvement in

the war in Kurdistan by transmitting gathered information from Kurdistan back to Germany. The delegation trips also served a protective function, where German activists, leveraging their citizenship privileges, exposed themselves to repression and relayed information about this repression back to Germany in order to generate international pressure. At times, these delegations also facilitated political learning and contributed to the (re-)emergence of Kurdistan solidarity in Germany. However, despite the significant number of delegation trips, they did not lead to enduring transnational relationships, and typically, the transnational brokerage ceased after the delegation trips were concluded. In essence, there was a lack of sustained transnational relationship maintenance or ongoing transnational exchange with the PKK-led Kurdish movement, but rather a series of solidarity activities related to a distant struggle.

On the contrary, as early as the 1990s, there were initial signs of the emergence of a transnational space, which can be traced to the involvement of internationalists who joined the PKK. The internationalists engaged in *political learning* within the PKK, which in turn triggered the formation of relationships between the radical left and the Kurdish movement in Germany, as well as the recruitment of new internationalists who joined the PKK. However, owing to the limited number of internationalists, the solidarity relationships did not progress to the extent where one could describe the formation of a fully-fledged transnational space.

2. Phase I: National Arena

This chapter analyses the dynamics between the German State, the Kurdish Diaspora, countermovements, and the general public within the National Arena across the different temporal phases. The goal is to demonstrate how these dynamics led to relationship transformation between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany. Whereas repression was one of the main pathways of relationship formation in Phase I, it only triggered relationship formation towards the end of in Phase II, and only in specific cases, whereas in Phase III it fostered relationship maintenance.

During Phase I, repression played a central role in triggering relationship formation and was the catalyst for the main relationship transformation pathway. Nevertheless, repression and stigmatization also drove many radical left groups to engage in boundary activation, resulting in a polarized radical left in Germany towards the Kurdish movement. First, based on Chapter V, I will summarize the repression of the German authorities against the PKK-led Kurdish movement, highlighting the migration regime as a complementary field of repression, while sketching the role of stigmatization in the national public.

Firstly, the findings indicate that during this phase, the *repression* targeting the Kurdish movement predominantly took a selective¹⁹⁹ (as opposed to a generalized) form. These measures began to emerge in the early 1980s and reached their peak with the PKK ban in 1993. This prohibition effectively criminalized all entities associated with the PKK-led Kurdish movement. Subsequently, various instruments of repression, such as anti-terrorism trials, the migration regime and stigmatization were (almost exclusively) directed at the Kurdish movement. However, following the implementation of the PKK ban, instances of repression occasionally assumed more generalized forms, extending their reach to encompass not only the Kurdish solidarity movement but also the broader left.

The relationship between the Kurdish movement and the German state, after an initial phase characterized by first disinterest and then some relationship formation, rapidly deteriorated into one marked by hostility. German authorities resorted to employing almost all action modes of repression summarized by Boykoff, including direct violence, public prosecutions, surveillance operations, break-ins, infiltration efforts, dissemination of false reports, harassment campaigns, implementation of extraordinary legal measures, and mass media deprecation. In contrast to existing literature, my analysis posits that the process of criminalization of the Kurdish movement in Germany commenced no later than 1986, when a Newroz fest was disrupted by the police. In 1987, German police forces arrested Kurdish activists, subjecting them to prosecution under section 129a of the German Criminal Code. Originally conceived for the purpose of prosecuting the 'Rote Armee Fraktion' (RAF), this legal provision pertains to the establishment of terrorist groups and membership therein.²⁰⁰ In 1989, this culminated in the commencement of the 'Düsseldorf Trial', the largest 'terrorist trial' in German legal history up until that point. These

¹⁹⁹ Generalized repression refers to repression that targets both the Kurdish movement and the radical left, whereas selective repression targets just one, the Kurdish movement.

²⁰⁰ Importantly, this section criminalized membership in an association whose purposes were aimed at allegedly terrorist goals, which were defined in the context of a catalogue of crimes. The defendant's direct actions do not need to be proven; merely membership in the organization is sufficient. This membership can result in a prison sentence ranging from one year to ten years.

legal proceedings lasted until 1994 and served as a sobering indication to the Kurdish movement that the German state had aligned itself with Turkey's interests (Başer 2015b: 8).

The peak of repression against the Kurdish movement in Germany materialized with the imposition of the PKK ban in 1993. Immediately following the ban, a significant number of individuals alleged to be PKK members were apprehended, and over thirty Kurdish associations faced closure. Subsequently, information offices, periodicals, publishing houses, a news agency, and all PKK-associated symbols were rendered illegal. The consequences of this measure were profound and included over ten thousand investigations, prohibitions on demonstrations, rallies, events, and even weddings, as well as thousands of temporary detentions and identity checks, raids on associations and residences, and deportations (Morres 2015: 7). Since the ban was issued, individuals accused of being PKK members were frequently prosecuted for violating the law on associations, even though section 129a continued to be employed. The prohibition gave rise to further tensions between the German state and the Kurdish movement. Demonstrations protesting the PKK ban were frequently prohibited by local authorities. Highway blockades occurred in multiple locations, two female supporters of the PKK resorted to self-immolation, clashes with law enforcement personnel transpired, and Kurdish cultural centres that had been forcibly shuttered were occupied (Başer 2015b: 11; Lyon, Uçarer 2001: 939). The ramifications of the PKK ban often extended beyond the immediate Kurdish movement, exemplified by a comprehensive ban on all demonstrations in Munich in 1994. One particularly grim incident during this period of heightened tension unfolded on the 29th June 1994. A Kurdish youth named Halim Dener was fatally shot in the back by two plainclothes police officers while he was in the midst of affixing posters displaying the banned ERNK. In short, the PKK ban exacerbated the already strained relations between the German authorities and the PKK-led Kurdish movement, precipitating an escalation marked by increased repression, stigmatization, and acts of violent protest.

In mid-1996, the strategy of the PKK underwent a profound transformation. Öcalan, in a public address, repudiated the violence of the past as a mistake and advocated for a peaceful, politically oriented dialogue between the PKK and the German government (Lyon, Uçarer 2001: 941). In 1998, the German government, stipulating the definitive cessation of violence in Germany as a prerequisite, decided to cease categorizing the PKK "as a terrorist organization but rather as a criminal organization" (Lyon, Uçarer 2001: 941–42).²⁰¹ Nonetheless, another surge of Kurdish protests and subsequent repression unfolded shortly after Öcalan was abducted in 1999. Germany witnessed intense mobilization, marked by demonstrations and occupations, notably in front of the consulate in Berlin, where Israeli security forces fatally shot four Kurdish activists. While the security forces were quickly evacuated to Israel, the Kurdish protesters faced investigations, with over 30 individuals subjected to legal proceedings. Adult participants were handed down probationary sentences of up to two years for disturbing the peace and were confronted with the looming threat of deportation (Bergemann 2004).

Secondly, during Phase I, the German government employed the increasingly stringent migration regime as a supplementary tool of repression against the PKK-led Kurdish movement. Particularly during the 1990s, deportations were wielded as a threat against politically active Kurds, and these

²⁰¹ This meant that members, if sued, would no longer be charged with membership in a terrorist organization (section 129a) but under section 129, which deals with membership in a criminal organization (Lyon, Uçarer 2001: 942).

threats materialized into actual deportations. This action mode of repression, not considered by Boykoff, carried far greater severity compared to other measures like employment deprivation. Since the PKK ban, the asylum process for refugees became entangled in a paradox: individuals could be recognized as political refugees due to their support for the PKK, yet they simultaneously faced the possibility of deportation or denial of naturalization. The legal persecution of Kurdish refugees in Germany significantly curtailed their political activities, as they lived under the constant threat of deportation or other severe consequences arose. German politicians frequently employed the spectre of deportation as a public deterrent against the mobilized Kurdish diaspora. For instance, in 1996, following clashes between Kurds and the police, Wolfgang Schäuble, the then Parliamentary Group Chairman of the CDU, demanded immediate deportation in cases of disturbing the peace “without ifs and buts” (Büro Ulla Jelpke 1996).²⁰² These frequent threats of deportation, as noted by Başer, engendered a sense of *victimization* within the diaspora (Başer 2015b: 11). Towards the end of the 1980s, there was a de-facto moratorium on deportation,²⁰³ and between 1994 and 1995, Germany announced a brief suspension in the deportation of Kurds to Turkey (taz 1994a). Nonetheless, despite these temporary halts, the number of deportations from Germany to Turkey rose from 2,814 in 1993 to 6,640 in 1998 before subsequently decreasing.

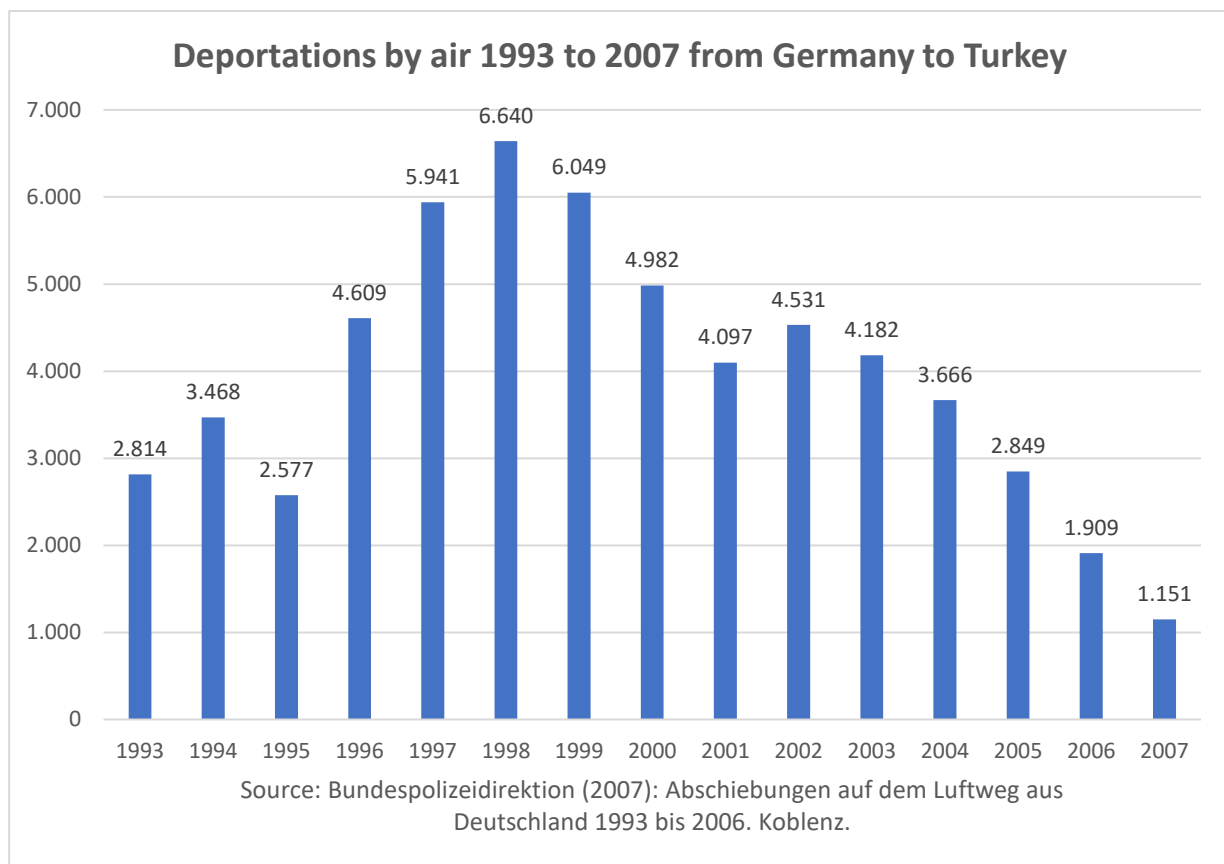


Figure 2: Deportation by air 1993 to 2007 from Germany to Turkey

²⁰² The Parliamentary Secretary of the Union Parliamentary Group Joachim Höster spoke out against the tactics employed: “Those who fear torture at home do not behave in the host country as the Kurds did over the weekend” (Büro Ulla Jelpke 1996).

²⁰³ Implemented by several Länder, however, often with exceptions.

These statistics, while not providing insight into the specific number of Kurds or PKK sympathizers deported, underscore the increasing significance of intimidation within the diaspora.²⁰⁴ It is worth noting that, Østergaard-Nielsen, albeit without a clear empirical basis, asserts that “almost all” of the asylum seekers deported to Turkey were Kurdish (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003: 63). In short, during Phase I, the German state expanded its repression against the Kurdish movement into, or by means of the migration regime. The *repression* and *stigmatization* efforts by German state authorities were formidable but insufficient to quell the political activities of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany. In this phase, repression through the migration regime, and particularly section 129a, primarily targeted the Kurdish movement, largely sparing the radical left. However, as will be demonstrated later, the PKK ban, initially appearing as a form of selective repression, yielded generalized consequences. Subsequent sections will detail instances of leftist demonstrations being prohibited and individuals and groups with ties to the Kurdish movement coming under government scrutiny.

Thirdly, the interactions between the PKK-led Kurdish movement and the Turkish fascist countermovement in the National Arena during Phase I were initially characterized by dynamics of outbidding, and subsequently, de-escalation. The violent confrontations that occurred during this period generally contributed to the stigmatization of the Kurdish movement in Germany, and prompted segments of the radical left to engage in boundary activation. The media extensively covered these violent conflicts, parliamentary discussions revolved around them, and they were used to justify the increasing repression, and German nationalist and racist organizations exploited them (Başer 2015b: 10). All of this unfolded against the backdrop of German fascists targeting both Kurdish and Turkish individuals and properties, while the radical left in Germany was combating this growing racist mobilization. For instance, following the arson attacks by German Neo-Nazis on Turkish residences in Solingen and Mölln, the fascist ‘Türk Federasyon’ claimed to have nearly doubled its membership (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003: 51). Ultimately, as a result of the tactical shifts within the Kurdish movement and the Turkish fascist movement, the level of conflict began to decline in the late 1990s. However, the violent confrontations between Turkish fascists and Kurdish activists exacerbated the stigmatization of the PKK-led Kurdish movement. Furthermore, the attacks by Kurdish activists on Turkish establishments at a time when Neo-Nazis and racist attacks were on the rise in a reunified Germany also triggered a tactical conflict between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany (see Chapter VI. 3.).

Finally, it is essential to consider the stigmatization of the PKK within the German public. While this analysis is not primarily focused on discourse or frame analysis, it amalgamates the insights from a limited number of academic studies on this matter with assessments provided by my interviewees. During the early 1980s, German media coverage of Kurdistan was notably scarce, making it challenging to access information about the region. This phase has been aptly characterized by Nikolaus Brauns as the “non-existing” of Kurdish representation in the German media (Brauns 2019). However, from the late 1980s, there was a noticeable increase in reports on PKK activities, particularly within the diaspora, with greater frequency observed in the 1990s

²⁰⁴ For example, the state of Bavaria issued deportation orders to 15 Kurds who were arrested at the protests following a Newroz festival in 1994. Fearing deportation, one detainee attempted suicide (Dokumentationsstelle der Antirassistischen Initiative Berlin 2021: 21).

(Küçük: 70). In the late 1980s, reports detailing the massacres of Kurds in Iraq and the chemical weapons attack on Halabja deeply affected the German public. Kurds were briefly framed as victims²⁰⁵ during this period, a framing that persisted until the Second Gulf War in 1990 (Brauns 2019: 34). Conversely, Kurds were portrayed as perpetrators in both Turkey and in Germany. The conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK was depicted in the German media as a counter-terrorism effort, with reports on alleged PKK atrocities often uncritically sourced from the Turkish state news agency Anadolu (Brauns 2019: 34). With the PKK ban in Germany, the terrorist framing became salient, and the *stigmatization* of the PKK-led Kurdish movement became entrenched. Many interviewees voiced their concerns about the “anti-propaganda” propagated by the German media in Phase I and its repercussions on the solidarity movement. Kurdish activists often cited the wrongful accusation of the PKK in the 1986 murder of Olof Palme as the beginning of this counterpropaganda and stigmatization. To address this perceived anti-propaganda, it is important to examine two facets of mass media deprecation: the biased reporting prevalent in the German media, and the negative framing, particularly within the taz newspaper. I have chosen these examples as they were frequently referenced by the interviewees and significantly influenced the relationship with the radical left in Germany.

Concerning biased reporting, the confrontational tactics employed by the Kurdish movement, their rivalry with Turkish fascists, and the involvement of Turkish and Kurdish leftists' organizations, all contributed to the *stigmatization* of the PKK-led Kurdish movement in the German public. During Phase I, the media describe the movement with labels and frames such as terrorists (Nowacki 2019: 66), Stalinist (Spiegel 1996a), killers (Çürükkaya et al. 1997; Spiegel 1987), sect (Senocak 1999), leadership cult around Öcalan (Gsteiger 1994), and criminals (Ekberg, Berndt 1999). Moreover, the conflict was often racialized, both in general and in the context of the countermovement in particular (Brauns 2019: 38). As Nowacki points out, the biased reporting focusing on violent confrontation and negative framing were prevalent in Phase I (Nowacki 2019: 66). A study by Scheufele and Brosius, which analysed media coverage of Kurdish movement actions in Germany from 1993 to 1996 found that one-half to two-thirds of all reports about Kurds focused on violent actions and property damage (Scheufele, Brosius 2001: 457). There were instances of false reporting as well, such as the case in April 1996 when the Cologne tabloid 'Express' initially published an article claiming that the PKK was planning to assassinate Foreign Minister Kinkel and Chancellor Kohl (Welt 1996). It was not until November 1996 that 'Der Spiegel' debunked these unfounded accusations (Spiegel 1996b).²⁰⁶ In summary, biased and violence-oriented reporting heavily influenced perceptions of the PKK-led Kurdish movement in the general public. The negative portrayal was further exacerbated by Öcalan's announcement of potential attacks on German facilities and citizens in early 1996. However, by mid-1996, there was a shift in the Kurdish movement's framing strategy regarding the German public (Başer 2015b). In May 1996, Öcalan refuted allegations of death threats against German politicians in various German radio and newspaper interviews. He also acknowledged the PKK's past misconduct while operating in Germany and pledged that the organization would renounce

²⁰⁵ This is indicated by the titles of numerous books which were published at the time, such as "A People Struggles for Survival" (Wimmer Michaela et al. 1991) "The Deceived People" (Deschner 1989) and "The Orphans of the Universe" (Ghasi 1994).

²⁰⁶ By that time, the damage was done: flats were searched, telephone lines were tapped, suspected Kurds were questioned, and the negative framing went viral. At the end of the investigation, the Federal Criminal Police Office did not renounce the accusation (Brauns 2019).

violence in Germany moving forward. Finally, in August 1997, Öcalan assured during a ZDF²⁰⁷ interview that the PKK would renounce violence in Germany. Nevertheless, these actions did not lead to a more positive framing of the Kurdish movement in the German media, as the stigmatization continued to be reproduced.

Despite the taz's regular reporting on war crimes and atrocities committed by the Turkish state and other actors in the Kurdish region (Dreger 1991; taz 1990), as well as the repression faced by Kurds in Germany (taz 1994b; taz 1995), the newspaper maintained a highly negative stance towards the PKK. The taz employed similar frames for the PKK as other national media outlets, such as depicting them as Stalinist (Gottschlich 1990), sect (taz 1996), a personality cult around Öcalan (Erzeren 1999), involved in organized criminal activities (Appen 2000), killers (Dribbusch 1990) or driven by ethnic nationalism (Seidel-Pielen 1996). In general, it appears that the taz's goal was to bring attention to human rights abuses in Turkey while simultaneously questioning or undermining the legitimacy of the PKK as representatives of the Kurdish people (taz 1993). The taz often interviewed or framed other Kurdish organizations as the "good Kurds" (Naumann 1993). For example, during the escalation of the late 1980s, the taz sided with KOMKAR and Dev-Yol (Lavel 1987). Journalist Kai von Appen even claimed that the taz's Hamburg branch received a collective warning from the Berlin headquarters in 1986, warning them against continued positive reporting on the PKK's positions, and reportedly, one editor was even dismissed as a result (Appen 2001: 25–26). This incident was considered by activists to be an illustrative example of the widespread defamation that Kurds were subjected to (Brauns 2019: 34).

It is important to note that during the 1980s and 1990s, the taz was regarded as an alternative or radical left newspaper. Considering the taz as a media-as-practice (Mattoni 2020), this alternative media outlet was initially embedded in a New Left milieu, both framing and organizing concurrently. In its early years in the late 1970s, the taz emerged as a journalistic expression of leftist social movements and resonated strongly with the Green Party. Similar to the Greens in the 1990s, the taz gradually transitioned from the social movement sphere into the political establishment. The negative framing of the PKK by the taz can be viewed as an indication of the broader shifts occurring in the alternative milieu more generally, driven by the Green Party's desire to gain resonance in the mainstream public, and influenced by its relationship with other leftist-Turkish organizations. Despite the negative framing and perceived false accusations, both the Kurdish movement and the solidarity movement protested and took disruptive measures.

In essence, a stigmatization against the PKK and its movement were present in the German media landscape. In particular, violent actions in Germany were emphasized and used to stigmatize the political struggle of the PKK, labelling it as terrorist and Stalinist, among other things. The question of how much the PKK itself contributed to this negative framing is not the focus here; rather the analysis intends to explore the effect of stigmatization on the process of establishing relationships with potential allies. As the next section will illustrate, stigmatization, like repression, had a two-sided effect on solidarity-building, but it mostly hindered the formation of relationships, in contrast to repression. The negative framing in the taz was particularly influential because it was read within the alternative milieu and the radical left. In any case,

²⁰⁷ Second German public television channel.

stigmatization became an object of dispute and mobilization within the solidarity movement itself.

2.1. Kurdish Movement - Radical Left

The repression against the PKK-led Kurdish movement in Germany had a dual impact during Phase I. On one hand it led to the formation of relationships between the radical left and the Kurdish movement, culminating in jointly organized campaigns against the ban on the PKK, and actions advocating for the right of residence for Kurdish refugees, as well as the establishment of anti-repression organizations, solidarity committees, alternative media outlets, as well as new Kurdish associations featuring German leftists on the executive boards. However, it is important to note that these solidarity relationships and activities faced considerable repression. On the other hand, due to the perceived threat of repression and the terrorism stigma associated with the PKK, some leftist groups engaged in boundary activation towards the Kurdish movement. The mechanism of *attribution of threat* is central for different mechanisms triggered by repression. A Kurdish activist discussed the assessment of threats:

“It was always the case that groups had to decide for themselves whether to work with the Kurdish movement. Working with the Kurdish movement means to be affected by repression. And that is just a reality in Germany since the PKK was banned in 1993. Therefore, it is one of the biggest questions that really all groups and all individual people must decide for themselves.”

A SMO's assessment of threats is likely to be influenced by several factors. Firstly, they consider whether forming relationships with a particular movement or cause would make them a target of state repression or a countermovement. This assessment is closely tied to the question of whether the repression is generalized, targeting the entire left, or selective, targeting the solidarity movement or only the Kurdish Movement. Secondly, the severity and novelty of repression play a significant role in threat assessment. New and harsh repression measures are more likely to be perceived as a serious threat. Conversely, when repression becomes a routine or habitual part of the activist landscape, it may lead to a degree of habituation or institutionalization of anti-repression work, where activists become accustomed to dealing with such challenges. Lastly, the nature of existing relationships between SMOs also affects threat attribution. Well-established and close relationships with a particular movement or cause are more likely to trigger similar threat attributions. The converse is likely to be true in cases where relationships are more weakly established.

To delve deeper into these mechanisms triggered by repression, it can be argued that when repression takes on a generalized form, affecting a wide range of activists from the Kurdish movement, the broader left, and even bystanders, it tends to trigger relationship formation. In such cases, the shared experience of repression fosters solidarity and cooperation among these groups. Conversely, repression is selective and primarily targets the Kurdish movement, with perceived consequences for the broader left only in the long run, relationship formation tends to be limited to those groups that attribute the repression against the Kurdish movement as affecting them directly. Stigmatization, as a separate factor, tends to result in boundary activation rather than relationship formation. When SMO's perceive stigmatization, their response may sometimes be to distance themselves from the stigmatized cause or the

movement in order to protect their own interests, or avoid the consequences of being associated with these groups.

2.1.1. Relationship Formation: Attribution of Threat

This section provides a chronological account of key events in the formation of relationships between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in response to various forms of repression. It illustrates that when faced with new and severe selective repression attempts, more solidarity organizations emerged and different currents within the radical left formed coalitions, often by *downplaying ideological differences*. The common thread among these groups was the common attribution of a medium to long-term threat, as they believed that the same repressive measures could eventually be applied to their own organizations. However, as the repression evolved, particularly with the PKK ban, and took on more generalized forms, some moderate actors within the left began to distance themselves from the repression against the PKK-led Kurdish movement. This shift in response to the changing nature of repression was a significant development in the dynamics between the two movements.

Repression: Threat and Downplaying of Differences

Despite the repression that occurred in the early and mid-1980s, there was a noticeable absence of major solidarity actions and expressions of support from the radical Left in Germany. In contrast, other diaspora organizations responded with solidarity gestures. For instance, in 1984, following a police raid against the PKK-led Kurdish movement, a Latin America committee (MIR and others) sent telegrams to the Minister of the Interior to express their disagreement (Kurdistan Report 1984). However, as the repression intensified throughout the 1980s, expressions of solidarity began to slowly emerge:

“But at that time, there were also anti-systemic and alternative groups that stood by us, working together with us to fight against these dirty campaigns. While the German police even tried to stop us from printing flyers, these groups not only printed the flyers for us, but also distributed them right along with us. We did not really appreciate the cooperation with these groups at that time” (Civaka Azad 2018: 7).

One veteran Kurdish cadre assessed this relationship in retrospective:

“Our association in Duisburg was opposite to the association ‘Kopf aus dem Sand’²⁰⁸ ... They put the posters and information material even in a baby stroller. This has also created such an honest solidarity. A solidarity without ifs and buts.”

These initial instances of relationship formation were largely incidental, driven by the spatial proximity of meeting places, and served as a counter to the attempts at resource depletion. However, more widespread relationship formation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement took place at a later stage. The first Kurdistan solidarity groups, such as die ‘Freunde des kurdischen Volkes Hamburg,’²⁰⁹ were established thanks to the connections made through asylum lawyers and individual Kurdish intermediaries. The late Robert Jarowoy, an activist, former prisoner in context of the ‘Bewegung 2. Juni’, and local politician involved in the ‘Freunde des kurdischen Volkes Hamburg’ related:

²⁰⁸ Head out of the Sand.

²⁰⁹ Friends of the Kurdish People Hamburg.

“Yes, the Kurds we got to know mainly through a lawyer who processed Kurdish asylum applications ... And they all hoped that this struggle would make it possible to go back to Kurdistan one day ... And activities that took place here, were all in support of this struggle. Of course, you had to see how you could get along here, that is, not be deported to Turkey into the torture cellars, and also survive materially and perhaps still earn enough money to be able to donate something for various purposes. And we have tried to support all of that” (Radyo Azadî 2020).

Initially, the ‘Freunde des Kurdischen Volkes’ engaged in relationship formation primarily due to brokerage and the attribution of similarity,²¹⁰ however they also played a role in mobilizing against repression through the migration regime. The group facilitated the formation of coalitions with other SMOs when the repression associated with the Düsseldorf Trial reached its first peak. It was during this trial that broader solidarity activities began to emerge in response to this selective repression. As one veteran Kurdish cadre assessed:

“Düsseldorf Trail has a completely different dimension ... The first solidarity groups or alliances have been made. They were not even there before. But the Düsseldorf Trial has made it so that over 30 Kurdistan solidarity groups have been newly formed. Actually, we can say thank you to the German state.”

The initial harsh wave of repression against the Kurdish movement in the late 1980s triggered the formation of relationships with the Kurdish movement. Between 1988 until 1990, at least six solidarity coalitions or action groups specifically formed to address the repression surrounding the Düsseldorf Trial.²¹¹ Additionally, during this period, 18 broader solidarity committees were also established, often as a direct response to the repression. Notably, from 1991 until the PKK ban, no new coalition specifically focusing on repression was formed. On 21st October 1989, just three days before the upcoming trial, a massive demonstration with 18,000 participants took place in Düsseldorf calling for the release of Kurdish prisoners. According to the then attorney general Kurt Rebmann, between 1987 and June 1989, the Kurdish movement and the solidarity movement organized a total of 238 protest actions against repression, including 96 demonstrations and 142 occupations of political offices and media stations, with 165 of these actions taking place in Germany and 63 in other countries (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1989a; Spiegel 1989).²¹²

In 1988, following the initial arrests, a meeting of solidarity groups was convened in Gießen. This meeting involved seven groups from the radical left, including the ‘Freunde des Kurdischen

²¹⁰ See Chapter VI. 3.

²¹¹ ‘Solidaritätskomitee Ruhr mit den politischen kurdischen Gefangenen in der BRD’ (at least from 1989), ‘AK Freilassung der kurdischen Gefangenen Bielefeld’ (1989), ‘Hamburger Solidaritätskomitee mit den in der BRD inhaftierten Kurden (1989), ‘Solidaritätsgruppe gegen den Kurdenprozess Nürnberg/Erlangen’(1990), ‘Arbeitskreis zur Freilassung der kurdischen Gefangenen’ (Bonn, 1990), ‘Arbeitskreis gegen den Kurden Prozess Frankfurt’(1991) | ‘Solidarity Committee Ruhr with the political Kurdish prisoners in the FRG’, ‘Action group Release of Kurdish Prisoners Bielefeld’, ‘Hamburg solidarity committee with the Kurds imprisoned in the FRG’, ‘Solidarity group against the Kurdish trial Nuremberg/Erlangen’, ‘Working group for the release of Kurdish prisoners (Bonn)’, ‘Working group against the Kurdish trial Frankfurt’. Some renamed themselves later as ‘regular’ solidarity committee: for example the ‘Solidaritätsgruppe gegen den Kurdenprozess Nürnberg/Erlangen’ was later named ‘Kurdistan Solidarität Nürnberg/Erlangen’.

²¹² In general, the repertoire of the solidarity movement concerning repression included writing letters to detainees (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1988c), the creation and distribution of brochures and leaflets (AK Freilassung der kurdischen Gefangenen Bielefeld 1988), organizing information events, photo exhibitions (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1990c), staging solidarity hunger strikes (FEYKA Kurdistan 1988c), organizing solidarity weeks (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1989e), collecting signatures (FEYKA Kurdistan 1989d), and organizing demonstrations and rallies in front of prisons (FEYKA Kurdistan 1989b; FEYKA Kurdistan 1989c).

Volkes', and representatives from the Kurdish movement.²¹³ During this meeting, they decided to publish the biweekly 'Kurdistan Rundbrief', which would provide news from Kurdistan and updates on the solidarity movement. The aim was to broaden the readership beyond the radical left and engage with individuals from various backgrounds. As a Kurdish activist who was involved in producing the magazine related that it "had a very broad editorial team of party members, which is now called 'Die Linke', trade union members and so on". In short, the establishment of the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief' was initially triggered by repression from German authorities (FEYKA Kurdistan 1988b).

Another similar action unit was formed in Bielefeld, which included organizations like the 'Rote Hilfe'²¹⁴, VSP²¹⁵, the 'Marxistisch-Leninistischen Partei Deutschlands' (MLPD)²¹⁶, asylum groups, and an alternative neighbourhood newspaper (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1988a). Importantly, the German authorities were already closely monitoring the formation of relationships between the Kurdish movement and other radical left organizations in the late 1980s. As an anti-imperialist activist recalled:

"We had our own blocks on their demos and so on. The crazy thing was, that the demos were attacked, but it was not the Kurdish demo, which was attacked, but our blocks were beaten out. So, we were really beaten out of the demonstration, and we were also told, [by the police] 'so you [the Kurdish organizations] are welcome to make your demonstration, but not with them'."

The authorities' strategy of physically separating the Kurdish movement and the radical left, which can be summarized as a 'divisive disruption' strategy, aimed to isolate these movements. However, in this case, the strategy proved to be counterproductive.

Repression effectively helped for ideological differences between the PKK and other groups to be overcome. For instance, at a conference of antifascist groups in North Rhine-Westphalia in 1988, a resolution was passed "against the obstruction and persecution of Kurdish organizations in the FRG" (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1988b: 2). While there were some opposing voices expressing concerns about the resolution's perceived lack of criticism of the PKK, it was ultimately agreed that condemnation of the use of section 129a was the primary focus. Even the MLPD stood in solidarity with the Kurdish movement against the repression, despite its differences with the PKK. Conversely, a local chapter of the Green Party withdrew from the coalition due to their belief that the PKK was not being adequately criticized (AK Freilassung der kurdischen Gefangenen Bielefeld 1988). This incident highlights the distant, and later, hostile stance of the Green Party towards the PKK, as depicted in a report about a call for a solidarity event against the repression of the Kurdish movement in Germany:

²¹³ Including: BWK, 'Freunde des kurdischen Volkes Hamburg', 'Freunde des kurdischen Volkes Gießen', 'Arbeitskreis Kurdistan München', 'Europäischen Komitees zur Verteidigung der Flüchtlinge und Gastarbeiter' (CEDRI), 'Kurdistan Komitee Köln', 'FEYKA Kurdistan' | BWK, 'Friends of the Kurdish People Hamburg', 'Friends of the Kurdish People Giessen', 'Working group Kurdistan Munich', 'European Committees for the Defense of Refugees and Guest Workers' (CEDRI), 'Kurdistan Komitee Cologne', FEYKA Kurdistan.

²¹⁴ Red Aid. Anti-repression organization.

²¹⁵ United Socialist Party.

²¹⁶ Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany. The MLPD has around 2,800 members and is nowadays rather isolated in the German radical left.

“The decision of the district executive committee of the Greens [Bielefeld] was preceded by a dispute with the ‘AK Freilassung der kurdischen Gefangenen Bielefeld’²¹⁷ that lasted more than eight weeks. Only after the AK demanded a public discussion from the Greens about their failure to deal with the numerous invitations and calls, the district executive committee was ready to decide on the call for an event. It was certainly influenced in its decision by members who demanded the participation of the Greens in the event on the evening of the meeting in the Green Office. In the executive committee’s resolution, it is said that it stands against the criminalization of the Kurds in the FRG. How this should look concretely is not described” (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1989b).

In this case, the Green party, albeit very reluctantly, was pressured into condemning the repression of the Kurdish movement in Germany.²¹⁸ During the Düsseldorf Trial, regional coalitions with a broader leftist spectrum frequently passed resolutions against the repression. For instance, the ‘Alliance against neo-fascism in Karlsruhe’ unanimously passed such a resolution in 1989, and this alliance consisted of a variety of leftist member organizations. Often, the Düsseldorf Trial was perceived as a form of repression targeting the entire left and anti-fascist movements in Germany. For instance, an anti-fascist coalition in Stuttgart²¹⁹ passed a resolution stating that “the aim of this trial is directed against the elementary interests of the entire anti-fascist opposition in the FRG” (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1990a). In sum, cooperation between the radical left, primarily from an anti-imperialist current but sometimes involving local anti-fascist groups, union organizations, and party chapters, increased after the Düsseldorf Trials. This collaboration was triggered by selective repression, and, at times, contributed to overcoming ideological differences.

Relationship formation also extended to prisoners. For example, there is a documented exchange of letters between Huseyin Çelebi, one of the accused in the Düsseldorf Trails, and Christa Eckes, imprisoned as a member of the RAF. Their correspondence spanned from April 1988 until December 1989, the period of their hunger strike together with other RAF prisoners during the Düsseldorf Trials. During this time, Christa Eckes and Hüseyin Çelebi managed to exchange their experiences with solitary confinement, the judiciary, and reflect on the situation of the Kurdish, Turkish and German left (Dutzi 2021). Similarly, a Kurdish cadre claimed that there was a joint brochure between Christian Klar, a prominent RAF member, and a Kurdish activist imprisoned during the Düsseldorf Trial.²²⁰ The ‘Angehörigen Info’²²¹, a monthly magazine published since 1989, which dealt with the hunger strikes of RAF prisoners, regularly reported about the Düsseldorf Trial. In 1994, when Kurdish prisoners went on a hunger strike against the PKK ban, RAF prisoners like Helmut Pohl and Rolf Clemens Wagner expressed their solidarity (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994m). However, beyond these instances, there appears to have been no further

²¹⁷ Working Group for the Release of Kurdish Prisoners Bielefeld.

²¹⁸ Later, some parts of the Greens campaigned for the end of the PKK ban, since the “abolition of the fundamental rights of a minority is always a threat to the fundamental rights of all” (Grützmacher 1998). However, other representatives of the Greens, publicly equated the commitment to lifting the PKK ban with partisanship for the PKK and therefore strongly opposed it. The Greens’ working group on the Kurdish question advocated not taking the side of any of the conflict parties (Grützmacher 1998).

²¹⁹ Antifaschistisches Netzwerk Stuttgart-Ludwigsburg-Heilbronn.

²²⁰ The Brochure might be called ‘Roter Widerstand’ or ‘Rote Revolution’. Unfortunately, no evidence of this brochure could be found.

²²¹ Relatives Info.

extensive exchange between the PKK and the RAF, especially since the RAF became less active in the 1990s and dissolved in 1998.

The ban on the PKK in November 1993, resulted in a significant increase in repression, particularly targeting Kurdish structures and solidarity organizations. However, this repression also led to more diverse currents of the radical and moderate left becoming involved in solidarity actions and relationship formation. New solidarity groups emerged in response to the ban. Immediately after the ban, various Kurdish and Turkish organizations and associations called for the ban to be lifted (Kurdische Vereine in Deutschland 1993). Additionally, organizations of the moderate leftist spectrum, including PDS, the Greens, BUKO, VVN/BDA, local Jusos and some factions of the DGB chapters²²² and a church coalition (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1993b), among others, protested against the PKK ban. While the Greens criticized the ban, they also distanced themselves from the PKK (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994o). Many radical left groups and parties, such as 'Volksfront'²²³, DKP, anti-imperialist and anti-fascist groups, voiced their protest and organized or participated in protest events. Often, these protests against the PKK ban were met with heavy repression, leading to violent confrontation with the police.²²⁴

In the weeks and months directly after the ban, the Kurdistan Solidarity committees decided to intensify their efforts for a free Kurdistan. The previously banned 'Kurdistan Komitee', which had coordinated the work of the solidarity committees, was replaced by 'Solidaritätskomitee Kurdistan' in Bonn, organized by the solidarity committees themselves, later named the 'Kurdistan-Informationsbüro'²²⁵ (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994g). The ban also led to the formation of new coalitions such as a 'Bündnis gegen das PKK Verbot und der kurdischen Vereine Hamburg' and 'Komitee zur Verteidigung der Rechte der Kurden und Kurdinnen Nürnberg'²²⁶ in 1994. On the 12th March 1994, the Kurdish movement and the Kurdistan Solidarity committees called for demonstrations against the PKK ban in Bonn, and around 4,000 participants from the radical left, Kurdish and Turkish organizations attended the demonstration. Importantly, instead of the usual anti-imperialist groups and parties, the coordination of anti-fascist groups AA/BO²²⁷ spoke at the demonstration (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994d). In addition, other groups of the radical left increased their activities around the PKK ban, as one activist recalled: "Well, I was at that time in Libertad!²²⁸ And we always did something in some form about Kurdistan about the repression.

²²² 'Bundeskoordination Internationalismus' (BUKO) | 'Federal Coordination Internationalism', 'Verbindung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes – Bund der Antifaschistinnen und Antifaschisten' (VVN-BDA) | 'Union of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime', 'Jungsozialisten in der SPD' (Jusos) | 'Young Socialists in the SPD', 'Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund' (DGB) | 'German Trade Union Confederation'.

²²³ 'Volksfront gegen Reaktion, Faschismus und Krieg' | Popular Front against Reaction, Fascism and War. Small party with around 1,300 members.

²²⁴ For example, in Kassel, 10,000 activists were forbidden from participating at a 'resistance event', which resulted in the blockade of four freeway accesses by 4,000 Kurds. The police encircled and resorted to violence against the protesters. Negative reporting in the press followed this particular event, where in the Frankfurter Rundschau a police spokesman said that "they [the Kurds] even use their own children to block police cars" (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1993e).

²²⁵ 'Kurdistan Solidarity Committee', later 'Kurdistan-Information Office'. For the 'Kurdistan Komitee' see Chapter VI. 3.

²²⁶ 'Alliance against the PKK ban and the Kurdish associations Hamburg' and 'Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Kurds and Kurdish Women Nuremberg'. The latter, according to my assumption, were initiated by the circle of the already existing solidarity committees.

²²⁷ See Chapter IV. 'Antifaschistische Aktion/Bundesweite Organisation'.

²²⁸ Nationwide initiative for the freedom of all political prisoners and later merged into the IL.

Especially after the PKK ban.” In particular, anti-fascist groups began to engage more in relationship formation with the Kurdish movement and in mobilizations against the PKK ban.²²⁹

Furthermore, the first attempts were initiated to establish the “German-Kurdish friendship associations” (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994o). On the 24th March 1994, with explicit support from “German friends”, the YEK-KOM was founded as a new umbrella organization of Kurdish associations in Germany, replacing the banned ‘FEYKA Kurdistan’. Leftist individuals became chairman of associations, which the Kurdish movement utilized, or demonstration registrants for Kurdish mobilizations. As one long-term solidarity activist recalled:

“I mean, in the 1990s, the Kurdish movement [used] other German leftists as demo registrants or as association chairmen, because the associations were forbidden one by one. One tried to get Germans into the association executive committees, purely so that the association was not considered as a foreigner association.”

Yet, this cooperation on a formal level was not without challenges, as the same activist continued:

“Some German leftists, who were suddenly on the board of the association, thought they really had something to say. And wanted to say to [the Kurds], you can’t hang up the pictures of Öcalan now, because that is forbidden, and of course [the Kurds] saw that very, very differently. Actually, he should be only pro-forma to the outside of the association chairman, internally nevertheless other democratic structures exist.”

Despite challenges due to differing expectations of formal liability and actual influence, cooperation between the Kurdish movement and individuals continued, as the same activist related: “The Kurdish movement really made mistakes, alienated people – in part, I must say, people have been permanently alienated in this matter to this day.” Besides these problems, this cooperation allowed the Kurdish movement to respond to resource depletion and to be active in the diaspora, to mobilize and to prevent certain repression attempts.

The PKK ban, and the Düsseldorf Trial, brought about a renewed attribution of threat within the radical left, which, in turn, led to relationship formation. Activists in Munich emphasized that the repression following the ban spurred the creation of structures and coalitions between the German left and the Kurdish movement. Radical left-wing groups perceived the initial specific and subsequently more generalized repression against the Kurdish movement as a threat that could later be directed towards them, as an activist from Munich argued:

“And when the PKK was banned, we said ... this ban is not only an attack on a party, not only [on] an ethnic group, but in general an attack on democratic rights, including the rights of the working class. DGB demonstrations ... and a May Day demonstration were also banned with the argument that the PKK could go there with its flags. One could actually see where this ban would lead.”

Once again, the severity of repression contributed to overcoming ideological differences. One activist who was part of an antifascist group at the time, related this phenomenon:

²²⁹ Surely, also due to the fact that more autonomous antifascist groups formed at the same time, due to the rising threat of German fascist mobilizations and attacks.

“In the 90s, we also did a lot of demos. The repression was really harsh against Kurds. It’s clear: No matter how you stand to the movement. It is not acceptable what happens there.”

Similarly, an activist from AZADÎ observed:

“For the German left, that was a reason for solidarity. Even if we have ideological differences, even in the 1990s, when it comes to repression, all these 129 and 129a procedures, we are of course on the side of the Kurds, even if we have problems with the ideology of the PKK.”

The banning of an entire party and its movement organizations led parts of the radical left to momentarily overlook its ideological differences with the PKK, and to cooperate with the movement precisely because of their shared experience of repression. The following section shall present two examples of relationship formation triggered by repression in the aftermath of the PKK ban, namely the ‘Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitees München’ and AZADÎ.

*Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitees München*²³⁰

The ‘Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitees München’ is one of the solidarity committees, which formed due to the repression. A leftist activist from the DKP, who was mainly active in housing and anti-racist struggles earlier, reported:

“I became involved with Kurdistan after the PKK was banned in 1993, when we founded a Kurdistan solidarity committee in Munich in 1994. After the ban, there was an incredible amount of repression against individuals, Kurdish associations were closed and so on.”

The basis for the foundation of the solidarity committee was an already existing coalition of individual activists called ‘Münchner Bündnis gegen Krieg und Rassismus’.²³¹ As another activist from Munich related:

“And as Trotskyists in Munich at that time, we were already active in the anti-racist alliance with other leftist, communist groups, DKP and parts of the autonomous groups, and when the PKK was banned, we already knew some Kurdish activists from these other activities. Simply because we have done with the common struggles against deportation, or they have participated in our actions against war or against Nazis.”

When this repression became salient, the organizations and individuals who had cooperated earlier in another coalition formed a solidarity coalition with Kurdistan. Around 20 activists participated regularly in the meetings of the Munich Solidarity Committee, and “these were mainly Germans, who showed solidarity against the repression of the Kurds”, as the DKP activist recalled. A broader spectrum of the (radical) left in Munich also participated in this coalition, as another activist remembered:

“We as a Trotskyist group, the DKP also participated. There were even left-wing Social Democrats and the whole spectrum of the Munich Left ... And then we founded the ‘Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitees München’. And then one or two Kurdish activists or intellectuals joined it. The writer Haydar Işık²³², for example, took part in the meetings again and again. And then

²³⁰ Munich Kurdistan Solidarity Committee.

²³¹ Munich Alliance against War and Racism. There was already the ‘AK Kurdistan’ in Munich, which was part of the broader Kurdistan solidarity network, however, none of the interviewees had been members of AK Kurdistan | Working group. I am not able to assess how the continuity or discontinuity of these coalitions evolved. Two interviewees reported being active in the Munich Kurdistan Solidarity Committee following the PKK ban, however they did not mention the ‘AK Kurdistan’.

²³² Writer, mainly on the Dersim rebellion. He was a co-founder of the Kurdish P.E.N. Centre in Germany.

after a certain period of time – we then helped organize a Newroz celebration as the committee.”

Here, the increasingly generalized nature of repression triggered a broad coalition among leftist groups, while Kurdish individuals were in the minority. While this strategy was coordinated with the Kurdish movement, it is difficult to ascertain whether a representative was present in the coalition, or whether coordination occurred via meetings outside the coalition. The coalition worked on the basis of the initial call for the Kurdistan committee, and its preliminary goal was to counter the repression against the Kurdish movement. In alignment with the founding call, there were not many conflicts, and participants were guided by this orientation. The high-level of repression against the Kurdish movement was the main driving force of this relationship formation: “Well, the repression was stronger and from there, I think, there was also a greater solidarity”, as one activist from Munich argued. The relationship maintenance will be discussed below.

AZADÎ

The legal aid fund AZADÎ²³³ was founded in the aftermath of the PKK ban. In 1994, a nationwide meeting took place in Cologne, without Kurdish participation, because of anticipated repression:

“Participants in the discussions on how to support the Kurdish movement after the bans included Kurdistan solidarity groups, activists from Antifa, the ‘Libertad!’ group, anti-imperialist groups, and ‘Rote Hilfe’. Representatives of ‘medico international’ and lawyers were also present as observers” (Morres 2021).

These discussions resulted in the recognition of practical anti-repression work as a strategic necessity. The occasionally violent actions of the Kurdish movement in Germany, and the PKK ban resulted in numerous criminal proceedings against Kurdish activists who, as a solidarity cadre argued,

“at that time did not take advantage of the offers of the German organization, ... the ‘Rote Hilfe’, [because] they did not know what it was and could hardly communicate in the same language.”²³⁴

In 1996, at the interface between the German anti-repression organization ‘Rote Hilfe’ and the Kurdish structures, the legal aid fund AZADÎ was founded²³⁵ with the goals of establishing closer contact between the movements, providing legal support, and overcoming language barriers. One of the founding activist remembered:

“So I went to Cologne, the first thing I did was to build up AZADÎ with another person for one and a half years. Together with the Kurdish lawyers and the German lawyers and ‘Rote Hilfe’, we set up an aid structure for all the prisoners.”

Referring to AZADÎ as an example, activists claimed that the threat of repression and the resulting need for legal advice was a reason to create new solidarity structures. The work of AZADÎ consists of the documentation of criminalization, observation of trials, payment for lawyers and legal

²³³ Literally translated as Freedom.

²³⁴ In contrast to this statement, which was shared by several interviewees, in 1988, in Rendsburg, a small city in the North of Germany, one third of the members of the local ‘Rote Hilfe’ chapter were Kurds (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1988e).

²³⁵ The first board consisted of a representative of ISKU, a ‘Rote Hilfe’ board member, a former staff member of a member of the Bundestag, and an activist of ‘Aktion 3. Welt Saar’ (Morres 2021).

proceedings, and engaging in various activities to assist imprisoned Kurds while also working towards the ultimate goal of lifting the PKK ban in Germany (Morres 2021). Concerning the public relation work:

“With the ‘AZADÎ-Infodienst’²³⁶, whose first issue appeared in November 1995 still in paper form, we try to give the readers a broad overview of the different levels of repression against Kurds in Germany” (Karacadağ 2020a).

AZADÎ continues to be active until today and has established itself as a long-term solidarity relation between the radical left in Germany and the Kurdish movement.²³⁷

In sum, following the Düsseldorf Trial and the PKK ban, an *attribution of threat* within the radical left led to the establishment of solidarity committees, collaborative efforts to organize demonstrations, and other forms of relationship formation. Importantly, in response to selective repression, a sub-mechanism involving the downplaying of ideological differences enabled relationship formation even with groups that had differing ideologies from the Kurdish movement. Furthermore, the increasingly generalized repression after the PKK ban prompted more moderate actors to join coalitions against the repression, as seen in the case of the Munich solidarity committee.

Migration Regime

Cooperation against the migration regime, particularly in the context of opposing deportations and advocating for the right of asylum, provided additional opportunities for relationship formation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement. A broad repertoire of actions was employed for this effort, including demonstrations against asylum tightening measures, protests against individual deportations, and support for individuals during visits to authorities and lawyer appointments.

For instance, in Munich activists organized a significant demonstration in response to the deportation of a Kurdish individual, as one activist related: “This [showing a picture] was about a deportation of a Kurd. We organized a large demonstration, well it was 1,000 people I think, at that time already relatively large.” Additionally, the ‘Aktion Fluchtburg and Asyl e.V.’²³⁸ supported a Kurdish activist who went on a hunger strike in a deportation prison in West Berlin in 1989, due to the rising number of deportations to Turkey that year. In February 1989, 50 representatives from refugee organizations, churches, ‘amnesty international’ and parliamentarians demonstrated at an airport, successfully preventing the deportation of a Kurdish individual named Cemal Sevim (Volksfront WB 1989: 1–2). As reported in the ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’, actions against deportation became more frequent during Phase I, and some refugee organizations actively resisted the criminalization of Kurdish refugees (Aktion 3.Welt Saar 1996; Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994k). The individual-level contacts fostered a deepening of relationships between activists from both sides, both on an individual and group level. An individual who was active in antifascist efforts during that time related:

²³⁶ Information service.

²³⁷ AZADÎ has, for example, a section in the ‘Rote Hilfe Zeitung’, the newspaper of the ‘Rote Hilfe’, and the most widely circulated anti-repression magazine in the German-speaking region with around 12,000 copies per issue.

²³⁸ Action Flight Castle and Asylum registered association.

“Of course, we also supported refugees from Kurdistan, from the diaspora. Again and again, we organized demos, and through this of course a personal approach to the struggle finally came about.”

In 1996, a coalition called ‘Flüchtlingshilfe Kurdistan’²³⁹ was established in Landshut, a small town in Bavaria, for the explicit purpose of supporting refugees. Indeed, as discussed earlier, relationship formation can take various paths and be influenced by a range of factors, and the relative importance of these pathways may vary depending on the specific context and groups involved. However, in this case, the pathway of relationship formation via refugee solidarity, particularly in the context of asylum rights and opposition to deportations, did not appear very common. At least, it was not mentioned in the interviews as a relevant factor for relationship formation. On one hand, it is possible that this pathway was indeed less relevant or less commonly pursued in comparison to other means of solidarity and relationship formation. On the other hand, individuals and groups who primarily engaged in refugee solidarity may not have been as deeply involved in long-term solidarity efforts with the PKK-led Kurdish movement, which could explain why their experiences and actions were less emphasized in the interviews.

Stigmatization: Countering Stigmas and Signalling

In contrast to repression, stigmatization seldom triggered relationship formation. As one leftist activist related, when recalling his initial encounter with the Kurdish movement,

“I came [to the Kurdish movement] because everyone was agitating against the movement. So, it was normal that state organs were agitating against liberation movements. But in the Kurdish movement it was relatively new, that so-called left-wing objects ... taz or Arbeiterkampf (AK)²⁴⁰ or Turkish Left and above all the green alternative list GAL Hamburg ... the goal was to defame the Kurdish movement, that it bristled from lies ... And that of course attracted me. So, what’s behind this? ... Why is this going against the Kurdish movement so strongly?”

However, this perspective was shared by only one activist, linking state and leftist stigmatization to relationship formation. Other respondents primarily reported negative consequences. Nevertheless, in the 1980s, when stigmatization of the Kurdish movement in Germany, particularly in the taz, reached one of its first peaks, the already established solidarity group occupied the editorial office of the taz:

“And then we heard what was spread in the taz. I say that consciously ‘dirt’ about the Kurdish liberation movement ... And we were completely shocked when we then read these articles. ... We went with 20 or 30 people to the taz in the editorial office and said ‘we will make an occupation, until you normalize your reporting’. We did not want them to make propaganda for the PKK, but we wanted them to report reasonably, objectively, instead of a nasty agitation, which took place there” (Radyo Azadi 2020).

Following the occupation, the taz pejoratively reported that “friends of the Kurdish people” had occupied its offices. The group later re-named itself the ‘Freunde des kurdischen Volkes’ (see

²³⁹ Refugee Aid Kurdistan.

²⁴⁰ Workers’ Struggle (AK), the newspaper of the Kommunistischer Bund | Communist League (KB). After the KB dissolved in 1992, the newspaper was renamed to ak - analyse & kritik.

above) with the aim of countering the stigmatization (ISKU et al. 2018). There were also other actions to contest the stigmatization, as one activist recalled:

“There came reports in the NDR²⁴¹, which lied. Then Kurds went to the NDR and told the NDR more or less verbally ... You didn’t get in the building afterwards because they noticed that. But then you just stood in front of the station, blocking the access roads. But it was everywhere. It happened in every city, and it was a very, very large and strong mobilization.”

These actions were primarily organized by Kurdish organizations, but the solidarity movement with Kurdistan did address stigmatization and occasionally publicly protested against certain reports. The ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’ regularly dedicated one two pages to a press review, often aiming to counter false information. However generally speaking, stigmatization rarely triggered relationship formation but served as a contested issue for both the Kurdish movement and the solidarity movement.

Two militant or urban guerrilla groups referenced the stigmatization of the Kurdish movement within the radical left in Germany in letters of confession in Phase I. ‘Das K.O.M.I.T.E.E.’²⁴² was a militant group in the Berlin left-wing scene, which came forward on the 27th November 1994, after setting fire to a military building in Bad Freienwalde. In their statement, they framed the Bundeswehr²⁴³ as a legitimate target due to its significant support for Turkey's war against the PKK and the Kurdish population. At the same time, ‘Das K.O.M.I.T.E.E.’ criticized the insufficient solidarity of the German left with the Kurdish liberation struggle and publicly portrayed the attack as a symbolic action that ought to “relate us as German leftists to the Kurdish liberation struggle” (Das K.O.M.I.T.E.E. 1999: 58). In 1999, after an attempted attack on the construction site of a deportation prison in Grünau, this thematic focus was extended to highlight concerns about the tightening asylum system, especially for Kurds. ‘Das K.O.M.I.T.E.E.’ stated in their declaration of dissolution:

“We felt that the largely non-behaviour of the radical left here was a declaration of bankruptcy. Many people had to use it as justification for the partly justified criticism of the PKK. For us, however, criticism of the PKK is no justification for lack of solidarity” (Das K.O.M.I.T.E.E. 1999: 77).

The ‘Rote Zora’ executed a similar action and presented a comparable argumentation.²⁴⁴ Their final official attack targeted a shipyard operated by the company Lürssen near Bremen on the 24th July 1995. The group justified the attack by stating that Lürssen was “one of the arms suppliers to the Turkish regime, which is waging a murderous war against the Kurds” (Rote Zora 1995). However, the attack also served as a signal to the radical left in Germany:

“It is our concern to break up the passivity of many women and left-wing contexts towards the Kurdish resistance and the massive repression of the Kurds seeking refuge here and supporting the resistance at home. This inaction is often justified with criticism of the PKK’s policies. Women cannot identify with the PKK – neither can we – and unfortunately, solidarity is mostly made dependent on this question” (Rote Zora 1995).

²⁴¹ “Northern German Broadcasting” is a public broadcaster.

²⁴² The C.O.M.M.I.T.T.E.E.

²⁴³ Unified armed forces of Germany.

²⁴⁴ Emerging from the ‘Revolutionäre Zellen’ (RZ) as an autonomous, militant women's organization, the ‘Rote Zora’ carried out 47 attacks, mainly in the 1980s. Most attacks were carried out in support of feminist struggles (Karcher 2018: 112).

Both 'Rote Zora' and 'Das K.O.M.I.T.E.E.' advocated for the inclusion of Kurdistan in internationalist politics and endorsed a 'critical solidarity' with the PKK-led Kurdish movement, despite their emphasis on ideological differences. However, they carried out attacks in solidarity with the Kurdish people, advocating for a stronger solidarity movement.²⁴⁵ Above all, their actions were primarily directed at the radical left scene, seeking to establish solidarity relations and address the stigmatization of the Kurdish movement. This may be interpreted as a form of signalling (McAdam et al. 2001: 26–27) directed towards one's own movement, aiming to shift their theoretical and practical concepts of solidarity in order to meaningfully engage in solidarity work with Kurdistan. To the best of my knowledge, these militant groups did not form personal relationships with the Kurdish movement.

In sum, stigmatization rarely, if ever, directly triggered relationship formation. During the stage of relationship maintenance, both the radical left and the Kurdish movement actively addressed stigmatization, by framing negative labels as an attempt at criminalization, and by trying to counter false information. Some militant actions by the radical left served as signals to downplay ideological differences within their own movement and engage in solidarity, even though they sometimes reproduced the same stigmas in their communications.

2.1.2. Relationship Maintenance

The following section traces relationship maintenance, firstly, dealing with strategies against repression, secondly, with repression against the solidarity movement, and thirdly, with the habituation mechanism.

Besides AZADÎ's institutionalized anti-repression work and its support for the reestablishment of organizational structures, there were two strategies which the solidarity movement used to maintain relationships and respond to the high level of repression. The Kurdistan Solidarity Committee in Munich serves as an apt example. Firstly, they undertook public relations efforts, aiming to raise awareness of the ongoing repression against the Kurds within German media, find public advocates, and mobilize a larger segment of the German left to express solidarity with the Kurdish activists facing repression. This involved actively publicizing the persistent repression and organizing events for this purpose, as one respondent recalled. Secondly, another strategy involved provoking the German authorities into taking generalized, excessive actions. A solidarity activist discussed both strategies in the context of the ban on demonstrations in Munich on the 12th April 1994:

"There was supposed to be a trial in Munich ... against the occupiers of the consulate²⁴⁶ ... We announced a demonstration ... And then there was a huge uproar, everything was banned. That was the first time that there was a total ban. There was a dirty report in the newspaper ... It was said, the Kurds are mobilizing in Munich nationwide, that's what the police and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution claimed. And then they banned

²⁴⁵ In particular, the 'Rote Zora' wanted to distance itself from a political solidarity "measured by identification with or distancing itself from liberation movements". These identifications, they argued, were used to "project one's own desires" and are "not a sustainable basis for solidarity." On the contrary, they argued that as soon as a different reality becomes visible behind the projection, it is usually the end of the solidarity (Rote Zora 1995). The 'Rote Zora' wanted a new internationalism: "Not in 'exchange', but in practical solidarity, our contacts to Kurds will develop and can be spun and linked to these networks" (Rote Zora 1995).

²⁴⁶ The 24th June 1993 saw multiple protest actions in European cities against Turkish diplomatic offices and stores, as well as a 14-hour occupation of the Turkish consulate in Munich (Spiegel 1993).

everything. Even lawyers here in Munich, the 'Bayrischer Strafverteidiger'²⁴⁷, who wanted to have a rally in another place, that was also banned. Only a week later, we organized a demonstration in Munich against the PKK ban ... There was an article in the 'Süddeutsche Zeitung' (SZ)²⁴⁸ about it [Reading from the article]: 'Spooky, 4,000 police officers, since they claimed there are 10,000 Kurds from all over the Federal Republic coming to the trial. The highways, access roads, everywhere there were controls and so on at the airport, everywhere civil war atmosphere. But the enemy did not appear. Not even harmless Kurds were seen by the police' the SZ wrote. [Continues reading:] 'Did anyone really believe that the PKK would send 3,000 of its best cadres to besieged Munich, to the lion's den. The Bavarian Ministry of the Interior will soon have to deal with the tactics of guerrilla warfare'."

This quote illustrates how a single demonstration against a trial, for which the Kurdish movement, the radical left and the solidarity movement were collectively mobilizing to raise public awareness, triggered an excessive response from the authorities. This repression extended beyond targeting just the solidarity movement, the Kurdish movement, or radical left groups, but also began to affect bystanders. The same respondent suggested that the common goal shared by the Kurdish movement and the radical left was to expose the political structures in Germany as a "police state".

It is noteworthy that when repression escalated and became more generalized, it not only triggered an increase in solidarity activities and statements, but also sustained the relationship. For instance, the demonstrations organized by the Munich solidarity committee on the 23rd April 1994, addressed the "state of emergency in Munich" and received support from a diverse array of organizations in southern Germany (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994n).²⁴⁹ Another instance of public relations work is the 'Süddeutsche Appell'²⁵⁰ which, in 1995 compelled authorities to rescind a ban on Newroz celebrations in Munich due to the mobilization of a broad spectrum of supporters and the resultant public attention (Neues Deutschland 1995). Similarly, in the late 1990s, the Kurdistan solidarity movement successfully rallied a wide array of politicians, public figures, and organizations to endorse a 'peace train'. Notably, this initiative was described by the as "the largest and politically broadest Kurdistan initiative of European personalities to date" (Pickert 1997).²⁵¹ The 'Musa Anter Peace Train' aimed to have ten wagons and involve several hundred participants, with cultural events and press conferences planned in major cities along the route (Paul 1997). As one solidarity cadre recalled:

"It was supposed to set off from Brussels and travel through the FRG to Istanbul or Ankara. And the then Minister of the Interior, Kanter, banned it at the time. This peace train did not materialize."

Here, even the broadest possible alliance failed to protect the initiative from repression by German authorities, indicating the limitations in public relations strategies. In place of the peace train, a broad delegation travelled to Kurdistan instead (see Chapter IV. 1.).

²⁴⁷ Bavarian defense lawyers' initiative.

²⁴⁸ 'South German Newspaper'. Daily newspaper and second-highest circulation among German dailies.

²⁴⁹ 2,000 persons attended the demonstration, mainly from the left in Germany and "200 at most" from the Kurdish movement since the repression was very high against Kurdish activists (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994a).

²⁵⁰ South German Appeal.

²⁵¹ Organizations among others, such as 'medico international', 'Pro Asyl', unions to Members of the Bundestag, e.g. Cem Özdemir (Greens) signed the Appeal (Pickert 1997).

Secondly, the risk of becoming a target of repression by German authorities constituted an immediate threat for any activist maintaining direct relationships with the Kurdish movement. Numerous interviewees from the solidarity movement, who were active during the 1980s and 1990s, recounted personal experiences of repression, albeit with varying degrees of severity. These repressive measures encompassed a spectrum, ranging from facing charges and convictions to being prosecuted under anti-terrorism laws. One activist from the Kurdistan Solidarity Committee Munich said on his charges:

“We had a Kurdish speaker, [the police] wanted by all means to know the name of the Kurdish speaker, who appeared at the demonstration. And I actually refused to give the name. Then you are summoned to the public prosecutor’s office. Normally, you can be taken into coercive detention²⁵². 14 days in jail and then they ask you again. You could actually be put in jail, permanently, as long as you don’t give them the name. That was not the case with me. I had to pay a 300 Deutsche Mark fine there.”

Here, the repression only resulted in financial penalties. Another activist, who was then part of an Antifa group, described the relatively higher risks involved in maintaining a direct relationship with members of the Kurdish movement:

“For example, if a person was here [in Germany], who was with the guerrilla ... you have to think about that, three days later, the cops stormed the flat, with battering rams, and made searches.”

Furthermore, various solidarity publications faced scrutiny and legal action following the PKK ban. An editor associated with ‘Bijî – Informationen aus Kurdistan und der BRD’²⁵³, a weekly publication based in Nuremberg with a distribution of approximately a thousand copies per issue (Dünneberg 1996), was sentenced under the law on associations (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1996). The repression authorities also focused their efforts on internationalists who had travelled to Kurdistan. During the prosecution of Andrea Wolf, numerous radical left wing spaces were subject to surveillance and investigations in 1998: the internationalist squat ‘B5’ in Hamburg, which housed the left-wing internet project ‘Nadir’ and ‘Kurdistan-Solidarität Hamburg’²⁵⁴ was subject to searches, as were the spaces of AZADÎ in Cologne. AZADÎ activists interpreted

“[the actions] of the Federal Prosecutor's Office (BAW) in Karlsruhe as an attempt to hinder the nationwide cooperation of Kurdistan solidarity groups and to defame internationalist commitment” (Vogel 1998).

In particular, numerous internationalists were persecuted under section 129a and activists were even tracked across borders, as one of these internationalists recalled:

“And we had just taken a holiday flat in Belgium to discuss how it should go on? And at night, an anti-terrorist commando came into this house. That was really intense. There came through the windows from several sides in suits, with laser pointer, weapons unlocked. The whole, small flat was destroyed. They then took us and questioned us in a small police station ... The flat was in ruins ... They said the German cops had said that we would be armed. So

²⁵² Beugungshaft. The purpose of coercive detention is to force witnesses to testify.

²⁵³ Bijî - Information from Kurdistan and the FRG.

²⁵⁴ Kurdistan-Solidarity Hamburg.

that was the reason why they acted so harshly. I mean, that was a discussion about international solidarity.”

All of those targeted by the raid were active in Kurdistan solidarity efforts in Germany. They worked, among others, in ‘Kurdistan-Solidarität Hamburg’, the ‘Kurdistan Report’, and legal aid associations like AZADÎ or MEDYA-TV²⁵⁵ (Boderius 1999). This repression did succeed in fragmenting relations among the persecuted activists, but encouraged them to continue in their solidarity work and reinforce their efforts. In an interview from this time, one activist claimed:

“We will continue our work despite the obstructions. The situation of the Kurdish people requires international solidarity; this is an essential part of our work ... Today, we have to fight to enforce political work of this kind in Germany ... against criminalization” (Boderius 1999).

In fact, most of the persecuted activists in this case continued to be involved in solidarity efforts for a long-time in various different ways. These activists were among the most committed and tended to have already established strong relationships with the movement. Here again, the divisive disruption led to a growing number of solidarity activities.

Thirdly, in the late 1990s, once the repression against the Kurdish movement had decreased to a certain extent, so did the solidarity activities around repression. As one activist from the Munich solidarity committee recalled:

“But the repression then eased. There was the usual PKK ban and the ban on PKK emblems. But somehow it calmed down. For a few years, nothing much happened. I remember we had demonstrations in front of the Turkish consulate here in Munich for a few years, but it wasn’t as exciting as when they closed down Kurdish associations and cracked down on the Kurds for collecting donations because they allegedly supported the PKK.”

It is worth noting that the ‘Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitees München’ did not experience any tensions or conflicts that led to its dissolution. “I don’t think anything happened, that something broke”, argued the same activist from Munich. Instead, it gradually faded away as different groups and individuals shifted their attention to other pressing issues, such as the NATO war against Yugoslavia in 1999. Since the Munich coalition developed along the repression-relationship pathway, its dynamics were contingent on the level of repression, and when the repression eased slightly, so did the activities of the coalition. There appears to be a habituation mechanism at play here, ultimately leading to the coalition’s dissolution. However, more data is needed for Phase I to make a strong argument for this mechanism.

In summary, the increasingly generalized repression against the solidarity movement after the PKK ban prompted new solidarity activities and mobilized a broader political spectrum against repression. Consequently, the solidarity movement employed a dual tactic: triggering even more generalized repression to form new relations with a broader political spectrum, and mobilizing that spectrum to counter the repression. However, when the repression lost its novelty or decreased, particularly from 1998 onwards, a habituation mechanism seemed to take hold. Importantly, selective repression that targeted activists with close and stable relationships with the Kurdish movement often led to relationship maintenance. Nevertheless, selective repression,

²⁵⁵ Active from 1999-2004. Successor of the Kurdish satellite broadcaster Med TV (Schamberger 2022: 173).

especially with potentially severe consequences like persecution under paragraph 129a, also resulted in relationship break-ups or boundary activation, which will be explored in the following section.

2.1.3. Relationship Break-up and Boundary Activation

Repression also triggered relationship break-up or boundary activation. A Kurdish activist suggested that the PKK ban was an obstacle to relationship transformation, arguing that existing coalitions fell apart as a result:

“The repression of the German state with the PKK ban has also prevented many from continuing to work on this issue. For some it did not work immediately, but rather a year or two later. But then they distanced themselves.”

Another veteran Kurdish activist emphasized the “de-solidarizing” effect of this state repression. The threat of being targeted by the repression of the German state prevented many groups from continuing to cooperate with the Kurdish movement or even from forming relations. An internationalist argued that conditions to form a solidarity group were very negative, and the group fell apart, inter alia, because of the high level of repression against her. Individuals also lost their jobs as a consequence of their relations with the Kurdish movement:

“For us, it was that the repression in '93 actually started. We had an Antifa group at a youth centre at that time. And the social pedagogue who looked after us held an information event on Kurdistan. As a result, she was fired, she was kicked out.”

The formation of a relationship with the PKK-led Kurdish movement exposed organizations to the immediate risk of being targeted by German state repression. Due to the close surveillance of the relationship between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany by police and domestic intelligence, many moderate parties and groups kept their distance from the Kurdish structures.

“In general, the ban on the PKK and especially its stigmatization as a terrorist movement had led to many more bourgeois-liberal forces keeping their distance for a very long time.”

Repression, coupled with stigmatization, prompted the parliamentary left to engage in boundary activation. For instance, within the left-wing party PDS, only a fraction, including figures like Ulla Jelpke, supported the lifting of the PKK ban. However, considerable resistance arose within the parliamentary group, especially from prominent figures who were reluctant to advocate on behalf of the Kurdish movement. The significant media stigmatization since the late 1980s played a substantial role in this, as did the fear of being associated with terrorism by political opponents during ongoing election campaigns (Jelpke 2021: 115). In essence, when repression carried significant consequences for individuals or organizations, such as persecution under section 129a, more moderate groups tended to engage in boundary activation. Notably, stigmatization played a significant role in triggering these mechanisms.

Stigmatization: Polarization

This sub-section shall trace the sub-mechanism of stigmatization as a trigger for boundary activation. It is important to note that boundary activation and non-relationship formation, especially in the distant past, can be challenging to identify. Most of the evidence presented here is primarily derived from interviews who had positive relationship formations. While I have

attempted to include secondary data, such as frame analysis from my Master's thesis, this data has limited generalizability and may have a bias towards the narratives of the solidarity movement and the Kurdish movement. Nevertheless, the overarching argument that the PKK-led Kurdish movement faced stigmatization, which in turn triggered boundary activation and non-relationship formation within the radical left in Germany, appears to hold true.

The polarization between the Turkish and Kurdish left also influenced other radical left groups in Germany that had already established relationships with Turkish leftist organizations in the 1980s. These groups initially framed their understanding of the Kurdish movement through the perspectives of rival Turkish or Kurdish organizations. One Kurdish cadre explained the different factions and the borrowing of the radical left from the Turkish left in the 1980s:

“At that time, the DKP was with the TKP²⁵⁶, because at that time this classical communist party, they always supported each other ... The second large group at that time was the current DIDF²⁵⁷. Third, they called themselves Devrimci İşçi, Revolutionary Workers²⁵⁸ ... And we, we were completely new.”

Within the polarized landscape of the Turkish left diaspora organizations, initially, radical left groups from Germany encountered difficulties in understanding the conflicts and tended to keep their distance from the PKK-led Kurdish movement, as a then autonomous activist from Hamburg suggested:

“And as far as Turkish-Kurdish organizations are concerned, they always had something to do with it on the margins, but rather reservedly, because these conflicts, these internal conflicts that were there, were not understood at first. And the reaction was rather: ‘I'd rather stay out of it’.”

Therefore, the counter-framing and the borrowing mechanism, at least initially, prevented relationship formation. However, what was more frequently mentioned by the respondents was the impact of mainstream media on the radical left in Germany. This reliance on mainstream media can be attributed to various factors, including the limited organizational capacity of the radical left and the co-optation and institutionalization of actors such as the Green Party. Negative campaigns, notably in newspapers such as the *taz* and others, significantly influenced the perception of the Kurdish movement among large sections of the left and radical left in Germany. The stigmatization led to boundary activation by parts of the radical left as a long-term solidarity activist argued:

“The hate campaigns of the state, the bourgeois press against the Kurdish movement, including the PKK, have also had a strong impact in the past, even in many leftist minds.”

While the stigmatization did not trigger boundary activation, it was identified as an obstacle, by another solidarity activist:

“The first wave [of stigmatization] against the Kurdish movement was already before. Of course, we in Hamburg were influenced by it ... and it took us a while to find our own position.”

²⁵⁶ Türkiye Komünist Partisi | Communist Party of Turkey.

²⁵⁷ Demokratik İşçi Dernekleri Federasyonu (DIDIF) | Federation of Democratic Workers' Associations.

²⁵⁸ Part of Dev-Yol.

But that quickly dissolved when we got to know people from the movement directly and also saw how this anti-campaign was structured.”

Indeed, earlier efforts at relationship transformation or personal relationship formation seemed to counter the stigmatization mechanism, at least to some extent. The framing used by state authorities and the mass media had already had a strong impact. In particular, several interviewees emphasized the role of the taz in contributing to the stigmatization of the Kurdish movement. One solidarity activist argued:

“I mean, even before the ban, especially the taz ... at that time the taz was still a radical left-wing newspaper, one must not forget ... it was at the forefront of the smear campaign against the PKK, which has taken over the whole state security fairy tales and every Kurd who somehow died in Europe was immediately told that it was a PKK murder and the like.”

This framing persisted during the 1990s, and after the abduction of Öcalan, another activist reported:

“Here in Germany, a consulate occupation took place. So, the one in Berlin, where four people were shot in front of the embassy. In the taz was an article with the basic message: ‘they are themselves to blame. Why do you demonstrate there?’ Well, I had been in Gorleben²⁵⁹ a few months before, and if the train had run over us, the taz wouldn’t have said, ‘it’s our own fault’. So, there were unarmed demonstrators shot, and then they say it’s my own fault. So taz is really a chapter in itself.”

Readers of the taz, without personal or organizational ties to the Kurdish movement, would have had difficulties in receiving other frames than those put forward by the taz or the mass media. Additionally, since the taz was perceived as a radical left newspaper, most activists would have attributed credibility to the reporting.

In addition, the Kurdish movement’s public relation work and the work of solidarity movement unsettled bystanders among the left in Germany, as a long-term activist pointed out:

“Let me put it this way, in the 1990s, the relationship [between the Kurdish movement and the Left in Germany] was relatively tense. This had a lot to do with the fact that it was very difficult to exchange information. It was also very much due to language barriers. It also came to the point that Kurdistan solidarity structures translated PKK texts that were written for the Kurdish population, one to one, so to speak. And because the entire cultural context was not communicated, because some of them were also very deterrent, and I would say it also provided ammunition.”

A combination of state-led stigmatization, biased media coverage, counter-campaigns in publications like taz and shortcomings in public relations efforts of both the Kurdish movement and the solidarity movement contributed to the activation of boundaries among broader sections of the radical left. This led to a divided and polarized landscape, where one faction of the radical left distanced itself from the Kurdish movement, while the other continued to engage in relationship transformation. In the following, I provide a brief overview of the currents that opted for boundary activation or even participated in counter-campaigns. This overview draws

²⁵⁹ Gorleben is known for its role in the proposed establishment of a national nuclear waste repository, the ongoing regular nuclear waste transports to the existing above-ground interim storage facility, and the substantial protests against these activities.

primarily from the frame resonance analysis conducted in my Master's thesis and some insights from interviews.

For most autonomous groups, the PKK was not a supportive political force. The standpoint of the autonomous movement in the 1990s is summarized best as follows:

“Since the PKK is authoritarian and patriarchal, is imbued with folk and anti-Semitic ideas and persecutes critics inside and outside the party for 'physical liquidation', the autonomous current proves its theoretical progress by distancing itself from the PKK” (A.G. Grauwacke 2019: 127).

The frames put forward by the taz and the mass media can be frequently found in radical journals. For example, in the anarchistic journal ‘Graswurzel Revolution’²⁶⁰ the PKK-led Kurdish movement was described as nationalist and Stalinist while Öcalan was named an “autocratic ex-Stalinist” (Reinhardt 2016: 76–77), which was incompatible with its own anti-authoritarian ideology. Solidarity with the PKK was therefore completely excluded, and solidarity rather proclaimed with Kurdish refugees in Germany. Since the 1990s, the Antideutsche current was developing an explicit critique of national liberation movements and anti-imperialist solidarity in general. One long-term solidarity activist recalled:

“Books about Kurdistan solidarity have been written by the ‘Gruppe Demontage’²⁶¹. So basically, like the Kurdish movement at the beginning of the 80s, we were defamed at the beginning of the 90s, as how stupid we are, how backward we are.”

In the “Post-Fordist Guerrilla” (Gruppe Demontage 1999), the ‘Gruppe Demontage’ from Hamburg criticized the idea of a people as a basis for a progressive agenda:

“As long as PKK as well as the solidarity movement continue to refer to categories like people and ethnicity and do not make anti-racist approaches an important part of their politics, a comprehensive liberation beyond the attribution of national identity ascriptions is not possible” (Gruppe Demontage 2000).

Critics, particularly within the Antideutsche movement, as highlighted in publications such as ‘Jungle World’, have raised concerns about the solidarity movement’s ‘blindness’ to the allegedly folkish and anti-Semitic qualities of the PKK. The solidarity scene in Germany faced criticism for allegedly endorsing the equation of party, people and leader, which was believed to have led to numerous self-immolations (Reinhardt 2016: 79–80). Antideutsche activists reject the idea of expressing solidarity with, or even forming relationships with national liberation movements, because such movements also strive for their own nation and in doing so perpetuate nationalism. This form of boundary activation goes beyond mere demarcation and involves explicit agitation against both the Kurdish movement and the solidarity movement in Germany.

The stigmatization of the PKK-led Kurdish triggered boundary activation and led to non-relationship formation within the radical left in Germany. This effect was particularly pronounced within parts of the autonomous movement, the anarchist current, and the Antideutsche current, which engaged in boundary activation, and often reproduced the same stigmas found in mainstream media. More moderate parties, such as PDS and the Greens, distanced themselves

²⁶⁰ Grassroots Revolution.

²⁶¹ Dismantling group.

from the PKK-led Kurdish movement, largely due to the terrorism-related stigma associated with it.

2.3. Summary

Phase I: National Arena

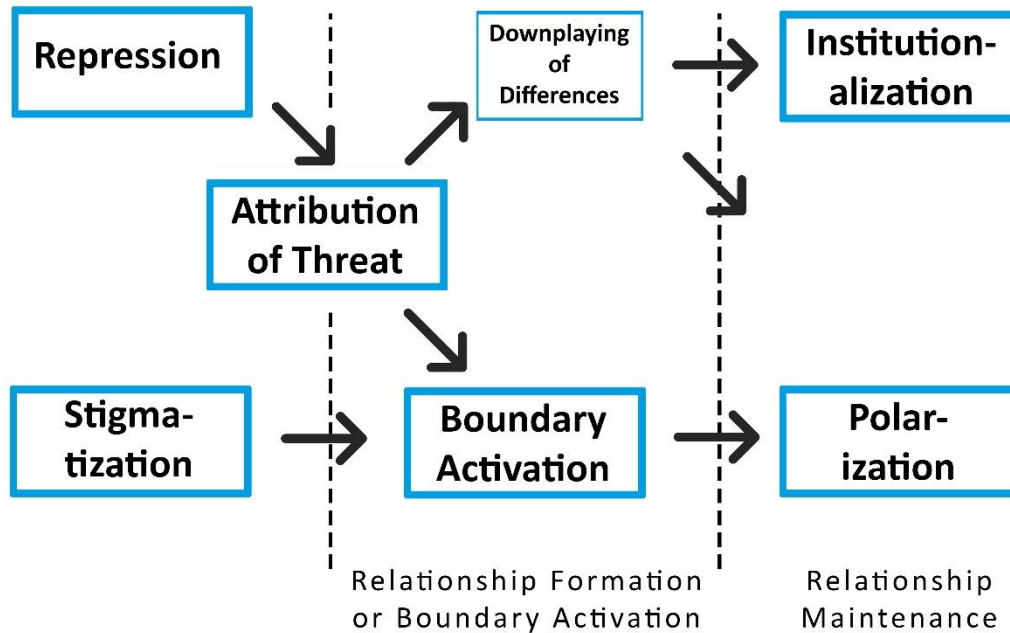


Figure 3: Diagram of Mechanisms in the National Arena in Phase I

Since 1986, the criminalization of the PKK-led Kurdish movement in Germany began and reached its zenith with the ban of the PKK in 1993. German security authorities employed all the action modes of repression mentioned by Boykoff. Notably, there was a pronounced stigmatization of the PKK, propagated by the German media, labelling it as a terrorist and authoritarian organization. Significantly, repression was gradually extended to the migration regime, and targeted Kurdish and other leftist activists without German citizenship. However, despite intense *repression* and *stigmatization* by the German state, the Kurdish diaspora in Germany remained active.

This situation reflected the ‘repression/protest paradox’, with repression having a dual effect, both triggering relationship formation and relationship break-up. This paradox can be resolved by considering how repression impacted the *attribution of threat*, which was influenced by the nature of the repression (selective or generalize), the type of organizations involved (moderate or radical), and the quality of the relationship.

On the one hand, repression triggered relationship formation, when it was perceived as a threat to the broader left in general. This perception often assisted in overcoming ideological differences, leading to solidarity actions, the formation of solidarity committees, and the establishment of long-standing anti-repression organizations. This repression caused ideology

and identity to be downplayed. Repression was a primary driver of relationship formation in Phase I. When repression generalized, affecting a wide spectrum of activists from the Kurdish movement, the broader left, as well as bystanders, such as in the case of the demonstration ban in Munich, solidarity extended from the radical left to more moderate actors. Selective repression, explicitly targeting activists closely connected to the Kurdish movement, prompted relationship formation among groups that believed the repression against the Kurdish movement ultimately threatened the broader left. Radical left groups, who had been targets of state repression before and thus had a heightened focus on such issues, were particularly prone to forming relationships in response to repression. Additionally, individuals and organizations within established, deeper ties to the Kurdish movement intensified their connections when repression directly targeted them. Towards the end of the 1990s, a habituation mechanism seemed to take hold, especially when repression slightly eased.

On the other hand, *relationship break-up or boundary activation* occurred due to fear of repression. Selective repression specifically targeted activists within the Kurdish movement or closely associated with it. The threat of prosecution under association or terrorist laws was very real for those forming direct relations with the Kurdish movement. Therefore, the decision to abstain from forming relationships or to sever existing ones with the Kurdish movement was driven by an interest in avoiding immediate state repression.

Stigmatization in the national public sphere and by state authorities mainly led to boundary activation or non-relationship formation within the radical left towards the PKK-led Kurdish movement. Some segments of the radical left, which had formed relationships with leftist Turkish groups, adopted frames from their Turkish allies. Moreover, certain elements of the radical left actively campaigned against the PKK. In sum, the combined effects of repression, negative media framing and state-led stigmatization contributed to the perception of the PKK as an authoritarian and terrorist organization.

These factors led to a significant portion of the radical left disengaging from or actively opposing the Kurdish movements. Despite this, repression remained a critical driver of relationship formation in Phase I, even helping actors to overcome ideological differences. Throughout the 1990s, a polarization emerged within the German (radical) left concerning the Kurdish movement.

3. Phase I: Inter-Movement Arena

In the Inter-Movement Arena of Phase I, I will focus on the relationship transformation between the radical left in Germany and the Kurdish diaspora from 1980 until 1999. I will trace the mechanisms and sub-mechanisms of relationship transformation in the different stages of relationship formation, maintenance, and break-up. This structure of analysis will also be adopted in the Inter-Movement Arenas of the upcoming phases.

We already know from the Transnational and National Arena mechanisms of relationship transformation that are relevant for the Inter-Movement Arena. Therefore, they should be retraced here shortly. From the Transnational Arena, we know that the crisis of internationalism of the radical left, in a time when the Kurdish movement entered a peak of its confrontation with the Turkish army, provided an unfavourable basis for relationship transformation, which was summarized as asynchronicity of internationalist struggles. Nevertheless, instances of *transnational brokerage* occurred in forms of delegation trips and internationalists joining the PKK. More important for the relationship formation between the radical left and the PKK-led Kurdish movement was the *repression* of the German authorities against the Kurdish diaspora. The repression triggered relationship formation in the form of solidarity committees and an anti-repression organization. Here, the repression was *attributed as a threat* for the (radical) left on the whole, groups overcame ideological differences and engaged in coalition formation. On the other hand, there was a *relationship break-up* due to fear of repression, since selective repression targeted explicitly activists within the Kurdish movement or closely related to it. More, there was considerable *boundary activation*, inter alia due to *stigmatization* in the national public, and some parts of the radical left even engaged in an active campaign against the PKK. In sum, repression triggered one of the main pathways of relationship formation in Phase I and in the course of the 1990s a polarized landscape of relationship within the German left towards the Kurdish movement developed.

Now, I will shortly sketch the main process of the Inter-Movement Arena, to provide a rough overview, which then will be traced more in detail. In the beginning of the 1980s, there was a non-recognition of the Kurdish movement in Germany by the radical left. From the second half of the 1980s onwards, beside relationship formation triggered by repression, brokerage occurred with the sub-mechanism of attribution of similarity and attribution of opportunity. Especially with the anti-imperialist movement, relationships formed and the Kurdish movement in the diaspora were integrated in the already existing canon of internationalist solidarity praxis. The relationship maintenance started soon after by coalition formation in the form of solidarity committees with Kurdistan in almost all bigger West-German cities. These solidarity committees were coordinated on a national level by the PKK-led Kurdish movement and later, after the PKK ban, by organizations of the solidarity movement, most importantly the 'Informationsstelle Kurdistan' (ISKU). In 1999, after the abduction of Öcalan, the relationships broke apart and the solidarity committees with Kurdistan dissolved.

Concerning relationship partners, due to the closed opportunity structure in the National Arena, moderate and bourgeois parties did not form relationships with the PKK-led Kurdish movement. A Kurdish cadre summarized: "From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s ... the contacts of the Kurdish movement were mainly to be found in leftist structures." Above all, the relationship

formation took place with anti-imperialist groups and later with autonomous feminist and antifascist groups. Until the reunification of Germany, K-groups also supported the liberation struggle of the PKK-led Kurdish movement. From its foundation in 1990, PDS had a complicated relationship towards the Kurdish movement, opposed the repression and violations of human rights, but except for individuals, formed no direct relations with the Kurdish movement.

In the upcoming analysis, I will first describe the different stages of relationship transformation on the basis of the interviewees and the documents. After a chronological description, the analysis of the mechanisms and their constituting sub-mechanisms follows. Often the description as well as the mechanisms are based on multiple sources, if not otherwise indicated. In this sub-chapter I rely heavily on the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief', which changed the reporting on the solidarity movement after the PKK ban, which is why, after the end of 1993, it served less for exchange and coordination between solidarity groups and more for mobilization and dissemination of public information. In any case, on the basis of the various sources from different cities and different points in time, which differ somewhat only in details, I evaluate the process described in the following as robust.

3.1. Relationship Formation: A Long Road to Relationships

In the course of the 1980s, an older Kurdish cadre assessed, that the Kurdish movement was struggling to spread the news,

“to the left structures, that there are Kurds at all ... There is a Kurdish liberation movement, the Kurds are not all homogeneous. There is a guerrilla struggle that is fighting against colonialism, which is simply striving for a united, socialist Kurdistan.”

This long-lasting disinterest changed rather suddenly into specific attention in the end of the 1980 and early 1990s. Within the stage of relationship formation, the mechanism of brokerage occurred. As has already been pointed out, brokerage was triggered by repression in the National Arena and seldom by internationalists from the Transnational Arena. However, in the Inter-Movement Arena brokerage was triggered by the sub-mechanisms of attribution of similarity and attribution of opportunity, leading soon to coalition formation.

3.1.1. Brokerage: Forging Ties

The brokerage mechanisms within the Inter-Movement Arena occurred in Phase I over a longer period of time, from the beginning of the 1980s until roughly the mid-1990s. Thereafter, the brokerage mechanism became rather seldom, since most radical left groups already established relations or engaged in boundary activation. The brokerage mechanism occurred in the forms of individual brokers, institutionalized forms, such as journals and localities, internationalists as brokers and collective actions as opportunities for encounters. In the following, I trace incidents of brokerage chronological, while jumping between the different forms of brokerage.

In the 1980s, the number of brokers between the Kurdish movement and the radical left were limited, no least due to a language barrier. One Kurdish cadres claimed: “He [Hüseyin Çelebi] was also the person who made all these contacts as the only German-speaking person.” Certainly, the statement of the only German-speaking broker is an exaggeration, but the mere fact that only

few Kurdish cadres existed, who spoke German and few German activists who spoke Turkish²⁶², reflects the importance of brokers in the beginning of the relationship formation. The founding of the 'Kurdistan Report' in 1982 was one of the first steps of the Kurdish movement to bring the information of the existence of a Kurdish liberation movement into (the radical left) in German language. In the first issue, the aim of the 'Kurdistan Report' was specified:

"The legitimate struggle of the Kurdish people could not be communicated to the public and interested parties either at all or only in a distorted way. The 'Kurdistan Report' wants to close this gap within its possibilities." (Kurdistan Report 1982)

To create awareness of their own struggle and to become recognized as a (legitimate) political force were the first goals in the strategy of the Kurdish movement in Germany. In the beginning, the 'Kurdistan Report' was the official organ of the European representation of ERNK and was organized with help from 'Serxwebûn'²⁶³, the newspaper of the PKK (Kurdistan Report 1982). One Kurdish cadre assessed the relevance of the journal:

"At the beginning of the 80s, there was an important medium, the 'Kurdistan Report', which was published in German. The aim was to report on the resistance in German language too. ... The target group of 'Kurdistan Report' was also clear. The fact that it has been published every two months since '82 until today also shows that the Kurdish movement is interested in articulating itself to the outside world."

The 'clear target group' was the German-speaking left or in the words of the 'Kurdistan Report' itself the "progressive Federal German public" (Kurdistan Report 1988). In contrast to the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief', the 'Kurdistan Report' focused more on the analysis of the developments in Kurdistan and included to a lesser degree reports from solidarity actions in Germany. Since 1982, the 'Kurdistan Report' has been published continuously and can thus also be seen as a continuous interest of the Kurdish movement to inform the left public about the Kurdish movement and to form and maintain relations with (radical) left organizations in Germany.²⁶⁴ The 'Kurdistan Report' can be seen as a first institutionalized form of brokerage between the PKK-led Kurdish movement and the (radical) left in Germany, especially because the language barriers were bridged in one direction.

From the mid-1980s, relationship formation took place between the anti-imperialist left and the Kurdish movements, not at least because of brokers, which were able to communicate in two languages. In 1984, Hüseyin Çelebi initiated a solidarity group for the PKK-led Kurdish movement with interested individuals in Hamburg in, e.g., the already mentioned 'Freunde des kurdischen Volkes'²⁶⁵ (ISKU et al. 2018). In addition to his language skills, Çelebi was also able to act as a broker between the movements, due to his socialization in the Kurdish movement and German radical left groups, since for a time he was part of the 'Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterjugend'

²⁶² Kurmanji, (and to a lesser extent Sorani or Xwarîn) became just later the language of communication in the Kurdish associations in the diaspora.

²⁶³ Independence. Literally, Serxwebûn means "to be oneself" and in the Kurdish anti-colonial struggle hint to "self-awareness, -perception, and -realization" (Schamberger 2022: 329). The 'Kurdistan Report' was first distributed via 'Serxwebûn', later 'Agri Verlag', after its ban in 1994, the ISKU until today.

²⁶⁴ According to the Constitutional Protection of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, the 'Kurdistan Report' reached a circulation of up to 15,000 copies in Phase III (Verfassungsschutz Nordrhein-Westfalen: 144).

²⁶⁵ See Chapter VI. 2.

(SDAJ)²⁶⁶ (Dutzi 2021: 11). Robert Jarowoy from the 'Freunde des kurdischen Volkes' links the initial brokerage with the closeness of the diaspora:

"Of course, there were also other internationalist movements in Nicaragua or El Salvador at that time. But [Kurds] were relatively close, and we had just personal contacts and so that began. And we saw the importance of this movement in the anti-imperialist struggle and that was at least as much a motive." (Radyo Azadî 2020)

Soon after the initial contacts, an attribution of similarity took place, between individuals from the radical left and the Kurdish movement.

"We were looking for a new orientation, ... how to build something new ideologically, but also in practical, concrete work. And then we got to know the PKK movement. ... And we said that at the moment this is perhaps one of the most important things that can be done here from Germany to support this revolutionary, internationalist movement. Internationalism was the decisive factor for us." (Radyo Azadî 2020)

With the PKK-led Kurdish movement, activists from an anti-imperialist current, found a socialist and internationalist movement that grew stronger at that time and that had similar ideological pillars. The 'Freunde des kurdischen Volkes' organized delegation trips and mobilized around the Düsseldorf Trial, where Hüseyin Çelebi, was charged and imprisoned. Soon, they helped to coordinate the work of the growing solidarity movement.

At the same time, a further institutionalization of brokerage took place, with the formation of an office, where inter alia the 'Kurdistan Report' was produced: the 'Kurdistan Komitee' in Cologne²⁶⁷. Here, interested activists could inform themselves about the Kurdish struggle, could build new relationships and even join later meetings and coalitions. A younger Kurdish cadre summarized:

"And at the end of the 80s, the 'Kurdistan Komitee'. There were figures like Hüseyin Çelebi and Engîn Sîncer²⁶⁸, two German-speaking Kurdish youths, who built up the public relations office at that time and did information work, published the report, tried to build up solidarity committees."

The 'Kurdistan Komitee' initiated solidarity committees, published brochures²⁶⁹, organized annual fundraising and published the 'Nachrichten aus Kurdistan'²⁷⁰. One activist, which is still active in publishing the 'Kurdistan Report', about the journal and the office in which it was produced in the early 1990s:

"Also attempts were made [to inform] in German language here – friends, comrades, politicians – about the Kurdish liberation struggle. And this [the 'Kurdistan Komitee'] had also

²⁶⁶ Socialist German Workers' Youth. Independent youth organization of the DKP.

²⁶⁷ Kurdistan Committee. Officially: 'Kurdistan Komitee in der BRD e.V.' | 'Kurdistan Committee in the FRG registered association'. It was banned in 1993 and the ban was confirmed by the supreme court in 2000.

²⁶⁸ Nom de guerre: Erdal, before Hayri. Sîncer joined the Kurdish movement in the late 1980s and was co-founder of the YCK (Association of the Youth of Kurdistan) in Frankfurt. He went to Kurdistan in the early 1990s. He was appointed a member of the Central Committee at the 6th Party Congress in February 1999. Sîncer died in 2003 probably due to an accident (Kurdistan Report 2003).

²⁶⁹ Such as "Genocide charges against German government agencies for supporting the genocide of the Kurdish people" (Kurdistan Komitee in der BRD e.V. 1993).

²⁷⁰ News from Kurdistan. Monthly published until 1990 and then merged with the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief'.

been a place where contacts could be established. That was then closed ... not by the fact that it was banned, but by the fact that people were arrested.”

In the 1980s, the repression of the German state targeted among other Kurdish cadres, such as Hüseyin Çelebi, who actively engaged as brokers.

On the other side, from the radical left, there were brokers too: The story of Uta Schneiderbanger, summarized by her friends in a book and mentioned by several of my interviewees, is the story of a broker between radical leftists in Germany and Kurdish leftists. Politicized during the time of the RAF hunger strikes, squatting movement and women/lesbian struggles, she received a profound anti-imperialist education, which made her open to the concerns of national liberation movements. In Berlin, she sought contact with the Kurdish left:

“After 1984 I began to establish contacts with the PKK. During that time, we organized demonstrations on 8th March 8, 1st May, and other major events with joint international preparatory committees. I was not able to build a continuous relationship. I heard about the founding of the YJWK²⁷¹ and inquired about women's work. But – I think it was after 1986 – Kurdish women participated for the first time in our internationalist women's plenum.”
(Freundinnen v. Uta 2010: 47)

For Uta Schneiderbanger, it took a longer time – around two years – to build a sustainable relationship between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Berlin. Importantly, the newly found autonomous women organizations of the Kurdish movement, were able to engage in relationship formation with the autonomous women organizations of the radical left through the work of a female broker. The attribution of similarity was based on ideological similarity on anti-imperialism and anti-patriarchal struggles. Schneiderbanger engaged in the 1990s constantly as broker between autonomous women/lesbian structures and the Kurdish movement, since most autonomous structures dissolved after a certain time. She helped to establish different coalitions, such as the ‘Internationalistisches Plenum’ (Internationales Frauenplenum 1995) and solidarity groups such as the ‘FrauenLesben-Kurdistan-Solidaritätskomitee Berlin’ (see below).

Besides individual brokers, the mere fact that the Kurdish movement organized and mobilized as a diaspora in Germany produced protest events, where individual activists from the radical left came into contact with the Kurdish movement. On long-term solidarity activist remembered:

“So, my very first contacts with Kurds, not only with the Kurdish movement, ... were during the first Gulf War in 1991. At the demonstration, I first met some moustached men with a flag, and I asked one which country it was. And they said: ‘this is exactly the problem: we don't have a nation yet, but we are Kurds’. And these were my very first contacts. And then I noticed that they were even PKK members.”

Here, the agitation in public spaces led the activist to engage with the Kurdish question. Especially in the first half of the 1990s, the Kurdish movement mobilized large demonstrations, which could not go unnoticed by the radical left, due to the media attention.

From the Transnational Arena, we already know that the internationalists sometimes acted as brokers between the Kurdish movement and the German radical left from the 1990s onwards.

²⁷¹ See Chapter V. 2.

Taking up the point, where one internationalist reported, that his journey to Kurdistan triggered a process among his political friends, one of these friends reported:

“I didn't really get to know the Kurdish movement until [Name] said ‘I have the opportunity to go there’. And for us that was quite surprising, because we had not yet dealt with it at all. ... And his friends then only began to deal with it.”

Importantly, the internationalist acted as a broker or as a trigger of relationship formation, precisely because of his absence. After his departure, the friends soon engaged in relationship formation:

“We have taken up contact in the associations. And there it was the first women's structures just developed, and we were completely astonished, what ... they have built. We had not noticed all this before.”

Through their efforts to form relationships with the Kurdish movement they engaged in a political learning process and discovered connecting points. In the beginning, the group organized a Newroz Delegation in 1994. The first preparation and organization of the delegation was accompanied in the beginning with fascination:

“We were also so fascinated how in such a Kurdish centre, young to old were all represented. It was a completely different sociality²⁷² than ours in the autonomous centre. We were very enthusiastic about that, and it quickly resolved all the contradictions we had ... They were very quickly put into perspective through personal contacts. We could understand much more.”

The attribution of opportunity about sociality, the organization of the women's movement and the ability on the part of the Kurdish movement to form relations, triggered further (personal) relationship formation and learning process. After the delegation, parts of the group, engaged in coalition formation, as the same activist remembered:

“We then founded Kurdistan a Solidarity. ... And we founded, relatively quickly, a FrauenLesben-Kurdistan-Solidaritätskomitee. There was then one in Hamburg and one in Berlin.”

Through this formation of coalitions, new personal contact was formed, which again strengthened personal ties. New activists for the solidarity groups were recruited in the same path as the initial group before, as another solidarity activist noted:

“So, from the first circle of friends, little by little, people, who got to know the movement with us, then went on delegations themselves. So, it is really the case that for most of them, a delegation trip has triggered a great deal. ... And those who worked with us were mainly those who had previously been involved in the autonomous scene, district work and cultural work and ... of course, from the Anti-imp structures.”

The activists came from the same political scene, and personal ties in contact with the Kurdish movement, went on delegation trips to Kurdistan and were afterwards active in the solidarity movement.

²⁷² Gesellschaftlichkeit.

In the analysis up to this point, the brokerage mechanism was analysed along individual broker, institutionalization by journals and offices, internationalist, and mobilization of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany, connecting individuals and groups from the radical left in Germany with the Kurdish movement, thereby overcoming language barriers and stigmas. In the next part, I will analyse the brokerage mechanism along the constituting sub-mechanisms of attribution of similarity and attribution of opportunity. Those sub-mechanisms did not occur necessarily one after another, but usually, after an initial linking between two actors an attribution of similarity along with attribution of opportunity took place. The political learning sub-mechanism starts at this point but continues and becomes stronger in the coalition building phase. Hence, the political learning sub-mechanism will be discussed later.

Attribution of Similarity: Anti-Imperialist and Feminist Solidarity

With the increased activities of the Kurdish movement, such as mass demonstrations, motorway occupations, and violent actions, as well as the media attention that accompanied them, the PKK was increasingly discussed in German left-wing groups. The relationship was 'relatively tense', which can be seen in the various boundary activation of leftist groups towards the Kurdish movement as well as in the open rejection of some currents in particular.²⁷³ In fact, the relationship of the radical left with the Kurdish movement was characterized by polarization. Starting from the second half of the 1980s, however, an attribution of similarity took place, mainly by the anti-imperialist movement. As already discussed in the Transnational Arena, the Kurdish movement sought to establish relationships in the broader progressive left and in particular socialist organizations. In Germany, anti-imperialist groups were strategic allies²⁷⁴ for the Kurdish movement. Hence, the Kurdish movement sought ideological similarity in the relationship transformation based on class struggle and anti-imperialism. Importantly, the PKK claimed the leadership role in these relationships, due to the fact that the Kurdish movement was the strongest socialist movement in Germany since the beginning of the 1990s.

In the late 1980s, when the Kurdish movement was still trying to establish hegemony in the diaspora and the anti-imperialist movement had not yet collapsed, anti-imperialist groups engaged in attribution of similarity and integrated the Kurdish movement in their solidarity work. One long-term activist from the autonomous movement remembers: "At that time [in 1986], ... Kurdistan was part of it, just like El Salvador or Nicaragua." One early example of the integration of the Kurdish movement in the canon of anti-imperialist solidarity struggles was the 'Antiimperialistischer Kongress'²⁷⁵ in 1986 in Frankfurt, while simultaneously showing the polarized landscape. Another anti-imperialist activist remembered:

"At that time, we had organized a congress in Frankfurt, the anti-imperialist congress, which was enforced against the police ... It was a very special congress, because representatives from liberation movements all over the world came ..., including the Kurdish movement. The problem was that it almost did not take place, because left-wing circles wanted to prevent it – militantly wanted to prevent it."

²⁷³ See Chapter VI. 2.

²⁷⁴ Importantly, the Kurdish movement, as do other movements, distinguish between tactical and strategic alliances, meaning that tactical alliances are formed to achieve a concrete goal where a long-term perspective on an ideological basis is not necessary, whereas strategic alliances are formed on the basis of shared analysis and ideological goals.

²⁷⁵ Anti-imperialist Congress.

Even though the Kurdish movement was not one of the central actors in the congress, it was part of the guest list and the discussions. Importantly, there were also clashes with, among others, ATIF²⁷⁶/Partizan activists, which prevented an event with a Kurdish group (Antiimperialistischer Kongress 1986: 125). Around the same time, one activist reported how she came in contact with Kurdistan through the anti-WAA²⁷⁷ meeting in Bonn:

“It must have been at the end of the 80s, I was in Bonn in the anti-WAA, so resistance against the reprocessing plant in Wackersdorf and the Runway West. ... There were a few anti-imps in Bonn who also brought that [Kurdistan Solidarity] into it. But that was just for me without much background knowledge. It was simple, we went to the demonstrations, but we didn't understand much about it.”

Here, the anti-imperialist movement, in the end of the 1980s, integrated Kurdistan in their solidarity work and tried to normalize the attribution of similarity, at least within their current. Also at universities, student organizations sometimes provided rooms for the events. For example, in July 1988, the foreigners' council of the AstA²⁷⁸ in Essen organized a solidarity event with Palestine and Kurdistan, with around 600 participants from Kurdish, Palestinian and German groups (FEYKA Kurdistan 1988a).²⁷⁹

In contrast to the boundary activation of parts of the radical left, the anti-imperialist current engaged in attribution of similarity on the basis of ideological and strategic proximity. In the following, I will exemplify this attribution of similarity, along national liberation, anti-patriarchal struggles, and strategic approaches. Concerning national liberation, one communist and long-term solidarity activist explained:

“As a Marxist, as a communist, I am in favour of the right of self-determination of peoples. ... The Kurdish movement has two projects: one is to achieve status for the Kurds or some form of national liberation. The other is the much more far-reaching project of creating a free human being or a socialist society. Here I really have the luxury of a movement with which we can cooperate, which we can support, and not only where we can support the first, the democratic goal of national liberation, but much further, the goal that we also have.”

Such statements were common within anti-imperialist and communist groups. For example, in 1990, an anti-imperialist congress in Duisburg passed a resolution where solidarity with the national liberation struggle was proclaimed:

“We support the liberation struggle of the Kurdish people for national independence and self-determination and defend the right of armed resistance against colonialism and national oppression.” (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1990d)

Secondly, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the women's struggle came to the forefront in the Kurdish movement in ideological writings and in organizational implementation. For those of the

²⁷⁶ ATIF - Federation of Workers from Turkey in Germany | Almanya Türkiyeli İşçiler Federasyonu. Association formed in 1976 by TKP/ML sympathizers in the FRG. Founding member of the 'European Confederation of Labor from Turkey' | 'Avrupa Türkiyeli İşçiler Konfederasyonu' (ATİK) (Brauns, Çakır 2018: 512).

²⁷⁷ A meeting against the Wackersdorf reprocessing plant. Due to the protest, the plant was never completed.

²⁷⁸ Allgemeiner Studierendenausschuss | General Students' Committee. Student representation at universities.

²⁷⁹ On the other side, from the start on, reports and analysis for and from the Palestine movement were part of the articles in the 'Kurdistan Report' (Kurdistan Report 1983b; Habbas 1984) as well as reports and analyses on Nicaragua (Kurdistan Report 1983a).

radical left with an anti-patriarchal focus and who were aware of these developments, this led to an attribution of similarity. A female autonomist activist reported:

“Then the discussion about the women's army came up. Of course, that really impressed me. Somehow there in the Middle East a women's army was built up. So, I was hooked on it right away. Yes, then we made contact with Kurdish structures.”

Increasingly, the women's movement became one of the main organizational pillars of the Kurdish movement, a fact the radical left referred to positively.

Thirdly, the strategy of the Kurdish movement also resonated with the strategic concept of the anti-imperialist current in the 1980s, such as people's front and urban guerrilla strategy. The people's front strategy assumed that the international working class and the national liberation movement would unite in the struggle against imperialism, and therefore the strategic focus was solidarity with the national liberation movements (Haunss 2008: 513). One anti-imperialist activist argued:

“In many countries at that time in the 80s and also with Kurdistan, it was of course the hope for developing a socialist movement. ... So, it was not only related to Kurdistan. ... For us, that was never the point of going there, but the point that they can only be successful if we weaken imperialism here.”

In the 1980s, the urban guerrilla strategy was still relevant in the anti-imperialist current. The strategy of militant groups such as RAF, RZ, and 2nd June Movement, in times where, in the FRG, a revolution seemed unlikely, was to attack the capitalist-militarist complex in the centres, in order to facilitate the revolutionary movements in the peripheries. Robert Jarowoy, sentenced and imprisoned in the context of the 2nd June Movement, drew a continuity of this strategy in relation with the Kurdish movement:

“We have always seen ourselves as anti-imperialists. ... All the consequences of capitalist, imperialist policy, which we had always tried to attack since 1968, whether that was the RAF or 2nd June Movement, was to lead the fight in the heart of the beast of imperialism. And we have recognized ... that the PKK movement was not only a liberation movement for the Kurdish people, but a very clear attack on the imperialist system and also a very far advanced one.” (Radyo Azadî 2020)

The ideological and strategic bases of anti-imperialism made for the generation of activists, which supported the RAF prisoners of the third generation, easy to relate to the Kurdish movement, due to complementary strategic orientation. On the basis of the strategic proximity, the Kurdish movement was not seen as a solidarity objects, but as strategic coalitions partners, as an anti-imperialist activists argued:

“Yes, we have approached the [Kurdish] movement, not as a solidarity movement, but because we had been part of the anti-imperialist front in Western Europe,²⁸⁰ which was built up. We wanted to approach the movement as strategic allies, as partners.”

At the end of the 1980s, the support for the PKK was a continuation of the same strategy that had been used with other liberation movements.

²⁸⁰ In May 1982, the RAF called for an anti-imperialist front in Western Europe.

In sum, the radical left attributed to the Kurdish similarity on the level of ideological proximity concerning anti-imperialist ideology, feminist ideology, and strategic proximity based on urban guerrilla and people's front strategies. The attribution of similarity opened up the path towards the formation of coalitions or solidarity committees, with the goal of strategic alliances on the basis of ideological and strategic proximities.

[Attribution of Opportunity: The Strongest Leftist Movement in Germany](#)

Above, some instances of attribution of opportunity with the Kurdish movement were already mentioned, often expressed as fascination by the interviewees. Here, I will focus on the attribution of success of the Kurdish movement organizing a strong people's movement and the opportunity perceived by the radical left to learn from the Kurdish movement. One activist described his initial fascination when engaging with the Kurdish movement:

“So, what fascinated me at that time about the Kurdish movement here [in Germany] was: Most of us went to the demonstrations as young people and were relatively isolated. The Kurdish demos there were the society on the street, there were the strollers, grandma, and grandpa. ... So that was what attracted me, that it works, that old and young are together and can't be separated. ... And here everyone was ranting about why they were just shouting Apo²⁸¹, Apo, Apo. But we were interested in the why? ... What did Apo do for you that you listen to him.”

In this attribution of opportunity, the willingness to learn and to understand contradictions was already inherent. One activist reported for the 1990s:

“And at that time, we already had the claim to get to know the movement, to get to know what organizing means. ... I know that at my first demonstration in Kassel, the police stopped us, and we stood there opposite the cops with an 80-year-old grandfather and a mother with a child. And you just stood there and didn't run away. I was totally fascinated by the fact that people stood together.”

Here, the commitment of activists of the Kurdish movement fuelled the fascination with the movement. Importantly, the interest of the solidarity activists was to learn about how the Kurdish movement was able to successfully organize a whole society and what could be learned for the radical left in Germany. The Kurdish movement being so successful in organizing was one reason for the German radical left groups to form relations with them, as one long-term solidarity activist argued:

“Protests happened in every city, and it was a very, very big and strong mobilization. And that was for us as anti-imperialists, who saw that we only have strength in the internationalist struggle, that we can never become a ... left mass movement, that we can actually only achieve strength in the centres if we unite internationally, with all the forces that live here – it makes no difference whether Kurd, Turk, Chinese or Albanian or whatever – that we only create really an international movement. And in it was the Kurdish movement avant-garde, also because it was active here, locally.”

The respondents stressed that the Kurdish movement, through its mobilized diaspora and its strength, became an opportunity, even the 'only' opportunity for a successful mobilization of the

²⁸¹ Nickname for Abdullah Öcalan.

radical, anti-imperialist left in the centres. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many anti-imperialist structures dissolved and while a greater lack of orientation prevailed individual activists sometimes joined the newly found solidarity groups for Kurdistan in the search for new perspectives.

In short, the initial brokerage between the radical left and the Kurdish movement was, from the point of view of the radical left, also marked by an attribution of opportunity. Firstly, the mobilization success of the Kurdish diaspora triggered the willingness of the radical left to learn from the Kurdish movement while secondly, there was also hope within the radical left (especially during the crisis of anti-imperialism) that the Kurdish movement could initiate a new leftist mobilization in the FRG.

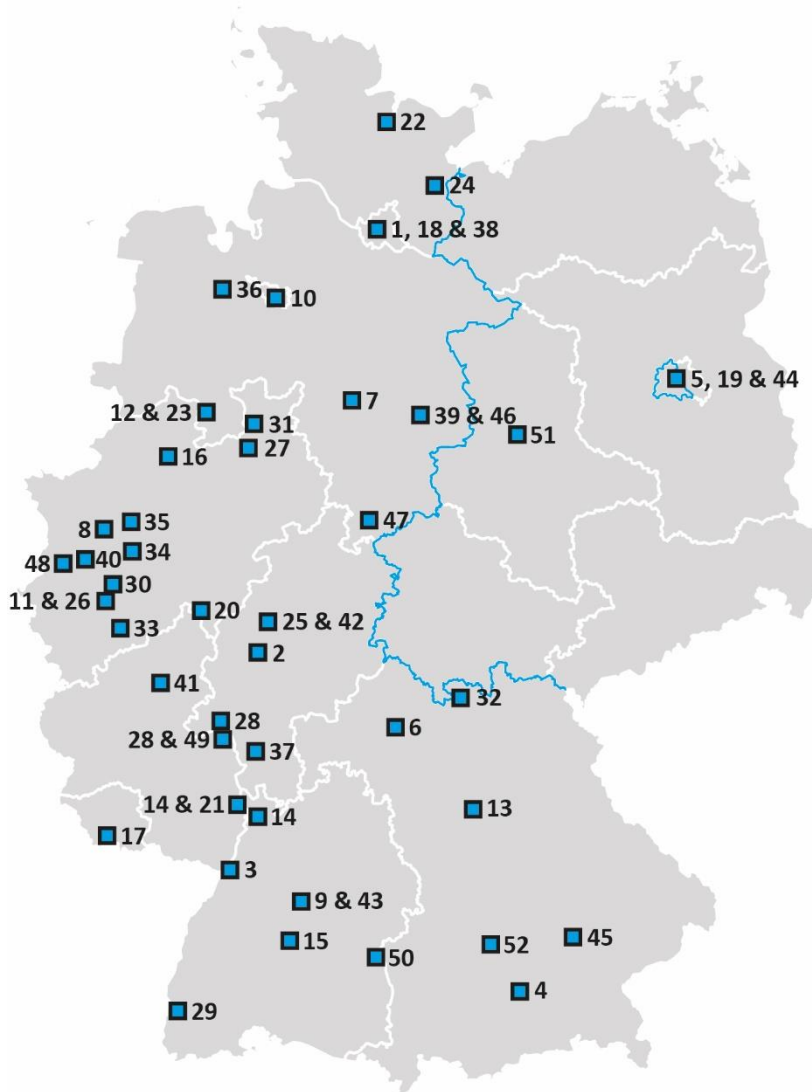
3.2. Relationship maintenance: Coordinating and Learning through Relationships

The stage of relationship maintenance in Phase I is marked by the mechanisms of coalition formation and scale shift. Coalition formation between the Kurdish movement and the radical left occurred in Phase I from the late 1980s until 1999 in the form of broader coalitions, not directly focusing on Kurdistan, and in the form of Kurdistan solidarity committees. Especially in the later form, brokerage on the one side and attribution of threat on the other side triggered the coalition formation. The transition from brokerage towards coalition formation was described by one activist as quite fast. Soon after the mechanism of coalition formation a *scale shift* took place: the existing solidarity groups coordinated on a national level. Within both mechanisms, coalition formation and scale shift, the sub-mechanisms of political learning and resolving tension occurred.

3.2.1. Coalition Formation: Kurdistan Solidarity Committees

In the mid-1980s, there were no organizations, in which interested people or groups could participate or coordinate Kurdistan solidarity activities in the FRG. In the late 1980s and in the early 1990s, coalitions formed, wherein organizations and individuals from the Kurdish movement and the radical left coordinated solidarity activities together. A Kurdish activist claimed that “it started in late 80s already, this moving together”. Besides the coalitions and working alliances concerning repression, in the late 1980s new solidarity committees with Kurdistan formed. In this section, I will first provide an overview of the numbers and cities the coalition formation took place in, then describe some general characteristics of these coalitions, and describe one exceptional coalition more in-depth. Thereafter, I will analyse the mechanism of scale shift, and finally, I will trace the constituting sub-mechanisms of both.

In the following map, all Kurdistan solidarity groups and committees as well as groups which were mentioned in the ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’ have been drawn in. The year in which the coalitions were first noted is given in parentheses, although the individual coalition may have been formed earlier. I also included the German-Kurdish Friendship association, since they represent a relationship formation, however, they are not coalitions as such. From these groups I count 44 groups as Kurdistan solidarity committees or similar solidarity coalitions.



MAP LEGEND

 Former border between GDR and West Germany

 Cities with solidarity coalitions

1 Name and year of the individual committees see below

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 1) Freunde des kurdischen Volkes Hamburg (1988[1984]) | 16) Arbeitskreis Kurdistan Münster (1990) | 28) Freunde des kurdischen Volkes Mainz-Wiesbaden (1991) |
| 2) Freunde und Freundinnen des kurdischen Volkes Gießen (1988) | 17) Kurdistan Solidarität Saarbrücken (1990) | 29) Kurdistan-Solidarität Freiburg (1992) |
| 3) Kurdistan Komitee Karlsruhe (1988) | 18) Kurdistan Internationalismus-gruppe-Hamburg (1990) | 30) Freundes des kurdischen Volkes Leverkusen (1992) |
| 4) Arbeitskreis Kurdistan München (1988) | 19) Arbeitskreis Kurdistan/Botan (Berlin, 1990) | 31) Kurdistan-Solidaritätskomitee Bünde (1992) |
| 5) Kurdistan Komitee Westberlin (1989) | 20) Arbeitskreis Kurdistan-Solidarität Siegen (1991) | 32) Kurdistan-Solidarität Coburg (1992) |
| 6) Kurdistan Komitee Schweinfurt (1989) | 21) Freundeskreis des kurdischen Volkes Mannheim (1991) | 33) AK Internationalismus im Infoladen Bonn (1992) |
| 7) Kurdistan Solidarität Hannover (1989) | 22) Arbeitskreis Kurdistan Kiel (1991) | 34) Kurdistan Solidarität Wuppertal (1992) |
| 8) Kurdistan-Solidarität Ruhr (1989) | 23) Kurdistan-Solidarität Osnabrück (1991) | 35) Kurdistan Solidarität Bochum (1993) |
| 9) Freundeskreis des kurdischen Volkes Stuttgart (1989) | 24) Asyl & Solidaritätskomitee Lübeck (1991) | 36) „Kein Fußbreit dem Faschismus“ Oldenburg (1993) |
| 10) Initiative Internationale Solidarität / Kurdistan Solidarität Bremen (1989) | 25) Kurdistan-Komitee Marburg (1991) | 37) Darmstädter Solidaritätskomitee (1993) |
| 11) Arbeitskreis Kurdistan-Solidarität Köln (1990) | 26) Deutsch-Kurdischer Freund-schaftsverein Köln (1991) | 38) Unabhängige Kurdistan-Solidarität Hamburg (1994) |
| 12) Internationalistischer Arbeitskreis Kurdistan Osnabrück (1990) | 27) Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitee Bielefeld (1991) | 39) Kurdistan-Solidarität Braunschweig (1994) |
| 13) Kurdistan-Solidaritäts-Komitee Nürnberg (1990) | | 40) Kurdistan Solidarität Düsseldorf (1994) |
| 14) Freundeskreis des kurdischen Volkes Mannheim/Heidelberg (1990) | | 41) Deutsch-Kurdischer Freundes-kreis Koblenz (1994) |
| 15) Kurdistan Komitee Tübingen (1990) | | 42) Kurdistan Solidaritätsbündnis Marburg (1994) |
| | | 43) Deutsch-Kurdischer Freund-schaftsverein Stuttgart (1994) |
| | | 44) Deutsch-Kurdischer Freund-schaftsverein Berlin (1996) |
| | | 45) Flüchtlingshilfe Kurdistan (Landshut) (1996) |
| | | 46) Deutsch-Kurdischer Freund-schaftsverein Musa Anter (Braunschweig) (1996) |
| | | 47) AK Kurdistan (Göttingen) (1996) |
| | | 48) Kurdistan-Solidaritätsgruppe Mönchengladbach (1996) |
| | | 49) Deutsch-Kurdischer Freund-schaftsverein Mainz (1996) |
| | | 50) Kurdistan-Solidarität Allgäu-Oberschwaben (Ulm, 1997) |
| | | 51) Kurdistan Solidarität Magdeburg (1997) |
| | | 52) Deutsch-Kurdische Gesellschaft Ried (1998) |

Figure 4: Map of Solidarity Coalitions in Phase I

Importantly, the Kurdistan solidarity committees formed in West-German cities, not exclusively but regularly in cities with a Kurdish association, which is true for at least 33 cities.²⁸² These cities also correspond with the 20 largest cities in West Germany. Kurdistan solidarity committees existed also in cities where I couldn't find Kurdish associations in the 1990s, such as Braunschweig, Bunde, Coburg, Göttingen, Lübeck, Marburg, Münster, and Schweinfurt.²⁸³ However, there were also many smaller cities with a Kurdish association, where no solidarity committees emerged.²⁸⁴ There is only one solidarity committee in East Germany, founded in 1997 in Magdeburg, probably due to the fact that in East Germany there was not yet a Kurdish diaspora nor a strong radical left beyond an antifascist movement. However, in the late 1990s, also antifascists groups from East Germany dealt with Kurdistan, when working together with ISKU (see below). In sum, in terms of solidarity committees, Germany divides between East and West continued.

Furthermore, it can be assessed that the existence of both a Kurdish association and radical left groups increased the likelihood of relationship formation. One ISKU activist argued that: „In many cities, many people worked with the Kurdish associations and organized things together. There were always connections like that.“ One long-term activist described the regional differences and argued, that internationalists centres of the radical left contributed to a strong Kurdistan solidarity:

“Yes, regionally really different. For example, in Hamburg there was a relatively strong Kurdistan Solidarity movement. One point in it was that at that time an international centre was built. The B5 in Sankt Pauli. ... And in other cities, ... such as Duisburg, there were also groups that had centres there and there was such an exchange. In the south it was more difficult, but there was also cooperations.”

It is also worth highlighting that in cities without an explicit Kurdistan Solidarity committee, there were radical left groups forming relationships with the Kurdish movement. For example, the 'Aktion 3. Welt Saar'²⁸⁵ have been active on delegations as well as in publications (Aktion 3. Welt Saar 1995) working against the PKK ban or in solidarity with refugees.

The formation and number of Kurdistan Solidarity Committees also changed on a time scale. In the following bar chart, the number of addresses of Kurdistan solidarity committees or other Kurdistan groups are provided by month from 1988 until 1999. Importantly, also after 1999 the number remained the same, even though all interviewees claimed that in and after 1999 the Kurdistan solidarity committees dissolved. Consequently, these numbers tell us only the moment a solidarity committee formed and came into contact with the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief', but not at all the duration of the respective coalition.

²⁸² Berlin, Bielefeld, Bochum, Bonn, Bremen, Cologne, Darmstadt, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt am Main, Freiburg, Gießen, Hamburg, Hanover, Karlsruhe, Kassel, Kiel, Koblenz, Leverkusen, Magdeburg, Mainz-Wiesbaden, Mannheim, Mönchengladbach, Munich, Nuremberg, Oldenburg, Osnabrück, Saarbrücken, Siegen, Stuttgart, Tübingen, Wuppertal, Ulm. The solidarity committee for the Ruhr area was based in Essen, but likely also active in Dortmund, Duisburg or other cities close by.

²⁸³ As for Marburg and Göttingen, these are student cities marked by a strong radical left tradition.

²⁸⁴ Aachen, Aschaffenburg Bremerhaven, Celle, Dresden, Düren, Erfurt, Esslingen, Fulda, Friedrichshafen, Gummersbach, Grevenbroich, Hagen, Halle/ Saale Hanau Ingolstadt, Heilbronn, Heidenheim, Lahr, Leipzig, Limburg, Peine, Pforzheim, Rendsburg, Reutlingen, Salzgitter, Singen, Troisdorf, Vechta-Lohne, Zwickau.

²⁸⁵ Action 3rd World Saar.

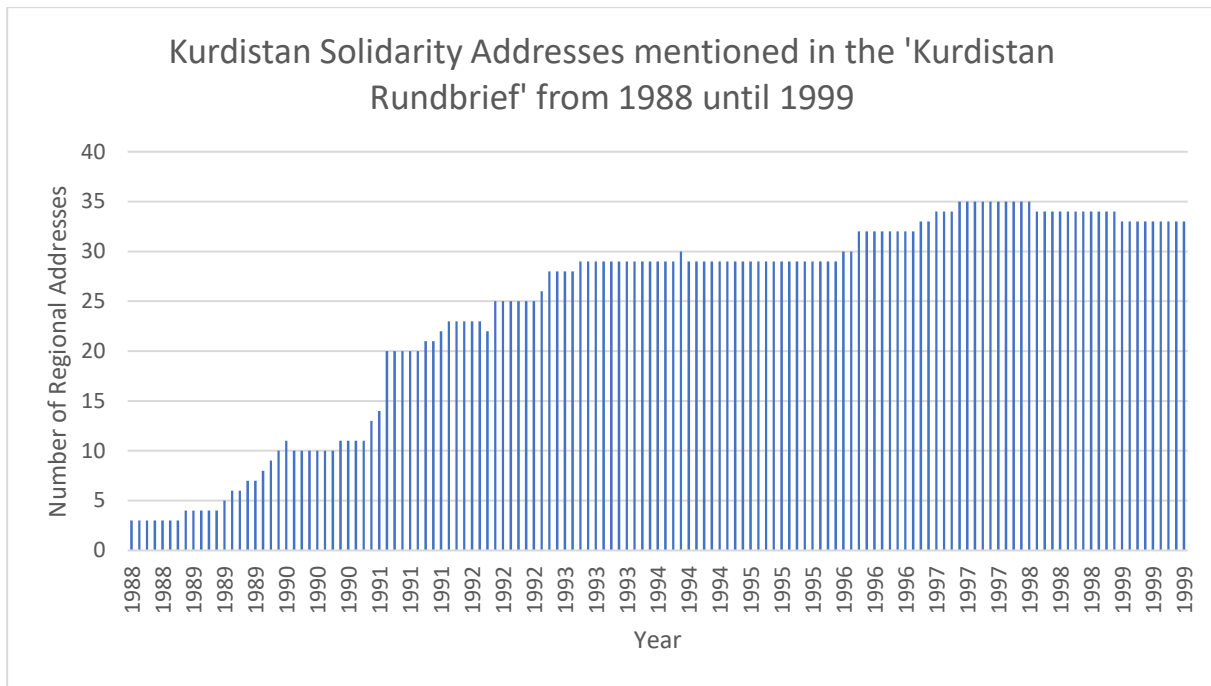


Figure 5: Kurdistan Solidarity Addresses in the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief' from 1988 until 1999

A first wave of the formation of Kurdistan committees took place from 1988 until 1990, reaching 11 committees with an address in the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief'. From 1991 until 1993, the number of solidarity committees rose sharply, up to 29 committees, while no new anti-repression coalition formed in this period (see Chapter VI. 2.). Thereafter, the number remained constant and from 1996 onwards only a few solidarity committees were formed, such as in Göttingen, Magdeburg and Allgäu-Oberschwaben. Importantly, the rather ad-hoc committees against repression, for example after the PKK-ban, were not included in the list of the Kurdistan solidarity addresses.

In general, the solidarity committees were coalitions of local groups and individual activists mostly from the radical left, with Kurdish activists as members or at least contact persons. In the case of the Munich solidarity committee, the committee was a coalition between individuals, representatives of different (radical) left groups and Kurdish activists. One solidarity committee in Marburg, formed in 1994, consisted of "numerous German and Kurdish organizations" (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994j). Not in all cases an activist of the Kurdish movement sat at the meetings, but usually the solidarity committees had a contact person in the Kurdish movement. Until its ban, the Kurdistan solidarity committees were often supported by the 'Kurdistan Komitee'. The goals of these Kurdistan solidarity groups ranged from support of the PKK, over solidarity against repression to the fight against German imperialism. The statement of Kurdistan Solidarity Schweinfurt can be seen as exemplary for the different goals of the Kurdistan Committees:

"We want to support the liberation struggle with our activities, as well as stand up for the rights of the Kurdish anti-fascists living here. A special concern is to oppose the imperialist German-Turkish cooperation and the special interests of the FRG in this region, as well as the criminalization of Kurdish organizations and the deportation of Kurdish refugees." (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1989c)

Thematic changes often were triggered by the Kurdish movement at the national meetings.

Based on the analysis of the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief' and Interviews, I will now provide a short overview of the organization involved in the Kurdistan solidarity movement and the stage of the relationship transformations. Between 1988 until 1990, regular supporters or cooperation partners from the radical left were 'Volksfront', KBW, VSP, DKP, local anti-imperialist groups and from 1989 the MLPD. Often, other diaspora organizations supported demonstrations and other solidarity committees, and occasionally supported the actions of the Kurdish movement. For example, in 1990, there was a rally for a free Kurdistan in Gießen, which was supported, among others, by the local Ireland Solidarity and the Palestinian-Lebanon committee (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1990c). In the late 1980s the participation and relationship transformation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement was not yet far developed. For example, in 1988, a celebration of the beginning of the armed struggle took place in Gelsenkirchen, to which the German left was invited, and the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief' complained:

"About 2000 to 3000 Kurds participated in the event, Germans unfortunately only a handful showed up ... A comrade from the 'Volksfront' then briefly reassured the Kurds of their unrestricted solidarity and emphasized that despite the agitation and the distancing of many leftists from them, many leftists are ready to fight together with them. The response to this was positive and connected with the request / demand to implement this in practice."
(Kurdistan Rundbrief 1988d)

Occasionally, similar complaints were made in the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief', which, however, should not be overestimated, since such statements can also serve mobilization purposes. Between 1990 and 1993, to a lesser extent, anti-imperialist organizations, or K-groups, such as KBW were mentioned as supporters. The numbers of solidarity committees rose however, whereas the number of organized events and the organizational capacities seems to have rather fluctuated. For example, a mobilization in North-West Germany for a demonstration in solidarity with Kurdish liberation struggle, organized by the solidarity committee from Bremen, Hanover, Bielefeld and Osnabrück, was only attended by 150 activists, half of them from the radical left (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1990e). In contrast, many events and projects were organized by the solidarity movements, ranging from information events, demonstrations, solidarity weeks, fundraising campaigns, educational seminars, city partnership from below,²⁸⁶ signature collections, protest postcards, photo exhibitions, open letters, wall newspapers and a "Emergency kit for Kurdistan".²⁸⁷

Since the PKK ban, from 1994 until 1999, most reports in the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief' were concerned with the repression against Kurdish organizations and the solidarity movement. Importantly, there was a change of reporting in the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief' from actions of the solidarity movements, or even dialog between the solidarity committees, towards press statements from parties and human rights organization.²⁸⁸ In general, bigger radical left organizations are rarely mentioned as supporters for demonstrations, since on the one hand

²⁸⁶ Diyarbakır (Amed) – Karlsruhe. Organized by a 'Freundschaftsverein Diyarbakır – Karlsruhe'.

²⁸⁷ In the issues of the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief' in 1993, there were seldom reports on local events organized by the solidarity committees. Whether this was due to a real decline in activity or to editorial decisions cannot be answered.

²⁸⁸ In 1997, there was a first open meeting of the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief' and the admission to the editorial office of more professionalized members, like lawyers or members of the parliament, such as Ulla Jelpke (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1997b).

organizations such as the KBW dissolved, while on the other hand the repressions seem to have altered the publication strategy within the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief' towards statements from moderate groups. In contrast, at the YEK-KOM annual general meeting in 1997, there were representatives among others, from 'Rote Hilfe', AZADÎ, DKP and MLPD, ISKU und 'medico international', and GDF²⁸⁹ (YEK-KOM 1997). Additionally, the interviewees highlighted that during the 1990s, more antifascist groups participated in the Kurdistan Solidarity movement.

In sum, the Kurdistan solidarity movement was mainly organized through the solidarity committees, reaching its peak in numbers and activities in the mid-1990s.

FrauenLesben-Kurdistan-Solidaritätskomitees²⁹⁰ Berlin and Hamburg

In the following passages, I will look at one exception to the Kurdistan solidarity committee, the 'FrauenLesben-Kurdistan-Solidaritätskomitees Berlin and Hamburg', which focused on the women's movement in Kurdistan and the diaspora. The reasons for choosing these cases are firstly that I obtained information on all stages of relationship transformation of these coalitions, and secondly the fact that they were highlighted by the interviewees themselves.

In 1995, the 'FrauenLesben-Kurdistan-Solidaritätskomitees' were founded in Berlin and Hamburg. The request of the foundation arose after an international Women Kurdistan Conference on 8th March 1994 in Cologne, where the Kurdish women had called for support for their struggle.²⁹¹ From the side of the Kurdish women, a committee was founded

"to improve the cooperation with other women's movements, ... to create more publicity, understanding and solidarity for the struggle of the Free Women's Movement of Kurdistan."
(Kurdistan Rundbrief 1994).

The goal of the Women/Lesbian-Kurdistan Solidarity Committees was to work more closely with the Kurdish women's movement, to discuss the idea of the women's movement, and to learn from each other (Freundinnen v. Uta 2010: 77–78). The Berlin committee had around 10 members from the radical left, whereby there was a continuity with an internationalist, feminist organization, which disintegrated before.²⁹² One activist from Berlin remembered:

"Women with very different contexts. And different conditions also result in different capacities. It is also normal, so age differences ..., a young Turkish woman, a young Kurdish woman, was there. One that went into the mountains for a longer period of time ... A very good mixture."

In Hamburg and Berlin, there were women from political groups, who already worked in the Kurdistan solidarity movement for a time, mostly from an anti-imperialist current. The attribution of similarity took place on the basis of anti-patriarchal ideology as well as the idea of forming a relationship with all fighting women worldwide. One activist from the Hamburg committee:

²⁸⁹ Göcmen Dernekleri Federasyonu (GDF) - Föderation der Immigrantenvereine aus der Türkei | Federation of Immigrant Associations from Turkey.

²⁹⁰ Women/Lesbian-Kurdistan Solidarity Committees.

²⁹¹ Already before, at the 5th congress of the YJWK, the Kurdish women decided to "seek contact and joint events with German women's groups." (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1992b).

²⁹² 'Feministische Antirassistische Revolutionäre Aktion' (FARA) | 'Feminist Antiracist Revolutionary Action', was an attempt for a nationwide organization, formed with an internationalist approach.

“The Women/Lesbian Committee was a lot about solidarity work against sexual violence, especially the situation in the prisons in Turkey and sexual torture. And of course, also the women’s organization, so to introduce the organization of the Kurdish women’s movement.”

In the beginning, the Kurdish women’s movement reached out to the women’s movement in Germany, in order to form a relationship, obtain information about their way of organizing, and then diffuse their strategy. One activist in the Hamburg committee described political learning as the main aim of the coalition: “it was about exchange, getting to know each other.” The relationship with the Kurdish movement was maintained as described by an activist from Berlin:

“We then went to the association and discussed things there and took part in meetings. Today I think, ... it wasn’t integrated enough into the work of the associations. But maybe I couldn’t because of our way of working ... We were not able to make a real plan and everything was dependent on external events.”

The exchange between the Kurdish movement and the radical left took place through the Kurdish association but was restrained by the autonomous way of organizing, meaning no shared long-term strategy but rather event-oriented mobilizations. One important event was an international women’s demonstration on the occasion of the 8th of March 1996, in Bonn. The Women/Lesbian-Kurdistan Solidarity Committees together with the YAJK mobilized for this demonstration nationwide.²⁹³ In fact, on the 9th of March, the nationwide demonstration was held with a focus on Kurdistan and the importance of women in the struggle for freedom, including the fight against increasing sexualized violence on the part of the Turkish state. The demonstration with several thousand women went through the city peacefully and some banned ERNK, PKK and Öcalan flags were shown. One activist from Hamburg recalled:

“And then the police clubbed the demonstration. They [police] shut down the street. And this was legendary, I don’t know how many hours we stood there, but then they surrounded us. And we managed to actually release all the prisoners and leave with them. I think that took 8 hours. And for all those who were there, from the feminist structures, many were very impressed, how consistently and persistently the Kurdish women in the front led the fight. ... It has already shaped us very much.”

The police surrounded the demonstrators in the street and demanded offenders to be handed over, the flags to be rolled up and the demonstration to be dissolved in small groups. The women refused, and the situation escalated when demonstrators tried to break through the police lines where several women were seriously injured. The women waited for 8 to 10 hours in the streets until the prisoners were released and they could leave together with the other protestors (Freundinnen v. Uta 2010: 78–79). The perseverance and steadfastness fascinated many women from German groups. Importantly, the success that the prisoners were released, and the crowd could leave together, contributed to the maintenance of this solidarity relationship.

In 1996, the Berlin committee became part of the Solidarity with ‘Berliner Komitee Solidarität mit den Samstagmüttern’²⁹⁴. The ‘Cumartesi Anneleri’ or Saturday Mothers are relatives of opposition members, who were forcibly disappeared in Turkey and Kurdistan. Since May 1995,

²⁹³ However, one respondent claimed that there was a lack of communication between the two committees and an actual exchange only took place at conferences organized by ISKU or via the Kurdish movement.

²⁹⁴ Saturday Mothers Committee in Berlin. Such a committee also existed in Hamburg, but I have not been able to obtain information on whether the Hamburg Women/Lesbian committee was part of it.

they have demonstrated every Saturday in Istanbul, following the example of the 'Madres de Plaza de Mayo' in Argentina. On the occasion of the 'Week of the Disappeared' in Istanbul in May 1996, the 'International Committee Against Disappearances' was formed, which tried to build committees in different countries. In autumn, the Berlin committee was founded. The committee organized a rally in different parts of Berlin every Saturday, simultaneous to the protest of the Saturday Mothers in Istanbul. One activist on these protests:

"Uta and her group and the committed relationship with each other played a large part in the fact that the committee lasted until 1999 and that the rallies were well attended."
(Freundinnen v. Uta 2010: 83)

Importantly, the relationship maintenance was based on the commitment, Schneiderbanger as a broker, and the Women/Lesbian Committee put into this coalition. One activist from this time on the relationship maintenance:

"With the Saturday mothers: There were also regular rallies here in Berlin. And what we heard from the organizations – there were not only Kurds, but Turkish leftists too – that brought about a change in the way we treated each other. We got to know each other, became familiar, and exchanged ideas."

Through the regularity, commitment, and the focus on a concrete project, the relationship deepened. Furthermore, the committee organized delegations as process observations and supported the work of a 'Women's Office against Sexual Torture' in Istanbul. The break-up of the coalition will be discussed below.

The formation of the two Women/Lesbian coalitions was initiated by a call of the Kurdish women's movement and was met by an attribution of similarity on the base of anti-patriarchal and internationalist ideology on the side of the radical left. The committees lasted for around three to four years, maintained by event mobilization, formation of transnational ties, and fascination about the commitment of the Kurdish women's movement. However, there was already a lack of relationship work in the coalition and missing possibilities of developing strategies on the side of the autonomous women, which will be discussed further in the section about the relationship break-up. Comparing the committees of different cities, the Berlin one was able to organize a more intensive coalition work by organizing a weekly event in transnational solidarity with the Saturday mothers. The Women/Lesbian committees generally developed only in cities with a strong(er) radical left, where a differentiation in different issues of solidarity was possible. Interestingly, there was no (continuous) exchange between these coalitions except for the coordination of coalitions on a national level, which will now be discussed.

3.2.2. Scale Shift: Coordination of Coalitions

The mechanism *scale shift* refers to the change in scale and numbers of the coordination of actions or campaigns and their implementation either in different localities or as regional, national, or transnational mobilization. In the case of the solidarity movement with Kurdistan one can trace a scale shift, including the sub-mechanisms of political learning and resolving tensions. In particular, the coordination of solidarity actions occurred from the end of the 1980s throughout the 1990s on a national level.

Already in 1989, there was a conference of all Kurdistan solidarity groups in the FRG organized by the 'Kurdistan-Komitee'. Officially 'FEYKA Kurdistan'²⁹⁵, the umbrella organization of Kurdish associations, invited all local groups that "support the armed liberation struggle in Kurdistan" (FEYKA Kurdistan 1989a). The counterparts within the radical left were in the beginning mainly the 'Freunde des kurdischen Volkes', which were also organized across cities. The first conference was attended by 42 people from 12 cities, and lectures were held about the situation in Kurdistan, Kemalism, and the relationship between the FRG and Turkey, repression in the FRG against Kurds and other topics. Importantly, a platform of the solidarity groups was founded, and a coordination committee was elected, including people from the solidarity groups and the Kurdish movement. The goal of the '(Vorläufige) Plattform der Kurdistan-Solidaritätsgruppen'²⁹⁶ was

"to support the liberation struggle for national independence and self-determination and represent the right to armed resistance against colonialism and national oppression. In our work, we set the goal for ourselves to support this liberation struggle politically and materially through public relations, journalistic activities, fundraising campaigns, solidarity events, etc." (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1989d)

Furthermore, the aim was to oppose the international relation between the Turkish and the German state, and the repression against Kurds. In order to create publicity, several brochures were planned to be produced. The second conference in February 1990 was attended by 40 activists from 12 cities and representatives from five guest groups. Among other things, a fundraising campaign was initiated to support the liberation struggles, the work of the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief' was discussed,²⁹⁷ and the Kurdish movement reported about the struggle in Kurdistan (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1990b). A solidarity cadre from Hamburg remembers:

"The Kurdish movement organized a weekend once a year, where they invited all the solidarity structures that existed ... and where they reported what the current analysis is, where the work on the ground was evaluated, where proposals were made. This has already been done regularly."

A year later, 60 people were present at the conference with 19 Kurdistan solidarity committees from different cities.²⁹⁸ Importantly, after the reunification of Germany, there were still only West-German solidarity committees involved. Kurdistan solidarity became larger in the early 1990s, indicated by the number of solidarity committees attending the meeting and the numbers of 'Kurdistan Rundbrief' issues printed, which rose from 300 in 1989 up to 1150 in 1991 (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1991a). In 1992, the conference was attended by around 60 representatives from 21 solidarity committees. Simultaneously, the thematic range widened.²⁹⁹ In the same year

²⁹⁵ 'Kurdistan-Komitee Köln' and 'FEYKA Kurdistan'.

²⁹⁶ (Preliminary) Platform of Kurdistan Solidarity Groups.

²⁹⁷ The 'Nachrichten aus Kurdistan' published by the 'Kurdistan Komitee' were discontinued and merged with the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief'.

²⁹⁸ Kiel, Lübeck, Hamburg, Hanover, Bremen, Osnabrück, Oldenburg, Münster, Wuppertal, Köln, Siegen, Bonn, Wiesbaden, Gießen, Frankfurt, Karlsruhe, Stuttgart, Mannheim/Heidelberg. Two more groups were active in Bielefeld and Essen/Gelsenkirchen, but couldn't attend the meeting.

²⁹⁹ The speeches were held by the Kurdish movement ranging from "tasks of the solidarity movement from the point of view of the ERNK", development of the Kurdish women's movement and the repression in Germany, and working groups were organized with topics such as "recognition of the ERNK in the FRG?", asylum in the FRG for Kurds, goals of the Kurdish revolution, "experience in town twinning and local solidarity projects", Düsseldorf trial, "Turkey aid and resistance against it" (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1992e).

a second conference took place in October, where a Tourist boycott to Turkey was called out with an action day in April of the next year (Freundinnen und Freunde des kurdischen Volkes Gießen 1992). The background to this was that in the same phase, the PKK was also proclaiming tourist destinations in Western Turkey as targets, and the Kurdish movement in Germany was increasingly targeting the tourism industry. One activist from an Antifa group of that time reported:

“We did various things against all these travel agencies. You could also say propaganda actions on the street, street theatre, banners hung in different places, information brochures hung on walls.”

In 1992, there were also regional meetings of Kurdistan solidarity groups, such as the one in Baden-Württemberg. From 1993 onwards, the ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’ only indirectly reported about these conferences and sent the protocols directly to the solidarity committees. The reason for this change in reporting is probably the repression by the German state. However, the conferences continued until the end of Phase I, and were organized later by ISKU. An activist from ISKU reported:

“Well, there were discussions on a supra-regional level, that one was invited to, annual meetings, where the various solidarity groups were invited. ... There was then more or less a political assessment made about the situation not only in Kurdistan, but how the Kurdish movement worldwide analysed the situation. And, of course, questions could be asked about what is actually happening in Kurdistan right now. That was always a lively exchange. And of course, there were always other opportunities to make contact with comrades from the Kurdish movement.”

On the one hand, these conferences provided the Kurdish movement with the opportunity to spread their analysis of the political situation in Kurdistan, diffuse information about war in Kurdistan and establish or maintain contacts with (new) solidarity groups. On the other side, the solidarity work was evaluated, and new agendas set. The strategy often followed the assessments of the Kurdish cadres involved. However, the points of leverage employed when developing new campaigns were the international relationships between Germany and Turkey of political, military, and economic nature. For example, the tourist boycott aimed at the economic linkages.³⁰⁰ In 1993, the Kurdistan solidarity committee, together with the Kurdish associations, organized a campaign against arms export. Under the slogan “No weapons for genocide”, there were information events and protest actions in several cities in Germany (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1993d). In sum, the conferences organized by the Kurdish movement coordinated the actions on a national level, fostered new relationship formation between the Kurdistan Solidarity Committees and the Kurdish movement and provided the space for political learning. In the coordination the Kurdish movement took on a leading role.

³⁰⁰ Tourism from Germany declined rapidly in 1993 by around 23 percent in June, many trips were cancelled and the Turkish state tried to counteract this with funds for advertising campaigns in Europe (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1993f).

Informationsstelle Kurdistan (ISKU)

After the PKK ban, the concept of the 'Informationsstelle Kurdistan' (ISKU)³⁰¹ was developed by radical left activists from the solidarity movement and the Kurdish movement. One of the main activists from the ISKU noted:

“And at that time there was already the idea of founding the 'Informationsstelle Kurdistan', which was set up in a similar way to the 'Informationsstelle Lateinamerika'³⁰². The idea was to bundle the solidarity structures, to organize them, to give them their own structure. Above all, after the ban, to create a structure that could again create a counter public.”

Concepts of organizing a solidarity movement were developed with recourse to the experience of other preceding or longer existing solidarity movements and organizations in the FRG. The ISKU replaced the coordinating work of the 'Kurdistan Komitee' and other structures from the Kurdish movement. The target group of the ISKU were especially the solidarity committees and organizations of the radical Left in Germany. Officially formed in the end of 1994, the ISKU organized the biannual conferences of the solidarity groups in Germany, as another ISKU activist noted:

“The ISKU invited twice a year to the conferences, so the member meetings and those were also always relatively well attended. [At these conferences,] one also discussed the state of affairs both in Kurdistan and here. Also, educational work was made, and actions were considered. And the conferences were not independent of the Kurdish movement, but this was also together with the Kurdish movement.”

The ISKU firstly, had an outward function, with public relation and organizing campaigns and, secondly, an inward function, to coordinate, to educate and to provide opportunities for relationship transformation. One of the main tasks of the ISKU was the public relation and translation work, as ISKU activist summarized:

“Back then, the work of the so-called solidarity structures was translating from the Kurdish press into German and publishing it. This was not possible for a long time, also due to the PKK ban, many structures were no longer there and there were not so many people from the Kurdish movement at that time who knew German, who could do public relations work in German. ... At the beginning of the ISKU, we always sent a package with copies once a month [laughter]. So, there was really a completely different communication back then. You can't imagine that today.”

The aim was to counter the reporting in the mass media and provide up-to-date information for the solidarity committees and their daily work. The ISKU provided background information on the history of Kurdistan and the PKK, on the repression in Germany. Importantly, through a close connection with 'Nadir', a cross-current online publication platform for the radical left, established as early as 1993, ISKU was already in a technical position to disseminate their information also via the Internet. Another ISKU activist remembered:

“That was due to the fact that in the international centre of the B5 a Nadir computer group was founded, that wanted to democratize the Internet. We had very quickly the opportunity

³⁰¹ Kurdistan Information Office.

³⁰² Latin America Information Office.

to bring things into the Internet. It had limited reach because it was not yet used so much. But the ISKU and 'Kurdistan Report' or then later the 'Kurdistan Informations-Zentrum'³⁰³ (KIZ), could be found on the Internet."

The fact that the ISKU was formed with people from the radical left opened up possibilities of using the resources of the radical left for the solidarity movement.

Furthermore, the ISKU supported or coordinated different national campaigns. For example, ISKU supported campaigns from YEK-KOM, such as the 'dialog instead of repression' campaign³⁰⁴ against the PKK ban or campaigns against deportation and illegalization of Kurdish refugees (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1998). Within the campaign against the PKK ban, ISKU organized a bus tour through Germany, which faced immense repression (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1997a). One ISKU activist reported from this campaign:

"One very positive campaign, as I would call it, was a one-month bus tour against the PKK ban. It started in Hamburg and then went through many cities like Bremen, Münster, Cologne, Freiburg, Ulm, we didn't get into Munich, ... we never got off the highway. Dresden, Erfurt, Marburg³⁰⁵. So, through the hicksville, Göttingen and so on. I was actually supposed to end in Berlin. But then it didn't work out there, either, because there were bans, so it ended in a church here in Hamburg."

Importantly, the bus tour also went through East-German cities, where they established contacts with antifascist groups. Here, the camping interlocked with the brokerage function of the ISKU. "A solidarity movement also emerged in East Germany" as an ISKU activist noted and the ISKU provided contacts and information for the solidarity groups. In fact, most groups in East Germany were antifascist groups who dealt mainly with the rising fascist movement in the reunited Germany and, as the same ISKU activist remembered, "they were open for internationalism.". Already in the 1990s, the antifascist groups looked towards the Kurdish movement for organizing strategies, since the Kurdish movement was capable of organizing broader parts of the society. The ISKU tried to provide a platform for such discussions, as one ISKU activist remembered:

"That went pretty quickly, this organizing approach, with the seminars with many solidarity groups. There were many from the Antifa circles who also went to the Kurdistan solidarity, who were present at the delegations and the discussion: How to organize? What could we learn from the movement? That was also important to us: We wanted to understand the movement, but also to understand what we can learn from it, so that we can achieve a different organization. In other words, a more social organization. ... That was then in 1997/1998."

The ISKU tried to foster a process of political learning with regard to organization from the Kurdish movement, while simultaneously bringing together solidarity groups from different cities and organizing themselves. This double function of coordinating and discussion about who to organize was not implemented to the end, because the solidarity committees disintegrated in

³⁰³ Kurdistan Information Centre.

³⁰⁴ 'Für die Aufhebung des ‚PKK-Verbots‘ – Dialog statt Verbot', later organized by an „coordination circle“.

³⁰⁵ Probably also Leipzig and Magdeburg.

1999. In the next step I will elaborate more on political learning and resolving tensions as sub-mechanisms of coalition formation and scale shift.

Political Learning: From Kurdistan to Revolutionary Organizing

The political learning mechanism started already in the beginning of the relationship formation, however, was continued and brought forward during the relationship maintenance stage. In the beginning of the relationship formation, there was a clear lack of knowledge about the Kurdish movement on the side of the radical left. One report in the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief' assessed that,

“overall, a significant lack of factual information about the Kurdish liberation struggle, its support in the FRG and the persecution measures of the German government became clear.”
(Kurdistan Rundbrief 1988b)

Some of the newly found solidarity committees saw their main work in political learning and in the diffusion of information about Kurdistan. The Schweinfurt solidarity committee stated: “The purpose and goal of our alliance is primarily information work about Kurdistan.” (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1989c). Regularly, at events from the solidarity committees, the 'Kurdistan Komitee' held lectures about the situation in Kurdistan, the history of Kurdistan, the international relations between Germany and Turkey and the German repression against the Kurdish movement. In general, political learning was organized through information events, delegation reports, brochures, or journals such as the 'Kurdistan Report' or the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief'. Here, mainly information from Kurdistan, the history of the Kurdish movement, the proclamation of the PKK/ERNK and developments within the movement were spread. For example, the 'Kurdistan Rundbrief' translated interviews from newspapers such as 'Yeni Ülke'³⁰⁶ with high ranking PKK members, such as Cemil Bayik (Kurdistan Report 1992), or proclamations of Abdullah Öcalan (1996). Moreover, local education took place in the solidarity committees or was organized by them. For example, the 'Kurdistan-Komitee Karlsruhe'³⁰⁷ organized, a two-day seminar about Kurdistan in 1991, where a representative of the ERNK spoke and where the delegation who visited the Mahsum-Korkmaz Academy showed pictures of their trip (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1991b).

The ISKU put forward a discussion and learning process about organizational learning or German history, directed towards the active groups in the solidarity movement. In particular, the 'sociality' or the ability to mobilize a whole society in the diaspora was a point many radical left activists were fascinated about and wanted to learn more about from the Kurdish movement. As an explicit reason to deepen the relationship with the Kurdish movement, one activist from Munich, formulates the exchange of skills this relationship provided:

“In a way, it was also an offer. ... German leftists, an autonomous scene, ... could help the Kurdish movement with its public relations work ... And then we worked in ... external work, as our Kurdish friends called it. We wrote or corrected leaflets, but – and that was the exciting thing – we also got something back. The Kurdish friends said that you can learn from us how a revolutionary movement, that is really anchored in the people, not the German people, but

³⁰⁶ Weekly founded in 1990, merged in 1993 with the daily Özgür Gündem.

³⁰⁷ Kurdistan Committee Karlsruhe.

the Kurdish people, works. How problems are solved there, how people are mobilized. And this was an experience that we were lacking at the beginning, in the mid-nineties.”

This quote shows very clearly how different resources, access to political decision-makers and knowledge in public relations work were exchanged against the experience of organizing a mass movement.³⁰⁸ Some groups and individuals even went further and joined the Kurdish organizations temporarily or even on a long-term basis, in order to learn the organizational processes. Another solidarity activist from Hamburg argued:

“For us, that was always rather the point that we went more and more into, for example, the Kurdish Women’s Council ... , because we had the feeling that we wanted to be more part of the organization and understand how this organizing process works.”

This, however, also created tensions and relationship break-ups of solidarity structures, as will be discussed below.

In sum, the political learning mechanisms occurred already in the relationship formation and more frequently in the relationship maintenance stage. The learning process between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in general included the respective other movement’s history, theories, and strategies. The political learning process from the Kurdish movement towards the radical left in Germany needed considerable translation work and was focused at first on the history of the Kurdish movement and Kurdistan in general and later on the organizational strategies of the Kurdish movement. The political learning process from the radical left towards the Kurdish movement included skills, such as public relation work, and movement history. In comparison, even when activists highlighted the complementary nature of the political learning process, more input came from the Kurdish movement and the Kurdish movement rarely took over ideological or strategic aspects of the radical left. During the peak of the political learning mechanism during the nationwide conferences in the 1990s, the education even included dealing with the problems of the radical left in Germany and possible solutions that could be learned from the Kurdish movement.

[Resolving Tensions: Metropolitan Chauvinism and Affirmation](#)

Not only due to polarization, the relationship between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany was described by activists as tense. Tensions arose during the relationship maintenance, due to strategic and tactical conflicts, level of critique and affirmation, and differences in movement culture. However, none of these tensions were mentioned in all or the majority of the relationships, beside the strategic tension between ‘here versus there’ and the level of critique and affirmation.

Movement Culture and Language

A rather conservative culture of the Kurdish movement also prevailed in the Kurdish associations in the 1990s. As an example, one activist cited an incident in which a woman was thrown out of a Kurdish association because she wore a miniskirt. Activists from the radical left were indignant about this, but Kurdish mediators tried to explain that the movement had to maintain a more

³⁰⁸ One can assess that the relationship in this case was a mutual one, or as Waterman calls it “complementary solidarity” (Waterman, Cox 2014).

conservative habitus in the associations so that parents would send their children. Also, different ways of planning political activities were mentioned as creating tensions by a solidarity activist:

“For example, this rational and fully disciplined approach of the Germans, while the Kurds deal with it more spontaneously and flexibly. This is, for example, what makes cooperation more difficult.”

However, these tensions were seldom reported or could be resolved quickly. As already mentioned in the relationship formation in the beginning of Phase I, there were hardly any Kurdish brokers, who could speak German and German brokers, who spoke Turkish. However, over time, the numbers of brokers rose, while language problems kept on being an issue. On solidarity activist mentioned,

“that Turkish was spoken preliminary in Kurdish association and the German-speaking activists received mainly whispered translations, which hindered good communication.”

In any case, translation work, from news in the ‘Kurdistan Report’ or ‘Kurdistan Rundbrief’, over translation during delegation trips or coalition meetings, to explanation of context of decision was done by mediators (Mische 2008) from the radical left and the Kurdish movement. Importantly, translations also created tensions, when texts were directly translated, without explaining the context or convey different styles of writing.

Strategic and Tactical Conflicts

In general, one of the main tensions of every solidarity movement is the ‘here versus there’ negotiation, although it is not an irresolvable contradiction. Strategically, the question for the organizations involved, is whether to support primarily the liberation movement ‘there’ by providing resources, putting pressure on decision makers, or weakening the capacities of imperialism, or primarily focus on the building of a (revolutionary) movement ‘here’ in the centres, while employing the solidarity mainly as a tool to delegitimize the ruling class and broadening the movement with diaspora organizations. Importantly, given limited resources, this strategic contradiction cannot easily be solved by following both strategies at the same time. Between the focus on ‘there’ or ‘here’, there is a tension that needs to be resolved in a negotiation process. In other words, movements forming relationships in a transnational space need to negotiate strategic questions deriving from their spatial nature. Concerning tactical conflicts, problems may arise, when one movement forms relations out of tactical – so short term – considerations, with persons, organizations, or movement, which are perceived by the other movement as adversarial. Furthermore, tactical conflicts may also arise out of the different spaces or contexts the movements are operating in.

The strategic focus of the Kurdish movement in Phase I was, first and foremost, to gain support for the liberation struggle in Kurdistan. Consequently, the focus of the Kurdish movement in Germany was to collect resources for the struggle in Kurdistan, to stop the support of Germany for Turkey and also to build broader tactical alliances in order to assert pressure on Turkey. In other words, the preliminary aim of the Kurdish movement was not to organize a revolutionary movement in Germany. However, this was something some solidarity activist hoped for:

“In the nineties, we simply had a little hope that the Kurds could mobilize so many, and they are also left-wing. Maybe they can build up a socialist or communist movement for us here

in Germany, because we can't get it together ourselves. Of course, that's bullshit. Of course, this is a shortcut that doesn't work that way. ... That was the misconception, I say from my generation: the PKK should solve the crisis of the German left because it can mobilize 100,000 people from the stand."

Importantly, in exchange for the support of the Kurdish movement, some solidarity activists in Germany, expected or at least hoped, that the Kurdish movement in Germany, strengthen their mobilization and organization, in Germany. The same solidarity activist described this expectation as "misconception", which however, first needed to be resolved by political learning:

"This is a thing that I also noticed in the nineties: With the mass of the Kurdish movement – it is hardly possible to get them involved in German or internationalist activities. In the meantime, I have realized that the Kurdish movement, the associations are people's associations, but you have the most different degrees of politicization. You may have a small minority of five percent highly political people. They also support everything we do as a radical left, but they simply have the problem that they have got their hands full of their own main issue: Kurdistan. But these are the people who, if they can somehow make it, really participate in our activities, but the masses are just not political enough – so they would certainly, if we explain to them what it's about, say that's a good thing. But they are not used to going there."

The activist formulates the insights from his engagement with the Kurdish movement as a learning process. Firstly, the mobilization of the Kurdish diaspora is not easily convertible to other leftist issues in Germany, given the focus of Kurdish rank-and-file and sympathizers for the particular struggle in Kurdistan. Secondly, also those activists with a broader politicization have limited resources and the Kurdish movement employed their resources preliminary on the support for Kurdistan in Phase I. Consequently, the Kurdish movement did not follow strategies of the radical left groups, such as building long term class power through labour struggles, building a revolutionary party in Germany, or forming a city guerrilla. Importantly, the solidarity activist solved this tension by political learning and often solidarity activists aligned their strategy with conception, that the main aim in the centres is to stop support and supply of the imperialist forces, in order to support the national liberation movement in the anti-colonial struggle. Nevertheless, the basic tension remained, and again and again came to the surface. At the YEK-KOM conference in 1997, the criticism was raised by German organizations, that the Kurdish movement does not deal enough with domestic issues. The critique was accepted by YEK-KOM, and promised that "in the future there will be more collaboration on such problems, participation in events and a solidarity contribution" (YEK-KOM 1997). In particular, the issue of racism and the right of residence became a central part of YEK-KOM's work in the coming years.

Tactical Conflicts

Tactical conflicts occurred on different minor and bigger issues throughout Phase I, from which I will highlight two, which were mentioned by several sources or recurred in other phases. Firstly, a tactical problem arose, when the Kurdish movement talked to or cooperated tactically with individuals or organizations, which the radical left saw as their enemies. One activist from an Antifa group mentioned:

“What worried us: It was then also the time that Lummer met once with Öcalan and Wallraff³⁰⁹ too. On one side we struggle with the movement, on the other side they meet with Lummer? Our dialectical thinking didn't bring that together.”

The CDU member of the Bundestag Heinrich Lummer, after a meeting with Abdullah Öcalan, pleaded for further talks with Öcalan and considered the “PKK leader capable of dialogue” (Dalan 1996). Yet, Lummer was an adversary in the eyes of the radical left in Germany. In 1981, Heinrich Lummer, the then Senator of the Interior of Berlin, had eight occupied houses evicted and riots broke out, in the course of which Klaus-Jürgen Rattay was killed by a bus. Lummer was perceived by the radical left as the cause of Rattay's death, since he was the responsible person and because of his escalating behaviour. Consequently, the radical left had difficulties to see Lummer as a partner for negotiations, even if it was clearly as tactical cooperation on the side of the Kurdish movement.

Finally, I want to stress a tactical tension, which the Rote Zora mentioned in their communiqué. The Rote Zora supported actions against the asylum system, against the PKK ban, against the profit-maker of the Turkish-German relations and Tourism industry.

“However, we connect actions to the demand “No tourism to Turkey” with the aim to hinder the big business of the FRG groups and not to attack small Turkish travel agencies. The silence of the PKK on the actions directed against Turkish migrants in this spring, facilitates the further racist and nationalist formation in the FRG society, especially between Kurds and Turks. This is fundamentally contrary to our objectives.” (Rote Zora 1995)

In the 1990s, there was a wave of racist and fascist attacks and pogroms in Germany. For the radical left, there was a tactical conflict between attacks on travel agencies by Kurdish activists, while there were attacks by German fascists against Turkish and Kurdish shops and people. The overlapping of different racisms – that of the German fascists against foreigners and that of the Turkish nationalists against Kurds – in the same context led to a complex situation that was difficult for the radical left to understand, navigate, but especially difficult to communicate. Similar, one activist from an antifascist group reported:

“We have carried out many actions, especially protest actions against travel agencies. Whereby it must also be said, making protests against travel agencies that organize trips home or visiting trips for migrants is perhaps not the best idea, but in principle, of course.”

To target individual travel agency owners, who in the first place were active in this business due to the racist system in Germany, this protest created tensions, which were difficult to legitimize. This problem reoccurred in Phase III, when Kurdish youth attacked Turkish state led mosques, while there was a racist mobilization against Muslims in Germany.

Critique and Affirmation or Metropolitan Chauvinism and Projection

The most complex tension is that between critique and affirmation or, in the particular case of North and South relationships, the tensions between metropolitan chauvinism and projection. In other words, the tension arises between a criticism by the radical left, often marked by Eurocentrism, purity claim and mistrust on the one side, and affirmation, in the form of paternalism, appropriation, and projection on the other side. This tension reared throughout

³⁰⁹ Investigative journalists. With Selim Çürükkaya, dissident of the PKK, he published a book about the PKK (Wallraff 1997).

the phases, while shifting in their relevance. The parts on critique and affirmation are partly based on the frame resonance analysis of my Master thesis. Since I deal here for the first time with these concepts, I will also introduce some terminology.

Eurocentrism or metropolitan chauvinism can be understood as synonyms, whereby the first is the general term and the second the wording of the Kurdish movement for an attitude of leftist activists to measure struggles in other parts of the world against their own movement history. A member of the KNK³¹⁰ defines her understanding of Eurocentrism:

“I think the German left is very strongly influenced by Eurocentrism This is a disease of Europeans. People believe that they can only measure and evaluate the world from Europe's point of view, i.e., with its standards. This is noticeable in the approach to non-Europeans. That they believe they have to patronize. That they are always teaching, always telling us what to do. Totally far from practising self-criticism.”

Similar, one long-term solidarity activist recalls the “typically German know-it-all” attitude in the 1990s:

“So, I found it again ‘admirable’ how the ‘Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei’³¹¹ with three newspaper sellers stands in front of a demonstration with 100,000 Kurds and tells them you are following wrong leaders and running in the wrong direction [laughing].”

Another example is the ‘Gruppe Demontage’, based on their understanding of antiracism, that a recall to a people leads automatically to racist nationalism, claim that the PKK is a ‘völkische nationale Befreiungsbewegung’³¹² (Gruppe Demontage 1999) and therefore deny any solidarity with the PKK (Gruppe Demontage 2000). Among others, Kurdish activists described Eurocentrism on the side of the radical left as an expectation of ‘ideological purity’. The perception of inconsistency between the ideology of the Kurdish movement and its actions, can be interpreted as such a purity demand. On the one hand, there is serious criticism of the Kurdish movement and on the other hand, there is the search for contradictions that occur in every social movement and in all revolutionary upheavals. A Kurdish activist describes this purity demand in general:

“Because they have their own, entrenched definition of revolution in the sense of blatant upheaval and suddenly everyone is on the street, everything is somehow a united front, and everyone somehow wants the same thing. And they don't understand that a revolutionary situation is something else, that it's a process, that it's a blatant struggle, with steps backwards, that it's a chaos, but a chaos in the right direction.”

Solidarity can be easily withdrawn when perceived contradictions occur without any consequences for their own groups or movements. Furthermore, scepticism or mistrust against the Kurdish movement needed to be handled in Phase I. Hüseyin Çelebi summarized this in 1990:

“‘I don't want to know what will happen to the Kurdish people when the PKK is in power’, this is concretely a sentence I heard a few days ago, and it is for me an expression of this absolutely arrogant thinking. ... What it expresses is that this woman thinks that the people

³¹⁰ Kongreya Neteweyî ya Kurdistanê (KNK) | Kurdistan National Congress.

³¹¹ Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SpAD) | Spartacist Workers' Party Germany. Small Trotskyist party with no more than 100 members nationwide.

³¹² Literally: etho-national liberation movement. Völkisch refers a racist understanding of ethnicity and is a category used by antifascists for right-wing, nationalist and racists movements. As a side note: In a review by Südwind on the book, it is ironically remarked that “the Öcalan group with its völkisch concept of nation fails the emancipation test”.

in Kurdistan are stupid people who help some force to power and then put themselves under its wing like blind people. That means: How will the PKK come to power, if they come into power? ... Only through the liberation struggle, in which the population actively participates! She knows that this is the case. And that means that she associates with the struggle of the population the struggle of a stupid, poor, little Negro, the poor, little, stupid Asian, who is chasing after some clever demagogues and who must first make clear to those who are good missionaries from the land of the whites what foolishness the people there are committing. That is expressed in this.” (ISKU 1990)

In this one quote, the metropolitan chauvinism and the scepticism against the Kurdish movement is characterized as the denying the subjectivity of the Kurdish activist.

On the other side of the coin, there is the ‘positive’ form of Eurocentrism, namely, paternalism, affirmation, and projection. Some Kurdish activists criticized the general ‘helper syndrome’ of the radical left, where the PKK-led Kurdish movement is constructed as a victim that needs to be helped (Reinhardt 2016: 88–89). The helper syndrome is most evident in humanitarian work in general, whereby groups like ‘medico international’ have tried to develop self-reflection and conscious practice.³¹³ In contrast to the real balance of power between the Kurdish mass movement and a fragmented German radical left, an expression of superiority or claim to leadership is nevertheless perceived by Kurdish activists for individual actors of the radical left. Concerning appropriation, the KNK member summarized the phenomenon in general:

“When some start representing Kurdistan more than the Kurds themselves, because they think the Kurds won't do that. ... Where you think to yourself: Stop, come down. But that's a disease that the European left has to deal with.”

Finally, projection refers to the idealization of the other, by suppressing contradictions and to transfer one's own ideas and needs to the other. Importantly, while the former points were frequently raised by Kurdish activists, projection was rather voiced by solidarity activists as a criticism of the solidarity movement.

Here I have sketched the complex field of criticism and affirmation for the 1990s, with the different forms of expression. However, it must be emphasized that the sincere occurrence of this tension could not be quantified, and the assessment of the tense relationship is based on the narrative of metropolitan chauvinism and projection the long-term activists and Kurdish activists voiced. Most agree that Eurocentrism was stronger in Phase I and gradually lost its relevance throughout the phases. Additionally, I argue that this field was additionally problematic to navigate, since the whole Kurdistan solidarity operated in a polarized landscape.

Finally, the question arises, how these tensions were negotiated. The resolving this tension described a long-term solidarity activist on the development of his relationship with the Kurdish movement:

“And I made the experience for myself, in the 1990s: When I was still a hard Trotskyist, which I am no longer, I was often of the opinion that I knew things better than the Kurdish movement and that one should rather do trade union work than guerrilla work and stuff like that. Fortunately, the Kurdish friends were patient with me and laughed about it. But they

³¹³ See Chapter VIII. 1.

also listened to it because I worked with them anyway. I fought for the right to also bring in my suggestions, to bring in my criticism and to be heard. And that is also the case with many points in the Kurdish movement today. The movement is open to criticism, they even want impulses from outside.”

The eurocentrism was overcome within a relationship, by the Kurdish movement showing patience on certain behaviour and the solidarity activists, besides criticism, maintained the commitment in the solidarity movement. Through this process, a deeper and long-term relationship was possible. However, I argue that this was not the usual case, and often the relationships were hindered by these tensions.

Summary of the Relationship Maintenance

Within the stage of relationship maintenance, the coalition formation and scale shift were the main mechanisms. From the late 1980s, coalitions formed as solidarity committees with Kurdistan in every major West-German city. The different solidarity committees were diverse in membership, degree of action and the participation of Kurdish cadres in it. However, most of them can be understood as a place of coordination between the Kurdish movement and the radical left. Coalition of the Kurdish movement and the radical left not focused on Kurdistan were the exception. The solidarity committees were coordinated by the Kurdish movement and, after the PKK ban, by the ISKU on a national level. Campaigns were organized, brokerage initiated, and the possibility of political learning provided. Both the coalition formation and the coordination on a national level were marked by the sub-mechanisms of political learning, and the resolving tensions. In the next step, I will trace the relationship break-up of these coalitions.

3.3. Relationship Break-up: A Sudden End

In the following I will first present the reasons for the break-up of the coalition analysed above and then cluster these break-ups along the mechanisms of failure to resolve tensions and attribution of opportunity (or in this case defeat). Importantly, only the latter can be seen as constant throughout the different coalitions.

FrauenLesben-Kurdistan-Solidaritätskomitees Berlin and Hamburg

The coalition of individual women from the radical left and the Kurdish women movement broke apart due to several reasons but the most important one was the abduction of Abdullah Öcalan. From the perspective of the Berlin committee, there was a lack of relationship maintenance during the coalition, as interviewees reported:

“Yes, it broke apart. And exactly at the point where we didn't deal with each other intensively enough. That's the contradiction. On the one hand, you don't always want to keep busy with yourself, but it's totally important to really get to know each other. And that takes time. You have to devote time to each other for that.”

In general, there was a tension between the resources the coalition was able to allocate and the outcome the coalition was producing. Additionally, the coalition of individual women from the radical left seems to have been more of a transition group, rather than a proper long-term organization or coalition of representatives of women organizations, as the same activist mentioned:

“Somehow life paths then decided: one person went into the mountains, the other more into the [Kurdish] association and further into the Kurdish structures. Sometimes there were also gaps.”

Importantly, also in the Hamburg committee, an activist highlighted the fluctuation of the autonomous movement, with changing focus or withdrawal from politics, and the recruitment of individuals into the Kurdish movement:

“Some [activists] just pulled out or concentrated again on other things, or withdrew then again completely politically. And what was often a break that parts went into the Kurdish structures.”

Within the autonomous (women) movement, from which most of the participants came, the time of political engagement was usually limited to a certain age. Variation in participation and cohort changes were the consequences. The competition for recruiting activists between the radical left and the Kurdish movement will be discussed more below. Most important was the abduction of Öcalan for the break-up of the Women/Lesbian solidarity committees, as an activist argued: “It was very difficult in Berlin at the time. The Women-Lesbians Kurdistan Committee dissolved at that time”. In sum, the ‘FrauenLesben-Kurdistan-Solidaritätskomitees Berlin and Hamburg’ accumulated various tensions and broke-up by in times of the crisis of the Kurdish movement.

3.3.1. Failure to Resolve Tensions

As mentioned above, there were many tensions in the relationship maintenance between the radical left and the Kurdish movement. Most of these tensions could be solved or at least did not trigger relationship break-up immediately. However, the tension around resources, including the time and commitment put into the coalition and the competition for activists and the tension between critique and affirmation contributed to the relationship break-up.

Tensions around Resources

As mentioned in Chapter II, there is a tension between the resources a coalition is able to allocate for the relationship maintenance, including political learning, trust building and formation of interpersonal ties, and the outcome the coalition is producing in the form of mobilization and other solidarity activities. In the case of the Women/Lesbian Committees, insufficient resources committed to the maintenance of the coalition contributed in the long run to the break-up. Similarly, the high fluctuation in the autonomous movement and the antifascist movement made a constant relationship transformation difficult. Within the Women/Lesbian committees, the variation of participant commitment and the reliance on the capacities and decisions of individual activists contributed to the relationship break-up. Therefore, an equal or equivalent relationship partner on the side of the radical left for the Kurdish movement was missing. As mentioned for ‘FrauenLesben-Kurdistan-Solidaritätskomitees’, committed individual activists participated occasionally in the structures of the Kurdish movement or even as internationalists in the guerrilla. Here, the recruitment of the Kurdish movement from solidarity structures triggered a relationship break-up, according to a from Berlin:

“It was very difficult in Berlin at the time, the Women-Lesbians Kurdistan Committee dissolved at that time. And some of them, like Uta, worked more in the association. ... Uta

was also one of those who went in completely because she was so disappointed by the radical left here.”

Step by step, the solidarity cadres got involved in the Kurdish organizations. Even though they were just a few, they nevertheless were missing as cadres in the radical left.

Additionally, relationships did not come to fruition or broke apart because of the above introduced tension between critique and affirmation. One activist, later organized in ‘Libertad!’, argued:

“In short, we already had contact with the movement in the 80s, but ... [it] expected from us that we do solidarity work for them. So, solidarity works in the sense of distributing leaflets, carrying their positions to the outside, and so on. Which we rejected at that time, because for us that was a kind of solidarity work that was based on dealing with a movement without criticism That was not internationalism for us then, and still is not internationalism today.”

The quote illustrates how the relationship transformation was interrupted due to a perceived requirement of affirmative solidarity, without criticism or mutuality. Activists thus failed to resolve the tension between critique and affirmation. While this triggered relationship break-up in this case, it was far from being a consistent factor across time and coalitions.

3.3.2. Attribution of Defeat and Dissimilarity

During the time Abdullah Öcalan was forced to leave Syria in October 1998 and his abduction in February 1999, a brief revival of cooperation and mobilization took place. Afterwards, there was a "total break" of solidarity relations, as a long-term solidarity activist remembered:

“That was the time when Öcalan was in Rome and then the kidnapping, there was a lot going on and everyone was on the street. And many people showed solidarity. And after that, it collapsed, ... because there was all this uncertainty about what would happen now.”

On 17th April 1999, there was a demonstration in Bonn with around 100,000 participants for the freedom of Öcalan (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1999a). After a phase of intense mobilization, including demonstrations, occupations, and deaths in front of the Israeli Embassy in Berlin, followed by intensive repression, the Kurdistan solidarity movement dissolved. Another solidarity activist remembered: “It then broke off with the arrest of Apo. The committees were gone, the people left. Some of them were still there, but only a few.” There were two factors triggering a relatively sudden and complete break-up of solidarity relations. The first was the *strategic and ideological shift* of Öcalan interpreted as treason of previously held positions and the second was the *attribution of defeat*. Importantly, the crisis of the Kurdish movement itself fuelled this relationship break-up.

The crisis of the Kurdish movement consisted not only in the imprisonment of its leader. Öcalan demanded from prison the end of the armed struggle in order to enable democratisation within Turkey and his rejection of the idea of a separate Kurdish state. The consequence was fights within the PKK between three groups. First, the right-wing, pro-imperialist positions represented by Osman Öcalan, second, a wing represented by Abdullah Öcalan, opting for a democratic reorganization of the party, and third, a left wing, which insisted on the centralist structure. This ‘time of crisis’ lasted for several years. Within the Kurdish movement and the diaspora, this created confusion and a feeling of defeat, as a Kurdish cadre argued:

“There was also a political organizational crisis of the movement and at that time, there was a reorientation process of the Kurdish movement and at the time also the whole solidarity committees broke up. So, everything broke down at that time”.

This ‘time of crisis’ was also a crisis in terms of membership and organizational capacity. A Kurdish cadre assessed that “everyone had to reorganize. So, many have left the Kurdish movement, especially men.” Importantly, similar to the crisis of internationalism of the radical left, the abduction of Öcalan, triggered a crisis of the Kurdish movement, with in-fights, crumbling organizational structures, and withdrawal of many from the movement.

Attribution of Dissimilarity

Nick Brauns argued in an interview that the sudden relationship break-up in 1999 was based on a perceived departure from the previously held position of the Kurdish movement:

“The substantive reason for an estrangement was rather that some solidarity supporters suddenly found the PKK too moderate. In 1998, Abdullah Öcalan sought a settlement with Turkey; after his abduction, he called for an end to the guerrilla struggle. Many German leftists did not understand that the movement must also be prepared to compromise.” (Bähr 2018b)

The attribution of similarity was undermined by the contradiction the Kurdish movement faced. The radical left perceived this contradiction as inconsistency or betrayal:

“Mainly by the Turkish left, the ML spectrum, also by the left in Germany [he was accused], that he is making this ideological turn to save his own head.”

The crisis of the Kurdish movement triggered a complete break-up of the solidarity relations among active individuals and groups from the solidarity movement, since in their perception the ideological attribution of similarity as a basis for these relations was eroded. Especially those activists who another solidarity activist described as “Germans, who had become 150-percent Kurds” by emulating methods and ideology in a strict way faced a crisis during the strategic and ideological shift of Öcalan. The same activist continued:

“They were all the more disappointed when, after Öcalans' abduction, he changed his course. These were then the people who were pissed off, some of whom are still pissed off today – so it was a disappointed love there. Because they had also identified 100% with the movement. And when the movement changed its line – temporarily, I would say – ... these people are so miffed that they still see the Kurdish movement as traitors to a revolutionary cause and do not even want to take note of how the movement has long since turned the corner and is now doing progressive politics again.”

These ‘Apo-logists’³¹⁴, who were few in numbers, ignored contradictions and developments in the Kurdish movement, and broke-up their relationship when the projection could not be held up any longer. Even in the next phases, a rapprochement was impossible for some individuals.

In my master thesis, I detected a ‘frame inconsistency’ during the strategic shift of Öcalan, in all currents of the radical left (Reinhardt 2016). For example, the Trotskyist ‘Sozialistische Zeitung’³¹⁵ evaluated Öcalan’s defensive strategy after his arrest as a betrayal of the fighting and fallen

³¹⁴ Pun intended.

³¹⁵ The Socialist Newspaper.

supporters (Rauchfuss 1999). In the post-autonomous 'analyse & kritik', the death sentence against Öcalan was criticized, but it was stated that he had made the "cheapest peace offer" in the entire conflict (Keetman 1999). In the Antideutsche 'Jungle World', Öcalan was called a traitor even though the journal was never supportive of the Kurdish movement in the first place (Wertmüller 1999).

Contributing to the perceived strategic shift were the internal disputes within the Kurdish movement, the lack of insights into these disputes, and the lack of channels to communicate other points of view. In other words, most relationships between the Kurdish movement and the radical left had not built sufficiently strong channels of communication to sustain in times of crisis. In times of threat, with fast changing external conditions, intense internal debates and focus on self-defence, the Kurdish movement did not prioritize communication with relationship partners, especially when they had limited influence and mobilization capacities. Overall, there was a shift from a high resonance with the ideology of the PKK-led Kurdish movement within the anti-imperialist movement and the Kurdish solidarity movement in general to a strong disappointment and accusations of inconsistency and treason.

Attribution of Defeat

Additionally, in the phase of the expulsion of Öcalan from Syria, the attribution of threat between the Kurdish movement and the solidarity movement was in congruence and corresponded with strong mobilization in Germany for a short time. Yet, after the abduction of Öcalan, dissonance between the attributions of threat became salient. On the one hand, the solidarity movement interpreted the abduction and defence strategy as complete defeat and withdrew their solidarity by ceasing their work. A solidarity cadre remembered:

"I didn't understand that because I thought you couldn't pull out in such a difficult situation. For me, it was not understandable why so many people broke away. I thought you can't make such a move in such a situation and just say that what you're doing is stupid."

On the other hand, the Kurdish movement in these times of biggest threat expected the strongest solidarity. An older Kurdish cadre argued:

"The Kurds said that we needed solidarity right now in our most difficult hour. And where are you now? I couldn't understand that at all, maybe something psychological, so to speak, it was perceived as a defeat."

What contributed to the disintegration of the solidarity movements was the attribution of total defeat, a feeling that was also shared by Kurdish activists. Yet, in contrast to the Kurdish movement, who had to deal with this situation in the diaspora and in Kurdistan, it was much easier to withdraw solidarity and break-up relationships, since the consequences were limited. As Balsen and Rössel assessed for the previous solidarity movements in the FRG, "the objects of solidarity are interchangeable at any time" (Balsen, Rössel 1986: 533). The relationship formation had partly been based on an attribution of opportunity because the Kurdish movement was seen as a successful, anti-cyclical movement. The crisis of the movement and the attribution of defeat eroded this basis for relationship maintenance. Since parts of the radical left looked for a solution for its problems within the Kurdish movement, a defeat of this movement led the radical left to search for solutions somewhere else. In general, one can assess that solidarity is often proclaimed with successful movements and not with movements whose defeat is perceived as

immanent. Only individual solidarity activists and a few groups maintained the relationship with the Kurdish movement. Usually, individual solidarity activists entered the Kurdish movement at this time. A solidarity cadre argued:

“I somehow had the trust that the movement would try to make the best of it and explain it to us, ... why what is being done and how ... What I found impressive about the movement was that they kept looking for solutions and implemented them.”

The relationship transformation between the Kurdish movement and some individual solidarity activists created trust to such an extent that the relationships also survived this severe crisis of the Kurdish movement. However, these were individual cases of solidarity cadres.

In sum, the solidarity movement with the Kurdish movement dissolved completely in 1999. Kurdish solidarity committees ceased their work, solidarity activists broke up their relationships, and the Kurdish movement was perceived as defeated. The complete and sudden break-up of solidarity relations was triggered by the perception of Öcalan's strategic shifts as treason and the attribution of defeat. The basis of the relationship of attribution of similarity and opportunity was eroded. Nevertheless, some organizations continued their work such as ISKU and AZADÎ. One initiative even started its work at this time: the ‘International Initiative Freedom for Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan’ (Kurdistan Rundbrief 1999b).

3.4. Summary

Phase I: Inter-Movement Arena

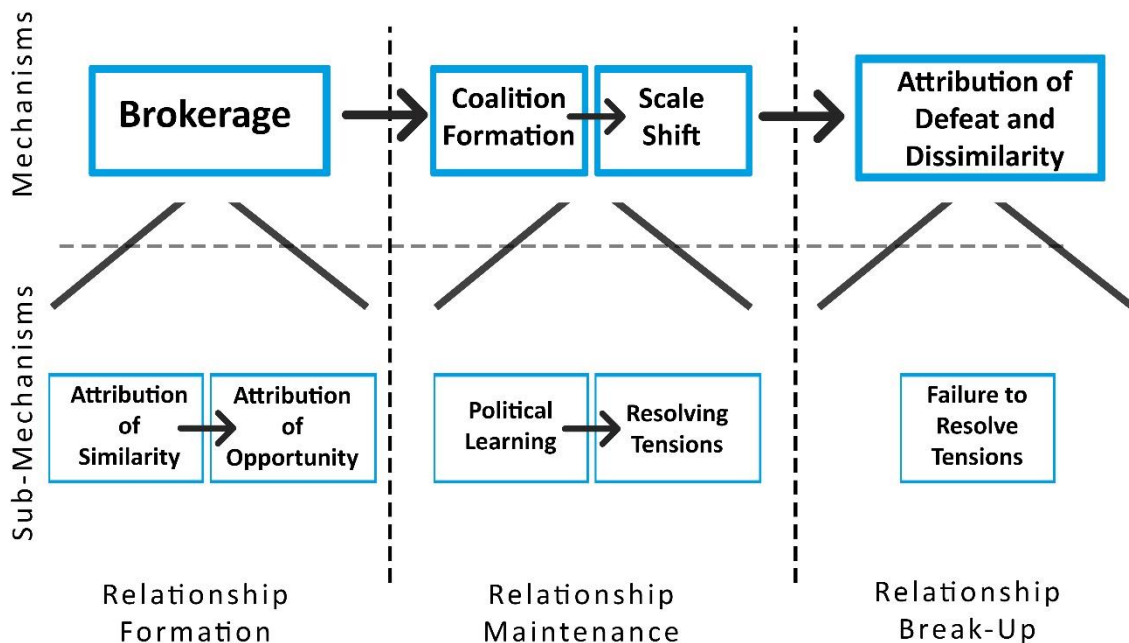


Figure 6: Diagram of Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms in the Inter-Movement Arena in Phase I

In this chapter, I traced the relationship transformation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement in Phase I through the stages of relationship formation, maintenance, and break-up.

The main mechanisms were first brokerage, then coalition formation and scale shift, and finally the attribution of dissimilarity and defeat. In the following, I will summarize the findings and discuss their implications.

Within the stage of *relationship formation*, I identified the mechanism of *brokerage* as the central one, with the sub-mechanisms of *attribution of similarity* and *attribution of opportunity*, leading soon to coalition formation. The brokerage mechanisms occurred in Phase I over a longer period of time, from the beginning of the 1980s until roughly the mid-1990s. Thereafter, the brokerage mechanism became rather seldom, since most radical left groups already established relations or engaged in boundary activation. The brokerage mechanism was analysed along individual brokers, institutionalisation by journals and institutions, internationalists, and mobilization of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany, connecting individuals and groups from the radical left in Germany with the Kurdish movement. On the one side, the Kurdish movement from 1982 onwards established journals and offices to diffuse their points of view and form relationships with the left in Germany. On the other side, the radical left in Germany, foremost the anti-imperialist movement, started to engage in attribution of similarity with the ideology and strategy of the PKK-led Kurdish movement in the late 1980s. Additionally, I traced an attribution of opportunity mechanism on the side of the radical left, which perceived the Kurdish movement as a successful movement, which provided the opportunity of political learning or even the hope of formation of a revolutionary movement in Germany.

During the *relationship maintenance* stage, shortly after brokerage, *coalitions were formed* in the form of solidarity committees. In total, 44 Kurdistan solidarity committees or similar solidarity coalitions formed in West-Germany and one in East-Germany. The Kurdistan solidarity in Phase I – in contrast for example to the Cuban Solidarity – was mainly a West German movement, even though in the second half of the 1990s, East-German antifascists formed relationships with the Kurdish movement. What contributed to the formation of these coalitions was the existence of a Kurdish association and a strong(er) radical left in the same city. The solidarity committees varied between the cities but were usually a coalition of local groups, individual activists mostly from the radical left and Kurdish cadres. In contrast to Munich and other cities, the Women/Lesbian Kurdistan solidarity committees developed only in Berlin and Hamburg with a strong radical left, where a differentiation of solidarity issues was possible. The formation of these solidarity committees occurred in Phase I from the late 1980s until 1999, but most formed from 1988 until 1993. Shortly after the first solidarity coalitions were formed, a *scale shift* took place, and the actions of these committees were coordinated on a national level. Initially, the Kurdish movement in Germany organized national meetings for the solidarity committee with Kurdistan, where campaigns were set. Additionally, the conferences provided the space for the Kurdish movement to diffuse their analysis and for the solidarity committees to learn from each other. Finally, the conferences also fostered new relationship formation between the Kurdistan solidarity committees and the Kurdish movement, especially for cities which had no Kurdish association. After the ban of the 'Kurdistan Komitee' in 1993, the ISKU took over the coordination of the national meetings. The ISKU had, firstly, an outward function with public relation and organizing campaigns and, secondly, an inward function towards the solidarity committees to coordinate, educate and provide opportunities for relationship transformation.

The sub-mechanism of *political learning* was central throughout the relationship formation and maintenance between the Kurdish movement and the radical left. Political learning shifted from an initial learning about Kurdistan, the conflict, and the goals of the PKK, towards a more in-depth learning about organizing and mobilizing strategies of the Kurdish movement. Even though activists highlighted the complementary nature of the political learning process, more input came from the Kurdish movement and the Kurdish movement seldom took over ideological or strategic aspects of the radical left. Additionally, while many *tensions* on different issues arose during the relationship maintenance between the radical left and the Kurdish movement, most of them could be *resolved* by mediators or by political learning. Two of the tensions are worth highlighting, since they recurred throughout the different temporal phases: Given limited resources of both movements, the strategic question arose whether to support primarily the liberation movement 'there' by providing resources, putting pressure on decision makers, or weakening the capacities of imperialism by building a (revolutionary) movement 'here' in the centres, while employing the solidarity mainly as a tool to delegitimize the ruling class and broadening the movement with diaspora organizations. A second tension arose along the degree of critique and affirmation or, in the particular case of Kurdistan solidarity, the tensions between metropolitan chauvinism and projection.

Relationship break-ups occurred occasionally throughout the 1990s but mostly after the abduction of Öcalan in 1999. I traced the relationship break-up along the mechanisms of *attribution of defeat and dissimilarity*. Importantly, the abduction of Öcalan marked a crisis of the Kurdish movement itself, with confusion inside the movement and lack of communication towards coalition partners, which fuelled the relationship break-up. Many leftists interpreted the strategic and ideological shift of Öcalan in prisons as betrayal of previously held positions and perceived the abduction as attribution of defeat. Since the relationship formation was partly based on an attribution of opportunity and attribution of similarity, the attribution of defeat and betrayal eroded this base for relationship maintenance. In 1999 the solidarity movement with the Kurdish movement completely dissolved and only a few organizations kept on working in Phase III.

Chapter VII. Phase II: 2000–2014

In this chapter, I will investigate the relationship transformation between the PKK-Led Kurdish movement and the radical left firstly in a Transnational Arena, secondly, in a National Arena, and, thirdly, in an Inter-Movement Arena. Chapter VII deals with Phase II, lasting from 2000, after Öcalans abduction until the war in Kobanê at the end of 2014.

1. Phase II: Transnational Arena

Regarding the Transnational Arena in Phase II, I trace the relationship transformation process between the Kurdish movement and the radical left on a transnational level from 2000 until 2014. Firstly, I argue that the conditions for transnational relationship formation in the second part of Phase II were more favourable than during Phase I, which was characterized by the asynchronicity of internationalist struggles. This was due to the ideological and organizational transformation of the Kurdish movement, and the disillusionment of the radical left in Germany, which led to a search for new perspectives. Secondly, there were growing instances of transnational brokerage, marked by the recurring sub-mechanisms of *political learning*, *transnational diffusion*, and the *resolving tensions*, as well as a broadening of the transnational repertoire to include delegation trips, international camps in Kurdistan, transnational conferences and internationalists joining the Kurdish movement.

1.1. Ideological Transformation and Disillusionment

In the beginning of Phase II, the Kurdish movement entered into a ‘time of crisis’, characterized by infighting over its ideological and strategic orientation. Öcalan’s line, marked by the ideological transformation towards Democratic Confederalism, prevailed and in 2005, the paradigm change was announced. Thereafter, the Kurdish movement still needed time to process this transformation for the purposes of socialisation, political learning, and the resolving tensions. By the mid-2000s, the Kurdish movement transformed its organizational structures and implemented the new strategy mainly in Bakûr. For the same time, a Kurdish cadre summarized the Kurdish movement’s capability to frame the new paradigm and the subsequent strategy as follows:

“The discussions were more developed then, the people from the Kurdish liberation movement were also able to better represent what they wanted.”

Issue specific coalition formation between the Kurdish movement and women’s (Freundinnen v. Uta 2010) and ecological movements (Dissard 2021) occurred consistently throughout Phase II, while after 2005, the movement intensified its communication efforts with other movements, facilitating a process of diffusion. A long-standing solidarity cadre remarked on this development:

“And the movement was actually able to communicate this to the outside world through the Social Forum, the conferences that then took place, they also participated in the World Social Forums. They travelled as a movement to all countries, the contacts to Latin America were expanded to other struggling movements ... The focus was no longer only on Europe.”

The ‘new internationalism’ stemming from the ideological transformation opened up new possibilities of transnational relationship transformation between the Kurdish movement and the radical left. This reconfigured internationalism was still marked by a dialectical understanding

of particularistic and universal struggle, while replacing the leadership role of the PKK of Phase I with an emphasis on mutual solidarity relations. Importantly, the form of relationship transformation envisioned by the PKK-led Kurdish movement was premised on political learning, joint actions, and trust building, all aimed at forming a coalition for Democratic Modernity. All 'anti-systemic' movements were seen as potential coalition partners, including diverse radical left groups from Feminist, Marxist, Anarchist and Trotskyist currents. However, it was only in the second half of Phase II that the process of relationship formation began.

The internationalist politics of the radical left during Phase II were characterized by summit protests and a growing disillusionment with the autonomous approach and campaign politics. The mechanism of disillusionment can be defined as a "decline in the commitment of individuals or political actors to previously sustaining beliefs" (Alimi et al. 2015: 86), which might lead to an opening for other frames, ideologies and strategies. The main argument here is that growing frustration within the radical left, and especially in the autonomous movement, first triggered a disillusionment with the autonomous approach, and secondly, an openness and search for new theoretical and organizational approaches. In Phase II, the presence of the Antideutsche movement within the radical left contributed to fragmentation around internationalist theories and practices. This led many groups to refrain from solidarity work with national-liberation movements.

"The overwhelming rest of the 'radical' left, the larger groups that have emerged from the Antifa or Autonomous movements, have decided, in the face of the mock battles between 'anti-imps' and 'anti-Ds,' simply not to say anything more on the matter" (Schaber 2015).

At the beginning of Phase II, the autonomous movement increasingly turned to summit protests and European-level mobilizations, while the anti-imperialist ideology was displaced by an anti-neoliberal frame. By 1999, an alter-globalisation movement was emerging in Germany, marked by the protest against the G8 summit in Cologne (Rucht et al. 2007). However, the autonomous movement mobilized against international summits in Prague, Goteborg and Genoa, without necessarily engaging in transnational relationship formation or coordination through coalitions (A.G. Grauwacke 2019: 363). The G8 summit in Germany in 2007 was set to become a crystallisation point for the strategy of summit mobilization. In particular, the post-autonomous 'Interventionistische Linke' (IL) took a leading role in the preparation for this protest and has remained organized ever since (Peters 2014: 686). These actions were followed by mobilizations against a NATO summit in Strasbourg in 2009, and the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen the same year. With the economic crisis of 2008, the German radical left attempted to lend its support to the anti-austerity movements in Southern Europe, and in 2012, 2013, and 2015, mobilized under the label 'Blockupy' against the opening of the new headquarters of the European Central Bank and its austerity politics. In the mass media as well as in the discussions within the autonomous movement, the confrontations between protesters and the police often took centre stage, overshadowing political demands (Della Porta, Teune 2022).

In particular, within the radical left, criticism was frequently targeted at the "Gipfelhopping"³¹⁶ or the nomadic character of the mobilizations against summits which lacked a clear long-term strategy or a programme beyond contesting neoliberalization (Peters 2014: 245). The critique led

³¹⁶ Summit hopping.

some groups, such as the post-autonomous IL, to engage in more continuous organizational approaches and broader alliance politics, however campaign politics remained a cornerstone of the post-autonomous repertoire. In general, a growing frustration developed concerning the form of mobilizations against major events and the (post-)autonomous organization model. The crisis of autonomous and antifascist organizations was also evident in the quantity of these groups, which decreased from 295 in 2009, to just 189 in 2014 (Schuhmacher 2014). Congresses such as ‘Antifa in der Krise?!’ in 2014³¹⁷ and later, the ‘Selbermachen Kongress’³¹⁸ in 2017 during Phase III were expressions of this *disillusionment* and, at the same time, indicated an opening to explore new ideas and processes.

Regarding developments concerning the Kurdish and radical left movements in the Transnational Arena, the conditions for transnational relationship transformation in the second part of Phase II were certainly more favourable when compared with the asynchronicity of internationalist struggles in Phase I. On the one side, following an initial period of internal confrontations, the Kurdish movement entered into a phase of *ideological and organizational transformation*. However, in order to be capable of diffusing the new paradigm to other movements, the Kurdish movement first needed to pass through a process of intense ideological work and socialisation. On the other side, the internationalist practices of the radical left, such as mobilizations against summits, despite their success in terms of attracting significant numbers of participants and disrupting the events, prompted a widespread *disillusionment* with the (post-)autonomist approach and led individuals and groups to explore new perspectives. In sum, the second part of Phase II presented more favourable conditions for a rapprochement between the Kurdish movement and the radical left, also indicated by a notable increase in instances of transnational brokerage during this period.

1.2. Transnational Brokerage

This sub-section shall present evidence of *transnational brokerage* between the radical left and the Kurdish movement, with a specific focus on the recurring sub-mechanisms of transnational brokerage, namely *political learning*, the *resolving tensions* and *transnational diffusion*. While the *attribution of opportunity* could also be identified and will be discussed where applicable, it was not as relevant as the other sub-mechanisms. Each of these sub-mechanisms will be exemplified within a transnational repertoire, encompassing delegation trips, transnational forums, internationalists joining the Kurdish movement, as well as transnational conferences. Importantly, all sub-mechanisms are present within each repertoire, however for clarity, they will be illustrated individually within the context of one repertoire. The following sub-sections are based on the analysis of my own interviews as well as secondary materials such as books and brochures produced by the movements themselves. Unless indicated otherwise, this argument is considered robust based on the congruence of the interviews and other documents.

³¹⁷ The double-meaning embedded in the title, “Antifa in the crisis?!” referred to the challenges faced by Antifascist movements operating during periods of rightward shifts in European capitalism, as well as the broader crisis within the organizational framework and concept of Antifa itself.

³¹⁸ The “Do-it-yourself congress” focused on the themes of self-organization, counter-power, grassroots work, and collective, self-determined life. International speakers reported on their experiences in grassroots democratic projects from Kurdistan, Chiapas, Italy, Turkey, and Greece.

1.2.1. Transnational Diffusion: Delegation Trips

As argued in Phase I, delegation trips can be considered as instances of *transnational brokerage* since they link hitherto unconnected actors with each other. Three types of delegation trips can be identified during Phase II: delegations with a preliminary protective function, such as election observations, delegations with the intention of creating attribution of opportunity, such as Newroz delegations, and project delegations, with concrete goals, such as diffusing collected information back to Germany. Compared to Phase I, the protective function of delegation trips was less relevant, and instead, the focus shifted more towards the diffusion of Democratic Confederalism as an ideology, rather than to exposing human rights violations. However, this does not imply that there were larger delegations during elections, or that delegation trips in response to human rights violations occurred. One activist who organized delegations in Phase II commented on these human rights delegation trips:

“I would say that many election observers set out during that time, in large groups as well. ... That was 40-50 people who were from Germany, different groups went to different regions and dealt with it ... They then brought back their reports ... We also dealt with it legally again and again, accompanied delegations several times to secure evidence of war crimes, that is, to make smears of chemical weapons victims, deceased and the like. These were things that were important in order to initiate lawsuits from the International Criminal Court. But it never came to anything, and it was always dismissed.”

However, considering their small number, these delegations were a far cry from the “veritable train” of human rights delegations that were common during Phase I. Most delegations went to Bakûr and seldom to Başûr.³¹⁹ However, following the Rojava revolution, a greater number of delegations travelled to Rojava at the end of Phase II. It is worth mentioning that respondents also referred to the resolving tensions and the attribution of threats, albeit not as frequently.

Often during or after delegation trips, activists engaged in the publication of articles in left-wing media and organized information tours, among other practices aimed at diffusing the practices of the solidarity movement. In particular, some delegation trips were undertaken with the explicit goal of fostering political learning, and the creation of brochures and books to inform the German-speaking public about the paradigm change and its implementation. It is important to note that these works laid the foundation for a rapid attribution of similarity in Phase III.

In 2011, a research delegation, consisting among others of activists from solidarity committees and ‘Tatort Kurdistan’³²⁰, travelled to Bakûr and subsequently published the brochure “Demokratische Autonomie in Nordkurdistan”³²¹ (Tatort Kurdistan 2012). The group was founded during the second ‘Mesopotamian Social Forum’ (MSF)³²² where interviews were already conducted:

“On July 14, 2011, Democratic Autonomy was proclaimed for Northern Kurdistan. With the result of the trip, a brochure should be created, which should make the concept – the

³¹⁹ In fact, I could not identify any delegation that travelled to Rojhilat, also reflecting the degree of organization and the focus of the Kurdish movement there.

³²⁰ See Chapter VII. 2.

³²¹ Democratic Autonomy in Northern Kurdistan.

³²² The MSF was visited by approximately 2,000 – 3,000 activists from the MENA region, and a small handful of people from Europe. The main focus was the “Arab Spring” and Democratic Confederalism (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 127).

construction of self-governing structures, which exist independently of the state in the existing state – known and discussable for the left in the German-speaking area” (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 128).

The delegation travelled to different cities in Bakûr and interviewed representatives of cooperatives, city district councils, women and youth councils, educational associations, and cultural centres. Transnational brokers organized interviews with individuals who participated in the women’s movement and self-defence structures (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 129). The brochure, significant given that it was one of the first instances of a publication concerning Democratic Confederalism from the radical left, was later translated into at least three languages and was widely read by radical left activists. Here, the delegation’s purpose mainly consisted of diffusing information on the practical implementation of the paradigm in Bakûr. Additionally, the yearly Newroz delegations, organized by the Kurdish student organization YXK, often engaged in different kinds of diffusion work, for instance by producing and disseminating travel reports in the form of articles or by organizing information events. For example, a brochure published in 2013, mostly consisting of interviews with Kurdish activists, dealt with the institutions of the Kurdish movement and Öcalan’s peace declaration at the Newroz celebration in Amed (Redaktionskollektiv 2013).

Some delegations of more experienced and cadre activists even produced entire books written in the German language. During the first half of Phase II, there were only a few books available on the Kurdish movement that delved into its ideological and organizational transformation. Moreover, there was a notable absence of written information and analysis in the German language concerning the women’s organizations and their development within the movement. During the Amed Camp (see below), an interest began to emerge in addressing this problem:

“Together we discussed how we can make all the valuable things that have been created by the Kurdish women’s movement accessible to broader circles of women in Germany. ... And in this context, the idea of making a book project was born, the result of which became the book ‘Widerstand und gelebte Utopien’”³²³ (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 133).

In contrast to other delegation trips, there was a more intensive preparation process, involving several meetings, educational sessions on the political issues and practical considerations. In 2010, the group travelled to the Medya defence areas³²⁴, where they conducted almost 100 interviews with fighters and militants of the Kurdish women’s army and movement.

“It was really enormous luck that we had the opportunity to visit many areas of the women’s movement in a few weeks and to get to know the dimensions as well as the diversity of the movement so intensively and personally ... The friends on the ground provided a lot of time and space and with great logistical effort made our trip, interviews and discussions possible” (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 136).

The group was able to speak with representatives of the KJB, the women's party PAJK, the women’s guerilla YJA-Star and many more. During a stay in the women’s academy Şehîd Zîlan³²⁵,

³²³ Resistance and Lived Utopias.

³²⁴ Areas under the control of the HPG and YJA Star in the Turkey-Iraq-Iran border region with an area of 2,500 square kilometres. These include the mountainous regions of Qandil, Bradost, Behdîan and Heftanîn (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 296).

³²⁵ See Chapter V.

the delegation also reported about Kurdistan solidarity in Europe, the Amed Camp, the history of the women's movement in Europe and the experiences of anti-capitalist struggles in the metropolises (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022:138). After returning from Kurdistan, the delegation spent two years working on a project which culminated in the publication of a 592-page book, organized around the structure of the Kurdish women's movement and included in-depth interviews (HerausgeberInnenkollektiv 2012). Following this delegation and the relationships it helped to establish, the Kurdish movement extended an invitation to visit the Medya defence areas, in order to conduct an international women's academy with the goal of analysing the 'extra-systemic' women's movement in Germany, and forming a strategy for a new women's organization. Its implementation would have certainly gone far beyond diffusion and transnational brokerage. Nonetheless, this endeavour encountered various challenges and ultimately failed due to various reasons. It is crucial to highlight the specific transnational issues that contributed to this failure, in particular, the significant difference in temporal dynamics between Kurdistan and Germany:

"It was difficult to find a common time frame for the trip. At this point, we failed because of our entrenched structures. Many are politically very active, have obligations, are involved in paid labour or family and there are few opportunities for spontaneity. The Kurdish women's movement ... is fighting in the context of war ... To be spontaneous and flexible are basic requirements for a successful defence against any attacks ... The two approaches 'Okay, right now it's safe, come in two weeks' versus 'next year in summer there are no events planned, I have time' did not fit well together" (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 143).

In this context, the need for spontaneity and flexibility required to organize an academy in the Medya defence areas clashed with the reality of most activists being involved in various other struggles, or constrained by the demands of the capitalist and patriarchal system, which often necessitate careful planning and predictability for events. As a result, only a few individual activists were able to participate in the academy, highlighting the challenges posed by the differing temporalities of the two contexts (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 145).

Towards the end of Phase II, the Rojava Revolution commenced and became increasingly relevant for the solidarity movement. Consequently, dedicated activists from both the solidarity movement and the Kurdish movement began preparing for delegations to Rojava. Despite challenging circumstances, three activists from 'Tatort Kurdistan' managed to stay in Cizîrê Canton for four weeks in May 2014, conducting numerous interviews and research. Their impressions and findings were compiled into a book titled "Revolution in Rojava" (Flach et al. 2015: 11). The book served as a pivotal introduction for the radical left into the freedom struggle of the Kurdish movement in Rojava, particularly during the intense struggle in Kobanê. An internationalist remembered:

"In 2014, we made the first delegation trip there and to carry the experiences from there here, that simply struck an important audience again. And while before you had three people sitting at self-governance events, suddenly you had 300 sitting there and you thought to yourself, 'what's going on? Where were you?' And again, everyone was completely amazed that something like this was coming from the Kurdish movement. Again, it was something completely new for people, but it achieved an incredible amount."

By 2014, the authors were already actively engaged in diffusion activities and reported on their delegation trip through various information events.³²⁶ The work of this and subsequent delegations played a crucial role in generating the knowledge necessary for the emergence of a broad solidarity movement.

It is worth noting that the delegations that came later were often better prepared and came with clear objectives. Lessons from the partly more challenging experiences of earlier delegations contributed to the idea of the Amed Camp, a youth camp in Kurdistan. Significantly, the call for the Amed Camp included reflections on the transient nature of transnational relationship formation:

“So far, hardly any sustainable working structures have emerged after the annual European delegations to Newroz. We see the camp/MSF, the time before and after it, as a process from which new left networks of solidarity in Europe can and should emerge” (Nachbereitungsgruppe des Amed Camps 2010: 18),

The first delegations, while serving as an initial brokerage, were unable to establish and sustain a continuous relationship or ensure the ongoing reproduction of these delegations. In other words, the formation of a transnational space characterized by reciprocal and consistent exchanges did not occur during this early phase. However, with the introduction of the Amed Camp and subsequent delegation trips, the diffusion mechanism became increasingly salient, the solidarity movement in Germany grew stronger, and the development of a transnational space slowly began to take shape.

1.2.2. Resolving Tensions: *Amed Camp*

The Kurdish movement introduced the international left to the ideological and organizational transformation toward Democratic Confederalism through the Mesopotamian Social Forums (MSF) in 2009 and 2011. The International Amed Camp, held in 2009 within the framework of the first MSF, saw participation from around 150 youth activists representing various countries including Germany, Italy, the Basque country, Palestine, France, Austria, the Netherlands and Turkey (Jaedicke 2009), with the primary aim of facilitating exchange between different movements. This event was considered a turning point by some interviewees, with one remarking that “many young people ... saw the whole thing in a completely new light.” The Kurdish movement’s own attempt to organize the MSF reflected its transformed internationalism, given that Kurdish activists had actively participated in World and Regional Social Forum meetings while simultaneously implementing a similar format in Kurdistan. According to Casier (2011a), the MSF served as a space to showcase the vanguard role of the PKK beyond Kurdistan. One long-term solidarity activist highlighted the significance of the MSF in the following way:

“There was the Mesopotamian Social Forum in 2009, that was already a big step, that the MSF was built up like the other Social Forums. And that was actually noticed by the other Social Forums, that was already a big step, because the countries from the region, in the Social Forums, were not so much talked about. And that was really an outward step.”

³²⁶ The book later was translated into English (Knapp et al. 2016).

The organization of the MSF marked a significant shift in the Kurdish movement's ideology and practice of internationalism, transitioning from primarily seeking solidarity for the Kurdish movement as the most advanced socialist struggle, to embracing a new internationalism rooted in reciprocity, eventually aspiring to global Democratic Confederalism.

In this paragraph, I will highlight the tensions that arose during the Amed Camp and, despite those tensions, the outcome of the camp as a starting point for a new Kurdistan solidarity movement in Germany. Before delving into the details, it is worth briefly mentioning the role of transnational brokers in the preparation of the Amed Camp. Ellen Stêrk,³²⁷ along with other activists from Germany, collaborated with activists from Amed to organize the camp, as an activist from that period reported in a book about her life:

“I remember very well the first discussions Ellen initiated about this camp in spring/summer 2008. She talked to a lot of activists in Germany and Kurdistan – again and again – until it finally gained momentum. Because in summer and autumn 2008 for a long time it did not look as if it would actually take place” (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 99).

The process leading up to the Amed Camp involved several key steps. First, information events were organized to mobilize individuals for the camp. Following this, a preparatory group was established, along with seminars. The overarching goal of the Amed Camp was to introduce the Kurdish movement as a topic within the German radical left, to make the ideology and practise tangible, and thus to overcome the isolation experienced after the relationship break-up of Phase I. Additionally, the call said that “particularly important to us is the mutual acquaintance of grassroots activists” (Nachbereitungsgruppe des Amed Camps 2010). Prior to the camp's commencement, a preparatory group travelled to Amed, to collaborate with organized activists on site, in order to set up the camp. The event took place over five days in September 2009, attended by around 70 people from Germany, including a diverse range of activities such as podium discussions, workshops, concerts, readings, demonstrations, and civil disobedience actions. The camp's thematic focuses encompassed the Kurdish question, war, imperialism, youth, ecology, Democratic Confederalism and, most importantly, feminist issues. Ultimately the Amed Camp succeeded in achieving one of its main objectives, namely the initiation of a political learning process.

However, interaction and relationship formation within the Transnational Arena were not without their challenges, marked by tensions and differing expectations when rank-and-file activists from autonomous groups interacted with the Kurdish youth. In general, these tensions primarily revolved around differences in individualistic and collectivist movement cultures, and in particular, the organization of the camp, the lack of transnational brokerage skills and Eurocentrism. The individualistic approach often seen in the autonomous scene posed obstacles to the establishment of transnational relationships. As one Kurdish activist pointed out: “More individualistically shaped autonomous people have more difficulties to create access, because they often ... put their own affliction in the centre.” For instance, these tensions came to a head when activists from Germany disrupted the planned program:

³²⁷ This paragraph is mainly based on the book ‘Verändern wollte ich eine Menge’ | ‘I wanted to change a lot’ (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022), which chronicles the life of Ellen Stêrk, published posthumously by solidarity activists and friends. Ellen Stêrk played a pivotal role as a transnational broker in the process of relationship formation between the Kurdish Movement and the radical left in Germany, particularly in the organization of the Amed Camp.

“Then there was the idea from the Kurds that we would start the day together, do 12 hours of camp, so to speak, everything together and in parallel. This was unimaginable for those who came predominantly from an anarchist scene. There was also a good bang right away. There was hardly any agreement” (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 110).

Due to the fact that the Amed Camp was mostly attended by rank-and-file activists, and given the lack of internationalist exchange among the German radical left in general, relationship formation was obstructed by a lack of brokerage skills. As a translator reported:

“Discussions held for hours and long, long speeches that were not translatable at all, because they were hardly clear sentences in there. But they always have the claim: ‘you translate that now’. So, really people who are really not capable of internationalist work or who would have needed a lot more experience for that.”

In particular, the Kurdish participants were critical of their interlocutors’ Eurocentrism, which manifested itself in various ways, notably in the aggressive atmosphere and the imposition of an ‘ideological similarity test’ during discussions:

“The majority of them were anarchists coming from Europe and they asked mainly about our way of organizing and how decisions are made in our country. I think because they assume that our way of organizing is not democratic, that decisions are made from above and imposed on the base” (Nachbereitungsgruppe des Amed Camps 2010: 76)

Despite the numerous tensions and reservations, including concerns about a cadre organization and disagreements over decision-making processes, one of the organizers considered the Amed Camp as a starting point for the emergence of a new Kurdistan solidarity movement in Germany:

“Pretty difficult, the discussions in the Amed Camp ... However, in retrospect, this created people who were intensely involved later, and I think it made a difference for many people. That’s why I think it wasn’t bad that many of them were there, and from then on, they got very involved. But it was really completely unclear at that time, whether we were doing more harm than good.”

Consequently, the Amed Camp played a central role in nurturing a new generation of solidarity activists. These activists went on to establish new solidarity structures, such as ‘Tatort Kurdistan’, and helped to diffuse knowledge about the ideological transformation to the radical left in Germany. Indeed it was remarked that afterwards, “the solidarity movement blossomed again” (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 106). In essence, the Amed Camp marked the resurgence of the solidarity movement, and gave rise to a new kind of transnational brokerage, which was more capable of resolving tensions, promoting political learning and facilitating the diffusion of knowledge, ultimately laying the foundation for the burgeoning solidarity movement with the Kurdish cause.

1.2.3. Transnational Broker?: Internationalists

Ellen Jaedicke (nome de guerre: Stêrk), a prominent figure frequently mentioned, stands out as one of the few individuals from the radical left who joined the ranks of Kurdish military units during Phase II, prior to the war against the Islamic State, and played a central role in facilitating transnational brokerage. Her decision to join the Kurdish women’s movement was motivated by a combination of factors, including a sense of frustration with the lack of perspective and other

problems within the radical left, coupled with the need to find a space for reflection, analysis, and political learning. The first step began with her involvement in the Jineolojî committee, which she explored as part of a delegation focused on political learning. A Kurdish activist involved in this initiative reported that

“of all the education³²⁸ ... she made transcripts and notes. When we took a break, we asked her, ‘Stêrk, why do you write so much?’ She said: ‘The education I see here, I will pass on to all feminist women when I go back to Germany. And I will introduce this system to them’” (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 151).

Importantly, Jaedicke understood her task to be that of a transnational broker, educating herself in order to disseminate the knowledge she gained during her experiences to the radical left in Germany.³²⁹ Following her involvement in the Jineolojî committee, Jaedicke joined a language school in Qandîl, learned Kurmancî, and immersed herself in the collective life of the guerrilla. Later she also received basic military training and finally, returned to the Jineolojî committee. In her letters, she detailed her daily life in the guerrilla, and shared insights from her political learning process, for example about the concept of Hevaltî, revolutionary comradeship and Jineolojî. Additionally, she wrote text for the ‘Kurdistan Report’ and other media. After returning to Germany in late 2013, she dedicated herself to forming closer relationships with the Kurdish women’s movement. Her commitment to fostering solidarity and transnational connections continued to flourish during Phase III, where she organized various events and workshops, serving as a crucial link between the Kurdish women’s movement and activists in Germany, up until her death in 2016 (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 233). Indeed, Jaedicke’s role as a transnational broker was characterized by her dedication to knowledge dissemination and active relationship transformation.

The case of another internationalist, Kevin Jochim (Dilsoz Bahar), prompted a reflection within the radical left of how to deal with the fallen, triggered by his death in combat. On the night of July 6, 2015, he and 5 other militants lost their lives in an IS attack in the village Şergirat, Silûk district. His decision to join the Kurdish movement in 2012 at the age of nineteen was influenced by both push and pull factors. On one hand, the fragmentation and lack of revolutionary perspective within the radical left scene, coupled with criminal proceedings against him, played a significant role. On the other hand, the consistent revolutionary policy of the Kurdish movement attracted him, leading to his ideological transformation from Marxism-Leninism towards Democratic Confederalism, which gave him “new hope” as a prospective “alternative for all humanity” (ISKU 2016). In any case, Jochim’s journey to Kurdistan was shrouded in secrecy, and he did not inform his friends or family about his decision, causing much confusion and concern regarding his whereabouts (Hackensberger 2015). After joining the Kurdish movement, Jochim significantly reduced communications with his friends and political contacts, and consequently, he never directly acted as a transnational broker. During his tenure in Kurdistan,

³²⁸ The German word ‘Bildung’, is a term used by the Kurdish movement and the solidarity movement to indicate lessons or teaching.

³²⁹ Some contributions also flowed in the other direction, from the radical left to the Kurdish movement. However, as one German participant remarked, assessing the exchange at the time: “It was clear that we lack the routine, the practice and the experience to exchange from movement to movement, to exchange not with individual opinion, but as a structure” (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 153). On the side of the radical left, an equal counterpart was missing, which could have provided the educational and discussion work necessary, in order to engage on an organizational and not only on an individual level.

he underwent basic training, achieving fluency in Soranî and Kurmancî writing and speaking. He actively participated in battles across various locations, and in the winter months of 2014, travelled to Rojava. According to an account provided by a fellow internationalist, Jochim actively participated in meetings alongside other European internationalists, which were dedicated to discussing their roles in the Kurdish movement, the political, social and diplomatic work in Europe, and their involvement in guerrilla warfare (Vorbereitungskomitee 2017: 23). Jochim was killed in combat in 2015, and his death was formally announced by the YPG. Later, he, alongside Ivana Hoffmann, emerged as one of the prominent symbols representing internationalists who had fought alongside the Kurdish movement and perished in the struggle. Funeral rallies were held in various cities, and his image was displayed on banners during different demonstrations. His passing, along with that of others, presented a complex challenge for the radical left as they grappled to deal with the loss of activists from their own ranks who had perished in the course of their struggle.³³⁰

In summary, during Phase II, the internationalists were not a significant component of transnational brokerage due to their limited numbers. Nevertheless, the two examples presented here represent contrasting approaches to joining the Kurdish movement as internationalists: one with the primary goal of acting as a transnational broker, and the other focusing on providing support to the movement on the ground. Despite their small numbers, both played important roles in paving the way for future internationalists who joined the Kurdish movement, and their involvement sparked debates within the radical left about how to cope with activists who had lost their lives in battle.

1.2.4. Political Learning: Transnational Conferences

In both Phases II and III, transnational conferences jointly organized by the Kurdish movement and the solidarity movement in Germany became an important part of the repertoire within the Transnational Arena. There were also transnational conferences organized by the Kurdish movement in Phase I, however, they were usually not aimed at the radical left, but broader human rights and moderate actors. In Phase II, these conferences played a crucial role in disseminating the ideology of Democratic Confederalism to a wider audience within the global left in an accessible manner, serving as platforms for concentrated political learning and exchange. This section shall focus on conferences from Phase III, as they are thematically relevant to this discussion.

In Hamburg, international conferences were organized by a group called ‘Network for an Alternative Quest’ with the AstA of Hamburg University in 2012, 2015, and 2017.³³¹ This organizing network consisted mostly of Kurdish organizations and some older solidarity organizations in Germany.³³² The solidarity movement and the Kurdish structures in Hamburg needed to dedicate considerable resources to these conferences and “it was clear that the half year before, there is only conference preparation”, as an solidarity activist remembered. The

³³⁰ See Chapter VIII. 1.

³³¹ Additionally, a conference was to take place in 2020, but had to be cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and was repeated in 2023.

³³² These included: International Initiative “Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan”; KURD-AKAD (Network of Kurdish Academics); YXK (Association of Students from Kurdistan); Kurdistan Report; ISKU; Cenî (Kurdish Women’s Office for Peace); Civaka Azad (Kurdish Centre for Public Relations).

inaugural conference in 2012 had the aim of widely diffusing the ideological transformation of the Kurdish movement, and provided an opportunity for political learning, as indicated in the conference invitation text:

“This conference will also be interesting for all those who want to keep up with the changes in Kurdish society and the Kurdish movement and learn about the alternatives they propose” (Network for an Alternative Quest 2012).

There were contributions from prominent intellectuals such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Antonio Negri, Janet Biehl, and many representatives from the Kurdish movement were present, such as the then co-chairwoman of the BDP³³³ Gültan Kışanak, as well as representatives from movements from the Global South, such as Solly Mapaila, General Secretary of the South African Communist Party (Network for an Alternative Quest 2015). The second and third conferences included even more representatives of movements and transnational speakers.³³⁴ One activist from Hamburg later reflected on the events:

“These conferences were very important, because they were the first time to speak about Apo, about his ideas, with international participation. In these conferences, they were discussed together with, for example, Latin America, with the Landless People’s Movements, with the different countries. Thanks to these speakers, there simply was a much more open audience. And the movement was suddenly perceived differently. No longer as abstract or dogmatic ... Many suddenly began to actually deal with the ideology of Abdullah Öcalan ... What is it actually about?”

The conferences played a vital role in intensifying the exchange and political learning between revolutionary and emancipatory movements across the globe, fostering new collaborations and contributing to the sustenance of existing relationships. Activists from the German radical left could easily participate in these sessions, and thus often formed a significant portion of the attendees. The Kurdish women’s movement was closely involved in the Hamburg conferences, but also organized its own conferences in different countries, in order to foster a “world women’s confederalism”, a goal announced by the Kurdish Women’s Movement in 2018 (Al-Ali, Käser 2020). For example, in 2018, the ‘Women Weaving the Future’ took place in Frankfurt and saw participation from international attendees. In sum, already in Phase II and increasingly in Phase III, the Kurdish movement made efforts to diffuse the ideology and strategy of Democratic Confederalism on a global scale. These conferences, held in Germany, provided opportunities for new activists to encounter the new paradigm and engage in political learning.

³³³ See Chapter V. 1.

³³⁴ The second conference included, inter alia, contributions from John Holloway, David Harvey, David Graeber, representatives from the Kurdish movement such as Asya Abdullah (co-chairwoman of the PYD), and other movements, such as Dimitrios Roussopoulos (Black Rose Book) and Alex Mashilo (South African Communist Party). The third conference, among others, included speakers such as Debbie Bookchin, Raul Zibechi, David Graeber, Fawza Yusufis of the Kurdish movement (co-president of Democratic Federation of Northern Syria), as well as Cassia Figueiredo Bechara (MST Brazil), and Sonia López (Colombian Congress of the Peoples (CdP)).

Phase II: Transnational Arena

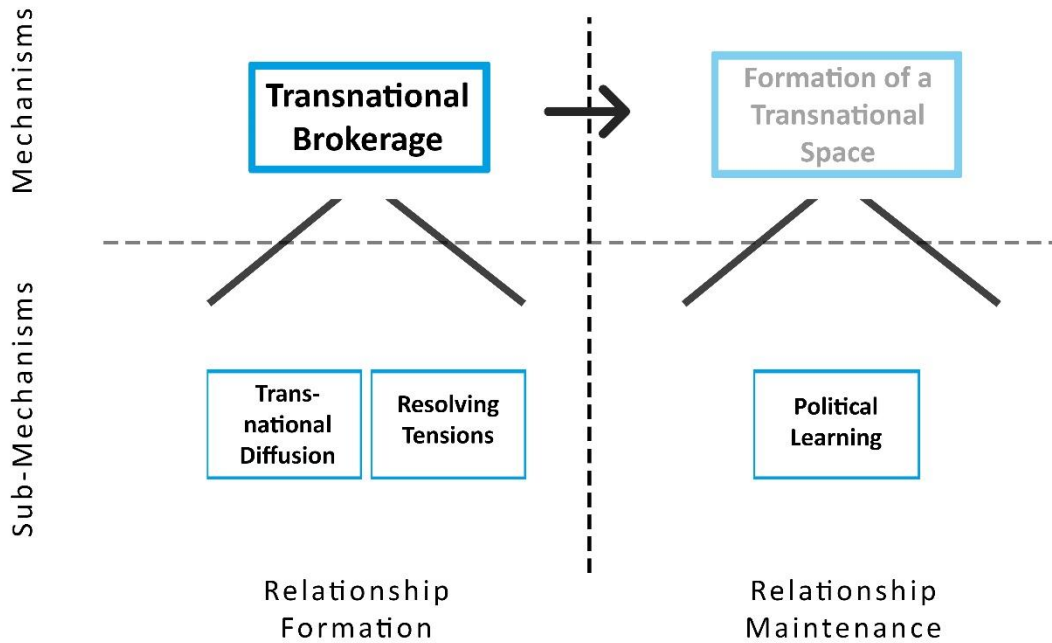


Figure 7: Diagram of Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms in the Transnational Arena in Phase II

In sum, the *ideological* and *organizational transformation* of the Kurdish movement played a critical role in the rapprochement between the Kurdish movement and the German radical left. On one hand, the Kurdish movement underwent an intensive process of ideological work and socialization in order to fully embrace this transformation. Only then was the movement prepared to disseminate the principles of Democratic Confederalism and its newly transformed internationalism to other movements. On the other hand, the internationalist practices of the radical left in Germany, particularly the mobilizations against summits of international organizations, despite achieving significant successes, led to a *disillusionment* with the (post-)autonomist approach and led some groups to seek new approaches. Consequently, the second part of Phase II saw more favourable conditions for transnational relationship transformation in contrast to the asynchronous internationalist struggles observed in Phase I.

In this phase, *transnational brokerage* emerged as the primary means for cultivating a growing transnational solidarity movement. The delegation trips, besides triggering an attribution of opportunity with the Kurdish movement's increasing success, were mainly focused on generating and transnational *diffusing* information about Democratic Confederalism and its practical implementation in Bakûr and later Rojava. A central event during this period was the Amed Camp in 2009, which contributed significantly to the expansion of the solidarity movement with Kurdistan throughout Phase II. However, it is important to note that the camp was not without its challenges, as it brought about considerable *tensions* related to the organization of the camp, Eurocentrism, and the lack of transnational brokerage skills among rank-and-file activists from

the radical left. Despite these tensions, after the camp many participants became active in the Kurdistan solidarity movement for a long time. Locally, campaigns and solidarity committees were formed with the assistance of these activists, and more leftist groups began establishing relationships with the PKK-led Kurdish movement. Finally, *political learning* was a continuous process, with delegation trips and the Amed Camp serving as critical moments. However, this process can also be identified in a condensed form during transnational conferences taking place in Germany throughout Phases II and III. These conferences, accessible for the radical left in Germany, provided a transnational space for discussions and knowledge-sharing regarding the ideological and organizational transformation of the Kurdish movement. It is noteworthy that, due to their very limited numbers, internationalists did not play a significant role in transnational relationship formation. In the transition from Phase II to Phase III, first glimpse of the formation of a transnational space could be traced.

2. Phase II: National Arena

This section shall provide an analysis of the dynamics of repression and stigmatization in the National Arena during Phase II with a view to identify the mechanisms of relationship transformation. During this period, repression persisted, with some continuities and shifts, shaping the dynamics of the relationship between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany. Essentially, the analysis demonstrates that despite a continuity of repression against the Kurdish movement in the early part of Phase II, a meaningful relationship formation remained elusive and failed to materialize. It was only in the latter part of Phase II, and even then, only sporadically, that the threat represented by countermovements and state repression triggered the formation of relationships.

Within the National Arena, German security authorities deployed a diverse repertoire of tactics against the Kurdish movement through the implementation of anti-terrorist laws, association bans and restrictive migration regime. Initially, this selective repression primarily targeted the Kurdish movement. The criminalization of the Kurdish movement had profound consequences for its activists, although it did not deter them from their mobilizing efforts. The effects of this repression were intricate and largely went unnoticed by the German public. To provide some context, between October 1999 to October 2000, there were 11 arrests, 71 detentions, 175 raids on associations and private residences, resulting in a cumulative prison sentence of 59 years and 9 months for 45 Kurdish political prisoners in Germany, along with suspended sentences totalling 10 years and 4 months (AZADÎ e.V. 2013: 19). Many of these proceedings, in terms of sheer volume, revolved around violations of the law on associations, essentially the PKK ban. These violations encompassed activities such as vocalizing slogans, displaying symbols like the PKK or KCK flags, and distributing publications like *Serxwebûn*.

An illustrative example is that of Roza K., residing in Nuremberg. In 2006, she was received a sentence due to her association with the PKK, accompanied by certain conditions: she was restricted to leaving the city within a 15-kilometre radius, and for the past 16 years, she has been required to visit the police station every week to verify her compliance with the district restriction (ANF News 2022a). Indeed, the PKK ban engendered numerous ambiguities, thereby providing a pretext for further repression. Often it became a matter of police or assembly authorities'

discretion to determine whether a particular slogan or act violated the law.³³⁵ Throughout Phase II, the persecution of Kurdish activists concerning the PKK ban and repression during demonstrations remained pervasive, largely unaltered by the Kurdish movement's evolving strategy in Germany. While direct confrontations decreased considerably, primarily due to the movement's strategic shift, surveillance, harassment, and persecutions continued unabated.

In the aftermath of the 11th September 2001, and the subsequent 'war on terror', an important legal development unfolded in 2002 with the introduction of section 129b. This provision extended criminal liability to encompass membership in a foreign terrorist organization, requiring individual cases to receive authorization from the Ministry of Justice for prosecution.³³⁶ Starting in 2005, this legal framework was applied to left-wing, international organizations such as the 'Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam' and DHKP-C.³³⁷ Regarding the Kurdish movement, a significant shift occurred in 1998, when the attorney general's office downgraded the legal classification of the PKK to that of a criminal entity. However, in October 2010, a Federal Court of Justice decision reclassified the PKK in Germany as a command component of the broader organization, rendering it prosecutable as a foreign terrorist entity. Importantly, this alteration eliminated the requirement for offences to be committed within Germany. Instead, individuals accused of participating in combat activities and alleged attacks in the context of the conflict in Kurdistan could now be held accountable before German courts.³³⁸ An incomplete list provided by AZADÎ covering the period from 2000 until 2010 documents 33 arrests connected to section 129, five linked to section 129a, eight to the law of association, and eleven under various other sections (AZADÎ e.V. 2013). For instance, the case of Ali Ihsan Kitay is illustrative, as he was apprehended in 2011 in Hamburg on charges of belonging to a foreign terrorist organization. His case played a significant role in shaping new dynamics in the formation of relationships in Hamburg during Phase II. In brief, the persecution of alleged PKK activists in Germany during Phase II transitioned from criminal prosecution to terrorist allegations, accompanied by an increasing politicization of these legal proceedings. Notably, the extraordinary laws implemented during this phase were initially not designed with the explicit purpose of targeting the PKK but were later applied against the Kurdish movement.

In Phase I, the repression against the PKK-led Kurdish movement was primarily carried out at the national level, however a significant shift occurred after 2001, marked by the internationalisation of this repression. Importantly, the Council of the European Union and the United States both designated the PKK and its successor organizations as terrorist entities. Although these

³³⁵ The display of banners and flags with the image of Abdullah Öcalan have been the subject of legal disputes and restrictions in various demonstrations and rallies. The specific rules regarding how many flags with Öcalan's picture are permitted in relation to the number of participants. For example, in Berlin in December 2007, flags with the image of Abdullah Öcalan were allowed by the police. In contrast, on December 18th, 2007, ten thousands took part in a demonstration and rally in Düsseldorf and because of the banned flags, clashes broke out between police and Kurdish youths during the course of the demonstration, with pepper spray and mounted forces being used (AZADÎ e.V. 2013: 40–41; taz 2007).

³³⁶ Since the Ministry is the institution that decides what is to be classified and prosecuted as a terrorist organization, section 129b was considered by attorneys as a politicization of criminal justice that undermines the separation of powers and functions as tool for the "pacification of foreign policy interests" (Appen 2012).

³³⁷ Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi | Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front.

³³⁸ Inevitably, the domestic political conditions of other states such as Turkey are taken into consideration by German courts: for instance, whether Turkey is a State under the rule of law, whether violent resistance to these conditions comes from a freedom movement or a terrorist movement are now questions dealt with in German courts (Kuhn 2018). Therefore, in each 129b proceeding, German courts investigate the legitimacy of the PKK's struggle, and consequently deny it, often with recourse to international terror lists (see below).

designations had limited direct legal or economic ramifications, they substantially constrained the political opportunities available to Kurdish organizations, politicians, and media (AZADÎ e.V. 2013: 4). One notable example of this international repression was the case of the Kurdish transnational broadcasting television station Roj TV. The Turkish governments exerted considerable pressure on the Danish government to shut down the station, which held a broadcasting licence in Denmark (Ataman 2008). Although Denmark initially delayed revoking the licence, the German Federal Ministry of the Interior took action in mid-June 2008 by banning the operation of Roj TV, leading to the closure of its German studio in Wuppertal. Subsequently, in an attempt to prompt the German government to alter its 'anti-Kurd' policy and rescind the ban on Roj TV, the HPG abducted three Bavarian climbers on Mount Ararat. However, the climbers were released shortly after without any concessions (Ramelsberger 2008). Further international measures were taken against Roj TV. The station faced heavy fines from Copenhagen court for its alleged support of terrorist activities and ultimately had its broadcasting licence revoked in July 2012 (AZADÎ e.V. 2013). With the introduction of section 129b and the inclusion of the PKK in the EU-terror list, the internationalisation of the PKK's persecution intensified during Phase II. This internationalization of repression can be summarized as a strategy aimed at depleting the resources of the transnational Kurdish movement, targeting both its financial and media infrastructure, while maintaining the enduring stigmatization of the movement as a terrorist organization.

Furthermore, in Phase II, Kurdish activists continued to experience pressure from the migration regime, albeit with reduced intensity. The number of deportations decreased in Phase II from 4,351 in 2002 to 249 in 2014 (see Figure 11). It is important to note that while these statistics do not provide specific information about the number of Kurds or PKK sympathizers deported to Turkey, they do indicate a general decrease in the overall threat of deportation. Nevertheless, Kurdish activities still faced legal challenges related to their political activities. Engaging in legal demonstrations or participating in events hosted by Kurdish associations could lead to denials of naturalization in the 2000s, with authorities citing activists' 'extremist' activities as grounds for refusal. Kurdish refugees and migrants were confronted with the possibilities of expulsion, the non-renewal or shortened validity of temporary residence permits, the withdrawal or revocation of residence permits, restrictions on rights associated with residence permits, prohibitions to leave the country, and entry and residence bans (Haberstroh 2020). For instance, in 2008, Ismet B. received an expulsion order from the asylum district office. The decision was based on the assessment of his perceived "dangerousness" as well as a prognosis of continued risk. The justification for the expulsion order stemmed from Ismet B.'s involvement in a Kurdish association affiliated with YEK-KOM (AZADÎ e.V. 2013: 48). As one veteran Kurdish activist observed regarding Phase II:

"Of course, some people stay away from the club, so that's something we always have to take into account if no new Kurdish people come, because they know exactly that the associations are being fully observed."

The persistent threat of repression and the significant consequences deterred many Kurds from actively participating in the movement (Başer 2015b: 13). In essence, there was a shift in the migration regime concerning politically active Kurds during this period. The direct threat of deportation decreased, but Kurdish activists were kept in a state of insecurity through means

such as the denial of naturalization. This often facilitated their surveillance, employment deprivation, and harassment.

To counter the criminalization of their activities, the PKK-led Kurdish movement in Germany engaged in various initiatives, including petitions, conferences, sit-ins, and mass protests. In 2001, a transnational signature campaign titled “I, too, am a PKK member” was launched. The campaign spanned Europe and Turkey, serving as a prelude to a peace initiative by the PKK, aiming to overturn the PKK ban in Germany (AZADÎ e.V. 2013: 19). By the end of the year, approximately 120,000 self-denunciations were collected across Europe, with around 80,000 self-incrimination letters collected in Germany alone by 2004 (Morres 2004). The confessions signed in Germany were presented to members of the Bundestag, state parliaments, as well as other authorities. Public authorities suspected that the campaign’s intent was to overwhelm the German prosecution authorities, potentially leading to the PKK ban being rendered ineffective (BIS 2001). However, this led to a new wave of criminalization against the signatories, with a substantial number investigated, charged, and convicted for violations of association laws. For instance, in 2004, the chairman of YEK-KOM, Ayten Kaplan, and Mehmet Demir received financial penalties and given criminal records (Morres 2004). The consequences for the signatories extended beyond penal law, affecting asylum and residence matters. Applications for naturalization, residence extensions and settlement permits were often denied due to the PKK self-incrimination statement being considered as an act of support (Dienelt 2006). In sum, selective repression by German authorities against the PKK-led Kurdish movement in Germany remained at a high level during Phase II, despite developments within the PKK itself and strategic shifts in mobilization within Germany. In contrast, the nature of repression transitioned from criminal persecution towards prosecution under terrorist laws, and, in general, repression became more internationalized.

During Phase II, sporadic violent clashes with Turkish fascists occurred. For example, on the 28th October 2007, during a rally for ‘Unity and Brotherhood between Turks and Kurds’ in Berlin-Kreuzberg and Neukölln, Bozkurts aggressively pursued Kurds and some leftists through the streets. To evade the violent group, which eyewitnesses reported was armed with machetes, individuals sought refuge in cafés and doorways (Lier et al. 2007). The background for this fascist demonstration, which drew 1,500 to over 4,000 participants, was the escalating violence between the HPG and the Turkish army along the Turkish-Iraqi border.³³⁹ This event had several consequences, including widespread media coverage, often framed as an imported conflict (Biermann 2007; N-tv 2007), de-escalation attempts (Oldenburger, Nibbrig 2007), and subsequently, a new relationship transformation process, which will be discussed further below. Similar incidents occurred in 2011 in Berlin (Thiermann 2012: 31–32; Wierth 2011).

In the national public in Phase II, reporting about Kurds can be characterized as scarce and predominantly negative (Nowacki 2019: 65–66). In fact, media coverage of Kurds and, especially the PKK-led Kurdish movement significantly declined. In 2005, it represented only one-sixth of the coverage seen in 1995 (Nowacki 2019: 50). Politically active Kurds continued to be portrayed

³³⁹ Again, the background of this escalation was the political crisis in Turkey between the AKP government and the military during the presidential election, which resulted in the election of Abdullah Gül as President and an agreement to seek a military solution to the Kurdish question. Turkey’s threat of a full-scale invasion into Iraqi territory culminated in the deployment of 100,000 Turkish army soldiers to the region in February 2008.

as a disruptive faction within German society by the media (Demmrich, Arakon 2021). While the terrorism label persisted during Phase II, it was less frequently reiterated. In 2005, mentions of Kurds in connection with the PKK primarily involved criminal proceedings and, on one occasion, demonstrations (Nowacki 2019: 52). Political expressions by Kurds were nearly non-existent in 2005 (Nowacki 2019: 53–54), except in instances of violent confrontations. For example, the Kurdish Cultural Festival, which had been held annually for over 25 years, only received national media attention when clashes with the police occurred, as was the case in Mannheim in 2012. In contrast, peaceful celebrations by tens of thousands of Kurds typically received only local coverage (Brauns 2019: 40).

In short, despite numerous demonstrations and varied actions in Germany, developments within Kurdistan and the PKK, media coverage of Kurds and the Kurdish diaspora remained limited. Notably, the ideological and organizational transformation of the PKK-led Kurdish movement was rarely addressed in German media, including leftist newspapers. In response to this stigmatization and biased reporting, efforts were made to establish a Kurdish counter-public. For example, 'Civaka Azad'³⁴⁰ was founded in 2011 by young Kurdish activists who "took offence at the reporting on the subject of Kurds and Kurdistan" (Civaka Azad 2019).

2.1. Kurdish Movement – Radical Left

In the early 2000s, despite ongoing repression, there was limited relationship formation between the radical left in Germany and the PKK-led Kurdish movement. AZADÎ continued their anti-repression efforts, which included the publication of three brochures documenting the chronology of repression (AZADÎ e.V. et al. 2003; AZADÎ e.V. 2013; AZADÎ e.V., YEK-KOM e.V. 2008). They also provided individual support for prisoners and defendants, engaged in public relations work against the PKK ban, raised awareness about the deportation of Kurds, and resisted repression attempts by German authorities. A long-term AZADÎ member argued that this 'phase of confusion' within the Kurdish movement

"also affected the work and existence of AZADÎ. Through perseverance, persuasiveness and continuity of political commitment, however, this difficult time could be survived together" (Morres 2021).

Thereafter, AZADÎ continued to act as an interface between the Kurdish movement and the 'Rote Hilfe'. One long-term AZADÎ member reflected:

"It's actually very constant work. We are not doing any different work today than we did back in 1997 or 1998. Similar to the 'Roten Hilfe'. There may have been a little development in membership or in 2010 with the 129a and 129b procedures, the whole problem was exacerbated, but our general working method and cooperation with the Kurdish structures has always been good, and also with the 'Roten Hilfe' [it] has always been good and has not really changed."

Besides the institutionalization of AZADÎ, in the early 2000s there was minimal evidence of relationship formation triggered by repression. During a demonstration in Hamburg related to the "I, too, am a PKK member" campaign, the Interior Authority claimed that approximately 1,200 Kurdish demonstrators marched peacefully, with only "a few German left-wing extremists"

³⁴⁰ Free Society - Kurdish Center for Public Relations Work.

present (BIS 2001). Relationship formation began to occur more sporadically in the second half of the 2000s, often triggered by immediate countermovement threats and the application of section 129b, along with similar high-profile cases of selective repression. Two illustrative cases are Ali Ihsan Kitay's 129b process, and the countermovement threat in Berlin. It is important to note that these were the only cases identified in the analysis during the 2000s and early 2010s. However, towards the end of Phase II, there were signs of increased participation from radical left organizations in anti-repression demonstrations organized by the Kurdish movement. For instance, during the demonstration marking the 20th anniversary of the PKK ban on the 16th of November 2013 in Berlin, which drew a crowd of between 4,000 to 20,000³⁴¹ people (Başer 2015b: 14), as well as an active contingent from the radical left. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that selective repression and countermovement threats only occasionally served as triggers for relationship formation during this phase, unlike the more prominent role they played in Phase I as the main relationship transformation pathway.

2.1.1. Relationship Formation: Countermovement Threat and Selective Repression

Countermovement Threat: ARAB and 'Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitee Berlin'

As previously mentioned, the 2007 demonstration by the Grey Wolves in Berlin, during which they attacked Kurdish individuals and institutions in Berlin's Neukölln and Kreuzberg districts, was a significant event. It marked the beginning of a relationship transformation process, as radical left groups responded to these events. In the aftermath, the 'Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitee Berlin'³⁴² gained strength, and a gradually evolving solidarity movement with Kurdistan took shape. In this context, this analysis will focus on the process of relationship formation, while the aspects of relationship maintenance will be discussed in Chapter VII. 3. As one activist who witnessed the countermovement attacks related:

“And the trigger ... was that a Bozkurt march took place here [in Berlin] in 2007 ... as a result of which a Kurdish Mosque was attacked. We stood in front of the mosque with a few older people from Antifa Gençlik³⁴³ and a few people from the Kurdish association ... And there were hardly any cops there, and the [Bozkurts] attacked us with machetes and all kinds of things. ... And then we founded the Kurdistan Solidarity Committee and held a big demonstration on Hermannplatz”

At the end of 2007, the first organized contact between the radical left in Berlin and the Kurdish movement was forged. This marked the establishment of the 'Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitee Berlin' a group which included, among others, members of the 'Antifaschistischen Revolutionären Aktion Berlin' (ARAB)³⁴⁴ and Kurdish youths. It is worth noting that ARAB, formed around 2006 and 2007, was one of the larger groups within Berlin's autonomous scene and had been under observation by the Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution from the outset. Prior to this, activists from the anti-imperialist ARAB had limited, if any durable contacts

³⁴¹ Depending on the source: press (Berliner Morgenpost 2013) or movement source (Tatort Kurdistan 2013).

³⁴² Kurdistan Solidarity Committee Berlin.

³⁴³ 'Antifaşist Gençlik' was founded in 1988 in Berlin as the interface between migrant association culture, youth gangs of the neighbourhood and autonomous anti-fascist politics. Soon, Antifaşist Gençlik groups formed in several German cities and beyond. In the mid-1990s, the structures disintegrated as a result of state repression. (AK Wantok 2014). See also Chapter VI. 1.

³⁴⁴ Antifascist Revolutionary Action Berlin.

with the PKK-led Kurdish movement and held a degree of scepticism towards the movement. An ARAB activist argued:

“Funnily enough, because of our class political orientation, we tried very early to get good contacts to the communist left in Turkey ... but due to the experience with the communist groups and ... what was heard from [the Kurdish movement] was very shitty. Osman Öcalan took control, they supported the Iraq war, and it was all things that pushed us into the distance. We had stronger contacts with ... the DHKP-C of the Mahir Çayan³⁴⁵ line. We had a very bad image of the PKK, not so much because they were so nationalistic, as was the Antideutsche paradigm at that time, but rather because they were so social democratic and so capitularistic³⁴⁶ in the years before.”

Prior to the initiation of their relationship, clear boundaries were established because other Turkish organizations defined the PKK as social democratic, thus excluding it from the radical left. These ideological distinctions were expressed by ARAB based on their affiliated partners and their limited knowledge of the Kurdish movement.

However, according to radical-left activists, the presence of a direct physical threat in the form of a countermovement in their own neighbourhood led to a rapprochement with the Kurdish movement and instances of coalition formation, even though there was initially a significant ideological gap. The common enemy, the Turkish fascists, who posed a direct threat, served as the catalyst for forming relationships to confront and counteract this danger. This, however, required a concrete identification of the Turkish Bozkurts as fascists, a recognition that only a few groups within the German radical left had at this point. In this case, an *attribution of threat* was necessary for cross-movement *coalition formation* to commence. In the aftermath of these violent events, the autonomous ARAB joined the Kurdistan solidarity committee, which had been formed earlier in the same year. As the same ARAB activist reported:

“When we were reaching out to the Kurds at that time, we ignored everything we heard about them – the capitularistic and social-democratic course of the PKK. But there is a relevant youth formation which is at least accessible for social-revolutionary politics, and which could be a potential partner.”

One week after the racist attacks, a demonstration took place, attended by 2,000 activists from the Kurdish movement and 100 individuals from the German autonomous spectrum (ARAB, Antifaschistische Revolutionäre Aktion Berlin 2008). Despite their initial scepticism, ARAB became actively involved in *downplaying ideological and tactical differences*, as related by the same activists:

“Through the foundation of the Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitee, which still exists today, we got to know the Kurdish association and have [been engaged in] long-term work with the young, and then also with the older cadres ... That was different in any case, as the comrades of the DHKP-C told us about the political line. That took a long time, but within one year we came closer and closer to them. Nobody in the German left knew about Democratic Confederation. It was only then that we processed that.”

³⁴⁵ Co-founder of the Marxist-Leninist organization ‘People’s Liberation Party-Front of Turkey’ | ‘Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi’ (THKP-C).

³⁴⁶ The activist used the neologism ‘kapitularistisch’. An adjective derived from the noun capitulation.

This downplaying of differences opened the path to *political learning*. The Solidarity Committee itself acted as the source of information. Activists from different ideological currents converged in the solidarity committee, including Trotskyists, (post-) autonomous groups, and some older activists previously engaged during Phase I (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 96). Within ARAB, a collective learning process took place, drawing from the experiences of earlier solidarity structures and the knowledge of long-term activists:

“Well, we've been doing a lot of research on the conflict lately. Sources were for example articles by Nick Brauns³⁴⁷, books about the liberation movement and Kurdish websites. We also wrote our own text about the background of the Kurdistan conflict and put it on our website. The website of the ‘Informationszentrum Kurdistan’ (ISKU) is also important for up-to-date information” (ARAB, Antifaschistische Revolutionäre Aktion Berlin 2008).

During this learning process, they formulated specific goals and established connections between the situation in Kurdistan and Germany. The ‘Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitee Berlin’ aimed to address the oppression of the Kurdish movement in Turkey and Europe, arms exports, deportations, sections 129a/b, and the PKK ban. Their activities primarily focused on raising awareness, with an emphasis on reaching out to the radical left in Germany. As ARAB observed in one of its published texts,

“We want to inform about the political connections in the Kurdistan conflict in order to overcome the prejudices that many of the German left have towards the Kurdish liberation movement” (ARAB, Antifaschistische Revolutionäre Aktion Berlin 2008).

The solidarity committee expanded and positioned itself as the interface between Kurdish associations, institutions, and the broader German groups in Berlin. In sum, the formation of relationships, in this case, marked by a coalition between radical left groups and Kurdish structures, began with the perception of a threat and a downplaying of ideological disparities, facilitating a path toward a political learning process. The maintenance of this relationship pathway will be explored in Chapter VII. 3.

Selective Repression: 129b Process of Ali Ihsan Kitay

As mentioned earlier, in 2011, Ali Ihsan Kitay was arrested and subsequently sentenced to two and a half years in prison for “membership in a terrorist organization abroad” (Section 129b StGB) by the Hamburger Higher Regional Court in 2013. He was accused of holding leadership positions in several PKK regions in Germany, including Hamburg. Allegedly, he organized fundraisers, Newroz festivals, and demonstrations, but was never accused of a concrete criminal offence in Germany (Appen 2013). This repression, along with several other arrests of Kurdish activists and trials under section 129b, had significant implications not only for the Kurdish movement (since it was the first sentence against a Kurdish activist under section 129b), but also for the relationship between the radical left and Kurdish movement. One veteran internationalist remembered:

³⁴⁷ Nikolaus Brauns is a German journalist and historian. He was a research assistant to the domestic policy spokesperson of the left-wing parliamentary group under Ulla Jelpke and author of various articles and books on the Kurdish movement and the Turkish left (Brauns, Kiechle 2010; Brauns, Çakır 2018).

“There was the trial against Ali Ihsan. That was a 129b trial here in Hamburg, where young people got together and wanted to observe this trial. And actually, they had little experience. They were really very young.”

Following Kitay’s arrest, several rallies were organized outside the remand prison. These gatherings served as platforms to criticize the KCK processes in Turkey, the solitary confinement of Kitay, and section 129b. During the pre-trial period, a group called ‘ATESH – Für eine sozialrevolutionäre Perspektive’³⁴⁸ joined the existing coalition ‘Solidaritätsbündnis für Ali Ihsan Kitay’³⁴⁹, which had been formed earlier by anti-repression groups and Kurdish organizations.³⁵⁰ As one solidarity activist from Hamburg related:

“This has become more present in the time when [names] were in jail, where also Ali Ihsan had a 129b procedure in Hamburg. And some lawyer connected the [anti-repression] solidarity group ... with the Kurdish youth, because it was said that they were also doing solidarity [actions] with prisoners, because they have someone in jail here. Can't we do something together?.”

The group established contact with the Kurdish movement due to their shared experiences with repression, the internationalisation of repression by authorities, and their interactions with law enforcement agencies. It is worth noting that a lawyer acted as broker between these two youth groups which had both been affected by repression. Shortly thereafter, an *attribution of similarity* took place, as an activist from ATESH reported:

“That was the process of how our [anti-repression] solidarity group got together with them, how they met and talked. I still totally remember how we were in the [Kurdish] association for the first time, and they told us about the Neolithic and all the theories, and I asked myself the whole time why I didn't know anything about it ... Where I thought, ‘Unbelievable! They think exactly the same as we do’.”

The initiation of a relationship formation process, triggered by the initial trigger point of repression, soon gave rise to efforts to bridge the gap between the Kurdish movement and the radical left, extending beyond the scope of repression. In Hamburg, prior relationship formation had already occurred, with groups like ‘Tatort Kurdistan’ leading anti-repression efforts. However, following the repression against Kitay, the youth group ATESH developed connections with the Kurdish movement, and simultaneously expanded the mobilization structure of the solidarity movement. An activist from ATESH shared insights on this collaboration:

“We have mainly started to organize blocs together, organized demos together, but also actions in front of the SPD headquarters. What we have done a lot, where the YXK had the idea, where we said, we bring the people from the German left.”

In December 2011, around 300 activists from Kurdish youth and anti-fascist groups occupied a square opposite the ‘Rote Flora’³⁵¹ in Hamburg (Dolzer 2011). This demonstration not only highlighted the case of Ali Ihsan Kitay, but also drew attention to repression in Turkey and hunger strikes by Kurdish prisoners there which aimed at improving Abdullah Öcalan's prison conditions.

³⁴⁸ For a social revolutionary perspective; Atesh is a Turkish name and means fire.

³⁴⁹ Solidarity alliance for Ali Ihsan Kitay.

³⁵⁰ ‘antirepressionsgruppe hamburg’, ‘Ermittlungsausschuss Hamburg’, ‘Rote Hilfe’, ‘Tatort Kurdistan’, ISKU, YXK.

³⁵¹ Autonomous centre that has played an important role in Hamburg’s autonomous scene since 1989.

It was a moment where different movement cultures converged: activists chanted ‘Antifa Gençlik International’³⁵² and hooded individuals set off fireworks from the roof of the ‘Rote Flora’ (Dolzer 2011). ATESH contributed to this solidarity effort by creating graffiti at the start of the trial, merging the movement culture of the autonomous scene with the content of the Kurdish movement. They also connected Kitay’s case to larger trials of the radical left during that period.³⁵³ Leading up to the trial, the solidarity coalition organized information events, mobilized for a rally, and published a brochure.³⁵⁴ When the trial commenced, about 90 people were present in the courtroom, as related by an solidarity cadre:

“Normally, when you see these trials, nobody goes there. The prisoners are alone there a lot. But in this case, the courtroom was always full. And of course, it has an effect on Ali Ihsan. Because he asked himself, ‘Who am I that they are here?’ So first of all, a question mark: ‘What’s going on now?’ And on the other hand, he was also excited.”

During the trial, the coalition remained active by coordinating court dates, hosting information events, organizing solidarity rallies, producing reports and press releases, and staging a demonstration in Hamburg on the day that the judgement was pronounced. Unlike the ARAB, the youth group ATESH had no pre-existing perceptions and was open to forming relationships with the Kurdish youth movement in Hamburg. As a coalition, they engaged in a learning process about the repression against leftist movements in Germany, focusing on the Kurdish movement in particular. They also delved into the history and development of the PKK-led Kurdish movement. An activist from ATESH provided an assessment of the outcomes of their solidarity efforts:³⁵⁵

“I would ‘boast’ that there was such great solidarity from the radical left in Hamburg at the beginning [in Phase III], had something to do with the fact that we have prepared for this. I mean also by the coincidence that we got in contact through the repression, and someone brought us together: You have someone in jail, they also have someone in jail.”

In sum, the selective repression, including the use of extraordinary laws against the Kurdish movement in Germany played a significant role in fostering a relationship transformation with the radical left. In this case, the transformation laid the groundwork for the expansion of a solidarity movement in Phase III.

Repression and Occasional Cooperation

Despite not engaging in constant cooperation, some radical left groups, at least verbally, expressed their solidarity with the Kurdish movement during significant repression efforts by the German authorities. For instance, in September 2005, when 300 police officers searched 60 offices, private residences of journalists, and editorial offices³⁵⁶ of the Kurdish daily newspaper

³⁵² International Antifa Youth.

³⁵³ For example, the trial against Sonja Suder and Christian Gauger of the RZ and Gülaferit Ünsal from the DHKP-C.

³⁵⁴ The content of the brochure was supported “after a long, productive and intensive discussion” by all members of the coalition (Bündnis Freiheit für Ali Ihsan et al. 2012).

³⁵⁵ As a side note: Jakob Riemer, who had participated in the trials as an observer, according to his father, travelled to Kurdistan as an internationalist because of Kitay’s sentence (Meyer 2020). On the 9th July 2018, he was killed in northern Kurdistan in the Çarçella region of Gezer during a military operation by the Turkish army (Yüksekova, Cölemêrg/Hakkari province).

³⁵⁶ The premises of two Kurdish music and book publishers were also searched, as were the Mesopotamian News Agency (MHA) and Mesopotamia TV.

‘Özgür Politika’³⁵⁷, which is published in Germany. This action was in response to the reprint of the founding declaration of ‘Koma Komalên Kurdistan’ (KKK)³⁵⁸ and alleged involvement in PKK organizational structures.³⁵⁹ The autonomist, internationalist group A.L.I.³⁶⁰ from Göttingen and the anti-repression organization ‘Libertad!’³⁶¹ expressed solidarity with the newspaper and called for the ban to be lifted (A.L.I., Antifaschistische Linke International 2005).

In 2008, a joint demonstration for the freedom of political prisoners was organized by both the Kurdish movement and antifascist groups, possibly initiated by the Berlin solidarity committee. As a Kurdish activist recalled

“I think that the next big cooperation with Antifa, for example, was the first really large joint action, the demo ‘Freedom for Heval Dersim and Andrea’. It went to the jail in [the Berlin district] Moabit. In the big one sat Heval Dersim, and in the small one sat Andrea.”

Andrea was an antifascist at that time, imprisoned for several offences during demonstrations and for failing to start her imprisonment. Vakuf M., a 34-year-old, was arrested in March 2008, suspected of being a “PKK leading functionary”, and charged under section 129 and later 129b (AZADÎ e.V. 2013:44, 61). The demonstration aimed to draw connections between the repression against the PKK-led Kurdish movement, the 129b process against DHKP-C, the 129a process against the ‘militante gruppe’ (mg)³⁶² and repression against antifascists (Andreasoligruppe 2008). However, as the same Kurdish activist observed, merely demonstrating together did not lead to further relationship formation, apart from the efforts made by the Kurdistan Solidarity Committee during the preparation:

“Yes, but there were very big fears of contact. On the one hand, you heard from antifas, ‘what’s with all the ethno pop?’ ... The Kurdish youths were not taken seriously and were disqualified, while older men from the Kurdistan club spoke about the habitus of the leftists, [and] they called them ‘lumpenproletariat’. There was a large gap.”

Clearly, the joint demonstration between the radical left and the PKK-led Kurdish movement at this demonstration was not a common occurrence. The reasons for this lack of relationship formation can be attributed to differing movement cultures, particularly the racism exhibited by the radical left in Germany towards the Kurdish movement. It is important to note that this example demonstrates that relationship formation was not yet a normalized process, as it would become in Phase III.

Additionally, there appeared to be cooperation against deportations and the migration regime; however, these relationship transformations were not reported or emphasized by interviewees. Therefore, I rely here exclusively on secondary sources. For instance, on the 26th August 2008, the Kurdish association ‘Birati e.V.’³⁶³ and the ‘Karawane für die Rechte der Flüchtlinge und

³⁵⁷ Özgür Politika has been published since the 28th August 1995, with a circulation of over 10,000 copies.

³⁵⁸ Later KCK.

³⁵⁹ Shortly after, the ban on the Kurdish daily newspaper Özgür Politika was lifted by the Federal Administrative Court (Pomrehn 2005).

³⁶⁰ ‘Antifaschistische Linke International’ (A.L.I.) | ‘Antifascist Left International’. Successor of the Antifa (M).

³⁶¹ This was a group which was founded in 1993 that advocates an annual international day of struggle for the freedom of all political prisoners worldwide. The group understood internationalism to mean that in order to create this common day of struggle, diverse groups and movements had to work together on an international level.

³⁶² militant group (mg). The group was accused of 25 arson attacks from 2001 to 2009.

³⁶³ Roughly translated to fraternity (Reiber 2017).

Migrantinnen³⁶⁴ jointly organized an information stand in Bremen against the ban of the Kurdish TV station Roj TV and against German deportation policies. During this action, posters featuring the Roj TV symbol were confiscated by the police (AZADÎ e.V. 2013: 47). Often, when coalitions were formed against deportations, interactions occurred with church groups or NGOs like ‘amnesty international’ (Euler 2006). These interactions were primarily focused on individual cases rather than the decriminalization of the PKK. In 2012, the initiative ‘Bleiberecht für Ilhami Han’³⁶⁵ organized protests and public awareness campaigns against Han’s deportation to Turkey.³⁶⁶ This initiative itself reflected a denser cooperation between the Kurdish movement and the radical left, at least concerning number of coalition partners.³⁶⁷

2.1.2. Stigmatization: Non-engagement

Following the relationship break-up in the early 2000s, there was a trend towards disengagement with the Kurdish movement. The stigma associated with terrorism continued to be a concern, particularly for more moderate groups and parties who feared being labelled as terrorist supporters when working with PKK-associated structures, in some cases triggering boundary activation. As a staff member of the party ‘Die Linke’ recalled:

“The other fear was to be pushed into the terrorist corner. Which was tried again and again ... In 2008 ... von Guttenberg, who I believe sat on the Foreign Affairs Committee for the CDU, started a campaign: ‘Die Linke supports terrorist organizations’ ... Then it was said that Ulla Jelpke's anteroom would coordinate contacts with the PKK.”

The chairman of the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group in the Foreign Affairs Committee, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, went so far as to accuse that “the PKK supporting milieu reaches as far as the Bundestag Offices of Die Linke” (Solms-Laubach 2008). In light of the kidnapping of the three German climbers, the party’s parliamentary group leadership withdrew a motion for the decriminalization of the PKK, fearing the consequences of being associated with a movement resorting to such means (Musa 2008). Moreover, when activists collaborated in a coalition against the migration regime in Germany and commemorated Halim Dener, overcoming the stigmas attached to older activists from Phase I proved to be the first major obstacle in the process of relationship transformation. This point will be analysed in the following sub-chapter.

³⁶⁴ Caravan for Refugee Rights and Migrants is a network of individuals, groups and organizations of refugees, migrants and Germans based on anti-imperialism and anti-racism.

³⁶⁵ Right to stay for Ilhami Han.

³⁶⁶ The German Foreign Office claimed that the preliminary proceedings against Han in Turkey for PKK membership have been dropped and therefore would not face persecution. However, the Bavarian Office for the Protection of the Constitution suspects Han of being a PKK functionary. He has had to report to the police in Munich every day and the Turkish state is likely aware of this persecution.

³⁶⁷ A call was signed by many Kurdish organizations as well as others such as the DKP, MLPD, ‘Die Linke’, DIDF, a union youth organization, a refugee organization, and an Antifa group (Initiative „Bleiberecht für Ilhami Han“ 2012).

Phase II: National Arena

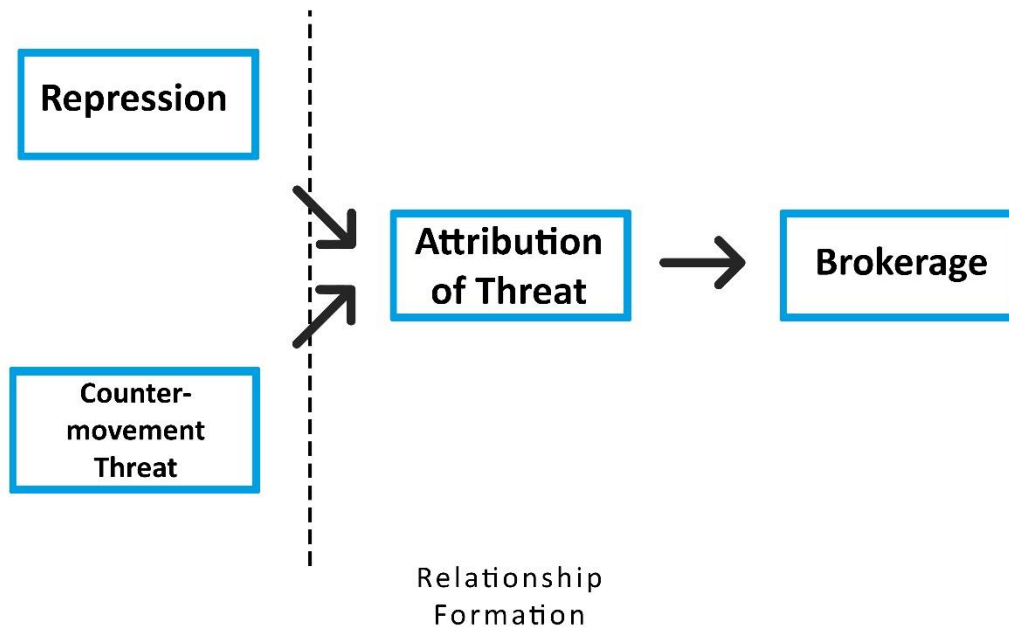


Figure 8: Diagram of Mechanisms in the National Arena in Phase II

In Phase II, despite the ongoing high and selective repression against the PKK-led Kurdish movement, there was little solidarity from the radical left in Germany in the early 2000s. AZADÎ acted as the primary institutionalized interface between the Kurdish movement and the 'Rote Hilfe'. Several factors contributed to this lack of relationship formation, including the state of disarray that the PKK-led Kurdish movement found itself in, the dissolution of previous relationships, and the constant nature of repression. The last point may appear counter-intuitive, however I argue that the constant nature of repression, without immediate escalation, seemed to lead to a sense of habituation to the repression, especially when there were no pre-existing relationships to counteract it.

The initial instances of relationship formation in the second half of the 2000s were triggered by immediate countermovement threats and the application of section 129b as a new stage of repression. In one case, the perception of a shared threat led to a downplaying of ideological differences, paving the way for relationship transformation. Towards the end of Phase II, there was a noticeable increase in radical left organizations participating in anti-repression demonstrations organized by the Kurdish movement. However, it is important to note that while repression and countermovement threats occasionally triggered relationship formation, they did not represent one of the primary pathways for relationship transformation, as was the case in Phase I.

3. Phase II: Inter-Movement Arena

The first part of this chapter deals with the low point of the Kurdistan solidarity in Germany between 2000 and 2007 along with the remaining relationship maintenance. The ideological and organizational transformation, as traced in Chapter V, is the main mechanism triggering the rapprochement between the radical left and the Kurdish movement in the second half of Phase II and Phase III. Additionally, I consider the mechanism of generation change in both the Kurdish diaspora and the radical left in Germany, creating new possibilities for relationship formation.

The second part deals with new relationship formation and maintenance in Phase II. From 2007 onwards, new Kurdistan solidarity committees formed, and later the 'Tatort Kurdistan' campaign coordinated individuals and groups of the Kurdistan solidarity movement in the making. I argue that brokerage occurred, triggered by mechanisms from the other Arenas, such as attribution of threat and transnational brokerage. The relationship formation was initially marked by coalition formation and political learning, and not an immediate attribution of similarity. After 2009, the 'Tatort Kurdistan' campaign came about and coordinated the activities of the Kurdistan Solidarity movement in the making (limited scale shift). The relationship maintenance of the coalitions and 'Tatort Kurdistan' was constituted by the sub-mechanisms of attribution of similarity and resolving tensions. Importantly, this relationship transformation set the stage for a broader solidarity movement to evolve in Phase III.

3.1. Low Point of Kurdistan Solidarity in Germany

"Then, after Öcalan's abduction, there was actually no Kurdistan solidarity for five to seven years. A few people from the 'Kurdistan Informations-Zentrum', one or two small committees, simply continued to work. These were all people, you could say, who were so involved in the movement itself that they hardly had any contacts with the German left and the radical left." (A solidarity Cadre)

In the beginning of the 2000s, there was almost no relationship transformation between the radical left and the Kurdish diaspora in Germany. The crisis and the development of the PKK from 2000 to 2005 was followed by very few people within the radical left in Germany. However, some maintained their relationship, such as ISKU, AZADÎ and 'Kurdistan Report'. Only on an individual level, the low point of Kurdistan solidarity was bridged, as a Kurdish activist remembered:

"There is no larger organization with which there has been continuous, intensive cooperation for many years. There are local initiatives, but these are individuals who have come together. There are people with whom cooperation has been going on for 10, 20 or 25 years."

The developments of the Transnational Arena set the conditions for the degree of interaction in the Inter-Movement Arena and the relationship transformation taking place in it.

3.1.1. Relationship Maintenance during the Low Point

Some solidarity structures continued their work, especially because people with closer relationships and high commitment – cadres of the solidarity movement – were organized in these structures. The focus of the solidarity work was on the realm of public relations work and anti-repression, while relationship transformation between the solidarity groups was dropped completely, since "they no longer existed in that sense ... in the early 2000s". Solidarity work was

thrown back to its beginning in the 1980s, where the main work was translation and information diffusion, as the same solidarity cadre remembered:

“We have continued to try to do public relations work and to make this process that is happening in Turkey understandable, in addition to all the anti-repression work that was going on all the time. ... Bring out news in German, daily translations on the website. So, what ANF³⁶⁸ is doing now, we had tried roughly. We also always had such an info sheet ‘Nûçe’³⁶⁹, where things were always summarized.”

‘Nûçe’ was published on Fridays with a compilation of weekly news and information from Kurdistan, Turkey, and Europe at least until 2018. Around 850 issues were produced in paper format as well as online. Moreover, ISKU engaged in mobilization and other activities. While doing so, ISKU maintained a close relationship with organizations from the Kurdish movement and especially with the women’s movement, as the same female activist described:

“We mobilized for demonstrations, but especially with the women's movement. We worked a lot with ‘Cenî’³⁷⁰ ... So, the offices worked very closely together. ‘Cenî’, the ‘Kurdistan Informations-Zentrum’³⁷¹, and the ISKU, and we always coordinated and tried to coordinate the public relations work. Whenever there were Kurdish festivals or demos, we always had stands there. We always made information booths and were contact persons for all the German-speaking people.”

The women’s structure of the Kurdish movement took the lead in transforming the Kurdish movement, and became the main point of contact for the radical left in Germany. Importantly, the remaining solidarity cadres continued their work and later diffused their knowledge and experiences to the newly forming solidarity movement.

3.1.2. Double Generation Change

During Phase II, the respondents describe a generational change, in terms of language and movement culture within the Kurdish movement in the diaspora and a generational change within the radical left too, which essentially caused a complete replacement of activist individuals over the course of one generation. Both generational changes, within the Kurdish movement and the radical left, overall provided new possibilities for relationship transformation. An older Kurdish cadre concluded:

“Above all, the fact that Kurds mastered the German language, who grew up here, have been socialized here, naturally have a completely different way of dealing with Germans than the generation of my father, who could not articulate themselves ... So, on the one hand there is a change, but also in the German left, this generation changed. This of course brings them all closer together.”

On the one hand, there is a generational change in the Kurdish diaspora, which brought forth a generation that speaks German and was partly socialized in the German left. One younger Kurdish cadre assessed:

³⁶⁸ Ajansa Nûçeyan a Firatê | Firatnews Agency.

³⁶⁹ Nûçe translates to News.

³⁷⁰ ‘CENÎ - Kurdisches Frauenbüro für Frieden’ | ‘CENÎ - Kurdish Women's Office for Peace’ was formed in 1999.

³⁷¹ KIZ | Kurdistan Information Center.

“So, I know what to say when I want to bring a Kurdish person onto the street. And I also know what I have to say when I want to bring a German person onto the street. So, I grew up in these two worlds.”

So, in contrast to Phase I, the Kurdish diaspora of Phase II produced more brokers who had contacts in the radical left, had forged friendships and had also acquired the knowledge about the new paradigm. Another cadre from the Kurdish movement argued:

“But in the 1990s it was often the case that many left-wingers showed interest here, but the counterpart was missing a bit, people from the Kurdish side who could discuss the content with them. These were isolated people at that time. ... Nowadays, there are many people of Kurdish origin who are in the Kurdish movement, but also have good contacts with the German left, are also partly in there, in both movements. They can represent well. They can lead discussions well. There are significantly more than 20 years ago. ... And there is such a base of younger people, who have also forged friendships with each other. The likelihood that more will come of it is greater.”

Additionally, the translation problems no longer existed to the extent that the previous solidarity relationship had been hampered. Translation work still was crucial and the daily work in the relationship transformation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement. However, more activists from the Kurdish movement in the diaspora could speak German and Turkish or Kurdish at native speaker or fluent level. Consequently, the number of potential brokers, who were able to build new linkages rose. On the other side, due to Erasmus programs and Turkish courses at schools in Germany (Hedtke 2013), the number of radical left activists who could at least communicate on a basic level in Turkish was rising slightly as well.

On the other hand, there is a generational change and a generational gap within the radical left in Germany. One long-term activist in the radical left assessed:

“You have to realize that, at least within the left here in Berlin, I would say in Germany, there was also a break. So, there are very few people who come from the 1990s. So, there is a gap. In certain age groups, they are really few. So now mine [around 60] anyway, not at all. But it's not like 40-year-olds, 50-year-olds who were also active in the past are now so present. ... So those who joined younger, they obviously have a different relationship to Kurdistan than from my history. ... They don't have this demarcation or this phobia that existed before.”

Firstly, the time spent in radical left-wing groups, especially in the autonomous and antifascist groups, is short. In most cases, the length of active participation in the groups is limited to the period of schooling and, more often, studying between the age of 20 and 30, while some groups are able to maintain a longer membership (Haunss 2008: 509). I argue that there is a generational change of the radical left which consists of many short cohort changes or, in other words: within the radical left there is a high fluctuation within the (post-)autonomous groups. Importantly, besides party structures such as PDS/'Die Linke', DKP, SAV or MLPD, or other groups such as the 'Rote Hilfe' and the anarcho-syndicalist FAU, there are hardly any larger, especially super regional radical left-wing organizations that have existed for more than 15 years (Peters 2014: 684–702). As mentioned in Chapter IV, some groups of the post-autonomous movement such as 'FeLS', 'Avanti' and 'Libertad!' announced their merge into the 'Interventionistische Linke' in Phase II and were able to establish a certain continuity.

Besides the direct diffusion and educational work later done by long term solidarity activists, the high fluctuation led much of the movement's knowledge to be forgotten, as a radical left activist assessed: "The radical left in Germany often failed to pass on certain themes or to preserve its own history". Even between the generations of a (radical left) family, the knowledge was not transmitted. An activist reported of his father, who closely worked with the Kurdish movement in Phase I, and the activist only got to know the Kurdish movement by chance in Phase II. Meanwhile, the previous relationships and boundary activations, along with the stigmatisation, were partially forgotten too. One long-term solidarity activist assessed that "a healthier cooperation was then possible. ... These scepticisms were then no longer present in the newer generation of younger antifa activists." In contrast, one Kurdish cadre argued that "the prejudices still exist. It's not like they've just been erased. But for the first time, they're saying, ok 'we have to look at what's happening now'". While the generational change brought on more possibilities for the relationship between the radical left, the generation change meant an almost complete generational gap for the Kurdistan solidarity movement. Much of the knowledge, discussions, and strategies, which were developed before, were only accessible for the generation to come by the few long-term activists. One of these solidarity cadres traced the process:

"There was once a break of almost 10 years where very few people have followed. ... There's a whole generation missing. And then came a new momentum, where many people came ... who were quite curious and quite open to an internationalist movement."

In sum, there was a new generation of radical left activists, who were open for internationalism in general and the Kurdish movement with the new paradigm in particular and who were, however, also lacking the experiences of the past phase of internationalist practice with Kurdistan. Overall, it can be said that the generational change in the Kurdish diaspora and in the radical left in Germany has created new opportunities for relationship transformation.

3.2. Relationship Formation and Relationship Maintenance

In the beginning of Phase II, relationship transformation from the Kurdish movement in respect to organizations from Germany, was not to be found in the radical left, but rather in respect to NGOs or movement organizations on specific issues, such as ecological movements. As sketched in Chapter VII. 1., with the declaration of the new paradigm, the anti-systemic forces worldwide became the strategic partners to the Kurdish movement. This statement applies equally for the radical left in Germany. One Kurdish cadres explained:

"If we take up the left as something broader – radical left, traditional left to political parties and initiatives – then for the Kurdish liberation movement, the left is the strategic partner here [in Germany]. But beyond that [the Kurdish movement] also meets with more liberal [groups] and others or also sometimes leads projects, but we like to do that with the left."

However, from 2000 until 2007, the strategic partners were not available for relationship transformation, due to the previous relationship break-up. Nevertheless, the ideological and organizational transformation of the PKK-led Kurdish movement was the main trigger for new relationship transformation processes, as a young Kurdish cadre argued:

"Especially in Northern Kurdistan, in Turkey, what is now actually known as Rojava, is being built up: This model of council structures and this new wind has also spurred development here [in Germany]."

The prerequisite for a new solidarity movement to form was the ideological transformation mechanism within the Kurdish movement and their efforts to form relationships. From 2007 onwards, new solidarity groups formed, delegation trips were organized, and campaigns were carried out. With the Amed Camp in 2009 and the Rojava Revolution in 2012, the solidarity movement got new pushes from the Transnational Arena, as the same activist described:

“Kurdistan local groups formed in the cities, and in a phase from 2009 to 2014 to Kobanê, the ‘Tatort Kurdistan’ was active. From the beginning of the Syrian civil war there were more discussions again, but of course also on a small scale. And then just again the climax and a new phase, you can say, actually with the Revolution in Rojava, 2014 with Kobanê, where quite a lot of new things have emerged.”

The slowly growing solidarity movement in Phase II was able to form relationships between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany, which provided the relational infrastructure for the ‘explosion’ of the solidarity movement in Phase III. In the next part, I will trace examples of brokerage which were not already mentioned in the other arenas. Most parts are based on the interviewees and documents and are often in great congruence with each other. Therefore, if not otherwise indicated, I consider the argument as robust.

3.2.1. Brokerage: A slow growing Movement

Similar to the transnational brokerage, brokerage occurred after 2005 until the end of Phase II. I will summarize the mechanism in the first part, along different repertoires, such as the translation of books, establishment of public relations institutions on the part of the Kurdish movement as well as failed attempts of brokerage. Some relationships were triggered by repression, some by transnational brokerage, and other by being active in the same city. Importantly, I argued that in contrast to Phase I, where brokerage was marked by an attribution of similarity within the anti-imperialist movement, the brokerage mechanism in Phase II was marked first by coalition formation and then by political learning. The political learning sub-mechanisms often took place in the established coalitions. Only thereafter, the attribution of similarity took place in the stage of relationship maintenance. I will trace these sub-mechanisms along Kurdistan solidarity committees and a broader coalition concerned with the death of Halim Dener.

From 2005 onwards, the Kurdish movement slowly tried to get the news of the paradigm transformation out to the progressive left worldwide. In Germany, this was mainly done by the Kurdish organizations themselves and the few remaining solidarity structures and activists. The new paradigm not only needed to be transmitted, but also translated before that. Since most of the work that laid the foundation of the paradigm change was written in Turkish by Öcalan, the books needed to be translated into different languages and needed to be published. A member of ‘International Initiative Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan’, who did much of the translational work:

“And I had the impression that this discussion ... in Kurdistan was so far advanced and that in Germany or in Europe simply no one has noticed. And therefore, I have suggested, I would like to create further books, thus translating from the materials to transport this discussion and to make a discussion possible. And that fits well as part of this ‘International Initiative’,

because there was also the effort to simply make known [Öcalan] peace efforts and him as the key figure.”

However, the Kurdish movement struggled to diffuse their content into the broader left. Some currents of the radical left already engaged in boundary activation before, and there were problems to overcome the stigmatisation from the previous phase. The same activist continued:

“And I had the experience when I was in Berlin in 2004, there was the ‘Linke Buchtage’³⁷² in the Mehringhof and the partner publishers didn't put the books on the table, because they think: ‘No, Öcalan, that's... – no idea what they exactly said – ‘Stalinist’ or something. ‘We don't sell it’. It was a book from their partner publishing house, and they also had it in the box. But they just didn't get it out of the box and put it on the table. It was an unbelievable ignorance, prejudice, no idea, disinterest.”

The initiative had problems to find publishers,³⁷³ and the books were mainly published through a Kurdish publishing house. In general, the activist assessed that “there was a really long dry spell from 2000 until the beginning of 2011 or so.”

One Kurdish activist sketched the slowly developing brokerage triggered within the radical left in Germany by the news of the ideological transformation:

“I could say that from 2008 onwards, interest increased ... There were various radical leftists, autonomists, antifascists. Then, slowly, libertarian communists, communalists, anarchists, some of them began to show interest. Parallel to that also the Antideutsche, individual ones. Then also individual groups like MLPD, DKP, so traditionally leftists, it began slowly. It started when the movement became stronger, and when it became more intense in Kurdistan. For the first groups, it was related to the concept, for the anarchists or the Antideutsche, for the others it was more for pragmatic reasons.”

Importantly, the activists argued that in different currents in the radical left, different sub-mechanisms occurred: attribution of similarity, with the more libertarian currents and attribution of opportunity with the communist left. However, I argue that no immediate attribution of similarity or opportunity took place, as was the case with the anti-imperialist in Phase I, when they received the news that the PKK-led Kurdish movement struggled as a national liberation movement against imperialism. In contrast, in Phase II, the brokerage between the Kurdish movement and the radical left was rather marked by political learning – often taking place within coalitions. Democratic Confederalism, a completely new ideology for the radical left in Germany, needed to be understood, seen in practice, converted into its own writings and reports. Importantly, from the National and Transnational Arena, we already know that a certain scepticism towards the Kurdish movement existed, which needed to be overcome.

With the Amed Camp in 2009 and with more solidarity groups and committees forming, the task to diffuse the knowledge about the ideological transformation was increasingly taken over by solidarity structures such as ‘Tatort Kurdistan’, as an activist argued: “The paradigm shift has already taken place. I do believe that it is now a matter of spreading the ideological processes or the writings and the declarations of the KCK.” However, with the practical implementation of Democratic Confederalism in the Rojava Revolution, the Kurdish movement intensified their

³⁷² Left book days. A cross-currents book and discussion fair.

³⁷³ The first publisher of Gilgamesh's Heirs, who translated texts by Mumia Abu-Jamal into German, did publish Öcalan, because Öcalan was a prisoner writing from death row, Mumia Abu-Jamal. However, the publishing house later went bankrupt unrelatedly.

public relationship work as well as, and institutionalized brokers were formed such as 'Civaka Azad'.

Before highlighting coalitions, who became themselves brokers, I want to emphasize that not all attempts of brokerage did necessarily create successful relationship formation. As mentioned in the Transnational Arena, transnational broker Ellen Jaedicke, tried to bring the concept of Democratic Confederalism into a radical left group called 'Avanti – Projekt undogmatische Linke'³⁷⁴. Her aim was to link both movements:

“Once, Ellen prepared an evening on Democratic Confederalism. It was important for her to introduce this concept. She has always tried to connect these structures: in terms of content and organization.” (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 122)

However, the attempt to ideologically and organizationally bridge the movements failed, as a member of 'Avanti' remembers:

“This was really difficult, because the structure of the Kurdish association was really ancient and also sometimes really annoying and sluggish, while 'Avanti' could not really look beyond its own nose. In the end, the Kurds never participated out of intrinsic interest in actions that didn't have something to do with Kurdish things, while 'Avanti' didn't really see the specific situation of the Kurdish people in Berlin and was very much stuck in its own logic.” (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 122)

Whether the assessments of the Kurdish association and 'Avanti' correspond to the truth is not verifiable here, however, in any case a relationship transformation did not materialize, apart from Jaedicke's efforts as a broker.

Roughly summarized, the Kurdish movement spent the first half of the 2000s on the ideological transformation and the second half on a more or less successful brokerage with the radical left, including the transmission of the new paradigm. From 2009 onwards, the transmission of the new paradigm was being received more strongly within the radical left in Germany.

[Coalition Formation and Political Learning](#)

In the following part, I will present two coalitions between the radical left and the Kurdish movement in Phase II, one in the form of a broader event coalition and one in the form of a Kurdistan solidarity committee. I will highlight that within the coalition, first, a political learning took place with no immediate attribution of similarity, and that the coalition themselves took on a brokerage role.

Kurdistan-Solidaritätskomitee Berlin

Different Kurdistan solidarity committees formed in Phase II, whereas the Berlin one was the first. The starting point of the solidarity committee Berlin was the attribution of threat, however, soon thereafter the relationship transformed, and other mechanisms of relationship maintenance became salient. Firstly, the coalition itself became a broker, while secondly, a political learning mechanism developed within the coalition, which will be discussed below.

³⁷⁴ 'Avanti – Project Undogmatic Left'. 'Avanti' can be characterized with the label 'post-autonomous', and later merged into the IL.

The 'Kurdistan-Solidaritätskomitee Berlin' consisted of individuals and groups of different currents of the radical left as well as a few Kurdish activists. An elected coordination was able to make decisions at a short notice between meetings and also acted as spokesperson (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 97). Later, the committee became part of 'Tatort Kurdistan'. The solidarity committee tried to become an institutionalized broker between the radical left and the Kurdish movement, as one long-term activist explained:

“So, we actually had a double goal: we said we actually want to be a link between the radical – and also the less radical – left in Germany and especially in Berlin on the one hand and the Kurdish movement on the other. We want to overcome the dilemma that in Kurdish demonstrations there are mostly only Kurds and maybe a few Turkish communists. The other way around, the Kurds living here, they don't only have the problem of Kurdistan, ... but all the points that we otherwise deal with as a radical left, are actually also issues that Kurdish migrants should also address. ... Our goal is that the Kurdish movement and the Kurds living here also participate more in such activities. But we also told the friends³⁷⁵ that you would also have success with that, you could also bring your topics there.”

The bridging idea of the solidarity committee was that by forming coalitions between the Kurdish movement and the radical left groups, both movements will profit from the relationship: on the one hand, the Kurdish movement could diffuse their ideology into the radical left and create solidarity with the struggle in Kurdistan, on the other hand, the radical left could expand their mobilization base.

Concretely, the bridging work of the committee consisted of the publishing of dates of actions of the Kurdish movement in advance on leftist websites, in order to attract people from the radical left to join the solidarity actions. “Before, one could not notice anything about an upcoming Kurdish demonstration, because the date was only communicated in the Kurdish community” (ARAB, Antifaschistische Revolutionäre Aktion Berlin 2008). In 2008, one member of ARAB assessed:

“We like to engage with Kurdish youth on the Kurdish question, but we also expect them to participate in our actions against Nazis and social cuts. This is already working to some extent. Last year, for example, about 20 Kurdish young people took part in the Silvio Meier memorial demonstration³⁷⁶ and also in actions on the 8th of March.” (ARAB, Antifaschistische Revolutionäre Aktion Berlin 2008)

In contrast, a member of the solidarity committee evaluated that the relationship work was only being carried out one-sidedly. This tension will be discussed below. The solidarity committee engaged in the production of information and mobilization material, in the organization of information events, as well as in the mobilization for demonstrations and rallies. For example, activists from the 'Kurdistan-Solidaritätskomitee Berlin' helped to create the brochure 'Demokratische Autonomie in Nordkurdistan'³⁷⁷ (Tatort Kurdistan 2012). Through already active groups in the solidarity committee, information material for the radical left in Germany was produced and provided the possibility for political learning. The Berlin solidarity committee engaged in discussion and learning processes, which already started soon after its formation. One

³⁷⁵ “Freunde” as the German translation of Hevals.

³⁷⁶ See Chapter VIII. 3.

³⁷⁷ Democratic Autonomy in Northern Kurdistan.

activist, who was often a speaker at information events, talked about the repetition of the political learning in different parts of the radical left:

“You could do five events and people would still come up to you again and again, “what, they don't want a nation-state?”. Again and again, starting from scratch. But that was good, to be able to convey the practical experiences from Northern Kurdistan.”

Reports from delegation trips became of interest and the frequently alluded to brochure on Democratic Autonomy, was mentioned by other activists as one of the first sources of education about the ideological transformation of the Kurdish movement.

The outcome of this relationship work was that the solidarity committee increasingly became a central broker in Berlin, as an older solidarity activist assessed: “Our committee and the [Kurdish] movement are now seen as legitimate parts of the left and radical left of Berlin. I see that as a great success.” On an individual level, the solidarity committee also created solidarity activists, as one interviewee traced his own path into the solidarity movement, by social ties with activists from the ‘Kurdistan-Solidaritätskomitee Berlin’.

Kampagne Halim Dener

Occasionally, in different cities, cross-movement coalition formation took place between the radical left in Germany and the Kurdish movement from the end of the 2000s onwards. These coalitions often touched the Kurdish question but were combined with other issues such as migration or repression. One example of the cross-movement coalition is the ‘Halim Dener Kampagne’³⁷⁸ starting in 2013 in Hanover.

In the first part of Phase II, the Kurdish movement had been holding small memorial rallies on the anniversary of Dener’s death, but were reaching only people from the diaspora. As the starting point of the campaign, several reasons were mentioned by different sources, such as spatial proximity and repression. On the occasion of the 20th death day of Dener, a coalition formed beforehand, as a young Kurdish activist remembered:

“In 2013, we built up the Halim Dener campaign in Hanover, built up with a lot of radical left-wing autonomous groups from Hanover and around. ... I can still remember the first session. We have come together to talk about, okay, Halim Dener has been murdered, about police violence, flight, and various other subjects. We are all d’accord with these issues. And then we had a completely different discussion. Is the [Kurdish] Movement still Marxist-Leninist? And is the movement still the movement of the late '90s? We had trouble with that.”

Despite the predefined issue on which the coalition was based, the Kurdish movement itself was the subject of the first discussions. The same activist continued:

“This discussion started with them saying: ‘Actually, we know who the Kurds are, and we know that they are a movement. We know that they were organizing.’ ... In the end, they still had those pictures from the highways in mind, the images that are actually in the media. ... Really uncritically adopted. And we were so stunned.”

The formation of cross-movement relationships usually does not start without any information of the respective other. Here, the history of the relationship, even though the relationship had

³⁷⁸ Halim Dener Campaign. For Halim Dener see Chapter VI. 2.

been interrupted or broken-up before, could and did re-emerge. The outcome of the generational change mechanism can be enlightening two distinct ways:

“There were really two people sitting there, talking about how, after Halim Dener was murdered, they worked with the Kurds. And then came new, young people. ... And it was just interesting to see this development. Not only this development from the new generation, but that they, [the old generation], have not noticed ... that from the beginning of 2000 within the Kurdish movement ... a radical ideological change took place. And they completely missed that.”

In the radical left in Germany, there was a generational change that replaced almost the entire active community. Only a few persons remained as individual continuity and the “two persons”, brought their (partly) negative experiences into the coalition. As the same Kurdish activists recollected:

“There were two people who organized the demonstration at that time, two or three days after Halim Dener was murdered. They talked about the case and the difficulties they had in working with the association and how it just didn't work out.”

The dynamic of this relationship in the 1990s and the break-up and the negative experience that arose from that relationship, was still active after almost 20 years. This led the stigmatisation and negative experiences of relationship transformation produced in the 1990s to enter the coalition at the end of Phase II. Importantly, the previous interaction did not lead to mutual observation, not even at a distance. Rather, according to the interviewee, the activists took no notice of the transformation in the Kurdish movement. On the other hand, there was the new generation, which had no previous interaction with the Kurdish movement, as the same Kurdish activist continued:

“And everyone else was new. All others would have heard only maybe Halim Dener and Kurds, Kurdish movement. But about what that means, they had no information at all.”

Yet, this non-interaction and almost non-existent knowledge about the Kurdish movement didn't lead the new generation to enter the coalition without the scepticism towards the Kurdish movement. The same Kurdish activist continues:

“We thought that we have made the decision: ‘yes, we want to get organized’. But there was such crass scepticism that it was so difficult for me. This is just generally the case in Germany: The difficulty that one is so sceptical towards other organizations If we are talking about the same topic and are critical of it, there should be a common basis, that we trust each other and a base for our organization to collaborate. But there just wasn't.”

The reoccurring expression of mistrust could potentially trigger the break-up of a relationship. In contrast, in this case, the coalition was maintained by *political learning*, as the same Kurdish activist argued:

“It took a very long time. We really spent the first few sessions just talking about what the movement is, what we do, who we are. And it took us a long time to establish a base like this. And after that it just came about that we did something practical together, even beyond the theory. And I can say that our contact still exists today. We simply started again, started differently.”

In this case, the first step of the political learning sub-mechanism was the education on the history of the Kurdish movement, the ideological transformation, and its practical implementation. This political learning paved the way for a practical collaboration on the actual topic of the coalition: the discussion, politicisation, remembrance and scandalisation of the death of Halim Dener. The same Kurdish activist assessed:

“I can already say that by coming together not only on the practical level, but also by discussing the content, we have been able to make a new beginning in Hanover. It may be that before individuals have discussed it, but in such a form of organization with the different groups in Hanover it was the start in 2013.”

Finally, the coalition was able to create a campaign and mobilize for a first demonstration. Mobilization, demonstrations, and actions were planned with groups from Hanover, Hamburg and Göttingen in regular preparatory meetings. Beyond (post-)autonomous groups, also different regional anti-racist groups, such as ‘Flüchtlingsrat Niedersachsen’ and the ‘Oury Jalloh Initiative’³⁷⁹, joined the coalition, as well as local groups of parties such as ‘Die Linke’, the Green Party and ‘Die Partei’³⁸⁰. The coalition was able to create a frame which connected groups along the biography of Halim Dener, the colonial oppression in Kurdistan, the migration regime, the repression against the Kurdish movement in Germany and the impunity for police officers. In fact, the translated title of the first demonstration was: “Halim Dener: tortured. fled. banned. shot. – Away with the PKK ban!”. In the mobilization for the demonstration, 17 information and discussion events on the contents of the campaign took place in various cities – in Mainz even a mobilization demonstration with 150 participants (Kampagne Halim Dener 2014). In 2014, 20 years after the murder of Halim Dener, a demonstration with at least 1,000 participants went through Hanover, with support of 53 organizations from a broad left spectrum. During the demonstrations, banned symbols of the Kurdish movement were shown and “a sense of collectivity and solidarity under repression created” (Kampagne Halim Dener 2020: 207). In retrospective the campaign assessed, that

“despite different demonstration cultures and a lack of experience in joint political work, German and Kurdish leftists succeeded in putting together an action that was strong in terms of content, large in number, and attracted a lot of public attention.” (Kampagne Halim Dener 2020: 208)

The successful campaign continued after the demonstration, even though initially, “no one was thinking of launching a multi-year campaign” (Kurdistan Report 2020). The development of this coalition will be summarized in the discussion of Phase III. In sum, before this cross-movement coalition could be started, a longer political learning process needed to take place in which the scepticism against the Kurdish movement could be overcome.

What is missing until this point, concerning political learning, is the intensity of some educational initiatives. For such a process, I want to give the following two examples: Firstly, in the solidarity committee in Berlin there were discussions about internationalism and internationalist practice which resulted in a discussion event entitled “Internationalism in the 21st Century” developing

³⁷⁹ ‘Refugee Council of Lower Saxony’ and the ‘Oury Jalloh Initiative’. Oury Jalloh burnt to death in a prison cell on 7th January 2005, probably set on fire by policemen. The initiative fights for justice for Oury Jalloh and other similar cases.

³⁸⁰ ‘Die Partei’ is a satire party.

theses for a 'new internationalism' (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 117). Secondly, an international women's academy was supposed to be implemented in 2011 in the Meyda defence areas, with the goal of forming a revolutionary and feminist organization in Germany.³⁸¹ However, the nationwide preparation group in Germany did not manage to create a delegation, partly due to the fragmentation of the feminist movement between different ideologies and generations, different commitments, clandestinity and the corresponding lack of transparency. Nevertheless, the group continued to meet, educate themselves, and discuss the idea of a nationwide organization. The meetings were alternately prepared by the respective sides, and joint discussion took place:

"They dealt with fundamental texts of the women's movement, used their own biographies to pass on the history of the women's movement to the younger generation, or discussed current issues." (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 145)

In Berlin a series of discussion and education events was organized in 2012 with the question of a feminist organization in solidarity with the Kurdish women's movement, and in Hamburg, a regional meeting transformed into a seminar series in 2015. The political learning let many of the participants to engage in one way or the other in Kurdistan solidarity:

"We did not succeed in travelling to Kurdistan as a large group or even in creating a new structure. Nevertheless, a good cooperation has developed on many levels, often local or topic-related ... Some are part of WDR³⁸², some do educational work or research within the framework of Jineoloji." (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 145)

Even though the political learning mechanism was not triggering a coalition formation in Phase II, such a formation finally did occur during the relationship transformation process. The attribution of similarity was not the main trigger of relationship transformation, but the radical left first needed to learn about the new paradigm within the Kurdish movement. Importantly, the political learning mechanisms occurred only unidirectional from the Kurdish movement to the radical left, while learning mechanisms about the radical left were not reported in the Kurdish movement.

3.2.3. Limited Scale Shift: Tatort Kurdistan

In the following, I will trace the limited scale shift along the example of 'Tatort Kurdistan' as the central national campaign in which the solidarity movement with Kurdistan coordinated its action in Phase II. Importantly, I argue that within 'Tatort Kurdistan', the attribution of similarity took place with the struggle of the Kurdish movement when later the ideology of Democratic Confederalism came to the forefront. In the end of this section, I will summarize the resolving tension mechanism of both relationship formation and maintenance. A younger Kurdish cadre summarized the start:

"In 2009, activists from Germany went to the Amed Camp. Dozens of them. And came back, thought about what could do and then founded the 'Tatort Kurdistan' campaign."

'Tatort Kurdistan' was an expression of the rapprochement of the radical left in Germany and the Kurdish movement. The Amed youth camp led to an exchange between the European and

³⁸¹ See Transnational Arena II.

³⁸² Women Defend Rojava. See Chapter VIII. 3.

Kurdish participants, especially about the concept of Democratic Confederalism. 'Tatort Kurdistan' was founded in early 2010 (Civaka Azad 2017a). When the idea of 'Tatort Kurdistan' was developed, discussion arose around the kind of solidarity one wanted to develop, as a solidarity activist remembered:

"We understand ourselves as persons, here locally, which those crimes do not pass without leaving a trace, who can identify with the struggle. We want to go away from a paternalistic 'we help you' as in historical solidarity movements, but that refers to exchange. One is in a dialogue but refers to certain basic values and then tries ... to develop oneself further based on them."

Here, the *attribution of similarity*, was explicitly mentioned as the identification with the struggle in Kurdistan. The solidarity work was conceptualized by the activists of 'Tatort Kurdistan' as dialogue and exchange in (perceived) contrast to the solidarity to Kurdistan of the past. This conceptualization is noteworthy as the discussion on the forms of solidarity were advanced for a new solidarity movement in the making. Among other things, this discussion came about due to the fact that the solidarity cadres took over the transmission and education of the new activists who created 'Tatort Kurdistan', as an activist mentioned:

"And for the German left, a number of older people are still there, which is good, because they can transfer their experience. A lot of knowledge can be passed on, and also an attitude towards certain things. You put things in a different perspective, when you have the history and people, who were there during the formation, who have gained experience, who can speak from a different time."

The solidarity concept included dialogue and activities between the Kurdish movement and radical left groups, without the latter necessarily becoming a solidarity group with Kurdistan. Consequently, the question arose, how to integrate new groups and individuals, when one does not want to organize as solidarity committees for Kurdistan. A long-term solidarity cadre:

"The discussion was to make a campaign about the German participation in the war in Kurdistan. There is a point where everyone can behave, in their structures in which they work. And we thought, okay, Kurdistan is the Tatort³⁸³, these are the areas where we can fight the German participation in the war, the arms exports. Then against the Ilisu dam project, where it was also about connecting the ecological struggles. Then the anti-repression work. And then to organize that more as a campaign, so that we can call to action days, the groups act, without having to organize now as Kurdistan solidarity. That was again the difference to before. It was about organizing more openly."

Within this coordination different groups, initiatives and associations came together and discussed, evaluated, and planned new campaigns and actions. 'Tatort Kurdistan' worked as a nationwide campaign, which meant that there were no further substructures or formal restrictions. Everyone was invited to participate, whether as an individual or as part of an organization or group. Actively involved were the older solidarity organizations (e.g., ISKU, 'Kurdistan Report' and AZADÎ), Kurdish organizations (YXK, NAV-DEM, 'Civaka Azad', CENÎ), newer solidarity structures, but also various local groups and individuals. For example, the 'Kurdistan-Solidaritätskomitee Berlin' was part of 'Tatort Kurdistan'. Additionally, there were local meetings

³⁸³ Scene of crime.

and cafés organized under the label (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 115). The organizations associated with the campaign were free to plan activities and carry them out under the label 'Tatort Kurdistan'. This loose coordination on the one hand provided many groups an easy access, but on the other hand, the coordinating task remained mostly with the initiating circle, as the long-term activist remembered:

“So more have participated in the days of action. That was a possibility for many to act.
But there weren't so many groups who actually put their work into it. It was more the old circle and a few younger people. So, there were always some who participated as a Tatort group, but most of them were groups that had their own neighbourhood work or whatever.”

In contrast to the institutionalized coalition process by the ISKU in Phase I, the work by 'Tatort Kurdistan' was looser, which is why the term limited scale shift is used, in order to differentiate between the intensity of the coordination between Phase I and II. A young solidarity activist mentioned:

“There is no nationwide coordination. There is no person responsible for nationwide coordination. There is a meeting, what then decides okay, who is preparing the next meeting? Of course, there are people who have more responsibility and less.”

About once³⁸⁴ a year, a nationwide meeting of 'Tatort Kurdistan' took place to jointly define and prioritize themes, campaigns, and activities. The actual practice of 'Tatort Kurdistan' included the following tasks: preparation and supply of mobilization and information material, the organizing of delegation trips to Kurdistan, the implementation of information events, publication of brochures and books, organization of conferences and congresses, mobilization of local and nationwide demonstrations, public relation, and conduction of campaigns. Initially, 'Tatort Kurdistan' framed the Kurdish question in Turkey as an issue, in which the German government and German capital were deeply involved. This emphasis on the German involvement reflected in various campaigns initiated by 'Tatort Kurdistan' in Phase II.³⁸⁵ However, the focus of 'Tatort Kurdistan' shifted over time, as a solidarity activist argued:

“Yes, it evolved. In the beginning, it was more about saying what crimes happen. And now it's more: The Tatort is on the one hand a crime scene in a negative sense, but on the other hand in a positive sense [a place of action].³⁸⁶ And connected with it is the idea that not only crimes happen there, or they lead a defensive struggle, but that something is also built up.”

'Tatort Kurdistan' informed about and promoted the model of Democratic Federalism as a democratic, ecological and gender-libertarian concept of society as being implemented in Bakûr and Rojava. At some point, the attribution of similarity with the Democratic Federalism became salient within the campaign and educational work and information distribution became a core task of 'Tatort Kurdistan', as the same activist argued:

³⁸⁴ On an information flyer from 'Tatort Kurdistan' it is said, that there are three of those nationwide meetings, however, none of the interviews or other sources speak of more than one (e.g. Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 116).

³⁸⁵ The campaign 'Demokratie hinter Gittern' | 'Democracy Behind Bars' dealt with the KCK process from 2009 in order to create publicity for this in Germany. A conference was organized on the topic of 'Globalized Warfare - Geostrategic Interests of the FRG in Kurdistan' in 2011. There was an action day on the occasion of anti-war day 2014 against arms exports to Turkey and the NATO cooperation and 'Tatort Kurdistan' supported campaigns against the PKK-ban, such as 'PKK? Na Klar!' | 'PKK? Of course!' (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022, S. 115).

³⁸⁶ The German word Tatort usually refers to a crime scene but can literally be understood as a place of action.

“But of course, it's also about saying, this is something that should be discussed. The texts of Abdullah Öcalan, but also the statements of the movement itself. We try of course also to be ambassadors. ... We have the opinion that it makes sense to orient oneself at the ideology of the Kurdish freedom movement, and not wallow oneself in the lack of perspective or the own theory. There is something discussable.”

The relationship between the radical left and the Kurdish movement slowly coalesced, when the (mutual) political learning process intensified. The focus of ‘Tatort Kurdistan’ shifted from 2014 onwards from Bakûr towards Rojava, but without forgetting the former.

Resolving Tensions: Kreuzberg or Kurdistan?

Interestingly, throughout the campaign of ‘Tatort Kurdistan’, only a few tensions were mentioned, which is probably due to the open character of the relationship maintenance. However, exactly this low level of commitment and resources put into the coordination was also the point perceived as a problem by activists. Also, within other coalitions, the ‘here versus there’ tension resurfaced, in the form of expected mutuality within the relations and following tensions between an imbalance of strategy of internationalist solidarity and other social struggles in the local places in Germany. Secondly, the tensions around critique and affirmation reappeared too.

I will exemplify these tensions mainly in the case of Kurdistan committee in Berlin, but similar tensions were mentioned by interviewees for other relationships. Groups like ARAB engaged with the Kurdish movement, with the expectation of equivalent interchange and cooperation: “But we do not see solidarity as a one-way street, either.” (ARAB, Antifaschistische Revolutionäre Aktion Berlin 2008). The ARAB formulated an expectation of mutuality and checked such mutuality in the participation in demonstrations and other events of the respective other. The claim, to participate also in social struggles in Europe, was also announced by the Kurdish movement and also from members of the Executive Council of the KCK:

“Whether joint discussions, education, or protests in the streets [in Europe] – they are all part of the common struggle ... We have already given clear mandates to all the structures of the movement. All of our structures have been tasked with organizing these types of events and happenings on a regular basis themselves, supporting them when needed, and participating in them ... We have decided that we will participate in all these events and not only in those that are directly related to Kurdistan.” (Altun 2019: 48)

Frequently, solidarity activists assessed, however, that only a few Kurdish activists took part in events or demonstrations of the radical left. Criticism was announced by solidarity activists in all phases, that Kurdish activists did not engage enough in other struggles, on the basis of the expectation that the solidarity relations are mutual. One solidarity activist assessed:

“I would say that we have partially succeeded. Participating in Kurdish demonstrations, there are now more German or internationalist leftists there. Conversely, it is still very difficult.”

In retrospective, one activist from ARAB assessed the relationship transformation as following:

“And from then on more and more it turned around, instead of what is still needed on the ground today, a reasonable social-revolutionary district policy in Kreuzberg ..., the relationship has turned around exactly. The ARAB has made more and more Kurdistan policy over time.”

The activist from ARAB claimed that the group did more solidarity work than actually intended. The strategy that ARAB had in mind – to push for a social-revolutionary uprising in Berlin-Kreuzberg and gain a mobilization base within the Kurdish youth for such a cause – can be considered as failed, as the ARAB turned more and more towards Kurdistan solidarity. The reasons for this shift in the power relations are multifarious, yet disillusionment within the radical left is certainly part of it, as the same ARAB activist argued:

“On the one hand, the social struggles here have become weaker. After the [financial] crisis everyone expected that the left would somehow get into a social offensive and that just didn't happen and the development in Kurdistan became more and more important. And with time, we had many who went to Kurdistan and worked there. And for those who stayed here, it was the only thing that made sense. We felt such a sense of emptying of meaning at social protests ... and also alienation from the population. In the here and now, one could help the people in Kurdistan concretely. That is the only concrete liberation thing that we have on the plan at the moment.”

The disillusionment in the ARAB with its own struggle led to the search for other new perspectives, and the already formed relationship with the Kurdish movement became the point of orientation. As with other solidarity movements in the 1970s and 1980s, the strategy was in times of low mobilization in the centres of capitalism, at least a revolutionary process in the periphery could be supported. Broadly, speaking, in the Inter-Movement arena tensions between strategies take place regularly and need to be negotiated.

Secondly, tensions arose also around critique and affirmation, however, to a lesser degree than before. One Kurdish cadres assessed:

“But I think that in the meantime it has become better insofar, this Eurocentrism, this helper syndrome, it has got a little better. That is my impression. Whether it is overcome is then another question. That still happens. Again and again, you meet people who appear very arrogant and then know-it-all. But there are also many who are not like that. ... And if there is a delegation and someone acts like that, then there is also criticism from the other people: ‘you can't say that’. It has already become a little better.”

Similarly, another Kurdish cadre argued, that this development came about through the generation change:

“The older generation of the left are more dogmatic, than the younger generation. Patronising, they have their principles, Marxist-Leninist, everything that does not fit their scheme is labelled as non-socialist, also when dealing with non-German structures. With a younger generation we have more of a feeling, the relationship is at eye level than with the older generation, they are very from above.”

On the other side, critique was demanded and accepted, when there was longer relationship maintenance. Nick Brauns on the relationship between critique and solidarity and a book he published with Brigitte Kichel (2010):

“In my PKK book, I also described many unpleasant sides of the PKK. I spoke openly about how in the 1990s people were shot here, who were accused of being agents ... Or I problematized the personality cult around Abdullah Öcalan, but also tried to explain it. So not in a hostile way, but I mentioned all that. So, I didn't go around the negative points. And the

book was very well received in the Kurdish scene and especially because of the critical points. ... If someone who is in solidarity with them, where it is clear he is not an enemy of the movement, ... then criticisms like that are also gladly received. But it is not so well received, a know-it-all criticism, from people who are not in solidarity. ... If you really want to be heard, then you should really first be in solidarity.”

The level of criticism, according to the solidarity activist, needs to correspond with the level of commitment and the stage of relationship transformation. In general, the tensions around critique and affirmation seem to be less relevant in a non-polarized arena.

Occasionally, other tensions were mentioned around an exclusive, individualist, and clandestine movement culture in the autonomous movement, a more conservative movement culture in some Kurdish associations, and discrepancy between commitments in both movements. However, increasingly, mediators, especially from the Kurdish movement, were able to solve these tensions. In general, there were no tensions that led to relationship break-ups.

3.3. Summary

Phase II: Inter-Movement Arena

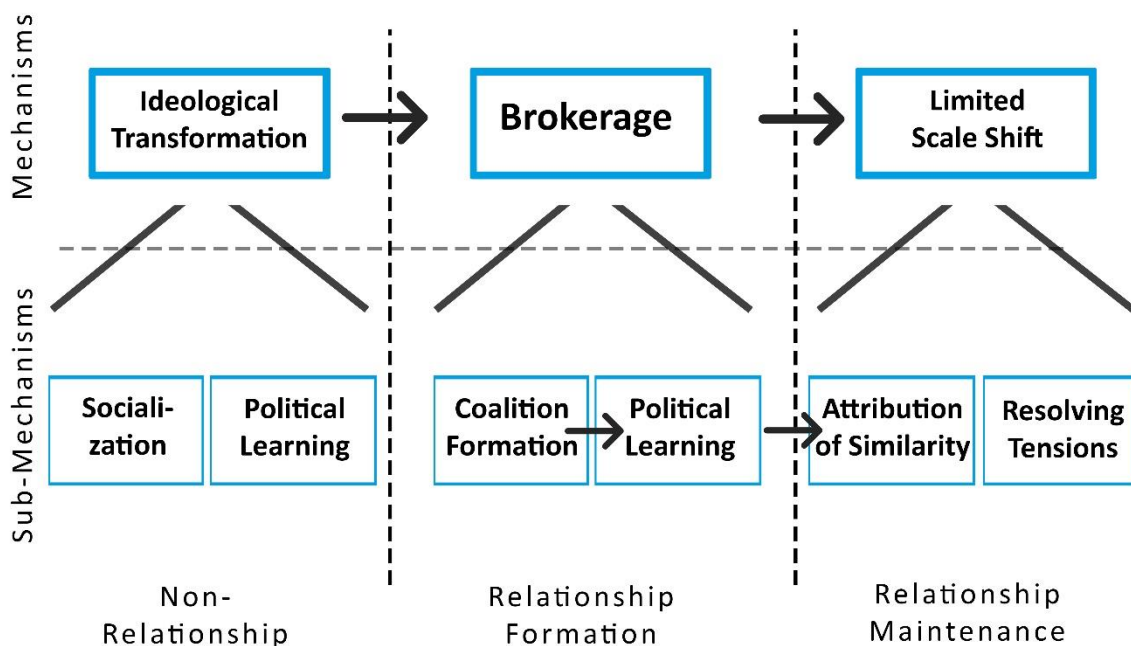


Figure 9: Diagram of Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms in the Inter-Movement Arena in Phase II

In the beginning of Phase II, there was the low point of the Kurdistan solidarity in Germany from 2000 roughly until 2007. Only a few solidarity cadres maintained relationships with the Kurdish movement. During this time, the Kurdish movement underwent an ideological and organizational transformation, which required a lot of time and resources for political learning, socialisation, and implementation within the diaspora. Afterwards, the Kurdish movement in Germany was able to diffuse the new paradigm into the radical left. Additionally, I consider the mechanism of

generation change both in the Kurdish movement in the diaspora and the radical left in Germany, creating new possibilities for relationship formation.

In this section, I have argued that the first relationship formation was not triggered by the diffusion of the new paradigm and then immediate attribution of similarity or opportunity, as was the case with the anti-imperialist movement in Phase I. In contrast, in Phase II, the brokerage between the Kurdish movement and the radical left was rather marked by political learning – often taking place within coalitions. Coalition formation, such as solidarity committees with Kurdistan or the Halim Dener campaign, was triggered by varying mechanisms of the different arenas. In the formed coalition, political learning about the Kurdish movement and the new paradigm were central. Democratic Confederalism, as a new ideology for the radical left in Germany, needed to be understood, seen in practice, converted into its own writings and reports on the side of the radical left. During the political learning, the coalitions became brokers for the radical left, spreading the new paradigm. After the Amed Camp in 2009, the ‘Tatort Kurdistan’ campaign formed and coordinated the work of the growing solidarity movement. However, due to its loose structure, this scale shift was limited. Also, within the ‘Tatort Kurdistan’ campaign, the focus shifted from attribution of similarity with the struggle of the Kurdish movement in general, towards an attribution of similarity with the Democratic Confederalism in particular. Finally, throughout relationship formation and maintenance, tensions arose around the strategies between the ‘here versus there’ and the level of critique, which however was lower in contrast to Phase I.

The solidarity movement in Phase II, was able to build relationships between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany, and provided the relational infrastructure for the rapid growth of the Kurdistan solidarity movement in Phase III.

Chapter VIII. Phase III: 2014–2020

In this chapter, I will investigate the relationship transformation between the PKK-Led Kurdish movement and the radical left firstly in a Transnational Arena, secondly, in a National Arena, and, thirdly, in an Inter-Movement Arena. Chapter VII deals with Phase III, which begins with the war in Kobanê and lasts until the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

1. Phase III: Transnational Arena

In Phase III of the Transnational Arena, I trace the ongoing relationship transformation between the Kurdish movement and the radical left on a transnational level. The main argument is that the transnational relationship transformation between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany evolved from transnational brokerage during Phase I and Phase II towards the establishment of a more comprehensive and interactive transnational space in Phase III. In theoretical terms, transnational brokerage refers to the initiation of new transnational relationships, whereas the establishment of a transnational space is marked by an ongoing exchange of information, resources, and activists. Consequently, my analysis sought to trace both quantitative and qualitative shifts in the frequency of relationship formation and the durability of these relationships. The objective was to determine whether a consistent flow of information, resources and activists had indeed been instituted. In addition to *transnational diffusion* as the initial mechanism observed during the battle of Kobanê, I will present the Internationalist Commune of Rojava (ICR) as an ideal type of the formation of a transnational space mechanism, which involves several sub-mechanisms, including *political learning*, *local relationship formation* and *transnational coordination*. Through this process, a consistent flow of internationalists was established. They travel to Rojava/AANES, join the ICR, undergo a political learning process, integrate into local activities, engage in transnational coordination, return to their respective organizations in Germany, and subsequently rekindle the transnational relationships formed during their engagement in Rojava.

1.1. Diffusion of Hope and Global Kurdistan Solidarity

The “Siege of Kobanê” (Küveli 2015) triggered a worldwide solidarity movement with the Kurdish movement. International brigades travelled to Rojava, internationalists from many continents fought and died in Rojava, worldwide funds were collected for weapons and infrastructural projects, and a plurality of solidarity events and demonstrations took place. Solidarity committees were formed, among others, in South American countries such as in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay, in the USA, as well as in many European countries, notably the UK, France, Spain, Italy, Greece and Poland. These committees, along with other forms of solidarity coalitions, have fostered the development and strengthening of relationships between the PKK-led Kurdish movement and various other ‘anti-systemic’ movements. For instance, I interviewed a representative from the Mapuche movement who emphasized the shared struggle of both Mapuche and Kurds against “the colonial occupation of their lands and patriarchy”. Moreover, the Revolution in Rojava has become a global symbol of hope for those aspiring to revolution and a more just world, to paraphrase an activist from Santiago de Chile. While the visible mobilization and actions of the worldwide solidarity movement have somewhat decreased in Phase III, the PKK-led Kurdish movement continues to play a pivotal role in organizing and networking the

various movements on a global level. A Kurdish activist described the ongoing efforts towards building a global women's movement:

“There is always an exchange of content ... with all other women's groups from [Chiapas] to India and Afghanistan ... And in 2017 there was the women's conference, *Jîneology*. Feminist groups, FLINTA*³⁸⁷ groups, all of them, came together and networked. The Kurdish movement only created the framework ... to organize and fight for the same cause.”

The Kurdish women's movement, by creating a framework that enabled various women's movements to integrate other struggles while maintaining the particularities of their own struggles, assumed the role of a broker between different women's movements, effectively facilitating the formation of transnational coalitions. Despite considerable differences in theoretical, social, and practical contexts, the Kurdish women's movement strives for a joint struggle of women's movements worldwide. Indeed, the Kurdish women's movement can be regarded as a pioneer in the strategy of creating a global movement for Democratic Modernity or World Democratic Confederalism (Dirik 2021: 71–73).

Correspondingly, Kurdistan became the central internationalist topic among the radical left in Phase III. This process of the emerging Kurdistan Solidarity within the radical left in Germany will be discussed in more detail later. For now, I will only mention other aspects in the transnational arena that are pertinent to the radical left in Phase III. In particular, the so-called refugee crisis was a crucial issue for the radical left. In 2015 and 2016, around 2 million refugees arrived in Europe via the Balkan route mostly from Syria and Iraq, fleeing the Islamic State and the Syrian civil war. Consequently, the fight against IS, the resistance in Rojava and other parts of Kurdistan, and the role of the Turkish state, were once again linked in an urgent manner to the domestic political situation in Germany. In particular, the EU-Turkey agreement of 18th March 2016, which regulates the repatriation of illegalized refugees from Greece to Turkey, was massively criticized. This agreement was interpreted by both the radical left in Germany and the Kurdish movement as a *quid pro quo*, where the EU, in exchange for Turkey's assistance in closing refugee routes through Turkey, would turn a blind eye to Turkey's military operations in Bakûr, Rojava and Başûr. Demonstrations were organized to draw connections between the issues of the migration regime and the oppression of Kurds (Interventionistische Linke 2016). Summit protests became less relevant in mobilizing the radical left, with the exception of the G20 protest in Hamburg in 2017, which escalated into violence (Malthaner et al. 2018). It is worth noting that neither the Zapatista movement nor any other country or movement-specific solidarity effort even came close to the relevance of the Kurdistan solidarity movement in Phase III in terms of attention, mobilization, and relationship formation.³⁸⁸ Therefore I will now continue with the Kurdistan solidarity movement as the primary internationalist focus point of the radical left in Germany.

1.2. Formation of a Transnational Space

As my research results demonstrate, the onset of the war in Kobanê marked a significant shift in the relationship between Germany and Kurdistan, characterized by both quantitative and

³⁸⁷ Is a German abbreviation that stands for ‚Frauen, Lesben, Intergeschlechtliche, nichtbinäre, trans and agender‘ | ‘women/females, lesbians, intersex, non-binary, trans and agender people’.

³⁸⁸ Outside of the investigation period, support for the 2022/2023 protest in Iran also brought many people onto the streets in Germany, about 100,000 in November in Berlin, under the slogan ‘Jin, Jiyan, Azadî’ (woman, life, freedom) formulated by the Kurdish women's movement.

qualitative changes. Quantitatively, there was a notable increase in transnationally coordinated solidarity actions, relationship formation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement, the number of internationalists travelling to Kurdistan, and the (re-)emergence of transnational projects. A Kurdish cadre remembered in 2016:

“[Regarding] the period of the IS attack on the Kurdish city of Kobanê and its successful defence from late 2014 to early 2015: both on the Kurdish side and on the side of the radical left in Germany, that led to a considerable increase in activities.”

I argue that the increase in transnational actions was also accompanied by a qualitative change. This did not only concern transnational brokerage, which involves the creation of new transnational relationships, but rather the maintenance of durable relationships with a constant exchange of information, resources, and activists. I will present the Internationalist Commune of Rojava (ICR) as an ideal type of this mechanism. With the involvement of the ICR and other transnational activities, the intensity and stability of transnational brokerage increased significantly. This included both the frequency of relationship formation and the durability of relationships, along with a constant flow of exchange. As a result, a transnational space emerged between the radical left in Germany and the Kurdish movement. It is important to note that this transnational space was built upon the groundwork established by the Kurdish movement over the decades prior.

In this sub-section, I will present evidence of the formation of a transnational space. This space was facilitated by various sub-mechanisms including *transnational diffusion* as the starting point, followed by *political learning*, *local relationship formation*, and *transnational coordination* in the recreation of transnational relationships. First, in order to provide evidence for this quantitative and qualitative shift, I will briefly analyse transnational repertoires such as delegation trips, transnational projects, and the experiences of internationalist Şehîds. This section draws upon my interviews and document analysis, and the consistency of evidence from multiple sources indicating the same mechanisms allows me to evaluate this argument as highly robust.

1.2.1. *Transnational Diffusion: Kobanê*

The diffusion of the resistance in Kobanê, similar to the dynamics of diffusion worldwide, extended widely to the radical left. In this sub-chapter, I will focus on the diffusion through mass media, while the relational diffusion facilitated by already existing channels and transnational ties will be discussed in their respective contexts. The central argument here is that mass media coverage of the war in Kobanê played a key role in fostering relationships between the radical left and the Kurdistan solidarity movement in Phase III, and triggered large-scale mobilization in Germany. At the outset of the fighting against IS, mass media coverage of the war in Kobanê was extensive and the resistance of Kurdish fighters was prominently featured on television screens in German living rooms (Küpeli 2015: 5). This media attention introduced many radical left activists to the Kurdish movement or raised their awareness of the conflict. The diffusion was initially triggered by major media outlets, but was quickly amplified through social media and websites like ‘Live Maps’, as an internationalist remembered:

“I still can remember very well that I sat with many other friends in the kitchen, and we sat all the time in front of Twitter and looked at where [and] what [was] moving ... Where are the positions of Daesh, how is it shifting right now? It was ... exciting, but at the same time

also very helpless and a very, strange feeling ... It was like sitting in front of the screen watching a TV movie, trying to understand, to have an active role in it.”

The extensive, live, and direct media coverage of the resistance in Kobanê played a pivotal role in triggering an attribution of threat by activists and organizations, followed by an attribution of similarity.³⁸⁹ I argue, supported by the views of some respondents, that such widespread diffusion would not have occurred without this mass media coverage. In fact, Kobanê also exemplifies the German radical left’s dependency on mass media. Shortly after the victory in Kobanê, in the fall of 2015, when the siege of predominantly Kurdish towns in Bakûr by units of the Turkish police and military commenced (referred to as the ‘Cities War’), solidarity activities began to wane, as a long-term solidarity activist complained:

“In the battle of Kobanê, everyone was ... there ... but now in Bakûr one city after the other ... is being shot down – almost like Kobanê. More civilians have been killed in Bakûr ... than in the Battle of Kobanê and yet we experienced almost no solidarity movement.”

Turkish military actions were not as prominently featured in the media as those of the IS. Many interviewees shared the impression that the German left’s actions and involvement in protests against the curfews, the massacres of the civilian population and the destruction of entire cities and districts in Bakûr declined. Other reasons for this decrease in actions, aside from mass media dependency, will be discussed in Chapter VIII. 3. Nevertheless, it is evident that the transnational diffusion of the existence of the Kurdish movement, the Rojava Revolution and their threat, triggered a new solidarity movement with Kurdistan.

1.2.2. Quantitative and Qualitative Shift: Delegation Trips, Transnational Projects and Şehîds

In order to provide evidence for the argument of a quantitative and qualitative shift in Phase III, the following section shall present some examples of the expansion of repertoires, the enlargement of the pool of actors and the increasing durability of relations. I begin by discussing delegation trips, emphasizing the increase in participation, then the (re-)emerging repertoire of transnational projects undertaken by various actors, and finally the emerging role of internationalist *Şehîds*, which contributed to the formation of the transnational space.

Delegation Trips

In Phase III, while delegation trips remained a staple of the solidarity movement’s repertoire, their relevance was superseded by other transnational activities. Unlike in Phase I, there was no ‘virtual train’ of delegations, and in contrast to Phase II, the primary destinations shifted towards Rojava and Başûr instead of Bakûr. While the latter was initially visited by large delegations, it became increasingly challenging, especially after the attempted coup in Turkey (2016), leading to repression and even the discontinuation of some delegations. During the early stages of Phase III, the primary function of the delegations shifted towards the attribution of opportunity, often expressed as fascination, while the protective³⁹⁰ and diffusion functions became less prominent. A Kurdish cadre from YXK argued:

³⁸⁹ This process of relationship formation will be discussed further in Chapter VIII. 3.

³⁹⁰ Some delegations, such as one of the ‘Gemeinsam Kämpfen’, participated in ‘Living Shield Action’ in Rojava against the threat of Turkish invasion (Junge Welt 2019).

“And the strongest thing you can do with German friends is simply to take them to Kurdistan every now and then. All those who were there, I don't know anyone who says that it didn't touch me. I have experienced that ... friends who have said, ok cool, what can we do now in Germany and immediately collected ideas.”

Through the delegation trips, activists received an impression of the Kurdish movement on the ground, the repression of the Turkish state and often engaged later in the solidarity movement. One radical left activist, who went spontaneously on a Newroz delegation and witnessed the Kurdish movement in 2015 reported the sensation of fascination:

“Simply a very inspiring experience with the delegation trip and I think, so to speak, it condenses a bit at this moment at the Newroz fest in Diyarbakır where 1,000,000 people were standing there. This is the first time that I have had such a realistic hope: you can really inspire a socialist revolutionary idea in a foreseeable period of time with really very many people. I think that was such a fantastic feeling.”

In 2015, shortly after the resistance in Kobanê, there were a multitude of Newroz delegations, and these delegations saw a significant increase in the number of participants, as one Kurdish cadre related: “I mean, the YXK delegation was three to four times larger than usual.” In fact, the delegation alluded to, which was organized by the YXK, was conducted with around 80 participants, mainly from the autonomous movement. However, shortly after the Newroz delegation in 2015, the threat to such delegations increased considerably. A striking example of the transnational threat posed by countermovements is the Suruç bombing in 2015 in front of the Amara Culture Centre, where 33 activists from a youth delegation aiming to rebuild Kobanê³⁹¹ were murdered by an IS suicide bomber. Simultaneously, this event marked the end of the peace process and the start of new waves of repression in Turkey. The direct threat of repression by the Turkish state for delegations became significant in 2016, when members of the delegations were arrested (Civaka Azad 2016a; YXK 2016) or deported (Lower Class Magazine 2016). The ‘Kurdistan Hilfe’, which had conducted yearly Newroz delegations since the 1990s, stopped organizing delegation trips because of the repression (Kurdistan Hilfe 2020). Other groups continued to organize delegation trips to Bakûr, albeit with fewer and usually more experienced activists or public figures, such as members of parliament or lawyers.³⁹² Due to the repression in Bakûr, as well as a shift in the focus of the Kurdish movement and the participants, more delegations began to visit Rojava and Başûr. Various groups, such as ‘Gemeinsam Kämpfen’³⁹³ and ‘Kurdistan Hilfe’, organized delegation trips to destinations like Mexmûr or Şingal. Delegations also visited Rojava, but due to the embargo, these delegations were typically smaller groups that engaged in longer-term relationship transformation with local structures. For instance, in 2018, a women’s delegation was invited to visit Rojava by the autonomous women’s structure of the Internationalist Commune of Rojava (Frauen*delegation 2018). In summary, while the initial delegations in Phase III were primarily aimed at the attribution of opportunity, the later delegations were organized by more committed activists with the purpose of

³⁹¹ The activists came mainly from the Sosyalist Gençlik Dernekleri Federasyonu | Socialist Youth Associations Federation (SGDF), the youth wing of the Ezilenlerin Sosyalist Partisi | Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP).

³⁹² Outside of the period of investigation, in 2021, the federal police banned 17 members of a peace delegation from leaving Germany for Hewlêr, in southern Kurdistan (ANF News 2021b).

³⁹³ Feminist solidarity organization. See Chapter VIII. 3.

disseminating information and establishing transnational relationships. In contrast to previous phases, delegations became just one of many transnational activities.

Transnational Projects

In Phase III, a transnational repertoire of the Kurdistan solidarity movement became salient: the construction of (predominantly medical) infrastructure. On the one hand, there were international brigades, organized by political parties for international solidarity, and on the other, there were human rights projects, initiated by groups from across the leftist spectrum. In the following paragraph, I will briefly introduce two organizations and their work, while also indicating some tensions. In the second case, the resolution of these tensions resulted in long-term transnational relationship maintenance.

ICOR Hospital: After the IS was defeated in Kobanê, the reconstruction of the city was pending, since 80 percent of it was destroyed during the war. Transnational infrastructure projects emerged, such as the construction of a hospital in Kobanê, supported by the ‘Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands’ (MLPD)³⁹⁴. The MLPD has around 2,800 members and is rather isolated in the German radical left, however internationally it is affiliated to the Marxist-Leninist “International Coordination of Revolutionary Parties and Organizations” (ICOR) which has around 50 members worldwide. The ICOR claimed to have coordinated the work among others with the PYD and the MLKP³⁹⁵ and dispatched solidarity brigades in order to build a maternity clinic in Kobanê (MLPD 2015). The brigades attracted people from different currents of the radical left: between June and September 2015, five brigades with 177 activists from ten countries participated in the construction of four medical practices and an operating room, bringing with them donations, medical equipment and several tons of tools (Peter 2015). While the construction of the health centre faced considerable difficulties due to Turkey’s embargo of Rojava, in November 2015, the clinic nevertheless managed to open. A member of a Kurdistan solidarity committee assessed the work of the international brigades:

“A health station in Kobanê is a huge, important sign of international solidarity and it is something tangible in material terms.”

Later, donations were collected by ICOR for the ecological expansion of the health centre in Kobanê, which included the installation of solar panels to the centre. Following the brigades, the MLPD and their youth organizations organized information and celebration events for the ‘ICOR hospital’. They engaged in disseminating information about the situation in Rojava to areas beyond Kurdistan, and later protested regularly against Turkey’s invasions of Rojava. For the MLPD, the brigades were considered a success in terms of propaganda, since their work was also reported in the nationwide media (Spiegel 2015b) and the call was shared by many groups from the (radical) left movement. Additionally, a documentary film was produced and released, chronicling the construction process. However, the film contained heavy propaganda for the ICOR and made rather exaggerated statements, suggesting that “with this practical cooperation, the Kurdish liberation struggle no longer stands alone, but becomes part of the worldwide revolutionary movement” (Kobane-Brigade.org 2016:21:10). Here, a potential tension between the material support and the agitation of the MLPD emerged. In fact, in the non-polarized

³⁹⁴ ‘Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany’.

³⁹⁵ ‘Marksist Leninist Komünist Parti’ | ‘Marxist-Leninist Communist Party’. The Turkish organization is part of ICOR.

solidarity movement with Kurdistan, the MLPD is frequently criticized for its appropriation of protests, while the MLPD criticizes groups and individuals for their anti-communism.

CADUS – Redefine Global Solidarity: CADUS is a non-profit and independent aid organization that initiates sustainable projects in different regions of the world with a focus on medical care. It was founded by individuals with experience in organizing leftist festivals and working in humanitarian aid organizations, with a keen critical awareness of the problems in the international human aid business, such as paternalism or the creation of dependency.³⁹⁶ Their first regional projects were implemented from 2014 onwards in Rojava. One CADUS employee reported:

“And then, the request came directly, I think it was ‘Die Linke’, or at least from that milieu, to participate at a delegation to Syria. They said: ‘You have medical expertise’ ... and thus the contact came about. Then we saw that a paramedic training concept was needed. The person who did it at the time is a trainer in the field and said I can do it. This is how the initial contact came about.”

With this project in Rojava, an attribution of similarity was pivotal at the beginning of CADUS’s transnational relationship transformation with the Kurdish movement. The same CADUS employee argued:

“In the beginning, there was a very great attraction with the social model what was tried to develop there, what is still developed, and solidified. That was definitely and is also for many parts of CADUS, maybe not the most important, but a very clear motive.”

However, CADUS is seen first and foremost, not as affiliated with a certain party or a concrete project, but with the people of a certain region. From the beginning, its partner organization was ‘Heyva Sor a Kurd - Kurdish Red Crescent’.³⁹⁷ In 2014, during its first fact finding mission to Rojava, CADUS collected donations, implemented a series of other projects, and produced reports for the German public. The first larger project was the ‘Mobile Hospital for Rojava’, a portable medical facility built on two four-wheel-drive trucks, designed to provide emergency medical care to the population of Rojava. The project, according to the employee, “took two years to finance, plan, build”, and relied on nationwide action days which were organized by CADUS in leftists’ clubs. In 2017, the mobile hospital reached Iraq, where it had to wait to cross the border due to the embargo on Syria by Turkey and KDP. In view of the fierce fighting around the recapture of Mosul from IS, CADUS used the waiting time to operate a trauma stabilization point in Mosul for Iraqi and Peshmerga troops. This created considerable tensions between CADUS and ‘Heyva Sor a Kurd’, as the same CADUS employee remembered:

“It definitely also came to misunderstandings ... ‘Why is this now going to a system in northern Iraq that is definitely not well-disposed towards us?’ ... It was very difficult to communicate to people: we are a humanitarian aid organization; we are not an activist group ... As a humanitarian organization, it is very difficult to say to the 250,000 people in Mosul

³⁹⁶ As related by one of its members, CADUS’s general approach is as follows: “At best, we make ourselves superfluous and leave behind what people can use themselves without needing us ... actually, the approach is, that we do not want to be needed. But we see quite clearly that there are situations where an external input of resources, time, expertise. and material is needed”. The approach is carried out with a future-oriented focus, among others, by providing training, within the scope of each project, for the local personnel, as well as contingency plans in the case of an eventual emergency termination.

³⁹⁷ Heyva Sor A Kurd was established in 2012 to meet the urgent health needs of the people affected by the conflict in Rojava (later AANES).

who are under continuous bombardment. ‘We have equipment here that we can’t get to you right now’. We are not supporting them. This was definitely damper.”

Here, the non-partisanship of a human right organization came into conflict with the expected partisanship by the Kurdish movement. Finally, in May 2018, the mobile hospital was able to cross the border into Rojava, and was delivered to ‘Heyva Sor a Kurd’. Transnational personal ties grew over the years and helped to resolve the tensions, as the CADUS employee continued:

“So, the person who worked with us in the beginning is now the head of the Kurdish Red Crescent. What makes it even easier to explain things [i.e., the situation with the Mobile Hospital in Iraq].”

Through the reliable, personal, and continuous relationship maintenance, CADUS established themselves as an important partner for ‘Heyva Sor a Kurd’ and local health councils. CADUS has been involved in various other projects across Rojava, which have encompassed the deployment of medical teams, paramedic training, the establishment and management of a field hospital in al-Hol Camp³⁹⁸, the creation of a primary health clinic in ar-Raqqa³⁹⁹, financial support for Til Temir Hospital⁴⁰⁰, the funding of an ambulance vehicle, outfitting a trauma stabilization point along with on-site training, the restoration of a hospital in Tirbespî⁴⁰¹, and assistance for the COVID-19 response in 2020. As the CADUS employee had assessed:

“In the meantime, we are very, very close, but also very transparent with each other. What works, what is not possible, what we can do.”

Additionally, CADUS helped to diffuse information from Rojava/AANES into the leftist club and party scene in Germany and, in turn, generated monetary donations from this scene:

“I think in this subculture context in Berlin and Hamburg there, many people know CADUS, because we have talked to many people in the subculture ... There are always smaller festivals and also large festivals that give us space for the campaigns.”

CADUS depended on the goodwill of the leftist subcultural scene as well as the generally positive reporting about Rojava in the mass media.

In sum, CADUS⁴⁰² positioned itself discursively against the classic pitfalls of human right organizations. In this work, they established a long-term transnational relationship with ‘Heyva Sor a Kurd’ and carried out various infrastructural projects in the medical field. However, two points of tension could be detected in their operations. Firstly, CADUS is dependent on donations and project funds from larger organizations, and therefore takes care to not be directly associated with any particular party. At the same time, CADUS highlights the democratic aspects of the Rojava Revolution, instead of for instance, emphasizing the role of the PKK, from which derives a second tension, concerning the non-partisanship of human rights organizations. In the case of the mobile clinic, however, the cooperation partner expected partisanship instead of (perceived) support for their political adversaries. Ultimately, this tension could be solved by

³⁹⁸ Approximately 60,000 relatives of IS fighters live in Camp Al-Hol, including many with EU member state citizenship. Additionally, parts of the camp are also inhabited by internally displaced people who had fled over the course of the conflict with the IS.

³⁹⁹ Former self-proclaimed capital of the IS.

⁴⁰⁰ Girê Xurma.

⁴⁰¹ Qamişlo.

⁴⁰² The same is true for ‘medico international’, which performs similar work in Kurdistan since the 1980s.

imposing communication and temporal limitation of the support. In terms of form, the construction of the ICOR hospital resembles CADUS's work, since the health infrastructure is built in Rojava and delivered over to the autonomous administration following completion. However, the human right organizations rely more on professional staff than on political volunteers. In contrast, the MLPD opted for clear partisanship with political parties and engaged in political agitation, while utilising its solidarity activities with Kurdistan to promote its own party very openly. This way of doing solidarity work sometimes led to irritation in the solidarity movement, up to tensions.

*Internationalist Şehîds*⁴⁰³

Internationalists who joined military units in Kurdistan did not have a significant impact on transnational relationship transformation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement. During their time in these military units, they were often isolated from the local population, had limited opportunities to disseminate information back to their home countries, and in many cases, did not continue their involvement in the Kurdistan solidarity movement upon their return. However, their actions did pave the way for other internationalists to follow suit and travel to Rojava. According to the German Domestic Intelligence Agency, approximately 295 people from Germany have joined the 'Kurdish units' since June 2013, with more than half returning and at least 32 losing their lives in the process (BfV 2021; BMI 2020). It is important to note that unlike the solidarity movements of the 1970s and 1980s, military engagement did not appear to be the primary form of political commitment. Nonetheless, those internationalists who lost their lives in Kurdistan received a different level of attention, and their stories will now be discussed.

The increasing number of internationalists who joined the military units in the conflict between the Kurdish movement, Turkey, and IS also led to a rise in the number of people who lost their lives in this struggle, as a Kurdish cadre noted: "After Andrea Wolf, except Uta Schneidebanger, there were no Şehîds until 2014. Now many have been in Rojava, including Germans who have joined the PKK in Iraq." An incomplete list of internationalists from Germany who died in the ranks of Kurdish military units since 2014 includes ten names (noms de guerre): Ivana Hoffmann (Avaşin Tekoşin Güneş), Günther Hellstern (Rustem Cudî), Kevin Jochim (Dilsoz Bahar), Michael Panser (Bager Nûjjiyan), Sarah Handelsmann (Sara Dorşin), Konstantin Gedig (Andok Cotkar), Jakob Riemer (Şiyar Gabar), Anton Leschek (Zana Ciwan), Eva Maria Steiger (Elefterîa Hambî) and Thomas (Azad Şerger). These internationalist martyrs, known as Şehîds, played a significant role in the formation of a transnational space and initiated a process of reevaluating how to commemorate them within the radical left. This process involved adopting or *emulating* some of the traditions of the Kurdish movement, and transforming the culture of commemoration. In the following, I will trace the development of the transnational space using the example of the internationalists Şehîds, while the emulation of these traditions will be explored further in Chapter III. 3.

⁴⁰³ Is directly translated into martyrs or fallen. While the first has a religious connotation, the second is passive, while the Kurdish word indicates the active, political decision to fight for a free life, aware of possibly dying in this fight. In the memory of those who continue to fight, Şehîds become immortal, but not in the religious understanding, but in the remembrance of their movement.

One prominent example is Ivana Hoffman, who lost her life at the age of 19 while fighting against IS in Girê Xurma⁴⁰⁴ in the ranks of the MLKP. Before joining the conflict, she was actively involved in organizing antifascist, class-based, and feminist protests in Duisburg as a member of 'Young Struggle'⁴⁰⁵, the MLKP's youth organization in Europe. She participated in a political youth festival in Turkey with a delegation (Vorbereitungskomitee 2017: 14).

In the spring of 2014, she travelled to Rojava and joined the 'International Freedom Battalion' (IFB). Initially, Hoffman joined the 'Hüseyin Demircioğlu Academy'⁴⁰⁶, which had been established in the Medya Defense Areas in 2010 by the MLKP with the assistance of the PKK (ANF News 2022c). She actively fought in Cizire Canton for six months before being killed on 7th March 2015. Following her death, her body was returned to her mother at the border between Rojava and Turkey and was carried during a mourning demonstration. Shortly after her death, the group 'Freundeskreis Ivana Hoffmann'⁴⁰⁷ was founded by her friends, relatives, and comrades. A commemorative demonstration in Duisburg drew between 2,000 to 6,000 mourners. At her funeral, high-ranking representatives from the Kurdish movement were in attendance. For instance, Salih Muslim, then co-chair of the PYD, delivered a speech at the funeral:

"I greet comrade Ivana, the precious comrade of Kurdistan. Today we bury our comrade Ivana, so our sorrow is very great. We are all comrades of Ivana. The fallen show that the struggle in Kobanê and Rojava is an international one" (RedGlobe 2015).

Ivana Hofmann's legacy and sacrifice had a lasting impact, with at least seven festivals organized in her memory. Young Struggle published a book chronicling her life and embarked on a reading tour to share her story (ANF News 2022c). Her image became a symbol, featured prominently at demonstrations, on flyers and on posters. Commemorative events and remembrance days were held in her honour, and songs were composed in tribute. For example, the leftist rapper 'Zynik' paid homage to Hoffman and those who fell in Kobanê in the song 'Märtyrer sterben nicht'.⁴⁰⁸

As a Kurdish cadre explained, the death of an internationalist brings the war in Kurdistan, with all its consequences, to Germany, to the family, to the political organization the person came from, and finally also to the general public:

"All these people who have died in northern Iraq or northern Syria are killed by a military intervention of a NATO partner of Germany, which is equipped with German weapons, with Leopard 2 tanks from Germany. When persons from Germany die in this war, they also somehow bring this war to Germany. Exactly, it has its effect, culturally, with families, and also politically. Because you ask yourself the question: 'Why do people from Germany go there?' ... Exactly, that reinforces this process."

To some extent, this mechanism resembles the politicization and consequent mobilization of Kurds in the diaspora at the start of the 1990s (Başer 2015a: 275–76). In the case of Ivana Hoffmann, parts of the family and her political organization formed a group, with the aim of remembering her as a person, but also by continuing her political struggle. The continuity of the

⁴⁰⁴ Til Temir.

⁴⁰⁵ Before Komünist Gençlik Örgütü (KGÖ) | Communist Youth Organization.

⁴⁰⁶ Hüseyin Demircioğlu (1959-1996). As a member of the MLKP, he acquired the title of 'Teacher of the Revolution'. He died in 1996 while hunger-striking in prison in Turkey.

⁴⁰⁷ Circle of Friends Ivana Hoffmann.

⁴⁰⁸ Martyrs do not die.

aforementioned festivals and the variety of commemorative events, while simultaneously dealing with contemporary issues in Kurdistan, illustrate the strengthening of local and transnational relations. Some parents of the Şehîds became politically active, writing a letter to Chancellor Angela Merkel demanding a “permanent halt to arms exports and economic aid to Turkey” (ANF News 2020c). Moreover, Ivana Hoffmann, for a growing solidarity movement with Kurdistan, became a symbol, inspiring others to organize and establish women’s groups, even if they had no personal ties with her: “one listener also reports that it was Ivana's example that led her to organize and establish a women's group.” (ANF News 2022c). In general, the death of internationalists appears to trigger commitment within the organizations they came from, their communities, and among individuals active in the solidarity movement. Some express a sense of responsibility to continue their struggle (Vorbereitungskomitee 2017). Regarding transnational ties, an ‘Internationalistisches Gedenkfest zur Ehren der gefallenen Internationalist*innen’⁴⁰⁹ was organized in Germany in 2017, representing one of the most explicit expressions of the formation of transnational space⁴¹⁰. Furthermore, the deaths of individuals with German passports received extensive coverage in national media, especially in the case of Ivana Hoffmann (Hermann 2015; Spiegel 2015a; Yücel 2015), whereas this level of attention was not prominent for people coming from Germany with Turkish or other passports. Some articles disparaged the motives of the internationalists, portraying them as fanatics or deluded, although most attempted to provide reasons and at least mentioned the political context of the war in Kurdistan and the objectives of the Kurdish movement. A cadre from the Kurdish movement shared the following perspective on internationalists and Şehîds:

“I think they have a very central role. The Internationalists, through their contribution to the resistance, and ultimately some friends who have also sacrificed, who have given their lives, are indeed a decisive point in this revolution. They have made this revolution, a revolution where different revolutionary struggles were brought together... People from different political backgrounds coming together there and defending together and falling in that struggle. They also brought together these struggles that are going on all over the world. They also fought for these values. That's why, of course, they are very important for us and, of course, we orient ourselves according to these people.”

The internationalists and the Şehîds, played a significant role in strengthening transnational relationships, symbolizing the internationalism of the Kurdish struggle, and exemplifying the connectedness of various leftist struggles worldwide. In essence, the internationalists who lost their lives in Kurdistan brought the war to Germany, prompting the formation of initiatives and actions, fostering greater dedication within the solidarity movement, and encouraging engagement with developments in Kurdistan. The internationalist Şehîds were instrumental in shaping the form of the emerging transnational space, and stood as a symbol of the international character of the Kurdish movement.

In summary, there was a quantitative shift, indicated by a rise in transnational actions, increased participation of activists in transnational activities, and the broadening of the transnational repertoire. Crucially, there was also an expansion in the number of organizations engaged in relationship-building efforts. Qualitatively, relationships became more stable, and relationship

⁴⁰⁹ Internationalist memorial festival in honour of the fallen internationalists.

⁴¹⁰ This festival will be discussed further in Chapter VIII. 3.

maintenance, exemplified by CADUS, persisted until the end of Phase III, while internationalist Şehîds contributed to the formation of the transitional space through personal, symbolic, and organizational ties.

1.2.3. *Internationalist Commune of Rojava*

“So, what role do internationalists play: How we [as Kurdish activists] produce the bridge between people on the ground and the diaspora. This bridge is made concretely in the internationalist works. So, internationalists, because they go to Kurdistan, I understand them as a bridge for exchange.”

The Internationalist Commune of Rojava (ICR) was founded in 2017 under the slogan ‘learn, support, organize’. It served as a hub for internationalists in Rojava, enabling them to coordinate efforts, educate themselves, and actively participate in local community initiatives. Operating within Rojava’s self-governance structures, the ICR serves as an almost ideal illustration of the formation of a transnational space between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany. In the following section, I will provide a brief overview of the ICR’s history and activities, and then analyse the development of this transnational space, focusing on the sub-mechanisms of *political learning*, *local relationship formation* and *transnational coordination*. The ICR has also spearheaded several transnational campaigns, one of which will be analysed more extensively in a separate section.

In Phase III, marked by the Rojava Revolution and the war in Kobanê, a significant influx of internationalists travelled to Kurdistan, many of whom chose to join civil organizations rather than military units. As the number of activists arriving in Rojava increased, the Kurdish movement, in collaboration with internationalists, recognized the need to establish structures for the integration of these newcomers. Initially, it appeared that a majority of the internationalists involved in civil organizations were coming from Germany. Anja Flach (2019a) has connected this trend to the extensive diaspora work carried out by Kurdish organizations in Germany. The constant efforts of these Kurdish organizations, combined with the transnational networking enabled by brokerage in Phase II, made it relatively straightforward for Germany internationalists to access opportunities to travel to Rojava. For instance, some activists were directly recruited in Germany for the establishment of the ICR, as recalled by one internationalist:

“Someone I know for a long time, came back from Rojava ... He rattled off all the comrades who still had something to do with [Kurdistan]. And told me ‘We want to build something new, internationalist, civil. Do you want to go?’ I said, ‘yes’ immediately.”

Additionally, some internationalists, who had already been in Rojava, became part of the process that led the formation of the ICR. At that time, the primary physical entry point for internationalists was the city of Qamişlo⁴¹¹, later shifting to the canton of Cizîrê⁴¹² near the city of Dêrik⁴¹³. From the initial educational process, the concept of the ICR emerged through collaboration with the Kurdish structures, notably the youth movement of Rojava YCR⁴¹⁴

⁴¹¹ Qamishli.

⁴¹² Al-Hasakah Governorate.

⁴¹³ Al-Malikiyah.

⁴¹⁴ The ‘Yekîtiya Ciwanên Rojava’ (YCR) is the umbrella organization of the youth movement in Rojava, which is structured as a council system, struggling against gerontocracy, and organizing in the areas of culture, sport, and education. Along with the YCR, there is also the autonomous young women’s organization ‘Tevgera Jinên Ciwanên Şoreşger’ | Revolutionary Young Women Movement.

(Internationalist Commune of Rojava 2022). It is important to note that the commune was understood by the internationalists as an integral component of the broader governing council system in Rojava, as another internationalist argued:

“So, the internationalist commune is not only the people who are on the ground at the academy. The academy is the place where this manifests itself, but it is the building block of democratic representation.”

At the beginning of the process, the prevailing diagnosis was that thus far, internationalists had only arrived to Rojava individually, and without much coordination between them:

“Although internationalists have already been working in Rojava for many years, up until now there has been no established system to bring people from abroad to Rojava and to integrate them into the structures of the revolution” (Internationalist Commune of Rojava 2018: 23).

In order to institute a formal means for internationalists to join and participate in the Rojava Revolution through civil organizations, both a physical location and a virtual platform had to be established. One internationalist described this work:

“We were building the website and getting as much publicity as possible in Europe: compiling e-mail addresses of parliamentarians and journalists, of multipliers ... and then putting out the publication, the going public of the internationalist commune.”

The ICR had to be established as a physical place too, which was essentially done with the planning and work of residents. A member of the commune recalled: “Most of the construction work was done by workers from the region. But of course we helped out whenever and wherever we could” (Flach 2019a). A house for women, one for male internationalists, a kitchen, a press centre, and an academy were built, and a tree nursery was established.

The slogan of the commune, ‘learn, support, organize’, encapsulates not only the key areas of political activism—education, involvement in local structures, and coordination of transnational solidarity campaigns—but also alludes to the core sub-mechanisms underpinning the formation of a transnational space: political learning, local relationship transformation and transnational coordination. The fundamental difference between transnational brokerage and the formation of a transnational space via the ICR is the contrast between establishing a one-time connection between unrelated movements, and continually renewing this connection through the ongoing flow of activists, information, and resources. This difference is aptly conveyed by an activist belonging to an autonomous group in Germany which was part of the ICR:

“The basic aspect has worked very well so far, that since the Internationalist Commune was established, there have always been people down there, who have always gone there with the clear perspective to learn there, to participate, to develop a perspective and to come back ... Not only the ‘pure’ perspective of Rojava – to take the political perspective, political principles, certain modes of operation, ideological insights, and try to develop them here – but also to take the chance to use this place as internationalists, and that’s more than just seeing a bit of education or learning a bit of language.”

Significantly, the ICR facilitated a constant influx of internationalists, who travelled to Rojava, particularly to become part of the ICR. These individuals underwent a political learning process, integrated into local processes, engaged in transnational coordination efforts, returned to their

respective organizations, and in doing so, perpetuated the transnational relationship. The Internationalist Commune of Rojava can be interpreted as a transnational space in a dual sense: firstly, it ensures and manages a constant exchange of information, resources, and activists, and secondly, it establishes a tangible transnational space on the ground where internationalists and members of the Kurdish movement have the opportunity for dialogue and political learning. This does not imply a lack of tensions, varying levels of participation, or other challenges that impact transnational flows. In the following, I will elaborate on the three sub-mechanisms and, where relevant, address associated tensions.

Political Learning

The importance assigned to political learning is underscored by the fact that the ICR was from the outset, rooted in an educational process whose first organized activity was an internationalist academy in the summer of 2017 (Internationalist Commune of Rojava 2018b).⁴¹⁵ For 20 days, internationalists from the USA, Switzerland, Catalonia, England, Germany, and Argentina, among others, participated in sessions dealing with ideology, history, and language. Such academies are intense phases of political learning, as an internationalist of the commune, is quoted by Anja Flach:

“Education was given in Kurdish with English translation. Sometimes we really struggled with ourselves. The fixed classes went on for eight hours every day and then in the evenings there were seminars and discussions. Many of us were not used to this density of such big topics and ideological discussions” (Flach 2019a).

Some aspects of the education were organized by the internationalists themselves, while others were conducted by Kurdish cadres. As early as August 2018, a second educational phase commenced, which involved visits to various institutions in Rojava and on-site education (Flach 2019a). An internationalist emphasized the significance of the ICR in Rojava as a space for collective political learning:

“There is no revolution in the world where there is a place where internationalists come together and learn together. Okay you also have the Zapatista schools [Escuelita Zapatista]. But to have a place like that, in a revolution that is taking place, is currently unique ... That is a total developmental step, that people go there with a certain conviction.”

The Kurdish movement not only provided a place within the revolution for internationalists to come to Rojava and educate themselves. The stay itself and the confrontation with the realities on site alone must be understood as an essential learning process, as one internationalist described his first weeks in Rojava:

“First, we went on a delegation for two weeks through the whole of Rojava, saw everything, visited the institutions, got to know relatively much. That was also the time when I made a reality check between my projection and reality. Where you saw that there is still wage labour everywhere ... And many communes ... are under construction, to say the least ... That was already intense for me because I always had to categorize it for myself. You also have other people there with whom you could talk about it.”

⁴¹⁵ That first academy was named after an internationalist Şehîd, Anna Campbell (Helin Qereçox), who was killed during an attack by the Turkish army in Efrîn in March 2018.

Being present on the ground and witnessing the complexities and contradictions first-hand, alongside a political structure facilitating the processing of these experiences, appears to have accelerated the shift from projection to the maintenance of enduring relationships.

Education within the ICR encompassed various topics including ideology, personality, and language. Some of the ideological subjects included Democratic Confederalism, sexism, the women's movement, Jineolojî, Democratic Modernity, the history of the Rojava revolution and the global leftist movement. These formative processes involved three recurring aspects. Firstly, many internationalists from Germany had fragmented knowledge about the history of their own movement, both in recent history, and spanning several centuries. Therefore, as was the case in the previous phase, political learning continued to focus on the history of the revolutionary movement in Germany. The second aspect pertains to the personal transformation of internationalists. One internationalist, who was part of the ICR reflected on the complexity of this personal development:

“It is very, very much to understand ourselves. Already the possibility is given, to step out ... to experience yourself differently, you can also understand many things ... [In the commune] we lived the principles of criticism and self-criticism, which are lived principles for decades, of cooperativeness. And I think that is also a very inspiring moment, to actually be aware that you were and are part of a revolutionary movement worldwide, something very concrete.”

Stepping outside of their usual political and social routines provides internationalists with the opportunity to reflect on the political work carried out in their own countries. Additionally, techniques such as 'tekmîl' and 'platforms' have been adopted from guerrilla experiences. Tekmîl is carried out regularly to collectively assess and criticize everyday life, whereas platforms involve an in-depth process of collective criticism and self-criticism. A "platform" is a collective method that aims to identify and dismantle mechanisms of domination. Specifically, a person presents their biography, evaluates their own work and is then critiqued by other participants with the aim of personal development (Herausgeber:innenkollektiv 2022: 156). Finally, internationalists undergoing education in the ICR also reported a transformation from individualism to sociality, often described as the development of a socialist identity. This involves the understanding of oneself as part of society, organizing society and finding a way of dealing with daily contradictions. This shift stands in contrast to the autonomous movement in Germany, which tends to position itself outside and against society. Moreover, the process of personality development also deals with capitalist and patriarchal aspects in internationalists' socialization. At this point, it is evident that political learning constitutes a central component of the ICR's work and constitutes a sub-mechanism in the formation of a transnational space.

Local Relationship Formation

One of the primary objectives of the ICR, integral to its political learning mechanisms, involve establishing relationships through engagement with local governing and civil institutions in the revolutionary context. The language courses in Kurdish languages were one important aspect for forming relationships with the local organizations and people. One internationalist argued:

“I think it is indispensable, because the revolution in Rojava is indeed a revolution under the leadership of the Kurdish movement. For me, what I wanted was to talk to the people as well.

I wanted to know what the mother was thinking, sitting there? ... It just gives you a completely different approach. Language is simply the key.”

The same internationalist regretted that he did not learn Arabic in addition to Kurmancî, since it prevented access to Arabic speaking parts of society. Besides the youth movement, the internationalist commune had cooperation partners such as the Mala Jin⁴¹⁶ in Qamişlo, and the women's village of Jinwar, where a Jineolojî Academy took place (Flach 2019). This collaborative approach ensured that relationship transformation extended beyond the personal connections of individual activists, but were handed over to subsequent internationalists. This ongoing exchange effectively sustained these relationships, occasionally involving internationalist support for various projects or congresses, as one activist related:

“Then I went to Şingal⁴¹⁷ with a comrade and spent two weeks preparing a congress with the youth movement ... The idea was to do youth work in Şingal in order to get to know something of the society ... I mean, we both didn't really know Kurdish yet ... A comrade there, who also knew German ... We drove around in the car all day, knocking on doors everywhere and asking if we could have a Chai with them and talking to the kids in the family, telling them: ‘you can now get organized at the congress!’ That was the founding congress of the Yezidi youth. It was not only for Şingal. There were people from Kobanê, from everywhere where there are Yezidis ... But we didn't really contribute anything. We were always there asking what this meant and writing it down. That was the best way to learn Kurdish, especially to learn the words that are really used there.”

Importantly, local relationship transformation included an ongoing learning process encompassing language acquisition, cultural understanding, political insights, and organizational skills. Nevertheless, besides the learning process, the organizational contributions of the internationalists to the Kurdish movement were limited, as an internationalist concluded:

“I learned a lot about the movement, about the culture of the movement, how it managed to bind really different parts of society to itself without upsetting them. But I didn't know enough culturally, with all the codes, to take an organizing role there.”

Moreover, challenges emerged when internationalists attempted to engage in political organizing within local families. In some instances, families expressed a desire to migrate to Europe, while internationalists advocated for continued engagement in the maintenance of the revolution in Rojava. Given their differing relationships to the region, the internationalists could only play a limited organizing role and encountered other contradictions compared to Kurdish movement cadres. Nonetheless, the ICR transformed the character of relationships, from one based on the personal social ties of individual activists, to the regular maintenance of relationships between internationalists and the movement in Rojava.

Transnational Coordination

The ICR also serves as a hub for transnational coordination, which can be understood as the “joint planning of collective action and the creation of instances for cross-spatial collaboration” (Tarrow 2005: 121). Firstly, within the ICR, internationalists from various leftist currents and countries converged, necessitating the establishment of shared practices and coordination of their efforts.

⁴¹⁶ House of the Women's Movement.

⁴¹⁷ Sinjar.

Secondly, internationalists returning to their home countries, despite facing challenges, often engaged in bridging activities between Rojava and their respective societies. Most importantly, the ICR has coordinated several transnational campaigns. Among these, I will emphasize the 'Make Rojava Green Again' and the '#RiseUp4Rojava' campaigns, as they are not only highly visible, but were also highlighted by interviewees themselves.

Firstly, as previously mentioned, the ICR serves as a transnational space in two distinct ways: it functions both as a physical hub in Rojava, where internationalists can coordinate various aspects of their work, including daily life, political education, and local relationship maintenance. In this context, it is essential to also highlight the ICR's role as a space for coordinating exchange between diverse leftist currents and ideologies originating from different countries. A Kurdish activist aptly characterized the ICR as a place for transnational cooperation:

"The internationalist commune: if you look, the [internationalists] ideologically do not come from the same spectrum, from the same political corner. But the struggle, the revolution has managed to create a common platform for all left forces. In it, confrontation takes place, you can meet there, you can put aside all the hostility, the confrontations at least to a certain point. This atmosphere was created."

Within the commune, the ideologies and strategies from various leftist currents and movements converged, fostering an environment for exchange and discussions. The Kurdish movement facilitated a space for coordination and dialogue between sometimes polarized ideologies and organizations. However, this cooperation was guided by the attribution of similarity with the Revolution in Rojava and the ideology of Democratic Confederalism. In essence, the Kurdish movement provided the ideological framework within which these exchanges occurred.

Secondly, the ICR coordinated the internationalists' transnational bridging activities. As the ICR itself emphasized:

"Bringing the struggle of the people in Rojava to our societies elsewhere across the globe is one of the most significant contributions to the revolution" (Internationalist Commune of Rojava 2022).

The primary objective of most internationalists in the civic organizations, as previously mentioned, was to acquire knowledge and then return to their respective countries to actively participate in solidarity work. After their time in Rojava, these internationalists reintegrated into their own organizations, organized informational and educational events, engaged in press work, and implemented the knowledge they acquired in Kurdistan to their activities back home. In fact, the majority of the internationalists associated with the civic organizations, in contrast to those in the military units, contributed in some capacity to the solidarity movement with Kurdistan. The return of internationalists to their home countries contributed, among other things, to the normalization of the PKK-led Kurdish movement and the Rojava Revolution within the German left.⁴¹⁸ However these internationalists also faced difficulties upon their return. Firstly, they needed to readjust to their home societies again, as one internationalist remembered:

"In this process of coming back, you also have difficulties, you have to adjust to a reality again. Which is often not very easy. It could lead to conflicts, that you don't speak the same

⁴¹⁸ See Chapter VIII. 3.

language anymore. Maybe that can even lead to the end, that is no longer my way. I think that this development can also happen.”

Another challenge for internationalists, the second one referred to, was that the organizational, political contexts from which they came were often incompatible with their experiences and expectations. This was partly pronounced when internationalists went to the ICR as individuals rather than being sent by their political organizations. This divergence in experiences sometimes led to a sense of separation or alienation. One internationalist who later became involved in the MRGA campaign, expressed his difficulties:

“I had thought I could draw lessons from my experience and just apply that. But I did not know how, where or what I should do. Then I didn't do anything for two months. I was in a state of limbo.”

Furthermore, adapting to a different context and integrating the lessons learned into that context could be overwhelming, or at least challenging for individual activists. Finally, there are the difficulties related to repression when travelling to and from the ICR (Altun 2019): internationalists are presented with one set of challenges when leaving Rojava, and another in the form of repression in their home countries upon their return. In any case, such repression often remains at the level of surveillance and rarely leads to prosecution. Thirdly, many internationalists actively participated in the execution of transnational campaigns that originated and were coordinated through the ICR. The following will present an analysis of the ‘Make Rojava Green Again’ campaign, and shortly sketch the ‘#RiseUp4Rojava’ campaign.

The ‘#RiseUp4Rojava – Smash Turkish Fascism’ Campaign originated in the ICR and facilitated worldwide solidarity actions. It was established in the spring of 2019 in response to Turkey’s invasion of Efrîn the previous year. At that time, there was a notable absence of transnational coordination among solidarity groups from various countries (cf. Schindler 2023) and the ICR stepped in to address this gap. A year after the invasion of Efrîn, the ‘#RiseUp4Rojava’ campaign gained prominence and called for global action days in solidarity with Rojava in January 2019 (Flach 2019). In the same year, the campaign also organized a ‘Day x’ campaign in order to prepare in advance of another invasion. When Turkey invaded the ‘Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria’ (AANES) in October 2019, the campaign announced action weeks with specific days targeting the arms industry, Turkish airline flights or media companies. Notably, a Europe-wide demonstration with over 10,000 people took place in Köln, organized by the campaign in close collaboration with the Kurdish movement (Lüdemann, dpa 2019; Bähr 2019). The ICR effectively coordinated transnational protests with relatively limited resources, leveraging the relationships it had previously established with a wide range of solidarity organizations. There was a network of at least 52 supporting organizations across 16 countries, primarily in Europe, but also including the US and South Africa (#RiseUp4Rojava 2019). The campaign primarily announced days of action online and set the overall strategy. These calls were then adopted by local solidarity groups and adjusted to fit local conditions. While it is challenging to ascertain whether this was always done with the local Kurdish movement’s cooperation, the Kurdish groups were included in the German context.

The campaign played a crucial role during times of crisis. However, between these threat situations, ‘#RiseUp4Rojava’ shared information about local actions and created an online space

where the solidarity movement with Kurdistan resonated. This allowed small solidarity actions to be framed within the context of a global solidarity movement, providing symbolic reinforcement. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the online mobilization was susceptible to repression: Twitter frequently blocked the campaign's accounts (ANF News 2021a), as did other social media platforms.

Make Rojava Green Again

The 'Make Rojava Green Again' (MRGA) campaign was initiated by the ICR in early 2018 as a long-term campaign in cooperation with the Committee for Nature Reserves of the Commission for Economy and the Committee for Ecology of the Commission for City Administration and Ecology of Dêrik (Internationalistische Kommune 2018: 113). The campaign's significance rested on the importance of ecology as one pillar of Democratic Confederalism, the necessity for an ecological transformation in Rojava, and, finally, on the fact that a significant number of internationalists had a background in ecological movements (ANF News 2019d).

The campaign's objectives concerned education, the local implementation of ecological projects and the mobilization of solidarity worldwide. Firstly, the campaign sought to create ecological consciousness and spread knowledge about ecological problems to internationalists in the academy and to the local residents in schools, youth centres, communes, and the city administration. Secondly, the campaign supported projects such as the tree nursery in the commune, the Hayaka nature reserve and a community garden and planting project in Dêrik.⁴¹⁹ Thirdly, and most importantly for this analysis, 'Make Rojava Green Again' fundamentally aspired to foster international solidarity: "Put simply, the campaign is a bridge between work, discussions and experiences here locally and activists, scientists and movements around the world" (ANF News 2019d). The campaign engaged in transnational coordination, organizing transnational exchanges of information, resources, and activists from and to the ICR.

The MRGA campaign, initiated within the ICR, actively diffused the ideology of Democratic Confederalism to Europe as a potential framework for coalition building among environmentalist movements and groups. It conducted extensive press work, coordinated internationalist action days, organized local events, brochures, videos and even produced a book in collaboration with the council structures of Rojava. The book introduced the concept of social ecology, provided background information about the concrete ecological situation in Rojava, proposed solutions for ecological issues in the AANES and global, and presented opportunities for participation in the campaign (Internationalistische Kommune 2018). Translated into twelve languages, the book aimed to reach a broad international audience.⁴²⁰ The campaign, through other press and public relations efforts, also addressed other ecological problems in the AANES, and highlighted the environmental destruction caused by the Turkish state, including actions such as blocking water flows and burning fields. One MRGA activist later reflected that "The idea came from Rojava with MRGA, and we actually built it up in Germany."

⁴¹⁹ The latter was carried out in cooperation with the twin city association Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg - Dêrik e.V.

⁴²⁰ In Germany, 200 books in English were confiscated, since the publisher and distributor, the Mezopotamia publishing house, was banned in 2018 (ANF News 2022a) (See Chapter VIII. 2.). Despite this repression, the book was published and distributed through information events in Germany.

Concerning local relationship formation in Germany, attempts were made to establish local branches or groups of the MRGA campaign, however, these efforts faced initial challenges and were not sustainable, mainly due to the internationalists' limited organizing skills and resources. Nevertheless, the campaign facilitated the formation of relationships between internationalists and actors within the broader ecological movement in Germany. One internationalist recounted building new connections with groups which had no prior contact with the Kurdish movement or were previously unaware about its existence:

“We can reach a different target group through the eco[logical] issue and make it known there once again. That was also really cool, because I talked to a lot of people who had never heard of it. They always had this attitude, like there's still one stone on top of another in Syria? And you could just tell them that it's a really cool thing that they're building there.”

For instance, the Green party in Flensburg organized a public seminar and expressed support for the campaign's goals (KV Schleswig-Flensburg, Bündnis 90, Die Grünen 2020). The MRGA campaign also participated in the 'Witzenhäuser Konferenz 2019'⁴²¹ and collaborated with the 'Attac⁴²² Summer Academy'. Additionally, it also made declarations of solidarity with the 'Hambi', an occupied forest that was a focal point for radical left environmental activism in 2018.

Locally, MRGA supported global climate strikes organized by 'Fridays for Future' (FfF), and at numerous demonstrations, solidarity with Rojava was expressed (Make Rojava Green Again 2019). Later, the campaign also engaged in Europe-wide coordination meetings, including one in 2019 organized by the Italian 'NO-TAV movement'⁴²³. These local collaborations and relationships in Germany were leveraged for action days and emergency calls: during the Turkish invasion of the AANES territories in 2019, the MRGA issued calls to FfF groups worldwide. In Germany alone, 90 local FfF groups responded to the call, expressing their solidarity with Rojava and mobilizing for protests under the slogan '#FridaysForPeace' (Fridays for Future Frankfurt am Main 2019). The MRGA campaign also coordinated several action days, such as those under the slogan 'Ecologists Rise up for Rojava!'. These actions called for global efforts to halt the Turkish invasion of Northern Syria in 2019. An analyst from a counterterrorism journal associated with the 'Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung'⁴²⁴ assessed that the MRGA campaign in Germany had facilitated the formation of relationships across the leftist spectrum:

“Left-wing extremists are tapping into the justified indignation about Turkish politics in the middle of, especially, the left-wing democratic spectrum, thus expanding their social reach” (Siewert 2019: 5).

The creation of relationships through the campaign helped in enabling a broad resistance against the Turkish invasion and attacks. In sum, thanks to their cooperation with actors from the European ecological movements the MRGA campaign played a role in expanding the network of local relationships, engaging with actors beyond the Kurdish solidarity movement, and in coordinating international solidarity based on these relationships.

⁴²¹ Ecological conference organized by the Department of Ecological Agricultural Sciences at the University in Kassel.

⁴²² Alter-Globalization organisation founded in 2000, with members in 50 countries, and a broad membership.

⁴²³ 'No to the High-Speed Train movement', which is based in the Susa Valley in Piedmont.

⁴²⁴ Right-wing, party-affiliated foundation of the CDU.

Thirdly, concerning the reciprocity of exchange with Rojava, the MRGA sought to organize flows of resources, expertise, and internationalists, while establishing and maintaining transnational relations. The most straightforward yet crucial flow was related to donations collected in Europe. Fundraising campaigns were supported by media efforts, and funds were also collected at local events. Moreover, the campaign recruited new internationalists who would go to Rojava, or experts willing to support projects with their knowledge. Additionally, the campaigns encouraged activists to establish connections with key figures that could expand their scope of reach, such as journalists, politicians, experts, and scientists in the field of ecological sciences. Finally, the MRGA campaign initiated and maintained long term transnational relationships through ‘town-twinings’.⁴²⁵

To summarize, the ‘Make Rojava Green Again’ campaign effectively disseminated knowledge about the Rojava Revolution’s essentially ecological character among European environmental movements. While the campaign itself did not establish its own ecological groups, various solidarity and environmental organizations adopted its label, and internationalists from the campaign organized local discussions and informational events. This local engagement helped to form relationships in Germany which were particularly valuable during times of threat as they facilitated broad mobilization efforts. Additionally, MRGA sought to secure donations for projects in Rojava and establish relationships with ecological experts. In essence, the transnational campaign efficiently coordinated flows to and from the ICR, playing a key role in forming and maintaining transnational relationships.

Summary Internationalist Commune of Rojava

The ICR played a crucial role in the formation of a transnational space between Kurdistan and the global left, with a particular emphasis on Europe, and especially Germany. The ICR serves as an exemplary case of how a transnational space between the radical left and the Kurdish movement was established, with a continuous flow of internationalists travelling to Rojava and integrating with the ICR. These internationalists underwent a process of political learning, integrated into local initiatives, participated in transnational coordination efforts, and returned to their respective home organizations, thus reinforcing the transnational relationship. This formation of a transnational space can be understood through three key sub-mechanisms. Firstly, the ICR began with a strong focus on *political learning*, attracting internationalists who sought to deepen their understanding of the Rojava Revolution. Secondly, initially based on personal connections, through the activities of the ICR, *local relationships* between the internationalists and the movement in Rojava evolved into more structured and regular interactions. Thirdly, the ICR became a hub for *transnational coordination* within the solidarity movement with Kurdistan. Internationalists from different leftist currents and countries engaged in bridging activities and collaborated on various initiatives and campaigns. Notably, the ‘#RiseUp4Rojava’ campaign coordinated global actions during periods of crisis, while the ‘Make Rojava Green Again’ campaign fostered local relationship formation with the broader ecological movement. Despite its limited resources and size, the ICR effectively contributed to the development of a transnational space between Rojava and the radical left in Germany. This space allowed for the

⁴²⁵ Thus, the campaign is part of a twinning between the city of Rojava and the district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg in Berlin. Accordingly, urban district gardens are being created and green spaces are being planted with trees (Rojava AG IL, Lukas 2019). Additionally, in 2019 and 2020, parts of the riverbed (Korniş) in the centre of Dêrik were redesigned.

coordination of transnational campaigns, facilitated political learning and was crucial for sustaining relationships both in Rojava and Germany.

1.3. Summary

Phase III: Transnational Arena

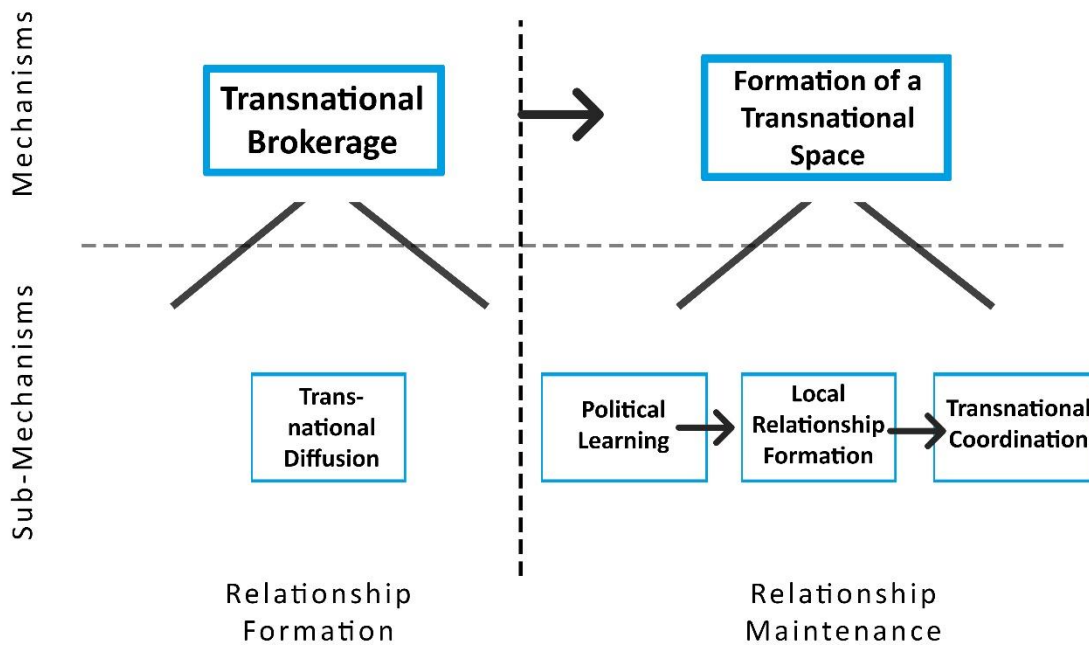


Figure 10: Diagram of Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms in the Transnational Arena in Phase III

In the context of the Transnational Arena, the evidence suggests that the character of transnational relations between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany evolved from their basis in transnational brokerage in Phase I and Phase II, towards the formation of a coordinated transnational space in Phase III. As the starting point of the Kurdistan solidarity in Phase III, the transnational diffusion by mass media during the resistance in Kobanê can be pinpointed. Quantitatively, there was a noticeable increase in various aspects of transnational solidarity efforts. This included a rise in jointly coordinated solidarity actions, an influx of internationalists travelling to Kurdistan, and the proliferation of transnational projects. Qualitatively, the relations formed during this phase became more enduring and sustainable due to the impact of delegation trips, transnational projects, and internationalist Şehîds. Transnational flows of information, resources, and activists were recreated and strengthened over time. For instance, the construction of medical infrastructure organized by political parties as international solidarity and human right organizations was not a completely new repertoire but reemerged in Phase III in greater numbers.

The emergence of the ICR illustrated the formation of a transnational space and its constituting sub-mechanisms of *political learning*, *local relationship formation* and *transnational coordination*. Internationalists travel to Rojava/AANES, join the ICR, undergo a political learning process, integrate into local activities, engage in transnational coordination, return to their

respective organizations in Germany, and subsequently rekindle the transnational relationships formed during their engagement in Rojava. With the ICR and other transnational activities, the transnational brokerage reached an intensity that one can speak of the formation of a transnational space between the radical left and the Kurdish movement.

2. Phase III: National Arena

This section presents the analysis of the National Arena during Phase III from 2015 until 2020. Like in previous sections, I will briefly outline the relevant changes and continuities in the repression and stigmatization of the Kurdish movement, countermovement threats and the national public in Germany in order to analyse the relationship transformation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement. In essence, the analysis shows that Phase III was marked by a continuity of selective repression and an increase in generalized repression, both of which contributed to relationship maintenance.

In Phase III, the PKK-led Kurdish movement continued its pursuit of decriminalization, particularly on an international scale. Meanwhile, German security authorities persisted in prosecuting the Kurdish movement using anti-terrorist laws, association bans, and restrictive asylum regulations. However, repression began to take on a more indiscriminate character, encompassing not only the Kurdish movement itself but also the solidarity movement and their relationships. In 2017, the ban on the PKK was extended to include 33 symbols, which included the symbols of the PYD, YPJ, and YPG. Strikingly, these organizations remain unbanned in Germany and were not included on the EU's list of terror groups. The symbol ban, however, led to several consequences.

Firstly, it resulted in assembly authorities inconsistently permitting or prohibiting the display of such flags and symbols, creating ambiguity and tensions. For instance, within the same week in Berlin, these symbols were banned at one rally but allowed at two other demonstrations (Peter 2019). This ambiguity often sparked tension during demonstrations and rallies, escalating protests. Secondly, the symbol ban triggered an increase in legal proceedings for alleged violations of association laws. This escalation manifested in numerous house searches, the issuance of penalty notices, and the blocking of social media accounts. Bavaria, in particular, became known for its aggressive enforcement of the symbol ban. As an example of the generalized repression, preliminary proceedings were initiated merely for sharing an article from the 'Bayerischer Rundfunk'⁴²⁶ on social media, where the accompanying picture displayed a YPG flag (Possoch 2018). Targets of these actions were not limited to political activists in the solidarity movement, but also affected bystanders (Bähr 2021). Lastly, it is worth noting that the Bavarian Supreme Court, in line with the prior rulings of other regional courts, ruled in December 2020 that displaying these symbols at demonstrations and online does not constitute a punishable offence.

During Phase III, repression against Kurdish activists persisted, particularly concerning the migration regime, and the threat of deportation notably increased. Starting from 2015, the number of deportations to Turkey began to rise once more, reaching a peak in 2019 with 429 deportations by air. It is important to note that this figure does not directly indicate the number of Kurdish activists deported, but it does highlight the looming threat of deportation that hangs over the political activities of Kurdish activists.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁶ Public-service radio and television broadcaster, based in Munich.

⁴²⁷ One example is that of Zeki T., who came to Germany twenty years ago as a six-year-old. Being a Kurd with a Turkish passport, he was deported to Turkey in 2019 because of his work in a Kurdish cultural association. In concrete terms, Zeki T. was accused of taking part in legal rallies, Newroz celebrations, meetings, and fundraising campaigns organized by the Democratic Kurdish Social Center "Medya Volkshaus e.V." (ANF News 2019).

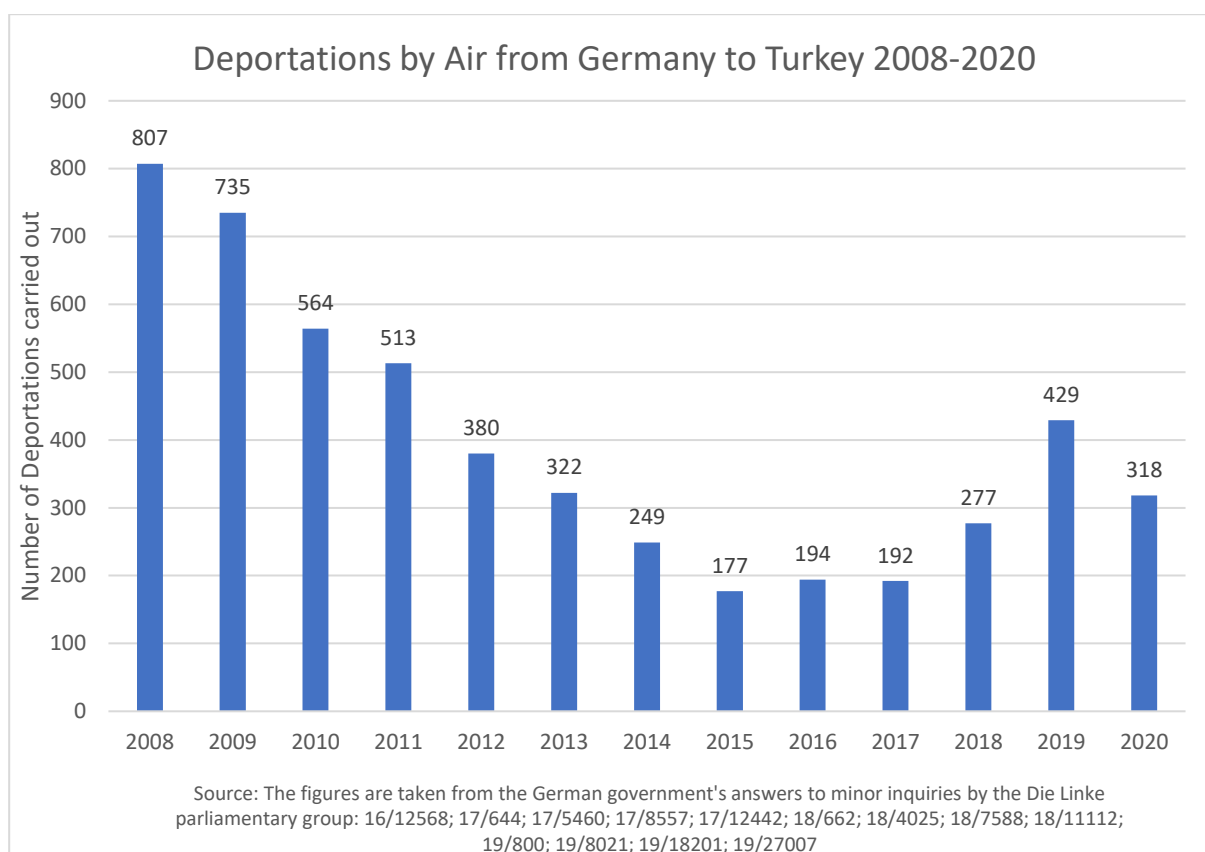


Figure 11: Deportations by Air from Germany to Turkey 2008-2020

During this phase, additional measures under migration law were employed to repress politically active Kurds, such as the termination of residence, refusal to extend residence permits, or the denial of naturalization. Southern Germany, in particular, saw an increase in cases where Kurdish migrants were denied German citizenship. The repression by the migration regime considerably restricted the freedom of movement for politically active Kurds, not only to Kurdistan, but also within Germany and Europe.

Concerning the threat posed by the countermovement, critical events in Kurdistan had the potential to escalate tensions between various diaspora movements in Germany (Başer, Féron 2022: 9). Phase III witnessed several of these events, which occasionally led to violent confrontations between the Kurdish movement and Turkish fascists or Salafists in Germany. The war in Kobanê, for example, triggered mobilization in the Kurdish diaspora and heightened tensions (Başer 2015b: 1–2). Clashes were reported between Salafist and IS supporters, and Kurdish youths, who were protesting for Kobanê in Hamburg, Celle, and other German cities (Knaack 2014; O'Connor 2018).⁴²⁸ Additionally, violent attacks against Kurdish institutions or information stands by Turkish fascists occurred in cities like Berlin, Essen and Hamburg (Zeit Online 2018). During the invasion of Efrîn in 2018, there was an increase in attacks (including

⁴²⁸ The formation of another right-wing countermovement was triggered by this escalation, namely PEGIDA: 'Patriotischen Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes' | 'Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident'. Under the motto 'Non-violent and united against religious and proxy wars on German soil' the first PEGIDA rally took place in October 2014 in Dresden. The movement, which grew rapidly and underwent a scale shift, initially combined the topic of asylum with anti-Muslim racism by using the example of the clashes between Kurdish activists and Salafists in Celle and Hamburg (Antifa Recherche Team Dresden 2016: 34–35). However, there has hardly been any long-term cooperation between German (radical) right-wing groups and the Grey Wolves over the past decades. Only one event could be identified, in April 2016, where Grey Wolves demonstrated side by side with activists of the neo-Nazi party 'Die Rechte' against the PKK (Bozay 2017).

arson) against Turkish nationalist institutions (Deutsche Welle 2018), likely carried out by Kurdish youth and radical left actors. For instance, a DİTİB mosque in Berlin were targeted. When Turkey invaded the AANES in 2019, clashes erupted between Turkish Fascists and Kurdish activists, as seen in Herne, Germany (Başer, Féron 2022). Even during broader demonstrations, like the ‘anti-colonial march’ in 2019 in Berlin, the Kurdish bloc was attacked and provoked by Turkish fascists.

However, during my participatory observations of demonstrations against Turkish invasions and wars in Kurdistan, I noted that the organized structures of the Kurdish movement and the solidarity movement were keen on de-escalating situations. Organizers marked with vests often intervened to prevent violent escalations, forming barriers between demonstrators, police, or Turkish fascists. In Berlin neighbourhoods like Kreuzberg, Neukölln, and Wedding, Turkish fascists occasionally provoked demonstrators with wolf salutes and slogans in support of Erdoğan. Both the Kurdish movement and the fascist countermovement had an interest in not being perceived as escalators of the conflict. After violent clashes, both sides were eager to denounce any violence and sometimes accused the other side of provocation. Therefore, while the escalation and provocation between movement and countermovement increased in Phase III, organized structures made efforts to avoid violent confrontations.

Regarding the national public, following a brief period in the beginning of Phase III where a window of opportunity was momentarily open, stigmatization against the PKK re-emerged albeit with a positive resonance of the Rojava Revolution. The military successes of the HPG and the YPG/YPJ against the IS boosted the PKK’s international recognition. The YPG and YPJ were celebrated as heroes in the media, and even the PKK, which had played a decisive role in rescuing the Yazidis in Şingal, received reconsideration in parts of the press (Brauns 2019: 36). The taz, which had previously contributed to stigmatization in Phase I, ran a headline in 2014 declaring, “the PKK belongs to Germany” (Yücel 2014). In general, there was a growing number of newspaper articles covering developments in Kurdistan and demonstrations in Germany (Nowacki 2019: 53). Publicly, representatives from a broader political spectrum announced that they would consider lifting the PKK ban. Even CDU/CSU parliamentary party leader Volker Kauder no longer publicly ruled out supporting the PKK in the fight against IS at the end of 2014 (Reuters 2014). Notably, ‘Die Linke’ moved closer to the Kurdish movement during this time, and did not go back on its pledge to challenge the PKK ban, as recalled by a solidarity activist:

“That’s when Gregor Gysi⁴²⁹ virtually put himself at the head of those who said ‘the PKK ban must go’. Gysi himself travelled to Kurdistan and spoke with the various forces, from the Barzanis to the PKK. And I mean a year before, we already had great difficulties formulating a small question on the subject ... Now, the ‘Die Linke’ has said: we are about to introduce a motion to lift the PKK ban in the Bundestag ... And the nice thing is that ‘Die Linke’ did not [break their promise] ... So even now, when for the federal government and others the PKK is again only the terrorist organization, ‘Die Linke’ maintains its course in these questions.”

For a brief moment, the political opportunity structure in Germany appeared to be opening for the Kurdish movement’s demands to lift the PKK ban. However, since 2017, this window of opportunity appears to be closing, as international relations with Turkey have once again taken on a central role for the German government. Many media outlets began to describe the YPG/YPJ

⁴²⁹ Prominent member of Die Linke.

as an “offshoot of the terrorist PKK” (Brauns 2019: 36). However, the overall framing of the Kurdish movement in Syria was relatively positive compared to the stigmatization of Phase I. The terrorist stigma continued to be the master frame used by the mass media in Germany to characterize the PKK, however other negative attributions such as ‘Stalinist’ or ‘political sect’ were less frequently used. Importantly, some mass media acknowledged the PKK’s changed goal of establishing Democratic Confederalism instead of pursuing an independent Kurdistan. Additionally, in terms of the conflict escalation between the movement and the countermovement, Brauns argued that there was a tendency in the media to ‘racialize’ the conflict, or emphasize ethnic cleavages, as seen in newspapers headlines like ‘Brawl: Kurds against Turks’ (2019: 38). This brought back the notion of an ‘imported conflict’, not only from the radical right, but also from the mass media. In summary, following a brief period where lifting the PKK ban seemed possible, as the political opportunity structure eventually closed, it began to appear as increasingly unlikely. However, while the terrorist stigma against the PKK has been continuously reproduced, the project in Rojava has garnered more attention globally, albeit ranging from ambivalent to positive reactions.

2.1. Kurdish movement- Radical left

In Phase III, repression did not serve as a trigger for new relationship formation but rather for relationship maintenance. As demonstrated for the Transnational Arena and as shall be shown for the Inter-Movement Arena, new relationships were often triggered by diffusion and the attribution of similarity. However, repression and the attribution of threat have remained important issues for the solidarity movement. Demonstrations against the PKK ban, for example, still manage to mobilize many supporters. The generalized repression resulting from the symbol ban, in particular, led to acts of solidarity and civil disobedience. Combined with a relatively more favourable general public opinion, repression and stigmatization rarely led to the break-up of relationships.

2.1.1. *Repression and Relationship Maintenance: Protest and Civil Disobedience*

The following section demonstrates that selective repression against the Kurdish movement fostered relationship maintenance in the form of initiatives to establish anti-repression organizations and joint mobilization, and that generalized repression triggered relationship maintenance as indicated by the case of the symbol ban and recurring acts of civil disobedience. Finally, it discusses relationship break up, or rather non-engagement, resulting from tactical disputes concerning the countermovements threat.

Unlike in Phase I, repression in Phase III only occasionally triggered relationship formation. One such example was the banning and dissolution of ‘Mezopotamien Verlags’ and ‘MIR-Multimedia’⁴³⁰ under the law of association in February 2019 for alleged support of the PKK and being considered its ‘sub-organizations’. This led to thousands of books, including Kurdish children's books, language and history books, and CDs of Kurdish music being confiscated (Millich 2019). In response, several publishers and book trade organizations issued protest statements. In the context of the solidarity project “Against Censorship - For Freedom of Publication”, three German-language publishers, ‘edition 8’ (Swiss), ‘Mandelbaum’ (Austria) and ‘Unrast Verlag’

⁴³⁰ ‘Mezopotamia Publishing House’ and ‘MIR Multimedia Publishing House’.

(Germany) reprinted selected works from the banned publisher, making them accessible again (Millich 2019). The 'Edition Mezopotamya' was financed by donations.

Selective Repression triggering Relationship Maintenance

In essence, selective repression against the Kurdish movement in Germany fostered relationship maintenance within the active solidarity movement. This maintenance manifested as long-term anti-repression efforts and joint mobilization against the PKK ban. The threat of repression was attributed as a threat against a close partner, leading to a concerted effort to support and sustain the relationship. One veteran internationalist activist recalled the selective repression practiced against the Kurdish movement, highlighting the role of terrorist laws:

“[The repression] has already changed to some extent. Certain repression is less. We [internationalists] are becoming fewer. I don't know what that means, whether they're watching us, I guess. That they're not interested in getting more people [towards the Kurdish movement] ... They have more of an observing role towards us, towards the internationalists. There were a few arrests, from those who came back [from Kurdistan], but in relation it is quiet in Germany. And the repression against the Kurdish movement is rather increasing again.”

In Phase III, criminal proceedings against internationalists who went to Rojava and joined civil institutions or military units were sometimes initiated, but often dropped after a period of investigation and surveillance. Notably, there were no convictions against German internationalists based on section 129 a/b during this phase, and the severe repression primarily targeted the Kurdish movement. Additionally, the solidarity movement was rarely targeted by the migration regime, except for restrictions on leaving the country.⁴³¹ This selective repression triggered an attribution of threat and fostered relationship maintenance, particularly with radical leftist groups.

AZADÎ continued its “classic legal aid work” with “direct, very close cooperation with the ‘Rote Hilfe’” in Germany, as a long term AZADÎ argued. They organized several conferences⁴³² on the topic of the criminalization of Kurds in Germany in collaboration with other groups. I attended one such conference in Munich in 2019, where seemingly all speakers present sought to link the repression against the Kurdish movement with broader repression against leftist organizations and the erosion of basic democratic rights. The conference was organized in partnership with the ‘Rote Hilfe’ Munich, the alliance ‘noPAG - NEIN! Zum Polizeiaufgabengesetz Bayern,’⁴³³ and the Bavarian Refugee Council. One long-term AZADÎ member described the group’s priorities as follows:

“As AZADÎ, we issue press releases, of course, but our work is primarily juridical. So, we provide proper lawyers, pay them, do information work, but our goal is not necessarily to gather 100 people in front of the courthouse, that's rather done by other structures.”

⁴³¹ For instance, the Spanish internationalist Maria, who lived in Germany, was expelled by the German authorities and banned from re-entering the country for 20 years. The reason given was that her stay in Germany, according to the authorities, was exclusively for the purpose of activism for the Kurdish freedom movement. In this context, she acted as a link between the radical left scene and the PKK (Grupo Internacional 2021).

⁴³² For example, the ‘25 Years of PKK Ban - 25 Years of Repression and Democracy Dismantling in the Service of German Foreign Policy’ in 2018 in Berlin.

⁴³³ noPAG - NO! To the police task law Bavaria. PAG refers to the proposed Bavarian Police Act.

Effectively, the consistent selective repression of the German state against the Kurdish movement made the work of AZADÎ necessary and contributed to its institutionalization. Over the years, AZADÎ became a central hub for relationship maintenance and networking between the Kurdish movement, lawyers, civil society actors and the radical left.

During Phase III, mobilization and campaign work were predominantly carried out by campaign coalitions such as 'Tatort Kurdistan'. One activist from 'Tatort Kurdistan' related the opportunities that campaign coalitions afforded to the movement in the context of ongoing anti-repression efforts, and the risks involved in being perceived as associated with the PKK:

"I mean the campaign 'Tatort Kurdistan', it is also a label or a platform that gives the opportunity to address the issue of PKK ban without identifying directly with the PKK. It is more difficult for the state to impute 'Tatort Kurdistan', which stands for the decriminalization of the PKK, as a membership or support of a terrorist organization, than a direct solidarity structure of the movement for the PKK ... Of course, this can always be constructed. But the state just has a different analysis and has no interest in criminalizing 'Tatort Kurdistan', because there are structures of the movement here, on which there is more of a focus ... 'Tatort Kurdistan' is a structure that provides the framework for raising this issue. I think it definitely fulfils its function."

Notably, activists are well aware of the threat of being targeted by the PKK ban. Based on the experiences of other solidarity movements and the ongoing repression, 'Tatort Kurdistan' and other solidarity groups use precise framing such as 'lifting of the PKK ban' to stay within legally permitted demands. In contrast, in 2015, the campaign 'PKK? Na Klar!'⁴³⁴ encouraged activists to display their faces in front of forbidden PKK flags, aiming to increase the number of people potentially affected by the PKK ban, essentially trying to generalize the repression. Additionally, every year around the 26th November, the anniversary of the PKK ban, the Kurdish movement organizes demonstrations against the ban in coalition with solidarity structures. Apart from demonstrations against invasions of Rojava by the Turkish army or its proxies, these demonstrations against the PKK ban were some of the largest mobilizations across the country. For instance, the nationwide demonstration under the slogan 'The desire for freedom cannot be banned', held on the 25th anniversary of the PKK ban, saw around 3,000 participants in Berlin in 2018. The call for this demonstration was endorsed by numerous groups nationwide, including Kurdish structures, radical left groups, and individuals. In 2016, demonstrations took place in various cities, including Stuttgart, Berlin, Göttingen, Munich, Saarbrücken, Hamburg, Frankfurt, and Bonn. These demonstrations connected the repression against the Kurdish movement with the repression against leftists social centres like the Rigaer Straße in Berlin, or Korn⁴³⁵ in Hanover (Civaka Azad 2016b).

In sum, selective repression against the Kurdish movement led to relationship maintenance within the active solidarity movement. This included anti-repression work, demonstrations against the PKK ban, and information campaigns that were jointly organized. Importantly, the

⁴³⁴ PKK? Yes, of course!

⁴³⁵ On the 11th February 2016, the police searched the Independent Youth Center 'Kornstraße' (Korn). The association running the 'Korn' was accused of supporting the PKK by providing premises. Rigaer Straße is a street in Berlin with several leftist former squats.

repression against the Kurdish movement in Germany was linked with the repression against other leftist organizations.

Generalized Repression triggering Relationship Maintenance

Generalized repression, especially in case of the symbol ban triggered relationship maintenance and mass civil disobedience against the ban. Repression against cooperation and solidarity between the Kurdish movement and the German left, particularly through the symbol ban, escalated significantly from 2017 onwards, especially during and after the Turkish invasion in Efrîn (Millich 2018). A member of AZADÎ assessed:

“There are also more non-Kurdish activists who are prosecuted for displaying PKK or YPG/YPJ symbols. In any case, for the repressive apparatus, such cooperation is like a ‘red cloth’ that must be cut” (Karacadağ 2020b).

Many activists from the solidarity movement became targets of the generalized repression under the symbol ban. For instance, on 19th June 2018, house searches were conducted in the vicinity of the ‘Arbeitskreis Asyl Cuxhaven’⁴³⁶, because the group had registered demonstrations against the Efrîn invasion, where banned symbols were displayed (Millich 2018). Given the disproportionate effort expended by security authorities to enforce the symbol ban and the low rate of convictions or minor punishments⁴³⁷, questions arose regarding the goals of this repression. During my interviews, respondents argued that the authorities aimed, firstly, to collect data on activists within the growing solidarity movement. Secondly, they believed that the goal was to prevent cooperation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement through intimidation via raids and persecution. However, the intimidation attempts often backfired and the generalized repression, combined with lower legal consequences, actually led to increased solidarity.

In fact, displaying YPG and YPJ flags became a widespread act of civil disobedience. During the G20 protests in 2017, YPG flags were handed out in the thousands and waved (Wilde 2017). The symbol of the YPJ was prominently displayed on one of the houses on Hafenstraße in Hamburg with the slogan ‘solidarity is a weapon’ in 2018. The residents of Hafenstraße wanted to express their solidarity against the persecution of the Kurdish movement in Germany, and their support for the struggles in Efrîn (ANF News 2018a).⁴³⁸ This civil disobedience even spread beyond radical left groups: for example, Sevim Dağdelen, a member of ‘Die Linke’, caused a scandal in the Bundestag, when she displayed the YPG flag during a debate on the extension of the army mission against the IS (Zeit Online 2017). These widespread acts of civil disobedience generated further repression and violence. During a demonstration in Berlin in 2017, around 500 people participated in a demonstration with the slogan ‘Solidarity with Rojava and Şingal - Against the

⁴³⁶ Working Group Asylum Cuxhaven. Cuxhaven is a city on the German North Sea coast.

⁴³⁷ Minor in comparison with the repression against Kurdish activists under section 129a/b. Most people were sentenced to fines.

⁴³⁸ This painting of the house was a reoccurring solidarity action: in 1994, the façade of a house in the Hafenstraße in Hamburg was painted with the ERNK flag to protest the ban on Kurdish organizations in 1993 and the murder of Halim Dener by the Germany police. At that time, the façade had been painted shortly before the visit of Queen Elisabeth II, an event attended by tens of thousands of visitors. The police were unable to act because of the large number of tourists but came shortly afterwards to paint over the entire symbol with black tar paint. This action of the police was captured by cameras and became famous in the left scene under the title “special command: wall and colour” the residents were able to prevent the overpainting by water and doused the police with waterproof paint (ANF News 2018a).

criminalization of the PYD, YPG and YPJ'. YPG and YPJ flags were repeatedly waved during the demonstration and shortly before the demonstration ended, the police abruptly intervened, and at least two demonstrators were seriously injured (Civaka Azad 2017b). 'FC St. Pauli'⁴³⁹ supporters displayed a large banner with 'Bijê Rojava'⁴⁴⁰ during a football game and waved YPJ flags. In response, the German Football Federation requested a fine of 4,000 Euros (dpa 2020)⁴⁴¹, however, the initiated procedure was later discontinued.

Significantly, most of the organizations within the radical left that initiated the civil disobedience tended to already have had some kind of relationship with the Kurdish movement. The generalized and ambiguous repression provided an occasion to protest against the repression faced by the Kurdish movement. In particular, this repression allowed the movement the possibility to connect its own experiences of repression with other civil rights issues, notably the erosion of fundamental rights through new police laws. For example, during a mass demonstration in Munich against a planned Bavarian "police state law", a large YPG flag was displayed as a prominent banner (ANF News 2018b). Furthermore, the generalized repression served as leverage to achieve successful protest outcomes in several ways.

Firstly, the mass violation of the bans allowed for a clear expression of solidarity and simultaneously pushed back against this repression, since the police often found it impossible to arrest or prosecute all activists involved. Secondly, activists charged for violating the symbol ban received support from legal aid organizations. This support provided an additional stage of protest and often resulted in legal victories. One prominent example is Kerem Schamberger, who faced charges for displaying YPG/YPJ symbols in twelve different cases and had his flat raided in 2017. He used these repression attempts to publicly highlight the practices of repression against the Kurdish movement, giving numerous interviewees in national media (Schick 2017). Ultimately, he was cleared of the charges related to the symbol ban, but was sentenced for statements against his prosecutors (ANF News 2021a). In effect, the ruling against the symbol ban signalled that small successes are possible in the fight against the repression of activists in Germany. However, it is important to acknowledge the individual, financial, and psychological costs of repression. This aspect, however, was not stressed by the interviewees. Finally, as one Kurdish activist from Bavaria related, such instances of generalized repression triggered broader expressions of solidarity:

"In my perception, there is more solidarity, and a very broad spectrum from the classic allies to people with whom you have never had any contact, because of the general publicity. At some point, the press, the public reported on it. At some point, certain political parties and groups took a stand on it and so on."

As indicated by this activist, a common interest in mobilizing against this generalized repression allowed the Kurdish movement to form relationships with actors beyond the radical left, such as civil society actors.

⁴³⁹ Famous leftist football club from Hamburg.

⁴⁴⁰ Long Live Rojava.

⁴⁴¹ The German Football Federation was made aware of the poster of the Pauli fans by a letter from the Turkish Football Association - which in turn had been alerted by the Turkish Foreign Ministry (dpa 2020).

In short, within the radical leftist groups, data suggests that repression preliminary did not trigger relationship formation, but rather the maintenance of existing relationships.

2.1.2. Repression and Relationship Break-Up: Tactical Tensions

In contrast to repression triggering relationship maintenance, one long-term solidarity cadre remarked about the radical left's failure to acknowledge this repression:

“And the repression against the Kurdish movement is rather increasing again. And that is very little noticed by the radical left, but that has been the case for a long time, that they, that the processes of Turkish or Kurdish left are little noticed.”

In contrast, based on my interviews and existing sources, I argue that the perception of repression is higher in Phase III than it was during Phase II, given that an awareness among most radical left currents of the repression against the Kurdish movement only emerged from the 2010s onwards. However, as one solidarity activist argued, mobilization against repression, especially concerning individual cases, was not a key focus:

“I have the feeling that again and again, when people [from the Kurdish movement] are arrested, in comparison to other leftists, the Kurdistan solidarity [movement] is not so active in court procedures, e.g., to accompany, to scandalize. The [Kurdish] movement as itself in Germany, sure, but our solidarity work is not so focused on it now.”

As mentioned earlier, the mobilization against the PKK ban, in general, was a focal point of the solidarity movement. However, anti-repression work in terms of individual cases was only occasional. One reason for this can be attributed to the limited resources of the solidarity movement and the radical left in general. Furthermore, there might be a habituation mechanism to repression. When repression remains constant for years, as Vörkel has shown for social movements in Germany, the intensified repression tends to be accepted (Vörkel forthcoming).

Additionally, it is worth noting that repression in Phase III continued to be a mechanism mentioned by respondents as triggering a decline in the activities of the radical left. A Kurdish cadre argued in 2016:

“There was a raid on the ‘Komel’⁴⁴² in Hanover. After that, in another city, a group blatantly dissociated itself from one of our groups and in a room that they shared with our group for years. They suddenly started labelling their things because they were afraid that the police would go in there and connect them to us. And our friends were of course mega shocked. They were afraid of being associated with us and then getting repression.”

In summary, while the possibility of relationship break-up triggered by repression was mentioned occasionally by activists, it appears to be a less common outcome when compared to the cases where selective and generalized repression triggered relationship maintenance. Consequently, it can be concluded that relationship break-up or non-recognition due to repression has considerably less importance.

Countermovement Threat: Tactical Tensions

Sometimes it happens that internationalists with scarves or symbols of the Kurdish movement are threatened on the open street, but these incidents are rather the exception compared to

⁴⁴² Kurdish name for association.

Kurdish activists, as an internationalist argued: “the Turkish fascists tend to attack the Kurdish structures and not the internationalists.” Therefore, the attribution of threat of non-Kurdish or non-Turkish left structures might consider the threat as less relevant.

Notably, the radical left was reluctant to engage with the rising threat of a countermovement in Germany, as one young Kurdish cadre observed:

“Racism is not only here in Germany, but there are also fascists elsewhere and the attitude towards them must be the same ... Some groups [of the radical left] can openly express themselves, but others have not found a strategy for themselves and just keep quiet. And that’s just a problem, that the two [German and Turkish Fascism] are not seen together.”

Indeed, the reluctance of the radical left in Germany to engage with Turkish fascists can be attributed to several factors: missing knowledge, tactical considerations, and the non-attribution of threat. Turkish fascists, often associated with the Grey Wolves, tend to target Kurdish activists rather than German radical leftist activists or structures. An activist from Munich highlighted this point, noting that Turkish fascists rarely posed a direct threat to the radical left:

“[Turkish fascist] came up sometimes. But I can't remember any real problems. I can remember that they showed up once at a demonstration at the Stachus. But then the police stopped them and separated them from us.”

This lack of direct or imminent threat from Turkish fascists might lead to a dissonance in threat attribution among the radical left in Germany. However, this aspect was not directly mentioned by the respondents.

Furthermore, there is a significant knowledge gap regarding Turkish fascists organizations and nationalist movements within the radical left in Germany. As one Hamburg based solidarity activist pointed out:

“many are afraid, because they cannot overlook it. It is not yet so clear how you can behave there. If you are not in the structures, you just need people who can speak the language, who can classify it.”

In contrast, the Turkish left and the Kurdish movement in Germany are much better informed about Turkish fascists and their activities.

Whereas this knowledge was partially built up within the radical left during Phase I, it was mostly lost in the 2000s and increased since the end of the 2000s. One younger activist summarized the non-engagement of the antifascist movement in Germany:

“But of course, it is first of all a scene of white persons, where the problems of migrants were not so present, because the fight was against German fascists.”

Efforts have been made in Phase III to make this knowledge accessible again to the radical left. For example, activists of the ‘Radikale Linke | Berlin’⁴⁴³ created a brochure about ‘Turkish Nationalism in Wedding’⁴⁴⁴ highlighting associations and mosques associated with the Grey Wolves and or DİTİB⁴⁴⁵ mosque, an association closely related to the AKP (ANF News 2018c).

⁴⁴³ Radical Left Berlin, biggest autonomous group from 2015 until 2020 in Berlin.

⁴⁴⁴ Berlin neighbourhood.

⁴⁴⁵ Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği | Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs.

However, there is no deep knowledge or research work about Turkish fascists in the German radical left, which by contrast is well informed about German nationalist or fascist organizations. Additionally, there is a tactical tension within the mostly white antifascist movement about how to deal with Turkish fascists. One solidarity activist noted:

“If we see ourselves as anti-fascists in Germany, we are somehow also fighting against Turkish fascists. This is even more difficult in Germany, because Turkish fascists are recruited from a community that is simply racist and oppressed. You have of course already once a more complex starting position, but I think it should not excuse that one has ultimately actually ignored this problem for decades.”

The approach to countering the countermovement threat differs between interviewees from the Kurdish movement and those from the radical left. In contrast, a Kurdish activist emphasized the importance of making the actions of Turkish fascists public, and framing them as nationalist and fascist, rather than reducing the issue to a mere conflict between Turks and Kurds:

“The first thing is to make it public and speak against it. The difficulty is, when Kurds do it, it is reduced to the conflict between Turks and Kurds ... The media distorts it so blatantly as internal social conflict and not about racism ... That can be a task, to expose this from other groups. It is not about protecting the Kurds, but about questioning this ideology and taking a critical look at it. That is an important step that should be taken.”

This approach aims to counter the racialization of the political conflict in the media and encourages critical examination of the ideology behind the Grey Wolves. On the other hand, there is a great deal of insecurity due to the fact that this initiative does not come from Turkish or Kurdish organizations, as a veteran solidarity activist described:

“It is an issue, but it is difficult. Now also with the Islamist groups, observers go there, to get an overview, [those] who go there at all, but few dare, unless there is a clear announcement of the Turkish or Kurdish organizations, to oppose them.”

The issue of openly agitating against Turkish nationalist, Islamist, or fascist organizations in Germany is a complex and uncomfortable one for many of the predominantly white activists from antifascist groups. This discomfort arises from the broader context of racism in Germany, which includes rising Islamophobia, decades of racism against Kurds and Turks, and even pogroms and murders. The simultaneous racism of Turkish nationalists in Germany against Kurds and the violence in Kurdistan can be overwhelming for activists.

As mentioned earlier, the ‘Fight-4-Afrin’ campaign in Germany called for militant actions against the Turkish state’s attack on Efrîn. This campaign led to attacks on Turkish fascist institutions, as well as arms manufacturers, highlighting the cooperation between the German economy and Turkey. Mosques, particularly those affiliated with DİTİB, which was seen as cooperating with the Turkish secret service and representing the Erdoğan regime in Germany, were also targeted (A.G. Grauacke 2019: 419–420).⁴⁴⁶ These attacks sparked a debate within the left. Some radical left currents interpreted these attacks on mosques as anti-Muslimism actions, especially given the

⁴⁴⁶ Outside the period of investigation, however, an example that was frequently discussed in the media was an attack on a DİTİB mosque by a spontaneous autonomist demonstration in Leipzig in 2021. The response was rather negative both in the alternative and mass media. Before, there was already a bomb attack on a DİTİB mosque in Dresden in 2016 and the perpetrator acted out of racist motives, latter appearing as a speaker at PEGIDA demonstrations (Mense 2021).

increasing number of attacks on mosques by fascist structures and the rising tide of anti-Muslim racism. However, others criticized the attacks but also questioned the trivialisation of the DİTİB, and only a minority viewed the attacks as antifascist actions.

One of the concerns among radical left actors was that actions against Turkish right-wing and fascist institutions could be appropriated by racist and anti-Muslim actors. The fear adds to the discomfort surrounding such actions. Nevertheless, despite this tactical conflict, actions against Turkish fascists were jointly organized, indicating that there are ways to address and navigate this complex issue. For example, there were demonstrations combining the fight against all fascist movements, as a Berlin based activist remembered:

“There was also clearly a youth demonstration in Wedding against Turkish and German fascists with the title ‘Youth against Fascism’. These are the right signs.”

The leftist football club ‘FC St. Pauli’ also took a clear stance on this issue when they decided to no longer field professional footballer Cenk Şahin. The decision came after Şahin publicly expressed his support for Turkey’s invasion into the AANES (dpa 2019). A Hamburg based solidarity activist:

“But there are always attempts in Hamburg to make joint alliances. The soccer scene is doing it, and it’s being talked about a lot there. At ‘St. Pauli’, it’s always a topic and within the fan groups [it] is clear that no Turkish fascists should be allowed in.”

In sum, the countermovement threat failed to trigger relationship formation or maintenance on a larger scale, but rather created tactical tensions between the Kurdish movement and the radical left.

2.1.3. Stigmatization: Continuity and Irrelevance

In Phase III, stigmatization played a relatively minor role in relationship transformation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement. This was partly because, following a short window of opportunity, where even the CDU discussed the possibility of lifting the PKK ban, the portrayal of the Kurdish movement in mainstream media remained somewhat ambivalent. Furthermore, the radical left had gained a better understanding of the ideological transformation within the Kurdish movement, and many saw this transformation in a positive light. A young Kurdish cadres argued:

“The anti-propaganda of Turkish fascists has less influence. Rather, the German media have negative impact, with the PKK ban etc. What the Turkish fascists use the most is this terror discourse. With the PPK ban, the movement has been denounced anyway, but terrorism is propagated by the Turkish media, the Turkish state, and the Turkish fascists. This has more influence on political parties, but less left-wing radicals, because they look less at what the state actors are saying.”

In the early stages of Phase III, some remnants of the stigmatization introduced in Phase I were still present, particularly within the anarchist movement. These anarchists initially showed distrust towards the Kurdish movement, particularly towards the PKK, which was framed as authoritarian, and there was mention of a “fanatical cult of martyrdom” that was challenging to relate to. Interestingly, reports by Kurdish authors closely associated with the movement were viewed with more suspicion than those of Western anarchists who had visited or worked in

Rojava and Bakûr (Anarchist*in aus dem Rheinland 2015: 21). However, as Phase III progressed, the anarchist current became increasingly engaged in Kurdistan solidarity efforts, and some of the stigmas began to fade. While traces of these stigmas could still be found in other currents, the overall significance of stigmatization in shaping the relationship between the radical left and the Kurdish movement in Phase III was considerably reduced compared to Phase I.

2.2. Summary

Phase III: National Arena

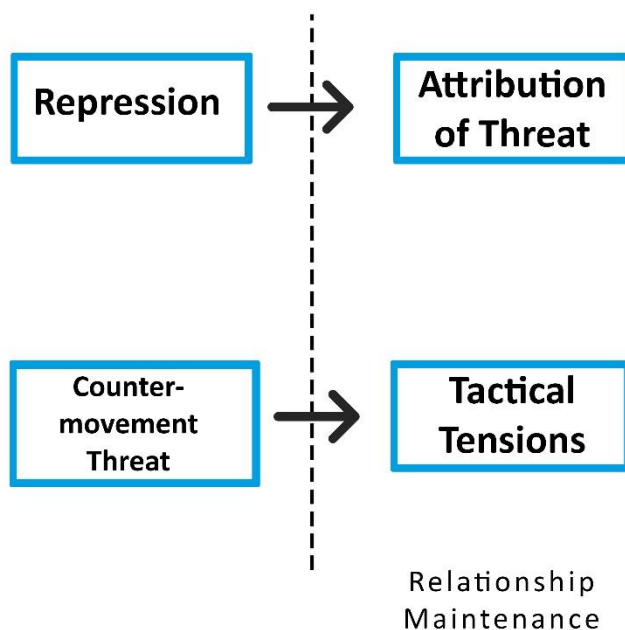


Figure 12: Diagram of Mechanisms in the National Arena in Phase III

In contrast to Phase I, where the repression often led to relationship formation, and Phase II, where it occasionally triggered relationship formation, Phase III witnessed a different dynamic. In this phase, repression primarily contributed to relationship maintenance. When it came to selective repression, solidarity committees, radical left groups and organizations of the Kurdish movement came together to mobilize against the PKK ban. They connected the repression against the Kurdish movement to broader issues related to basic rights. However, concerning individual cases, there was a noticeable decrease in engagement from the radical left, which could be attributed to limited resources or a form of habituation to ongoing repression. Regarding generalized repression, such as the symbol ban, it actually sparked solidarity and acts of civil disobedience. This repression was perceived as a direct threat to the solidarity movement, which prompted a strong response. Crucially, it provided an opportunity to achieve positive outcomes. While stigmatization of the Kurdish movement persisted in the broader public, it held less significance in the radical left. Furthermore, the break-up of solidarity relations due to repression and stigmatization was rare in Phase III. Nonetheless, the radical left in Germany still

struggled with how to handle Turkish fascists, largely due to a lack of knowledge and tactical tensions, and often resulted in a failure to mobilize or engage meaningfully with this issue.

3. Phase III: Inter-Movement Arena

Regarding the Inter-Movement Arena of Phase III, I will now focus on the relationship transformation between the radical left in Germany and the Kurdish movement from 2015 to 2020. I will trace the mechanisms and sub-mechanisms of relationship transformation in the different stages of relationship formation, maintenance, and break-up, whereas the relationship maintenance from Phase II will be discussed on its own. As previously noted, in the Transnational Arena there was a mediated transnational diffusion around Kobanê, and the transnational activities reached such an intensity that a transnational space was formed between the radical left in Germany and the Kurdish movement. In the National Arena, on the other hand, repression against the Kurdish movement fostered relationship maintenance. Nevertheless, in the Inter-Movement Arena relationship transformation took place, which had a dynamic of its own.

The new relationship formation was mainly characterized by brokerage triggered by the attribution of threat during the time of Kobanê and was soon followed by attribution of similarity with the Revolution in Rojava and Democratic Confederalism. At the same time as the relationship maintenance from Phase II was continued, some coalitions needed to find a new role in the growing solidarity movement, which was characterized by a *normalization mechanism*. In contrast to the polarization of Phase I, Kurdistan became almost quotidian in the daily work of the radical left, to paraphrase Coma Roura (2016). Almost all radical left currents engaged to some degree in Kurdistan solidarity, and the Kurdish movement in the diaspora became an ever more important catalyst for coalition formation between formerly separated radical left groups. Coalition formation took place in the form of solidarity committees, town twinning, and broader coalitions. Solidarity activists engaged in political learning, the Kurdish movement allocating considerable resources for education. Later in Phase III, the solidarity movement experienced *differentiation*, that is the formation of more specialized solidarity groups and coalitions, such as autonomous women's, youth, and ecological groups. In general, the relationship maintenance was characterized by fewer tensions, although contentious issues resembled those from the preceding phases, with an emphasis on strategy of the 'here versus there', and the accusations of metropolitan chauvinism and of projection. Relationship break-up took place in the form of non-participation in coalitions or mobilizations, however, not as a clear break with the Kurdish movement, as in Phase I, due, mainly, to lack of resources.

In the upcoming analysis, first I will describe the different stages of relationship transformation. After a chronological description of each stage, the analysis of the mechanisms and their constituting sub-mechanisms follows. The description, as well as the analysis, is based on multiple sources (interviews, participant observation, documents). Various sources from different cities and points in time differ only in details, allowing me to evaluate the evidence for the process described in this chapter as robust.

3.1. Relationship Formation

In Phase III, relationship formation in the form of brokerage occurred, mostly, between October 2014 and the first half of 2015. In the beginning, new connections between previously unconnected groups were created, while later loose ties which had already been established were reactivated, for example in times of threat. Around the battle of Kobanê, transnational diffusion triggered brokerage with the attribution of threat sub-mechanism. Importantly, soon

after the attribution of threat there was an attribution of similarity, often based on the materials and framing the previous solidarity movement provided.

3.1.1. Brokerage: An Exploding Movement

In Chapter VIII, 1., we have already traced the transnational diffusion by mass media. In the following, I will concentrate on brokerage, which often became visible in the form of mobilization in Germany, soon triggering coalition formation.

The period of the IS attack on the Kurdish city of Kobanê and its successful defence, from late 2014 to early 2015, represents a peak of the Kurdistan solidarity. Both on the Kurdish side and on the side of the radical left in Germany, the media reporting led to a considerable increase in activities. During this time, numerous demonstrations and rallies were held throughout Germany: In October 2014, over 20,000 people demonstrated in Düsseldorf (Spiegel 2014), thousands in Berlin (Kather 2014), Hamburg, Bremen, Hanover, Dortmund, Münster, Frankfurt and Stuttgart, as well as across Europe (Deutschlandfunk 2014). In several cities there were occupations of party offices, such as in Munich and Göttingen (AZ München 2014; Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine 2014). About a hundred Kurdish protesters irrupted into the European Parliament (Toivanen 2021: 5). At the end of October 2014, over 15,000 went to the streets in Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt am Main and Cologne (Deutsche Welle 2014). The Kurdish diaspora in Europe sent diaspora members, material and humanitarian convoys towards Rojava (Toivanen 2021: 6). As one solidarity cadre activist argued, such mobilization by the solidarity movement around the world, but mainly by the Kurdish diaspora itself, was fundamental to ensure the survival of the attacked regions: “I believe that Kobanê or Rojava would no longer exist today without these worldwide solidarity actions.”

In fact, as mentioned in Chapter V, a new Kobanê Generation in the diaspora emerged. Increasingly, the mobilization around Kobanê was supported by non-Kurdish activists or even prepared at event coalitions, as a Kurdish activist noted in 2016:

“But the IS attack on Kobanê and then the protests and reactions to it were very interesting. We organized demonstrations in which almost the entire left spectrum was present. ... It was something special for the entire left in Germany that so many different groups came together. I was in Erfurt, there were the Antideutsche, the radical left, small groups, MLPD, people from the ‘Die Linke’, even Greens – but rather the exception – individually interested people, people from the IL.”

Groups that had previously opposed the PKK or had not worked on this issue joined the protests against the attacks and against Turkey’s blockade of Rojava. Indeed, despite the activities of a mobilized diaspora in their cities, the existence of the Kurdish movement and, especially, of the Rojava Revolution was a completely new issue for many radical left-wing activists. A younger solidarity activist remembered:

“In 2014, this was super new for the left-wing scene, Syria, Kurds. They knew just the old 90s, 80s, ... but what happened in Syria was, for a large part of the European left I think, simply not present.”

In the beginning of Phase III, fundraising campaigns such as ‘Weapons for Rojava’ or ‘Nightlife for Rojava’ (Nowak 2014) were initiated, from which the project ‘A Fire Brigade for Rojava’ emerged.

Often the relationships were established through the already existing solidarity committees. However, completely new brokerage also took place, especially in cities where there was no solidarity movement before. The expansion of the solidarity movement and, in particular, the formation of coalitions will be further discussed below. Now, I will trace the attribution of threat and the quickly following attribution of similarity for the initial relationship formation in Phase III.

Attribution of Threat: Kobanê

The transnational diffusion by mass media was crucial for the attribution of threat in the Inter-Movement Arena. The triumphal advance of the IS in Iraq and Syria was unbroken up to this point and the cameras of the international media broadcast the war in the city from the Turkish border side (Küpeli 2015). The world public, including the radical left, became aware of the threat for the Kurdish movement. One Kurdish activist stated:

"The solidarity at the time of Kobanê went much, much further than the radical left. Many could identify with the struggle, but the danger was also taken up as a danger to themselves."

The IS was seen as an enemy that threatened humanity as such, and was internationally ostracized. The threat was also perceived by Europeans, since the IS's terrorist attacks could also affect people in Europe. The war in Kobanê was thus fought against an enemy that was considered by many political currents, parties, and organizations, even beyond the radical left, as a "common enemy", as young solidarity activist argued.

On the other hand, for many people, including those in the left in Germany, the YPG and YPJ units were an unknown actor who, unlike the PKK, had no terrorism stigma attached to it. In addition, already in interplay with the attribution of similarity, the German radical left had become aware, through mass media reporting, of the council system in Rojava. One long-term Kurdish cadre assessed:

"Of course, the mainstream media contributed a bit to this. It showed that the Kurdish freedom movement has elements, liberating, emancipatory elements put into practice. It showed where a real, strong left struggle can lead ... In Kobanê, when it was in danger, a lot of people showed solidarity."

Even though just becoming aware of the Revolution in Rojava, in particular, and Democratic Confederalism, in general, the radical left perceived the threat of IS against Kobanê as a threat to a leftist project. Importantly, in the beginning, a victory of the YPG/YPJ was not yet foreseeable.

Consequently, the radical left campaigned for an opening of the Syrian-Turkish border for Kurdish fighters and supply. Some respondents, as quoted above, considered the partial opening of the border and the start of air support of the anti-IS coalition as a success of the worldwide solidarity and demonstrations. In short, the interviewees stated that during the siege of Kobanê there was a threat situation for the Kurdish movement which, firstly, was covered extensively in the media, secondly, was also considered as a threat for the wider European public and, thirdly, was perceived as a threat for a specifically leftist project.

Attribution of Similarity: Rojava Revolution

The main argument here is that soon after the attribution of threat took place, many activists and groups from the radical left identified aspects of the Kurdish movement in Rojava as similar to their own ideology or strategies. Importantly, a basis of knowledge about characteristics of the revolution was provided by the preceding solidarity movement. Initially, however, the attribution of similarity was often marked by projection and a sole focus on Rojava. Later, understanding about contradictions and limitations was established in broader parts of the solidarity movement through political learning processes.

In the beginning, the concrete establishment of grassroots democratic council structures in Rojava was described as a central aspect for relationship formation by the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany, as was the women's revolution. Similarly, Toivanen mentioned that the mass media had a "focus on Kurdish female fighters and the role women played in combat was unprecedented" (Toivanen 2021: 5). Soon after the initial brokerage, as one solidarity activist described, the Kurdish movement became "a projection surface for everyone" in the radical left. One solidarity activist described the following:

"They now walk around with a Kurdish kufiyya around their necks and hold up the flags of the YPG. I personally find it bizarre when I see this, but I'm glad that these people have changed their mind."

Importantly, I argue that the projection occurred mainly in the first year(s) of Phase III, while later it was partly overcome by political learning. For example, in the beginning the relevance of the PKK for the Rojava Revolution and, in general, the interconnectedness of all parts of Kurdistan was not widely recognized by the radical left. For the second part of Phase III, a Kurdish cadre assessed the following:

"I think there are already more differentiated approaches on the part of the German left. But when I see the mainstream press, there are the guns and Amazons ... But I think in left-wing groups this is not the case, not so strongly at least."

Different currents of the radical left highlighted different aspects of the Kurdish movement as points of similarity. I will provide here only a small overview, in order to highlight the diversity of points of attribution of similarity. For the anarcho-syndicalist movement, Kaufer summarizes the following points of attribution of similarity:

"The Kurdish movement and the Kurdish institutions in Northern Syria would enhance the possibilities of women to emancipate from patriarchal suppression, that the new institutions could contribute to a trans-ethnic and basis democratic organization and enable the implementation of a cooperative economy." (Kaufer 2019: 50)

For other sub-currents of anarchism in Germany, according to Kaufer, the attribution of similarity was based on the struggle against the nation-state, hierarchies and patriarchy (Kaufer 2019: 52). Marxist-Leninist groups highlighted the centrality of the PKK as a cadre party, ecological groups highlighted the ecological pillar of Democratic Confederalism, while women's groups emphasized the centrality of the fight against patriarchy. In general, Democratic Confederalism offered many points of contact for attribution of similarity. Often, several aspects were mentioned by the same actor. Additionally, the success of the Kurdish movement as a beacon of hope was also important

for the radical left. Attribution of opportunity is reflected, for example, in the statement of the Kurdistan Solidarity committee in Bremen:

“We were inspired, above all, by the emancipatory social model of democratic Confederalism. The developments in Rojava are not only a model for the entire Middle East, but have given people worldwide new hopes for a possible alternative to capitalism.”
(Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitee Bremen 2014)

Here, especially, the success of the Rojava Revolution, as one of the most advanced projects, was highlighted.

3.2. Relationship Maintenance

“I believe that the relations between left-wing forces in Germany and the Kurdish freedom movement, ... are better and more developed than ever before.”

The relationship maintenance in Phase III was described by all interviewees as dense and close. Joint campaigns, coalitions, and mobilization with many currents of the radical left took place. A Kurdish cadre, much involved in the relationship work with the radical left, provided an overview:

“In the last years, there has been a stronger move together. What started with Kobanê, what had a high point with Efrîn one and a half years ago, and now with the attack on Rojava, has shown once again that the topic of Kurdistan is one of the main topics for many left-wing groups ... With the feminist movement, the ecological movement, there is definitely a positive trend. If you look at Fridays for Future, or ‘Ende Gelände’⁴⁴⁷, they have now made positive reference to Rojava. The feminist movements, I think there's a lot of moving together. There is a positive trend.”

This moving together of the Kurdish movement and the radical left will be discussed along the normalization and differentiation mechanisms. Before, I will briefly discuss the relationship maintenance from Phase II.

3.2.1. Relationship Maintenance from Phase II

The coalitions and initiatives from the radical left which had already engaged with Kurdistan in Phase II, as well as a new generation of Kurdish brokers, were open to the wave of activists and SMOs who wanted to learn more about the Kurdish movement, Democratic Confederalism, and its implementation in Rojava. The coalitions and initiatives continued in Phase III, but sometimes needed to adapt or were replaced by other coalitions. ‘Kurdistan Report’ remained an important medium and was more widely read than before, according to an activist, but was complemented with the ‘ANF News Germany’, which provided more day-to-day news from Kurdistan, the solidarity movement, and other movements in the FRG. Initially, ‘Tatort Kurdistan’ acted as a broker, providing information, and coordinating solidarity activities. However, as the product of internal discussions and of the dynamics of the Inter-Movement Arena, ‘Tatort Kurdistan’ was less engaged in mobilization but focused on translation and distribution of analyses of the Kurdish movement. Also, solidarity committees served as brokers. In the case of Berlin, the local committee faced a generational change and was joined by the creation of another solidarity

⁴⁴⁷ Literally: End of terrain. Ecological movement, known for occupying opencast mining in Germany.

committee. As an example for the continuity, but also break-up, of collations from Phase II to Phase III, here I trace the process of the Halim Dener campaign further (see Chapter VII. 3.).

Halim Dener Campaign

After the first demonstration in 2014, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the death of Halim Dener, the campaign coalition solidified. Because of a mural in the autonomous youth centre 'Korn' which showed Dener's face and a suggested PKK flag, the authorities initiated criminal proceedings based on the PKK ban. The coalition needed to dedicate itself to anti-repression work, which further strengthened it. More important, however, were the transnational developments:

“Again and again, large and powerful demonstrations took place in Hanover, the Kurdish community became rapidly politicized and the determined Kurdish resistance against the IS did not leave the German political conditions untouched.” (Kampagne Halim Dener 2020: 209–10)

The Halim Dener campaign became a contact point for people and groups dealing for the first time with the Kurdish movement. The coalition for a demonstration developed into a continuously working campaign coalition. The stated goal was to fight for a place for commemoration of Halim Dener and to initiate debate within the city.

“In addition, the campaign clearly positioned itself in solidarity with the Kurdish freedom movement and against state persecution based on the ban on associations and symbols.” (Kampagne Halim Dener 2020: 211)

Each year, around the anniversary of Dener's death, a locally oriented demonstration was organized.⁴⁴⁸ In 2017, an initiative was started to name a square in Hanover after Dener and the district council approved it. However, the city overruled this decision, arguing that such a place would 'jeopardize peaceful coexistence' in Hanover (Kampagne Halim Dener 2020: 210–11). Finally, in 2019, the campaign found its end with a demonstration on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Dener's death with a nationwide mobilization, with over a thousand participants and the installation of a memorial plaque, which was removed by the authorities 10 days later (Kampagne Halim Dener 2020: 216–17).

Within the campaign, several sub-mechanisms of relationship maintenance can be detected, of which I want to highlight the resolving tensions mechanism. After the initial phase of political learning needed to overcome the scepticism against the Kurdish movement, the coalition was able to maintain its work throughout the years, even though the relationship was tested by conflicts and debates:

“Interaction within the campaign was always trusting and constructive. Resentment and frustration occurred, as they do everywhere, but they never fundamentally called into question the solid and friendly cooperation in the coalition.” (Kampagne Halim Dener 2020: 219)

⁴⁴⁸ Memorial stones were laid in March and September 2016, to start the discussion about a memorial site, but both were removed by the city a short time later. Also in 2016, a 24-hour rally was held, where the urban war in Bakûr was also pointed out. Subsequently, the mayor Stefan Schostok (SPD) promised funds for a documentation of the case of Dener, which he never kept (Kampagne Halim Dener 2020: 212–13).

The representatives of the campaign particularly underlined the importance of personal relationships for the trusting relationship within the coalition:

“It also became clear in the context of the campaign work how central personal contacts were. Whether it was a question of having a basis of trust, even for controversial discussions, or of being able to settle practical issues quickly ... – it doesn't work without personal contacts and acquaintances.” (Kampagne Halim Dener 2020: 219)

Notably, controversial discussions and resolving tensions could take place only when a closer relationship was formed. Additionally, what helped to maintain the coalition was the mutual commitment or balanced distribution of work between the central SMOs.

The reasons for ending the campaign were manifold: on the one side, the lack of resources and closed opportunity structures, and on the other side, the success of the coalition in terms of successful relationship transformation and remembrance of Dener in the city. Here, I will deal with the lack of resources, since it was a recurring tension in Phase III. During the preparation of the demonstrations many resources were provided by the coalition partners, and usually the participation in the meetings declined sharply after the demonstrations:

“The breaks were necessary in view of the mostly high intensity in the spring and summer, apart from that, the Kurds, especially, in light of the situation in Kurdistan and the repression by the German authorities, also had their hands full.” (Kampagne Halim Dener 2020: 218)

The resources allocated by the different coalition partners for mobilization and relationship maintenance could not be provided for the whole year, since the involved organizations also dealt with other issues besides the campaign. Therefore, there were yearly times of intensive work and times of latency. Importantly,

“while the campaign started in 2014 with a very broad base of supporters and activists, a hard core slowly but surely crystallized in the following years, which was responsible for maintaining the continuity and structure of the campaign work.” (Kampagne Halim Dener 2020: 218)

The core consisted of four groups from the radical left and the Kurdish movement, who were responsible for maintaining the coalition by reinitiating meetings, as well as ensuring the diffusion of knowledge and experience. However, there was a strong fluctuation among the delegates of the other groups and partly also among the delegates of the core groups. Such fluctuation hindered the coalition to develop a more continuous discussion process:

“What has suffered over the years, however, is the exchange of content and strategy ... Probably, primarily, due to a lack of time and resources.” (Kampagne Halim Dener 2020: 220)

Within the coalition, a joint assessment of the political situation, of the situation in Kurdistan and Germany, of how the campaign was developing, and how to further direct it was not developed, since the resources to prepare and conduct such a more in-depth exchange were not provided for. Some relationships continued after the campaign was stopped. However, without continuously provided resources for relationship work, relationships between SMOs can simply dissolve. In sum, in the case of Halim Dener, the coalition continued for a long time and dissolved when resources were lacking and the specific goal was partially achieved.

3.2.2. Normalization: A Quotidian Movement

Almost all radical left groups have declared solidarity with the Revolution in Rojava, and many with the PKK-led Kurdish movement.⁴⁴⁹ For the time of the attack on Kobanê, a long-term solidarity cadre assessed:

“And then groups jumped on the bandwagon that had never done anything with Kurdistan and that had not done any international solidarity work. Like the IL, for example, I have not seen that they were active in such an area before. And all of a sudden, they got involved and collected money for weapons and hospitals and developed an alliance with the YKK. I mean, the MLPD also jumped on.”

Later, during the Efrîn invasion in 2018, even more moderate actors such as ‘Die Linke’, the Greens, the networks of ‘#unteilbar’⁴⁵⁰ and ‘Seebrücke’⁴⁵¹, and ‘Attac’ called for protests (Kaufer 2019: 48). ‘Jusos’, ‘Die Falken’, ‘adopt a revolution’⁴⁵², ‘medico international’ together with NAV-DEM requested the foreign minister to condemn the invasion. Anarchist groups or unions, such as the FAU, called for demonstrations (Kaufer 2019: 50–51), post-autonomous groups such as the IL and ‘ums Ganze!’ mobilized nation-wide, Trotskyist organizations, such as SAV⁴⁵³ and ‘Klasse gegen Klasse’⁴⁵⁴, as well as communist, Leninist or Maoist groups such as ‘Kommunistischer Aufbau’⁴⁵⁵, ‘Perspektive Kommunismus’⁴⁵⁶ or MLPD, and DKP called for solidarity with Efrîn. There was even a militant campaign, ‘fight4Efrîn’, with attacks on Turkish business, Turkish fascists localities, DİTİB mosques, German banks and companies, party offices and many more.

However, not all groups and parties who called for solidarity, especially in times of threat, engaged in relationship formation. Therefore, after the relationship formation by brokerage, I will trace the relationship maintenance by the normalization mechanisms with the coalition formation and political learning sub-mechanisms. I argue that, in contrast to Phase I, where the Kurdistan Solidarity was characterized by polarization, in Phase III the solidarity movement with Kurdistan was marked by normalization, that is a recognition of broader parts of the radical left of the PKK-led Kurdish movement as an ally and its corresponding legitimization (Quinsaas 2016: 1026). Often, respondents answered the question about which SMOs are involved in the Kurdistan solidarity with a small list of SMOs or currents, which were not involved in the solidarity movement. A long-term solidarity activist and former Trotskyist assessed the relationship maintenance of different groups:

“Nationwide: ... People from the Trotskyist spectrum always like to jump on the movement. So, when it really goes bang somewhere, the battle for Kobanê or things like that, then they

⁴⁴⁹ Only, the ‘Kommunistische Organisation’ (KO) | ‘Communist organization’, a right-wing splinter of the DKP, argued in several articles that the PKK is pro-imperialist and, therefore, that there is no basis for solidarity with the Kurdish movement (Bina 2019; Hensgen 2021).

⁴⁵⁰ Indivisible - For an open and free society - solidarity instead of exclusion. It is a coalition of NGO’s and parties from SPD, Greens, ‘Die Linke’ towards ‘Pro Asyl’ and many more.

⁴⁵¹ Decentralized, international NGO for safe havens for refugees.

⁴⁵² Syrian opposition coalition in the FRG. In the beginning of Phase III, very critical towards the PYD.

⁴⁵³ Sozialistische Alternative | Socialist Alternative.

⁴⁵⁴ Class against class. Trotskyist group.

⁴⁵⁵ Communist Formation. Nationwide, more Maoist influenced, communist attempt of rebuilding a communist party.

⁴⁵⁶ Perspective communism. Nationwide communist network.

are there, but after three weeks they have something else where they jump on. But these are also the ones where I say that little serious solidarity comes out.”

The DKP, which was involved in Kurdistan solidarity in Phase I, was rather distant in Phase III:

“It is noticeable that the DKP does very little about it. I also have to say that there are always individual DKP groups that are interested. But it always depends very much on individuals But with the DKP you can see that they had a problem with Rojava for a very long time, because they, I say, out of a primitive-anti-imperialist scheme say that Assad is on our side and did not want to understand that there is a third position ... That confused the DKP, not all of them, we also did events with the DKP on this.”

In contrast, and more decisive for the Kurdistan Solidarity, the post-autonomous IL and their local groups engaged in Kurdistan solidarity mobilization as well as coalition formation. In general, (post-)autonomous groups were largely involved in solidarity actions and relationship transformation, as well as antifascist, student, and feminist groups.

The main argument in the following is that, like in Phase I, solidarity committees formed in two waves throughout Germany, becoming brokers not only for the relationship transformation between the radical left and the Kurdish movement, but also for the relationship formation between radical left groups themselves. A second argument is that political learning occurred more intensively than in Phase I, by education provided by the Kurdish movement and by an emulation of strategies.

[Coalition Formation: Solidarity Committees and More](#)

In Phase III, there was formation of coalitions in two waves: during and after the war in Kobanê 2014/2015 and during the invasion in Efrîn in 2018, triggered by attribution of threat and following attribution of similarity. In many cities Kurdistan solidarity committees or similar coalitions formed during or after the war in Kobanê, such as in Bochum, Bonn, Bremen, Celle, Düsseldorf, Göppingen, Hamburg, Flensburg, Freiburg, Gießen, Kassel, Kiel, Leipzig, Lübeck, Mannheim, Munich, Münster, Oldenburg, the Ruhr Area, Stuttgart, and Wuppertal.⁴⁵⁷ Cities such as Berlin and Hanover were missing, since coalitions already existed before. In some cities, there were initiatives that had a humanitarian focus, such as in Bielefeld.⁴⁵⁸ Of all of these committees, which were formed from October 2014 onwards, some lasted only a year and others continue until today. Often these coalitions formed shortly after the attribution of threat: For example, in Kiel the local solidarity committee formed after a demonstration in solidarity with Kobanê was

⁴⁵⁷ ‘Rojava Solidarität Bochum’, ‘Bonner Solidaritätskomitee Kurdistan’, ‘Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitee Bremen’, ‘Kurdistan-Solidarität Celle’, ‘Solidarität mit Kurdistan - Düsseldorf’, ‘Göppinger Solidaritätsbündnis für Rojava/Nordsyrien’, ‘Hamburg für Kurdistan’, ‘SKR - Solidaritätskomitee Rojava Flensburg’, ‘Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitee Freiburg’, ‘Kurdistan Solidaritätsbündnis Gießen’, ‘Solidaritätskomitee Rojava Kassel’, ‘Kurdistan Solidaritäts-Komitee Kiel’, ‘Rojava Soli Bündnis Leipzig’, ‘Lübecker Initiative "Solidarität mit Kobanê und Rojava"', ‘Solidarität mit Rojava! Mannheim’, ‘Münchener Solidaritätsbündnis für Rojava/Kurdistan’, ‘Perspektive Rojava – Solidaritätskomitee Münster’, ‘Solidaritätskomitee Kurdistan Oldenburg’, ‘Ruhrgebietsbündnis - Solidarität mit Rojava’, ‘Initiative Kurdistan-Solidarität Stuttgart’, ‘Kurdistan Soli Wuppertal’ | ‘Rojava Solidarity Bochum’, ‘Kurdistan Solidarity Committee Bonn’, ‘Kurdistan Solidarity Committee Bremen’, ‘Kurdistan Solidarity Celle’, ‘Solidarity with Kurdistan - Düsseldorf’, ‘Göpping Solidarity Alliance with Rojava/Nordsyrien’, ‘Hamburg for Kurdistan’, ‘SKR – Solidarity Committee Rojava Flensburg’, ‘Kurdistan Solidarity Committee Freiburg’, ‘Kurdistan Solidarity Alliance Giessen’, ‘Rojava Solidarity Committee Kassel’, ‘Kurdistan Solidarity Committee Kiel’, ‘Rojava Solidarity Alliance Leipzig’, ‘Lübeck Initiative "Solidarity with Kobanê and Rojava"', ‘Solidarity with Rojava! Mannheim’, ‘Munich Solidarity Alliance for Rojava/Kurdistan’, ‘Perspective Rojava - Solidarity Committee Münster’, ‘Kurdistan Solidarity Committee Oldenburg’, ‘Ruhr Area Alliance - Solidarity with Rojava’, ‘Kurdistan Solidarity Initiative Stuttgart’, ‘Kurdistan Solidarity Wuppertal’.

⁴⁵⁸ Initiative für Frieden und Hoffnung in Kurdistan Bielefeld | Initiative for Peace and Hope in Kurdistan Bielefeld.

carried out by an event coalition of different (radical) left groups and the Kurdish movement, which transformed into a long-standing coalition (Kurdistan Solidaritäts-Komitee Kiel 2016). Similarly to Phase I, the coalitions comprised SMOs, individuals, parties or associations from the radical left and the Kurdish movement.

In early 2018, solidarity committees were formed in several cities, such as Berlin, Braunschweig, Darmstadt, Göttingen, Hamburg, Halle, Magdeburg, Marburg, Jena, Tübingen.⁴⁵⁹ In the case of Berlin and Hamburg, the committees were re-established or were formed as an addition to the older committees. For the peak in 2018, one Kurdish cadre claimed that “there were at least 35 solidarity committees in Germany, plus another 11 to 12 autonomous women's organizations. And that's not counting the whole institution, the town twinning and so on.” Therefore, according to the activist, around 50 coalitions between the Kurdish movement and the radical left existed in 2018. Importantly, in contrast to Phase I, where Kurdistan Solidarity was mainly a West-German movement, in Phase III Kurdistan solidarity coalitions were also established in East German cities, such as Magdeburg, Leipzig and Jena, and solidarity actions were carried out there. Thematically, a Kurdish activist described the work of the solidarity committee in Munich as follows:

“For example, feminist issues are being worked on by some friends in this alliance. On the one hand, there is anti-militarism, working on Germany's role in this war. Then there is ... a cultural focus, which is always connected with film events, solidarity events and so on. Clearly also of an ecological character: We have many friends here in Munich who are also active in national or international ecological projects such as Make Rojava Green Again.”

Notably, the differentiation of thematic issues is reflected in the work of most committees and will be further discussed below. Similar to Phase I, up until 2018 there were yearly conferences of the solidarity committees organized by the Kurdish movement, however not frequent enough as to speak of constant national coordination. In 2021, beyond the temporal scope of this thesis, the ‘Initiative Demokratischer Konföderalismus’⁴⁶⁰ was formed, which attempted to apply the ideology of Democratic Confederalism in Germany and coordinated groups and coalitions of the solidarity movement.

Concerning the composition of the solidarity committees, one solidarity cadre assessed the following for the case of Munich:

“One must actually say that the work here in Munich is mainly carried out by people who have a German background. That is a shortcoming, that Kurdish young people are not so addressed. I see mistakes on both sides, that we don't manage to integrate them somehow. On the other hand, ... Kurdistan is sometimes far away.”

In contrast to other cities, such as Berlin, where the Kurdish and migrant youth are part of committees, the Kurdistan solidarity in Munich is characterized by white activists, reflecting the

⁴⁵⁹ ‘Widerstandskomitee Berlin’, ‘Freund*innen der Kurdischen Freiheitsbewegung Braunschweig’, ‘Rojava Solidaritäts-Komitee in Darmstadt’, ‘Solidaritätskomitee mit Efrîn Hamburg’, ‘Rojava-Solidaritätsbündnis Göttingen’, ‘Rojava Soli Bündnis Halle’, ‘Solidaritätsbündnis Kurdistan-Magdeburg’, ‘Widerstandskomitee Rojava Marburg’, ‘Kurdistan-Soligruppe Jena’, ‘Bündnis „Solidarität mit Kurdistan“ Tübingen’ | ‘Resistance Committee Berlin’, ‘Friends of the Kurdish Freedom Movement Braunschweig’, ‘Rojava Solidarity Committee in Darmstadt’, ‘Solidarity Committee with Efrîn Hamburg’, ‘Rojava Solidarity Alliance Göttingen’, ‘Rojava Soli Alliance Halle’, ‘Solidarity Alliance Kurdistan-Magdeburg’, ‘Resistance Committee Rojava Marburg’, ‘Kurdistan Soli Group Jena’, ‘Alliance "Solidarity with Kurdistan" Tübingen’.

⁴⁶⁰ Initiative Democratic Confederalism.

lower level of organization of the Kurdish structures and the lack of relationship transformation on the side of the local radical left. In Berlin, the 'Widerstandskomitee'⁴⁶¹ enabled a more intense relationship maintenance, becoming a broker for the radical left, trying to overcome the 'here versus there' contradiction of the previous phases and emphasizing political learning in times of latency. I will now further discuss this example, since different interviewees talked about this specific relationship transformation process.

Widerstandskomitee Berlin

In February 2018, a coalition of radical left groups and the Kurdish movement formed as the 'Internationalistisches Efrîn-Widerstandskomitee Berlin'⁴⁶², later only operating under the name 'Widerstandskomitee Berlin'. Together with other Kurdish organizations, moderate actors from SPD to 'Die Linke' and some unions, as well as more radical actors, such as IL, the 'Widerstandskomitee' mobilized for a demonstration in Berlin under the slogan 'Together against the Turkish attacks on Efrîn', rallying around 20,000 participants (Bähr 2018a). After the threat situation, a Kurdish cadre assessed the following for several solidarity committees, but particularly for the one in Berlin:

"There are attempts by internationalist committees not only to define themselves through these highlights when something happens in Kurdistan, but to develop their own policies, to perpetuate solidarity through educational work or through deeper cooperation between groups. And the point is not only to work on Kurdistan, but also to focus on struggles here, e.g., neighbourhood work."

An activist from the autonomous 'Radikale Linke | Berlin', one of the central SMOs in the coalition, highlighted something similar:

"We work in the resistance committee because it is – with all the problems that such processes bring with them – this is a process that tries exactly to overcome the typical error, always to do something when it burns, but to develop a continuous work and trying to develop ideological rapprochement, so to speak."

Importantly, there are three aspects the Kurdish cadre mentioned which I will now discuss more in depth. Firstly, the brokerage function for the radical left, secondly, the centrality of political learning, and finally, the local implementation of strategies of Democratic Confederalism. These are not all the activities of the coalition, but central ones for the relationship transformation process.

Firstly, Kurdistan committees became not only a broker between the radical left and the Kurdish movement, but rather a broker for the fragmented radical left:

"It definitely shows that Kurdistan Solidarity also brings groups together. These are groups that otherwise do not come together and find a common denominator with Rojava, where they come together ... This is also the case in other cities."

In contrast to the Israel/Palestine question within the radical left, which led to polarization, the normalization of Kurdistan solidarity led to the fragmented left coming together on the basis of

⁴⁶¹ Resistance Committee

⁴⁶² Internationalist Efrîn Resistance Committee Berlin.

a shared attribution of similarity. An activist in the 'Widerstandskomitee' argued that, from 2018 onwards, the solidarity committee functioned as a coalition between the radical left in Berlin:

"In the last two years, you can already see that new people are coming in from completely different political backgrounds. The exciting thing is that in these structures, people can work together who would actually not have been able to stand each other regarding other political topics. But that also leads to a rapprochement in other areas, which is something really nice to see."

The relationship formation through the 'Widerstandskomitee' triggered personal ties and political exchange, which also helped in coalition formation in other contexts. Importantly, this brokerage through Kurdistan solidarity committees occurred in other cities, too, as one Kurdish cadre from Munich argued:

"I have also noticed that the structures that are active in the Kurdistan solidarity context, have a very unifying function. For example, the earlier mentioned very divided German left ... that is sometimes hostile to each other. It is willing to come together in this context ... I would not underestimate the networking and unifying role of these Kurdistan/Rojava structures. Yes, I can say that, at least here at the local level."

Therefore, it can be concluded that, to a certain extent, the Kurdish movement acted as broker for the radical left. In the case of Berlin, however, the 'Widerstandskomitee' lost groups over time, mostly due to lack of resources and prioritization of other issues.

Secondly, there was a strategic shift of parts of the radical left and a reorientation towards Democratic Confederation. More concretely, there was a changing self-understanding of being part of a society, and a reorientation towards its organization, i.e. a shift away from the previous understanding of autonomous fight against the fascist, capitalist, and patriarchal society. This strategic shift, occurring from 2015 onwards, is not only traceable to the influence of the Kurdish movement, and this is also why I did not include it in the paragraph about the emulation sub-mechanism (see below). However, I argue that the transformation of the relationship with the Kurdish movement at least contributed to this strategic shift. One aspect of this is the practical reorientation towards neighbourhood work in the radical left, which became more prominent in Berlin in Phase III in the form of tenant groups, anti-eviction groups, or so called 'Kiezkommunen'.⁴⁶³ The latter, standing in the tradition of communist councils, also refer explicitly to the Kurdish movement and try to build 'counterpower' in line with the strategy of Democratic Autonomy, by "gradually wresting terrain from the grasp of the state" (radikale linke | berlin 2018).

One key moment for the strategic change was the 'Selbermachen Kongress'⁴⁶⁴, in 2017, with around 600 participants from all over the German-speaking countries, and speakers from Kurdistan, Chiapas, Italy, Turkey and Greece (Lower Class Magazine 2017). Thematically, topics such as "self-organization, counter-power, grassroots work and a collective, self-determined life" (Lower Class Magazine 2017) were discussed, with the Kurdish movement as a central actor. As one participant argued, "the Kurdish movement in the FRG is simply a point that we can't get past internationally", and the congress was one of "the first points where, for me at least, this

⁴⁶³ Neighbourhood Communes.

⁴⁶⁴ Do it yourself congress.

cooperation also became very practical". Another solidarity activist claimed that the reorientation was partially an emulation of the Kurdish movement:

"Of course, you can take over some tools from there to here. But you can't implement everything one-to-one. For example, these district councils, this is a nice tool that could be installed here."

Within the 'Widerstandskomitee', different local 'Kiezkommunen' and other neighbourhood groups discussed and exchanged experiences. One Kurdish cadre assessed:

"And that's why I think 'Kiezkommunen' are super important because I believe that society can do more on its own in the streets. It's also a bit like this council system idea of Rojava. I find it pretty well implemented."

Importantly, through the ideology of Democratic Confederalism the strategy of creating local organizations within society against state structures becomes central. As a consequence, the contradiction between 'here versus there' is resolved to some extent. The Kurdish cadre, who mentioned the exchange about neighbourhood work, continued:

"Discussions developed about how you can also shape solidarity differently, also think for your local city, think Kurdistan along with bringing together the fragmented left. To see the Kurdish association as part of it. Everyone has his field in which one works and brings that together."

By working in neighbourhoods, trying to organize tenants, women, and workers, the different groups tried to carry the topic of Democratic Confederalism into the specific localities, while creating new mobilization structures for Kurdistan solidarity. However, smaller groups with fewer resources could not allocate resources for alliance and grassroots work in order to resolve this contradiction. Due to this and other reasons, some of them left the coalition. Thirdly, the groups in the 'Widerstandskomitee' also engaged in political learning, which will now be discussed in general.

Political Learning: Tutoring from the Kurdish Movement

"Revolutionary processes are, above all, learning processes. The revolutionary thing about it is that people learn and emancipate themselves."

In the following I will discuss three aspects of political learning in Phase III: firstly, the shift from internationalism in times of threat towards education oriented learning processes, secondly, the one-sidedness of political learning, and thirdly, the development from consumption of education towards creation of education.

Firstly, as already discussed along the case of the 'Widerstandskomitee' in Berlin, a Kurdish cadre assessed for the solidarity movement in general:

"There is still a lot of action-oriented internationalism, where internationalism is defined by actions. How many people were at the demonstration, did we organize a joint demo? Was the demo bad or good? So often it is a technical, bureaucratic discussion. But internationalism would also mean to discuss concepts mutually, to learn. In any case, there are now more educational initiatives."

In some solidarity committees, the action-orientated solidarity around the times of threat transformed into efforts for a deeper exchange. A Kurdish activist in Munich traced this development:

“At some point in the practical work, it became clear that it is not enough to simply come together for actions and demonstrations, ... but also to discuss the content ... In concrete terms, education has taken place. The Kurdish movement now has a lot of German-language or multilingual material, which also reaches the people. And that, of course, also makes its contribution.”

Through information events, ‘education’⁴⁶⁵ for the solidarity movement and plenty of material in German language, the Kurdish movement opted for a relationship transformation based on political learning. In the ‘Widerstandskomitee’ in Berlin, there were several seminars on the Kurdish movement, the women’s movement, but also on the history of struggles in Germany. One Kurdish cadre commented as follows on the political learning in times of latency:

“Through such committees, in quiet times, they continue with educational work or with projects in the city. That’s a good approach. What also shows how the future can look, this was also discussed in Darmstadt, at the national conference. That is already a new process.”

In January 2020, there was a national conference of Kurdistan committees, where it was decided that the year 2020 should operate under the motto of an ‘educational offensive’, with emphasis on feminism and Democratic Confederalism (ANF News 2020b).⁴⁶⁶ There were several educational processes for solidarity activists mentioned by the interviewees, which dealt with the Kurdish movement in a very intense way. Throughout Phase III, there were a variety of information events, workshops, and education organized by the Kurdish movement and the solidarity movement. For example, in Berlin and Hanover there were so-called ‘Café Rojava’s, regularly organizing information events about different topics of the Kurdish movement, such as the Women’s Resistance in Rojava. There were readings of Sakine Cansız diaries, photo expositions or film screenings. Notably, in the first years of Phase III there were more information events about the Rojava Revolution, Democratic Confederalism, and the council system in general, and later events dealt with more specialized topics, such as the economic structures, reports from delegation trips to Rojava or women’s resistance in Rojhilat. I assess, as did several respondents, that the knowledge about Kurdistan was more widespread and deeper within the radical left than in Phase II, and, with regard to ideology, also than in Phase I.

Secondly, concerning who was teaching and who is learning, an activist from Munich assessed:

“I think we Germans learn, in the end, more from the Kurdish movement than they from us ... How do I deal with different opinions? ... How do I work with women? How do I work with families? How do I deal with religious feelings? These are all things where I think we can learn more.”

⁴⁶⁵ Bildung. Literally translated to education, is a term of the solidarity movement for seminars.

⁴⁶⁶ Additionally, the same Kurdish cadres mentioned the main topics of the political learning, which were also reflected in the fourth Challenging Capitalist Modernity conference, which should have taken place in 2020:

“The organizing issue is one of the biggest issues, and the education issues. The Hamburg Conference, it is exactly about these two questions. The goal is to invite social movements and discuss from Kurdistan: how do we need to organize and do we need to educate.”

Often seminars were provided by the Kurdish movement, requested by radical left groups, or Kurdish speakers were invited to information events. One Kurdish activist commented on such a seminar:

“There was an education from the Kurdish movement, which was requested. It should be five days of input from the Kurdish movement ... And they were only Germans. And then you move into a Kurdish movement space. And then just five days of input, discussion and so on ... It was a super cool training unit, really, everyone was really serious about it.”

The Kurdish movement provides considerable resources for the education of the radical left. In contrast, structured education units are seldom provided for the Kurdish diaspora by the German radical left. However, the Kurdish movement, through relationship transformation, also engaged to a certain extent in political learning about the radical left. Another Kurdish activist assessed:

“And the other way around, in the Kurdish movement, with older comrades, one had the perception, as if the German leftists were actually all united and a homogeneous bunch, acting together. That's just not the way it is ... A lot has happened in recent years. They have noticed there is ‘Die Linke’ as a party, they are not the same as autonomous groups, antifa groups and anarchist groups. The constant contact has also clarified certain things.”

Even if there is a two-way learning process, the organized nature, the depth of education and its frequency indicate a clear bias towards the Kurdish movement as teachers and the radical left as students.

Thirdly, one Kurdish activist reported the tension around a consumer attitude on the part of the radical left and a partial resolution of the general imbalance. However, no other Kurdish respondent mentioned a similar process.

“What always bothered me for a while, when these educational processes started, was that after a certain time there was such a consumer attitude. Okay, the Kurdish movement should come and give us education and then bye-bye!”

The same activist continued on the change:

“And now I have the feeling that this movement, these educational initiatives go out by themselves. For example, one group invited us in the meantime, if we want to just participate in an educational initiative ... I definitely love that ... I feel like now it's starting to be a time when people are doing it themselves.”

In this case, the Kurdish movement was invited, and the solidarity movement went beyond the consumption of education and towards a mutual learning process.

To conclude, political learning is an important sub-mechanism of the normalization of Kurdistan solidarity in Germany. It is supported both by the Kurdish movement and the radical left. However, there is a clear role distribution of the Kurdish movement as teacher and the radical left as students, which occasionally created tensions.

3.2.3. Differentiation: Ecological, Feminist and Youth Relationships

Importantly, together with the normalization of Kurdistan solidarity a differentiation mechanism also followed in the course of the Phase III. *Differentiation*, in general, refers to the process of actors becoming more organizationally distinct “in goals and tactics” (Bosi et al. 2014: 8). In the

case of relationship transformation, I extend this definition to the cooperation between different actors on more specific issues. In Phase III, the differentiation in the solidarity movement with Kurdistan mainly includes the relationship transformation of women's, ecological and youth groups. I have already discussed ecological cooperation in the Transnational Arena along with the example of 'Make Rojava Green Again'. Now I will focus on the relationship formation of the youth and women's movements.

Almost all youth organizations from the (radical) left⁴⁶⁷ announced their solidarity with Rojava in some way, from party youth organizations such as 'Linksjugend ['solid]'⁴⁶⁸, some chapters of the 'Jusos'⁴⁶⁹, and the 'Grüne Jugend'⁴⁷⁰, to independent organizations such as 'Naturfreundejugend'⁴⁷¹ and 'SJD - Die Falken'⁴⁷², to (post-)migrant youth groups such as DIDIF⁴⁷³. As a young Kurdish cadre commented, "there are many young people in the FfF local group who are also active, at the same time, in the Kurdistan Solidarity committees or, at least, in the environmental movement". Within the radical left, from the anarcho-syndicalist ASJ⁴⁷⁴ to the Trotskyist youth organization 'REVOLUTION' and the communist 'Internationale Jugend'⁴⁷⁵ to many autonomous youth groups, the whole spectrum of radical left youth organizations mobilized for solidarity demonstrations or organized solidarity events.

Relationship formation between the Kurdish movement, the radical left and, especially, (post-)migrant youth organizations took place: for example, 'Young Struggle' and 'Zora'⁴⁷⁶ worked closely with the Kurdish movement, while also expressing a critique of the ideology of Democratic Confederalism (Young Struggle 2018). What is more, groups of young activists formed as Kurdistan solidarity groups, such as the 'Jugendkommune Sara Dorşin'⁴⁷⁷ in Berlin or an internationalist youth commune in Leipzig. Their cooperation partners from the Kurdish movement in Germany are, inter alia, 'Tevgera Ciwanên Şoreşger'⁴⁷⁸ and 'TekoJIN'⁴⁷⁹. Importantly, YXK / JXK grew rapidly, organized events at universities and tried to form relationships with other student organizations. Often internationalists joined the local groups of YXK / JXK. In short, most of the radical left youth groups at least announced solidarity and often relationships were formed with the Kurdish youth movement.

While in Phase I the Kurdish women's movement was already at the forefront of establishing relationships beyond solidarity with Kurdistan, this function increased in Phases II and III. At this

⁴⁶⁷ I have not directly interviewed anybody from radical left youth organizations in a narrower sense. However, it should be highlighted that the Kurdish movement has a broader concept of youth, often until mid-30s, where most of the autonomous groups discussed in this work would be included. For the Kurdish movement, the YXK/JXK as a student organization is clearly part of a youth organization. However, in a narrower sense, here I consider only groups from the radical left organizing explicitly as a youth organization.

⁴⁶⁸ Youth organization of 'Die Linke'.

⁴⁶⁹ SPD youth organization.

⁴⁷⁰ Green youth. Youth organization of the Green party.

⁴⁷¹ Naturefriends Youth.

⁴⁷² Socialist Youth of Germany - The Falcons. Children's and youth association related to the SPD.

⁴⁷³ Demokratik İşçi Dernekleri Federasyonu | Federation of Democratic Workers' Associations.

⁴⁷⁴ Anarcho-Syndikalistische Jugend | Anarcho-Syndicalist Youth. Youth Organization of the FAU. Their activities sharply declined during Phase III.

⁴⁷⁵ International youth.

⁴⁷⁶ Independent youth organization of the MLKP.

⁴⁷⁷ Youth commune Sara Dorşin.

⁴⁷⁸ Revolutionary youth movement, was formed as umbrella organization in 2018 in Germany.

⁴⁷⁹ Tevgera Jin ên Ciwanên Têkoşer | Movement of young fighting women. Founded in 2020 as a movement of young Kurdish women and internationalists in Europe.

point, I want to give the example of 'Dest-Dan Frauenrat Berlin'⁴⁸⁰ and their coalition work, from which I have interviewed three activists separately. According to one of them, Dest-Dan was formed in the end of 1990 as an organization for Kurdish women in the diaspora:

"Our aim is to reach all women who are affected by violence ... and also to organize these women. Dest-Dan was founded at the end of the 90s to receive women from Kurdistan who have come here and with particular experiences. It was about giving them opportunities to lead their everyday lives and not to get lost in ... the realities here."

However, during Phase II the women's council changed its focus, including internationalists as members and broadening its thematic scope. A Kurdish activist:

"And before it was only limited to Kurds. It was about saying yes, in the diaspora we also need these structures. And then it changed, because internationalists also worked within Dest-Dan, and it was about dealing with flight, migration and also all these ... violence against women, oppression, everything that exists."

The development of 'Dest-Dan' can be seen as an example of the ideological and organizational transformation of the Kurdish movement in the diaspora. In 2013, 'Dest-Dan' took to the streets after the murders of Sakine Cansız, Leyla Şaylemez and Fidan Doğan in Paris and became a coalition partner for the radical left feminist movement in Berlin. One young Kurdish activist commented on the relationship work: "That is definitely one of our strengths, to network with all the other local women's structures A lot of networking and a lot of educational work". As an example of the relationship formation of 'Dest-Dan', I want to focus on the broader coalition of the 'Alliance of Internationalist Feminists', which included, inter alia, women's organizations from Germany, Kurdistan, Turkey, Poland, South America, Korea, Sudan, Palestine, as well as Sinti and Romani and refugee women's organizations. The Kurdish women's movement was represented by several organizations, such as 'Dest-Dan', 'HDK Frauenrat'⁴⁸¹, 'Frauen aus Rojhilat'⁴⁸², 'Ezidischer Frauenrat'⁴⁸³, 'Jinen Ciwanen Azad'⁴⁸⁴, 'JXK Berlin'⁴⁸⁵ and 'Gemeinsam Kämpfen'⁴⁸⁶. Since 2015, the Alliance of Internationalist Feminists have been organizing the 25th of November and 8th of March demonstrations in Berlin, sometimes mobilizing more than 10,000 participants. The coalition transformed beyond the event coalition and managed to create a week of events bringing the particular struggles under a joint frame, a long-term solidarity cadre described:

"The week goes from the 3rd of August, the attack in Şingal⁴⁸⁷, to 14th of August, the International Day of Remembrance for the 'Comfort Women' of the Korean AG Trostfrauen. Exactly that is already a time when specific conditions of women are illuminated."

Here, under the frame of femicide or violence against women, the "different masks of the patriarchy" are dealt with. The coalition also tried to deepen the relationship between the

⁴⁸⁰ Dest-Dan Women's Council Berlin.

⁴⁸¹ HDK Women's Council. Halkarin Demokratik Kongresi - Peoples' Democratic Congress (HDK).

⁴⁸² Women from Rojhilat

⁴⁸³ Yezidi Women's Council

⁴⁸⁴ Autonomous women Youth organizations

⁴⁸⁵ Autonomous women organization of YXK.

⁴⁸⁶ See below.

⁴⁸⁷ Start of the Genocide of Yezidis by IS.

different women's organizations by increasing the exchange between them, as a young activist described:

"Yes, it's also about saying that we can't do our struggles separately from each other or side by side, but we have to keep them together and create one space. And that's why there is this space to come together, with different perspectives and also different problems. Sure, we are all affected by patriarchal patterns, but on different levels ... It's another experience that you can also share with each other in this room ... And of course, it's really about strengthening oneself, about empowering oneself, and it's also about organizing together. That is really the strongest weapon."

As to the debate about universalism and particularism of solidarity in general, and about sisterhood and diversity in particular, this feminist coalition tries to solve this contradiction by doing coalition work on the basis of internationalism and feminism, all the while recognizing the diversity of different women's experiences, engaging in political learning about other experiences, and mobilizing under a joint frame. One activist commented on the political learning in the coalition:

"For an alliance to really be an alliance, there needs to be a lot of exchange and discussion. That's where we still have a lot to do. And between these two big demos ... we want to meet once a month at a women's group and to get to know each other better. Totally good approach. But that also requires a lot of capacity in the individual structures that then prepare the meetings and the others go there."

The coalition lasted throughout Phase III and can therefore be seen as a successful coalition, being able to mobilize and deepen the relationship between the involved women's groups. Nevertheless, tensions arose that needed to be resolved: importantly, the activists highlighted the tension between the resources required for relationship maintenance and the necessity of intense relationship work for longer relationship transformation. In short, the relationship maintenance work included sub-mechanisms such as political learning and resolving tensions about resources. In contrast to this coalition, speaking about the women's movement in general, one Kurdish cadre assessed that there is an imbalance between the strength of the structures of the Kurdish women's movement and the radical left in Germany. Similarly, when asked about the cooperation between the feminist movement in Germany and the Kurdish women's movement, one Kurdish activist responded in 2016 that she did not know of any equivalent German women's organizational structure. Thus, the Kurdish movement does not find structurally equivalent contact persons in some currents of the German radical left, which makes relationship maintenance more difficult.

In sum, in Phase III relationships with the corresponding movements in Germany developed regarding all central pillars of the ideology of the PKK-led Kurdish movement that found their organizational implementation in the diaspora, such as a women's coalition, youth cooperation or relationship formation with the ecological movement. After having analysed this differentiation of relationship transformation in general, I will now look at one central sub-mechanism: emulation.

As a reminder, emulation is defined as collective action modelled on the actions of others (McAdam et al. 2001: 335) and includes methods, ideas, and strategies of organization too. In Phase III, radical left groups took over several aspects of the Kurdish movement: From ideology, institutionalized critique, and self-critique (tekmîl) to the revitalisation of women autonomist structures. Also, the revival of the strategy of building council structures can be partly traced back to these interactions with the Kurdish movement. I will separate this analysis into three parts: The first part is dealing with the above-mentioned issue-specific relationship transformation and the formation of corresponding organizations emulated from the Kurdish movement. Here, I will focus on the autonomous women's movement. The second aspect deals with the emulation of tekmeîl, and the critique of copying certain elements of the Kurdish movement. The third point is the emulation concerning the culture of commemoration, which was partly discussed in the Transnational Arena and will be further developed here.

Several respondents, especially those who engaged in feminist politics, argued that the re-emergence of autonomous women groups in the radical left came about through the interaction with the Kurdish movement. This is illustrated by two quotes from interviews with an experienced internationalist as well as a Kurdish cadre.

“Yes, more autonomous women's structures have re-emerged from the confrontation with the Kurdish movement. That is really the case.”

“The autonomous organization of women, which is a concept from Rojava that is increasingly discussed with left-wing structures here. From the exchange with the Kurdish movement, German left-wing structures have taken up the concept again. This is something very concrete.”

Importantly, autonomous women organizing was also present in the radical left in Phase I but lost relevance in Phase II – only to re-emerged during Phase III. Surely, not every autonomous women organization in the FRG was emulated from the Kurdish women's movement. However, in several cases, there was a direct connection. Firstly, the 12 autonomous women's organizations of the solidarity movement with Kurdistan clearly represent adaptations of the Kurdish women's way of organizing. One example will be traced more in detail below. Secondly, the return and acceptance of autonomous women's structures in bigger (post-) autonomous organizations, are partly traceable to the previous relationship formation with the Kurdish movement, according to two of my interviewees and my own assessment. Thirdly, one Kurdish cadre from Munich argued:

“It has changed both sides. Even if in many leftist circle's feminist struggle was an important element, concretely, in political organizing it was not represented. Through the contact, the constant discussion with the Kurdish women's movement, it has become a completely different thing. I notice again and again that friends from all groups tried to bring the women's question into practice, always bringing the objection, if there is no participation of female comrades ... I would claim that this constant intervening has arisen through the seriousness of the [Kurdish] women's movement.”

Whether this assessment is true cannot be reconstructed with full certainty here. However, it can be stated that the Kurdish women's movement had an impact that fostered the revival of

autonomous feminist organizations in the radical left in Phase III. In the following, I will trace the development of one autonomous women organization in solidarity with Kurdistan.

Women Defend Rojava

The Kurdish women's movement 'Kongra Star' launched the campaign 'Women Defend Rojava' (WDR) in 2019 to coordinate internationally the resistance against the Turkish war against the AANES. One internationalist from WDR on the start in Berlin:

"The special thing about WDR is that it is not a group that was simply founded but was initiated by the Kurdish women's movement ... So, in the beginning, commissions were founded with different people who somehow had contact with the Kurdish women's movement or new interested people. We then did public relations work, but also feminist plenary meetings at the beginning, very large."

Explicitly, in their self-conception, WDR attribution threat against Rojava, as an attack of patriarchy against women:

"So, when the Turkish state attacks Rojava, an attack on all of us is. As Women Defend Rojava, we want to connect the women who will not stand by, but who will stand up against the Turkish war policy." (Women Defend Rojava 2019)

The call for the campaign was received by the radical left, but the step for initiating local groups was again initiated by the Kurdish movement. As a young solidarity activist mentioned:

"It was mainly started through CENÎ, the Kurdish Women's Office for Peace, which initiated this again ... which then simply built WDR up here on site with friends who were already in contact with the Kurdish movement."

Importantly, the already formed relationships of the Kurdish women's movement with individual activists and groups, provided the foundation for the campaign coalition. In different cities in Germany, WDR groups emerged, as the same activist summarized:

"It has emerged in many cities in Magdeburg, Frankfurt, at times also Munich, in Hanover, in Hamburg, in Berlin, in Tübingen, Kassel.⁴⁸⁸ And meanwhile, a few are no longer there, a few, like us, rather became a group. In Hamburg, it's quite different, because there is also a very strong 'Gemeinsam Kämpfen' group, and they have used WDR as a platform for action. The approach is also very different."

In Berlin, the call was distributed in the solidarity movement and autonomous movement, and a feminist activist recollected: "Yes, it has formed in Berlin from the 'Widerstandskomitee', where it was said that we now call the Women Defend Rojava Committee Berlin." One of the first actions was an open general meeting with "over 100 women, only FLINTA* persons". Soon after, the open feminist campaign coalition transformed gradually into an autonomous women group with more commitment. Another, older activist mentioned:

"And from that, it developed very quickly. Okay, there are a lot of people who want to organize themselves and who also want to work together in a binding way. As a result, of

⁴⁸⁸ There are also WDR groups in Dresden and Oldenburg and Austria.

course, a lot of people dropped out ... 40 FLINTA* people in any case continuously worked and then with Corona it just collapsed.”⁴⁸⁹

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, a process of personality development started within the autonomous women’s groups, which a Kurdish activist from CENÎ reported about:

“Often you have this emotional, indefinable feeling, that something bothers you inside, but you cannot put it in terms. So, because you think that you know too little to formulate what you feel, but then all of a sudden through autonomous women's organizing your feeling gets a language, because you can exchange, because you are not threatened by patriarchal structures that tell you how to think and speak. All of a sudden, these feelings can be expressed in words in a total solidarity space, because the other people have the same experience due to their socialization as women. With WDR or with ‘Gemeinsam Kämpfen’, those are the points that brought the people together.”

Even though the process was maybe not originally intended by all participants, the emulation of the autonomous way of organizing supported by the Kurdish movement triggered a process of personality development and relationship transformation between the women. The same respondent continued:

“These are such valuable processes that are happening with the women themselves that you can literally see a revolutionary force that is emerging, because people are simply developing personally. The thing is, why we do insist on personal development, the women simply develop personally in a really great way. But it also becomes totally clear with their political stance and then in the actions ... The women have felt each other, they have become friends. They have become comrades. That is what is beautiful about the word Heval, because it is the friend and comrade at the same time. And they live this hevaltî much more than one in mixed-gender structures.”

Importantly, through the personality development, which is central to the PKK-led Kurdish, the solidarity work was also strengthened, and most women became very committed solidarity activists up to solidarity cadres.

Tekmîl

As already explained in Chapter VIII. 3., tekîmîl refers to regular meetings to reflect on everyday life and practice and is especially applied in the guerrilla. Tekîmîl is one building block in the practice of personal development. Criticism and self-criticism were not unknown to Maoist and Communist groups in the radical left in Germany in the 1980s but were not applied in Phase II in the broader radical left. The emulation of tekîmîl by radical left groups in Phase III took place, when the relationship transformation, and the political learning was further developed. Referring to the outcome of the relationship transformation within the radical left, one Kurdish cadre assessed: “In practice, what comes out the most is criticism and self-criticism. I don't even want to call it tekîmîl: only criticism and self-criticism.” A solidarity activist critical mentions the emulation of tekîmîl at the end of a political meeting: “So, on a smaller level, there is actually also criticism, self-criticism. Just as it is done there, we take over ..., without looking what we actually need it for?” Another Kurdish cadre mentioned that she gave several times input on tekîmîl for

⁴⁸⁹ Since the start of the pandemic is the end of my investigation, I only want to mention, that the group continues to work with a smaller, age-mixed core, due to own commitment and organizational support by the Kurdish movement.

the radical left. Two Kurdish cadres mentioned that the outcome of this emulation was distorted. Firstly, the emulation often only took the method and dropped the context of personality development:

“Simple transfer does not work ... There are people who blindly try to transfer mechanisms like that. But this is in any case superficial. This thing with tekmiş is complete bullshit. You can also call it a feedback round. This is not something that the Kurdish movement invented.”

Indeed, one solidarity activist reported about the emulation of tekmiş in his autonomous group, the necessity to transform tekmiş to fit in the local context and the final practice of keeping a feedback round at the end of a meeting. Secondly, A Kurdish cadre talked about her observations of the use of a more rigid emulation of tekmiş in the radical left:

“So, from my experience, the Germans get it wrong in the sense of thinking that self-criticism is the self-flagellation and criticism the hot seat: Now, I can really throw up. So, they criticize someone and just destroy him. That's not a criticism. Or a person criticizing themselves, where they start crying and telling what a bad person they are. That's not what it is.”

Similarly, a long-term solidarity activist, highlighted the adoption of tekmiş by the radical left as non-solution orientated but often destructive and aimed at exclusion. In contrast, a Kurdish cadre highlighted the ‘error-friendliness’ of the Kurdish movement and the aim of tekmiş as advancing the personality of the individual. Both solidarity activists and Kurdish cadres criticized this form of emulation. Another Kurdish cadre on this process:

“I think you have to have a deep discussion, how we came to these methods. One often desires to get ready-made repertoire. So ready seminars, ‘how can I build my perfect organization in ten seminars?’ Well, there is no such thing – not even in Kurdistan ... There has been a struggle for 40 years, and it has created values that cannot simply be transferred. In the struggle, which also has its roots regionally.”

In short, as the relationship between the Kurdish movement and the radical left transformed, some aspects and methods were emulated by the radical left. In the case of tekmiş, emulation was superficial and resembled a feedback round. On the other side, a rigid emulation led to rather harmful outcomes, since the organizational and historical context could not be adopted.

Şehîds

From the Transnational Arena, we already know how Şehîds fostered the formation of a transnational space. Now, I will look at how the radical left in Germany needed to find a way of dealing with these growing numbers of activists from their ranks who were killed in Kurdistan. In the following, I want to trace the transformation of the radical left’s culture of commemoration by emulating aspects of the Kurdish movement’s culture of commemoration. I will shortly sketch the commemoration culture of the radical left in Germany, concretize the commemorative culture of the Kurdish movement, in order to show how the radical left emulated some of these elements.

The radical left in Germany has a tradition of commemorating persons from their history who were murdered. The most famous examples are Luxemburg and Liebknecht⁴⁹⁰, commemorated

⁴⁹⁰ Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were killed by Freikorps – paramilitary units – after the Spartacist Uprising in January 1919.

annually by a large demonstration in Berlin, to which communist groups from all over the FRG mobilize.⁴⁹¹ One activist from the Kurdish movement tries to summarize the radical left culture of commemorating:

“The German left also deals with fallen activists/comrades, for example here in Friedrichshain⁴⁹²: Silvio Meier.⁴⁹³ The demonstrations are ultimately also forms and expressions of this ... The problem or the difference is that quite a lot of the people who perish here do so because they are murdered by Nazis or killed by police officers or so. They are just ultimately accidental victims.”

However, German radical leftist activists such as Silvio Meier or Conny Wessman⁴⁹⁴ were activists who engaged in political struggle and did not join military units. They did not engage in political action expecting probable death. In consequence, the fallen activists of the German radical left, after whom streets and squats are named, are not remembered as revolutionaries who died for their cause, but rather as victims of fascism, the repressive state, or the racist system. Special care is taken not to glorify the fallen activists and to avoid the accusation of martyr cult.

In contrast, the radical left frequently criticized the Kurdish movement for creating a martyr cult in the 1990s and occasionally does so today. Before I discuss this criticism, I outline the general commemorative culture of the Kurdish movement. One activist of the Kurdish movement explained:

“You are dealing with a struggle that has been going on every year for 40 years, and an insane number of people have been killed in the struggle. And the people in Kurdistan have a certain way of dealing with it: One just shows the pictures ... And they are then held in honour. Of course, the people know what they embody, what they have achieved, what they have tried to do.”

Due to the intense war with the Turkish state, the PKK needed to establish a way of dealing with death in its own rows, which evolved with the history of the movement.⁴⁹⁵ Nowadays, the idiom ‘Şehîd namirin!’ – the fallen are immortal – summarizes the way of commemoration: through active remembering the Şehîds are kept alive as people who died in the joint struggle. Remembering them also represents a commitment to take up their struggle and continue it. As an attempt to explain of the meaning of Şehîds one Kurdish activist tries to summarize it as a defence of life:

“What is more important than to live? And even to give up that, so that these values can be defended ... I think, if we would have the decision whether we want to create a life, then of course we would decide for life. But the circumstances in which these battles are fought,

⁴⁹¹ This demonstration was carried out originally between 1919 and 1933, was then reinitiated in the GDR, and then became a central event for the communist current in the FRG after 1990.

⁴⁹² Local district in Berlin.

⁴⁹³ Silvio Meier, an antifascist, was murdered in 1992 by a neo-Nazi, in a confrontation, that took regularly place between antifascist and fascists in East-Berlin in the 1990s.

⁴⁹⁴ She died in 1989 after the police chased her into moving traffic.

⁴⁹⁵ Already, the founding of the PKK is framed by Öcalan as an oath to Haki Karer, who was one of the first Şehîds of the movement (1977) and at that time second person in rank (Jongerden, Akkaya 2012: 9). Selahattin Celik, former PKK militant, is cited, that some commemorative practices stem from the international collaboration with the Palestinian movement (Marcus 2007: 58).

unfortunately, also require that there are courageous people who decide to defend these values.”

This transcendental understanding of Şehîds, especially the aspect of self-sacrifice, is certainly a basis for the accusation of martyrdom from some currents of the radical left. The commemorative culture of the Kurdish movement consists of practices such as commemorative demonstrations, naming of places, units, commandos, or academies after the Şehîds, building of memorial places, minutes of silence, as well as showing the pictures at demonstrations or in rooms of the organization. Commemorative events are regularly held in Europe at local, regional, and national levels (Rudi 2019: 350). In the room of Kurdish associations in Europe and in Germany one will often find pictures of the Şehîds, including persons from the particular community, important martyrs for the movement, internationalist Şehîds as well as pictures of international revolutionary figures such as Rosa Luxemburg and Che Guevara (Rudi 2019: 351). Indeed, in different places in Kurdistan and the diaspora, Şehîds are commemorated differently and fulfil different functions within the movement.⁴⁹⁶ Importantly, Rudi claims that “martyrs both territorialize and de-territorialize resistance for the movement” (2019: 358) or, in my framework, foster the transnational space of the Kurdish movement. One internationalist sketches the general differences in commemoration between the radical left and the Kurdish movement from his point of view:

“[Here in Germany] it is always like a final loss ... They were victims. Silvio Meier: victim ... But down there, people are not victims. They just kind of died in this resistance ... So, it's not a final farewell, but one remembers the friends, and they are just never victims. They are just not passive, but they just actively died for something in this fight.”

In other words, in contrast to the commemoration culture of the radical left, the Kurdish culture highlights the active role of the Şehîds, their motivation, their commitment, and their struggle by remembering them with a large repertoire of actions.

With the death of internationalists of the radical left in Kurdistan, a change took place in its culture of commemoration. In general, internationalists received high attention in the Kurdish movement in the radical left in Germany and in the general public. Concerning the emulation of elements of the commemoration culture of the Kurdish movement by the German radical left, I want to highlight three aspects: Firstly, some of the interviewees expressed that there was a change in the commemoration culture of the radical left – at least in the solidarity movement – from framing the fallen activists as victims towards highlighting their revolutionary decisions. Importantly, commemorative events were organized with emphasis on the internationalists and their motivations: Rundbrief

“So, with Sarah [Handelmann] and Şehîd Bager [Michael Panser], I think that there is a change. I think that many well-organized commemorations have been performed ... It simply has been possible to illuminate different aspects of the person with music and, I don't know, different contributions, poems, speeches in different languages, to somehow give the whole thing a meaning.”

⁴⁹⁶ For a full study see Rudi, who conducted an ethnographic study on the PKKs dealing with the death.

Similarly, in a brochure for the festival for the fallen activists, a new way of commemoration is described:

“They [the fallen] are not anonymous, not unknown, not weirdos. They are sincere people who, like us, dream of a fairer, freer, and more humane world and are ready to give everything for this common dream. Their death means a great loss for our common struggle, but it also means a collective responsibility.” (Vorbereitungskomitee 2017: 4–5)

In the brochure, the fallen activists are explicitly described with their history and motivations, while the active decision of the fallen activists to become revolutionaries, with the possibility of dying in this struggle, creates a strong obligation for solidarity activists to engage in the same struggle. In contrast to Silvio Meier, where the attribution of threat – “it could have happened to any of us” (Sturm 2020) – was the trigger for politicization of activists, the active decision of the fallen activists triggered commitment in the radical left in Germany.

Secondly, there are some repertoires from the Kurdish movement that are emulated by the German radical left. For instance, previously, photographs of the fallen activists were seldom shown during demonstrations of the radical left. When they are shown, they are usually depicted in strongly modified form, for example in a stencil aesthetic. In contrast, during several demonstrations of the Kurdistan solidarity movement in Germany a banner was shown, depicting all eight fallen internationalists from Germany as less modified black and white photographs. In general, the pictures of the internationalists were shown more often in various forms in the solidarity movement in Germany, such as on posters, banners or as pictures hanging on walls. Additionally, during my participatory observation, I witnessed that often a minute of silence for the Şehîds took place in the beginning of meetings of the solidarity movement and people stood up during this minute. This would have never been done in radical left meetings before. Minutes of silence were also held at joint demonstrations of the Kurdish movement and the solidarity movement in Germany, whereas this was only occasionally part of the repertoire of the radical left before. Finally, some groups from the solidarity movement are named after Şehîds, which would have been rather unusual before in the radical left. For example, the ‘Jugendkommune Şehîd Sara Dorşîn’⁴⁹⁷ named themselves after Sarah Handelman.

Thirdly, even larger attempts were made to create a new culture of commemoration: a festival for the internationalist Şehîds was organized by internationalist relatives, ‘Tatort Kurdistan’, YXK and JXK and others. In the brochure for the festival, the emulation is explicitly mentioned: “It is important to recreate the culture of the memory of the fallen after the example of the Kurdish freedom movement here [in Germany]” (Vorbereitungskomitee 2017: 8). In 2017, the festival in commemoration of the internationalists who died in Kurdistan took place in Celle⁴⁹⁸. There were speeches of the relatives and various organizations, such as the ‘Ivana Hoffmann Circle of Friends’ or the ‘Circle of Friends Andrea Wolf’ and the co-chairman of the PYD, Salih Muslim (Hoffmann 2017). Additionally, the photographs of the fallen activists were arranged with pictures of other revolutionaries as a collage on a banner in the background of the stage and in a memorial room

497 Youth commune Şehîd Sara Dorşîn.

498 In Celle lives the largest Yezidi community in Germany - and the second largest in the world. Therefore, there is a closer relationship transformation between the radical left and the Yezidi community.

the pictures of the internationalists and others were exhibited. An internationalist, who participated at this event, remembered:

“There was a large commemoration festival, where the people were remembered again individually and collectively, where people from other countries were invited, for example, parents from Canada and England and so on.”

The commemoration festival was, on the one hand, a place to remember the internationalists, and, on the other hand, a place for transnational relationship formation and maintenance. Especially, the exchange between parents and other relatives of the fallen internationalists included the formation of transnational ties that had a new quality, since in the radical left in Germany parents are usually not organized in the same movement as their children. Finally, the goal of the festival was to establish a culture of remembrance, by collectively handling the mourning and commemoration, while emulating the basic orientation and parts of the repertoire from the Kurdish movement. In sum, the aim of the festival was to spread the revolutionary culture of commemoration into the daily life of the solidarity activists.

In short, emulation in Phase III was widespread in the solidarity movement with Kurdistan and was concerned, among other things, with organizational strategies, such as autonomous women groups, methods, such as *tekmîl*, and cultural aspects, such as the commemoration of fallen activists. This mechanism indicates the intensity of the relationship transformation process between the radical left and the PKK-led Kurdish movement.

[Resolving Tensions: Resolution of Contradictions?](#)

Most respondents agree that there were fewer tensions in the relationship transformation between the radical left and the PKK-led Kurdish movement in Phase III compared to preceding phases. One Kurdish cadre highlighted that tensions exist in every relationship but that they were resolved more successfully in recent times:

“But you can also see that in collaborations that have been going on for many years ... and you can see that it's going well, then you can assume that there was a lot of conflict that was resolved. That is a beautiful process.”

The main tensions from the previous phases still existed in Phase III, though. However, they were less intense, and efforts were made to resolve certain contradictions. For example, the spatial tensions between the strategies focusing on the ‘here versus there’, were still relevant in Phase III, however, attempts were made to overcome this contradiction by emulating parts of Democratic Confederalism. Above, the ‘Widerstandskomitee’ and ‘Kiezkommunen’ were already presented as attempts to adapt the strategy of Democratic Autonomy of creating local organizations within society against state structures. Importantly, through the perspective of a World Democratic Confederalism, the Kurdish movement still is concerned with advancing and protecting the struggle in Kurdistan, but the strategy of Democratic Autonomy and Democratic Republic are also applied in Germany to a certain extent. However, while these attempts are proclaimed, they have not far advanced. The above-mentioned ‘Initiative Demokratischer Konföderalismus’ (IDK), tried to advance the implementation and coordination of groups trying to implement the strategies of Democratic Confederalism – with limited success until today. Likewise, a long-term solidarity activist argued that the radical left is not succeeding in

establishing a revolutionary strategy in the FRG. This is why some activist join or remain in the Kurdish organizations, as a solidarity cadre argued:

“And there are of course also different decisions, from those who say, we still do not get it right here in the left, decide, we stay in the Kurdish movement and in a more organized framework, or to build solidarity structures. Because many say the German left still does not manage to build more organized structures, and so to live a collective life.”

In any case, the spatial tension between the ‘here versus there’, seems to have found a possible solution, when both movements pursue a similar strategy for both localities.

Continuing the development of Phase II, the Eurocentrism or the Metropolitan chauvinism, “thinking revolutionary politics only within the framework of Europe, from the perspective of one's own life” (Maulhofer 2017), seems to be decreasing. More precisely, in the beginning of Phase III, the focus shifted towards affirmation or projection, as mentioned above. Later, different groups and currents formulated critique on certain aspects of the ideology or strategy of the Kurdish movement. Despite the criticism, they maintained clear solidary positions in relation to the PKK-led Kurdish movement.

An exemplary discussion in the (post)autonomous magazine ‘re:volt’ summarizes the mutual criticism arising in Phase III, but as well the possibility for advancing the discussion in an unpolarized arena. First, an article was published with the title “Kill the projection in your head!” (Marulanda 2017), which criticized different currents of the radical left for their respective one-sided view on the Kurdish movement. A response was written by a Kurdish activist, with the title “Kill the metropolitan chauvinism in your head!” (Firaz 2017), and he criticized appropriation of the Rojava Revolution by parts of the radical left as well as an arrogant, metropolitan chauvinist attitude. Finally, a synthesis was attempted, with an article titled “Metropolitan chauvinism and projection” (Marulanda 2018), acknowledging both Eurocentrism and projection, while proposing key points for a “serious internationalism” and arguing for a continuity of relationship maintenance with the PKK-led Kurdish movement. One young Kurdish cadre summarized the balance of criticism in such relationships: “You have to keep opening the door to each other. That is a process. That is a justified criticism. That's exactly what you could call solidarity-based criticism.” To take up the argument from the previous phases, the level of constructive critique between movements can only increase if the relations between movements also become denser. In short, tensions were still existing in Phase III, while in an Inter-Movement Arena marked by normalization, the tensions could be better solved, compared to the previous phases.

3.3. Relationship Break-up: Limited Resources

Importantly, all Kurdish activists described the radical left as fragmented and lacking stronger, nation-wide organizations, which triggers problems for relationship maintenance. Small, fragmented groups often lack the resources needed for coalition building. Lacking resources was the main factor mentioned by activists from all coalitions that dissolved or suffered from declining participation. Therefore, the relationship break-ups were not a clear break-up of the relationship, but a shift towards other issues, often due to resource constraints. These relationships, especially in times of threat, could however be reactivated.

Phase III: Inter-Movement Arena

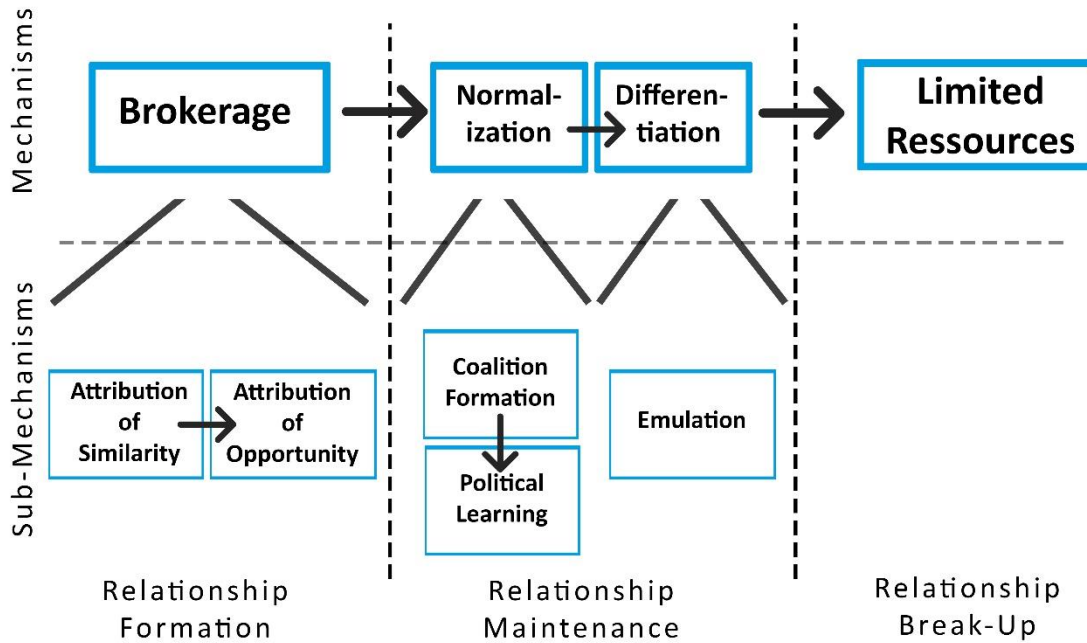


Figure 13: Diagram of Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms in the Inter-Movement Arena in Phase III

In sum, during the war in Kobanê, brokerage was triggered by the attribution of threat mechanism and was soon followed by attribution of similarity with the revolution in Rojava. The initial attribution of similarity was marked by projection and later countered by political learning. Previous relationships from Phase II were continued, however, sometimes changed their role in the rapidly growing solidarity movement. Importantly, a normalization took place in Phase III, when Kurdistan solidarity became almost quotidian in the daily work of the radical left. Almost all radical left currents engaged to some degree in Kurdistan solidarity. What is more, the Kurdish movement in the diaspora became a catalyst for coalition formation between formerly separated radical left groups. Coalitions were formed mainly in 2014/2015 and 2018, in times of threat, in East and West Germany. Political learning was widespread, and the Kurdish movement provided the content and resources. Later in Phase III, the solidarity movement experienced a *differentiation*, which is the formation of more specialized solidarity groups and coalitions, such as autonomous women, youth, and ecological groups, often emulating aspects of the Kurdish movement. Relationship break-up took place in the form of non-participation in coalition or mobilization but not as a deliberate break.

Chapter IX. Comparison and Conclusion

This chapter will present a comparative analysis of the concatenation of different mechanisms and sub-mechanisms across different temporal phases and arenas of interaction. The objective is not to provide a comprehensive summary of the findings from each sub-chapter, but rather to highlight the similarities and differences in these mechanisms during the process of relationship transformation. The analysis will begin with the Transnational Arena, before moving to discuss the National and Inter-Movement Arenas respectively. Subsequently, the comparison will shift to the relationship transformation process between the radical left and the PKK-led Kurdish movement and the mechanisms of other solidarity movements in the FRG before proposing general pathways of relationships transformation between social movement organizations across borders. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a summary of the key findings and insights gained from this thesis, while also highlighting challenges, limitations, and suggestions for further research.

1. Transnational Arena: From Brokerage to a Transnational Space

In the Transnational Arena, it is crucial to consider the evolving dynamics between Turkey and Germany on the international stage, the changing nature of internationalism within the PKK-led Kurdish movement (shifting from anti-imperialist to anti-systemic solidarity), and the challenges faced by the autonomous left. The following mechanisms can help to assess the conditions for transnational relationship formation in each phase. Phase I was marked by *asynchronous internationalist struggles*, which hindered the formation of robust and durable relationships. In Phase II, following the ideological transformation within the PKK-led Kurdish movement, characterized by intensive ideological work, socialization, and organizational changes, the Kurdish movement was ready to disseminate its new paradigm to the radical left on a global scale. Meanwhile, the disillusionment with the (post-)autonomist approaches to internationalism within the radical left in Germany led some groups to seek new perspectives. In Phase III, these dynamics intensified, resulting in the emergence of a global Kurdistan Solidarity movement. In the case of Germany, this phase witnessed a particularly significant development of solidarity with Kurdistan.

Transnational brokerage played a central role in relationship transformation in the Transnational Arena across all phases, however, it was only in Phase III that transnational relations reached an intensity in the frequency and quality of exchange, resembling an emergent *transnational space* between the radical left and the Kurdish movement. In Phase I, most activities were concentrated in Bakûr, whereas after 2014, a shift to Rojava began. During this phase, transnational brokerage was primarily characterized by the sub-mechanism of transnational diffusion and political learning. Delegation trips to Kurdistan were a prominent example of the diffusion mechanism, with the purposes of collecting and disseminating information in Germany, for instance regarding Germany's involvement in the war in Kurdistan. At times in the 1990s, they successfully led to temporary halts in arms exports to Turkey, based on evidence that delegations and journalists had collected during these trips. The delegation trips also had a protective function, whereby German activists, using the privileges afforded by their citizenship, triggered repression, and diffused information about this repression back to Germany, in order to create international pressure. However, the content of this diffusion mainly revolved around human rights violations

and international relations between Germany and Turkey, with only a marginal emphasis on the ideology of the PKK-led Kurdish movement. Despite the numerous delegation trips, they typically did not result in lasting transnational relationships, and the transnational brokerage often ended after these trips. In contrast, the first traces of an emerging transnational space were evident as internationalists joined the PKK, engaged in political learning, diffusion, and the reactivation of existing relationships. Political learning primarily focused on understanding the PKK's mode of organization and reflecting on revolutionary strategies for Germany. Internationalists not only acted as transnational brokers by forming relationships with the Kurdish movement across borders, but also inspired other activists to engage in Kurdistan solidarity, organize transnational activities, and recruit new internationalists to go to Kurdistan. However, due to the limited number of internationalists, transnational relationships did not fully develop into what could be considered a proper transnational space.

Phase II began with a low point in the transformation of transnational relationships, which were only bridged by transnational coalitions of the women's and ecological movements and not with the radical left. Following the ideological shift within the PKK-led Kurdish movement, relationship formation was still marked by *transnational brokerage*. However, *diffusion* and *political learning* were accompanied by the *resolving tensions*. The transnational repertoire of the solidarity movement, thus far consisting largely of delegation trips, was also expanded to include Social Forums and transnational conferences. In contrast to Phase I, the delegation trips in Phase II were not primarily focused on exposing human rights violations, but instead aimed at collecting information and creating materials about Democratic Confederalism and its practical implementation in Bakûr and Rojava. One notable event during this phase was the Amed Camp in 2009, which, despite requiring the *resolution of tensions*, marked the beginning of a growing Kurdistan solidarity movement in Germany. During the camp, the relationship formation between rank-and-file activists of the autonomous movement and the Kurdish youth was hindered by Eurocentrism and a lack of transnational brokerage skills. Nevertheless, the knowledge about the paradigm change arrived in the Kurdish movement reached the radical left in the FRG and many participants from the Amed Camp became active in the Kurdistan solidarity movement for an extended period. Additionally, political learning during this phase can be seen in transnational conferences held in Germany, which provided a transnational space for discussions and learning about the ideological and organizational transformation of the PKK-led Kurdish movement. Overall, the relationship formation in the Transnational Arena during Phase II was more significant compared to Phase I, despite its initial challenges.

In Phase III, there was a significant expansion in transnational relationship formation. This phase saw a quantitative increase in the number of transnationally coordinated solidarity actions, transnational relationships, internationalist travelling to Kurdistan, and an increase in transnational projects. Furthermore, there was a qualitative improvement in the durability of these relationships and the reestablishment of transnational flows. During Phase III, the transnational relationship formation between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany transitioned from one based on transnational brokerage seen much earlier, towards the formation of a transnational space, marking a notable shift in the nature and depth of transnational interactions.

Notably, the 'Internationalist Internationalist Commune of Rojava' (ICR) stands out as an exemplary model of the formation of a transnational space, which embodies the core sub-mechanisms of *political learning*, *local relationship formation* and *transnational coordination*. Within the ICR, a continuous influx of internationalists was created which engaged in a cycle of activities, consisting of travelling to Rojava, participating in political learning processes, integrating into local initiatives, working on transnational coordination, and eventually returning to their respective organizations, thus perpetuating, and reinforcing these transnational relationships. Regarding political learning, the Kurdish movement provided internationalists with opportunities to participate in various initiatives. In Phase I, internationalists could attend academies, or gain experience in military units as guerrilla fighters. In Phase II, internationalists could learn about the new paradigm and joined the HPG, however, only in very small numbers. In Phase III, the ICR itself established an academy for internationalists, further enhancing the political learning process, and compared to phase I, the number of internationalists increased at least tenfold. During Phase III, relationships were not only formed and maintained in Germany, as was the case in Phases I and II, but as exemplified by the Make Rojava Green Again Campaign, local relationship formation began to take place both in Kurdistan and in Germany. This two-way relationship maintenance was pivotal for sustaining transnational connections. Transnational coordination emerged as a new mechanism in Phase III, involving coordinating political work between internationalists in the ICR and local political organizations. Additionally, transnational campaigns were launched to strategize and take action during periods of threat, as well as to provide resources for long-term relationship maintenance. Indeed, in Phase III, the relevance of the Transnational Arena for relationship formation, and its spill-over to other arenas can hardly be overestimated.

In sum, the transformation of relationships between the radical left in Germany and the PKK-led Kurdish movement was significantly influenced by developments internal to the latter. Major events in Kurdistan triggered mobilizations, and had a direct impact on the relationship transformation process. The crisis of the Kurdish movement was also reflected in the dynamics of relationship transformation with the radical left in Germany. The most crucial mechanism in this transformation was the ideological and organizational shift that occurred within the Kurdish movement, paving the way for a new Kurdistan Solidarity Movement in the FRG. To paraphrase a young Kurdish cadre, the strength comes from Kurdistan. Throughout the different phases, transnational brokerage played a central role in initiating and establishing contacts between these two-movements, however in many cases they did not lead to lasting relationships and often ended after a short period. It was only in Phase III that transnational relationships began to increase in quantity, were consistently maintained, and even recreated to a significant extent, whereby one could indicate the emergence of a transnational space. This transnational space between the Kurdish movement and the radical left was built upon the foundation laid by the Kurdish diaspora over the past four decades. Much of the initiative for this relationship transformation came from the developments and resilience within Kurdistan itself, and it was only in Phase III that the transnational space between these two movements began to reach its full potential.

2. National Arena: The Repression/Relationship Paradox

Repression against the Kurdish community in Germany since the mid-1980s has been rather constant, with the PKK-led Kurdish movement consistently featuring as one of the main targets of state repression. This repression has taken various forms, including the application of anti-terrorist laws, bans on Kurdish associations, and restrictive asylum policies. Nevertheless, the intense *repression* and *stigmatization* of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany has not succeeded in fully suppressing its political activities. While there have been fluctuations in the intensity of repression, such as the shift from 129a to 129 proceedings from 1998 onwards, and changes in its scope, such as the generalized repression with the symbol ban in Phase III, overall, repression has remained at a high level. The foreign policy interests of the German governments have periodically driven new waves of repression against the Kurdish movement. Notably, the transformation of relations between the Kurdish movement and other actors has been closely monitored by authorities and the subject of repression. The *stigmatization* of the PKK as a terrorist organization has persisted since the late 1980s, and although it was not intensely reproduced in the national media during Phase II, this stigmatization continued to exist. There was a brief window of opportunity for the lifting of the PKK ban during and after the war against the IS, but this did not materialize. In general, the Kurdish movement in Rojava faced less negative media coverage compared to the Kurdish movement in Bakûr.

Repression and stigmatization, while relatively stable over time, have triggered different attributions of threat and subsequent mechanisms across the temporal phases: Whereas repression was one of the main pathways of relationship formation in Phase I, triggering attribution of threat, overcoming ideological differences, as well as the institutionalized anti-repression organization AZADÎ, it only triggered relationship formation towards the end of in Phase II, and only in specific cases, whereas in Phase III it fostered relationship maintenance. Furthermore, in Phase I, repression often led to relationship break-up or boundary activation, whereas in Phase II and III, this was evident in only a few cases. During Phases I and II, stigmatization triggered boundary activation, despite being not overly relevant for relationship transformation in Phase III. However, stigmatization almost never had a positive influence on the transformation of relationships between the radical left and the Kurdish movement. Despite having some positive effects on mobilization in Phase I, the threat of countermovements only triggered relationship formation on one occasion in Phase II. Meanwhile, the countermovement threat led to the emergence of tactical tensions across all phases. For example, until today, the radical left in Germany faces difficulties in agreeing on how deal with Turkish fascists in a context of heightened anti-Muslim racism and far-right mobilization.

The variation in mechanisms triggered by repression can be attributed to several factors. First, it is influenced by its relative weight in comparison to and its interaction with other mechanisms in the other two arenas. Second, the nature of repression matters, with selective and generalized repression eliciting different responses. Third, the stage of relationship transformation plays a crucial role, as do fourth, qualitative shifts in the form of repression utilized by state authorities.

Firstly, in cases where relationship formation was primarily triggered by transnational brokerage, as largely occurred during Phases II and III, repression tended to trigger relationship maintenance since relationships were already soundly established.

Secondly, with these cross-arena dynamics in mind, selective and generalized forms of repression triggered similar *attributions of threat* and corresponding relationship transformation mechanisms. Selective repression triggered a diverse attribution of threat: more moderate groups engaged in boundary activation, while radical left groups tended to attribute threats as affecting themselves, at least in the long term. Additionally, selective forms of repression such as terrorism procedures, given the high degree of potential risk, led to the dissolution of relations between certain groups and persons. Conversely, generalized repression triggered relationship formation or relationship maintenance with moderate and radical actors, since the threat tended to be perceived as targeting the Kurdish movement and the broader left. For example, the symbol ban in Phase III, targeting Kurdish activists, solidarity activists, and bystanders triggered relationship maintenance, mass civil disobedience and occasionally the formation of new relationships.

Thirdly, individuals and groups with long-standing, close relationships with the Kurdish movement were more inclined to engage in relationship maintenance when confronted with repression. In cases where the relationship had already deteriorated, such as in the beginning of Phase II, selective repression did not lead to any new relationship formation. Similarly, stigmatization tended to activate boundaries within broader segments of the radical left, except when it was mitigated by pre-existing, existing closer relationships.

Fourthly, new and severe cases of repression, such as the Düsseldorf Trials in 1988, the PKK ban in 1993, or the first application of section 129a in 2010, prompted the establishment of solidarity committees and the formation of new relationships. However, when repression remained constant or even subsided, it did not lead to the creation of new relationships, and instead, evidence of a habituation mechanism is apparent across the phases. In fact, constant repression contributed to the emergence of one of the longest-standing and institutionalized organizations within the solidarity movement with Kurdistan: AZADÎ. Similar to how constant repression against the radical left led to the formation of the largest and most institutionalized organization, the 'Rote Hilfe', the continuous repression against the Kurdish movement has resulted in the institutionalization of relationships.

In sum, the mechanisms of repression and stigmatization influenced the process of relationship transformation in different ways across the temporal phases in the National Arena. The repression paradox becomes evident when examining the attribution of threat, considering the scope of repression, the stage of relationship transformation, and the particular form of repression.

3. Inter-Movement Arena: From Polarization to Normalization

The transformation of relationships between the radical left and the Kurdish movement can be characterized by polarization in Phase I, non-recognition and political learning in the early and late stages of Phase II respectively, and normalization and differentiation in Phase III. The following section shall provide a small overview of relationship transformation in the different phases in order to compare the mechanisms along the stages of relationship transformation in greater detail.

In the early 1980s, there was little recognition of the Kurdish movement within the radical left in Germany. However, starting from the second half of the 1980s, beside relationship formation

triggered by repression, brokerage activities emerged driven by the sub-mechanisms of attribution of similarity and attribution of opportunity. Notably, relationships were established, particularly with the anti-imperialist movement, leading to the integration of the Kurdish movement in the diaspora into the pre-existing internationalist activities. Conversely, the groups belonging to the autonomous and emerging Antideutsche currents engaged in boundary activation, resulting in non-engagement or counter-mobilization, leading to a polarized landscape. Shortly after, the maintenance of these relationships began through the formation of coalitions in the form of solidarity committees with Kurdistan, which sprang up in nearly all major West-German cities. These solidarity committees were nationally coordinated by the PKK-led Kurdish movement, and later, following the PKK ban, by organizations within the solidarity movement, most importantly the 'Informationsstelle Kurdistan' (ISKU). It is important to note that the relationship between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany was described as relatively tense, and efforts were made to resolve these tensions in the interests of relationship maintenance. However, in 1999, after the abduction of Öcalan, these relationships fractured, leading to the dissolution of the solidarity committees with Kurdistan.

During the initial stages of Phase II, there was a notable decline in Kurdistan solidarity efforts in Germany, lasting roughly from 2000 until 2007. Only a small number of dedicated solidarity cadres maintained connections with the Kurdish movement. Both movements were experiencing generational shifts, while the Kurdish diaspora implemented the ideological and organizational transformation, opening up new opportunities for relationship formation. In contrast to Phase I, the brokerage activities between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Phase II were not primarily characterized by an immediate attribution of similarity, but instead by political learning, often taking place within coalitions. The political learning was particularly concerned with the new paradigm, and over time, the coalitions became brokers for the radical left, spreading knowledge about the new paradigm. Following the Amed Camp in 2009, the 'Tatort Kurdistan' campaign was established, effectively coordinating the efforts of the growing solidarity movement. The focus shifted towards the attribution of similarity with Democratic Confederalism. The solidarity movement in Phase II, successfully fostered relationships between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany, and provided the relational infrastructure for the rapid emergence of the Kurdistan solidarity movement in Phase III.

During the war in Kobanê, brokerage played a significant role, initially triggered by an attribution of threat, and was soon followed by an attribution of similarity with the revolution in Rojava. Many pre-existing relationships formed in Phase II were maintained, however the role that they played within the rapidly expanding solidarity movement sometimes shifted. Phase III saw the normalization of Kurdistan solidarity within the activities of radical left. It became a routine part of their daily work, with nearly all radical left currents engaging to some extent in Kurdistan solidarity efforts. Moreover, the Kurdish movement in the diaspora acted as a catalyst for building coalitions among hitherto separated radical left groups. These coalitions emerged mainly in 2014/2015 and 2018 during times of heightened threat, and they were active in both East and West Germany. Political learning was widespread, with the Kurdish movement providing valuable content and resources. Later in Phase III, the solidarity movement began to experience *differentiation*, with the formation of more specialized solidarity groups and coalitions. These included autonomous women's, youth, and ecological groups, which often emulated aspects of

the Kurdish movement's approach. While some relationships dissolved as an effect of non-participation in coalitions or mobilization, these break-ups were not abrupt. Next, the different stages of relationship transformation shall be compared.

Relationship formation across all phases involved brokerage, which facilitated the establishment of new connections between previously unconnected parties. However, the specific sub-mechanisms and the time spans for these processes differed. In Phase I, the attribution of similarity within the anti-imperialist movement occurred relatively quickly after the initial brokerage. In contrast, in Phase II, the brokerage process was characterized by coalition formation initially, followed by political learning. It was only after this political learning process took place that an attribution of similarity with the new paradigm occurred during the stage of relationship maintenance. In Phase III, brokerage was mainly triggered by attribution of threat, followed soon after by an attribution of similarity. Importantly, the brokerage mechanisms in Phase I spanned a longer period, from the early 1980s until roughly the mid-1990s, whereas in Phase II they operated from 2007 until 2014. Meanwhile, brokerage appears to occur only in the first years of Phase III.

In other words, relationship formation in Phase I involved the establishment of connections between anti-imperialist actors who quickly recognized each other as coalition partners. However, in the National Arena, the trigger for relationship formation was equivalent repression occurring over a long-time span. In Phase II, the formation of relations in the form of coalitions was influenced by dynamics in the other arenas, however there was no immediate attribution of similarity. The Kurdish movement needed to overcome initial scepticism, and the radical left needed to engage in political learning in order to recognize the Kurdish movement as partners. In Phase III, the attribution of similarity occurred rapidly, albeit with some projection, which was addressed through extensive political learning during the relationship maintenance stage.

The *relationship maintenance* stage differs in the different temporal phases in terms of the most pronounced mechanisms. In Phase I it was marked by polarization, in Phase II by slow expansion, and in Phase III, by normalization. Throughout all phases, the coalitions took the form of Kurdistan solidarity committees. In Phase I, these solidarity committees were established in over 40 West-German cities and were soon coordinated by the PKK-led Kurdish movement, and later by central groups within the solidarity movement (scale shift). There were few coalitions on issues other than Kurdistan during this phase. Phase II saw the occasional formation of solidarity committees, with 'Tatort Kurdistan' coordinating the efforts of the groups which were typically active in other fields as well. This was referred to as a limited scale shift. In Phase III, solidarity committees were established in 35 cities, and there was a significant increase in coalitions on other issues, particularly feminist and ecological alliances, totalling 50 coalitions or Kurdistan groups. A differentiation mechanism was also evident during this phase, whereby relationship transformation took place between organizations on more diverse issues. In Phase III, the radical left emulated certain aspects of the Kurdish movement, such as the formation of autonomous women's organizations, however this emulation occurred rarely during Phase I, and not at all in Phase II.

The political learning sub-mechanism was present across all phases, but held varying degrees of relevance. In Phase I, political learning primarily focused on understanding the Kurdish question,

the international relations between Turkey and Germany, and the history of the Kurdish movement. Only towards the end of Phase I did ideological and especially organizational learning become a focal point, though it was interrupted by relationship break-up. Phase II began with a lack of recognition, and then transitioned into a stage of processing the ideological change within the Kurdish movement, and creating materials for the radical left. Nevertheless, political learning was the most relevant mechanism for the entire relationship transformation process during Phase III. The Kurdish movement allocated considerable resources to facilitate political learning for the radical left, while the radical left engaged in intensive discussions and implemented various ideological, strategical, and organizational aspects into their own organizations.

Throughout all phases, tensions were a consistent feature at various stages of the relationship transformation process. These tensions included strategic conflicts related to the 'here versus there' dimension, tactical disagreements on how to handle Turkish fascists, and the balance between critique and affirmation. However, the nature and severity of these tensions, as well as the possibilities for resolution, varied across the phases. During Phase I, in the late 1980s and 1990s, the relationship between the Kurdish movement and the radical left in Germany was marked by relatively high tensions, characterized by communication problems, difficulties in translation, and Eurocentrism. Conversely, Phase II saw lower levels of tension, partially due to the relatively low commitment of some segments of the solidarity movement. In Phase III, tensions remained relatively low, and efforts to resolve some of the central tensions had emerged. For example, the ideological transformation and the adoption of Democratic Confederalism by the Kurdish movement in the diaspora seemed to provide a solution to the spatial tension between the 'here versus there', as both movements pursued more aligned strategies for both localities.

Relationship break-up was a significant phenomenon primarily in Phase I. During this phase, there was a nationwide dissolution of relationships following the abduction of Öcalan in 1999, marking a crisis within the Kurdish movement. Kurdish solidarity committees ceased their activities, solidarity activists ended their engagements, and the Kurdish movement was perceived as defeated. This dissolution was exacerbated by the crisis, characterized by confusion within the movement and a lack of communication with coalition partners. The sudden and complete break in solidarity relations was triggered by the perception within the radical left, that Öcalan's strategic shifts represented a betrayal of previously held positions, or in other words, an attribution of dissimilarity. Furthermore, since the initial formation of relationships was partly based on an attribution of opportunity, given the Kurdish movement's reputation as a successful, anti-cyclical movement, the crisis within the movement and its perceived defeat eroded this foundation for maintaining these relationships. In Phases II and III, relationship break-ups were not as definitive but rather involved a shift towards other issues, often due to resource limitations. These relationships, especially during times of threat, could be reactivated.

In sum, the relationship transformation process in the Inter-Movement Arena was characterized by the attribution of similarity, political learning, and various tensions across all phases. This arena served as a convergence point for various processes from other arenas, and the relative weight of these constituent mechanisms played a crucial role in shaping the transformation of relationships between the radical left and the PKK-led Kurdish movement.

4. Comparison between Solidarity Movements in the FRG

This section shall compare the dynamics between the Kurdish solidarity movement and the radical left in Germany with the other solidarity movements in the FRG, examining how these dynamics evolve across the different stages of relationship transformation.

'The Solidarity Will Be Televised' could be a summary for the process of relationship formation among solidarity movements in the FRG. In the cases of Vietnam, Chile or Kobanê, the main trigger for brokerage was the diffusion of a threat situation through mass media. The radical left's dependency on mainstream media was often countered by the establishment of movement-specific media, evolving from printed newspapers to internet pages, social media platforms and messenger channels. However, despite the presence of progressive alternative media and the establishment of transnational media networks by the Kurdish movement (Schamberger 2022: 545), this dependency on mainstream media has remained.

The attribution of similarity was a central element in these movements and was often accompanied by the attribution of opportunity. Initially, actors needed to become aware of each other and possess basic knowledge about each other's causes. Following this, SMOs would decide which groups were potential coalition partners and which were not. For example, the Vietnamese people were seen as pioneers in the fight against imperialism, the Zapatistas were considered to be at the forefront of the revolt from below, and the PKK-led Kurdish movement was perceived first as an advanced anti-imperialist struggle and later as a vanguard of feminist revolution. Throughout these cases, the radical left sometimes enjoyed a rigid 'ideological similarity test', meaning that they would only form relationships with SMOs closely aligned to their own ideological concepts. Regarding the attribution of opportunity, the emergence of solidarity movements rarely coincided with moments of defeat or internal turmoil within the movements they supported, leading to dissolution in those circumstances. The case of Chile stands as one exception.

The stage of *relationship maintenance* is closely connected to political learning, a facet that is sometimes overlooked in the literature. Initially, I intended to build a central argument around the projection mechanism, which suggests that one's own desires, strategies and ideologies are imposed onto another movement. While I acknowledge the existence of this mechanism, I argue that it is, to some extent, a strawman narrative. In line with Balsen and Rössel (1986), as discussed in previous sections, I have argued that rather than projection, relationship maintenance is frequently characterized by paternalism and Eurocentrism, and the level of critique and affirmation in these relationships needs to be negotiated in each relationship. In the early stages of relationship formation, projection mechanisms are often prevalent. People become excited about a movement that they were previously unaware of, they hope for a fresh perspective and they may romanticize certain aspects of that movement. This was evident in cases like Algeria, Vietnam, or Rojava in Phase III. However, as political learning follows, especially when facilitated by a mobilized diaspora, solidarity activists tend to recognize the contradiction, limitations, and developments within the movements they support. Here the strawman argument comes into play. It is important to note that the absence of public criticism does not imply the absence of criticism altogether. Critique is often expressed within the coalitions behind closed doors. It is crucial that the degree of criticism aligns with the degree of relationship transformation.

Additionally, when the solidarity movements are characterized by polarization, fewer public discussions are likely to take place, whereas when the solidarity movement normalizes relations, widespread and public political learning is more feasible. In summary, while projection does occur during the transformation of relationships between movements across borders, it can be countered by political learning and should be analysed within the continuum between critique and affirmation.

Chapter II has already established that diasporas tend to develop alongside their alliance systems. Conversely, it can also be argued that a solidarity movement develops differently when a mobilized diaspora is present on the ground. A mobilized diaspora offers various possibilities for relationship transformation, and it significantly impacts all stages of the relationship transformation process: formation, maintenance, and break-up. This was evident in the cases of Algeria, Chile, or Palestine, and this even more evident in the case with the solidarity movement with Kurdistan, since it is the strongest mobilized diaspora in Europe:

Firstly, in cases where there is an organized diaspora movement on the ground, organizing and mobilizing in the same region or cities, the dynamics of relationship transformation differ from situations where there are only a limited number of cadres or no activists at all in the same spatial area, as seen in the case of the Zapatistas. Anja Flach's argument holds weight here, that "through the large group of organized exiled Kurds, there is also the possibility of direct engagement with the Kurdish liberation struggle, its organizations and members" (Flach 2019b: 21). During the stage of *relationship formation*, brokerage is more likely to occur in cities where the diaspora is organized and a radical left presence exists. When a mobilized diaspora is able to establish associations in different cities or publish a journal in the local language, relationship formation is facilitated. Mobilization in the same city occasionally triggers brokerage as well, however mobilization in the same spatial area can also lead to strategic and tactical tensions during relationship maintenance that would not have arisen in cases without a mobilized diaspora on the ground. However, local *relationship maintenance* also provides the possibility for more intense political learning, regular meetings, and the formation of personal ties. Furthermore, emulation occurred, partly enhanced by a mobilized diaspora, such as in the case of the Chile solidarity, where cultural expressions were adapted. Indeed, often ideologies or strategies devised in the Global South are acquired in the Global North. In the case of the Kurdistan solidarity, the emulation involved ideologies, organizational strategies, methods, and cultural practices, and was partly reinforced by the interaction in the Inter-Movement Arena. Finally, the rapid *relationship break-up* towards the end of Phase I was also fuelled by the failure to resolve tensions, such as competition over resources, that occurred due to mobilization in the same region.

Secondly, the diaspora often mediated the diffusion of information from their respective countries, often triggering a deeper political learning process, as seen in the cases of Chile or Kurdistan. Especially in Phase III, the Kurdish movement provided considerable resources for political learning of the radical left. Thirdly, since most mobilized diasporas faced repression from the migration regime, the solidarity movement also had to contend with the tightening asylum system in the FRG, as was the case in Palestine and Kurdistan, necessitating a shift in objectives. Likewise, the ban on Palestinian organizations and the repression against the Kurdish movement in the FRG, triggered an attribution of threat, albeit to varying degrees. Finally, the fragmentation

within the diaspora sometimes was borrowed by the solidarity movement, as was the case with the Chile solidarity movement, or during Phase I, when the polarization between the Turkish and Kurdish left influenced parts of the radical left in the FRG. In summary, diasporas and their solidarity movements develop alongside each other, but the process of relationship transformation exhibits specific mechanisms and sub-mechanisms when it occurs in the same spatial area. These mechanisms have been central to solidarity movements in the FRG, including the solidarity movement with Kurdistan. Based on these observations, in the next section I propose several pathways of relationship transformation between movements across borders.

5. Pathways of Relationship Transformation across Borders

In order to summarize the results of this analysis and to extend their applicability beyond the specific case of Kurdistan solidarity in Germany, this thesis proposes distinct pathways of relationship transformation between social movements across borders. These pathways align with the concept of Arenas of Interaction. Although these arenas are interconnected and mutually influential, they are presented here separately for clarity. These pathways offer a conceptual framework for comprehending how social movements initiate, sustain, and sometimes terminate relationships across borders. They represent informed hypotheses about the generalized processes of relationship transformation between social movement organizations operating in different countries, grounded in the comparative analysis of various phases of Kurdistan solidarity in Germany, and analogous solidarity movements within the country. However, further empirical investigations in different contexts are necessary to validate or refine these pathways in different settings.

Transnational Space Pathway

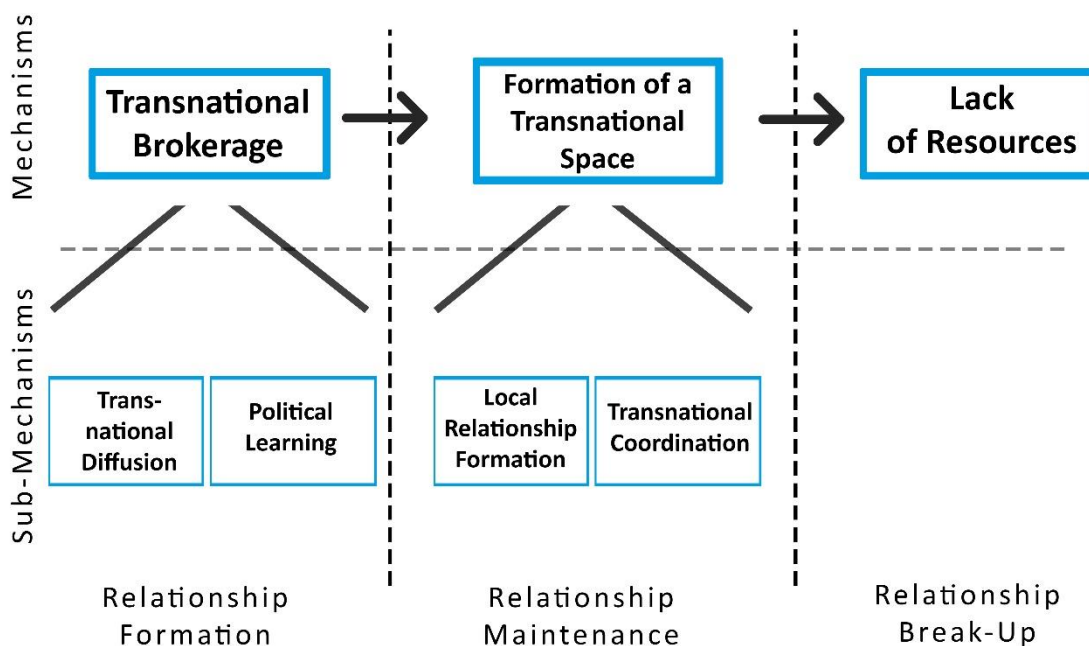


Figure 14: Formation of a Transnational Space Pathway

The formation of a transnational space, while crucial in specific contexts like the transnational solidarity movement with Kurdistan, may not be readily generalizable to all cross-border social movement relationships since it primarily pertains to scenarios involving a pre-existing mobilized diaspora and its transnational space. The process of creating a transnational space typically commences with transnational brokerage activities, often initiated through delegation trips that facilitate connections between SMOs across borders. Within this pathway, the sub-mechanism of transnational diffusion plays a prominent role, which involves the dissemination of information concerning conflicts, evidence of war crimes, or the partner movement’s ideology and strategy, transferring this knowledge back to the home movement. Notably, transnational brokerage inherently includes elements of political learning, especially when internationalists engage with partner movements for extended durations. However, relationships developed through this pathway often conclude after the initial transnational brokerage, as this might not have been the primary objective or due to resource constraints within the involved SMOs. The establishment of a transnational space involves sub-mechanisms such as political learning, local relationship formation, and transnational coordination. In essence, this pathway fosters a continuous flow of activities, information, and resources across borders. It is important to acknowledge that maintaining transnational relationships can be more challenging and resource-intensive for both partnering SMOs compared to other pathways.

Attribution of Threat Pathway

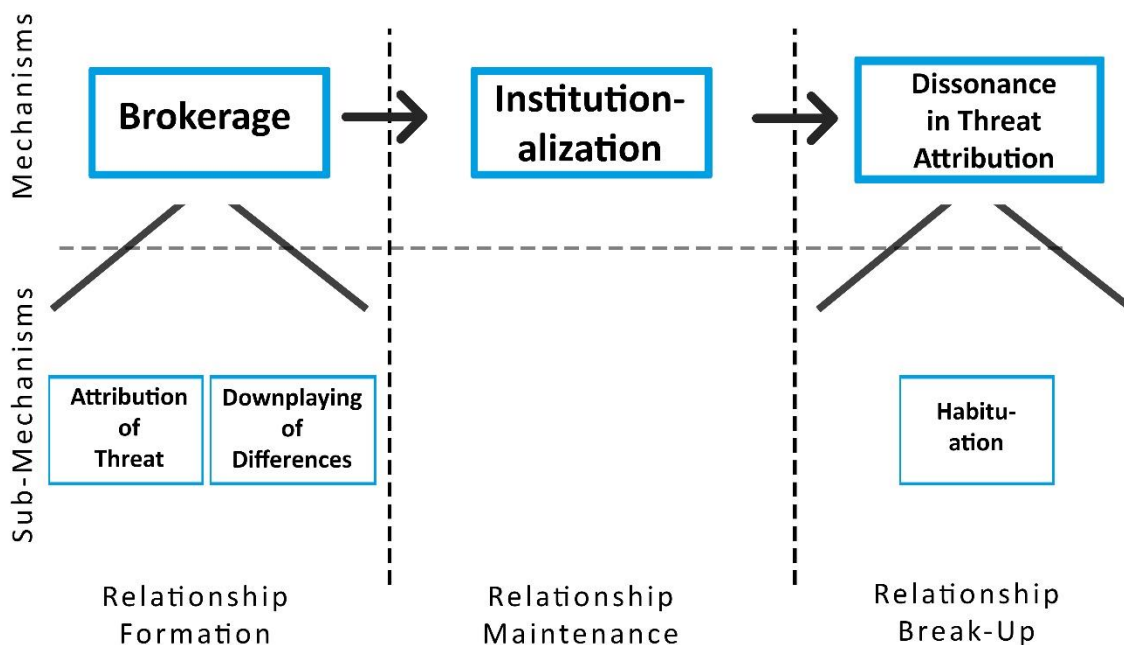


Figure 15: Attribution of Threat Pathway

The attribution of threat pathway primarily emerges as a response to government repression or countermovement threats within the National Arena. When a perceived threat is identified, affecting both another movement and one’s own, this often leads to the initiation of brokerage

between SMOs representing different movements. The attribution of threat can effectively mitigate ideological differences by postponing or downplaying them, in order to address the shared threat. In cases where repression persists without significant fluctuations or remains selective in nature, a habituation mechanism may come into play. It is worth noting that in the context of the radical left in the FRG, efforts were made to counteract this habituation by establishing anti-repression organizations, thereby ensuring that relationship maintenance did not hinge on continuous mobilization or rank-and-file exchanges (institutionalization). Relationship dissolution within this pathway tends to occur when there is a dissonance in threat attribution. This dissonance arises when one movement perceives a countermovement threat or selective repression as a legitimate concern while the other does not. In essence, the attribution of threat pathway is characterized by its short-term nature, with relationship transformations typically unfolding in response to immediate threats.

Attribution of Similarity Pathway

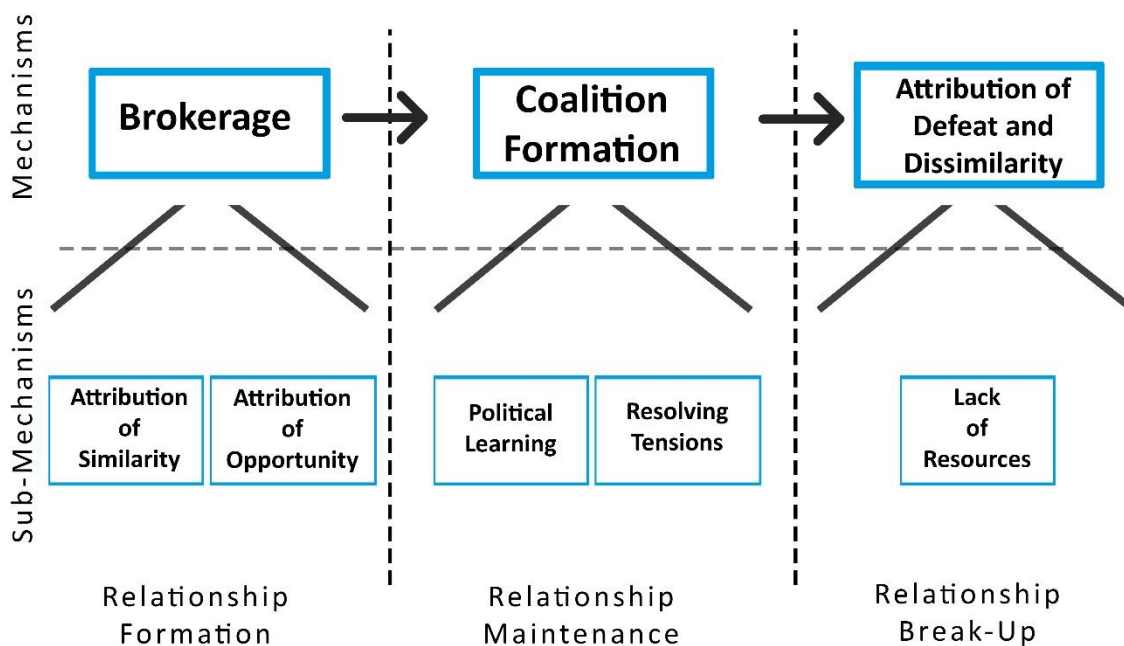


Figure 16: Attribution of Similarity Pathway

The *attribution of similarity pathway* represents a distinct trajectory within relationship transformation, characterized by its propensity for long-term developments, encompassing a series of interconnected mechanisms that unfold over an extended duration. It commences with the initiation of brokerage mechanisms, which serve to establish relationships between previously unconnected movements. The brokerage mechanism is predominantly driven by the attribution of similarity sub-mechanism, where both movements or SMOs recognize each other as potential coalition partners, based on an assessment of shared ideologies, strategies, and tactics, often rooted in limited knowledge. Additionally, the attribution of opportunity can come into play, especially when one of the movements is experiencing success or growth, further facilitating the brokerage process. As the relationship progresses into the maintenance stage,

coalition formation typically occurs. In the case of the FRG, this often takes the form of solidarity committees, mobilizing around international relations formed between nation-states. Constant political learning is a central feature of relationship maintenance, ensuring that both sides remain engaged and informed. Within these coalitions, tensions are bound to emerge, necessitating resolution to prevent eventual relationship break-up. Within this pathway, relationship break-up can be triggered by various mechanisms, including severe crises within one of the movements, which may involve an attribution of defeat, a lack of resources, or an attribution of dissimilarity. The latter may occur when there is a significant shift in ideology, strategy, or tactics within one movement without adequate communication with the coalition partner to explain this transformation.

6. Conclusion

This PhD thesis embarked on an exploration of the intricate dynamics governing the transformation of relationships between the PKK-led Kurdish movement and radical left movements in Germany over the course of several decades, spanning from the 1980s to 2020. This research traced the process of relationship transformation across three distinct temporal phases and three arenas of interaction, providing evidence of the complex interplay of mechanisms and sub-mechanisms that either instigated relationship formation, sustained relationship maintenance, or precipitated relationship break-up. At a broader level, this thesis proposed three distinct pathways of relationship transformation, each characterized by its unique attributes.

The first pathway, referred to as the *formation of a transnational space*, represents a formidable undertaking, requiring sustained efforts to facilitate continuous flows of activities, information, and resources across borders. It is the most challenging pathway to pursue, and often, these transnational relationships do not extend beyond their initial brokerage phase. The second pathway, known as the *attribution of threat*, is typically triggered by government repression or countermovement threats, and tends to be of short duration. These relationships tend to arise swiftly in response to perceived threats but may not endure over the long term. Lastly, the *attribution of similarity* pathway engenders more enduring relationship transformations, often rooted in ideological alignment. These relationships are characterized by extended periods of political learning and may evolve into coalitions that require ongoing maintenance in order to navigate the tensions that invariably arise.

The following section shall overview this research project's empirical and theoretical contributions to the existing literature of contentious politics, transnationalism, diaspora politics and coalition building, while also showing limitations and suggestions for further research. Empirically, this study refutes the claim that there was no substantial mass solidarity mobilization⁴⁹⁹ with Kurdistan, as asserted by Zarnett (2017: 109). Instead, it provides evidence of the existence of a substantial network of at least 44 solidarity committees in Phase I, over 10 in Phase II, and around 50 in Phase III, in Germany alone. These coalitions were coordinated on a national level, and from Phase III, also on a transnational level.

⁴⁹⁹ Zarnett sets the threshold for a solidarity movement at a minimum of ten single-issue solidarity NGOs focused on a distant rebel group (Zarnett 2017: 45).

Drawing on a dataset encompassing 40 interviews, document analysis and participant observation, this research traces the intricate history of the Kurdish solidarity movement, following its formation, transformation, achievements, tensions, contradictions, and dissolution. Furthermore, this study reveals the impact of the solidarity movement on an international, national, and inter-movement level, ranging from tangible outcomes, such as arms export stoppages, to more subtle effects, including the emulation of ideologies and methods. Nonetheless, there remains substantial room for further investigation into the solidarity movement with Kurdistan in Germany and beyond. A crucial avenue for exploration is a comparative analysis of Kurdistan solidarity movements in different countries, which can yield valuable insights into the global dynamics of solidarity activism. In the context of the Kurdish solidarity movement in Germany, many of the empirical sections of this thesis could be expanded upon to provide a deeper understanding of its intricacies and mechanisms. Particularly promising for future research is the examination of the emulation of commemorative culture by the radical left, exemplified by the 'Halim Dener campaign'. This case offers a rich terrain for memory studies, and further investigations in this area could yield fruitful insights.

In terms of analytical contributions, this research has enriched the literature on coalition building. While much of the existing literature in this field tends to focus predominantly on the formation of coalitions (van Dyke, Amos 2017: 10), this study has adopted a mechanism-process approach in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the entire process of relationship transformation. This approach has addressed a noted gap in the coalition building literature, which often struggles to elucidate the intricate interplay between various factors and to analyse the dynamic evolution of coalitions over time. In line with the coalition building literature, this research has affirmed the relevance of factors such as organizational structures, ideologies, social ties, political opportunities and threats, and the availability of resources in relationship transformation. However, by tracing the complete trajectory of relationship transformation, it has become evident that these factors can vary in their significance at different stages of this process. Furthermore, this study illustrates that these factors can be influenced or superseded by mechanisms from other arenas or can fluctuate in importance during different temporal phases. For instance, despite the presence of similar high levels of repression, Phase I witnessed the emergence of one of the primary pathways of relationship transformation, even managing to overcome ideological differences. In contrast, Phase II experienced repression that initially hindered relationship formation, and later facilitated it only in specific cases. Phase III, on the other hand, saw repression playing a role in fostering relationship maintenance. The nuanced variations in the impact of repression across these phases can be attributed to a range of elements, including its relative weight compared to mechanisms from other arenas, its interaction with other mechanisms, and the specific stage of relationship transformation. In essence, this research has provided a more fine-grained and temporally sensitive understanding of the mechanisms influencing relationship transformation, contributing to the advancement of coalition building literature.

Additionally, this thesis has contributed to the literature on diaspora mobilization by emphasizing the intricate interplay between diaspora movements and their alliance systems, with each influencing the evolution of the other, as indicated by existing studies (Coma Roura 2016; Quinsaas 2016). This research has also provided empirical evidence that challenges Zarnett's

hypothesis suggesting that a highly mobilized diaspora “is less likely to be the recipient of high levels of Western activist solidarity” (Zarnett 2015: 197). In the case of the Kurdistan solidarity movement in Germany, relationship formation was prompted by the confrontational mobilizations occurring within the same National Arena. Contrary to Zarnett’s proposal, this research demonstrates that strong mobilization within the same city presents opportunities for the formation of direct ties. Moreover, this study also traced instances of tension and polarization, which were however triggered by a different combination of mechanisms than initially suggested by Zarnett. Notably, the assumption that the frame of a strong and mobilized diaspora is essentially particularistic and therefore cannot resonate with Western movements was refuted in this study by tracing the attribution of similarities by the anti-imperialist movement in the late 1980s. The latter understood the particular national liberation struggle as a universal struggle against imperialism and therefore supported the PKK-led Kurdish movement. Furthermore, the thesis contended that distinct mechanisms come into play when the process of relationship transformation involves only cadres from a distant struggle or when daily opportunities for interaction with a mobilized diaspora are available. In addition to highlighting the co-evolution of diasporas with their respective alliance systems, this research has underscored that local movements follow distinct trajectories when a mobilized diaspora is present in their vicinity. This challenges the common assumption of a power imbalance favouring Western movements, as evidenced in the case of Kurdistan solidarity, where the power dynamics were rather reversed. A young Kurdish cadre even humorously advocated for ‘development aid’ for Germany:

“If you compare the situation in Rojava and Germany, you are here in Germany actually in the weaker position as a leftist ... Actually, one would have to make a solidarity movement with Germany, and send a solidarity delegation the other way around.”

Indeed, this research has emphasized that the Kurdish diaspora played a significant role in educating the radical left in Germany, with the latter emulating the methods and strategies of the PKK-led Kurdish movement. Notably, the PKK-led Kurdish movement has emerged as one of the most influential radical left movements in Germany. Consequently, this study aspires to enrich the existing literature by presenting a more nuanced understanding of the relationship transformation dynamics between mobilized diasporas and their alliance systems. Further research endeavours could delve into the impact of evolving migration systems on relationship transformation dynamics, and explore the interactions among various diaspora movements, post-migrant SMOs, and local movements.

Finally, my research has contributed to the transnational solidarity movement literature by identifying recurring mechanisms within transnational relationship transformations. The empirical analysis brought to light the spatial tension between strategies emphasizing local struggles ‘here’, versus supporting struggles ‘there’, as well as the dissonance in threat attribution. Additionally, it highlighted the tension between critique and affirmation, often framed as metropolitan chauvinism and projection. Further research endeavours could extend this work by conducting systematic comparisons between various solidarity movements in Germany. A particularly fruitful undertaking might involve comparing solidarity movements in East and West Germany.

X. Appendix

A. List of Abbreviations and Organizations

This table includes all abbreviations and organizations, including an English translation, and a reference to their main introduction in the thesis. All abbreviations and organizations that were at least mentioned two times in different paragraphs are included.

Table 1: List of Abbreviations and Organizations

Acronym	Name in Original Language	English Translation	Reference
AA/BO	Antifaschistische Aktion/Bundesweite Organisation	Antifascist Action/Federal Organisation	Chapter IV.
AAENS	Rêveberiya Xweser a Bakur û Rojhilatê Sûriyeyê	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria	Chapter V.
ARAB	Antifaschistischen Revolutionären Aktion Berlin	Antifascist Revolutionary Action Berlin	Chapter VII. 2.
ATESH	ATESH – Für eine sozialrevolutionäre Perspektive	Fire - For a social revolutionary perspective	Chapter VII. 2.
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi	Justice and Development Party	
AstA	Allgemeiner Studierendenausschuss	General Student Committee	
Bewegung 2. Juli	Bewegung 2. Juli	2 nd June Movement	Chapter IV. 2.
CENÎ	CENÎ - Kurdisches Frauenbüro für Frieden	Kurdish Women's Office for Peace	Chapter VII. 3.
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Christian Democratic Union	
DEP	Demokrasi Partisi	Democracy Party	Chapter VI. 1.
DİTİB	Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği	Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs	Chapter VIII. 2.
Civaka Azad	Civaka Azad – Kurdisches Zentrum für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit e.V.	Free Society - Kurdish Center for Public Relations (registered association)	Chapter V. 2.
Dev-Yol	Devrimci Yol	Revolutionary Path	Chapter V. 2.
Die Falken	Sozialistische Jugend Deutschlands — Die Falken	Socialist Youth of Germany - The Falcons	Chapter IV. 1.
DBG	Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund	German Trade Union Confederation	
DHKP-C	Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi	Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front	Chapter VII. 1.
DKP	Deutsche Kommunistische Partei	The German Communist Party	Chapter IV. 2.
DTP -> BDP	Demokratik Toplum Partisi -> Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi	Democratic Society Party -> Peace and Democracy Party	Chapter V. 1.
ECHR		European Court of Human Rights	
ERNK	Eniya Rizgariya Neteweyî ya Kurdistanê	National Liberation Front of Kurdistan	Chapter V. 1.
EU		European Union	
EZLN	Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional	Zapatista Army of National Liberation	Chapter IV. 4.
FAU	Freie Arbeiter*innen-Union	Free Workers' Union	Chapter VIII. 3.

FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei	Free Democratic Party	
FEYKA Kurdistan	Föderation der patriotischen Arbeiter- und Kulturvereinigungen aus Kurdistan in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland	Federation of Patriotic Workers and Cultural Associations from Kurdistan in the Federal Republic of Germany	Chapter V. 2.
FfF		Fridays for Future	
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale	National Liberation Front	Chapter IV. 1.
FLINTA*	Frauen, Lesben, Intergeschlechtliche, nichtbinäre, trans and agender	women/females, lesbians, intersex, non-binary, trans and agender people	
FRG	Bundesrepublik Deutschland (BRD)	Federal Republic of Germany	
GDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik	German Democratic Republic	
GIM	Gruppe Internationale Marxisten	Group International Marxists	Chapter IV. 3.
GNN	Gesellschaft für Nachrichtenerfassung und Nachrichtenverbreitung	Society for News Gathering and Dissemination	Chapter III.
HDP	Halkların Demokratik Partisi	Peoples' Democratic Party	Chapter V. 1.
HRK -> ARGK -> HPG	Hêzên Rizgariya Kurdistan -> Artêşa Rizgariya Gelê Kurdistan > Hêzên Parastina Ge	Freedom Forces of Kurdistan -> People's Liberation Army of Kurdistan -> People's Defence Forces	Chapter V. 1.
ICOR		International Coordination of Revolutionary Parties and Organizations	Chapter VIII. 1.
ICR		Internationalist Commune of Rojava	Chapter VIII. 1.
IDK	Initiative Demokratischer Konföderalismus	Initiative Democratic Confederalism	Chapter VIII. 3.
IIVS	Initiative Internationale Vietnam Solidarität	Initiative Internationale Vietnam Solidarity	Chapter IV. 2.
IL	Interventionistische Linke	Interventionist Left	Chapter IV. 4.
IS		Islamic State	
ISKU	Informationsstelle Kurdistan	Kurdistan Information Center	Chapter III. 2. Chapter VI. 3.
JITEM	Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele	Gendarmerie Intelligence Organization	Chapter V. 1.
KBW	Kommunistische Bund Westdeutschlands	Communist League of West Germany	Chapter IV. 2.
KCK	Koma Civakên Kurdistan	Kurdistan Communities Union	Chapter V. 1.
KDP	Partiya Demokrata Kurdistanê	Kurdistan Democratic Party	
KIZ	Kurdistan Informations-Zentrum	Kurdish Information Centre	Chapter VI. 3.
KJB -> KJK	<i>Koma Jinên Bilind</i> -> Komalên Jinên Kurdistan	Union of Proud Women -> Kurdistan Women's Communities	Chapter V. 1.
KOMKAR	Federation of Associations from Kurdistan in Germany	Federation of Associations from Kurdistan in Germany	
KPD-AO	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands-Aufbauorganisation	Communist Party of Germany - Assembly Organization	Chapter IV. 2.
Kongra Gel	Kongreya Gelê Kurdistanê	People's Congress	Chapter V. 1.

KON-MED	Konföderation der Gemeinschaften Kurdistans in Deutschland e.V.	Confederation of Communities of Kurdistan in Germany (registered association)	Chapter V. 2.
LTTE		Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam	
Kurdistan Komitee	Kurdistan Komitee in der BRD e.V.	Kurdistan Committee in the FRG registered association	Chapter VI. 3.
MIR	Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria	Movement of the revolutionary left	Chapter IV. 3.
MİT	Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı	National Intelligence Organization of Turkey	
MLKP	Marksist Leninist Komünist Parti	Marxist–Leninist Communist Party	Chapter VIII. 1.
MLPD	Marxistisch-Leninistischen Partei Deutschlands	Marxist–Leninist Party of Germany	Chapter VI. 2.
MRGA		Make Rojava Green Again	Chapter VIII. 1.
MSF		Mesopotamian Social Forum	Chapter VII. 1.
MTT		Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly	Chapter II. 1.2.
NATO		North Atlantic Treaty Organization	
	Naturfreundejugend	Naturefriends Youth	Chapter IV. 1.
NAV-DEM	Navenda Civaka Demokratîk ya Kurdên li Almanyayê	Democratic Social Center of the Kurds in Germany	Chapter V. 2.
NLF	Mặt trận Dân tộc Giải phóng Miền Nam Việt	National Liberation Front	Chapter IV. 2.
NVA	Nationale Volksarmee	National People's Army	Chapter VI. 1.
Kurdistan Report	Kurdistan Report	Kurdistan Report	Chapter V. 2.1.
Kurdistan Rundbrief	Kurdistan Rundbrief	Kurdistan Newsletter	Chapter III. 2.
	Ostermarschbewegung	Easter March Movement	Chapter IV. 2.
PAJK	Partiya Azadiya Jinê ya Kurdistanê	Party of the Free Woman of Kurdistan	Chapter V. 1.
PDS -> Die Linke	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus -> Die Linke	Party of Democratic Socialism -> The Left	Chapter I.
PGA		Peoples Global Action	Chapter IV. 4.
PJKK -> PJA	Partîya Jinên Karkerên Kurdistan -> Partîya Jina Azad	Women's Worker Party -> Party of the Free Women	Chapter V. 1.
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê	Kurdistan Workers' Party	Chapter V.
PLO	Munazzamat at-Taḥrîr al-Filasṭīniyyah	Palestinian Liberation Organization	
PUK	Yekêtiy Nîştimanîy Kurdistan	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan	
PYD	Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat	Democratic Union Party	Chapter V. 1.
RAF	Rote Armee Fraktion	The Red Army Faction	Chapter IV. 2.
RZ	Revolutionäre Zellen	The Revolutionary Cells	Chapter IV. 2.
SGDF	Sosyalist Gençlik Dernekleri Federasyonu	Federation of Socialist Youth Associations of Turkey	
SDAJ	Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterjugend	Socialist German Workers' Youth	Chapter VI. 3.
SDF	Hêzên Sûriya Demokratîk	Syrian Democratic Forces	Chapter V. 1.

SDS	Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund	Socialist German Student League	Chapter IV. 2.
SMO		Social Movement Organization	Chapter I.
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Social Democratic Party of Germany	
TEV-DEM	Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk	Movement for a Democratic Society	Chapter V. 1.
Unidad Popular	Unidad Popular	Popular Unity	Chapter IV. 2.
uG	...Ums Ganze! Kommunistisches Bündnis	...To the Whole! Communist Alliance	Chapter IV. 4.
USA		United States of America	
USSR		Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	
VSP	Vereinigte Sozialistische Partei	United Socialist Party	
Volksfront	Volksfront gegen Reaktion, Faschismus und Krieg	Popular Front against Reaction, Fascism and War	Chapter VI. 2.
WDR		Women Defend Rojava	Chapter VIII. 3.
YAJK	Yeketiya Azadiya Jinên Kurdistan	Association of Free Women of Kurdistan	Chapter V. 1.
YEK-KOM	Yekitiya Komalên Kurd li Elmanya	Federation of Kurdish Associations in Germany	Chapter V. 2.
YJA Star	Yekîneyên Jinên Azad ên Star	Free Women's Units	Chapter V. 1.
YJWK	Yekîtiya Jinên Welatparêzên Kurdistan	Union of Patriotic Women of Kurdistan	Chapter V. 2.
YPG / YPJ	Yekîneyên Parastina Gel / Yekîneyên Parastina Jin	People's Defense Units and Women's Protection Units	Chapter V. 1.
YXK	Yekîtiya Xwendekarên Kurdistan	Association of Students from Kurdistan	Chapter V. 2.

B. List of Interviews

Table 2: List of Interviews

Name of SMO	Space	Movement	Phase	Year
Initiative zur Rettung von Hasankeyf	Transnational	Kurdish Movement	II, III	2016
Kongreya Neteweyî ya Kurdistanê (KNK)	Transnational	Kurdish Movement	I, II, III	2016
Yekîtiya Xwendekarên Kurdistan (YXK)	National, Berlin	Kurdish Movement	II, III	2016
Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitee Berlin	Berlin	Solidarity Movement	I, II, III	2016
AZADÎ e.V.,	National	Solidarity Movement	I, II, III	2016
Die Linke – Basisorganisierung	Berlin	(Radical) Left	III	2016
Antifaschistische Revolutionäre Aktion Berlin (ARAB)	Berlin	Radical Left	II, III	2016
Rote Hilfe	National	Radical Left	II, III	2016
Civaka Azad – Kurdisches Zentrum für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit	National	Kurdish Movement	I, II, III	2019
Dest-Dan FrauenRat Berlin	Berlin	Kurdish Movement	I, II, III	2019
Ajansa Nûçeyan a Firatê (ANF)	National	Kurdish Movement	I, II, III	2019
Widerstandskomitee Berlin	Berlin	Solidarity Movement	II, III	2019

Radikale Linke Berlin	Berlin	Radical Left	III	2019
Tatort Kurdistan	National	Solidarity Movement	II, III	2019
Internationale Commune of Rojava	Transnational	Solidarity Movement	III	2019
Internationale Commune of Rojava	Transnational	Solidarity Movement	III	2019
Proletarische Autonomie	Magdeburg	Radical Left	II, III	2019
CADUS – Redefine Global Solidarity	Transnational	(Radical) Left	III	2019
Kurdisches Gesellschaftszentrum e.V.	Munich	Kurdish Movement	II, III	2020
Dest-Dan FrauenRat Berlin	Berlin	Kurdish Movement	I, II, III	2020
Dest-Dan FrauenRat Berlin	Berlin	Kurdish Movement	II, III	2020
Kurdische Frauenbüro für Frieden CENÎ e.V.	National	Kurdish Movement	II, III	2020
Frauenrat Rojbîn	Hamburg	Kurdish Movement	I, II, III	2020
Kurdistan Report	National	Kurdish Movement	II, III	2020
Yekîtiya Xwendekarên Kurdistan (YXK)	National, Hamburg	Kurdish Movement	III	2020
Informationstelle Kurdistan e.V. (ISKU)	National	Solidarity Movement	I, II, III	2020
Internationale Initiative »Freiheit für Abdullah Öcalan – Frieden in Kurdistan«	Transnational	Solidarity Movement	I, II, III	2020
Gemeinsam Kämpfen	National	Solidarity Movement	III	2020
Münchener Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitee	Munich	Radical Left	I, III	2020
Deutsche Kommunistische Partei (DKP)	Munich	Radical Left	II, III	2020
Interventionistische Linke (IL)	Berlin	Radical Left	II, III	2020
Frauen und Lesben Solidaritätskomitee Berlin	Berlin	Radical Left	I, II, III	2020
Internationalist Freedom Battalions (IFB)	Transnational	Solidarity Movement	III	2020
Women Defend Rojava (WDR)	Berlin	Solidarity Movement	III	2020
Women Defend Rojava (WDR)	National	Solidarity Movement	III	2020
Städtepartnerschaft Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg – Dêrik e.V.	Berlin	Solidarity Movement	II, III	2020
AZADÎ e.V.,	National	Solidarity Movement	II, III	2020
Unnamed		Solidarity Movement		
Yekîtiya Komalên Kurd li Elmanya (YEK-KOM)	National	Kurdish Movement	I, II, III	2021
FrauenLesben Kurdistan Solidaritätskomitee Hamburg	Hamburg	Solidarity Movement	I, II, III	2021

C. Interview Guide

The interview guide was adapted depending on the person I interviewed, whether the person was from the Kurdish movement or the radical left, and whether the person spoke English, German, or Turkish. These and follow-up questions were adapted to the individuals and the organisations they represented.

Table 3: Interview Guide

Thank you for taking the time	Thank you for taking the time to do this interview.
Goal of the interview	<p>The interview is done for my doctoral thesis as well as for a brochure or book for the movement. The goals are there:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to trace the long history of solidarity work with Kurdistan - Understanding mechanisms that have led to solidarity being broken off, newly created, or lasting in the long term - enable discussion of different understandings of solidarity within and between movements.
Importance of the respondent	<p>As a speaker/expert/member/activist of... you have a good insight into the topic.</p> <p>Or we want to get your perspective on...</p>
Voluntary, privacy, security, and anonymity	<p>Firstly, I want to clarify that your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. You may choose at any time not to answer a question, not to express your point of view, or not to disclose information related to your activism.</p> <p>Please keep in mind not to disclose any information that might be harmful to you or any other person. More concretely, please only share information with me that can be said publicly.</p> <p>Also, I would like to clarify whether I may mention you in the work by name and position, or if you would like to give the interview anonymously?</p> <p>Do you want to get the whole interview sent as a transcript?</p> <p>What else is important to you in connection with the publication of individual quotes from the interview?</p>
Duration and structure of the interview	<p>How much time do you have for the interview? It will take up to 2 hours, depending on the interview.</p> <p>There are three parts to the interview: the first part concerns you as an activist, the second part deals with the why of solidarity, and the third part deals with the how.</p>

Other requests?

Do you have a question in advance? Then I turn on the voice recorder.

1. Introduction

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Main Question</i>	<i>Specific Questions</i>
Personal political history	How did you get involved in politics? When and how did you get involved in the (solidarity) work with Kurdistan?	In which groups have you been active so far?

2. Why?

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Main Question</i>	<i>Specific Questions</i>
Solidarity	What is solidarity for you?	
Goals and strategies	What does solidarity mean for the work with the Kurdish movement/with the radical left? What are the goals of your group's solidarity work with the Kurdish movement/of the Kurdish movement's work with radical left groups? What do you think is the reason for the Kurdish movement to start such a cooperation with your group/for the radical left groups to form such a cooperation?	What does the Kurdish movement /your group try to achieve with the mobilization? What do you think is the reason for the other movements to establish such cooperation? Is it more of a practical political alliance to achieve a particular goal, or is it based more on ideological agreement?
Internationalism	What role does internationalism play in the work of your group?	Have you heard about the efforts of the PKK in a global movement for radical democracy? Do you feel part of such a movement? In connection with the Kurdish movement and Zapatismo, there is more frequent talk of a new internationalism. Have you heard about it, and if so, what do you mean by it?

3. How?

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Main Question</i>	<i>Specific Questions</i>
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Relationship	How would you describe the relationship between the left in Germany and the Kurdish movement at the moment?	Was there any change in this relationship? If yes, which are they?
Organizations (SMOs)	(With which groups are you working? With whom not?)	
Spatial	Where do you and your group work spatially?	At what levels does cooperation take place? [Level exemplified as local, national, international, or global]
Process of relationship formation	How did the cooperation start?	For which reasons did and does cooperation exist with certain groups? Why is there no cooperation with other groups?
Issues	On what issues are you cooperating?	Are you first trying to build an issue—cooperation—or are you first discussing a common ideological or political ground? Which comes first?
Ideology	What role does the PKK ideology play in establishing cooperation? Was there a change? Which people and writings have shaped you and your group?	Was the relationship the same before and after the PKK's paradigm shift? Was there a change?
Categorization of relationships (cohesion)	How would you rate the cooperation? How close is the relationship?	
Relationship maintenance	How did the cooperation develop?	How do you assess the continuity of this cooperation?
Mechanisms	In your opinion, what are the reasons for this development?	
Repression	Do the actions of the state have any influence on cooperation?	How much does the state target your political actions?
Countermovement	Do the actions of Turkish fascists against the Kurdish movement have any influence on cooperation?	

Frames	<p>How is the Kurdish movement represented by the radical left? Has this changed over time? / How does the Kurdish movement see your group? What do you believe?</p> <p>How does the Kurdish movement portray the other movements?</p>	
Political Opportunity Structure	<p>What role do threats to the Kurdish movement play in the relationship?</p> <p>What role do opportunities for political success play in the relationship?</p>	
Critical junctures	<p>Have there been any events that have caused an upswing or downswing in solidarity with the Kurdish movement?</p>	
Brokers	<p>To what extent do personal contacts play a role in cooperation?</p> <p>What role do internationalists and şehîds play?</p>	<p>Was there any cooperation with the group you worked with before on other topics?</p>
Tensions	<p>Were there tensions and conflicts?</p>	<p>What were the causes?</p> <p>How do you address or plan to address these tensions?</p>
Language	<p>What influence does language have on the relationship to/with the Kurdish movement?</p>	
Racism	<p>What influence does racism have?</p> <p>What role do metropolitan chauvinism and Eurocentrism play?</p>	
Generations	<p>Are there differences between the first, second, and third generations of active Kurds?</p> <p>Are there differences between the German generations?</p>	
Resources	<p>What role do resources—specifically, money, time, and infrastructure—play in the relationship?</p>	
Impact on the local movements	<p>Are there any effects of solidarity work on local movements?</p>	

Theses	Other people I interviewed criticized... Other interviewees expressed that a substantial factor was...	
Outcome	What are the outcomes of the solidarity movement with Kurdistan so far?	
Relationship break-up	How did the cooperation end?	What were the reasons?
Outlook	How do you think that the relationship between the Kurdish movement and the radical left will further develop?	Where do you see problems or a need for improvement?

What do you think about the interview? Did we forget an important aspect?

Can you give us more people who might be interesting to us?

Thank you for the conversation.

Interview situation:

Interviewer:

Date of the interview:

Place of interview:

Time: from ___ clock to ___ clock

Other present:

Mood or atmosphere:

Assessment of the interaction:

Willingness to talk:

Further impressions:

D. Map of Kurdistan

The Map is based on Jordan Engel 'Decolonial Atlas' (Engel 2017) and the four parts of Kurdistan were added by myself.

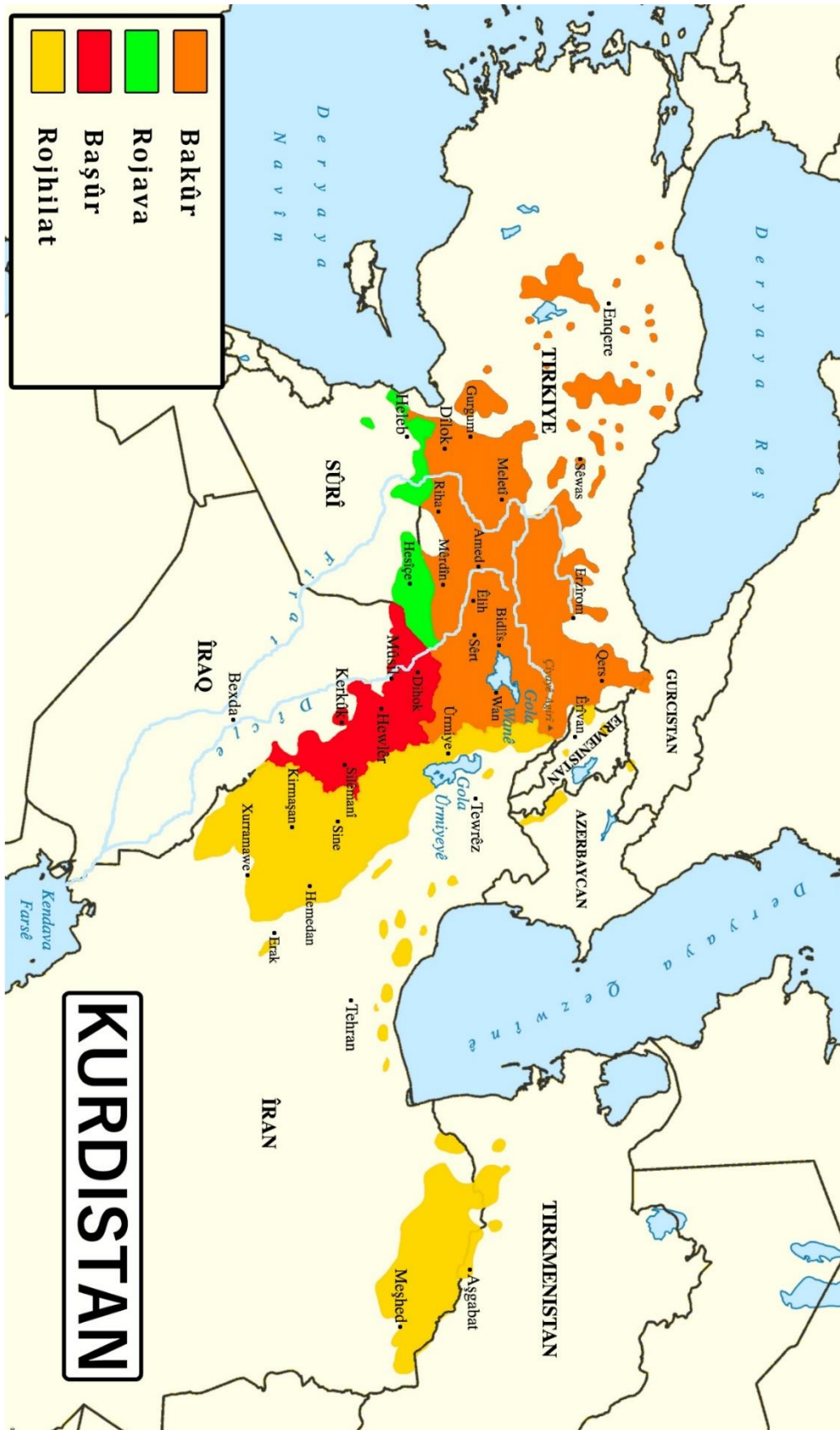


Figure 17: Map of Kurdistan

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