Strategies without Borders: Transnational Methodologies of Revolution in the Sixties

How did two highly distinct methods of revolution, pursued by Ernesto Che Guevara and Daniel Cohn-Bendit respectively, influence the Turkish revolutionary Mahir Çayan’s strategy of revolution?

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The Turkish experience of the global and revolutionary 1960’s came to an end on March 30th, 1972, in the small village of Kızılorda. That day, Kızılorda was besieged by the Turkish Armed Forces—"helicopters, armored vehicles, heavy machine gun and mortar crews, and soldiers" swarmed the village.¹ The objectives of the military operation, led by major general Tevfik Turun, were "to find and rescue the three NATO technicians abducted by the terrorist organization Turkish People's Liberation Army-Front (THKP-C) and to capture, dead or alive, the leadership of the THKP-C."² Only the latter part of this mission statement was achieved during the siege in Kızılorda. THKP-C founder Mahir Çayan, along with 13 additional members of the THKP-C and other affiliated groups such as the Turkish Revolutionary Youth Organization, were cornered in the house of the county governor. Ertuğrul Kürkçü, the founder of DEV-GENC, recalls the horrible incident as follows: "The pins were pulled out of the grenades. Mahir called out to the soldiers: 'Withdraw the privates, let the ranking officers come face us!' As soon as he finished his sentence, machine-gun fire started. Soon after, they launched rockets and fired mortars at our position, and one of these proved to be a direct hit. Because of the impact, one of us

¹ A photograph taken by one of the reporters of the Vatan newspaper dating back to the spring of 1968 shows a small company of Turkish soldiers, who were ordered to quell the student uprising in the Middle Eastern Technical University in Ankara, gazing upon the gigantic word carved by the students into the University's stadium: "DEVIRJM" (Revolution). Among the students involved were two leading revolutionaries of the period: Deniz Gezmiş and Mahir Çayan. The contrast in the photograph between the sizes of the word 'revolution' and the company of soldiers should be noted as misleading, given the events at Kızılorda that would later occur in 1972. REVOLUTION, 1968, photograph, in Çınar Özer, “Binlerce öğrenci ayakta!,” Vatan Gazetesi, December 31, 2012, http://www.gazetevatan.com/binlerce-ogrenci-ayakta--502342-gundem/. 12 Mart: İhtilalin Pençeinde Demokrasi, directed by Can Dündar, (1994; İstanbul: İmge Yayınları, 2002), DVD.
² 12 Mart.
dropped his grenade, and that was it.’’ Indeed, with the sole exception of Kürkçü, neither the young revolutionaries, nor their hostages, survived the shelling of mortars and rocket launchers—there were no military casualties. Except for the hostages, none of those who lost their lives in the ordeal were older than 26; the youngest victim was 19 years old.4

One could perceive this clash between the Turkish army and these young revolutionaries as an isolated event, strictly as a product of Turkish national politics; indeed, this is the way that many historians have interpreted the massacre at Kızılderil.5 However, this incident may also be understood within the global framework of revolutions in the 1960s. Turkey’s place within this framework becomes especially clear when analyzing the revolutionary strategy of Mahir Çayan. His writings show—Çayan himself acknowledges this—that his revolutionary philosophy was “deeply influenced by the theories of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin”; the methods that Çayan had adopted as a student and guerrilla leader, on the other hand, reveal the influence of contemporary revolutionaries from other countries.6 Of these, Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Che Guevara arguably had the most significant impact on Çayan’s strategy of revolution; therefore, one of Turkey’s closest connections to the global and revolutionary 1960s can be observed in the relationship between the methodologies of these iconic revolutionaries, whose revolutions were transcending national borders, and those of Çayan.

It must be noted that it is difficult to discern the extent to which Cohn-Bendit and Guevara truly had an impact on Çayan, or whether his methods were merely similar to those of Cohn-Bendit and Guevara. Çayan himself, however, acknowledges that he had studied the tactics of both revolutionaries.7 Considered together with his occasional references to Cohn-Bendit and Guevara, this insight suggests, at the very least, the implicit influence of these revolutionaries on Çayan. Such an impact would also explain the uncanny, yet coherent, parallels between Çayan’s strategies and the highly distinct—almost contradictory—strategies of Cohn-Bendit and Guevara. Before this impact can be discussed in depth, however, some of the possible explanations for the disregard of this impact by the scholarship on radical politics in modern Turkey must be explored first. Following this discussion, to elucidate the relative ease with which Çayan was able to synthesize elements of both Cohn-Bendit’s and Guevara’s strategies in his own methods, the similarities between the theoretical assumptions of each of these revolutionaries will be analyzed. After their common theoretical background is established, the methodologies that these revolutionaries employed in their efforts to bring about their revolutions will be scrutinized in terms of their solutions to the following questions: who will bring about the revolution, where will the revolution begin, and how will it happen? At the end of this inquiry, I will conclude that the solutions to these questions, as proposed by Mahir Çayan’s methodology of revolution, constituted a synthesis of the solutions put forward by Daniel Cohn-Bendit’s and Che Guevara’s revolutionary strategies.

If Çayan did engage with the methods of his contemporary revolutionaries, why does the existing scholarship on Mahir Çayan and his THKP-C fail to adequately explore the full extent of this engagement? While this question can be answered in numerous ways, an analysis of the major works on the history of the radical leftist movements in Turkey suggests two significant and common reasons for this shortcoming: an overemphasis on his nationalism and a misinterpretation of his assessments of Turkey’s readiness for revolution. The exaggeration of Çayan’s nationalism is most evident in one of the most prominent works on the subject, The Army and the Radical Left in Turkey: Military Coups, Socialist Revolution, and Kemalism by Özgür Mutlu Ulus. Diverging from the mainstream history of Turkish radical socialist movements, Ulus contextualizes Mahir Çayan’s thought almost exclusively within his native Turkish culture. Specifically, Ulus refers to the “modern Turkish culture” that was established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s regime during the very infancy of the Turkish Republic; Mahir Çayan was “born into the Kemalist-nationalist culture.”

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3 12 Mart.
4 12 Mart.
While she acknowledges that "international influence and imitation" were factors that drove students like Çayan to radical politics, Ulus claims that they were nevertheless "not the major factors in the active participation of university students in politics." The most important factor that contributed to student protests was, according to Ulus, the Kemalist youth culture. Referring to the work of historian Jacob M. Landau, she demonstrates how pervasive this youth culture was by claiming that "As Landau had pointed out, Atatürk had called on the youth to watch over the Republic and its independence in a speech that every Turkish child learnt in school." For Ulus, the widespread student protests thus became a symbol of the "Kemalist Youth and the Turkish spirit of 1968." In such a narrative, there can be no room for an exploration of the influences of foreign revolutionaries like Cohn-Bendit or Guevara on Çayan: the story of Mahir Çayan, according to Ulus, was the story of a Kemalist revolutionary, not an internationalist one. Indeed, in the chapters devoted to Çayan in Ulus' work, Ulus mentions his Marxism and Leninism only once. Such emphasis on Mahir Çayan's nationalism rather than his radical leftism thus caused scholars to overlook his engagement with foreign contemporary revolutionaries.

In addition to the exaggeration of his nationalism, scholars' oversight of Çayan's internationalism may be explained by a common misinterpretation of his assessments of Turkey's readiness for revolution. Jacob M. Landau, who is frequently cited in Ulus' work, presents such a misreading of Çayan in his *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*. In his work, Landau paints a significantly different picture of Çayan than the one in Ulus' work. In fact, he directly challenges the argument that Çayan was a Kemalist-nationalist, which indicates that Ulus' depiction of Çayan as such is an exaggeration. He claims that Necati Sağır, one of Çayan's oldest comrades and his classmate from Ankara University, denied that Çayan and his THKP-C were Kemalists. He cites Sağır as stating in his trial that "Atatürkism cannot be reconciled with our goals. We are socialists." According to Landau, Çayan's anti-imperialism stemmed from his unique form of socialism, not his Kemalism; this was the radical aspect of Çayan's philosophy, since "this is a turning point, in which, for the first time, Atatürkism formally ceases to be of relevance to organized political groups, albeit outside organized political life." Nevertheless, just like Ulus, Landau overlooks Mahir Çayan's connection with the global 1960's. According to Landau, Mahir Çayan's effort to develop "a strategy for revolution specifically suited for Turkey's unique condition" isolated him and his movement from revolutionaries across the globe. Since, according to Çayan, Turkey was in a unique "semi-feudal and semi-colonial" state, Landau argues that Çayan was opposed to importing revolutionary strategies from different countries. This assumption is inherently fallacious primarily because of Landau's depiction of Çayan as a socialist; why would Çayan be open to the foreign ideas of socialism when he himself thought that Turkey had not yet developed into a fully capitalist state? Since it is well established by prominent scholars like Ahmet Samim that Çayan was "a radical socialist," and given Çayan's unequivocal endorsement of the "heroic" tactics utilized by the M-26-7 during the Cuban Revolution, Landau's assumption that Çayan "rejected foreign methods of revolution" becomes significantly less persuasive. This implicit problem within Landau's framing of Çayan represents a broader misinterpretation of Çayan's assessment of Turkey's readiness for a proletarian revolution by scholars, which has naturally led into the oversight of the international influences on Çayan's methods. Regardless of their shortcomings, the significance of the contributions that works like Ulus's and Landau's for the understanding of Mahir Çayan's revolutionary thought cannot be denied. Rather, these shortcomings only suggest the need for a different and more global framework for analyzing Çayan's methodology of revolution.

To establish this global historical framework, one must look for sources originating from around the globe that can be found either explicitly or implicitly in Mahir

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9 Ulus, 109.
10 Ulus, 109.
11 Ulus, 111.
12 Ulus, 114.
14 Landau, 47.
15 Landau, 48.
16 Landau, 53-55.
Çayan’s *Bütün Yazılar*, the complete collection of his theoretical and methodological writings as well as his personal correspondences. Based on these criteria, Ernesto Che Guevara’s *Guerrilla Warfare* and Daniel Cohn-Bendit’s *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative*, supplemented by several of their other collected writings, can provide crucial insights regarding Mahir Çayan’s strategy of revolution. Traces of both works can be found in Çayan’s *Bütün Yazılar* either as explicitly cited or as implicitly embedded. Indeed, Çayan synthesized elements of Cohn-Bendit’s and Guevara’s methods, about which he had read in these works, in his own strategy of revolution. Perhaps the fundamental factor that allowed Çayan to accomplish this feat was their common ideological background. With a few nuances, all three revolutionaries are widely regarded as having envisioned and fought for a Marxist revolution that would ultimately end the exploitative and oppressive class structures; however, to simply limit the analysis of these revolutionaries’ theoretical background to discerning whether they were Marxist oriented or not is to neglect the remarkably similar ways in which these revolutionaries have not only endorsed but also criticized Marxist theories.

It is not difficult to demonstrate these revolutionaries’ adherence to Marxist theories; in their writings, they all rely on fundamental Marxist notions of historical materialism and class analysis. For Che, the revolution involved the creation of “a new human consciousness, a new Communist consciousness as an integral component of the new revolutionary society” that fulfilled the Marxist expectation by overcoming “the legacy of capitalist alienation.” In fact, if there is any unifying theme to Guevara’s prose in *Guerrilla Warfare*, it is the theme of Marxist salvation and renaissance. Guevara advances these themes by drawing attention to and praising the scientific character of Marxist thought; Guevara believed that Marx was a “scientist on par with Newton and Pasteur.” According to him, “we, practical revolutionaries, initiating our own struggle, simply fulfill laws foreseen by Marx, the scientist.” Similarly, Daniel Cohn-Bendit bases his entire analysis of the March 22nd Movement in his *Obsolete Communism* on Marxist terminology. Cohn-Bendit regularly criticizes the Gaullist government for not having learned anything from Marx’s writings. One such example in his work is his criticism of the decisions that the French Ministry of Education had taken concerning Nanterre; he writes that “the Ministry suffers from a basic lack of historical understanding, or else they would have learned from Karl Marx that ‘men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past.’”

Mahir Çayan was no different than Cohn-Bendit or Guevara in his adherence to Marxism; his writings in *Bütün Yazılar* are as much an outline of his revolutionary strategy as they are, in his words, a “defense of Marxism.” This character of his writings is clearly manifested in his Marxist study of the Turkish War of Independence. For many, regardless of their political orientation, such a study was “unprecedented.” Furthermore, his correspondences with the board of editors of *Aydınlık* entail lengthy arguments against the so-called “revisionists…those right-wing fascists masquerading as Marxists” who were corrupting the left; to show the extent to which *Aydınlık* had deviated from the Marxist path and to defend *Aydınlık*, “the voice of the Turkish left,” from falling completely into the hands of these revisionists, Çayan even attached a copy of Marx’s *German Ideology* to his letter. It is thus evident that the praises these revolutionaries gave to Marxism overlap with each other. However, the revolutionaries’ shared adherence to Marxism arguably comprises the less remarkable similarity in their theoretical backgrounds.

What is more extraordinary about these revolutionaries’ theoretical backgrounds is the similarity of the grounds on which they had based their *critiques* of Marxism and Leninism. These three revolutionaries were not
merely passive consumers of Marxist ideology; in their written works, they made their own positive contributions to radical leftist thought through their unique critiques of Marxism. They all argue that Marxism was written in a highly sophisticated language that was simply unintelligible to the proletarian readers. Guevara maintains that “the masses understood [Marxist] values, but not sufficiently.” He asserts in Guerilla Warfare that “the [masses] see only a part of the picture and must be subject to incentives and pressures of a certain intensity.” Guevara designates Marx’s language to be the main cause of this problem: “Fidel [Castro] would always talk about how hard it was to truly understand Marxism. I agree with him.” Cohn-Bendit likewise highlighted the difficulty of understanding Marx’s writings, especially for workers who had little access to education. As he is explaining why universities are “factories of privilege,” Cohn-Bendit writes that “I...regret that the writings of Marx are, at least in part, hard-going even for scholars and, in their present form, a closed book to most of the working class.” Since Marx’s writings were “accessible only to the bourgeois intellectual,” Cohn-Bendit argues that “cultural inequality is no accident, but part and parcel of the oppressive structure of both capitalist and ‘communist’ societies.” Çayın observed this cultural inequality in Turkey, and assessed it to be “chronic.” Although, Çayın had a unique interest in discussing this phenomenon in Butûn Yazılár, he was desperate to explain why the rural population of Turkey, who, according to Çayın, were supposed to be a part of the revolutionary vanguard, consistently sided with the government forces when conflicts arose in the countryside. In a letter written around 1969 to the editorial board of the Turkish socialist magazine Aydınlık, Çayın listed “the thorough education of the noble Turkish villagers in Marxist ways” as the second objective of his THKP-C; he added that “what we observe in the behaviour of peasantry is intellectual imperialism manifest...the members of our party are involved extensively in finding a cure to this sickness...” In terms of designating the true cause of this disease, Çayın half-heartedly wrote that “the intricate language of Marx...has made things difficult for our party thus far.” Therefore, Guevara’s, Cohn-Bendit’s and Çayın’s praises, as well as criticisms, of Marxism reveal significant parallels in their ideological backgrounds. This similarity not only indicates a truly global character of the revolutionary 1960’s, but also explains the relative ease with which Çayın was able to synthesize Cohn-Bendit’s and Guevara’s methodologies in his own strategy of revolution.

Mahir Çayın’s synthesis of Daniel Cohn-Bendit’s and Che Guevara’s methods of revolution must be analyzed in terms of its three fundamental components: the who, where and how of the revolution. The three revolutionaries’ similar critiques of Marxism necessarily lead to this question: who will be the principal actor in bringing about the revolution? In Guerilla Warfare, Che argues that while the masses would constitute the manpower of the revolution, their insufficient understanding of Marxism “necessitates a vanguard party [that will act as] the catalyzing agent that creates the subjective conditions necessary for victory.” According to Che, “This is the mission of our revolutionary parties...their analysis [of Marxism] must be profound and exhaustive so that there will be no mistakes.” Naturally, therefore, “The vanguard group, consisting of the party of advanced individuals, is ideologically more advanced than the masses”; in Latin America, according to Guevara, this party of advanced individuals should be the guerrilla fighters.” He explicitly argues that “…the still sleeping mass had to be mobilized...[the revolutionary] vanguard, who are the guerrillas, act as the motor force of this mobilization, the generator of revolutionary consciousness and militant enthusiasm.”

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, on the other hand, held a significantly different, and perhaps more incoherent,
view than Guevara’s regarding the principle agents of revolution. He wrote in Obsolete Communism that “our movement does not need leaders to direct it; that it can perfectly well express itself without the help of a ‘vanguard.’” Cohn-Bendit even argued that a vanguard was detrimental for the revolutionary cause: “…the workers’ self-confidence is enormously increased once they act without delegating any of their power to political parties or trade unions.” In Cohn-Bendit’s view, “the workers need no teachers; they will learn the correct tactics from…not an abstract conflict of ideas…[but from] people fighting in the street.” However, he also argues that since “the monopoly of capital invariably goes hand in hand with a monopoly of power and knowledge…this is precisely where the students can show the way.”

According to Cohn-Bendit, by attacking “the self-styled custodians of authority and of wisdom…those who, on the pretext of dispensing knowledge, preach obedience and conformity…students [had to] proclaim that the same repressive structures are weighing down on them and the workers alike.” Since it was in the universities that this mentality was sustained, students were indispensable for revolution. To reconcile these two contradictory views, in his interview with Jean-Paul Sartre, Cohn-Bendit proposes to abandon the concept of a leading vanguard and turn to a “much simpler and more honest one of the active minority functioning as a permanent leaven, pushing for action without ever leading it.”

In Cohn-Bendit’s view, then, students were to be the principal agents of revolution, not just its leaders.

Before moving on to the discussion of Mahir Çayan’s response to the issue of determining who would be the principal actor of the Marxist revolution in Bütün Yazılar, it is important to note that Çayan had been a student revolutionary as well as a guerilla fighter; Çayan was a third-year student at the Faculty of Political Science in Ankara University when he co-organized the anti-imperialist protests of 1967, and he was the founding leader of Turkey’s most successful communist guerilla organization THKP-C when he was killed by the Turkish Armed Forces. Indeed, it may well be argued that Çayan was Turkey’s Guevara as well as its Cohn-Bendit. Çayan’s fusion of these revolutionaries was not limited to his identity, however, but also extended to his methodological engagement with these revolutionaries. Çayan indicates that he had read both Guerilla Warfare and Obsolete Communism in his private letters. In light of what he had read, he writes that “We, the Marxists of semi-colonial countries, have a lot to learn from the glorious proletarian leaders of the Cuban Revolution, especially Guevara”; he also states that “the movement ignited by Cohn-Bendit must be studied for its noteworthy success in establishing the subjective conditions for revolution.”

The first level of Çayan’s methodological synthesis of Guevara’s and Cohn-Bendit’s strategies is observed on his approach to determining the principal agent of revolution. Like Che, Çayan argued for a militant vanguard to lead the revolution: “the enlightened among our people have realized that pacifism should not be the way; they have realized the need for an armed organization to materialize the revolution, which explains the prestige of our own guerillas, the fighters of the THKP-C.” Çayan continues: “…if revolutionary propaganda is to be effective in waking the masses and drawing people to our cause, it must take the form of an armed, guerilla propaganda like in Latin American countries.”

However, being a student himself, Çayan was aware of “the intellectual imperialism that dominated the lecture halls of universities in Istanbul and Ankara.” Just as Cohn-Bendit argues for attacking the repressive structures of universities, Çayan calls for a strict “reconstruction of university hierarchies led by students.” In his call, Çayan shows signs of Cohn-Bendit’s impact on him when he proposes that “professors who belong to the

37 Cohn-Bendit and Cohn-Bendit, Obsolete Communism: Left-Wing Alternative, 33.
38 Cohn-Bendit and Cohn-Bendit, 47.
39 Cohn-Bendit and Cohn-Bendit, 89.
40 Cohn-Bendit and Cohn-Bendit, 90.
43 Çayan, Bütün Yazılar, 23, 67, 257.
44 Çayan, 118; Çayan, 34.
45 Çayan, 120.
46 Çayan, 219.
47 Çayan, 220.
48 Çayan, 221.
left must unite with their students in this effort,” just as Cohn-Bendit stated in his interview with Sartre that “we shall call on left and extreme left teachers who are prepared to work with us...in establishing institutions of ‘parallel education’”⁴⁹. It must be acknowledged, however, that Çayan was against Cohn-Bendit’s opposition to a vanguard; he tied “the waning of the French Student Revolution [with]...the failure of the Communist Party in owning up the movement.”⁵⁰ Regardless, Mahir Çayan thus synthesized the positions of Che Guevara and Daniel Cohn-Bendit on the issue of determining the principal agents of revolution by assigning both his guerillas and the university students the leading roles in his revolutionary strategy.

After determining who should lead the revolution, the revolutionaries turned their attention to where it would take place. Çayan’s synthesis of Guevara’s and Cohn-Bendit’s methods of revolution is as apparent in his answer to the ‘who’ question as it is in his answer to the ‘where’ question. Regarding the location of the revolution, Guevara is quite clear in Guerilla Warfare: “in the underdeveloped parts of America, the battleground for armed struggle should be in the main the countryside.”⁵¹ Che explains this by the dominant “agrarian system of feudal character” in Latin America, which ensured that “no matter how hard the living conditions of the urban workers are, the rural population, comprising more than 70 percent of the Latin American populations, lives under even worse conditions of oppression and exploitation.”⁵² Indeed, for Che, the revolution could not happen anywhere other than the countryside, at least in Latin America: “These circumstances determine in Latin America that the poor rural population constitutes a tremendous potential revolutionary force.”⁵³ The logistics and tactics of guerilla warfare also necessitated the revolution’s emergence in rural areas. Che not only claimed that “a group of men in contact with the soil must live from the products of this soil,” but also that “The armies in Latin America are set up and equipped for conventional warfare...when they are confronted with the irregular warfare of peasants based on their home ground, they become absolutely powerless.”⁵⁴ It may be argued that Cohn-Bendit, on the other hand, did not take such things into account, as he argues in Obsolete Communism that “the revolution will arise spontaneously in the university campuses, the streets, and the factories.”⁵⁵ Cohn-Bendit recognizes the potential importance of a revolution in rural parts of France, but argues nevertheless that “the revolution...must primarily take place at the heart of oppression: universities and factories, not in the countryside; a stab at the heart is deadlier than a stab in the leg.”⁵⁶ It must be noted that he does not adequately explain why the revolution had to be also taken to the streets in Obsolete Communism. In fact, compared to Guevara’s Guerilla Warfare, Cohn-Bendit offers a very limited discussion of the spatial aspects of his conception of the revolution.

Recognizing the benefit in both rural and urban guerilla warfare, Çayan combines elements from both Guevara’s and Cohn-Bendit’s revolutionary strategies in his own. He argued for combining rural and urban warfare because of, among other reasons, the unique socio-political condition of Turkey, which was mentioned in the discussion of Landau’s work on Çayan: “Turkey was simultaneously a feudal and colonial country.”⁵⁷ In this sense, Çayan adhered to Cohn-Bendit’s tactics of striking at the heart of the enemy: since “the countryside [was] the center of feudal power, the big cities, especially Istanbul, [were] the center of colonial power,” the revolution had to take place in both a rural and an urban setting. Çayan adds that “this organization [THKP-C], has been active in a region that spans from the rural farms to the urban factories, from the universities to Halkevleri [People’s Community Centers]”⁵⁸. However, Çayan also incorporated Guevara’s tactical argument into his strategy; since the Turkish military had a weak presence in the countryside, it was safer and more rational for the THKP-C guerillas to be active there. In a confident tone, he writes: “they [the army] lose 10 men for every revo-

⁴⁹ Çayan, 224; Bourges, The French Student Revolt: The Leaders Speak, 80.
⁵⁰ Çayan, Bütün Yazılar, 224.
⁵¹ Guevara, Guerilla Warfare, 98.
⁵² Guevara, 98-99.
⁵³ Guevara, 100.
⁵⁴ Guevara, 100.
⁵⁵ Cohn-Bendit and Cohn-Bendit, Obsolete Communism: Left-Wing Alternative, 80.
⁵⁶ Cohn-Bendit and Cohn-Bendit, 81.
⁵⁷ Çayan, Bütün Yazılar, 256.
⁵⁸ Çayan, Bütün Yazılar, 257.
lutionary fighter who falls…the landscape provides them with no opportunities to display the elite academy tactics that they use to repress the workers and the students in Istanbul.” In his own solution to the question of where the revolution will happen, then, Mahir Çayan integrates elements of both Che Guevara’s and Daniel Cohn-Bendit’s responses to the same question.

The final question about the revolution, however, remains: how did these revolutionaries expect their revolution would happen? For Guevara, all that the guerrilla fighters needed to do was “their job…[which] is to engage the imperialists through irregular warfare.” It was through this irregular warfare that Guevara expected the peasants to rise up with the guerilla forces; this could only be accomplished with “an authoritative guerilla vanguard, to steer the action in such a way that would ensure peasant support.” Unlike Guevara, Cohn-Bendit emphasized the “spontaneity” of revolution. He maintains that during the revolution in 1968, the workers “had asked themselves a crucial question that would spark the revolution: ‘The factory is ours, so do we need to start working for the bosses again?’” Cohn-Bendit argues that “This idea arose quite spontaneously, not by command, or under the aegis of the so-called vanguard of the proletariat, but simply as a natural response to a concrete situation,” and models his entire conception of revolution in Obsolete Communism according to this phenomenon of spontaneity.

In his own formulation of a methodology of revolution, Çayan borrowed the terms ‘irregular warfare’ and ‘spontaneity’ from Guevara and Cohn-Bendit, and thus synthesized these two revolutionaries’ strategies in his own. While he believed that his THKP-C had to engage in irregular warfare in the countryside, the bulk of the revolutionary force would rise spontaneously. Çayan’s synthesis becomes clearer in the rough course of action that he suggests for the revolution. First, “The peasant masses, led by a proletarian party, would strike at the local feudal elements.” After the imperialists reacted to this strike, “a popular war would then spontaneously start, led by a Front for National Liberation…the enemy will, in the rural parts, be repulsed into the sea, while urban guerillas will clean up the towns.” Therefore, one could clearly see a fusion of Daniel Cohn-Bendit’s and Che Guevara’s revolutionary methodology in the way that Mahir Çayan had conceived of his own strategy of revolution.

All in all, Mahir Çayan’s methodology of revolution was a synthesis of Daniel Cohn-Bendit’s and Che Guevara’s revolutionary strategies. As demonstrated in this study, one of the clearest ways to study this synthesis is to consider each revolutionary’s methods in terms of three fundamental questions regarding the revolution: who will bring about the revolution, where will the revolution begin, and how will it happen? Çayan’s synthesis of Cohn-Bendit’s and Guevara’s answers to these problems was facilitated by the similarity in all three revolutionary’s theoretical backgrounds. Once the true extent of his global links to other foreign revolutionaries like Guevara and Cohn-Bendit is examined thoroughly, Çayan’s incorporation of their strategies shows one of the clearest ways in which Turkey was connected to the global and revolutionary 1960’s.

Mahir Çayan’s legacy is still very much alive in Turkey. Protesters shouted his name, along with the names of his friends, as they occupied Gezi Park in 2013. Erтуğrul Kürkçü, the sole survivor of the massacre at Kızıldere, is one of the co-presidents of the People’s Democratic Party (HDP), which advocates for the vision of the Turkish people’s peaceful coexistence with Kurdish people, a vision that Çayan himself had adhered to throughout his life. The global framework in which his methods have been analyzed in this paper suggests that he belongs to the legacy of the global 1960s. These words of Çayan may be regarded as a testimony to this fact: “We do not study Marxism to make idle intellectual conversation; we study Marxism because we want to change the world, because we want to change the Turkey of this world.”

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59 Çayan, 276.
60 Guevara, Guerilla Warfare, 61.
61 Guevara, 62.
62 Cohn-Bendit and Cohn-Bendit, Obsolete Communism: Left-Wing Alternative, 15.
63 Cohn-Bendit and Cohn-Bendit, 16.
64 Çayan, Bütün Yazarlar, 274-282.
65 Çayan, 277.
66 Çayan, 278.
67 Çayan, 102.