

# Not quite in, but via Europe. Reading Lenin in Turkey

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## RESÜMEE

Die Schrift Lenins *Detskaja bolezn' levizny v kommunizme* wurde 1920 auf Russisch veröffentlicht und liegt seit der Istanbul-Erstveröffentlichung in den 1960er Jahren bis heute in vier Übersetzungen auf Türkisch vor. Keine einzige Übersetzung allerdings erfolgte unmittelbar aus dem russischen Original. Die französischen und englischen Versionen wurden von den türkischen Linksintellektuellen herangezogen, die sich der Popularisierung der Schrift widmeten. Neben der Verzerrung aufgrund der Übersetzung aus einer ‚dritten‘ Sprache wurde die Rezeption des Leninschen Werkes stark durch eine seit den 1920er Jahren bis in die Gegenwart andauernde linguistische Purifizierung des Türkischen geprägt. Die Rezeption Lenins in der Türkei erfolgte mittels der Übertragung der französischen und englischen Übersetzungen aus der russischen Sprache. Somit war nicht zuletzt die (sprachliche) Europäizität der Texte und Diskurse ein wichtiges Merkmal der türkisch-russischen Verflechtung.

Russia and Turkey are both multicultural societies which border mainland Europe. Challenged by European industrialisation and cultural achievements of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, intellectuals and elites in both countries reacted by initiating discussions on their own (under)development, its causes and potential solutions. This tradition continued into the twentieth century as well. Fascination and rejection are two interwoven, characteristic features of Turkish and Russian century-long preoccupation with European ideas. Even Turkish-Russian bilateral relations and the reception of Russian thought in Turkey cannot be read without awareness of the ‘European’ aspect. We argue that the French and English language was an important medium that enabled the cultural transfer from Russia to Turkey throughout the twentieth century.

Our paper examines the depiction and analyses the transfer of Vladimir Lenin's works and their reception in Turkey throughout the last century. Lenin's 1920-published monograph, *Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder* was chosen as a case-study. Turkish leftist intellectuals translated and published this monograph numerous times in Turkey, but they never worked directly from the original Russian text. All Turkish translations were conducted from French or English translations. We will explore the main agents of transfer – publishing houses, translators, preface-writers – as well as the metamorphosis of meaning of Lenin's key notions while translated from Russian, via French and English into Turkish. Additionally, we will pay attention to the particular situation of the Turkish language after the linguistic and cultural revolution under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and numerous Turkish language reformation projects since the 1920–1930s.

The first chapter demonstrates the early reception of Russian thought among Muslims of the Ottoman Empire, within the framework of modernisation strategies under Mustafa Kemal.

### The First Turkish Translations of Russian Culture

Despite numerous entanglements between Ottoman and Russian Empires throughout history, intellectual contact between Russians and Turks was uncommon. Among Ottoman-Turkish intellectuals, the image of Russia and its culture was quite negative. For instance, instead of referring to Russians by the proper noun as *Russian*, the pejorative word *Moskof* (resident of Moscow) is commonly used. References to Peter the Great as “Peter the Mad,” or describing Catherine the Great as a whore further illustrate this attitude.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that the underlying reasons for this negative image are the eight great defeats of the Ottomans, by the Russians between 1676 and 1878, which greatly contributed to the eventual decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire.

Yet at the end of this long period, the very first and belated sparks of interest in each other's culture emerged, through the work of some Caucasus-born intellectuals in the Ottoman-Turkish world. After the great defeat in the Russian-Turkish war 1877–1878, a sudden interest in Russia developed among Ottoman intellectuals. Evidence of this can be found in the translation of Aleksandr Griboedov's *Gore ot uma* [*Woe from Wit*] into Ottoman Turkish, as *Akıldan Belâ* in 1884. The translation was done by Mizancı Murat Bey<sup>2</sup>, a Dagestan-born intellectual and graduate of a Russian *gymnase*. Other prominent Russia-born translators in the late Ottoman Empire were Celal Enisi of Tbilisi, Cihangir Andicani and Madame de Gülнар (Olga Lebedeva<sup>3</sup>). They were important agents of transfer and contributed heavily in the field of cultural transfer from Russian to Otto-

1 Ahmet Cevdet Pasha's *Tarih-i Cevdet* (especially in Vol. I, Istanbul 1972, pp. 354-357) is probably the earliest source that calls Peter the Great, “Peter the Mad” and judges Catherine II as “a woman with unstoppable passions”.

2 İsmail Habib Sevük, *Avrupa Edebiyatı ve Biz*, Istanbul 1940, p. 267.

3 Ömer Faruk Akün, “Gülнар Hanım”, *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul 1996, Vol. 14, pp. 244-248.

man lands. During the first decades of the twentieth century, and especially from the period of the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 to the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the favorite Russian authors in Turkey were Lev Tolstoi, Maxim Gorkii and Alexander Pushkin.<sup>4</sup>

### Language-building in Turkey

One of the most important dimensions of Kemalist modernization was the reformation of the Turkish alphabet in 1928. Initiated by the government, this modernization resulted in the Latinization of Ottoman Turkish. Simultaneously, the Istanbul and Ankara-based linguists tried to steadily drop the Arabic and Persian loanwords from the Turkish vocabulary, via *Wortschöpfung* and other language-building measures.<sup>5</sup> Along with other modernization projects, Turkish elites were interested in encouraging translations of European literature. This would help popularize European culture and along with the Latinization of the script, would hopefully accelerate the modernization and industrialization of the traditional Turkish society. The Turkish masses were obliged to learn the new script, while the Turkish intellectuals had to work hard to translate many works from the European cultural canon within a short period of time. This was to help ensure the quick acceptance and spread of the new alphabet. The government allotted considerable resources to training translators and supporting them in their work, and due to their focus on the Western world, many Western classics, especially from French literature – including books translated from different languages into French – were translated into Turkish. The fervent translators of French literature and French-written literary and political texts such as Samizâde Süreyya, Hasan Ali Ediz and Zeki Başıtar for literary titles, and especially Haydar Rıfat for non-fiction titles and works on Russian political thought, should be mentioned here.

The latter is significant, because in this period Turkish intellectuals were greatly interested in Russian political thought because of its strong anti-Western sentiments and critique of European imperialism. However they were also searching for an explanation for Turkey's underdeveloped and unindustrialized condition. It is likely that most of the pro-alternative modernization intellectuals secretly supported the USSR<sup>6</sup>. Despite sympathies towards Soviet-Russian way of modernization in Turkey, neither boom of Russian studies at the Turkish universities nor private initiatives to study Russian could be witnessed in Turkey in that period. Haydar Rıfat's work was particularly important in

4 Türkan Olcay, "Dünden Bugüne Rus Edebiyatının Türkçe Çevirileri", Lecture at the Orient Institute Istanbul, March 19, 2014. See Türkan Oldzhai: Retseptsiiia perevodov russkikh literaturno-khudozhestvennykh proizvedenii v Turtsii, in: International Journal of Russian Studies 5(2010/1), <http://www.radtr.net/dergi/sayi5/tolcay.htm> (Last accessed on 08.07.2010).

5 On language reform in Turkey see Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform. A Catastrophic Success*, Oxford 2002.

6 In this context, the *Kadro* journal (1932–1935) was of crucial importance in the early republican period.

giving the Turkish reader access to key works of Russian thought by translating these not from the original, but from French.

### Discovering Lenin in Turkey

There were several Turkish intellectuals who discovered Lenin's works in the 1920s. Haydar Rifat translated dozens of books from 1928 to 1935, ranging from Plutarch to Dostoevskii, and Marx to Lenin.<sup>7</sup> Especially interested in Russian political thought, he produced a number of books – acting both as a writer and as a translator – on socialism and communism in the Soviet Union. Rifat can be considered the first translator of Lenin in the Republic of Turkey. In 1932, he authored his *Sovyetizm ve Demokrasi* [Sovietism and Democracy] about the Soviet Union's political system.<sup>8</sup> The monograph was published in a crucial period for Turkish politics. Challenged by the Kurdish riots in Eastern Anatolia, the authoritarian 'one-ruling-party' regime in Ankara was caught in a diplomatic triangle between the USSR, Western democracies and rising Fascist powers. The Great Depression of 1929 had started to impact all areas of Turkish socio-economic life and claims of political corruption were multiplying.

In the same year, Haydar Rifat also published *Bolşeviklik Âlemi* [World of Bolsheviks].<sup>9</sup> This book was followed in 1934 by his final work *Lenin Mezhebi (Nazarı ve Ameli)* [Leninism: Theory and Practice].<sup>10</sup> While the Turkish government had close contacts with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy around 1932–1935, Rifat Bey represented a completely different intellectual position. In the following years, he was imprisoned for his continuous efforts to promote Leninism in Turkey.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, during his imprisonment he continued to write on revolutionary issues. He finished the summary of Marx's *Capital*, entitled *Sermaye*, in 1932 and published it a year later.<sup>12</sup> But Lenin stayed at the forefront of his research – in 1932, Haydar Rifat authored the translation of a monograph on Lenin's life and work: *Lenin'in Hayatı* (1932).

The Istanbul-based publishing houses that published Haydar Rifat's translations in the 1930s were very popular and prestigious. These publishers, especially Şirket-i Mürettebiye Matbaası and Vakit Kitaphanesi (sometimes referred to as Vakit Yayınları from 1935–1936 onwards) existed for over twenty years. They were especially known for their semi-professional efforts (lacking care with copyrights, allowing too much freedom in interpretations and so on) in translating the classics of Western literature.

7 By the 1934 Surname Law, Haydar Rifat (1877–1942) adopted the surname 'Yorulmaz,' which means 'Tireless,' in accordance with his energy.

8 Haydar Rifat, *Sovyetizm ve Demokrasi*, Istanbul 1932, 103 pp.

9 Haydar Rifat, *Bolşeviklik Âlemi*, Istanbul 1932, 81 pp.

10 Haydar Rifat, *Lenin Mezhebi: (Nazarı ve Ameli)*, Istanbul 1935, 145 pp.

11 News dealing with trials between Recep Peker (the Minister of Justice) and Haydar Rifat: *Cumhuriyet Gazetesi*, April 24, 1930. See also: *Akşam Gazetesi*, May 1, 1930, pp. 1-2.

12 Karl Marks, *Sermaye [Kapital]*, edited and translated by: G. Dövil, [Gabriel Deville] into French, translated from French into Turkish by Haydar Rifat, Istanbul 1933, 305 pp.

Haydar Rifat's first translation of Lenin's work was *Devlet ve İhtilal* [State and Revolution] in 1934.<sup>13</sup> This translation was part of a collected volume including works of Bukharin, von Jhering and Stalin. Another of Lenin's monographs translated by Haydar Rifat was *İşçi Sınıfı İhtilali ve Kautski Mel'unu* (1934) [The Proletarian Revolution and The Renegade Kautsky].<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy that from its title to its contents, and from notions and concepts to transliterations of foreign names, this book mirrors the above-mentioned transformation of the Turkish vocabulary in the long twentieth century. In addition to this, the courage and challenges to authority in Haydar Rifat's translated works are obvious. The introduction he wrote for *Lenin'in Hayatı*, a very concise but fairly comprehensive work, is quite interesting. The author posed several questions at the beginning, such as:

*How was a man able to conquer Russia without a rifle, an army or money [...]. How did he make Russia, with a huge population that reached seventy million, obey his command? This book answers these questions.*<sup>15</sup>

The presentation of these kind of articles, written in a fluent and simple style, aimed to promote curiosity in the reader about Lenin. This was obviously incompatible with Mustafa Kemal's ostensible view that "Communism is like a snake and the snake's head must be crushed wherever it's seen". Even though there were many discussions about this contradiction, one of Turkey's most respected historians, Mete Tunçay's explanation is perhaps the most reasonable:

*In the case of Turkey, Socialism, Marxism and Communism are all modernizer ideologies. Whichever rise to power, all these ideologies bring innovation, just like the new Kemalist Republic. For example, should you compare a Greek Communist's speech against the Metaxas administration of the 1930s, and a Turkish Communist's speech against the Kemalist government in Turkey, you will see that Turks are very moderate [...].*<sup>16</sup>

There are many aspects to consider when examining the interaction of Kemalism and the early Soviet leadership (from the beginning in 1917-19 to 1950). Yet it is obvious that they had an interesting relationship with many ups and downs for many reasons. For now, we will focus on the political-intellectual context in Turkey, which formed the background for the translation of Lenin's work.

13 Lenin, *Devlet ve İhtilal*, translated by Haydar Rifat, İstanbul 1934, 165 pp.

14 Lenin, *İşçi Sınıfı İhtilali ve Kautski Mel'unu*, translated by Haydar Rifat, İstanbul 1934, 151 pp.

15 Pier Şal, *Lenin'in Hayatı*, translated by Haydar Rifat, İstanbul 1932, Preface.

16 Mete Tunçay, "Cumhuriyet Türkiye'si ve 'Marksizm'", Osmanlı Bankası Arşiv ve Araştırma Merkezi, Güncel-Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Seminerleri 2005–2006. [http://www.obarsiv.com/cts\\_mete\\_tuncay.html](http://www.obarsiv.com/cts_mete_tuncay.html) (Last accessed 01.08.2014).

### *Detskaia bolezn' levizny v kommunizme* (1920)

*Detskaia bolezn' levizny v kommunizme*<sup>17</sup> was written by Vladimir Lenin in 1920, and was published and translated into German, English and French in the same year. The booklet aimed to describe the “true” Communists’ standing and position concerning a number of essential questions. By analysing the Russian revolution and its international and historical meaning, Lenin promoted the idea of the Communist struggle for the implementation of its final goals. A Communist activist, according to Lenin’s descriptions, should be a politically active strategist, able to compromise, to use and misuse parliamentarianism etc. Finally, Lenin pleaded for a decisive struggle against Mensheviks. Leftism within Communism was defined as a disease that had to be cured by crucial intervention and exclusion of the leftists. Lenin delivered an overview on recent developments within the Communist parties of the leading European countries. The booklet had the character of a manifesto, as well as operations instructions for the members of Communist parties worldwide. It was translated as *The Infantile Sickness of “Leftism” in Communism* and published by the Executive Committee of the Communist International (Comintern). Later, the English title was reformulated as *Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder*.<sup>18</sup> The French title was *La maladie infantile du communisme (le “gauchisme”)*<sup>19</sup>. Along with the German translation and the Russian original, the booklet was handed out among the delegates of the Second World Congress of the Comintern in July-August 1920. The booklet earned different responses from a variety of European communists. While it was heavily criticised by the German Communist Otto Rühle, the booklet was praised by the Dutch Socialist Herman Gorter. According to the Soviet sources, *Detskaia bolezn'* was re-published more than 300 times until the 1970s, in 49 countries worldwide.<sup>20</sup> It is not clear whether the authors of the “Great Soviet Encyclopaedia” included Turkey in this group of 49 countries. However, Lenin’s booklet, ‘inspired’ by the quarrels of German, Swedish and Dutch Communists, was translated from French and English into Turkish and re-published repeatedly both in Istanbul and in Ankara.

### **Turkish Translators and Publishers of *Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder***

There were four Turkish translators of Lenin’s booklet from the 1960s onwards. We will examine Muzaffer Erdost (Kabagil), Osman Saidoğlu, Süheyla Kaya and Burak Ferit Aydar below.

17 For the Russian original see <http://www.marxists.org/russkij/lenin/1920/leftwing/02.htm> (Last accessed 21.09.2015).

18 For the English translation see <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch01.htm> (Last accessed 21.09.2015).

19 For the French translation see <http://www.marxists.org/francais/lenin/works/1920/04/g1.htm> (Last accessed 21.09.2015).

20 Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Enciklopediia, <http://www.litmir.co/br/?b=106261&p=311> (Last accessed 26.08.2015).

## Muzaffer Erdost

Muzaffer Erdost prepared his translation of Lenin's work *Detskaia bolezn "levizny" v kommunizme* (1920) on the back of the French version (*La maladie infantile du communisme*) by using additionally the English edition ("*Left-wing*" *Communism, an Infantile Disorder*) published by the Soviet publishing house, Progress Publishers in Moscow in 1975. Erdost's translation was printed in March 1970. Its second edition emerged in December 1974, followed by the third edition in February 1976, and the fourth edition exactly a year later, in February 1977. The fifth edition appeared in June 1991. The latest, seventh edition was published in September 1999 by Sol Yayınları under the title "*Sol*" *Komünizm – Bir Çocukluk Hastalığı* in Ankara at Şahin Matbaası.

Erdost was born in 1932 in a little village in the province of Tokat in Central Anatolia. He was the son of a farmer, and being unable to finish his studies at the Faculty of Agriculture at Ankara University, he continued his education at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the same university and graduated in 1956. Erdost witnessed the rising Turkish anti-Americanism during his university years and through his work for the semi-official newspaper *Ulus* of the Kemalist Republican People's Party's [Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP] between 1956 and 1963. As a translator of Leninist literature, he was familiar with socialist discourse on imperialism. After the military intervention in May 1960 in Turkey and the proclamation of the New Constitution in 1961, which strengthened the freedom of press, he founded the Leftist edition house Sol Yayınları, together with his friends and brother (İlhan Erdost), in the mid-1960s.

According to many contemporaries, Erdost and his colleagues at Sol Yayınları received financial and moral support from some anti-American officers of the Turkish army.<sup>21</sup> During the protest events in 1968, this young and humble publishing house became one of the most critical intellectual centers in Turkey.

While looking at many translations of Lenin's various works, supposedly made by Muzaffer Erdost, Erdost's 2010 admission that he was not determined, enthusiastic or competent when it came to translation, is quite stunning. Neither his English nor his French were good enough, but because he was the publishing director of Sol Yayınları and because he knew that they were publishing 'dangerous books', he 'authored' the translations prepared by others.

From the very beginning, translations of Sol Yayınları appealed mostly to the readers close to Kemalism and to the National Democratic Revolution [Milli Demokratik Devrim, MDD]<sup>22</sup>, hence to the environment of Mihri Belli, the *Aydınlık Sosyalist Dergi* and *Türk Solu* journals and the Communist Party of Turkey [Türkiye Komünist Partisi-TKP]. Sol Yayınları's staff were rooted in their Turkish Maoist environment and their work is often criticized by other socialists for being intentionally mistranslated, or "being censored

21 For more details, see Hasan Cemal, *Kimse Kızmasın Kendimi Yazdım*, İstanbul 18/2007.

22 Mustafa Şener, *Türk Solunda Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset: Yön, MDD ve TYP*, İstanbul 2010, pp. 173-230.

due to their political engagements”<sup>23</sup>. During an interview conducted with the journalist Aydın Çubukçu from *Evrensel Kültür Journal* in 2014, one of the prominent revolutionaries of the time, he pointed out that Muzaffer Erdost knew neither Russian nor English nor French on a level sufficient to translate any book. Çubukçu also assumed the translations were done by Erdost’s brother, İlhan Erdost who was tortured to death in the Ankara-based Mamak prison under the junta regime in September 1980. Nevertheless as the owner of the publishing house, Muzaffer Erdost used his own name in order to take responsibility, which should not be considered odd given the conditions of the time.<sup>24</sup> Let us look at another argument that supports these claims and sheds light on the period. Muzaffer Erdost’s response to *Radikal*’s headline of 2010, “The translations thought to belong to Muzaffer İlhan Erdost, in fact belonging to Mihri Belli,”<sup>25</sup> discloses his confessions at the time, before and after, and reveals some details that will also help us to better understand the argument. It also gives us great insight into the general limits and conditions of the mid-twentieth century Turkish leftist intellectual world. This is the “open letter” that Erdost wrote as a sort of rebuttal to *Radikal*:

*Sol Yayınları started publishing in 1965 with eight books. Among the eight, there were no translations by Mihri Belli. My first incarceration due to Sol Yayınları was because of Mao Zedong’s book, entitled Theory and Practice. The translator of the book was inscribed by the name of “N. Solukçu.” Yet I was arrested as the translator. Last year when Alaaddin Bilgi described “The First Raid on Sol Yayınları” in his book Yine de Aydınlik, published by Evrensel, he mentioned the book as “The work I translated in November 1966 from Mao Zedong with the title Theory and Practice [...]”. It was Alaaddin Bilgi who translated the book, yet I was the one who assumed it as the translator, and was arrested for it. There was no wrong here. Since I wanted the book to be translated, I assumed the responsibility. As written on the back cover of the book, I was the editorial director; it was under my sole liability to translate and publish; I was the publishing executive.*

*When Theory and Practice was first published and I was arrested, Erdoğan Berktaş was in the publishing house. I didn’t even know Mihri Belli then. Berktaş translated Lenin’s Imperialism for the publishing house. It was not published under his name either.*

*Those reading the notes of Alaaddin Bilgi regarding Theory and Practice, can see that there are two expert reports given for Theory and Practice. When I was taken to appear before the Criminal Courts of Peace on Duty, there was a negative report brought by Sulhi Dönmezer. Our fellow Halit Çelenk, while examining the file so as to raise an objection against my arrest, came across a positive report given a month earlier.<sup>26</sup>*

23 The best known example would be the translation of Marx’s *German Ideology*. The translation conducted by Sevim Belli (Sol Yayınları, Ankara 1976) consisted of only 128 pages. The recent translation that was prepared by Evrensel Basım Yayın (Olca Geridönmez and Tuncay Ok) is exactly 600 (sic!) pages long.

24 Hasan Aksakal, Mutlu Dursun: Interview with Aydın Çubukçu, 30.07.2014.

25 Kaya Genç, “Çeviride ‘Ne Yapmalı’ Tartışması”, *Radikal*, 29.08.2010.

26 Ibid.



The later part of the letter takes an even more interesting turn:

*I was on trial for nearly 15 books, of which I translated none. I took responsibility for all of them. The work of Mihri Belli What Is To Be Done? And Giap's People's War and People's Army were among the books I stood trial for.*

*Mihri Belli translated What Is To Be Done, the original translation is his work, he knows English and French very well, and his translations do not sound like translations. That is to say, his Turkish translations sound as if the writings were originally written in Turkish. Not only did he know the terms and concepts of scientific socialism, but he also had knowledge beforehand on the subjects of the books he translated. Everyone knows Mihri Belli translated What Is To Be Done, as well as Rasih Nuri İleri. I bring this up for a reason: Rasih Nuri İleri criticized Mihri Belli for deliberately altering the meaning of a statement while translating What Is To Be Done; not me. I told the Press Prosecutor 'the translation is mine.' However, 'Muzaffer Erdost' was not inscribed as the translator, 'Muzaffer İlhan Erdost' was definitely not. There was a 'M. Kabagil.' M. Kabagil was my pen name.*

*When I first presented my program for publishing (which at the time I had not started publishing yet), Doğan Avcuoğlu introduced me to Şükrü Koç as 'the friend who would publish Lenin!' I believe Şükrü Koç was a member of parliament. He would later come to say 'my friend you are looking for trouble,' and Avcuoğlu would give me courage by saying 'we will support him!'*

Erdost also informs on the scope of translation projects and how known figures of that time got involved with the translating process:

*[...] I published Imperialism knowing I would get seven and a half years for it. The translation however was not mine, it was Erdoğan Berktaş's. The translator was inscribed with a pen name. I then had Imperialism translated by Cemal Süreya. After September 12, Cemal had passed away and Kenan Somer requested his translation to be published instead, since he thought his was better. We did not publish it, as it was given to and published by Süleyman Ege. At the time another of his translations was published by Evrensel. His reason was that he wanted 'a different' translation. None of this was our concern, nor did it bother us. We did not disrespect any translator, including Cemal Süreya.*

*Since November 1965, we published nearly 30 of Lenin's books. Currently there are 22 books on sale. Readers can find new editions on the bookshelves of Sol Yayınları by İlhan İlhan Kitabevi. Seven of these books are Lenin's independent books, while 15 are compilations of Lenin's writings categorized by their titles. Some compilations were organized by Sol Yayınları. For example, "Bourgeois Democracy and Proletariat Dictatorship" are our compilations. We deliberately published Lenin's two important books (The Renegade Kautsky and State and Revolution) because Süleyman Ege was imprisoned for three and a half years (after standing trial twice) in Ankara Central Jail and Adana Jail for taking responsibility for these Lenin's two books (by Bilim and Sosyal Yayınları). After his pardon they were republished, and again he stood trial for a long time.*

*I explain this for a reason: We, in our publications, present the imprints of the books we*

*took as original texts. Whether they are French or English, if you attempt to compare our publications not with the texts we took as original, but with some other translations, it would be ridiculous to judge us on the difference that arises not in the translation itself, but the in the different texts, be they English or French.*

*In mid-1974 when I got out of prison, What Is To Be Done was re-edited: The first was compiled from an old edition in French, and the new translation was edited from English and French translations. This created a new situation from the perspective of the publishing house. The translation was done for the publishing house, and it was obligatory for a name to be inscribed as the translator. At first my pen name was given. At the second stage, the publishing house wanted to publish an issue emphasising the new translations. It would not have been wrong to place 'Sol Yayınları Translation Committee' as the translator. However, this would have raised new questions, and for this reason, as the responsible editor for the publishing house, my name was given. That is all. As the saying goes, to produce dromedary, one needs to be a dromedary.*

*Besides, Turkish Penal Law articles 141-142 had been removed. Who would protect whom from what? The translation belonged completely to the publishing house. The first copy belonged to Mihri Belli; the later versions belonged to the publishing house. For this reason, my name was given as the translator.<sup>27</sup>*

Erdost summarized the internal arguments and described Turkey's intellectual environment in the second half of the twentieth century:

*Result: As it was written in Radikal, 'a truth was not brought forth,' because there was nothing hidden: Everyone knew that I had the published books translated, rather than translating them myself, and that it was the work of the publishing house. Secondly, I did not place my name 'to protect Mihri Belli.' This is a cruel thing to say. The truth must be spoken: Mihri Belli spent 10 years in prison for the Communist Party's cause. He had just been released. However, as for his writings, he also stood trial for his translations that he submitted to other publishers. He never needed protection nor did he ever seek it. During the preparation of both the translations and the establishment of the publishing house, considering the threat of legal action, I explained my decision of using one of my pen names for all translators. At the same time I was aware and took responsibility for my decision to publish at my own will. By the time Mihri Belli came to the publishing house, there were three-to-four pending cases against me. Years later, when I benefited from the General Amnesty and got out of prison, I was indicted for 37.5 years related to five books, and there were pending cases for other three books. Among the convicted books, What Is To Be Done was Mihri Belli's translation.<sup>28</sup>*

There is a need to reevaluate the translation of Lenin's works in their broader context of the political-cultural-social relations of the translation activities, how the cultural transfer

27 "Muzaffer İlhan Erdost: 'Sol Yayınları Bir Efsanedir'", <http://www.haberveriyorurum.net/haber/muzaffer-ilhan-erdost-sol-yayinlari-bir-efsanedir> 3 August, 2010 (Last accessed 14.05.2015).

28 Ibid.

process works and the motives behind the people transferring cultures, as their concerns and goals can result in different meanings. Erdost contributed to the reception of Lenin's work as a pseudo-translator and first of all as the publisher.

### *Osman Saidođlu*

A lesser known translator appeared in two Lenin translations in late-1960s. Osman Saidođlu, firstly translated a book entitled *Marksizmin Kaynađı: Karl Marks ve F. Engels* (The Sources of Marxism, 143 pages) in as early as 1967, then *Marksist Eylemin Çocukluk Hastalığı ve Devrim Stratejisi* (145 pages) in 1968 under Gün Yayınları (Publishing Company) in Istanbul. His next work was Roger Vailland's novel *Ezenler/Ezilenler* and this translation from French was published in 1976 for another weak publisher, Re Yayınları in Istanbul. In the same year, his translations from Zaharia Stancu's *Yaşayan Ölüler* (Living Deads) and Maxim Gorkii's *İsyancı* came out, once again for Re Yayınları, but to the best of our knowledge, they had almost zero impact. After these books, Osman Saidođlu's name was seen within the five volume translation of Victor Hugo's *Sefiller's* (Les Miserables) final two books for Sosyal Yayınları in the early 1980s. Unfortunately, none of these books nor any other source give credible information about Saidođlu's biography. Today, among socialist readers and publishers, Saidođlu's translation, along with his name is not remembered.

### *Süheyla Kaya*

Süheyla Kaya has been translating many books from English and German since the mid-1970s, on subjects including communism, modern history, and international politics. Kaya authored both children's books and those dealing with conspiracy theories. Due to her revolutionary activity, Kaya was officially accused and tried at the end of the 1970s in Turkey. After she was released, Kaya concentrated on translating and was highly productive.<sup>29</sup>

29 Some of Kaya's translations are; Lissy Schmidt's Özgürlüğün Bedeli (Irak Kürt Bölgesinden Röportajlar (1991–1993) [co-translated with Zeynep Herkmen, Istanbul 1996], Otto Heller's Yahudiliğın Çöküşü (Yahudi Sorunu-Yahudi Sorununun Eleştirisi-Sosyalizm'le Çözümü) [co-translated with Saliha N. Kaya, Istanbul 1992], Ernesto Che Guevara's Savaş Anıları (Küba Günlüğü), Istanbul 3 2005], once again Che Guevara's Afrika Rüyası [Istanbul 2002], Stalin's SBKP (B) XVI., XVII., ve XVIII. Parti Kongre Raporları [co-translated by Saliha Kaya, 1994], once again Stalin's SBKP(B)'deki Sağ Sapma Üzerine [1992], Stalin's Eserler, 16 Volumes [1992–1998], Eva Groepler's Anti-Semitizm, [Istanbul 1994], Jean Paul Sartre's Hepimiz Katiliz (Sömürgeçilik Bir Sistemdir) [1995], Anatoli Lunacharskii's Devrim ve Sanat (Denemeler-Konuşmalar-Notlar) [Co-translated with Saliha Kaya, 2000], Lenin's Seçme Eserler – Tarım Sorunu Teorisi [co-translated with İsmail Yarkin, 1998], again Lenin's Ulusal ve Sömürgeşel Ulusal Sorun Üzerine [co-translated with İsmail Yarkin and Saliha Kaya, 1997], Lenin's Sol Radikalizm: Komünizmin Çocukluk Hastalığı [1996], Lenin's İşçi Sınıfının Emekli Köylülükle İttifakı [co-translated with İsmail Yarkin 1997], Lenin's Kapitalizmin En Yüksek Aşaması Olarak Emperyalizm [2001] and Zbynek A. Zeman's Devrim Taciri: İttihat ve Terakki'nin Bolşevik Teorisini Parvus Efendi: Winfred B. Scharlau, [Istanbul 2007]. Finally, she also has done nearly twenty translations from Erich Kastner's children books via Can Yayınları, which is one of the leading publishing houses in Turkey. In total, her list of translations includes 54 books, as of June 2015..

## Burak Ferit Aydar

Burak Ferit Aydar was born in Ankara in 1968 and graduated from the department of English Literature at Istanbul University. Since his graduation at the beginning of the century, he has been working as a freelance translator for several left-wing publishing companies such as Metis, Pencere and Sel Yayınları (all of them based in Istanbul). He is also an editing contributor to Boğaziçi Yayınları since the end of 2014. Among others, he has translated works by Edward Said, Ian Watt, Paul de Mann, and John Reed. His best known translation work was Cihan Tuğal's *Passive Revolution* into Turkish, which has been reprinted five times in four years.

Burak Ferit Aydar is responsible for Lenin's renewed translations into Turkish for Agora Kitaplığı Publishing Company in Istanbul. His Lenin translations amount to 22 books since 2009.<sup>30</sup> Even though he is accepted as honest and hardworking, conflict among leftist publishers in Turkey continues. According to many readers, Aydar's translations include plagiarism of Erdost's Sol Yayınları translations.

In an interview of 2010, Aydar told the journalists that it was not as important to know Russian for any translation of Lenin's works (sic!). According to him, a translator would need the Russian original for a translation of Bakhtin's writings but not necessarily of Lenin. The latter had written clearly.<sup>31</sup>

## Linguistic aspects

One of the reasons why Turkish translations of Lenin's work are problematic, is due to the transformation that the Turkish language underwent in the twentieth century. While Lenin repeatedly used the Russian notion of *revolutsiia*, which could be easily translated as *revolution* into English and French, several generations of Turkish readers were accustomed to various synonyms of what can be termed *revolution* in English. While most European languages possess more or less stable core language at least since the nineteenth century, Turkish underwent massive purification processes. There is no unique translation of *revolution* in Turkish. Osman Saidoğlu translated the Russian revolution as *Rus ihtilâli* but the proletarian revolution as *proleter devrimi*.<sup>32</sup> The Turkish adjective *proleter*

30 See Sosyalizm ve Savaş (2014), Bolşevikler İktidarı Elllerinde Tutabilecekler mi? (2014), Emperyalist Ekonomizm-Marksizmin Bir Karikatürü (2014), Bolşevikler Devrime Gidiyor (2013), KöyYoksullarına-Sosyalistler Ne İster? (2013), Bütün İktidar Sovyetlere (2013), 1917 Şubat Devrimi (2012), Ulusların Kaderlerini Kendilerinin Tayin Hakkı (2012), Friedrich Engels (2011), Proleter Devrimi ve DönekKautsky (2011), Komünist Enternasyonal-Komintern (2011), Uzaktan Mektuplar (2011), Nisan Tezleri (2011), Kronstadt'dan Parti İçi Muhalefete (2010), Karl Marx (2010), 'Sol' Komünizm-Bir Çocukluk Hastalığı (2010), Sosyalizme Geçiş Döneminde Ekonomi (2010), Ne Yapmalı? (2010), Bol-şevikler ve Proletarya Diktatörlüğü (2010), Sovyet İktidarı ve Dünya Devrimi (2010), Emperyalizm (2009), Yenilgicilik ve Enternasyonalizm (2009), Devlet ve Devrim (2009).

31 Osman Akınhay: "Ferit Burak Aydar'ın ismini ve çalışkanlığını bilen biliyor", in: <http://ceviribilim.com/?p=3401> (Last accessed 21.09.2015).

32 V. Lenin: Marksist eylemin çocukluk hastalığı ve devrim stratejisi, İstanbul 1968. p. 7.

is nothing but a loanword from French (proletaire). M. Kabagil (Erdost)<sup>33</sup> as well as Süheyla Kaya<sup>34</sup> used the notion of *devrim* both for Russian and proletarian revolution. While the word *ihtilâl* is of Arabic origin and has been used until now by Turkish authors referring to the French Revolution,<sup>35</sup> another word *inkılâb* is of Arabic-Persian origin and refers in Turkish discourses to the revolution of the Young Turks in 1908, as well as to the modernization reforms under Atatürk. As *enghelab* and *inqilab*, it is still used in modern Persian, Azerbaijani and Urdu as the only word for *revolution*. Aiming at de-arabisation and de-iranisation of their own vocabulary, the Turkish linguists introduced the Turkish word *devrim* to the dictionaries throughout the 1950-60s. Derived from the verb “devirmek”, which literally means “to knock over, to knock down, to overthrow”, *devrim* was meant to substitute *ihtilâl* and *inkılâb*. As can be seen from all the existing translations, from Haydar Rıfat’s work in the 1930s, Muzaffer Erdost’s in the 1960s-1970s or from Süheyla Kaya in the 1990s and Burak Ferit Aydar’s 2010s, this confusing linguistic issue persists.

On the other hand, though the originally Arabic word *mel’un* is used in modern Turkish as religious defamation meaning “damned”, “cursed” or “punished”, in Haydar Rıfat’s and his contemporaries’ usage it was simply naming people – such as Kautsky – who broke their promise. Another thing that younger generations have no idea about, is that the uses of “Leninism, Marxism, Bonapartism, etc”, used to be written and spoken as “Lenin mezhebi”, “Marks mezhebi” or “Bonapart mezhebi” a few decades ago. For today’s average Turkish reader, “mezhep” only means “religious sect” or denomination. Actually, this simple detail clearly shows how Turkish intellectuals have had difficulties defining Western political concepts and terms in the Turkish language for a long time. A similar situation appeared around the word for *worker* and *party*, two of Lenin’s key notions. There are two versions, an originally Turkish *işçi* and Arabic *amele*, currently used in modern Turkish. *Parti* (Party) is a neologism in Turkish. Until the mid-twentieth century, mainstream usage was *fırka*.<sup>36</sup> There were many organizations in the early twentieth century that had *amele* in their titles such as Amele Birliği, Amele-i Osmani Cemiyeti, Amele Bayramı (Labour Day)<sup>37</sup> and so on. In the 1930s Haydar Rıfat wrote on “Amele Fırkası”<sup>38</sup> (Workers’ Party), afterwards it was commonly used as “İşçi Fırkası” at first and then “İşçi Partisi” from 1960s onwards. As a result, the words for “worker”

33 V. Lenin: “Sol” komünizm, bir çocukluk hastalığı, İstanbul 1970, p. 7; V. Lenin: “Sol” komünizm, bir çocukluk hastalığı, İstanbul 1977, p. 7.

34 V. Lenin: “Sol radikalizm” komünizmin çocukluk hastalığı, İstanbul 1997, p. 72.

35 In late 1940s and 50s, translation of Albert Sorel’s *French Revolution* was named *Avrupa ve Fransız İhtilali* (MEB Yayınları, 1949–1955, 7 volumes). The popular book by Pierre Gaxotte was translated into Turkish as *Fransız İhtilali* (Varlık Yayınları 1962). One of the most popular text books in political history in Turkey is Murat Sarıca’s *100 Soruda Fransız İhtilali* (Gerçek Yayınevi 1970); a companion study by academics of Selçuk Üniversitesi, 200. *Yıldönümünde Fransız İhtilali ve Türkiye* (Konya 1991); Stefan Zweig’s Fouché biography also uses the term “Fransız İhtilali” in the subtitle of the book (İstanbul 2007).

36 Ahmet Makal, *Ameleden İşçiye: Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi Çalışmaları*, İstanbul 2007.

37 Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye’de Sol Akımlar, 1908–1925*, Vol. I, Ankara 1978.

38 See Lenin, *İşçi Sınıfı İhtilali ve Kautski Mel’unu* (1934 edition)..

and “party” both changed in their daily usage and in the literary language within a few decades.

The words “Socialism” and “socialist” underwent a great metamorphosis too. “İştirakiyyun”, “iştirakiye” and “iştirakiyatun” derive from the etymological base “şirk-işrak-iştirak” that means literally “to join”, “to share”, “common” and “to be a part of” in classical Arabic. These words were employed by Ottoman-Turkish intellectuals for centuries, even until the early Turkish Republic.<sup>39</sup> Later, in the mid-twentieth century, alternative expressions were encouraged by Öztürkçecilik, an intellectual movement praising the further de-arabisation and de-iranisation of Turkish. This culturally nationalist movement demanded further purification of the Turkish language. Öztürkçeci intellectuals’ efforts gave birth to the word “toplumculuk” (referring to *toplum* (society), and the suffix *culuk* for *ism*) in late 1960s and early 1970s. It has been popular among socialist and in Kemalist milieus for a while. Eventually, “sosyalizm” became the only used Turkish notion for socialism. Both the *İştirakiyyun* of Arabic origin and paradoxically the Turkified word *toplumculuk* have been out of use since at least 2000.

The Turkish language underwent an alphabet change and steady transformation since the 1920s. Not only the translations of Lenin’s works, but also the classic Ottoman literature and even the novels published in 1920-40s needed to be adapted linguistically before re-publishing. This is a distinctive situation of academic and literary Turkish. The growing interest in Russia and Russian thought in Turkey goes hand in hand with the further development of Slavonic Studies at Turkish universities. The new generations of Turkish Russianists are preoccupied with the translation of Russian literature from the Russian original. Communist writings, including the works of Lenin are still translated from English and French versions. The research literature on Communism and leftist movements available in the Turkish bookstores and libraries consists mostly of translations of European researchers or research literature in French, English and German. European translations, particularly French and English language ones, are still essential bridges between Russian and Turkish discourses and in the cultural transfer between Russia and Turkey.

39 Şemsettin Sami writes about Gotha Programme in *Tercüman-ı Şark* and explains that his iştiraki thoughts are basically similar to his Islamic faith. Ahmed Midhat Efendi uses these words against not-translated forms of social-ism and socialist in French, in his all writings at *Daarcık Journal*. Cevdet Pasha mentions iştirakiyyun many times in his monumental *History*. Mizancı Murad Bey prefers to write “socialist” in general, but sometimes he turns to “iştî-rakiyyun”. The Turkish historian of thought Cemil Meriç summarizes what these words meant to Ottoman-Turkish intellectuals in his *Sosyoloji Notları*. Unlike the others, political Islamists give a bad name to iştirakiyyun. They refer to Mazdek, Karmats and Hasan Sabbah’ movement. See Cemil Meriç, *Sosyoloji Notları ve Konferanslar*, İstanbul 2004, p. 161-163. Besides, iştirak and iştirakiyyun were two of the most popular words in late Ottoman period’ debates. The *Journal of İştirak* was quite strong and effective during the Second Constitutional period; İştirakçi Hilmi Bey was still one of the most interesting political figures; Halk İştirakiyyun Cemiyeti (after that Fırkası) was in motion of those years. For more details; see Tunçay, *Türkiye’de Sol Akımlar*, I, pp. 37-60. Erden Akbulut & Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye Halk İştirakiyyun Fırkası*, Sosyal Tarih Yayınları, 2009. Also see Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, I, pp. 185-190 and 263-279.